

Plumes of Power:

Melchior de Hondecoeter, William III of
Orange, and the Advent of the Estate Piece

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Introduction

The paintings of Melchior de Hondecoeter¹ delight viewers with their energetic depictions of avian life in the poultry yard or on the terrace, but De Hondecoeter has not been given the serious attention that his artwork deserves. His work is not unknown, and it is easy to find tote bags and magnets adorned with his spectacular birds, yet there has been surprisingly little scholarship devoted to the painter.

The last decade, however, has seen an increase of art historical scholarship on De Hondecoeter, with the Rijksmuseum publishing a booklet in 2008 by Marringje Rikken, several articles by Lisanne Wepler in 2010, 2011, and 2013, and plans for a catalogue raisonnée and monograph from Joy Kearney, as well as several articles and book chapters by the same author. In 2014 Lisanne Wepler completed a dissertation dealing with the artist, titled “*Bilderzählungen in der Vogelmalerei des niederländischen Barocks.*” Earlier contributions include two articles by Maarten Van den Wijngaart in 1994 and a (unpublished) graduate thesis completed by Els Vlieger in 1992 titled “*Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d’Hondecoeter.*”

While all of these writers have recognized the innovative nature of De Hondecoeter’s specialization in depicting birds in park-like settings, none have adequately addressed the implications of this invention in terms of visualizations of power. In her essay “Melchior de Hondecoeter in the Service of William III—Royal Taste and Patronage in the Dutch Golden Age” in a 2011 exhibition catalog, *Collecting and the Princely Apartment*, Kearney (like numerous other scholars) has promoted the notion that De Hondecoeter’s paintings are little more than decorative celebrations of hunting and collecting. Wepler, on the other hand, has published several compelling papers arguing that De Hondecoeter pictured Aesopian fables. She elucidates the captivating narrative

¹ Melchior De Hondecoeter’s name appears in many variations in historical texts, and in recent scholarship he is referred to by his last name as “Hondecoeter,” “d’Hondecoeter,” or “De Hondecoeter.” I have chosen to use the latter form to simplify the spelling and pronunciation for an international audience and in keeping with modern Dutch naming conventions. To this end, I have retained the simplest form and English version of each name throughout the text. Many of the names and titles of the key figures changed during the time range covered, but will remain in the form in which they are introduced in the text, for the sake of clarity and cohesion.

quality of the interactions between the birds in his paintings and identifies clever adjustments in the depiction of the fables that would have surely delighted the informed viewer. Wepler's analysis establishes a precedent for considering De Hondecoeter's paintings in this light and hints that additional layers of narrative and iconography lie beneath the varnish. Building on Wepler's analytical approach, this thesis sets out to answer the question of how the depictions of architecture contained within the paintings by Melchior de Hondecoeter commissioned by William III relate to the architectural settings they are contained within, and how this displays the subjugation of nature in the context of the commission.

I will define and analyze the estate piece, the genre that De Hondecoeter invented and mastered, but has up until this point been overlooked. The estate piece embodies the theme of man versus nature and the culture of collecting. The pendant paintings *A Hunter's Bag on a Terrace* (fig.1.0) and *A Hunter's Bag near a Tree Stump with a Magpie*² (fig.1.1) are masterful depictions of traditional hunting scenes, allegory, and elements of the estate piece, so will receive particularly close attention. In addition to these two, I will concentrate on a selection of De Hondecoeter's other paintings for Stadholder-King William III, reassessing the paintings as they stood within their settings in William's country houses, and especially the ways in which this framework relates to the implied context within the paintings. By doing this, I will cast light on the specific paintings for William III and more generally, on De Hondecoeter's larger body of work.

Therefore, this will be the first paper to focus on the content of De Hondecoeter's paintings for the three country houses. In addition, no one has yet explored the interplay of nature and architecture that De Hondecoeter developed and in which he specialized. This genre has barely been defined, and never been analyzed to any extent. Descriptions of "birds in a park-like setting" abound, which, although accurate, is neither informative nor straightforward.

² In chapter 4 I will make a case for renaming these paintings *The Presumptuous Peacock* and *The Courageous Magpie*, respectively.



Fig.1.0 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *A Hunter's Bag on a Terrace*, here renamed 'The Presumptuous Peacock,' ca. 1678. Oil on canvas, 211 x 137 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig.1.1 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *A Hunter's Bag near a Tree Stump with a Magpie*, known as 'The Contemplative Magpie,' here renamed 'The Courageous Magpie,' ca. 1678. Oil on canvas, 215 x 134 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

I have coined the term “estate piece” for these works by De Hondecoeter. This term acknowledges that birds are not the exclusive inhabitants of the pictures, and the use of “estate” in my definition not only implicates the controlled nature seen in these parks but also recognizes the privilege and power inherent in this type of setting. The terraces depicted are not untouched landscapes, but rather private holdings of the elite, an extension of noble families and the exclusive architecture they inhabit.

In order to decipher the relationship between the real and depicted architecture and how these communicate power, I will analyze the image-building campaigns of William III and will investigate how De Hondecoeter's paintings enhanced William's reputation and also correspond to the design schemes of his houses. By exploring the gardens, menageries, and buildings of William III in the context of his design influences and contemporary thought on gardens, and by utilizing the established symbolic narratives of De Hondecoeter, I will provide a framework in which to interpret the pictures made for William's houses. I will analyze these depictions of man's dominance over nature (a message that is pregnant with royal ambition) while taking the paintings' placement within the architecture into account.

This analysis will be conducted by adopting Michael Baxandall's concept of the period eye³ in order to reconstruct a historic viewer's understanding of the politics, houses, and gardens of William III and their relationship to the paintings of De Hondecoeter. Reconstructing this model of cultural context is key in determining what visual skills the intended viewer used to interpret the paintings within the nexus of collecting and scientific knowledge. By looking at representational traditions, political building projects, and the practice of collecting exotica it is possible analyze a small subset of De Hondecoeter's paintings which all contain various symbolic or allegorical elements related to the Prince of Orange.

As the paintings were conceived for the three palaces, this thesis will also research the original setting of each painting (to the extent that this is known) and will contextualize each within the overarching architectural scheme. The design style of William III is notably comprehensive, therefore I will pay special attention to the significance of architecture and gardens as culturally articulated space. This thesis will contribute to righting the *indecorous* dismissal of De Hondecoeter's ingenuity through much of his reception history.

³ Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*.

An Explanation of choices

William likely owned more paintings by De Hondecoeter, but I have limited myself to five paintings for the sake of brevity and because these were undisputedly owned by William. They are diverse, as well, in De Hondecoeter's oeuvre: two paintings with a focus on exotic birds, one with waterbirds and one without; a pair of hunting scenes; and an unusual painting of non-avian exotic animals.

I have chosen to use various terms, both modern and contemporary, to represent the historic Dutch Republic — the Netherlands, the Low Countries, United Provinces, and so forth. By these, I mean the provinces over which William III ruled as stadholder, or which were culturally associated. By Holland, I refer to the historical province of Holland or the economic, political, and cultural power that made Holland a leader in the Dutch Republic. Additionally, William III was, in fact, stadholder of only five of the seven provinces: Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel. The provinces of Friesland and Groningen were under the stadholdership of Henry Casimir II, Prince of Nassau-Dietz, and later his son, John William Friso. However, I will refer to William as the stadholder of the Dutch Republic as he was the stadholder of the majority of the provinces and certainly their most powerful leader and significant political figure during his stadholdership.

1.0 Chapter 1: The Who: Melchior and William

In order to understand the historical context in which De Hondecoeter produced his works, an introduction to the artist and his major stylistic influences in the tradition of animal painting is first needed. By analyzing overlapping legends about the lives of De Hondecoeter and the artist Otto Marseus van Schrieck, it is possible to explore the methods and naturalism of the artists as understood by the historical viewer. As “types” provide language and context for new information, in addition to looking at these pictures in the context of animal painting it is useful to outline the ways in which De Hondecoeter's paintings could be considered history paintings as well as their commonalities with still-life paintings. Paintings focusing on birds or other animals are less

prevalent than major, established genres, so discussing De Hondecoeter's work in these terms provides an entry point into and terminology with which to investigate them. It also provides some of the context in which a contemporary beholder may have interpreted them, a viewpoint imperative to adopt in order to understand De Hondecoeter's paintings. Next, as his paintings reveal him to be a careful observer of bird behavior and anatomy, I will interrogate De Hondecoeter's ornithological knowledge, as well as that of the intended beholders of his pictures. While empirical evidence would have been a part of this body of knowledge, the contemporary viewer would have had a familiarity with fables and other literary interpretations of birds; therefore, it is crucial to examine the literary references that have been established to have influenced De Hondecoeter. Finally, I will introduce the Stadholder-King William III, for whom De Hondecoeter painted.

1.1 Melchior De Hondecoeter, Painter of Birds

Melchior de Hondecoeter (1636-1695)⁴ came to painting birds by way of heritage. He was at least a fourth generation artist; his great-grandfather, Nicolaes de Hondecoeter, was a painter in Delft.⁵ His grandfather, Gillis de Hondecoeter (ca. 1580-1638) specialized in painting animals pictured in broad landscapes (fig.1.2). His father, Gijsbert de Hondecoeter (1604-1653), honed this theme further with his paintings of barnyard fowl — the animals grew larger while the landscape shrank (fig.1.3). Next came Melchior, born in 1636 in Utrecht. He was only 17 years old when his father died, so he received much of his artistic training from his uncle through marriage, Jan Baptist Weenix (1621-1659), along with his cousin Jan Weenix (1640-1719).⁶ The elder Weenix was also an experienced animal painter, and specialized in Italianate scenes and gamepieces.

⁴ Biographical details taken from: Bredius, *Künstler-Inventare*; Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*; Vlieger, "Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d'Hondecoeter;" Van den Wijngaart, "Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636?-1695) I."

⁵ Bredius, *Künstler-Inventare*, vol. 4, 1216-1218.

⁶ Van den Wijngaart, "Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636?-1695) I," 5.



Fig. 1.2 Gillis Claesz. de Hondecoeter, *Rocky Landscape with Deer and Goats*, 1620. Oil on panel, 17.7 x 26.5 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 1.3 Gijsbert Gillisz. de Hondecoeter, *Rooster with Chickens*, 1652. Oil on canvas, 72 x 86 cm. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

Following his stay in Rome and membership in the Bentveughels, Jan Baptist Weenix painted many Italianate scenes characterized by architectural elements. Clearly this subject matter and the increased monumentality of his paintings was aided by the Flemish, Italian, and French influences he encountered in the Bentveughels.⁷ This classicism passed through Weenix's studio and can be seen in De Hondecoeter's paintings; it is likely that the architectural details in Weenix's paintings were instrumental in De Hondecoeter's later development of the gardens that define his estate pieces. One also notes De Hondecoeter's frequent use of his uncle's invention, the floating feather (fig.1.4).⁸



Fig. 1.4 Jan Baptist Weenix, *Still Life with a Dead Swan*, ca. 1651. Oil on canvas, 184.5 x 187.3 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

⁷ Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 46-47.

⁸ In fact, his reputation for this element surpassed his teacher's — one painting he produced for William III, now in the Rijksmuseum, bears this name.

De Hondecoeter's artistic lineage also had Flemish elements: his grandfather Gillis de Hondecoeter was born in Antwerp and later moved to Utrecht, where his painting style was influenced by the Flemish animal painter Roelant Savery.⁹ Animal painting in general had roots in the Southern Netherlands and this Flemish subject matter and style can be seen in the De Hondecoeter family.¹⁰ Among other forms of animal painting, Gillis de Hondecoeter produced paradise paintings, which originated in Flanders.

Paradise painting is a genre that, under the pretext of edenic or heavenly landscapes, fills a scene with a large variety of animals, including exotic and sometimes mythological creatures. First and foremost, these are animal paintings or landscapes, but operate under the guise of narrative found in mythological or history painting; often included in the background is something to provide the animals with a context for their gathering, for example, an ark, or Adam and Eve (fig.1.5). These figures are subordinate, but ground the painting in a pictorial reality through locality.¹¹ Melchior de Hondecoeter did not rely on these narrative structures but painted the birds front and center and developed a new kind of painting by placing his subjects in a garden setting.

The classical and Flemish influences in De Hondecoeter's background contribute to an overall more opulent and decorative style than that practiced by many of his colleagues, and this appealed to the patricians who collected his work. The artist borrowed compositions and imagery from Flemish painters such as Frans Snyders, Jan van Kessel, and Peter van Boucle.¹² He owned multiple paintings by Frans Snyders¹³ which is significant because of the developments that Snyders made in treating animal painting and depicting fables.¹⁴

Following his education under Jan Baptist Weenix, De Hondecoeter spent his working life in The Hague and in Amsterdam. He was an active member in The Hague

⁹ Houbraken, *De Grootte Schouburgh*, v. 1, 57.

¹⁰ Wepler, "Fabulous Birds: Melchior d'Hondecoeter as Storyteller," 35.

¹¹ Tzeuschler Lurie, "Gillis Van Coninxloo: A Landscape with Venus and Adonis," 257.

¹² Wepler, *Bilderzählungen in der Vogelmalerei des niederländischen Barocks*, 165-175.

¹³ Vlieger, "Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d'Hondecoeter," 18.

¹⁴ Wepler, "Stories in Pictures from the World of Birds: The Courageous Magpie," 92.



Fig 1.5 Gillis Claesz. De Hondecoeter. *The Garden of Eden*, 1635.
Oil on panel, 96.5 x 143.5 cm. Jeffrey Tillou Antiques, Litchfield.

artist society *Confrerie Pictura*, joining in 1659¹⁵ and, curiously, submitting a seascape with ships as the required painting to hang in their headquarters, which he later replaced with a more typically De Hondecoeter bird painting.¹⁶ He was nominated as a governor of the fraternity in 1662, but likely moved to Amsterdam within the year.¹⁷

De Hondecoeter found success not only in the respect of his peers, he also created a market for bird painting and his work was in high demand among the fashionable.¹⁸ His most prestigious commissions were for Stadholder William III. William did not patronize artists until he appointed Robert Du Val as court painter in 1682; nonetheless, he bought and commissioned paintings and took great interest in the decoration of his houses.¹⁹

¹⁵ Gram, *De Schildersconfrerie Pictura en hare Academie van Beeldende Kunsten te 's Gravenhage, 1682-1882*, 20.

¹⁶ Vlieger, "Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d'Hondecoeter," 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁹ Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 146.

1.2 Science and Myth, Stilled Life and Method

De Hondcoeter lived during the rise of the scientific age, when anatomical accuracy and naturalistic depictions were increasingly valued.²⁰ There was a huge influx of exotic species and artifacts in Holland, and money to be spent on such items (and paintings of them). Much of this wealth stemmed from the success of the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company (the VOC and the WIC²¹) and the rise of the middle class. The exploration, colonization, and subjugation of distant lands poured interesting things into the Netherlands, and the time was ripe to study them.²²

De Hondcoeter's attention to behavioral details and anatomy reveal a scientific mind — the birds he painted are morphologically correct and can be identified. While there is no evidence to suggest the artist was involved in the scientific study of birds beyond his objective of realistic painting, he kept company with those who moved between the fields of art and science.

De Hondcoeter knew and likely picked up some of the same traits from painter and naturalist Otto Marseus van Schrieck.²³ The former created at least six *sottobosco* paintings, an invention of Marseus' that consists of a close-up of creatures interacting on the forest floor among botanically accurate plants and mushrooms (fig.1.6, fig.1.7). De Hondcoeter must have worked closely with Marseus; not only is the imagery similar, but De Hondcoeter appears to have applied the same delicate technique for which Marseus is famous: transferring the colored dust of real butterfly wings to the wet canvas by making an impression.²⁴ He abandoned the genre, but continued to use a sponge

²⁰ Seelig, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck: Reflections of Art, Nature, and Science," 15.

²¹ Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie and West-Indische Compagnie

²² Westermann, *The Art of the Dutch Republic 1585-1718*, 112-116.

²³ Hildebrecht, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1619/20--1678) and the Nature Piece," 157.

²⁴ I have found no sources that reference De Hondcoeter's use of butterfly wings, but his depictions of them (for example, in *Animals and Plants*) exhibit signs of fading and in-painting that are similar to Marseus van Schrieck's butterflies. Technical analysis would be necessary to confirm this suspicion. For Marseus van Schrieck's development of this technique, see Hildebrecht, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1619/20--1678) and the Nature Piece," 4.



Fig. 1.6 Otto Marseus van Schrieck, *Forest floor with Thistles and Snake*, ca. 1665. Oil on canvas, 68.4 x 53 cm. Staatliches Museum, Schwerin.



Fig. 1.7 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Animals and Plants*, ca. 1668. Oil on canvas, 66 x 52.5 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

technique to achieve a moss-like effect. There are also similarities among some of the plants De Hondecoeter depicted in the foreground of some of his later bird paintings.

There is another similarity between these two that is less visible to the naked eye: they both paint animal scenes that contain meanings accessible only to the privileged viewer. In Marseus' case, that viewer would have been scientifically-minded and steeped in natural history. For such a viewer, Marseus' paintings would have vibrated with tension: anatomically correct, naturalistically depicted snakes holding themselves in impossible positions and behaving in unnatural ways.²⁵ In De Hondecoeter's case, the viewer would

²⁵ For example, Marseus painted snakes chasing butterflies (not a part of their diet) or interacting with species that come from different habitats, knowledge that would have been available to the snake enthusiast, such as the Medici, who collected a number of his paintings. Hildebrecht, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1619/20--1678) and the Nature Piece," 58, 141.

have been a bird enthusiast and/or one well-versed in classical literature. Only a collector or specialist would have known the extreme rarity of the species in many of his paintings, some of which the artist may never have seen alive or in person. Moreover, the literary-minded viewer would have known to look for the emblematic fables that are embedded in many of his paintings based on their familiarity with the stories that must have inspired De Hondecoeter.²⁶ In Arnold Houbraken's entry on De Hondecoeter in *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, he offers another comparison between these two painters:

Just as people said of the painter, Otto Marceus, that he raised his snakes for his use, and that they were so accustomed to lying still until he had finished with them; so it is said of Hondecoeter that he trained one of his roosters in particular: that he need only be placed by his easel, and then the artist with his maulstick, could arrange his head upwards or downwards, to the left or to the right, or with flapping wings as if he were moving forward, and he would stand stock-still until his master indicated that he had at least for the moment, done his service in standing still.²⁷

Houbraken writes that the snakes allowed Marseus to pose them, and that they held their position for him while he painted them, and that De Hondecoeter similarly handled roosters, both possessing a spell-binding ability to subdue and possibly befriend an aggressive animal. While the truthfulness of Houbraken's statements is unlikely, the reality of it is also irrelevant, as the claim relates a truth about both painters — the exquisite realism of their depictions of the animals they specialized in painting, respectively.²⁸ If not the literal truth, then, what is the purpose of this anecdote? Firstly, it highlights the

²⁶ Westermann, *The Art of the Dutch Republic 1585-1718*, 55-57.

²⁷ “Gelyk als men van den Konstschilder Otto Marceus zeit: *Dat hy slangen tot zyn gebruik opvoede, en de zelve gewende in zoodanigen gedaanten stil te blyven leggen, tot hy zyn volkomen gebruik daar van gehad had; zoo word ook van Hondekoeter verteld, dat hy een Haan inzonderheid daar toe gewend had: Dat hy den zelve maar zette by zyn Ezel, en dan door zyn schilderstokje het hoofd opwaards, of neerwaards, het lyf lings of rechts gedraait, of met wapperende wieken, of als voortgaande schikte, die dan in zulken gedaante stokstil bleef staan, tot dat het opstaan van zyn meester te kenne gaf, dat hy voor dien tyd met dus te staan uitgediend had.*” Houbraken, *De Groote Schouburgh*, v. 3, 72, trans, Hildebrecht, “Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece,” 158.

