

The Orangist Appropriation of Erasmus: From Orangism to Erasminianism

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Abstract

The attribution of an Erasmian spirit to William of Orange is tenuous but has nevertheless been made consistently since the early twentieth century. This article makes use of reception theory to connect this association to events of the early nineteenth century that happened in response to the French dominance in the Netherlands and their subsequent expulsion. In 1810 and 1813 Rotterdam Orangists and opponents of the French presence appropriated the Erasmus statue in the city for their own cause by adorning it with orange accessories and by attaching short verses to it. The repetitive recollection of these events throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century culminated in the attribution of an Erasmian mind to William of Orange, who was himself associated with Orangism as of the twentieth century. While the initial Orangist actions were local and public endeavours, the association gradually entered the national political and academic sphere in the twentieth century. This transfer is exemplary for the changeability of 'isms' such as Orangism and Erasmianism. This article therefore ultimately emphasizes that besides the caution it requires, this changeability provides opportunities for reception histories.

Keywords: historiography, reception history, Desiderius Erasmus, Erasmianism, William of Orange, Orangism

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In his 2021 biography of William of Orange, René van Stipriaan posited that the education of William of Orange was strongly based on Erasmian values and that the prince must have read Erasmus's publications, or at least engaged with Erasmian minds.¹ With this statement, Van Stipriaan found himself walking in step with the long tradition of scholarly associations of Erasmus's thought with William of Orange.² Such statements had already been recognized and criticised in 1979 by historian J.A.L. Lancée, who researched both William of Orange and Erasmus, especially in the context of historical myths. After setting out a brief historiography, Lancée argued that the attribution of an Erasmian character to William of Orange is uninformed, because the two sixteenth-century men are hardly comparable.³ Lancée's refutation notwithstanding, the supposed resemblance continued to be emphasized. In what follows, I will argue that the lure of the comparison is based on shared values, tradition, and nationalism. By tracing the comparison back to the early nineteenth century it will become clear what motivations may lay behind today's comparisons of the two historical figures. I will not repeat Lancée's argument but abstain from assessing the interpretations to a certain extent, because my focus is not on invalidating but on explaining the history of attributing a sense of Erasmianism to William of Orange.

The imagining of Erasmus was central to the conference 'Erasmianism. Idea and Reality' that took place in Amsterdam from 19 to 21 September 1996.⁴ In her contribution to the conference, Erasmus scholar Silvana Seidel Menchi questioned the meaning of the 'ism' in Erasmianism. She recognized two types of Erasmianism, the first referring to a direct follower or imitator of Erasmus, while the second and more ubiquitous is rather based on a strongly mediated image of Erasmus. A mediation is unavoidable because such terminology is always selective and can never refer to the entirety of Erasmus's thoughts. Seidel Menchi proposed a moratorium on the term Erasmianism, suggesting that scholars reflect on the specific cases of Erasmus's influence through reader response theory, also known as

1 Stipriaan, *De zwijger*, 67-72. I am grateful for the feedback provided on earlier drafts of this article by my supervisors Han van Ruler and Ronald van Raak, as well as by Joris Oddens.

2 Specifically, Van Stipriaan refers to Deursen, *Willem van Oranje*.

3 Lancée, *Erasmus en het Hollands humanisme*, 162-171.

4 The proceedings of this colloquium have been published in Mout, Trapman, and Smolinsky (eds.), *Erasmianism*.

reception theory.⁵ I, on the other hand, will argue that it is valuable to study Erasmianism as an entity with its own values, independent from the reception of Erasmus. I thus understand Erasmianism as a changeable term used to attribute someone or something with characteristics that have historically been associated with Desiderius Erasmus. While my purpose is different from Seidel Menchi's, I will make use of reception theory to reflect on the emergence and transformation of William of Orange being understood as Erasmian.

Reception theory, also known as reader-response theory or audience theory, is a branch of criticism that emerged in 1960s Western Germany in response to the positivist approach within literary studies.⁶ This positivist approach was itself a response to strongly motivated wartime rhetoric and a prime focus on the reader as opposed to the text.⁷ As the name implies, reception theory also focuses on the effect and interpretation of a text rather than the text itself (the term 'text' is used here in its broadest sense to include people, events, and artworks).⁸ One of the aims of reception theory is to unravel our contemporary interpretation of a text, which is assumed to be informed by both the original work and the history of reception, incorporating the impact of previous interpretations of the original work and the context of publication.⁹ By taking this approach, I aim to unpack the process through which our understanding of Erasmus and William became so closely intertwined.

Reception theory has only been institutionalised in the field of history to a limited extent when compared to its influence in literature, classical, and Bible studies.¹⁰ Despite the lack of university programmes or journals devoted to reception history, histories of receptions do exist, especially in the field of memory studies.¹¹ It seems, however, that such studies are not directly embedded in reception theory. Harold Marcuse did try to connect history and reception theory more strongly, for which reason he has defined reception history as 'the history of the meanings that have been imputed to historical events'.¹² This definition seems merely to take events as its object, but the approach can easily be applied to historical people like Erasmus and William of Orange. Such endeavours are obviously not new, as is evident in publications tracing the historical interpretations of these prominent figures. For example, E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier and A.E.M. Janssen edited the volume *Willem van Oranje in de historie, 1584-1984*, in which they analyse how historians have presented William of Orange differently across four centuries.¹³ Bruce Mansfield's

5 Seidel Menchi, 'Do We Need the 'Ism'?

6 The origin of the field is often attributed to Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, translated in Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'. Maarten De Pourcq describes this genealogy of reception history as 'an invented tradition': De Pourcq, 'Classical Reception Studies', 221. For an overview and primary texts of reception theorists, see Machor and Goldstein (eds.), *Reception Study*, 1-74.

7 Holub, *Reception Theory*, 6-8; Martindale, 'Introduction', 3-4.

8 This appears rather poststructuralist, with both the broad understanding of text and the focus of readership over authorship, but reception theory and poststructuralism developed seemingly independently across different continents. For the (institutional) differences between the predominantly German reception theory and American poststructuralism, see Holub, *Crossing Borders*.

9 Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,' 20; Martindale, 'Introduction', 5.

