

Floris, Count of Holland (onder ps. Niels Kobet)

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bron

Niels Kobet, *Floris, Count of Holland*. Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, Amsterdam 1976

Zie voor verantwoording: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/bolk008flor02_01/colofon.php

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Voorwoord

‘Van alle vorsten die vóór Karel V over Nederland geregeerd hebben, is de zoon en opvolger van Willem II de populairste naam gebleven. De sleutel van het voortreffelijke in Floris V moet echter nog gevonden worden. Wij zien Floris zijn land zo goed als verkopen aan een koning van Engeland; zien hem daarna met dezelfde onbesuisdheid dien vorst verraden en het bondgenootschap van een koning van Frankrijk zoeken; tot hij ten laatste, wanneer hij door verbeurdverklaringen en trouweloosheden zijn nederlandse edelen verbitterd en vernederd heeft, met een onbegrijpelijke *niaiserie* zich in hun handen stelt. Beminlijk mens naar het schijnt, was hij als staatsman een warhoofd en liet zijn volk slechts burgertwisten na.’

Zo luidt het weinig vleierende oordeel van Conrad Busken Huet over ‘der keerlen God’, de wellicht enige figuur uit onze middeleeuwse geschiedenis, van wie de doorsnee Nederlander iets meer weet dan de naam alleen, en die tijdens zijn bewind, nu zeven honderd jaar geleden, Amsterdam de stadsrechten heeft verleend.

De nederlandse letterkunde is niet rijk aan toneelstukken die betrekking hebben op de vaderlandse historie. Eén ervan, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, gedicht door P.C. Hooft, handelt over de moord op Floris V, maar zal de hedendaagse lezer enkel nog afschrikken van wege de rederijkerstoon en de ver doorgevoerde allegorese die het drama volstrekt bloedeloos hebben gemaakt. Kan, vooral indien van *Geeraerd van Velsen* zo onomwonden het tegendeel gezegd moet worden, een tragedie, klassiek naar vorm en geschreven in het klassieke engelse *blank verse*, eveneens behelzende de ondergang van graaf Floris, nog leesbaar laat staan speelbaar zijn? Een drama met een held die tengevolge van zijn politieke tegenslagen veeleer als anti-held valt te kenschetsen?

De opzet van de schrijver: een inhoud van nu en alle tijden te hullen in een oude maar onvergankelijke vorm. Wat beoogt de handeling? Een man wiens eerzucht zichzelf maar bovenal zijn land geldt, die veel tot stand

brengt, wordt door zijn succes overmoedig, roept tegenkrachten op die hij niet meer de baas kan en valt daaraan ten offer. Draaipunt is de hybris, de overmoed waartegen de oude Grieken in hun treurspelen keer op keer gewaarschuwd hebben. Floris' raadsman, de wereldwijze monnik, brengt de kern van het gebeuren, het onafwendbare gevoel dat de top is overschreden, onder woorden in de verzen:

There is a zenith in the lives of men
 That marks the culmination and the top
 Of all their strength, success and poise. Once they
 Have passed that stage, the stars and planets move
 From their auspicious constellation and
 The tide begins to turn, unnoticed by
 The very men whom once it carried to
 The forefront of their kind.
 (IV, 1)

De woorden van de monnik geven het thema aan, de uitwerking volgt in hoofdzaak de historische lijnen: de dood van Willem II in West-Friesland in 1256, de twee veldslagen die Floris gevoerd heeft tegen de Westfriezen, de ene uitgelopen op een nederlaag, de andere op een overwinning. Floris' verwickelingen met de bisschop van Utrecht, de gevechten in de zuidelijke Nederlanden: het is alles zo overgeleverd en in de oude kronieken opgetekend. Historisch zijn ook de bijna onwaarschijnlijke risico's die Floris neemt door nagenoeg de helft van zijn bezittingen te verkwanzelen, zijn zoon naar het engelse hof te zenden en zijn eigen leven in de waagschaal te stellen door onvoorzichtigerwijze in de macht te geraken van Gwijde van Dampierre. Evenzo gestaafd is Floris' aanspraak op de schotse kroon, zijn poging de engelse wolstapel naar Dordrecht te halen en de verrassende spoed waarmee hij de engelse alliantie inruilt voor de franse. Aan de internationale achtergrond is uit geschiedkundig oogpunt evenmin geweld gedaan: Edward, bedwinger van *Wales*, *Hammer of the Scots*, heeft onder zijn bewind de grondslagen gelegd van het engelse recht. Zijn devies luidde: *suum cuique* ('to each / his own', III, 2). Als hertog van Aquitanië was hij de grote tegenspeler van zijn leenheer Philips IV, bijgenaamd *Le Bel*. Philips, de raadselachtige zwijger en staatsman van absoluut gezag, overtuigd dat het doel de middelen heiligt ('who wills a purpose must accept the means', V, 2). En tenslotte de partijtwisten in Vlaanderen. Wij staan aan de vooravond van de honderdjarige oorlog...

Niet historisch zijn de monnik die als Floris' raadsman optreedt en de bankier Nathan. Deze bankier heette in werkelijkheid Lambert Vrieze. In de dertiende eeuw vonden voor het eerst op grote schaal in West-Europa Jodenvervolgingen plaats. In 1290 had Edward alle Joden bij decreet uit Engeland verbannen: sommigen zijn verdronken bij hun gedwongen overtocht. Niet lang daarvoor waren de Joden in York volledig uitgeroeid. Van beide gebeurtenissen maakt Nathan gewag.

Zonder te voldoen aan de eis van de drie eenheden van tijd, plaats en handeling, verloopt het drama toch als een griekse tragedie. Het adagium *quem deus vult perdere, prius dementat*, dat teruggaat op het oudgriekse besef van ATE (verblinding), komt tot uitdrukking in Floris' woorden over de bisschop van Utrecht ('the man whom God decides / to overthrow will first be made to lose / his mind', II, 1), maar is niet minder op Floris zelf van toepassing. En wat is meer klassiek dan het bodeverhaal waarin van de gevangenneming van Floris wordt verteld? Zowel op de '*Ides of March*' uit het drama *Julius Caesar* van Shakespeare als op een vers van Yeats ('*the falcon cannot hear the falconer*') wordt teruggegrepen als de oude heks Floris waarschuwt tijdens de afrit ter valkenjacht. De ingewijde lezer zal voorts in de angstdroom van Beatrice Hieronymus Bosch' schildering *Verzoeking van de heilige Antonius* herkennen en in de erotische raadseldialoog tussen Floris en Maud een passage uit Heine's *Aus den Memoiren des Herren von Schnabelewopski* (III, 3).

Toch is de strekking van het stuk van deze tijd: het niet aflatende getwist om kleine belangen, de verdeeldheid, de partijstrijd; Edward die de engelse wol wil gebruiken als economisch wapen tegen Vlaanderen; de escalerende gevechten en kapingen over en weer tussen engelse en normandische schippers; de lichtvaardigheid waarmee alles wordt beraamd en de onvermijdelijk daaropvolgende ontgoocheling. En onderwijl maken de grotere machten zich gereed om toe te slaan.

Wanneer Floris stervende heeft gezegd 'the sword indeed - has never left - my house', spreekt de hertog van Brabant de omineuze slotwoorden:

The King of France has sent his army to the North
 And Robert of Artois, his general,
 Has met the Flemish on the battlefield.
 The Flemish army has been utterly destroyed.

Een enkel woord tot slot over de schrijver: Niels Kobet is de schuilnaam van een Nederlander die door jarenlang verblijf in angelsaksische omgeving tweetalig is geworden. Schoolgegaan bij de klassieken, met wie hij mettertijd geheel vertrouwd is geraakt, werkte hij niettemin lange tijd in de industrie. Het is zijn stellige voornemen deze, zijn eerste dramatische proeve, door andere te laten volgen die op een zelfde wijze oud en nieuw met elkaar zullen verbinden door het beste van beide vast te houden.

JBWP

Matri

Historical note

In the thirteenth century a beginning of national consciousness arose in what is now called the Low Countries. These consisted at that time of the following main components. The County of Holland, in the North, occupied that part of the present Netherlands in which lie the cities of Amsterdam, Leiden and The Hague. To its East lay the domains of the Bishop of Utrecht, around the city of that name. These bordered on the Duchy of Brabant which extended southwards from the river Meuse to include Antwerp, Brussels and Louvain and so straddled the great trading route from Cologne to Bruges. This latter town was, with Ghent, foremost among the prosperous cities of the county of Flanders. Between Flanders and Holland lay the islands of Zeeland where both these Counties strove for supremacy.

While Holland, Utrecht and Brabant tried to affirm their independence from the Holy Roman Empire, Flanders' struggle was, and always would be, with France.

What follows is not, of course, a history but a play.

Dramatis personae

in order of appearance

RODERICK, an old retainer of Floris.
AMSTEL and VELZEN, nobles and liegemen of Floris.
FLORIS, Count of Holland.
CARMELITE FRIAR, confidant of Floris.
NATHAN, banker at Utrecht.
BEATRICE, wife of Floris and daughter of Guy Dampierre.
ANTONY BEK, Bishop of Durham.
EDWARD PLANTAGENET, King of England, Duke of Aquitaine.
EDMUND OF LANCASTER, Edward's brother.
MAUD, wife of Velzen.
JOHN, Duke of Brabant.
GUY DAMPIERRE, Count of Flanders.
PHILIP IV, called the Fair, King of France.
PIERRE FLOTE, Chancellor of France.
BISHOP OF UTRECHT.
Footmen, soldiers and peasants.

The action takes place in the year 1296.



act one

Scene I

*A room in Floris' castle.
Roderick and a footman.*

RODERICK

This very night it was, and just as cold,
When, forty years ago, the Father of
Our Count rode off to fight the Frisians
And never did return.

FOOTMAN

How did he die?

RODERICK

God knows - he left the camp one night and none
That saw him since. He must have run into
A crowd of those barbarians; and they,
Not realising his identity
Must on the spot have put him to the sword
Thereafter to regret the ransom they
Impetuously lost.

How young he was,
Count William, when he died, but twenty eight,
And mourned by all that knew him, as indeed
Was right, for not for nothing did he get
Elected Holy Roman Emperor.
His manners were restrained and, slow to take
Offence, he always showed himself to be
Of perfect courtesy. He only left
One son, Count Floris, who had just been born.

FOOTMAN

Was not his uncle Holland's regent?

RODERICK

Yes,

But only for two years, until he died,
Struck from his horse at his own tournament.
The only thing he did was to arrange
For Floris to be married, when sixteen,
To Beatrice, the Count of Flanders' child,
So unity might grow between these lands
Of single speech.

An evil thing, that death:
His sister, who thereafter took his place,
Invited trouble from all sides. The land
Was torn between the powerful who ground
The weak and poor. The cities built strong walls.
Authority was gone and law was lost.
And Floris, but a child, twelve years of age,
When Count of Holland he became - too young,
The barons must have thought, to hold his own.

The first he did was loudly to proclaim
That he would soon avenge his father's death.
He borrowed money, borrowed men and then,
His forces ill-equipped, invaded swamps-
For that is where they live, those Frisians.
A dreadful error it turned out to be:
The Frisians not only killed his men
But in so doing also gave the sign
For peasants cities barons to revolt
From end to end of this once peaceful land.
That was the time when Floris showed his skills.
He did not fight the cities but instead
He reinforced their rights, extended them
And so made them supporters of his cause
Through bonds of gratitude. Nor did he fight

The peasants, rather chose amongst them those
 Whose wealth and influence were such that they
 Controlled their neighbourhood. He knighted them
 And so gained sturdy friends as counterweight
 Against the stubborn nobles, who have since
 Been filled with spite and murderous intent.

And those that you see coming there are first
 In rank among that vicious grasping lot.

Enter Amstel and Velzen.

AMSTEL

Please tell Count Floris we have come at once,
 In answer to his call, and leave us here:
 We wish to be alone until such time
 As he who now is master of this land
 Shall condescend to see his erstwhile peers.

Roderick and footman exeunt.

VELZEN

You should control yourself.

AMSTEL

How can I when
 Not long ago I used to be a free
 And independent man, beholden to
 No Count or Duke. I was an idiot
 To get embroiled in that disastrous fight
 With the deceitful Bishop of Utrecht.
 When Floris got me off the hook he made
 Me pay: I had to grant him all my land
 Which he then granted back to me but I
 Received it as in liege and so became
 A servant to his overweening pride.

VELZEN

Not only you have suffered thus. I too

And many other barons were like you:
 We've had to reconcile ourselves to new
 And second rank.

AMSTEL

If it were that alone
 I would with time have learned to bear the load.
 He placed a second burden on my back:
 My Cousin John he ordered to be killed
 When John removed a tenant from his land,
 A lowly peasant who, emboldened by
 The Count, dared sue my cousin in the court.
 And court was scared of Count: John lost his case
 And with it lost his temper, drew his sword
 And promptly killed the peasant with the judge.
 For this Count Floris made him lose his head.

VELZEN

Your cousin always had been somewhat rash.

AMSTEL

That may be true, but who can tolerate
 And suffer lowly peasants that stand proud
 Against their Lords and even rise in rank
 To equal those whom Providence confirmed
 In their prerogatives?