²⁸ This is an example of the concept of *the artist as magician*, a device used by artists' biographers since at least the Hellenistic period of ancient Greece, as outlined by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz in the 1930s. The artist is depicted as a genius who holds a unique power over nature. Kris and Kurz *Legend, Myth, and the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*.

realism De Hondecoeter was able to depict, especially in the movement of the animals. Secondly, it declares that he painted from life, evidenced by an intimate and intense level of observation. His paintings seem to reveal experience in front of living birds; De Hondecoeter likely kept birds in the garden he rented, but it is not known what varieties.²⁹

Another interpretation comes from Houbraken's attribution of this power over nature to Marseus van Schrieck. Douglas Hildebrecht argues that the posing of live snakes could in fact relate to the studio practice of using a posable wooden mannequin. If so, he argues, this directly substitutes the painting of human figures and history painting with the painting of animals.³⁰ Similarly, as identical claims are made about their studio practices, this argument can be applied to Houbraken's anecdote about De Hondecoeter. Could it be that De Hondecoeter's replacement of human characters with birds creates a new type of history painting? In his poultry yard paintings, especially, birds display a range of human emotion: jealousy, rage, fear, consternation, attraction, et cetera. The large scale of the paintings and the dynamism of the fowl must have amused these privileged viewers as ways in which De Hondecoeter subtly elevated the barnyard or poked fun at the human antics portrayed in history painting.

1.3 History Painting and Still-Life

While De Hondecoeter also painted game pieces, most of his extant paintings are of living birds interacting, usually in a poultry yard or in an estate piece.³¹ By the 1620s, depictions of animals previously relegated to margins and backgrounds were forefront as subjects in the established genre of animal painting.³² However, the narrative quality of the action and communication between the birds painted by De Hondecoeter and the

²⁹ Vlieger, "Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d'Hondecoeter," 18. Marseus van Schrieck, on the other hand, is known for certain to have kept live snakes on his land on the outskirts of Amsterdam. Hildebrecht, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece," 149.

³⁰ Hildebrecht, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece," 147-153.

³¹ While usually described as "birds in a park-like setting," I propose shortening the terminology and clarifying this genre as the "estate piece." I analyze the genre and justify my term choice in chapter 4.

³² Wepler, "Fabulous Birds: Melchior d'Hondecoeter as Storyteller," 34.

similarity of the exotic birds to collected objects suggests it is relevant to analyze his bird paintings through the lens of the more standardized genres to which they also bear resemblance: history painting and still-life.

In relation to the former, the birds are anthropomorphized while still interacting in a bird-like manner.³³ The scenes are high in drama and picture love triangles, power-plays and outside threats, all elements that work in making a large-scale history painting dynamic and captivating. For example, one can almost hear the aggressive squawk of the peafowl pair in *The Threatened Hen* (fig.1.8). The painting captures the instant of their threat; they are in conflict with the hen, yet two of the hen's chicks still rest beneath her,



Fig. 1.8 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Two Peacocks Threatening a Hen with Chicks*, Known as *The Threatened Hen*, 1681. Oil on canvas, 115.5 x 141 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

³³ This anthropomorphization was not without critics. In 1888, Wilhelm von Bode highly praised De Hondecoeter's luminous colors but criticized him for imbuing animals with such human-like emotion. Bode, "Die grossherzogliche Gemäldegalerie zu Schwerin," 27-28.

others continue to peck for seeds or bugs, and only the two chicks nearest the hen and the peahen seem to take part in the dispute. The various actions of the chicks enhance the drama and suddenness of the mood change — perhaps it is akin to a poultry version of Caravaggio’s *Calling of Saint Matthew* (fig.1.9), in which Christ gestures towards the tax collector even as his feet have already turned to leave.³⁴ The hen looks at the two chicks who are in conflict with the peachick; she spreads her wings as she attempts to gather her children, apparently concerned first with bustling them to safety before returning the direct challenge of the peahen or the peacock who stands behind his mate with his beak ajar to scream at a pigeon.



Fig. 1.9 Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1599–1600. Oil on canvas, 322 x 340 cm. San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

³⁴ Puttfarken, “Caravaggio’s ‘Story of St Matthew’: A challenge to the conventions of painting,” 169-170.

Another example of poultry in the midst of a dramatic encounter is *Birds in a Park* (fig.2.0). Two roosters and a hen take the lead roles: the dark rooster in the foreground of the painting crows triumphantly while the red rooster flees the scene, casting a glance back over his shoulder. The hen (the apparent reason for their quarrel) stands firmly between them with her chicks milling about her feet. She seems to be scolding the red rooster as he exits, which leaves the larger narrative open to the imagination. The interactions between the animals are based on the natural behavior of their species, but are simultaneously relatable as human-like. There is a strong sense of storytelling in his paintings and De Hondecoeter displays his careful attention to the movement and anatomy of his subjects. His experience in the poultry yard is clear, and his paintings are



Fig. 2.0 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Birds in a Park*, 1686. Oil on canvas, 112 x 140 cm.
The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

imbued with realism. Like those of many artists, his paintings are said to be done “naer ’t leven,”³⁵ which may be understood as a boast of a painting’s lifelike effect.³⁶ His paintings are large scale, making animals larger than life and giving them a treatment typically reserved for history painting.

De Hondecoeter may have had access to some birds, but they were certainly not holding poses for the artist as Houbraken claims. It is possible that some of the birds he saw and sketched only once, or painted from preserved specimens, wooden models, or simply copied from other sources. More so than the other birds he painted, the exotic species tend to appear rigid and disconnected from their environments, which supports the premise that he had limited access to these birds or never saw them himself. His apparent unfamiliarity corresponds with the rarest and most recently imported birds in Europe. The pelican, for example, only occurs in a single pose, though in a number of paintings, which indicates he used a single two-dimensional model.³⁷ De Hondecoeter depicts local birds most expressively, but many of these are also repeated in the same pose or in reverse, as if copied and pasted from drawings or prints on to the paintings. Occasionally the reuse of motifs leads to inconsistencies within a composition. Most notably, there is a particular depiction of a pigeon that often reappears, sometimes in situations that make little sense, as when it seems to be unnaturally coasting when it should be taking flight.³⁸

Crispijn van de Passe writes in his 1643 drawing instructional,

I, as well as other fine masters, such as the famed Scholten, etc., have discovered that all winged creatures (be they wild or tame) are too mobile to be drawn or painted. Thus an author, having made a sketch of his action on paper or on panel, after having first shuttered his windows allowing only a single light to enter, nails the bird, which is dead, onto a block in such a position as he intends to draw or paint it, this method making it considerably easier to develop his intention. Those birds which he is unable to obtain dead he

³⁵ Swan, “*Ad vivum, naer het leven*, from the life: defining a mode of representation,” 354-357.

³⁶ “...the *nae t’leven* claim may have been intended less as a truth about practice and more as boast, a boast the message of which is not ‘from life’ but ‘as if from life.’” Berger, *Caterpillars*, 71.

³⁷ In order to demonstrate this, I have created an image comparison slider and applied it to three paintings, see chapter 3. It is available at <http://joechrismans.co/plumesofpower.html>. See Appendix B for screenshots and additional information.

³⁸ Vlieger, “*Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d’Hondecoeter*,” 32.

*fastens with strings, for it is almost impossible to create them from memory, and, in order to depict them realistically after life, the arranger must pay attention to the natural movement of the bird. The rest is more easily learned by practice.*³⁹

Painting from restrained living birds is only recommended, therefore, if no dead model can be obtained. The movement may be sketched, but the preferred method of painting from life is painted from death. Among the items in the inventory taken following De Hondecoeter's death was an armature meant for a bird: "drie schilders esels en een galgh om vogels op te setten."⁴⁰ It is not clear if a living bird would have perched there, been restrained there, or if a dead bird would have been arranged. It is possible it was used for all three of these purposes. It is unlikely that he was able to obtain freshly deceased exotic birds to pose (at least not in the variety and quantity depicted in his paintings), so he would have had to observe living or stuffed birds and sketch from these, or the paintings and sketches made by others. As Van de Passe writes, *the rest is learned by practice*.

It is necessary to consider the implications of a phrase like "from the life" or "as if from life" and make clear distinctions — the artist saw birds, but did not arrange a physical scene and work in front of it, nor did he paint in a garden. The observer is presented with realistic looking birds, which is the heart of the comment. This ability is a rare gift, which makes it worthy of note, and Houbraken's narrative indicates he was exceptional in his craft. If not painted from life, but from the imagination, models, and pre-made sketches by the artist, the animals were assembled much in the way of still life paintings: flowers that bloom in different seasons converge to create a spectacular and fanciful bouquet.

Painters of floral still-lives also are often credited with painting *naar het leven*, but their bouquets were (at the time) impossible, as they depict flowers that did not bloom in the same season or that were too delicate to transport. They also tend to take gravity as a suggestion rather than the rule, with overflowing and top-heavy bouquets stuffed into too-tiny vases. De Hondecoeter's depictions of exotic birds function similarly — visually, they

³⁹ Van de Passe, *'t Licht der Teken en Schilderkonst*, as quoted in Hildebrecht, *Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece*, 152-153.

⁴⁰ Bredius, *Künstler-Inventare*, vol. 4, 1211.

are a collection, assembled by a collector and existing together only in the unnatural environment of a manmade landscape. In reality, they are a collection of species that do not belong together, selected for their beauty and exoticism and assembled by the artist from preparatory drawings. Upon visiting the menagerie at Versailles, the fabulist Jean de La Fontaine was especially impressed by the birds he saw there and praised the diversity and artifice of nature, comparing the animals to flowers.⁴¹ As Gerard de Lairesse recommended for still-life painting, the most beautiful and most rare subject matter has been chosen, as it is in this that the genre has merit of “beauty and goodness.”⁴²

In addition, and also as in still-life painting,⁴³ these exotic bird paintings represent an impressive collection that is not specific to the owner of the painting but rather assembled from the repertoire of the artist, as can be seen through the repetition of individual birds. They were intended to create an impression instead of a record of a collection of species or manicured gardens.

1.4 Ornithological Knowledge

Even if De Hondecoeter did not corral groups of birds together to sit for their portraits, it is clear he was very familiar with the behavior and movement of common birds. More than his other animal paintings, his poultry yards reveal an intimate knowledge of their behavior. The exotic species he painted are far less dramatic in their actions and more likely to be arranged in a manner that primarily displays their feathers, or stand in stoic poses not related to their behavior. He was most familiar with observing poultry, and it may be that his experience with more exotic birds was limited to just a few viewings or preserved specimens. A few extant studies give a glimpse into his process: for example, a sheet of sketches at the Rijksmuseum (fig.2.1)⁴⁴ as well as oil sketches of seven chicks in

⁴¹ Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier. *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West*, 34.

⁴² De Lairesse, *The Art of Painting*, trans. Fritsch, 548.

⁴³ Chong, “Contained Under the Name of Still Life: The Associations of Still-Life Painting,” in *Still-Life Painting from the Netherlands*, 29.

⁴⁴ The turkey in this sketch is similar to the one which appears in reverse in *A Hunter’s Bag on a Terrace*, see chapter 4.

various poses, which he appears to have used as a template for adding chicks to paintings (fig.2.2).



Fig. 2.1 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Sketches of a Composition and Different Birds*, ca. 1645 - ca. 1695. Chalk on paper, 371 x 313 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 2.2 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Seven Chicks*, ca. 1665 - ca. 1668. Oil on canvas, 32 x 38 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Whether restrained or dead, the armature for posing individual birds indicates the artist had real birds in his studio. While occasionally birds seem to be unnaturally pasted into the composition, as previously mentioned, there are clues within the paintings as to De Hondecoeter's ornithological knowledge. In the depiction of a pair of blue-crowned hanging parrots in *The Menagerie* (fig.2.3), the male hangs upside down. This is normal behavior for this species, and this accuracy would have been appreciated by an observer who also possessed this knowledge.

There is also a curious pairing in *The Menagerie*: two male gray-headed lovebirds are perched on the marble edge at the bottom of the painting. All of the other birds depicted in twos form pairs of male and female. Each of the paired birds in this painting are sexually dimorphic species, and shown to great advantage of their coloration and



Fig. 2.3 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *The Menagerie*, ca. 1690. Oil on canvas, 135 x 116.5 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

behavior. The gray-headed lovebird, also sexually dimorphic, is notoriously difficult to breed even in the 21st century,⁴⁵ which suggests it was one of the many birds imported and not hatched in captivity. Is it possible that De Hondecoeter only saw the male of this species, either housed together or one individual? It may be that this was an artistic

⁴⁵ Collar and Kirwan, “Grey-headed Lovebird (*Agapornis canus*),” in *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Online edition.

choice, but it may also signify his limited knowledge of this species, just as the hanging parrot indicates knowledge of behavior unique to that species.⁴⁶

His later paintings teem with an exoticism that would please any viewer, but also contain seventeenth-century Easter eggs, if you will, for someone who had inside knowledge of exotic animals and bird behavior. To understand the ways in which De Hondecoeter's audience may have interpreted the birds in his paintings, it is necessary to investigate the potential extent of their ornithological knowledge. Those who would have seen his paintings were likely wealthy enough to be in the market for such paintings,⁴⁷ had access to the houses of those who owned them, or were other artists. While the general public would have had the opportunity to see some exotic animals, at places like Jan Westerhoff's Blauw Jan inn, which housed a menagerie, it can be assumed that the purchasers of De Hondecoeter's paintings, wealthy merchants and patricians,⁴⁸ had greater access to exotic animals than the average person. Furthermore they would have been well acquainted with the use of birds as a device for depicting moral messages or human behavior, as this had been a feature of emblem books for nearly 150 years and had appeared in large format since the 1620s.

While empirical knowledge was taking precedence in the ways in which the world was perceived, the beholders of De Hondecoeter's paintings would also have been familiar with older ways of looking at and interpreting imagery of the natural world. Namely, birds were associated with the heavenly sphere and thought to lack original sin, as they flew in the heavens.⁴⁹ According to paradise painting and poetry, Eden was populated with brightly colored birds.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ This is not the place to perform a detailed catalogue of the birds and their behavior in De Hondecoeter's paintings, but since he took such care in the accuracy of and consistency in his depictions, such a study could shed light on his artistic choices versus his ornithological knowledge or contemporary beliefs on various species.

⁴⁷ Vlieger, "Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d'Hondecoeter," 77-78.

⁴⁸ Van den Wijngaart, "Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636?-1695) I," 4.

⁴⁹ Hildebrecht, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece," 348-349.

⁵⁰ For example, the poems of DuBartas and Milton. *Ibid.*

1.5 Literary Influence

Traditionally, while admired for his colors, composition, and skills of observation, De Hondecoeter, “the Raphael of the animals,” has been considered a ‘decorative’ painter.⁵¹ Lisanne Wepler’s recent research has made significant progress in rejecting this simplification of De Hondecoeter, through the case she presents regarding his depictions of fables and proverbs; the following sections outline three of these literary devices. This is not to say that there had been no previous recognition of fables in his work, but it was very limited or only mentioned as an aside in relation to his oeuvre.

The Bird Concert

De Hondecoeter’s bird concerts, where an owl stands over sheet music and beats time to a presumably screeching cast of birds, correspond to literary sources and reference the practice of using an owl as a lure.⁵² Smaller birds attempt to chase off the immobilized owl during the day, so that they cannot be preyed upon at night. Thus enticed, they are caught in a snare or on birdlime that has been applied to nearby branches.⁵³ De Hondecoeter depicts birds trapped on birdlime in his bird concerts, and sometimes the tether that restrains the owl as well. This theme corresponds with the proverb “every bird is known by its song,” warning us that, like the birds, we are known by our words. De Hondecoeter’s Flemish forerunner, Frans Snyders, was the first to develop the theme of bird concerts and to bring fables and proverbs from paper to canvas.⁵⁴

Emblem books had been popular since the sixteenth century and the viewing public had grown accustomed to recognizing other instances of this imagery in interpreting paintings.⁵⁵ In particular the etchings of Marcus Gheeraerts, published to correspond with fables written by Edewaerd de Dene in *De warachtighe Fabuluen der Dieren*,

⁵¹ Vlieger, “Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d’Hondecoeter,” 38.

⁵² Wepler, *Bilderzählungen in der Vogelmalerei des niederländischen Barocks*, 109-118.

⁵³ Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 38.

⁵⁴ Wepler, “Fabulous Birds: Melchior d’Hondecoeter as Storyteller,” 40.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

provided both artists and observers with rich content. Gheeraerts' images were republished or used as models for other prints through the seventeenth century, greatly disseminating the imagery as well as the method of looking at and interpreting animal paintings.⁵⁶

The Raven Stripped of Borrowed Feathers

De Hondecoeter also painted a fable depicting the raven stripped of his stolen feathers, several of which are extant,⁵⁷ including one commissioned for William III's palace Soestdijk, now at Het Loo. The fable exists in several versions, but in short, the crow or magpie gathers and adorns himself with the beautiful feathers of the peacock and other birds. The birds discover the imposter and pluck back their feathers from the fraudster. De Hondecoeter was likely the first to depict the fable of the raven in paint, and he increased the dynamism and complexity of the emblematic image significantly and imaginatively.⁵⁸ De Hondecoeter played with his source material: he transferred the behavior of some characters to others and added a rooster to confront the thief.⁵⁹ The artist not only introduced this subject to easel painting, but combined multiple versions of the narrative into one image. He was well aware that the iconography would be recognized by the beholder regardless of the version with which they were familiar, and they would be delighted to pick apart the narrative just as the small birds in the painting retrieved their feathers.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid, 39-40.

⁵⁷ Van den Wijngaart, "Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636?-1695) II, Pronken met andermans veren," 32-33.

⁵⁸ Wepler, "Fabulous Birds: Melchior d'Hondecoeter as Storyteller," 43.

⁵⁹ "The many bird-fight scenes in d'Hondecoeter's oeuvre attest to the fact that this deviation from the text serves to make the painting more exciting and interesting. D'Hondecoeter, moreover, enriches the painting by adding several bird species already mentioned in Aesop." Wepler, "Fabulous Birds: Melchior d'Hondecoeter as Storyteller," 44.

⁶⁰ Van den Wijngaart, "Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636?-1695) II, Pronken met andermans veren," 32.

The Courageous Magpie

The third literary theme thus documented in De Hondecoeter's oeuvre is Aesop's fable of the Peacock and the Magpie (sometimes the Peacock and the Jackdaw) (fig.2.4), or, as termed by Wepler, *The Courageous Magpie*. This theme had also been painted by Snyders (fig.2.5). The story goes as follows: The birds have gathered to select a king, and the peacock proclaims himself the best candidate due to his impressive plumes. Just before the cheering birds declare him king, the magpie addresses him: "May it please your majesty elect to permit one of your unworthy subjects to represent to you his suspicions and apprehensions in the face of this whole congregation. We have chosen you for our king, we have put our lives and fortunes into your hands, and our whole hope and dependence



Fig. 2.4 Marcus Gheeraerts, *Paeu ende acxtere*, in Eduwaert de Dene's edition of Aesop's Fables, "De warachtighe fabulen der dieren." Published by Pieter de Clerck, Bruges, 1567. Etching, 97 x 113 mm. The British Museum, London.



Fig. 2.5 Frans Snyders. *Bird Concert*, mid 17th century.
Oil on canvas, 203 x 334 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

is upon you; if, therefore, the eagle, the vulture, or the kite, should at any time make a descent upon us, as it is highly probable they will, may our majesty be so gracious as to dispel our fears, and clear our doubt on the matter, by letting us know how you intend to defend us against them?"⁶¹ The peacock is stunned into silence, and the birds decide they will not, after all, base their choice of a ruler on beauty. The story ends the moment the birds realize their folly;⁶² left without a resolution, the reader/viewer is left to contemplate the cautionary words of the magpie who is the only one to stand up to the peacock and the crowd.

Once again, De Hondecoeter paints a theme that has been explored by Snyders. While Snyders was innovative in his use of Aesopian characters, De Hondecoeter adds richness and complexity to the narrative structure and reaches a previously unattained

⁶¹ Bussey, *Fables: Original and Selected*, 118.

⁶² In some versions of this fable the election is cancelled: *Fables: Babrius and Phaedrus*, trans. Perry, 464-465. In others versions the eagle is elected king. Wepler, "Stories in Pictures from the World of Birds: The Courageous Magpie," 97-98.

level of lush coloration and elegance. His combinations of emblematic and other motifs further the multiplicity of meaning.

The popularity of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1559 painting of *Netherlandish Proverbs* (fig.2.6) (and the many subsequent versions of this painting) shows the familiarity of and widespread use of proverbs, as well the delight viewers took in searching for them. They were embedded in the Netherlandish culture, and many of the proverbs depicted by the Bruegel family continue to be familiar today. Emblem books were widely distributed and their low prices and many reissues ensured their place in popular culture.⁶³



Fig. 2.6 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, 1559. Oil on panel, 117.2 x 163.8 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

⁶³ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 318.

