

## On the Representation of an Early Modern Dutch Storm in Two Poems

By Katrin Pfeifer

### Abstract

On 19th December 1660, a severe storm raged over the Dutch isle of Texel, causing severe damage. It proceeded to destroy parts of the city of Amsterdam. Both the sailor and merchant Gerrit Jansz Kooch and the priest Joannes Vollenhove wrote a poem about this natural disaster, presumably independently of each other. The poets perceived the storm differently: Kooch, an eyewitness of the storm, matter-of-factly portrays the calamity and details a feud between his son-in-law and a colleague to commemorate the day of the disaster. In contrast, Vollenhove personifies the winter storm and struggles to understand it. Their poems are valuable sources for a cultural historical analysis. After a brief review of historical severe storm research, I will analyse these poems from a cultural historical point of view. I will shed light on how this severe storm was represented poetically in the Early Modern Period.

**Keywords:** Environmental history, cultural history, the Netherlands, Early Modern Period, natural disaster, storm, perception, poetry

## Introduction

This article presents two recently rediscovered poems about the severe storm of 1660, which raged over Northern Holland. The poems were written by the sailor and merchant Gerrit Jansz Kooch and by the priest Joannes Vollenhove. Vollenhove and Kooch had contrasting agendas, and comparison of their poems indicates that these two men used the calamity as an excuse to draw attention to their own social and political ends. Material presented by Kooch and Vollenhove in their poems portrays events that they considered to be significant enough to put into verses. I will compare the two poems on different levels, addressing the following research questions: Which events during the storm are mentioned? What are the underlying motives of the authors and functions of the poems? How do the poetics of the two poems differ, specifically with respect to the use of symbols as rhetorical figures? This article contains the first English translation of the poems.

Although historical research on natural hazards is becoming increasingly popular (see, e.g., Mauch & Pfister 2009; Pfeifer & Pfeifer 2013a; Steinberg 2006), research on historical severe overland storms is still in the early stages of development. This research gap stands in stark contrast to historical storm floods (e.g., Gottschalk 1977; Jakubowski-Tiessen 1992; de Kraker 2013) and storms over sea (e.g., Wheeler 2003, 2005), as both types of disaster have been investigated thoroughly. The meteorologist Jan Buisman (2006), for example, has been writing an extensive history of weather in the Netherlands, including severe overland storms. However, storms in the Netherlands are explored principally by the *Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut* (KNMI; e.g., van Engelen, Buisman & IJnsen 2001). Pfister et al. (2010) investigated the impact of the storms *Marcellus* and *Prisca*, which raged through Switzerland in the year 1739. Storms were and are primarily investigated by natural scientists, and such debates are centred upon climate and weather conditions. The ways in which affected persons dealt with natural disasters and their aftermaths has been more or less ignored. This aspect is, however, essential for the present article. Storms that raged in Austria are surveyed by the *Zentralanstalt für Meteorologie und Geodynamik* (ZAMG; e.g., Matulla et al. 2008; for Austria see also Pfeifer 2014; Hauer & Pfeifer 2011). In the rest of Europe storms are researched, for example, in the wider area of Great Britain by Hubert Horace Lamb (1991; see also Pfeifer & Pfeifer 2013b), in the Czech Republic by the geographer Rudolf Brázdil and his group (University of Brno; e.g., 2005, 2010), and in Spain by the meteorologist Miquel Gaya (2011). The atmospheric physicist Nikolai Dotzek (Dotzek et al. 2000; Dotzek 2001), who died before his time, did pioneering work—notably in European tornado research—in Germany (*Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt*, Oberpfaffenhofen). Moreover, he initiated the *European Severe Storms Laboratory* in 2002 with the goal to advance research on severe storms and extreme weather events on a European level (see Dotzek et al. 2009).

So far, the severe storm of 1660 and the two poems have remained more or less absent from storm literature in general and in works on Dutch history in particular.

### **Storm poetry by Kooch and Vollenhove**

The sailor and merchant Gerrit Jansz Kooch presumably started writing poetry in 1655 at the age of 57 when his beloved daughter Stijntgen succumbed—most probably—to pestilence (van Eeghen 1966a: 37; van Eeghen 1966b: 2-3). Kooch did not need to make extra money and we have no evidence that he ever worked on commission. Rather than complying with restraints on poetic content imposed by a financier, Kooch instead wrote poetry when he was inspired to do so. Thus, it can be assumed that his literary work was neither influenced nor warped by backers, and does not display typical attributes of financed art, such as exaggerations and understatements. Kooch was interested in natural phenomena in general. He wrote about natural disasters: the storms of 1660 (see Appendix) and 1674 (see Pfeifer 2014), and the floods of 1625, 1633-1634, and 1675. He wrote in retrospect about the first two floods and noted events that had remained indelibly etched in his memory (van Eeghen 1966c: 79).

