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Schadenfreude and Slander in the Age of Revolution: The Case of the Dutch Journal *Lanterne Magique of Toverlantaern* (1782–83)¹

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the late eighteenth-century Dutch periodical *Lanterne Magique of Toverlantaern*. This political journal is analyzed from the perspective of its sense of humour and its rhetoric. *Lanterne Magique*, it is shown, is all about humiliating and scapegoating political enemies, and schadenfreude is the main means through which this is done. Political opponents are jocularly depicted as drunkards, cowards, and perverts. Thus, schadenfreude, as part of a broader culture of defamation, turns out to be a useful tool within late eighteenth-century public debate. Furthermore, the seeming popularity of *Lanterne Magique* tells us that both this debate and the sense of humour of eighteenth-century society differ from that of our own day. Realizing this will make us better understand early-modern political rhetoric and laughter.

KEYWORDS

Age of Revolution; schadenfreude; slander; magic lantern; peepshow; libels; humour; laughter

1 This article is a translated and slightly reworked version of Ivo Nieuwenhuis, 'Geen effectiever vermaak dan leedvermaak: Humor als retorisch wapen in de *Lanterne Magique of Toverlantaern* (1782–'83)', *TS: Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies*, no. 36 (2014), 101–18.

Introduction

On the night of 25 to 26 September 1781, a pamphlet was anonymously distributed across the towns and villages of the Dutch Republic. It contained a fierce attack on the pernicious influence of the noble family of Orange — for a long time the *de facto* rulers of the state — on the politics of the Republic ever since its nascence in the late sixteenth century. This pamphlet, entitled *Aan het volk van Nederland* ('To the people of the Netherlands'), would become one of the most famous political texts in Dutch history.² It is considered the starting point of a revolutionary period spearheaded by the so-called Patriot Movement. This movement advocated political reforms of the then oligarchic state system, so as to make it more public and democratic.³ The text is also seen as a rhetorical masterpiece, and forms the main claim to fame of its author, the nobleman Joan Derk Van der Capellen tot den Poll.

The rhetoric deployed in *Aan het volk van Nederland* is two-faced. On the one hand, the pamphlet uses a defamatory style of arguing.⁴ The House of Orange is attacked on personal grounds; its members are slandered. Of prince Maurice, son of William of Orange, leader of the Dutch Revolt (1568–1648), it is said that

He was a man of the worst manners: a savage, a malicious person, and an excessive lecher, who had the habit of hunting every beautiful woman, whether or not she was a virgin, married, or widowed, and to lure her into his wicked desires, which led to various illegitimate children.⁵

Prince Maurice is presented here as a low character: a pervert who cannot control his sexual urges. He is described in colored language, packed with strongly judgmental adjectives ('worst manners', 'excessive lecher', 'wicked desires'). The focus on excess and indecency and the coloured, judgmental language are both typical of the defamatory rhetoric that was often used in political pamphlets in this period. This rhetoric relates Van der Capellen's text to an important strand of early-modern publishing, that of libelling. All across Europe, libels were a common means of performing politics during this period. Whenever a political conflict occurred, the parties involved swamped each other with libels.⁶

2 For a good, modern Dutch edition of this text, see Joan Derk Van der Capellen tot den Pol, *Aan het volk van Nederland*, ed. by H. L. Zwitser (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1987). Some key passages have been translated into English by Arie Wildschut. They can be found at members.casema.nl/wilshut/ahvvn.htm

3 On the Patriot Movement see S. R. E. Klein, *Patriots republikenisme: Politieke cultuur in Nederland (1766–1787)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995); N. C. F. Van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland: Van oude orde naar moderniteit, 1750–1850* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004); Wyger R. E. Velema, *Republicans: Essays on Eighteenth-Century Dutch Political Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

4 This style is analyzed in more detail in Marijke Meijer Drees, 'Pamfletten: Een inleiding', in *Het lange leven van het pamflet: Boekhistorische, iconografische, literaire en politieke aspecten van pamfletten 1600–1900*, ed. by José de Kruif, Marijke Meijer Drees, and Jeroen Salman (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 9–28 (pp. 9–18).

5 'Hy was een man van allerslegste zeden: Een wreedäart, een valsch mensch en een overmaatig geile boef, die gewoon was elke schoone vrouw, evenveel of zy maagd, getrouwd, of weduwe waren, te bejagen en tot zyne booze lusten te lokken, en op die wyze verscheide onechte kinderen naliet.' Van der Capellen, p. 29. All translations in the article are my own.

6 See Jeffrey K. Sawyer, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Alastair Bellany, "'Raylinge Rymes and Vaunting Verse': Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603–1628", in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 285–310; Robert Darnton, *The Devil in the Holy Water, or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Michel Reinders, *Printed Pandemonium: Popular Print and Politics in the Netherlands, 1650–72* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

But another type of rhetoric is also present in *Aan het volk van Nederland*. This is the kind of rhetoric in which the political viewpoints or political behaviour of one's opponent are attacked, rather than the weaknesses of his character. This more ideological way of arguing, in which one attempts to play the ball, not the man, was not yet very common in public debates around 1780.⁷ In Van der Capellen's pamphlet we recognize this rhetoric mainly in the overall tenor of his argument, which is that the bad economic and military state of the Dutch Republic at the time is mostly a matter of misgovernment and that, therefore, there should be a change of regime.

Of these two types of rhetoric — defamatory and ideological — the latter eventually became the official standard of political communication. Although personal attacks are still common practice among politicians, they are generally considered fallacies. Within the paradigm of modern democratic thought, politics is supposed to be a struggle for ideas, a debate between competing worldviews. Around 1780, this was only a paradigm in the making. Absolute authority was still the norm. Within that situation, the business of politics was strongly tied up with the persons who ruled. As absolute authorities, they were not primarily ruling on the basis of an ideological agenda, but on the basis of their supposed and claimed fitness for the job, which was connected to their noble descent and/or exceptional ethics. As a result, public debates on politics almost automatically became personal, questioning the issue of fitness, even if, like in *Aan het volk van Nederland*, they concerned the essentially ideological issue of how a country should be ruled.

In this article, I will dive deeper into this by now disqualified form of political reasoning. More specifically, I want to understand how personally attacking an opponent could be a successful rhetorical strategy within late eighteenth-century political culture. I try to reach this aim by analyzing one case of political literature from this period that uses a strongly defamatory rhetoric: the journal *Lanterne Magique of Toverlantaern* (1782–83). This journal consists solely of personal attacks on and the relentless scapegoating of political opponents, and seems to have received quite some popular acclaim for this strategy. In what follows, I will first introduce this journal, and then discuss its implications for our understanding of eighteenth-century political rhetoric. I will focus my discussion on the role of humour, more specifically schadenfreude, as I argue that humour for a large part explains the effectiveness of defamatory rhetoric at the time.