Even when there are no literary sources to provide a plot, close observation of De Hondecoeter's works reveals the possibility of a storyline in the interactions between the animals in many of his paintings.⁶⁴ If symbolic meaning can be successfully argued for in some of his paintings, which were until recently disregarded as decorative,⁶⁵ it is also possible that others in his still under-studied oeuvre could also reveal themselves to be paintings of depth. Given the narrative potential in his paintings, and that fables and proverbs have been established as types within his oeuvre, it is worth taking the time to investigate some of the paintings commissioned by William III. They are exceptional paintings produced for an exceptional client. In order to analyze the paintings, it is necessary to examine the historical context of William III's political ambitions and the design philosophy of the houses which De Hondecoeter's paintings were made to decorate.

1.6 William III, Stadholder and King

William (fig.2.7), born Prince of Orange in 1650, was the only child of Stadholder William II, who died mere days before his son's birth. In retaliation for his father's heavy-handed and monarchical designs, the Dutch Republic⁶⁶ chose not to elect a new stadholder and rejected a regent stadholdership.⁶⁷ William was eventually placed under the care of the state following the death of his mother, and groomed for the position of stadholder, amid the quarreling of the republicans and the Orangists.⁶⁸ He married his first cousin, Mary Stuart, daughter of the future king James II of England and the niece of the current king Charles II, a union which strengthened William's political ties to the island nation and brought him a step closer to his eventual and unique role of

⁶⁴ Wepler, *"Fabulous Birds: Melchior d'Hondecoeter as Storyteller,"* 37.

⁶⁵ Wepler, *Bilderzählungen in der Vogelmalerei des niederländischen Barocks.*

⁶⁶ During this period William's uncle, William Frederick, and later his cousin, Henry Casimir II, held the stadholdership in Friesland and Groningen.

⁶⁷ Bevan, *King William III: Prince of Orange, the first European,* 7.

⁶⁸ Even his political opponent, Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt, took an active interest in William's education and instructed him in politics. In the event that political tables turned, De Witt wanted William to be qualified to lead the Dutch Republic. Bevan, *King William III: Prince of Orange, the first European,* 20.

Stadholder-King. By birth, he was fourth in line for the English crown, following James, Mary, and her sister Anne.

It is imperative to understand William's power and responsibility as stadholder in order to understand depictions of it in his houses and artworks. The provinces of the Netherlands were ruled individually by groups of regents, and as a whole by the governing body the States-General, which appointed a stadholder. The stadholder was a stewardship position with medieval roots that was officially elective, but functionally hereditary. Following the death of William II, most of the provinces abstained from electing a stadholder until invading armies made it advantageous to centralize leadership in order to protect the Dutch Republic; as stadholder, William was also Captain-General of the army and successfully pushed back the enemy forces. While he was appointed to the most powerful position in the Netherlands in 1672, he was technically a civil servant



Fig. 2.7 Godfried Schalcken, *Portrait of King-Stadholder William III*, 1699. Oil on canvas, 163.2 x 149.9 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague.

and had limited power. By contrast, through his marriage with Mary Stuart, he would become king of England, Scotland, and Ireland, jointly ruling with his wife from 1689 until her death in 1694 and as sole monarch until his death in 1702.

An interesting anecdote concerning William before he was elected stadholder, in which his rank was downplayed for the sake of sociability, demonstrates the behavior coding of class structure in the Netherlands. The French exile Jean Hérault de Gourville, with whom William occasionally played cards, hosted a dinner party. All the guests, of various rank, made the evening exceptional when they agreed beforehand to waive official ceremony.⁶⁹ This shows that even the Netherlands, republican as it claimed to be, was still steeped in medieval hierarchy. That protocol was waived only by a predetermined agreement illustrates that William's right of noble birth and that military ranking was strictly observed in social as well as political life.

William likely received some education in art during his youth, and was certainly exposed to artworks, especially via the collections of his grandfather Frederik Hendrick and of his grandmother, Amalia van Solms, at Huis ten Bosch.⁷⁰ Some of these paintings he later inherited, although the collections were divided among relatives. He commissioned his first painting at the age of 15, leaving his grandmother to begrudgingly sort out the bill. Solms then instructed the artist Johannes Mytens not to make any paintings for the prince unless he had her explicit approval.⁷¹ In 1677 in Antwerp William met Jacob Jordaens, purchased paintings by Rubens, and called on art dealers.⁷² Inventories show that a large number of artworks were added to the Orange collections during William's stadholdership.⁷³

⁶⁹ Gourville wrote: "...et qu'en y entrant chacun seroit dépouillé de son caractère et de sa qualité: ce qui fut fort bien observé. ...Chacun prit la sienne sans songer à aucune cérémonie." Gourville, *Mémoires de Gourville*. 223-224.

⁷⁰ Van Gelder, "The Stadholder-King William III as Collector and 'Man of Taste,'" 30-31.

⁷¹ Broomhall and Van Gent, *Dynastic Colonialism*, 172

⁷² Van Gelder, "The Stadholder-King William III as Collector and 'Man of Taste,'" 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

In 1685, James II was crowned king of England and Mary came into line for the throne. As heir presumptive, Mary and William were suddenly entertaining increasing numbers of visitors and dignitaries at their estates. Their increase in status necessitated building projects and scaling up that would allow them to compete with the most powerful people in the western world.⁷⁴ Following William's deposition of James in the Glorious Revolution and the subsequent joint coronation of himself and Mary, the couple continued building, collecting, and gardening in the Netherlands and England throughout their reign, only ceasing construction at Hampton Court upon Mary's death.

This chapter has provided the necessary introduction of the two main players: the painter and the purchaser, Melchior and William. By specifying many of the artist's influences, it will become clear in the next chapter how his artistic style fit into William's houses and carefully controlled public image. Questioning De Hondcoeter's knowledge and analyzing the truth conveyed within Houbraken's myth of the compliant rooster, as well as laying the groundwork for the scientific and commercial position of the Dutch Republic (which will be further addressed in chapter 3), provides an access point to understand the motivations of the commission.

2.0 Chapter 2: The Where: Architectural Settings

The focus of this chapter is the architectural settings that contained De Hondcoeter's paintings for William III. Before analyzing the particulars of William III's houses it is necessary to provide context to understand the function of country houses in the Dutch Republic. Outlining the design influences and some of the historical data that is relevant for the three houses provides context for how they were decorated. I will analyze *The Menagerie* based on its placement within the architecture, and on the diversity of origins of the species depicted and their interaction with each other. Exploring how William III and

⁷⁴ Jones, "The building works and court style of William and Mary," 2.

pro-Orangists shaped his public image through various means of propaganda, including his architectural projects, provides the necessary background to interpret the ways in which his houses and gardens integrate into his long-term political goals. By analyzing his gardens, particularly at Het Loo, it is possible to show how they function as a part of his image-building, thus strengthening the connection between De Hondecoeter's paintings and William's grand design scheme. Finally, to provide a more thorough historical overview, I will briefly comment on the continuance of these themes following the coronation of William and Mary and their primary residences in England.

This group of De Hondecoeter's paintings must be considered within the context of the artist-client relationship,⁷⁵ the patron's position, and the larger design scheme in which they were contained. The works were not just selected to hang within William's houses, but were commissioned specifically for them and built into the woodwork, over doors, mantels, and enclosed in niches. As new building projects commenced, the paintings were sometimes moved from their original location, but they retain their deep connection to the intentions of William III and the purpose of country houses. This chapter provides an overview of the three palaces of William III most relevant to this discussion: Honselaarsdijk, Soestdijk, and Het Loo. These houses were designed as whole, unified entities in their architecture, furnishings, and gardens.⁷⁶ De Hondecoeter's paintings were a part of this scheme; therefore, valuable insight into the underlying themes and signifiers in the paintings can be gleaned by examining the influences that echo throughout their architectural settings.

⁷⁵ Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 38-40.

⁷⁶ Jones, "The Building Works and Court Style of William and Mary," 4.

In order to correctly interpret the designs of the individual houses, it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of the purpose of country houses and gardens in the seventeenth century. The typical formula for grand country houses at this time was symmetrical, with wings for male and female apartments on either side of the house, each featuring a series of rooms of an increasingly private character as one moved out from the center. There was no corridor between them, and as the rooms progressed, the privilege to enter was increasingly concentrated; an invitation to access a far room acknowledged status and power, and was only available to the most inner circle of the resident. These progressive rooms have gone through changes in name, in style, and of specific use throughout the years, but at their core, they consist of an antechambre, chambre, and cabinet, sometimes called a withdrawing chamber, bedchamber, and closet.⁷⁷

Although not the most impressive room in a palace in terms of size, the cabinet was traditionally the most privileged,⁷⁸ and all who entered the William's palaces would have been aware of this hierarchy.⁷⁹ The diminutive size of this room did not mean it was intended for personal use only, but marked its exclusivity; often it was home to the most precious objects and paintings of the owner and was richly decorated.⁸⁰ It is worth noting that this formal structure was only in effect while William was in residence.⁸¹ Impressive dinners and balls would take place elsewhere in the house, but the conversations that shaped countries were most likely to occur in private, in the cabinet.⁸²

Country houses were intended as displays of wealth and power as well as exerting the nobility's right to the hunt. With the explosion of wealth in the seventeenth-century Low Countries, members of the merchant class were increasingly able to afford country

⁷⁷ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 126.

⁷⁸ Galletti, "Rubens's Life of Maria De' Medici: Dissimulation and the Politics of Art in Early Seventeenth-Century France," 897.

⁷⁹ Ronnes, "The Architecture of William of Orange and the Culture of Friendship," 65.

⁸⁰ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 126-130.

⁸¹ Ronnes, "The Quiet Authors of An Early Modern Palatial Landscape," 210.

⁸² This word has been adapted in modern times to denote the highest ranking officials and advisors to the head of government.

houses — the right to pursue game on these lands, however, remained exclusive to the nobility. A more in-depth look at hunting rights and culture will be explored in chapter 3.

William's country houses were used in the typical fashion: to entertain and to gamble, to hunt and to garden, for health reasons, and as symbols of wealth and prestige. It was not all pleasure, however, as in the country as well as in the city, business continued as usual.

2.1 Stylistic Influences

In part, William owed his position of stadholder to the offenses of Louis XIV.⁸³ Under his threat, the States-General had been forced to submit their Stadholderless Period, and William had been locked in combat with the French ruler ever since — in military campaigns, and, more subtly, in an ongoing competition of taste.⁸⁴ While William followed the French fashion for his interiors and gardens, he produced a dignified and more or less simplified version of French design. French taste had already been established in the Orange court; Frederik Hendrik had been highly influenced by his youthful travels and used family connections to retain the services of French architects and designers.⁸⁵ Eventually, William III's successes on the continent and in England established his courtly style and he overtook Louis XIV as tastemaker.⁸⁶

The Dutch court culture was less rigid than the French, which, in its extreme formalism, had created a duality of public apartments and more secretive, private

⁸³ Ronnes, "The Architecture of William of Orange and the Culture of Friendship," 58.

⁸⁴ Fleischer, "Hydraulics in Horto: levelling between water and power in seventeenth-century gardens in France and Holland," 49.

⁸⁵ Broomhall and Van Gent, *Dynastic Colonialism*, 89-90.

⁸⁶ "By the time the Nine Years War came to an end in 1697 English state beds were statelier than French ones, English gardens had winter plantings while French ones were left bare, English court silver was being produced in quantity and in styles of surpassing beauty while Louis XIV had had to melt down his plate as a contribution to the war effort. The Duchess of Orleans no longer recommended French clothing styles to her English friends, for the English were now setting the styles that French ladies copied." Baxter, "William III as Hercules: the political implications of court life," 96.

spaces.⁸⁷ This reflects the political differences of the two nations (one lead by a stadholder, the other by an absolute monarch), and is further evidence of the relationship between architecture and image-building. The Dutch version of French-influenced architecture was much more reserved and distinguished than French design. This contrast can be seen, for example, when comparing Huis de Voorst (fig.2.8), Honselaarsdijk (fig.2.9) and Het Loo (fig.3.0) with the decadent French houses Le Château-Vieux de Meudon (fig.3.1), Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte (fig.3.2), and Versailles (fig.3.3). While on the one hand preserving courtly etiquette and establishing themselves as a force to be reckoned with, William and Mary preferred domestic, comfortable spaces. Their tendency to furnish and collect paintings with Flemish influences and decorate in a French style provided a grander vision than otherwise would be imparted if they primarily collected in the regional style. By operating in a familiar style while distancing themselves from the general public and the overall republican local style, they reflected and reinforced their class and authority. Simultaneously, they incorporated French fashion and design into their houses, while presenting their grandest house, Het Loo, as a competitor and alternative to Versailles, without the absolutism of the French court. One of the ways in which their houses were able to compete with Versailles, while at the same time being less opulent and on a smaller scale, was through stately design and a tightly controlled, unified scheme of architecture, interiors, and gardens. While the overall purpose and some of William and Mary's influences have been outlined, it is helpful to have some knowledge of how they acquired these three specific palaces, and the people involved in creating the designs.

⁸⁷ “[Louis XIV] imposed on his courtiers highly formal and complicated rituals which were all intended to underline his position as monarch by Divine Right; but even Louis, himself almost indefatigable, needed to be able to retire to a less oppressive atmosphere where he could relax with his family and closest entourage. In the French royal buildings, therefore, were forged at this time two patterns which still have significance today: on the one hand, a pattern for what a palace should be like; and on the other one that provided a background for comfortable and civilized relaxation.” Thornton, *Authentic Decor: The Domestic Interior 1620-1920*, 48.



Fig. 2.8 Martinus Berkenboom, *Gezicht op Huis de Voorst*, c. 1675-1715. Etching, 225 x 378 mm. The Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 2.9 Carel Allard (attributed to), *Paleis Honselaarsdijk van voren*, c. 1689-1702. Etching, 160 x 190 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 3.0 Bastiaen Stopendael, *Gezicht op Paleis Het Loo*, c. 1689-1693. Etching, 382 x 487 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 3.1 Famille des Pérelle, *L'Entrée du Chateau de Meudon à deux lieues de Paris*, c. 1659-1679. Etching, 300 x 400 mm. Private Collection, France.



Fig. 3.2 Adam Perelle, *View of Vaux-Le-Vicomte*, c. 1680s. Etching. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 3.3 Adam Perelle, *Veüe generale du chateau de Versailles*, c. 1680s. Etching. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

2.2 Frederik Hendrik's Honselaarsdijk

William inherited the palace Honselaarsdijk, which had functioned as the primary country estate of his grandfather, Frederik Hendrik. There had, in fact, been an ongoing conversation between the architecture of William's estates and Versailles before he was

even born: following the renovations of Honselaarsdijk in 1646, it was called “het Klein Versailles” due to its similarities, and before Versailles reached its massive proportions under the instruction of Louis XIV.⁸⁸ The classicist Pieter Post acted as the architect for this phase of the building, and his son Maurits Post continued in his father’s steps, adding on to Honselaarsdijk, and also as the architect of William’s Soestdijk palace. Botanist Daniel Desmarets managed the gardens and menagerie that Frederik Hendrik installed at Honselaarsdijk. The paintings produced for Honselaarsdijk provide the only proof of the price of any of De Hondecoeter’s paintings, although it is not known which, or how many were purchased for this occasion. The receipt indicates that William paid the astonishing amount of nearly 9500 guilders for the paintings at a time in which well-known artists often received between 15 and 20 guilders for a painting.⁸⁹

2.3 Forming Style at Soestdijk

William bought the estate at Soestdijk in 1674 and quickly bought up surrounding land, guaranteeing hunting ground.⁹⁰ It was the first house he acquired by means other than inheritance, and came two years following his rise to stadholder. He purchased the house for 18,755 guilders — while he may have purchased it simply for its vicinity to his relations or its excellent hunting grounds, it has been suggested that it may also have been a power play: his purchase severed a family estate from the son of his political opponent Cornelis de Graeff. He had already forced both of De Graeff’s sons to leave their positions on the Amsterdam city council, and he may have manipulated the sale of

⁸⁸ Morren, *Het Huis Honselaarsdijk*.

⁸⁹ This receipt, and its conversion to guilders, is taken from the research of Els Vlieger. “Uitgaaf Raackende syn Hoogst. Huys tot Honsolredijck. Noch heeft den rendant betaalt aan Melchior Hondekoter konstschilder densomma van vijftien hondert vijfentachtig ponden voortschilderen van eenige stucken op Honsolredijck van beesten gevogelte etc. vermogens twee bijzondere ordonnanties en (?) quintantie daer sijnde hier. Bij twee ordonnantie van Sijs H’ (?) in datis 15 sept. 1680 en 28 feb. 1681. Mitsgaders quiten.” Vlieger, “Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d’Hondecoeter,” 78. National Archive, The Hague: Nassause Domeinraad Ordonnanties. “Generale rekening over het jaar 1680,” inv. no. 789.

⁹⁰ Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 132.

Soestdijk as well.⁹¹ The estimated value of the house was 30,000 guilders, but he managed to acquire it for less than 2/3rd of this price.⁹²

After securing the property, Maurits Post was immediately contracted for a renovation and expansion of the existing lodge. It was a serious design, styled in the hybrid Dutch-French manner that developed into William's signature courtly style, with large windows which incorporated the view and the interior, allowing the resident to experience the garden from inside.⁹³ The construction was completed in an impressive four years. Though later overshadowed by the expansive Het Loo, this was William's first foray through the whole process of purchase, design, and construction, and was home to at least two paintings commissioned from De Hondecoeter. The game pieces he painted for the entry are arguably the most complex and most impressive paintings he created. I shall return to these masterpieces in a later chapter.

Gerard de Lairese, a Wallonian artist and art theorist who worked in a French classicist style, painted a monumental ceiling here and had a hand in organizing the overall design scheme at Soestdijk, which may have included the De Hondecoeter commissions.⁹⁴ De Lairese also received commissions from William's curator, Robert Du Val, and created large wall paintings for Het Loo and likely had a say in other design choices.

2.4 Achievement at Het Loo

The Stadholder owned a collection of houses both inherited and purchased, but the estate that was to become William's most ambitious building project contained only a small castle when he purchased it in 1684.⁹⁵ Het Loo employs a traditional, symmetrical

⁹¹ Van Zoest, Jansen, Rem and Kurpershoek. *Paleis Soestdijk: Drie eeuwen huis van Oranje*, 17.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ The house was likely fitted with the revolutionary new sash-window. Louw and Crayford, "A Constructional History of the Sash-Window," 233.

⁹⁴ Kurpershoek, "Jager en tuinieren, schilderkunst en porselein" in *Paleis Soestdijk: drie eeuwen huis van Oranje*, 146.

⁹⁵ This castle became known as Oude Loo, and continues to be used today by the royal family.

structure with a main building and L-shaped wings connected by colonnades. The brick exterior and rigid form lacks the fuss and frills of the French court, but this solemnity was not without modernity: newly invented sash windows were used throughout the main house.

There was a long cast of characters responsible for the gardens, architecture, and interiors at Het Loo and the other two palaces, sometimes with seemingly overlapping roles or competing responsibilities. This can make it difficult to ascertain who did precisely what, but there are several parties who stand out, and all were guided by the overarching goal of creating a strong, harmonious design. Following the death of Maurits Post, Jacob Roman took over as William's architect and it is likely that he served as the main architect of Het Loo. Also important was Daniel Marot, who was largely responsible for designing interiors for William. A Frenchman initially trained in architecture and engraving, he had fled his homeland due to the persecution he faced there as a Huguenot. He brought French design with him, and likely continued to be influenced by Parisian style through its transmission through prints (albeit a bit old fashioned).⁹⁶ His designs are characterized by their detail as well as their completeness — his furnishings, plaster work, and wall coverings created a unified decorative scheme that had not previously been attained (fig.3.4).⁹⁷ Marot designed the interiors and/or oversaw the design of the interiors and the garden at Het Loo, but the chain of command in the design is not always clear, nor can we be sure as to who reached out to commission De Hondecoeter.

Hans Willem Bentinck, nobleman, favorite of William's, and later the first earl of Portland, was entrusted with implementing William's wishes during his building projects and the design program of his gardens, and continued to oversee the care of the gardens for years to come.⁹⁸ He delegated the design and likely had a hand in the finished product

⁹⁶ Thornton, *Authentic Decor: The Domestic Interior 1620—1920*, 80.