10 Beal, 'Reception History and Beyond'; Hardwick and Stray, *A Companion to Classical Receptions*.

11 Rietbergen, 'Herdenken of Vergeten?'; Hogervorst and van Ulzen, *Rotterdam en het bombardement*.

12 Marcuse, 'Reception History'.

13 Haitsma Mulier and Janssen, *Willem van Oranje in de historie*.

series covers almost five centuries of interpretation, detailing the fluctuating fortunes of Erasmus's reputation in scholarly, religious, and political terms.¹⁴ Mansfield presented meticulous research on the European interpretations of Erasmus, but because of his focus on Germany, England, and France, the book series can only very cautiously be applied to the Dutch context, especially because Mansfield himself drew a tenuous connection between William of Orange and Erasmus's thought.¹⁵ Publications such as these generally take into account the contemporary context and the primary sources that are interpreted but tend to ignore other aspects of Jauss's 'horizon of expectation' or Baxandall's 'cognitive style' such as the impact of secondary sources on new interpretations of the primary sources.¹⁶ In my analysis of the associations between the two early modern figures, I will therefore incorporate this horizon of expectation – especially the role of available interpretations – in order to understand the association between Erasmianism and William of Orange. Besides assessing interpretations against pre-existing interpretations, adopting a reception theory approach means that I will attempt to understand historical receptions of Erasmus within their own time without making judgments based on my own, equally mediated understanding of Erasmus.¹⁷ The recurring motifs in these historical receptions are Orangist pasquils. Before I explain this further, it is necessary to sketch the societal background to these motifs.

Revolutionary Orangism

I have already said a few words about Erasmianism, but for my comparative approach it is vital to contextualize Orangism as well. While generally understood as the support of the House of Orange, the precise preferences of the Orangists and the exact implementation of the support has changed throughout its long history, ranging from seventeenth-century support for the stadtholder to the twentieth-century appeal of a re-united Greater Netherlands. The continuity and discontinuity of popular support of the Oranges has been studied by Henk te Velde and Donald Haks in 2014.¹⁸ They traced Orangism back to the Dutch Republic, when Orangists supported the Princes of Orange as stadtholder and opposed the far-reaching power of the regents. More specifically, in her contribution to the volume, Judith Pollmann argued that the first political sentiment worthy of the name Orangism emerged in 1617-1618, when William and Maurice of Orange were seen as exemplary rulers because of their commitment to both internal and foreign politics.¹⁹ In

¹⁴ Mansfield, *Phoenix of His Age*; Mansfield, *Man on His Own*; Mansfield, *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century*.

¹⁵ Mansfield, *Man on His Own*, 274-275: 'There was a sturdy tradition running through some of the leaders of the Revolt (including, probably, William of Orange himself) [...] which associated the practical piety, irenicism, and religious tolerance those people favoured with the name of Erasmus.'

¹⁶ Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'; Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 29-32.

¹⁷ Martindale, 'Introduction', 3, also emphasized this point: 'Most versions of reception theory stress the mediated, situated, contingent (which of course does not mean the same as arbitrary) character of readings, and that includes our own readings quite as much as those of past centuries.'

¹⁸ Te Velde and Haks (eds.), *Oranje onder*.

¹⁹ Pollmann, 'Schuilen onder de vleugels van Oranje'.

the early nineteenth century, however, this political ideal pertaining specifically to William and Maurice made way for a more general nostalgic and anti-French conviction among Orangists.²⁰

The nostalgia and anti-French sentiment evident in the Orangism that emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century should be seen in the context of a looming civil war in the Dutch Republic. A group of Dutch reformist citizens, known as ‘Patriots’, wished to reduce the power of Stadtholder William v through major political reforms. In the 1780s the Patriots indeed managed to reform the political system in several Dutch cities and obtain majorities in local and national governmental bodies.²¹ William v and his wife Wilhelmina of Prussia took refuge in Nijmegen and sought help from Wilhelmina’s brother, King Frederick William II of Prussia, who organised a military intervention in the autumn of 1787 that quelled the Patriot revolt and restored William’s power. Many Dutch Patriots took refuge in France, where they experienced the French Revolution of 1789.²²

Inspired by the French Revolution, around 1795 a group of Dutch Patriots envisioned a Dutch Revolution supported by French troops. During this so-called Batavian Revolution, the Patriots overthrew the Orange stadtholderate and proclaimed the Batavian Republic, officially a French sister republic but in practice more of a puppet state under French military control. Conflicting views about the implementation and representation of power among Republicans, Moderates, and independent members of parliament obstructed the establishment of a steady political system, which led to a chaotic period that extended beyond the establishment of the first National Assembly in 1796.²³ To reclaim control, Napoleon installed a Grand Pensionary in the person of Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck, who would soon be replaced by Napoleon’s brother Louis Napoleon, who in 1806 took the title King of Holland. When Napoleon lost faith in the loyalty of his brother, however, he incorporated the Kingdom of Holland into the First French Empire in 1810. After three years, the Napoleonic regime collapsed, paving the way for the foundation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815 with William I of the Netherlands, son of Stadtholder William v, as king.

Historians have shown that the Dutch frequently expressed their disagreement with the policies implemented by the Napoleonic regime. These protests occurred in Holland throughout the French period but especially after the draft of 1811.²⁴ Around 1811 and 1812, criticism of the French regime was increasingly expressed through the use of the colour orange. While this colour had previously been reserved for supporters of the Orange stadtholderate, it gradually became a national symbol for the fatherland.²⁵ As we shall see, the renewed independence and reinstallation of the House of Orange that followed the retreat of the French military forces in 1813 was celebrated with displays of orange

20 Velde and Haks (eds.), *Oranje onder*, 14-19.

21 For the role of Patriots in local and national politics, see Van Sas, ‘Tweedragt overal’.

22 Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 143-162; Rosendaal, *Bataven!*

23 For an elaborate overview of the political structure in this period, see Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*.

24 Joor, ‘“A Very Rebellious Disposition”’; Hansma, ‘Oproerkraaiers en waaghalzen’; Verheijen, *Nederland onder Napoleon*, ch. 7; Hansma, *Oranje drijven*.

25 Uitterhoeve, ‘De kleuringen van Oranje’.

clothing, decorations, flags, and other accessories throughout the country. In Rotterdam, the focal point was the statue of Erasmus.

