

*‘Holmes’s bonfire’,  
an interpretation on the basis of national identities*

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Gearfetting

*Dit artikel giet oer de reden ta, en jout de reaksjes fan 'e oarlochfierende partijen op, Holmes's bonfire, de amfibyske oanfal op 'e Noard-Nederlânske kust troch de Ingelsen yn 'e lettere faze fan Twadde Ingelsk-Nederlânske (See)oarloch (1665-1667). De arguminten dy't beide partijen bybrochten, sa wurdt ornearre, soene ôfkomstich wêze út it politike debat sa't dat ûntstean koe yn it ramt fan 'e ferskillende nasjonale identiteiten fan 'e twa lannen.*

*Introduction*

The three, predominantly naval, wars of the mid-seventeenth century between England and the Dutch Republic have traditionally been described from economic, power-political and maritime perspectives. Cultural implications, while not ignored by historians, have generally been considered only in so far as they bear on propaganda or rhetorical aspects, with little attention to deeper-lying matters such as their impingement on collective identities.

The view that the economic rivalry, which formed the background to the three wars, was also their primary cause has recently given way to acceptance that ideological differences also formed a major source of discord. The Dutch, in their rapid rise to economic primacy were seen as harbouring ambitions to world domination. In England, during the pre-war period, a polemical pamphlet campaign stoked powerful anti-Dutch feelings.<sup>1</sup> They had, it was claimed, abandoned the worship of God for that of Mammon and were accused of ingratitude for the help they had received during their struggle for independence from the Spanish Habsburg overlord. To some English, the Dutch came to be seen as the ‘antitype’ of their own identity as honourable, pious and courageous.

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1 Dates in the text are New Style; in the footnotes the dates of contemporary sources are Old Style, indicated by OS. S.C.A. Pincus, *Protestantism and patriotism. Ideologies and the making of English foreign policy, 1650-1668* (Cambridge 1996), 237-239, 261-263, 267, 299, 300 and 320; Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England 1660-1760* (Cambridge 2007), 138-151.

The Dutch came likewise to adopt a negative mirror image of their neighbours across the North Sea.<sup>2</sup> The first to make the politico-cultural dimension of the Anglo-Dutch wars a specific object of study of contemporary sources were scholars of British history. This example has recently received following by specialists in the history of the Dutch Republic. ‘Holmes’s bonfire’ is the name given to an English amphibian raid on the Dutch coast during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667). Although one of the (in the Netherlands at any rate) less well remembered actions of the war, with the approach of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary interest in it has revived, hence its selection as the theme of this special issue of *It Beaken*. The intense emotions, and the great volume of pamphlet and other literature engendered by it, make it a suitable subject for the examination of reactions to it and what they reveal of the identities of the two countries. The concept of ‘identity’, it is proposed, forms the most appropriate instrument for the study and analysis of the impact of the action.

### *Identity*

Identity, in the view of culture-historian Willem Frijhoff, is a rhetorical construct arising from the interaction between one’s own self-image and how one is perceived by others, or between the image that a group has of itself and the conception that others have of it. Stereotyping, clichés, images of heroes and enemies, and similar forms of representation may all be incorporated into the structure.<sup>3</sup> A nation, in the view of Benedict Anderson, provides an example of an ‘imagined political community’ of people, most of whom do not know one another personally yet carry in their minds the ‘image of their communion’. It is possible to speak of a group identity once certain essential elements are shared by a sufficiently large proportion of the total. Identities are not necessarily mutually exclusive, it is possible fervently to be simultaneously Hollander (or Englishman) and Amsterdammer (or Londoner), depending on the context.<sup>4</sup> The relative importance of these compatible identities may depend on the circumstances at a particular moment in time.

