

Keywords: Humour; nostalgia; politics; conservatism; Dutch cabaret; Wim Sonneveld

Keywords in Dutch: Humor; nostalgie; politiek; conservatisme; Nederlands cabaret; Wim Sonneveld

Abstract (English):

In this paper, I analyse the conservative implications of nostalgia in the famous Dutch cabaret song ‘Het Dorp’ as well as the humorous deconstruction of nostalgia’s conservative politics in two recent parodies of this song. Dutch cabaret is a popular form of theatre comedy which might involve joke-telling, sketches and songs, and in which social critique plays a pivotal role. In recent years, comedians have increasingly questioned the conservative political narratives expressed in past cabaret performances. Taking Wim Sonneveld’s ‘Het Dorp’ (1965) and parodies of this song by Alex Klaasen/Jurrian van Dongen and Erik van Muiswinkel (2004) and Kyle Seconna/Elisha Zeeman (2017) as my case study, I argue that ‘Het Dorp’ presents a conservative worldview in which nostalgia is mobilized to mourn the loss of order and traditional values in the present, modernized world. Building on Svetlana Boym’s distinction between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgia and Merijn Oudenampsen’s analysis of Dutch conservatism, I argue that Sonneveld’s original presents a ‘restorative’ nostalgia that has strong conservative implications. Furthermore, I argue that both parodies of the song use change of setting, humorous incongruity and playful citation to reveal and criticize the conservative implications of nostalgia in ‘Het Dorp’, thereby creating a more ironic, ‘reflective’ nostalgia and ‘repoliticizing’ a song that hides and depoliticizes its conservative political claims.

Abstract (Dutch):

In dit artikel analyseer ik de conservatieve implicaties van nostalgie in het beroemde Nederlandse kleinkunstlied ‘Het dorp’ en de manier waarop hedendaagse cabaretiers deze conservatieve implicaties op humoristische wijze deconstrueren en bekritisieren. Cabaret is een populaire Nederlandse theatervorm die onder andere grappen, sketches en liedjes kan bevatten en waarin maatschappijkritiek van oudsher een belangrijke rol speelt. In de afgelopen jaren hebben cabaretiers regelmatig op speelse wijze kritiek geleverd op de conservatieve implicaties van nostalgie in het klassieke cabaret. In dit artikel neem ik ‘Het Dorp’ van Wim Sonneveld en parodieën op dit lied door Alex Klaasen/Jurrian van Dongen en Erik van Muiswinkel (2004) en Kyle Seconna/Elisha Zeeman (2017) als casus en betoog ik dat in Sonnevelds oerversie een conservatief wereldbeeld naar voren geschoven wordt waarin

nostalgisch wordt terugverlangd naar een tijd van orde en regelmaat en traditionele waarden. Hiermee lever ik kritiek op de tendens in recent onderzoek om nostalgie primair als een progressief verschijnsel te zien. Voortbouwend op Svetlana Boyms onderscheid tussen ‘restauratieve’ en ‘reflexieve’ nostalgie en Merijn Oudenampsens ideeëngeschiedenis van het conservatisme in Nederland, beargumenteer ik dat ‘Het dorp’ begrepen moet worden als de uitdrukking van een conservatieve ideologie die bekendstaat als het ‘organicisme’. Vervolgens betoog ik dat de parodieën van Klaasen en Seconna een ironische, ‘reflexieve’ vorm van nostalgie creëren door de setting van het origineel te veranderen, humoristische dubbelzinnigheden te creëren en speels te citeren uit het origineel. Terwijl de conservatieve implicaties van nostalgie in Sonnevelds origineel worden toegedekt en gedepolitiseerd, brengen deze twee parodieën door het humoristisch blootleggen van deze implicaties in mijn lezing juist een ‘repolitiserings’ van ‘Het Dorp’ tot stand.

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The Politics of Humour and Nostalgia in Dutch Cabaret¹

Dick Zijp

En langs het tuinpad van mijn vader
Zag ik de hoge bomen staan
Ik was een kind en wist niet beter
Dan dat het nooit voorbij zou gaan

And along the garden path of my father
I saw the tall trees
I was a child and for all I knew
It would never pass away²

Wim Sonneveld, 'Het Dorp', 1965

In this paper, I demonstrate how Dutch comedians have revealed and criticized the conservative implications of nostalgia in the Dutch cabaret tradition. Although resistance and critique are often thought of as 'serious', this paper emphasizes the playful and comical ways in which contemporary comedians oppose dominant conservative political narratives at a time of European disintegration and the rise of right-wing political power.

In the Dutch context, the term 'cabaret' does not refer to cheap nightclub entertainment or vaudeville performances, but to a popular form of theatre comedy which is often celebrated for providing social critique and speaking truth to power.³ Dutch cabaret is a cultural hybrid which might contain jokes, personal anecdotes, songs, sketches and slapstick. The genre originated in the French and German cabaret experiments of the fin-de-siècle, and was later influenced by British and American stand-up comedy.⁴ It has a long tradition of both lyrical and satirical songs, which are often imbued with a deep sense of nostalgia.

Although Dutch cabaret is commonly considered as left-wing and progressive, recent research has demonstrated that cabaret may have strong conservative implications.⁵ In recent years, critically acclaimed comedians like Micha Wertheim and Claudia de Breij have also pointed

¹ I would like to thank Suzanne Kooloos, Maaike Bleeker and Ivo Nieuwenhuis, as well as the anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would like to thank Elisha Zeeman for helping me with the interpretation and translation of 'Die Dorp'.

² The English translations of the different versions of 'Het Dorp' were made by the author.