Magic Lanterns and 'Raree Shows'

Eighteenth-century libels could take many forms: anything from simple poems to elaborate biographies in prose. A favourite category were the parodies of originally non-literary genres such as inventories, wills, and shipping reports, where a libel would present itself as, for example, the will of a recently deceased or dismissed public official, using the articles of the will to mock or slander the official and the faction to which he belonged.⁸ Also popular were dialogues and conversations, where the libel would take the form of a discussion on a recent political event that had supposedly taken place in real life, for example at a tavern.⁹ Those libels looked like little plays, with characters speaking to each other in direct speech.

7 Klein, pp. 114–17.

8 On will parodies in Dutch libels, see Marijke Meijer Drees and Joost Vrieler, 'Nagelaten nieuws: Testamenten in vroegmoderne pamfletten', *Voors*, 22.2 (2004), 4–28.

9 On dialogues and conversations in Dutch libels, see Clazina Dingemans, *Rap van tong, scherp van pen: Literaire discussiecultuur in Nederlandse praatjespamfletten (circa 1600–1750)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008).

The magic lantern and ‘raree show’ libels form a combination of the last two categories. In these libels, a magic lantern performance or ‘raree show’ — also known as peepshow — is parodied. These shows were a popular form of street entertainment in Europe from the late seventeenth century on. Showmen went from town to town, showing their audiences images that had been painted on glass and projected on a blank wall or sheet — in the case of magic lanterns — or visible in a closed-off wooden box with one or two looking holes to peep through — peepshows (Figs 1 and 2).¹⁰ In a magic lantern or peepshow libel, the reader is imagined as present at such a performance. Usually, the readers are not placed so as to actually see the images presented, but rather they listen to the showman and his audience talk about the them. Through this conversation, they learn a lot about what there is to be seen, and, more importantly, how they ought to respond. The images that are discussed depict recent events such as battles, royal successions, and economic crises. The showman is not a neutral observer of these events, but gives his opinion on them, and so does the audience. Some of the figures present on the images are mocked, others are praised. It thus quickly becomes clear that the show with which the readers are confronted is politically charged.

Magic lantern and raree show libels were mainly a Dutch phenomenon.¹¹ I have found over a hundred different publications from the Low Countries using this formula, the oldest being from 1689 and the most recent from 1920. Their popularity peaked between 1706 and 1721, when about 65 separate titles in this genre were published. They should be clearly delineated from the actual magic lantern and peepshow performances, which were usually not politically charged, as far as we know.¹² There are no signs that these libels were written versions of performances that actually took place. The libels rather comprise a tradition in their own right, comparable to the parodies of wills and inventories mentioned above. In all these cases, the conventions of the genre that is parodied form the starting point for a political satire that is aimed at defaming specific persons and the party they belong to.

The main figure in all magic lantern and raree show libels is the showman. He is recognizable through the French-Dutch hotchpotch that he speaks. This idiolect refers to the place of origin of the actual lanternists and peepshow performers. Most of them came from the then impoverished regions of Savoy and Wallonia, where the native language was French. They started touring Europe with their shows due to the lack of labour at home, thus becoming polyglots out of necessity (Fig. 3).¹³ But the language of the showman is not just a reference to the real world. It also makes him into a funny character. His heavy French accent and the recurring inclusion of French words into his discourse are presented as tokens of his poor command of the Dutch language, signs that make him look silly in the eyes of the public. His designated role is that of the clown. In some of the libels, he is even named Harlequin.¹⁴ His dominant presence in the libels gives the often fierce political attacks performed in them a ring of lightness and jocularly.

As libels, the magic lantern and raree shows bear an obvious relationship to the political tide. The peak in raree show libels between 1706 and 1721 coincides largely

10 On these devices and their history, see Richard Crangle, Mervyn Heard, and Ine van Dooren, eds, *Realms of Light: Uses and Perceptions of the Magic Lantern from the 17th to the 21st Century* (Ripon: Magic Lantern Society, 2005); Georg Füsslin, ed., *Der Guckkasten: Einblick — Durchblick — Ausblick* (Stuttgart: Füsslin Verlag, 1995); Richard Balzer, *Peepshows: A Visual History* (New York: Abrams, 1998).

11 The Dutch tradition of raree show libels is discussed in more detail in Ivo Nieuwenhuis, ‘Politiek op de kermis: Het genre van de gefingeerde rarekiekvertoning’, *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman*, no. 39 (2016), pp. 1–16.

12 Füsslin, pp. 56–61.

13 Balzer, p. 42.

14 Nieuwenhuis, p. 5.



Fig. 1 Representation of a magic lantern show. Carel Frederik Bendorp, *Show with Magic Lantern for an Audience at the Fair* (1782). Etching, 134 x 96 mm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

with the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–14). Later in the century, we also see the genre pop up at times of political crisis; for example, during the civic upheavals of 1748 and in the years of the Patriot Movement (1781–87). It was the latter period in which the first magic lantern journal appeared. Every two weeks for a period of ten months (September 1782–June 1783), *Lanterne Magique of Toverlantaern* (*Lanterne Magique* or *Magic Lantern*) was brought to the Dutch public (Fig. 4). Each instalment, aptly called a ‘show’ (‘vertoning’), spans sixteen pages in which a series of often related images was described by an anonymous showman. With a total of twenty instalments — 320 pages of fictional lantern slide descriptions — this was by far the largest total volume ever reached within this genre.

There are other reasons too why *Lanterne Magique* stands out within the history of magic lantern and raree show literature. As a subcategory of libels, the fictional magic lantern and raree shows usually occur as one-offs, provoked by a concrete political situation. By contrast, *Lanterne Magique* is a periodical, published at regular intervals



Fig. 2 Representation of a peepshow performance. John Young, *The Show* (1787). Mezzotint after the painting *The Peep Show* by John Hoppner, 630 x 437 mm. London: British Museum

and thus not directly dependent on the presence of newsworthy events. This kind of periodicity forms an innovative trait of Dutch political literature in the 1780s. The Patriot Movement is known for its discovery and clever use of the periodical press as a vehicle for persuading ever larger parts of the Dutch citizenry of its political message, thus overruling its opponents, the Orangists — supporters of the House of Orange, the noble family in charge of the *stadholderate* — within public debate.¹⁵ *Lanterne Magique*, however, was an Orangist and not a Patriot journal. What we are dealing with here, then, is a periodical using a formula that is usually only found in incidental publications (i.e. pamphlets), initiated by a political faction (i.e. the Orangists) that is otherwise known for its lack of mastery of the periodical press.