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- 2 Hugh Dunthorne, *Britain and the Dutch Revolt 1560-1700* (Cambridge 2013), 110-132; J. Scott, *England’s troubles. Seventeenth-century political instability in European context* (Cambridge 2000), 396-400.
  - 3 Willem Frijhoff, ‘Hoe talig is groepsidentiteit? Reflecties vanuit de Geschiedenis’ in: *Taal en Tongval. Tijdschrift voor taalvariatie* 17 (2004), 9-29; see also: Maria Grever and Kees Ribbens, *Nationale identiteit en meervoudig verleden* (Amsterdam 2007).
  - 4 Benedict R.O’G. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London 2010), 6-7.

An identity may incorporate a foundation myth, or story of a seminal event in the community's history. An example is the legend of the founding of Rome by Aeneas after the fall of Troy, as recounted in Virgil's *Aeneid*. It is strengthened by 'othering', the 'other' being held to embody the antithesis of one's (group's) own virtues or values. Politicization may follow from the insistence of the purity of the patriotism or piety of oneself or one's own faction, compared with the laxness or irregularity of that of others. By the time of the Anglo-Dutch Wars, to the English the Dutch had come to be seen as the 'antitype' of their own identity. The Dutch came likewise to adopt a negative mirror image of their neighbours across the North Sea.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, a leader or other notable may be taken to personify either the virtues or the vices of his community. For the Romans, Horatius Cocles provided an example of the former while, for the Germans who bore the brunt of Louis XIV's campaigns of the 1670s, his depravities were projected on to the whole French nation, as a 'vile stereotype' and 'antitype' to its (simple, generous, honest) victims. The attitudes of the English and Dutch to one another at the time of the Anglo-Dutch Wars similarly provide an example of negative antityping.<sup>6</sup>

Political discourse, which may have both visual and linguistic elements, takes place within the matrix provided by national identity and serves to interpret that identity. It addresses both internal and foreign-policy issues, which are frequently intermingled, as with the urging by the elder Cato of the destruction of Carthage to secure the future of Rome, or the flirtation by pro-Orange elements in the Republic with Charles II in the hope of effecting the elevation of his nephew Prince Willem III to his forbears' role of stadhouder and the downfall of the regent regime, the 'True Freedom', headed by Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt.

#### *Holmes's bonfire: context and action*

The First Anglo-Dutch War of 1652-1654 and a Treaty of Friendship of 1662 had done little to remove the economic and ideological sources of tension between the two countries. Clashes for control of slaving stations on the West-African coast now provided the *casus belli* for the war that broke out in 1665.<sup>7</sup> A succession of sea battles was fought, principally in the North Sea and English Channel. The first, off Lowestoft in June

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5 Dunthorne, *Britain and the Dutch Revolt*, 110-132; Scott, *England's troubles*, 396-400.

6 Tim Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648-1815* (London etc. 2007), 305-321; Wim van Nispen, *De Teems in brand. Een verzameling teksten en afbeeldingen rond de Tweede Engelse Zeeoorlog (1665-1667)*, 16-17.

7 See the contribution of Adri van Vliet in this issue.

1665, was a resounding English success. In the August of the second year, the Dutch had overall victory in the great Four-Day Fight but had to concede defeat again in the St. James's Day Battle three weeks later.

The English now enjoyed control of the North Sea and sought to inflict a knock-out blow on the Dutch. The impracticability, owing to difficulties with the provisioning of the English fleet, of a coastal blockade, or an attack on a major seaport, led them to consider a raid on the northern off-shore islands (called in England 'Frisian' but actually at the time administered by the States of Holland) Vlieland and Terschelling. The channel between them, the Vlie, was a well-trafficked route for ships leaving for the Baltic and arriving from there on their way to the *Zuiderzee* and Amsterdam. Dutch East-Indiamen, who chose the northerly route round Scotland in order to avoid capture by privateers and, on occasion, privateers themselves also anchored there. A raider could expect to find pickings in the shape of richly laden ships taking advantage of the safe anchorage. Storehouses on the islands, which functioned as trans-shipment points for the northern Dutch hinterland and the German rivers Elbe, Ems and Wezel, were also tempting targets for plunder. The English fleet commanders Prince Rupert of the Rhine and General at Sea George Monck, Duke of Albemarle, deputed Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Holmes to lead a raid with the aim of causing the maximum of economic damage. Holmes had played a role in the prelude to the war, when on the Guinea coast he had captured a number of Dutch slaving stations, which were subsequently retaken by the Dutch Admiral Michiel de Ruyter.

