

THE IMAGE OF THE NETHERLANDS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Recently, Frans Naeff published a book entitled 58 Miljoen Nederlanders in Andermans Ogen, one of a series originating on Dutch television, and edited by Professor Dr. A. F. Manning, of the University of Nijmegen, and Professor Dr. M. de Vroede of the University of Leuven. In his introduction the author says:

Each year millions of people visit the Netherlands. Some are just passing through, while others just come to pay a visit to us or our country. They make a boat trip through the canals of Amsterdam, visit the Rijksmuseum and Rembrandt's House . . . and already they depart again to see the sights of another country. Such tourists have not seen much of our country; they have not talked with Dutch people, and they have only visited the tourist attractions. And yet, when they are home again, their friends will ask them how they liked Holland, and what Dutchmen are like. In answer they will tell what was, and what wasn't, as they expected it to be. For they had certain expectations, had actually formed an image of our country before they started their trip. As tourists, Dutchmen, too, are just like this. We also think that every Spaniard is a potential bullfighter, that no respectable Frenchman would dare to be out on the street without a long loaf of French bread, and that all Englishmen are phlegmatic and wear a derby hat.

Outsiders have also built up an image of the Dutch. But that image has not always been the same. The visiting tourists as well as the Dutch themselves have changed over the years, and the role played by the Netherlands in relation to other countries has not always been equally important. All these things are influential in creating the image which outsiders have of us. The outsider sees us as we cannot see



Fig. 3

"On the canal," an illustration from the 1881 edition  
of Hans Brinker; or The Silver Skates,  
by Mary Mapes Dodge

ourselves. We can learn to know something about ourselves when we hear how we appear in the eyes of another. But every opinion not only tells us something about ourselves, but also something about the outsider who makes such a judgment.<sup>1</sup>

Naeff includes observations about the Netherlands beginning with those of Tacitus, who wrote about his experiences in the Low Countries as long ago as 98 A.D., all the way up to a recent article in the French weekly L'Express entitled "Jusqu'où iront les Hollandais?". Over the years the position of the Netherlands amongst the nations has undergone many changes, and so, too, has the image of the Netherlander. What is this image today? Does a Dutch national character really exist? If it does, is this of

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<sup>1</sup>Translated from the Dutch by Hendrika Ruger: Elk jaar bezoeken miljoenen mensen Nederland. Sommigen zijn op doorreis, anderen komen om ons en ons land eens te bekijken. Ze maken een tochtje door de Amsterdamse grachten, bezoeken het Rijksmuseum en het Rembrandthuis . . . en ze vertrekken al weer naar de bezienswaardigheden van een ander land. Zulke toeristen hebben niet veel van ons land gezien, ze hebben niet met Nederlanders gesproken en hebben alleen die plaatsen bezocht waar alle toeristen komen. En toch, als ze thuiskomen, zullen vrienden hun vragen wat ze van Nederland vinden, hoe de Nederlanders zijn. Ze zullen antwoorden wat wel en wat niet was zoals ze verwacht hadden. Want ze hadden bepaalde verwachtingen, eigenlijk al een oordeel over ons land, voordat ze op reis gingen.

Nederlanders zijn als toeristen net zo. Wij denken ook dat in iedere Spanjaard een stierevechter schuilt, dat een beetje Fransman zich niet zonder stokbrood onder de arm op straat waagt en dat alle Engelsen onverstoort zijn en een bolhoed dragen. Zo hebben buitenlanders ook een beeld van de typische Netherlander. Maar dat beeld is niet altijd hetzelfde geweest. Zowel de buitenlandse reizigers als de Nederlanders zijn in de loop van de tijden veranderd en ook de positie van Nederlands temidden van andere landen is niet altijd even belangrijk geweest. Al die dingen zijn van invloed op het beeld dat buitenlanders van ons en Nederland hebben. De buitenlander ziet ons zoals wij dat zelf niet kunnen. Wij kunnen iets van onszelf te weten komen als we horen hoe wij er uit zien in andermans ogen. Maar elk oordeel vertelt niet alleen iets over ons, maar ook over de buitenlander die een oordeel velt.

