

**FASCINATION FOR THE «MADRITSCH APOLL»:
LOPE DE VEGA IN GOLDEN AGE AMSTERDAM**

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Fascinación por el «Apolo madrileño»: Lope de Vega en Ámsterdam durante el Siglo de Oro

Fascination for the «Madritsche Apollo»: Lope de Vega in Golden Age Amsterdam

RESUMEN: El presente artículo estudia el modo en que las obras de teatro españolas en su traducción al neerlandés fueron vendidas en Ámsterdam entre 1617 y 1672, con un especial énfasis en las obras de Lope de Vega. La notable popularidad de este autor es analizada en términos cuantitativos y cualitativos; a saber, empleando datos numéricos para identificar cuántas de las obras traducidas eran suyas para después examinar la frecuencia y la manera en que fue mencionado. Este método ha demostrado ofrecer nuevas perspectivas para el estudio de las imágenes de «el otro», dado que la estrategia de venderlas como «españolas» o «neerlandesas» refleja los gustos, intereses y debates predominantes en la sociedad de entonces.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lope de Vega, Siglo de Oro neerlandés, estrategias de mercado, imagología, opinión pública.

ABSTRACT: This article studies the manner in which Spanish theatre plays in their Dutch translation were sold in Amsterdam between 1617 and 1672, with an emphasis in Lope de Vega's works. His remarkable popularity is analysed in quantitative and qualitative terms; that is, employing numeric data concerning how many of the translated plays were his, while also paying attention to how often his name was mentioned and in which fashion. This method has proved insightful when studying images of «the other», for the manner of selling these translations as «Spanish» or «Dutch» reflects the reigning tastes, interests and debates in society.

KEY WORDS: Lope de Vega, Dutch Golden Age, marketing strategies, imagology, public opinion.

It is vox populi that many Spanish drama authors, with Lope de Vega as leading figure, were translated¹ in Amsterdam in the Golden Age. Their works became significantly popular in the local theatre, the Schouwburg, which triggered discussions between writers concerning the style they should be employing for their plays, either a classicist one, or that of the *nueva comedia*. With the opening of the Schouwburg in 1638, the need for theatre plays increased enormously and could not be satisfied by local writers alone. The presence of these translations has as well been analyzed as a proof of the changing taste of the public, which was undoubtedly the case; but they have never been used for further study of images of the other, of the enemy.

In her study about the images the Dutch had of the Spanish around 1650, Marijke Meijer Drees states that «there had always been [throughout the seventeenth century] admiration for Spain»² giving as an example, among other signs, the enormous amount of Dutch literature that was influenced by Spanish examples. However, her research is based on political texts and all of her sources circulated in elite and learned circles. The present paper aims to get closer to the evolution of public opinion concerning the Spanish by studying Lope de Vega's popularity as well as the manner his plays were brought in the book market of seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

Through the study of marketing strategies this article thus contributes to the field of Imagology, which originates in Comparative Literature. Image studies or Imagology is an approach that aims at surveying explicit images of the own nationality as well as those concerning the other identified groups. It was severely criticised -among others- by Wellek in 1963 for its underlying patriotism, which led to a positivistic, nationalist study, and was therefore detrimental to the research³. Accordingly, Imagology has been stripped off an essentialist point of view throughout the twentieth century and images have been progressively regarded as constructed ideas. This implies that researchers do not consider the existence of a 'Spanish character' for instance, but rather of an 'idea of what is Spanish', either conceived by the Spanish self or by other groups. In addition, the interaction and

¹ The terms 'translation/translated' and 'adaptation/adapted' will be used indistinctly in this article given that no study has been dedicated to establishing the category the great majority of these plays pertain to.

² Meijer Drees, 1997: 79.

³ Wellek, 1963.

synchronism of these ideas are taken into account when carrying out an imagological analysis, thus respecting their susceptibility to change in contact with other images and their evolution through time. In 2007 the encyclopaedic compendium *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters: A critical survey* assembled by editors Beller and Leerssen was published. It reviews the history of images since Antiquity, the history of the field itself, and presents its key concepts and objectives⁴.