Holmes's attack fleet, on 19 August 1666, comprised eight warships, five fire-ships and a force of several hundred men. Navigating the coastal shoals and the difficult entrance to the Vlie was facilitated by the help of a Dutch traitor, Laurens van Heemskerck, and some captured pilots. Once inside the shelter of the coastal shallows and islands, Holmes discovered a fleet of no less than 150-170 merchant ships, guarded by two warships. He decided therefore, although his orders were to give priority to the plundering and destruction of strategically and economically significant installations on the islands, to inflict as much damage as possible on this fleet. The operation was an almost complete success, only ten to twenty of the anchored ships escaped the fire-ships and conflagrations started by boarding parties. On the following day Holmes turned his attention to the practically undefended islands. Vlieland appeared to offer disappointingly few opportunities for plunder, causing him to concentrate his attention on its neighbour. On Terschelling, after the burning of some buildings, a fire started at the western, upwind end caused the destruction of almost the entire village of West Terschelling (also known as Brandaris after its mediæval lighthouse), with the inev-

itable human casualties).<sup>8</sup> In their report to King Charles and Secretary of State Lord Arlington Holmes and the fleet commanders justified their decision to deviate from the original plan of attack.

*Representation of Holmes's bonfire in England and the Republic*

On 24 August, news of the action, speedily dubbed 'Holmes's bonfire', reached England and was proclaimed in London by Lord High Admiral James, Duke of York. The first, eye-witness accounts were by Holmes himself, later expanded in his *True and Perfect Narrative*, and an anonymous member of the shore party. It was soon spread by pamphlets and other printed material. This second act of vengeance was grist to the mill for a people whose disappointment at the result of the Four-Day Fight had been only partly assuaged by its successor. A flood of printed accounts, many containing grossly exaggerated numbers of ships and houses destroyed, spread rapidly throughout the country. Church bells were rung and sermons of thanksgiving preached.<sup>9</sup> The *London Gazette* hailed the signal success, by God's grace accomplished. The triumphant mood was captured by Samuel Pepys, the Clerk of the Acts to the Navy Board, who noted in his Diary: 'The guns of the Tower going off and there being bonfires also in the street for this late good success.'<sup>10</sup> Songs, verses and pamphlets also caught the exultant mood: 'Our streets were thick with bonfires large and tall, but Holmes one bonfire made, was worth them all.' *The Dutch Gazette: or, the sheet of wild-fire, that fired the Dutch fleet* gave details of the rich booty seized from the anchored ships and also recounted in gruesome detail the fate of their crews.<sup>11</sup>

More considered, if no less jubilant reactions by weightier poets followed the gush of initial printed reactions. John Dryden, in his long poem *Annus Mirabilis*, describing the events of 1666 but published a year later, celebrated how '... in ports and roads remote, / Destructive fires among

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8 Anne Doedens and Jan Houter, 1666: *de ramp van Vlieland en Terschelling* (Franeker 2013), 177, 200-201; J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic, its rise, greatness and fall 1477-1806* (Oxford 1995), 766-776.; Richard Ollard, *Man of War: Sir Robert Holmes and the Restoration Navy* (London 1969), 148-161; Frank L. Fox, *A distant storm: the Four Days' Battle of 1666, the greatest sea fight of the age of sail* (Rotherfield 1996), 341-342, 387.

9 *A True and Perfect Narrative of the great and signal Success of a Part of His Majesties Fleet under his Highness Prince Rupert, and his Grace the Duke of Albemarle, burning One hundred and Sixty Dutch ships within the Vlie: As also the Town of Brandaris upon the Island of Schelling, by some commanded Men under the Command of Sir Robert Holmes, the 8 and 9 [OS] of this Instant August* (London 1666); Doedens en Houter 12, 29, 42, 72, 174, 275-7; Ollard, *Man of War*, 155; Pincus P&P 286-288.