any interest or value to the Netherlander? Naeff declares, and rightly so, that people with a common language and history do have certain general characteristics. But, he concludes, although this is true, and an image of the Netherlander does exist, all this is of value to the Dutch only if they take an amazed look in the mirror, then turn their attention to such evaluations and opinions, and consider what these reveal about themselves and about those of other nationalities. We know that such a look in the mirror has been taken long ago, and the resulting image is evident in advertisements of Dutch products, such as cheese, beer, and liquor, and has been perpetuated by the Dutch outside the Netherlands as well as at home. Consider, for instance, this news item in a copy of De Nederlandse Courant dated May 5, 1978:

Dutch Folklore in the U.S. at the Opening of  
the KLM Office

New York

There will be an entire week of festivities for New Yorkers on the occasion of the opening of a new American Head office in the heart of Manhattan. Typical Dutch folklore, that is still as popular with Americans as ever - clog dances, tulips, a barrelorgan, and flowergirls in Volendam costume - will draw flocks of people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Translated from the original Dutch by Hendrika Ruger:

Hollandse Folklore in VS bij opening van KLM kantoor

New York

De New Yorkse bevolking houdt een complete feestweek over aan de opening van KLM's nieuwe Amerikaanse hoofdkantoor in het hartje van Manhattan. Typische Hollandse folklore, die er bij de Amerikanen nog steeds in gaat als koek: klompdansen, tulpen, een draaiorgel en bloemenmeisjes in Volendammer kostuum, brengt drommen mensen op de been.

If the Netherlanders themselves like to trade on their national image, and help perpetuate it, no wonder tourists and visiting authors look for facts to reinforce their preconceived ideas. No wonder they ask us, Dutch-Canadians, if we wear wooden shoes at home, and that wooden shoes, windmills, tulips and cheese are mentioned to Dutch people who travel abroad.

There is general concern about the invisible qualities as well. The well-known literary critic Herman Meyer in his essay Das Bild des Holländers in der Deutschen Literatur, concludes his extensive study of das Holländerbild with a warning to the reader that "national images" can lead to the perpetuation of false impressions. He emphasizes that it is time to clear up the misconceptions created by these "hearths of infection," as he calls them. As well, although our ethnic multicultural festivals, perhaps better defined as the "festivals of hyphenated Canadians," have contributed to a better understanding of other groups within Canada, it will be difficult to liberate ourselves of certain stereotyped ideas about other nationalities. The roots of these ideas often have been implanted in early childhood. It is in the history of children's literature that we find some of the sources of infection. This can be substantiated with examples.

Long before the invention of the railway and the rise of tourism, travellers wrote down their experiences of travel in other countries. Then, when the railway was developed, the people on the American continent started to travel as a means of recreation. This came to a temporary halt when the civil war started. After the war, the luxury liners arrived on the scene and travelling to Europe also became popular. Mark Twain published Innocents Abroad in

1870. He publicized actual travel instead of vicarious "armchair travel," by reading or hearsay. His Innocents Abroad is:

the record of a pleasure trip. It has a purpose which is to suggest to the reader how he would be likely to see Europe and the East if he looked at them with his own eyes, instead of the eyes of those who travelled in those countries before him.

In this preface, Mark Twain voiced the spirit of the pioneer. It unleashed an adventurousness in America that found an outlet in the re-exploration of the old countries, the world from which the settlers' forefathers had come.

This interest was reflected in the children's books, in stories of travels through Europe and adventures in European countries. The Netherlands were also included in these works, or sometimes were even the subject of entire books. In the work by Horace Scudder (1832-1902): The Bodley Grandchildren and their Journey in Holland, the Bodley children travelled to Holland to trace their ancestors. The Bodley books are dated, however, and are not read today. Nor are the works of Elizabeth Williams Chamneu (1850-1922). In her Witch Winnie series, Winnie and her friends, pupils in a New York boarding school, visit Europe and stop in Paris and in Holland.