It must be noted here that the Orangist *Lanterne Magique* may have adopted the new form of periodical publication, but nevertheless still looks much like a libel in terms of its rhetoric and style. In this *Lanterne Magique* differs from most Patriot journals of the day, in which the new type of ideological arguing that I discussed in the introduction

15 Van Sas, pp. 195–221.

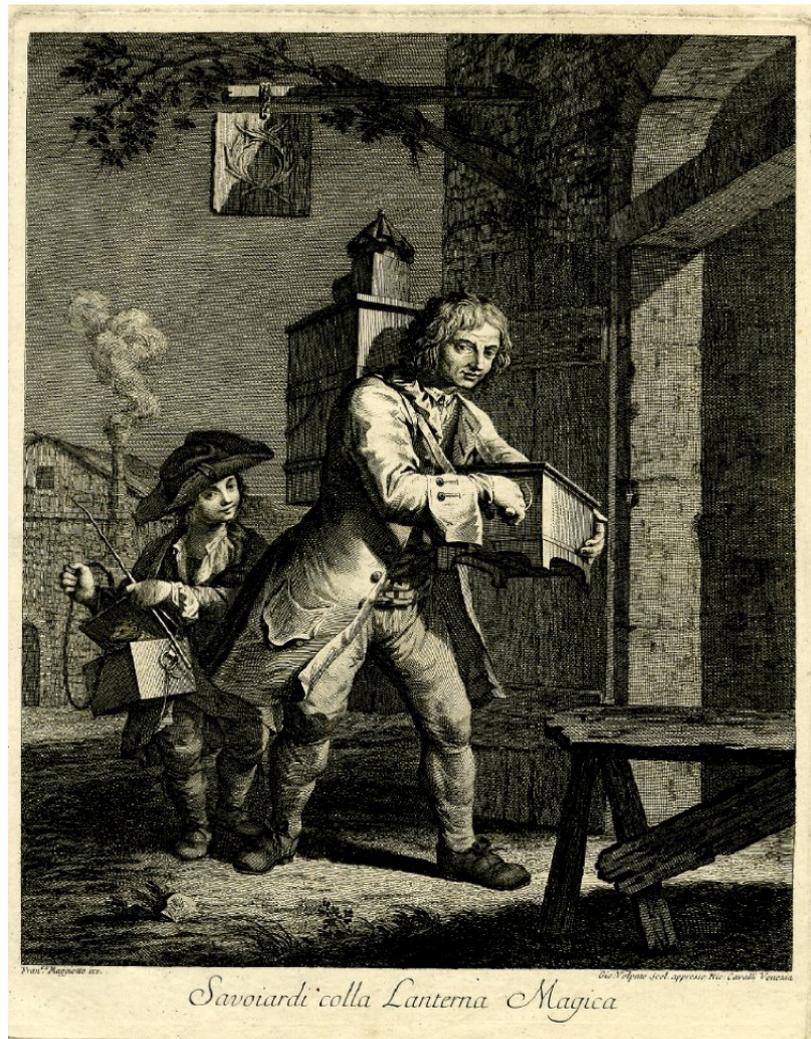


Fig. 3 A Savoyard on tour with his magic lantern. Giovanni Volpato, *Le Arti per via / Savoardi colla Lanterna Magica*. Etching and engraving, 366 x 285 mm. London: British Museum

was dominant. Like Van der Capellen in his famous pamphlet, the Patriot periodicals used their pages to explain their political agenda, more than to slander their opponents.¹⁶ *Lanterne Magique*, on the other hand, does not explicitly display a political agenda at all. It limits itself to defaming members and supposed allies of the Patriot Movement.

In this defaming, *Lanterne Magique* goes much further than earlier magic lantern and raree show libels. This is yet another thing that makes this journal peculiar. Although ridiculing political opponents always formed the core of the genre, the zeal and aggressiveness with which *Lanterne Magique* performs this task is unprecedented. In older libels, the ridicule usually concerned a larger group, such as the French troops during the War of the Spanish Succession, who were collectively presented as cowards and fools.¹⁷ In *Lanterne Magique*, the ridicule is always personal, and it shows its targets to be perverts, drunkards, or weaklings.