⁹⁷ Marot has been credited with modifying the Louis XIV style to the existing restrained classicism and Dutch architectural idioms, thus creating a stately style that was in some instances favorably compared to Versailles. Cremers, "Our Heritage: The Dutch Garden, an Introduction to Its History," 19.

⁹⁸ Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 299-300.



Fig. 3.4 Daniel Marot, *Trompe-l'oeil decoration for staircase of Het Loo*, 1712. Etching, 275 x 192 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

as well. An avid gardener, he also collected exotic plants. He was interested in the scientific study of plants as well as garden design and collecting, and even commissioned a catalog of his collection, the *Codex Bentiniana*.⁹⁹ Hired in 1682 as “Keeper of the cabinet and art,” Robert Du Val also helped furnish Het Loo and refurnish some of William’s other country houses. Of French and Dutch extraction, he also spent time in Venice and Rome, so classical influences and the choice of classically influenced painters may come from these experiences. As court painter and curator of William’s collections, he is at least

⁹⁹ Onnekink, *The Anglo-Dutch Favourite: The Career of Hans Willem Bentinck, 1st Earl of Portland*, 102.

in part responsible for the later commissions of De Hondecoeter for Het Loo, but the Soestdijk pendants predate his influential role by around four years. He continued to adorn Het Loo with artworks after William became king, which shows how important the maintenance of this property was to William, either personally or as a signifier of power, as this did not wane (but in fact, increased) following his rise to the throne; Du Val sent nearly 50 paintings and tapestries from England to Het Loo at the end of the century.¹⁰⁰ Like De Hondecoeter, he was a member of Confrerie Pictura, and was a co-founder of the drawing school which later became the Royal Academy of Art, which was housed in the same building as Pictura.¹⁰¹

Du Val worked closely with Daniel Desmarets, his father-in-law, in organizing and designing for William. Desmarets, a Walloon who was a preacher in several cities in the Dutch Republic before devoting his time to botany, began his service to William managing the gardens and menagerie at Honselaarsdijk. He was appointed superintendent of the country houses, estates, and gardens in 1685, and received several promotions, which culminated in his appointment as “Comptroller-general of His Majesty’s household in the Netherlands” in 1692.¹⁰² As a botanist, he had his own collections of exotic plants, as well as a *kunstkamer* that contained at least preserved reptiles and insects.¹⁰³ He and Du Val were the overarching designers of the scheme at Het Loo, overseeing the designs of Marot and others, and likely reporting in part to Bentinck. William had himself a dream team, picking up on classical as well as French themes and incorporating them into a Dutch idiom in a new and fundamental style, that became unique to William and Mary. It was a powerful style and remarkable in its unity, at Het Loo as well as the various reworkings of William’s other houses.

¹⁰⁰ Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 34.

¹⁰¹ Gram, *De Schildersconfrerie Pictura en hare Academie van Beeldende Kunsten te 's Gravenhage, 1682-1882*, 28.

¹⁰² Van Gelder, “The Stadholder-King William III as Collector and ‘Man of Taste,’” 34.

¹⁰³ Engel, *Hendrik Engel’s Alphabetical List of Dutch Zoological Cabinets and Menageries*, 172.

2.5 Expansion and The Menagerie

When William and Mary were crowned king and queen of England, it became appropriate to enlarge the palace and extend the gardens of Het Loo, showing a direct correlation between their status and architecture. The King's Garden and the Queen's Garden were designed during this phase of development, and were located at equally privileged positions, alongside the king's and queen's apartments and easily accessible from their cabinets (fig.3.5).¹⁰⁴

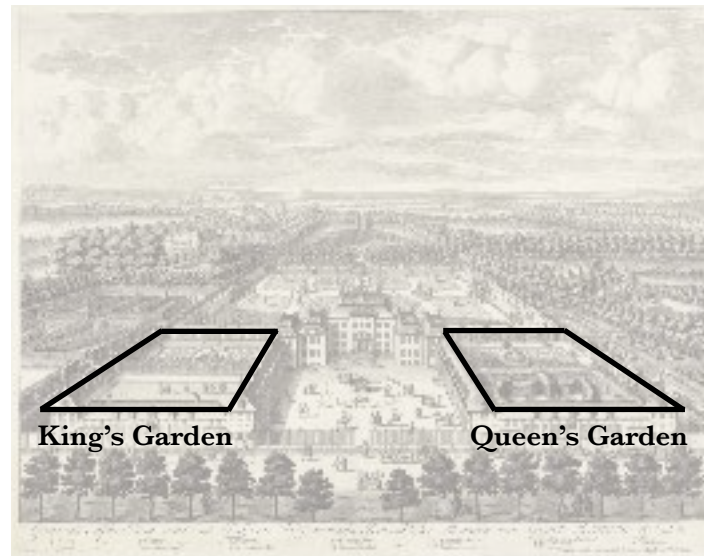


Fig. 3.5 The King's Garden and Queen's Garden

De Hondcoeter's paintings *The Menagerie* (fig.2.3) and *Landscape with Exotic animals* (fig.3.6) would have been a part of this expansion. William's private cabinet at Het Loo, one of the most symbolically exclusive rooms in the house, contained these two paintings, and provided access to his garden, both through a side door just outside of the cabinet, and visually, through the windows that overlooked the garden. Both of these paintings were incorporated into the paneled walls rather than framed separately, which is one of the reasons De Hondcoeter's paintings have been considered decorative. That care was put into their surroundings and the overall design should not be cause to reject them.

¹⁰⁴ Vliegenthart, "Het Loo," in *William and Mary and Their House*, 43.



Fig. 3.6. Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Landscape with Exotic Animals*, ca. 1690 - ca. 1692. Oil on canvas, 169 x 156.8 cm. Paleis Het Loo Nationaal Museum, Apeldoorn.

The Menagerie, which hung above a doorway, depicts a collection of birds perched on a balustrade, in a nearby tree, and on an urn, while two monkeys interact on a carpet draped over the balustrade on the lower right-hand side of the painting. The view is low, in the realm of the animals, and hints that it was commissioned specifically to hang high, above this door. If entering the cabinet through the set hierarchy of entrance — from the antechambre, through the chambre, and then into the cabinet — this painting would have been conspicuous and one of the first things visible, along with the window overlooking the garden.

At the top of *The Menagerie* sits the Eurasian bullfinch, the only bird native to the Low Countries represented. It can be no coincidence that this bird sits high above the more exotic species, looking down upon them, and that anyone walking into the king's

gardens from his chambers must pass through the doorway directly beneath the painting, and thus be included in the hierarchy. Below the bullfinch are two Northern cardinals from America, with the male of the pair looking directly at an ornate lorikeet native to Indonesia. Perched on the urn sit two larger birds, a yellow crested cockatoo from Indonesia and an African grey parrot. At the base of the urn, a lesser yellow-crested cockatoo squawks out of the picture frame, while nearby, a red-breasted parakeet seems to eye the viewer apprehensively.¹⁰⁵ A pair of blue-crowned hanging parrots are on a nearby branch, the female sitting while the male hangs upside, as described in chapter 1. Moss grows on the tree, which De Hondecoeter applied using the technique learned from Marseus van Schrieck, also described in chapter 1. A purple-naped lory, with a chain reminding the beholder that this scene takes place in a cultivated environment rather than nature, peers out of the painting at the beholder. These last four species are also from Indonesia. The two male gray-headed lovebirds, native to Madagascar, sit on the marble support at the bottom of the painting. On a Persian carpet are two squirrel monkeys (the more ominously named *doodshoofdaapjes* or ‘skull monkeys’ in Dutch) from Central America, one of which, paw clutching something defensively, bares its teeth at the other.

As of yet, no emblematic or literary correlation has been identified for the painting, but the positioning of the bullfinch is highly suggestive. It is the only bird indigenous to the Netherlands, therefore it is the only bird with agency and the ability to leave the garden. The bullfinch does not stand on the man-made balustrade, but is positioned in the highest and most natural location in the painting: the tree. Two of the exotic birds wear chains, but the native bird is unrestrained. The bullfinch serves as a reminder that the scene on the balustrade does not take place in an exotic location, but is local; therefore, the other animals have been collected. In addition, it is interesting to note that the native species takes the highest perch, perhaps a hierarchical allusion to the global position of the Dutch above their colonies and trading posts throughout the world — the collector, if you will, sits above the collected. Finally, the bullfinch has breached the

¹⁰⁵ It is also possible that both of the crested cockatoos are sulphur-crested cockatoos.

boundaries of the garden, a small, flame-colored reminder that not all elements of the garden are under the control of man. As commissioned works, there is an even greater connection between the iconography of the paintings and collector, William III, than there would be if the paintings were painted on speculation and purchased on the free market. Examining the animals in their historic context as well as the collecting and display practices of William III, reveals a connection between these foreign species and William's imperial ambition.

2.6 A History of Image-Building

The architecture of Het Loo itself conveys power, but the act of building is also symbolic. William employed this method of symbolic building in both England and the Dutch Republic.¹⁰⁶ Before William and Mary's coronation, they had already put into motion the demolition of and replacement of the palace at Hampton Court.¹⁰⁷ Their immediate move from Whitehall distanced them from their predecessors while establishing their own reign. It also implemented their aesthetic program in England, which was consistent with their houses on the continent.

Literal building projects were a normal part of royal image-building, both in the extent and style of the enterprise.¹⁰⁸ The Dutch Republic, while a political system that included a States-General and regents, was not an exception to this royal behavior, of which William was a master. He was trained in the art of propaganda from an early age, and was already the subject of Orange-Nassau image-building at four years old: in a painting commissioned by William's grandmother, Amalia van Solms, he is depicted by Adriaen Hanneman standing next to a potted orange tree, holding an orange, while he

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Baxter argues that William's rebuilding of Het Loo during the Nine Years War (in contrast to Louis XIV's suspension of all building activities at Versailles) was "a deliberate and delicious piece of propaganda." Baxter, *William III and the Defense of European Liberty, 1650-1702*, 358.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, "The building works and court style of William and Mary," 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ronnes, "The Quiet Authors of an Early Modern Palatial Landscape," 206-207. Regarding Het Loo, Jan Ten Hoorn wrote in 1700: "Hier beval dan de Vorst, op het voorbeeld van alle de Grootste Personagien, een gering gedenkteeken van zijne wijldlustige gedachten te laten." Ten Hoorn, *Reis-boek door De Vereenigde Nederlandsche Provinciën*, 271.

treads on a thistle, the symbol of the Stuart House (fig.3.7). The orange tree existed in a variety of iterations: pruned, in bloom, and with different stages of fruit development. The Orange-Nassau family used these variations to exploit whatever characteristic was deemed useful, according to the political scene and current events.¹⁰⁹ At age ten, William doodled an orange tree in a letter to his uncle, King Charles II.¹¹⁰



Fig. 3.7 Adriaen Hanneman, *William III, Prince of Orange, as a Child*, 1654. Oil on canvas, 133 x 94 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

William was brilliant in his use of propaganda, which he implemented throughout his career to sway public opinion, most notably with a deluge of prints, pamphlets,

¹⁰⁹ Broomhall and Van Gent, *Dynastic Colonialism*, 175.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

broadsides, and commemorative coins (!) issued during the Glorious Revolution.¹¹¹ Never before had anyone ever issued so much simultaneous propaganda as William in the years 1688-1689.¹¹² He fashioned himself as a savior of the Netherlands and defender of the Protestant faith — a courageous and wise leader. When he landed in England he carried with him, along with other weaponry for the invasion, a printing press.¹¹³ The success of his propaganda can be seen in the results: not only did James II flee and William was crowned king, but the transition was accomplished more or less without violence.

In addition to the top-down image-building produced by William and the Orangists, popular songs exhibit his reputation. It is unknown if Orangists commissioned songs or if they were merely products of economic opportunity and public sentiment.¹¹⁴ Regardless, they functioned both as instruments of dynastic image-building and evidence of popular belief, and are especially helpful in representing the broader public as they did not exclude the illiterate. Many of these songs celebrated his lineage as well as his acts of heroism, and were filled with imagery of orange trees and allusions to his royal birth and heritage as the ruling family of the Netherlands.¹¹⁵ Emphasizing his position as rightful heir is significant because it reveals that the Dutch (or at least the Orangists) considered him as ruler by birth — the Dutch Republic appears not be so “republican” after all.

This representation of William as a guarantor of liberty is especially apparent in songs written during the Glorious Revolution.¹¹⁶ They show him as the courageous defender of the English people against the wrongs of James II and the threat of

¹¹¹ As propaganda, prints are intended for mass consumption, and their imagery would have been accessible to people with a range of intellectual or political awareness; some prints contained obvious iconography, while others referenced emblem books or incorporated levels of meaning intended for more sophisticated beholders. These prints were predominately issued by Dutch makers, and were accompanied by text in English, Dutch, or both. Schwoerer, “Propaganda in the Revolution of 1688-89,” 843.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 856.

¹¹⁴ Wijmans, “Songs of an Orange,” 52.

¹¹⁵ According to the 26 songs written in Dutch and as examined by Welmoed Wijmans’ 2015 thesis “Songs of an Orange.”

¹¹⁶ Wijmans, “Songs of an Orange,” 32.

Catholicism in the present moment, based on his heroism and success in pushing back the French in the *rampjaar* of 1672, and represented as a safeguard for the future in struggles for freedom. The song *Wilhelmus kloeck beleyt in Engelandt* compared him to the biblical heroes Joshua and Gideon, who were liberators of the Chosen People. William was portrayed as a hero for restoring freedom to the Dutch and to England; the song also claimed his reputation as a hero would spread throughout the world: “Now shall the fame of his heroic name spread / By Moor and Indian / By Tatar Turk and to the end of the world / Also by the Persian.”¹¹⁷

By framing his heroism within the context of distant people groups the song implied that his influence extended to these places as well, which maximized his authority and the global presence of the Dutch. He was presented as brave and good, past, present, and future, and throughout the world, an image that he promoted at home and abroad. This image appeared in high and low media — from playing cards to ballads to paintings to his ever increasing residences. House building is akin to image-building, and he outfitted his houses with imagery that presented a controlled view of his strength, wisdom, and valor. Let us pass beneath *The Menagerie* and into the gardens, and see how he formed his image among the flowers and trees.

2.7 The Garden of William and Mary

Both William and Mary loved their country houses and the activities they afforded, especially their celebrated gardens. Frederik Hendrik’s gardens at Honselaarsdijk were famous, and were ornamented with fountains and statues purchased in France. It also had a menagerie, which William renewed. William’s interest in garden design was well known and made its way into popular culture. His gardens were disseminated through travel

¹¹⁷ Nu sal de Faem sijn Helden naem versenden / By Moor en Indiaen / By Tarter Turck en aen des Werelts enden / Oock by den Persiaen. “Wilhelmus kloeck beleyt in Engelandt.” Anonymous, *Nieuw vermeerderd konincklijck lied-boeck, versien met verscheyden lof en triumphgesangen*, in the Nederlandse Liederbank, see https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_nie237nieu01_01/_nie237nieu01_01_0014.php#_nie237nieu01_0014

accounts, prints, and possibly in set design.¹¹⁸ In 1696, the young, well-educated English traveler, Edward Southwell surmised that the intimate size of the apartments at Het Loo resulted from its conception as a much smaller building; however, Southwell was impressed by the uniformity of the additions and the splendid gardens and wrote: “But whatever is wanting in the House, is fully made up in the gardens.”¹¹⁹ William once wrote to Bentinck, “as you know, hunting and garden art are two of my greatest passions.”¹²⁰ Mary considered decorating and gardening her one extravagance.¹²¹ William’s doctor recommended the garden for his mental health, so that William could escape “the pleasures and vanities of the world;”¹²² the garden was mathematical and cerebral, designed as a return to Eden.

Gardening was seen as a cultured pastime, and life in the countryside as highly desirable for the wealthy.¹²³ Country estates and their gardens were en vogue, and functioned as advertisements of social and political currency. The Dutch garden was characterized by exacting topiary, arbored walking paths, straight lines, and overall tidiness. Due to the geometric layout in fashion in the Netherlands at the time, Marot’s position designing the gardens took considerable skill and was considered to have more to do with mathematics than with plants, and so he was called the Royal Mathematician.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ For an example, see Frans and Julie Muller’s discussion of stage direction for *The Fairy Queen*, the set of which, they argue, referenced Mary’s large collections of Chinese porcelain and Delftware, used depictions of William’s gardens at Het Loo, and had prominent orange trees in Chinese vases placed on the stage. They use prints of Het Loo in their reconstruction of the set’s garden. Muller, “Completing the Picture: the Importance of Reconstructing Early Opera.”

¹¹⁹ Fremantle, “A Visit to the United Provinces and Cleves in the Time of William III Described in Edward Southwell’s Journal,” 51-52.

¹²⁰ “Chasse et...jardinages vous savez estre deus de mes passions.” De Jong, “For Profit and Ornament: The Function and Meaning of Dutch Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary, 1650—1702,” in *The Dutch Garden in the Seventeenth Century*, 37.

¹²¹ She considered herself punished for this extravagance when, due to her constant prodding and her architect’s rushed compromises, a wall and ceiling at her English houses collapsed, killing workers. Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 289-290.

¹²² Hamilton, *William’s Mary*, 152.

¹²³ De Jong, “Netherlandish Hesperides’ Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary 1650-1702,” 17.

¹²⁴ Janssens-Knorsch, “From Het Loo to Hampton Court: William and Mary’s Dutch Gardens and Their Influence on English Gardening” in *Fabrics and Fabrications: The Myth and Making of William and Mary*, 285.

While the overall garden and house were designed to be cohesive, the gardens were sectioned into smaller, self-contained areas separated by hedges or canals. Decorative pots or statues were frequently placed at transitional spaces, like converging paths or corners.¹²⁵ Thus, the symmetry of the house continued onto the grounds as the garden's spaces were also mirrored.

Bentinck, as William's artistic advisor for furniture and gardens, was influential in the garden designs and image of William at home.¹²⁶ He was responsible for William's plants in Holland, in England as Deputy Forester, Superintendent of the Royal Gardens, and Ranger of Windsor Park,¹²⁷ and far beyond Europe as well.¹²⁸

William's gardens were additionally influenced by French style through the designs of Claude Desgots. Desgots came from a family of gardeners and had worked on prestigious estates in France, as well as with André Le Nôtre, the designer of the gardens of Versailles. Like the architecture of William's country houses, these were not copies of French designs, but rather used as inspiration and molded into a Dutch garden.¹²⁹

William frequently walked in his gardens, both on his own and when receiving guests.¹³⁰ By being personally shown to visiting dignitaries and guests, the gardens developed an even stronger connection to William, physically, and to the image he cultivated. The gardens would also be seen by the visiting public, and disseminated through prints, word of mouth and travel accounts, and even on the stage. The Englishman Joseph Shaw, who visited to Het Loo around 1700, wrote that the magnificence of the gardens exceeded his power of description.¹³¹ One of the features

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Van Gelder, "The Stadholder-King William III as Collector and 'Man of Taste,'" 32.

¹²⁷ Onnekink, "The Anglo-Dutch Favourite. The career of Hans Willem Bentinck," 101.

¹²⁸ The botanist Bentinck sent to Barbados retrieved plants and seeds on behalf of King William, some of which were the first to arrive in Europe from the West Indies and were grown at Hampton Court. Howard, "Early botanical records from the West Indies, particularly Barbados: Ligon (1657) to Lord Seaforth (1806)," 65-96.

¹²⁹ The term "Dutch garden" is still used to describe gardens characterized by baroque parterres, exacting topiary, an axial layout, or planted with a high volume of tulips.

¹³⁰ De Jong, "'Netherlandish Hesperides' Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary 1650-1702," 31.

¹³¹ Shaw, *Letters to a nobleman, from a gentleman travelling thro' Holland, Flanders and France*, 10.

visitors would have enjoyed in William's gardens were the fountains. Water features were not only ornamental opportunities for statuary, reflection, and beauty, but impressive feats of engineering and opulent in their use of water.¹³² The site of Het Loo was specifically chosen due to the advantageous water pressure provided by its hilly surroundings; water from nearby streams was piped down to Het Loo where it could supply the numerous water features.¹³³ The central fountain at Het Loo was the highest shooting fountain in Europe (fig.3.8), while the fountains at Versailles, though numerous, were foul, functioned poorly, and were switched on and off as Louis XIV walked around the gardens.¹³⁴

The gardens' decoration as well as their hydraulics functioned politically. While the Sun King fashioned himself as Apollo, William was represented as Hercules (fig.3.9).



