

VIRTUS

25 | 2018



Yme Kuiper

Fathers and sons

A sketch of the noble life forms of the Bentincks in the period of the Great Wars in Europe (1672-1748)*

162

House Middachten has a rich history. This is exemplified by the 280 portraits and eighty miniatures that currently cover the walls of this beautiful house at De Steeg, in the Dutch province of Gelderland. Many of them are connected with the Bentinck family, whose members started to act on the stage of the European old-regime nobility from the late seventeenth century onwards. Since the mid-nineteenth century four generations of the branch Van Aldenburg Bentinck owned Middachten and left their mark on the decoration program of the house.¹ The goal of this short article is to sketch the life and times of a father Bentinck, three of his sons and two of his grandsons. The father is Hans Willem Bentinck, first Earl of Portland, who lived from 1649 until 1709. Hans Willem was born at House Diepenheim in Overijssel, one of seven united provinces of the Dutch Republic, and he died at his estate Bulstrode Park in Buckinghamshire. His two sons were born in England, during Hans Willem's second marriage to Jane Martha Temple. These sons are Willem (or William) Bentinck (born at Whitehall Gardens in 1704) and his younger brother Charles John (born at Bulstrode Park in 1708). His eldest son from his first marriage, to Lady Anne Villiers, was Henry Bentinck, Lord Woodstock and later, from 1715, the Duke of Portland and governor of Jamaica. Henry accepted this last post because he had lost a fortune in a

* I am grateful to Hanneke Ronnes and Sebastiaan Derks for their valuable suggestions to improve a draft of my article, and to Claas Conijn for his help finding illustrations at House Middachten.

1 A. van Loon, *A Short History of Middachten* (De Steeg, 2015) 92-93.

Willem Bentinck (1704-1774) (painting after a portrait by J.E. Liotard, c. 1750; coll. House Middachten, De Steeg/Rheden)



163

financial scandal, the South Sea Bubble, in 1720. Ten years earlier Henry had inherited nearly a million pounds (over nine million guilders). This profligate died in Spanish Town, but he was buried in Westminster Abbey in London.²

As a matter of fact, it is quite easy to open the Big Story Box of the Bentincks, with their noble Dutch, English and German branches. This article builds on a few studies on the Bentincks published since the 1970s. Several members of this family had great careers at the dynastic courts of Europe between the years 1675 and 1750. These were the times of Louis XIV and Louis XV, Charles II and James II, William III of Orange, George I and George II, Frederick William I of Prussia, his son Frederic the Great of Prussia, and, last but not least, Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. It was also the era of great wars, especially the Nine Years War (or the War of the Grand Alliance) and the Wars of the Spanish and Austrian Succession, ending in the Peaces respectively of Riswick (1697), Utrecht (1713) and Aix-la-Chapelle (1748). Many Bentincks were

² See for Henry Bentinck: P.-E. Schatzmann, *The Bentincks. The history of a European family* (London, 1976) 126-128.

involved in these wars and peace negotiations. We can read much more about this in the impressive thematic biography of Hans Willem Bentinck by David Onnekink, *The Anglo-Dutch favourite* (2007), or in Paul-Emile Schatzmann's sound family history, *The Bentincks* (published already in 1976). Politics and military campaigns were prominent aspects in the worlds of the Bentincks in early-modern times. The history that I relate in this short article can be characterized as biographical and microhistorical in approach, less focused on politics, yet situated in the realm of cultural history.³ In this article the focus is on the father-son(s) relationship, closely connected with – most of the time, implicitly – notions of masculinity, the habitat of male friendship and patrilateral sentiments of identification, which are typical for noble life forms in early-modern Europe.⁴

The rise of the family

164

Born at House Diepenheim Hans Willem Bentinck was a scion of an old noble family, that for generations had regional and local influence among the landed elite of the Dutch provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel.⁵ His father (Berend Bentinck) was Lord of Diepenheim and a member of the Knighthood of Overijssel. His mother (Anna van Bloemendaal) was of non-noble birth, but lived long enough to follow the career of her third son in the service of William III, Prince of Orange, Stadholder of the Dutch Republic (from 1672) and King of England and Scotland (with his wife Mary Stuart, from 1688). Anna was sixteen when she married Berend and she gave birth to nine children. Their house Diepenheim had recently undergone significant renovations in the trendy style of Dutch classicism, influenced by the Italian Renaissance architects Palladio and Scamozzi.⁶ The notable Amsterdam architect Philips Vingboons probably designed their new house. It seems that his mother Anna and his sister Eleonora, who was five years older, were the most significant people in Hans Willem's early youth. At the tender age of fifteen, Hans Willem left home and joined the court of the Prince of Orange, William III, in The Hague. Because the anti-Orange faction ruled the province of Holland, and in fact the whole of the Dutch Republic, with Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt as the man in charge, young William's education was permanently suspiciously monitored by political opponents of the House of

3 See for the politics: D. Onnekink, *The Anglo-Dutch favourite. The career of Hans Willem Bentinck, 1st Earl of Portland* (London, 2007); C. Gerretson and P. Geyl, eds, *Briefwisseling en aantekeningen van Willem Bentinck, Heer van Rhoon. Hoofdzakelijk naar bescheiden in het Britsch Museum. Tot aan de praeliminaires van Aken (30 april 1748)* (Utrecht, 1934); F. Jagtenberg, *Willem IV. Stadhouder in roerige tijden 1711-1751* (Nijmegen, 2018).

4 See for the notion of (male and female) friendship in the circles of King William III of Orange: H. Ronnes, *Architecture and élite culture in the United Provinces, England and Ireland, 1500-1700* (Amsterdam, 2006) 105-105-117.

