

Shared Futures in Times of Rupture: The Marriage Story of Daniel van der Meulen and Hester della Faille, 1584-1585

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Abstract

This article examines future thinking within the mercantile bourgeoisie of the late sixteenth-century Low Countries. Through letters, it explores the marriage story of Daniel van der Meulen and Hester della Faille, scions of two prominent Antwerp merchant families. Daniel and Hester took their vows in Haarlem during the siege of Antwerp (1584-1585), bringing controversy, uncertainty, and fear into the present timespace. This essay aims to contribute to a better understanding of temporal experiences in the past by showing how rupture affected social expectations and envisioned futures within the mercantile family regime. By analysing futural orientations and future-oriented actions related to the occasion of marriage, this article highlights the role of the future – near and far – in the daily life of historical actors, the ways these people shaped their imagined future, and, of course, for what underlying reasons. I argue that aspects such as lifecycle expectations, patrimonial culture, and opportunities for social mobility played an essential role in choices regarding investments of time. Since decisions on the allocation of time were made by those managing the nuclear family, this essay illustrates how the distribution of power – at the micro level – impacted individual lives and subsequently shared futures.

Keywords: future thinking and action, mercantile elite, marriage, Calvinism, Dutch Revolt, siege of Antwerp

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Social, economic, and political crises, so-called ruptures, affect virtually every sphere of our existence. This includes matters closest to our hearts, such as romantic love, friendships, and family ties. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us were faced with the constant presence or, in the cases of long-distance relationships, the absence of our loved ones. Shared expectations, plans, and projections found themselves in the metaphorical pressure cooker. This article examines how a closely-knit social group navigated their vision of the future during earlier times of upheaval. To do so, I delve into the marriage story of Daniel van der Meulen (1554-1600) and Hester della Faille (1558/9-1648), both descendants of well-known Antwerp merchant families.

Daniel and Hester tied the knot on 24 December 1584, during the Dutch Revolt, and, more precisely, while Antwerp was besieged by the Habsburg armies led by Alexander Farnese. The attack caused tension among Antwerp's inhabitants, also between the couple's families. Whereas the Van der Meulens were Calvinists who supported the continuation of the rebellion, some of the Della Failles preferred peace and, therefore, acceptance of the Habsburg administration. The eventual fall of Antwerp in August 1585 sent waves of displaced Brabant Protestants into the northern Netherlands, England, and the Holy Roman Empire. Amongst these were members of both families.¹ This was not the first time that Antwerp Calvinists, including the Van der Meulens, had left the city because of hostilities. Since the late 1560s, Protestants had been leaving the Scheldt city in search for a haven to practise their faith, but many returned, not at least because the city had been functioning as a Calvinist Republic since 1577. However, the Republic's capitulation to Habsburg forces led to yet another, more permanent exodus.² The war was not the only reason that relations between the two families were tense: Hester's guardianship by her brothers since her father's passing in 1583 also increased tensions. If they withheld approval for the marriage, Hester would not receive her father's inheritance, a substantial fortune. One of her brothers, Marten della Faille, had reservations about Daniel. He believed Daniel's intentions were primarily focused on the family's wealth and did not want his sister to enter into a marriage under false pretences.³

1 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, xxvi-xxvii; Müller, 'Koopmansfamilie', 35.

2 Brulez, 'Diaspora'.

3 Sadler, *Family*, 3, 207.

Steven Ozment has called the sixteenth century ‘the heyday of the patriarchal nuclear family’.⁴ These male-controlled structures were connected to the rise of modern capitalism and the increasing power of the merchant bourgeoisie.⁵ After all, wealth earned from trade and entrepreneurship provided ‘an excellent basis for a political career and a position of prestige and authority in local society’.⁶ The Van der Meulen and Della Faille families were representatives of this newly-established elite. Within this patrilineal system, the survival of the family took precedence of everything else, and marriage was the strategic device used to ensure it.⁷ This did not mean that there was no room or need for love within an early modern marriage, or that romantic relationships were necessarily forced. Most people could choose their partners or reject suitors designated by the family.⁸ Still, since many European communities believed that love prior to the wedding was unnecessary but would come about through marriage, the institution could be deployed for the ‘benefits of kin and community networks’.⁹ This article analyses how early modern principles and ideas regarding marriage influenced Daniel and Hester’s expectations of their future as husband and wife and, more importantly, the impact that rupture may have had on realising these projections. Moreover, it will demonstrate that the early modern nuclear family was a power regime, managing the futures of relatives by exercising control and playing political games.¹⁰

I will use the notion of ‘temporality’ to refer to the interplay between past, present, and future. A temporality, or timeline, is connected to beings, objects, activities, events, states, or ideas – anything a person may encounter during their lifetime. In recent historiography, temporality has been mobilised as a category of analysis to understand the experience and mindset of historical actors within a particular timespace.¹¹ Responding to Matthew Champion’s call for a ‘fuller history of temporalities’, I explore the interaction between different temporalities present in the mercantile family regime.¹² The coexistence of various temporalities – to be considered ‘layered and entangled but separable’ – is also known as ‘pluritemporality’.¹³ The interface between individuals and the variety of synchronised temporalities can be connected through Peter Burke’s ‘occasionalism’, the switching between different roles by the same person.¹⁴ Occasionalism occurs at the everyday level, interacting with others or acting in certain places – each ‘occasion’ or ‘domain’ requires a different hat and, as this essay will show, temporal organisation.¹⁵ Through occasionalism,

4 Ozment, *Fathers*, 2.

5 Ozment, *Fathers*, 59; Adams, *Familial State*, 38.

6 Lesger, *Handel*, 141.

7 Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 8.

8 For early modern love in practice, see Ozment, *Magdalena*; Barclay, ‘Love’, 85.

9 Barclay, ‘Love’, 85.

10 Viazzo and Lynch, ‘Family’, 445.

11 Ogle, ‘Time’, 314.

12 Champion, ‘Fuller History’, 255.

13 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 2. On ‘pluritemporality’, see Landwehr, ‘Alte Zeiten’.