10 Samuel Pepys, Diary, 15 August 1666 OS, via: [www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1666/08/15/](http://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1666/08/15/).

11 Doedens and Houter, 1666, 275-6, 280-281.

whole fleets we send: / Triumphant flames upon the water float, / And out-bound ships at home their voyage end.' Thomas Sympson's *England's Palladion or Britain's Naval Glory* compared the fate of West Terschelling to the fall of Troy and suggested that the conflagration even surpassed the volcanic eruption of Mount Etna. The victory was no less glorious than that over the Spanish Armada, or the Turkish fleet at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The Bible was also invoked: the English were identified with the Israelites, the Dutch with their enemies the Amalechites. Insults forming part of the general street invective against the Dutch were committed to paper in the pamphlet *The Dutch damnified: or, the butter-boxes bobbed*. The opportunity was taken to respond to one of their own offensive descriptions of the Englishman as the 'tailed man' (*staart-man*, devil or dog): in *Sir Robert Homes his bonfire* this was turned back on them; the Dutch were now the dogs, the English, lions. At this crucial period in the war, this welcome success was inevitably exploited to the full to encourage the 'home front' and, in the poem *Joyfull news for England*, to associate the triumph with the restored monarchy of Charles II.<sup>12</sup>



*Illus. 1. Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell was perceived in the Dutch Republic as the archetypical 'tailed man'. The etymology of this insult is obscure, it may have referred to the supposedly treacherous English bulldog, to a venomous poison, or to the devil. Etching produced in 1652. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.)*

12 Doedens and Houter 1666, 277-282; Diederik Enklaar, 'De gestaarte Engelsman', in: *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Academie der Wetenschappen*, Nieuwe reeks 18 (1955), 105-140.

Nevertheless, it did not take long for the initially exultant reactions to become tempered by more sober reflection: 'But, Lord!', wrote Pepys, 'to see what successe do, whether with or without reason, and making a man seem wise, notwithstanding never so late demonstration of the profoundest folly in the world.' From a Captain Guy, for whom Holmes was 'an idle, proud, conceited, though stout fellow', he heard that 'the whole fleet was ashamed to hear of our bonfires.'<sup>13</sup> Only a few weeks later, all rejoicing and *Schadenfreude* were abruptly halted by the devastating Great Fire of London, which laid waste to a great part of the historic city. Dryden, in his *Annus Mirabilis*, described both conflagrations but avoided the obvious moralizing point taken by his counterparts across the North Sea.<sup>14</sup> It was England's fate, at this period, for its triumphs to be overtaken by disasters: as the victory of Lowestoft had been overshadowed by the Great Plague, so now Holmes's bonfire was to fade in the light of the Great Fire and would, less than a year later, be roundly avenged by the skillfully executed Dutch raid on Chatham, where through lack of money the bulk of the English fleet had been laid up. A large number of warships were burned and the flagship the *Royal Charles* towed to Holland. This humiliation caused the English negotiators at Breda to moderate their tone and remove the last obstacles to the conclusion of the peace of July 1667.<sup>15</sup>

Chatham completed Pepys's disillusionment with Charles II, whom he saw as responsible for the debacle. He recorded his celebrated account of how, on 'the night the Dutch burned our ships the King did sup with my lady Castlemaine, at the Duchess of Monmouth's, and there were all mad in hunting of a poor moth.' In a later reflection, Pepys noted that 'those of [the Dutch] who went on shore ... though they went in fear of their lives ... and notwithstanding their provocation at Schelling, yet killed none of our people nor plundered their houses, ... and, which is to our eternal disgrace, that what my Lord Douglas's men ... found there, they plundered and took all away'. Andrew Marvell's satirical poem *Last instruction to a painter* mourned how, as a result of 'Confusion, folly, treachr'y, fear, neglect', at Chatham 'our sick ships in summer lay / Like moulting fowl, a weak and easy prey'.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Pepys, Diary, 15 August, 28 October 1666 OS.