Joannes Vollenhove's father worked as a lawyer, and made sure that his son received a good education (Dibbets 2007: 24). Thus, Joannes Vollenhove attended a Latin school in Kampen before studying law, history and philosophy as a preparation for his theological studies at the University of Utrecht (Dibbets 2007: 28-32). Later he studied theology at the University of Groningen (Dibbets 2007: 38). Vollenhove then dedicated his life to God, working as a priest. From 1655 to 1665—the time during which the events in question occurred—Vollenhove lived and worked in Zwolle (Dibbets 2007: 47). Like Kooch, he wrote poetry, not on commission, but was in a position to choose the moment when he was inspired to compose his texts.

I will now focus on two poems about the storm of 1660 written by Kooch and Vollenhove.

### **A storm and two poems about it**

In the night from 18th to 19th December 1660, a severe storm raged over the Dutch isle of Texel. Both the sailor and merchant Gerrit Jansz Kooch and the priest Joannis Vollenhove wrote a poem about this natural disaster (the complete Dutch originals and their translations are given in the Appendix). There is no evidence of any influence between both authors, so both poems were most likely written independently of each other.

Kooch and Vollenhove described the storm damage on the island Texel—houses were destroyed or demolished. Some families lost all their belongings and were made homeless. Ships were cut loose of their anchors and floated into the sea. In

addition to this, houses, churches, and trees in the city of Amsterdam were affected by the storm. Given the divergent backgrounds of the authors, it is obvious that both perceived the natural disaster differently. Kooch's poem is very special as it consists of three coherently written pieces: Firstly, Kooch describes not only the aftermath of the storm but also a feud between his son-in-law Gerrit Steemann with one of Steeman's colleagues, the notary Joris de Wisje. Secondly, this notary—Joris de Wisje—wrote some verses, in which he makes fun of Steeman. Kooch incorporated them into his account and, thirdly, wrote a paragraph in his son-in-law's defence. In contrast, Vollenhove's poem is more of a sermonising lamentation. His poem is clearly theologically motivated and written in a spiritual manner. Furthermore, he works excessively with the stylistic device of personalization. The personalization of the winter storm can be interpreted as a mental coping strategy.

We do not know when the poems were written. Kooch signed his poem twice with "G I Kooch" but did not date it. Despite intense archival research, the handwritten original of Vollenhove's poem could not be found; it is likely that it no longer exists (Pfeifer 2014: 66). Kooch suggests in the first lines of his poem that he wrote it during the storm. However, he could only have completed it after the storm, as he chronicles the aftermath of the disaster. Vollenhove, on the contrary, does not indicate when he wrote the poem.

### **Gerrit Jansz Kooch's view**

Gerrit Jansz Kooch's poem "The great storm of 1660" has the subheading "About the cock's flight and the cross' fall from the Jan Roodepoorts-Tower onto the notary's house." The rhyme scheme of the first part of the text starts with an alternate rhyme, continues with two consecutive couplets, and concludes with six alternate rhymes. At the end of his text, Kooch included a tail-rhyme stanza on the damage inflicted to Gerrit Steeman's house, who was his son-in-law. Kooch had lived together with his daughter Aeltje and her second husband, the notary Gerrit Steemann, in a house on the north side of Jan Roodepoortssteeg since 1657. They lived in an alley next to the Singel or Rounaanse Kai. Today their house has the address Torensteeg 8 in Amsterdam (van Eeghen 1966b: 3).

The family experienced the storm of 1660 together. They were not only eyewitnesses of the natural disaster that had occurred in the morning of 19th December 1660, but were also its victims: their house was damaged. Kooch begins to describe vividly the storm's severity in the first lines of his poem:

When water and air came  
to battle the earth and to ensure  
that about 100 great ships drifted onto  
the sand and banks of stream Texel  
and sank down to the bottom of the sea  
and a number of people died

the thunderstorm partly damaged our house  
I composed these verses to commemorate this day;  
the severest wind was early in the morning,  
before the day broke.

Kooch points out that he intended to write the poem “to commemorate this day” and he notes that the “severest wind” raged before the day broke. This means the storm began early in the morning but before dawn when it was still dark. Not only the noise of the strong wind, but also the fact that the storm occurred during darkness, must have been particularly frightening.

In the following lines Kooch depicts the horror the storm caused. People were scared, houses were robbed of their roofs, and ships were capsized. Damage to the isle Texel was extreme: “many houses were flattened to the ground” and “trees were blown down.” Kooch was in Amsterdam when the storm raged. He witnessed the natural disaster and describes the occurrence as follows: “It seemed as if air and earth became one.” Even the Ropoorts-Tower “had to bow the wind”: the cock was blown away and the cross fell on Steeman’s house. It broke the roof into pieces, the gable-chimney fell down with a crash and Kooch explains that he and his family were happy that no-one had to suffer “a worse trial.” Humorously, he explains that he was sitting together with his family under the cross (which was lying on the remaining roof) and he “[t]hought if the cross had to torment us, it was better on the house than in the house.” Steeman was married, Roman Catholic, and had no children. His circle of friends and acquaintances wondered and speculated about why such a devout and yet well-off man was childless. Would it not have been in his own interest to bequeath his name and possessions to his offspring? The reason for his childlessness remains unclear. During the storm the cross from the Ropoorts Tower—not the cock—fell directly onto Steeman’s house. Because of that, Joris de Wijse, who likewise was a notary, quickly composed the following verse:

The cross from Ropoorts Tower fell exactly onto Steeman’s house. Why? There are reasons for that. Because he [Steeman] loves the cross very much! But why wasn’t the cock blown there too? The cock did not want that because his [Steeman’s] cock did not want to crow.