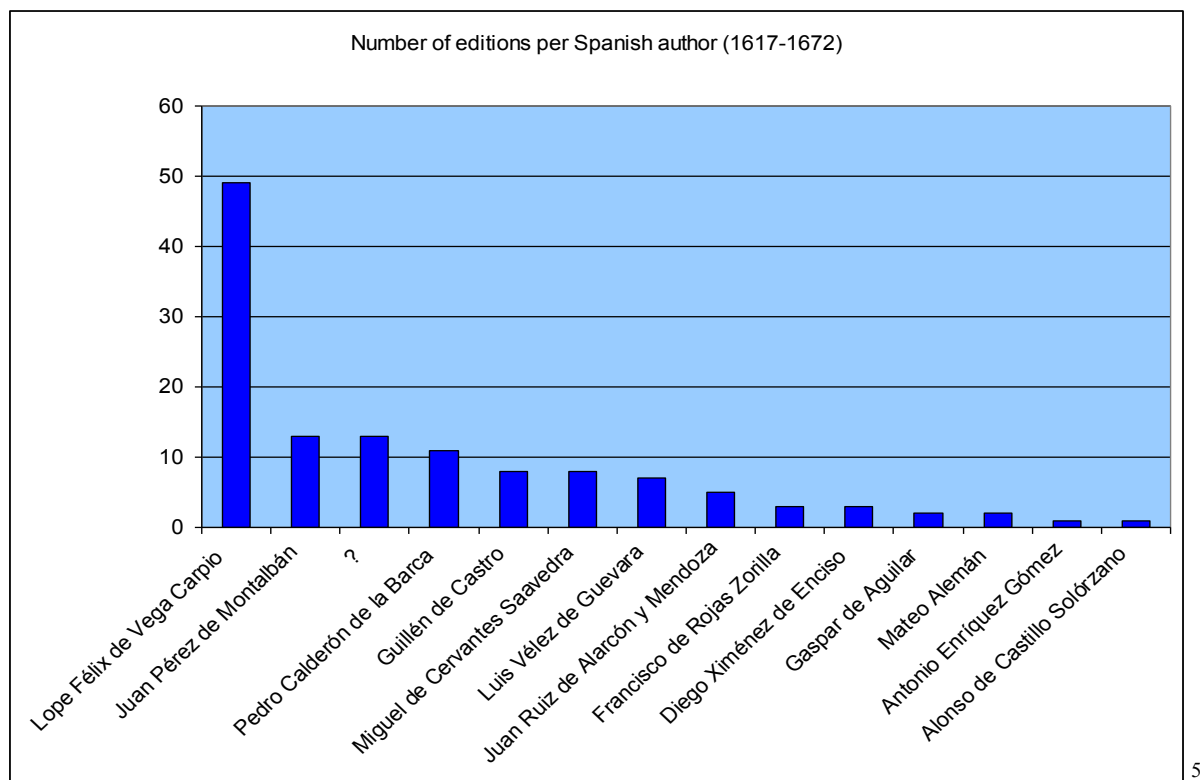
Questions I have tried to answer using my sources are: How popular was Lope de Vega? How were his plays presented? How was Lope de Vega depicted? How often was he mentioned? What can we say about Lope de Vega as a brand? And, last but certainly not least: do we see a clear difference before and after the Peace of Munster in 1648?

The present study thus attempts to analyze the evolution of the fascination for Lope de Vega and his name as a merchandise product in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century with the translated plays as main source and will present the value of this type of research for the study of images of the enemy.

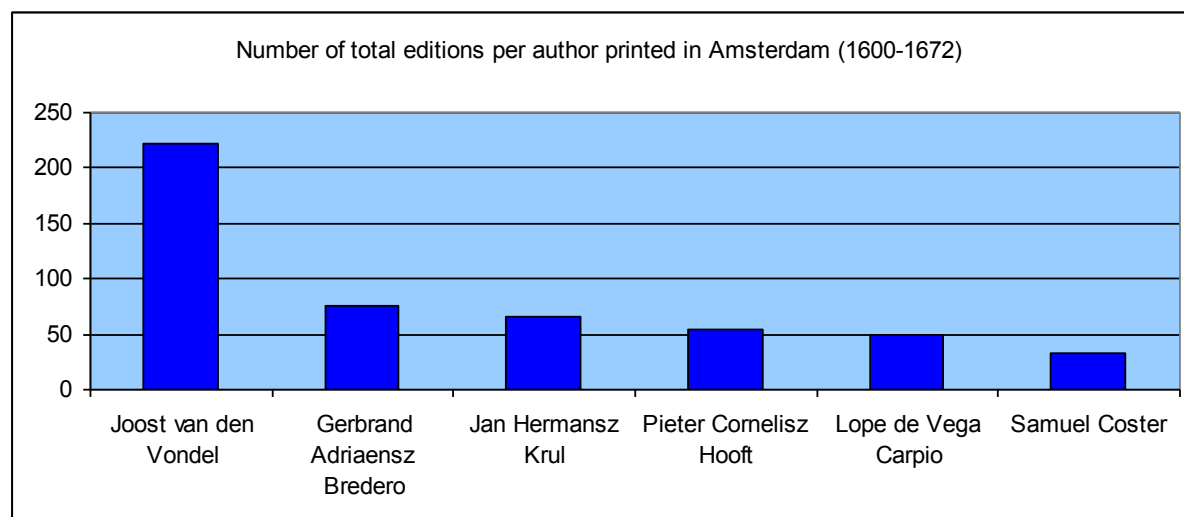
LOPE DE VEGA'S POPULARITY IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY AMSTERDAM

⁴ Beller and Leerssen, 2007.

Concerning the book market, other Spanish authors were no competition for him.