14 Doedens and Houter 1666, 180-181, 278.

15 Arthur Bryant, *Samuel Pepys, the Man in the Making* (Cambridge 1945), 296; Doedens and Houter, 1666, 278; P.G. Rogers, *The Dutch in the Medway* (London etc. 1970), 62-69.

16 David Davies, 'The British view of the Second Anglo-Dutch War and the 'Battle of Chatham'', in: *Marineblad* 127 (4) (2017), 13-17; Pepys, Diary, 21, 30 June 1667 OS; Andrew

The English triumph had its counterpart in Dutch grief and anguish, the English envoy Sir William Temple reported its immense psychological impact. There was, however, an initial period of stillness, as if the magnitude of the tragedy needed time to sink in, before the flood of pamphlets and other condemnatory material. The sole eye-witness account was provided by the preacher Frans Esauszoon den Heussen on the adjacent island of Vlieland and was published by him in book form as *Gedachtenisse van d'Engelsche Furie op de Vliestroom, en der Schellingh* ('Memorial to the English Fury in the Vlie and on Terschelling'). It urged the English perpetrators to humble themselves before God. On Terschelling, preacher Grevensteyn appealed for revenge. An early printed account in the *Hollantse Mercur* was passionate in its denunciation of the English fiends and their inhumanity in burning the houses of the mostly poor villagers. If the effect of this, in money terms, paled in comparison with the destruction of the fleet, its psychological effect was understandably far greater. A poem by the greatest Dutch poet of the period, Joost van Vondel, gave a heartrending description of the inhabitants' appeals to God for mercy as the flames devoured their homes. The strongly God-fearing islanders, adherents of the Calvinist Reformed Church plus a strong representation of pacifistic Mennonites, were always ready to see the hand of Providence at work in their lives. Following the St. Nicholas storm of December 1665, in which forty-two fishermen of Terschelling had lost their lives, the islanders had been reminded, in a letter from co-religionists in Amsterdam, that this action of their righteous God was amply deserved by their sins. Their latest trial was the result of enemy action, but might not the Almighty now have chosen the English as the instrument of this new chastisement? If so, then some verses, also by Den Heussen, made it clear that the arrogant English had also been visited by His wrath in the form of the Great Fire of London a few weeks later.<sup>17</sup>

Divine punishment provided the theme for numerous publications, including a series of prints with accompanying verses by Pieter de la Croix and popular poems such as *Femme Gerbrandtszoon's Savage action of the Englishman in the Vlie and on West-Terschelling*. Pamphlets included

Marvell, *Last Instruction to a Painter* (London, 4 September 1667 OS).

<sup>17</sup> Doedens and Houter, 1666, 63-65, 172-173, 198-201, 204, 211, 222-227, 254-255, 259; Anne Doedens and Liek Mulder, *Engels-Nederlandse Oorlogen 1652-1674* (Zutphen 2016) 120, 136.

*London's Devastation, or God's Just Punishment and London's ruin or God's Hand in the burning of the city on 12-16 September 1666, brought on themselves by the incendiarism in the Vlie and on the Island of Terschelling.* The latter began by directly quoting the opening line of Vondel's poem *Lament for the fearful devastation of London*, in which he did not fail to draw attention to the plight of the Terschellingens: 'The hellish British firebrand exultantly kindled the Vlie'. Dutch prayers had been answered, God was not mocked; the Dutch, like the English, identified themselves with the Israelites. Jan Zoet, in a poem appealing for Christian sympathy and financial help for the islanders, did not, however, forbear to mention that 'sins alone are the cause of plagues'. His poem, like Vondel's *Lament*, avoided the hyperbole to which others gave way. Vondel also invoked the fall of Troy but compared it, more realistically than the English poets, to the Great Fire, rather than the burning of an island village.<sup>18</sup>