Our present Count
 Thinks otherwise and knighted forty louts.
 Small wonder that the peasants look upon
 Him as their God and blindly follow him.

VELZEN

Do not forget: contented peasants are
 Less likely to revolt and pay more rent.

AMSTEL

How can you be so weak - and how can I
 Forget that man then took the daughter of

My Cousin John and made of her his whore?

VELZEN

As I recall she did not seem displeased.

AMSTEL

You wait, young man: your wife is beautiful.
Perhaps the Count will soon entrust you with
A task that takes you far from home and when
You finally return perhaps you'll find
That somebody has banked the fire that blazed
In your own marriage bed and that you thus
Bear horns.

VELZEN

By God, my man, if you....

AMSTEL

Be still!

I see our Count and that accursed monk.

Enter Floris and the Friar.

FLORIS

I thank you both indeed for having come
So urgently at my request, in spite
Of day and hour, for seldom can a night
Have been as grim as this. Yet, as you know,
The iron must be struck when hot and so
One cannot always choose one's time but must
Make use of present opportunity.
And so it is tonight, for I expect
A visit of the Jew, of Nathan, he
That is the Bishop's banker and his leech.

I know you two do not have cause to love
The Bishop of Utrecht. I know that you
Especially, my loyal Amstel, blame
Him for the loss of your prerogatives.

The time has come for you to take revenge
And grow at his expense. My plan is this.

You know by own experience that he
Is not always, let's say, what one is taught
A Bishop should be like and that his greed
And lust for power often have outstripped
His funds of cash, his credit and his men.
And that is why the Jew is of such use
To Christ's successor in these lands.

And why
I sent for you to come to me at once.
For never have the Bishop's needs been such
That he has sent the Jew in order to
Negotiate a loan from me, who am,
If not an open enemy, no friend,
And pose a threat to his stability.

He wants to borrow money - I to lend.
But not without security: I want
As guarantee that he will pay me back
Two of his most important fortresses.
These castles you must hold for me, so that
When he no longer pays his bills, as I
Am sure wil be the case before the year
Is out, they fall like apples from a tree
Into my lap and from then on will form
A part of my domains.

AMSTEL

You said just now
That we not you should grow at his expense.

FLORIS

Indeed I did and such will be the case,
For I shall grant those fortresses to you:
For you to hold on my behalf but gain
Their revenue.

AMSTEL

His castles are not near
My lands. What, should the Bishop cut me off?

FLORIS

How can he? When he knows that I'm the one
That holds the strings around his purse's neck
And soon, I hope, around his own?

VELZEN

I think
Your plan is sound. I should be very pleased
To cut myself a pair of shoes out of
The Bishop's hide. What do you say, my friend?

AMSTEL

It's true: no risk - no gain. I'll go along.

FLORIS

An excellent decision. Now go each
Your private ways until I let you know.

Amstel and Velzen exeunt.

I say - your niece sends you her best regards!

FRIAR

You did not need to make that last remark.
You would spread mustard on a wound!

FLORIS

I know.
I should not do it, but I do dislike
That man, so clearly torn between his greed
For what the Bishop owns and hatred of
Myself. He should be watched with care, that snake,
Lest, when I turn my back on him, he strike
And spread his venom through the wound.

And yet,
A useful man, because so ruled by greed

That he will swallow any bait to get
 What he desires. You saw how readily
 He followed Velzen's lead. Poor Velzen, what
 A trusting man! Such simplemindedness!
 It almost grieves me to make use of him.

FRIAR

You should not underestimate the men
 That are, or soon will be, your enemies.
 You are too confident, my son. I know
 That since your first defeat in that morass,
 Against the Frisians, you have done much
 To strengthen and repair the base that now
 Sustains such power as you have. I know
 That you have used the cities to oppose
 The discontent of thwarted noblemen
 And that as champion of the peasants' cause
 You use them to frustrate the barons' wish
 To be restored in ancient privilege.

But don't forget the fickle mob that shouts
 How much it loves you yet tomorrow wants
 Your life because some crazy hothead speaks
 To them of new and further benefit.
 All power ultimately rests upon
 Ideas in men's minds and therefore is
 Fragile and yours so in particular.

FLORIS

You are, as always, right. My task is hard,
 So difficult, in fact, that sometimes I
 Despair of ever bringing to an end
 What I've set out to do.

 Within these lands
 I must sustain the towns in their desire
 For prosperous stability; yet if
 It ever should occur to them to free
 Themselves of my command and feudal rule

I must be fast and strike at once, before
 The rot can spread, as I was forced to do,
 Some eighteen years ago, when I set fire
 To that rebellious town, so recently
 Acquired, of Amsterdam.

In order to
 Do that I must be careful not to break
 The barons, whom I need to check the pride
 Of rising towns, but only humble them
 And keep them from combining when my back
 Is turned.

And so I am the peasants' friend,
 Confirming them in all their humble rights,
 Protecting them against the arrogance,
 Outrageous greed and impudence of those
 Whose lands they work, as I did in the case
 Of Amstel's cousin John, that nasty brute.

Those are the triple elements that I
 Must hold in evershifting counterpoise.
 But these affairs are only half of what
 I want to do. The other part is still
 More difficult, for it concerns what lies
 Beyond the borders of this land. My first
 Endeavour must now be to find the grave
 Where lies the Father I have never known,
 Who luckless died now forty years ago.

And this is why I shortly plan to fight
 The Frisians and extirpate the shame
 Incurred when I, but eighteen years of age,
 Through ill-preparedness and lack of men
 Was beaten by that crowd of ruffians.

While doing this I must extend my hold
 Upon the Bishop of Utrecht. You know
 What I have planned. I'm certain to succeed,
 For I am building on the greed of men,

That surest of foundations.

All this is

But introduction to the hardest task
Of all: the coming war with Guy, the Count
Of Flanders, richest land of Christendom,
Who now intrigues for influence in my
Dominions in the South, which he desires,
And where he sows sour hatred and dissent.

But there I shall need help, for I alone
Cannot defeat the might of Guy Dampierre.
And that is why I seek alliance with
The King of England, Edward, Hammer of
The Scots.

FRIAR

My son, the task that you have set
Yourself is far too much for one man's life.
Content yourself with what's contained within
The borders of your land. It's large enough.

FLORIS

And leave the Frisians, my Father's grave,
And Flanders and the Bishop of Utrecht?

FRIAR

Yes, leave all that - do not exceed the bounds
Of what is possible.

FLORIS

I shall not be at peace
As long as Father's body does not lie
In hallowed ground.

FRIAR

Then go, if go you must.

Enter Roderick.

RODERICK

My Lord! The banker Nathan has arrived.

FLORIS

Let him come in.

Exit Roderick.

Enter Nathan.

Be welcome Nathan, on
A night so bitter cold as I cannot
Remember it has ever been before.

NATHAN

My Lord!

The Bishop of Utrecht sends you
His best regards and hopes that you are well.

FLORIS

I know the reason for your presence here.
I know your master well and so do you.

A Bishop is a man of God in whose
Right hand should be his sceptre which is used
To keep the children of his flock within
The bounds of our most Holy Church and in
Whose other hand is held the Holy Book
In which are kept God's Holy Laws - the Laws
He preaches to his children, so they know
Their duties to their God and fellowmen.

But that is not exactly as your Lord
Has shown himself to be, for in his right
He holds a sword: to rob and to destroy,
To burn, to plunder and to kill, where he
Cannot obtain what he desires by just
The simple word of 'excommunicate'.
And in his left he holds a purse in which
He gathers all the money simple folk
Have paid to him and to his priests, to pray

For solace and salvation of their souls.

Yet howsoever many of these men
 And humble women are thus duped to part
 With their hard-gotten coin, the Bishop's purse
 Is never full and stands in constant need
 Of further contribution, which explains
 Your presence here.

How much does he require?

NATHAN

My Lord, I am a simple banker and
 A Jew who is not much acquainted with
 The way a Christian bishop should behave,
 But all the better do I know his need
 Of five and twenty thousand pounds in gold.

FLORIS

Of what?

NATHAN

Of five and twenty thousand pounds.

FLORIS

The Bishop has gone mad!

NATHAN

My Lord, not mad
 But filled with the desire to beautify
 His city, his cathedral and his court.

FLORIS

You place a pretty mask before a face
 That shows dishonesty and greed!

NATHAN

My Lord!

FLORIS

However, you do not appear to need
My disabusing you of humankind.
You are a banker and as such you know
What sort of motives drives what sort of men.

I have the money that your master needs.

NATHAN

My Lord!

FLORIS

But I shall want an interest
And guarantee that he will pay me back.

NATHAN

My Lord, what are your terms?

FLORIS

As guarantee
I want two of his fortresses and as
For interest, it's two percent per month.

NATHAN

My Lord, your Christian laws condemn that sort
Of interest as usury: it's not
Allowed!

FLORIS

Since when does Nathan teach the laws
That we as Christians must obey? Since when
Do you as banker not receive your cut
Of any interest that passes through
Your hands?

Of course I am no usurer.
Just let the Bishop put his signature
Upon a draft that states that he shall pay
The sum of one and thirty thousand pounds

One year from now and I shall send to him
 The money he requires. The surplus will
 Be shared between us two. That's one percent
 Per month for each. I think that even such
 A Jew as you would not turn up his nose
 At this arrangement.

NATHAN

Please, my Lord, may I
 Retire and put your proposition to
 The Bishop? It requires some careful thought.

FLORIS

Of course it does. Come, Father, let us go.

Floris and the Friar exeunt.

NATHAN

What infinite contempt lies in those words
 Of 'such a Jew as you'; and how they hate
 Us, they that quote us first their Christian laws
 And then make use of us, the objects of
 Their spite, to circumvent those very laws
 Which they profess to hold in awe.

When first

We came into these lands we brought along
 Our skills of commerce but as soon as they
 Began to imitate our livelihood
 They told us to restrict our trade to that
 Of being bankers, since they feared we might
 Outwit and fool them - as indeed we would.
 So now the Christians force us Jews to do
 What's not allowed to them according to
 The precepts of their church.

But we at least

Are safe and left alone here in this land
 To make a living and to follow in
 The unobtrusive way that has been gone
 Before by countless generations of
 Our forefathers.

It's different across
 The sea, in England. There my family
 And friends were held to be the chattels of
 The Crown, protected by the King, and they
 Were graciously allowed to thank him for
 His bounty and benevolence by means
 Of loans that do not carry interest.

But even so they would be pliable
 And bear the load that God has placed upon
 Their backs, had not the populace become
 Inflamed with infamous and sordid lies
 Of ritual murder and obscene delight
 And so in frenzied ignorance had put
 To flame their women children houses books,
 As happened not so long ago in York
 Where not much more than hundred men escaped
 The ghetto's massacre and took refuge
 Within the castle where they finally
 Preferred to kill themselves to falling in
 The hands of the enraged and foaming mob
 That stood outside and shouted for their blood.

But now no member of our people lives
 Among that sullen race, as all have been
 Expelled. They first were asked to meet the bills
 For Edward's visit to his lands in France,
 To Aquitaine. And when they had been made
 So poor that they could no more be of use
 To his most Christian majesty, the King
 Declared that he preferred to deal with men
 That came from Florence and from other towns
 In Italy and that were men of Christ.
 He therefore threw them out and cancelled all
 The debts that a delighted populace
 Owed to the hated Jews. So, at one stroke,
 He added to his subjects' treasury
 Of love for him and to his own of gold.

My brother Aaron was among the Jews
That lived in London at that time and that
Had hired a ship to take them down the Thames
So they could carry out the King's command.
The master mariner cast anchor till
The ship by ebb remained on sands and then
Enticed the Jews to walk around with him.
But when at last he understood the tide
To turn, he went back to his ship and told
His men to throw him down a rope with which
To draw him up. My brother and his friends
Were swallowed up by grey and swirling waves.

So why indeed should Nathan spurn to act
As instrument of doom for that absurd
And cruel fool, the Bishop of Utrecht?

Nathan exit.

Scene II

Beatrice's room.

Beatrice. Enter Floris.

FLORIS

My dearest wife... I very much regret
That matters of high policy do not
Allow me to spend as much time with you
As I should like - and as I ought to do,
For no man should neglect his wife. I hope
You pardon me. You know that all I do
Is done according to the interest
Of this our land and therefore of yourself.

BEATRICE

I am the Count of Flanders' child and so
Accustomed from my childhood to the life
That women of my sort and rank must lead.

FLORIS

The knowledge of your love and loyalty
Will always be a source of strength for me.
But I have not come here to tell you of
Myself but to enquire how you have been,
Now that you find yourself with child again.

BEATRICE

Six months must lapse before I shall give birth.
It's early still. Yet so far I am well.
But giving birth is nothing as compared
With what comes after: seven times have I
Borne you a child yet only Margaret

Remains alive. Give God that in my womb
I hold a son and that he stay alive!

FLORIS

A son! It has to be a son! And he
Must live to take the burden of my work
When I shall die. You know this land does not
Accept the principle of feminine
Succession and that in the past a lack
Of sons has led to strife division and
Torment.

This is the more important as
Your Honourable Father, Guy Dampierre,
Seeks influence in Zeeland where he lets
His emissaries speak soft lies of gold
And succour if I should attack and want
To reaffirm hereditary rights.