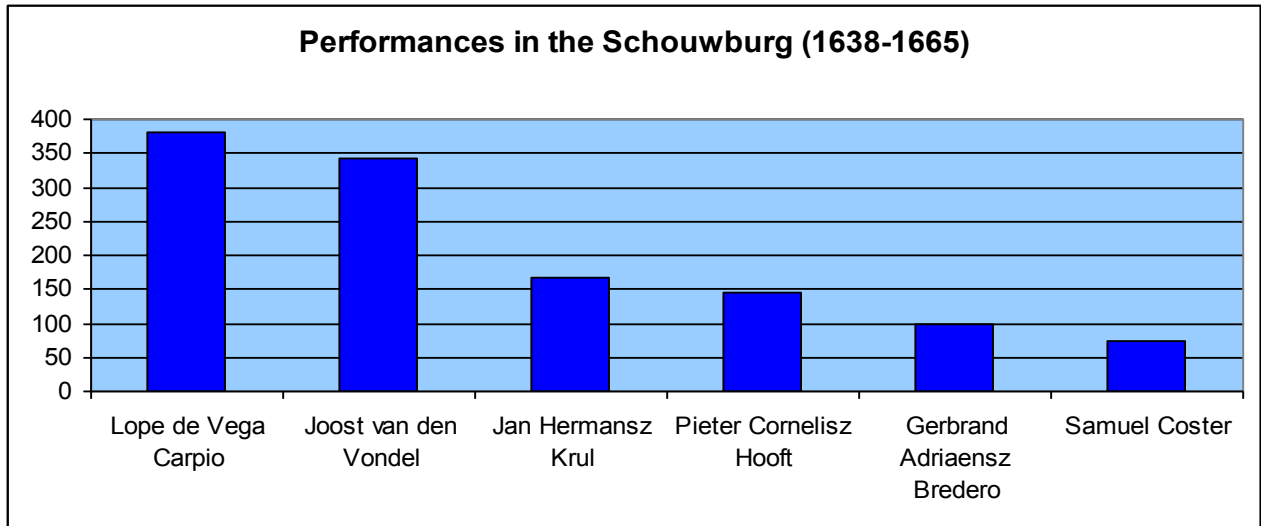


Even when compared to Dutch bestsellers at the time, Lope de Vega⁶ undoubtedly enjoyed great popularity (see the two graphs below). While Lope was no rival to the literary giant Vondel in the bookstores, his popularity surpasses that of Vondel and all other great writers in the Schouwburg.



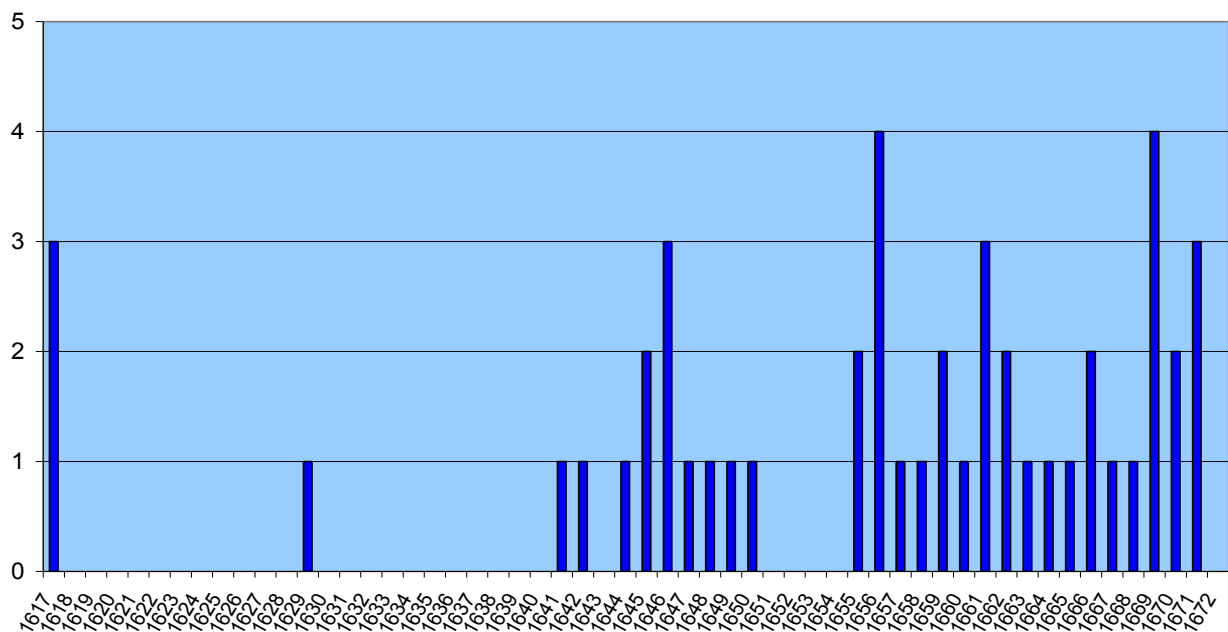
⁵ The graphs shown in this article are based on a database created by the author, unless otherwise specified. This database was composed using all secondary literature dealing with translations of Spanish drama, the database called Short Title Catalogue Netherlands and the translations themselves as primary sources.

⁶ In Lope de Vega's case this figure refers to translations.