³ Robrecht Herfkens, "A Smile and a Tear: Dutch Cabaret as a Satirical Vessel for Social Critique," *Limina* 21, no. 2 (2016): 1-16.

⁴ Wim Ibo, *En nu de moraal: Geschiedenis van het Nederlands cabaret, 1895-1936* (Alphen aan de Rijn: A.W. Sijthoff, 1981); Jacques Klötters, "7 september 1990: De eerste Comedynight in het Anthonytheater in Amsterdam: De minderheid aan de macht in de Comedytrain," unpublished paper.

⁵ Dick Zijp, "Re-Thinking Dutch Cabaret: The Conservative Implications of Humour in the Dutch Cabaret Tradition" (M.A. Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2014).

to the conservative implications of nostalgia in Dutch cabaret by playfully deconstructing past cabaret performances onstage.⁶

In this paper, I take as my case study one of the most performed, adapted and parodied songs in the history of Dutch cabaret ('Het Dorp', 1965), arguing that comedians have used humour to expose and to challenge the conservative implications of nostalgia as expressed in the Ur-version of the song. By doing so, this paper contributes to a further insight into the workings and political implications of nostalgia, as well as to a better understanding of the artistic and humorous strategies used by comedians to oppose conservative worldviews.

'Het Dorp' (literally: 'The Village'), a 1965 Dutch adaptation of the French song 'La Montagne' by Jean Ferrat, was written by Friso Wiegiersma under the pseudonym Hugo Verhage for his partner, the popular cabaret performer Wim Sonneveld. Sonneveld was counted as one of the 'big three' of postwar Dutch cabaret, apart from Toon Hermans and Wim Kan.⁷ Sonneveld was a national celebrity, who played for large theatre audiences and frequently appeared on television and in the media. Sonneveld's star status is demonstrated by the large crowds which turned up at the performer's funeral in 1974 to listen to his favourite song: 'Het Dorp'.⁸ Displaying a strong sense of nostalgia, 'Het Dorp' tells about a perfect childhood in a village that has been radically transformed by the forces of modernization. Although already popular during Sonneveld's lifetime, it was after the performer's death that the song entered the hit parade and became an instant classic. In 2008, the garden path next to Wiegiersma's birth place (today a municipal museum in Deurne) was officially named 'Het tuinpad van mijn vader' ('The garden path of my father').⁹

The nostalgic qualities of 'Het Dorp' are commonly accepted. The song is traditionally read as pleasantly nostalgic, and critics have praised the song as 'emotional'¹⁰, 'beautiful'¹¹ and 'melancholic'¹². However, the political implications of nostalgia in 'Het Dorp' have not been

⁶ *Hete vrede*, perf. Claudia de Breij (Leiden: Breijwerk, 2012), DVD; *Micha Wertheim voor de zoveelste keer*, perf. Micha Wertheim, De Kleine Komodie, Amsterdam, December 12, 2010.

⁷ "Cabaret," *Theaterencyclopedie*, accessed 9 December 2018, <https://theaterencyclopedie.nl/wiki/Cabaret>.

⁸ "Vele duizenden bij begrafenis Wim Sonneveld," *Leeuwarder Courant*, March 11, 1974.

⁹ "Het dorp (lied)." *Wikipedia*, accessed 9 Jul. 2018, [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Het_dorp_\(lied\)](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Het_dorp_(lied)).

¹⁰ A. de L., "Wim Sonneveld: Programma zonder inzinking," *De Tijd*, January 7, 1967.

¹¹ Paul Klare, "Sonneveld," *De Tijd*, September 23, 1972. Review of Sonneveld's LP *Sonneveld*, containing the performer's best songs.

¹² Frans Duister, "'Amusement' van het goede gehalte: Zomaar een leuke avond met Sonneveld en Ina van Faassen," *De Tijd*, January 7, 1967.

analysed. In this paper, I will use Svetlana Boym's distinction between 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia and Merijn Oudenampsen's analysis of Dutch politics to analyse the politics of nostalgia in 'Het Dorp'.

In the first part of this paper, I analyse the 'original' version of 'Het Dorp' by Wim Sonneveld. In the second part, I turn to two adaptations of the song: Alex Klaasen's parody of Sonneveld's song in the satirical television show *Kopspijkers* (written by Jurrian van Dongen and Erik van Muiswinkel, 2004) and an adaptation by two South African artists in cooperation with De Koningstheateracademie in Den Bosch (written and performed by Elisha Zeeman and Kyle Seconna respectively, 2017).

I argue that Sonneveld's version shows a conservative, 'restorative' nostalgia, whereas the adaptations show a more humorous, 'reflective' nostalgia. Furthermore, I argue that Sonneveld's version needs to be understood as the expression of the conservative doctrine of 'organicism' which has strong depoliticizing implications, while the two adaptations bring about a 'repoliticization' of 'Het Dorp'. Both adaptations, by playfully citing from the original version and changing its setting, present a critique of the conservative implications of nostalgia.

The Politics of Nostalgia

The pseudo-Greek term 'nostalgia' (from *nostos*, homecoming and *algia*, longing) traditionally carries negative associations. The term was coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer to refer to a disease that plagued Swiss soldiers fighting abroad, and kept its bad name when it came to be seen as typical of the modern condition.¹³ Nostalgia has been criticized both as a form of bad memory and a commodification of history.¹⁴ Fredric Jameson's famous account of nostalgia in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* presents an example of the latter tendency. Jameson argues that postmodern nostalgia produces a reification of history. For the postmodern artist, the past would be a mere collection of dead styles from which he can cite randomly to convey a general impression of "pastness", thus

¹³ Johannes Hofer, "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia," trans. Carolyn Kiser Ansprach, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 2 (1934): 376-391.