5 Schatzmann, *The Bentincks*, 41-52.

6 K. Ottenheym, *Philips Vingboons (1607-1678). Architect* (Zutphen, 1989) 65-68.

Orange. Never again a Stadholder from the House of Orange, was their credo.

As biographer Marion Grew has written, the deep, affectionate relationship between the two young lads in the context of the First Stadholder-less Period in Dutch history was inevitable: William was surrounded by enemies and Hans Willem by strangers, so the two became blood brothers.⁷ The Dutch historian David Onnekink writes about striking resemblances in their attitude: 'both [had] taciturn and steady characters'.⁸ One of Hans Willem's talents was to keep silent about William's aspirations and plans for the near future; and he continued to do so loyally until William's death in 1702. In addition, Hans Willem was very knowledgeable about horses, about their breeding and the ways to utilise horses in battle and in the planning of military campaigns. He was really a country squire at heart who loved hunting, horse riding and hounds. Again and again Hans Willem helped his important patron with his difficult projects and struggles. So Hans Willem contributed to the restoration of the power of the Stadholder in the Dutch Republic in 1672, and to the Glorious Revolution of William of Orange and Mary Stuart in 1688, which meant the impeachment and the end of the reign of William's father-in-law King James II. When Prince William married sixteen-year-old Mary Stuart in 1677, Hans Willem was ordered to buy the jewels (worth 40.000 pounds) which William gave to his bride.⁹

165

As early as 1670, William and Hans Willem visited England, meeting William's uncle Charles II of England. Hans Willem did not have a splendid education at a Latin school in Overijssel, but now he had the chance to visit the universities of Cambridge and Oxford. He received honorary degrees from both universities. The two young men also took a great interest in the botanical gardens of these universities. Nearly five years later, in 1674, William helped Hans Willem to buy the estate Sorgvliet near The Hague, well maintained during the previous fifteen years by the Dutch national poet and former pensionary of Holland, Jacob Cats. Over the next fifteen years Sorgvliet was transformed into an impressive complex. More than any other estate, Sorgvliet would be the centre of the world of the Bentincks in the Dutch Republic for the next hundred years. Around 1700, foreign visitors praised the beauty of its gardens, especially its orangery.¹⁰ Sorgvliet was not only a house of pleasure with fine gardens, but also a power house. Let me give just one example to show this.

We have to go back to the year 1691. King William is firmly in place as King of England – he has won his Irish battles against the incumbent James II; the names of those battlefields can still be found in cartouches in the great hall of Middachten. For a period of ten years Hans Willem had enjoyed the pleasures of Sorgvliet togeth-

7 M. Grew, *William Bentinck and William III (Prince of Orange). The life of Bentinck, Earl of Portland, from the Welbeck Correspondence* (London, 1924).

8 Onnekink, *The Anglo-Dutch Favourite*, 11.

9 Schatzmann, *The Bentincks*, 59.

10 V. Bezemer Sellers, 'The Bentinck garden at Sorgvliet', in: J.D. Hunt, *The Dutch garden in the seventeenth century* (Washington, 1990) 99-129.

er with his wife Anne Villiers, whom he had married in 1678. During Bentinck's time on campaign in England in 1688, she died in The Hague. It was not Hans Willem but his sister Eleanora and Princess Mary Stuart who attended Anne's deathbed in The Hague. Also there was William III's mistress Elizabeth Villiers, sister of the dying Anne. Nearly a month later Bentinck learned of the death of his wife. His secretary also told him about her funeral in the family crypt in Bentinck's seignury of Rhoon near Rotterdam. It had already taken place under the guidance of his sister Eleanora. Five years earlier Hans Willem had bought the seigneuries of Rhoon and Pendrecht for 145.000 guilders and the surrounding land for approximately 10.000 guilders.

In the winter of 1691, King William travelled back to Holland for the first time since his successful invasion of England. The Sorgvliet avenue was used for a triumphal procession. Some days later Hans Willem gave a big dinner at Sorgvliet. Diplomats from all the great European powers were invited and attended, except the French ambassador. William III had put his friend Hans Willem Bentinck, already Earl of Portland, firmly upon the European chessboard of power. In the gardens of Sorgvliet the honoured guests could admire a decorative programme with vases and columns that showcased the fame and reputation of the reigning King William III.¹¹ After this power show at Sorgvliet, the foreign guests travelled to William's brand new summer residence and hunting lodge Het Loo in Gelderland. Hunting and shooting were the great passions of William III. In the 1690s Het Loo was further embellished. Queen Mary never saw these improvements; she died in England in 1694.

166

Two friends

Alongside the rise in their political fortunes, William III and Bentinck encouraged each another to improve their knowledge of the art of gardening and garden design. However, it was not William III but his relative and general Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen (Stadtholder of Cleves since 1647) who gave Hans Willem Bentinck his first practical advice on how to embellish the gardens of Sorgvliet in 1675.¹² Johan Maurits had designed and realised an impressive, formal park landscape with a deer park and an amphitheatre inspired by Italian designs in Cleves. As the Dutch historian of garden architecture Erik de Jong and others have demonstrated convincingly in their research on Dutch garden and landscape architecture in the late seventeenth century, Hans Willem Bentinck formed a part of a network of garden connoisseurs which included the Huygens family, the Grand Pensionary of Holland, Orangist and botanic expert Gaspar Fagel, and the Dutch regent, diplomat and curator of Leiden

¹¹ De Jong typifies Bentinck's garden at Sorgvliet as 'a political theatre'; E. de Jong, *Natuur en kunst. Nederlandse tuin- en landschapsarchitectuur 1650-1740* (Bussum, 1993) 74, referring to Govert Bidloo's *Relation du voyage de Sa Majesté Britannique en Hollande Et de la Réception qui luy a été faite* (The Hague, 1692).

