

**caansvacaen**

**Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies**  
**Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises**

ISSN 1924-9918 <http://www.caans-acaen.ca/journal>

Volume 42. Issue 1 (2022)



CANADIAN JOURNAL OF NETHERLANDIC STUDIES  
REVUE CANADIENNE D'ÉTUDES NÉERLANDAISES

Editor: Krystyna Henke (khenke.cjns@gmail.com)  
Editor Emeritus: Basil D. Kingstone

Editorial board:

Hendrika Beaulieu (University of Lethbridge)  
Tanja Collet-Najem (University of Windsor)  
Inge Genee (University of Lethbridge)  
Edward Koning (University of Guelph)  
Timothy Nyhof (Winnipeg)  
Hugo de Schepper (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)  
Angela Vanhaelen (McGill University)

ISSN 0225-0500 (Volumes 1-31, print and on-line archive)  
ISSN 1924-9918 (Volumes 32-, on-line)

Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies / Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises (CJNS/RCÉN) offers a variety of articles on the culture of the Low Countries.

CJNS/RCÉN is published by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies / Association canadienne pour l'avancement des études néerlandaises (CAANS-ACAÉN).

CJNS/RCÉN is indexed in: MLA Bibliography; Bibliografie van Nederlandse Taal- en Literatuurwetenschap; Linguistic Bibliography/Bibliographie Linguistique; Bibliography of the History of Art; Historical Abstracts; American History and Life.

Cover illustration: Anna Sluijter: *Landweg Blaricum* (circa 1914). Museum Dr8888, Drachten, Netherlands.

# Table of contents

From the editor / De la part de la rédactrice en chef / Van de redactie	i-xii
<b>Articles</b>	
<i>Patricia Emison</i> Bruegel, peasants, and politics	1-26
<i>Henk van den Belt</i> A “mighty stream” of anti-intellectualism: Johan Huizinga, his age, and ours	27-52
<i>Leah Niederhausen</i> Representations of a nation? Comparing the Dutch 1956 National Monument and the 2021 National Holocaust Monument of Names	53-76
<b>Reviews</b>	
<b>Art</b>	
Nienke Bakker and Nicole R. Myers (eds) <i>Van Gogh and the olive groves</i> Reviewed by <i>Cliff Edwards</i>	77-80
Berlinde De Bruyckere, Erwin Mortier and Stijn Huijts <i>Angel's throat</i> Reviewed by <i>Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans</i>	81-86
<b>Biographies &amp; Case studies</b>	
William Barker <i>Erasmus of Rotterdam: The spirit of a scholar</i> Reviewed by <i>Riemer A. Faber</i>	87-92
Michaela Valente <i>Johann Wier: Debating the devil and witches in early modern Europe</i> Reviewed by <i>Hans de Waardt</i>	93-98
Arthur Eyffinger <i>T. M. C. Asser (1838-1913): 'In quest of liberty, justice, and peace'</i> Reviewed by <i>Joost Blom</i>	99-104
Jurjen A. Zeilstra <i>Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985: Living for the unity of the Church</i> Reviewed by <i>John A. Vissers</i>	105-112
Mary Eggermont-Molenaar <i>De Juta-kinderen van Sunny Home tot een bunker in Berlijn</i> Reviewed by <i>Paul Knevel</i>	113-120
Christopher Joby <i>John Cruso of Norwich and Anglo-Dutch literary identity in the seventeenth century</i> Reviewed by <i>Ole Peter Grell</i>	121-124

## Language

- Christopher Joby 125-130  
*The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900): A cultural and sociolinguistic study of Dutch as a contact language in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan*  
Reviewed by Ivo Smits
- Jelle Stegeman 131-138  
*Grote geschiedenis van de Nederlandse taal*  
Reviewed by Marijke van der Wal
- Robert Wilkinson and René Gabriëls (eds) 139-146  
*The Englishization of higher education in Europe*  
Reviewed by Rias van den Doel
- Piet van Sterkenburg 147-154  
*Rot zelf lekker op: Over politiek incorrect en ander ongepast taalgebruik*  
Reviewed by Inge Genee

## Literature

- Sadiqa de Meijer 155-158  
*alfabet/alphabet: a memoir of a first language*  
Reviewed by Stephen Cain
- Cees Nootboom 159-164  
*Leaving: A poem from the time of the virus*  
Reviewed by Désirée Schyns
- Pieta van Beek and Annemarié van Niekerk 165-170  
*My mother's mother's mother: South African women's writing from 17th-century Dutch to contemporary Afrikaans*  
Reviewed by Callie Long
- Jef Last 171-176  
*Mon ami André Gide*  
Reviewed by Leonid Livak
- Alisa van de Haar and Dirk Schoenaers (eds) 177-182  
*Francophone literature in the Low Countries (1200-1600)*  
Reviewed by Adrian van den Hoven
- Charles Pacius de La Motte/  
Hans Bots, Sébastien Drouin, Jan Schillings et Ann Thomson (eds) 183-186  
*Lettres de La Motte à Pierre Des Maizeaux (1700-1744)*  
Reviewed by Julien Perrier-Chartrand

## History

- John Hines and Nelleke IJssennagger-van der Pluijm (eds) 187-192  
*Frisians of the Early Middle Ages*  
Reviewed by Catherine Hills
- Peer Vries and Annelieke Vries 193-196  
*Atlas of material life: Northwestern Europe and East Asia, 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century*  
Reviewed by Milja van Tielhof
- Marc van Alphen, Jan Hoffenaar, Alan Lemmers and Christiaan van der Spek 197-200  
*Military power and the Dutch Republic: War, trade and the balance of power in Europe 1648-1813*  
Reviewed by Jonathan Israel
- Charles H. Parker 201-206  
*Global Calvinism: Conversion and commerce in the Dutch empire, 1600-1800*  
Reviewed by Guido van Meersbergen



Pieter C. Emmer and Jos J. L. Gommans <i>The Dutch overseas empire 1600-1800</i>	207-212
Pieter C. Emmer <i>Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse slavenhandel</i> Reviewed by Paul M. M. Doolan	
Gert Oostindie (ed) <i>Colonialism and slavery: An alternative history of the port city of Rotterdam</i> Reviewed by Jeroen Dewulf	213-218
Guido van Meersbergen <i>Ethnography and encounter: The Dutch and English in seventeenth-century South Asia</i> Reviewed by Zoltán Biedermann	219-224
Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (eds) <i>The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, trade, and violence in Early Modern Asia</i> Reviewed by Suzanne Moon	225-228
Paul M. M. Doolan <i>Collective memory and the Dutch East Indies: Unremembering decolonization</i> Reviewed by Liesbeth Rosen Jacobson	229-234
Rutger Bregman <i>Humankind: A hopeful history</i> Reviewed by Michiel Horn	235-238
 <b>Political science</b>	
Piet de Rooy <i>A tiny spot on the earth: The political culture of the Netherlands</i> Reviewed by Edward Anthony Koning	239-244
 <b>Antilles</b>	
Gert Oostindie and Alex van Stipriaan (eds) <i>Antilliaans erfgoed</i> Reviewed by Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger	245-250
Eric A. Eliason <i>The island of lace: Drawn threadwork on Saba in the Dutch Caribbean</i> Reviewed by Ryan Espersen	251-254
Marcel Weltak <i>Surinamese music in the Netherlands and Suriname</i> Reviewed by Corinna Campbell	255-260
 <b>Race</b>	
Francio Guadeloupe <i>Black man in the Netherlands: An Afro-Antillean anthropology</i> Reviewed by Jason N. Vasser-Elong	261-266
Mieke Kirkels and Chris Dickon <i>Dutch children of African American liberators: Race, military policy and identity in World War II and beyond</i> Reviewed by Allison Blakely	267-274

## **World War II & History of the Jews**

- Jan Schneider 275-280  
*In de hel van Birma: Ooggetuigenverslag uit de kampen langs de Birma-Siam spoorlijn 1942-1945*  
Reviewed by *Eveline Buchheim*
- Mirjam Schwarz and Hans Bouman 281-284  
*'Ik hoop dat alles weer gewoon wordt': Het aangrijpende verhaal van een Joods meisje in Winterswijk tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*  
Reviewed by *Katja Happe*
- Jaap W. Focke 285-290  
*Machseh Lajesoumiem: A Jewish orphanage in the city of Leiden*  
Reviewed by *Peter Tammes*
- Hans Blom, David J. Wertheim, Hetty Berg and Bart T. Wallet (eds) 291-298  
*Reappraising the history of the Jews in The Netherlands*  
Reviewed by *Dan Michman*
- Rudolf Dekker 299-304  
*Plagiarism, fraud and whitewashing: The grey turn in the history of the German occupation of the Netherlands, 1940-1945*  
Reviewed by *Remco Ensel*
- Rosemary Sullivan 305-311  
*Het verraad van Anne Frank: Het baanbrekende onderzoek van een internationaal coldcaseteam in Nederland*  
Reviewed by *Bettine Siertsema*

## From the editor

*Krystyna Henke*

In this issue of *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises*, although somewhat delayed but nevertheless especially worthwhile and sizeable, you will find, to begin, three peer reviewed articles that each in their own way and within the framework of their respective scholarly disciplines shine a spotlight on social and political problems: a lack of freedom of expression during Pieter Bruegel's time, an unhinged civilization as diagnosed by Johan Huizinga, and the suffering brought on by World War II. Tackling important topics, Patricia Emison, Henk van den Belt, and Leah Niederhausen offer new perspectives in their articles that build on previous scholarly research. Their articles do not only encourage further investigation of the extent to which current scholarship is receptive to new interpretations, but they also inspire a better grasp of contemporary society in and outside the Netherlands using an original and ethically responsible lens. The journal's multidisciplinary character can be said to promote that. I am also thinking about Huizinga's status as the most important public intellectual of the Netherlands (Du Pree 2016). As a historian he sought to understand the past and to connect it with the problems of today.

The current issue further contains reviews that were written specifically for this journal by a range of academic experts about more than forty, mostly scholarly books, published by, among others, Ambo Anthos, Amsterdam University Press, Balans, Brill, Leiden University Press, Luitingh-Sijthoff, Nieuw Amsterdam, Panchaud, Scriptum, Wereldbibliotheek, Classiques Garnier, Honoré Champion, Boydell Press, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge University Press, HarperCollins, Little, Brown and Company, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, McFarland, Reaktion Books, University Press of Mississippi, and Yale University Press. The topics that are discussed can be categorized as follows: art, biographies and case studies, language, literature, history, political science, the Antilles, race, World War II and the history of the Jews.

The various consequences of the pandemic frequently caused a shortage of available review copies at publishing houses and their distributors. Sometimes requested books never made it to a reviewer's home or office, or at least not

without a delay of many months. In a few cases Dutch professors offered to collect the books themselves either on foot or by bicycle from the offices of Amsterdam University Press, located in the heart of the city. In another instance a Canadian volunteer, a good Samaritan, helped out by picking up a book that had been sent from the Netherlands and that was waiting at a post office in Victoria, BC, personally delivering it to the professor's house, who due to strict coronavirus lockdown measures was unable to get out herself. The reader will understand why new titles that we had intended to review last year can only be discussed now.

On rare occasions we take on a review of a non-scholarly book about some aspect of Netherlandic culture. The resulting commentary likely provides interesting insight into how the scholarly, scientific world distinguishes itself from the popular or the commercial. Sometimes the lines blur, raising the question whether knowledge in its rarefied form ought to remain in a separate domain. Should one assume that science and scholarship have a role to play in the dissemination of knowledge, advising the public for the sake of a well-informed society? However, is it wrong if the motive is based on financial gain? For a scholarly journal engagement with a non-scholarly title presents a challenge. How does one determine the basis on which to review a book? How does one avoid an elitist attitude and can the attempt to take a more democratic approach vis-à-vis specialized knowledge have a negative impact on science and scholarship? What standards ought to be applied and what is the purpose of critique? Not everything that is being published is of course worthwhile. The review by Paul Knevel, who specializes in public history, deals with some of these issues. Katja Happe, too, indicates in her review that there are many stories of people who dealt with the Holocaust and whose personal experiences need to be placed in a larger social and historical framework. Meanwhile, Bettine Siertsema points in her review to the financial impetus behind a tendency for sensationalist topics and methods, as she highlights the fiasco of the recently published (and in the Netherlands recalled) book *Het verraad van Anne Frank* ('*The betrayal of Anne Frank*').

Furthermore, our journal focused its attention on a large number of titles about subjects that had been examined using a recognized scholarly approach. However, even there the guidelines are fluid, because different disciplines have their own requirements that tend to fluctuate when compared among the various specializations. Noteworthy is also the fascinating review by Remco Ensel about a book that examined the Ad van Liempt affair, demonstrating that the credibility of scholarship is undermined when plagiarism and other ethical breaches are committed. Another issue is that scholarship should not be a static undertaking and while an academic tradition may be followed, how new knowledge is being gathered must be continually examined. New problems that are being studied often require a novel approach. Contemporary research methods attempt to do

just that. As an example, I can mention the evermore challenged humanist worldview, as humans can no longer be regarded as being at the centre of attention now that a world of technology and climate change determine all, and the continued existence of life on earth is under threat. This is a reality that is being investigated through posthumanism, a new philosophical current (Braidotti 2013, 2019). In this regard, philosopher and feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti, who since 1988 has been affiliated with Utrecht University, has performed innovative work for which she has received numerous awards, among which, in 2005, also the title of Knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion (*'Ridder in de Orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw'*).

I would like to end by conveying my thanks for the help I received during the production of this issue. First, I am indebted to Callie Long for editing all three peer-reviewed articles, as well as many of the reviews. Next, I am grateful to Raynald Laprise and Alistair Watkins for their translations in French and Dutch. I also extend my thanks to Sophie Henke Tarnow who offered computer assistance during the formatting stage. As a peer-reviewed journal, when receiving articles for consideration, *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* is dependent on the assessments of scholars. Although they must remain anonymous, their insights and feedback are most valuable, and for this they deserve full recognition. Each of these individuals, respected scholars in their fields, knows who they are. I would like to take this opportunity to wholeheartedly express my thanks to them for the essential role they play in the double-blind review process, ensuring the maintenance of ethical and scholarly quality control of articles. Finally, I would like to say how thankful I am to the authors and the reviewers of books. Without their efforts, our journal would not exist.

Words fail to express how much I have enjoyed dedicating myself to this journal over the past three years. I did it with enthusiasm. Thanks to the support from the journal's editorial board and the confidence bestowed on me by the board of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies (CAANS), the publisher of the journal, I was able to expand its content to some extent, making it into a forum of outstanding book reviews written by eminent international scholars. Slavery, racism, and the colonial past are now a regular topic of critical consideration. In the Dutch context they have been broached rather late. It must be said that the postcolonial focus in our journal got its start with my predecessor, Inge Genee. Flanked by new research in this area, it gradually received a prominent place in this journal. At the same time, for me personally the moment has arrived that I will be withdrawing from my duties as editor-in-chief, as the heavy demands of my own scholarly research and the dissertation that needs to be finished, require that I put everything else aside. I

trust that *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* will continue to offer many interesting and challenging articles in the future.

I wish you maximum enjoyment and inspiration while reading this issue.

Krystyna Henke  
Toronto, Fall 2022

### References

- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.  
Braidotti, Rosi. 2019. *Posthuman knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.  
du Pree, Carla. 2016. *Johan Huizinga en de bezeten wereld*. Leusden: ISVW.

## De la part de la rédaction

*Krystyna Henke*

Dans ce numéro de la *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*/ *Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises*, certes un peu retardé mais néanmoins particulièrement intéressant et volumineux, vous trouverez, pour commencer, trois articles évalués par les pairs qui, chacun à leur manière et dans le cadre de leur discipline respective, mettent en lumière des problèmes sociaux et politiques : un manque de liberté d'expression à l'époque de Pieter Bruegel, une civilisation déséquilibrée telle que diagnostiquée par Johan Huizinga et les souffrances provoquées par la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Abordant des sujets importants, Patricia Emison, Henk van den Belt et Leah Niederhausen proposent de nouvelles perspectives qui s'appuient sur des recherches universitaires antérieures. Leurs articles encouragent non seulement une étude plus approfondie dans la mesure où la recherche actuelle est réceptive à de nouvelles interprétations, mais ils inspirent également une meilleure compréhension de la société contemporaine tant aux Pays-Bas qu'ailleurs, observée d'une manière originale et éthiquement responsable. On peut dire que le caractère multidisciplinaire de la revue favorise cela. Je pense également au statut de Huizinga en tant qu'intellectuel public le plus important des Pays-Bas (Du Pree 2016). En tant qu'historien, il a cherché à comprendre le passé et à le relier aux problèmes d'aujourd'hui.

En outre, le présent numéro contient des comptes-rendus, rédigés spécifiquement pour cette revue par un éventail d'experts universitaires, de plus de quarante ouvrages, pour la plupart savants, publiés, entre autres, par Ambo Anthos, Amsterdam University Press, Balans, Brill, Leiden University Press, Luitingh -Sijthoff, Nieuw Amsterdam, Panchaud, Scriptum, Wereldbibliotheek, Classiques Garnier, Honoré Champion, Boydell Press, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge University Press, HarperCollins, Little, Brown and Company, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, McFarland, Reaktion Books, University Press of Mississippi et Yale University Press. Les sujets abordés peuvent être classés comme suit : art, biographies et études de cas, langue, littérature, histoire, science politique, les Antilles, la race, la Seconde Guerre mondiale et l'histoire des Juifs.