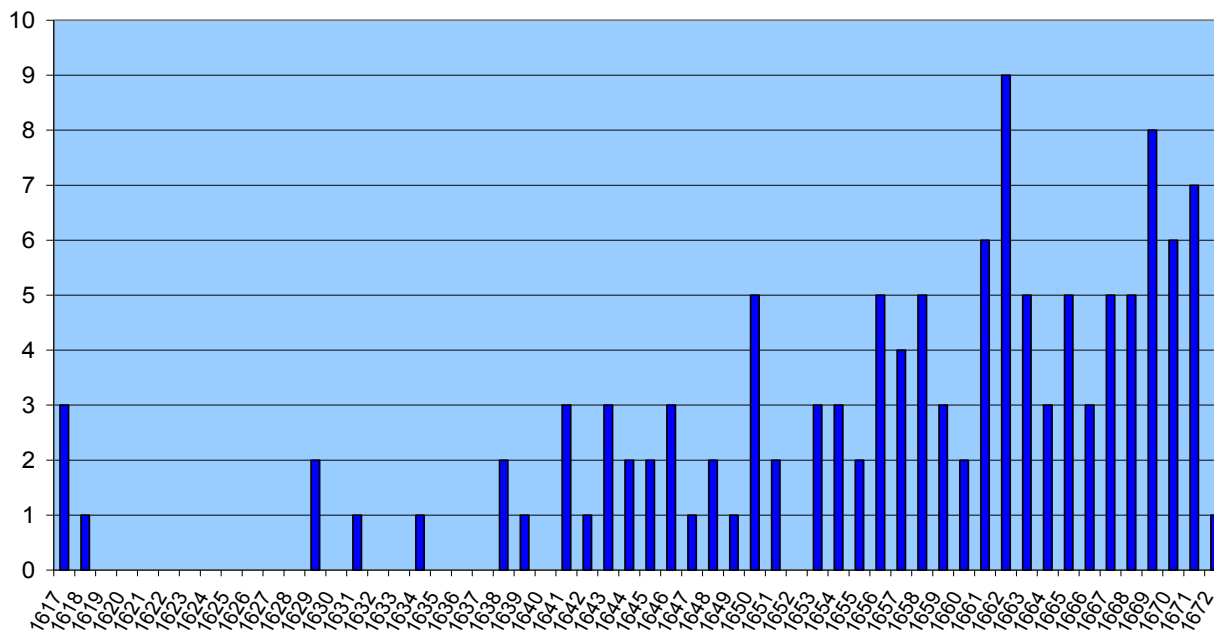
The question then arises as to when in the seventeenth century Lope de Vega was so popular.

Translations of Lope de Vega. Editions per year in Amsterdam



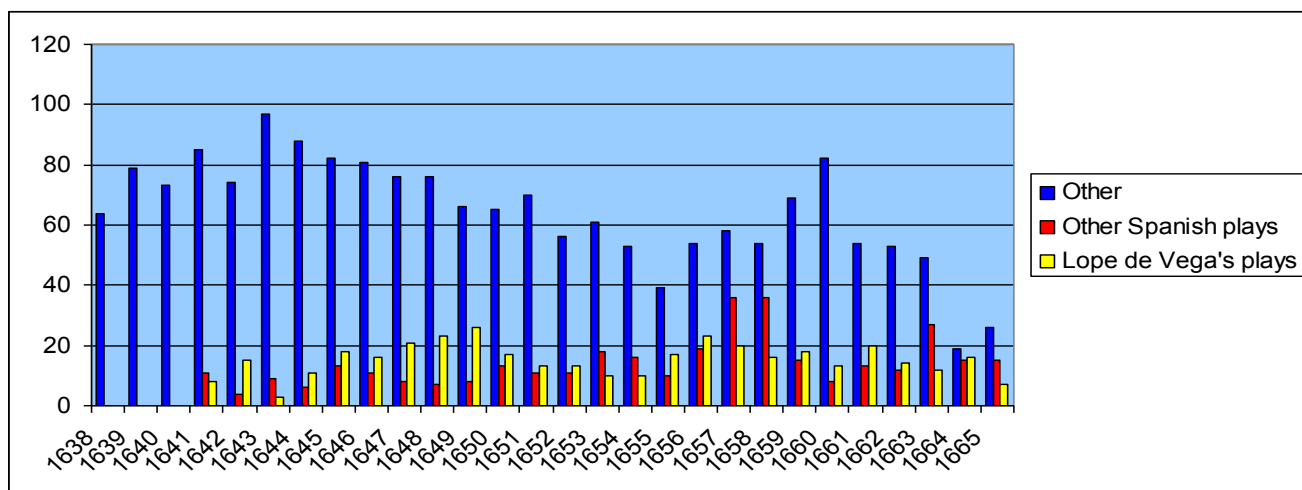
In this graph we can see how, after Rodenburgh's translations in 1617 and 1629, interest in Lope de Vega begins at the early forties and stays stable until 1671 except for a pause between 1651 and 1655, years in which other Spanish authors were translated, as we can see here:

Number of editions of translations of Spanish plays 1617-1672



It is possible that the translators wanted to try other formulas out, but since 1655 we see editions of Lope de Vega’s plays every year until 1672, when the Schouwburg closed its doors for six years due to the war.

In the theatre hall, Lope de Vega’s plays made their appearance in 1641, and stayed popular throughout the decades. They beat other Spanish plays in the 40s by far and were a constant in the programme of the Schouwburg.



Lope de Vega’s popularity among Dutch writers is something we can analyze now through graphs, but his presence in Amsterdam was, back then, less explicit for the broader public. When studying the images the Dutch had of the Spanish in the seventeenth century, I

regard these plays as a source that has much to offer. The manner in which they were brought out in the market is a reflection of what the publisher thought was attractive to Schouwburg's audience, given his economic interests. The fact that a play was presented as Lope de Vega's or not, as Spanish or not, is an indicator of what was sought or accepted by the buyers. In what follows, I will focus on explicit references to Lope de Vega and in these plays as a commercial object.

PRAISING LOPE DE VEGA AND SPANISH THEATRE

Theodore Rodenburgh was, as many have already pointed out, the person who introduced Lope de Vega and therefore the Spanish *comedia* in Amsterdam. He did so by translating three works by the Phoenix in 1617. He was as well the first to praise him in writing, and the last one to do so until 1646, when Isaac Vos published his translation of *El amigo por fuerza*.