¹² De Jong, *Natuur en kunst*, 70.

University (including its hortus) Hieronymus van Beverningh, who cherished the botanical garden at his estate Oud-Teylingen near Leiden.¹³ Soon after the Glorious Revolution in 1689, Hans Willem became Superintendent of the King's Gardens.

In 1698 Hans Willem reached the pinnacle of the pyramid of prestige: King William sent Bentinck to Paris as His Majesty's ambassador.¹⁴ Together with his eldest, sixteen years old son Henry, Bentinck stayed in France for six months. The two had their portraits painted by the famous artist Hyacinthe Rigaud. Bentinck had been reluctant to leave. This had all to do with William III's new favourite: the nobleman Arnold Joost van Keppel, about twenty years younger than Hans Willem. The King had recently made him Earl of Albemarle. Bentinck was not amused. He even wrote to William that there were rumours about a homosexual relationship between the King and Keppel.¹⁵ He demanded that William ordered Keppel to leave court. The answer he received was typical of William: 'I will see'. Much more than William III, Bentinck had the ability to adapt himself to court life. He was a master of the art of flattery. Even the most critical court society watcher, the Duc de Saint-Simon, praised Bentinck's court performances. More important still, Louis XIV liked the Anglo-Dutchman and took a tour through the gardens of Versailles with Bentinck and invited him to the royal ritual of *coucher*: putting the King to bed.¹⁶ Hans Willem had a keen eye for the interiors of the royal palaces as well as the gardens, and the hunting scene with its horses and hounds. All was excellent, he thought, but not as good as in England or the Dutch Republic.¹⁷

167

Back home, in England, the warm relationship between the two old friends did not recover. Keppel stayed at court and Hans Willem resigned for good in the summer of 1699. He started a new family and bought a fine, prominent townhouse in The Hague on the Lange Voorhout, number 7. It was the largest house in the street consisting of more than fifty rooms, most of them interconnected cabinets in the French style.¹⁸ In 1700 Bentinck married for the second time, to Lady Jane Martha Temple, a niece of the former English ambassador and garden connoisseur Sir William Temple. The couple occasionally traveled from England to The Hague, to visit their new townhouse and in the summertime Sorgvliet. Sometimes Bentinck visited William III. When he lay on his deathbed at Kensington Palace in March 1702, the King asked

13 De Jong, *Natuur en kunst*, 33-34, 70-73; Bentinck (Portland) already practiced a proto-English landscape style: 'At Bulstrode Portland tried to break up the monotony by introducing curved lines, and at the end of the three-lined avenue he dug a long pond'; Schatzmann, *The Bentincks*, 123. Perhaps he was inspired by the experiments in garden architecture of his relative Sir William Temple.

14 L. Panhuysen, *Oranje tegen de Zonnekoning. De strijd van Willem III en Lodewijk XIV om Europa* (Amsterdam, 2016) 488-496.

15 William's relationship with Keppel (and also Bentinck) was more than likely not of a physical nature; Ronnes, *Architecture and elite culture*, 114-115.

16 Grew, *William Bentinck*, 339.

17 Grew, *William Bentinck*, 316.

18 Th. Wijsenbeek-Olthuis, ed., *Het Lange Voorhout. Monumenten, mensen en macht* (Zwolle, 1998) 107-108.



Antoine Bentinck (1734-1768), oldest son of Willem Bentinck and Charlotte Sophie von Aldenburg (1715-1800) (*painting; coll. House Middachten, De Steeg/Rheden*)



John Albert (Albert Jean) Bentinck (1737-1768), second son of Willem and Charlotte Sophie. According to Hella Haasse the father of this son was not Willem Bentinck but Charlotte Sophie's lover Albrecht Wolfgang zu Schaumburg-Lippe (1698-1748) (*painting; coll. House Middachten, De Steeg/Rheden*)

for his old friend. Bentinck hurried from Whitehall to Kensington Palace, but when he reached the King's bedside William III was already unable to speak. According to tradition, William tried to whisper something in Bentinck's ear, yet no one present in the room (including Keppel) could hear what the King said. They only saw William take Hans Willem's hand and carry it tenderly to his heart.¹⁹

¹⁹ Grew, *William Bentinck*, 386; Panhuysen, *Oranje*, 545.

Three sons

After Queen Anne succeeded King William, Bentinck lost his position as superintendent of the English royal gardens.²⁰ His fascination for garden design and botanical experiments did not disappear, however. In 1706 he bought the estate Bulstrode Park. Here he started to break up the monotony of park and gardens by introducing curved lines and a long pond in the form of a canal. His former assistant at the royal gardens, Henry Wise, worked with him on this project. Otherwise, Bentinck was busy with the establishment of his children from his first marriage, as well as with his new family with Lady Jane: in 1704 their first son William was born, and in 1708 their second, Charles John ('Jack'). Bentinck's oldest son, the future Earl of Portland, Henry Bentinck, Lord Woodstock (born in The Hague in 1682) went on his Grand Tour in the years 1702-1703, ending in Italy, of course.²¹ He also went to the Dutch Republic to visit two of his relatives: firstly to Aunt Eleanora at House Nijenhuis, near Zwolle in Overijssel, who was his governess when he was a young boy; and secondly to his sister Anna Margaretha, whose husband, Baron van Wassenaer, owned House Duivenvoorde, near The Hague. When Hans Willem died at Bulstrode in 1709, his last will and testament left substantial sums of money to his widow and young children. Eldest son Henry inherited all the English possessions, and the eldest son of his second marriage, William, was left the Dutch possessions. The latter was an impressive inheritance, including the lordship of Rhoon and Pendrecht, the townhouse in The Hague and the estate Sorgvliet. Baron van Wassenaer, probably representing the Dutch branch of the family, unsuccessfully objected to the last will of his brother-in-law Bentinck, the Earl of Portland, on behalf of Portland's minor son William. In 1704, 22-year-old Henry Bentinck, Lord Woodstock, had married sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Noel.²² Henry's ambition was to have a military career, but his father persuaded him to take his seat in parliament, which he did. Hans Willem's widow remained at Bulstrode Park, with two daughters from Bentinck's first marriage and six children of her own. The last will of her husband included a message for his two young boys: move to the Dutch Republic for the sake of your careers.²³