There are two points of irony in these verses. On the one hand, the cross, which symbolises Christian belief and Steeman’s religious devoutness, is itself the object which damages his house. On the other hand, de Wijse comments on the cock, a symbol of fertility. The cock did not want to fall on Steeman’s house because “his [Steeman’s] cock did not want to crow.” This can be read such that de Wijse believed Steeman to be impotent. In what relation Steeman and de Wijse stood remains unclear. It is possible that they were involved in a legal battle or that they were rivals. However, we can trace back that de Wijse worked as Lodewijk van Alteren’s (1608-1657) bailiff and was involved in van Alteren’s immoral relationships. Although bailiffs were moral authorities and seen as role models, both

men were—independently of each other—in a sexual relationship with Clara de Graeu, a married woman (see Wagenaar 2011: 735).

De Wijse's verse spread immediately among high-class circles, and they teased Steeman a little. Kooch composed the following verses to stop them:

Don't scold because the cross  
fell on Steeman's house  
and the cock did not want to rest there;  
the cock does not accept his own kind,  
he shuns Steeman's house,  
because he flies away to other shores;  
although the cross broke the roof tiles  
while the cross rests upon the roof  
people live happily in the house.

Still, it seems Kooch and his family coped well. Kooch points out that only the roof—not the interior of the house—was damaged and that he and his kinsmen quickly returned to everyday life.

The cross fell down because it was very heavy. The cock flew away, no one knows where to. He stood loosely on the cross but was not tied to it. The cock flew away and was never found.

Kooch's explanations that the "cross fell down because it was very heavy", and that the cock did not "fl[y] away" because it "stood loosely on the cross but was not tied to it", are rational. Kooch offers neither religious nor allegoric interpretations. He might have done this to refute de Wijse's saucy symbolic interpretations. It remains unclear where the cock flew.

### **Joannis Vollenhove's view**

Joannis Vollenhove's poem about the severe storm of 1660 is entitled "About the terrible night storm [which occurred] in the winter month of the year 1660" and written in rhyming couplets. He starts his poem with a quote from the first book of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Moved by the winds the waves drove the ships apart and destroyed them." In this quote, Vollenhove refers to a storm that Juno sent with the help of the wind god Aeolus to Aeneas, when he headed in the direction of Italy with the Trojan fleet. The fleet drifted apart because of the winds; only seven ships made it to Carthage's shore. Virgil highlights the destructive potential of strong winds. Choosing Virgil's *Aeneid* as an epigraph to his storm poem, reflects Vollenhove's classical education. Moreover, the epigraph is consistent with the poem, as both texts embrace common themes including divine intervention, *pietas* (meaning "duty", "religiosity", or "devotion"), and destructive forces of nature.

Vollenhove personified the winter storm ("Terrible night power, oh wind! How could you rage so terribly?"). Natural disasters—respectively nature in general—

were often personified in the Early Modern Period (see also a poem about the rockfall of the Salzburgian Mönchsberg in 1669 described by Hauer (2009: 78-79)). The personification of the winter storm can be conceived as a first step towards coming to terms with the calamity because it transforms the unintelligible calamity into something concrete. The latter enhances psychological processing of the events.

A fundamental issue of environmental history is how nature—through time—enters the picture of historical development. Is nature presented in a passive way or as a participating agent? Do we have to ascribe nature “agency?” In historical contexts “agency”—the ability to act—is mostly assigned only to humans (see Winiwarter and Knoll 2007: 131). I do not deal with the ontological question of whether nature “acts” in this paper. Nevertheless, it is interesting, from a cultural historical point of view, that Vollenhove seems to ascribe the storm agency because he asks the storm directly the indicting question “how could you rage so terribly?” Intentions are usually the basis of actions. Vollenhove not only asks the storm which intentions underlie his action, but also why he raged so terribly: “Why have you increased so furiously?” And also:

What incited your displeasure so wretchedly,  
that you seemed to stir up all your gusts to our ruin;  
that you sank a ton of gold into the sea;  
with keels drilled into the bottom [of the sea],  
that you plundered and ruined the stock market?

It seems that Vollenhove cannot understand why the wind, which he describes as “a friend of our country’s commerce,” could transform into a violent storm and by doing so into an opponent. The Netherlands of the 17th century were a nation of sailors and tradesmen, and therefore dependent on favourable wind. Vollenhove notes:

In all the corners of this world  
where our ships buy the world and sell it again.  
From coast to coast, where Holland’s flag  
sails past the sun and the day  
to fatten our sea-lion  
with the earnings from so many regions.