16 Van Sas, p. 199.

17 Nieuwenhuis, pp. 10–13.

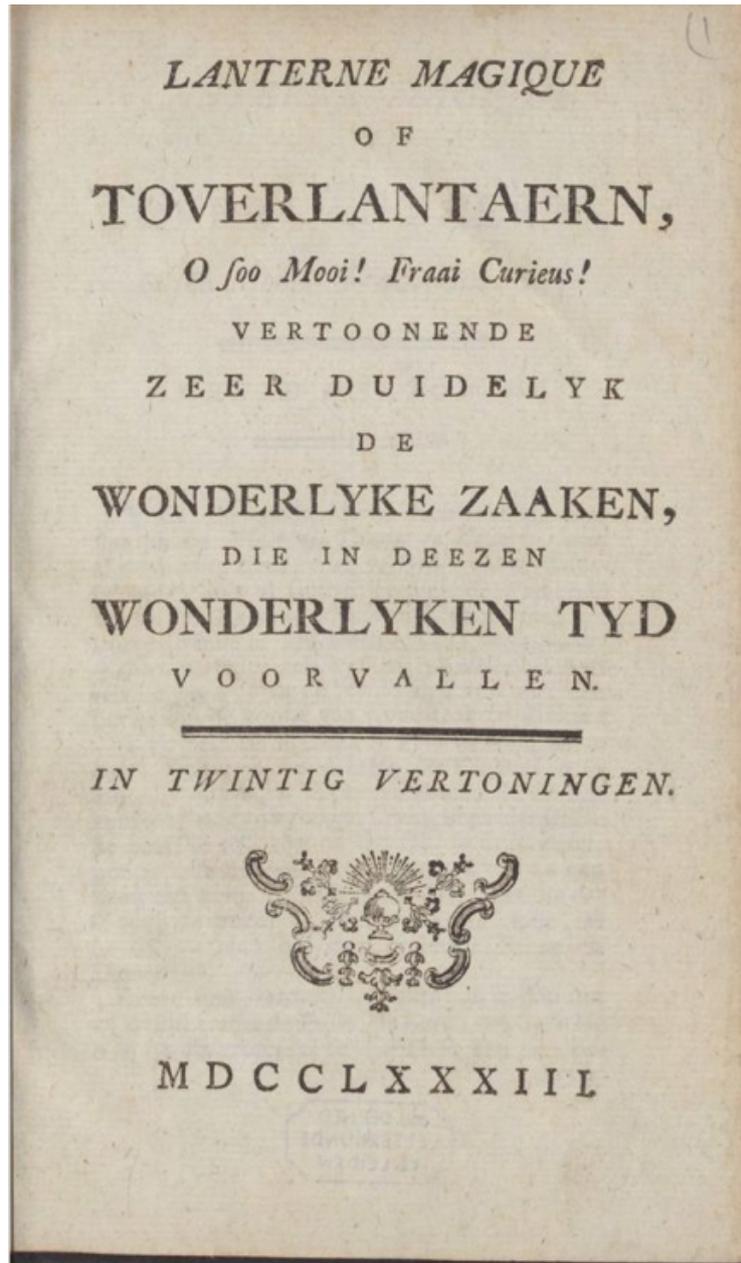


Fig. 4 Titlepage of anonymous [Henrik Sterck], *Lanterne Magique of Toverlantaern: O Soo Mooi! Fraai Curieus!* (Amsterdam: Dirk de Man, 1782–83). The Hague: Royal Dutch Library

A good example is the treatment of Nicolaas Hoefnagel, himself known as a fanatical libelist for the Patriot Movement. The showman describes a scene in which he enters the bookshop of his publisher to collect some money for a libel he wrote:

There you see now with *Hoefnagel*, the bookseller *Schuurman*, he buys a Libel, and he gives money therefore; o pay attention to how *Hoefnagel* receives the money. He puts it in his pocket and leaves, to kiss it away at the pretty girl, at the Whore, at the chick. — o Chick! chick! chick! — they take hold of the *Hoefnagel*, they have him; and tomorrow he has to go to the quack Löhman and take a pill, o that

nasty pill, he has to sweat and slobber, o to slobber, to slobber, pooh! pooh! pooh!
that dirty *Hoefnagel*.¹⁸

Typical for the style of *Lanterne Magique* is the recurring use of phrases such as ‘There you see’ and ‘Pay attention’, which signal to the readers that they are dealing with a magic lantern show. The showman is emphatically pointing to the relevant details of the scenes that are depicted on his slides. Also typical is the intensive use of proper names. In this short passage alone, the name Hoefnagel appears four times and is also italicized, as if to make it absolutely clear who is the target here, whom the readers should despise. Another striking element are the grounds on which Hoefnagel is attacked. He is accused of being a whoremonger, who spends the money he earned through libeling in a brothel, and ends up with a venereal disease. This shows the important role that defamation plays in *Lanterne Magique*: the personal attacks in this journal are meant to slander adherents of the Patriot cause, to show that they are bad characters and thus not to be trusted. Finally, the passage shows the importance of laughter in this journal. Phrases like ‘o Chick! chick! chick!’ and ‘pooh! pooh! pooh! that dirty *Hoefnagel*’ should be read as expressions of amusement on behalf of the showman, who seems to enjoy Hoefnagel’s misery and is keen to share this joy with his audience.

The aggressiveness of this journal becomes all the more clear when we realize that its instalments were mostly filled with these kinds of blunt, personal attacks involving either sex, drinking, physical violence, or a combination of the three. Imagine four or five of these personal attacks, several pages each, put together in one instalment. Add that up to twenty instalments over a period of almost a year, and you understand why the author of this journal has stayed anonymous until quite recently. For libels, anonymity was normal; for journals, it was less so. In fact, there are several eighteenth-century Dutch authors that are specifically known for the journals they wrote, most notably Jacob Campo Weyerman, Justus van Effen, and Pieter ’t Hoen.¹⁹ Thanks to Dutch historian Ton Jongenelen, we now also know who wrote *Lanterne Magique* and how its author managed to stay under the radar for so long. After profound archival research, Jongenelen concluded that this journal was written by the Rotterdam hack writer Henrik Sterck, by order of a tax officer from the same city, Johannes Olivier, who in turn was directed by the well-known Orangist publisher and former professor of Latin and Greek, Rijklof Michael Van Goens. Being a high-ranked citizen of Utrecht, Van Goens could not afford to be explicitly linked to a journal so vulgar as *Lanterne Magique* and so had to play his cards right to keep his distance to this project. In the end, he only succeeded in part, as there were already rumours of his involvement with the journal while it was being published.²⁰

What seems most remarkable about *Lanterne Magique* from the perspective of today is its apparent popularity. Although it sometimes happened that libels were secretly subsidized by government officials, it is unlikely that a journal would complete twenty instalments if it were not widely read. Also, we know that the first instalment was reprinted twice. This tells us that the repetitive slanderous attacks launched by *Lanterne*

18 ‘Daar sie je nou by *Hoefnagel*, de boekwurme *Schuurman*, se koop de Paskwil, en se keeve daar voor de keldte; o keef wel akte hoe *Hoefnagel* ontfangt die keldte. Hy steek dat in syn sakke en vertrekke, om dat te versoen by de mooye meid, by de Oer, by de kip. — o Kip! kip! kip! — sy kippen de *Hoefnagel*, se ebbe um beete; en morgte motte na de kwaksalvere Lèhman en neme de pil, o die lelyke pil, hum moet zweet en kwyl, o so kwyl, so kwyl, foei! foei! foei! die vuile *Hoefnagel*!’ *Lanterne Magique*, no. 1 (September 1782), p. 13.

19 Inger Leemans and Gert-Jan Johannes, *Worm en donder: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur, 1700–1800: De Republiek* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013).

20 Ton Jongenelen, ‘O so mooy! O so fraay! O so curieus! De *Lanterne Magique* (1782–1783)’, *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman*, no. 31 (2008), 124–34.

Magique were met with enthusiasm, at least among part of the eighteenth-century Dutch readership. How can this enthusiasm be explained?

Schadenfreude

The individual instalments ('shows') of *Lanterne Magique* do not contain any illustrations. There is, however, a frontispiece accompanying the complete series of this journal. It shows the interior of a tent, in which a magic lantern slide is projected on an empty wall, with a showman and a small audience watching it (Fig. 5). The slide that is projected corresponds to the description that opens the first instalment of *Lanterne Magique*. We see stadtholder William V, standing in the middle of the scene, accompanied by his wife and three children. Above them, in the sky, Fame is blowing his horn, while on the left, several figures are running away in fear, chased by thunderbolts coming from the dark clouds hanging above them. These figures represent members of the Patriot Movement.