Dutch reactions to the disaster were not confined to the printed word. Two of the Republic's most prominent marine artists, the Elder and the Younger Willem van der Velde, father and son, whose paintings and drawings had depicted many Dutch maritime feats, including those of the Anglo-Dutch Wars, produced pictorial accounts of the action. While their primary intention was to provide a record, they also permitted themselves some licence, artistic but perhaps also not unconscious of their works' propagandist value, showing for example the burning of the fleet and of West Terschelling as if they had been simultaneous, rather than successive deeds.<sup>19</sup>

In the Republic as in England, the initial near-unanimity of the reactions to the bonfire began to give way to a degree of misgiving and the realization that Dutch unpreparedness was to a degree responsible, and to a search for native scapegoats. The admiralties, the States and also those merchant shipmasters who against advice had tarried in the Vlie all received their share of blame.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Doedens and Houter, 1666, 226, 264-6, 282-285; Van Nispen, *De Theems*, 85-91.

19 Doedens and Mulder, *Engels-Nederlandse oorlogen*, 66, 132, 169; Remmelt Daalder, *Van de Velde & Zoon, Zeeschilders* (Leiden 2016), 66, 146-148; Doedens and Houter, 1666 168-169.

20 J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Zwolle 1869), Vol. II, 141; Doedens and Houter, 1666, 136-138, 145-150, 193 and 218.



Illus. 2. Dutch authors and artists accused the English Commonwealth of base envy and common theft. Here we see the Dutch lion forcing Admiral Blake to regurgitate the wealth stolen and to return the ships captured. Etching produced in 1652. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.)

*Holmes's bonfire and collective identity*

In England the powerful reactions to Holmes's bonfire formed an almost unanimous public expression of national identity. The ringing of church bells and the flood of triumphalist pamphlets and other printed material were not dissimilar to those following success in a major sea battle; a bloody nose had once again been inflicted on the Dutch.

The latter, in contrast, had suffered a devastating attack on their own soil and home waters, with loss of civilian lives. The initial reactions of the island ministers evoked the identity of a community of deeply religious fishing and farming folk. Except for the calls for divine punishment of the perpetrators, they would have been equally appropriate for the natural disasters suffered from time to time by the islanders. But the invasion of a remote corner was nevertheless experienced as an assault on the whole country; in the days following, the flood of anguished printed material constituted an evocation of the nation's identity.

For both countries the incident served to confirm the negative mirror image each had of the other. The English had, since the time of Elizabeth I, seen themselves as the altruistic and heroic champions of international Protestantism, as exemplified by their help and support to the young Dutch Republic. In 1585 they had provided money and an expeditionary force under the Earl of Leicester as reinforcement to the Dutch rebels in their struggle against the Spanish. Their defeat of the Armada in 1588 was an important element in their self-image as leaders of the Protestant world and a demonstration of God's favour. Pamphlets celebrated the noble English blood spilled on the soil of the Low Countries. The gallant death of Sir Philip Sidney, at the Battle of Zutphen in 1586, had entered the nation's folklore. The destruction, in the Great Fire, of his monument in Old St. Paul's Cathedral could be seen as emblematic of the rescission of the two countries' past comradeship.<sup>21</sup>

The Dutch were presented as treacherous and cruel. In this context, it was entirely to be expected that Holmes's bonfire should be presented as just retribution for the 'Amboyna Massacre' of 1623: as the two countries were contending for the remnants of the Portuguese trading empire in the East Indies, some English traders were accused of spying and executed, after confessions extracted from them by torture, by officials of the Dutch East India Company on the island of Ambon. In England, this atrocity had continued to rankle down the decades, to be invoked on suitable occasions as an example of Dutch baseness. Holmes's bonfire

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21 *A briefe report of the militarie service done in the Low Countries, done by the Erle of Leicester* (London 1587).

had thus provided confirmation of Dutch cunning and its divine punishment, contrasted with English uprightness.