Here, “sea-lion” refers symbolically to the Netherlands and the Dutch economy. The national symbol of the Netherlands is a lion. The “sea” refers here to seafaring; the “lion” is regarded as the king of animals and represents energy, power, and strength. Vollenhove attributes these qualities to the Netherlands. He seems to view the storm as a national attack. The poet describes a two-sided relationship between the Netherlands and the wind, consisting of a positive side (trade) and a negative one (devastation).

Vollenhove seems to personify the event to illustrate the extent and impact of the calamity. He also states:

This all shattered the merchant's hopes.  
Which guarantor, which maritime insurance  
will cover the damage?

Vollenhove is unsure about how the storm can be dealt with. Maritime insurance was quite common in 1660. Claims could be asserted in seafaring, but damages over land were not normally reimbursed (see Go 2009).

The isle Texel usually acted as a buffer against water and wind; it shielded the rest of the country. However, the isle could not stop the storm of 1660. Vollenhove describes this as follows: “[The isle] Texel now can't fend off threads: the country's throat is open.” An “open throat” prompts a picture which metaphorically associates the form of the Netherlands with the sagittal section of a scull: The Zuiderzee represents the throat. Such a metaphor might have easily been drawn from anatomical works as by Andreas Vesalius.

Vollenhove personifies the three most economically important rivers of the Netherlands: Maas, Waal, and IJssel. He also considers them to be victims. The storm shook them out of their dream and the poet accusingly asks:

Where can you house all the water, shy rivers,  
since you are used to pouring softly your network of streams  
from your full water pitcher  
into the swollen ocean's belly?  
This plague of the sea comes to torment your streams,  
to conquer them and to chase them from their beds.

Vollenhove presumably decided to work with the rhetorical device of personification to show that the storm not only brought misery to men, but also to nature itself. This rhetorical device serves to mentally cope with the impact of the storm. They now had a scapegoat. The damage the storm had caused was enormous: parts of the country were flooded and the transport networks via rivers were made impassable. Dams and pile works could not prevent this. Whole dikes were “wiped away,” ships sank:

The North and South Sea was full of wrecks,  
masts snapped off, crates and packages,  
and money and property were hurled around,  
and washed ashore along the lifeless coasts  
together with their owners  
who had remained at that place. [...]  
The sea rages and goes its way. [...]  
Yes, the sea [...]  
it howls, and foams, and consumes, and rapes.

Vollenhove asks:

Are wind and weather possessed by hate,  
bitterly furious with our conceit?  
And the wild power of the sea rages  
to avenge itself, it knows how to gain ground,  
in its passage and in its roaring. [...]  
Does the sea seek to repay the Dutch for the  
harm they did by altering the laws of nature without shame?

The poet refers here to dike building. Dikes were used to protect low-lying areas from inundation. Moreover, the Dutch tried to reclaim more and more land. They had altered the borders between land and sea. Vollenhove felt that the Dutch people had lost all respect for nature: his rhetorical questions suggest that he believed this to be the cause of the storm. Vollenhove works with the stylistic device of exaggeration to show the extent of the catastrophe:

In the same way the golf boils among the Indians,  
from the raging of the fierce hurricanes:  
the roaring of the sea, which chases every single ship  
onto banks and cliffs.  
Thus plunged the storm from the clouds,  
so that Latium, with its stones, buildings and peoples,  
and all Sicily were torn apart,  
embattled by the power of two seas.

Neither “the golf among the Indians” nor Sicily were hit by the storm of 1660. To this day Sicily was not “torn apart” by a natural disaster. Vollenhove most likely wants to show with the help of exaggerations that throughout the world storms can destroy countries or tracts of land and their people. He asks: “Whose hair is not bristling in mounds, when the thunderstorm is blowing in?” And he explains that stones were “shattered to dust by the wind,” buildings were torn down and trees uprooted. Furthermore, he explains

“The sun went up more slowly as it became day  
on its trembling wagon  
became very pale in its face.”

These lines show that not only the sun’s but also the Dutch people’s self-assurance was shattered, also with respect to the destruction the storm had caused. Vollenhove notes “the sun took fright and was shy in the light” and then focuses on the storm’s aftermath:

the hand-wringing, fishing for people,  
bellowing of the voiceless cattle,  
the villages submerged in a stormy sea  
drowned pasture by pasture,  
as if the world had sunk away.

The storm victims were weakened (by hunger), soaked to the skin, and stiff from the cold. In order to save their skin they had fled up trees and onto roofs.

Vollenhove addresses the night directly:

Oh night, which grants no beds  
their night's rest, too woeful and anxious,  
we will remember you many a year.

Normally, the night is as a period of rest from the exertions of the day. This night was an exception and full of horrors. That is why, as Vollenhove explains, it will be remembered for a long time.