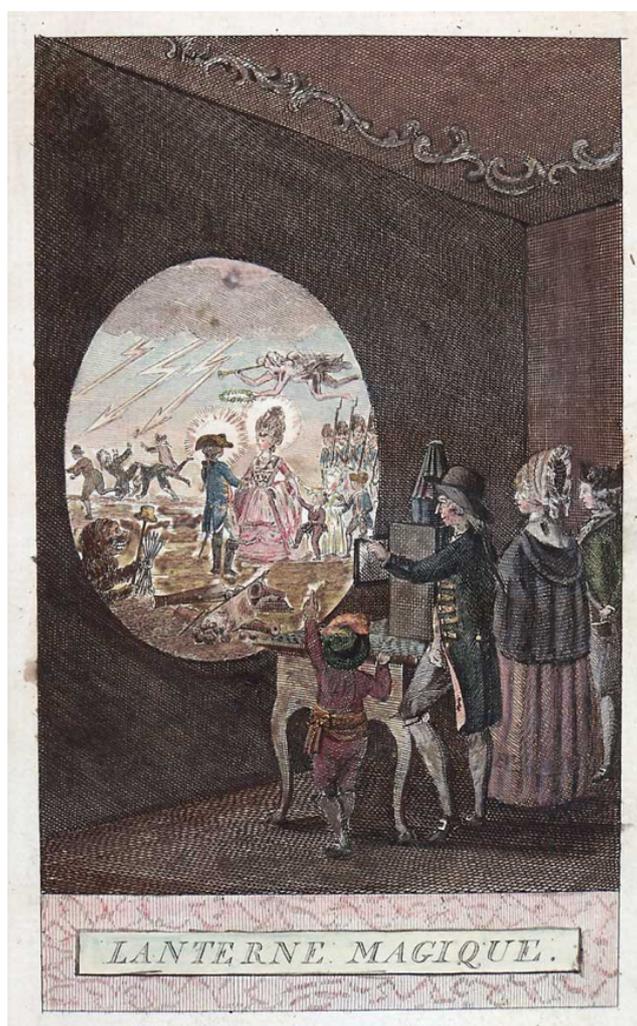


Fig. 5 Frontispiece of *Lanterne Magique*, showing a slide projection of anxious Patriots fleeing the stadtholder

The image is typical of how the Patriots are ridiculed in this journal. They are not only presented as bad characters, but also as weaklings, a bunch of cowards that always come off worst when they are physically challenged by their Orangist opponents.

Furthermore, this weakness is presented by the showman as a source of laughter. In the description of this image in the first instalment of *Lanterne Magique* we learn that the Patriots are getting anxious by the mere sight of the stadtholder — ‘They shake, they tremble’ — and that this anxiety makes them defecate: ‘they do poop, poop, o hear them poop!’ They are in much hurry to leave the scene, and in their hurry, they stumble. The stadtholder finds this very funny: ‘Look how the Prince [i.e. the stadtholder] laughs because they are stumbling’. The showman agrees with him: ‘Ha! Ha! That’s curious!’²¹

What we witness here is a clear case of schadenfreude. The audience is invited by the showman and the stadtholder to laugh (‘Ha! ha!’) at those faint-hearted Patriots, who run away in distress while defecating. Of course, we do not know if the actual readers of *Lanterne Magique* were rolling on the floor when they read scenes like these, but the fact that this journal came out every two weeks over a period of ten months indicates that they at least found it entertaining. Hence, this periodical tells us something about the sense of humour of the day. Apparently, in 1782 a Dutch audience was amused by scenes involving faeces and the physical humiliation of people.

Generally speaking, there is still a lot we do not know about early-modern laughter. Studies from the field of historical anthropology have shown that the attitude towards humour and laughter in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe was ambivalent.²² On the one hand, the positive effects of humour were generally acknowledged. Doctors agreed that laughter was an important medicine against melancholia, a disease especially men of letters and political leaders were susceptible to. Humour was also considered an essential part of the culture of politeness that was practiced by the upper classes, especially in the form of wit. A gentleman was supposed to be able to ‘converse agreeably’; that is, he ought to know how to have a pleasant conversation, including the witticisms that shape such a conversation.²³ On the other hand, humour was also feared. Laughter is first and foremost a physical expression, something that comes from within and cannot always be controlled. Hence, early-modern moral philosophers connected humour to excess, which was considered a sin. Still, even within moral philosophy, it was acknowledged that laughing was a very human thing to do, and thus something that should and could be completely forbidden. The solution was to allow only polite jesting, the kind of humour that does not insult or cross the boundaries of good taste; one that does not bite but only tickles.

Obviously, *Lanterne Magique* with its intensive use of schadenfreude does not belong to this category of tickling laughter. This journal, then, shows us that although polite jesting may have been the ideal, it certainly was not always practised. Recent studies on eighteenth-century humour confirm this observation. In his monograph *Cruelty and Laughter* (2011), Simon Dickie presents a wide variety of comical sources from mid-eighteenth-century Britain, which together prove that despite the emphasis placed by many authors of this period on politeness and sensibility, people from all classes had an appetite for rather cruel and harsh humour.²⁴ That bawdy jokes were appreciated

21 ‘Se beef, se tril; ‘sy doen poep, poep, oor um reis poep!’; ‘Kyk oe de Prins lakt om dat ze kom te buitel!’; ‘Ha! ha! dats curieus!’ *Lanterne Magique*, no. 1 (September 1782), p. 3.

22 Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, eds, *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997); Dominique Bertrand Brunet, *Dire le rire: Représenter pour mieux contrôler* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires, 1995); Johan Verberckmoes, *Schertsen, schimpen en schateren: Geschiedenis van het lachen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, zestiende en zeventiende eeuw* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1998).

23 Herman Roodenburg, ‘To Converse Agreeably: Civility and the Telling of Jokes in Seventeenth-Century Holland’, in *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 112–33.

24 Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

as well is shown in Vic Gatrell's study *City of Laughter* (2006), which discusses the tremendous stock of cartoons produced in London between 1770 and 1830.²⁵

Digging a little deeper into this inappropriate form of laughter as it is practised in *Lanterne Magique*, we discover that it touches upon two topics that have fascinated humour scholars for a long time. The first comprises the social effects of humour. Belgian sociologist Eugène Dupréel distinguishes two such effects when he speaks of 'rire d'accueil' ('laughter that brings people together') on the one hand, and 'rire d'exclusion' ('laughter that separates people') on the other.²⁶ In the first of these, the social effect of humour is solidarity. The corresponding emotion here is joy. In the second case, the effect is exclusion and the corresponding emotion is hatred. Often, an instance of humour facilitates both effects at the same time. This is also the case in *Lanterne Magique*, which, at once, unites Orangists and excludes Patriots. Because of its defamatory rhetoric, however, this journal leans more towards Dupréel's 'rire d'exclusion'. *Lanterne Magique* is all about separating us from them. *They* are cowards that should be ridiculed. *We* are the ones laughing at them. The schadenfreude that is practiced here is aimed at consolidating a binary opposition between good and bad, strong and weak. It also stimulates the probably already existing feelings of hatred towards Patriots among supporters of the Orangist faction.

