

Playing by the rules

The Hague courts and the Acteonisation du Grand Veneur d'Hollande (1643)

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Abstract

This article discusses an unpublished play, *Acteonisation du Grand Veneur d'Hollande* (1643). Created – and possibly performed – within the immediate circle of the court of Elizabeth of Bohemia in The Hague, its anonymous author satirizes the various personalities in the Orange courts of respectively Frederik Hendrik and Amalia von Solms, and Willem II and Mary Stuart. Focusing on the social ambitions of Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven, Lord of Heenvliet, and by using the popular myth of Actaeon and Diana, the clash between court and city, between princely aristocrats and republican burghers is played out.

Keywords: court entertainments, Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven, Lord of Heenvliet, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Amalia von Solms, Mary Stuart, The Hague court life, satire, Actaeon

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Two small, rather bland looking, parchment-bound manuscripts can be found amongst the literary papers of Sophia of the Palatinate, Electress consort of Hanover (1630–1714). While unsightly and unstudied, the manuscripts are remarkable reading material, addressing and ridiculing the inner circles of the three rivalling courts in The Hague: those of Frederik Hendrik and Amalia von Solms, of prince Willem and his wife Mary (Henriette) Stuart, and, in particular, of Elizabeth of Bohemia.

The manuscripts contain a draft version and a fair copy of an intriguing play about the Hague court society, titled *Acteonisation du Grand Veneur d'Hollande. Comodie. Piece nouvelle par le Sieur Auliscope. Anno 1643*.¹ Considering its layout and composition, the fair copy was possibly meant to be published, like the texts of other plays (mostly ballets) originating in Dutch court circles.² A separate title page is followed by a dedication to 'Her Excellency, Madame Princesse of (Hohen)Zollern, Marchioness of Bergen op Zoom'; a preface by Auliscope, the author, to the general reader; a number of French and German laudatory poems to the author and his text; a historical explanation of the events of 1643 (intended to 'make sense' of the play); a list of characters and, finally,

1 The (unfoliated) manuscripts are part of the personal archives of His Highness Ernest Augustus, Prince of Hanover. They are kept in the Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hannover, Dep. 84A, no. 168. I am grateful to His Highness for allowing me to study these documents. The play was first mentioned in M. Knoop, *Kurfürstin Sophie von Hannover*, Hildesheim 1964, p. 84.

2 For example the texts of festivities at the occasion of the marriage between Johan Wolfert Lord Brederode and Louisa Christina von Solms: *Relation de ce qui c'est passé à la Haye [...] les festins, comédies, bals, courses de bague, et autres magnificences faites au mariage de monsieur de Brederode*, The Hague 1638, or the *Ballet de la Carmesse de la Haye*, Den Haag 1655. On theatre at The Hague court, see: N.N.W. Akkerman and P.R. Sellin, 'Facsimile edition – A Stuart masque in Holland. Ballet de la Carmesse de La Haye (1655)', in: *Ben Jonson Journal* 11 (2004), p. 207–258 and (Part II) 12 (2005), p. 141–164; M. Keblusek, 'Entertainment in exile. Theatrical performances at the courts of Margaret Cavendish, Mary Stuart and Elizabeth of Bohemia', in: P. Davidson and J. Bepler (eds.), *Triumphs of the defeated. Early modern festivals and messages of legitimacy*, Wiesbaden 2007, p. 173–190; N.N.W. Akkerman, 'Cupido en de eerste koningin in Den Haag. Constantijn Huygens en Elizabeth Stuart', in: *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 25.2 (2009), p. 73–96.

the play proper: a French ‘comédie’ in verse, in five acts. Some of these contain scenes in German.³

A first hint of the singularity of the *Acteonisation*, which allows an intimate look behind the court scenes, lies in its list of characters. This list presents no fictional figures, but historic, real-life contemporaries: the Prince and Princess of Orange, prince Willem II, Mary Stuart and others. This is a comedy, situated in the world of the Hague court, and in its use of characters unambiguously referring to real-life, existing, contemporaries – and thus, so it is implied, a play in which ‘real’ events and characteristics of the personae involved are being presented and brought on the stage. These vary from inside allusions to infidel princes and choleric princesses, to jokes about national languages (Dutch, German, English) and to current political and cultural happenings.

The *Acteonisation* vividly portrays the dynamics, strategies and alliances played out between the three rivalling courts. In this essay, the *Acteonisation* will be examined as a portrayal of these rivalries, especially through its chosen framework of the Ovidian myth of Diana and Actaeon. This will highlight the extraordinariness of the play, as an inverted prince’s mirror, and as a testament to the rightful hierarchies within the world of the court.

Recently, historians have stressed the ongoing rivalries and tensions – hierarchical, political, cultural – between these three women and their interconnected courts.⁴ Their rivalry was played out mostly through performance, ceremony and display, in the glitter of jewelry and the sumptuousness of dress, the luxuriousness of the courtly stage.⁵ It could be seen in ‘public’ spectacles – for example royal entries, festivities for marriages and baptisms, and theatrical performances outdoors – as in more private events within the confines of the court – ballets, dinners, concerts, masques and plays. In both kinds of events, ceremony and rank were of the utmost importance; breaches of protocol were perceived to be extremely insulting. Because of the complex relations and positions in the Hague court world, conflicts were inevitable. In 1650, for example, Mary famously refused to be present at the baptism of her newborn son after some intense quarreling with Amalia over his name (Charles or William – Amalia won) and over the order of the baptism train.⁶

Such ceremonial events were opportunities where rivalry could be expressed, particularly in their theatrical staging.

Theatricality has become a key concept through which scholars try to understand the formal and informal ways power was put into ceremonial play in the early modern

3 In the draft copy, two German laudatory poems are missing, as well as the historical introduction.

4 Most recently N. Akkerman, *Courtly rivals in The Hague. Elizabeth Stuart & Amalia von Solms*, The Hague 2014. See Keblusek, ‘Entertainment in exile’, p. 181–184, and A. Hughes and J. Sanders, ‘The Hague courts of Elizabeth of Bohemia and Mary Stuart. Theatrical and ceremonial cultures’, in: *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 15.3 (2007), p. 1–23 (URL: <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-15/hughsand.htm>).