Let us cross the North Sea and return to The Hague and Sorgvliet. In June 1719 William and Charles John arrived in The Hague to meet their guardian, Count Johan

²⁰ Schatzmann, *The Bentincks*, 121.

²¹ See, for his Grand Tour: M. Green, 'Reporting the Grand Tour. The correspondence of Henry Bentinck, Viscount Woodstock, and Paul Rapin-Thoyras with the Earl of Portland, 1701-1703', *Paedagogica Historica*, L (2014) 465-478.

²² Green, 'Reporting the Grand Tour', 126.

²³ W.C. van Huffel, *Willem Bentinck van Rhoon. Zijn persoonlijkheid en leven 1725-1747* ('s-Gravenhage, 1923) 1-2. Also about Bentinck's last will: Grew, *William Bentinck*, 414-416. William Bentinck inherited 'all lands and estates in the Provinces of Holland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Drenthe or elsewhere, with all household goods in any of our houses here in Holland, with the sum of three hundred thousand guilders.'

van Wassenaer-Obdam. The count was 36, single, and lived in an impressive townhouse on the Kneuterdijk in The Hague, designed by Daniel Marot. As a member of the knighthood of Holland and the States General of the Republic, Wassenaer was an important member of the Dutch political elite. His younger brother Unico had great musical talents and would become Lord of Twickel (in Overijssel).²⁴

170 The Bentinck brothers William and Charles, who lived at the big Bentinck townhouse in The Hague or at Sorgvliet, missed life in England sorely, and even after eight years in Holland William wrote to his mother: ‘The thought of passing the rest of my life in Holland always makes me melancholic and presents itself to me in a disagreeable view’. Spending most of his time at Sorgvliet, William found consolation in his passions: music, horse-riding and gardening. He loved to play on his harpsichord or flute at Sorgvliet and on occasion he would also play the violin. The educational regime of his first tutor and guardian, who had his own rooms at Sorgvliet, was very strict. William found himself more at ease at the University of Leiden. There he built up a special relationship with the famous physicist’s Gravesande, who taught him mathematics and also stimulated his interest in the natural sciences. This interest would never leave him, notwithstanding his broad knowledge of history and literature. Brother Charles tried to follow in the footsteps of William, but was less ambitious, more shy, and he stammered. Many years later, in May 1747, Charles had to preside at the reception of the Prince of Orange, Stadholder William IV, in the States General on behalf of the province of Overijssel. On the same day William wrote a letter to their old mother, still residing at Bulstrode Park in England: ‘Charles was president yesterday for the first time. It was very uneasy for him. But he was well prepared and informed, and behaved with great decency and dignity’, referring to Charles’ stammer. The event also illustrates the warm and close relationship between the two brothers, going back to the time that their mother sent them to The Hague. In 1726-1728 William made his Grand Tour, after a long visit with Charles to their mother in England. He had a new tutor and their relationship was good, in contrast to that with Wassenaer. William later wrote about his dislike of Wassenaer, who was also a political opponent of the Orange-Nassau family. Unintentionally, as we will soon see, Wassenaer contributed to the greatest tragedy in William’s life: his unhappy marriage to Charlotte Sophie von Aldenburg (1715-1800).

During William’s Grand Tour his brother Charles stayed in Geneva with Professor Necker and in an intellectual environment of Huguenots. Even here in Geneva, Charles, still in love with England, celebrated King George’s birthday with friends.²⁵

24 J. Aalbers, ‘Mutando Non Mutor’, in: H.M. Brokken, ed., *Heren van stand. Van Wassenaer 1200-2000. Achthonderd jaar adelsgeschiedenis* (Zoetermeer, 2000) 155-198. Unico van Wassenaer was the composer of the famous *Concerti Armonici*, dedicated to William Bentinck. Until 1980 Pergolesi was considered to be its composer. See: A. Dunning, *Count Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer. A master unmasked, or the Pergolesi-Ricciotti puzzle solved* (Buren, 1980).

25 Schatzmann, *The Bentincks*, 133-134.

Meanwhile his brother William travelled from France to Germany, to visit the court societies of several German rulers, kings and sovereigns. He joined hunting parties, danced with ladies and princesses and impressed many courtiers with his good manners, but above all with his elegant play on the harpsichord. Everywhere the name Bentinck opened doors for the son of the first Earl of Portland. His father Hans Willem had visited many German courts in 1688. In particular, Landgraf Karl of Hesse-Cassel insisted that William be his honoured guest; his father had been there too as Karl's guest. Via Berlin, Dresden, Prague and Vienna, William arrived in Venice. The famous artist Rosalba Carriera drew a pastel portrait of the Anglo-Dutch traveller (it is unknown where the portrait is at present). Bentinck would stay a whole year in Italy and spent much of his time in Naples and Rome. He visited many famous villas and gardens, for example Frascati and Tivoli. He even visited, with the owners, the Borromean Islands on Lago Maggiore with their beautiful gardens.²⁶ On his way home he picked up his brother Charles in Lausanne and together they visited Paris and even met young King Louis XV at Versailles. Some French courtiers remembered the visit of the father of the two brothers in 1698. During the Grand Tour one of the Bentinck weaknesses cropped up time and again: they were big spenders. In the first year of the tour William spent an approximate 12.000 guilders on collector's items.

