

STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND REFORMATION TRADITIONS

Rape in the Republic,  
1609-1725  
*Formulating Dutch Identity*



Amanda Pipkin



Andrew Colin Gow

BRILL

SERIES EDITOR

# Rape in the Republic, 1609–1725

Formulating Dutch Identity

*By*

Amanda Pipkin



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Cover illustration: Titlepage of Joannes Gijsius, *Oorsprong en Voortgang der Neder-Landscher Beroerten ende Ellendicheden: Waerin vertoont worden/ de voornaemste Tyrannijen, Moorderijen, ende andere onmenschelijcke Wreetheden, die onder het ghebiedt van Philips de II Coninck van Spaengien, door zijne Stad-houders in 'twerck ghestelt zijn/ gheduyrende dese Nederlantsche Troublen ende Oorlogen*... 1616. Leiden University Library, 704 F 27.

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## Rape in the Republic, 1609–1725

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who always encouraged me to write books  
and "published" my crayon and construction paper masterpieces.*

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## PREFACE

When I started this project, I asked for some help locating stories of rape in the special collections of Dutch university libraries. Not surprisingly perhaps, the answer I received was: no, our collections will not help you learn more about rape. It is likely the archivists thought the place to research this topic would be in the municipal archives sifting through legal sources. However, as Sjoerd Faber's study of Amsterdam revealed, there are in fact few instances of rape that made their way into the legal record. He identified only eight charges of rape during the 131 years between 1680 and 1811. Els Kloek found only two cases of rape in Leiden during the 116 years between 1678 and 1794. Widening the search to include sexual assault, Manon van der Heijden found fourteen men accused and sentenced in Rotterdam and Delft during the seventeenth century. Reformed Church disciplinary documents are only slightly more helpful as Herman Roodenburg demonstrated because the council required women to appear before them to explain their out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Still, only nine of these women made accusations of rape during the 122 years between 1578 and 1700. While there remains a great deal more to be said about the incidence of rape cases that came before secular and church courts, this material primarily informs us about the few acts considered egregious enough to merit the very serious charge of rape.

As this book demonstrates, there is a wide array of seventeenth-century Dutch books that feature rape, including the well-known works of Joost van den Vondel and Jacob Cats. Other groups who published stories of rape that are highlighted in this study are patriotic propagandists, Protestant moralists, priests writing for a devout Catholic audience in the United Provinces, and literary women. In finding and interrogating these Dutch sources, I am indebted to the now substantial list of scholars who have articulated theories of rape and who have noted its presence in medieval and early modern literature. These scholars revealed that stories of rape abound in a variety of sources, that rape performs particular functions in society, and that frequently violent sexual acts are deemed too insignificant to be considered rape.

The answer I received about the absence of rape in the university collections is only noteworthy because I believe it is indicative of a contemporary inability to recognize rape both in the past and in the present. Part of the problem is that there were so many other ways people described rape in the past. In the seventeenth-century Dutch sources, what we consider rape fell under other words such as: immorality (*ontucht*), temptation (*tentatie*), assault (*aanranding*), impurity (*onsuyverheydt*), and abduction (*ontschaken*), just to name a few. However, as Susan Scholz and Diane Wolfthal have noted, there are also alarming instances in which modern scholars deny rape where past authors have acknowledged it. Moreover, there is a problematic continuity in the definition of rape that makes us blind to instances of contemporary rape. Like our early modern predecessors, contemporary men and women frequently defined rapists as strangers, outsiders, and criminals. Although we deem the violent attacks of these men reprehensible, our definition inhibits us from recognizing that a woman may also know her rapist, he may not leave visible evidence of physical trauma, and the victim may not tell anyone about the assault. In fact, according to sociologist James Brewer, this type of rape, known as acquaintance rape, accounts for seventy-six percent of all rape cases. This is only one of many possible examples that reveals how our modern conceptions of rape do not fit reality. My hope is that this book will emphasize some of the ways Dutch society condoned rape in the seventeenth century and raise awareness that rape myths and gender inequities survive to the present day.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Dutch have wielded an influence on the global imagination quite out of proportion to their geographic size. Currently the Dutch are famous (or perhaps infamous) for creating a liberal society in which people consume marijuana, visit prostitutes, and practice euthanasia. Late nineteenth-century Americans and twentieth-century Japanese cherished a very different vision of the Dutch in which they were guardians of a purer, simpler past. Americans experienced a “Holland Mania” that found expression in art, architecture, trinkets, and children’s books such as the legendary *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates*, which featured the eight-year old boy who saved his polder village by sticking his finger in the dike. The authors and artists inspired by this passion cast the Dutch as industrious people, decked out in traditional clothing immaculately clean even if mended, carrying milk or tulips, wearing wooden shoes or ice-skates, and smoking pipes full of tobacco.<sup>1</sup> More recently, the Japanese opened a picturesque theme-park near the site of the seventeenth-century Dutch East India trading post. Created to memorialize the trade agreement that made the Dutch the sole westerners allowed in Japan between 1609 and 1639, this village features Dutch-style buildings, canals, tulips, and windmills. This spotless, flower-filled park, like the Hans Brinker illustration below recalls Dutch culture during its maritime heyday of the seventeenth century.

