Part II

The Pamphlet as an Historical Actor
POISON IN PRINT: PAMPHLETEERING AND THE DEATHS
OF CONCINI (1617) AND THE BROTHERS DE WITT (1672)

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Introduction

In the late summer of 1672, following the lynching of the brothers John
and Cornelis de Witt in The Hague, a pamphlet appeared that attempted
to place those events within a wider context. The first part of this work
was a *praatje* or conversation between fictional English, French and
Dutchmen on the current course of relations between their countries;
the second half, however, cast its net in a different direction and was a
comparison between the lives and deaths of Concino Concini, Marquis
d’Ancre, the favourite of Marie de Medici, who was murdered in Paris
in 1617, and the brothers De Witt in Holland. This latter theme clearly
struck a chord, for the second half of the pamphlet was reissued in the
same year, this time in German.¹ There are striking similarities between
the manners in which the deaths of Concini and the brothers Cornelis
and John de Witt were treated in contemporary political rhetoric, and
it was intriguing to discover that a seventeenth-century contemporary
of De Witt had seen fit to draw attention to this parallel. In this article
I attempt to explore elements of the political tracts issued before and
after the deaths of Concini and the brothers De Witt based on the cor-
pus of political pamphlets contained in the Bibliothèque Nationale and
the Dutch Koninklijke Bibliotheek.

My findings support the proposition that the ritual of so-called
‘tyrannicide’ was an integral part of the culture of early modern Europe.
In the course of this ritual, writers of popular political polemic for-
mulated accusations of treason and ‘foreignness’, but the main burden
of their theme was that the overmighty subject had deprived the right-
ful ruler of his authority. Such accusations were levied not only in

¹ Den bedrogen Engelsman met de handen in ’t hair (…) een vergelijkinge tusschen
den Marquis d’Ancre en Cornelis en Ian de Witt (1672) Knuttel 10480; Bergleichung
Lebens und Todes des Marquisen d’Ancre zu Paris 1617 mit dem Leben und Tode des
Johannes und Cornelis de Wit im Hage (1672) Knuttel 10481.