171

An arranged marriage

Once William and Charles were back home, their guardian Count Wassenaer started a project that would end in disaster. Why he did so, we don't really know, we can only guess. The Count took the initiative to arrange a marriage between his ward (already 25 years old) and the only child of Anton II, Count of Aldenburg, his fourteen-year-old daughter Charlotte Sophie. We can closely follow the events in Hella Haasse's fine book *Mevrouw Bentinck of onverenigbaarheid van karakter (Madame Bentinck or incompatibility of character)*, published in 1978 and in Van Huffels's biography and dissertation *Willem Bentinck van Rhoon* (defended in 1923). The story of this arranged marriage starts with the first letter that Count Wassenaer wrote in 1730 to a friend of Count Anton, asking him to mediate between the two families, via the purchase of Bentinck's title of *Reichsgraf* in Vienna for 8.000 guilders in 1732 (in his own words: 'the silly paper from Vienna'), right up to the signing by Bentinck of a divorce document in 1739.²⁷ The first, arranged meeting between the two was at Twickel; the influence of Count Wassenaer is suspected. The last time that Charlotte Sophie walked – incognito – in the gardens of Sorgvliet was in 1761, when she tried to get a glimpse of one her sons. She was unsuccessful since Bentinck saw her and gave imme-

²⁶ Schatzmann, *The Bentincks*, 138-139.

²⁷ Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 75, 107.

diately instructions to send her away.²⁸ Not motherly care but trying to make financial arrangements with her eldest son had been Charlotte's motive for travelling to The Hague.

William and Charlotte Sophie married in June 1733 in Varel, but she had already fallen in love with the German nobleman and officer in the army of the Dutch Republic, Albrecht Wolfgang count zu Schaumburg Lippe (1698-1748). His residence was castle Bückeburg in today's Lower Saxony. William and his wife had two sons: Antoine and Albert Jean, born in respectively 1734 and 1737. Divorce was signed in April 1740 and some weeks later Charlotte Sophie gave birth to a son of her married lover, with whom she had another illegitimate son in 1745.

A true history is the apt subtitle of Haasse's book on the marriage conflict between Charlotte Sophie and 'Count' Bentinck, seen from the female perspective. The author characterises it as 'a composing of authentic documents'. Haasse reconstructed the drama by selecting and often translating French, German and English letters written by many *dramatis personae*. In her 'true history' she achieves a good balance between detachment and involvement. Van Huffel described Willem Bentinck van Rhoon's education, career and private life, especially during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, 55 years earlier. Her conclusion about the failed marriage is exactly the same as Haasse's: *incompatibilité des humeurs*. She had no evidence, unlike Hella Haasse who based her story on primary sources, about the sexual relationship between Count zu Schaumburg-Lippe and Charlotte Sophie during her marriage to 'Count' Bentinck. Van Huffel made a fair reconstruction of the troubles of Bentinck's marriage, and, more importantly, she openly criticised the 1912 biography by Aubrey Le Blond of Charlotte Sophie, in which the author more or less blamed Bentinck for the failure of the marriage. Le Blond cites in her book a letter of Count Lippe of May 1733, written some weeks before the marriage of Bentinck and Charlotte Sophie, that shows the already existing strong dislike of the latter of her future husband. This is certainly not 'an unbiased opinion', Van Huffel soberly comments.²⁹ 'We won't judge Charlotte Sophie van Aldenburg', Van Huffel writes, 'because we don't know how much she suffered and our knowledge of (...) her inner life does not go far enough.' In her view Bentinck had no keen eye for the nervous temperament of his wife and tried to educate her to his wishes. Repeatedly stressing the young age of Charlotte Sophie, Van Huffel still wonders why she left her two young children and did not seem to care much about them in the years to come.³⁰

There is one short story that I would like to add to all that has been written about the marriage and the divorce that once shocked *tout The Hague* and was a tasty *on*

28 H. Haasse, *Mevrouw Bentinck of onvernenigbaarheid van karakter. Een ware geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, 1978) 457-458.

29 Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 78.

30 Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 90, 96.

dit at many German courts. Haasse mentions this aspect briefly in her introduction, and only as a minor point. In my view, however, it is highly relevant and it deserves more attention. As Haasse rightly describes, the early life of Count Anton II and his mother Princess Charlotte-Amélie de la Trémoille was hectic and dramatic. Threatened by relatives about the ownership of the estates of Varel und Knyphausen, fiefdoms of the Danish King, in the German part of Friesland, they had to take refuge in their castle Doorwerth in Gelderland.³¹ But better times followed and the time came for Anton to get married. According to Haasse, Anton's guardians succeeded in deliberately arranging a marriage with a disabled girl who could not have children. After some years, this marriage was dissolved. This history is told by Haasse in one, long sentence.³² But small facts bear witness to larger issues here. Haasse's disabled girl seems to be Anna von Inn- und Knyphausen (1690-1718), the oldest daughter of the very rich nobleman Carl Ferdinand von Inn-und Knyphausen, owner of House Nieoord in the Dutch province of Groningen.³³ His name already gives away the German connection.