BEATRICE

My Lord, perhaps it is but slander that
He seeks to trouble the tranquillity
Of those uncomfortable islands that
Consist of mud and mist. Why should he want
To stir up hatred and dissent along
The borders of his land with yours, when in
The South the King of France, Philip the Fair,
Who's Fair of Countenance but Foul of Soul,
Is striving to impose the dominance
And sway of both his language and his court,
And lay his evergreedy hands on what
Has been acquired in patient years of toil
By Flanders' humble citizens? Why should
My Father then add risks to those that he
Already has instead of seeking to
Secure a Northern friend?

FLORIS

Because, my dear,
 He needs the help of England in his fight
 With France but knows that I am just about
 To join in an alliance with it's King,
 With Edward. Fearing that, in doing so,
 I shall succeed in robbing him of his
 Most profitable trade - the wool that comes
 From English sheep but leaves his towns as cloth-
 He wishes to reduce this land in size
 And lessen its attractiveness as friend
 And Edward's ally.

BEATRICE

Can't you then take each
 One half of this prosperity? Why must
 You fight, when half, in peace, is more than would
 Be left if one kept all but saw how it
 Grew less once war had caused it to decline
 And flee to stabler and more peaceful lands?

FLORIS

Dear Beatrice - the English King derives
 The greatest part of his prosperity
 From taxes that are laid upon the sale
 Of any English wool abroad, and so
 His officers can keep a careful check
 Upon this trade he has decreed that it
 May only go to any single place.
 It's therefore Guy Dampierre or I, not both,
 That will be Edward's favourite.

I must
 Be off, for I have much to do. Take care
 Both of yourself and of the fruit within
 Your womb: it's Holland's future that you hold.

Floris exit.

BEATRICE

Oh bitter life
To be the wife
Of Duke or Count or King
A life of strife
Where war is rife
And love is but a sting.

My husband fights
My Father's knights
And I am caught between.
They've set their sights
Upon their rights.
I don't know what they mean.

act two

Scene I

A room in Floris' castle.

Floris and the Friar; Amstel and Velzen; Roderick.

FLORIS

As I have said before, there is no way
 In which we can escape the coming war
 With Flanders. Guy Dampierre, its Count, appears
 Determined to increase the odds against
 His country and himself, for not content
 With the most deadly danger posed by France
 To present safety and prosperity,
 He picks a quarrel with his son-in-law
 And threatens to invade the islands that
 Divide his sphere of influence and mine.

VELZEN

Why should he want to do so rash a thing?

FLORIS

I see that you are not yet broken to
 The byways of diplomacy.
 Alone,
 He is unable to withstand the might
 Of France's chivalry. With England's help
 He can stand proud against the Gallic tide.
 And so he fears the contract we're about
 To make with Edward, lest he lose what in
 The past has been his undivided lot:
 Support and favour of the English King.
 This irks and prods him to preventive war.

AMSTEL

What is this contract that you have in mind?

FLORIS

You'll learn about it now.

Please call him in.

Roderick exit.

Enter Roderick and Antony Bek, Bishop of Durham.

RODERICK

My Lord, the Bishop Antony.

Roderick exit.

ANTONY BEK

I come

To bear good wishes from my Lord, the King
Of England, to the Count of Holland, both
Of whose domains are bordered by the sea
That separates their lands yet joins them in
The peaceful aims of trade and that therefore
Promotes a natural alliance, so
These maritime and friendly lands become
A check and hindrance to the arrogance
Of continental France.

FLORIS

Your words seem clear
Yet we are not the only ones to live
On this side of the narrow seas. We have
A neighbour in the South. It's Flanders that
I have in mind. You may have heard of it:
Its cities are much favoured by your King.

ANTONY BEK

Indeed, indeed, we do much trade in wool
With those industrious towns, to their and our
Prosperity. What would you have us do?

FLORIS

I ask the King to send his wool to us.

ANTONY BEK

Is this the reason you have sent for me?

FLORIS

Not quite - I know full well King Edward would
Not change the destination of his wool
Because I ask for it. I am prepared
To offer large and solid benefits
That will accrue to him as counterpart.

ANTONY BEK

What are these benefits you mean, my Lord?

FLORIS

My only child, my daughter Margaret
Is fourteen years of age. King Edward's son,
Alfonso, needs a wife. I offer him
My daughter's hand, whose dowry will consist
Of half the lands that I possess...

AMSTEL

My Lord!

FLORIS

If I should die without a son as heir.

ANTONY BEK

Your daughter's hand and half your lands against
All England's wool?

FLORIS

Not quite - there's one more thing.

ANTONY BEK

I thought there might be something else.

FLORIS

You know
 That Scotland's throne is vacant since the death
 Of it's late King and Edward must decide
 And choose between the rival clans that now
 Oppose their claims and gather men and arms.
 I too lay claim to Scotland's throne for I
 Have Ada Huntingdon as grandmother
 Who was the sister of a Scottish King.

Let Edward lend me his support as third
 Component of this treaty which will make
 Us strong and lasting friends.

AMSTEL

My Lord, I think...

ANTONY BEK

What you propose, although of interest,
 May not be easy to achieve, my Lord.
 Permit me to retire, so I may give
 King Edward an account of this design.

FLORIS

Of course, present him with my compliments.

Antony Bek exit.

AMSTEL

This is too much... You would a second time
 Dispose of what I own without so much
 As 'by your leave'... without consulting me...
 You treat me as of no account... You've killed
 My cousin John... You've turned my niece into
 A whore...

VELZEN

Forget what's happened in the past!

AMSTEL

By God, this is too much... You give support
 To miserable peasants who deny
 My immemorial rights... You lay the axe
 Against the very roots... against the oak
 Of vested interest and my content...
 You grind my face into the dust...

VELZEN

Do not
 Exaggerate - you too have had your share
 Of the prosperity that comes along
 With peace.

AMSTEL

To hell with your prosperity!
 I want my rights!
 By God, this is too much!
 You use me as a tool! You throw my lands
 Into the bargain so that you can get
 The English wool you seem to want so much.
 I hope you choke on it! You use my land
 To whet Alfonso's appetite and lust
 For Margaret. You give me bitter bread
 To eat, but one day I shall face you as
 A man and stuff your throat with English wool!

Amstel exit.

VELZEN

My Lord, I hope you will forgive him for
 This sudden outburst of disgust and spite.
 I know he does not mean it as it sounds.
 He is a most impulsive man but soon
 He will regain his normal self and rue
 His words.

FLORIS

He is not only, as you say,

Impulsive - neither does he understand,
 For what I said to Antony was: Half
 My lands - from which our friend at once concludes
 That this encompasses the grounds he holds
 In liege, not stopping to consider that
 I have much else besides.

But you, who are
 His friend and intimate, go after him
 And try to pacify the tempest in
 His mind-

or rather, ask your wife to use
 Her charm and smiling countenance.

VELZEN

My Lord,
 I think...

FLORIS

Oh well, arrange it as you wish.

Velzen exit.

FRIAR

You play a risky game. You stand to lose
 A lot - your gain would be uncertain, for
 The wool that would be brought to market here
 Could well be sold elsewhere in little time.
 The throne of Scotland can but be of small
 Importance to this land, so why pursue
 Such vague and distant interests?

FLORIS

I know.
 I know that Edward is not likely to
 Support my claim to Scotland's throne, as he
 Cannot afford to lose his influence
 Amongst the Bruces and the other clans
 By favouring a man that is not of
 Their kind.

But I, by claiming much, make him
 The more desirous to comply with that
 Part of my wish that is within his reach.
 Do not forget he seeks a counterweight
 To balance Flanders and to make her more
 Subservient to his country's affluence.
 I badly need his money and support.
 We're therefore natural confederates.

There is, however, one more thing, of which
 You cannot be aware. You seem to think
 That I shall never have a son. Well then-
 My Beatrice expects a child again.

FRIAR

Thank God!
 And let it be a son, so needed in
 These times of hazard, lest our newly found
 Stability become endangered by
 A woman's feeble hand. But what, if it
 Should be a girl, or if the child should die?
 It would not be the first!

FLORIS

If that should come
 To pass, which God forbid - who surely must
 At long last grant me what I have desired
 For all these years and what my country needs-
 If God should yet again deny my wish-
 Or if the English King should break his word-
 I shall have recourse to the King of France
 Who does not miss an opportunity
 To press the Count of Flanders and to bring
 To heel those wealthy towns.

FRIAR

You seem to think
 You can discard alliances as you

Would throw away an old and outworn coat.

FLORIS

Oh Father - in this deadly game I play
 The risks indeed are very high but so
 Are the rewards. It's either eat or else
 Be eaten by whoever shows himself
 To be the stronger, faster, smarter man.
 But think what fruits, what wealth and what renown
 Would fall to Holland if I can succeed
 In turning it into the market place
 Of England's wool and if I can outwit
 That sly old fox, the father of my wife.

Please go and see how Amstel does and talk
 Him into a more peaceful frame of mind.

Friar exit.

The Friar's blood is running thin. He fears
 I'll overreach myself. He may be right.
 It is not difficult to put the screws
 Onto the Bishop's thumbs or knock some sense
 Into a Frisian or two - it is
 Another thing to try and overthrow
 The wealth and weight of Flanders and to place
 This hazardous attempt upon a base
 Of shifting mud, because alliances
 With French or English Kings can no more be
 Relied upon than can a stinking swamp.
 And all the while, the gangrene of dissent
 Will spread, through Amstel, its decay and mould
 Behind my back. Perhaps I should pay heed
 To what the Friar says.

But then, what chance,
 What opportunity to cuckold Guy,
 Affirm my substance and identity
 And turn my face against adversity,
 And with one blow to raise this land of mine
 My country, far above its neighbours and

To make of it the hinge and fulcrum of
 The trade that flows by sea from North to South
 And goes by river and by land from East
 To West - a free and open meeting ground
 For commerce, merchants, customs, goods...

Enter Velzen.

VELZEN

My Lord!
 My Lord! The Jew is here, it's Nathan, who
 Brings tidings of the Bishop.

FLORIS

What are they?

VELZEN

Since many years the people in his lands
 Have put aside what little they could save-
 A penny here, a farthing there - to help
 To pay the costs of a crusade against
 The infidel, a last attempt to free
 The Holy Land from pestilential Turks.
 These moneys were deposited in what
 Was deemed to be a safe and holy place:
 The monastery where the Bishop, so
 He says, refreshes soul and mind in the
 Spiritual solitude and simple life
 That's lived by monks. The people's trust has been
 Betrayed. The treasure, having swollen to
 A goodly sum, has disappeared. There is
 But one who can be held accountable:
 Incompetent mismanagement of his
 Affairs has pressed the Bishop to commit
 The crime of misappropriation of
 Those holy funds.

FLORIS

The man whom God decides

To overthrow will first be made to lose
His mind. It's happened even faster than
I had foreseen.

VELZEN

What shall I do?

FLORIS

You must
Prepare yourself, with Amstel, to defend
Those fortresses I hold in pawn, for now
The Bishop can no longer hope to pay
His debt to me and in despair may well
Attempt to gain possession by the use
Of arms. Go off at once.

VELZEN

What of the Jew?

FLORIS

Please tell him to come in.

Velzen exit.

Enter Nathan.

So how and in
What words did he approach you, Nathan, when
He was found out?

NATHAN

My Lord, he's frantic with
Despair. 'For love of Christ', he said to me.
'The Jews have killed your Christ', was my reply.
'For pity's sake', he begged. I said: 'And who
Of all the Christians ever pitied us?'
I did however promise to convey
To you his urgent hope that you would help
Him in his deep and dark distress.

FLORIS

I will.

NATHAN

What interest and what security
Will you, my gracious Lord, demand this time?

FLORIS

Now listen carefully and tell him this.
I am prepared to help him once again
So he can pay his debt, replace the sum
That he has stolen and suppress the slur
And degradation that would be his lot,
But only on condition that he does
The following. I have instructed both
The knights that hold the Bishop's fortresses
In gage to see in person that they are
In state of readiness against attack.
I want the Bishop to besiege those forts
Without delay. He need not fear that they
Will be relieved, for they are far away
From Amstel's own domains and I shall see
To it that no supporting troops will go
The Bishop's way.

And so your Lord will shed
This millstone on his back and I the dog
That's always yapping at my heels.

NATHAN

My Lord:
You will extend and ease the present loan
Expecting both their bodies in return.

FLORIS

Your words are hardly delicate but that
Is in effect the substance of our deal.

Floris exit.

NATHAN

What man is this? What ruthlessness, that first
Extorts such terms as force a debtor to
Default and then makes use of the despair
And stupid felony committed by
His prey to doublecross his principal
Lieutenants?

Treason and hypocrisy:
Those are the traits of Christianity!
One Pope declares that he will offer us
The shield of his protection and forbids
That any Christian shall presume to seize
Imprison torture kill or wound a Jew.
Another says that we are doomed to a
Perpetual servitude because we're held
To be the murderers of Christ and so
Aquinas teaches in their schools that we
Are slaves of their immortal church which is
Therefore entitled to dispose of all
That we possess.