Erasmus as Orangist Pasquil

A few events in which Rotterdam Orangists associated themselves with Erasmus were retrospectively described in 1817 by Jacobus Scheltema, a Frisian author who is usually labelled a Patriot, but who wrote distinctively anti-French and pro-Orangist publications after the collapse of the Napoleonic regime.²⁶ In his *Geschied- en letterkundig mengelwerk*, Scheltema included not only a lengthy biography of Erasmus but also an account of the history of the Erasmus statue, such as its design by Hendrick de Keyser, its erection in April 1622, and the controversy surrounding it. While the statue was intended to celebrate the famous Rotterdammer, the high costs of creating and maintaining the statue had led to criticism, not to mention the religious controversies around Erasmus that were now revitalized. Indeed, a mere month after the statue's erection in 1622, the Rotterdam minister Jacobus Levisus criticized it in a sermon. He argued that Erasmus had been a libertine, a free spirit who had mocked all religions, and that the money for the creation of the statue would have been better spent to increase ministers' wages.²⁷

Scheltema also recounted that the Erasmus statue was 'adorned with the signs of the times' in 1747, 1748, 1787, and 1795.²⁸ While it is not entirely clear what these signs of the times refer to, a satirical newspaper article of 1786 provides some context. In that article, an anonymous Patriot claimed that the Rotterdam Orangists wished to unite, hold a meeting on the market square, and elect the Erasmus statue as their president.²⁹ Scheltema more elaborately described two occasions during the 1810s in which Orangist inhabitants of Rotterdam associated themselves with the bronze Erasmus statue.³⁰ In both instances, the statue was adorned with messages that testify to an anti-Napoleonic or pro-Orangist motivation.

These acts make the Erasmus statue a Dutch example of a pasquil in the original meaning of this word.³¹ While the term 'pasquil' has been used for any form of satire or mockery, it originates from the sixteenth-century Roman praxis of attaching satirical texts or images

²⁶ Scheltema, *Vergelijking van de afschudding van het Spaansche juk*; Scheltema, 'Over het lied: Wilhelmus van Nassouwen'; Scheltema, *De laatste Veldtogt van Napoleon Buonaparte*. Scheltema's oeuvre shows that he was rather interested in Erasmus, because he wrote several essays about (works by) Erasmus, some of which remained unpublished: Warnsinck, 'Lijst der werken van mr. Jacobus Scheltema'.

²⁷ *Spongia Erasmi*, 28; Scheltema, *Geschied- en letterkundig mengelwerk*, I, 107-108; Unger, 'De standbeelden van Desiderius Erasmus', 273.

²⁸ Scheltema, *Geschied- en letterkundig mengelwerk*, I, 122: 'In de jaren 1747 en 1748, zoo wel als in de jaren 1787 en 1795 heeft hetzelfde versierd geweest met de teekenen van den tijd.'

²⁹ *Nederlandsche courant*, 23 August 1786. Another source of 1792 mentioned that the statue was 'recently' adorned with orange ribbons: *De Vraag-Al*, IV, 39.

³⁰ Scheltema, *Geschied- en letterkundig mengelwerk*, I, 122-123.

³¹ Eric MacPhail kindly pointed out to me that Erasmus himself had been subject of an Italian pasquil when in 1524 a satirical story about him was posted on one of the statues: Biondi, 'La giustificazione della simulazione nel cinquecento', 35-36.

to the so-called talking statues of Rome. One of these is an ancient statue called Pasquino, after the critical shopkeeper in whose estate the statue was found. Even if the practice was soon forbidden, the talking statues served as mouthpiece, allowing the Roman citizens to express their criticisms anonymously. While written satires were fairly common during the Dutch Napoleonic times, I have not come across any talking statues in the Netherlands except for the Erasmus statue, even though the Roman tradition was known in the Netherlands.³²

The first Erasmus pasquil Scheltema described occurred in 1810, when the Kingdom of Holland was dismantled and the provinces, or *départements*, were incorporated into the French Empire. To replenish provisions for their battles abroad, the French troops in the Netherlands supposedly intended to melt the bronze Erasmus statue into cannon. According to the tale, the municipality paid a large sum of money to redeem the statue. Soon afterwards, an unknown critic tied an anti-Napoleonic message to the fence around the statue:

Here I still stand, same as before
 Attentively reading my book;
 But had only NAPOLEON,
 As he had once threatened, melted me to cannon;
 I would have, thus appointed,
 Surely blown him off his throne.³³

Writing in 1869, Jacob van Lennep and Johannes ter Gouw questioned whether this event ever occurred, and if it did, whether it happened in 1810, because the repetitive use of the past perfect tense ('had [...] melted me to cannon', 'had threatened', 'have [...] blown him off his throne') suggests the rhyme was constructed after the mood had tempered. Moreover, Van Lennep and Ter Gouw argued, tying an anti-Napoleonic message to the fence would not only be a dangerous act but could also antagonize the French soldiers.³⁴ However, we know that during the Napoleonic period the Dutch openly criticized French policies. In this light, the 1810 pasquil might have been related to the riots taking place in Rotterdam between 23 and 25 May 1810, when in response to the arrival of the French military rioters frequently assembled on the market square, also known as the Erasmus market, because this was where the statue stood at that point in time.³⁵ For the purpose of the present article, the veracity of Scheltema's account is of limited importance. What matters is that a pasquil tradition would afterwards inspire the notion that Erasmus and William of Orange were somehow associated.

After Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig, the emperor abdicated. Allied forces expelled the French soldiers from most parts of the Netherlands in late 1813. According to

32 Dingemanse and Meijer Drees, 'Pasquino in Early Dutch Pamphlet Literature'.

33 Scheltema, *Geschied- en letterkundig mengelwerk*, 1, 122: 'Hier sta ik nog, gelijk voor dezen/Aandachtig in mijn boek te lezen;/ Maar had mij eens NAPOLEON,/ Zoo als hij had bedreigd, gegoten tot kanon;/ Dan had ik, hiertoe afgezonderd,/ Hem zeker van zijn troon gedonderd.' Unless otherwise specified, translations from Dutch are by the author with comments by Han van Ruler.