Singular natural disasters were often interpreted in a symbolic-theological manner in the Early Modern Period, e.g. as God's punishment. Concerning the cause of the storm of 1660, however, Vollenhove, leaves it open who or what—he thinks—initiated the storm. God is only mentioned in the last stanzas when the poet addresses the grassland and free region, symbols standing for the Netherlands:

Blessed grasslands, free region,  
do not be too proud now of walls or fortresses  
or of houses built high up in the sky;  
even if gold is pouring onto your lap,  
even if all seas and waters  
cheer your fleets, so that they ring with laughter,  
even if you—who is well versed with each stream and canal—look in others' maps;  
and fear neither water curse nor robbers,  
a wind, God's breath, is stronger than you.

Vollenhove directs his last lines towards the Dutch. He warns them not to be too proud and points out that they are successful, good with their hands, affluent, and fearless. God, however, is stronger than they are. These lines can also be read as a preventive management strategy. Vollenhove seems to assume that a change in behaviour can avoid further damage and minimise the risk of future catastrophes. In previous lines he refers to the Dutch's arrogance, their plan to subdue the nature and to claim more and more land. It seems that Vollenhove intends to encourage the Dutch nation with his poem to think over their interaction with nature.

### **Concluding remarks**

Comparing the two poems, we see that Vollenhove seems to ascribe the storm a personality he does not understand, whereas Kooch describes the storm in a rather matter-of-fact and demystified way. Vollenhove perceives the storm as an acting agent and tries to conceive it and its severity. As a theologian and priest he knows how to hint at the classics and incorporated spiritual aspects in his poem by including various personifications in his poetics. Vollenhove's poem can be seen as a reminder to people to live a pious life, and by doing so, to attempt to prevent future calamities.

By contrast, the seaman and merchant Kooch describes the storm damages and the feud between his son-in-law and the notary Joris de Wijse, in which he comes to his son-in-law's defence. Construction of his son-in-law's defence, as well as coming to terms with the storm, were important motivations for writing the poem. Moreover, these motives explain the main functions of the poem: defending his son-in-law and coping with the severe storm. Unlike Vollenhove's, Kooch's view is not spiritual but rather secular.

Both Vollenhove and Kooch describe the storm damages. Their description of the storm damages makes it possible to classify the storm with the help of a modern meteorological wind scale, the Fujita scale. It ranges from F0 to F5, which corresponds to 64–116km/h and 419–512km/h, respectively. This scale was designed for classifying tornadoes, but it is also used in standard meteorological procedures to estimate wind speed. According to the damage indicators of the 1660 storm, the wind speed was most likely in the upper F1 range, around 180km/h (Pfeifer 2014: 65).

Finally, it should be mentioned that December 1660 had been a stormy month outside the Netherlands. Johann Conrad Knauth (1722), for example, describes a severe storm in the *Alt Zellischen Chroniken*. It raged in Roßwein near Nossen (administrative district Meißen, Germany) on the second Sunday of Advent and damaged churches, houses, and barns. Moreover, it destroyed gardens and uprooted trees. Knauth states that he had heard that other parts of Germany had also been affected by that storm in December 1660. Christian Lehmann (1747) reports on a severe storm which had raged in several places in Saxony also on the second Sunday of Advent in this year. Churches, houses, barns, and stables were destroyed, more than 100 sheep were battered to death, and approximately 2,000 trees were uprooted. Kooch and Vollenhove do not refer to these calamities.

Apart from their repositories of memory, the severe storm of 1660 has not entered into the cultural memory of the Dutch people. Until now, Torensteg 8 in Amsterdam boasts no commemorative plaque to Kooch and/or the storm damages.

The storm of 1660 was not the most severe in Dutch history. In 1674, for example, a severe storm raged over the Netherlands, which tore down parts of the city of Utrecht, including the nave of the cathedral. With the help of storm damage descriptions in the source material, we can now say that the storm of 1674 most likely obtained a level of F2 or F3, involving wind-speeds ranging from 184–256km/h to 256–335km/h, respectively (Pfeifer 2014: 122). It was thus more severe than the storm of 1660. The cathedral's nave has never been rebuilt. Gerrit Jansz Kooch, who was 76 years old at that time, wrote a poem consisting of 139 stanzas about this storm. Interestingly, Kooch refers to the storm of 1660 in the seventh stanza (my translation):

When Ropoorts-Tower's weather cock—driven by the wind—had begun to fly and  
the strong winds threw the cross from above onto our house, it seemed that we  
would lose our lives.

The fact that Kooch refers again to the weather cock, the damage done to his house, and to the experienced fear of dying indicates that these were most significant aspects of the storm of 1660 for him. They had been etched on his memory.

Both poems by Kooch and Vollenhove demonstrate impressively how they perceived the severe storm of 1660. Consistent with their different backgrounds, the authors produced secular and spiritual disaster narratives, respectively. Thereby, both texts illustrate early modern representations of a natural disaster. Finally, work on historical representations of natural disasters in general helps to remember previously forgotten, or neglected, major events of the past, and thereby allows them to re-enter cultural memory. This article is a first step towards re-remembering the severe storm of 1660.

