News, Propaganda and Poetry. Language and Imagery in Hugo Grotius’s Maurice Epigrams

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1 Introduction

The times did not seem rosy for The Dutch Republic, when on 10 July 1584 William of Orange was murdered. The rebellious provinces were now without a leader and the Spanish troops appeared unstoppable. It seemed only a matter of time before the independence of the Northern Netherlands would come to an end. Then, in 1586, William’s son Maurice of Orange took command of the Dutch forces. His task was an arduous one: to free the eastern and southern provinces and to re-establish some order in the Republic. He succeeded splendidly. In Maurice’s fourth year as a general, his legions started on a sequence of spectacular victories over the Spanish forces. In the years between 1590 and 1600, Maurice was able to drive the Spanish out of the eastern, and most northern provinces of the Republic and achieve several victories in occupied Flanders. The tide was turned in favour of the Dutch.¹

Unsurprisingly, by 1600, Maurice had become one of the most celebrated generals in Dutch historiography, pamphlets and poetry, since he was seen as the progenitor of the relative stability and peace throughout the Republic. His victories over the armies of the world’s biggest empire increased the self-awareness of the people who inhabited this small corner of the earth. This gave rise to the feeling that the newly acquired independence from Spain needed to be legitimated. This is also noticeable in the field of historiography: the years 1599–1601 were very productive for the historiography on the Low Countries, both in Latin and the vernacular.² The same holds true for pamphlets.³

² E.g. histories by Pieter Bor 1601; Janus Douza Sr. 1599; Janus Douza Jr. 1601; Emanuel van Meteren 1599, Anthonis Duyck 1602.
Good examples of the tributes to Maurice in poetry, include the so-called *Maurice epigrams* of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). In this study, sixteen of these epigrams will be discussed. They were written around 1600 and published on engravings by Pieter Bast (1550–1605) and Bartholomeus Dolendo (1572–1626), depicting the victories of Prince Maurice in the years 1590–1600. Fifteen of these engravings were published again, in the same year, with a Dutch translation of Grotius’s epigrams. This makes these epigrams the only poems by Grotius translated into Dutch immediately. It seems probable that the translation was prompted by their being part of a corpus of engravings, and that both the medium and the function of the engraving poem made a translation an attractive prospect. However, Grotius wrote many more engraving poems and yet none of those were translated immediately. Therefore, the subject of the engravings must have played an important role as well. This chapter will provide some insight into the role both image and propaganda played in the interaction between Neo-Latin and the vernacular in the case of the *Maurice epigrams*, by analysing the creation and reception of the engravings, the epigrams and their translation.

### Methodology

In order to understand how the medium of the engraving and its propagandist possibilities influenced the interplay between Neo-Latin and the vernacular in the case of the *Maurice epigrams*, I will first discuss the creation of the engravings to which they belong. Next, I will examine the medium of the news print, since this will tell us more about the formal aspects and function of the *Maurice engravings*. Since the illustrations on twelve of the engravings are evidently based on earlier news prints made by the influential news agent Hogenberg of

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