5 See Akkerman, *Courtly rivals*, *passim*, for examples.

6 In 1646, Mary refused to be present at the wedding ceremony and festivities of Louise Henriette, Princess of Orange, and the Elector of Brandenburg, because of ceremonial problems: M.A. Everett Green, *Lives of the princesses*, vol. VI, London 1850, p. 138–139.

world of the court – and beyond.⁷ Indeed, numerous studies on stage performances in, and by, the early modern court and its members have shown how crucial this notion is in appreciating spectacle as a powerful means of princely representation and power.⁸ It is clear that court members themselves were astutely aware of this. In ballets, masques and plays staged within the court walls, veiled comments on specific people and events were alluded to by way of metaphor and allegory.⁹ Only rarely, however, direct identifications of characters with living courtiers were made (such an exception is the infamous farce ‘Cardinal Wolsey going down to Hell’ (1531), recently dramatized in the BBC-series *Wolf Hall*).¹⁰ One can perhaps draw a connection to the English ‘pamphlet plays’, which sometimes were directed at individuals – such as Oliver Cromwell – who were ridiculed and identified by name.¹¹ Similarly, a French influence may be detected: the *ballets de cour* performed at the court of Louis XIII did occasionally satirize specific persons (albeit often under another, metaphorical name).¹² However, as we will see, the *Acteonisation* is in several ways a unique text.

The Acteonisation

The play’s characters are apparently listed not according to rank, but to their court position: the *Prince d’Orange* (Frederik Hendrik, 1584–1647), the *Princesse d’Orange* (Amalia von Solms), the *Princesse Royale* (Mary Stuart, 1631–1660), *Prince Guillaume* (Willem II, 1626–1650), and *Mademoiselle de Portugall Morice* (Eleonora Mauritia of Crato, Princess of Portugal, 1609–1674). Only then the play’s protagonist is mentioned:

7 See, for example, the introductory chapter in C. van Eck and S. Bussels (eds.), *Theatricality in early modern art and architecture*, Oxford 2011.

8 J.R. Mulryne and E. Goldring, *Court festivals of the European Renaissance. Art, politics and performance*, Abingdon 2002. Also for example, A. Kronbergs, ‘The significance of the court performance of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* at the Palatine wedding celebrations’, in: S. Smart and M.R. Wade, *The Palatine wedding of 1613. Protestant alliance and court festival*, Wiesbaden 2013, p. 339–352.

9 In 1639, for example, the tragedy of Jason and Medea was staged in the Bohemian court; ‘the whole play was acted by women’ who played ‘very creditably’: M.A. Everett Green, *Elizabeth, Electress Palatine and queen of Bohemia*, revised edition, London 1909, p. 355. This is just one of many examples, see M. Koblusek, ‘“A divertissement of little plays.” Theater aan de Haagse hoven van Elizabeth van Bohemen en Mary Stuart’, in: J. de Jongste, J. Roding and B. Thijs (eds.), *Vermaak van de elite in de vroegmoderne tijd*, Hilversum 1999, p. 190–202.

10 On this farce see G. Walker, *Plays of persuasion. Drama and politics at the court of Henry VIII*, Cambridge 2008, p. 20.

11 See S.J. Wiseman, ‘Pamphlet plays in the Civil War news market’, in: J. Raymond (ed.), *News, newspapers, and society in early modern Britain*, London 1999, p. 66–83. For example F. Osborne, *The true tragicomedy formerly acted at court*, ed. J. Pitcher and L. Potter, New York 1983, in which the so-called Overbury affair is explicitly addressed. See also A. Bellany, *The politics of court scandal in early modern England. News culture and the Overbury affair, 1603–1660*, Cambridge 2002, p. 273–275. On pamphlet plays in general see D.B.J.L. Randall, *Winter fruit. English drama 1642–1660*, Lexington 1995, p. 51–65.

12 For an overview of these *ballets de cour* see M.M. McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance. European fashion, French obsession*, New Haven, London 2008, chapters 5 and 6.

'Henvlite' (Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven, Lord Heenvliet, 1594-1660), 'Superintendent de la Princesse Royale et grand Veneur d'Hollande', that is, chief forester and gamekeeper of the province of Holland. Next come his wife, 'Stanop' (Catherine Wotton, Lady Stanhope, 1609-1667), Mary's governess and his daughter, 'Walberg' (Walburch Polyander van Kerckhoven, 1626-1686), one of Mary's ladies-in-waiting. These characters are followed by a number of other contemporary figures from the Orange courts of Frederik Hendrik and Amalia, and Willem and Mary, sometimes with a short description of their position or function. *Sevenar* refers to the Lady Sevenaer, lady-in-waiting to Amalia; *Soutland* (Catharina van Soutelande, c. 1605-?), is registered as 'Coiffeuse' of Amalia and did indeed serve at her court; *Deschamps* (Antoine Deschamp) likewise was, as his description in the character list suggests, Frederik Hendrik's equerry.¹³ *Beverwert* signified Lodewijk of Nassau, Lord Beverweerd (without any further specification, 1602-1665), while *Haucourt* (suggested to be Stanhope's 'Amant') referred to Charles d'Aumale, Lord Haucourt, a French captain in the States General army, with a rather dubious reputation when it came to women.¹⁴ One of the play's main minor characters, *La Garde*, 'Femme de Chambre dela Princesse Royale', is mentioned in a document of 1642, which lists all members of Mary's household after coming over from England.¹⁵

Both in its form and content, the *Acteonisation* is a text initially targeted at an in-crowd, those who are very closely connected to or even living inside the court; those with intimate knowledge of oddities of both the Prince of Orange, his family, and his highest ranking servants.¹⁶ But the *Acteonisation* is not a friendly text about, and for, the Orange court. It is a biting, sometimes malevolent, satire aimed at – as we shall see – another audience, whose members took pleasure not just in the events that were played out, or read about, but rather in the amusing circumstance that they themselves could be personifying people closely connected to them – and in doing so, ridiculing them; as if these people were, in fact, making fools of themselves. What is happening on the stage, the anonymous author tells the readers in his preface, is the real thing; this *is* what happens in the Orange court.