Rodenburgh's praise of Lope de Vega can be read in his poetry treaty *Eglentiers poëtens borst-weringh* from 1619. Note that he never mentioned the fact that he inspired himself in Lope de Vega's plays for his adaptations of *El molino*, *El perseguido* and *La escolástica celosa*. In his poetry treaty he writes:

the marvellous poet Lope de Vega Carpio (in his booklet named *Arte Nuevo de hazer comedias en este tiempo*) said that he puts Terence and Plautus away from his thoughts when he plans to write a play, adding that he does not stick to any [unity of] time, but instead subsequently arranges his chapters and mostly deals with historical subjects, judging it to be more attractive to the audience to show the whole story from beginning through the end. The same is done by all poets in England⁷.

This is, that we know of, the only mention of Lope de Vega until 1645. In this year a translation of *Laura perseguida* appeared under the title *Vervolgde Laura*. Adam Karelsz van

7 «Den treffelijcken Poët Lope de Vega Carpio, (in zijn boecxken, ghenaemt: Arte nueuo de hazer comedias en este tiempo) zeyt: dat hy Terens en Plaut uyt zijn ghedachten stelt, als hy zijn voorgenomen wercken wil rijmen: daer by voegende, dat hy zich aen geen tijdt bindt, maer voorzichtigelijck zijn bedrijven verdeeldt, en meest handelende yets 't geen Historiael is, oordelende dat het bevallycker voor de aenschouwers is, het begin en 't eyndt van alle de ghevallen af te beelden. 't Zelve ghebruycken oock alle de Poëten in Enghelandt.» Rodenburgh, 1619: 47.

Germez indicates Lope de Vega's authorship in his dedication, but without further praising the Spanish writer's work⁸.

In 1646, Isaac Vos publishes *Gedwongen Vrient*, the first play to mention Lope de Vega on the title page. The paratext to the edition reads:

Here came before my eyes the spirit of the deceased, but still in living memory Apollo from Madrid and great Spanish poet Lope de Vega Carpio, brought back to life and recreated by the art lover and diligent Sir Iacobus Baroces, now gliding on Dutch wings. And while stimulating his friend of the same tongue, his never resting friend, he urged him to deliver this his *Gedwongen Vrient* to me, in order to make it revive in Dutch verses in our Theatre of Amsterdam⁹.

Only one year later, in 1647, Leonard de Fuyter would as well dedicate beautiful words to the Phoenix:

the noble fruits of the genius of the great Spanish poet *Lope de Vega Carpio*, which have received no small respect from the great monarch of Europe, who has himself cherished them, and which are known and famous in all the civilized parts of the world. When still unknown to me, on hearing them they moved and touched me so much that I dared to undertake and follow the footsteps of the God of Poets, and wanted to practice the characteristics of his wisdom. It was done by the Sir Barokus so far, he transformed them, and I put them into Dutch verses, so that our art lovers (especially you) can experience and enjoy them¹⁰.

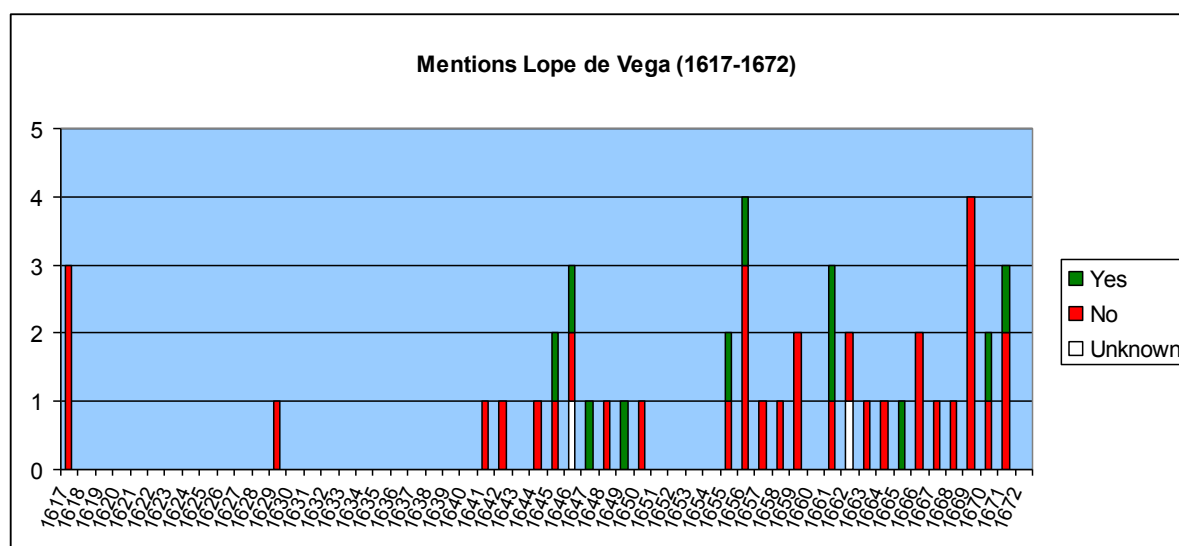
⁸ Van Germez, *Vervolgde Laura*, 7 of the dedication.