Our daily lives are vexed
By quite unnecessary rules. We are
To fast in Lent. We are obliged to wear
Distinctive badges on our dress. We may
Not enter churches nor build any schools
Besides the ones that we already have.
No Christian woman is allowed to nurse
A Jewish child. They speak of our Talmud
As an abomination and despise
'The insolence of that perfidious race'.
Their Bishops seek and burn the sacred books
As if they fear a secret influence
And vile contamination of the mind.
We are accused of being powerful.
But money only leads to power when
Its owner can withhold it at his choice,
Which we, who are reluctant instruments
Of royal poverty, can never do.

But none of this is of significance
 Compared with what is taking place in those
 Unhappy towns that have been smitten by
 The plague, like Strassbourg, where it is the Jews
 That are accused of having been its cause-
 And who indeed already have confessed!
 If they would roast my feet until the flesh
 Dropped of my bones, I would be ready to
 Admit that I had murdered God himself.

Our sense of unity is like a piece
 Of grit that irritates their eyes, for those
 That are uncircumcised remain outside
 The Covenant. The promises were made
 To Abraham and to his seed alone.

Nathan exit.

Enter Beatrice with candles.

BEATRICE

What awful dream that was!

Enter Amstel.

Oh Amstel won't
 You listen to the dream I had last night?

AMSTEL

With pleasure, if you so desire.

BEATRICE

It was
 An awful dream. I saw a scenery
 As I have never seen before and as
 I hope I'll never see again. The air
 Was filled with strange and evil creatures:
 A stork whose body ended in a ship
 Was flying Westward and in opposite
 Direction flew a fish with wings, upon
 Whose back was placed an ugly dwarf
 Together with his wife. They seemed to fly

Towards a city in the distance that
 Had burst in flames and spread a reddish glow
 Against a cloud of smoke. Much nearer were
 The ruins of a tower and in front
 I saw my husband playing dice and with
 Him were my daughter Margaret, who wore
 A crown of thorns, and two disgusting men:
 A beggar with a feathered tail, whose leg
 Was bent and at whose side there was a dog
 Just like a harlequin. The other man
 Was dressed in black. His face was like a pig's.
 Upon his bristly hair there stood an owl.
 He held a lute. He also held a key.
 I did not know what game they played but saw
 My Father to their right. He turned his back
 On them and held two warning fingers up.
 The wooden bridge beneath their feet stood in
 The stagnant waters of a pond in which
 There was a multitude of grisly things.
 A monkey with a sword sat snarling in
 A crate. A mouselike animal plucked at
 A harp. An armour-plated fish swam with
 A devil on his back towards a man
 That was imprisoned in a duck. A jar
 Upon the hindlegs of a horse stood hard
 Against a bull that had a ratlike head.
 And underneath a tree there stood the lewd
 And gleaming figure of a naked girl
 Who scratched between her thighs while looking at
 A cat that held a fish between its claws.

And many other things too strange and weird
 For me to tell about - except that they
 So frightened me that I woke up in tears
 And damp with sweat. What does all this portent?

AMSTEL

My Lady Beatrice - I wish I could

In truth declare that I don't understand
 A thing of all you've dreamt. Alas, the signs
 Are all too clear. The tower surely means
 The Bishop's fortress which I must defend.
 Its ruins do not spell much good for me.
 The game of dice must signify the risks
 Your husband takes in dealing with the King
 Of England who would be the beggar with
 The feathered tail, for Bishop Antony
 Is most assuredly the clown-like dog.
 I don't know who could be the other man,
 In black, whose face was like a pig's. Perhaps
 He is the King of France; the owl upon
 His head may well be one of that parade
 Of lawyers he employs to think up all
 The reasons and the subtleties which he
 Requires. Your daughter Margaret is crowned
 With thorns to celebrate her marriage
 To Edward's son.

BEATRICE

What did you say?

AMSTEL

But don't
 You know? He didn't tell you of his plans?
 Your daughter Margaret is now to be
 Alfonso's wife.

BEATRICE

My God - my daughter, still
 So young - my only child - I could not bear
 To see her go...

AMSTEL

With reason did you dream
 Your Father gave a warning sign to you.
 And then that naked wench that's envious

Of what the cat holds in its paws: that's Maud,
Young Velzen's wife, who is in rut and lusts
To have your husband's fish between her thighs.

BEATRICE

Oh no!

AMSTEL

Oh yes!

BEATRICE

Oh no! That can't be true.

AMSTEL

Why do you think that Velzen has been sent
Along with me?

BEATRICE

Because there are two forts
That must be held.

AMSTEL

But don't you think I should
Be able to defend them both myself?

BEATRICE

I do not understand these things of war.

AMSTEL

I think that you will soon begin to see.

BEATRICE

I know that Floris, in the past, has seen...
I mean, your niece... but not that woman Maud...

AMSTEL

My Lady Beatrice, please pray for me.
I must now leave on an assignment that

Is filled with danger - I may not return.

BEATRICE

I wish you well.

Amstel exit.

My God, take pity on
Us all.

Enter Floris.

FLORIS

Tomorrow I must leave to fight
The Frisians and extirpate the shame
Of that disastrous day when they enticed
My men to enter the morass where most
Of them were killed. I also must at last
And at all cost discover where and how
The body of my Father has been kept
So I may have it taken to the town
Of Middelburg, its final resting place,
And give a Christian burial to him
That once was Holy Roman Emperor.
I cannot rest while that is left undone.

BEATRICE

Oh Floris, do you have to undertake
That dangerous campaign?

FLORIS

There is no need
To fear that I shall make the same mistake.

BEATRICE

Last night I had a frightful dream: I dreamt
Of burning cities, fish that flew up in
The air, unnatural monstrosities,
The ruins of a tower, snarling cats,
All things of evil prophecy, and you
Were also there, you were with odious men

And played at dice. It made my blood run cold.

FLORIS

Your pregnancy is clearly having its
Effects on what you dream at night. I should
Not pay attention to those feverish
Disturbances.

BEATRICE

Why can't you wait until
Our child is borne?

FLORIS

The time is ripe. I want
To do it now, before your Father starts
Attacking in the South, in order to
Avoid the danger of two fronts.

BEATRICE

Why have
You promised Margaret to Edward's son?

FLORIS

By whom were you informed of that affair?

BEATRICE

I am the Mother of the girl!

FLORIS

I say
By whom were you informed?

BEATRICE

By Amstel, who
Came here to say goodbye not long ago.

FLORIS

What other news did you get out of that

Absurd and spiteful man?

BEATRICE

It was enough!
I could not bear to see my Margaret
Departed from my side before her time-
Alone - unhappy in a foreign land-

FLORIS

Don't worry, Beatrice, it is not yet
Confirmed. Perhaps King Edward will reject
The whole agreement that would bind our lands
Together and of which our daughter's hand
Is but a part.

BEATRICE

The part that interests
Me most.

FLORIS

Perhaps she would be pleased to be
Alfonso's wife and live at Edward's court.

BEATRICE

Perhaps-
Why did you order Velzen to
Defend that fort?

FLORIS

Because there are two forts
And Amstel can't defend them both himself.

I find your mood unpleasant and of ill
Intent. You are not usually in so
Inquisitive a frame of mind. And why
This sudden feeling of concern for the
Security of Velzen? Would you keep
Him here perhaps, around your skirts?

Farewell!

Floris exit.

BEATRICE

The dream foretold
My husband's bold
And heavy-striking hand:
My daughter sold
For Edward's gold
To gain my Father's land.

The evil things
That power brings
When people are for sale-
The trumpet rings
The death of Kings
And all to no avail.

act three

Scene I

*A room in Floris' castle.
Floris and Beatrice.*

FLORIS

Surprise and valour gave us victory.
While still at sea I split our fleet in two.
I took one half myself and told the rest
To wait until the morning and conceal
Themselves, while my contingent gained the land
And drew the Frisians away from their
Own camp: their rampart and defense against
The hot and murderous embrace of my
Embattled troops. This plan we carried out.
I got my men to put ashore not far
From where the Frisians had pitched their camp.
The night fell rapidly. We had to wait
Till morning grudgingly gave us a pale
And frigid light. The gusts of wind were hard
And miserably cold. No sleep, no food
And bodies almost numb. The Frisians
Advanced in furious and foaming rage.
They broke their ranks and vied who would display
The greatest courage by attaining us,
The hated enemy, the first. I had
Arranged my pikemen and my archers in
Their sturdy, disciplined and oft-rehearsed
Formations, that withstood their onslaught just
As rocks remain unyielding in a storm
And cause the waves to break and melt away
As foam. Tremendous was the shock but soon
Impetuous intensity was made

To feel the weight of skilled experience.
 At first my men advanced but slowly, step
 By hard-fought step, but then one Frisian
 Lost heart and in despair turned round and fled
 To what he thought was safety. This became
 A signal for the greatest part of that
 Excited but unsteady crowd to beat
 A hasty and disorderly retreat.

My other troops had meanwhile landed where
 The Frisians had kept their ships. The guards
 Were killed or put to flight within the hour.
 My men had just set fire to one of their
 Archaic cutters when they heard the first
 Of that disheartened rabble drawing near.
 They were thus in good time to welcome them
 As anvil to the hammer on my side.
 A number of the Frisians, caught in
 This ring of steel, was killed; another part
 Endeavoured to escape my veterans
 By swimming out to sea. Alas for them,
 The current was too strong - they sank from sight.

BEATRICE

Did none of those unlucky men survive?

FLORIS

About one half remained. My officers
 Proposed that they, without exception, should
 Be killed but I preferred to follow the
 Example of my Father who was wont
 To separate the captains from the men
 That in obedience and guiltlessness
 Are used to do as told. I ordered my
 Victorious troops to let the soldiers go,
 But did allow them to retain the clothes
 And trinkets that the enemy had brought.
 Thus naked did they have to find their way.

The captains and the noblemen I kept
 As surety for good behaviour and
 So that their ransom might defray the costs
 Of this campaign.

BEATRICE

And did you find the grave?

FLORIS

I did, but had to make more use than is
 My habit of the rack and burning coals
 To find out that before the battle there
 Were four alive who had been witnesses
 Of that event, now forty years ago.
 And three of them had died in my attack...
 The fourth took long to find and longer still
 To persuade. At last the tortures caused
 Him to reveal the place: a chimney in
 A humble house. Beneath its hearth we found
 My Father's skeleton. We wrapped it in
 The finest cloth and brought it home with us.
 I thank the Lord that I can soon perform
 My duty to his soul and give his bones
 A decent burial. He was a man
 Of courage, honesty, restraint and pride:
 A bubbling source of strength for all his men.

How young he was, no more than twenty-eight,
 When he came to that ignominious end.
 We must prepare ourselves to end our brief
 Existence and to leave this ruthless world
 At any sudden time.

BEATRICE

Please, Floris, stop
 That melancholy talk! My mood is black
 Enough. This land is full of clanking troops.
 My mind's assailed by doubts. My body is

Distended to accomodate the fruit
That's fully grown. My womb is yearning for
Delivery as does my soul for peace.

FLORIS

Dear Beatrice - I know these times are hard
And shall no longer weary you with my
Discussions on affairs of state and war.

Scene II

The English Court.

King Edward; Edmund of Lancaster, his brother.

EDWARD

I'm getting old. I'm not the man I used
To be. In Syria, when on crusade,
They said I was the strongest lance that fought
Against the Turk. But that was twenty years
Ago. Since then my wife has died, my dear
Eleanor, who has left a desert in
My heart. Her Father battled with the Moor
And gained Cadiz, Seville and Cordoba
For Christianity. Our Mother too
Has died, whose sister Margaret was wife
Of Louis King of France. That wilful pair
Of women formed the link between the Crowns
Of France and England, which has gone as well.

I do not like or trust its present King.

I had four sons. But two of them remain.
The other two are dead. My chancelor
Burnell is also dead. For eighteen years
He served the cause of England and my own.
It often seems our acts are no more of
Account than are the withered leaves that fall
In autumn from the trees. We live to die.

EDMUND

The law remains.

EDWARD

The law remains. To each
 His own. An instrument to stem the rush
 Of turbulence and pride. A tool to bring
 All men within the reach of justice and
 The Courts. The only way in which the weight
 Of force is made to yield to rule and wit.
 Stability. Proportion. Precedent.
 Those are the cornerstones that hold erect
 The legal edifice and form the bounds
 Of any orderly and peaceful realm.

I could not tolerate the Welsh to stay
 Apart and to infect the Marcher Earls
 With their vindictive disposition and
 Habitual revenge. They have been brought
 Within the law. They've lost through negligence
 The gains of their agility and as
 Their chieftains lack unanimous intent
 The natural advantages of free
 And hardy mountaineers gave way before
 Our disciplined assault and better arms.
 And so the Earl of Warwick caught the last
 Of those rebellious chiefs: at night he placed
 A ring of cavalry and archers round
 The desperate and bitter band. The Welsh
 Did not give in. They stuck their spears into
 The ground and turned the points against the charge.
 But first the bolts and arrows broke their ranks
 And then our horse dispersed and killed them off.

EDMUND

As Wales has gone so Scotland now must go.

Enter footman.

FOOTMAN

My Lord, the Bishop Antony is here.

EDWARD

Let him come in.

Footman exit.

Enter Antony Bek, Bishop of Durham.