Auliscopie is not interested in whether or not his readers approve or admire his work; he is concerned only with preserving, 'for posterity, a real life portrait of people so extraordinary, that historians won't dare to describe them [...] for fear that their books

¹³ *Gloria Parendi. Dagboeken van Willem Frederik, stadhouder van Friesland, Groningen en Drenthe, 1643-1649, 1651-1654*, ed. J. Visser, Den Haag 1995, p. 29: 1643/88.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 34: 1643/94: 'Haucourt gaf juffer Osmael een natte neus' (according to the footnote: Haucourt gave Miss Osmael gonorrhoea. It may also have meant: Haucourt had sex with Miss Osmael).

¹⁵ According to *Lyste van de suite van de koningin en prinsesse van Engeland, in den Hage gesonden aen de E. heeren Staten ende de burgermeesters, om gebiljeteert te worden in burgers huysen*, Amsterdam 1642. See also The Hague, Royal Archives, inv. A15-II-8 (Willem II), 'Train de la Reijne d'Angleterre et de Madame la Princesse en Hollande'.

¹⁶ The historical introduction is clearly meant to widen the audience to those who are *not* connected to the court – or should we even read this part of the text as tongue-in-cheek satire?

will be read as satires.¹⁷ His rough verse and indecent language are not the author's fault; on the contrary, he has done his utmost to be as true to the courtiers' language as he could – 'because most of them are foreigners or French who corrupt their language.'¹⁸ The dialogues at times may be suspiciously oblique but, Auliscopes stresses, this is a realistic portrayal of the way court intrigues are contrived. Lastly, he apologizes for two scenes wholly in the German language; this is, he states, similarly true to nature, 'because I can assure you that the Princess of Orange [*i.e.* Amalia] speaks German when in her chambers, because she believes that that language in its severity and harshness is as close as can be to God's words in Paradise when he put Adam in his place.'¹⁹ Thus a severe caricature is masked as highly realistic, and the irony in this double layer is what makes the play work as a comedy.

Its author chose an appropriate pseudonym: *Auliscopes* – he who spies on the court. Although he is clearly part of that world, he distances himself explicitly from the 'mauvaise Compagnie' – this wicked company. Precisely because he never really fit in, he suggests, he was able to observe, and describe, so closely. And his descriptions are truly revealing.

Already on its title page, the *Acteonisation* is explicit about the play's main character and the fate that will befall him: the 'Grand Veneur d'Hollande', Johannes Polyander van Kerckhoven, Lord Heenvliet, is to be 'Actaeonised'. Before we look into the Ovidian myth referred to and its possible meaning for the interpretation of the play, we have to examine Heenvliet's status at court.

Heenvliet and his (second) wife, Catherine Stanhope, were central figures in Mary Stuart's 'English' court at the Noordeinde. As ambassador *extraordinaire*, Heenvliet had played a major role in the marriage negotiations in 1639–1640, as well as in the wedding between Mary and Willem in Whitehall Palace on 2 May 1641. In 1641, Heenvliet himself married Catherine Stanhope *née* Wotton, the rich widow of the Earl of Chesterfield, whom he had met at the London court. This match was not an obvious one: contemporaries mocked Heenvliet's limitless ambition and his humble background as non-aristocrat, as a *burgher*, who had bought his title instead of inheriting it. The match, it was rumoured, served to get him higher up in English court circles. Stanhope only agreed to it upon King Charles I's explicit approval.²⁰

Heenvliet had been Frederik Hendrik's *protégé*, or favourite for a long time (the Venetian ambassador called him one of the prince's 'creatures' in 1643), and also enjoyed

17 'pour conseruer à la Posterité un pourtraict au vif des personnes si extraordinaires, que les Historiens n'oseront [...] de peur de passer pour Satires.'

18 '[ce] sont la plupart estrangers, ou bien des francois, qui corompirent leur langue.'

19 'Car je t'assure que la Princesse d'Orengé se sert de cette Langue, dans sa Chambre, persuadée (:comme Je crois:) qu'elle represente mieux la Seuerité, puis qu'on dit que Dieu y tansoit Adam au Paradis.'

20 He complained that he was being vilified as deriving from an 'issu d'un lieu obscur, et d'une race vulgaire'. See S. Poynting, 'Stanhope, Katherine, suo jure countess of Chesterfield, and Lady Stanhope (bap. 1609, d. 1667)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press 2004; online ed. 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15669>, accessed 16 January 2016.

King Charles I's and Queen Henrietta Maria's esteem and trust. After their daughter's wedding, he was officially appointed head of Mary's household, and his wife was made governess and first lady-in-waiting. Because Mary was only twelve when she moved to The Hague, Stanhope and Heenvliet effectively acted as her guardians.²¹

All these facts are mentioned in the 'historical' introduction to the *Acteonisation*, yet in a manner and tone which foreshadow the events of the play proper. It depicts Heenvliet as an unscrupulous careerist, an '*homme de basse*', a simple burgher who only through cunning and scheming succeeded in making himself favourable with Frederik Hendrik. Through the same sly methods, Heenvliet subsequently convinced the States General he must be appointed ambassador to England. According to the introduction, Heenvliet needed the aristocratic status of his wife for his own distinction. Stanhope, in turn, had made herself impossible in English court circles because of her 'wicked behaviour' and thus wanted someone, like her future husband, who could introduce her into foreign (*i.e.* Dutch) high society.

The play's representation of Heenvliet was in line with his reputation amongst various courtiers. When discussed by others, for example in correspondence, he was often denounced as an arrogant liar.²² In another unpublished play, he is mentioned, *en passant*, as a *nouveau riche* 'who is thought a Fool / by the entire court'. It is good to note however that this hostility was voiced by English exiles who had nothing left in the world but their rank.

