

Rittersma, Rengenier C., *Mytho-Poetics at Work. A Study of the Figure of Egmont, the Dutch Revolt and its Influence in Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2018, 416 págs. ISBN: 9789004345850.

The work under review is an English translation of a dissertation that was defended at the European University Institute in Florence in 2006 and was first published in German in 2009 by the Dutch historian Rengenier Rittersma. The book is about the Netherlandish Count Lamoral of Egmont, who famously lost his head at the Brussels market square in June 1568, one of the most prominent victims of the duke of Alba's efforts to restore order after the Calvinist Iconoclasm of 1566. Or rather, it is about the myths that were spun around him in later centuries. The author's analysis is centered around the question which elements of the life and death of Count Lamoral of Egmont –as represented in both contemporary sources as seventeenth-century historiography– were so appealing that they led to a surge of mythmaking in the eighteenth century, especially by the German authors Johann von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. What can explain the enduring attraction of Egmont's fate to later generations? In a sense, thus, we can say that Rittersma is primarily interested in Goethe and Schiller's representation of Egmont as a tragic hero, and in the 'genealogy' of this representation.

Rittersma and his subject are both from the Netherlands, but this dissertation shows many international influences, particularly German. The fact that the dissertation was originally written in German already shows the author's familiarity with that language and affinity for it. But even more telling is the fact that the author chose to focus on the mythmaking about Egmont in eighteenth-century Weimar by two of the greats of German literature: even in the bibliography we see that secondary works on Goethe and Schiller far outnumber works on literature, or the Dutch Revolt. Italy –where the dissertation was written and defended– is not absent either: the works of two seventeenth-century Italian authors are singled out for the most extensive and in-depth analysis of Egmont mythmaking. Such attention on a wide variety of European authors shows that Egmont played a role not just in the Netherlandish collective memory, but that he had become a much more international figure after death. This is of course wholly commensurate with Egmont's life: he had an eminent international career as a Habsburg general and courtier, he served at the court of Charles V, he fought on battlefields all over Europe and north Africa, married a German noblewoman and stood in for Philip II during the marriage to Mary Tudor.

The book consists of three parts that each deal with a stage in the mythmaking about Lamoral of Egmont. The first part deals with the representation of Egmont's execution in contemporary, sixteenth-century reports; the second part is about the reception of Egmont in seventeenth-century historiography; and the third part focuses on the emergence of the Egmont myth in the works of Goethe and Schiller in the

eighteenth century. Although many recent works on the Dutch Revolt and Egmont are mentioned, the main historiographical framework consists of works on mythmaking, and references are made to other individuals that became subject of mythmaking, such as Masaniello.

The contemporary sources discussed in the first part, were created by a remarkably international coterie: the Spaniards Alfonso de Ulloa and Bernardino de Mendoza, the Austrian courtier Michael von Aitzing, the Swiss publicist Adam Henricpetri, the Englishman Thomas Stapleton and the Dutchman Marcus van Vaernewijck. Not all of them were physically present at the execution –Stapleton is used because he transmitted the testimony of Maarten Rythovius, the bishop of Ypres, who had guided the Count through his last moments. The sources were written with all kinds of different intentions, which means many layers can be found in them. Certain sources connected Egmont's fate to the Batavian myth which was about the rebellion of local Netherlandish tribes against the armies of Julius Caesar and was intended to highlight the inbred nature of Netherlanders' love of freedom; yet others rather focused on the role of sacraments in the salvation of the soul, a recurring theme in Stapleton's account of Rythovius' interactions with Egmont. Rittersma also discusses an anti-Spanish layer in these texts, focusing on ideas about Spanish cruelty and aspirations for world domination. We briefly lose track of the early sources here, when Rittersma discusses the seventeenth-century authors Martin Opitz and Tomasso Campanella extensively. But most important among all the layers of meaning in these early sources is the personal layer which paints Egmont on the one hand as a noble and constant hero, but on the other hand as a naïve and popular opportunist who was undone by his rivalry with the resentful duke of Alba. The interpretation of the naïve Egmont would be the most influential in later texts.