The second topic to engage humour scholars is the relationship between humour and the body. This relationship is not only evoked by the inevitable corporeality of laughter itself, but also by the body as a source of laughter, which occurs when physical ailments become the butt of a joke.²⁷ Schadenfreude is to a large extent based on this principle. It makes physical harm laughable. Almost all humour in *Lanterne Magique* can be connected to this physical aspect. Puns or situational comedy are completely absent in this journal. All jokes come down to deriding persons who either have a physical ailment or are physically humiliated.

An example of the former is offered by a series of slides concerning the young erudite Patriot Willem van Irhoven van Dam. In 1782, Van Dam had just finished his studies in theology at Utrecht University. He had, however, no ambition to become a clergyman and chose to dedicate his life to writing political literature. He authored various well-wrought essays against the Orangists, which brought him high esteem among the rich merchants of Amsterdam, who, because of their age-old feud with the House of Orange, were enthusiastic supporters of the Patriot Movement.²⁸ Apparently, Van Dam was also of small stature.²⁹ This physical trait is ridiculed by *Lanterne Magique*. Van Dam is pictured visiting a brothel after earning some money for writing Patriot libels (this turns out to be a recurring motif). He wants to kiss one of the prostitutes 'but he is too small, he cannot reach her with his head'.³⁰ Hence, the prostitute puts Van Dam on her lap: 'she puts the Author on her knee, on her lap, ah! now all's well! now he can kiss, now he can lick. — o look at him licking! kissing! — that makes the show singular, I am roaring with laughter.'³¹ Later, he gets drunk and starts to sing dirty

25 Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (New York: Walker, 2006).

26 Eugène Dupréel, 'Le Problème sociologique du rire', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, no. 58 (1928), 213–60.

27 Dickie, esp. pp. 45–110.

28 Peet Theeuwen, 'Willem van Irhoven van Dam (1760–1802): Impressies van een Staphorster Indiana Jones en zijn kruistocht door politiek en letteren', *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman*, no. 30 (2007), 39–47.

29 I did not find any mention of Van Dam's small size outside *Lanterne Magique* to corroborate this claim.

30 'maar um is te kleine, um ken daar niet by met de koppe'. *Lanterne Magique*, no. 18 (10 May 1783), p. 277.

31 'sy sette de Scryvere op aar knie, op aar scote, ah! nou is 't koete! nou ken um soen, nou ken um lik. — o kyk um reis lik! reis soen! — dat make de vertoon sinculiere, se mot daar ma foi om lak dat se scatere.' *Lanterne Magique*, no. 18 (10 May 1783), p. 278.

songs. The prostitute ‘joins in and plays with him on her knee as with a child, from dou-dou-dyne.’³² O how funny!’³³ Unfortunately, for Van Dam, the end of the story is less funny. After he has become entirely inebriated, he is thrown out of the brothel by the prostitute, but not before she has robbed him of all his money. The next morning, he is found on the street by a town guard, looking completely bedraggled and with his peruke missing.³⁴

In this scene, like in the ones previously discussed, laughter plays an important role. ‘I am roaring with laughter’, says the showman, and a bit later: ‘O how funny!’ This laughter seems to be primarily caused by the ludicrous appearance of Van Dam, who is presented as if he were a dwarf, too short to reach for the prostitute’s mouth when he wants to kiss her, which leads her to put him on her lap like a little child. Next, she plays childish games with him and they sing together. In this way, Van Dam is comically humiliated, his physical appearance being the main source of comedy. That he is pictured as a whoremonger is, of course, in itself a form of defamation, but the crux of the insult lies elsewhere. Van Dam is being ridiculed because of his physical shortcomings. His visit to a prostitute ends up in playing childish games and singing dirty songs while sitting on her lap like a little boy. Thus, his masculinity is subverted. His physical defect — being of small stature — becomes a gender and sexual defect: the prostitute is not taking him seriously as a real man, but instead treats him like a little child.

Sometimes, the physical humiliation in *Lanterne Magique* is even more literal. A couple of times, slides are discussed that depict one or more Orangists giving a Patriot a beating. As always, the images are supposed to shake the audience with laughter. In the sixth instalment, of 20 November 1782, we find a good example of such a scene. The main figures this time are Pierre Gosse, the official publisher of the stadtholder and a fanatical supporter of the Orangist cause, who plays the role of hero, and Theodorus Van Brussel, a prolific hack writer and former clergyman favouring the Patriots, in the role of victim. Van Brussel has targeted Gosse in one of his political journals. Gosse does not accept that and will now teach Van Brussel a lesson. ‘You despicable Clergyman!’ Gosse shouts,

You have showed in general that you are a great villain, I have never done you any harm and you have prosecuted me with your rebellious gazette,³⁵ and done your best to ruin me and to make me hated. — You shall have it, Villain! — Bang, bang! — There Van *Brussele* gets a lick. — O pay attention! There rolls the giant Peruke off the head! — o look at him standing there! I have to laugh, about this silly Guy. — Ah! he wants to hit back, but he misses. — *Gosse* takes him by the head and throws him on the ground.³⁶

In this passage, the poor performance of Van Brussel when it comes to fighting forms the main source of laughter. He is presented as clumsy and weak. First he gets a few

32 This refers to a traditional Dutch children’s song.

33 ‘...doet mee en speule met em op de knie as met de kind, van dou-dou-dyne. Dat kaat krappeke!’ *Lanterne Magique*, no. 18 (10 May 1783), p. 278.

34 *Lanterne Magique*, no. 18 (10 May 1783), pp. 278–81.

35 Refers to Van Brussel’s political journal *Diemer- of Watergraafmeersche Courant*.

36 ‘Jy méprisabele Predikante! um heb ketoont en general dat um is de kroote scurke, se eb jou nooit kedaan de kwaad en um ebt my vervolket met um oproerike Courante, en um best kedaan om my te bederf en te maak keaat. — Um sel eb, Scurke! — Paf, paf! — Daar krykt van *Brussele* de klop. — O keef wel akt! daar rolt de krote Perrucq van de koppe! — o siet um daar staan! se mot lak, om de malle Vente. — Ah! y wil slaan weerom, maar dat is misse. — *Gosse* pakke em by de koppe en kooi em op de kronte.’ *Lanterne Magique*, no. 6 (20 November 1782), p. 89.

licks of Gosse, which make his peruke fly off his head. When he wants to hit back, he misses. Then Gosse gives him another blow: he takes him by his head and throws him on the ground. Aside, the showman is sneering: 'o look at him standing there! I have to laugh, about this silly Guy.' Again, a Patriot is humiliated and laughed at. Van Dam was ridiculed because of his sexual inabilities, Van Brussel meets the same fate because of his lack of physical power and fighting techniques. Like in the case of Van Dam, masculinity is subverted in the representation of Van Brussel. The defeat he suffers in this man-to-man fight with an Orangist can be seen as a *pars pro toto* symbolizing his overall failure to meet the masculine norm of being a brave and powerful warrior/soldier.