¹⁴ Sean Scanlan, "Introduction: Nostalgia," *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 3.

turning history into a spectacle.¹⁵ In recent years, this negative view of nostalgia has increasingly been criticized by nostalgia theorists.¹⁶

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym made an early attempt to provide a more nuanced understanding of nostalgia, and to differentiate between conservative and progressive forms.¹⁷ Boym's distinction between 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia contributes to a better insight into the politics of nostalgia. Boym argues:

Restorative nostalgia stresses *nóstos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *álgos*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming - wistfully, ironically, desperately [...] Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgic, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt.¹⁸

The restorative nostalgic, according to Boym, tries to repair 'longing' with 'belonging'.¹⁹ Restorative nostalgia is a conservative form of nostalgia that desires a return to the past, defined in terms of a lost (local or national) community. For Boym, restorative nostalgia is linked to the revival of a nationalist politics, because it defines the community in rather exclusive terms.²⁰ Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, allows for a more progressive politics. It is characterized by ironic distance and a self-reflective awareness that the past can never be brought back. Boym encounters it in the work of poets and thinkers like Baudelaire, Benjamin and Nabokov, but also in the rhetoric of post-soviet immigrants who long for a past that they know does not exist anymore, or has never existed in the romanticized version that they have produced of it.²¹ Boym emphasizes that the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is not absolute, but provides an analytical framework enabling a more detailed understanding of the phenomenon than traditional theories allow for.²²

¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 18-19.

¹⁶ See for instance: David Sigler, "'Funky Days are Back Again': Reading Seventies Nostalgia in Late-Nineties Rock Music," *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 40-58.

¹⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

¹⁸ Boym, xviii.

¹⁹ Boym, xv.

²⁰ Boym, 41.

²¹ Boym, Chap. 2 and 4.

²² Boym, 41.

In recent years, Boym's typology has been criticized for creating a reductive, hierarchical opposition between a 'simple', conservative nostalgia and a complicated, progressive nostalgia. Alastair Bonnett and David Sigler have both deconstructed the category of restorative nostalgia by pointing out that nostalgia always presupposes a reflective awareness that the past is out of reach, and never aims for a restoration of the past. 'To be nostalgic,' Bonnett writes, 'is to be dislocated, alienated, homeless and, hence, removed from one's object of desire. As this implies, nostalgia is inherently reflective: it presupposes a self-conscious relationship with history.'²³ In a similar vein, Sigler argues that Boym 'raise[s] the lost object of nostalgia to the level of the Thing, fundamentally misconstruing the mechanics of the drive.'²⁴

These critics are right that a conservative politics of nostalgia does not necessarily promote a simple return to the past, or a 'transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home'²⁵. Furthermore, Bonnett correctly observes that humour and irony do not necessarily work in the service of a progressive politics, but might also be used by conservative critics of modernity. However, what these critics fail to acknowledge is that restorative and reflective nostalgia presuppose a different relationship to truth. Restorative nostalgia treats history as the source of truth, and hence displays a strong *desire* for restoration. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, does not think of history in terms of truth, but rather acknowledges that the past can be read in multiple ways, depending upon our subjective perspective, including our fears, presuppositions and desires. Hence, I propose not to abolish Boym's typology altogether, but rather to sharpen the distinction based on the critical readings of Bonnett and Boym. I propose to broaden the category of restorative nostalgia to allow for the possibility of a conservative nostalgia that self-consciously and sometimes ironically reclaims symbols of the past, or strategically masks its longing for the past as truth or tradition.

All in all, Boym's typology offers a handy conceptual tool to analyse the political implications of nostalgia in both its progressive and conservative manifestations. Furthermore, Boym's theory points to the important relationship between humour and nostalgia, and the fact that humour and irony are often used as a means to present a deconstruction of history, even though humour can be used for a conservative politics as well.

²³ Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 44.

²⁴ Sigler, 44.

²⁵ Boym, xviii

Het Dorp

Wim Sonneveld first performed ‘Het Dorp’ in his ‘one man show’ with Ina van Faassen, *Wim en Ina* (1966). The performance presented a mix of sketches, comic monologues and (romantic) songs, among which ‘Het Dorp’ stood out, according to many critics.²⁶ Although ‘Het Dorp’ presents a critique of modernization and progress and thus engages with politics (in the broad sense of the word), this is often not foregrounded in the song’s reception. Boym’s distinction between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgia can help to redirect attention to the political implications of nostalgia in this song.

In the first couplet, the narrator conjures up a nostalgic image of his childhood in a small village, a time at when life was simple:

Thuis heb ik nog een ansichtkaart
Waarop een kerk, een kar met paard
Een slagerij, J. van der Ven
Een kroeg, een juffrouw op de fiets
’t Zegt u hoogstwaarschijnlijk niets
Maar het is waar ik geboren ben

I have a postcard at home
Depicting a church, a horse and cart
A butcher’s shop, J. van der Ven
A bar, a lady on a bike
It probably means nothing to you
But it’s where I was born

Dit dorp, ik weet nog hoe het was
De boerenkind’ren in de klas
Een kar die ratelt op de keien
Het raadhuis met een pomp ervoor
Een zandweg tussen koren door
Het vee, de boerderijen

This village, I remember what it was like
The farm kids in the classroom
A cart rattling on the cobble-stones
The townhouse with a pump in front of it
A sand road through the corn
The cattle, the farms

En langs het tuinpad van m’n vader
Zag ik de hoge bomen staan
Ik was een kind en wist niet beter
Dan dat het nooit voorbij zou gaan

And along the garden path of my father
I saw the tall trees
I was a child and for all I knew
It would never pass away

In the second couplet, the narrator presents a critique of modern life by comparing it to the idealized, rural past as described in the first couplet:

Wat leefden ze eenvoudig toen
then

Oh, such a simple life people led back

²⁶ Frans Duister, “‘Amusement’ van het goede gehalte: Zomaar een leuke avond met Sonneveld en Ina van Faassen,” *De Tijd*, January 1, 1967; Jan Spierdijk, “Schot in de roos: Wim Sonneveld was uitstekend,” *De Telegraaf*, January 1, 1967; Paul Klare, “Sonneveld,” *De Tijd*, September 23, 1972.