34 Van Lennep and Ter Gouw, *Het boek der opschriften*, 90.

35 Joor, *De adelaar en het lam*, 263-264.

Scheltema, it was against this background that another pasquil was attached to the Erasmus statue on 16 November: 'If no-one dares to wear orange yet, I dare to wager my old head.'³⁶ This rhyme seems to reflect a restraint in celebrating the defeat of the French army, as people were apparently hesitant to wear orange when the French were still around. However, in his reconstruction of the situation in Rotterdam after the shift of power in 1813, the Rotterdam archivist Eppe Wiersum noted that the inhabitants had already started to roam the streets dressed in orange a few days earlier. Similarly, on 13 November the actor Frits Adriaan Rosenveltdt took to the stage with orange ribbons while shouting 'orange on top!' While Wiersum provided a specific account of almost every day in November, he noted that 16 November, the day the Orangist verse was attached to the statue, passed without any notable events.³⁷ The police reports issued on that day either concerned the protests of the previous days or minor violations.³⁸ None of these reports concerned the Erasmus statue, but the activist who attached the pasquil to the statue may of course have remained under the radar. According to Gerrit Ernst, who re-enacted the event of 1813 in 1913, his grandfather Gerrit van Stolk had originally adorned the statue in 1813 on his way home from the tavern; no mention was made of an arrest.³⁹

The two verses of 1810 and 1813 imagined Erasmus as a contemporary. This imagined Erasmus is vigorous and fiery, the first to respond to events. Without there having been many recent publications about Erasmus at the time, it is difficult to assess the dominant view of Erasmus, while in his overview of references to Erasmus, Mansfield only listed foreign examples.⁴⁰ One recent reference to Erasmus that might give us any insight appeared in an 1809 play by Carel Alexander van Ray, which includes a story about Erasmus's encounter with his rival Joseph Scaliger. Van Ray indirectly criticized 'these dark days' in the assignment letter to the mayor and aldermen of Rotterdam and throughout the play berated the foreign involvement in the Netherlands, by means of extensive use of war metaphors in which the foreigner is personified by Scaliger and the Dutchman by Erasmus. Erasmus is thus only presented in very general terms as a celebrated Dutch scholar.⁴¹ Perhaps the lack of reflections on Erasmus in the Netherlands is somehow telling. For example, the 1808 competition for a eulogy on Erasmus received no noteworthy submissions and had to be re-issued in 1810, when the organizers did receive at least one submission and Rudolf Willem Jacob Pabst tot Bingerden was declared the winner. In his essay, Pabst tot Bingerden characterised Erasmus as 'the light of scholarship, in a dark age; and, as the great theologian, who was at once a thoughtful reformer in the affairs of religion'. He also wondered whether the lack of worthy submissions to the initial competition had been due to the difficult times or to a fear of not doing justice to the Dutchman

36 Scheltema, *Geschied- en letterkundig mengelwerk*, I, 123: 'Durf niemand nog Oranje dragen,/ Ik durf mijn oude kop wel wagen.'

37 Wiersum, 'De omwenteling te Rotterdam', 123-125; Jensen, *Verzet Tegen Napoleon*, 136-137.

38 Rotterdam, Stadsarchief (hereafter SAR), De Marivault 8, Stukken betreffende Oranje-onlusten, November 1813.

39 Van der Pot, 'Erasmus in 1813'.

40 Mansfield, *Man on His Own*, 69-118.

41 Van Ray, *Desiderius Erasmus te Bazel*; Jensen, *De verheerlijking van het verleden*, 141-144.

(‘vaderlander’).⁴² No clues point to a specifically critical Erasmus, as the ones Mansfield recognized abroad after 1815, but both Van Ray and Pabst tot Bingerden presented Erasmus as a national figure – a noteworthy characterisation in the light of the anti-French and Orangist actions. Of course, the Erasmus statue could simply have been a famous attraction in a central square in the city, as it was the only statue in Rotterdam at the time. Whatever the initial motivations, it is clear that around 1810 the image and thought of Erasmus were being associated with the House of Orange and with a national sentiment, associations that should not be neglected when interpreting further nineteenth-century exploits of the Erasmus statue.

Recalling the Erasmus Pasquils

The pasquils of 1810 and 1813, or at least their legends, were recalled and emulated throughout the nineteenth century, mainly on the occasion of Orangist celebrations. Despite their diverging contexts, with the first instance reflective of an anti-Napoleonic attitude and the second distinctively Orangist, the two verses were nevertheless often mentioned together or even merged into one. It is through these mentions that the association between Orangism and Erasmus was gradually strengthened. In what follows, I shall discuss several events, together representing a development that would ultimately culminate in both the political and scholarly traditions of associating William of Orange with Erasmianism.

A first instance that strongly reminds of the events in the 1810s was the forty-sixth birthday celebration of King William III on 19 February 1863. Walraven Francken wrote a new rhyme that was hung in an alley near the Erasmus statue:

If Desideer, that giant sun,
Could now step off his pedestal,
He would mingle in the crowds
To bring praise to William III.⁴³

While this poem does not refer to the verses that had been attached to the statue in the 1810s, it is certainly Orangist, even presenting the Erasmus statue as a supporter of the monarch. Walraven Francken had been a Reformed minister in Rotterdam since 1850 but was also the author of political and religious works. For instance, he had published on the correspondence between Vives and Erasmus and the religious conflict between Erasmus and Luther.⁴⁴ Francken was explicitly critical of Erasmus’s restraint, especially in the latter publication, as well as of his focus on language over theology, and his preference of

⁴² Pabst tot Bingerden, *Lofrede op Desiderius Erasmus*, 1-3: ‘Het licht van geleerdheid, in een duister tijdperk; en, als den grooten godgeleerden, die te gelijk een bedachtzaam hervormer in de zaken van den godsdienst was.’

⁴³ *Rotterdamsche courant*, 20 February 1863, ‘Feestelijke viering van’s Konings verjaardag’; *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche courant*, 20 February 1863, ‘De feestelijke viering van den Verjaardag van Z.M. den Koning, te Rotterdam’: ‘Als Desideer, de groote zon,/ Nu van zijn voetstuk stappen kon,/ Hij zou zich in de reien mengen,/ Om hulde aan Willem III te brengen.’