Fig. 3.8 Jan van Call, *View of the colonnades in the gardens of Het Loo*, ca. 1695 - ca. 1705. Published by Pieter Schenk. Etching, 132 x 170 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

¹³² Thompson, *The Sun King's Garden: Louis XIV, Andre le Notre and the Creation of the Gardens of Versailles*, 229-231.

¹³³ Fleischer, "Hydraulics in Horto: levelling between water and power in seventeenth-century gardens in France and Holland," 50.

¹³⁴ Thompson, *The Sun King's Garden: Louis XIV, Andre le Notre and the Creation of the Gardens of Versailles*, 247-260.



Fig. 3.9 Jan Broedelet, *Allegorical representation of William III ascending the throne*, ca. 1689. Published by Hendrick Focken. Mezzotint and etching, 322 (trimmed) x 419 mm. The British Museum, London.

Emblematically, the classical Hercules had been reinterpreted to represent Christian fortitude, military leadership, and as a protector of church and state.¹³⁵ The statuary of Het Loo references the hero several times, symbolically aligning William with Christian strength and virtue.¹³⁶ Most notably, one of the main fountains depicted Hercules as a child, strangling the snake that entered his cradle (fig.4.0).¹³⁷ William's connection with Hercules is also possible to trace through the allegory of an orange: the golden apple. Erik de Jong makes this connection in his article "Netherlandish Hesperides":

¹³⁵ Baxter, "William III as Hercules: the political implications of court life" in *The Revolution of 1688-1689: Changing Perspectives*, 97.

¹³⁶ These themes of William's character became especially evident after his invitation to depose James II and win the throne in the name of protestantism, and the image of William as Hercules appears in pro-Orangist songs and prints. Wijmans, "Songs of Orange," 16.

¹³⁷ The examples set at William's estates influenced other courtiers and the image of Hercules appeared in their garden to show political alliances. De Jong, "Netherlandish Hesperides' Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary 1650-1702," 29-31. One of these gardens belonged to Bentinck. Onnekink, "The Anglo-Dutch Favourite. The career of Hans Willem Bentinck," 103.

At...Het Loo a collection of orange trees, exotic plants and potted topiary were specially arranged in this theatre shape, like collector's items in an open air museum. The allegorical significance of the orange tree acquired an even greater significance when arranged thus: originally associated with Hercules, who took the golden apples from the Hesperian gardens as a reward for his courage and virtue, the orange trees in the Dutch Court gardens were seen as an emblem of the Orange sovereign William III: as a new Hercules he had defended country and faith against the French Apollo, Louis XIV.¹³⁸



Fig. 4.0 Laurens Scherm, *Hercules Fountain in the Garden of Palace Het Loo*, 1702. Etching, 172 x 206 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

This association with Hercules appears from a young age. A painting of him at 17 depicted William in classically inspired garb, posing in front of a garden complete with a sculpture of Hercules wrestling with the Nemean Lion (fig.4.1). In killing the lion, Hercules exhibits the power of the soul, to which mere physical strength is unequal — an interpretation that existed since the 12th century.¹³⁹ While attributes of Hercules are not included in De Hondecoter's paintings for the stadholder, allegories that communicate similar values appear in the Soestdijk pendants. The gardens were rife with symbolism, as were the paintings that reflected them.

¹³⁸ De Jong, "Netherlandish Hesperides' Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary 1650-1702," 31.

¹³⁹ Van de Velde, "The Labours of Hercules, a Lost Series of Paintings by Frans Floris," 118.



Fig. 4.1 Jan de Baen, *William III when Prince of Orange*, 1667. Oil on canvas, 180.3 x 133.1 cm. Royal Collection Trust, Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey.

2.8 Establishing Visual Culture in England

William and Mary took their love for building and decorating across the channel following their English coronation. They set up house at Hampton Court and Kensington Palace both to establish themselves as separate and distinct from their predecessors and to escape the London air.¹⁴⁰ In addition, they purchased Kensington Hall due to its access to hunting in Hyde Park and its proximity to the Palace of Whitehall.¹⁴¹

The monarchs spent massive sums on the decoration of their palaces and gardens in England. Their French tastes had developed into a Dutch architectural idiom; Het Loo

¹⁴⁰ William, who had struggled with poor health since childhood, especially valued the clean air of the countryside. In an instance of life imitating art, William was physically strongest when at Het Loo, his largest display of power in the Netherlands, and where the clean air and climate of this country relieved his asthmatic lungs.

¹⁴¹ Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 288-289.

exemplified this, and they turned down numerous plans for Christopher Wren's rebuilding of Hampton Court until a design resembling Het Loo was proposed.¹⁴² Here, too, the facade, interiors, and gardens were unified in design. The Herculean theme continued here, as the lion skin associated with the hero adorned windows at Hampton Court.¹⁴³ The image of the impenetrable golden skin promised protection, a reminder of the wisdom in associating with the House of Orange. Mary ordered exotic trees (especially orange trees) and had hot houses built, while William purchased the most significant collection of rare plants then in the Netherlands, and transferred many masterpieces from the royal collection.¹⁴⁴ One of the gardens was designed in the shape of a fortification,¹⁴⁵ possibly the most direct depiction of strength possible in landscaping, and more candid than even the allegorical statuary.

By outlining the building projects of William, both the literal country houses and the politically motivated molding of his reputation, this chapter has provided the setting to which De Hondecoeter's paintings are deeply connected. *The Menagerie* has been discussed within the context of De Hondecoeter's knowledge, the image program, and William's penchant for propaganda. The specific gardens of William and Mary have been introduced, and will be placed within the larger context of garden philosophy in the following chapter.

¹⁴² Janssens-Knorsch, "From Het Loo to Hampton Court: William and Mary's Dutch Gardens and Their Influence on English Gardening," 279-280.

¹⁴³ Broomhall and Van Gent, *Dynastic Colonialism*, 111.

¹⁴⁴ Janssens-Knorsch, "From Het Loo to Hampton Court: William and Mary's Dutch Gardens and Their Influence on English Gardening," 294.

¹⁴⁵ Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 288-291.

3.0 Chapter 3: The Why: Power Structures

This chapter provides a brief overview of the economic situation in the Dutch Golden Age and the context in which the *kunstkamer* and *menagerie* increased in popularity, and the *exotica* that filled them. I will establish the condition of William III's collections of animals, which is valuable in contextualizing De Hondecoeter's painting *Landscape with Exotic Animals*, for example. Next, by analyzing the conditions in which the Dutch formal garden emerged, and the contemporary philosophical understanding of gardens, historical context and important insights into the gardens depicted in De Hondecoeter's paintings will emerge. An understanding of the garden setting, as well as the collecting of animals in the *kunstkamer* or *menagerie*, is required to analyze many of his works, such as the painting known as *The Floating Feather*. Finally, I will introduce the game piece, and contextualize this genre within the legal and social climate attached to hunting, and illustrate William's attachment to the sport. This framework is necessary to interpret his houses and how they were decorated, with a focus on the specific paintings by De Hondecoeter.

3.1 Wealth in the Netherlands

The Dutch Golden Age was one of unprecedented wealth resulting from commercial enterprise. The trading of the Dutch East India (VOC) and West India Companies (WIC) were not completely distinct from the United Provinces or the House of Orange, but closely collaborating entities.¹⁴⁶ To thank William for his military success against Louis XIV in 1672, and thus protecting their trade interests, the VOC rewarded the Stadholder

¹⁴⁶ For instance, the Dutch navy provided support and the Orange princes provided financial backing for the companies; their trading power not only brought wealth to the Dutch Republic, but pushed back the colonial enterprises of other nations and in turn financed the stadholder's military campaigns. The VOC and WIC played up or down the role of the stadholder or the provinces, according to convenience in facilitating trade. Broomhall and Van Gent, "Trading Places: Orange-Nassau involvement in Dutch colonial expansion," in *Dynastic Colonialism*, 131-165.

with 1/33 of their dividends.¹⁴⁷ Naming conventions and the “princely flag,” featured heavily in VOC expeditions.¹⁴⁸ The glory of the homeland would have been considered, but the prosperity of trade was the prize.

A culture of abundance was born, establishing a market for luxury products, paintings, and prints.¹⁴⁹ The cultural output was exceptional and the number of painters and artworks produced grew at an astounding speed.¹⁵⁰ The quantity of furnishings and decorative items produced resulted in a price structure that afforded even middling households luxury items unattainable by those in comparative social positions of other European regions.¹⁵¹

In addition to luxury products, this newfound wealth and import opportunities fostered both curiosity and experimentation with the natural world. An influx of exotica coincided with a thirst for knowledge and available funding for scientific inquiries and collecting. Microscopes were invented at the end of the 16th century, and as lenses improved over the course of the century, the ability to investigate the natural world grew exponentially.¹⁵² The end of the seventeenth century saw significant advancements in this technology, along with the rise of empirical knowledge.

Thus, there was an increase in access to the secrets of the world, both through technology and the availability of and demand for exotic plants and animals.¹⁵³ Naturalists traded artifacts and specimens; they collected, observed, and experimented.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 139.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 140-143.

¹⁴⁹ The rise of Protestantism, too, redirected the making of art from the church to the private market. Consequently, many new genres, domestic subject matter, and painting styles developed that were less appropriate for altarpieces. Artists could specialize in these as never before, and due in part to these circumstances, there was a burst of creativity and a thriving art market.

¹⁵⁰ As many as 5 million paintings were produced in the province of Holland during the seventeenth-century. Prak, "Guilds and the Development of the Art Market during the Dutch Golden Age," 238.

¹⁵¹ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 316.

¹⁵² Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, 1-25.

¹⁵³ Jorink and Ramakers, "Undivided territory: 'Art' and 'science' in the early modern Netherlands," 14.

There was a surge in the exchange of scientific knowledge and celebration of the natural world in the Low Countries.¹⁵⁴

3.2 The Science of Collecting: Kunstkamers and Menageries

A kunstkamer (or cabinet of curiosities, wunderkammer, or rariteitenkabinet), the private precursor to the modern concept of a museum, is a collection of *naturalia* and *artificialia*. I refer neither to the room nor the cabinet as an object when using this term in this thesis, but to a collection as a whole or the concept of collecting curious objects, and will limit myself to the use of a single term for the sake of cohesion.

These collections developed as both a means to study and a show of study, increasing the prestige and political power of the collector. The aim of a kunstkamer was to create an encyclopedic microcosm of the world.¹⁵⁵ Many of these artifacts and curiosities came from the burgeoning trade industry stemming from the far reach of the VOC. Not only did the discovery and availability of exotic items and animals create a market for kunstkamers, the flood of wealth in the Dutch Republic allowed for many people to participate in collecting, a luxury previously limited to royalty. Kunstkamers showed an appreciation for the diversity of species; these collections, which included shells, coral, butterflies and other insects, dried plants, and specimens preserved in spirits (fig.4.2).¹⁵⁶ Prints and paintings, too, were popular additions to kunstkamers, especially as this was a way to include things that were otherwise impossible to collect, whether too large, expensive, or ephemeral.¹⁵⁷ Another branch of animal painting thus emerged to document and collect exotic animals where living animals would not be possible.

This culture of prestigious, scientific collecting can also be seen in the assembling of exotic species in menageries and aviaries. Menageries, or serragli, were the living

¹⁵⁴ Dupré and Lüthy, *Silent Messengers: The Circulation of Material Objects of Knowledge in the Early Modern Netherlands*, 1-2.

¹⁵⁵ Kaufmann, "Remarks on the Collections of Rudolf II: The Kunstammer as a Form of Representatio," 24.

¹⁵⁶ For more on this, see Engel, *Alphabetical list of Dutch Zoological Cabinets and Menageries*, 1986.

¹⁵⁷ Vlieger, "Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d'Hondecoeter," 40.



Fig. 4.2 Levinus Vincent, Illustration from *Wondertooneel der natuur*, vol. 2, ca. 1706 - ca. 1715. Plate 4, page 296. University of Strasbourg, Strasbourg.

counterpart to the animalia of the *kunstkamer*, living and breathing rather than stuffed, preserved, or drawn — opulent in the care they required and in their transience. Just as the *kunstkamer* preceded the museum, the menagerie foreshadowed the modern zoo. These collections similarly focused on acquiring and possessing the natural world. In the former, the purpose of the collection was often both scientific in nature and intended to display one's wealth and power. The latter, with its living residents, was even more exclusive, but was generally less focused on natural science and more likely focused on novelty and entertainment.¹⁵⁸ During the course of the seventeenth century the

¹⁵⁸ The living variation is only more exclusive than a *kunstkamer* if the two were of comparable size and contained similar species. There is no threshold of species and rarity in a menagerie, but the preciousness of mortality makes them considerably more extravagant.

entertaining nature of the menagerie changed, as pitting exotic animals against each other in death sport gradually fell out of favor.¹⁵⁹

Related in their purpose and topic, the two types of collections occasionally overlapped in their contents: sometimes an animal that started in a menagerie transitioned into the *kunstkamer*. The Dutch originated modern taxidermy. Reportedly, the negligence of a caretaker caused an entire collection of birds from the East Indies to suffocate — the owner wanted to preserve the exotic species and had them stuffed, preserved with herbs, and posed, and the practice developed from there.¹⁶⁰ Both *kunstkamers* and menageries were manmade collections of natural specimens (or natural and artificial) that did not exist together outside of that circumstance.

Royalty commonly kept menageries, and the princes of Orange were no exception. That the first cassowary to arrive in Europe belonged to Prince Maurice indicates an interest in collecting animals, the presence of a menagerie, and a history of gifting exotic animals. This bird, having arrived in 1614, was certainly long dead by William's time.¹⁶¹ A menagerie existed at Honselaarsdijk since before William's birth,¹⁶² primarily composed of animals gifted from other sovereigns and the VOC to Frederik Hendrik.¹⁶³ Although it had not been kept up, William renewed it.

His uncle and king of England, Charles II, gave William a collection of exotic birds (and twenty riding horses) as a Christmas gift in 1670, thus contributing to William's enjoyment of his country houses and his love of hunting.¹⁶⁴ A lion and a tiger also lived at

¹⁵⁹ Baratay, and Hardouin-Fugier. *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West*, 39-42.

¹⁶⁰ Moyer, *Practical Taxidermy*, 2.

¹⁶¹ Strehlow, "Zoological Gardens of Western Europe," in *Zoo and Aquarium History: Ancient Animal Collections to Zoological Gardens*, 81.

¹⁶² Engel, *Alphabetical list of Dutch Zoological Cabinets and Menageries*, 127.

¹⁶³ Frederik Hendrik also kept animals at other houses, such as the first chimpanzee brought to Europe, also a gift from the VOC. Strehlow, "Zoological Gardens of Western Europe," 81.

¹⁶⁴ Van der Zee, William and Mary, 54.

Honselaarsdijk, as well as a remarkable creature given to him by Bentinck: a chameleon.¹⁶⁵

3.3 Indian Animals Above the Mantel

De Hondecoeter's *Landscape with Exotic Animals* (fig.3.6), painted for Het Loo, is unusual within his oeuvre. The style and composition has more in common with his grandfather's rigid paintings of animals in landscapes than his usual, lively paintings. The animals do not appear to interact and the painting lacks the dynamism typical in his bird pictures. Clearly he was painting outside of his specialty, and the unprecedented subject matter indicates it was specified in the commission. More than usual, the individual animals appear displaced, or cut and pasted into the painting, and the quality of the painting is irregular. Backed by woods, streams, and a distant tower that suggests a nearby town, the setting is a rocky hill that functions as a tiered display for the animals. An elephant is partially visible on the far right and the rest of the scene is filled with 15 exotic cows, goats, sheep, deer, and other grazing mammals. The center-front of the painting is occupied by a few waterbirds in a pond and an Egyptian goose on the bank. The foreground most inhabits the scene, and recalls De Hondecoeter's familiarity with the paintings of Marseus van Schrieck: the detailed botanical grouping on the right, and even the group of delicate mushrooms on the far left. Visually, the plants are taller than any of the animals in the painting save the elephant, relegated to the far right side of the painting. Like Marseus van Schrieck, he displays the flora and fungi in a manner that allows for scientific identification.

De Hondecoeter painted commissions that can be identified as depictions of real, historic locations, for example *Birds Near a Balustrade, in the Background the Amsterdam Town Hall* (fig.4.3) and a cycle that depicts Huis Driemond (fig.4.4, 4.5). Because *Landscape with Exotic Animals* was also a commissioned painting and is exceptional in his oeuvre, it is appropriate to take a cursory glance at the evidence in order to dispel the myth that this

¹⁶⁵ Kurpershoek, "Jager en tuinieren, schilderkunst en porselein," in *Paleis Soestdijk: Drie eeuwen huis van Oranje*, 142.



Fig. 4.3 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Birds on a Balustrade, in the Background the Amsterdam Town Hall*, 1670. Oil on canvas, 183.5 x 162 cm. Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 4.4 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Bird Park with View of Huis Driemond*, 1671-1680. Oil on canvas, 338.5 x 188.4 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Fig. 4.5 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Bird Park with Swan and Dog*, 1671-1680. Oil on canvas, 338.5 x 209.3 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

was a literal collection. An aviary was known to have existed at Het Loo during the time of De Hondecoeter's commissions, but a menagerie at this location was not recorded until 1695, the year of his death. Furthermore, Indian animals did not appear in the collection until 1705, and the first elephant arrived at the palace in 1786. Therefore it is impossible for *Landscape with Exotic Animals*, which appears in inventories as “Indiaensche beesten van Hondekoten voor de schoorsteen,” to correspond to animals in the collection.¹⁶⁶ The animals in this painting, while celebrating diversity in the animal kingdom and menageries, do not represent William’s collection in an inventory-like manner.¹⁶⁷

The collecting practices of William communicate both imperial power and power over nature in their depictions of the interaction of non-native species. *Landscape with Exotic Animals* and the other paintings of De Hondecoeter function as examples of the kind of animals (if not the specific animals) that William collected, depictions which would long outlive not only the animals, but the painter and William himself. The painting depicts exotic, non-native species under the authority of a collector — it displays the wealth and privilege it took to assemble a menagerie, the power William had that led to political gifting, and an interest in the natural world. There is the possibility that there is an emblematic interpretation that has yet to be identified; as established by other paintings by De Hondecoeter, there is a precedent to examine this and other paintings in this light.

Like *The Menagerie*, this painting hung in William’s private cabinet at Het Loo and adjacent to King’s Garden. The view out of the windows of the garden functioned as a depiction of an unnatural nature that existed in time and space. On the opposite wall, and in conversation with the view, hung De Hondecoeter’s depictions of an unnatural nature that did not exist as a moment in time, and were unaffected by the seasons and

¹⁶⁶ Drossaers and Lunsingh Scheurleer *Inventarissen van de inboedels in de verblijven van de Oranjes en daarmede gelijk te stellen stukken 1567-1795*, vol 1, 667, no. 536.

¹⁶⁷ It has been suggested that this represents the menagerie at Honselaarsdijk rather than Het Loo, commissioned so that William could admire his animals while enjoying his newest palace, but this is doubtful as well.

weather. Both the gardens and the paintings use the natural world as prototype or clay, to be collected and molded at will.

3.4 Gardens as Depictions of Man and Nature

The Dutch formal garden reflects the spirit of collecting and the mastery of the land. Palaces were symbolic of political power, but functioned daily as places where William could pursue his favorite pastimes of hunting and gardening. De Hondcoeter's paintings were meant to fold into the architecture, decorations, and gardens that were conceived concurrently, as part of a unified aesthetic. The pendant paintings in Soestdijk made use of the natural light in their original setting and the collected birds of *The Menagerie* stood watch over the King's Garden at Het Loo. In one sense, the paintings of De Hondcoeter reflect the literal outdoors. In another sense, they project the ideas of the outdoors: the order, the chaos — the struggle between man and nature. With their high hedges and decorative urns, the gardens of Het Loo reflected this back, giving the impression of rooms.¹⁶⁸

Gardens, in particular seventeenth-century Dutch gardens, are an exercise in the ordering of nature. By definition, a garden is only distinguishable from nature by the meddling of man. It is a transitional space, a buffering between architectural interiors and the natural environment. In practical terms, these tall rows of trees limited wind damage to more delicate plantings. And, in the typically low, Dutch landscape, the rows spoiled no views as there were practically none to be had.