Conséquence indirecte de la pandémie, les maisons d'édition et leurs distributeurs ont souvent été à court d'exemplaires de leurs livres qu'ils rendent



disponibles pour les spécialistes devant en faire des comptes-rendus. Parfois, les ouvrages demandés ne sont jamais arrivés au domicile ou au bureau d'un critique, ou après un délai de plusieurs mois. Dans quelques cas, des professeurs néerlandais ont proposé de récupérer eux-mêmes les exemplaires, à pied ou à vélo, aux bureaux de l'Amsterdam University Press, situé au cœur de la ville. Dans un autre, un bénévole canadien, en bon samaritain, s'est occupé personnellement de ramasser un livre venant des Pays-Bas qui était en transit au bureau de poste à Victoria, en Colombie-Britannique, pour aller le porter lui-même à une professeure qui, en raison des règles strictes de confinement liées au coronavirus, ne pouvait sortir de chez elle. Le lecteur comprendra pourquoi les nouveaux titres dont nous avons l'intention de faire les comptes-rendus l'année dernière ne peuvent être présentés que maintenant.

En de rares occasions, nous prenons en charge la critique d'un livre non savant traitant d'un aspect de la culture néerlandaise. Le compte-rendu qui en résulte fournit probablement un aperçu intéressant de la façon dont le monde savant et scientifique se distingue du populaire ou du commercial. Parfois cette frontière s'estompe, soulevant la question de savoir si la connaissance sous sa forme exceptionnelle doit rester dans un domaine à part. Doit-on supposer que la science et l'érudition ont un rôle à jouer dans la diffusion des connaissances, en conseillant le public au nom d'une société bien informée ?

Cependant, est-ce mal si la motivation est fondée sur la perspective d'un gain financier ? Pour une revue savante, faire la critique d'un titre non savant représente un défi. Comment détermine-t-on la base sur laquelle critiquer un tel ouvrage ? Comment éviter une attitude élitiste ? La tentative d'adopter une approche plus démocratique vis-à-vis des connaissances spécialisées peut-elle avoir un impact négatif sur la science et l'érudition ? Quelles normes doivent être appliquées et quel est le but de la critique ? Tout ce qui est publié n'en vaut, bien sûr, pas la peine. Le compte-rendu de Paul Knevel, spécialiste d'histoire publique, traite de certaines de ces questions. Katja Happe, elle aussi, indique dans le sien qu'il existe de nombreuses histoires de personnes qui ont traité de l'Holocauste et dont les expériences personnelles doivent être placées dans un cadre social et historique plus large. De son côté, Bettine Siertsema souligne dans son compte-rendu l'impulsion financière dissimulant une tendance aux sujets et aux méthodes sensationnalistes, en attirant l'attention sur le fiasco d'un livre récemment publié aux Pays-Bas, *Het verraad van Anne Frank* (« La trahison d'Anne Frank »).

De plus, notre revue a concentré ses efforts sur un grand nombre d'ouvrages portant sur des sujets qui ont été étudiés selon une approche scientifique reconnue. Cependant, même là, les directives sont souples, car chaque discipline a ses propres exigences qui ont tendance à fluctuer lorsque comparées aux différentes spécialisations. Il convient également de noter le

compte-rendu fascinant de Remco Ensel concernant un livre traitant de l'affaire Ad van Liempt. Il y démontre que la crédibilité d'une recherche est entachée dès qu'un plagiat ou autre manquement éthique est commis par son auteur. Un autre problème est que l'érudition ne devrait pas être une entreprise statique, et bien qu'une tradition académique puisse être suivie, la manière dont les nouvelles connaissances sont réunies doit être continuellement questionnée. L'étude de nouveaux problèmes requiert souvent une nouvelle approche. C'est exactement ce que les méthodes de recherche contemporaines tentent de faire. À titre d'exemple, je mentionnerai la vision du monde humaniste toujours remise en question, parce que les hommes ne peuvent plus être considérés comme étant au centre de monde, alors que la technologie et de changement climatique déterminent tout, et que même l'existence continue de la vie sur terre est menacée. C'est cette réalité qui est examinée sous le prisme du posthumanisme, un nouveau courant philosophique (Braidotti 2013, 2019). À cet égard, la philosophe et théoricienne féministe Rosi Braidotti, affiliée depuis 1988 à l'Université d'Utrecht, a réalisé un travail innovant pour lequel elle a reçu de nombreuses récompenses, parmi lesquelles, en 2005, le titre de chevalier de l'ordre du Lion néerlandais (*Ridder in de Orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw*).

Avant de conclure, je voudrais remercier les personnes qui suivent pour leur aide dans la préparation de ce numéro. Je suis d'abord redevable envers Callie Long pour avoir révisé les trois articles évalués par les pairs, ainsi que de nombreux comptes-rendus. Je remercie également Raynald Laprise et Alistair Watkins pour leurs traductions en français et en néerlandais, ainsi que Sophie Henke Tarnow qui m'a fourni une toute assistance informatique nécessaire lors de la phase de formatage de ce numéro. En tant que revue à comité de lecture, la *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*/ *Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises*, lorsque des textes lui sont soumis pour publication, dépend des évaluations des universitaires. Bien que ces derniers doivent rester anonymes, leurs idées et leurs commentaires sont des plus précieux, et pour cela, ils méritent ma pleine reconnaissance. Chacune de ces personnes, des universitaires respectés dans leurs champs d'expertise, se reconnaîtra. J'en profite pour exprimer à chacune d'elles, de tout cœur, mes remerciements pour le rôle essentiel qu'elles jouent dans le processus de relecture en double aveugle, assurant ainsi le maintien d'un contrôle de la qualité éthique et scientifique des textes. Enfin, je voudrais dire à quel point je suis reconnaissante envers les auteurs des articles et des comptes-rendus. Sans leurs efforts, notre revue n'existerait pas.

Les mots me manquent pour exprimer à quel point j'ai aimé me consacrer à ce journal au cours des trois dernières années. Je l'ai fait avec enthousiasme. Grâce au soutien du comité de rédaction de la revue et à la confiance que m'a accordé le conseil d'administration de l'Association canadienne pour

l'avancement des études néerlandaises (ACAÉN), l'éditeur de la revue, j'ai pu élargir quelque peu son contenu, en un forum de comptes-rendus de livres exceptionnels, rédigés par d'éminents spécialistes internationaux. L'esclavage, le racisme et le passé colonial forment maintenant un sujet régulier de réflexion critique. Dans le contexte néerlandais, ce sujet a été abordé assez tardivement. Il faut dire que cet accent postcolonial de notre revue a commencé sous mon prédécesseur, Inge Genee. Accompagné de nouvelles recherches dans ce domaine, le postcolonialisme a progressivement reçu une place prépondérante dans cette revue. En même temps, en ce qui me concerne, le moment est venu de me retirer de mes fonctions de rédactrice en chef. En effet, mes propres recherches, ainsi que la thèse que je dois terminer, exigent que je m'y consacre à temps plein. J'ai toutefois confiance que la *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*/ *Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* continuera à offrir de nombreux articles intéressants et stimulants à l'avenir.

Je vous souhaite de tirer un maximum de plaisir et d'inspiration à la lecture de ce numéro.

Krystyna Henke  
Toronto, automne 2022

## Références

- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.  
Braidotti, Rosi. 2019. *Posthuman knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.  
du Pree, Carla. 2016. *Johan Huizinga en de bezeten wereld*. Leusden: ISVW.

## Van de redactie

*Krystyna Henke*

In dit, weliswaar enigszins verlate, maar desalniettemin bijzonder lezenswaardig en dikke nummer van *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises*, treft U allereerst drie *peer-reviewed* artikelen aan die allen op hun eigen manier en binnen het kader van hun betreffende wetenschappelijke disciplines de schijnwerper richten op maatschappelijke en politieke euvels – een gebrek aan vrijheid van meningsuiting ten tijde van Pieter Bruegel, de diagnose die Johan Huizinga stelde van een ontwrichte beschaving, en het leed van de Tweede Wereldoorlog en haar slachtoffers. Met een nieuwe blik beschouwen Patricia Emison, Henk van den Belt, en Leah Niederhausen in hun artikelen belangrijke onderwerpen die voortbouwen op bestaand wetenschappelijk onderzoek. Hun artikelen sporen niet slechts aan verder te onderzoeken in hoeverre de huidige wetenschap open staat voor nieuwe interpretaties, maar ook te overwegen hoe de hedendaagse samenleving binnen en buiten Nederland beter kan worden begrepen door middel van een originele en ethisch verantwoorde zienswijze. Het multidisciplinaire karakter van dit tijdschrift laat zulks toe. Ik denk tevens aan de reputatie die Huizinga genoot als de belangrijkste publieke intellectueel van Nederland (Du Pree 2016). Als geschiedkundige trachtte hij het verleden te begrijpen en te verbinden met het eigentijdse.

In dit nummer vindt U verder recensies die speciaal voor ons tijdschrift zijn geschreven door diverse experts over meer dan veertig voor het merendeel wetenschappelijke boeken uitgegeven door o.a. Ambo Anthos, Amsterdam University Press, Balans, Brill, Leiden University Press, Luitingh-Sijthoff, Nieuw Amsterdam, Panchaud, Scriptum, Wereldbibliotheek, Classiques Garnier, Honoré Champion, Boydell Press, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge University Press, HarperCollins, Little, Brown and Company, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, McFarland, Reaktion Books, University Press of Mississippi, en Yale University Press. De onderwerpen die besproken worden, kunnen als volgt worden gegroepeerd: kunst, biografieën en *casestudies*, taal, literatuur, geschiedenis, politieke wetenschappen, de Antillen, rassenkwesties, de Tweede Wereldoorlog en de geschiedenis van de Joden.

De uiteenlopende gevolgen van de pandemie veroorzaakten dikwijls een tekort aan recensieexemplaren bij de uitgever of diens distributeur en soms kwamen verzochte boeken nooit of althans pas vele maanden later bij een betreffende recensent aan. In enkele gevallen boden Nederlandse professoren aan zelf te voet of op de fiets een bepaald boek op te halen bij Amsterdam University Press, wiens kantoor zich in 't hartje van de stad bevindt. Een andere keer nam een Canadese vrijwilligster, een barmhartige Samaritaan in de provincie British Columbia, het op zich om een boek dat bij een postkantoor in Victoria, BC, al was gearriveerd uit Nederland, persoonlijk te bezorgen bij een professor die de deur niet uit kon vanwege strenge coronavirus lockdown-maatregelen. De lezer zal begrijpen waarom nieuwe boeken die wij vorig jaar reeds hadden willen bespreken, nu pas aan de orde kunnen komen.

Heel af en toe gaat een recensie in dit blad over een niet-wetenschappelijk werk dat een aspect van de Nederlandse cultuur behandelt. Het resulterende commentaar biedt wellicht een interessant inzicht in hoe de wetenschap zich van het populaire of het commerciële onderscheidt. Van tijd tot tijd wordt die grens overschreden. Het roept de vraag op of de wetenschap met haar verheven kennis zich apart behoort te houden. Heeft de wetenschap niet een rol te spelen in de verspreiding van kennis en om deze onder de mensen te brengen ten bate van een goed ingelichte samenleving? Maar is het juist als de motivatie op profijt is gericht? Voor een wetenschappelijk blad is de greep naar het niet-wetenschappelijke een uitdaging, want op welke basis recenseer je een boek? Hoe ontkom je aan elitair denken, en kan de poging om democratischer om te gaan met gespecialiseerde kennis negatief uitpakken voor de wetenschap? Welke maatstaven zouden moeten worden toegepast en wat is het nut van kritiek? Niet alles dat wordt uitgegeven is natuurlijk de moeite waard. De recensie van de in *public history* gespecialiseerde Paul Knevel houdt zich met sommige van deze kwesties bezig. Katja Happe doelt eveneens in haar boekbespreking op de vele verhalen van mensen die te kampen hadden met de Holocaust en wiens persoonlijke ervaringen in een ruimer maatschappelijk en geschiedkundig verband moeten worden geplaatst, terwijl Bettine Siertsema in haar recensie over de fiasco van het nieuwe (en in Nederland uit de handel genomen) boek *Het verraad van Anne Frank* wijst op de financiële drijfveer achter het najagen van sensationele onderwerpen en methodes.

Daarnaast heeft ons blad de aandacht gevestigd op een ruim aantal onderwerpen die op erkende wetenschappelijke wijze werden benaderd. Maar ook daar valt te spelen met de richtlijnen, aangezien verschillende vakgebieden diverse vereisten hebben die soms meer of juist minder gebruikelijk zijn bij deze of gene specialisatie. Bovendien toont de fascinerende boekbespreking van Remco Ensel over een boek dat het Ad van Liempt debacle onderzocht, dat de

betrouwbaarheid van de wetenschap door plagiaat en andere onethische misstanden in het nauw dreigt te komen. Een ander punt is dat de wetenschap niet statisch behoort te zijn en al wordt er een academische traditie gehanteerd, hoe nieuwe kennis wordt vergaard, moet constant aan de kaak worden gesteld. Nieuwe problemen die onderzocht worden, vereisen vaak een nieuwe aanpak en hedendaagse onderzoeksmethodes trachten daaraan te beantwoorden. Als voorbeeld noem ik de steeds meer gangbare verwerping van het humanistische wereldbeeld, namelijk dat de mens niet meer als middelpunt kan worden gezien, nu dat wij leven in een wereld waarbij technologie en klimaatverandering allesbepalend zijn en het voortbestaan op onze aarde wordt bedreigd, een werkelijkheid die door middel van een nieuwe filosofische stroming, het posthumanisme, wordt onderzocht (Braidotti 2013, 2019). De sinds 1988 aan de Universiteit Utrecht aangestelde filosofe en feministische theoretica Rosi Braidotti heeft baanbrekend werk verricht in dat opzicht waarvoor zij ettelijke onderscheidingen heeft gekregen, waaronder in 2005 ook de titel van Ridder in de Orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw.

Ik zou willen eindigen door mijn dank te betuigen voor de hulp die ik mocht ontvangen bij het samenstellen van dit nummer. Allereerst gaat mijn dank uit naar Callie Long voor het redigeren van de drie *peer-reviewed* artikelen alsook een groot aantal recensies. Daarnaast ben ik Raynald Laprise en Alistair Watkins dankbaar voor hun vertaalwerk in het Frans en het Nederlands. Sophie Henke Tarnow dank ik voor de computerhulp die zij verleende bij de opmaak. Als *peer-reviewed* tijdschrift is *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* bij aangeboden artikelen aangewezen op de beoordelingen van wetenschappelijke collega's. Alhoewel deze anoniem moeten blijven, zijn hun inzichten en feedback uiterst waardevol en verdienen zij de volste erkenning. Een ieder van deze personen, gerespecteerde deskundigen in hun vakgebied, weet wie ze zelf zijn en ik zou hen via deze plek graag extra willen bedanken voor de essentiële rol die zij spelen in het *double-blind review* proces bij de handhaving van ethische en wetenschappelijke kwaliteitseisen betreffende artikelen. Tenslotte zou ik mijn oprechte dankbaarheid willen betuigen aan de auteurs en recensenten. Zonder hun inzet zou ons tijdschrift niet kunnen bestaan.

Ik kan niet anders zeggen dan dat ik mij gedurende de afgelopen drie jaar enthousiast en met plezier heb gewijd aan dit blad. Mede dankzij de steun van leden van de redactieraad en het vertrouwen dat ik genoot van het landelijke bestuur van de Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies (CAANS) door wie dit tijdschrift wordt uitgegeven, heb ik het enigermate kunnen uitbreiden tot een forum van belangwekkende boekbesprekingen geschreven door vooraanstaande internationale wetenschappers. Slavernij, racisme, en het koloniale verleden komen nu steeds meer aan bod en wel met een kritischer

inzicht. Het zijn onderwerpen die in de Nederlandse context pas relatief laat de aandacht hebben gekregen. De postkoloniale koers in ons blad is trouwens al in gang gezet gedurende het redacteurschap van mijn voorganger, Inge Genee. Aan de hand van nieuw onderzoek op dit gebied, heeft het geleidelijk aan een prominente plaats gekregen in dit tijdschrift. Tegelijkertijd is voor mij persoonlijk het ogenblik gekomen dat ik mij zal moeten terugtrekken als hoofdredacteur, gezien de veeleisendheid van mijn eigen wetenschappelijk onderzoek en de dissertatie die hoognodig moet worden voltooid en waarvoor ik nu al het andere opzij moet zetten. Ik vertrouw erop dat *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* ook in de toekomst vele interessante en uitdagende artikelen zal blijven leveren.

Ik wens U veel leesplezier en inspiratie bij het doornemen van dit nummer.

Krystyna Henke  
Toronto, najaar 2022

### **Bronvermelding**

Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.  
Braidotti, Rosi. 2019. *Posthuman knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.  
du Pree, Carla. 2016. *Johan Huizinga en de bezeten wereld*. Leusden: ISVW.