From travel books, authors moved on to stories with a foreign setting. A book about the Netherlands which had an immense influence on several generations of readers and writers of children's books was the classic Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates by Mary Mapes Dodge (1831-1905). Mary Mapes Dodge grew up in New York city. The Mapes children were educated at home by private tutors and had access to the best literature. Mary Mapes married when she was 20 and was a widow at 27. She took her two sons with her to her parental home in Newark, New Jersey. She had a deserted



Fig. 4

Statue of Hans Brinker in Spaarndam.

On the base is the inscription, "Dedicated to our youth to honor the boy who symbolizes the perpetual struggle of Holland against the water."

farmhouse at her disposal which she furnished so that she would have a place to write. She published Irvington Stories in 1864 and then, a year later, Hans Brinker; or The Silver Skates. The remarkable fact about this work is that when she wrote it, she had never been to Holland. This explains why so many facts are incorrect. For instance, there is a passage where an English child reads aloud from an English history of Holland. In this famous scene there is the little boy who "puts his finger in the dike". Never has such a misrepresentation of the construction of a dike caused more confusion. Countless tourists, who had read the book, asked for the location of the historic dike. In order to prevent further disappointment to tourists, the Dutch eventually put up statues of the little boy who put his finger in the dike in Spaarndam in 1950 and later in Harlingen. This solved the problem and the statues have become important tourist attractions.

Mrs. Dodge did not write only "a good story about Holland." She was intrigued by the history of Holland, her interest inspired by reading Motley's Rise of the Dutch Republic. She wanted to weave as much Dutch history into the story as she could. The plot of the books becomes more and more complex, with several stories embedded in it. First there is the story of the children of the poor family, Hans and his sister Gretchen. These children have German names, because, as the author explains, they have been given the names of some German friends. Hans and Gretchen have severe problems. Some of these problems are solved by friends, who move in a different stratum of society. This affords the description of a visit to an art gallery and a skating trip for pleasure. Even though the plot is often disrupted, the diversions are thrilling. The incidents are told in such a way that the interest in the main plot,

Hans Brinker's tale, is maintained. In one of the "side stories," that of Raff Brinker's brain operation and the relation of his adventures, we find shades of Washington Irving's story of Rip van Winkle. The main figure, Raff, like Rip, recovers his memory after many years. This occurs not after a long sleep, but after a brain injury. All threads of this complex story are neatly tied together in the end.

In the description of the "noble but poor" Brinker family and in her admiration for Dutch art and history, Mrs. Dodge followed an established tradition concerning the view of the Netherlands in literature.

There had been a time when the Netherlands did not receive a very good press, especially in English literature and travel reports. National economic jealousy and competition in trade on the world's seas caused wars between the Netherlands and England. Several derogatory expressions referring to the Dutch came into use, and remain to this day as evidence that the English once had a quarrel with the Dutch. Examples of these are: Dutch courage, Dutch treat, to talk like a Dutch uncle, talk double Dutch, to be in Dutch with someone, and to sing like a Dutch nightingale. In the 17th century English travellers did not have much to say in favour of Holland as a country, either. In the 18th century the Germans were critical of the Dutch, whom they admired for their 17th century achievements in the fine arts, literature and commerce. While they admired the achievements of the "Golden" century, they were critical of the achievements and attitudes of the Dutch in the 18th century. Authors such as Schiller, Goethe and Kleist glorified Holland's past. For them, Holland's image included its past glories. Holland gradually became the little neighbour with a glorious history. When Holland

gained a reputation as a tourist country, in the 1850's, it grew in status and it became "a great little country with a great past," a "self made country," a "clean country." As we have mentioned, Mary Mapes Dodge wrote Hans Brinker before she had a chance to visit Holland. In describing it, she followed the common literary trend begun by the German authors and included the art and history of 17th century Holland in her story. Her widely read book had a great influence on the image of Holland in the world.



Fig. 5

"A Country Scene," an illustration from  
Stoddard's Lectures

When Stoddard's Lectures appeared in 1898 her influence could be clearly felt, as Stoddard met his own "Hans and Gretchen" in the Netherlands, and introduced them in his description of the maltreatment of work dogs. Dogs used to be employed as an energy saving device. They were put to work and, just like other animals, they were sometimes maltreated. Stoddard devoted several pages to the maltreatment of dogs and also of women in the Netherlands. He expressed himself as follows:

It really exasperated me to see this treatment of the canine race in Holland. But the dogs are cheap, and the men are lazy or hard-hearted; hence, so long as no society exists there to prevent it, Man's most devoted friend and trusty comrade will probably be compelled to lead a work existence that is indicated by our expression "a dog's life!".