14 Champion, *Fullness*, 9–10.

15 Burke, ‘Performing History’, 36. Burke’s notion is applied to time cycles other than the day-to-day. Liesbeth Corens, for example, has linked occasionalism to annual seasons and liturgical calendars to show the workings of confessional and international coexistence in the health town of Spa. See Corens, ‘Coexistence’.

I will analyse the complexity and dynamics of social relations within early modern mercantile families living in times of upheaval.

The temporal organisation of social roles depends on variables such as age, gender, social standing, and cultural background: human characteristics that are increasingly examined in the light of time and temporality by, inter alia, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians. Although relatively scarce, recent scholarship on gendered temporalities in the early modern era underscores that ‘time is an embodied aspect of human existence’. Still, cultural contexts shape and interpret time with distinct roles for both men and women.¹⁶ On the societal level, Arjun Appadurai argues that social differentiation affects the capability to pursue ambitions and control one’s own future. In other words, the ability to shape the future is not equally distributed. This means that the manner in which affluent mercantile families considered their particular futures, the topic of this essay, cannot be considered as representative of early modern society in general.¹⁷ Additionally, it is a cultural phenomenon whether social groups focus more on the past, present, or future, a trait referred to as ‘temporal orientation’.¹⁸ Nicholas Baker describes sixteenth-century merchants, the community under investigation here, as inherently future-oriented due to ‘their long professional experience and the deep familiarity with uncertainty and the unexpected that their métiers provided.’¹⁹ That is, their businesses lived or died on their ability to predict the future price of the goods in which they dealt. Therefore, they present a particularly intriguing group to study in the light of future thinking and actions. Lastly, control or power can determine one’s relationship with time. After all, power dynamics, evolving as a result of the management in place, are essential to ‘arrange, manage, and scale’ certain topics and their linked temporalities. This becomes particularly evident in times of conflict (such as the Dutch Revolt), as such a situation involves a clash of competing principles, determining which ideas about the past, present, and future take precedence and which recede into the background.²⁰

Anthropologists Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight have argued that the intensity with which we treat specific temporalities and the extent to which we prioritise them in the present can be measured with ‘futural orientations’. In order of strength or depth, these are anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope, and destiny.²¹ Furthermore, a dialogue between the history of temporality and emotions might give us a better understanding of our historical subjects’ experience of time.²² The term ‘emotions’ here refers to all of the feelings and sentiments communicated by our historical actors. Champion links time and emotions to narratives, suggesting that emotions shape stories and vice versa. This interaction significantly influences our perception of time. As an example, he uses the Christian narrative of Christ’s Passion, which structures the Holy Week (the week

16 Wiesner-Hanks (ed.), *Gendered Temporalities*, 7. See also Arcangeli and Korhonen (eds.), ‘A Time of Their Own’.

17 See Appadurai, *The Future*.

18 Burke, ‘Reflections’, 617; Lee, Liu, and Hu, ‘Relationship’, 699; Moshe, *Love*, 6.

19 Baker, *Fortune’s Theater*, 131–132.

20 Edelstein, Geroulanos, and Wheatley (eds.), *Power and Time*, 4. See also Clark, *Time and Power*.

21 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 2–3.

22 Champion, ‘Fuller History’, 262; Pernau, *Emotions*, 10.

preceding Easter Sunday) as a period of collective suffering and longing while also offering individuals a narrative of the shift from sorrow to joy, as ultimately demonstrated in the celebration of the Resurrection.²³

For the purpose of this article, I will examine social interactions in the family letters addressed to Daniel and Hester. My analysis begins and ends with two letters written to Hester, one by Daniel's older brother Andries in September 1584, the other by Daniel in March 1585, in order to show the transition from being a coveted marriage candidate to Daniel's wife. Daniel's part of the correspondence, which comprised forty-three letters, was written between October and December 1584. This period covers courtship, engagement, and wedding: from vision to reality.²⁴ Letters allow a narrative approach, exploring recorded ideas and feelings about the future and chronologically organised actions towards imagined futures.²⁵ First, I will read the letters in sequence to uncover future narratives related to the occasion or domain of Daniel and Hester's relationship. Drawing on Bryant and Knight's classification of futural orientations, my aim is to analyse how the envisioned marriage was approached within the temporal regime of the merchant family. How did the correspondents orient themselves towards the future, and what future-oriented actions did they take to realise their goals? As I will show, the issue of power and time was crucial in three ways: the rupture caused by the Dutch Revolt, in which Daniel and Andries actively participated; the family disputes relating to the marriage between Daniel and Hester; and lastly, the inequalities implicit in the patriarchal nature of early modern society.

The letters under investigation here have been transcribed and annotated in *Brieven en andere bescheiden betreffende Daniel van der Meulen, 1584-1600*.²⁶ This scholarly edition mainly relies on the Daniel van der Meulen archive kept at Erfgoed Leiden, but has been supplemented with contemporary letters of family members kept in other Dutch and Belgian archives, particularly letters written by Andries. Unfortunately, his correspondence has not survived, leaving us with no response from Daniel and thus a one-sided family portrait.²⁷ The marriage story of Daniel and Hester has also been discussed by Jesse Sadler in his 2015 dissertation *Family in Revolt*, for which he used the same (and some additional) sources.²⁸ Although this article draws on Sadler's reconstruction of events, my aim is not to re-explain Daniel and Hester's state of affairs, but to contribute to our understanding of the temporal experience and awareness of the historical actors involved and, by extension, that of their peers. The first section of this essay discusses the motivations behind the marriage between Daniel and Hester; it analyses how time was used, and by whom, as an investment in pursuing an engagement. The second section explores the connection between marriage and power, and the ways in which individual futures were constructed

23 Champion, 'Emotions', 34.

24 In total thirty-five letters from his brother Andries van der Meulen; four from his cousin Peeter Janssens; two from his sister Sara van der Meulen; one from his cousin Mattheus De Hoest; and one from his brother-in-law Jacques della Faille.