## Bruegel, peasants, and politics

*Patricia Emison*

How can we license ourselves to see what was intended to be routinely overlooked in paintings made during a time of oppression, images made not to whip up opposition but nevertheless used to record a conviction? Here it is proposed that there is more embedded history and less modern ambivalence in Bruegel's paintings of the later 1560s than recent scholarship has been geared to analyze and that the current approaches to the work inadvertently lead the viewer to see it as Bruegel intended for the authorities of his day. Bruegel's distinctive and broadening approach to the task of figural composition is examined as a symptom of his Netherlandish identity, both as it is manifested in his intriguingly limited response to what he saw when travelling in Italy (though perhaps if we adjust our expectations for what counts as an influence, the Palazzo Schifanoia Months in Ferrara by Cosmè Tura and Francesco del Cossa might be supposed to have played a part in Bruegel's thought) and in small adjustments made in his later paintings, which may indicate sympathies which could be expressed only covertly. The Rabbit Hunter autograph etching, the small Louvre painting of crippled beggars, and Bruegel's last painting, centered on a gallows, are analyzed as if meant to be fully understood only by those who already knew that the artist held the anti-imperial sentiments, while others should see instead only the welcome continuation of Bruegel's amusing lack of the idealization associated with Italian art and its theory. His responses to what he saw in Italy were, in general, as quirky as his depictions of his homeland, and the motivations extend beyond the religious (more often discussed) to the political. Van Mander's take on Bruegel's art as droll and anecdotal needs to be better balanced with Ortelius's comments about Bruegel's sophistication, and it is time to retire the thesis that Bruegel's pictorial meanings cultivate irresolvable ambiguity reflecting the artist's philosophical orientation.

Key terms: Bruegel; Italy; peasants; proverbs; Spanish occupation.

Bruegel's work has for more than a century been recognized as having explored new norms for painting, with his independence from literary and historical narratives as well as from Italian figural ideals, taken to be central to his accomplishment. How his work was seen during his lifetime and, slightly later, by Karel van Mander has remained more challenging to ascertain. Bruegel lived in a time and place during which a painter needed to appear to be orthodox in his religious and political beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, to the extent that Bruegel deviated from the norm as artist, he seemed to do so unassumingly, even self-disparagingly. Yet few would now question his power as an artist nor his self-awareness about his capacities, and the Italian narrative model has been thoroughly knocked from its central position in art theory. Therefore, it may be time to raise again, and in new ways, the question of whether Bruegel's relationship to the powerful in his society was as docile as he made it look. Might he, particularly in his last years, in certain instances have insinuated motifs geared to be recognized by select eyes, under the guise of pictures seemingly meant merely to amuse?<sup>2</sup> The earlier paintings in themselves were deliberately unitalianate, of that there is no question, though the implications of that artistic choice remain debatable. Once conditions in the Low Countries became so oppressive as to begin to instigate the Dutch War of Independence, also known as the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), might Bruegel have then shifted his work from merely unitalian to something subtly yet distinctly affirmative of his native land, even while cloaked in pictorial inventions the biographer Karel van Mander later deemed so amusing that the artist was known as "Pier den Drol"? And centuries later, might the blinkered gaze Bruegel intended for the Spanish imperial occupiers and their supporters have become normalized, so that any crypto-political themes were discounted or lost along with the highly restricted public with which they had once been surreptitiously shared?

The literature on Bruegel has repeatedly discussed his images of peasants as studies in ambiguity—are they being ridiculed or not?—and more recently, indeterminacy has been taken as itself a prime pictorial theme, one which leaves

---

<sup>1</sup> Guicciardini (1567) described Bruegel as "grande imitatore della scienza, & fantasie di Girolamo Bosco" (99) ('great imitator of the learning and imagination of Jerome Bosch'), so much so that he was dubbed a second Bosch, and art historians of previous generations routinely questioned Bosch's orthodoxy, an idea now definitely eliminated. On Boschian drolleries and their relationship to Bruegel, see Silver (1999, 37) and on former interpretations of Bosch's work as harboring heretical ideas, Cook (1984, n. 2-11). My thanks to the anonymous readers for their insights and recommendations and to Callie Long for her thoughtful editing.

<sup>2</sup> Film director Roy Andersson cited among his sources for *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2015) Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow*, with its birds on a branch. For him, the painting offered "flawless satire [used] to express the tragic conditions of being" (Andersson 2016).

the viewer on a fulcrum between trusting and mistrusting the image.<sup>3</sup> The literature tends to agree that these images portraying everyday types of people ought not to be categorized as genre painting, pure and simple, nor even as simple effusions of folk culture reflecting the wisdom of adages. Even Bruegel's paintings which might seem least complicated to understand can boast a fundamentally new artistic ambition relative to the work of his predecessors. This much we can agree on. But whether we describe this in terms of our more contemporary concerns with indeterminacy and ambiguity, emphasize the formal accomplishment of these compositions displaying many small-scale figures and vast river valleys, or hypothesize that, as the situation in the Netherlands became increasingly dire, Bruegel's imagery was infiltrated by his feelings about the threats against and sufferings of his fellow citizens, these are more delicate issues, and perhaps the nature of the problem disallows any truly definitive answer. The tendency to suppose that artistic identity is forged early in life is at issue here, for if Bruegel allowed his Netherlandish political identity to infiltrate his already very Netherlandish imagery, he did so in response to the terrible turn of public events during his later life rather than programmatically from the start.

This study entails an analysis of Bruegel's pictorial objectives, in particular his responsiveness to the exceptionally difficult times in which he lived, and secondarily his often nearly ignored reaction (or lack thereof) to Italian models. In both cases his course may be described as indirect yet profound. What has often

---

<sup>3</sup> Porras (2008, 86, 98) and Porras (2016, 149-151). Alpers (1972-73, 163-176); see especially "this ambiguous relationship to the pleasure displayed" (173). Cf. Eco, "Open Work," [1962], (1-23). See also on the ambiguity of Bruegel's imagery, Carroll (1987, 289-314); Freedberg, *Prints*, "Bruegel himself seems to be ambivalent." Freedberg further states "it is almost as though Bruegel himself has evolved a philosophy that is predicated on the ultimate ambiguity of things" (18-19); Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat (2017, 56-57) in *Pieter*. Keith Moxey, "Pieter Bruegel and Popular Culture," in Freedberg (1989, 42-52) opposed the consensus about ambiguity. Carroll (2008, 31-32, 72) allowed that *Proverbs* and *Carnival and Lent*, both dated 1559, provide "an occasion to reflect upon political concerns." Koerner (2016, 336); cf. 338, invoked Sedlmayr's *Entfremdung* (2000, 323-376). On the menacing bird trap of the *Winter Landscape with Birdtrap* (1565), it should be noted that the trap was not included in the preliminary drawing; Currie and Allart (2012, 198). The lower social classes were still being held up as humorous anti-examples in the following century, though in a nuanced way and not excluding the middle class; see Van Gemert (2014, 25-38), "Stamp." That the Dutch peasants were in many instances themselves landowners, although this was under threat in the 16th century, to such an extent as to cause "the disappearance of the original peasant character of the countryside" Van Bavel (2016, 171-172, 175, 180-81, 185). See also the useful summary of Bruegel scholarship by Meadows (1996, 6-13) and Kavalier (2021, 314), who takes the Flemish peasant as represented in art as protean and potentially ideal.

been taken as ambiguity on the part of the artist may be seen instead as imagery geared to be read in mutually incompatible ways, both valid though intended for different viewership. If we presume that Bruegel was not in a position to think for himself about contemporary events and to insert some potentially quite camouflaged yet distinct element of this experience into his imagery, then we thereby cut him off from modernity and also weaken our conception of early modernity. We risk restricting him to Van Mander's view, that of an artist who manages to be great at the task of being "minor."



Figure 1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Beggars*, 1568. Oil on panel, 18.5 x 21.5 cm. Paris: Louvre.  
Photo: D.V. Feldman.

Bruegel's compositions, while owing something to the panoramic norms for landscape established by Joachim Patinir, raise new questions about the sequentiality of the viewer's experience within a single pictorial field without definitive focus. Bruegel's use of images so thoroughly recasts figural narrative painting that he may seem to have repudiated it even when he has not. What he

has done is to radically reinvent what narrative might entail. This is not to deny the basic pleasure of Bruegel's imagery, which makes remarkably few demands upon the viewer. As Van Mander famously said: "a spectator can contemplate [few of Bruegel's pictures] seriously and without laughing."<sup>4</sup> In this paper we explore the possibility that, in Bruegel's most developed work, narrative (episodic rather than literary) and non-narrative newly co-exist.

One of Bruegel's smallest paintings, called *The Beggars or The Cripples or The Lepers*, dated 1568, and seen in Figure 1, recapitulates a group which appears nine years earlier in the *Battle of Carnival versus Lent* (1559), shown in Figure 2. The smaller work repeats nothing exactly, yet it is often considered a mere byproduct of the earlier work rather than a distinctively new effort. There were six beggars in the earlier group, five in the later. The visages of the beggars in the later work are less peaked and gaunt; in the earlier work, two of the faces are haggard to the point of alarming. The beggars of 1568 look more like Bruegel's typically jolly peasants of the paintings of the months. Their headgear has been elaborated: other than the red cylindrical hat acquiring crenellations, the hat on the far right figure is in the shape of a bishop's hat and the foremost figure has a paper crown, thereby implicating a range of social strata and insinuating a flavor of irony into what had in the earlier painting been a depiction of misery.

What most discussions of the Louvre panel and its relationship to the larger composition of 1559 fail to acknowledge is that in 1568 an image of beggars had a resonance that it hadn't had in 1559, particularly an image focused entirely on beggars. The Netherlandish opposition to the Spanish powers included a group calling itself the Beggars (*Les Gueux*), which counted among its leaders Hendrik van Brederode (d. 1568).<sup>5</sup> The smallness of the painting would support the idea that it was done on Bruegel's initiative, perhaps even with the idea that it was made so as to be easily tucked out of sight. Clearly, it was a painting that did not draw attention to itself. And if the painting excited any comment, the less

---

<sup>4</sup> Van Mander (1994 [1604], I, 233r). For a gloss on Van Mander's adjectives for Bruegel, "gheestighen en bootsighen" ('lively and whimsical'), (II, 318;) (III, 256).

<sup>5</sup> Manfred Sellink (2018, 282-285), in *Bruegel*, deems the association with *Les Gueux* "interesting" and the Louvre (2021) website now mentions *les Gueux* in relation to the painting. Duke (2009, 70) dates the use of the term from April of 1566, and its rejection by William of Orange to 1572; Duke (146-48) suggests some associations between the Beggars and the insignia of foxtails, which had some customary association with beggars to begin with. Cardinal Granvelle was known as the red fox. The Sea Beggar Guillaume de la Marck had his men wear foxtails in 1563, despite of Granvelle. There also seems to have been a German association with foxtails and several of the Dutch leaders had German familial connections. The begging bowl was also used as an emblem; see Arnade (2008, 78-89, 99, 110-11). It should be noted that the iconoclasts were considerably more violent and threatening than the Beggars, though both were targeted by the vengeful Alva. See also Arnade (2008, 170-73).

narrowly framed work of 1559 could be used to explain away the later painting, as art historians have so often done since. The Louvre website until recently included an apologetic note that this small Bruegel was their only painting by the artist, as though its smallness made it less important.

The back of the Louvre panel is inscribed in Flemish, “Cripples take heart, and may your affairs prosper.”<sup>6</sup> Cripples, crippled lepers it would seem, need not be taken to refer to the political group derogatorily called the Beggars, but the inference could be made by those so inclined. What most distinctly marks rethinking from the earlier, more comprehensive work is not only the focus on the beggars but also the exit of the woman to the right, a bowl in her hand as though she had just been giving something to the cripples. Could the exiting figure have been added because Bruegel was reflecting on the departure of Margaret of Parma, pushed into resignation late in 1567 by the appointment of the hardliner Alva? As the situation in the Low Countries worsened, she returned to Italy.<sup>7</sup>

Roger Marijnissen tries to explain away the Flemish sentiment inscribed on the back as a phrase that might be offered to cripples begging in the street, as though it were the soundtrack to a neo-realist film. But to write the benediction on the back implies that the intended reader is the owner of the painting, who presumably would have been a sympathizer, at the very least, with the “Cripples” (a circumlocution for *les Gueux*, whose leader was, in fact, lame),<sup>8</sup> and therefore would have taken the inscription as encouragement. Otherwise, the inscription is very odd. Yet prudently, nothing actually incriminating has been set down—as Marijnissen and others so neatly demonstrate when they see nothing of importance in the Louvre painting other than a reworking and reduction of the earlier painting, after almost a decade.

---

<sup>6</sup> “[K]rupelen, hooch, dat u nering beteren moeg” (Marijnissen 1971, 51); translation is from Louvre website. Dvorak (1941, 58) raised these possibilities (crediting R. van Bastelaer), but supposed, erroneously, that the Beggars were no longer a viable force by 1568. He allowed that the woman might refer to Margaret of Parma.

<sup>7</sup> Steen (2013, 290-293). See also Limm (1989, 30 and Koenigsberger (1968, 264-294). Cf. The Naples *Blind Leading the Blind* executed on canvas (so suitable for stowing away discreetly); Müller has analyzed the painting as “richly encrypted” (756, 785-787), in Melion (2014.)

<sup>8</sup> Van Nierop (1991, 419-443) suggests that they were first called Beggars by a member of Margaret's entourage, as an indication of how they should be treated. They were led by Philip of Bailleul, described in a contemporary source as a cripple. See also Duke (2010, 232-233).





Figure 2. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Battle of Carnival vs. Lent* [detail], 1559. Oil on panel, 118 x 163.7 cm. Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum. Photo: author.





Figure 3. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Magpie on the Gallows*, 1568. Oil on panel, 45.9 x 50.8 cm. Darmstadt: Hessisches Landesmuseum. Photo: Wikimedia.

In the mid-16th century, the Netherlands was a dangerous place for voicing opposition. The very high-ranking Counts of Egmont and Hoorn, both members of the Order of the Golden Fleece who fully expected their status to protect them, were beheaded in Brussels in June 1568.<sup>9</sup> Bruegel may very well have witnessed

---

<sup>9</sup> On the Counts' distance from both iconoclasts and Beggars, and even from the Reformation, see Arnade (2008, 184-187.) Tanis and Horst (1993) examine Joris Hoefnagel's etching *An Allegory of Spanish Tyranny*, 1570. It is estimated that 1100 people were executed, and 9000 dispossessed and banished (27). For a printed image of the execution by Frans Hogenberg, made in the same year, Arnade (2008, 189-90) and a smaller one by Wolfgang Meyerpeck (Rijksmuseum 2021). See also

the executions, which took place a twelve-minute walk from his house.<sup>10</sup> There is no doubt that Bruegel would have been obliged to operate with great subtlety had his work contained even the slightest comment on current events, especially so after those shocking executions, although his will to do so might very well have grown even stronger. Circumstances demanded that it be entirely plausible to take his images as devoid of innuendo. The small painting of cripples as they beg can be taken as a genre scene, the figures as connected only circumstantially. However, if instead, we see it as an allegorized version of the local history, as suggesting *les Gueux*, Margaret, and the pitiful situation of the opposition in the Low Countries, its unusually small size becomes part of its interpretation, part of the tale of oppression. It could be easily tucked away, and when it was not, Bruegel might hope that his trusted friends would see more in the painting than any other casual viewers. The painting could always be defended as no more than a derivation from the larger and earlier painting, especially since noticing the beggars or the exiting woman as possible allusions might mark one as a subversive. As long as Bruegel was characterized as an amusing painter, this afforded a degree of protection against being thought a troublemaker. It was a reputation worth cultivating.

In that same perilous year of 1568, Bruegel signed and dated the *Magpie on the Gallows*, shown in Figure 3, and left it to his wife, according to Van Mander, who indicated that the bird (there are actually two) referred to gossipers. There may be some implicit misogyny in Van Mander's implication that women need to be warned against gossiping, or even some desire to distract from the oddity of the subject. His account informs us that the medium-sized painting was meant to be kept within the family, and that is useful information. In the front left corner is

---

Vöhringer (2013, Chs. 8-9, 116-140) and Kaschek (2018, Ch. 1) "A Historiographical Introduction" and, on the situation in 1559, G. Schwerhoff, "Virtue or Tyranny? Pieter Bruegel, *Justitia*, and the Myth of the Inquisition" (107-109).