173

Anna was fifteen and had a good appearance when she married Anton von Aldenburg in the church of Midwolde near Nienoord in 1705; Anton was 24 years old. In January 1711 the couple divorced and four months later Anton married Wilhelmine Marie, Princess von Hessen-Homburg. She would become the mother of Charlotte Sophie, in 1715, after several stillborn children. As far as I can tell now, the divorce was possible because Anna confessed to adultery with a certain Böhm, a married servant of Count Anton.³⁴ The separation trial was in Copenhagen. Financial arrangements between the two families were made possible when Anton promised his father-in-law to leave his daughter's confession of adultery out of the official divorce document. In this document the spouses declared that their marriage was never consummated. In the autumn of 1710 Anna and Böhm were both interrogated at castle Varel.³⁵ Anna was sent home to her own family, but was no longer accepted as member of the fami-

31 Strange but true, father Hans Willem Bentinck tried to acquire the lordship of the manor Doorwerth in 1698. He asked the nobleman Jan van Arnheim, Lord of Roosendaal, to negotiate in secret with the Princess de la Trémoille, Countess of Aldenburg; castle Doorwerth was near William III's hunting lodge Het Loo and his hunting grounds at the Veluwe; N. Japikse, *Correspondentie van Willem III en Hans Willem Bentinck* (5 dln.; 's-Gravenhage, 1927-1937), III, 464-468.

32 Haasse, *Mevrouw Bentinck*, 14.

33 W.A.M. van Schie, *Anna van Ewsum. Haar afkomst, haar leven, haar wereld* (Leek, 2017); idem, 'Het tragische leven van Anna Wilhelmina, kleindochter van Anna van Ewsum', *Historische Kring Gemeente Leek*, XXXII (2018) 2-11. See, also U. von Alvensleben, *Die Lütetsburger Chronik. Geschichte eines friesischen Hauptlingsgeschlechts* (Göttingen, 1955).

34 I thank Wouter van Schie and Niels Peter Juel Larsen for sharing with me the original documents of this complex juridical case showing many aspects of the interdependence of gender and noble family life. Larsen found many relevant papers in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz ('Mappe Bentinck'). He is author of *Amelie. Historisk roman* (2006), based on the life of Princess Charlotte-Amélie de la Trémoille (1652-1732).

35 These interrogations were narrated in an official document; Gelders Archief, Family archives Bentinck/Aldenburg Bentinck, no. 2160. I thank Nouk Ruitenber for drawing my attention to this document.

ly. She also promised never to re-marry. I can hardly believe that this episode did not have any influence on Count Anton's behaviour and position in all the troubles that he would face during the marriage of his daughter to Bentinck.

Count Anton died in 1738. He and his son-in-law Bentinck got on well. After his death Bentinck wrote to his mother that 'he was a good man (...). I am sure that excepting you, nobody had more kindness and friendship for me than he.'³⁶ A year later Charlotte Sophie insisted on a divorce. After six years of marriage, most of which spent in The Hague, she left her husband and their two sons Antoine and Jean, born respectively in 1734 and 1737. They remained with their father. Charlotte reached an old age and outlived both Bentinck and their two sons.

Coda

174 William Bentinck reached the top of the Dutch political elite in the 1740s, and he did so in the same vein as his father: he became the superadvisor of Stadtholder William IV, who had married Anne, the Princess Royal, daughter of King George II of England. His mother, Lady Portland, had been Anne's governess.³⁷ In 1747 (during a new war with France) Bentinck was the initiator of the political project to elect William IV as Stadtholder of all the Dutch provinces instead of only Friesland, Groningen and Gelderland. Once again we meet the tandem Bentinck and Orange. And now in this order, for Bentinck became so prominent that the Princess of Orange tried to downplay and undermine Bentinck's actions. It is also paradoxical that the born aristocrat Bentinck, champion of the interests of the House of Orange Nassau, and at heart an arrogant man, had to mobilise (and thereafter to direct) the mob to achieve his goals.³⁸ Meanwhile, his brother Charles, married to the daughter of an English Duke, had left the army. In the political arena he was a loyal adherent of the Orangist faction.

In 1748 William was the most important diplomat representing the Dutch Republic during the peace negotiations in Aix-la-Chapelle. A year later, when William went to Vienna for a diplomatic mission, he also used his stay there to conduct family affairs on behalf of his two sons, Antoine (1734-1768) and Albert Jean (1737-1775). His own private war with Charlotte Sophie was not yet over. In 1754 all her possessions

³⁶ Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 94. See, for a balanced reconstruction of Bentinck's political career: J. Gabriëls, *De heren als dienaar en de dienaar als heer. Het stadhouderlijk stelsel in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw* (The Hague, 1990).

³⁷ The relationship between Bentinck and this Anne (of Hanover) always stayed tense and ambivalent; she had a more warm relationship with Charlotte Sophie while the last still lived in The Hague; Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 86 and 158. In November 1746 Charlotte Sophie asked the Prince and the Princess of Orange for a private audience 'sur une chose de la dernière consequence pour moi et pour ma famille'; *ibidem*, 121. It is evident that she wants their support in her conflict with Bentinck. Princess Anne liked to ridicule in her own family circles the obesity of Bentinck.

³⁸ Especially in the year 1747, when William IV of Orange became stadtholder of all the seven provinces of the Dutch Republic; Jagtenberg, *Willem IV*, 544-545.