⁴⁴ Francken, *Johannes Ludovicus Vives*; Francken, ‘Tets over Luther en Erasmus.’

rationality over passion. All these critiques were commonly found in nineteenth-century orthodox Protestant opinions about Erasmus, especially in the Netherlands, where the role of Erasmus in the Reformation was vigorously debated.⁴⁵ Despite these criticisms, however, Francken understood Erasmus's role in the Reformation as a necessary phase and suggested that Erasmus would have been preferred over Luther had he lived in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ The question remains as to why Francken referred to Erasmus in celebrating the king's birthday. In the Rotterdam context, the image of a statue stepping off its pedestal could also be applied to the statues of King William II or Hendrick Tollens, who were both more closely – though perhaps *too* closely – related to William III (the statue of Van Hogendorp was only erected in 1867). The centrality and visibility of the Erasmus statue might play a part here, but an implicit reference to Erasmus's political ideals should not be ruled out altogether. While Francken had criticized Erasmus's morals and opinions on the Reformation, he implicitly and indirectly agreed with his ideas about state and government. Francken defended Vives's thoughts about governance and peace, all of which are very much in accordance with Erasmus's *Institutio principis Christiani*.⁴⁷ Francken regretted that the rules and lessons offered by Vives, even if they were common practice now, had not been applied sooner.⁴⁸ Considering Vives's close indebtedness to Erasmus, it can be argued that Francken understood William III's rule as an implementation of the *Institutio*.

A few decades later, in 1887, a newspaper contribution seemed to judge the Orangist acts as misappropriations, arguing that Erasmus disagreed with (contemporary) Orangists.⁴⁹ The anonymous author, using the pen-name Verax, pretended to wonder why the overwhelmingly Orangist anti-socialist movement had not yet dressed the statue in Orange.⁵⁰ Orangism had become topical again as the Orangists protested against socialist movements, most famously in the so-called *Oranjefurie* of 1887, which was most prolific in Amsterdam but also struck Rotterdam.⁵¹ Verax continued by recalling a dream of the Erasmus statue coming to life and making a phone call to Mercurius, the Roman god of commerce. Responding to the contemporary socialist and anti-socialist quarrels, Verax's Erasmus argues that a secular society necessarily leads to a failed type of socialism or communism in which freedoms irrevocably lead to inequality. Without fear of God, a minority will always lay claim to material property, leading to inequality. Following a Marxist line of thought, Mercurius and Erasmus argue that this inequality inspires the working class

45 Mansfield, *Man on His Own*, 238-296.

46 Francken, 'Iets over Luther en Erasmus', 205, 213.

47 While Francken does not explicitly mention the *Institutio*, his description of Vives's ideas on governance and peace closely correspond to those of Erasmus. Francken associates Vives with Erasmus throughout his work, but especially and more concretely in Francken, *Johannes Ludovicus Vives*, 192-194.

48 Francken, *Johannes Ludovicus Vives*, 53.

49 Verax, 'Ditjes en datjes'.

50 In fact, a few months before, the statue had been 'traditionally' dressed in orange and provided with a verse in celebration of the seventieth birthday of William III in 1887. This time, the 1813 slogan on the occasion of the French retreat ('If nobody dares to wear orange yet, I dare to risk my old head') was vastly expanded by a certain 'W.A.K.' in praise of the king: *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 'Ter eere van den Koning en Zijn Huis', 22 February 1887.

51 Altena, 'Vroeg socialisme in een weerbarstige stad'.

to demand civil rights. However, Erasmus foresees that the wealthy, backed by the police, will reject these demands; indeed, the Orangist anti-socialists will try to quell the socialist protests. Erasmus is thus presented as a socialist, but only in a secular society because he ultimately preferred confessional feudalism. In the end, Mercurius warns Erasmus to lower his voice, 'otherwise they will think we are socialists'.⁵²

In spite of Verax's efforts to dissuade (anti-socialist) Orangists from engaging with Erasmus, the statue would be dressed in orange once again on the occasion of Queen Wilhelmina's eighteenth birthday on 31 August 1898. The 1813 verse was once again attached to the statue, this time in combination with an additional verse: 'Who does not dress in orange yet, will have my book thrown at his head.'⁵³ The combination of the old and new verse seems to imply that while it was an act of bravery to dress in orange in 1813, the tables had turned in 1898. Even if this was one of the last instances of an Orangist pasquil usage of the Erasmus statue, memories of these events would continue to be recalled in later decades.

In 1906, the events of 1813 were expanded upon in a feuilleton, or short tale, in the journal *Het Vaderland*. The feuilleton tells the story of the compliment to Erasmus and the fooled mayor.⁵⁴ According to its anonymous author, this humorous tale had been passed down to him by his grandparents. Although the author's grandparents might have experienced the French occupation themselves, the story of the events in 1813 was likely a fantasy or at least exaggerated. As we have seen, in that same year the French were evicted from the Netherlands and Scheltema reminisced about how the Erasmus statue was dressed in orange. In the 1906 feuilleton, the mayor of an island nearby Rotterdam owed most of his prestige to the French and bemoaned the nearing departure of his patrons – as the feuilleton's author put it, the mayor was a 'fiery patriot'.⁵⁵ The island's night guard, on the other hand, was labelled as Orangist. The author described that while rumour had it that the French were being chased out of Rotterdam and the Erasmus statue was dressed in orange and adorned with a verse, this sentiment was not shared on the island. The Orangist night guard wished to see with his own eyes whether Erasmus was truly dressed in orange but had to get approval from his patriotic mayor. With a false excuse, the guard got his way. When the mayor understood the guard's true intentions, he did not withdraw permission but asked the guard to give his compliments (in the sense of an ironic greeting) to Erasmus. When the man returned from Rotterdam, he told the mayor: 'I came to return the compliment of Jan Rassemus [Erasmus], and how he glows with health!'⁵⁶ Apparently, the Orangist Erasmus pasquil was still known in the first decade of the twentieth century.

52 Verax, 'Ditjes en datjes': 'anders ziet men ons ook nog voor socialisten aan'.

53 *Rotterdamsch nieuwsblad*, 'Het Koninginnefeest te Rotterdam', 3 September 1898: 'Wie zich nu niet met oranje tooit,/ Wordt mijn boek naar zijn kop gegooid.' The verse was attached by an anonymous Orangist, but the garland was attached by pupils of the Gymnasium.