25 Mische, 'Measuring futures', 444.

26 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, also available on-line: <https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/meulen> (Accessed on 23 November 2022).

27 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, CIII.

28 See Sadler, *Family*.

through family politics. The article's last section addresses the issue of marital expectations as a couple and as individuals.

Timing, Temporal Investments, and Anticipation

As the philosopher Aaron Ben-Ze'ev has noted, 'external timing refers to a specific point of time that, in retrospect, is thought to have had a good or bad effect on the outcome'. He has argued that external romantic timing can be a case of luck, like accidentally sitting next to each other on the train. Still, it can also mean recognising the right circumstances and actively making the most of them.²⁹ For Hester and Daniel, the latter scenario applied. During the siege of Antwerp they both stayed in Holland for distinct purposes. In May 1584, just a month or two before Farnese's attack on the Scheldt city, Hester and her brother Jacques della Faille fled their hometown to reside with their aunt in Haarlem. In September, Daniel made the journey to Delft, the political centre at the time. The merchant served as a representative for Antwerp and the States of Brabant to the States-General, and was sent to organise support for the Antwerp Calvinists. Subsequently, Daniel took it upon himself to convince Hester to marry him. They were acquainted from their time in Antwerp and shared a mutual interest in each other. Away from Marten, Hester's brother, who disapproved of the union, the couple managed to devise a plan to be together.³⁰

Besides timing, time itself is of the essence for a romantic relationship to flourish. Sociologist Mira Moshe has argued that the way we handle our relations nowadays is grounded in economic tradition. Individuals treat time like an investment, a venture that can be measured through so-called 'temporal coins'. People are under the impression that their efforts from the past and present will eventually pay off in the future. From this point of view, breaking up a long-term relationship is problematic because it could be considered a temporal loss. However, when a relationship proves effective, both parties want to intensify their temporal investments to maximise their time together and to create as much temporal profit or benefit as possible.³¹ This section examines how our correspondents from the sixteenth century also made temporal investments in order to establish an engagement between Daniel and Hester.

Economic transformations characterised the sixteenth-century Low Countries, and Antwerp became Western Europe's trade and financial centre.³² The desire of early modern merchants to acquire more profit also pervaded the romantic sphere. The marriage negotiations between Daniel and Hester were no exception. Their wedding was first and foremost set up as a strategic alliance of two mercantile families, with the highest pay-outs for the Van der Meulens, since Della Faille was one of the wealthiest and most well-connected families at the time.³³ On 22 September 1584, a month after Daniel had

²⁹ Ben Ze'ev, *Arc*, 71.

³⁰ Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, xxvi; Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 9-10; Sadler, *Family*, 4, 207.

³¹ Moshe, *Love*, 5.

³² See, for instance, Soly, *Capital*.

³³ Sadler, *Family*, 216-217.

moved to Holland for his diplomatic and, subsequently, romantic mission, Andries wrote to Hester – whom he already called his *toecomende suster* ('future sister') – the following:

My lady, the good affection I have always had for your father's house, and you in particular, has encouraged me to advise the dearest friend I have in the world (my brother Daniel) to converse with you and desire you as a wife. I have employed all of my capacity towards this, assured of how happy you both would be. I am well acquainted with my brother's peaceful conditions and sound qualities. Likewise, I am guaranteed your good qualities. Moreover, I know how profitable such an alliance will be to both your house and ours.³⁴

In Andries's letter, an important future goal is set: Daniel marrying Hester. The brother opens his argument emotionally. He facilitates the coming together of these individuals because he knows it will make them happy. Here, he links an optimistic emotion with the institute of marriage – a romantic narrative. As Manon van der Heijden has noted, Catholic theologians emphasised marriage for reproductive purposes, while Protestant Reformers advocated 'marital love' as its most desired outcome.³⁵ Hence, the Reformation brought a change of moral expectations regarding the prospects of conjugal life, one that Andries also processed in his rationale for an engagement. Next, Andries uses *vermoghén* to indicate his part in pursuing the objective, meaning power, capacity, or resources, all crucial elements for influencing family politics. Of interest here is Andries's claim of making temporal investments in the 'happily-ever-after' of the two lovers because he too – as part of Daniel's family – will share in the future profits of this marriage. The eldest son of the Van der Meulens advocates the positive impact a union would have on both families, for which he uses the word *profijteliĳck* ('profitable'). This means that Daniel and Hester and other supporters of their union pay the temporal price (i.e., investments of time and energy) of the romantic relationship. Andries continues:

Hoping that the same matter [the engagement] will now be carried out promptly, I kindly request that no further delay occurs, because I can sense my brother's dedication towards you, to the extent that it might be too burdensome for him.³⁶

This citation mirrors the earlier emotional argument for an engagement, yet it reverses the perspective by associating any postponement in the engagement with negative feelings (*al te swaer soude vallen*). In this context, a brief timeframe is perceived positively due to its association with minimal investment and maximum results.

34 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 24, no. 10^A: Andries to Hester, Antwerp, 22 September 1584: 'Me Jouffrouwe, De goede affectie die ick altyt Uus vaders huys ende U.L. int particulier hebbe toegedragen heeft mij gemoveert den liefsten vriendt die ick inder weerelt hebbe (dat is mijn broeder Daniel) te raden met U.L. comversatie te nemen ende te begeeren tot een huysvrouwe, deaertoe ick mij oock na alle mijn vermoghén hebbe geemployeert, versekert zijnde hoe gheluckich ghijlieden ten beyden sijden sijn zoudt, mij bekent zijnde de vreedsame conditien ende goede qualiteyten die in mijn broeder sijn ende van gelijcken mij verseeckert houdende van die van U.L., midsgaders oock wetende hoe profijteliĳck soodanighen alliantie aen U.L. huysse ende aen onsen huysse wesen zal.' Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

35 Van der Heijden, 'Marriage', 159–160.

36 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 24, no. 10^A: Andries to Hester, Antwerp, 22 September 1584: '[V]erhopende dat deselve saecke nu voort zal worden gheffectueert, welck ick midts desen U.L. ben seer vriendeliĳck biddende, datter doch gheenen wtstel meer en geschiede want ick mercke d'affectie mijns broeders tot Uwaert sulcx dat het hem al te swaer soude vallen.'