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps he even made drawings, which he later asked his wife Mayken to destroy, those works that Van Mander intriguingly alludes to. Van Mander reported that Bruegel on his deathbed ordered Mayken to burn certain drawings, either because he "was sorry" or lest she get into trouble for them (1994, 233v, 234r.); "Veel vreemde versieringhen van sinnekens sietmen van zijn drollen in Print: maer hadder noch seer veel net en suyver geteyckent met eenighe schriften by, welcke ten deele al te seer bijtigh oft schimpich wesende, hy in zijn doot-sieckte door zijn Huysvrouwe liet verbranden, door leetwesen, oft vreesende sy daer door in lijden quaem, oft yet te verantwoorden mocht hebben," translated by Stechow, *Sources*: "Many of his compositions of comical subjects, strange and full of meaning, can be seen engraved; but he made many more works of this kind in careful and beautifully finished drawings to which he had added inscriptions. But as some of them were too biting and sharp, he had them burnt by his wife when he was on his deathbed, from remorse or for fear that she might get into trouble and might have to answer for them" (40). Sybesma (1991, 467) proposed that the Berlin drawing of *Beekeepers* might be one such problematic drawing which escaped destruction.

a man defecating (a motif far from unprecedented in Netherlandish painting).<sup>11</sup> Close to the defecating man stand two men, clearly not peasants, surveying the scene. The one in the white coat displays a commanding air. Two peasants dance beside the gallows, as a man seems to intervene, perhaps spreading gossip, or perhaps a warning.

The Spanish rule had long depended upon informers.<sup>12</sup> The magpie commonly suggested gossip, as Van Mander's description makes clear, though in the aftermath of the shocking executions of 1568 the combination of an instrument of execution and the bird associated with malicious word of mouth may not be purely coincidental. Van Mander indicates that Bruegel made this unusual painting with no intention of selling it; whether he knew himself to be in failing health when he made it, we do not know. Do we really want to accept without qualm that he painted it as a warning to a gossiping wife, the mother of two fine artists and the daughter of two artists as well?<sup>13</sup> He placed a disrespectful act in the foreground, a cross in the middle ground beyond the gallows (another instrument of execution; moreover, an empty cross might suggest distance from Rome and its crucifixes), and dancing peasants (potentially emblematic of Netherlandish folk).<sup>14</sup> Given these elements, to a viewer thinking about the circumstances of 1568 the painting might suggest very local concerns: an execution ground, an allusion to dangerous rumor-mongering, an emblem of religious faith, a scatological motif as a sign of disrespect, and solidarity between the lower social classes and the Netherlandish dissenting elite. And yet, for a viewer who expected of Bruegel beautiful landscapes populated by festive peasants, this work could pass without problem. Art historians have frequently since commented on the beauty of the atmospheric perspective and the absence

---

<sup>11</sup> Gobin (2018, 7-24) cites a proverb to explicate defecation nearby a gallows as a subversive act.

<sup>12</sup> Parker (1977, 62-63). Jeremy Bangs, "Pieter Bruegel and History," *Art Bulletin*, 60.4, (1978, 704-05), cites the paid informer against Reformation preachers, Lange Margriet, in 1564.

<sup>13</sup> Bruegel's *Calumny of Apelles* drawing in the British Museum from the late 1560s is, on the one hand, a traditional subject for an ambitious artist to attempt, and, on the other hand, potentially a vehicle of protest. It is far enough from Bruegel's normal subject matter to be curious. Frayn offers a critique of obtuse art historians that includes offering several interpretations (some more fanciful than others, including *The Calumny of Apelles* and the *Death of the Virgin* in grisaille) linking Bruegel with anti-Spanish sentiment (1999, 190-99, 262-68, 296-97). On the small grisaille of the *Death of the Virgin*, dated 1565, as potentially transmitting a plea—a hope—for tolerance and against condemning one's fellow Christians, cf. Freedberg (1989, 59); see further Kunzle (2001, 61) and Vöhringer, *Politik*, (125, 131, 163).

<sup>14</sup> On Spanish perception of Netherlanders as overly given to drink and festivals, Arnade (2008, 176-177).



of any clear subject matter other than a gallows with a magpie.<sup>15</sup> They thereby inadvertently once again attest to the suitability of Bruegel's work for evading the suspicion of the authorities.

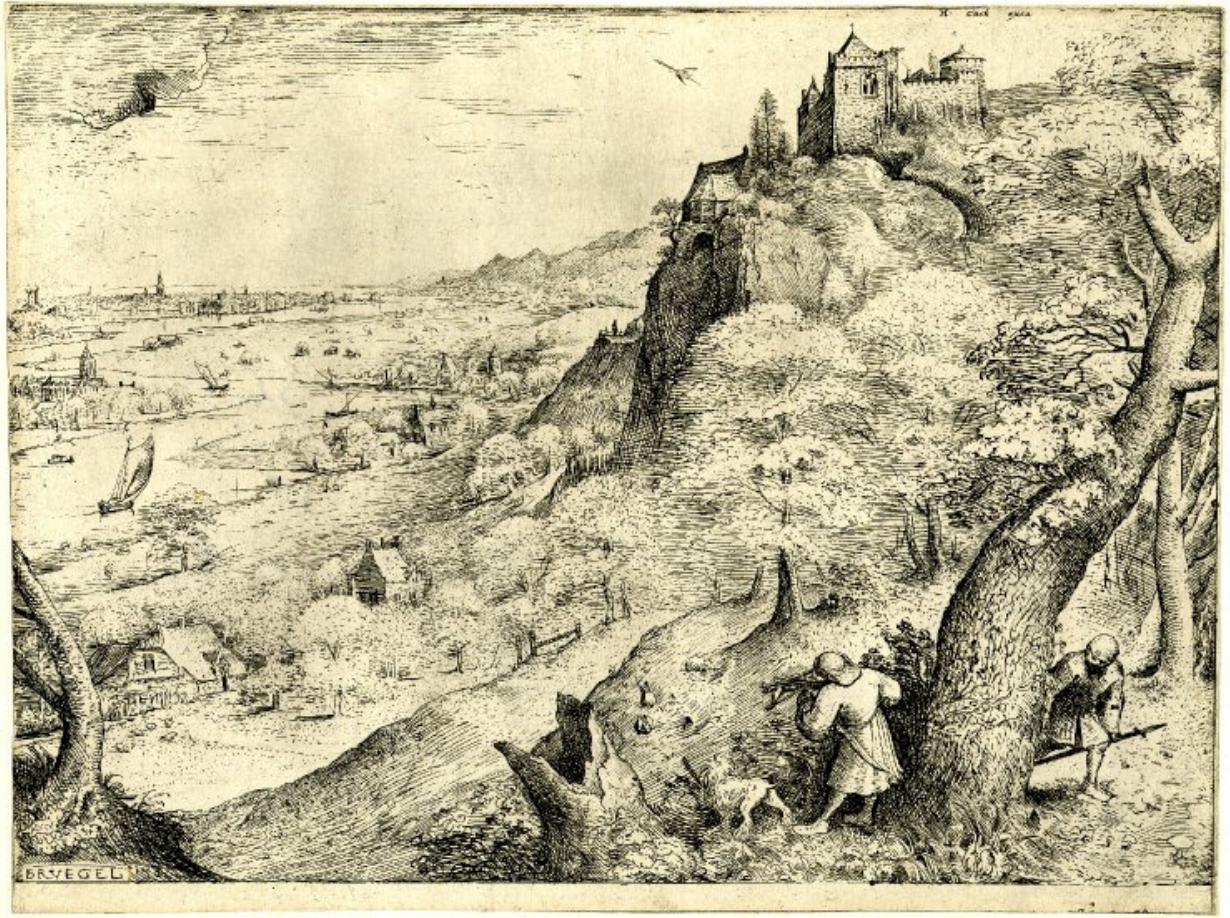


Figure 4. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Rabbit Hunt*, 1560 (?). Etching, 22.3 x 29.4 cm.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

<sup>15</sup> Kavalier (1999, 212-13, 220-23) sees the trio as dancing all together; Sellink (2018, 290-291), in *Bruegel*, considers theories that relate the work to contemporary politics or religion “unsubstantiated.” Arnade, 2000, 831-833 demurs at Kavalier’s dismissal of political readings and calls the *Gallows* painting, “provocative.” Weismann (2015, 130-32) supposes the woman in red is being arrested and that the painting has hidden political and religious reference. Honig (2019, 215) mentions Bruegel’s Protestant cousin Gillis van Conixloo, but finds the artist’s intentions ambiguous.

The only surviving etching Bruegel executed himself, the Rabbit Hunter, seen in Figure 4, shows an isolated ordinary man on a steep hillside, hunting rabbits with a crossbow, while a figure armed with a spear sneaks up on him from the rear. Joseph Koerner rightly declined to allow the image to be summed up in a proverb about the hunter being hunted, but then sublated the proverbial reading into a statement of ontology, noting “the hunter hunted, the trapper trapped, the viewer viewed: these reversals encapsulate something ineffable about our being in the world.”<sup>16</sup> Others have expostulated about the delicate and startlingly effective (given the novelty of the medium for the artist) technique with the needle, which so evocatively renders the shimmering foliage.

What has been stunningly absent from discussion of the work is the possibility of its relevance to the political situation in the Spanish Netherlands. The matter has been somewhat complicated by the work’s re-dating, from 1566 to 1560, as seen in Figure 5.<sup>17</sup> But given that there were objections to the continued presence of Spanish troops in the Netherlands from the time of Margaret of Parma’s installation as Regent in 1559, partly due to resentment that a local noble had not been chosen instead, and even more anger and fear by 1566, the exact dating does not seem in this case crucial to the question of interpretation.

The issue is rather whether a political interpretation of an image by Bruegel is considered an option. Many art historians are remarkably quick to dismiss this possibility, at least in part due to the assumption that Bruegel’s place in the history of art depends upon his break with the norms of the classicizing, Italianate, theoretically bolstered history painting. For these art historians, the assumed ambiguity of Bruegel’s images is essential to his accomplishment.<sup>18</sup> If he

<sup>16</sup> Koerner (2016, 41). Sullivan (2003, 34) cites Latin proverbs as essential to the interpretation.

<sup>17</sup> Freedberg (1989, cat. no. 62, 168). The date used to be read as 1566 (by Bastelaer, for instance), and since as 1506, in confusion for 1560, partly because the reversed drawing in the Fondation Custodia, Paris, which bears the clearer date 1560, was attributed to Bruegel by Mieke in 1996, after having been long and widely taken to be a copy. Müller (2018, 335) labels the drawing’s inscription “authentic?” *Bruegel*, Orenstein (2001, nos. 81-82); cf. *Renaissance of Etching*, 2019, no. 124, (259-60) and *Bruegel*, (2018, 135-37) where Sabine Pénot explicates the etching by reference to adages and Terence. Carroll (2008, 30-31) described resentment against Philip II in the late 1550s.

<sup>18</sup> Freedberg (1989, 1819): “ambiguity is precisely what arises acutely in the case of the interpretation of any number of Bruegel’s prints...it is almost as though Bruegel has evolved a philosophy that is predicated on the ultimate ambiguity of things.” Alpers (1983, 34): Bruegel is cited, along with Vermeer and Velázquez, as an artist whose lack of traditional moral or literary meaning requires “a notion of representation, or a concern with what it is to picture something.” Velázquez’s painting is deemed ambiguous. Porras (2016, 149-51) invokes ‘fluidity’ in her interpretation of this painting and suggests its theme is “the impossibility of knowing just how history will record the present moment, or which rumors will prove true and which will be forgotten.” See also Porras (2008, 97): “from a strictly commercial viewpoint...the painting appeals



is understood to be telling a story in this etching, even a slight story with no literary source, rather than describing a vista or invoking a proverb, this could undermine much of the current interpretation of his oeuvre as breaking with the basically Albertian model, perfected by Raphael and soon to become the norm of art academies, the first of which was founded in 1563.



Figure 5. Detail of Rabbit Hunt. Photo: author.

Art historians who have wanted (not without reason) to champion Bruegel as the anti-Albertian-istoria artist were thus thoroughly blinkered against any hints of political allegory. And they were partly right: he was by temperament an artist who invited the viewer to look at what was essentially familiar and to see it in a new light, rather than to extend the experience of the library.

Compounding this reluctance on the part of art historians, if Bruegel was telling a story that alluded to the conditions stoking unrest in the Low Countries, he would necessarily have arranged for its camouflage. An art of very quiet protest could not but try to distract the viewer with superficial delights, so that any

---

to the broadest possible audience," i.e., the supposed ambiguity in how peasants are presented in Bruegel's paintings allowed for a wider market.

political content was buried where the painter was confident imperial eyes would not recognize it. But then, who outside of the artist's immediate circle could certify its existence? No one, which was exactly Bruegel's aim. He was not painting for posterity. Only those whom he trusted would understand what he had done.

Bruegel's art is not generally one of suspense, unless it be of an amusing sort, such as a heedless figure about to trip and fall on uneven terrain. So when, in the *Rabbit Hunt*, real danger lurks, the viewer must be curious. An anonymous, ordinary figure is being stalked by a soldier. Some have seen only a spear-bearer, rather than a soldier. One catalogue entry circumspectly and diffidently reports, "it has also been suggested that the man with the spear is not hunting rabbits, but is a marauding soldier stalking the first man,"<sup>19</sup> thereby providing collateral evidence that Bruegel's image was sufficiently subtle to avoid trouble from the Spanish occupiers. Yet even if the viewer does not identify the figure with the spear as a soldier (and the disparity between crossbow and spear would seem to be significant), he menaces an unsuspecting man who is concentrating on an ordinary action. Bruegel took up the etcher's needle and made the major effort of working the plate himself, so it is worth wondering whether the subject matter and the medium seemed to him an important match, an image that would spread widely the idea of danger, without overtly conveying a warning. The work seems less an experiment in a new medium than a project too important to trust to a professional. Although it is true that the receding landscape possesses a finesse and delicacy beyond the efforts of professional etchers whose lines had to hold up for large editions, the figural elements relate to one another tautly, even as they are integrated with the uneven terrain.

Bruegel's etching readily passes as an image of rabbit hunting, since that is clearly taking place. That the civilian hunter may be about to become a victim of a military outrage is harder for the viewer to process. There was little precedent for political art that was not of the broadside type. Here we have an anecdotal incident set in a vast landscape. If it is not a landscape subject primarily, but a figural drama camouflaged within an ornamental landscape, then it was formed around a narrative conceit, however minor and undeveloped. Narrative norms are sometimes taken as necessarily a sign of cultural intrusion from Italy. Bruegel was typically quite impervious to such infiltration. However, this etching, if understood

---

<sup>19</sup> Freedberg (1989, 168), in "Allusion and Topicality in the Work of Pieter Bruegel, The Implications of a Forgotten Polemic," finds such a "chilling note" "not uncharacteristic" of Bruegel, but as a contrast to the "serene landscape" rather than insinuating any topicality. Cf. Koerner in Butts (1995, 27) where the image is taken as a meditation on contingency, on what we cannot see. The man with the spear is glossed as a kind of personification of death, but, again, without any topicality.



as an ad hoc narrative with a political message rather than one more example of visual ambiguity, might instead help us to reconceptualize both Bruegel's relationship both to narrative and to Italian art as being nuanced, and even sophisticated. His *Way to Calvary* (1564), with its foreground figures in the style of Rogier van der Weyden and its anecdotal approach to telling a terrible tale, supports both tenets, in that it asserts both its northern identity and its sophistication about narrative style.

The argument that loyal Catholics collected Bruegel's work, or those of his sons, and therefore there can be no latent dissent coded in the imagery, fails on two grounds: the first is that any content associated with dissent was meant to be disguised, and the second is that the Netherlandish resistance was itself complicated.<sup>20</sup> It included Catholic loyalists and a range of people for whom religious identity was in flux. Those resisting Spanish oppression often meant to resist the Inquisition without necessarily denying their feudal loyalty to their prince and without necessarily renouncing Catholicism. Even those reluctant to read political content in Bruegel's imagery have often ceded that *The Preaching of St. John the Baptist*, dated 1566, although it could appear to be a straightforward Biblical subject, suggests association with the so-called "hedge sermons" of the Reformers.<sup>21</sup> *The Conversion of Saul*, dated 1567, shows huge armies crossing the mountains. Even those reluctant to find political references have entertained the idea that the figure on horseback, placed centrally and seen from the back, might allude to the Duke of Alba's journey from Italy, after acquiring troops in Sicily.<sup>22</sup>

Van Mander explicitly denies the artistic place of politically informed imagery, in general. When describing the art of Herri met de Bles, Van Mander

---

<sup>20</sup> See also Kascheck (2012, 34-38). Meganck (2021, 419) associates certain paintings with Hapsburg functionaries, especially Jan Vleminck in the case of the *Census at Bethlehem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Bruegel* (2018, 233, 244-245); Duke (1990, 128-130); Arnade (2008, 81, 86); Gregory (2005, 7, 75-87). Beggar's badges that used the sickle moon to refer to the Turks, with the slogan, "Sooner Turk than Papist," Thompson (1972, 293). The quizzical and alert man leaning against the tree to the left, wearing a ruff and clearly of some status, distinguished by a drooping moustache, may have suggested the Beggars (that the moustache might have an association with the Turks; see van Nierop (1991, 431-432).