In simp'le huizen tussen groen
Met boerenbloemen en een heg

In simple houses in the green
With cottage garden plants and a hedge

Maar blijkbaar leefden ze verkeerd
wrong

But apparently their way of life was

Het dorp is gemoderniseerd
En nou zijn ze op de goeie weg

The village has been modernised
And now they're on the right track

Want ziet hoe rijk het leven is
Ze zien de televisiequiz
En wonen in betonnen dozen
Met flink veel glas, dan kun je zien
Hoe of het bankstel staat bij Mien
place²⁷
En d'r dressoir met plastic rozen

Look at all that life's got to offer
They watch the quiz on television
And they live in boxes made of concrete
With lots of glass, so that you can see
How the living room suite looks at Mien's
And her buffet with plastic roses

The comparison between past and present works to paint a romantic image of the past, in which people lived close to nature and as part of a community. The peasant communities of the past have, according to the song, been replaced by a 'modernized' world which is portrayed as unnatural and therefore corrupted. First, modernization is identified with industrialization and the devastation of nature, symbolized by houses of glass and concrete, decorated with 'plastic roses'. Secondly, modernization is understood in terms of individualization and the loss of community spirit. The modernized world is a world in which people are sitting in their houses, and are separated from each other by walls of glass. In the third couplet, the individualized modern life is compared to idyllic scenes of playing children:

De dorpsjeugd klit wat bij elkaar
In minirok en beatlehaar
En joelt wat mee met beatmuziek
Ik weet wel: 't is hun goeie recht
De nieuwe tijd, net wat u zegt
Maar 't maakt me wat melancholiek

The youth from the village sticks together
In miniskirts and Beatle hair
And roars along with beat music
I know: they have every right to do so
The new age, like you say
But it makes me a bit melancholic

Ik heb hun vaders nog gekend
Ze kochten zoethout voor een cent
Ik zag hun moeders touwtje springen
Dat dorp van toen, het is voorbij
Dit is al wat er bleef voor mij
Een ansicht en herinneringen

I knew their fathers
They bought liquorice for a penny
I watched their rope-skipping mothers
This village of the past, it's over
This is everything which remains to me
A picture postcard and memories

'Het Dorp' presents a good example of 'restorative' nostalgia. First, by painting a romantic picture of the past, which is deemed better than the present, the song makes a strong claim for

²⁷ In the 1960s, Mien was a common Dutch name.

the restoration of the past. Secondly, the idealized past is described in terms of a traditional village community in which people lived in harmony and close to nature, and in which the human bonds were not yet broken by the forces of modern individualism. In the first couplet, the truth of this historical image is immediately emphasized by the postcard, which authenticates this image of the past as historical truth, and invites the reader to follow the narrator and step into the past (as if this was reality itself, and not a representation).

To better understand the conservative rhetoric that supports this restorative nostalgia, the work of political sociologist Merijn Oudenampsen is helpful. In his impressive dissertation on the intellectual origins of the ‘New Right’ in Dutch politics, Oudenampsen argues that in the postwar period, the Netherlands lacked a conservative party or a fully developed conservative ideology, but that Dutch political culture was nevertheless characterized by a ‘centrist conservatism’²⁸, a conservatism shared by elites across the political spectrum. Building on the work of Dutch-American historian James Kennedy, Oudenampsen argues that this peculiar Dutch conservatism was rooted in a historicist and organicist vision of historical change.

The ‘historicist’ vision of change is in turn rooted in German idealism and romanticism and holds that change is effected by historical powers which are independent of human will and influence. In the Dutch situation, this historicist vision was combined with organicism. This conservative ideology rejects the idea that historical change is the result of political and ideological conflict, but rather sees change as the outcome of a harmonious process of gradual development. For this purpose, society is often compared to an organism (‘society develops itself’²⁹).

Oudenampsen’s analysis of Dutch conservatism complements Boym’s emphasis upon a conservative politics of restoration. According to Oudenampsen, Dutch centrist conservatism does not so much strive for a restoration of the past, but rather holds a *depoliticized vision of historical change* by rejecting the ability of human actors to influence the course of history.³⁰ In line with this, Oudenampsen characterizes Dutch political culture as a culture of *depoliticization*. Kennedy also emphasizes the specific Dutch culture of depoliticization by pointing to the Dutch tendency to refer to social developments and political processes in

²⁸ Merijn Oudenampsen, “The Conservative Embrace of Progressive Values: On the Intellectual Origins of the Swing in the Right in Dutch Politics,” (PhD diss., Tilburg University, 2018), 50.

²⁹ James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1995), 16.