In the *Acteonisation*, Stanhope and Heenvliet recognize each other's ruthlessness, and are united in their relentless ambitions, which focus on Heenvliet's appointment as 'Minister d'Etat', as permanent ambassador to England. They are supported in this endeavour by Lord Beverweerd (Frederik Hendrik's bastard son) who indeed always supported the couple. Similarly, in the play Lord Harcourt turns out to be firmly on their side, albeit for very personal reasons. As Stanhope's lover, Harcourt obviously likes his rival Heenvliet abroad, as ambassador in London. Plotting together with La Garde, Mary's 'Femme de la Chambre', he attempts to convince Frederik Hendrik to nominate Heenvliet as ambassador, assuming, rightly, the prince will be favourable to the idea. For Frederik Hendrik, the 'old arthritic' as he is consistently alluded to in the text, is in love with Stanhope as well (even though she is highly pregnant in the play), denouncing his wife Amalia at every occasion.²³ Haucourt and La Garde count on the

21 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson 115, fol. 385v-386 (Instructions Heenvliet), and 394 (Instructions Stanhope).

22 S. Groenveld, 'Verdicht verleden. Kanttekeningen bij een zeventiende-eeuws manuscript over Jacoba van Beieren', met commentaar op de zeventiende-eeuwse teksten door F.L. Zwaan, in *Hollandse Studiën* 8 (1975), p. 275-348, esp. 305 and vs. 236: 'die door t heele Hoff, geacht / wort voor een Nar.' In 1652, Sir Edward Hyde noted that whomever wanted access to Mary 'had to fool with my Lady Stanhope [...] and talk with Mons. Henfleet though he lie his heart out.' *Calendar of Clarendon State Papers*, vol. III, Oxford 1876, p. 127 (20 December 1652).

23 On 9 May 1643 Heenvliet's and Stanhope's eldest son, Charles Henry, was born. Although the child was named after the English King and Frederik Hendrik, the *Acteonisation*, in portraying an affair between Charles d'Aumale, Lord Haucourt and Stanhope, suggests the boy may have been his bastard.

fact that Frederik Hendrik will want Heenvliet somewhere far away, so he can safely pursue Stanhope. In the end, the scheming comes to nothing, because Amalia von Solms literally physically intervenes.

Amalia is almost cruelly caricatured in the play, with her less attractive characteristics enlarged to the extreme. The diaries of Willem Frederik, Stadtholder of Friesland and Groningen, similarly refer to her infamous temper, which Auliscopes in his historical introduction describes as well. The Princess of Orange, he states, is a feisty woman, choleric, irritable, incredibly stingy and mean, and relentlessly ambitious. She has the ‘foolish habit of publicly showing her bad temper, which sees her turning chalk white in the face, with a shiny bright red nose.’ (These physical traits are mentioned in Willem Frederik’s diaries as well).²⁴ Moreover, she is exceptionally jealous and she knows Frederik Hendrik’s predilection for beautiful women. In the *Acteonisation*, this is played out in hilarious scenes in which Amalia (alternately called by the other characters ‘the Tigress’, ‘Medusa’s Head’, ‘Cerberus’ or simply ‘The Monster’) is so enraged with her husband’s behaviour that she stamps her feet and shrieks like a harpy. A typical scene has Amalia accusing Frederik Hendrik of *naïveté* when it comes to Heenvliet’s ambitions: ‘Don’t you see’, she asks him, ‘that he is only interested in himself? You gave him a title, a castle, and his daughter a position at Mary’s court.’ She threatens the prince to tell everybody that he ‘has left our conjugal bed’, which remark has Frederik Hendrik retorting: ‘You know that is because I then don’t have to listen to you any longer.’ Yet Amalia insists she should be listened to, having done everything in her power for her husband’s political position: securing the title of ‘Altesse’, arranging his ‘creatures’, marrying off his son to the daughter of a king.²⁵ In some scenes Amalia turns her anger towards her hairdresser Soutelande, whom she curses in German and orders not to pull her hair – ‘or do you want to see me bald?’ But it is, ultimately, Amalia who triumphs and gets her way: the upstart Heenvliet has to swallow his ambitions and remain in The Hague, with his wife, at Mary’s court. This signifies Heenvliet’s ‘Actaeonisation’ – according to the last sentence of the final act.

In what context, exactly, should we position this comedy? We know that *ballets de cours* – a kind of *tableaux vivants* with spoken words – were frequently staged at the Orange court. Texts of some of these have been preserved, but only occasionally the authors are known (in 1624, Constantijn Huygens wrote a ballet dedicated to Elizabeth of Bohemia). Very much like masques, their British equivalents, these ballets were staged within the court, by (mostly male) courtiers and their high-ranking servants. In the extant lists of players, we encounter equerries and dancing masters, elite court

²⁴ Visser, *Gloria Parendi* (n. 13), p. 237: 1646/88–89 and also 295: 1646/201: ‘Lady Merode has told me about Amalia’s changeability, favouring this one and hating those, who she has favoured before and how she jeered at the government’ (Juffer Merode heeft mij [Willem Frederik] veel vertelt van H.H. [Amalia van Solms] veranderlijkheit, dat se nu den eenen aenhaelt en den anderen, die se heeft geëstimeert, dat se die wedrom haet en hoe dat se op de regeringe heeft gegeven). And p. 424, 1647/213: ‘She is a vain woman who cares only for herself [...] she respects nobody’ (eene vaine vrou die niet acht als sichselfs [...] voor de rest achtse niemandz).

²⁵ Act IV, scene 4. Amalia continues: ‘everyone should listen to me.’

members, and even the Prince of Orange himself, portraying jesters, chimney sweepers, burghers, peasants and gypsies ('Egyptians'). The *Acteonisation*, however, is another story altogether, precisely because of its set of characters. It seems highly unlikely, because of its narrative, style and phrasing, that the comedy should be read as a form of self-caricature, with the actual historic figures playing themselves: Amalia as Amalia, Heenvliet as Heenvliet, etc. Rather, we should read the text as a caricature of the 'other' courts, as a performed manifestation of the ambiguity of the Hague court world.