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Koerner (2016, 369, n. 76), who also acknowledges of the *Blind leading the Blind* that this parable would have acquired new resonance in 1568, though he doesn't name the Spanish, saying only that outsiders had imposed martial law. Zupnick (1964, 284, 288) thought that Bruegel's earlier art (1559-1564) contained more 'ambiguities' – which might suggest political criticism – than the later work; Ferber (1966, 213) analyzed the engraving of *Money Boxes* and the *Massacre of the Innocents* along similar lines; Gregory (2005, 89-104) argues for more than mere suggestiveness, arguing instead on behalf of a full-blown "topological process of contemporization." Silver (2014, 794, 800-803) argues that "no viewer could have failed to associate with Alba both the alpine imagery and the presentation of soldiers in contemporary armor and uniforms." Bakker (2012, 152) sees "an appeal to Alba to undergo a moral 'conversion.'"

asserted that the political interpretation he had heard mooted (criticism of the Pope) had to be wrong, simply because that wasn't the way art was made (“art ought not to be satirical”).<sup>23</sup> Whether he really thought so, or whether he wanted to avoid sparking worry among the patrons of art about such possibilities, may be debated; nevertheless, Van Mander’s biography of Bruegel, written thirty-five years after the artist’s death, has often been cited as evidence against interpreting his paintings as other than amusing. However, it is clear that Van Mander would never countenance such a reading because of his personal bias about the nature of art.

Bruegel's taste for dissimulation (demonstrated by dressing up like a peasant to attend their festivals) together with his insistence on honesty (he rejected a woman who couldn't stop lying)—both as reported by Van Mander—suggest that disguise, and specifically, disguise compatible with honesty, was a theme in his life. The same may be true of his art. Like the artist himself at festivals, his paintings may pretend to be one thing while actually being another. And what has been seen as Bruegel’s disinclination to narrative may instead be understood as a narrower disinclination toward the classicizing aesthetic. His peasant pictures, as a group, may be thought of as transgressive in relation to that standard. But it does not necessarily follow that his pictures decline the task of narration. Instead, they tell snippets or fragments of stories, sometimes featuring large, lumbering peasants and at other times whole galaxies of minor players, including women, children and the disabled. Bruegel distributes and disperses the viewer’s attention, rather than recording his own experience or studying the peasant class like an ethnographer. His is distinctively an art without dominating events, and yet containing many interactions. His characteristic and distinctive compositional strategy, the making of expansive, semi-organized space, a vast visual panoply, all may be supposed to have a basis in the experience of actual festival spaces.<sup>24</sup> His pictures, made to delight, owe something to that real-life visual field. Their scattered pockets of activity as an aggregate have a moderate, but only a moderate, coherence, like fairgrounds still today, full of stories glimpsed and overheard, forever fragmentary but knit into a whole that has a special kind of cohesion, not simple narrative coherence but a formal or tonal coherence. It is not that any one action ties the whole together, but the kinds of actions taking place display a fundamental compatibility. He distributes the viewer’s attention in a way that seems mere happenstance and yet is carefully plotted and calculated, not for the sake of serving a text, nor even a phrase, but to create a world which the

---

<sup>23</sup> (1994, 219v). On Van Mander’s role in promoting the art of Rudolf II, see Müller (1993, 17-20).

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Rosenbaum, writing for the Criterion Collection dvd of Jacques Tati’s *Playtime* (1967) in 2006, compared the restaurant sequence to Bruegel's *Fall of Icarus* and *Procession to Cavalry*.

viewer had to learn to experience, to wander about in and toy with, inventing micro-narratives at will. Bruegel provided a realism that wasn't purely visual, but experiential or phenomenal, and whose relationship to established narrative norms was oblique.

The question of Bruegel's relationship to narrative is distinct from that of his attitude toward Italian art. It remains stunningly distinctive that what most impressed him on his trip to Italy was the Alps.<sup>25</sup> Other than in the Babel paintings (whose relationship to the Colosseum might be thought unflattering to Rome),<sup>26</sup> Bruegel did not leave a record of reacting much to what he saw there. He collaborated with Giulio Clovio. He visited as far south as Sicily. It is possible that Bruegel stopped at Ferrara, as Rogier van der Weyden had before him and as did Joris Hoefnagel (a fellow friend of Ortelius) after him.<sup>27</sup> Certainly it was an important court, known for its patronage of painting and poetry. It is also true that Duke Ercole II's wife, Renée of France, was notorious as a Protestant sympathizer and shielder of heretics. If Bruegel did visit Ferrara, he almost certainly would have seen the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes: and there he would have found the most ambitious existing cycle of the months (ca. 1480), one remarkable in its time for its featuring of peasants. They are strikingly prominent, though not integrated into the landscape as Bruegel would shortly accomplish, and there is no fraternizing between peasant and landlord, as in Bruegel's images. There are other pre-existing cycles of the months (Castello del Buonconsiglio, Trent, for example, as well as in various books of hours), but Ferrara's distinctively achieves a kind of monumentality independent of classical models. Even though his own paintings bore no patent debt to the Palazzo Schifanoia cycle and his theme had nothing to do with the glorification of an autocrat, it is hypothetically possible that Bruegel started thinking about the months as a possible large-scale pictorial theme because of the spectacular and unusual cycle he saw in Ferrara.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Bruegel's mother-in-law, Mayken Verhulst, who is thought to have trained Bruegel's sons after his death and who published Serlio's treatise on architecture after her husband's death, was similarly underwhelmed by Italian formal models; DiFuria (2019, 157-177). On Bruegel's Babel, Carroll (2008, 75-83).

<sup>26</sup> Kaminska (2014) describes the ambient in which Jonghelinck would have displayed the *Tower of Babel* (1563) now in Vienna, but argues that it was in relation to Antwerp that it would have been discussed. See also Carroll (2008, 75-83).

<sup>27</sup> Harris (2005, 306).

<sup>28</sup> For a study of Bruegel's trip to Italy, based on landscape drawings, that proposes he stayed on the west coast, see Lichtert (2015, 39-54) and for a reconsideration of Bruegel's relationship to Italian art, Kavalier (2017, 80-85). See also Kaschek (2009, 104, 148-419). Müller (1999, 18-19) and for speculation on his religious inclinations, (21-39). That it was crucial to early scholars working on Bruegel that he was free of Italian influence, Cuvelier (2021, 360-62).

When Bruegel painted his own cycle of months, circa 1565, the Netherlands was in the grip of famine caused by harsh weather and failed crops, setting up the conditions for the revolt which was to come. His ambitious landscape cycle might have been prompted, at least in some part, by the plight of the farmers and laboring folk, and also in celebration of the special tie the locals felt to the land currently occupied. The tenor of some of the months, the cold ones in particular, contrasts with the celebratory air of the Ferrara frescoes, which were made to celebrate the beneficent rule of the Duke. The landscapes feature the same close association of lower- and upper-class figures that characterize, for instance, the *Wedding Feast (Vienna)* or the *Landscape with Gallows (Darmstadt)*, and which might be thought to signify local patriotic feeling against the occupying forces. The compositional type of the vista looking from on high down a river valley to the horizon reflected his experience on that trip—a trip that literally widened his horizons, one which exposed him both to elements he resisted as well as to some he adopted. The etching of the rabbit hunter, like the *Suicide of Saul*, suggests that he associated those plunging vistas with fearful emotions rather than pleasurable ones. It is not hard to imagine that crossing the Alps by horse could be a terrifying experience for a person accustomed to a characteristically level terrain.

The stories Van Mander tells about Bruegel have been used to confirm his distance from the Italian model with its emphasis on dramatic and literary narrative. We have argued here on behalf of seeing Bruegel as a practitioner of a new kind of narrative, deliberately fragmented and even incoherent of content to a degree, united formally by using the complexity of landscape as flexible armature, potentially also as a distraction. He insinuates inconsequential microhistories while displaying the vast world.

It was not merely this alternative approach to narrative that Bruegel's pictures activated. His peasant paintings provided a novel sense of relief for the viewer by no longer demanding to be looked up to subserviently and expectantly, the way altarpieces must be. Bruegel developed a pictorial point of view that contrasted with that generated by traditional ruling elites. He used the peasant population as the signifier of a generalized anti-subservience implied by endemic disorderliness. He employed an additive compositional model instead of working toward classical and organic completeness with its Italian referentiality. It was not only his choice of figural subjects and his compositional preferences, but also the new manner of displaying art, in private houses of citizens belonging to a new urban and bourgeois culture, that enabled a radical change in how narrative was used: not to grip the mind and emotions of the spellbound viewer, but instead to provide an occasion for looking together, casually, and companionably.

The essence of these paintings as a new kind of picture exacting no tribute, no prayer, and hence their status as relatively frivolous objects, allowed them to act as coy receptacles for subversive content when a deteriorating political situation spurred the artist in that direction. Perhaps there are quite personal references even in earlier paintings that we cannot identify.

Still, it is not to be supposed that Bruegel invented his new kind of pictures for the sake of latently expressing his political discontent, but that the pictures he had invented, with their more additive aesthetic, allowed for this amplification of purpose when the times seemed to demand acknowledgment. He was protected by the jovial aspect of the imagery, which had been devised by Bruegel as a young artist working in the wake of Bosch and which tended, in the absence of religious subject matter, to catalyze viewers' feelings that the paintings had no serious *raison d'être*. It has been argued here that his immediate circle would have seen in some of the work elements to which the occupiers were meant to be blind, supposing that they ever saw the paintings. Like other artists and writers working during times when overt challenge was not tolerated,<sup>29</sup> Bruegel devised discreet, privately satisfying ways by which to criticize the powers he could not otherwise curb.

After the death of the artist in September of 1569, the geographer Abraham Ortelius made an addition to the page dedicated to Bruegel in his *Album Amicorum* ('album of friends'): "Multa pinxit hic Bruegelius que pingi non possunt" ("Bruegel painted here many things which cannot be painted." This surely alludes to Pliny's *Natural History*, Book XXXV, where the same is said of Apelles. Ortelius immediately followed this with Pliny's praise for Timanthes, "in omnibus eius operibus intellegitur plus semper quam pingitur" ("in all of his works more is to be understood than was painted").<sup>30</sup> Art historians have often supposed that this oddly double compliment ought to be dismissed as routine encomium, despite being directed at an artist who, distinctively, rarely seemed to care about antiquity and its norms. However, the double reference, made without citing any particular pictorial feat such as Apelles's rendering of lightning, might well raise our suspicions as to whether Ortelius was not here actually praising Bruegel's subtlety under the guise of praising his naturalism.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, if the visual evidence

---

<sup>29</sup> E.g., the illustrated *Monster Cockroach* of 1921 by Korney Chukovsky, in which no one dared see a reference to Stalin, or Callot's etchings of 1633 *Les grandes misères de la guerre*, in which the wartime life of soldiers is described with painful verity rather than the more routine idealization.

<sup>30</sup> Ortelius (1969, 21-22, 12v), Stechow (1966, 37), Gibson (2003, 5), Popham (1931, 187).

<sup>31</sup> See on Ortelius, Kaschek (2009, 66) and on the evidence for Ortelius's evolving religious thought, including his attention to reticence and subtlety, see Harris (2004), esp. (116-117).

allows for understanding more than what was painted, as Ortelius plainly stated it did, we owe it to the artist to weigh the possibility very carefully.

## References

- Alpers, Svetlana. 1972-73. Bruegel's festive peasants. *Simiolus* 6.3-4: 163-176.
- Alpers, Svetlana. 1983. Interpretation without representation, or, the viewing of Las Meninas. *Representations* 1: 30-42.
- Andersson, Roy. 2016. A pigeon sat on a branch reflecting on existence. <http://www.royandersson.com/pigeon/>. Accessed April 1, 2021.
- Arnade, Peter. 2000. Review of Pieter Bruegel, parables of order and enterprise by E. Kavalier. *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 31.3: 831-833.
- Arnade, Peter. 2008. *Beggars, iconoclasts, and civic patriots: The political culture of the Dutch revolt*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bakker, Boudewijn. 2012. *Landscape and religion from Van Eyck to Rembrandt*. Translated by Diane Webb. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate.
- Bangs, Jeremy. 1978. Pieter Bruegel and History. *Art Bulletin* 60.4: 704-05.
- van Bavel, Bas. 2016. Rural development and land ownership in Holland, c. 1400-1650. In *The political economy of the Dutch Republic*, edited by Oscar Gelderblom, 167-196. London: Routledge.
- Butts, Barbara & Joseph Leo Koerner. 1995. *The printed world of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*. St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum.
- Carroll, Margaret. 1987. Peasant festivity and political identity in the sixteenth century. *Art History* 10.3: 289-314.
- Carroll, Margaret. 2008. *Painting and politics in Northern Europe*. University Park: Penn State Press.
- Cook, Albert. 1984. Change of signification in Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights. *Oud Holland* 98.2: 76-97.
- Currie, Christina & Dominique Allart. 2012. *The Brueg[h]el phenomenon*. Brussels: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage.
- Cuvelier, Hilde. 2021. Max J. Friedländer's perception of Bruegel: Rereading the art historian from a historical perspective. In *The Bruegel success story: Papers Presented at the Symposium XXI for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, 12-14 September 2018*, edited by Christina Currie, Dominique Allart, Bart Franssen, Cyriel Stroo & Dominique Vanwijnsberghe, 359-367. Leuven: Peeters.
- DiFuria, Arthur. 2019. Towards an understanding of Mayken Verhulst and Volcxken Diericx. In *Women artists and patrons in the Netherlands, 1500-1700*, edited by Elizabeth Sutton, 157-177. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Duke, Alastair. 1990. *Reformation and revolt in the Low Countries*. London: Hambleton Press.
- Duke, Alastair. 2010. In defense of the common fatherland, patriotism and liberty in the Low Countries, 1555-1557. In *Networks, regions and nations, shaping identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650*, edited by Robert Stein & Judith Pollmann, 217-239. Leiden: Brill.
- Duke, Alastair et al. 2009. *Dissident identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Dvorak, Max. 1941. *Die Gemälde Peter Bruegels des älteren*. Vienna: A. Schroll & Co.
- Eco, Umberto. 1989. The poetics of the open work. In *The open work*, translated by Anna Cancogni, 1-23. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Originally published as *Opera aperta: forme e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee*. (Milan: Bompiani, 1962).
- Can. J. of Netherlandic Studies/Rev. can. d'études néerlandaises* 42.1 (2022): 1-26

- Ferber, Sydney. 1955. Pieter Bruegel and the Duke of Alba. *Renaissance News* 19.3: 205-219.
- Frayn, Michael. 1999. *Headlong: A novel*. New York: Picador.
- Freedberg, David. 1989. *The prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*. Tokyo: Bridgestone Museum of Art.
- van Gemert, Lia. 2014. The stamp of your face: Tronies in seventeenth-century Dutch literature. In *Tronies: Das Gesicht in der Frühen Neuzeit*, edited by D. Hirschfelder and L. Krempel. 25-38. Berlin: Gebrüder Mann.
- Gibson, Walter. 2003. *The art of laughter in the age of Bosch and Bruegel*. Groningen: Gerson Lectures Foundation.
- Gobin, Anuradha. 2018. Picturing liminal spaces and bodies rituals of punishment and the limits of control at the gallows field. *RACAR, revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 43.1: 7-24.
- Gregory, Joseph. 2005. *Contemporization as polemical device in Pieter Bruegel's biblical narratives*. Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Guicciardini, Lodovico. 1567. *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi*. Antwerp: Silvio.
- Haag, Sabine, ed. 2018. *Bruegel: The master*. Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Harris, Jason. 2004. The religious position of Abraham Ortelius. In *Low Countries as a crossroads of religious beliefs*, edited by Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan de Jong & Marc van Vaecck, 89-139. Leiden: Brill.
- Harris, Jason. 2005. The culture of Early Modern friendship. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47.4: 299-325.
- Honig, Elizabeth. 2019. *Peter Bruegel and the idea of human nature*. London: Reaktion.
- Jenkins, Catherine, Nadine Orenstein & Freyda Spira, eds. *The renaissance of etching*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Kaminska, Barbara. 2014. "Come, let us make a city and a tower": Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Tower of Babel and the creation of a harmonious community in Antwerp. *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, 6.2: doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2014.6.2.3.
- Kaschek, Bertram. 2009. *Weltzeit und Endzeit, Die "Monatsbilder" Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.* Dresden: Fink.
- Kaschek, Bertram, Jürgen Müller & Jessica Buskirk, eds. 2018. *Pieter Bruegel the Elder and religion*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kavaler, Ethan Matt. 1999. *Pieter Bruegel, parables of order and enterprise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kavaler, Ethan Matt. 2017. Pieter Bruegel, Bernard van Orley, realism and class. *Simiolus* 39.1/2: 73-88.
- Kavaler, Ethan Matt. 2021. Peasant passions. Pieter Bruegel and his aftermath. In *The Bruegel success story: Papers presented at the Symposium XXI for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, 12-14 September 2018*, edited by Christina Currie, Dominique Allart, Bart Fransen, Cyriel Stroo & Dominique Vanwijnsberghe, 289-317. Leuven: Peeters.
- Koerner, Joseph. 2016. *Bosch and Bruegel: From enemy painting to everyday life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Koenigsberger, Helmut. 1968. The problems of the Netherlands and France to 1585. In *The new Cambridge modern history*, edited by Richard Wernham, 264-294. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kunzle, David. 2001. Spanish Herod, Dutch innocents: Bruegel's Massacre of the Innocents in their sixteenth-century political contexts. *Art History* 24.1: 51-82.
- Lichtert, Katrien. 2015. New perspectives on Pieter Bruegel's journey to Italy (c. 1552-1554/5). *Oud Holland* 128: 39-54.
- Limm, Peter. 1989. *The Dutch revolt, 1559-1648*. London: Taylor and Francis.