54 *Het Vaderland*, 'De ware geschiedenis van het compliment aan Erasmus en den gefopten burgemeester', 10 March 1906. The feuilleton was a response to an article in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 'Leer om Leer', 3 March 1906.

55 This might refer to Cornelis Goekoop, mayor of Goedereede.

56 *Het Vaderland*, 'De ware geschiedenis van het compliment aan Erasmus en den gefopten burgemeester', 10 March 1906: 'Ik kwam uwes het compliment van Jan Rassemus terugbrengen en als dat hij nog blaakt van gezondheid!'



Fig. 1 *Vürtheim publishers*, 17 november, Aankomst van den Prins van Oranje te Scheveningen, 1913, lithography, 40 × 60 cm, Leiden, *erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken*.

1913 marked the centennial of Dutch independence from France. That year, multiple commemorations were organized and commemorative illustrations published. One of these illustrations depicts William I arriving at the shore of Scheveningen in November 1813 (fig. 1). The king is welcomed by a crowd. In the background, an orange and the Dutch red-white-blue flag decorate the church of the harbour village. The central plane is flanked by six portraits surrounded with orange branches. On the top left stands King William I. Below is the Rotterdam statue of Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp, a prominent Orangist who shaped the provisional government after 1813. On the lower left is Princess Emma, the queen's mother. Queen Wilhelmina is depicted on the upper right, together with her daughter Princess Juliana. Wilhelmina's husband, Duke Henry of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, is portrayed on the lower right. Seemingly out of place among these Oranges and Orangists is the Erasmus statue in the middle right. The statues are not the only connections with Rotterdam. The Laurence Church is depicted on the top of the illustration and at the bottom are the arms and flag of Rotterdam.

This commemorative illustration was commissioned by the committee for the centenary of Dutch independence and was intended for distribution among schoolchildren in Rotterdam. The committee explicitly requested the depiction of the arrival of William I, the Laurence church with an orange flag, the Erasmus statue, and the statue of

Van Hogendorp.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the committee did not explain why it wished Erasmus to be included on the plate. A possible reason might have been to enhance the Rotterdam connection, which was also presumably behind the depiction of the Laurence church and the Rotterdam coat of arms. However, visually equating Erasmus to Van Hogendorp and members of the House of Orange suggests an understanding of Erasmus, or of his statue, as part of the Orangist party. Such a meaning is especially probable because, as we have seen, the narratives of Orangist acts surrounding the Erasmus statue had been recalled throughout the nineteenth century and were still alluded to in the first decades of the twentieth century, although mainly locally in Rotterdam.

William of Orange's Four Hundredth Birthday

We have not yet seen a comparison being made between Erasmus's thought and William of Orange as is suggested in Van Stipriaan's biography. Instead, Erasmus – or, more correctly, his statue – features only sporadically in Orangist media such as the poems and the commemorative plate. This situation changes as we move further into the twentieth century. Importantly, in historiography William of Orange had evolved into the head of the Orange family, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Orangism was by this time imposed on the Father of the Fatherland. This is evident from two book publications on the occasion of William of Orange's four hundredth birthday in 1933. The editor of one of these books, Pieter Geyl, tapped into the framing of an Orangist William of Orange to uphold the ideal of a Greater Netherlands ruled by the House of Orange.⁵⁸ He organised a celebration in opposition to the national celebrations, which, according to Geyl, claimed William of Orange for the Protestant cause.⁵⁹ In one of the book's essays, the Reformed professor Laurentius Knappert more broadly characterised William of Orange's plea for freedom of conscience as 'idealistic Orangist'. He even linked the Prince of Orange to eighteenth-century ideas on tolerance and drew a parallel to his own day, in which Orange does not refer to a colour or political group but to national unity, as we have seen above.⁶⁰ The concurrent associations of both William of Orange and the Erasmus statue with Orangism paved the way for a comparison between the ideas of these two historical figures. Yet this comparison was not made in the volume, even if one of the organizers of the commemoration, M.G. Schenk, later argued that 'William of Orange stood much closer to Erasmus than to Calvin'.⁶¹

57 SAR, N.V. Koninklijke Nederlandsche Drukkerij v/h J. Vürtheim & Zoon 55, Van Everdingen to Vürtheim & Zoon, Rotterdam, 28 February 1913.

58 Geyl, *Wilhelmus van Nassouwe*; Van de Westelaken, 'De Oranje-herdenking van 1933', 165-167.

59 Geyl, 'Streven en verwezenlijking'.

60 Knappert, 'Prins Willem en de godsdienstvrijheid', 188.

61 Smit, 'Lenie, schrijfster naast de rode looper...': 'dat Willem de Zwijger veel dichter bij Erasmus dan bij Calvin stond'.

In another publication on the same occasion, Knappert not only associated William of Orange with Orangism, but also with Erasmianism. In his biography of the prince, he typified William's religious conduct as distinctly humanist and Erasmian. While Knappert did not elaborate on his use of this latter term, it seems to refer to a tolerant approach to religious diversity and an ideal of a unified Christianity. Johan Huizinga had made the same association before, in his 1924 biography of Erasmus. He disagreed with fellow historians who claimed that Erasmus's political ideas had been applied in the Dutch opposition against Spain, but he maintained that 'there is much that is Erasmian in the spirit of [...] William of Orange' when it comes to his religious conduct.⁶² Knappert, however, argued that when the Prince of Orange ultimately had to choose sides between the various religious schools, he sided with the southern Reformed Church, which was distinctively Calvinist as opposed to the northern Reformed Church, which was originally 'independent of Luther, as of Calvin, under the influence of Erasmus'. Yet, even if William of Orange eventually did not side with Erasmus, Knappert argued this was only for political reasons, because the Reformed in the south had already started the revolt.⁶³

Erasmianism

Laurentius Knappert described William of Orange's religious conduct as 'Erasmian', a term that requires some further elaboration. The terms Erasmian and Erasmianism, even if they had already been used for centuries, only gained real currency in the twentieth century.⁶⁴ According to Nicolette Mout, they were often used by Dutch politicians and scholars as substitutes for the notions of tolerance and toleration, especially in order to indicate a distinctive feature of Dutch national identity. The terms, accordingly, do not necessarily refer to a connection with Erasmus. Instead, Erasmianism 'provides both a key-note and a (quasi-)historically founded explanation for religious, political and social tolerance for which the Dutch deem themselves still famous'.⁶⁵ However, especially outside the Dutch context, as Cornelis Augustijn has noted, the term Erasmianism is 'rather a mishmash than a clearly defined area'.⁶⁶ When speaking of Erasmus's own lifetime, Erasmianism might refer to a learned method, a political system, or a stance within the Reformation. Only the latter, Augustijn argued, may be used for the period after the death of Erasmus, even though Augustijn himself preferred the phrase 'influence of Erasmus', which leaves room for other influences as well.⁶⁷ Jan van Dorsten has gone further, questioning whether it is even possible to speak of Erasmus's influence. After critically assessing several usages of the term 'Erasmian', Van Dorsten refused to speak of Erasmus's influence and instead

⁶² Huizinga, 'Erasmus', 246.