How goes it, Antony?
How did you do, across the sea, and what's
Your news?

ANTONY BEK

My Lord, the Count of Holland would
Conclude a treaty with your Majesty.
His only child, a girl, is fourteen years:
He puts her forward as Alfonso's bride.

EDWARD

What dowry would she bring?

ANTONY BEK

One half of all
The lands that Floris owns, provided that
No son is borne to him.

EDWARD

What chance of that?

ANTONY BEK

His wife, the Count of Flanders' child, has yet
To bear a son that lives past infancy
And she appears of sickly character.

EDWARD

What is the value of those lands of his?

ANTONY BEK

The sum of eighteen thousand pounds per year.

EDWARD

What does he want himself?

ANTONY BEK

Your wool.

EDWARD

Aha!

I should have known. The mainspring of our wealth.
 Its power came to light as a result
 Of disputes that the Countess Margaret
 Of Flanders, mother of the present Count,
 Had with my Father Henry. Bent with age,
 Though not of will, she claimed my Father owed
 Arrears of pension and sought recompense
 By seizing all the goods of Englishmen
 That happened to be in her land. A most
 Unwise idea, thought her countrymen.
 My Father had no sooner ordered all
 Our merchants to abstain from trading wool
 With Flanders or her citizens were out
 Of work. She did not give in easily.
 Three years she managed to hold out against
 Her people's bitter discontent. At last
 She bowed her head. I settled all complaints
 With Guy, her son, an old crusading friend.

That was, however, the occasion when
 I gathered in my hands control of all
 The wool that leaves these shores and when I placed
 A standing duty on each sack: a good
 And profitable source of revenue.

Why does he want our wool at such a price?

ANTONY BEK

The more to sap and weaken Guy Dampierre,
 With whom he seems intent to go to war.

EDWARD

I see. What sort of man is he?

ANTONY BEK

A strong
 And forceful one. Well built, of middle height,
 With clear and penetrating eyes. He seems
 Of energetic character and most
 Ambitious for his country and himself.
 His ruthlessness is not in doubt: some of
 His men are plainly disaffected.

EDWARD

That
 Might be a future source of strength for us.

Now let me see - what costs, what benefits
 Would be the consequence of such a move?
 The wool itself might just as well be sold
 In Holland as in Flanders, as its yield
 Does not depend upon the place of sale.
 The dowry of his daughter Margaret,
 While not enormous, still deserves respect.
 But more important is the weight I add
 To England's influence in that obscure
 Yet growing corner of the continent.
 The Duke of Brabant is our ally and
 Our relative: my eldest daughter has
 Been promised to his son in marriage.
 Alfonso's marriage to Floris' girl
 Could be the counterpart and cornerstone
 That would complete an iron Triangle
 Of Brabant, Holland and Plantagenet
 To dominate the rivers and the seas
 That hold the wealth of Europe and the world.
 So far, so good. There is one major fault
 That must be rectified. The impact of
 This shift in balance would, of course, distress
 The Count of Flanders, as indeed is the
 Intention: just as well that he should be
 Reminded of the source of all his wealth.

We should however not let Floris go
 So far in his pugnacity as to
 Embark upon an actual state of war
 With Guy Dampierre and so disturb the peace
 That Flanders needs in order to resist
 The French... The Count of Holland must be made
 To see the light of reason.

Let us be
 Oblique. He is a fighting friend of John,
 The Duke of Brabant, whom he helped to win
 His battle with the Bishop of Cologne.
 Let Brabant be our instrument to make
 And keep the peace between those two.

Yes - tell the Count of Holland we accept!

ANTONY BEK

He also lays a claim to Scotland's throne
 Through his descent from Ada Huntingdon
 And asks for your support.

EDWARD

Why, let him be
 The thirteenth claimant to that throne and let
 Him try his luck. He is not likely to
 Succeed, for three of David Huntingdon's
 Descendants - Hastings, Baliol and Bruce-
 Are still alive today and are preferred
 To those that stem from David's sister.

But
 He must declare, as all the others have,
 That all pretended right must be professed
 To him, and judged by him, who has been shown
 To have the power and the cognizance
 To hear and to decide: that is to say,
 To me, to Edward, King of England, Duke
 Of Aquitaine and Scotland's sovereign Lord.

Scene III

*A room in Floris' castle.
Floris and the Friar.*

FLORIS

So far your fears have been unjustified.
The Frisians have now been broken and
My Father's soul can rest in peace. It's true,
The fortresses I hold in pawn have been
Invested by that idiotic rogue
The Bishop of Utrecht, but they are held
By Amstel and by Velzen and will not
Surrender soon. King Edward has become
Supporter of my cause. I now must turn
My mind to Zeeland, whither I shall soon
Depart with new and rested troops, to clear
The way and build a sturdy base from which
I can thereafter take the battle to
The cities and the heartland that make up
The power and the wealth of Guy Dampierre.

FRIAR

So far my fears have been in vain. One should
However not acclaim the day until
The evening has come and so beware
Of Edward: England's guiding principle
Has always been to let the others fight,
The better to control the much reduced
And weak survivor of the fight.
Beware
Of what the Frisians may do, once you
Have turned your back: they do not easily

Take to the bit that you have forced into
 Their mouth and may rise once again to fight
 A last despairing battle for a free
 And independent land.

Beware of Guy:

He is a sly and cunning man who is
 Not likely to forget the impact of
 His gold on disaffected noblemen.
 Postpone your march to Zeeland and relieve
 Instead the knights that are now threatened by
 The Bishop of Utrecht.

FLORIS

I do not feel
 The need to hasten to their aid. Those men
 Are safely put away and neutralized
 While I establish law and order in
 The South. I can moreover dry the tears
 And sup the charms of Velzen's succulent
 And spicy wife.

FRIAR

Oh Floris!

FLORIS

Father?

FRIAR

No!
 Not that, not that, do not add guilt to all
 The hazards that you are to undertake!

FLORIS

Why, it's a trifle she's not likely to
 Deny.

FRIAR

Remember David, Floris, think

Of David and Bathsheba! Do not kill
Uriah for the pleasure of the hour!

FLORIS

I too have read the book of Samuel.
The child of David and Bathsheba had
The name of Solomon, Beloved of
The Lord.

FRIAR

leaving

The sword shall never leave your house.

Enter Maud.

FLORIS

Why, tell me Maud, what's rounder than a wheel?
And what can fill the valleys to the brim?
What dresses best in royal halls? And whose
May be the whitest breast?

MAUD

It's snow that fills
The valleys and the sun is rounder than
A wheel. It's courage that can dress the best.
The whitest breast is mine.

But what can call
A greater distance than the crane? And what
Is quicker than a deer? And what can make
The widest bridge? And whose the strongest arm?

FLORIS

The call of thunder goes the longer way.
My thought of you is quicker than a deer.
It's ice that makes the widest bridge, and mine
The strongest arm.

Whose beard is worn upon
His back? And what is whiter than a swan?
Or blacker than a bolt? The coldest bed
Is whose?

MAUD

The peewit's beard is on his back.
An angel's whiter than a swan. It's sin
That's blacker than a bolt. The coldest bed
Is mine.

FLORIS

And whose the warmest heart?

MAUD

It's yours.

FLORIS

The whitest breast.

MAUD

The strongest arm.

FLORIS

It's yours.

They laugh.

MAUD

The warmest heart.

FLORIS

The coldest bed.

MAUD

It's yours.

They kiss; exeunt.

Scene IV*A prison.**Floris.***FLORIS**

What Godforsaken fool am I! Why did
 I trust that doublecrossing scoundrel with
 His treacherous proposals of a place
 ‘Where you can safely meet with Guy Dampierre
 In order to discuss your various
 Indictments and complaints so that you may
 Compose your quarrels and tranquillity
 May once again return to both your lands’.

How could I ever have believed that John
 Would be a loyal and trustworthy friend
 Because I helped him in his battle with
 The Bishop of Cologne?

My rule is not
 To trust a single man whose interests
 Are different from mine. I broke that rule.
 And then: what recklessness to come alone!

I wonder what his price has been, the rat!
 By God, if ever I get out of this
 Disgusting, foul and stinking hole - beware!

I told the Friar that it's either eat
 Or else be eaten. Little did I know
 How soon my turn would come to serve as meat.

Enter John, Duke of Brabant.

Why, Duke of Brabant, welcome to this hall,

My trusted comrade of the battlefield!
 I'm honoured by your visit. Do forgive
 The sparseness of the furniture and pay
 No heed to any furry little beasts
 That you may see along those cheerful walls.
 They are my pets and keep me company.
 And have some wine! Perhaps it tastes as if
 It were but putrid water but I can
 Assure you that it once belonged to the
 Distinguished cellar of the Bishop of
 Cologne, the man whom we together fought.

JOHN

I understand that you must feel betrayed.

FLORIS

Not only do I feel betrayed: I am!

JOHN

Please hear me out: I think I can explain.

FLORIS

What reasons can explain the breaking of
 A truce?

JOHN

The higher interests of both
 Your lands, of Holland and of Flanders.

FLORIS

Why,
 I think you mean the higher interests
 Of John, the Duke of Brabant!

JOHN

No I'm not
 Concerned, I merely used this stratagem
 To force the two of you to come to terms.

FLORIS

Your equitable impartiality
Must surely also have arranged for the
Imprisonment of Guy, so that we can
Negotiate or fight on equal ground.

JOHN

No, Guy is free but ready to come down
And talk it out and come to some consent.

FLORIS

How kind of him. Please give him my regards
And tell him I will not negotiate
As long as I am kept a prisoner.

JOHN

Well, think it over, you'll have ample time.

John exit.

Scene V

A room.

John of Brabant. Guy Dampierre, Count of Flanders.

GUY

What does the rascal say?

JOHN

His mood is foul.

He says he does not want to come to terms.

GUY

I'll send a man to kill him.

JOHN

No you won't!

I'm doing this because we all need peace

And not in order to create a cause

For endless war.

GUY

I can't afford to have

A fight on both my borders. Philip's men

Are pressing hard to gain advantages

For France. I must dispatch this man while he

Is in my power.

JOHN

Not while I am here!

I got ahold of him so he would have

To listen to your argument but not

To make him lose his head. I'm sure he'll see

The wisdom of a tripartite consent.

GUY

And what exactly does that mean?

JOHN

It means
That you and he will part in peace...

GUY

In peace!

JOHN

...And that you each allow the other to
Appoint a certain number of the men
That rule those miserable islands which
Are clearly of such vital interest
To each of you that you are bent upon
A war.

GUY

I've told you once before: it's not
Those islands in themselves that are of such
Concern to me - it's just that I cannot
Afford to have this mad adventurer
Continuously worrying within
My own backyard because I have much more
Important fish to fry.

JOHN

I think that he
Will be prepared to leave your land alone.

GUY

Can I be sure that he will keep his word?

JOHN

I shall myself give bond and guarantee.

GUY

The bond is twenty thousand pounds.

JOHN

Agreed.

Scene VI*A prison.**Floris.***FLORIS**

There's little I can do. These walls look strong.
 I do not think I can escape, at least
 Not easily nor soon. I kept my trip
 A secret from my men. The Friar does
 Not know where I have gone, nor when I would
 Return. I can't expect much help from him.
 I fear I'll have to come to terms and bide
 My time until I can collect this debt
 With interest.

Who would have thought that John
 Was capable of such a perfidy?

*Enter John, Duke of Brabant.***JOHN**

Whatever you may think, I am your friend.
 You helped me once - I'll help you in return.
 Your war with Guy is most unwise and will,
 By harming both of you, bring benefit
 To France, whose King is most desirous to
 Extend his power to include the mouths
 Of those great waterways through which the wealth
 Of Europe is transported to the sea.

You must compose your quarrels and present
 A single front. Those islands which have been
 The incident and cause of all this strife
 Are simply not commensurate with all

The risks and dangers that you undertake.
You should allow them to return to the
Obscurity which they so richly have
Deserved.

I have proposed the following
To Guy and he already has agreed.
I have proposed that both of you depart
From here in peace; and that you each appoint
An equal number of the magistrates
To rule the islands that will form a sphere
Of separate but equal interest.
Of this agreement I have promised to
Remain a bondsman and a guarantor
With twenty thousand pounds at risk. Are you,
Like Guy, prepared to stake your name on the
Observance of this firm agreement?

FLORIS

Yes!

Scene VII

*A room in Floris' castle.
Floris and the Friar.*

FRIAR

For God's sake, leave the man alone until
You have had time to rearrange and mend
Your interests in Zeeland, after this
Disastrous episode, and put to use
Your marvelous good fortune, having had
A son. Forget the Flemish; concentrate
Upon your own affairs; do not forget
That by attacking Flanders you will add
Another enemy to those that you
Already have: I do not think the Duke
Of Brabant will be overcome with joy
To realise that he has lost the sum
Of twenty thousand pounds.

FLORIS

I must impose
My will on those of Zeeland's noblemen
That treacherously cherish and support
The Flemish lion - and strike fast or else
The rot will spread. As yet I do not have
To fear attack from other parts because
The Frisians are turned into a scared
And witless crowd while over in the East
The Bishop of Utrecht is still contained.
But who can tell how long all that will last?
I cannot hesitate but must at once
Invade the provinces of Guy while he

Is still preoccupied with the to him
Far greater danger of attack from France.