175

The Swiss biologist and tutor Abraham Trembley teaches the brothers Antoine and Albert Jean Bentinck in their schoolroom at Sorghvliet, The Hague (drawing by Cornelis Pronk, c. 1744; coll. House Middachten, De Steeg/Rheden)

(including Varel, Knyphausen and Doorwerth) passed on to their oldest son Antoine.³⁹

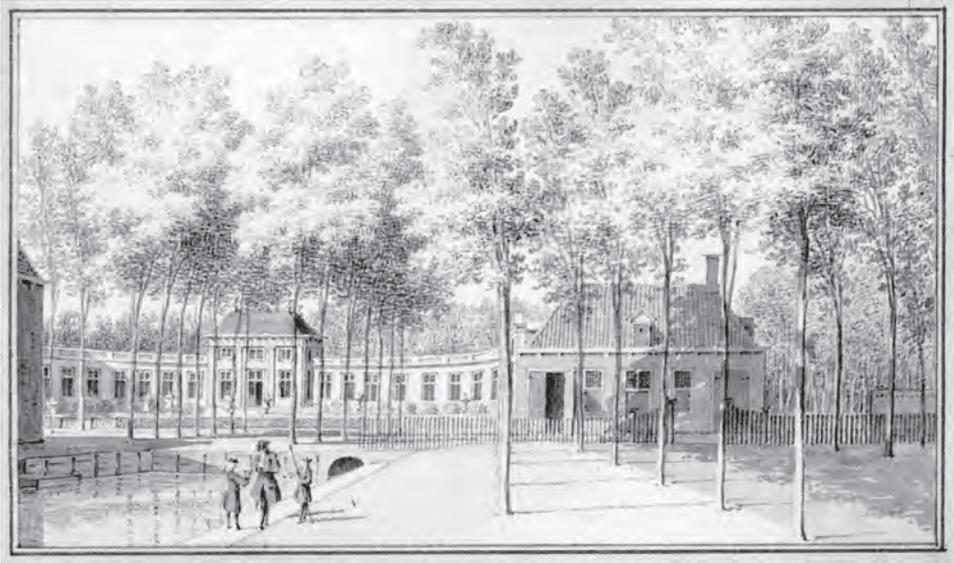
Back to Sorghvliet for the last time. In 1743 William Bentinck, Lord of Rhoon, became a member of The Royal Society. He thanked this honourable admission in part to the efforts of the new tutor to his two sons, Abraham Trembley, born in French-speaking Switzerland and a talented scientist. He came to Sorghvliet in 1737 and was witness to many quarrels between his master and his wife. The situation in the house of the Bentincks was untenable in the winter of 1738-1739: 'C'etoit un Enfer', he wrote to Lady Portland four years later.⁴⁰

Bentinck and Trembley shared three passions: mathematics, natural sciences and John Locke's ideas on the education of children. Locke argued that children, when little, should look upon their parents as their Lords, their absolute governors, and that when they reached a riper age, they should look on them as their only sure friends.⁴¹ Trembley used the gardens of Sorghvliet for all kinds of observations and experiments.

39 Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 129. Soon turned out that Charlotte did not accept this formal agreement; in the 1790s she still approached one of her grandsons to agree about a final settlement; *ibidem*, 130.

40 Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 95.

41 J. Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education* (1693), cited by Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 136.



Trembley and his pupils Antoine and Albert Jean near the orangery at the estate Sorghvliet, The Hague
(drawing by Cornelis Pronk, c. 1744; coll. House Middachten, De Steeg/Rheden)

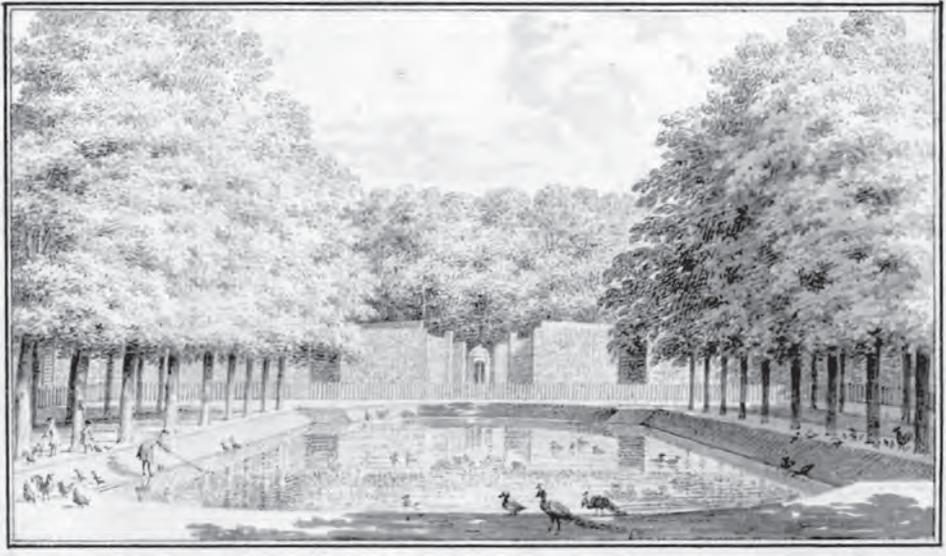
He built up an international reputation in The Hague, being the first to study freshwater polyps and to practise experimental zoology.⁴² In the rich archives of House Middachten a small album of drawings has been preserved that shows Trembley with the two Bentinck boys, who he is teaching lessons from the book of nature at Sorghvliet.

About the same time, in 1744, William Bentinck wrote to his old mother in England that she would be pleased with the education that he provided for his boys. He explicitly writes that he does everything to give them a warm, comfortable home, reminiscent of the lovely childhood that he had himself had enjoyed in England. ‘Impressions of this period of life will stay in one’s heart forever and are the basis of respect and friendship.’ What follows is striking: ‘In short this nation is spoiled with ease and luxury which have broken their spirit, and set a certain turn of pusillanimity and cowardice in vogue, which has its influence in every affair, great or little. I shall do my utmost endeavours to prevent this turn gaining in my family, and have a great help in Mr. Trembley.’⁴³

Trembley left The Hague in 1747 – the good harmony between Bentinck and his secretary was gone – and travelled to England. First he stayed at the estate of lady

⁴² Schatzmann, *The Bentincks*, 155-161.