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**Katrin Pfeifer** (née Hauer) is an historian working on European environmental and cultural history. She edited a Springer volume on natural disasters (2013) and published a book on pictures in education (2009, VDM). English translations of her books on severe storms (2014, LIT) and rockfalls (2009, LIT) are contracted with Springer. E-mail: [history.pfeifer@gmail.com](mailto:history.pfeifer@gmail.com).  
Web: <https://sites.google.com/site/historypfeifer/>

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## Appendix: The two poems

### Gerrit Jansz Kooch: Grootte sto[r]m 1660

*Van de haene vlucht en de kruijs val van Jan roode poorts tooren opt huys van de notaris  
G. Steeman*

*Als waeter ende Lucht het aertrijck quam bestrijen  
en op de texsel stroom wel hondert scheepen groot  
op sant of plaeten dreef oock na de grond dé gyen  
en over groot getal van menschen bleeven doot  
en dat t on weer ons huijs ten deele oock quam krenke  
steld ick dit vaers int schrift om op dien dach te denke  
den hartsten wint die men doen sach  
was smorgens vroech recht  
voor den dach*

*decembers negenthiende dach  
van sestien hondertsestich Jaren  
een grooten storm men doen sach  
dit meenich mens brocht in beswaren  
veel huijsen van haer dack ontbloot  
veel scheepen voor de stadt omwayde  
de scha int texsel over groot  
veel weeu en weesen dat beschreijde  
veel schoorstenen vielen ter neer  
verschajde huysen plat ter aerde  
veel boomen waeijden oock om veer  
t scheen lucht en aert tsamen vergaerde  
al stont de roopoorts tooren hooch  
de wint die deed het opperst bucken  
men weet niet waer de haen al vlooch  
het kruijs dat brack ons dack an stucken  
de geevel schoorsteen met gedruijs  
quam alles neer als donder slagen  
daer saeten wij doen ondert kruijs  
t waer goet leet niemant swaerder plaegen  
Ick was ontstelt in mijn gemoet  
maer doen ick mijn wel ginck versinnen  
ick docht alst kruijs ons quellen moet  
t is beeter opt huijs als daer binnen*

G[.] I[.] Kooch

*het kruijs van de tooren op de notaris gerrit stemans huijs gevalle sijnde en hij  
rooms gesint geen kinderen hebbende en smorgen op het stadt huijs koomende  
maeckte Joris de Wijse meede notaris metter vlucht dit vaersie*

*'t kruijs van Jan roopoorts tooren vil juijst op Steemans huijs waer om dat heeft sijn  
reen want hij hout veel vant kruijs maer waer om vil de haen daar oock niet op door  
t waeijen de haen en wou niet want sijn haen en wou niet kraeijen*

*also dit vaersie datelijck wat ginck onder al de prachte luys daer meede sij hem wat  
te quellen namen so hebben hem tot syn verschooning geassisteert met dit onder  
staende vaersie*

*Aen de quel geesten van de haene vlucht en kruijs val*

*spot niet om dat het kruijs  
neer viel op Steemans huijs  
de haen daer niet wou rusten  
de haen geen weerga lijdt  
dies Steemans huijs hij mijdt  
en vliecht naer andre kusten  
oft kruijs de pannen brack  
daert kruys blijft buijten t dack  
leeft men in huijs met lusten*

*T kruijs is gevallen want het was heel swear de haen is gevlogen men weet niet waer  
hij stont los opt kruijs en was ongebonden hij vlooch wech en is niet weer gevonden*

*G[.] I[.] Kooch*

## **Gerrit Jansz Kooch: The great storm of 1660**

(English translation by the author)

About the cock's flight and the cross' fall from the Jan Roodepoorts Tower onto the notary's house

When water and air came  
to battle the earth and to ensure  
that about 100 great ships drifted onto  
the sand and banks of stream Texel  
and sank down to the bottom of the sea  
and a number of people died  
the thunderstorm partly damaged our house  
I composed these verses to commemorate this day;  
the severest wind

was early in the morning,  
before the day broke.

On the nineteenth day of December  
of the year sixteen hundred and sixty  
people saw a great storm  
that got some of them in dire straits,

it robbed many houses of their roofs,  
toppled many ships before the city  
the damage on [the isle] Texel was extreme  
many widows and orphans mourned  
many chimneys fell down  
many houses were flattened to the ground  
trees were blown down  
Even if the Ropoorts-Tower remained aloft  
it too had to bow to the wind  
none knows where the cock flew  
the cross—it broke our roof into pieces—  
the gable-chimney fell with a crash  
there we sat under the cross  
it was good that no-one had to suffer a worse trial  
I was shocked  
then I thought it over.  
I thought if the cross had to torment us,  
it was better on the house  
than in the house.

G. I. Kooch

Because the cross had fallen from the towers onto notary Gerrit Steeman's house, who was Roman Catholic and had no children, Joris de Wisje, who likewise was a notary, quickly composed this little verse after Steeman had come to the town hall that morning.