The two scenes that I singled out here are symptomatic of the demeaning, physically oriented 'rire d'exclusion' that dominates the 320 pages of *Lanterne Magique*. It is a type of laughter that is difficult to relate to for twenty-first century readers. It is not that we are not used to bawdy and transgressive humour anymore. Sex and violence dominate popular shows such as the animated sitcom *South Park*. Offensive jokes figure prominently in the genre of stand-up comedy. Still, there is a fundamental difference between these contemporary examples and what happens in *Lanterne Magique*. Current comedy mostly uses rudeness and anger ironically: derogatory jokes on public figures function as hyperboles, deliberate exaggerations that should not be taken literally, and which are funny exactly *because* they are exaggerations.³⁷ This ironic tone of voice is completely missing in *Lanterne Magique*. The *schadenfreude* that is practised in this journal is sincere. It is the pain and humiliation inflicted on people like Hoefnagel, Van Dam, and Van Brussel that should actually make us laugh. This kind of blunt, openly aggressive laughter can only be understood within the context of a society in which physical violence was a fact of daily life, and where the government was still torturing and executing people without hesitance. In such a society, physical ailments could be an object of comedy in a way that today seems mostly absurd.³⁸

The Power of Tradition

The late eighteenth century is known for its revolutionary spirit. These were the years when the 'modern' notions of democracy, equality, and human rights were first put into practice.³⁹ This development is also connected to an overall shift in political culture, a fundamental change in the way politics was performed and in the political language that was used.⁴⁰ Typical of the new political culture emerging at this stage were, among other things, a much more active involvement of ordinary citizens in the business of politics and, subsequently, a more continuous public debate.⁴¹ When governing is no longer the exclusive affair of the king and his ministers, informing the public about ongoing politics becomes an urgent matter. When the public can vote, it better knows what to vote for; hence the enormous growth of news media in these decades. The active participation of citizens in politics also implied that discussions concerning the general course that the government should take no longer took place behind closed doors, but

37 Ethan Thompson, 'Good Demo, Bad Taste: South Park as Carnavalesque Satire', in *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, ed. by Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 213–32.

38 Dickie, pp. 45–110.

39 Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2007); Mart Rutjes, 'Useful Citizens: Citizenship and Democracy in the Batavian Republic, 1795–1801', in *The Political Culture of the Sister Republics, 1794–1806: France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Italy*, ed. by Joris Oddens, Mart Rutjes, and Erik Jacobs (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 73–84.

40 Keith Michael Baker, ed. *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, 4 vols (Oxford: Pergamon, 1987–94); Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Van Sas.

41 Van Sas, p. 112.

were a matter of public deliberation. As a result, public debate started to focus more on the clash of competing ideologies and less on the legitimacy of the authorities in charge.⁴²

When reading *Lanterne Magique*, all this seems quite far away. This journal does not inform its readers about ongoing political affairs in any real sense. The only thing that truly matters are the private lives of various members and allies of the Patriot Movement. They are attacked, not because of their ideas, but because of their alleged nature, their perversion and cowardice as it is shown on the slides that the showman has brought with him. Interestingly, these personal attacks are expressed in a medium — the journal — that is often considered as a specimen of the modern public sphere, with its emphasis on continuity and the exchange of ideas. What *Lanterne Magique* shows is that this medium could just as easily be used to pursue the traditional practice of slander. Worse still, the periodicity of this slander seems to make it all the more powerful. By repeating the personal accusations of Patriots again and again, the successive instalments of the journal together create a ‘negative mythology’ of this movement, an overall image of it being false, weak, and corrupt. I borrow the term ‘negative mythology’ from historian Robert Darnton, who uses it to identify a similar development in France in the years preceding the French Revolution, when a flood of libels came out defaming king Louis XVI and his entourage. According to Darnton, the strongly repetitive nature of the accusations brought forth in these libels eventually led to a general subversion of royal power. The ‘positive mythology’ of the king as God’s representative on earth was thus replaced by the ‘negative mythology’ of a morally bankrupt ruling class.⁴³

Seen in this light, *Lanterne Magique* shows itself to be a clever form of cultural appropriation. It takes the new medium of the journal to perform old-fashioned politics. Instead of using the instrument of periodicity to sustain the attention for political affairs and to foster a continuous debate on those affairs — like many Patriot journals of the day can be said to have done — the fortnightly rhythm here becomes a vehicle for sustaining a slanderous campaign against the Patriot Movement, whereby the periodicity of the medium facilitates the continuous flow of schadenfreude directed at Patriot targets.

This is all the more surprising when we realize that the Patriots are usually presented as the masters of the press in this period. From their advent, they understood how pamphlets, newspapers, and especially periodicals could be used to engage more people in their struggle against the stadtholder, and to convince the public of the validity and relevance of their ideas. The stadtholder and his entourage, it is said, were slow to realize this, and the counterattacks launched against Patriots by Orangists in the press are henceforth generally characterized as too little too late.⁴⁴ In the case of *Lanterne Magique* it is exactly the other way around. The Orangists were the first to adopt the format of a magic lantern libel and turn it into a fortnightly journal, fuelling Dutch public opinion with Patriot-hatred on a regular basis for ten months in a row. On behalf of the Patriots, hack writer Nicolaas Hoefnagel published a counter journal, called *Le Nouveau Lanterne Magique* (‘The new magic lantern’), but that journal only lasted for three instalments, which appeared irregularly. In other words, the Patriots may have been better at putting the new medium of the journal to use for mobilizing public support for their cause, but the Orangists outdid them when it came to using this medium for the old, but still powerful strategy of defaming political enemies.

42 Van Sas, pp. 122–30.

43 Darnton, pp. 299, 441.

44 Pieter Van Wissing, ed., *Stooschriften: Pers en politiek tussen 1780 en 1800* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2008), pp. 12–14.