⁴³ Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 141.



177

Trembley is busy with his experimental zoology, while his pupils Antoine and Albert Jean are feeding the ducks and peacocks in the garden of estate Sorghvliet (drawing by Cornelis Pronk, c. 1744; coll. House Middachten, De Steeg/Rheden)

Portland; later Trembley was employed by the Duke of Richmond, whose sister married Bentinck's brother Charles.⁴⁴ With their new tutor Bentinck's sons moved to Leiden to study at the university. The youngest son, Jean, would make a career in the British navy, after his training in Plymouth. Later still, the sons married two sisters from the noble Dutch family Van Tuyll van Serooskerken. Meanwhile Bentinck had become curator of Leiden university and travelled regularly to this city in his coach drawn by six horses. In his stables he held eight coach horses and three riding horses.⁴⁵ He had become a big man in the Dutch Republic, and he knew it.

In their study *Man's estate* the social historians Henry French and Mark Rothery write that 'masculinity is an expanding area of gender history'. In this book on the English landed gentry (during the period 1660-1900) the authors argue that we have to go beyond the study of printed conduct literature to get closer to the phenomenon of masculinity. Especially family correspondence reveals the ways in which masculine norms were produced through everyday interactions.⁴⁶ As we have seen in this article contacts and letters between parents and children in the Bentinck family show the

⁴⁴ Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 145-147.

⁴⁵ Van Huffel, *Bentinck*, 135.

⁴⁶ H. Finch and M. Rothery, *Man's estate. Landed gentry masculinities 1660-1900* (Oxford, 2012) 185-189.

reproduction of masculine values during crucial periods in the life course of fathers and sons: schooling by tutors, university education, Grand Tours, choosing a (very young) marriage partner and the practice of family life. But what kind of masculinity do we find here in the two generations of the Bentincks? What can a case study on a failed marriage tell us? Already in 1978 the American historian Ronald Trumbach argued in his study on aristocratic kinship and households that the English aristocratic family had experienced the increasing importance of domesticity during the eighteenth century.⁴⁷ In Trumbach's view domesticity refers to the supremacy of the interests of the household created by marriage over those of the family inherited at birth.

178

Other authors suggest that since the 1740s basic ideals of fatherhood changed into a new ethos of sensibility that included the origin of the more emotional and affectionate father. Finch and Rothery argue that the fundamental distributions of power and authority within gentry families remained fairly constant until the end of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding changing patterns in education of young English gentlemen. It seems that the father-son relationships of the Bentincks in this article still represent the traditional reproduction of male identities, while fathers held their authority in families, firmly based on their control over property, income, education and family honor. Therefore, it cannot be a surprise for us that William Bentinck's self-image after the disaster of his marriage derived strongly from his successful exercise of authority over his sons. His strong involvement with their education was probably an indication of the new trends of domesticity and sensibility. We need more research based on family papers – and not only of the English gentry, but also of landed elites in other European countries – to further unravel the complex interrelationships between masculinity, domesticity and sensibility in the course of the eighteenth century.

Yme Kuiper is an anthropologist and historian. He is emeritus professor of the University of Groningen and held the endowed chairs Anthropology of Religion and Historical Anthropology (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies) and Historic Country Houses and Estates (Faculty of Arts). He is co-editor of *Nobilities in Europe in the twentieth century. Reconversion strategies, memory culture and elite formation* (Leuven-Paris-Bristol, 2015). He contributed to this volume with an introduction 'Towards a comparative history of nobility in twentieth-century Europe' and an essay 'Memory, residence and profession. Aspects of reconversion of a Dutch noble family in the twentieth century'.

University of Groningen, the Netherlands – y.b.kuiper@rug.nl

⁴⁷ R. Trumbach, *The rise of the egalitarian family. Aristocratic kinship and domestic relations in eighteenth-century England* (New York, 1978) 287.

- Adellijke echo's? De invloed van de adel op de ontwikkeling van buitenplaatsen langs de rivieren van het Amstelland en de Oude Rijn 9
Gerrit van Oosterom
- Het Staatse ambassadegebouw in de zeventiende eeuw. Het logement van Hendrick van Reede van Renswoude in Madrid, 1656-1669 29
Maurits Ebben
- Naar het Oosten. Geografische verschillen in het ledenbestand van de Ridderlijke Duitse Orde, Balije van Utrecht, 1640-1840 57
Renger E. de Bruin
- De Belgische orangistische adel I. De zuidelijke adel in het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (1815-1830) 79
Els Witte
- The Bentinck family archives. Highlights and suggestions for further research 103
Menoucha Ruitenberg
- Bildung und Erziehung. Zur Bedeutung zweier Schlüsselkategorien für Charlotte Sophie Gräfin Bentinck 114
Christina Randig
- Charlotte Sophie, Joseph Eckhel and numismatics 127
Daniela Williams
- Craignez honte*. The Bentinck coats of arms and their use as an expression of the cross-border character of the family 144
Olivier Mertens
- Fathers and Sons. A sketch of the noble life forms of the Bentincks in the period of the Great Wars in Europe (1672-1748) 162
Yme Kuijper
- Van wapenbord tot koningsboek. Herinnering, herstel en herbestemming in de heraldiek van het Gulden Vlies (1559-1795) 179
Steven Thiry



25 | 2018