- Louvre. 2021. Collections. <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010061789>. Accessed April 5, 2021.
- van Mander, Karel. 1994-1996. *The lives of the illustrious Netherlandish and German painters*, I-III, edited by H. Miedema. Doornspijk: Davaco. Originally published as *Het schilder-boeck*. (Haarlem: 1604).
- Marijnissen, Roger H. 1971. *Bruegel*. New York: Putnam.
- Meadows, Mark. 1996. Introduction: Putting Bruegel in his place: Contextual studies of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*. 47: 6-13.
- Meganck, Tine Luk. 2021. Bruegel's patrons: How 'close viewing' may reveal original ownership. In *The Bruegel success story: Papers presented at the Symposium XXI for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, 12-14 September 2018*, edited by Christina Currie, Dominique Allart, Bart Fransen, Cyriel Stroo & Dominique Vanwijnsberghe, 413-423. Leuven: Peeters.
- Melion, Walter, James Clifton & Michel Weemans, eds. 2014. *Imago exegetica: Visual images as exegetical instruments, 1400-1700*. Leiden: Brill.
- Michel, Eva, ed. 2017. *Pieter Bruegel: Drawing the world*. Vienna: Albertina.
- Müller, Jürgen. 1993. *Concordia Pragensis: Karel van Manders Kunsttheorie im Schilder-Boeck*. Munich: Oldenbourg.
- Müller, Jürgen. 1999. *Das Paradox als Bildform, Studien zur Ikonologie Pieter Bruegel d. Ä.* Munich: Wilhelm Fink.
- Müller, Jürgen. 2014. Of churches, heretics, and other guides of the blind: The Fall of The Blind Leading the Blind by Pieter Bruegel and the esthetics of subversion. In *Imago exegetica: Visual images as exegetical instruments, 1400-1700*, edited by Walter Melion, James Clifton, & Michel Weemans, 737-790. Leiden: Brill.
- Müller, Jürgen & Ingrid Mössinger. 2013. *Pieter Bruegel d. Ä. und das Theater der Welt*. Chemnitz: Deutscher Kunstverlag.
- Müller, Jürgen & Thomas Ulrich Schauerte. 2018. *Pieter Bruegel: The complete works*. Cologne: Taschen.
- van Nierop, Henk. 1991. A Beggars' Banquet: The compromise of the nobility and the politics of inversion. *European History Quarterly* 21: 419-443.
- Orenstein, Nadine, ed. 2001. *Pieter Bruegel the Elder, drawings and prints*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Parker, Geoffrey. 1977. *The Dutch revolt*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Popham, Arthur E. 1931. Pieter Bruegel and Abraham Ortelius. *Burlington Magazine* 59.343: 184-187.
- Porras, Stephanie. 2008. Resisting the allegorical: Pieter Bruegel's Magpie on the Gallows. *Rebus I*. Spring: 86-100.
- Porras, Stephanie. 2016. *Pieter Bruegel's historical imagination*. University Park: Penn State Press.
- Puraye, Jean, ed. 1969. *Album amicorum Abraham Ortelius*. Amsterdam: Van Gendt.
- Rijksmuseum. 2021. De onthoofding van Egmont and Horne, Wolfgang Meyerpeck, 1568. [www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zoeken/objecten?q=meyerpeck&p=1&ps=12&st=Objects&ii=0#/RP-P-1900-A-22038,0](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zoeken/objecten?q=meyerpeck&p=1&ps=12&st=Objects&ii=0#/RP-P-1900-A-22038,0). Accessed April 1, 2021.
- Sedlmayr, Hans. 2000. Bruegel's Macchia. In *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and art historical method in the 1930s*, edited by Christopher S. Wood, 323-376. New York: Zone. Originally published as "Die 'Macchia' Bruegels." 1934. *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, 8:137-160.
- Silver, Larry. 1999. Second Bosch: Family resemblance and the marketing of art. *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 50: 30-57.



- Silver, Larry. 2014. Bruegel's biblical kings. In *Imago exegetica: Visual images as exegetical instruments, 1400-1700*, edited by Walter Melion, James Clifton, & Michel Weemans, 791-831. Leiden: Brill.
- Stechow, Wolfgang, ed. 1996. *Northern Renaissance art, 1400-1600: Sources and documents*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Steen, Charles. 2013. *Margaret of Parma: A life*. Leiden: Brill.
- Sullivan, Margaret. Jan. 2003. Proverbs and process in Bruegel's Rabbit hunt. *Burlington Magazine* 145.1198: 30-35.
- Sybesma, Jetske. 1991. The reception of Bruegel's Beekeepers: A matter of choice. *Art Bulletin* 73.3: 467-478.
- Tanis, James & Daniel Horst. 1993. *Images of discord: A graphic interpretation of the Eighty Years' War*. Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr College Library.
- Thompson, J. D. A. 1972. The Beggars' Badges and the Dutch revolt. *The Numismatic Chronicle* 12: 289-294.
- Vöhringer, Christian. 2013. *Pieter Bruegel der ältere: Malerie, Alltag und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert, Eine Biographie*. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Weismann, Annabella. 2015. *Pieter Bruegel d. Ä.* Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Zupnick, Irving L. 1964. Bruegel and the revolt in the Netherlands. *Art Journal* 23.4: 283-289.

### About the author

Professor at the University of New Hampshire (US), Patricia Emission is the author, most recently, of *Moving pictures and Renaissance art history* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021) and *Art and its observers* (Vernon Press, 2022), but also of several other books, including *The Italian Renaissance and cultural memory* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). She has contributed to a number of print exhibitions, including the catalogue accompanying an exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery (Manchester, UK) curated by Edward Wouk, *Marcantonio Raimondi, Raphael, and the image multiplied* (Edward Wouk & David Morris, eds) (Manchester University Press, 2016) and for an exhibition at the Cantor Center for Visual Arts (Stanford, CA, US), the essay "The architectural imagination" in *The Kirk Edward Long Mannerist Print Collection* (Bernard Barryte, ed) (Stanford University Press, 2015). She wrote on "Ideas: Philosophy, religion, history," a chapter for the early modern volume of *A cultural history of memory*, 6 vols., (Bloomsbury, 2020, 97-115), "Art, aura, and admiration in the age of digital reproduction," *Art History & Criticism/MIK* (Vol. 17, 2021), and "Did the Early Moderns believe in their art?" *Res*, (Spring/Autumn, LXXV/LXXVI, 2021).

Author's contact: [patricia.emison@unh.edu](mailto:patricia.emison@unh.edu)

### **Bruegel, paysans, et politique**

Comment pouvons-nous nous permettre de voir ce qui était destiné à être systématiquement ignoré dans des peintures réalisées à une époque d'oppression, des images faites non pas pour attiser l'opposition mais néanmoins utilisées pour obtenir une condamnation? Ici, l'on suggère qu'il y a plus de contenu historique dans les peintures de Bruegel de la fin des années 1560 et moins d'ambivalence moderne que la recherche récente a bien voulu en analyser. De même, les approches actuelles de l'œuvre semblent inviter le spectateur, par inadvertance, à voir celle-ci telle que Bruegel la destinait aux autorités de son temps. L'approche distinctive et élargie de Bruegel au travail de composition figurative est étudiée comme un symptôme de son identité néerlandaise, à la fois telle qu'elle se manifeste dans sa réponse étonnamment limitée à ce qu'il a vu en voyageant en Italie (bien que si nous limitons nos attentes à ce qui compte vraiment comme influence, le Salon des Mois du palais Schifanoia, à Ferrare — de Cosmè Tura et Francesco del Cossa —, pourrait avoir joué un rôle dans la pensée de Bruegel) et dans de petits ajustements apportés à ses peintures ultérieures, qui peuvent indiquer des sympathies ne devant s'exprimer qu'en cachette. L'eau-forte autographe du Chasseur de lapin, le petit tableau du Louvre représentant des mendiants infirmes et le dernier tableau de Bruegel (dont l'élément central est le gibet) sont analysés comme s'ils étaient destinés à être pleinement compris uniquement par ceux qui savaient déjà que l'artiste avait des sentiments anti-impériaux, alors que les autres ne devaient y voir que la suite bienvenue de l'amusant manque d'idéalisation de Bruegel associé à l'art italien et à sa théorie. Ses réponses à ce qu'il a vu en Italie étaient généralement aussi originales que ses représentations de sa patrie, et ses motivations s'étendent, au-delà du religieux (très souvent discuté), jusqu'au politique. Le point de vue de Van Mander qui considérait l'art de Bruegel comme drôle et anecdotique doit être pondéré par les commentaires d'Ortelius sur la sophistication de Bruegel. Il est temps d'abandonner la thèse voulant que les significations picturales de Bruegel cultivent une ambiguïté insoluble reflétant l'orientation philosophique de l'artiste.

### **Bruegel, boeren en politiek**

Hoe kunnen we onszelf permissie geven om iets waar te nemen dat eigenlijk bedoeld was om routinematig over het hoofd te worden gezien in schilderijen die gemaakt waren in een tijd van onderdrukking, afbeeldingen die niet waren gecreëerd om oppositie op te wekken, maar die toch een zekere veroordeling wisten vast te leggen? In dit artikel wordt geopperd dat er meer historische inhoud en minder moderne ambivalentie in

Bruegels schilderijen van de late jaren 1560 zit dan de recente wetenschappelijke analyses hebben willen aantonen, en dat de huidige benaderingen van het werk de kijker er onbedoeld toe brengen het waar te nemen op de manier zoals Bruegel het de autoriteiten van zijn tijd had voorgeschoteld. Bruegels kenmerkende en verruimende aanpak in het uitvoeren van figuratieve compositie wordt onderzocht als zijnde een kenmerk van zijn Nederlandse identiteit, zowel in zoverre als het zich voordoet in zijn veelbeduidende summiere reactie tegenover hetgeen hij observeerde toen hij door Italië reisde (althoewel, misschien als we onze verwachtingen aanpassen voor wat telt als invloed, zouden we kunnen stellen dat de Villa Schifanoia-maanden in Ferrara van Cosmè Tura en Francesco del Cossa een mogelijke rol speelden wat betreft het denken van Bruegel), alsook in kleine aanpassingen in zijn latere schilderijen, wellicht wijzend op sympathieën die slechts heimelijk konden worden uitgedrukt. De handtekeningets van *De konijnenjacht*, daarnaast het kleine Louvre-schilderij van kreupele bedelaars en het laatste schilderij van Bruegel, gecentreerd op de galg, worden geanalyseerd op de wijze waarop het lijkt alsof ze gemaakt zijn om slechts volledig te kunnen worden begrepen door diegenen die reeds door hadden dat de kunstenaar negatieve gevoelens jegens het bewind koesterde, terwijl anderen juist alleen de welkome voortzetting zouden zien van Bruegels grappige gebrek aan idealisering die wordt geassocieerd met Italiaanse kunst en diens theorie. Zijn reacties op wat hij in Italië vernam, waren over het algemeen net zo eigenzinnig als zijn afbeeldingen van zijn vaderland, en de motivaties reiken verder dan het godsdienstige (vaker besproken) en wel tot op het politieke toe. Van Manders kijk op Bruegels kunst als koddig en anekdotisch behoort beter in evenwicht te worden gebracht met de opmerkingen van Ortelius over Bruegels verfijning. Het is tijd om de stelling teniet te doen dat de bedoelingen achter de afbeeldingen van Bruegels hand een onoplosbare onduidelijkheid zouden cultiveren, getuigend van de filosofische oriëntatie van de kunstenaar.



# A “mighty stream” of anti-intellectualism: Johan Huizinga, his age, and ours

*Henk van den Belt*

Johan Huizinga’s foray into cultural criticism, *In the shadow of tomorrow* (1935/1936), has enjoyed a rather one-sided reception. It has largely been interpreted as a series of conservative complaints about modern technology and over-organization, the deterioration of moral standards and the decay of style and good taste, and the increasing engulfment of civil life by the demands of mass politics. Critics have also been underwhelmed by Huizinga’s call for spiritual catharsis and asceticism as the proposed remedy for this purported crisis of western civilization. While all these elements are indeed present in Huizinga’s account, they do not touch the core of his diagnosis of the cultural crisis. He himself designated the “disavowal of the intellectual principle” as the focal point of his diagnosis. It was not just that some schools of thought had repudiated their adherence to reason, but that many divergent tendencies had merged into a “mighty stream” of anti-intellectualism. This was, in Huizinga’s view, the defining characteristic of the age and lay at the root of the cultural crisis. It offers interesting parallels and contrasts with our own so-called post-truth era of disinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories. This article aims at a detailed reconstruction and contextualization of the core of Huizinga’s diagnosis of the crisis of western civilization and draws some tentative parallels with the present era.

Keywords: Cultural criticism; cultural crisis; philosophy of life; existential philosophy; sociology of knowledge; Huizinga.

## **The surprising relevance of Huizinga’s cultural criticism for today**

At one time, Johan Huizinga’s *In de schaduwen van morgen* (translated by his son Jacob Herman as *In the shadow of tomorrow*) (1935/1936) was more popular than his world-famous historical monograph *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* (‘The waning of the Middle Ages’) (1919). It belongs to a genre of cultural criticism that also

includes José Ortega y Gasset’s *Revolt of the masses* (1930) and several other specimens from the interwar period, all of which expressed deep concerns about the prospects of the humanistic ideals held by a cultural elite to which their authors themselves invariably belonged. They saw western culture threatened by an increasing *massification* and *levelling* in the wake of technological change, economic rationalization, and the growing influence of the lower classes in social and political life. In the 1960s this genre of cultural criticism largely became obsolete as the fears it expressed turned true. As the Dutch historian Remieg Aerts observes,

Democratization has pushed the humanistic and holistic concept of civilisation, moralism, and elitism aside as “antiques and curiosities”. Culture is in everybody’s possession: the high good has been converted into pennies. Therewith the old kind of cultural criticism also disappears, but its pessimism is confirmed. (Aerts 1996, 58)

In this article I want to argue nonetheless that Huizinga’s cultural criticism from the 1930s has still a surprising relevance for us today. But let me first note that Aerts’ negative judgment about this genre and Huizinga’s special version of it is by no means unique but reflects a widely held view among Huizinga’s younger historical colleagues. While *In de schaduw van morgen* (henceforth to be referred to as *Shadow*) received widespread approval from the pre-war lay public (Du Pree 2016), many professional historians (for example, Romein 1950; Geyl 1963; Wesseling 2015) were later on highly critical of his venture into cultural criticism. They found fault with the way he treated the crisis of the 1930s: not primarily as an economic and political crisis but rather as a manifestation of a deeper cultural crisis, for which a spiritual catharsis and a new asceticism were seen as the ultimate remedies. Huizinga’s complaints about the deterioration of moral standards, the decay of style and decorum, the growing apostasy from Christianity, and his concerns about the increasingly dominant role of the masses in politics, sports, and cultural life stamped him in their eyes as a stubborn conservative, unable and unwilling to accept the hard realities of modern technology and organization, economics, and politics and longing back to the good old days when a select intellectual aristocracy set the cultural tone. Carla du Pree summarized the *communis opinio* among later historians thus: “Huizinga was henceforth mainly seen as a talented historian, who however would have done better not to occupy himself with cultural criticism” (Du Pree 2016, 253).

Jan Romein even went so far as to argue that Huizinga was unable to understand his age precisely because he did not *want* to understand it (Romein 1950, 219). He recalled that Huizinga always proudly told his students that he had never seen a cinema from the inside. This piece of anecdotal evidence is in line

with what Huizinga’s son Leonhard later reported in his memories about his father:

According to him we were just wasting our time when we went to the cinema. He had a deep contempt for this institute, which appeared to him as an expression of utter vulgarity. So much had he indoctrinated us – or at least me – with this view, that even as a 17-year-old boy I still always looked around furtively to ascertain that nobody saw me entering a cinema. (L. Huizinga 1963, 120)

In *Shadow*, Huizinga had this to say about cinematic art:

Dramatic action itself is practically entirely expressed in the outwardly visible while the spoken word is relegated to a place of only secondary importance. The art of watching has become mere skill at rapid apperception and understanding of continuously changing visual images. The younger generation has acquired this cinematic perception to an amazing degree. This novel bent of mind, however, means the atrophy of a whole series of intellectual functions. To realize this one need only consider the difference between following a comedy of Molière and a film. Without claiming superiority of intellectual over visual understanding, one is nonetheless bound to admit that the cinema allows a number of aesthetic-intellectual means of perception to remain unexercised which cannot but lead to a weakening of judgment. (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 45-46)

When reading such passages, we can hardly suppress a smile as we are struck by the elitist disdain about going to the movies instead of attending a classic comedy. Pieter Geyl’s characterization of Huizinga as “accuser of his age” seems apposite (Geyl 1963), as does the apt title Jacques de Kadt chose for his review *De deftigheid in het gedrang* (‘Dignity driven into a corner’) (De Kadt 1991 [1936]).