Sometimes, however, Hans does not own a dog. What then? Does he assume the load himself? O, no! He puts it on his wife. "Gretchen," he says, "bring me my pipe, like a good Hausfrau, and I will help you get the yoke upon your shoulders." Then, while he calmly sits upon the deck, a halo of tobacco smoke about his head, his patient spouse goes on her way, like the mere beast of burden that she is. I wonder if she ever asks the question, "Is marriage a failure?" Poor creature!

It is surprising to note that as recently as 80 years ago it was quite acceptable to write about another country in this tone. While Stoddard expresses himself in a derogatory manner, Mary Mapes Dodge admires Holland. Hans Brinker, however, cannot be considered a book to help children build an accurate picture of life in the Netherlands, today or a hundred years ago even if the book is still very popular. It is mentioned in Ashley's study on Children's Reading and the 1970's as one of the fifty books that made a lasting impression on teachers, both men and women, ranging in age from 21 to 60 years. However, in the same study, children

no longer included it on their list of the 50 best books.

From 1873 until she died in 1905, Mary Mapes Dodge was also the editor of the children's magazine, St. Nicholas, which was published from 1873 to 1940. Most authors who wrote for this famous magazine were of English origin. However, occasionally the work of people of other nationalities was included. The Protestant Anglo-Saxon atmosphere of the magazine was accepted as a matter of course. In 1898 a poem "Going too far," by Mildred Howells, appeared in this magazine:

A woman, who lived in Holland, of old  
 Polished her brass till it shone like gold.  
 She washed her pig after all his meals  
 In spite of his energetic squeals.  
 She scrubbed her doorstep into the ground,  
 And the children's faces, pink and round,  
 She washed so hard that in several cases  
 She polished their features off their faces.-  
 Which gave them an odd appearance though  
 She thought they were really neater so!  
 Then her passion for cleaning quickly grew,  
 And she scrubbed and polished the village through,  
 Until, to the rage of all the people,  
 She cleaned the weather-vane off the steeple.  
 As she looked at the sky one summer's night,  
 She thought that the stars shone out less bright;  
 And she said with a sigh: "If I were there,  
 I'd rub them up till the world would stare."  
 That night a storm began to brew,  
 And a wind from the ocean blew and blew  
 Till, when she came to her door next day  
 It whisked her up and blew her away.  
 Up and up in the air so high  
 That she vanished, at last, in the stormy sky.  
 Since then it's said that each twinkling star  
 And the big white moon shine brighter far.  
 But the neighbours shake their heads in fear  
 She may rub so hard they will disappear.

This poem has helped to perpetuate the "Dutch cleanser" image of the Netherlands. A preoccupation with cleaning and scrubbing is not considered a Dutch trait of today, and

tourists tend to complain that Dutch cities are not as clean as, for instance, Toronto. Yet there will be more disappointed tourists in the future, for this little poem has been made into a picture book for children, entitled The Woman who lived in Holland. It appeared in 1973 and was illustrated by William Curtis Holdsworth. Also in that year a picture book appeared, written by J. Chasek and illustrated by Sal Murdocca, called Have you seen Wilhelmina Krumpf? The setting of this story is a village called Polderport, and the main characters live on Apeldorn Lane. To quote the author:

Polderport was one of those quiet Dutch villages where the women did almost everything in exactly the same way.

Apparently they all wash their windows every day, precisely at 4:00 p.m. They wave and greet each other with: "Hello Gretchen Zeider Zee! How are you today?" "As well as can be expected, Hilda Hoogelman!" The author elaborates on spring cleaning and the habits of the women, who take their picture frames apart in order to dust their insides. Wilhelmina Krumpf upsets the established order of the petit bourgeois village population by sneaking away from her household duties in the afternoon to go for a ride on a motor bike. The story ends when she convinces her neighbours that going for a ride on the bike is more fun than washing windows. This little book is an odd combination of the old image of clean little Holland and a touch of "woman's lib." The final product is a silly story, with derivative motives and poor illustrations.