But yes, I also must negotiate
A new and better treaty with the King
Of England, now that I have had a son
Whose birth invalidates the heart and main
Component of the present protocol.

FRIAR

I think that you are being most unwise
But go with God - I wish you well.

Scene VIII

Beatrice's room.

Beatrice.

BEATRICE.

This joyless life will shortly end for me.
 It's just as well. The bitter cup is full.
 I've been no more than a receptacle
 And breeding ground for Floris' seed. What love,
 What thought or what affection has he had
 For me? Ambition, lust and clashing pride
 Is what has filled this place. I hate it now.
 How young and gay I was when first I came
 To this austere and sombre world, this world
 Of men, where women are of no account
 Except as animals of pleasure and
 As instruments to breed and reproduce.
 How young and gay I was: how quickly I
 Was brought to heel; how long did I deceive
 Myself that this was as it ought to be.

I would have been content with just a bit
 Of lightness, just a touch of colour or
 Of fantasy - a thoughtful word, a kind
 Remark - a little common charity.
 But as I've lived so shall I die, a cold
 Ungrateful death, a stern and mournful priest
 Beside my bed, my husband doubtlessly
 Engaged in what he always calls 'Affairs
 Of State' - that is, unless he grunts and snorts
 Between the legs of Maud, that bitch on heat.

Why, let him win his battles, let him win
 His wars against the Frisians and let
 Him break the Bishop's back. Yes, let him beat
 My Father's army and the King of France.
 What does it mean? How long will all that last?
 A border here, a bailiff there, what is
 The difference for ordinary folk?
 The glory that is won by some, it seems,
 Inevitably means the misery
 Of other men. The only thing that counts
 Is peace, within oneself and in the world.
 The rest is words - just empty sounds - just noise.

Enter Floris.

FLORIS

Oh Beatrice, I cannot say how proud
 I am of you for having given me
 A son and heir. The country thanks our Lord
 For this divine assistance in a time
 Of danger and uncertainty. You must
 Be pleased yourself.

BEATRICE

I am.

FLORIS

If only he
 Will live! You must look after him yourself!

BEATRICE

I shall.

FLORIS

This means that Margaret will not
 Bring any dowry to her marriage
 And that my treaty with King Edward will
 Be null and void. You see, your fears about
 Your daughter were unjustified.

BEATRICE

I see.

FLORIS

Our son would be an even better link
Between the Houses of Plantagenet
And Holland, don't you think?

BEATRICE

Of course.

FLORIS

And how are you yourself?

BEATRICE

A little weak.

FLORIS

You must be careful to take as much rest
As you may need to nurse yourself to health.

Floris exit.

BEATRICE

So little gain,
So much in vain
Such utter selfishness;
Why all this pain
Just to attain
A little happiness?

My husband chose
To cut this rose
And now it is forlorn;
My death is close
I envy those
That never have been born.

act four

Scene I

*A room in Floris' castle.
Velzen and Maud.*

VELZEN

The Bishop had assembled all the men
That he thought capable of bearing arms.
It was a large but ill-assorted mass
That was imposing through its size though not
Because of quality.

MAUD

Oh yes?

VELZEN

It could
Be seen from far as ponderously he
Arranged its companies in some attempt
To form a disciplined formation. We
Had split our troops in two. While Amstel rode
Ahead I kept my soldiers back and out
Of sight, intending to march forward when
The moment would be opportune.

MAUD

Why yes!

VELZEN

The Bishop, seeing fewer troops than he
Expected, quickly drew ahead and met
With Amstel's army in a head-on clash
And pressed him hard. Outnumbered as he was

The latter started to give way. His horse
 Was killed, his standard even sank from sight.
 The enemy mistakenly began
 To think the day was theirs and raised a loud
 Triumphant cry. It was the moment I
 Had waited for.

MAUD

Oh yes?

VELZEN

I suddenly
 Attacked the Bishop in his flank with fresh
 And tireless energy. This great surprise
 Confused the enemy and threw him back.
 As they had not been keeping any of
 Their soldiers in reserve no obstacle
 Stood in our way to final victory.

MAUD

Why yes!

VELZEN

We caught the Bishop in the act
 Of putting on the modest habit of
 A monk but forced him to keep on his suit
 Of heavy armour and a helmet on
 His head. The sun was mercilessly hot.
 At mealtimes we allowed him to refresh
 And air his broiled and beet-red face as he
 Continuously cursed the day he met
 Count Floris.

MAUD

Yes?

Enter Floris and the Friar.

My Lord, until today
 I had not realised my husband was

So valiant a man but now that he
 Has told me all about the way in which
 He has defeated the forbidding might
 With which the Bishop of Utrecht opposed
 And fought him on the battlefield I know
 The strongest arm is his.

FLORIS

Of course, of course...
 We all congratulate your husband on
 His victory, which so delighted me
 That I decided to entrust him with
 A new and most important mission to
 The Court of Edward, King of England.

VELZEN

But,
 My Lord...

FLORIS

Of course, if you should feel that you
 Need first to get some rest...

VELZEN

It isn't that...
 What is this mission that you want me to
 Perform?

FLORIS

You know that I arranged for the
 Betrothal of my daughter Margaret
 To Edward's son Alfonso and that she
 Would bring as dowry to the marriage
 One half of all my lands provided that
 I die without a son as heir. You know
 As well that Beatrice has given me
 A healthy son, whose birth will clearly make
 The King of England disinclined to see

The matter through. I think we both would like
 To make a new arrangement since we are
 In need of one another. Please depart
 Therefore as soon as possible and put
 The following proposal to the King.
 Propose to him three things. The first: my son's
 Betrothal to his child Elizabeth.
 And then: a treaty to ensure that he
 Who is the friend or enemy of one
 Shall also be the other's enemy
 Or friend. And finally: that all his wool
 Is always to be brought to market here.

As guarantee and pledge of which you shall
 Take with you and hand over to the King,
 For his good care, my child, my new born son.

VELZEN

My Lord... your infant son?

FLORIS

My infant son.

VELZEN

Perhaps it would be best if Maud came too
 In order to ensure the safety of
 The child.

FLORIS

I leave that up to you - she has
 Her own to supervise - but as you wish...

MAUD

I think that's true: what can I do that can't
 Be done by other women who don't have
 To leave their own behind?

VELZEN

Well, if you think...

FLORIS

Decide yourself but do it quickly as
 There is no time to lose. I want you to
 Set sail tomorrow at the crack of dawn.

Floris, Velzen and Maud exeunt.

FRIAR

There is a zenith in the lives of men
 That marks the culmination and the top
 Of all their strength, success and poise. Once they
 Have passed that stage, the stars and planets move
 From their auspicious constellation and
 The tide begins to turn, unnoticed by
 The very men whom once it carried to
 The forefront of their kind. And such is our
 Corrupt and blighted nature that not one
 Of those that have been favoured by the Stars
 Becomes aware of what is happening:
 They blindly follow and pursue the course
 That leads to their destruction - yes, they thrash
 About in growing frenzy and despair
 And obstinately hurry to their doom.

And so this man, this Floris, blessed with gifts
 By Fortune's fleeting face, does not perceive
 That he is steadily eroding all
 The good that he has done in many years
 Of patient work among his countrymen
 To whom he brought prosperity and peace.
 The very measure of success which he
 Achieved within the borders of these lands
 Became the cause that made him think he could
 Exceed the limits of his time and place
 And so surpass the confines of his realm.

Alone he cannot fight the might of Guy.
 King Edward will desert his doubtful cause.
 The Frisians are soon to rise again.

The Bishop is an utter enemy.
The Duke of Brabant hates him bitterly,
While Amstel holds a dagger to his back.

I see it all draw near. What can I do,
An old and weary monk, but hope and pray?

Enter Maud.

MAUD

Friar, Friar, why look so glum?
Friar, Friar, life is for fun!

Scene II

The English Court.

King Edward; Edmund of Lancaster.

EDWARD

As I have said before, there is no way
 In which we can avoid the coming war
 With France. The situation in the South,
 In Aquitaine, is now untenable.
 I am its Duke but owe allegiance
 To Philip, King of France, whose sovereignty
 Enables him to offer and extend
 Protection to whatever miscreants
 And rogues that, having lost their suit before
 My Courts of Law, attempt to gain redress
 By making an appeal to Philip's court.
 Those men declare themselves to be direct
 Dependants of the King. They have renounced
 Allegiance to me, their feudal lord,
 And group themselves within their stubborn walls,
 While Philip's lawyers have devised a new
 And subtle category of the law
 Which they call 'royal cases', that concern,
 They say 'the safety of the realm' and fall
 Therefore within the jurisdiction of
 Their Court - a definition such as they
 Can use, of course, whichever way they wish.
 So homicide and larceny remain
 Without due punishment. The men that are
 Condemned immediately take their case
 To Philip's officers, who lose no time
 To question and arrest, imprison, draw

Up instruments, distraint and confiscate,
 Protected by the Lily of the King.
 The countryside is furrowed by those bands
 That call themselves 'appellants' but that are
 No more than common criminals who kill
 And rape and plunder churches and who keep
 My bailiffs at a distance, saying that
 They have 'appealed' to Philip's court. This can't
 Go on. What shall I do?

EDMUND

You cannot rule
 While under feudal obligation so
 You must shake off the fetter and the yoke
 Which you assumed that Whitsun, nine long years
 Ago, when on your knees you put your hands
 In Philip's hands and, doing homage, said
 You were his man according to the peace
 That was established by our forefathers.
 This Philip now demands the seisin of
 Six fortresses as guarantee and bond
 Until such time as you have met and have
 Agreed to settle all your various
 Complaints. I say: yield all of Aquitaine,
 So that you can regain possession by
 The use of arms, which will entitle you
 To rule thenceforth without encumbrance or
 Restraint.

EDWARD

I think you're right, for things have gone
 Too far. The animosity between
 Our seamen and the men of Normandy
 Has now flared up in almost constant war.
 We seize a ship from them, they one of ours.
 We hang a Frenchman from the mast. They crop
 The ears of twenty of our men. We drown
 The sailors of a ship that we have seized.

Their men then take revenge by cutting hands
 And feet off any English sailor caught
 And leaving him adrift to die a slow
 And painful death. And so it goes from bad
 To worse until we now have reached the stage
 Where recently two hundred of our ships
 Put out from Portsmouth and encountered in
 The Channel just as large a fleet that had
 Set sail from Normandy. The victory
 Was ours, but where will all that end?

EDMUND

We should
 Descend upon the town of La Rochelle
 In a surprise attack.

EDWARD

What purpose would
 That serve?

EDMUND

We also should detach the Count
 Of Flanders from his feudal Lord, the King
 of France.

EDWARD

Indeed, but how do you propose
 To set about that task?

EDMUND

You should forbid
 All trade with Flanders and let it be known
 That your decision stems from Guy Dampierre's
 Support of Philip's cause. His country is
 Already torn between the factions that
 Reject or favour France and this blockade
 Would shift the balance to our side and so
 Prepare and soften Guy. We then hold out

An advantageous treaty under which
 His daughter is betrothed to Edward, Prince
 Of Wales, your eldest son, while he equips
 And fields an army with our gold to fight
 Our cause but with his men and in return
 Receives our wool again which in between
 We had been selling in the North.

EDWARD

Why yes!

Enter Footman.

FOOTMAN

My Lord, the Bishop Antony.

Enter Antony Bek. Footman exit.

EDWARD

Well now,
 What brings you here?

ANTONY BEK

My Lord, I have received
 An emissary from Count Floris with
 The latest news.

EDWARD

Which is?

ANTONY BEK

That contrary
 To what I thought and told your Majesty
 His wife has borne a son. The Mother has
 Since died, the child is very much alive.

EDWARD

So farewell dowry, farewell marriage.

ANTONY BEK

Indeed, except that this resourceful man

Has now proposed another marriage:
Between your Majesty's Elizabeth
And this, his only son.

EDWARD

What does he want
Himself?

ANTONY BEK

He wants two things: a treaty to
Assure him of assistance at all times,
And secondly, and as before, your wool.
As guarantee that he will keep his word
He has entrusted and commends his son
To your good care.

EDWARD

The child is here?

ANTONY BEK

Indeed.

EDWARD

Why, tell him we accept and see to it
That all our wool is sent to Holland where
It shall be sold until our further wish.
And also see the child is kept in good
And careful custody. Not often does
A bird of such good omen nestle in
Our hand. Regarding Scotland, though, you must
Inform him that our choice has fallen on
John Baliol, that empty jacket of
A man, but that we shall allow for right
And proper compensation.

ANTONY BEK

Yes, my Lord.

Antony Bek exit.

EDWARD

And you prepare to carry out that raid
On La Rochelle that you proposed.

EDMUND

Indeed!

Scene III

A room at the Court of Flanders.

Guy Dampierre, Count of Flanders; John, Duke of Brabant.

GUY

I told you that you could not trust that man.
 No sooner had we set him free or he
 Created trouble where and when he could
 By sending godforsaken scum to rob
 And to destroy. We should have killed him when
 We held him in our hands. And you, my friend,
 Have lost the sum of twenty thousand pounds.