The sources under discussion in the second part, about Egmont's historiographical reception in the seventeenth century, have been selected by consulting the works that Goethe and Schiller used. Here, it becomes clear that Rittersma works backwards, from Goethe and Schiller through earlier authors to the event of Egmont's execution itself, instead of forwards: tracing the path the Egmont myth followed from 1568 to later ages. This indicates how central the eighteenth-century Germans were to Rittersma's thought process. Practically, it means that a strange selection of authors emerges. Well-known historians of the Dutch Revolt as Pierre de Brantôme, Everhard van Reyd, Pieter Christiaansz. Bor, Hugo Grotius and Famiano Strada are part of the analysis, but Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft –perhaps the best-known historian of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic– is omitted because neither Goethe nor Schiller used him. Dealing with each author in turn, some repetition is inevitable: recurring elements are Egmont's ambition, fed by his famous victory at Grevelingen (which also fed Alba's jealousy of him), his arrogance and naivety, and the freedom-loving nature of the Netherlandish people. Egmont is depicted, according to Rittersma, as representing a chivalrous ideal of a bygone era, which was connected to an equally obsolete system of government within which princes compromised with their noble elites. These elements would later be welded together by the authors from Weimar to create an image of Egmont as a quixotic freedom fighter.

In part three, Rittersma first presents an elaborate description of the intellection contexts in which Goethe and Schiller started work on their Egmont plays. Both were inspired by the revolutionary atmosphere in Europe, and particularly by the revolution against Austrian Habsburg rule in the southern Low Countries of 1787.

What's more, Goethe actually met the Netherlandish duke and duchess of Ursel on his travels in Italy. These aristocrats were very well acquainted with the situation in their homeland and may have provided Goethe with first-hand information. Schiller, on his part, was inspired by Goethe's play to write his own historical work. Their Egmont-image follows neatly from the images sketched by the earlier authors: Egmont continued to be the noble, honest and naïve count, who kept his faith in Philip II, but fell victim to Alba's all-encompassing jealousy. Goethe sketches a slightly more idealistic portrait of a patriot, while Schiller –who had worked more intensively with historical sources– sees him more as a pragmatist. Both, however, rehabilitated Egmont's openness and sincerity, which had been deemed old-fashioned and anachronistic in the seventeenth century, when a more cautious courtly ideal was in place. Rittersma argues that exactly that reputation for openness and naivety was one of the strongest characteristics of the mythmaking around Egmont.

As stated earlier, the unique international background of this work (and its author) reflects the complexities of its subject, Lamoral of Egmont, extremely well. However, one element is glaringly missing from the analysis: Spanish seventeenth-century works. Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez has shown convincingly that the Dutch Revolt, and that includes Egmont as well, resonated in seventeenth-century plays by authors such as Lope de Vega. Is it justifiable to overlook that in a book which is, according to its title, about 'the figure of Egmont, the Dutch Revolt and its Influence in Europe'? The answer is probably 'no', but the explanation for the omission of Spain lies in the fact that it is not really Egmont or the Egmont myth that is central to this work, but Goethe and Schiller. Particularly the second part (seventeenth-century historiography) is based on the works that those two German authors used, *not* on seventeenth-century mythmaking about Egmont in itself. And apparently, neither Goethe nor Schiller read Spanish. This dissertation should therefore be read as a genealogy of the Egmont myths of Goethe and Schiller, not as a general account of the image of Egmont in European mythmaking, which would most likely have included the works of P.C. Hooft and Lope de Vega –and for which Belgian and Dutch nationalist historiography in the nineteenth century would perhaps have been a more logical end point than the Weimarian authors. The work may thus provide the reader with a somewhat incomplete image of the Egmont myth, but the reader is nevertheless rewarded by a fascinating analysis of the work process of Goethe and Schiller, which Rittersma describes with great attention to detail and great joy.

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