The land encompassing Het Loo was dune and low brush before it was conquered and thoroughly gardened. The surrounding area was transformed from sand and shrubs into elegant vistas, complete with parkland, ponds, and woods — a man-made idealization of a natural setting (fig.4.6).¹⁶⁹ These “rooms” were not completely view-less — the design took into consideration the view of the parterres from windows as well as

¹⁶⁸ Janssens-Knorsch, “From Het Loo to Hampton Court: William and Mary's Dutch Gardens and Their Influence on English Gardening,” 289.

¹⁶⁹ Vliegthart, “Het Loo” in *William and Mary and Their House*, 44.

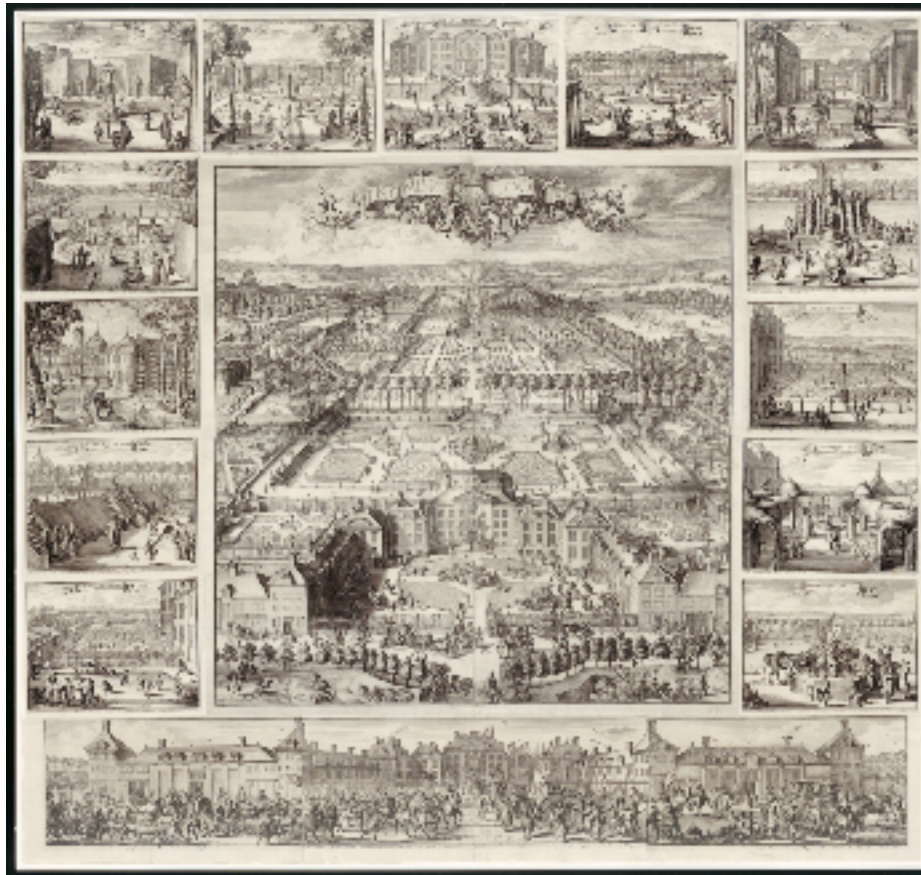


Fig. 4.6 Romeyn de Hooghe, *View of Palace Het Loo, the associated buildings and the accompanying park, 'T Konings loo (title on object), 1700 - 1737*. Published by Johannes van Oosterwyk. Etching, 1190 x 1270 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

glimpses caught through the “doorways” of hedges.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, the garden, house, and interior were a design unto themselves; they were separate and distinct from the larger countryside, safe and contained as a private paradise.¹⁷¹

The Dutch can be celebrated not only for draining lakes and pushing back the sea, but for turning wasteland into rich gardens. Jacob Cats addressed this transformation in his country house poem: “It is no small pleasure when, through art, one turns arid sands

¹⁷⁰ De Jong, “Netherlandish Hesperides’: Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary, 1650-1702,” 26.

¹⁷¹ Hamilton, *William’s Mary*, 152.

into useful lands.”¹⁷² The essence of this attitude is that nature is imperfect, and can be improved. Mankind possesses a transformative power over nature, not only to shape the landscape, but also to control the future of individual species, by cultivating plants and selecting them for desirable traits. Cultivation and control over nature was inexorably linked to the Garden of Eden in the seventeenth century. The Fall of Man told in the book of Genesis was taken as literal history, and it was not only a worthy goal, but a duty to pursue the return of paradise through natural science.¹⁷³ The garden, then, as the stage on which the Fall was played, was highly symbolic. The pursuit of empirical knowledge that overtook the seventeenth century was closely linked to the desire to control nature. Eden was thought to be in perpetual spring,¹⁷⁴ and the lush gardens of the Netherlands were ruled over by mathematics, horticulture, and the increasing availability of exotic plants from overseas. William requested of his gardeners that there always be flowers in bloom. Thus, through human involvement, nature mimicked art: the paradise scenes and wildly implausible still-life paintings of bouquets were coming closer to reality. The ground that God had cursed was becoming fruitful through the toil of man.¹⁷⁵

Stylistically, this desire to manipulate the natural world developed into a formal garden.¹⁷⁶ Uniquely Dutch is the frequency of topiary, a prime example of the combination of art and nature, designed by both creator and mankind.¹⁷⁷ These rigid lines and intricate patterns explain why the practice of designing gardens was considered to more closely resemble mathematics than nature, and how Marot came to the title of Royal Mathematician.

¹⁷² “Het is been kleyn vermaak wanneer men dorre sanden/Door middel van de Kunst verkeert in nutte landen.” Cats, *Ouderdom, buyten-leven, en hof-gedachten op Sorgholiet*. Trans, Janssens-Knorsch, “From Het Loo to Hampton Court: William and Mary’s Dutch Gardens and Their Influence on English Gardening,” 282.

¹⁷³ Hildebrecht, “Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece,” 316.

¹⁷⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV 264-268, X 678-679.

¹⁷⁵ Genesis 3:17

¹⁷⁶ Climate conditions, and French and classical styles also influenced formal garden development.

¹⁷⁷ Janssens-Knorsch, “From Het Loo to Hampton Court: William and Mary’s Dutch Gardens and Their Influence on English Gardening,” 285.

Following the destruction of many country houses by French troops in 1672, there was a burgeoning of garden design as the houses were rebuilt.¹⁷⁸ The more recently wealthy were also expanding into the countryside, mimicking the fashions of the nobility, and creating their own gardens.

While horticulturalists were successful in their manipulation of the plants and landscapes, nature still reigned supreme, and a thriving garden was impossible if her rules were broken. Thus, the natural conditions in the Netherlands greatly contributed to popular garden design. The high water table necessitated the inclusion of canals, which cut across or surrounded gardens in straight lines.¹⁷⁹ The fountains of Het Loo, although an impressive feat of engineering, would not have been possible without the cooperation of the land. The flat, windy landscape led to the development of the tall rows of trees or hedges to protect spaces, and thus the creation of the room-like quality.¹⁸⁰ The cool, rainy climate meant that physical buildings (hot houses and orangeries) had to be included in gardens to allow frost-susceptible plants to survive. Similarly, these plants and trees had to be planted in moveable containers, such as urns, to allow them to winter indoors, a concession that nature, after all, controlled the climate, even if the Dutch created the polders. This tension between man and nature appears in *The Menagerie*: the indigenous bullfinch, likely an intruder rather than a captive species in the formal garden illustrates the supremacy of the natural world, a moralistic reminder of the inevitable creep of nature back into the garden and the vanity of collections.

The gardens of the Stadholder were extensive, but a wealthy merchant would ideally have the same elements in miniature. One such garden belonged to Abraham Inses, near Haarlem (fig.4.7): a canal ran through the property and the garden was surrounded by hedges and walls. There were high fountains, topiary trees, statues, and a shell grotto among tidy, precise plantings. The aviary housed at least peacocks and a

¹⁷⁸ De Jong, "Netherlandish Hesperides": Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary, 1650-1702," 26.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 19.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

turkey, across from which fruit trees grew in planters. The garden was characterized by order and ambition.



Fig. 4.7 Unknown, *Hofsteden Vlietzorg en Zorgvliet aan het Buiten Spaarne bij Haarlem*, ca. 1689 - ca. 1709. Oil on canvas, 104.5 x 127 cm. Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam.

Jan van der Groen's treatise on gardens, the 1669 *Den Nederlandtsen Hovenier* stands alone in its breadth of garden related material (fig.4.8); it was widely republished and provides contemporary views on gardens and country living in the early modern period.¹⁸¹ He believed that nature "is only to be arranged, embellished, put into good order, decorated and made pleasurable by art."¹⁸² Understanding, possessing, and controlling can be formed in more palatable terminology: an interest in natural science, collecting, and gardening — all gentlemanly pursuits.

¹⁸¹ Jan van der Groen was employed as a gardener by Frederik Hendrik, William II, and William III, which included a period of gardening at Honselaarsdijk.

¹⁸² De Jong, "'Netherlandish Hesperides': Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary, 1650-1702," 18.



Fig. 4.8 Frederik Bouttats (de Jonge), *The Dutch Gardener*, title page for *De Nederlantsen Hovenier*, 't *Vermakelijck Lant-leven*, by Jan van der Groen, 1672. Published by Philips Vleugaert. Engraving, 132 x 165 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

This desire for mastery over nature can also be detected in Houbraken's report of De Hondcoeter and Marseus van Schrieck's power over rooster and snake, respectively. Both of these animals were known to be especially violent. The description of the two artists posing the most aggressive animal in their repertoire signifies not only impressive command of all manner of their craft and accurate renderings of scale and feather, but symbolically depicts their success in subduing fallen nature, and the particular threat of the postlapsarian animal.¹⁸³ They are credited as taming the untamed, as was the objective of much seventeenth century gardening, collecting, exploring, and conquering.

The gardens designed for William and Mary, and for others who could afford them, were similar in concept to a *kunstkamer*, and would have been appreciated for the

¹⁸³ Hildebrecht, *Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece*, 164-165.

same traits. Both displayed a collection of naturalia and artificialia, though on different scales. The kunstkamer had its intricately carved objects and paintings, shells, dried coral, and butterflies.¹⁸⁴ The formal garden, on the other hand, employed statuary and classically inspired architectural features and fountains, topiary, parterres, and canals.¹⁸⁵ Both arose from wonderment of the natural world and the desire and means to possess and collect.

By persistence and invention, the Dutch believed their formal gardens could become a new paradise. That art and nature operate in harmony is only possible with strict and violent trimming, bending, shaping, subduing, and cultivating (fig.4.9). The very process of garden design was an act of man defying the power of nature as it yielded an attractive park. Filling this setting with non-native species further exemplified man's control over the environment. De Hondcoeter displayed this manipulation by juxtaposing the local countryside and foreign creatures, nature subdued and the untamable wildness of the animals he depicted.



Fig. 4.9. Laurens Scherm, *Berceaus in the gardens of Paleis Het Loo, Het Groene Koningins Kabinet* (title on object), 1702. Etching, 167 x 199 mm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

¹⁸⁴ Fascinatingly, artificialia is not truly “manmade,” but items that were products of both nature and man’s desire to improve upon nature. Nautilus cups or carved ivory come first to mind in this category, but carved wood, silverwork, and even the pigments for paintings that are made from stone and earth also fit; nature, as it were, had her finger in all of these pies.

¹⁸⁵ Gardens also often contained shells in grottos or as a design motif, as seen at Het Loo.

3.5 Collecting The Floating Feather

The painting *A Pelican and other Birds near a Pool* (fig.5.0), more commonly known as *The Floating Feather*, exemplifies the values of collecting and displaying exotica in a carefully designed and maintained garden. Unlike *Landscape with Exotic Animals*, the animals are not displayed in a naturalistic enclosure, but have been forced in an area cultivated and governed by man.



Fig. 5.0 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Pelican and other Birds near a Pool*, known as ‘*The Floating Feather*,’ ca. 1680. Oil on canvas, 159 x 144 cm. The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

As has been previously outlined, Otto Marseus van Schrieck depicted nature interacting unnaturally, a deviation from natural history that would have been apparent to a beholder also in possession of this intimate knowledge. Only a natural historian or keen observer of snakes, such as his collectors in the Medici household, would have recognized their behavior as unusual.¹⁸⁶ De Hondecoeter also deviated from nature; while the behavior of the birds he depicted is natural, their assembly as exotic species is not. Both artists were careful observers and translators of nature: one for a scientific community that observed lowly snakes, lizards, and toads; and the other for the nobility and those who emulated them by collecting the rarest and showiest of birds. Special knowledge of their behavior was not required, but the informed collector would have been impressed by their plumage, expense, and distant origins.

This painting is a picture of elegant diversity. The collection of exotic and native birds populate a garden, and all of the species are strikingly beautiful. Among them, gathered on the right side of the painting, are most of the water birds: Eurasian teal, common merganser, red-breasted goose, Eurasian wigeon, common shelduck, muscovy duck, brant goose, smew, Egyptian goose, and northern pintail.¹⁸⁷ Many of these waterfowl were local residents in the seventeenth century, and while not truly “exotic,” are striking in their patterning and coloration, and thus also collectible. The waterbirds interact, but the black crowned crane, flamingo, cassowary, and great white pelican on the left side of the painting appear immobile. While expertly rendered, the pelican in particular appears to be pasted into the painting from a natural history illustration, and the smaller waterbirds possess an ownership of the space that the pelican lacks. De Hondecoeter’s adeptness at depicting the behavior of the birds on the right side of the painting leads one to believe he had significantly more experience observing waterbirds than large, exotic birds. It is probable that these depictions were taken from

¹⁸⁶ For more on Marseus van Schrieck’s relationship with the Medici, and their interest in snakes, see Hildebrecht, *Otto Marseus van Schrieck and the Nature Piece*.

¹⁸⁷ In the seventeenth century the Egyptian goose was an exotic import, but now has a self-sustaining population in the Netherlands.

individual examples that he had limited access to, and that the pelican was seen only once or from a preserved specimen, as it appears in a single pose throughout his paintings.

Of the five paintings made by De Hondecoeter for William III that are discussed in this thesis, *The Floating Feather* most resembles his work outside of stadholder commissions as it closely resembles two paintings, *Exotic Birds and Waterbirds in a Park* (fig. 5.1), in a private collection in California, and *Common Crane, White Pelican, Crown Crane, Red-breasted Goose, Little Spike, Egyptian Goose, Musk Duck and a Black Hokko by a Pool* (fig.5.2), in a private collection in Germany. A few of the characters switch positions, but the three paintings share many identical poses.¹⁸⁸ The American- and German-held paintings are horizontally oriented, while the stadholder's painting is vertical; it may have been based on one of the other paintings, and the composition merely reworked to accommodate a size restriction in the wall paneling, or the theme of the painting simply fit within the overarching design of William's palaces. Regardless of how it came into being, De Hondecoeter considered it a successful composition and explored the design opportunities by reworking elements of the painting.

Unfortunately none of the three are dated, and the dating of the privately held paintings are currently given wide ranges. It would provide insight into De Hondecoeter's process if the order in which the paintings were produced was known: did he receive a commission from William, and later continue to experiment with compositional opportunities? Or perhaps the painting for William was the pinnacle of this composition exploration. Many questions about De Hondecoeter's working process and his ornithological knowledge are raised by this painting that have not yet been answered, and would benefit from future scholarship.

In both the Dutch- and American-held versions, the cassowary and the flamingo are stacked on the far left of the canvas, and both of their bodies are largely hidden from view. De Hondecoeter possibly did this to showcase these large birds and their exoticism

¹⁸⁸ In order to demonstrate this, I have created an image comparison slider and applied it to the three paintings. It is available at <http://joechrismans.com/plumesofpower.html>. See Appendix B for screenshots and additional information.



Fig. 5.1 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Exotic Birds and Waterbirds in a Park*, ca. 1665 - ca. 1695. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 188 cm. Private Collection, Los Angeles.



Fig. 5.2 Melchior de Hondecoeter, *Common Crane, White Pelican, Crown Crane, Red-breasted Goose, Little Spike, Egyptian Goose, Musk Duck and a Black Hokko by a Pool*, before 1683. Oil on canvas, 115 x 136 cm. Private Collection, Germany.

without their monopolizing the canvas, or he may have had limited experience with them, as they frequently appear in the same pose in his paintings.¹⁸⁹ The German painting depicts a black curassow on the far right of the painting, showing just enough to identify the bird, with no more than one quarter of its body on the canvas. This may be the first European painting to include a Surinamese bird, let alone this species.¹⁹⁰

In *The Floating Feather*, the birds are gathered in and around a canal or pool; the body of water is not natural, but is set with stone blocks on the edge and part of the artificial landscape. In the foreground, De Hondecoeter used the previously mentioned sponge technique to depict the mossy surface on which the pelican stands. Another manmade pool lies in the distance, partially surrounded by a balustrade and leading into mature woodland that promises a successful hunt, as does the formation of wild birds in the sky. Thus, the setting is a garden like those common to country houses. The balustrade is set with ornamental urns and a partially visible statue; the garden was not only touched by human hands, but designed by someone with money to spare. It projects the wealth of collecting and the ordering of the natural. The paving stones on the water's edge and even a hint of garden architecture give context to the birds. What might otherwise be a motley crew are, in fact, highly prized and fashionable collector items.

3.6 Hunting Rights and The Game Piece

Within the grounds of the Dutch country house, the gardens were tightly controlled, a reflection of man's conquest of nature. Within the context of the countryside, the country house takes on a more violent character. Its very presence reflects the draw of the hunt — the gentleman's pursuit of dominance over nature through bloodshed.

A specialized still-life painting developed in celebration of this practice and to exploit the aesthetic possibility of the prey: the game piece. The popularity of the genre

¹⁸⁹ It would be interesting to analyze the individual poses of the birds, to see which species repeat frequently in his repertoire, how the poses develop over time, and if this correlates with an increase in his opportunities to see other birds.

¹⁹⁰ According to Ruud Vlek, via the RKD Website <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/66258>

rose over the second half of the seventeenth century, and the paintings became increasingly grand. The game piece retained the connotation of food from its beginnings as the kitchen piece, and thus the wealth that the land itself provided (while exotica represented the wealth of the world, and the success of the Dutch in collecting it).¹⁹¹ Hanging in a canal house, a game piece signaled wealth and power beyond those four walls. It suggested the ownership of a country house which may not have existed and a right to hunt which relatively few possessed. Its place hanging in a country house may be more thematically fitting, but it did not mean that the owner could legally hunt. Still, it suggested nobility. While the group of pictures examined for this thesis were painted for the Stadholder, for the majority of their owners, game pieces were aspirational pictures. Hunting was strictly regulated; only the nobility were allowed to hunt most wading birds and larger game. Even the ownership of greyhounds was forbidden for non-hunting classes.¹⁹² Given the prevalence of the game piece, it is not possible that these were only collected by those with the right to hunt; there were only around 100 noblemen in Holland.¹⁹³ Even in his displeasure at depictions of hunting gear, De Lairese acknowledges the popularity of the game piece among aristocratic and wealthy collectors when he writes, “I as little approve of horse-furniture and hunting equipage; tho’ these latter, with wild boars, stags, hares, pheasants, partridges, and other fowls, depending on princes and noblemen’s fancies, are more tolerable.”¹⁹⁴

It is important to note that the game pieces did not represent moments in time or specific hunting trophies, just as the exotic collections of birds like in *The Floating Feather* do not function as inventories. Instead, they present an ideal. And, just as the *pronkstilleven* did not portray the literal belongings of the owner, the game piece did not portray the game taken by owner. Instead, it evoked privilege and class.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Chong, “Contained Under the Name of Still Life: The Associations of Still-Life Painting” in *Still-Life Painting from the Netherlands*, 23.

¹⁹² Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 34-41.

¹⁹³ Onnekink, “The Anglo-Dutch Favourite. The Career of Hans Willem Bentinck,” 12.

¹⁹⁴ De Lairese, *The Art of Painting*, trans. Fritsch, 548-549.

¹⁹⁵ Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 41.