³⁰ Oudenampsen, “Conservative Embrace,” 32.

abstract and depersonalized terms, as opposed to the American tendency to speak about political matters by referring to ‘the nation’ or using personal pronouns like ‘we’ and ‘us’.³¹

In ‘Het Dorp’, we can see this organicist rhetoric at work. Historical change is described in depersonalized terms, for instance in the ironic lines: ‘But apparently their way of life was wrong / The village has been modernized / And now they are on the right track.’ The use of the passive indicates that history is a process beyond direct human control, even though the strong irony of these lines suggests that the narrator does not completely want to accept the course of history. This appeal to an organicist rhetoric is even stronger in the final couplet, which starts with a picture of youngsters listening to ‘beat music’, a symbol of modern times. The narrator comments: ‘I know: they have every right to do so / The new age, like you say / But it makes me a bit melancholic.’ Historical change is described here in historicist and organicist terms by pointing to the ‘demands of time’. History emerges as a power operating independently of human will. Youth is not granted any real political power, because its desire to do things differently from previous generations is only accepted because it is in tune with historical powers that are unavoidable, and in the end, outside of human control.

By subscribing to an organicist ideology, ‘Het Dorp’ presents a conservative view of the world, but at the same time directs attention away from this conservative worldview. This is not only because ‘Het Dorp’ stands within a romantic song tradition, with an emphasis upon the personal and the lyrical, but also because it presents its analysis of history in depersonalized and objective terms. According to Oudenampsen, it is by pointing out the ideological underpinnings of the depoliticizing rhetoric of Dutch political elites that their work can be ‘repoliticized’.³² In the same way, the conservative worldview expressed in ‘Het Dorp’ can be ‘repoliticized’ by exposing its ideological underpinnings. In the next sections, I will turn to two adaptations of ‘Het Dorp’ in which humour is used to ‘repoliticize’ the original by means of exposing and criticizing its conservative political implications.

Ironic nostalgia

³¹ Kennedy, 15.

³² Oudenampsen, Chap. 1.

In 2004, comedian Alex Klaasen presented a parody of ‘Het Dorp’ in the satirical television show *Kopspijkers*.³³ In the tenth season of this highly successful television programme, broadcast on Saturday night at prime time, parodies of famous pop and cabaret songs were used to comment upon news events, in this case one in a series of revenge killings in Amsterdam linked to organized crime. In Klaasen’s parody, the setting of the original song is changed to Amsterdam: Klaasen mourns the good old times in which Amsterdam was supposedly still a village and did not suffer from organized crime.

In contrast to Sonneveld’s original, Klaasen’s parody does not present a restorative, but a reflective form of nostalgia, in which humour is employed to mock and criticize the conservative implications of nostalgia in the original song. To further understand how this works, Linda Hutcheon’s approach to the workings of nostalgia in postmodern art is helpful.³⁴ In “Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern”, Hutcheon highlights the uneasy relationship between postmodern irony and nostalgia. According to Hutcheon, postmodern nostalgia is different from modern nostalgia, because it treats the past ironically. Using the example of postmodern architecture, Hutcheon points to

the difference between contemporary postmodern architecture and contemporary *revivalist* (nostalgic) architecture; the postmodern architecture does (indeed) recall the past, but always with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia, even as it consciously evoke nostalgia’s affective power. In the postmodern, in other words, (and here is the source of tension) nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited *and* ironized.³⁵

Klaasen’s parody shares this postmodern aesthetic, in which nostalgia is called up, but also mocked and ironized. On the one hand, the parody strongly appeals to feelings of nostalgia. The show’s host Jack Spijkerman introduces the song by stating that recent examples of organized crime call up a desire for times past, ‘the time of Wim Sonneveld’. By doing so, he points to the fact that Wim Sonneveld and his romantic cabaret songs have become symbols of simpler, better times. The feeling of nostalgia evoked by Sonneveld’s romantic *chansons* is exploited in Klaasen’s parody, not only because the original – nostalgic – composition and

³³ *Het cabaret van Kopspijkers II*, chapter 9, “Het Dorp,” (Amsterdam: Universal Pictures International, 2004), DVD. Unlike Sonneveld’s original, this adaptation was part of a weekly satirical television programme and as such did not attract the special attention of reviewers. Hence, it is not possible to analyse the media’s reception of the song.

³⁴ Linda Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern,” in *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, ed. Raymond Vervliet and Annemarie Estor (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 189-207.

³⁵ Hutcheon, 205.

arrangement are closely followed, but also because Klaasen precisely imitates Sonneveld's voice and gesture.

The 'original' imitated here is the song as performed by Sonneveld in his one-man show with Ina van Faassen, and especially the version that was recorded for television and VHS (and that can now be watched on YouTube).³⁶ Klaasen is dressed like Sonneveld, and carefully imitates his voice, movements and facial expressions. Furthermore, Klaasen starts the song while sitting on the typical, old-fashioned chair that we recognize from the television version, and he stands up at the beginning of the second couplet, just as Sonneveld did. Since Klaasen's imitation is so lifelike, and no attempt is made to make his incarnation of Sonneveld appear grotesque or exaggerated, it evokes nostalgia for an entertainer that we might have watched in our childhood, or that we only know from black-and-white videos.

The association between Sonneveld and nostalgia for times past is further strengthened by the change of setting. Sonneveld made a number of songs and sketches about Amsterdam, which were frequently marked by a deep nostalgia for a traditional, authentic Amsterdam that we might know from our grandfather's stories or from old postcards. By doing so, Sonneveld was part of a longer tradition of song and entertainment in which a romantic picture was painted of old Amsterdam.³⁷ By changing the setting from a small village to the capital of the Netherlands, Klaasen appeals to those nostalgic sentiments. In the final chorus, Klaasen playfully cites Sonneveld's own declaration of love to Amsterdam, his famous song 'Aan de Amsterdamse grachten', thereby calling up the nostalgic atmosphere of Sonneveld's song, and appealing to the desire for 'the time of Wim Sonneveld' as emphasized by the show's host Jack Spijkerman:

'k Heb aan de Amsterdamse grachten	To Amsterdam's canals
Mijn hart verpand, ja mooi is dat	I have pledged my heart, well great
Maar zelfs een kind zal nu wel weten	But even a child would know by now
Dit dorp werd echt een grote stad	This village has truly become a big city ³⁸

³⁶ AVROTROS, "Het Dorp | 100 jaar Wim Sonneveld," YouTube video, 3:16, posted 19 June 2017, accessed 9 December 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTrzuKEimA8>.