The cross from Ropoorts Tower fell exactly onto Steeman's house. Why? There are reasons for that. Because he [Steeman] loves the cross very much! But why wasn't the cock blown there too? The cock did not want that because his [Steeman's] cock did not want to crow.

So this verse spread immediately among the better circles, which is why they teased him a little. To help him we have composed the following verse.

To the tormentors about the flight of the cock and the cross' fall

Don't scold because the cross  
fell on Steeman's house  
and the cock did not want to rest there;  
the cock does not accept his own kind,  
he shuns Steeman's house,  
because he flies away to other shores;  
although the cross broke the roof tiles  
while the cross rests upon the roof  
people live happily in the house.

The cross fell down because it was very heavy. The cock flew away, no one knows where to. He stood loosely on the cross but was not tied to it. The cock flew away and was never found.

G. I. Kooch

## Joannis Vollenhove: Op den Gruwzamen Nachtstorm

*In Wintermaant des jaars 1660.*

*Disjecitque rates, evertitque æquora ventis.*

*Afgrylyk nachtgewelt, o wint!  
Hoe valtge aan 't stormen dus ontzint?  
Hoe dus verbolgen opgesteken  
Uit den Noortwesten, en die streken?  
's Lancs koopfortuin had u te vriend  
Met een' voorwint en spoet gedient  
Van alle winden, waar ons zeilen  
De werelt kopen en weer veilen.  
Van kust tot kust, en Hollants vlag  
De zon voorby zeilt en den dag,  
Om onzen zeeleew vet te mesten  
Met d' inkomst van zo veel gewesten:  
Toen quam uw gunst al 't lant te sta.  
Wat hitste nu deze ongena  
Zo schendig op; daarge al uw buien  
Tot ons bederf scheent op te ruien;  
Daar tonnen gouts, in zee gesmoort,  
Met kielen in den gront geboort,  
De Beurs uitschudden en bederven?  
Dit slaat des koopmans hoop aan scherven.  
Wat borg, wat zeeverzekeraar  
Staat voor dees shade in? geen gevaar  
Stopt Tessel nu: 's lants keel staat open.  
Maar och een vloot, eerze uit kon lopen,  
Legt in den schoot van 't Vrye Lant  
Vergaan, verdreven en gestrant.  
De Noort- en Zuidtsee dryft vol wrakken,  
Gekerfde masten, kist en pakken,  
En gelt en goet, dat onder een,  
Langs al de dootsche kusten heen,  
Geslingert, los komt aangedreven,  
Met eigenaars met al gebleven.  
O Maas, en Waal, en Ysselstroom,  
Wat nachtstorm wekte u in den droom?  
Waar bergtge al 't nat, verlege vlieten,  
Gewoon uw stroomnat zacht te gieten*

*Uit uwe volle waterkruik  
In 's oceaans gezwollen buik?  
Dees zeeplaag komt uw dromen plagen,  
Veroveren, en ten bedde uit jagen.  
Uw vruchtbare akkers leggen blank.  
De zeeplas bruischt, en gaat zyn' gangk.  
(Geen dam noch paalwerk houdt nu tegen)  
Ja gaat met hele dyken vegen,  
En huilt, en schuimt, en scheyt, en sloopst.  
Waar 't vetsfte kleilant onder loopt.  
Zo ziedt de golf by d' Indianen,  
Op 't bulderen der dolle orkanen:  
Een zeedruis, dat schip by schip  
Te berde jaagt op bank en klip.  
Zo stortte 't onweer uit de wolken,  
Dat Latium, met steen en volken,  
En gansch Sicilje scheurt van een,  
Met kracht bevochten van twee zeen.  
Zyn weer en wint, van haar bezeten,  
Op ons verwaantsfceil fel gebeten?  
En woedt het woeste zeegevelt,  
Om zich te wreken, en weet velt  
Te winnen, in zyn' vaart en bruizen,  
Te no gestuit met magt van sluizen,  
Met wint en molens uitgemaalt?  
En poogt de zee heur scha betaalt  
Te zetten aan de Nederlanderen,  
Die haar natuurwet stout veranderen?  
Noch schut geen zeescha 't lantverdriet.  
Wien ryzen al de haren niet  
Te berge, ais 't onweer aan komt snuiven,  
Dat stenen aan hun stof verstuiven,  
Dat want en gevelspits en dak  
Van boven tuimelt, krak op krak;  
Geen' boom alleen rukt van zyn' wortel,  
Maar kerk en toren klinkt te mortel;  
En trest den aardboom met een' schrik,  
Als voor den jongsten ogenblik?  
De zon rees trager op in 't dagen  
Op haren sidderenden wagen,  
Gedootverft in heur aangezicht:  
De zon verschrikte en schroomde in 't licht  
t'Aanschouwen zo veel jammernissen;  
Dat handenwringen, menschevissen,  
  
Dat loejen van het stomme vee,  
De dorpen in een bare zee  
Gedompelt, wei by wei verdronken,*