Overall, the confidence with which Andries tackles the issue of Hester and Daniel best fits the futural orientation of anticipation from Bryant and Knight's typology. The anthropologists describe this mode of future thinking as follows: 'Anticipation is more than simply expecting something to happen; it is the act of looking forward that also pulls [one] in the direction of the future and prepares the groundwork for that future to occur.'³⁷ In other words, a person stands with one foot in the present and the other in the future. A crucial textual clue for anticipation is Andries's reference to Hester as a 'future' or, to be more precise, 'forthcoming sister' (*toecomende suster*) prior to engagement. In Bryant and Knight's understanding, anticipation is the most intense futural orientation. This means that the anticipated – in this case, familial unity and happiness resulting from marriage – gains prominence within the existing regime of temporalities in which our protagonists operate. The question is, however, what happens when anticipation is hampered by conflict.

At the time of Daniel's courtship, Andries could only assert himself from Antwerp because of the office he had held here as an alderman since 1580, a position that was accompanied by important responsibilities during the siege: 'I have been very desirous to come with my brother [to Haarlem], but have been prevented from doing so by the straitened occupations of my office, which gives me much pain.'³⁸ Clearly, the occasion of the siege – a rupture in time – slowly got a grip on the correspondents' lives, awakening or foregrounding certain roles and accompanying temporal orientations, followed by negative feelings. Early on, the siege caused a delay in the anticipated engagement. On 3 October 1584, Andries wrote to Daniel that 'I do not think that anything can be done regarding your case (*Uwe saecke*)', referring to Daniel's courtship, 'because of the great inconvenience of the times'.³⁹ The rupture left Andries unable to consult with Hester's brothers. At the same time, he advised Daniel to make 'as much effort as possible' with Hester and devote all his time to the matter.⁴⁰

The engagement's progression hinged on Jan della Faille, Hester's eldest brother, joining Daniel, Hester, and Jacques in Holland. Once in their midst, they could more easily persuade him to agree to the marriage.⁴¹ Marten would remain in Antwerp, deliberately excluded from the discussion, also for reasons that benefit his brothers, who were cautious about granting him complete authority over the family affairs.⁴² However, the rupture made bringing this future-oriented action to fruition challenging. On 5 October, Andries reported that Jan could not travel until conditions were less perilous.⁴³ Five days later,

37 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 29.

38 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, x, no. 10^A: Andries to Hester, Antwerp, 22 September 1584: 'Ick ben seer begeerich geweest met mijn broeder aldaer te comen maer ben door de nootelijcke ocupatie van mijne offitie belet, welck mij wel leet is.'

39 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 37, no. 16: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 3 October 1584: 'Belangende Uwe saecke en achte ick niet dat aldaer iet inne te doen zal wesen absolutelijck door de groote onghelighenthey des tijts.'

40 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 37, no. 16: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 3 October 1584: 'bij de principale [Hester] soo seer te benestigen als't moghelijck sijn'.

41 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 50-51, no. 23: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 17 October 1584.

42 Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 9-10; Sadler, *Family*, 222.

43 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 39, no. 17: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 5 October 1584.

the alderman noted a further deterioration in Antwerp's situation, expressing concern about its impact on Jan's journey, but 'time will tell'.⁴⁴ In the following weeks, Jan remains worried by the conflict, 'his body struck by fear' because of the dangers he may encounter along his way up north.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Andries assured his brother that he would make every effort to facilitate Jan's departure 'so that the matter is not delayed by the inconstancy of time'.⁴⁶ Thanks to Andries's labours, Jan was eventually able to take the journey before 9 November.⁴⁷

These future narratives reveal and recognise different areas of influence, namely that of the awaited in-laws and the prevailing political climate. Naturally, these factors affect the timeline Andries had envisioned for Daniel's courtship. Uses such as 'inconstancy of time' (*onghestedicheyt des tijts*), 'great inconvenience of time' (*grootte onghelegentheyt des tijts*), and 'time will tell' (*den tijd zal leeren*), as well as derivatives of '(to) fear' (*ick vreesse; de vreesse; vreesachtich*), vividly demonstrate how the sense of rupture is articulated in Andries's writing – his is a discourse of crisis. As Bryant and Knight argue, periods of violence and terror can render the future uncertain and unknown, hindering the capacity for anticipation.⁴⁸ However, according to Andries's writings, contemporary events should not delay pursuing the desired future of a union between Van der Meulen and Della Faille. He attempted to keep the domains of courtship and rupture separate for as long as possible. Still, this could not be done due to their temporal entanglement – a crucial aspect of pluritemporality. By way of contrast, his brother-in-law Louis de Malapert adopted a more critical stance.⁴⁹ He employed the term *dese ghelegentheyt van thijde* ('this occasion of time') to evaluate the anticipated engagement in a more pessimistic, or realistic light. Unlike Andries, he believed that the current circumstances were not favourable to engage in family politics, given the impossibility to converse in person.⁵⁰

The siege of Antwerp not only prevented many from travelling but also caused no little anxiety. Together with objections from the Della Failles, this resulted in an intensification of temporal investments by the proponents of Daniel and Hester's marriage. The plan was never abandoned, meaning that the potential profits of the union were perceived as being great enough to warrant such unexpected and increased investments of time and energy, accompanied by an extended timeline with no clear horizon. In addition, the correspondence indicates that the situation in Antwerp was considered temporary and should not get in the way of a wedding, a momentous event within the early modern life cycle that provided stability and continuity for the individuals and families involved. The uncertainty and fear colouring the present timespace were swept

44 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 41, no. 19: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 10 October 1584: 'doch den tijd zal leeren'.