JOHN

The wretched man has made a fool of me.
 I shall not rest until I have the chance
 To square accounts with him. I'm not without
 Some influence among his noblemen.

GUY

These times are hard for Flanders and for me.
 There is a three-fold pressure on my land.
 The first is from the North, as you yourself
 Have found out at your cost. The second is
 From France whose King is evermore intent
 To strengthen all the attributes that he
 Derives from feudal rule. I know that he
 Can rightfully regard himself as my
 Superior and sovereign Lord but does
 That also mean that he may send his men
 As agents to enquire and pry into
 The private and internal business of

This land? Or that my vassals must declare
 And swear that they will march against myself
 If Philip should decide that I have not
 Acquitted and fulfilled my feudal oath?
 Or that he archbishop of Reims should be
 Allowed to excommunicate as soon
 As I am deemed to be at fault? I must
 Resist such centralising tendencies
 And so must you, for Philip's appetite
 Can only grow - and you are next, my friend.
 As if this would not be enough, the King
 Of England, Edward, he who was my friend
 When we together fought against the Turk
 Has now decided to repeat the ploy
 And stratagem his father utilized
 Against my Mother to such good effect.
 He robs my country of the wool it needs,
 Pretending that I am in league with France.
 I do not understand what he can hope
 To gain by this abrupt departure from
 His hitherto reliable concern.

And this blockade inflames and aggravates
 The power struggle that goes on between
 The factions of this agitated land.
 Some men proclaim themselves supporters of
 The King whose lily and whose language they
 Intend to see established here against
 The wishes of the humbler folk that speak
 The Flemish language and distrust the ways
 Of wealthy merchants and of magistrates.
 They hate the Frenchman's lily and oppose
 To it the Flemish lion's claw. A cliff
 Now separates the leaders from the led.
 It's this divided country that I must
 Inspire to stay together and confront
 The dangers from without. What can I do?

JOHN

Throw in your lot with Edward. Do as I.
 My son will soon have Edward's daughter as
 His wife: a symbol of the link between
 The house of Brabant and Plantagenet.
 King Edward needs support against the King
 Of France. He's had to yield in Aquitaine.
 Propose to join his cause and you will see
 That he will let you have the wool you need
 And in addition pay you gold to field
 An army and attack the North of France,
 So Philip's energies and men will be
 Diverted from the South. And then, as crown
 And centrepiece of your diplomacy,
 You should propose the marriage of both
 Your eldest children so your daughter will
 In time be England's Queen, a union
 To hinder and to spite the pride of France.

GUY

You know full well that I am not allowed
 To marry Philippina if the King
 Of France has not approved the marriage.
 The match that you propose flies in the face
 Of France's interests and makes of war
 A virtual certainty. It is a course
 Of action that is fraught with danger. But
 To sit with folded arms and watch the French
 Become through stealth the masters of this land
 Is equally disastrous. Rather make
 A clean and open break than let things slide
 Until the situation is beyond
 Repair. So, yes, let's ally Flanders with
 The English - but on one condition: that
 You put an end to the activities
 Of Floris in the North. That filthy swine
 Must now be run to ground. The task is not,
 I think, beyond the wit, the money and

The might of Edward and yourself, plus all
The disaffected noblemen that sulk
In Floris' own domains. This must be done.

JOHN

It shall be done - I'll see to it myself.

Scene IV

A room in Velzen's castle.

Velzen.

Enter Amstel.

AMSTEL

What visions did you have, my noble friend,
When you were on your trip? What dreams, what thoughts
Became your constant visitors at night?
What lustful sighs and groans have filled your ears?

VELZEN

Shut up!

AMSTEL

Whose long and lissome legs spread out
To swallow and receive the hairy dirk?
Whose heaving breasts were bruised by greedy lips?
Whose arms embraced the straining body of
The man you served so faithfully? Whose smooth
And auburn hair was used to wipe the sweat
And clean the musty loin?

VELZEN

I say Shut up!

AMSTEL

What loving welcome greeted you, when you
Returned from Edward's court? What passion did
She show, when her beloved husband took
Her in his arms again? What did she say,
Your Maud, about the way in which she had
Been covered by that stallion?

VELZEN

Oh No!

AMSTEL

Oh yes, you fool, you poor deluded wretch!

VELZEN

Where is the proof? You're speaking out of spite!

AMSTEL

The whoring of your wife is known to all.

VELZEN

By God, I'll kill the bitch.

AMSTEL

Not her! Kill him!

She's but the creature of her desires

And whims - she can't be held accountable.

It's he that wakened dark and dreadful lust:

It's he that must be made to pay.

Enter Footman.

FOOTMAN

My Lord,
The Duke of Brabant.

Footman exit.

Enter John, Duke of Brabant.

AMSTEL

Welcome John, you're just
In time to join me and commiserate
With Velzen here, whom Floris cuckolded.

JOHN

We've all been cuckolded, including you.

AMSTEL

Perhaps your wife has had her belly poked
By that repulsive goat, but mine has not!

JOHN

I don't mean that, I mean the way in which
You were cut off from help and had to face
The Bishop of Utrecht alone when he
Attacked those fortresses you occupied.
He told me so himself: in urgent need
Of money he obtained a second loan
But had to promise that he would invest
Those forts at once, while Floris said he would
Prevent assistance from your own domains.

AMSTEL

My God, what utter fools we've been!
 You mean
To say that had the Bishop not been such
A blatantly incompetent baboon
We would have lost our heads through Floris' guile
And treachery?

JOHN

 I mean precisely that.

VELZEN

What man is this that treads on all the laws
Of loyalty and order and that shows
Such ruthlessness and disregard for all
The feelings of his fellow men? He pawns
His newborn son. He rapes my wife. He stabs
A dagger in our back. What does he want?

AMSTEL

He wants to be the tyrant of this land.
He wants us all to have to lick his boots.
He wants our women and our daughters to
Beget his bastards and to quench his lust.

But you have not yet told us how he has
Cuckolded you as well.

JOHN

I got him to
Agree with Guy Dampierre that neither would
Invade the other's land, while I myself
Consented to pay damages if he
Did not observe this undertaking. As
You may have heard, he recently sent troops
To plunder and to kill in Flanders. I
Have lost the sum of twenty thousand pounds.

AMSTEL

The man is mad and must be killed.
He lost
A brilliant opportunity when he
Allowed King Edward to deny his claim
To Scotland's throne, accepting in return
A paltry sum in compensation of
That grievous loss. He should have pressed his case,
Which surely was as good as anyone's,
And gained accession to that rich domain.
He then should have enfeoffed us nobles with
The most important parts of that severe
But energetic land, where we could raise
An army to march South and bring defeat
To Edward in the very heart of all
He owns, while Flemish mariners would keep
Him bottled up by sealing all his ports.
That would have been my grand design.

JOHN

I think,
You slightly underestimate the King
Of England and his strength.

Enter Footman.

FOOTMAN

My Lord, a man
Desires to see you, who pretends to be
A Bishop by the name of Antony.

AMSTEL

Why, talk about the devil-

VELZEN

Let him in.

Footman exit.

Enter Antony Bek.

ANTONY BEK

My Lords, I beg to be allowed to speak
To you of what is in my Master's mind.
King Edward has commanded me to tell
You of his deep concern with the affairs
Between your country and your neighbour to
The South. It seems that war with Flanders has
Become a certainty. This much disturbs
The balance in these lands and so assists
The growing appetite of France. Count Guy
Dampierre is France's main opponent in
The North. He must be helped not fought. And so
This is the reason why King Edward has
Concluded a most solemn treaty with
The Count of Flanders to confirm and fix
The following: the latter's eldest girl
To be betrothed to Edward, Prince of Wales.
And secondly: a promise to ensure
That he who is the friend or enemy
Of one shall also be the other's friend
Or enemy. And lastly: that the wool
Which now is sold in Holland will return
To where it used to go.

VELZEN

But that is just
The treaty that King Edward made with us!

AMSTEL

With us? With us? You mean with Floris! Why,
Do you still take the side of him who has
Befouled your nest?

ANTONY BEK

My Lords, I may be brief.
Count Floris has become a danger to
The equilibrium that Flanders needs
In order to restrain Philip the Fair.
His son is at King Edward's court. I think
The time has come for him to join his child.
I leave the means to you. It would be worth
Your while.

Antony Bek exit.

JOHN

A very sound advice.

act five

Scene I

*A room in Floris' castle.
Floris and the Friar.*

FLORIS

Goddamn the English King! He takes such pride
In all his magistrates and courts of law
Yet when it suits himself he rats on him
Who was but yesterday his friend.

I must

Confess events have shown that you were right
To warn against entanglements abroad.
And yet: I should have thought that Edward would
Not dare to turn his coat so soon and that
His sense of honour would not let him side
Against the Father of the child that he
Accepted as in trust.

We must now turn

To the alternative that I proposed
To you when we discussed and laid our plans:
The King of France. The enmity between
Philip the Fair and Edward is our chance
To parry and deflect this blow, regain
Initiative and come to grips with Guy.
King Philip has outwitted Edward in
The South and so won Aquitaine, at least
For now: I do not think we've seen the last
Reversal of the tide of fortune for
Those hardened men are one another's match.
King Edward's strategy is clear: he must
Wage battle in the North while Philip's troops
Are busy in the South. That is his aim

In making friends with Guy Dampierre. I would
 Not be surprised if John of Brabant too,
 Along with Luxembourg, perhaps Cologne,
 Were drawn into a northern partnership,
 United by their lust for English gold
 And fear and hatred of the might of France.

This leaves us out. We have no choice but make
 A virtue of necessity and turn
 To France. I cannot go myself. Affairs
 Here in the North are so unstable and
 Are pregnant of such germs of chaos and
 Decay that I cannot afford to leave
 This witches' brew lest it boil over and
 Infect the land with pestilential stench.

It's you that must defend our interests.
 It's you that now must go to Philip's court
 And plead the various advantages
 Held out by an alliance of our land
 With France: the upper and the nether stone
 To grind and pulverise the wealth and pride
 Of Flanders and of Guy. I do not think
 It will be hard, for Philip's interests
 Run parallel to ours. But all the same:
 Beware, for Philip is as proud and tough
 As any King that has been crowned at Reims.
 You'll know his rank and quality at once.
 He's taller by a head than other men.
 When on a horse his legs are off the ground
 By no more than a hand. He stands erect
 And seldom speaks. His hair is blond as hay.
 His eyes are blue and cold as ice and look
 Disdainfully at other men. They say
 His piety is great although austere.
 His table never carries more than three
 Unseasoned dishes and his steward does
 Not pour a single wine that has not been

Produced within his own domains. This means
 The royal palate never tastes the joys
 Of burgundy, champagne or claret, which
 Are therefore sent abroad to our delight.

He also chased the strumpets from his court.

FRIAR

In this at least you two are not alike.

FLORIS

And why despise the pleasures of the flesh?
 Why do as Philip does, who wears, they say,
 A hairshirt and commands his priest to whip
 And discipline his hot and surging blood?
 Those are the manners of fanatics who
 Present a greater danger to the rest
 Of humankind than all we libertines.

However that may be, it's probable
 That you will never see the King but will
 Instead negotiate with one of those
 Immensely cunning lawyers that transact
 The true affairs of France - it may well be
 That you are asked to state your terms to Flote,
 Who is the Chancellor. If so, you're well
 Advised to tread with care.

FRIAR

I'll do my best.

Scene II

*A room in the palace of the King of France.
King Philip. Pierre Flote, Chancellor of France.*

PIERRE FLOTE

A dispute now divides the magistrates
And clergy of the town of Ghent, because
The clerics there engage in commerce and
The magistrates maintain that they must pay
The taxes that are levied on all trade.
The clerics hold that they are subject to
The canon law but to no wordly tax
And so refuse to pay. The parties have
Agreed to settle in accordance with
Your Majesty's opinion which, I think,
Will be that clerics, in their quality
Of clergy, are indeed exempt from tax
But not as traders and must pay.

The King remains silent.

I fear
That Flanders is unsteady, rich though it
May be. Its Count endeavours to combat
The powerful patricians but now
The grumblings of the guilds have grown into
An undisguised revolt which he in vain
Attempts to stifle and suppress. The cause
Of France is not always supported by
The men that have most influence. They are
Divided in allegiance. In Ghent
The members of each faction even dress

In such a way as to make known whom they
 Support. Whatever structure we erect
 In that disturbed and stubborn land may well
 Go down as would a castle made of sand
 Before the rising waves.

The King remains silent.

Count Guy Dampierre
 Has placed himself outside the feudal law
 By his agreement with King Edward to
 The marriage of Philippina and
 The Prince of Wales. This brass neglect to ask
 Your Majesty's permission is in sharp
 Contrast to his decision, taken in
 More loyal times, to give the girl a name
 That would remind him of your Majesty.
 The present situation needs, I think,
 The surgeon's knife: the archbishop of Reims
 Should now be told to excommunicate
 The Count of Flanders so that he may taste
 The bitter fruits of his disloyalty.

The King remains silent.