In two other poems of the early part of this century we find a clear demonstration of the exaggeration of the diminutive aspects of Holland. The text of one of them, "The Little Toyland" by an unknown author, follows:

Away 'way off 'cross the seas and such  
Lies the little flat Land of the Dutch, Dutch, Dutch!

Where green toy meadows stretch off to the sea,  
With a little canal where a fence ought to be!

Where windmills' arms go round, round, round,  
And sing to the cows with a creaky sound.

Where storks live up in the chimney top,  
And the wooden shoes pound plop, plop, plop!

Where little toy houses stand in a row,  
And dogcarts clattering past them go!

Where milkcans shine in the shiniest way,  
And the housemaids scrub, scrub, scrub all day.

Where dikes keep out the raging sea,  
And shut in the land as cosy as can be.

Oh, that little toy land, I like it much,  
That prim little, trim little, land of the Dutch!

We find here shades of Heinrich Heine's poem "Kleines Volk."  
It is also worth noticing in passing that it is not at all  
unusual to hear Canadians speak about their Dutch acquaint-  
ances as 'little', saying, for instance, "I'd like to  
introduce you to another person I know who comes from  
Holland, a little Dutch girl from Amsterdam." Very often  
this girl will be of normal height, if not taller than the  
average Canadian. Yet the diminutive image has established  
itself firmly in the Anglo-Saxon mind. In general, the  
little poem is charming, and full of repetition, which is  
bound to please children. It firmly establishes Holland  
as a little country full of meadows, mills, cows, wooden  
shoes, scrubbing maids, and dog carts. The real Holland  
is bound to disappoint the young traveller who lands in  
Randstad.

We find a similar picture in the poem "A little Dutch  
Garden" by Harriet Whitney Durbin:

I passed by a garden, a little Dutch garden  
 Where useful and pretty things grow,-  
 Heartsease and tomatoes and pinks and potatoes,  
 And lilies and onions and rue.

I saw in that garden, that little Dutch Garden,  
 A chubby Dutch man with a spade,  
 And a rosy Frau with a shoe like a scow,  
 And a flaxen-haired little Dutch maid.

There grew in that garden, that little Dutch garden,  
 Blue flag flowers, lovely and tall,  
 And early blush roses, and pink little posies,  
 And Gretchen was fairer than all.

My heart's in that garden, that little Dutch garden,  
 It tumbled right in when I passed,  
 'Mid wildering mazes of spinach and daisies,  
 And Gretchen is holding it fast.

Again we meet a "Gretchen" in this poem, yet another poem influenced by Mary Mapes Dodge, and again German is confused with Dutch.

Yet another poem for children, also influenced by Hans Brinker; or The Silver Skates, is by the poet Phoebe Cary, and is called "The Leak in the Dike." It is fairly long, 165 lines, and therefore we will not include it here. However, it is the entire story of the boy who put his finger in the dike and nearly perished. This poem is also found in Sechrist's collection 1000 Poems for Children, in the section "Poems of Patriotism and History," and it ends with:

And his deed shall be sung by the cradle  
 And told to the child on the knee!  
 So long as the dikes of Holland  
 Divide the land from the sea!

If we take into account that the propagation of folk tales was another characteristic of the Romantic period, it becomes clear why this fairytale fantasy of Dutch heroism was accepted so readily at the time, and even as late as

this century, and was even retold in verse form by this poet.

At this point we must wonder if anything of quality has ever been available to children of North America. However, things have been improving since the 1930's. By then some children's books by Dutch authors in translation were available to North American children. One of these was Afke's Ten, by Nienke van Hichtum, originally published in Holland in 1903. The author describes the ups and downs of a family in Friesland. The family is very poor, but this fact is faced in a realistic manner. The family ties are strong, and the children happy without being affluent. This work is a classic of Dutch children's literature, but the English translation, published in 1936, is no longer available and the book is seldom found in Canadian libraries. The English translation was done by Hilda van Stockum, who was born in Rotterdam in 1908. After training in art schools in Holland and Dublin, she settled in the United States in 1934. In that same year her story for children A Day on Skates was published. She also did the illustrations for the book. Skating on the Dutch canals often occurs as a theme in Dutch literature, as we have already seen in Hans Brinker. Soon after Hilda van Stockum had left the Netherlands she described its villages as "quaint". She begins her story as follows:

In that small country called Holland, with its many canals and dikes, its low fields and quaint little villages, Father Frost went prowling 'round one January night, with his bag full of wonders.