³⁷ See also: Jacques Klötters, "De muzikale constructie van de Jordaanmythe," in *Een muziekgeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, ed. Louis Peter Grijp (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), 653-660.

³⁸ Van Dongen and van Muiswinkel explicitly refer to the lyrics of Sonneveld's song. The chorus of 'Aan de Amsterdamse grachten' ('To the canals of Amsterdam') reads: "To the canals of Amsterdam / I have pledged my heart forever."

However, Klaasen's parody does not allow viewers to indulge in these feelings of nostalgia. The lyrics, written by van Dongen and van Muiswinkel, present an ironic commentary upon nostalgia and point to its strong conservative implications in Sonneveld's original. They do so by emulating the song's structure, but revising its message through the change of setting, humorous incongruity, and playful quotation. The presence of a narrator who believes the Amsterdam of his childhood to have been a small village immediately creates a humorous incongruity between reality as we know it (Amsterdam as the capital and biggest city of the Netherlands) and a fictional account of the city as provided by the nostalgic (Amsterdam as a small village). Thereby, the song reveals the way nostalgia facilitates a distorted and romanticized picture of the past, populated by idealized and innocent peasant communities not yet corrupted by modern city life.

In the first couplet, further conservative implications of nostalgia are exposed. Like the original, the song presents a narrator looking at an old postcard, which makes him nostalgic for the time of his childhood:

Thuis heb ik nog een oude prent
 Waarop een plein, een stripteasetent
 Een shoarmazaak en verder niets
 Zo was het dorpje Amsterdam
 like
 Een man reed gratis met de tram
 Een arme junk verkocht z'n fiets

I have an old print
 Depicting a square, a striptease club
 A kebab shop, and nothing else
 This is what the village of Amsterdam was

Wie steentjes gooide naar een ruit
 window
 Of appels stal, was een schavuit
 En Appie Baantjer was geduldig
 De misdaad was iets sympathieks
 De oudste hoer had nog wat chics
 Wat waren schurken toen onschuldig

Someone throwing small stones at a
 Or stealing apples, was a rascal
 And Appie Baantjer was patient
 Crime was sympathetic
 The oldest whore had something stylish
 Oh, villains used to be so innocent

En langs het tuinpad liep de dader
 path
 Gemaskerd met een juten zak
 Je wees 'm na en vroeg je vader:
 father:
 'Pap, is het goed als ik 'm pak?'

And the culprit walked along the garden
 Masked, wearing a burlap sack
 You pointed after him and asked your
 'Daddy, am I allowed to catch him?'

By including many references to crime, but emphasizing that past crime was innocent, the song exposes and criticizes our inclination to accept past vices as more innocent than the

problems of the present. Furthermore, the song reveals that this type of nostalgia for the past supports a conservative worldview in which the present is criticized for a loss of order and tradition, and a restoration of past order is called for.

The song does so most explicitly by referring to Appie Baantjer, the author of a famous series of crime novels, later transposed to television. The Baantjer novels have a clear structure: a white, male detective has a hard time solving a crime, but in the end, he succeeds and order is restored. By referring to a time when ‘Appie Baantjer was patient’, the song ridicules the conservative desire for a past in which order prevails over chaos – as opposed to the current situation, in which, as the second couplet ironically suggests, chaos reigns and crime cannot be controlled anymore.

Finally, by including the ‘striptease club’ and ‘kebab shop’ in this supposedly romantic picture of the past, the song ridicules the sense of nostalgia pervading conservative discourses on sexuality and immigration. Both the ‘striptease club’ and the ‘kebab shop’ are, in conservative thought, connected to the loss of order. Whereas the striptease club is often seen as a symbol of loose sexual morals, the establishment of fast food shops by Turkish and Moroccan immigrants has often been criticized in conservative circles as part of a broader critique of immigrant intruders taking over the city.

In the third couplet, a few lines from the original song are quoted, while the preceding lines are changed. By doing so, Klaasen ridicules the sudden acceptance of modern change by the narrator in Sonneveld’s version (the narrator does so, surprisingly, in the final couplet). Quoting the original, Klaasen sings: ‘I know: they have every right to do so / The new age, like you say / But it makes me a bit melancholic.’ As we have seen, in the original, these lines refer to the seemingly innocent phenomenon of teenagers listening to ‘beat music’. However, the quoted lines are here preceded by an absurdly exaggerated comparison between innocent past and corrupt present: ‘I myself prefer dog’s dirt / Over corpses on the pavement / Surrounded by innocent bystanders.’ These lines repeat the song’s critique of nostalgia’s conservative implications by making the absurd claim that dead bodies on the pavement are nowadays as common as dog’s dirt used to be in the past.

Furthermore, by suggesting that a new generation has every right to kill people, the song exposes the absurdity of the organicist rhetoric of Sonneveld’s original. By changing the

context of the quoted lines, suddenly the belief that social change is unavoidable, whatever its moral consequences, appears absurd and unproductive. By thus exposing the conservative implications of nostalgia and its depoliticizing tendencies, Klaasen's parody 'repoliticizes' Sonneveld's original.