The lesson we learn, then, from the case of *Lanterne Magique* is that traditions should not be underestimated, even — perhaps especially — in times of revolution.⁴⁵ When we analyze a revolutionary period, we tend to focus on ruptures and fault lines, on what was innovative: the first experiments with democracy, the emergence of ideological reasoning in public debate. These innovations were certainly there, but as the saying goes: old habits die hard. For over two centuries, European citizens were accustomed to the rhetoric of defamation. It formed a recurring element in all instances of international and domestic political conflict. Whenever there was a serious controversy, libels would start to appear that slandered one of the quarrelling parties.⁴⁶ Obviously, this practice did not just disappear with the advent of a modern political culture at the end of the eighteenth century. Like with polite jesting, this culture was to a large extent an ideal. It had to fight a still rather stubborn practice.

That the Patriots realized this as well is suggested by the fact that they too continued to make quite some use of the rhetoric of defamation in their publications. We already saw an example of this in the pamphlet *Aan het volk van Nederland* by Joan Derk Van der Capellen. Another proof is a cartoon that depicts the stadtholder as a swine, drinking wine from a trough and urinating on some legal documents (Fig. 6). This anonymous cartoon was published by a Patriot bookseller from Amsterdam at the height of the conflict in 1786. Its intended effect seems to be similar to that of *Lanterne Magique*: to slander the enemy and humiliate it through ridicule and bawdy humour.

Conclusion

The analysis performed in the previous pages also puts Van der Capellen's pamphlet, with which I started this article, in a new perspective. The rhetorical force of this text lies precisely in its skilful fusion of defamation and ideological reasoning. It contains enough substantial arguments to ground a new, reformist political movement, yet it also offers the kind of personal attacks that appeal to the more basic instincts of its readers — their anger and discontent — and so instigates them to revolt.

But not all that glitters is gold. Rhetorically and literarily speaking, *Lanterne Magique* is no match for *Aan het volk van Nederland*. The only true skill the author of the former possesses is to sense exactly what the audience wants to hear, and where they would laugh. The people behind this periodical understood that *schadenfreude* was a useful tool when one wanted to influence public opinion, or simply sell books. And so they started a periodical that did just that, thereby adopting the formula of an imaginary magic lantern show, until then only used in libels. Every two weeks, their 'showman' came back with new slides defaming members and allies of the Patriot Movement. Given the substantial amount of issues that this journal completed, one is inclined to think that it met with considerable popular acclaim.

To twenty-first century readers, these imaginary slideshows and the *schadenfreude* that is practiced in them may be surprising at best and repulsive at worst. Within the context of late eighteenth-century public debate, however, they can be seen as an effective form of political communication. *Schadenfreude* was a common form of amusement, despite the fact that decorum demanded humour to be polite and good-hearted at all times. Also, the rhetoric of defamation was a regular part of public debate, and it had been so for over two centuries at that point. New forms of political reasoning — more

45 This importance of tradition in times of revolution also forms one of the focal points of the current Dutch research programme *The Persistence of Civic Identities in the Netherlands, 1747–1848*, led by Judith Pollmann and Henk te Velde (Leiden University).

46 See note 5 above.

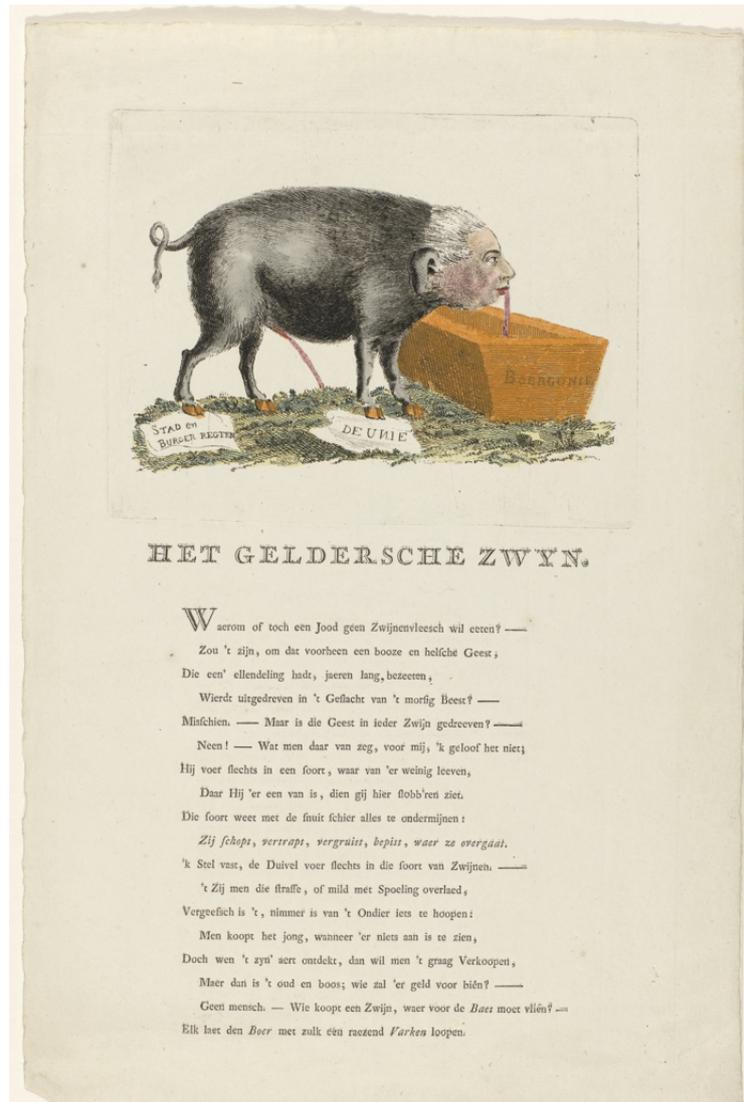


Fig. 6 Defamatory rhetoric deployed by the Patriots: stadtholder William V depicted as a swine. Anonymous, *Het Geldersche zwyn* ("The Gelders Swine"; 1786). Etching with printed verse, hand-coloured, 390 x 250 mm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

ideological, less personal — were emerging, but these were not yet dominant; so instead we find *Lanterne Magique* comically attacking political opponents by presenting them as cowards, whoremongers, or drunkards.

In this periodical, laughter and defamation, *schadenfreude* and slander, enforce each other. The insulting humiliation of the enemy forms a source of laughter. The comic aspect, present in the form of *schadenfreude*, makes this humiliation into more than just a slanderous attack; it is also a form of amusement. How significant this type of amusement was for the struggle between Patriots and Orangists at large is difficult to determine. Still, the fact that both parties in this conflict made use of it shows us that *schadenfreude* was considered an effective weapon in the battle for political dominance, at least potentially so. As such, *Lanterne Magique* should certainly be taken seriously, even if the showman suggests otherwise.

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