45 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 48, no. 22: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 16 October 1584: 'dat hij de vreesse int lijf heeft'. See also Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 57-59, no. 26: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 25 October 1584.

46 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 51, no. 23: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 17 October 1584: 'opdat de sake door de onghestedicheyt des tijts niet vertachtert en worde'.

47 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 50-51, no. 34: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 7-8 November 1584.

48 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 44.

49 Andries's wife was Susanna de Malapert; her brother Louis was married to Hester's sister Maria della Faille.

50 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 52-53, no. 24: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 18 October 1584.

away by an optimistic and durable prospect for an ‘ordinary’ future. This perspective likely stemmed from past experiences grappling with chaos and warfare during the Dutch Revolt. As discussed in the introduction, the Van der Meulens had previously left Antwerp for several years, only to re-establish themselves along the Scheldt when it was once again considered safe for Protestants. These previous encounters with upheaval likely contributed to the perception that a state of rupture was transitory, just another crisis waiting to be resolved.

Horizontal Expectations and Vertical Responsibilities

In early modern times, marriage as a tool or strategy can be explained on two levels. First, it could be deployed to shape the present in favour of the lovers and their respective nuclear families, forming a horizontal bond. Simultaneously, it could influence the lives of subsequent generations via legacy and inheritance, which entails a vertical relationship.⁵¹ Incidentally, these horizontal and vertical connections can also be interpreted as short-term and long-term future thinking. As the previous section has shown, arranging a marriage between persons of repute could involve (a lot of) family politics. In the case of Daniel and Hester, familial negotiations were primarily left to the eldest sons of each family, as the respective fathers were both dead.⁵² However, other authoritarian figures also oversaw the mercantile family regime. At Della Faille, these were Jan’s brothers, Jacques and Marten. Together with Jan, they were named as executors of their father’s estate – the family legacy – and in this capacity they supervised Hester’s future.⁵³ On the other side, Elizabeth Zeghers used her power as a matriarch to ensure that the engagement between her son and Hester came to fruition.⁵⁴

A letter written by Daniel’s sister Sara clearly displays Elizabeth’s involvement as a family manager. On 29 October 1584, Sara conveyed their mother’s wish for Daniel to refrain from his intention to visit them in Antwerp. Elizabeth pressed her son to conclude his pending affairs (*Uwe voorgenomen saeck*), another reference to the proposed engagement. Consequently, Daniel was forbidden to return to his hometown, despite the critical condition of his youngest sister, Marie, who was battling tuberculosis (*de loose*). According to Sara, she ‘gets weaker every day’, ‘heaves white foam’, and ‘spits up a spoonful of clear blood’.⁵⁵ Her days seem numbered. Sara recognizes this as part of God’s plan. However, she also expresses that witnessing a loved one battling an illness for an extended period remains a sorrowful experience.⁵⁶ Despite the gloomy situation in the family’s residence, Daniel’s availability as a brother was compromised as he needed to prioritise his role as

51 Sadler, *Family*, 207

52 Sadler, *Family*, 6-7; 22; 598. Jan van der Meulen died in 1563.

53 Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 9-10.

54 Sadler, *Family*, 207-208, who notes that Elizabeth Zeghers ‘occupied a structural position similar to that of Jan [della Faille] de Oude’ when he was still alive.

55 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 62, no. 28: Sara to Daniel, Antwerp, 29 October 1584: ‘Sij swackt alle daege’; ‘wit schuym is dat se overgeeft, alsoo spoundense doen wel eenen lepel vol claer bloed’.

56 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 62, no. 28: Sara to Daniel, Antwerp, 29 October 1584.

a suitor. The difference in futural orientations within the Van der Meulen family regime, concerning the lives of siblings Daniel and Marie, is highlighted by the following commendation formula:

Nothing else at this time but commanding you in the protection of the Lord; I pray to Him to give my dear brother a long and happy life in peace and to fulfil your good desires. Our most beloved mother and our sisters, including our sister Marie, send you their best regards.⁵⁷

Sara's letter reveals several dichotomies, including female-male, young-old, sickness-health, and short-long life. It is, however, obvious whose temporal necessities are given precedence. Marie passed away on the morning of 9 November; Daniel and Hester were engaged on 22 November. Daniel thus secured his future without bidding farewell to his sister.⁵⁸ Investing time in future affairs and their expected profits – which in this case translates into upward social mobility – was given priority over investment in expiring matters, such as a sick (and young, female) relative; a clear trade-off between temporal and by extension socio-economic gain and loss.

Within the early modern family, mutual responsibility was not solely based on pecking order but also on friendship, a term used for affectionate relationships with other individuals, including relatives. Friendship, alongside marriage, was a meaningful way to strengthen horizontal ties between non-marital family connections.⁵⁹ Sadler emphasizes the importance of creating 'functional relationships' among kin. He notes that being siblings was not enough; it was also necessary to be friends who met both physical and emotional expectations, which were influenced by the power dynamics within the social circle.⁶⁰ Hence, friendship was accompanied by hierarchies and, more importantly, expectations – a futural orientation closely related to anticipation and placed second in Bryant and Knight's typology. They point out that the difference between the two orientations is their 'thickness in the present' and their 'relationship with the past'.⁶¹ Whereas anticipation draws the future into the here and now, expectation concerns a more far-reaching horizon that includes (im)possibility; our expectations might (not) be met. The anthropologists describe it as 'a conservative teleology' because of its 'implicit and assumed reliance on the past'.⁶²

In the context of Andries and Daniel's relationship – prompted by the hierarchy of older and younger brothers – Andries's earlier description of Daniel as his 'dearest friend in the world' (*den liefsten vriendt die ick inder weerelt hebbe*) exemplifies his sentiments towards his brother, or at the very least how he conveyed their relationship to others.