Furthermore, unusual combinations of game are often displayed together, such as migratory birds whose season in the Low Countries did not correspond. In addition, it is unlikely that a variety of different species and sizes of animals would be pursued on the same day, or that a hunter would use the multiple methods commonly depicted together on any given hunt.¹⁹⁶ As established, the game piece does not celebrate a particular day of hunting through an inventory-like approach. Rather, these celebrate hunting prowess and privilege.

Hunting as a pastime provided William III great pleasure, and relief.¹⁹⁷ Reportedly, Het Loo housed anywhere from 30 to 152 riding horses.¹⁹⁸ Soestdijk, Honselaarsdijk, and Het Loo were all formed as hunting lodges, and their design schemes and collections reflected this. Decorating his houses and collecting were certainly of interest to William, but hunting was always their primary purpose and his passion. He was trained in the sport since childhood¹⁹⁹ and, in fact, he was accused of spending too much of his time pursuing game.²⁰⁰ At Het Loo, he proudly displayed more than 300 antlers from his hunting escapades.²⁰¹

William, as Stadholder and Prince of Orange, fulfilled all of the power and privilege the game piece idealized. For many collectors of the genre, it would have presented an affected status and ambition. But for William, it accurately portrayed his political power, his skill as a hunter, his noble birth, and his ownership of extensive estates. Understanding the conventions and symbolism of the game piece reveals the ways in which De Hondcoeter exploited these themes in the works he created for William.

¹⁹⁶ Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 56.

¹⁹⁷ Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 102.

¹⁹⁸ Ronnes, “The Quiet Authors of An Early Modern Palatial Landscape” in *Landscape Biographies*, 211.

¹⁹⁹ He received three horses for his sixth birthday, which were housed at Honselaarsdijk, and was trained in riding from the age of eight. William was introduced to hunting at the age of nine, when he was allowed to pursue a rabbit that was released in a conservatory for his pleasure. The following year his uncle led him on a real hunt, where they killed a boar. By the age of 14 he was passionate about the sport. Van der Zee, *William and Mary*, 17-32.

²⁰⁰ Baxter, “William III as Hercules: the political implications of court culture,” 103.

²⁰¹ Van Gelder, “The Staholder-King William III as Collector and ‘Man of Taste,’” 40.

This chapter has clarified the state of collecting, in *kunstkamers* and of living animals, and the interest in science and status associated with this pursuit. Evidence has been presented which shows both *Landscape with Exotic Animals* and *The Floating Feather* are not pictures of reality, instead conveying the spirit of exotic collecting. The Dutch garden and hunting rights are both shown to be products of the contemporary obsession with controlling nature and charged symbols of status and privilege to which De Hondecoeter would have responded.

4.0 Chapter 4 The What: The Pendants and The Estate Piece

In this next chapter I will provide three significant arguments. First, an analysis of the pair of pendant paintings Melchior de Hondecoeter painted for Soestdijk palace, basing my argument on the significance of their original location at the palace and the context of William's political power at the time of their creation. By comparing them to other paintings in De Hondecoeter's oeuvre, one can establish a correlation between these and Aesopian characters. One of the paintings has previously been identified with William III and the House of Orange; this allegorical connection will be expanded, taking into account their symbolism as a pair of paintings, as depictions of gardens, as game pieces, and in conversation with the fable of the Peacock and the Magpie. Following this, I will propose a new definition of De Hondecoeter's most inventive painting type as "the estate piece;" all previous attempts at naming this genre have been deficient. Lastly, I will clarify the historical context of collecting and gardening necessary to understand these pictures.

4.1 Contemplating the Soestdijk Pendants

The pendant pair, *A Hunter's Bag on a Terrace* (fig.1.0) and *A Hunter's Bag near a Tree Stump with a Magpie* (fig.1.1), also known as '*The Contemplative Magpie*,' were commissioned for Soestdijk, and prominently displayed in the entrance. These were incorporated into the architecture in shallow niches in the palace designed by the architect Maurits Post, and built in a mere four years (1674 to 1678). Gerard de Lairesse was responsible for the interior scheme and much of its implementation. The unification of the paintings within the architecture reminds the beholder that the building functioned as a hunting lodge for the Stadholder, and that the architectural elements depicted in the paintings could be found mirrored in the gardens.

Stepping through the main door, which is flanked by a narrow window on each side and a window above, the visitor would have been engulfed by the paintings with their nearly floor-to-ceiling height. Not only were these the first paintings a visitor would see upon entering the palace, but one would be surrounded by them. While grandly furnished, this entrance was a narrow space. The light would have streamed in from behind the beholder to illuminate the two hunting scenes: a peacock with game birds and a hare on the left, and a magpie with game birds on the right. The natural lighting was mimicked in the paintings. The peacock and the magpie, their beaks open, were in a heated debate. The beholder was caught between, no longer an observer, but partaking in the conversation.

Who should be king? The presumptuous peacock declares he should be king, while the magpie vehemently rejects this. The paintings both ask the question and produce the answer — in an urn standing on a pedestal high above the peacock grows an orange tree, in reference to stadholder William, prince of Orange. Already holding the highest office in the Dutch Republic, he fully realized this allegory a decade later, when he was crowned king of England in 1689. These two living birds, juxtaposed with the lifeless game

displayed before them, are yet another occurrence of the fable of the peacock and the jackdaw, as established in chapter 1.²⁰²

As has been addressed in chapter 2, there is a marked difference in William's efforts to enhance his connections to the Stuart House following the crowning of James II. The Peacock and the Magpie pendants predate this as they were most likely painted in 1678, the year following his advantageous marriage to Mary Stuart; nevertheless, the fabled conversation between the birds can be seen as political commentary. The declaration? William merited the crown of England.

4.2 The Presumptuous Peacock

In *A Hunter's Bag on a Terrace*, the painting hanging on the left of the beholder, the primary actor is a peacock on the stage of an elegant terrace. He emerges from behind the balustrades and appears on the steps, informing the beholder that this terrace is one architecturally defined space within a larger setting, the garden of a rich country estate. On the far left of the painting stands a classical statue, and one catches a glimpse of the country house or a garden building, both of which indicate the estate continues beyond the frame.²⁰³ The presence of the game implies an estate larger than just the formal gardens, with access to hunting grounds.

Functionally, the plinth provides a visually and allegorically solid base for the orange tree. The potted tree is thrust to the top of the painting and takes center stage. The spoils of the hunt rest against the balustrade; the rod to which they are tied is diagonal, leaning against the urn and pointing to the orange tree and building the composition. Resting on a pile of net and a green velvet hunting bag (frequently repeated

²⁰² Lisanne Wepler has identified this fable in a number of De Hondcoeter's paintings, often previously classified as bird concerts or poultry yards. She names the indicator of this theme as "the act of communication between peacock and magpie amid an assembly of birds of many species." Wepler, "Stories in Pictures from the World of Birds: The Courageous Magpie," 92. Further, Wepler has suggested the two birds may be in conversation if the paintings were hung across from one another, and indicating William III as king. Wepler, *Bilderzählungen in der Vogelmalerei des niederländischen Barocks*, 104-107.

²⁰³ This sort of accessory became increasingly popular under the influence of Gerard de Lairese. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 67.

in De Hondecoeter's game pieces) is a collection of local game: a hare, heron, and black grouse are tied to the pole; a snipe is tucked in behind them; and a pheasant is laid on the pile of game.²⁰⁴ A hunting horn hangs from the edge of the plinth. A peahen rests on the balustrade while the peacock struts out from behind it; a blackbird flies through the sky, as well as additional local birds further in the background. A turkey walks in the distance, apparently too distant to care about the peacock's claims, but reminding the beholder that the owner of this estate not only engages in the noble pastime of hunting but also has the good taste and fortune to collect living species. It implies a larger collection of ornamental and table birds, just as the hint of architecture and statuary imply a fuller picture beyond the scope of the painting.

On the far right, a topped tree stands behind the peahen. The damage is jagged, indicating this was a force of nature, not a cut. While De Hondecoeter sometimes depicts tree branches that lack leaves, they generally reach into and across the painting and function as seating for his cast of birds, not calling attention to themselves as this tree does. It stands in contrast to the healthy, fruit-bearing orange tree, and will be further analyzed shortly. A crowned lion grotesque decorates the urn, alluding to the *Leo Belgicus* and holding a laurel garland in its mouth.²⁰⁵ Acanthus leaves decorate the bowl of the planter.

4.3 The Courageous Magpie

Across the room its pendant, *The Contemplative Magpie* is set on the edge of a wood. At the right side, on the horizon line, nearby civilization is evident from the suggestion of a steeple on the far side of a body of water. The game hangs from a tree and rests piled up at the base. The array of game birds is impressive: a Northern shoveler, quail, tufted

²⁰⁴ Originating in Asia, pheasants were not strictly local, but were introduced as game birds. The keeping and breeding of pheasants had been a noble privilege in the Holy Roman Empire. They were expensive and considered a delicacy in the seventeenth century. Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier. *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West*, 35.

²⁰⁵ The 'Belgick Lyon' refers to the historic geographic region of the Low Countries as represented by a lion. It was incorporated into heraldry and was also used by William's supporters to refer to the stadholder during the Glorious Revolution. Schwoerer, "Propaganda in the Revolution of 1688-89," 850.

roman goose, common shelduck, and gadwall lie on the ground, while more quail, an unidentified black duck, and a red-breasted merganser hang from the tree branch behind a large Eurasian bittern. The bittern is a notoriously solitary and extremely shy bird, most active at dawn and dusk — such game highlights the virtuosity of the hunter as well as the skill of the painter.²⁰⁶ Rolls of nets rest in the foreground on the left, along with other hunting tools, like the lure made from a lobster claw,²⁰⁷ and the birdshot lying directly in front of the goose. A cage stands behind the game with its cover pulled up slightly, bringing attention to the artist's initials that are carved into the frame.

The magpie stands prominently on a stump, this perch mimicking the balustrade in *A Hunter's Bag on a Terrace*; nature is in conversation with architecture. The stump functions as an architectural feature, and judging from the axe wounds, was the result of human meddling rather than the result of the natural rhythm of the forest. In contrast, the damaged tree in the peacock painting appears to have been struck by lightning, regardless of its protected and controlled environment in the garden. The magpie painting is the wooded counterpart to the ordered garden of the peacock painting. The settings within the paintings play off of each other, and with the knowledge that beyond the paintings and the palace, the literal gardens and woods were in the constant push and pull of man versus nature.

The magpie's stump is the more subtle recognition of this power play. The hunter has asserted his strength by killing and collecting the birds provided by nature. Both the act of gardening and the act of sport hunting are attempts by man to control, direct, and overpower the natural world. As outlined in chapter 3, the image of game was a status symbol. These paintings celebrate William's prowess as a hunter as well as his noble lineage. While the orange tree is unmistakable, even the hunting elements alone would be enough to provide this function.

²⁰⁶ I was unable to positively identify the bird lying on the branch, but it may be a kingfisher. If so, this bird also features the skill of the hunter, as it is reputedly a fast, difficult to hunt species. Vlieger, "Doctoraalscriptie over het leven en werk van Melchior d'Hondecoeter," 51.

²⁰⁷ To operate, one would inflate the leather pouch by blowing through a hole in the claw. When squeezed, the bellows produced a whistle to attract birds. Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 939.

Likewise, the country houses in which these two paintings were contained — first Soestdijk and later Het Loo — were depictions of power and part of the political image making of William. The significance of the paintings within the architecture is unmistakable; these paintings were commissioned for the entrance, therefore the first interior impression of this first major building project, and later moved to his most significant building project.

4.4 An Aesopian Reading

De Hondecoeter's audience was accustomed to looking for allegory within paintings, and there is a strong precedent to read these works as a proverb or fable.²⁰⁸ The Peacock and the Magpie was already in his repertoire, and he was experienced in riffing on depictions of established themes and combined sources.²⁰⁹ Here, he paints it larger, grander, and expertly folds this fable into an allegory of the house and rule of the Prince of Orange.

In her argument for establishing the fable of the peacock and the magpie in De Hondecoeter's oeuvre, Wepler remarks on the ways in which he altered Snyder's depiction of the fable.²¹⁰ For example, while Snyder's placement of the magpie on a tree stump featured it as a main character, De Hondecoeter generally opted for a subtler approach in showing the communication between the peacock and magpie.²¹¹ In this instance, however, he has taken a different approach to manipulating the theme. This combination of the game piece and the fable painting has certainly altered the established iconography, but the magpie's appearance on the stump, as well as the open-beaked conversation between the birds, clarifies any ambiguity in the narrative. The magpie is elevated and backlit, prominent in the stark contrast, and easily associated with the pictorial tradition when perched on the tree stump.

²⁰⁸ To see possible interpretations of *The Threatened Swan*, by Jan Asselijn, and how allegory may have been projected onto the painting by its audience, see Wepler, "Fabulous Birds: Melchior d'Hondecoeter as Storyteller," 47-49.

²⁰⁹ Wepler, "Fabulous Birds: Melchior d'Hondecoeter as Storyteller," 44.

²¹⁰ Wepler, "Stories in Pictures from the World of Birds: The Courageous Magpie," 96.

²¹¹ Ibid.

The pair of paintings are unusually large format for game pieces and the displayed game and living birds are motifs rarely combined within De Hondecoter's oeuvre.²¹² The fable of the peacock and magpie cleverly ties the two paintings together. The turkey and the peafowl hint at a further exotic bird collection, and a few distant birds adorn the sky. Other than these, the peacock and the magpie, locked in verbal conflict, are the primary survivors of this successful day of hunting. The birds usually depicted chattering and commenting in the fable are instead their silenced witnesses, this dark twist giving the painting a certain urgency. The peacock has escaped the table by his beauty, the magpie by his cleverness.

The warning of the danger of choosing a leader based on his beauty also addresses William's somewhat unfortunate looks. He was neither handsome nor charming, and his sickly childhood had done him no favors; he was scrawny and slightly bent, with a prominent hook nose and droopy eyes.²¹³ Still, it was not William's charisma, but valor and leadership that saved the Republic from the disaster year of 1672. Throughout his life, he was known to be quiet and serious, a man of as few words as possible.²¹⁴ Even in allegory he retains this trait (here, an asset) where he stands nobly, as the silent orange tree, while birds squawk around him. He becomes the wise ruler the magpie shows is needed.

The two paintings depict consecutive moments in the narrative of the fable. If one painting, the same imagery would depict the two birds seemingly talking over one another. Instead, by painting the story on two canvases across from one other, De Hondecoeter divided the scene into two moments, and folded the beholder into the heart of the narrative. The time required of the beholder's eye to move from one painting to the other would have increased participation in the conversation and intensified the debate between the peacock and the magpie.

²¹² Sullivan noted that the classical motifs frequently appear in De Hondecoeter's depictions of live birds, but rarely in his game pieces. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 67.

²¹³ Schwoerer, "Propaganda in the Revolution of 1688-89," 849, 869-870.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 870.

The paintings take on new meaning if they are considered together rather than on their own. The separation of the imagery allows the theme of subdued nature to emerge by juxtaposition: the peacock is domesticated and pictured in an “unnatural nature” setting of a controlled garden. This contrasts with the untamed magpie pictured in a wooded area. The peafowl and turkey are just as much collected as the game birds, as they are all under the dominion of the landowner. Likewise, the paintings must be contextualized within the harmonious settings they were made to inhabit. The move from Soestdijk to Het Loo also hints at their importance. Soestdijk was William’s first purchase; Het Loo replaced Soestdijk as his primary palace for hunting and entertaining. Following his coronation, William rarely visited Soestdijk but would have continued to enjoy these paintings at Het Loo.

4.5 The Allegory of the Trees: William Past, Present, and Future

The Presumptuous Peacock and *The Courageous Magpie* celebrated and enhanced William’s image as a hero in the Dutch Republic through the allegory of the thriving orange tree and the dying tree. The symbolic orange tree as a tool in image-building has been discussed in chapter 2, and its use was widespread. The image of a tree — dead, sick, or thriving — was an established symbol representing the state of society.²¹⁵ In addition, the image of a withered tree was used as a religious symbol. For example, the dead tree that stands before the church in Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s *Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind* (fig.5.3) suggested the state of the Catholic church.²¹⁶ *Christ Calling Saint Peter and Saint Andrew* (fig.5.4), an etching by Dirk Vellert, opposed a green tree (a symbol of Peter’s Christian virtue and fidelity) with a withered tree, an analogy of Peter’s movement from his past to his calling as a disciple.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Schwoerer, “Propaganda in the Revolution of 1688-89,” 860.

²¹⁶ Müller, “Of Churches, Heretics, and Other Guides of the Blind: The Fall of the Blind Leading the Blind by Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the Esthetics of Subversion,” 767.

²¹⁷ Melion, “Meditative Exegesis and the Trope of Conversion in Dirk Vellert’s Calling of Peter and Andrew of 1523,” 248-250.



Fig. 5.3 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind*, 1568. Distemper on canvas, 86 x 154 cm. Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Napoli.



Fig. 5.4 Dirk Vellert, *Christ Calling Saint Peter and Saint Andrew*, 1523. Etching and engraving, 146 x 112 mm. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

William, symbolized by the flourishing tree, was celebrated as a member of the House of Orange. As a branch of that tree, William furthered the Orange's glorious dynasty. In contrast, the damaged tree in the distance mirrors the condition of the Dutch Republic in 1672, in crisis as they were assaulted from all sides. The restoration of the stadholdership and William's leadership, however, promised a prosperous future. Like the imagery in the songs discussed in chapter 2, William is depicted historically as a hero and as assurance of the security of the Dutch Republic in the future. Therefore, the orange tree symbolized the growth and prosperity of both William and the state. As the Orange-Nassau were able to adapt the orange tree to suit their needs, likewise the damaged tree is a versatile symbol that can stand in for any number of threats. Like the magpie prescribes, William is the wise ruler, a strong leader who will protect the Republic from any eagle — or Sun King — who attempts to devour them. Finally, the dying tree also serves as a reminder of the ultimate power of nature, and that cultivated gardens are still subject to natural forces, a power flexed in the disastrous storm of August 1, 1674.

4.6 The Intended Niches and the Current Hanging

The paintings were intended to hang in the vestibule. This is significant not only because they created the first impression upon entering Soestdijk palace, thus setting the tone for the entire experience there, but because they occupied a transitional space, thus segregating and linking the outdoors and the indoors and the visions of power inherent to these spaces. In passing between the paintings, the visitor moved from the open, skylit side of the paintings into the architecturally defined space, just as they had passed from the garden into the house (fig.5.5). In *The Presumptuous Peacock* this space is defined by the balustrade, while in *The Courageous Magpie*, the stump and trees define the space. Therefore, the enclosed, architectural space in the former painting is on the right-hand side and in the latter painting on the left-hand side; hung across from each other in the hallway, the pictorial open-air was nearest to the literal door and outside world. The darker, structural elements in the paintings led deeper into the rest of the house. The vestibule where these paintings hung connected the great hall with the garden (fig.5.6, fig.

5.7). While the cabinet was the seat of power and available only to William's inner circle, the great hall was the largest and most opulent room, intended for important functions and the primary entertaining space.²¹⁸

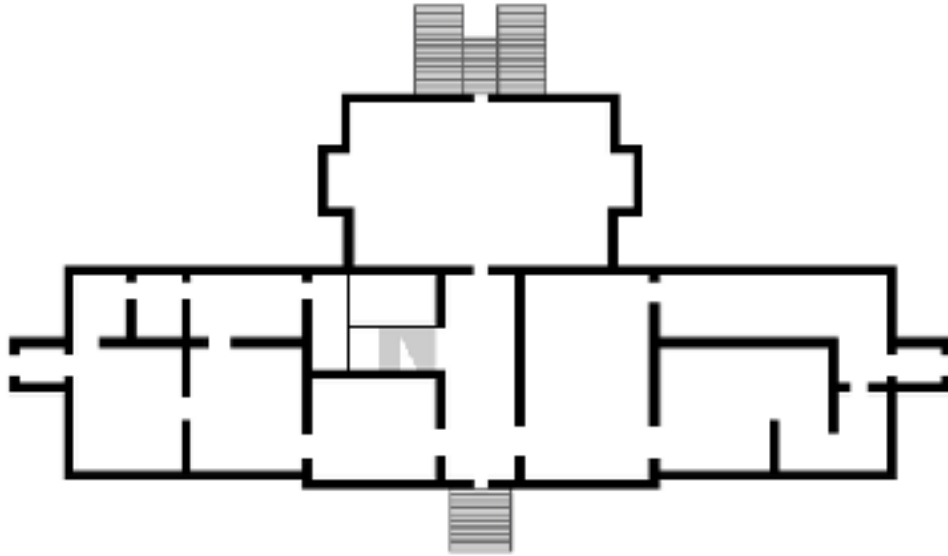


Fig. 5.5 Floor plan of Soestdijk Palace, 1674-1678, Maurits Post. The vestibule leads into the great hall. Sourced from Van Zoest, Rob, Mieke Jansen, Paul Rem and Ernest Kurpershoek. *Paleis Soestdijk: Drie eeuwen huis van Oranje*. Zwolle: Uitgeverij WBooks B.V., 2009.