*Als waar de werelt wechgezonden;  
Den Iantzaat, styf van kou, doormat,  
Van honger flaw, van arbeit mat,  
Op dak, of boom, om zich te redden,  
Gevlucht. O nacht, die gene bedden,  
Hun nachtrust gunt, te droef en bang,  
Gy zult ons heugen jaren lang.  
O stormwint, die elx hart vervoerde,  
En zo verwoedt uw vinnen roerde,  
Uw les quam ons te dier te staan,  
Om haastig in den wint te slaan.  
Gezegent weiland, Vry Geweste,  
Nu draag geen' moedt op muur, of veste,  
Of huizen, hemelhoog gebout;  
Al regent u de schoot vol gout;  
Al juichen alle zeen en wateren  
Uw vloten tegen, datze schateren;  
Al zietge, op ieder stroom en vaart  
Bedreven, andren in de kaart;  
En vreest voor watervloek, noch rover.  
Een wint, Godts adem, mag u over (I).*

### **Joannis Vollenhove: About the terrible night storm (1660)**

(English translation by the author)

About the terrible night storm [which occurred] in the winter month of the year 1660.

Moved by the winds the waves drove the ships apart and destroyed them.  
Terrible night power, oh wind!  
How could you rage so terribly?  
Why have you—[coming] from north-west and these regions—  
increased so furiously?  
You [wind] had been a friend of our country's commerce,  
served by a favourable breeze and haste.  
In all the corners of this world  
where our ships buy the world and sell it again.  
From coast to coast, where Holland's flag  
sails past the sun and the day  
to fatten our sea-lion  
with the earnings from so many regions:  
then your favours for the whole country came to an end.  
What incited your displeasure so wretchedly,  
that you seemed to stir up all your gusts to our ruin;  
that you sank a ton of gold into the sea;  
with keels drilled into the bottom [of the sea],  
that you plundered and ruined the stock market?

This all shattered the merchant's hopes.  
Which guarantor, which maritime insurance  
will cover the damage? No chance of that. [The isle]  
Texel now can't fend off threads: the country's throat is open.  
But, alas, before a fleet could sail  
it lay in the free country's bosom  
bygone, expelled, stranded.  
The North and South Sea was full of wrecks,  
masts snapped off, crates and packages,  
and money and property were hurled around,  
and washed ashore along the lifeless coasts  
together with their owners  
who had remained at that place.  
Oh Maas, oh Waal, oh IJsselstrom [these are rivers]  
which night storm awoke you from your dream?  
Where can you house all the water, shy rivers,  
since you are used to pouring softly your network of streams  
from your full water pitcher  
into the swollen ocean's belly?  
This plague of the sea comes to torment your streams,  
to conquer them and to chase them from their beds.  
Your fertile fields are flooded.  
The sea rages and goes its way.  
(No dam or piles can hinder it now)  
Yes, the sea wiped away whole dikes,  
it howls, and foams, and consumes, and rapes.  
There the rich clay-land is flooded.  
In the same way the golf boils among the Indians,  
from the raging of the fierce hurricanes:  
the roaring of the sea, which chases every single ship  
onto banks and cliffs.  
Thus plunged the storm from the clouds,  
so that Latium, with its stones, buildings and peoples,  
and all Sicily were torn apart,  
embattled by the power of two seas.  
Are wind and weather possessed by hate,  
bitterly furious with our conceit?  
And the wild power of the sea rages  
to avenge itself, it knows how to gain ground,  
in its passage and in its roaring.  
In such great distress will it be stopped  
by the might of locks, of windmills.  
Does the sea seek to repay the Dutch for the  
harm they did by altering the laws of nature without shame?  
And still no vessel can contain the country's distress.  
Whose hair is not bristling in mounds,  
when the thunderstorm is blowing in,

stones are shattered to dust [by the wind],  
walls, gable tops, and roofs  
plunge down from above, breaking and crashing;  
not only trees tear at their roots,  
but also churches and towers shatter;  
and hit the ground with horror,  
as if at the end of the world?  
The sun went up more slowly as it became day  
on its trembling wagon  
became very pale in its face:  
the sun took fright and was shy in the light  
upon seeing so many misfortunes;  
the hand-wringing, fishing for people,  
bellowing of the voiceless cattle,  
the villages submerged in a stormy sea  
drowned pasture by pasture,  
as if the world had sunk away;  
denizens, stiff from the cold, soaked [to the skin],  
weakened by hunger, tired of work,  
fled onto the roof or tree,  
to save their skin. Oh night, which grants no beds  
their night's rest, too woeful and anxious,  
we will remember you many a year.  
Oh stormwind, who seduced everyone's heart,  
and so madly moved your flippers  
we had to pay dearly for your lesson,  
to get rid of it quickly.  
Blessed grasslands, free region,  
do not be too proud now of walls or fortresses  
or of houses built high up in the sky;  
even if gold is pouring onto your lap,  
even if all seas and waters  
cheer your fleets, so that they ring with laughter,  
even if you—who is well versed with each stream and canal—  
look in others' maps;  
and fear neither water curse nor robbers,  
a wind, God's breath, is stronger than you