The first reactions of the outraged Dutch likewise confirmed their own negative mirror image of the enemy. The inhabitants of the Republic could invoke their own 'grand narrative' of their doughty and just struggle against Philip II and the Duke of Alva, the sufferings of the citizens of Haarlem, Zutphen and Naarden, and the stout resistance of those of Leiden and Alkmaar. It found concrete form in paintings, pamphlets, poems and songs, and in the form of commemorative goblets, medals and siege relics such as cannon balls from Haarlem and cloth from the Lammenschans in Leiden. The Dutch had shown themselves brave, freedom-loving and prepared to sacrifice life itself for freedom which, they could point out, had been achieved without the beheading of their sovereign.<sup>22</sup>

After 1652 the Spaniard, as the oppressing 'other', was replaced by the Englishman, the aggressive, jealous, thieving 'tailed man'. To reciprocated accusations of treachery and inhumanity the Dutch added those of English envy and greed. This new negative stereotype was easily grafted on to the old and had the advantage that it, and their own Dutch self-image – honest, free – remained easily recognizable and politically valid stereotypes.<sup>23</sup>

It was natural for the Dutch to make the comparison of Holmes's bonfire to the Spanish atrocities of earlier periods. Like them, it targeted civilians, their homes and livelihoods. It was inevitable that the statesmen of the True Freedom would promulgate the message that the Great Fire of London and the Chatham raid represented the Almighty's punishment of the evil English and His commendation of their own regime.

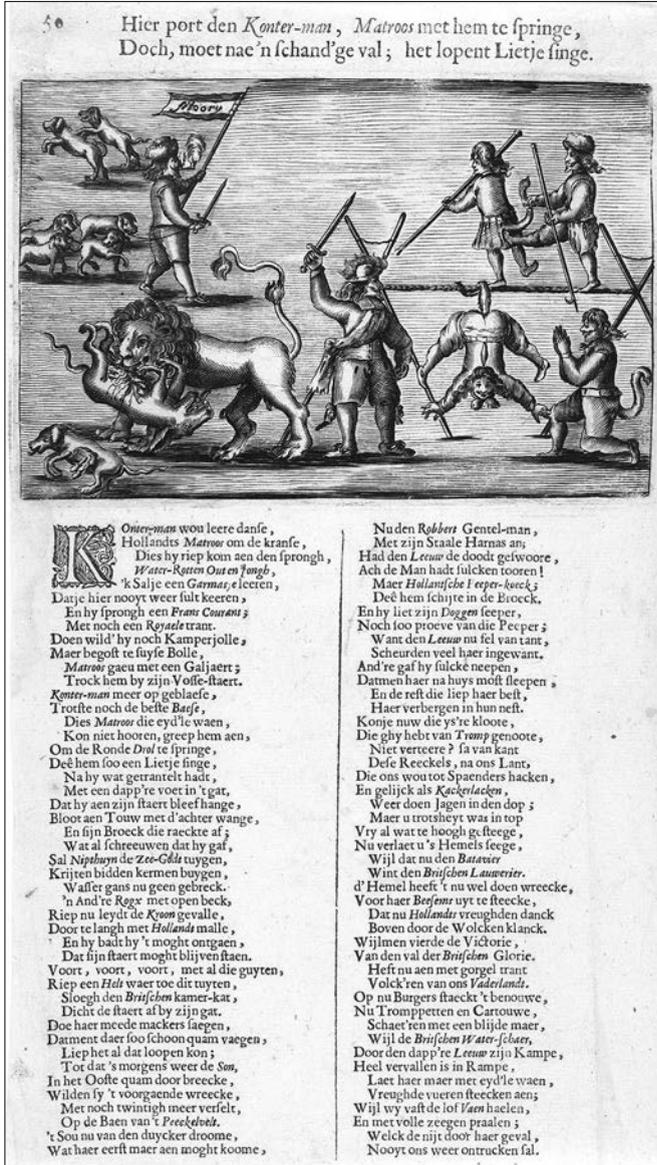
In neither country did the existence of a national identity imply total unanimity. In both, the initial flood of patriotic sentiments was followed by more sober reflections, with in the Republic criticism of the True Free-