This book sets out to provide a far less idyllic set of images that the men and women living in the Republic during the seventeenth-century used to define what it meant to be Dutch. I am specifically referring to depictions of rape that abound in the literature of the Dutch Golden Age.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Saskia de Bodt and Jill Bradley, *Children of Holland: The Image of the Netherlands in American Children’s Books* (Zwolle: D’Jonge Hond, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The Dutch Golden Age roughly spans the seventeenth century. More specifically, some historians pinpoint the Twelve Years’ Truce in 1609 as its start, note that the economic boom had tapered off by 1670, but observe that the Dutch culture continued to flourish into the eighteenth-century. For a discussion of the use and usefulness of this designation in Dutch history see the introduction of *Women of the Golden Age: An International Debate on Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland, England and Italy*, ed. Els Kloek, Nicole Teeuwen, and Marijke Huisman (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994).

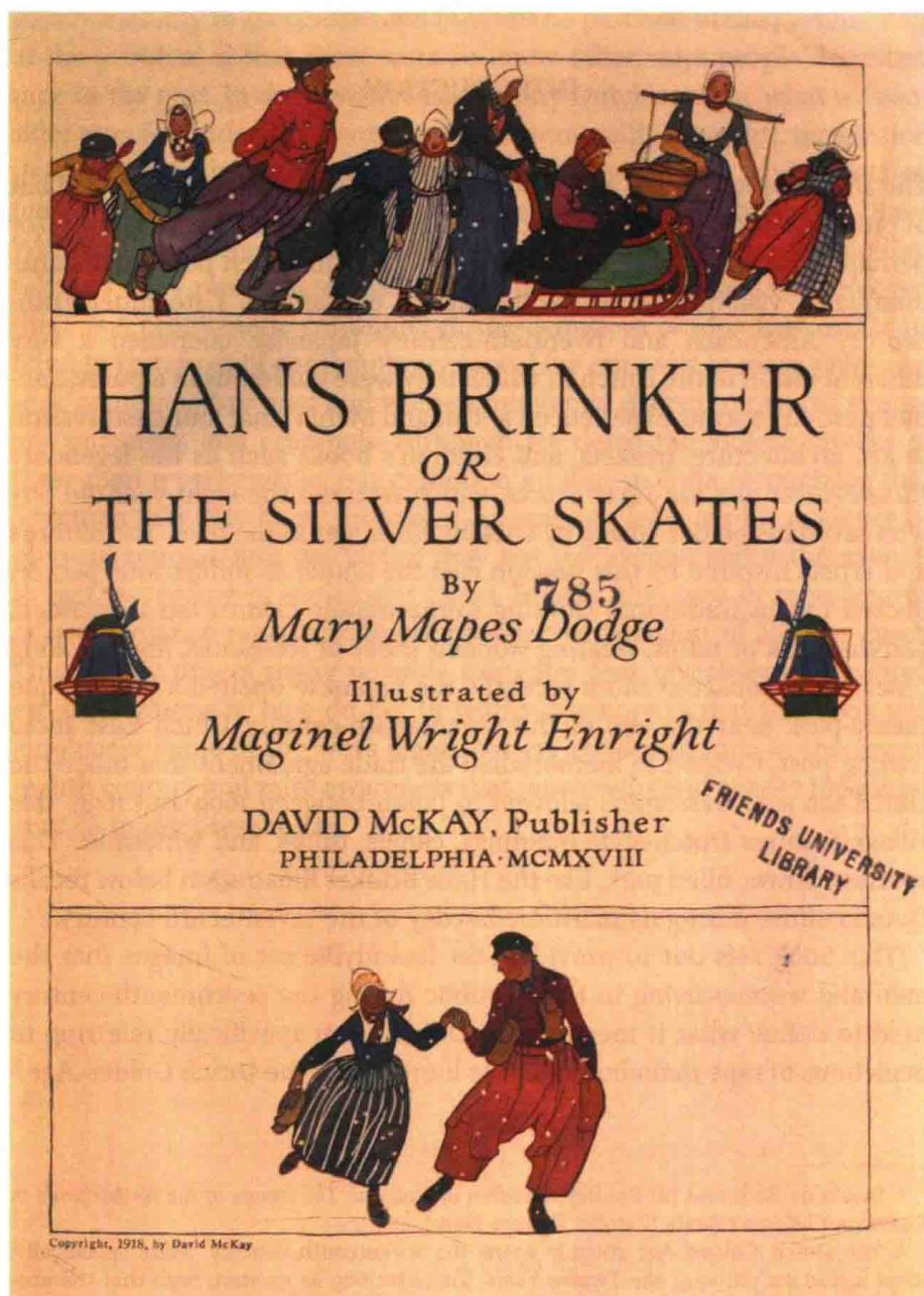


Plate 1. Maginel Wright Enright's titlepage illustration of Mary Mapes Dodge, *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1918).



At first glance, these stories are confounding. For instance, how should we interpret the fact that the climactic scene of the most famous Dutch play—the *Gijsbrecht van Amstel* by Joost van den Vondel, which was so well-received that it ran once a season in the Amsterdam Theater from 1638 to 1968—not only depicts the rape and murder of a nun, but also the fact that she is raped while lying on the dead body of her uncle, the bishop? What are we to make of popular Protestant moralist, Jacob Cats' story of a woman who begs a court of law to allow her to marry her rapist? What purpose did Catholic advice to women to kill a man threatening rape serve? These images may fail to jibe with the more common stereotype of the traditional Dutch as prudish, frugal, and meticulous; however, these surprising stories offer tremendous historical insight into the seventeenth-century Dutch society and culture that produced them. These stories of rape, and many others like them, are not just incidental tales of deviant behavior.<sup>3</sup> Rape was fundamental to the cultural construction of Dutch national identity during the first half of the seventeenth century, and it served as a subtle means of voicing opposition during the second half.