Given the provenance of the manuscripts (amongst the papers of one of the daughters of Elizabeth of Bohemia, possibly in her handwriting), and a number of other clues, it is likely the play was produced by, and for, the Bohemian court members – if it was ever played. It is dedicated to Maria Elizabeth II Bergh, Princess of Hohenzollern, Marchioness of Bergen op Zoom, one of Elizabeth's most trusted friends in the Dutch Republic. The prefatory poems and scenes in German (in characteristic black letter handwriting) seem to point to an author from these regions, well-versed in (sometimes phonetically written) French and of course German – possibly from the Palatinate. The sheer *absence* of any figure from the Bohemian court in The Hague is telling, for no character in the play is altogether positively portrayed – they are all scheming, lying, spying.²⁶ Thus, the play must have circulated, read, possibly been staged, in the intimacy of Elizabeth's court; so amusingly depicting the strained relationship between the courts of Amalia, Mary and Elizabeth.

The play, according to its title, is set within the framework of the Ovidian myth of Actaeon. How are the court's antipathies played out within this framework? What, exactly, does the text tell us in terms of the title's 'Acteonisation'? How can we interpret the play, and why did Auliscopé, the anonymous author, chose this mythological narrative?

Actaeon at court

The history of Actaeon and Diana is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (III, 138–252). On one of his wanderings through the forest, the Greek prince Actaeon, a hunter, unexpectedly happens upon Diana and her nymphs, who are taking a bath. The sheer act of seeing makes him an observer, thus implicating him in an act of voyeurism (like, of course, Auliscopé who secretly observes and spies on the court). Enraged, Diana splashes water over him, turning him into a stag; he is then hunted down, and killed by his own dogs.

The myth of Actaeon and Diana was a beloved theme in Renaissance and Baroque imagery – not just depicted in paintings, but also in frescoes, fountains, decorative

²⁶ Rather remarkable is the absence of a character depicting 'Constantijn Huygens'. Was he not deemed worthy of a part in the play, being from bourgeois ancestry? Or was he seen by the Bohemian court as such an outstanding figure (a positive mirror image to Heenvliet) that they did not want to ridicule him as a representative of the Orange court?

objects (collectable *Kunstkamer* items such as drinking cups and textiles) and even illustrations in *alba amicorum*.²⁷ Paintings by Veronese (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1560–1565), Titian (National Gallery, 1556–1559) and later Rembrandt (Wasserburg Anholt, 1634) show the various elements that together make up the story: the naked women bathing in the woods; the act of seeing; the transformation into a stag; Actaeon's death by his hounds. Rembrandt, for example, melts two myths into one work of art when he depicts both the stories of Diana and Actaeon and Diana and Callisto.

One of the most prolific artists in the Dutch Republic exploiting the myth was the Utrecht painter Cornelis van Poelenburch, who takes us straight into court culture. Exactly in the period in which the *Acteonisation* was written – the mid-1640s – he and his followers painted various landscapes with Diana and her nymphs bathing. In most works, Actaeon himself is only barely visible on the fringes of the image, turning the beholder into an observer, a spy, himself.²⁸ Van Poelenburch was extremely popular in the Hague court circles: Frederik Hendrik had at least nineteen of his art works in his collection, and in Amalia's picture gallery some of his religious and mythological works could be seen.²⁹ Although the preserved inventories of the Orange palaces do not specifically mention any Actaeon-painting by him, it is evident such images were greatly appreciated by the court (not in the least because its iconography involved naked women). We find, among others, a 'Diana en Actaeon' by Hendrik van Balen in Frederik Hendrik's gallery in the Stadhoudersdijk Kwartier (his official apartments); two large canvases depicting 'Actijon' in the Stadtholder Court in Leeuwarden in 1633, and, from a later period, an Actaeon appropriately hung in a bathroom in the Honselaarsdijk palace (dating to the period of Mary II Stuart and Willem III).³⁰

Designed by Jacob van Campen, Honselaarsdijk's new decoration programme – executed in the late 1630s when the hunting palace was rebuilt – was completely devoted

27 For the Gonzaga castle in Fontanello, a 'Saletta di Diana and Actaeon' was commissioned from Parmigianino in 1523–1524 (frescoes); in the garden of None-Such Palace a fountain depicted the Diana and Actaeon myth. In Hardwick Hall, Elizabeth Talbot's embroidered panel with a depiction of the myth is preserved, dating to 1597. The *album amicorum* in the National Library, The Hague, Album Juv van Harinxma (KB 79 J 47). About the drinking cups, see below.

28 E.J. Sluijter, *De 'heydensche fabulen' in de schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw. Schilderijen met verhalende onderwerpen uit de klassieke mythologie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, circa 1590–1670*, Leiden 2000, p. 50–52, 81–82, 115–117.

29 P. van der Ploeg and C. Vermeeren (eds.), *Vorstelijk verzameld. De kunstcollectie van Frederik Hendrik en Amalia*, The Hague 1997, p. 17, 55.

30 S.W.A. Drossaers and Th.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Inventarissen van de inboedels in de verblijven van de Oranjes en daarmee gelijk te stellen stukken 1567–1795*, vol. 1, The Hague 1974, p. 184, no. 72: 'Een schilderij van Acteon ende Diana, door van Balen gedaen' [a painting of Actaeon by Van Balen] and p. 537: Honselaarsdijk: 'Het quartier van het Badt', no. 379: 'Een badt van Diana en Acteon van dito [=Du Val]' [Honselaarsdijk, in the bathroom: A bath by Diana and Actaeon by ditto [=Du Val]], vol. II, p. 42–43: Leeuwarden 1633, under 'Groote stukken' [big pieces], no. 247: 'Een klein Actijon' [A little Actaeon] (p. 42) and no. 302: 'Actijon'; p. 109: Leeuwarden 1681, no. 830: 'Een stuckge van Acteon, comende van H.F. Doorl. vrouw Hedwig geboorne prinsesse van Dennemarck' (Hedwig of Denmark (1581–1641), wife of Elector Christian of Saxony) [a small piece of Actaeon, once belonging to Hedwig, Princess of Denmark].