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22 Alastair Duke, 'The elusive Netherlands. The question of national identity in the Early modern Low Countries on the eve of the Revolt', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 119 (1) (2004), 10-38; Judith Pollmann, 'No Man's Land. Reinventing Netherlandish Identities, 1585-1621', in: Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann (eds.), *Networks, Regions and Nations. Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650* (Leiden 2010), 241-261; Dunthorne, *Britain and the Dutch Revolt*, 32-33; Helmer Helmers, *The Royalist Republic. Literature, politics and religion in the Anglo-Dutch public sphere, 1639-1660* (Cambridge 2015).

23 Gijs Rommelse, 'Negative Mirror Images in Anglo-Dutch Relations, 1650-1674', in: Lotte Jensen, (ed.), *The roots of nationalism. National identity formation in early modern Europe 1600-1815* (Amsterdam 2016), 199-216.

dom regime in The Hague and, in England, evident distaste for the excessive triumphalism of the first reactions to Holmes's exploit. These explicit expressions of political opposition demonstrate the contrasting reactions possible within the overall linguistic context of national identity.

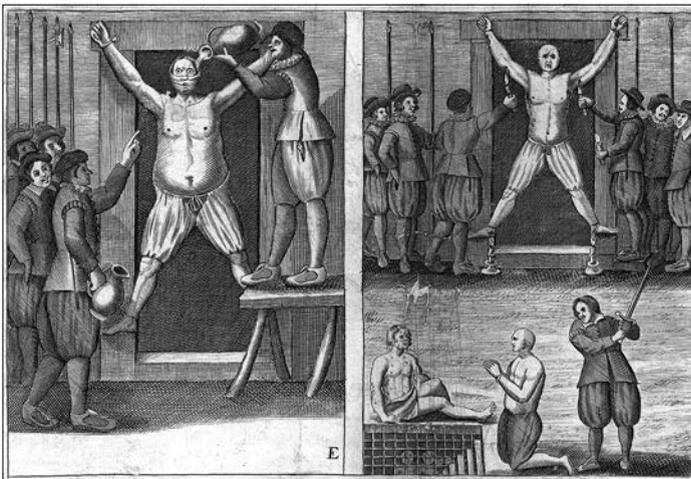


Illus. 3. On the left the Dutch lion is mauling English dogs, while on the right we see the tailed English tight-rope walker kicked off his rope by a Dutch sailor. Satirical etching produced in 1673. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.)

*Conclusion: interacting identities*

Holmes's action had resulted, in addition to the torching of the village of West Terschelling, in the loss of merchant vessels equivalent to between a quarter and a third of all the Dutch shipping destroyed during the war. Its consequences, both economic and human, led to a flood of published reactions in both countries.

Since the war did not prevent the free flow of news between the two belligerents, in each country there was awareness of the representation of Holmes's bonfire in the other. In addition to the fury provoked by the action itself, the Dutch were indignant at its triumphalistic representation in England as an instance of God's favour; it served to confirm their enemy's perfidy and his total lack of apprehension of God's will. For the English, the Dutch reactions appeared hypocritical and self-pitying. Their refusal to acknowledge the lesson of Holmes's bonfire served to reinforce their view of their neighbours across the North Sea as their 'religious and political antitype'. Holmes's bonfire and the reactions of both perpetrator and victim to it had the effect of corroborating each country's negative mirror image of the other. That of the Dutch: God-fearing, sober, republican, had suffered violation at the hands of the faithless and malicious English, whose own perceived identity as benevolent protector of the early Republic and of Protestantism justified its chastisement of the treacherous and ungrateful Dutch.



*Illus. 4. The East India Company reshaped the gruesome narrative of the so-called Aboyna Massacre of 1623 to stir up anti-Dutch sentiments. Print from a pamphlet published in 1673. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.)*