57 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 63, no. 28: Sara to Daniel, Antwerp, 29 October 1584: 'Niets anders op dese tijdt dan, bevelende U in de bescherminge des Heere, bidde Hem U mijn lieve broeder te geven in gesontheit een lanck gelucksalich leven ende het volbrengen Uwer goeder begeirten. Onse seer lieve moeder ende onse susteren, insoderheit onse suster Marie doen U seer groeten.'

58 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 73-74, no. 35: Peeter Janssens to Daniel, Antwerp, 9 November 1584; Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 74-75, no. 36: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 9/10 November 1584; Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 94-95, no. 48: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 2 December 1584.

59 Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 14-15.

60 Sadler, *Family*, 26.

61 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 22.

62 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 58.

Additional interpersonal expectations were established through nuanced textual cues, such as Andries's sign-off in his letters to Daniel: 'Your servant brother, always willing, Andries van der Meulen.'⁶³ 'Always' refers to a timeless and steadfast commitment, signifying an enduring fraternal bond. One could, of course, argue that it is part of the greeting formula, a standardised way to end a letter. Still, nowhere else in the Van der Meulen correspondence of 1584-1585 is this temporal adverb used as consistently as in Andries's letters to Daniel. The power of repetition could have considerably affected Daniel's expectations of Andries. Moreover, the combination of the spatial 'world' and temporal 'always' suggests that their friendship is larger than the current timespace. Andries's argument to Hester, namely that he makes temporal investments not only from the standpoint of his patrimonial role but also with his brother's welfare in mind, his future happiness, encourages this assumption.

Back to the present, how did the ongoing rupture affect the expectations of relatives and friends in the context of Daniel and Hester's marriage story? A wedding, especially one that had been so vocally supported and welcomed by various family members, naturally included expectations such as the attendance of loved ones at the celebrations. While the Dutch Revolt positively influenced the bringing together of Daniel and Hester, it turned out to be problematic for the wedding ceremony that took place in the Walloon church of Haarlem, 'a fully Calvinist affair'.⁶⁴ A majority of the couple's friends and relatives from the Southern Netherlands were unable to attend due to the evolving war. Others refrained from attending because of their disapproval of the marriage, including Marten and relatives who had remained in the Church of Rome. The ceremony, originally scheduled for 16 December, three weeks after the engagement (as per Protestant tradition), was ultimately held on 24 December.⁶⁵ A number of relatives were unaware of the time adjustment, including Andries. Consequently, he penned the following to Daniel on 7 December 1584:

Regarding the attendance of friends at your festivities, I know you would wish this, as do I, but you must sufficiently consider the current affairs. First, my attendance is impossible and excused. Mother, my wife, and our sister Sara are very short of time, and the dangers are also great. Especially if mother came over, I would be worried that fear would shorten her days. Our best friends do not recommend it either.⁶⁶

Andries had to compromise as a result of the different roles he fulfilled, namely as alderman of the endangered city of Antwerp (connected to rupture), paterfamilias (vertical relationship), and fraternal friend (horizontal bond). He sympathised with his younger brother's wishes to have his nearest and dearest at the wedding. Still, he was responsible for protecting both the city of Antwerp and the family's well-being. As an alderman, he could not attend the festivities anyway, but neither did he wish his mother, wife, and sister

⁶³ 'U.L. dienstwillighe broeder/ altijt bereyt/ Andries van der Meulen.'

⁶⁴ Sadler, *Family*, 229.

⁶⁵ Sadler, *Family*, 226, 229-230.

⁶⁶ Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 107, no. 52: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 7 December 1584: 'Belanghende de comste van de vrienden op U.L. feestete wete ick U.L. wel wenschen zout, ghelijck ick van ghelijcken, maer U.L. can de gelegentheyt der jegenwoordigher saken genoegh considereren. Eerst mijn comste is geexcuseert ende onmogelijc. Moeder, mijne huysvrouwe ende onse sustere Sara valt den tijt seer cort ende de perijckelen zijn oock groot. Insonderheyt al quame moeder wel over, soude ick sorghen datde vreesse haer daghen vercorten zoude. Onse beste vrieden en raden tselفة oock niet.'

to go to Haarlem given the current conflict and limited time horizon (again, he assumed that the wedding would take place on 16 December). He prevented the family from travelling out of fear for their health and safety, especially that of the matriarch Elizabeth's. Apparently, their closest friends came to the same conclusions. When Daniel and Hester's anticipated union was to be celebrated, fear reigned instead. The influence of rupture in this instant demonstrates that within the temporal regime of the early modern mercantile family, collective well-being trumped personal desires, and vertical responsibilities exceed horizontal expectations.

Hope and Patience

In Protestant tradition, marriage is regarded not as a sacrament, as in Catholicism, but as a sacred alliance, signifying the union of man and woman in becoming as one.⁶⁷ This marital commitment signified a profound transformation, representing a new phase in life in which other roles, like parenthood, may emerge. However, a married couple consists of two persons who also bring their own experiences and expectations into the alliance.⁶⁸ This section explores the correspondence leading up to and following Daniel and Hester's wedding celebrations. It will focus on two main themes: the envisioned prospects tied to their marriage (representing a shared future) and the communicated expectations linked to their distinct roles as husband and wife (reflecting individual experiences of marriage). Of course, this analysis will consider the impact of rupture on Daniel and Hester's love life.

On 12 December 1584, cousin Peeter Janssens wrote to Daniel:

Herewith I wish me to be in your good grace and that of your dearest bride, my future niece, praying to make my recommendation in her good grace and wishing you in the protection of the Almighty, whom I pray will spare you and all of us in a blissful life.⁶⁹

We can discern two futural orientations tied to distinct temporal horizons in this bidding. The first is anticipation and pertains to 'future niece' (*toekomende nicht*), indicating an imminent wedding associated with a specific date. The shift from 16 to 24 of December is of little consequence, as the plan is set to materialise promptly, thanks to the intensification of temporal investments undertaken. The second is hope, formatted as a wish. It orientates the new life phase – with God's help – in an optimistic direction; Peeter prays that Daniel and Hester's time together will be blissful. Bryant and Knight describe hope as a future of blocked or unrealised potential: 'Hope is about something that doesn't

⁶⁷ Barclay, 'Love', 85.