Rape may seem an odd theme for a narrative that is meant to inspire moral behavior and patriotism, especially since the intellectual current of Christian Humanism popular in the Republic provided authors and artists with a wealth of classical and Biblical heroes. However, the impulse of inspiring proper behavior through the depiction of morally reprehensible alternatives was a fashionable seventeenth-century strategy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> It was American feminist theorist Susan Brownmiller who pointed out that rape serves culturally condoned functions. See Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975). See also the introduction and chapter one of Ann Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Art historians have recognized this technique in the famous art of the Dutch Golden Age. Although modern scholars initially appreciated Dutch paintings as realistic, Eddy de Jongh encouraged an iconographical methodology to interpret paintings' concealed didactic and moral messages. Svetlana Alpers and Eric Sluiter argued that the focus on hidden meanings conceals audiences' enjoyment of the visual appeal of the painting. I am convinced by Wayne Franits' analysis that argues that meaning was not necessarily concealed, but rather a constituent element of Dutch painting in the seventeenth century. The symbolism and pictorial style conveyed meaning that was readily apparent to the contemporary viewer. See Simon Hendrik Levie and Eddy de Jongh, *Tot lering en vermaak: betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de 17de eeuw*. Tentoonstelling Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 16 September–5 December 1976 (Amsterdam: 1976); Svetlana Alpers, *Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Wayne Franits, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Franits, ed., *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University