⁹ «is my de Geest van den verstorven doch eeuwich in heughnis levenden Madritsche Apoll, en grooten Spaensen Poëet Lope de Vega Carpio, opgewekt en herschapen door den kunstlievenden en yverigen Heer Iacobus Baroces zwevende op Nederduytze wicken, voor mijne oogen verschenen, en al prikkelende zijn taalgenoot, en rust-besnijdende vrient, gedwongen, deeze zijne *Gedwongen Vriendt* mij over te dragen, om op onze Amsteldamsche Schouburgh in Neder-duytse Vaarzen te doen herleeven» (Vos, *Gedwongen Vrient*, A2).

¹⁰ «[...] de eelste vruchten der harsenen van den grooten Spaensche Poët *Lope de Vega Carpio*, diese in geen kleyn aensien hebben gebracht by den grootsten Staf-drager van Europa, die de selve soo gekoestert heeft, datse bekent en geroemt sijn in al de redelijkste deelen der werelt, daarse my noch onkundigh zijnde, door het gehoor soo vervoert, en doorgrieff hebben, dat ick my heb derven verstouten, dien Godt der Poëten op de hielen te volgen, om my te oeffenen inde eygenschappen sijner wijsheden, ende eyndelijck door den Heere *Barokus* soo veel te wege gebracht, dat hy deselve heeft hervormt, en ick gestelt in Nederduytse vaarze; op datse onse Konst-lievende (doch voornamelijk U.E) mochten smaaken en behagen» (De Fuyter, *Verwerde-Hof*, 2 of the dedication).

Thus 1619, 1646 and 1647 are the years in which Lope de Vega is so highly praised, a trend with no continuation after the Peace of Munster. The only other occasion in which his name is mentioned is in the reprints of these works, but never again in a first edition.

In this graph we can see when Lope de Vega was mentioned and when not¹¹.



All the green bars are thus reprints of the adaptations I have already mentioned. Only the fact that the plays mentioning him enjoyed several reprints kept Lope de Vega’s name present in the theatre panorama. It is also worth pointing out that with several other plays based on Vega’s original the publisher did inform the reader that the play was translated from the Spanish, but did not mention Lope de Vega’s hand was behind it.

Lope de Vega’s art was thus strongly present in the Schouwburg and in printed form, but his authorship and skills, after highly flattering praises before 1648, were rarely mentioned.

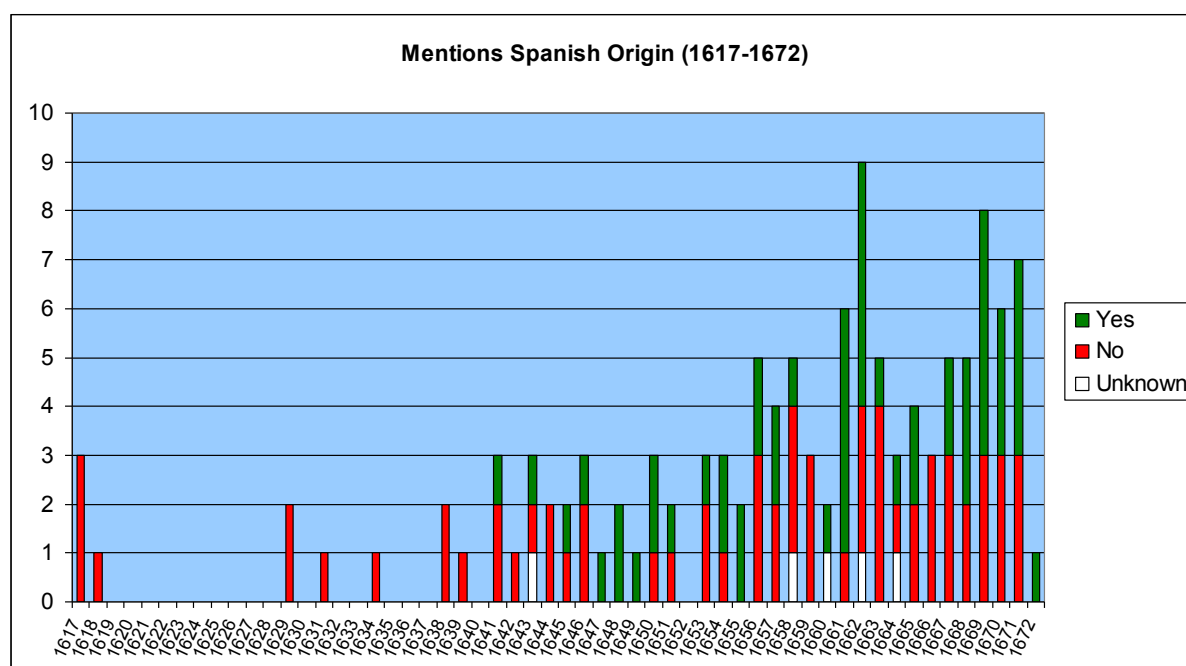
MARKETING AND THE SCHOUWBURG’S AUDIENCE

We have seen above that the fascination for Lope de Vega among Dutch authors revived, after Rodenburgh, in 1641; but what can we say about other social groups? Thanks to mentions of Lope de Vega or the Spanish origin of these translations, or precisely their absence, we can get closer to the opinion the man in the street had. This I believe because the

¹¹ In this graph as in the subsequent one, the category ‘unknown’ stands for editions that have not been consulted due to their location outside the Netherlands.

manner of marketing a book was determined by the publisher’s economic interests, and he therefore based his decision on what he thought was attractive to most people. Looking into marketing trends thus offers a unique opportunity to peek into public opinion through a new source. So far, political pamphlets have been the main source for the study of public opinion. While it is true that authors and book sellers of pamphlets had commercial ambitions, their texts were originally written to express an individual’s point of view and to manipulate public opinion rather than to reflect it¹².