Just as the initial view of the paintings upon entering the front door is meaningful, so too must the perspective from inside the house toward the door be considered. One enters from behind the main characters, and they both point toward the interior. The beholder is included in their perspective, taking part in the conversation between them. Upon exiting, the peacock and the magpie now face the beholder, who assumes the position of the House of Orange and advocates for William. If propagandistic efforts were successful, the visitor is more aligned with the stadholder than when he entered. The elegantly displayed game birds now point the way into the garden; the long necks and sharp beaks of the heron and the bittern gesture toward the door.

²¹⁸ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 126-128.



Fig. 5.6 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed. Kris Roderburg and Paul van Galen. "Paleis Soestdijk: Interieur, overzicht van de vestibule richting de stuczaal met geopende deuren, gelegen in het corps de logis, 20403431." Digital image. Wikimedia Commons. 2006.



Fig. 5.7 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed. Kris Roderburg and Paul van Galen. "Paleis Soestdijk: Interieur, overzicht van de vestibule richting het bordes met geopende deuren en met zicht op de de hardstenen gedenknaald aan het einde van de Koningslaan, gelegen in het corps de logis, 20403432." Digital image. Wikimedia Commons. 2006.

At the time of writing, the two paintings hang side by side at the Rijksmuseum as if the light is emanating between them (fig.5.8). The museum asserts that the fall of light from the left in the former and the right in the latter indicate that they flanked either side of a window. While this acknowledgement of the light source and consideration of original position within a specific architectural setting is commendable, this hanging does not go far enough: the paintings are intended to hang across from each other not side by side, as evidenced by the original architecture and the narrative between the pair. If they must be hung against a single wall, the peacock painting should be in the first position, as this allows the paintings to be read from left to right. Each painting depicts the moment each bird issues his argument; therefore, the peacock is first to speak, and the magpie replies in turn. Their current position reduces the narrative to almost nothing, and instead heralds the light source, a supporting device, as the central feature in the artworks.

This arrangement, where the two birds face away from each other, makes it impossible for the beholder to identify the narrative. A more accurate hanging would be to switch the position of the paintings or, ideally, to again hang them across from one another, at close quarters. The current hanging removes a significant plot line from the paintings, leaving both main characters looking off into space rather than engaging with each other and the beholder, caught between them. With the narrative lacking, the pendants suffer the same fate as the cycle now at Belton House, Lincolnshire in the UK; conceived as the story of Orpheus taming the wild animals, the narrative is now missing as the critical panel (depicting Orpheus) was sold.²¹⁹



Fig 5.8 Author's photo. The two paintings hang in a manner that de-emphasizes the narrative (which in fact, makes them a pair, not the light source). 2018.

²¹⁹ Kearney, "Ornithology and Collecting in the Dutch Golden Age: Captured Specimens and the Collecting of Exotica," in *Collecting Nature*, 72.

4.7 A Unified Pair

On the simplest level, the pendants are game pieces referring to the recreational purpose of the house. Their placement in the countryside and the elegant displays of game upon entering the house make this immediately apparent. The status of the owner is easily discernible — the size of the house and the size of the paintings make this clear. The game displayed in the pictures were exclusive rights of the nobility. Any seventeenth-century beholder would have recognized these displays of grandeur. A fellow nobleman and hunter would have appreciated the diversity of game and the expertise necessary to track these animals.

The allegory of the two trees provide the next level of meaning, as the orange tree was a well known symbol of William's family and their Orangist supporters. Its contrast to the broken, dying tree offers numerous comparisons, but William's success in ruling the Republic is key. As pendants, the beholder would have linked the paintings and understood the visual connection between the remaining living birds — the fable of the peacock and his challenger, squawking about who should be king. Finally, another opportunity for comparison emerges between the paintings: one scene takes place on a garden terrace, the other on the edge of a natural forest.

In keeping with the renaming of variations of the peacock and magpie theme by Wepler, I propose these two paintings be called *The Presumptuous Peacock* and *The Courageous Magpie*. The magpie is not captured in thought, but in speech. Like the hanging, a name that unites the paintings to the narrative allows the beholder to access a more complete picture of De Hondecoeter's and William's intentions.

The Soestdijk pendants are more than pretty wall hangings. They are rich allegorical scenes, honoring the House of Orange and William III's hereditary right to rule, and celebrating his wisdom, courage, political ambition, and military success. Through the literary and visual culture inherent in the fable, De Hondecoeter weaves the themes of prosperity and strength, beauty and wisdom, subduing and cultivating, collecting and killing as man is pitted against the natural world, all while seamlessly

integrating the paintings into the architectural scheme and social signaling of hunting and country houses.

4.8 The Estate Piece

Just as the depiction of nature and architecture converse within the two vestibule paintings, the country estate itself converses with the natural world. It stands as a monument to the privilege of leisure and hunting, and is the frequent backdrop to De Hondecoeter's birds.

There has not yet been a direct term to apply to De Hondecoeter's most inventive application of animal painting. "Birds in a park-like setting" is often used, but is cumbersome, and "birdscapes," as Joy Kearney suggests, is inadequate.²²⁰ Neither of these terms sufficiently suggest the display of power in a manicured garden, or the collection of exotica shown walking on those grounds. The manipulation of nature is at the core of De Hondecoeter's paintings. My term, "estate piece," acknowledges the tension between man and nature, accurately describes the setting, and stresses the exclusive nature of collecting. The estate piece is not an Arcadian landscape, but celebrates man's achievement over nature by subduing and controlling his natural environment into highly organized gardens, and by assembling collections of living, breathing creatures, removing them from their native habitat, and putting them together with species from across the globe. These grand paintings hung in grand houses depicted, in most cases imaginary, even grander country houses. They were collected by those who would like to advertise they were privileged enough to afford such luxuries, and possessed the knowledge, status, and connections to acquire exotic species.

De Hondecoeter often painted the country house, whether explicit or implicit. When he does not include a recognizable facade or distant house, the gardens, with elegant terraces, statuary, and manipulated waterways, reveal the character of the setting. Whether pictured on a terrace or a patch of earth, the presence of sculptures and

²²⁰ Kearney, "Ornithology and Collecting in the Dutch Golden Age: Captured Specimens and the Collecting of Exotica," 70.

architectural elements disclose the location as estate grounds. Like the game piece, an estate piece need not depict or be contained within a country house to display power — to the estate owner, it was a celebration of the achievement of landowning, and for the wealthy city dweller, it suggested the means and social standing necessary to acquire a country house.

The estate piece also functions as a replacement of the paradise painting. There is no figure or ark to indicate why the animals are gathered together. Rather, they are understood as gathered at the will and expense of a collector, as a master over nature. The rise of the Scientific Age provided new ways of looking and collecting. Many believed that through understanding and controlling nature, gardeners and scientists could return it to its prelapsarian state. The collector, then, repopulated it with all manner of colorful birds. Many of De Hondecoeter's poultry yard paintings spark the imagination with their dramatic interactions, but the estate piece does not necessitate a narrative element. *The Menagerie* and *The Floating Feather* exemplify the genre, while the Soestdijk pendants are unusual in their combination of elements of the estate piece, game piece, and Aesopian characters. The primary function of the estate piece is the collection of animals within the controlled environment of a landscaped country house garden.

The estate piece evokes the power of trade and the excess of the Dutch economy without being specific. The wealth of the individual is tied to the wealth of the economic state of the Dutch Republic. Through the collecting of live animals brought from distant lands, and the collecting of preserved specimens for the *kunstkamer*, the portrayal of exotic species interacting in real life is actually possible. They become a depiction of a new Eden created through both brain and brawn. Species that were unknown to Europeans mere decades prior are included in these paintings, an exhibit of the power of trade and exploration.²²¹ This abundance is further enhanced through frequent cropping; De Hondecoeter consistently shows partial birds, either hidden behind other birds or on the edges of the canvas. Not only does this allow him to include a greater variety of

²²¹ Native species are also included in De Hondecoeter's paintings, for their decorative qualities or as a subtle reminder that regardless of man's meddling with nature, life finds a way.

species, their truncation implies the further form of that individual and of the garden as a whole. It also increases the window-like view, especially when the paintings were incorporated into the wall panels, furthering the illusion of his pictures as reflections of the natural world.

While the birds in the estate piece often celebrate diversity, their setting does not. The balustrades and parks they inhabit are trimmed and mowed into rigid, organized settings and steeped in classicism. The depictions of architectural elements, from identifiable houses to suggested buildings, and elements such as statues, urns, balustrades, steps, and paving stones, provide the beholder with the context for the paintings as wealthy estates. Hedges or plantings occasionally assist in exposing the setting as a garden, but it is always the architectural elements that assure the beholder of the scene.

Both the garden settings and the exotic species demonstrate power over the world. In the garden, the focus is on controlling the environment. In collecting, the focus is on the removal of an animal from its environment and into an artificial assemblage. The combination of these two modes of implementing human designs on the natural world create a powerful picture of the seventeenth-century attempt to muscle nature into a new Eden.

While the estate piece developed at a time when increasingly opulent game pieces were also on the rise, the former can also be seen as an alternative to the latter. The newly rich may have been limited in their hunting rights, but not in their purchasing power.²²² The ability to collect exotic animals was equally theirs. Gradually country houses were purchased and built by non-patricians as well.

De Hondecoeter's estate pieces retain characteristics of other genres in an inventive manner; they express the dynamism of history painting and the collecting and display of still-life painting. As a new paradise painting, they celebrate the power of collecting and the variety accumulated through Dutch trade, and the overarching achievement of engineering the very landscape.

²²² Sometimes the two coincided, allowing someone to buy into the aristocracy or some of the rights reserved for them.

The analysis in this final chapter has presented the Soestdijk pendants in a new light — not the light of a window between them, but of a door that allows the beholder to access a range of messages regarding the valor, wisdom, and noble lineage of William, Prince of Orange. By delving into the power implicit in nature transformed into formal gardens, it has been possible to further develop the allegorical significance of paintings made for the stadholder or the free market. In the context accumulated through the previous chapters, the estate piece has been introduced in order to fill a gap in the language used to convey the significance of many of De Hondecoeter's paintings.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the paintings Melchior de Hondecoeter made for William III, within their context: their settings within the houses, William's political position and the noble privilege inherent in the buildings as hunting lodges, the ideological thought behind seventeenth century Dutch gardens, the materialist culture of wealth and collecting in the Dutch Republic, and the emblematic and literary devices at De Hondecoeter's fingertips. The comprehensive design scheme of William's palaces, most notably Het Loo, built as the largest country house in the United Provinces, and created by Bentinck, Marot, Du Val, Desmarets, De Lairese, et al., afforded the opportunity to examine the paintings within the grand scheme of architectural design.

De Hondecoeter often painted naturalistic depictions of a completely unnatural phenomenon: birds from a variety of continents congregating together. As modern viewers of De Hondecoeter's paintings, it is easy to slip into appreciation of the birds as characters, but contemporary viewers would have been newly exposed to most of the species in his estate pieces. The peacock and the turkey were collectable if not particularly

rare,²²³ but the variety of the other birds would have been arresting. The combination of these foreign species pictured in a stately Dutch garden must have been a sight to behold. The subjugation of nature is a frequent theme in De Hondecoeter's oeuvre, through the collecting power of the Dutch and the attempts of gardeners to rectify a fallen world. The space of a garden is defined by human hands through architecture and cultivation; furthermore, the seventeenth century Dutch garden is characterized by its room-like qualities and ornamentation. By inserting collected species into the unnatural settings of elegant gardens, De Hondecoeter presents a picture of privilege and luxury. The power that this conveys is amplified in the context of William's positions of Prince of Orange, Stadholder, and King.

William and Mary extended the palace Het Loo when their status increased; therefore, the architecture and process of building was connected to status and politics. Designed as a unified whole, this message is projected in the gardens, interiors, and architecture. The style that William promoted at his country houses is that of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* vision of himself as a wise, courageous ruler. The paintings of Melchior de Hondecoeter discussed in this thesis exemplify this theme even as they function as individual elements of the overall design scheme and the philosophy of power and image-building. De Hondecoeter's paintings are synchronic: seamlessly, they are dynamic characters as well as naturalistic and anatomically accurate; they are exotic birds in a local landscape, a projection of status, and an illustration of man's command over nature.

I have investigated *The Menagerie*, *Landscape with Exotic Animals*, *The Floating Feather*, and most importantly for this discussion, the pair of paintings depicting the allegory of the House of Orange and the fable of the peacock and the magpie, here renamed *The Presumptuous Peacock* and *The Courageous Magpie*, through the lens of the paintings' dialogue with nature — nature depicted, their location in the countryside, and the contemporary view of the natural world — as well as through their surrounding architecture. These

²²³ The peacock, while not indigenous to Western Europe, had long been kept semi-domesticated, as an ornamental and table bird. It graced the tables of the elite more for its aesthetic appeal than its taste. Thomas, "Food and the Maintenance of Social Boundaries in Medieval England," 140. Turkeys were imported as early as the 1520s. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, 37.

paintings display the diversity and inventiveness in De Hondecoeter's oeuvre, as well as the diversity of species contained within. The depiction of an ornamental bird, whether exotic or native, does not define a painting as ornamental. In the case of De Hondecoeter, their presence shows that the birds are possessions that have been assembled by an outside force.

In the Soestdijk pendants, among his most imaginative designs, De Hondecoeter combined a variety of iconographical motifs; the beholder is not forced into one theme, but instead, the layers of meaning must be picked apart. The more acquaintance with these two paintings, in conversation with each other and the beholder, the richer their imagery reveals itself to be. In conclusion, I recommend that the Rijksmuseum adjust the hanging of the Soestdijk pendants in order to facilitate the intended conversation between them, and to provide the opportunity for contemporary beholders to interpret the narrative and allegory as has been outlined in this thesis.

By building on previous scholarship relating to William III's commissions, drawing from the history of gardens, and expanding on the narrative potential and political implications of De Hondecoeter's paintings, I have provided much-needed analysis of the Soestdijk pendants; created a new descriptive term, the estate piece; and furthered the discourse on Melchior de Hondecoeter, through which I hope to inspire appreciation of and scholarly inquiry into this often overlooked painter of birds.

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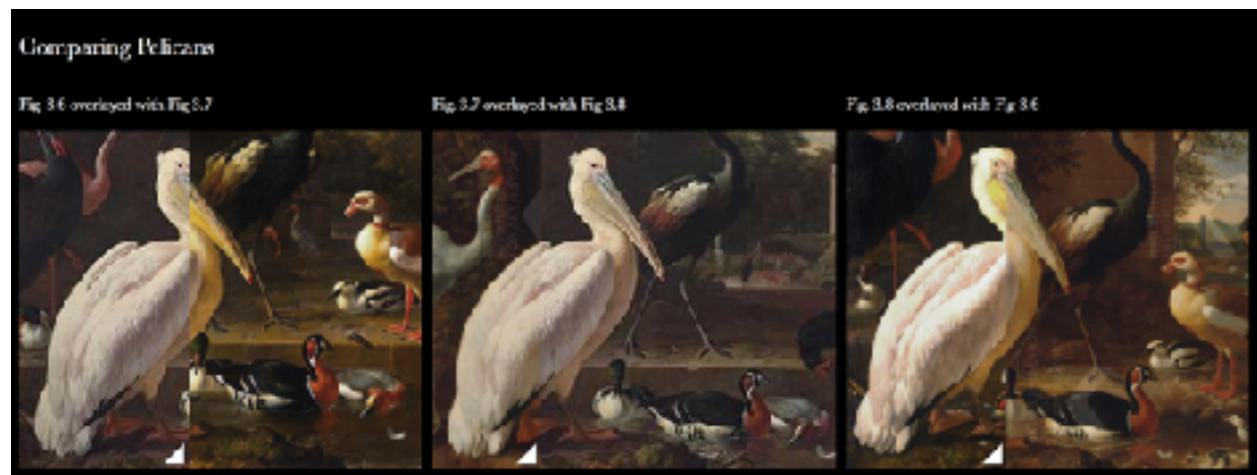
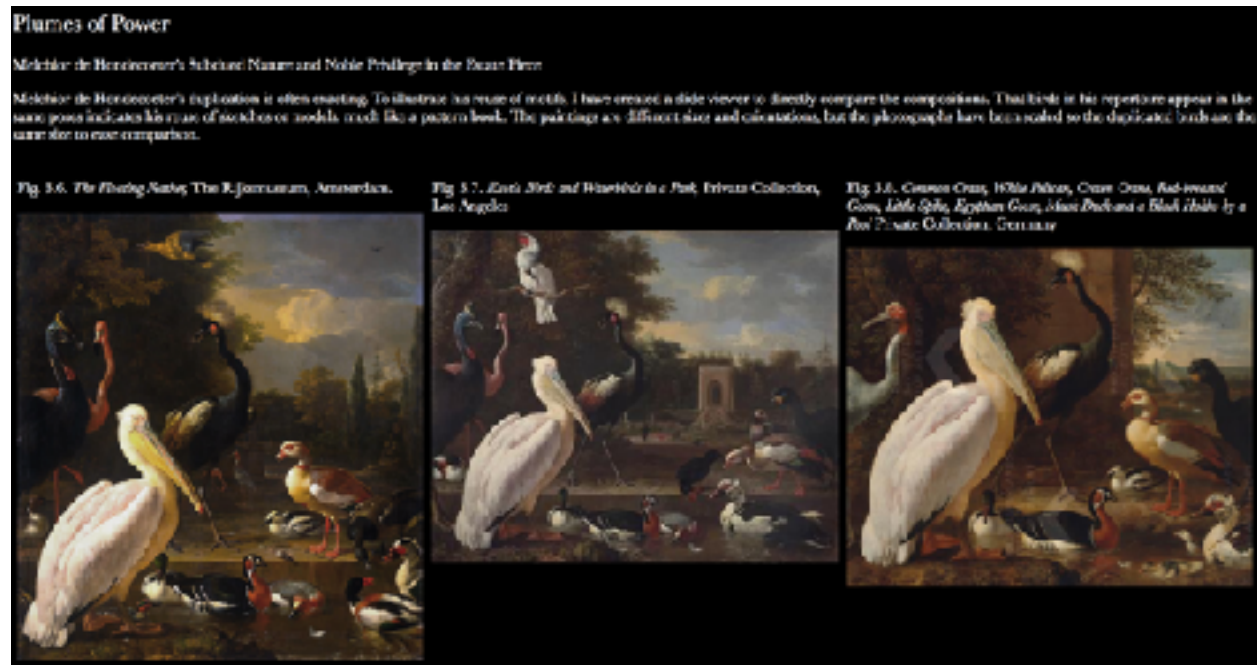
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Appendix

Melchior de Hondecoeter's duplication is often exacting. To illustrate his reuse of motifs, I have created a slide viewer to directly compare the compositions. That birds in his repertoire appear in the same poses indicate his reuse of sketches or models, much like a pattern book. The paintings are different sizes and orientations, but the photographs have been scaled so the duplicated birds are the same size to ease comparison. There are a few screenshots are below with partial overlays. Additional comparisons available on the website.

To interact with the viewer, see <http://joechrisman.co/plumesofpower.html>



Comparing Red-breasted Geese

Fig. 3.6 overlaid with Fig. 3.7



Fig. 3.7 overlaid with Fig. 3.8



Fig. 3.8 overlaid with Fig. 3.6



Comparing Black Crowned Cranes

Fig. 3.6 overlaid with Fig. 3.7



Fig. 3.7 overlaid with Fig. 3.8



Fig. 3.8 overlaid with Fig. 3.6