Before we dismiss Huizinga’s diagnosis of the crisis of western civilization as hopelessly out of date, however, we should consider that the fact that he felt ill at ease with his own age by no means implies, as Romein too easily suggested, that he did not *understand* his age. If anything, it would have made him more sharply aware of many of its shortcomings. As Ernst Gombrich wrote in Huizinga’s defense, “it is from those who react to the problems of their time in an intensely personal way that we can generally learn much more than we do from the well-adjusted” (Gombrich 1973, 285). Huizinga’s account includes numerous perceptive observations on the weakening of judgment, the decline of the critical faculty, the increasing disregard for truth and the strong influence of various anti-intellectualist doctrines, all of which appears highly relevant in our own post-truth age of fake news, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. The danger of the

tendencies Huizinga discerned was that they reinforced political polarization and could pave the way for the rise of dictatorships. He gave the following description of the general state of mind of his time, which with some modifications could be extrapolated to our own post-truth era:

Delusion and misconception flourish everywhere. More than ever men seem to be slaves to a word, a motto, to kill one another with, to silence one another in the most literal sense. The world is filled with hate and misunderstanding. There is no way of measuring how great the percentage of the deluded is and whether it is greater than formerly, but delusion and folly have more power to harm and speak with greater authority. For the shallow, semi-educated person the beneficial restraints of respect for tradition, form and cult are gradually falling away. Worst of all is that widely prevalent indifference to truth which reaches its peak in the open advocacy of the political lie. (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 150-151)

Although we might have reservations about the typically conservative appeal to the beneficial effects of respect for tradition, we can hardly disagree with Huizinga’s view that universal education in itself is not a sufficient antidote to the rule of delusion and mendacity.

In an essay published in *Fortnightly* in 1940, Huizinga noted the imperviousness of modern man to reason and argument despite the legacy of universal education:

Man [sic] is supposed to be a reasonable being. If he really were, his mind when holding some opinion should yield to such arguments as proved its untenableness. But in actual fact it seldom shows itself willing or capable to do so, even on scientific matters, not to speak of political or confessional opinions. [...] Has there ever been a Fascist or a Communist who allowed himself to be cured by having it expounded to him that his premises were wrong? (Huizinga 1950 [1940], 470)

In our own so-called post-truth times we have also found out to our dismay that scientific enlightenment and fact checks are not always effective and can even be counterproductive in halting the spread of fake news and disinformation. The reason is, as psychologists have pointed out, that the human mind does not actually work as it was supposed to work according to the western liberal tradition, which assumes that “if we ‘educate’, ‘inform’ and ‘reason with’ people then they will reach a logical conclusion from the presented evidence” (Coper 2022, 213). Instead, human beings have a “strong desire to conform to each other and [their] pre-existing worldviews” (213).



### The subjugation of the will to knowledge to the vital impulse

Almost all of Huizinga's critics have largely ignored what he himself described as the "focal point" of his diagnosis (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 110), or "the most fundamental element of the cultural crisis as a whole" (64-65), namely what he alternatively called "the disavowal of the intellectual principle" (63), or the "subjugation of the will to knowledge to the vital impulse" (64). Why the critics failed to engage with the central core of Huizinga's cultural criticism is hard to say; perhaps they were too obsessed with denouncing him as an old-fashioned conservative. It is however precisely this core of his diagnosis which assumes a new relevance in light of our post-truth era.

Huizinga defended the claims of science and reason against various anti-intellectualist deemed schools of thought current in his age that tended to deprecate their achievements and bemoan the consequences for human life. Prominent among these schools was the so-called philosophy of life or *Lebensphilosophie*, which traced its origins back to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson. This current of thought was very influential in the 1920s and 1930s, also outside academia. It held that intuition and feeling, rather than reason and intellect, would enable people to directly access and experience the reality of life and reconnect to the meaningful cosmic totality of *All-Life* (Sassen 1938; Skidelsky 2008). In fact, the philosophy of life amounted to a type of cultural criticism in its own right. It articulated a deeply felt dissatisfaction with a mechanized and overly rationalist civilization, which allegedly had alienated people from the sources of life, from their fellow human beings, and from the rest of nature. The most extreme form of this type of cultural criticism can be found in the work of two German *life-philosophers*, the left-leaning Theodor Lessing and the right-leaning (and antisemitic) Ludwig Klages. The titles of some of their major works reveal the message: Lessing's *Die verfluchte Kultur* ('The cursed civilisation') (1921) and Klages' *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* ('The spirit as adversary of the soul') (1929-1932). They went further than other philosophers of life insofar as their criticism amounted to an unconditional condemnation of culture and the schematizing spirit as inherently hostile to life (Aerts 1996, 41).

The philosophy of life was popularly expressed by the Dutch vitalist poet Hendrik Marsman in his famous poetic line "*Groots en meeslepend wil ik leven!*" ('I want a life, grand and compelling') (Marsman 1941, 75) and in his adage that "a strong life justifies itself" (Marsman 1979 [1926], 595). Huizinga disagreed with this view. He raised the question of what could guide the will if it scorns all guidance from the intellect (or from the Christian moral law), answering ominously: "Only life itself, blind and inscrutable life" (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 92).

Although there is some common ground between the cultural criticism inspired by the philosophy of life and Huizinga’s criticism of western civilization (both took issue with modern technology, mechanization, and economic rationalization, for example), there are also major differences. In fact, Huizinga’s cultural criticism was in many respects a mirror image of the earlier cultural protest concerning the dominance of reason and the schematizing intellect in the name of life, feeling, and intuition. Indeed, the very phrase Huizinga used to diagnose the central affliction of modern culture, the “subjugation of the will to knowledge to the vital impulse” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 64), could have been the rallying cry for the various forms of the philosophy of life. While the latter lamented an allegedly overly rational culture, it was as if Huizinga deplored that the dominant culture had apparently heeded their complaints and incorporated their irrational tenets. They denounced the presumed intellectualism of western culture, while Huizinga criticized its alleged anti-intellectualism. For Huizinga, the philosophy of life was not external to western culture but had become a major (and highly problematic) component of it.

The difference in attitude also showed itself in Huizinga’s positive appreciation of science, which for him embodied the intellectual principle or the *will to knowledge*. This refers to the culturally sanctioned imperative to extend scientific knowledge for its own sake and not in the service of the striving for power or of utilitarian ends. He considered the so-called crisis of modern physics in the early 20th century as a sign of health and not as a part of the wider cultural crisis, because it showed science at the limits, and therefore at the height of its thinking power: “It is the refinement of the means of understanding and the intensification of the will to knowledge itself which lie at the bottom of the ailment” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 39). The only thing to be deplored, according to Huizinga, was that the new knowledge had not yet settled in culture and become the common property of civilized persons: “It has not yet been integrated in a new cosmic conception of illuminating harmony” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 35). He apparently deemed it desirable that the new scientific insights of modern physics would in broad outline become part of the worldview of laypersons. By way of historical parallel, we can point to the great insights and discoveries of 17th century natural science, which around 1700 were incorporated, as a “new image of nature” in the general culture and thus became the common property of almost all educated people (Huizinga 1949 [1933], 345).

Huizinga defended science also against the sceptical views of his great-nephew Menno ter Braak, who was a trained historian, writer and literary critic, and an ardent admirer of Nietzsche, the great master of suspicion who relentlessly *unmasked* all art, science, and religion as so many disguises of the will-to-power (Henrard 1963). In his book *Politicus zonder partij* (‘politician without a party’), Ter

Braak had attempted in Nietzschean style to unmask the claims of scientists to be part of a higher, spiritual culture:

Nobody – and the man of science is no exception to this rule – wants to be known as utterly useless. That is why he justifies his utility “from on high”; that is why he, the naturally mediocre but diligent worker-bee, continually poses as a spiritual human being. Take away the spiritual and the ‘higher’, unmask the spiritual conspiracy ... and the libraries and laboratories house only ants, ants, continuously busy to drag along little straws and pine needles for the ant-heap, which they baptised Science. (Ter Braak 1934, 205)

In a letter to his great-nephew, Huizinga objected to the latter’s Nietzschean views on science:

I still think, if you’ll excuse me, that your entire disavowal of knowledge, your reversal of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’, your ‘immoralism’, are rather cheap, with however much talent you present them. Just one word about [what you say on science]. – While reading these passages, I saw before my eyes some younger physicists and biologists, who I know well and esteem highly, and I saw against your contempt the unfathomable contempt, expressed in a smile, with which they would answer yours, and I saw you curl up into a withered leaf and be blown away. (Huizinga 2010 [1935])

There is no doubt that Ter Braak, as a self-declared Nietzschean, exemplified for Huizinga the disavowal of the intellectual principle, which he considered the central tenet of the cultural crisis. Indeed, Nietzsche himself, the great inspirator of the philosophy of life, had been one of the first who “repudiated the intellectual principle,” albeit “with all the poetical vigour of his genius” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 64). The friendly contacts Huizinga maintained with several natural scientists and mathematicians (for example, Willem de Sitter, Lourens Baas Becking, Jan Burgers, Eduard Jan Dijksterhuis) prevented him from looking down upon their work and denigrating the cultural significance of science.

### **Existential philosophy as part of the “mighty stream” of anti-intellectualism**

The philosophy of life was not the only school of thought with which Huizinga found fault. In his view it was only one contributory current that eventually was to merge with several other “tendencies” into one single “mighty stream” of anti-intellectualism (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 64), which threatened to undermine the bulwarks of our intellectual culture. These other currents are historical materialism, pragmatism, the sociology of knowledge, and the existential

philosophy of Heidegger and Jaspers. We should furthermore keep in mind that under the philosophy of life Huizinga also subsumed racial doctrines and the legal-political theory of the amoral nature of the State.

We thus see the broad scope of Huizinga’s cultural diagnosis of anti-intellectualism. How could he possibly deal with all these intellectual currents, together making up a large part of the philosophical landscape of his age? How could he plausibly argue that they all contributed to the prevalent atmosphere of anti-intellectualism? These questions are the more pressing, as Huizinga, by his own admission, had an “almost complete absence of interest” in philosophy (Huizinga 1968 [1947] 215). Of course, we should take this admission with a grain of salt. Huizinga was well-acquainted with at least some philosophers, as he showed in his inaugural lecture at the start of his academic career (Huizinga 1968 [1905]). Here he used the work of Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, Georg Simmel, and Eduard Spranger to define the proper task of the science of history.

An important but often overlooked source of information and guide about the confusing debates raging in philosophy was Reinier Beerling’s *Antithesen*, the debut work of a young philosopher of history which was published just before *Shadow* and for which Huizinga himself had written a preface to commend it to the public’s attention. As the latter wrote in his preface, “With his lively and well-documented argument the author leads us straight into the midst of the enormous crisis of modern thinking” (Huizinga 1935). Beerling had therefore strengthened Huizinga’s awareness that there was indeed a “general spiritual crisis” in modern thinking: “Over the entire domain of the mind the alarm-bell is sounding [...]” (Beerling 1935, 129).

Beerling was one of the first philosophers in the Netherlands who, in the fourth chapter of his *Antithesen*, extensively discussed Martin Heidegger’s work. He thereby also made Huizinga familiar with this philosophy (“M. Heidegger’s bewildering existential philosophy,” as Huizinga described it in his preface). Beerling’s appraisal of Heidegger’s (and Jaspers’) philosophy probably provided the justification for Huizinga to include existential philosophy among the currents of thought held to be contributing to the “mighty stream” of anti-intellectualism. Beerling argued that existential philosophy largely shared the anti-intellectual thrust of the philosophy of life:

[...] the philosophy of life and existential thinking find each other [...] inasmuch as both attribute to the sciences a ‘derivative’ character; indeed, in Heidegger’s ontology the disparagement of the cognitive function receives a particularly sharp accent. (Beerling 1935, 251)

Beerling similarly criticized the “radically anti-intellectualist mentality” of Karl Jaspers:

Universal validity and absolute standards are now truly suspended; in their place functions as truth criterion *der Wille selbst, der bejaht oder abstöszt* [‘the will itself, which either affirms or repels’], which in the ears of a scientifically oriented philosophy must sound as downright blasphemy. (Beerling 1935, 190)

Not only did both philosophies share an anti-intellectual tendency, Beerling also suggested that existential philosophy could be considered as just a variant of the philosophy of life. The special terminology of *Dasein* (‘existence’) should not deceive us:

Where Heidegger talks about *Dasein*, he could also have said ‘life’, two concepts with an equally undifferentiated impress; that he avoids ‘life’ can be partly explained from his aversion to use terms worn off by extensive usage, and also because the word ‘Da-sein’ allows him to use special etymological derivations for the purpose of ontological clarification. (Beerling 1935, 250)

Not surprisingly, Heidegger and his followers disagreed with this assimilation and emphasized the distinct status of *Dasein* as against “life” (Heidegger 1993 [1927], 50, 246). Still, by many relative outsiders, existential philosophy and the philosophy of life were indeed seen as next-door neighbours (cf. Ertel 1938; Kastein 1938).

Huizinga agreed with Beerling’s negative overall appraisal of existential philosophy. In *Shadow* he wrote:

The next addition of intellectually fashionable words will doubtless be ‘existential’. I can see it springing up on all sides. Before long it will have landed with the public at large. When, in order to convince one’s audience of profundity, one has said ‘dynamic’ long enough, it will be ‘existential’. The word will serve to forsake the spirit all the more solemnly, a sneer at all that is knowledge and truth. (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 67)

We should notice that this passage occurs as the opening paragraph of Chapter XI on “The worship of life,” which suggests that Huizinga also viewed existential philosophy as a variant of the philosophy of life. In prophesying the future success of *existential* as an intellectually fashionable word, he has been credited with a special gift of foresight, as if he already predicted the post-war popularity of Sartre’s existentialism (Hermans 1968). In the mid-1930s, however, such possibilities were far from Huizinga’s mind. Besides, it was Beerling who had already noted that “the word ‘existence’ has swept like a whirlwind across the entire language area of philosophy [...]” (Beerling 1935, 195).

### The *Seinsverbundenheit* of thought

We have now reviewed two currents of thought embodying the disavowal of the intellectual principle. What about the other contributory tendencies to the “mighty stream” of anti-intellectualism: pragmatism, historical materialism, and the sociology of knowledge?

The case of pragmatism is quite straightforward. It is included because of its relativization of the notion of truth: “Pragmatism deprived the concept truth of its claim to absolute validity by placing it in the flow of time. To the pragmatists truth is what has essential value for those professing it” (Huizinga 2019 [1936]), 64; translation adapted).<sup>1</sup>

Historical materialism and the sociology of knowledge are condemned in one single stroke:

Sociological thinkers like Max Weber, Max Scheler, Karl Mannheim, and Oswald Spengler have of late introduced the term of the *Seinsverbundenheit des Denkens*, which may be very imperfectly rendered with ‘the environment of life-conditioned nature of thought’. The concept itself makes them next-door neighbours to historical materialism, which is professedly anti-intellectual. (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 64)

It may not be immediately clear why Huizinga thought historical materialism to be “professedly anti-intellectual.” Elsewhere, he held Marxism, alongside Freudianism, in large measure responsible for the relativization of moral standards (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 88), which for him was closely linked to the disavowal of the intellectual principle. Huizinga considered ethics and knowledge to be intimately connected: “For ultimately every ethical judgment is an act of cognition” (82; translation adapted). For us, this connection may be less obvious. The more basic reason to consider historical materialism anti-intellectual was apparently that it subscribed to the idea of the *Seinsverbundenheit des Denkens*, an idea which it allegedly shared with the four sociological thinkers mentioned and which would make the latter by implication equally anti-intellectual. In this connection it must be noted that Huizinga had probably only limited familiarity with the work of Weber, Scheler, and Mannheim, although he knew Spengler’s work very well.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the book reporting on his visit to the United States in the mid-1920s, Huizinga had given a rather favourable judgment of American pragmatism (Huizinga 1972 [1926]). He was especially enamoured with the generally optimistic and constructive can-do attitude of pragmatist thinkers like William James and John Dewey. He had earlier drawn on James’ insights into the varieties of religious experience in *The waning of the Middle Ages* (Huizinga 1955 [1924]). In *Shadow* he now put pragmatism in a more negative light due to its relativist conception of truth.

Let us therefore look more closely at the *Seinsverbundenheit des Denkens*, to use the German expression which caused the translator (Huizinga's son Jacob Herman) so much difficulty (in the Dutch original it was simply left untranslated). This expression had been coined by Karl Mannheim to serve as the guiding principle for the sociology of knowledge, the new discipline that he and Max Scheler had officially launched in the 1920s. In Mannheim's later English works the expression *Seinsverbundenheit* is usually rendered as "existential determination" or "situational determination," with the explicit proviso that the word *determination* should not be taken as aiming at a mechanical cause-effect sequence (cf. Mannheim 1936, 239). A more appropriate alternative, then, would have been *existential conditioning* or *situational conditioning*. More recently, the notably literal translation "existential connectedness" has also been suggested (Meja & Stehr 2016 [1990]). When Mannheim talked of being (*Sein*) or existence, he did not approach these terms in the sense the existential philosophers did, but always intended to refer to social being or social existence. In this respect his usage was closer to that of Karl Marx. Indeed, the latter gave a classic (although rather one-sidedly deterministic) formulation of the principle involved: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx 1859). It is therefore true that the tenet of the *Seinsverbundenheit des Denkens* makes Mannheim and Scheler, as Huizinga said, "next-door neighbours to historical materialism" (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 64). Arguably, this also applies to Spengler's theory of the life cycle of cultures, insofar as each culture was supposed to have its own standards of valid knowledge. But Spengler ticked other boxes as well because he was also a prominent exponent of the philosophy of life (Boterman 1992; Hughes 1952). One could have some reservation, however, about lumping Max Weber together with the other three so-called sociological thinkers, in view of his emphasis on the value-neutrality of scientific inquiry.