⁶³ Knappert, *Willem I, Prins van Oranje*, 36: 'Onafhankelijk van Luther, later van Calvijn, onder invloed van Erasmus.'

⁶⁴ Zijlmans, *Vriendenkringen in de zeventiende eeuw*, 165.

⁶⁵ Mout, 'Erasmianism in Modern Dutch Historiography', 189-198; Mout, Trapman, and Smolinsky (eds.), *Erasmianism*, 2.

⁶⁶ Augustijn, 'Verba Valent Usu', 6: 'Alles zusammen ist es eher ein Mischmasch als ein klar umgrenztes Gebiet.'

⁶⁷ Augustijn, 'Verba Valent Usu', 14: 'Einfluß des Erasmus'.

attributed the term to the widespread fame of Erasmus.⁶⁸ As we will see, in the twentieth century Erasmianism would be equated with Dutch identity, and more specifically with William of Orange.

A couple of newspaper contributions by historian Paul van Overzee in 1964 demonstrate the discussion between Erasmus's direct influence and indirect Erasmianism. In two short articles, Van Overzee explicitly discussed both Erasmus's and William of Orange's take on religious tolerance. He argued that the Brussels court was home to the 'humanist spirit of Erasmus', which the Prince 'drank in'. Van Overzee claimed that even if William of Orange showed greed and converted to Calvinism, he remained an Erasmian Christian humanist until his death.⁶⁹ In response to the criticism his article provoked, Van Overzee clarified that Orange's Erasmianism did not come about through any direct reading of the humanist, but through what professor Lindeboom has called 'biblical humanism'.⁷⁰ In other words, a direct relation between Erasmus and William of Orange was not what Van Overzee had envisaged. Instead, William of Orange was attributed a rather vaguely defined Erasmianism that was deemed to have been present throughout the sixteenth-century Netherlands.

Just a year later, this idea of Erasmianism being prevalent in Dutch society was alluded to in a political context. The 1965 draft foundational statement of the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (vvd) attributed the Netherlands with an Erasmianism that had also been evident in the politics of William of Orange.⁷¹ Ultimately, the document connects this Erasmian spirit to the idea that freedom and responsibility are inseparable – a very liberal stance. This Erasmian mind, moreover, is said to have been inherent to followers of different convictions and worldviews. The latter statement should be understood in the context of the deconfessionalization of Dutch society. The pillarization of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dutch society along religious lines, which had clearly shaped the 1933 celebrations, was rapidly dismantled in the 1960s and 1970s. Now that the pillars no longer strictly divided society on the basis of religious conviction, Erasmus could become a national symbol. After numerous consultations and meetings, the draft statement of the vvd was eventually entirely revised. Because the Erasmianism of William of Orange could not be substantiated and was deemed ahistorical, the reference to Erasmus was ultimately omitted.⁷²

Remarkably, the liberal appropriation of Erasmus had a precursor in a party at the other end of the political spectrum. The Dutch Communist Party (CPN) had incorporated Erasmus in its foundational statements. In its 1946 programme, the party referred to Erasmus merely because of his humanism, which was seen to be at the basis of the party's own political outlook. In the revised programme of 1952, the reference to Erasmus became more nuanced: the CPN presented itself as heir to Erasmus's striving for freedom from royal and

68 Van Dorsten, 'The Famous Clerk Erasmus'.

69 Van Overzee, 'Het vrijheidsideaal van Willem de Zwijger'.

70 Lindeboom, *Het bijbelsch humanisme in Nederland*; Van Overzee, 'Erasmus en Willem de Zwijger.'

71 The Hague, Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (hereafter vvd) 147, Commissie tot Herziening van het Beginselprogramma, 1963-1965.

72 NA, vvd 148, Members' responses regarding the Beginselprogramma, 1965; vvd 149, Amendments and proposals for changing the Beginselprogramma, 1965.

ecclesiastical tyranny. In both cases, Erasmus stands alongside Spinoza and Hugo Grotius; in neither case is there any mention of William of Orange.⁷³ Apparently, the Erasmian idea of tolerance and the Erasmian worldview were popular characteristics for political parties to associate themselves with. The Catholic historian L.J. Rogier deemed the kneading of a historical figure such as William of Orange into a political similitude a natural law. He considered the Calvinist political identification with the Dutch prince a falsification of history and an insult to William of Orange, but he did uphold the connection to Erasmus: 'Erasmus [...] may be the patron of the house Orange, at least of the Prince of Orange par excellence.' For Rogier, Erasmianism is 'the most essential feature of his [Orange's] historical stature', evident from his refusal to take sides (religious liberalism and political compromise) and his Christian humanism.⁷⁴

Rogier wrote one of the many academic studies about William of Orange in the last decades of the twentieth century that made note of William's Erasmianism.⁷⁵ This Erasmianism at the same time continues to be described as inherent to the time, while no direct influence of Erasmus's publications is claimed. Hans Bots, for example, described William of Orange as the proponent of a spirit of freedom that was characteristic of the sixteenth-century Netherlands; a spirit that had its roots in the biblical humanism of Erasmus.⁷⁶ Bots thus described William of Orange as an Erasmian, but not as a direct or active follower of Erasmus on the basis of his writings. Similarly, Karel Bostoën and Karel Cools argued that the views of William of Orange were rooted in the Erasmian tradition, which was also one of the oldest and most essential components of Dutch culture in general.⁷⁷

In a similar fashion, Erasmus scholar E.H. Waterbolk characterized William of Orange's sense of tolerance and pacifism as Erasmian in his 1970 article *L'érasmanisme de Guillaume d'Orange*.⁷⁸ While he equally did not trace any direct influence of Erasmus or his writings, Waterbolk argued that William grew up and lived in an Erasmian environment. The prince's environment could be considered Erasmian because his father and uncle were taught by Erasmus himself and because Erasmianism was evident throughout the learned community in the Low Countries. While the main reason for the prince's tolerance and pacifism was piety, Waterbolk argued that he had strong political, economic, and military motives as well. William of Orange's thoughts and actions were based on his naivety and opportunism rather than on an Erasmian conviction. While the prince agreed with Erasmus in arguing for the freedom of conscience, he departed from Erasmus in his attempts to accept a pluralism of religions. Still, despite his deviation from

73 *Beginselverklaring en statuten der C.P.N.; De weg naar socialistisch Nederland*.