Postcolonial nostalgia

In 2017, a cooperation between De Koningstheateracademie in Den Bosch and South African artists Kyle Seconna and Elisha Zeeman led to another, intriguing adaptation of 'Het Dorp', written by Zeeman in Afrikaans.³⁹ The Koningstheateracademie in Den Bosch is a private university of applied sciences, offering a four-year Bachelor of Cabaret programme. In 2017, the academy initiated an artistic research project on cabaret and social critique in different countries. In the first year of the project, a cooperation between Dutch and South African comedians resulted in the performance *Club Cabaret*, of which 'Die Dorp' was part. Except for some notable dramaturgical differences between *Club Cabaret* and regular Dutch cabaret performances – most notably, the performance was explicitly framed by the performers as part of an artistic research project – its use of sketches and songs to present a playful commentary upon Dutch society made *Club Cabaret* into a typical cabaret performance. 'Die Dorp' marked a break with this dramaturgy, because it presented a meta-commentary upon Dutch cabaret from the perspective of two South African artists.⁴⁰

In both the *Kopspijkers* parody and Zeeman's adaptation, the setting is changed to allow for an ironic commentary upon the original song and the conservative implications of nostalgia. Yet there is a difference between the two adaptations in terms of their evaluation of nostalgia as a political affect. Whereas the *Kopspijkers* adaptation presents a wholly ironic account of nostalgia, Zeeman's adaptation re-appropriates a nostalgia so often considered typical of Western modernity, and re-articulates it as a critique of colonialism.

³⁹ Club Cabaret, "Club Cabaret - Die Dorp," YouTube video, 3:58, posted on 2 October 2017, accessed 9 December 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-laRdv1k3E>.

⁴⁰ Because this was a small-scale production, it was not reviewed by national newspapers. The performance was reviewed by one local newspaper, *Brabants Dagblad*. In the (short) review, 'Die Dorp' is not mentioned. See: Rebecca van de Kar, "Club Cabaret: Humor, maar niet per se om te lachen," *Brabants Dagblad*, August 8, 2017, accessed 9 December 2018, <https://www.bd.nl/s-hertogenbosch/club-cabaret-humor-maar-niet-per-se-om-te-lachen~aa48090f/>.

In ‘Die Dorp’, the setting is changed from a small Dutch village to a precolonial South Africa not yet corrupted by Western colonialism. In the first couplet, the precolonial South Africa is mourned:

In die goeie goue dae
was daar ’n plek sonder vrae
’n landskap Suid-Afrika
tafelberg was onbewoon
die lug was toe nog so skoon,
Maar toe kom van Riebeeck hier troon

In the good, golden days
There was a place without questions
A landscape, South Africa
Table Mountain was uninhabited
The air was still so clean
But then Van Riebeeck came to reign

die land se riviere was toe vol
Nêrens in sig was daar ’n mall
daar was nog leeus in die Laeveld
Geen standbeeld van ’n generaal,
geen banke om te betaal,
geen probleem met poes in ’n taal

The country’s rivers were filled
No malls could be seen anywhere
There were still lions in the Lowveld
No statue of a general
No banks you had to pay
No problems with the word “poes” in any
language

Like Sonneveld’s original, the song calls up a picture of an innocent, premodern past, in which nature is still in its place. Furthermore, the song makes it clear that the arrival of the Dutch (Jan Riebeeck was a Dutch navigator who founded the first Dutch settlement in South Africa) marked a radical break with this innocent past, and unleashed the forces of modernization. Finally, the coming of the Dutch is linked to the corruption of morals by portraying the precolonial past as a time when a word like ‘poes’ (which best translates as ‘cunt’) did not yet exist, because Afrikaans (a legacy of the Dutch ‘Boeren’) was not spoken. The word ‘poes’ is one of the heaviest swear words in Afrikaans, and is used here to summarize the way the Dutch have corrupted South African society.⁴¹

In the first chorus and the second couplet, the precolonial past is compared to a present in which there is still a strong legacy of colonial power:

ja, daar was velde sonder snelweë
Daar was geen parlement gewees
die mense het geleef in vrede
Ja, hul het niks gevrees

Yes, there were fields without highways
There was no parliament
The people lived in peace
Yes, they didn’t fear anything

Nou is daar soveel verkeer
probleme met die weer
Die hel daal om ons neer

Nowadays there is so much traffic
Weather problems
Hell is descending upon us

⁴¹ Personal interview with Elisha Zeeman, August 27, 2018.

Maar blykbaar was Afrika verkeerd
jul het ons gemoderniseer
Ons het soveel by jul geleer

But apparently Africa was wrong
You have modernised us
We have learned so much of you

En kyk hoe lyk ons lewe nou
Ons Maandae is tog nou so blou
Die townships langs die highway
wat oorspoel wanneer dit reën
die sinkplate het geen steun
Ons bid maar vir die Heer se seën

And look at our life today
Our Mondays are so blue
The townships along the highway
Which are flooded when it rains
The zinc sheets have no support
We just pray for the Lord's mercy

Like the first couplet, the lyrics follow the structure of the original and repeat its critique of modernization in terms of industrialization (big roads, traffic) and the destruction of nature (pointing to the consequences of climate change, mostly felt by the poor, who live in townships along the highways frequently flooded by the rain). However, by changing the setting from a small Dutch village to pre-modern South Africa, the song also exposes the Western point of view presupposed in Sonneveld's original, and points to the fact that modernization cannot be disconnected from the colonial project.