⁶⁸ Certainly, spouses' difference in perception of time is influenced by their gender roles, which demand a certain distribution of responsibilities within and outside the household, encompassing various tasks and aspects of family management. Unfortunately, the source selection restricts a vivid portrayal of Daniel and Hester's gendered experiences within their marriage – perhaps a subject for future investigation.

⁶⁹ Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 116, no. 57: Peeter Janssens to Daniel, Antwerp, 12 December 1584: 'Hiermede ick mij wenssche in U.L. goede gratie ende in U alderlieff bruyt, mijn toecomende nicht, biddende mijnne recommendatie te doen in hare goede gratie en wenssche U.L. den Almogende in Sijnne bescherminghe, dien ick bidde dat Hij U beyde ende ons allen wilt gesparen in een salich leven.'

presently exist but potentially could; hope is based on more than a possibility and less than a probability.⁷⁰ Moreover, it concerns an orientation in motion, a positive movement towards something. In their chart, hope comes in at number five (out of six), which means that the hoped-for is not considered the most relevant within the pluritemporal spectrum, undoubtedly since there is so little control or social engineering involved.⁷¹ Logically, this orientation will receive fewer temporal investments than the anticipated or the expected. Incidentally, hope encompasses various definitions that may not entirely align with Bryant and Knight's explanation.⁷² In a Calvinist context, hope also takes on a distinctive meaning. Here, it is often understood as a form of assurance or confidence in God's promises. Unlike some other Christian traditions where hope may be seen as a wishful desire for a positive outcome, Calvinists emphasise a more certain and grounded expectation. After all, they believe in the sovereignty of God, meaning that everything that happens, both good and bad, is part of a divine plan. As such, hope finds its foundation in God's steadfast nature.⁷³

Andries also sent his well-wishes on behalf of the family in Antwerp, writing the following message on 13 December 1584:

I wish you, my brother, much happiness in this new state into which you will have entered (so I hope with God's help) before receiving this letter, as I also wish to your companion, my dear sister. Likewise, our household sends their regards to you, wishing you much peace.⁷⁴

This future narrative explicitly mentions the transformation from bachelorhood to marital status. Andries hopes for *veel gheluckx* ('much happiness') and *vrede* ('peace') as characteristics of Daniel and Hester's – whom he now considers a sister – joint life. Within the context of rupture, both Peeter and Andries present married life as a 'Time of Stability or Peace', which is directly opposed to the 'Time of Crisis or War' in which Daniel and Hester got wed.⁷⁵ Within this Calvinist framework, their hopeful statements serve as a beacon guiding Daniel and Hester towards a stable, bright, and enduring future, steering them away from the turbulence of the present.

Once the two were married, the family brokers could take a step back, and the spouses themselves needed to get to work to plan the rest of their lives together. Attaining the potential of a harmonious, content, and joyful marriage was a responsibility that rested not solely in the hands of God. Andries offered valuable counsel to secure the future of the newlyweds. In a letter dated 30/31 December 1584, he advised Daniel to fulfil his wife's every desire, creating an environment of assured, steadfast, and unbreakable love.⁷⁶ Furthermore, he noted:

70 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 134.

71 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 136-137.

72 For more interpretations of hope, see Tatschner, 'Hope'.

73 Sytsma, 'John Calvin', 526-527.

74 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 118, no. 59: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 13 December 1584: 'Ick wenssche U, mon frère, veel gheluckx in desen nieuwen staedt daer ghij sult (soo ick verhope metter hulpen Godts) vóór d'ontfangh van desen brief in ghetreden zijn, ghelijck ick oock doen aen uwe compaignie, mijn lieve sustere. Van ghelijcken doen oock alle die van onsen huysse hare groetenisse aen U beyden, wenschende Ulieden veel vrede.'

75 Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 150.

76 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 126-127, no. 64: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 30/31 December 1584.

I write this to you because I know that first love, however strong, is unsteady and uncertain, and can be moved by a small storm. Therefore, practise steady patience for a while. It will serve you well.⁷⁷

This citation illustrates that youthful love was seen as impulsive, uncertain, and delicate in the early modern period, and was compared to the unpredictability of the weather. Andries advised Daniel to place his focus on being a devoted husband and lover, prioritizing it over other responsibilities. As premarital love was not the norm, engagements were often brief.⁷⁸ Therefore, Daniel needed to exercise patience to give his marriage the opportunity to thrive. According to Barclay, from the Reformation onwards ‘early modern society placed more weight on love as an action or a set of actions (than a “feeling”).’⁷⁹ Her deduction is consistent with the way Andries addresses his brother. The importance of temporal investments for future benefits of romantic love is evident, suggesting that the following principle held true in the past as well: ‘Romantic relationships [...] are not based on a single night; they are about the ongoing development of a couple’s flourishing.’⁸⁰

The beginning of Daniel and Hester’s marital timeline mirrored that of the siege of Antwerp. Daniel’s political duties in Holland took a backseat due to the time required for courtship and wedding preparations. Nearly a month after their union, it was imperative for Daniel to refocus on his diplomatic responsibilities, especially with the advancing Habsburg army. He relocated to Delft, where the States-General were based at the time.⁸¹ In contrast to their heart desires and the advice offered by Andries, the married couple unexpectedly found themselves living apart, diverging significantly from the best wishes the couple had received for their joint future. That reality did not align with prior hopes and expectations becomes evident in Daniel’s emotive letter to Hester on 7 March 1585:

It saddens me not a little to be separated from each other and to travel back and forth like this, which is not without danger and looks somewhat ridiculous to the world. It is not my wish to stay away for long, nor does it conform to the loyalty and love that we pledged to one another. However, the circumstances require us to be patient for a while.⁸²

The patience Daniel had to exercise as a new husband in order for love to grow he now passed on to Hester, allowing him to fulfil other roles, in his case his diplomatic responsibilities caused by the current war. Daniel invoked the promises of loyalty and love (*trowe ende lieffde*) as the central binding force between the two lovers during these troubled times. Sadler writes that ‘the development of a constant and secure mutual affection and

77 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 127, no. 64: Andries to Daniel, Antwerp, 30/31 December 1584: ‘Dit schrijve ick U.L. doordien ick wete dat de eerste liefde, hoe sterck datse is, onghestadich ende onseker is ende datse door een cleyn onweder te bewegen is. Daromme ufenet U in gestadighe patientie voor een tijt, zult U wel daerbij bevinden.’