to the representation of Diana, with scenes of her life painted on the ceilings and an enormous chimney piece by Peter Paul Rubens depicting the *Crowning of Diana*. In 1632, Amalia van Solms and her sister Louise Christine commissioned Gerard van Honthorst to portray them as Diana (a copy of which was presented to Elizabeth of Bohemia), as did Elizabeth herself and Louise Hollandine, one of her daughters. Their rivalry was evidently played out in a competitive appropriation of the Diana-goddess. Signifying both fertility and chastity, the image of Diana had been appreciatively used for, and by, Elizabeth I and it may well have been Elizabeth of Bohemia, the 'Diana of the Rhine', who introduced this particular iconography into Hague court circles.³¹

The Actaeon-myth has been interpreted in many ways, but the most common explanation in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentaries and (emblematic) literature reads Actaeon's tragic fate as the inevitable consequence of unbridled lust and desire.³² Emblemists such as Barthélémy Aneau (1557), Natale Conti (1551), Georgius Sabinus (1555), Johannes Spreng (1564), Johannes Sambucus (1564) and Francesco Turchi (1584) refer first to physical lust and the dangerous temptations of women. According to other authors, the *voluptas aerummosa*, the disrupting desire, refers to more than just sexual craving: excessive 'moon-gazing' (astrology; Diana being goddess of the moon), gaming and hunting are equally dangerous, according to Giuseppe Horologgi (1563).³³ In his influential *Choice of Emblems* (1586) the English poet George Whitney described Actaeon's fate as that of those 'who do pursue / their fancies fonde, and things unlawfull crave.'³⁴

In choosing the Actaeon-myth for his (or her?) satirical play, the anonymous author knew his audience to be perfectly able to understand and appreciate the myth and its meaning(s). Given the German-English provenance of the play, it is interesting to look more closely at some commentaries and interpretations which could have influenced the play's narrative. For indeed, some English commentators on Ovid specifically linked the world of the court to Actaeon's downfall.

In George Sandy's 1632 commentary, *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, dedicated to King Charles I and with a prefatory poem to Queen Henrietta Maria (Elizabeth of Bohemia's brother and sister-in-law, respectively), the myth signifies far more than illicit (sexual) desire:

[...] this fable was invented to shew us how dangerous a curiosity it is to search into the secrets of Princes, or by chance discover their nakedness: who thereby incurring their hatred, ever after live the life of a Hart [!], full of feare and suspicion: not seldome accused by their servants, to gratulate

31 Akkerman, *Courtly rivals* (n. 4), p. 9.

32 L. Barkan, 'Diana and Actaeon. The myth as synthesis', in: *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980), p. 317-359 provides an enlightening overview of meanings, interpretations and sources. For the Actaeon-myth in (Dutch) emblems, prints and paintings, see Sluijter, *De 'heydensche fabulen'*, esp. p. 103-118. For the 2008 exhibition and catalogue focused on the visual representation of the Diana and Actaeon-myth and the (forbidden) act of looking at nudity, in both early modern and contemporary art, see B. Wismer and S. Badelt (eds.), *Diana und Actaeon. Der verbotene Blick auf die Nacktheit*, Düsseldorf 2008.

33 See Sluijter, *De 'heydensche fabulen'*, p. 103.

34 G. Whitney, *A choice of emblems*, London 1586, p. 15.

the Prince, unto their utter destruction. For when the displeasure of a Prince is apparent, there commonly are no fewer Traitors then servants, who inflict on their masters the fate of *Actaeon*.³⁵

In this rather ambiguous reading, Actaeon is mirrored in the prince who is betrayed by his own servants, who have uncovered his secrets and whom he can never trust again; thus, his servants have metaphorically killed him. Yet the spying of secrets, the view of the 'nakednesse' of the prince, makes him a Diana as well, while his servants take on the role of Actaeon. Although not made explicit by Sandys, he goes on to explain that Ovid himself likened his fate to that of Actaeon: 'Why had I sight to make mine eyes mine foe? / Or why did I vnsought for secrets knowe? / *Actaeon* naked *Dian* vnaware / So saw; and so his hounds their masters tare.'³⁶ One should guard his eyes, Sandys warns his readers, 'nor desire to see, or know more then concerns vs; or at least dissemble the discovery.' Sandys follows those commentators of the myth 'who thinke it to be meant by his [the prince] maintaining of ravenous and riotous sycophants: who haue often exhausted the Exchequors of opulent Princes, and reduced them to extreame necessity', *i.e.* the Prince is killed by his demanding servants. Actaeon, in short, is a double-faced man: at the one hand he is the relentlessly ambitious 'favourite' of a prince, at the other the too-liberal and open-handed prince himself.³⁷

This political implication of the myth had already been emphasized – in very similar words – by Francis Bacon, in his *Wisedome of the Ancients* (1619), dedicated to Elizabeth Stuart, the later Queen of Bohemia. Bacon chose the Actaeon-story as an example of 'the curiosity of Men, in prying into secrets, and coveting with an indiscreet desire to attain the knowledge of things forbidden.' The transformation into a stag, Bacon unequivocally read as a metaphor for

those that are near Princes, and come to the knowledge of more secrets then they would have them, doe certainly incur great hatred. And therefore (suspecting that they are shot at, & opportunities watched for their overthrow) doe lead their lives like Stagges fearefull and full of suspicion.³⁸

Those who seek access to the prince, who indiscreetly want to know all his 'secrets', who do not know their place and who over-ambitiously try to gain his favour, stand to lose their position at court. Suspecting courtiers a step below them of similar practices, they will be forever fearful. This anxiety will 'kill' them in the end.

These political overtones of the Actaeon-myth are very clear in several English plays and masques of the early seventeenth century, such as Ben Jonson's 1601 *Cynthia's Revels*, where the myth of Actaeon refers to the fall from grace and subsequent banishment of the Earl of Essex from the court of Elizabeth I (Diana).³⁹ In several of his plays,

³⁵ G. Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, London 1632, p. 100. The interpretation of Actaeon's gaze as a quest for (divine) knowledge can be found in G. Bruno, *Gli Eroici Furori*, London 1585.