Affairs with England have now also reached
 A point of no return. The die is cast.
 King Edward has, as Duke of Aquitaine,
 Denounced his homage to your Majesty.
 He did not like the methods he has used
 To render Scotland subject to his own
 Superior sovereignty, when those same means
 Were turned against his interests in France.
 I think we should now once again prescribe
 The very medicine that he employs
 In Flanders, for his royal person and
 Conclude a treaty with John Baliol.
 That King of Scotland is so greatly irked

By Edward's overbearing attitude
 And interference with his own affairs
 That with a little help he'll fall into
 Our lap, a useful stimulus and spur
 To prod in Edward's side. And so we meet
 His check in Flanders with our mate across
 The sea.

The King remains silent.

When Edward gained as ally Guy
 Dampierre he lost the Count of Holland who
 Has sent a monk as emissary to
 Secure your Majesty's support. This monk
 May seem a country priest but is no fool
 And knows the value of his master's troops.
 I think it may be worth our while to win
 The Count of Holland for our cause: the sum
 Involved is not excessive and it can
 Not hinder even if it does not help.

KING PHILIP

The only reason of Our Kingdom is
 This country France itself. Conversely We
 Personify its unity which must
 Be saved and strengthened to withstand attack,
 So its integrity can pass from Us
 To Our successors down the march of time.
 The Princes of this earth must execute
 The laws that God has made and that unite
 In harmony and order all the Peers
 Of France of whom there once were six. Three now
 Remain, of whom the Duke of Burgundy
 Accepts his obligations. Aquitaine
 And Flanders must be made to take the yoke.

Who wills a purpose must accept the means.

Scene III

*A room in the castle of John, Duke of Brabant.
John. The Friar.*

FRIAR

My Master Floris does not know that I
Am here. He would no doubt condemn this bold
Initiative. The temper of the times
Has taken such a turn as justifies
My disobedience. I hope my Lord
Will be so gracious as to hear me out.

JOHN

Your master owes me twenty thousand pounds.

FRIAR

Respect for bonds is something that exists
No more and you are not the only one,
My Lord, to suffer from this decadence
Of what was thought, in former times, to be
The mortar of society. The child
That Floris gave King Edward has become
A prisoner: a tool that may be used
At will against its Father's interests.
King Edward in his turn has had to yield
The seisin of six forts to Philip, King
Of France, who violates the very laws
He claims to symbolize, since he is not
Prepared to retrocede those fortresses
Whatever Edward may consent to do.

The words that men exchange have lost their worth.

The laws are twisted out of shape to serve
 The purposes of those whom chance has lent
 The passing use of power. England has
 Subdued the proud and freedom-loving land
 Of Wales and now intends to do likewise
 To Scotland. Philip wants to do the same
 To Flanders and to Aquitaine. Those states
 Are bent on growth. I wonder to what end.

JOHN

Let Floris pay me twenty thousand pounds!

FRIAR

I think I may be able to convince
 My Master that he should redeem the bond.

JOHN

Oh yes?

FRIAR

I know that you have influence
 Among the discontented noblemen
 That now create such turbulence and spite
 In Holland, where my Master has reduced
 Their rank and power by the clever use
 Of countervailing tendencies.

JOHN

What would
 You have me do?

FRIAR

Our lands are desperate
 For peace and so I have suggested that
 The Count attend a meeting where his men
 Will once again be face to face with him
 Whose army they destroyed: the Bishop of
 Utrecht. I hope he will be able to

Conciliate those enemies. Will you
Attempt to pacify the Bishop's ire?
Will you prevail upon the barons to
Restrain their feelings of revenge towards
The Count?

JOHN

Where will this gathering take place?

FRIAR

The Bishop's pride will only let him meet
Count Floris in a palace of his own.

JOHN

It will not be an easy task but I
Can try.

FRIAR

My Lord, I am most grateful for
Your intervention!

The Friar exit.

JOHN

Miserable monk!

Scene IV

*A room in the palace of the Bishop of Utrecht.
 Floris, the Bishop, Amstel and Velzen. The latter two are drunk.
 Gregorian music is sung in the background.*

BISHOP

Our dearest sons in Christ, We cannot say
 How pleased We are to see that you have come
 To recognise the errors of your ways
 And bow your head in friendship and remorse.

AMSTEL

The only friendship he has ever had
 Has been for peasants, foul and greasy louts,
 Whom he spurred on to impudence and greed
 And whom he even took into our rank.

BISHOP

The laws of this Our Church indeed lay down
 The rightful measure of each state and each
 Concern - a measure which the Count did not
 Observe when he demanded interest.

VELZEN

If you had not embezzled money that
 Was destined to finance crusades you would
 Not have to send a Jew to beg for loans.
 You help the Turks, the enemies of Christ!

BISHOP

We understand and We forgive your spite
 Which has resulted from our hazardous

Attempt to gain possession of Our Forts.
You know that Floris put Us up to that!

VELZEN

It seems, my Lord, your promises have lost
What little value they have ever had.
The Duke of Brabant is still waiting for
The money that he put at risk for you!

AMSTEL

And what about my cousin John whom he
Had murdered just because my cousin did
Not let those stinking peasants work his land
Who anyway refused to pay their rent?

VELZEN

That was his greatest crime, when we were sent
To hold the Bishop's fortresses while he
Arranged for them to be attacked and then
Prevented the arrival of our friends.

AMSTEL

How fortunate we did not find ourselves
Confronted with a fighting man but with
A prelate whose incompetence was just
As great as is his lack of honesty.

BISHOP

We are a man of peace and better versed
In Holy Writ than war and yet We think
We lost that day because of cunning not
Because We lacked morale or strategy.

AMSTEL

Ridiculous assertion! All you had
Succeeded in assembling was a crew
Of useless layabouts and rogues that lost
Their heads when faced with my courageous troops.

VELZEN

Preposterous pretention! It was I
 That gained the victory that day when I
 Attacked with fresh reserves, while you had lost
 Your horse, your standard, near enough your life.

BISHOP

Whatever little honour there can be
 In vanquishing a Bishop of the Church
 Was lost when you maltreated Us and made
 Us keep Our armour and Our helmet on.

AMSTEL

Well, you are not the only one to lack
 A sense of strategy. Our Lordship missed
 A golden opportunity: he could
 Have been the King of Scotland, had he dared.

VELZEN

With you, of course, as general! How can
 A man control an army that cannot
 Control his niece, a black-haired slut that whines
 And pouts and rolls her arse and licks her lips.

AMSTEL

Now listen here, my man! You should not talk
 Of whining sluts in rut: you married one!
 Your Maud is Holland's greatest whore, who's known
 By many men in intimate detail.

FLORIS

I am impressed by all this eloquence
 But now that we are friends again perhaps
 The Bishop will agree to let us start
 The hunt with falcons that he promised us.

BISHOP

Of course, of course, dear children, go in peace.

Scene V

*A room in Floris' castle.
The Friar. Enter Roderick.*

RODERICK

Oh Father, Father, help, our Count has been
Imprisoned!

FRIAR

What! What did you say?

RODERICK

He has
Been taken prisoner by that insane
And Godforsaken bunch of barons that
Is led by Amstel and by Velzen and
That has been prompted by the Bishop of
Utrecht.

FRIAR

My God! Where have they taken him?

RODERICK

To Amstel's castle, near the Zuyderzee.

FRIAR

Please tell me, calmly but precisely, what
You saw.

RODERICK

It happened yesterday. It was
A brilliant autumn day. The air was fresh,

The sky was clear, the sun was bright, the leaves
 Were not yet falling from the trees. The Count
 Had risen from that so-called meal of peace
 With Amstel, Velzen and the Bishop. He
 Appears, on horseback, at the palace gate,
 Surrounded by the others and their retinue.
 A single servant rides by Floris' side.
 I follow at some distance, near enough
 To see and hear, as all of us ride down
 A path to where the hunt will start. The men
 Have drunk a lot; they must have quarreled for
 They ride in heavy silence near the Count,
 A rancorous expression on their face.
 The Count alone sits loosely on his horse.
 A smile flits now and then about his mouth
 As he looks at the sullen louts around.
 No sound is heard except the horses' hooves,
 The clanking of the arms, a dog that yelps
 As Velzen hits it with his sword, a glum
 And surly look appearing in his eyes.
 The Count in black, a hooded falcon sits
 Upon his wrist, his only weapon is
 A sword. And still no word is said until
 We meet an old and half-mad woman who
 Is standing at the forest edge, a pile
 Of wood upon her back. She lifts her arm,
 It's like a dry and crooked stick, and points
 At Floris: 'Falconer beware the time
 The Falcon leaves your wrist', she screeches and
 I feel a shudder going down my spine.
 Count Floris stops his horse, his face is pale,
 He asks the witch the meaning of her words.
 The woman cackles but does not reply.
 'Annoy some other people', Amstel says,
 'Or I shall have you burned'. The woman turns
 And looks at Amstel from her lowered eyes.
 'The falcon's hood will soon be taken off'
 She cries and cackles, disappearing in

The wood - and heavy-hearted we go on.
 At last we are about to reach the heath.
 At last our hunt can start, when suddenly
 We find ourselves surrounded by a large
 And well-armed company that bears
 The colours of that traitor Amstel whom
 Count Floris faces quietly. He says:
 'And where do you propose that we should ride?'
 In answer Amstel lays his hands upon
 The reins of Floris' horse. He bites his words:
 'You'll ride wherever we shall tell you to'.
 Now Velzen draws his horse towards the side
 Where Floris holds the falcon, grasps the bird
 And says: 'By God, you are our prisoner'.
 On hearing this Count Floris reaches for
 His sword, but Velzen is too quick: he draws
 His own and says: 'By God, I'll split your skull
 Down to your teeth'. He would have done just that,
 Had Amstel not restrained his arm. The man
 That rode by Floris' side attempts to free
 The Count. He is struck down by twenty blows.
 Count Floris turns around and shouts at me:
 'Be off', he cries, 'and save yourself'. It would
 Have been impossible to fight that crowd.
 It was with difficulty that I got
 Away. I rode throughout the night, and now
 I'm here. Oh Father, what to do?

FRIAR

Go raise
 The peasantry - go straightaway and tell
 The peasants that live in the neighbourhood
 Of Amstel's castle that the time has come
 At which they must repay the Count for all
 His benefits. They must surround the place
 Where Floris is now held and see that none
 Can leave - I shall go there myself. Now go-
 Be off.

Roderick exit.

My God, take pity on us all.

Scene VI

*A place near Amstel's castle.
Amstel, Velzen, Floris bound. Soldiers.*

VELZEN

I think your plan is wrong. We should have killed
Him on the spot. Why take him all the way
To England, when a single blow would save
Us all this trouble? Don't forget not one
Of all the nobles here would come to his
Support. His nearest friend is now in France.

AMSTEL

Your thinking still is somewhat primitive.
Do not forget that somebody must take
His place and neither you nor I would be
Acceptable as Count of Holland to
The rest of the nobility. In fact,
The only candidate is now the boy
That has been left at Edward's Court, and since
He is too young he will need tutors and
Advisors, which is something that might be
Of interest and profit to such men
As us. But Edward will not let him go
Except if we will yield his father in
Exchange. Besides, the Bishop Antony
Made promises of gold.

FLORIS

You stupid fools!

AMSTEL

Shut up, you swine! Let somebody make sure
He doesn't talk again! Or, better yet,
I'll see to that myself.

So there, my man,
Take that into your mouth, a special bit
Of English wool, the wool you want so much
That you are ready to get rid of half
Of what you have (and that includes your son)
If only they agree to sell their wool
Within this land. I told you once before
The day would come I'd stuff it down your throat!
Here, tie it down a bit. He musn't choke:
His death would please me greatly, but not yet.

Enter soldier.

SOLDIER

My Lords, we have been followed by a mass
Of peasants, armed with pikes and staves, that is
Now rapidly approaching us.

VELZEN

You see,
You idiot, we should have stayed behind
Your castle's walls!

AMSTEL

Get on your horses, quick,
Get out of here and take him to the sea!

SOLDIER

Look, there, another troop of peasants, there!

AMSTEL

It seems the swine have come to help their herd.
I cannot stand their stench, so I am off!

Amstel and soldiers exeunt.

VELZEN

By God, this is the time I've waited for-
 You bastard - finally I've got you in
 My hands and now you'll get what you deserve-
 You doublecrossing scum - take that and that-

stabs Floris twice

That is for Maud, whom you defiled, you swine-
 And that and that

stabs Floris twice

that is for Amstel's niece
 And for his cousin John-
 they're getting near-
 I haven't finished yet-
 take that and that

stabs Floris twice

That's for betraying us - the Bishop of Utrecht
 Sends you his kind regards - and that

stabs Floris a seventh time

 is for
 Your son - yes - as you've lived so will you die-

Velzen exit.

Enter the Friar, Roderick and peasants.

FRIAR

Oh Floris, Floris, do not leave us yet!

FLORIS

The sword indeed - has never left - my house-

FRIAR

And then to think that it was I who made
 Him go to that disastrous meeting in
 Utrecht!

Enter John, Duke of Brabant.

Why, Duke of Brabant, it's too late
 To ask for twenty thousand pounds, but still,
 You should be satisfied, for he himself
 Has now become repayment of your bond.

JOHN

The King of France has sent his army to the North
And Robert of Artois, his general,
Has met the Flemish on the battlefield.
The Flemish army has been utterly destroyed.

Paris

October 1974-May 1975