Furthermore, the lyrics point to the depoliticizing tendencies of Western colonial power. First, the last line refers to a common argument put forward by South-Africa's powerful white, Christian minority. Expressing the conviction that we all need to 'pray for the Lord's mercy', this statement denies the human ability (and necessity) to intervene in climate change, and thereby also denies responsibility for a problem that mostly affects the poor. Secondly, by ironically quoting two lines from the original, but changing their context, the song points to the conservative implications of nostalgia and the connection between modernization and colonialism. The lines 'But apparently their way of life was wrong / The village has been modernised' have been changed into: 'But apparently Africa was wrong / You have modernised us'. By replacing the passive by an active voice, the song points to the depoliticizing tendencies of Sonneveld's original. In Sonneveld's original, modernization is presented as an anonymous force, and thereby as almost inevitable. In Zeeman's adaptation, on the other hand, modernity is exposed as a Western, political project.

The inevitability of modernization –and, thus, the Western, colonial project –is further criticized in the third couplet. Like the *Kopsijkers* adaptation, 'Die Dorp' ironically quotes from the original by staging a narrator who, in the end, seems to defend modernization and thereby neutralizes his critical engagement with society. Zeeman does so by presenting a

critique of the colonial legacy of racism and conflicts between a powerful white minority and a less powerful black majority, while at the same time –ironically –denying that this is a problem at all:

Die mense haat mekaar	People hate each other
rassisme nie net hier en daar	Racism is everywhere
Apartheid is nog lank nie klaar	Apartheid is by no means over
maar dit is als nie net sleg	But it's not only a bad thing
dit gee ons goed om mee te terg	It gives us something to tease you with
En dit maak alles sommer reg	Which makes everything right

The irony of the last three lines is further emphasized by the song's final couplet and final chorus, in which the narrator presents a bitter joke about the inequality between black and white:

so voor ons afsluit met die lied	So before we close the song
daar is nog een grap om te geniet	There is a joke to be enjoyed
Want lag is medisyne	For laughter is medicine
jul het ons geleer van kleur	You have taught us about colour
bruin is min en wit is meer	Brown is less and white is more
Wit kry al die kaassmeer	The white get all the cheese spread
Ja ons sê dankie vir die kaassmeer	Yes, we say thank you for the cheese spread
Ons sê baie dankie vir wit brood	We say many thanks for white bread
Ons sê ook dankie Unilever	We also say thank you Unilever
Vir al die kak wat aan die wit man behoort	For all the shit belonging to the white man

The narrator emphasizes the power of humour to 'heal': 'Laughter is medicine'. Although this 'joke' might indeed provide temporary relief for the underprivileged, at the same time it emphasizes that the social body cannot be healed so easily, because of the perpetuated inequality between blacks and whites, symbolized here in a comic fashion by 'cheese spread'. According to the logic of colonialism, 'white' is always better than 'black'. The joke teller applies this logic not only to skin colour, but also to food, arguing that 'cheese spread' and 'white bread' belong to white men. Although this line of reasoning might appear absurd, both cheese spread and white bread are considered as luxury products in South Africa, which cannot be afforded by the poor, and are thus indeed mostly consumed by the rich –white – minority. The joke also re-appropriates the racist stereotyping perpetuated by Western colonialism by portraying the Dutch (or their South African descendants) as 'cheese heads', a common, pejorative nickname for white Dutchmen. Furthermore, in the last two lines, another

reversal of racist stereotypes is played out when the narrator ironically thanks Unilever (the Dutch company famous for its production of margarine and butter) for bringing a lot of ‘shit’ to South-Africa. By doing so, the negative connotations of notions of ‘blackness’ that we are familiar with through colonialism are here bestowed upon the Dutch, by implying that they, in spite of their whiteness, are ‘shitheads’.

The fact that Zeeman’s adaptation has been performed by a black, South-African singer (Kyle Seconna) for a predominantly white, Dutch audience, adds to the complexity of the song and its workings on the spectator. On the one hand, by using the original, nostalgic music of Ferrat and painting a picture of an innocent, premodern world of nature, the song appeals to feelings of loss and desire with which Western audiences are very familiar, thus mobilizing nostalgia’s affective powers. On the other hand, by presenting a critique of Dutch colonial power, it becomes harder for a white, Dutch audience to indulge in feelings of nostalgia while listening to the song. Rather, the song confronts the spectator with the fact that he or she is complicit in this process of modernization, and cannot remain at a safe distance from it (as one can in Sonneveld’s original) by imagining it as an anonymous and unstoppable power.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have pointed to the conservative implications of nostalgia in the famous Dutch cabaret song ‘Het Dorp’ as well as to the humorous deconstruction of nostalgia’s political operations in two recent parodies of the song. I have argued that Sonneveld’s original presents a ‘restorative nostalgia’ that is supported by a conservative rhetoric of depoliticization, whereas two parodies of the song are embedded in a more ironic, ‘reflective nostalgia’. Both parodies are aware of the fact that the past cannot be made present, and use humour and irony to deconstruct the conservative implications of nostalgia in Sonneveld’s original and thus ‘repoliticize’ Sonneveld’s song.

Although this paper has emphasized the conservative implications of nostalgia, Boym’s distinction between ‘reflective’ and ‘restorative’ nostalgia makes it possible to claim –in line with recent academic research on the topic –that nostalgia is not inherently conservative. In ‘Die Dorp’, we find an example of a more progressive (reflective) nostalgia. Whereas Alex Klaasen’s parody of ‘Het Dorp’ presents a wholly ironic account of nostalgia, ‘Die Dorp’ presents a ‘postcolonial nostalgia’ which is connected to a critique of colonialism. Although

Zeeman's adaptation is fully aware of nostalgia's conservative implications, and although its picture of an innocent, precolonial 'state of nature' is itself not free from irony, the song does at the same time employ nostalgia's affective powers to project a more progressive political future, in which the negative consequences of Western modernization and its colonial project –like poverty, climate change, and racism –are critically confronted.

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