³⁶ Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, p. 100.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, concluding: 'Plutarch in the life of Sertorius makes mention of two *Actaeons*, the one devoured by his hounds, and the other by his favourites: not as if this latter were the allegory of the former.'

³⁸ F. Bacon, *The Wisedome of the Ancients*, London 1619, p. 53.

³⁹ See J. Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, Oxford 1993, p. 163, who claims Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were often 'used as a vehicle for contemporary political comment in [...] drama.'

Shakespeare referred to Actaeon's fate, for example in *Twelfth Night* (possibly staged at the Whitehall Court in January 1601) where Duke Orsino identifies himself as a 'hart', hunted down by his hounds (his desires). The cuckold Falstaff, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, can also be identified as an Actaeon.⁴⁰

The overall theme of the myth, then, can be read as (visual) transgression, in all its forms: sexual, intellectual, political. In the courtly context, it is referred to most directly in terms of secrecy and ambition: the courtier who seeks secrets of the prince in order to come, literally, closer to his sovereign; or the prince himself who allows his servants to spy on, and steal from him.

Actaeon at play

To what measure, and in what way, do we find these interpretations reflected in the *Acteonisation*? Auliscopie first employs the more obvious wordplay with references to 'chasser' (hunting), hart/heart and deer, identifying the myth's protagonist (the hunter Actaeon) with Heenvliet's position as chief forester (Grand Veneur), thus also referring to the court's hunting prerogative and privileges.⁴¹

The whole play is suffused with the notion of secrecy and the discovery of hidden things (affairs, ambitions, the truth behind rumours). Heenvliet himself states in his last scene (Act v, sc. 5) that 'It is a long time since I was recognized / My accuracy in spying has become superfluous.' Frederik Hendrik, the 'old cuckold', is transgressing the boundaries of conjugal love, corrupting youth and sexuality. La Garde, Haucourt and Stanhope are similarly crossing over into the forbidden territories of spying, scheming, discovery and adultery. Amalia of Solms, the anti-Diana, terrorizes her husband and her court, thus transgressing the ceremonial formalities required of her status. Instead of bathing together with her nymphs, she is found bullying her dresser Soutelande.

Heenvliet is Actaeon, whose ambitions are killed. He will not become ambassador but has to remain 'in the apartment of my wife' because of Amalia's ultimatum: if he pursues his ridiculous desire to be a minister of state, she will make him pay for it. Amalia-Diana only knows of Heenvliet's cunning schemes because of courtiers and servants who in turn have their own agenda. (La Garde's pivotal role as trouble-making schemer in the *Acteonisation* is intriguing, considering a series of 'real life' events in

⁴⁰ Bate, *Shakespeare*, p. 164-166. J.M. Steadman, 'Falstaff as Actaeon. A dramatic emblem', in: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963), p. 231-244.

⁴¹ In this context, we should also interpret the mysterious painting *Keur baert Angst* by Jacob Fransz van der Merck (c. 1638-1640), almost certainly produced for the Bohemian court. Whether or not a direct reference to the Actaeon-myth, the court's hunting privilege is indeed one of its themes. Intriguingly, Elizabeth of Bohemia's daughter, Louise Hollandine, the painting's protagonist, is depicted next to a freshly killed male deer, proudly holding up the bloody hunting knife and surrounded by hunting dogs. For a possible interpretation of this work see W.J. Hoogsteder, "'Keur baert angst", een verboden liefde', in: *Jaarboek Oranje-Nassau. Liber amicorum Marieke E. Spliethoff*, The Hague 2015, p. 24-35.

the early summer of 1643, which resulted in her rushed departure from The Hague.)⁴² These courtiers are the hounds who hunt down and prey on Heenvliet, the chief forester. In Auliscopé's version of the myth, Actaeon's deer-antlers have undergone a transformation of their own and have been changed into cuckold's horns.

Heenvliet's Actaeon had to be torn apart, because his transgressions are unpardonable. His whole identity, the play suggests, is a transgression in itself. He aspires to be appointed ambassador, yet his status as 'titled' favourite with the prince is already a farce. Here, we touch on the core of the *Acteonisation's* theme, the play's moral stance: burghers like Heenvliet will never, and should never, become part of the court's universe.

Indeed, this moral message is thematized in various monologues by Heenvliet, as well as in a lengthy speech by the Princess Royale to her nurse. At various moments, Heenvliet complains about the way he is being treated by the court: no one takes him seriously; he is made the laughing stock; his current wealth means nothing because he does not know the court's ceremonies and practices ('des galanteries'). His titles similarly are not taken seriously. He fears he will fall out of grace with Frederik Hendrik, 'and be hunted down' by other courtiers, as if he is no more than a 'merchant's servant' (Act II, sc. 2).⁴³ The court's patronizing attitude towards burghers is indeed evident in the words of Mary, who distances herself emphatically from the Dutch Calvinist religion, the Republic's mercantile profit-making and its *bourgeoisie*. She reminds herself of the ballet that has been staged for her and her mother Henrietta Maria 'last Winter', one of the most humiliating experiences of her life. It had been written by 'one of the greatest idiots of the Orange court', it was 'worse than my marriage'. She had been forced to sit with the Hague *canaille*, and on top of this, the Hague consistory had tried to ban the performance because it was considered debauching.