The story, like Afke's Ten, is set in Friesland. Some names of the characters are also reminiscent of Afke's Ten. One of the main characters of the story is even called Afke.

The story focuses on an ice holiday, a "picnic on skates" for the entire school class under the direction of the teacher. All canals are frozen and there is enough fresh snow to provide ammunition for a happy snowball fight between the children of IJlst and Sneek, two Frisian towns. Nor did Hilda van Stockum resist the temptation to introduce Holland's glorious past into the plot of the story. The idea that Dutch history had to be included in any book about Holland still lived on in 1934. Consequently, in answer to the question of one of the schoolboys whether "the tower Michiel de Ruyter climbed was as high as this one?" the teacher provides information about the Dutch hero who started his career as an assistant rope maker and rose to become one of the greatest sea admirals Holland ever had. Other incidents, such as when one boy skated into open water and nearly drowned are more to the point and fit better into the story. But all ends well in this beautifully illustrated picture book.

It would be inappropriate to abandon the theme of skates and skating without mentioning the book Far out on the Long Canal by the Dutch-American author Meindert de Jong. Meindert de Jong is an American who was born in Wierum, Friesland in 1908. In his works for children, he recalls his early childhood memories. He came to Michigan in 1916, with his parents and his brother, David Cornel de Jong, who is also a writer and a poet. The family settled in Grand Rapids, where there exists one of the largest groups of settlers belonging to the Christian Reformed Church. De Jong's Calvinistic upbringing is noticeable in his books. He has received many awards for his works and is recognized as a significant author of children's literature. In 1954 he received the Newberry Medal for his book The Wheel on

the School. In 1962 he received the Hans Christian Andersen International Book Medal. Children in other countries have enjoyed Meindert de Jong's work, too. A German translation of The Wheel on the School appeared in 1954, a Japanese edition in 1956, a Swedish one in 1957, a Polish in 1961, and an Italian edition in 1967. In Hungary and Scotland it was broadcast on radio. It is reported that the children in a class in Edinburgh were spellbound when it was read on a school broadcast.

Meindert de Jong's tales are reminiscent of his youth. His story Far out on the Long Canal is about a winter in the life of nine-year-old Moonta Reimersma, when ice finally came to ditches and canals and Moonta had a chance to learn to skate. De Jong's stories are filled with adventure and warm affection and always describe the anxieties of children who are learning to grow up. His story Dirk's Dog Bello is a typical "boy and his dog" story. Again, it is just as dated as other descriptions of Holland, with dog carts as mentioned by Stoddard.

However, his stories are more than just dated description. Places such as Wierum still exist in Friesland, the most Northern province of the Netherlands. Even if modern times are catching up with such isolated villages, nestled against the sea dikes, the boys and girls in these villages still grow up in a different Holland from that of their relatives in Amsterdam. For there are, of course, many different Hollands, just as there are many different Canadas.

Another author-illustrator who is still active and producing children's books is Peter Spier, the son of the well-known journalist and illustrator Jo Spier. Peter Spier was born in Amsterdam in 1927 and came to the United

States in 1952 to work for a branch of the publishing company Elsevier in Houston, Texas. An example of his work as an illustrator of the Dutch landscape is provided by the picture book The Cow Who Fell in the Canal, with text by Phyllis Krasilowski. This work was received so well that it also appeared in a Dutch translation in Holland. The illustrations are authentic and are drawn with an eye for detail, delightful to children and adults alike. Hendrika's life in the stable and meadows is drawn realistically. The cow's adventures in Alkmaar are very interesting and although certain "quaint" characteristics are illustrated, we are not told that they are quaint:

Hendrika was an unhappy cow. She lived on a farm in Holland, where it is very flat.