As we can see, mentioning the Spanish origin of a play was quite common since 1643¹³.



We know that these plays were aimed at and reached a broad public, including people pertaining to the lower classes, because they were sold at the Schouwburg, and the theatre hall was frequented by people pertaining to varying social strata. Proof of it is that Jan Vos, who was manager of the Schouwburg between 1647 and 1667, wrote that the Schouwburg was meant for the common people to learn¹⁴. Moreover, the historian Jacob Adolf Worp

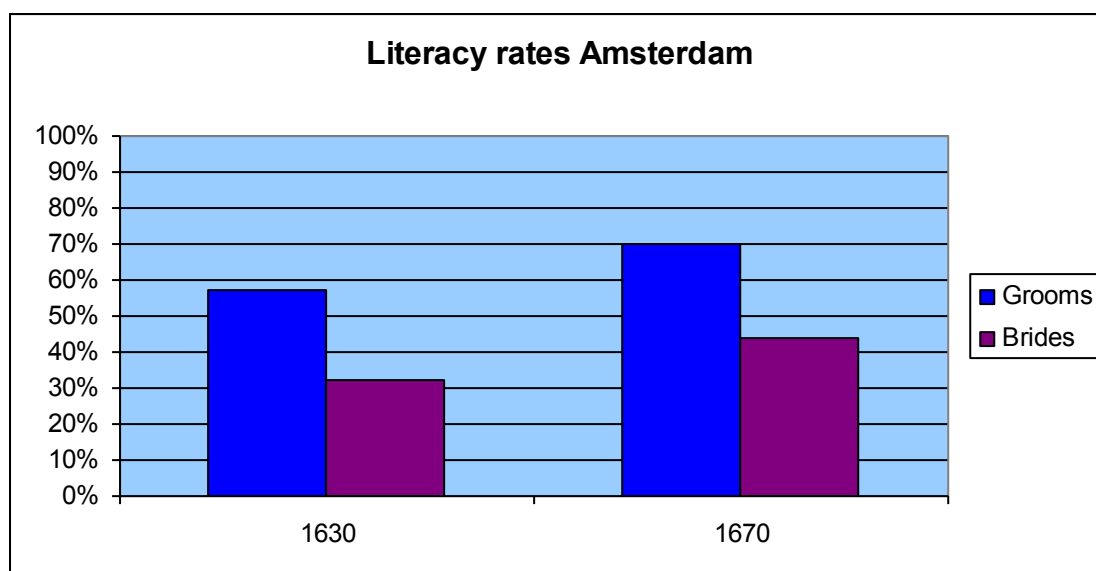
¹² Harms, 2010: 284-291.

¹³ This graph reflects the result of a search for the mention of the Spanish origin of the play for the quantitative study of trends in commercial strategies, leaving a qualitative analysis beyond the scope of this study and as a subject for my Master thesis *The Phoenix glides on Dutch wings. Lope de Vega’s «El amigo por fuerza» in seventeenth-century Amsterdam* (to be published online by the University of Amsterdam: www.scriptiesonline.uba.uva.nl).

¹⁴ «De Schouwburg is voor ’t oor en oog van ’t volk gesticht. / Men leert hun door het spel huisnutte schranderheden. / Zij wraakt de trouwloosheid en roemt de burgerplicht. / Welsprekendheid heeft macht om’t hart als was te kneden. / Zo wordt het brein deurzult in deugd en wijs beleid. / De Laster brult vergeefs om ’t

related in his *History of the Schouwburg of Amsterdam* that people ate, drank and fornicated in the Schouwburg, and that some of the common visitors were not allowed entry when there were special performances planned, for instance for the burgomasters¹⁵. Besides, the regents' primary objective was collecting funds for the two parishes that had financed the construction of the theatre hall and were the recipient of its earnings¹⁶. We are thus certain of the presence of people in the Schouwburg who came from non-intellectuals or elite circles.

The next logical question is related to their capacity to be receptive to the merchandising of Spanish plays. For this subject I would like to turn to A.M. van der Woude and his research concerning literacy rate in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century¹⁷. The historian concludes that this rate was higher in the Northern Netherlands than in the South, and published a table, based on the signatures in marriage acts in Amsterdam.



As we can see, more than half the grooms could write their name, the percentage being significantly lower for women. It goes without saying that the fact they could write their name does not speak for further writing skills. But it does tell us much about the amount of people who could read, for writing was only taught once the student commanded reading. We can then assume that a considerable amount of people visiting the Schouwburg, also those

Schouwtoneel te schennen, / 't ontdekt het aards bedrog en haar onzekerheid. / Toneelspel leert het volk hun ijdelheden kennen».

Vos, 1662: 527-528.

¹⁵ Worp, 1920: 126.

¹⁶ Smits-Veldt, 1991: 17.

¹⁷ Van der Woude, 1980.

¹⁸ Van der Woude, 1980: 262. The author presented this data as negative, thus showing illiteracy rates.

outside the elite, was target of the marketing mechanisms employed, such as title pages mentioning Lope de Vega.