74 Rogier, 'Oranje en de Nederlandse staat', 38-41: 'Zo gezien, kan Erasmus – 'de Rotterdamse heilige' zei Joost van den Vondel – schutspatroom heten van het huis Oranje, ten minste van de prins van Oranje bij uitstek'; 'maar wat is dat anders dan Erasmianisme, de verwezenlijkste trek van zijn historische gestalte?'. See also Van der Lem, 'De prins in de geschiedschrijving', 208-209.

75 Mout, 'Erasmianism in Modern Dutch Historiography', 196-197, offers an overview of the relation between Erasmus and William of Orange as drawn by Dutch historians.

76 Bots, 'De tolerantie van de Oranjes'.

77 Bostoën and Cools, 'De orde van den Prince'.

78 Waterbolk, *L'érasmanisme de Guillaume d'Orange*'.

Erasmianism in his political conduct, Waterbolk characterised William of Orange as an Erasmian at heart. Waterbolk deemed the Erasmian ideal in William of Orange's politics unsuccessful. The Father of the Fatherland aimed to unite the Netherlands, but the provinces were disunited as a result of the act of abjuration in 1581. William of Orange also tried to secure religious tolerance in 1577 through the Second Union of Brussels, but this document was accepted by neither the Catholics nor the Protestants. Finally, he wished for peace but got involved in war. Waterbolk attributed some of these failures to William's Erasmianism. Firstly, tolerance led to polarization and dogmatization of political ideology, and secondly, religious tolerance in Erasmus's sense was obsolete and could not be applied within the new pluriform world of Christianity. Ultimately, Waterbolk argued that William of Orange's Erasmianism was untimely: he was ahead of his time in appreciating tolerance, while he had an outdated and naive view of Christianity. In his study of the historiography of William of Orange, Anton van der Lem characterised Waterbolk's study as a 'short, but nice article' and did not question the recognition of a sense of Erasmianism in William of Orange at all.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Having traced the reception histories of Erasmus, William of Orange, and the verses of the 1810s, it is clear that the present-day association between Erasmus and William of Orange is instead a concurrence of the receptions of these two men, which portrays them as advocates of freedom and religious tolerance. While the pasquils of 1810 and 1813 were unlikely to be based on such a motivation, they did initiate the connection between Erasmus and Orangism on the one hand, and between Erasmus and freedom on the other. In the many nineteenth- and twentieth-century commemorations of these events, Erasmus was primarily associated with criticism of foreign powers, independence from France, and the return of the royal house of Orange. After William of Orange had also been incorporated in the national Orangist narrative, a connection with Erasmus could be substantiated, especially when Erasmus was alluded to in a national context rather than merely as a Rotterdam hero. At this point in time, the connection was made because newly shared values were attributed to the two men and because of the new national sentiments associated with Erasmus and William of Orange.

Since an actual connection between William of Orange and Erasmus could not be substantiated, this association went hand in hand with the increased usage of the term Erasmianism. Historians did not argue that the prince had read Erasmus; instead, he was deemed to have an Erasmian mind or spirit. The suffix '-an' is normally used to refer to scholars who study or adopt the philosophy of historical figures, such as Aristotelians, Cartesians, Kantians, Habermasians, or Wittgensteinians, and in this vein a scholar of Erasmus's philosophy could be called an Erasmian. However, as scholars are prone to refer to people as being 'Erasmians', even in cases in which there is no proven affinity or

⁷⁹ Van der Lem, 'De prins in de geschiedschrijving', 210-211.

historical relation with Erasmus, the term should be used with caution. Erasmianism may refer to a broad horizon of affinities with Erasmus, ranging from direct and comprehensive resemblance (such as pupils) to indirect and partial or even vague forms of similarity, as is the case with William of Orange.

I have already discussed Seidel Menchi's criticism of the -ism in Erasmianism, and similar arguments have been made more generally for almost a century, notably by Arthur Lovejoy. Lovejoy recognized terminology such as isms as 'complexes, not of simples', arguing they refer to 'several distinct and often conflicting doctrines'.⁸⁰ The political role of isms has recently been studied in a project at the University of Helsinki. The researchers argue that isms are often incompatible with long-term or global perspectives because of their multi-layered temporality.⁸¹ Whenever scholars critically assess isms, they often seem cautious and their proposed methodology mainly serves to avoid the fallacies of isms. Indeed, both Erasmianism and Orangism proved to be flexible terms and should be used with caution. We might wonder about the value of isms if they are distanced too far from their namesakes.

The danger of anachronism in the use of isms should not encourage the historian of ideas to entirely omit such terminology from their studies. According to Cesare Cuttica, a study of isms may serve to 'recognize some cardinal points on our intellectual horizon and on that of the men and women studied'.⁸² A reception history of isms can provide insight in not only their changing meanings through time and space but also shed light on our understanding of the ism. For this purpose, it is vital to detach the ism from its namesake – in our case to detach Erasmianism from Erasmus – because the ism leads a life of its own and will develop its own values. As this article has shown, the broad scope of Erasmianism includes values such as tolerance and freedom, but may equally be associated with other isms such as nationalism and Orangism, each of which have their own long and changeable history.

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⁸⁰ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 3-7.

⁸¹ Kurunmäki and Marjanen, 'A Rhetorical View of Isms'.

⁸² Cuttica, 'The Intellectual Historian and the Isms', §30.

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