The reader is left free to form his own opinion.

Another book, written as well as illustrated by Peter Spier, is Of Dikes and Windmills. In this book, Spier provides a history and technical details of present land reclamation in the Netherlands. The text is clarified by the illustrations. The value of this work may be seen when its explanations are compared with the following passage from the work of Mary Mapes Dodge:

Far over the sea is a famous little country generally known as Holland; but that name, even if it means Hollow land or How Land? does not describe it half so well as this - The Funny Land of Pluck. Verily, a queerer bit of earth was never shone upon by the sun nor washed by the tide. It is the oddest, funniest country that ever raised its head from the waves (and between ourselves, it does not quite do that), the most topsy turvy landscape, the most amphibious spot in the universe, - as the Man in the Moon can't deny, - the chosen butt of the elements, and good naturedly the laughing stock of mankind. Its people are the queerest and drollest of all the nations; and yet so plucky, so wise and resolute and strong, that "beating the Dutch" has become a by-word for expressing the limits of mortal performance.

When this excerpt is compared with the descriptions provided with one of Spier's illustrations, we must agree that children of this generation will have a better idea of the Netherlands when they set out on their own travels to discover the world. An example of Spier's approach is:

A clunking and creaking dredge hungrily eats way into the bank, widening the North Sea Canal. The soil - a precious commodity in the Netherlands - is put in barges and used elsewhere to strengthen the canal's dikes and as fill for polders being prepared for industry. In a small work harbor the sinker pieces are built that will reinforce the new shores, keep the soil in place and protect them from the wash of passing ships.

"The five of us started this one at eight this morning," said the foreman at 10 A.M., standing to his hips in water. "In an hour he'll be sunk. Oh, it's only a little one . . . you should have seen the ones we built in the Zuiderzee! Even so, it'll take thirty tons of stone to get 'em down. Yes, meneer, he's nicely put together, you could sail on him to England if you had to! Shame you were not here yesterday. The dredge suddenly stopped and they yelled to us that they had an elephant in a bucket. And sure enough, they had a skull with two long tusks. The meneer from the University said it was a 'masterdont' or some name like that."

In this passage, Peter Spier not only provides information about dike building but he also gives other details, such as the opinions of the workers "on location." This lends a sense of reality to the work. His information about mills, historic pumping stations and the building of new towns in the polders, which were created by the draining of the Zuiderzee, all add up to a most lively account. This book, written on a child's level, is an excellent source of information on the subject.

In a recent article, Spier gives his impressions of a visit to Broek, his birth place. After 25 years he found many changes. He found the village streets crowded with

strollers, most of them bearded and beaded young people. One of the old villagers told him that these young folk lived in the youth hostel. Spier, shaking his head about this, answered him with "Sure a bunch of creeps with those beards". He continues in his article with:

It was a mistake, for after a minute or so of thought he replied: 'Creeps with beards? Do you remember my grandfather, Pete?' Oh yes, too late I did. He had an enormous white beard. 'And my own father?' Of course. He too had an enormous growth hanging from his face! How I wished I'd kept my mouth shut! But my just punishment was not yet over, for T. continued: 'And Petrus had a beard, and so did Paulus, and Jesus wore a beard.' I deserved it.

Here, in a few lines Spier tells us that on his visit in 1975, he found the spirit of tolerance still existing in the Netherlands. However, when the winds howl straight from the North Pole in the wintertime, and the "Ruysdael" clouds move rapidly over the flat land, it is not always a comfortable place. It is about this aspect that the author Alta Halverson Seymour writes in her story: When the Dike Broke. She gives a convincing and accurate account of the flood of 1953:

Of the busy, neat little village of Kuyfoort only roofs and top stories of the houses showed above the water. In some of the upper windows Dirk could see sheets out for signals that help was needed.

This passage is typical of the book's realism. Some of the child characters in this book behave heroically, but as many heroic deeds were performed in those days, the story is entirely credible.