To conclude, it is plausible to state that the taste and opinion of people outside the elite and intellectual circles was influential for the programming of the Schouwburg and the manner of marketing the plays.

EXPLAINING THE EVOLUTION OF THE FASCINATION FOR LOPE DE VEGA AND THE MARKETING STRATEGIES

In her study about the image the Dutch had of the Spanish in the seventeenth century, which I referred to at the beginning of this article, Meijer Drees states that there had always been admiration for Spain and that the Peace of Munster changed the image the Dutch had of the Spanish, giving space for praise again¹⁹.

Concerning the first point, I would like to argue that, while we can indeed find proof of admiration for Spain all along the seventeenth century, this can only be applied to the cultural elite. She does indeed exclusively offer sources and examples coming from this social group, such as propaganda texts and literature inspired by Spanish books. As Meijer Drees states: «for men of letters it was possible to simultaneously play the war trumpet and employ old expressions of appreciation and praise for the Spanish culture»²⁰. To be sure, these sources cannot be used to make statements about the images reigning in other social groups, for points of view in propaganda texts did not reflect public opinion, but rather the writer's intentions. Concerning literature inspired by Spanish models, this genre exclusively tells us that the writer, in all examples given by Meijer Drees a man of letters, admired Spanish literature; but given that the reader never knew it was based on a Spanish product, we cannot derive any conclusion about his ideas. Here is where theatre plays show their value as sources for studying images: given the context, namely a commercialization of the genre with the opening of the Schouwburgh, they were conceived to please the audience. In this they greatly differ from other sources, becoming a window to an opinion, that of social classes outside the elite, that has otherwise faded in history.

¹⁹ Meijer Drees, 1997: 79, 114.

²⁰ Meijer Drees, 1997: 98.

As to the Peace of Munster, this study has hopefully shown that admiration for Lope de Vega and Spanish literature began already in the early forties for Dutch writers and before 1648 for the rest of the population. The public of the Schouwburg was already explicitly being offered Spanish plays as early as 1641 and plays written by the «Madritsche Apoll» in 1645. The mere appearance of these works in the market as Spanish or Lope de Vega's is not proof of acceptance, but rather of what the publisher thought to be accepted. What makes them a valuable source for the study of images is the combination of the publisher's inclusion of their origins, the popularity they enjoyed and the literacy rates among people living in Amsterdam. Note that the first play praising Lope in times of the Schouwburg, *Gedwongen Vrient* from 1646, was the Phoenix's most popular one in Amsterdam, printed 7 times in the period 1617-1672 and counting 83 performances in the Schouwburg in 27 years (period 1638-1665). This acceptance by the man in the street of Spanish literature sold as such can be related to the political atmosphere of the time. Historians like Arie Theodorus van Deursen or Simon Groenveld have reminded us that long before Munster was signed, namely in the early forties, many voices were asking for peace²¹. These voices arose firstly in Holland and were stronger in merchant cities. They were indeed coming from merchants, but also from politicians. Now, thanks to the manner of marketing Lope de Vega and translations of Spanish plays and the popularity of these works, it can be stated that non-intellectuals and people from outside the elite were open to Spanish cultural products before 1648. Whether this implies their idea of Spain had changed cannot be stated with certainty and probably was not related to the introduction and popularity of Spanish drama in Amsterdam. It is possible that, as was the case for the elite, the lay man saw Spanish people as the enemy and harboured negative images of him while appreciating and welcoming Spanish theatre.

The fact that no new praises appear after 1648 shows that the mention of Lope de Vega as author of these works was used as a marketing strategy. A second proof is the paratext of Leonard de Fuyter's *Verwerde Hof* (1647), an adaptation of Antonio Mira de Amescua *El palacio confuso*²², where De Fuyter praises Lope de Vega and indicates the Phoenix's authorship also on the title page. Selling a play as Lope de Vega's while it was not was a marketing strategy also to be found in the Italian theatres²³.

²¹ Van Deursen, 1996: 95-99; Groenveld, 1997: 55-58.

²² Sullivan, 1983: 49.

²³ D'Antuono, 1999: 6-7.

CONCLUSION

As to how popular Lope de Vega was in Amsterdam between 1617 and 1672, the answer is that implicitly he was the most popular among the Spanish theatre writers and a rival to the most popular Dutch authors. Explicitly, on the other hand, he had his Golden Age before the Peace of Munster, not to be praised in new translations ever again.

Placing these plays in the market as Lope de Vega's and Spanish before Munster might reflect the debates concerning the signing of peace with Spain that were already taking place in the early forties. These debates, certainly present in political circles and fed by the merchant class, undoubtedly reached the men of letters and very likely the lower classes. This can be suggested not only because of the market strategies used in these plays, but also because of the popularity they enjoyed. Unfortunately it will remain impossible to safely estimate how many from the 'common people' Vos was referring to came in contact with the manners of merchandising Spanish products and therefore impossible to establish in how far the image of the Spanish as the enemy had changed in their circles. The question remains whether their images of Spanish people created during the Dutch Revolt were related to the acceptance of Spanish theatre.

In conclusion, the fascination for Lope de Vega and for cultural products coming from Spain had began before 1648 regardless of the social group, but whether this admiration is linked to negative images about the Spanish is a question that needs more research focusing on the manner all Spanish plays were marketed. Lope de Vega was employed as a commercial brand as happened in Italy and became stunningly popular in seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

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