The Mary-character is referring to the 'real' *Balet des Mariages* that had been performed in the Main Hall of the Binnenhof on 27 November 1642 by high-ranking couriers and military men from the States' army, showing, in the guise of gypsies, fools

⁴² The role of Mademoiselle La Garde at the court of Mary Stuart is indeed an intriguing one. She was sent over from England in Mary's train as one of the Ladies of the Bedchamber, but should have returned with Henrietta Maria. The Queen departed in mid-January 1643, but La Garde remained in The Hague. In the summer of 1643, however, a 'scandal' broke out at court, with La Garde seeking refuge at Heenvliet's country house at Teylingen. She was promised the large amount of 4000 francs (including 100 francs promised personally by Frederik Hendrik) to leave The Hague and return either to England, or to her husband and children in Paris. The problems were only solved in September 1643. It is not clear from the extant documents what this scandal entailed. See Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Clarendon 95, fol. 104v-116r (letters by Heenvliet to Frederik Hendrik, Amalia von Solms and Willem II). Interestingly enough, in a short note by Constantijn Huygens to Heenvliet on another scandal in the summer of 1643 (involving Heenvliet and Stanhope's wanting to dine privately), Huygens employs the phrase '[prendre] la garde' remarkably often. La Garde is described as an 'insolent' woman by Elizabeth of Bohemia, referring to the same crisis; London, National Archives, State Papers Holland, 81/53/2, fol. 284-285 (16 July 1643). I thank Nadine Akkerman for this reference.

⁴³ 'Il m/a abandonner et ie seray chassé [...] Comme ie n'estois rien qu'un Valet de Marchand.'

and peasants, a comic homage to love.⁴⁴ Indeed, Frederik Hendrik had been forced by the Hague Calvinist ministers to account for the ballet's sumptuous theatrical staging and its sinful contents. He could only object that he was compelled, according to court custom and ceremonials, to honour the Queen of England and her eldest daughter in this costly manner.⁴⁵ Evidently, theatrical entertainment served to distance the court from the *bourgeoisie* world. Courtiers liked to disguise themselves as chimney sweepers and merchants in their ballets; comic entertainment thus was a way of confirming one's identity as not 'one of those'.

Unruly courtly behaviour, it was thought, is damaging; political transgressions – a burgher masquerading as a courtier, a courtier infringing upon the prince's secrecy – should be recognized and punished, just like Actaeon. As Mary testifies in her monologue in the *Acteonisation*, and other characters point out as well, the court is ruled by ceremony, hierarchy and (informal) rules. Transgressing rules (and rank) is potentially dangerous, but sometimes necessary – especially in a theatrical environment – to impose and emphasize those rules again.⁴⁶ In the play's context, of course, Heenvliet as Actaeon bears another layer of irony. As a former burgher, he controls, as chief forester,

44 *Balet des Mariages*, The Hague 1642. Heenvliet wrote a short report on the performance. Prior to the ballet, Henrietta Maria, Amalia von Solms and her eldest daughter Lousie Henriette, Mary Villiers and James Stewart, Duchess and Duke of Richmond, Charlotte de la Tremouille, Catherine Stanhope and Heenvliet dined at Mary's in the Oude Hof at the Noordeinde; Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Clarendon 95, fol. 88v–89r. See also Koblusek, 'Entertainment in exile' (n. 2), p. 182–183.

45 L. van Aitzema, *Saken van staet en oorlogh in, ende omtrent, de Vereenigde Nederlanden, beginnende met het jaer 1633, ende eyndigende met het jaer 1644*, The Hague 1669, p. 846. The consistory accused the prince 'expressedly' of unnecessary costs, which were deemed painful because of the 'current sad situation in England, and the bloody war in Ireland since October last year [1641].' Frederik Hendrik agrees his robes could have been made of lesser material but he reminded the ministers a royal visit (of Henrietta Maria) was honourable to the State. She had been greatly welcomed in Amsterdam, now he had to do 'what custom forces me to do.' For the Amsterdam entry, see P. Nolpe, *Beschrijvinge vande blyde inkoopste, rechten van zeege-bogen en ander toetel op de wel-koonste van Haare Majesteit van Groot-Britanien, Vrankryk, en Jerland. Tot Amsterdam, Den 20 May, 1642*, Amsterdam 1642.

46 In this respect, the court's passion for related entertainment such as drinking games and its equipment of drinking cups and automata can be easily linked to these ideas. Moving table pieces (*Trinkspiele*) were passionately collected in early modern courts; we know Amalia von Solms owned such an automaton, depicting Diana on a horse. The automaton's mechanical format is directly related to the Actaeon-myth of transgression, for automata functioned as inverted confirmations of courtly ceremony and rules. In their unexpected movements they showed a reversal of courtly codes, thereby reminding the spectators of the control a prince had over his court and his world. E.R. Truitt, "'Trei poete sages dotors, qui mout sorent di nigromace.'" Knowledge and automata in twelfth-century French literature', in: *Configurations* 12 (2004), p. 167–193, esp. 175: 'Automata, in this instance, are defenders both of courts and of courtly behavior, simultaneously enforcing and enacting perfectly disciplined behavior in the moral and aesthetic realms.' They are 'an analogue for the courtier, especially the courtier-poet: they are unobtrusive, servile, graceful creatures, effortlessly entertaining and educating their audience while also promoting and protecting intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and behavioral ideals.' Thus, we can understand the abundance of Diana-and-stag automatons in early modern courts as unmistakable, visible suggestions of the importance of playing by the rules, of not crossing the (often invisible) lines.

who may hunt, and who may not. He oversees the woods (the Haagsche Bosch) where the courtly hunt takes place. Yet, it is suggested, he himself may not enter those woods.

The play, thus, allows not only a rare glimpse behind the scenes, but provides us with a unique textual manifestation of the dynamics of the Hague court world. The literary representation of the international court culture's clash with the world of Dutch *burghers*, as well as the clash of the individual courts, surely is exceptional.

In the *Acteonisation*, the 'bourgeois', the 'guezze' (in its original meaning of beggar), the 'homme de basse' Heenvliet, whose ambition to be part of a world he can never be part of is so reprehensible, is destroyed by the untouchable Amalia-Diana. And this is where the double layer of the play truly reveals itself. For Amalia von Solms, after all, started out her career merely as 'one of the women' of Elizabeth of Bohemia. It is the true hierarchy of the Hague court world and its rules and regulations that is at stake here, being explored, infringed upon and ridiculed. In doing so, Auliscopes restores the balance and puts the court at large firmly back into order, and in its place.