While this is a fine story for older boys and girls, a good introduction for younger children is Dirk lives in Holland, by Astrid Lindgren, a volume of the series "Children Everywhere", published originally in Swedish. Astrid

Lindgren introduces children to other countries in simple language, accompanied by photographs by the well-known Swedish photographer Anna Riwkin-Brick. A similar level of information is transmitted both in text and illustration. As a result of its fine quality and usefulness the book has been popular for over 15 years. The setting of the story is Veere, as it was before the Delta Plan dike was finished. Dirk and Elleke, the two main figures, want to see the Queen's yacht pass by. Dirk wants a bicycle to go and see her, and his grandfather gives him one. The author introduces bikes, water and the monarchy of the Netherlands in this one small volume. In the photographs we see flowers, national costumes, cows and cleanliness.

Then there is Rie Cramer's book, The Little Dutch Girl. It is a delightfully illustrated nonsense story. In it, a small girl prefers to walk in the sunshine on Sunday morning instead of going to church, as her mother tells her to do. She is punished for her disobedience when she tries to do the same thing the Sunday after she has been warned. When she goes for a walk again she is followed by the big church bell, "waddling after her with a grim and angry face". This is, of course, an interpretation of a folk tale and, as such, a work of fiction. It is not to be recommended for very small children because it may frighten them.

A good informative story, written in the same vein as Astrid Lindgren's book, is Jan of Holland, by Peter Buckley. While Dirk's Holland is situated in the town of Veere, Jan's Holland is the former island of Urk, a rather unique place in the Netherlands, by no means comparable to the typical Dutch city. In this book, the hero, Jan de Vries, has reached the age when he must determine his future, because he has to choose a suitable secondary school. Is he

going to be a fisherman, like his forefathers, or is he going to become a farmer on one of the new farms in the North East Polder? He chooses farming, and while he makes up his mind, the reader is introduced to the history of the Zuider Zee works and to the Delta Plan. Children who have read this book will certainly understand the facts of land reclamation and the dangers of the sea, which continually threaten the very existence of Holland. They will also enjoy such books as Jan de Hartog's Little Ark and den Doolaard's Roll back the Sea, which are available in English.

Another little book, The Book of the Netherlands, by Angelo Cohn, is not as successful. The photographs are in black and white only, and the information that the author provides is often simply not true. When a barrel organ passes through the streets the inhabitants may give their contributions faithfully to support this often regular entertainment; but it is wrong to say that they also indulge in spontaneous dancing in the streets. This was true in May 1945, after the liberation of Holland, but no such incidents take place today. The caption of a photograph of a shoemaker's pothuis tells us that this shop is "a vital part of business life in the Netherlands". The book was published in the early sixties, so there is simply no excuse for including this type of dated information. Unfortunately, works such as this do little to whet the appetite for more books about Holland.

The Stolen Mirror by Lidia Postma is a well written story which has a Dutch background. In 1976 the author won Het Gouden Penseel, the prize for the best illustrated children's book in Holland, for the illustrations of Andersen's Fairy Tales. She also provides the illustrations for her own story, The Stolen Mirror. It is a modern fairy

tale which deals with Michael, a boy who lives in a city in Holland. When Michael's father asks him which he would rather have, a bicycle or a baby brother or sister, Michael prefers a bike, which his father then gives him. He goes on a trip on his new red bicycle and becomes involved in a quest to kill a dragon, which has stolen a magic mirror. Of course, everything ends well after some very frightening adventures. Holland is incorporated into the story through the illustrations.

Recently, another book of fantasy by the Dutch author Annie Schmidt was translated into English. This story, The Island of Nose, is also a quest story, with delightfully realistic Dutch touches.

Space prevents me from mentioning the works of a number of other Dutch authors, translations of which have helped introduce Holland to North American children. The list of well written books, authentic in their portrayal of the Netherlands, is now growing rapidly. Thanks to the support of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Welfare of the Netherlands, selected books now have been translated into some fifteen languages and are being given world-wide distribution.

At the present time, there is a need for several attractive children's books written for English-language readers. These books would serve the need for simple, accurate accounts of modern life in the Netherlands. It is high time that a truer image of Holland replaces the conventional one created by the overwhelming popularity of Hans Brinker; or The Silver Skates.

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