78 Barclay, ‘Love’, 85

79 Barclay, ‘Love’, 85.

80 Ben Ze’ev, *Arc*, 78.

81 Sadler, *Family*, 232-233.

82 Jongbloet-Van Houtte, *Brieven*, 444, no. xxvii^A: Daniel to Hester, The Hague, 7 March 1585: ‘Het verdriet mij niet weynich aldus gesceyden te wesen ende soo over ende weder te reysen welck niet sonder peryckel ende voor de werelt wat spottelijck is, ende lange uut te blijven en is mijn herte niet, noch oock conforme de trowe ende lieffde die wij malcanderen besworen ende beloofd hebben, doch sijnde de gesteltenisse soo sij is, moeten wel voor een tijt patiëntie hebben.’

emotional attachment [...] provided a strong basis for their interactions [...] with the outside world'.⁸³ The danger here, of course, lies in the fragility of that mentioned love. Lastly, as with hope, we can also place the use of patience in a Calvinist framework. Patience is a key virtue rooted in the belief in God's providential control over all aspects of life. It serves as a foundation for enduring trials, maintaining faith, and living a life aligned with God's will.⁸⁴ This religious doctrine shapes a narrative regime in which emotions and temporal experiences mutually influence one another: first enduring in the present, but ultimately attaining happiness in the future.

Daniel and Hester's marriage, once at the forefront of the discussed temporal framework, gradually receded into the background after its consummation. This suggests a conflict between two distinct occasions: the romantic (couple time) and the political (vocation time), constantly demanding attention and therefore alternating temporal investments. Again, the demands arising from the rupture appear to overshadow the futural orientations tied to horizontal bonds, as previously exemplified in Daniel's relationship with Andries. The correspondence clarifies how Daniel's new role as paterfamilias concerns Hester's experience of time, making her prone to disappointment when marital promises fail to materialise. As her husband, he invokes a Calvinist narrative of patience to somewhat rationalize the situation and prevent or de-escalate possible tensions between the couple. Moreover, the letter sheds light on Daniel's emotional state, marked by internal conflict due to the responsibilities and expectations tied to his roles, manifesting as a sense of sadness. It is worth noting that this emotion might also be one he was expected to convey for Hester's sake.

Conclusion

Arguably the most significant insight gleaned from this study is that the future, particularly in the context of marriage, is depicted as both constructive and optimistic, even though Antwerp, the home ground of the families examined, was under siege – an event that generated a timespace marked by anxiety and fear, traditionally seen as impediments to human agency. Nonetheless, the Van der Meulen correspondence underscores the idea that rupture was perceived as a temporary setback, most likely based on previous experiences with turmoil. In anticipation of a forthcoming return to normalcy, time investments were made to materialize the next logical step in the life of our correspondents: marriage. Daniel and Hester's union was conceived as a partnership that would not only enhance their own lives but, more significantly, those of their immediate families. Here, the cyclical nature of life – progressing through various life stages with their associated events and expectations – aligns with the linear trajectory of improvement, ensuring the family's enduring prosperity.

The realization of the marriage plan encountered obstacles; familial disagreements and Antwerp's siege produced an unconventional and more lengthy timeline than initially

⁸³ Sadler, *Family*, 234.

⁸⁴ Sytsma, 'John Calvin', 526-527.

envisioned. Nevertheless, the plan's completion had everything to do with the influence exercised by the senior members of the merchant family on the existing pluritemporal regime. Through their place in society and the household, family managers could construct futures by taking actions themselves or giving orders to others. Pay-offs were based on the number of people a particular future scenario would benefit. Ideally, scenarios included both horizontal and vertical interests – the former focused on social relations in the current timespace, and the latter involving socio-economic improvement, legacy, and inheritance – ensuring continuity.

This article has demonstrated that the temporal ambitions of the Van der Meulen and Della Faille families were driven by a mercantile and patrimonial culture: the interests of the individual were balanced with the best outcomes for the collective. Their approach to the future and handling of rupture likely mirrored that of other nuclear families in their community. A close examination of the types of futural orientations and the level of temporal investment at a particular moment in life allows us to discern which objectives hold greater significance within a specific temporal framework. Moreover, by investigating other people's temporal experiences through such a synchronic study of pluritemporality, it becomes feasible to uncover both commonalities and variations in past future thinking within a society, and potentially even across different times and regions.

Lastly, this essay has shown that the organisation of social structures significantly impacted how early modern people oriented themselves towards the future and how imagined futures were constructed, even on the micro level. In addition, it has presented both rational and emotional motivations behind what we might call domestic planning. Because of its focus on the nuclear family, my research interfaces with what is called family strategy, an element within the wider history of the family and household.⁸⁵ The concept of strategies embraces 'choices, risks, uncertainties, and constraints' – issues inherently related to future thinking.⁸⁶ For historians of the early modern era accustomed to employing the concept of strategies, incorporating concepts like temporality and future orientation could offer deeper insights into the prospects of historical figures, how they articulated them, and how they navigated or adjusted to changing times. This would be one way to improve our understanding of both short- and long-term future thinking in the premodern world.

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