From the way Huizinga used the notion of "existence-conditioned thought" (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 68), it transpires that he considered the idea of the "existential conditioning of thought" as virtually coterminous with the "subjugation of the will to knowledge to the vital impulse" and the "disavowal of the intellectual principle" (63-66), so that the three expressions could be employed interchangeably. *Existence-conditioned thought* was in his view a form of thought that let itself be guided by fanciful allegories and wishful thinking, while suppressing the critical intellect. Hence, according to Huizinga, the ascendancy of the concept of myth, which was even taken as a guide-rule for life, and the priority accorded to *mythos* over *logos*. More specifically Huizinga noted, "The order of precedence of blood and spirit has been completely reversed by the apostles of the life philosophy" (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 69): in the new racial mythology the

*spirit* functioned only in the service of the *blood*. Here the life philosophy was treated as closely related if not identical to the Nazi ideology of *blood and soil*.

For Huizinga, the French thinker Georges Sorel represented a person in whom all (or at least a great many) anti-intellectual tendencies of the age had come together with rather ominous consequences. After enumerating the various currents making up the “mighty stream,” Huizinga concluded a long paragraph with the following punchline: “It was Georges Sorel who, in his *Réflexions sur la Violence* [‘Reflections on violence’], formulated the practical political consequences of all this, thereby becoming the spiritual father of all modern dictatorships” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 64).

It may be illuminating to elaborate on this example a little further. Sorel is indeed often seen as an intellectual forerunner of fascism and, less often, of communism (Wiardi Beckman 1931, 172-173;<sup>2</sup> Mannheim 1936, 120-121; Hughes 1961, 161-182). At one time he admired both Mussolini and Lenin. From his biography we also know that Sorel was inspired by Bergson’s philosophy of life and William James’ pragmatism, after an earlier infatuation with Marxism. He was also considered, by the American sociologist Robert Merton, to be an early French contributor to the sociology of knowledge (Merton 1968, 544). When Huizinga said that Sorel drew the practical political consequences from “all this,” we therefore have at least four components in his thought that supposedly contributed to the “mighty stream” threatening our intellectual culture. Sorel’s doctrine of the indispensability of myths in social and political life and his justification of violence can be added as constituting further disturbing elements. For Huizinga, Sorel surely embodied the “systematic philosophical and practical anti-intellectualism [...] we are witnessing” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 65). He personified the link between the general cultural crisis and the rise of totalitarianism. The examples of Heidegger and Spengler could also have been chosen to show a personal link between an anti-intellectual creed and totalitarianism.

Of course, such linear genealogies are always contestable. Many would be willing to draw a direct line from Nietzsche’s doctrine of the will-to-power to the Nazis, but the example of anti-fascist Nietzscheans like Thomas Mann, André Gide, and Menno ter Braak militates against such a simple construal. The view that Sorel was an intellectual forerunner of fascism has also been disputed (De Kadt 1948 [1938]; Van Stokkom 1992). This by no means implies that one should not exercise proper vigilance towards the potentially dangerous political consequences

---

<sup>2</sup> Huizinga was Wiardi Beckman’s academic supervisor in 1931 when the latter defended his historical dissertation on French syndicalism, which contains an extensive discussion and highly critical appraisal of Sorel’s views.



contained in certain forms of thought. Huizinga held his great-nephew to account for the Nietzschean views he endorsed, even challenging him with the provocative question "What has prevented you to become an ardent Nazi?" (Huizinga 2010 [1935]). After the defeat of Nazi Germany, Thomas Mann also reassessed the Nietzschean legacy. One of Nietzsche's biggest and most fateful mistakes, Mann now conceded, was that he saw morality and the intellect exercising undue power over the vital instincts, "as if it were necessary to defend life against spirit!" (Mann 1948). At this point Mann's reappraisal fully agrees with Huizinga's view on Nietzsche and his followers.

Huizinga's judgment of the political tenor of the philosophy of life was nonetheless also rather one-sided, based on a selective choice of examples. Whenever he talked about "the apostles of the life-philosophy" (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 69, 82), he had in mind proto-fascist thinkers of the so-called Conservative Revolution who were intellectually close to the Nazis. For him, it was only a small step from life to *blood and soil*. The *Lebensphilosophie* of Weimar Germany is often tarred with the brush of being a precursor of Nazism, but among adherents there were also left-leaning life-philosophers like Theodor Lessing.<sup>3</sup> The situation in the Netherlands was perhaps even more variegated, especially during the 1920s. Here, the philosophy of life was, alongside neo-Hegelianism, a central plank of a broad so-called humanitarian movement outside academia, encompassing a motley of diverse groups like religious socialists and religious anarchists, adherents of theosophy, conscientious objectors, practical idealists and other do-gooders, Dostoevsky admirers, wisdom seekers, neo-romantic mavericks and youth clubs for outdoor recreation and the study of nature (Brolsma 2015). Many religious socialists who were part of this humanitarian movement aligned themselves politically with the *Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij* ('Social-Democratic Workers Party'), and some of them (Willem Banning, Herman Bernard Wiardi Beckman) were to play a large role in freeing this party from the shackles of Marxism during the 1930s. The political colour of the philosophy of life was much more variegated and ambiguous than Huizinga's cultural criticism allowed. His view is surprisingly similar to the account that was to be given almost twenty years later by the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, who in retrospect saw the philosophy of life paving the road to Hitler (Lukács 1981 [1954]). The difference,

---

<sup>3</sup> Skidelsky warns against "the fallacy of interpreting Weimar intellectual life under the rubric 'bad Right' versus 'good Left'" (Skidelsky 2008, 176). Even a notorious antisemite like Ludwig Klages was not just a "second-rate protofascist" (Skidelsky 2008, 176), as he was made out by Georg Lukács. His criticism of technology has been influential among Marxist thinkers like Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin.

of course, is that Huizinga considered Marxism as part of the problem, not the solution.

### **A closer look at the sociology of knowledge**

Given Huizinga’s use of the *Seinsverbundenheit des Denkens* (‘existential conditioning of thought’) as an alternative formula for the “disavowal of the intellectual principle” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 63), it appears that the plausibility and tenability of his diagnosis of the cultural crisis would demand a more thorough-going engagement with the sociology of knowledge.

Huizinga had criticized existence-conditioned thought for its tendency to indulge in fantasies and wish-dreams unchecked by critical reasoning. There may indeed be many examples of this tendency among those to whom he referred as “the apostles of the life-philosophy” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 69 and 82), but it is not a fair criticism of Mannheim, who had formulated the *Seinsverbundenheit des Denkens* as the guiding principle for the new sociology of knowledge. This tenet was not meant as a licence for uncritically surrendering oneself to fanciful dreams and wishful thinking. In formulating his principle, Mannheim pointed at the general circumstance that the views held by persons and groups, especially those on social and political matters, are often closely related to their positions in society and to their sociopolitical aims and aspirations. This connection is by now widely recognized and is in its generality hardly open to dispute.

On reflection, Huizinga would probably have accepted the general correlation between social positions and theoretical views but might still have been concerned about the implications to be drawn from this recognition.<sup>4</sup> This is at least suggested by the final paragraph of Chapter X in the Dutch original of *Shadow*, which has been omitted in the English version. In translation, this passage runs as follows:

For the time being it remains an open question to what extent the inevitable recognition of the ‘*Seinsverbundenheit, Situationsverbundenheit*’ [‘existential conditioning, situational conditioning’] of thought has brought a greater clarity for cultural consciousness, and to what extent, if conceived

---

<sup>4</sup> In *Homo ludens* (1938), Huizinga subscribed to the Durkheimian thesis about the close connection between the dualistic social structure of Indigenous tribes and their worldviews: “Anthropology has shown with increasing clarity how social life in the archaic period normally rests on the antagonistic and antithetical structure of the community itself, and how the whole mental world of such a community corresponds to this profound dualism” (Huizinga 1949 [1938], 53).

too exclusively, it might usher in the downfall of culture.<sup>5</sup> (Huizinga 1950 [1935], 360)

Here Huizinga seems to admit that the existential conditioning of thought cannot be denied but must be recognized as inevitable. On the other hand, he also feared that this insight might be "conceived too exclusively," in which case it might even lead to the downfall of civilization. The meaning of this phrase and therefore of the entire paragraph is however far from clear, which may be the reason why the paragraph has been omitted in the English version of the book.

Mannheim's sociology of knowledge was not simply a programme of empirical inquiry into the possible connections between social backgrounds and theoretical views; rather he set out a broader philosophical and political agenda in which this inquiry was to be integrated. It is possible to accept the empirical part and to reject the broader agenda.

Mannheim saw his own sociology of knowledge as a generalization and radicalization of the so-called criticism of ideology, which from its Marxist beginnings had developed into a universally used weapon with which various political parties in Weimar Germany attacked each other's positions, thereby engaging in "reciprocal unmasking" (Mannheim 1936, 37). For an apolitical person like Huizinga, such an aggressive practice of unmasking or "the tearing off of disguises" (Mannheim 1936, 35) must have felt offensive to good taste.<sup>6</sup> It would have reminded him of the "unquenchable unmasking rage" (*onstilbare demaskeerwoede*) with which Ter Braak went about to relentlessly puncture all sacrosanct illusions of high culture (Van Duinkerken 1967, 192) and on which Huizinga had criticized his great-nephew in their personal correspondence. Mannheim agreed that "radical unmasking" had dire consequences; it led to "the collapse of confidence in thought in general," so that "more and more people took flight into scepticism or irrationalism" (Mannheim 1936, 37). Nonetheless, he held that his sociology of knowledge offered a way out of the impasse: "For this relativism and scepticism compel self-criticism and self-control and lead to a new conception of objectivity" (Mannheim 1936, 42).

To many, however, the attempt looked more like a desperate Munchhausen operation. Digging ever deeper into the social soil from which our

---

<sup>5</sup> "Het blijft voorloopig een open vraag, in hoeverre de onvermijdelijke erkenning der 'Seinsverbundenheit, Situationsverbundenheit' van het denken een verheldering van het cultuurbewustzijn is geweest, en in hoeverre zij, al te exclusief opgevat, den ondergang van een cultuur zou kunnen inleiden."

<sup>6</sup> In his book on Erasmus, Huizinga wrote: "He who pulls off the masks in the comedy of life is ejected" (Huizinga 1957 [1924], 71).

intellectual convictions are thought to spring does not enable us to extricate ourselves from the existential determination of thought. Mannheim’s idea of a “socially unattached intelligentsia” (*freischwebende Intelligenz*) supposedly exempt from ideological distortion (Mannheim 1936, 137), was widely ridiculed as a glaring inconsistency of his sociological approach.

One may fully accept the existential conditioning of thought as a general fact of life and still be concerned about the implications to be drawn from this recognition. If attention is shifted completely from the substantive views at issue in a dispute to the social backgrounds of the disputants, this can indeed lead to a disavowal of the intellectual principle. The danger of this shift is, as Karl Popper once put it, that serious arguments are no longer taken seriously (Popper 1974 [1945], 251-252). Take the intriguing example of a possible bias in theories about sexual selection within evolutionary biology. It has been suggested that these theories reflect gender stereotypes that were current in certain social circles, the purported bias being that the females in the animal kingdom are invariably depicted as unduly passive in mating and sex, in line with Victorian ideals of (human) femininity (Cooke 2022). This is an interesting correlation that might be a useful reminder about the possible influence of social prejudice. However, the way to resolve the substantive issue is not by examining the social backgrounds of the evolutionary biologists ever more closely, but by further testing the theories in question and collecting more evidence about the mating behaviour of female (and male) animals.

Mannheim was also reluctant to accept the traditional epistemological distinction between the social genesis and the validity of judgments (Mannheim 1936, 22 and 258), but maintaining this distinction is essential if we want to prevent that the recognition of the existential conditioning of human thought has the anti-intellectual effect so much feared by Huizinga. When this distinction is blurred, it is indeed all too easy to focus one’s attention not on the empirical evidence that militates for or against a particular theoretical view, but exclusively on the motives or interests by which those who bring forward this view are supposedly led. It is then only a small next step to dismiss, for example, Einstein’s theory of relativity as *Jewish pseudo-science* and to put a *German physics* in its place (Richter 1980), or to unmask Mendelian genetics as *bourgeois science* and demand a *Soviet agrobiology* instead (Huxley 1949).<sup>7</sup> We see this tendency also in our own age, for example, when the scenario of global warming in climate science is depicted as a ploy devised by “red dressed in green” socialists, intent on

---

<sup>7</sup> Huizinga referred to such “strange concoctions like Marxian or Nordic mathematics which some in all seriousness would have us accept” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 38-39), but he apparently treated them as no more than exceptional curiosities.

destroying the American way of life (Oreskes & Conway 2010, 254), or when the controversies around the Covid-19 pandemic assume the character of a political culture war (Horton 2022). All this can lead to an atmosphere of paralyzing relativism and scepticism, in which every scientific hypothesis or theory is an immediate candidate for *unmasking* and *debunking*.

### Then and now

Huizinga’s criticism of the “disavowal of the intellectual principle” is still relevant today (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 63), although the tendency he took issue with has taken new forms. The urge to unveil and debunk, nurtured by systematic suspicion and distrust, previously realized itself in various forms of ideological criticism but currently finds a new outlet in formulating and spreading all kinds of conspiracy theories (Coper 2022). The fact that such theories are eagerly embraced by large segments of the public, seems also to testify to the weakening of judgment and the decline of the critical spirit highlighted by Huizinga. In the filter bubbles and echo chambers of social media platforms only the voices of like-minded people are being heard; the dissident messages of others are carefully shut out. Emotions carry more weight than scientifically established facts in shaping the outcomes of public debates. It will not be difficult for present-day readers to illustrate Huizinga’s pessimistic argument with numerous topical examples.

The place once taken by the philosophy of life and existential philosophy in the western cultural landscape is currently filled by postmodernism and its many varieties (Wight 2018). Some tenets of the philosophy of life find remarkable resonance among the more radical forms of contemporary environmentalism.<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud – the “masters of suspicion” as Paul Ricoeur called them (Ricoeur 1970, 32) – have many disciples among the genealogists and deconstructionists who tirelessly keep on unmasking the idols of humanism and reason (Ferry 2019). We can also point to the similarity between the old sociology of knowledge and social constructionism in contemporary science studies. One prominent practitioner in the latter field, Bruno Latour, felt terrified when he

---

<sup>8</sup> Just one example: the *Dark Mountain Manifesto* exhibits a hostility to culture that is reminiscent of the most radical philosophers of life. The latter already condemned modern civilization for its devastating impacts on Indigenous peoples and the natural environment. Thus, in his book *Mensch und Erde* (‘Man and earth’) (1929), Ludwig Klages wrote: “Under the pretext of ‘profit’, ‘economic development’, ‘culture’, [progress] is intent on the *destruction of life*. It attacks it in all its forms, cuts down forests, extinguishes species, wipes out indigenous peoples, smothers and disfigures the landscape with the varnish of commerce and degrades those living creatures which it spares, like ‘livestock’, into mere merchandise, into the marked objects of an unlimited greed” (quoted in Skidelsky 2008, 175). Some radical environmentalists also recognize an intellectual kinship with Heidegger’s philosophy.

realized that with his critical analyses of scientific practice he had given extremists like climate sceptics a formidable weapon to undermine even the most *bona fide* science (such as climate science): “Dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives. Was I wrong to participate in the invention of this field known as science studies?” (Latour 2004, 227). Other practitioners of science studies also concede that the field may be held partly responsible for the recent rise of post-truth politics (Collins, Evans & Meinel 2017).

The current weaponization of disinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories raises a question that had already been raised by Huizinga’s critics: To what extent is the widespread adoption of unscientific or otherwise incredible views to be treated as a cultural issue rather than as a political issue regarding the exercise of power? Jacques de Kadt had retorted to Huizinga that German racism was more a matter of political power than a cultural issue because many of the Nazi leaders themselves (with the exception of some at the very top) did not genuinely believe the official racial theories but cynically exploited them for political purposes (De Kadt 1991 [1936], 100-101). Similarly, Menno ter Braak argued that the Nazi racial doctrine was only the phraseological façade for the *ressentiment* projected on the eternal scapegoat, *the Jew*: “the hatred comes first, the hatred of Jews comes second, and the ‘scientific’ argumentation comes third” (Ter Braak 2019 [1937], 40-41). Philosopher Quassim Cassam makes a similar point about modern-day conspiracy theories: “They are political gambits whose real function is to promote a political agenda. They aren’t ‘just theories’ like any other” (Cassam 2019, 7). If the issue is indeed one of political power, it will not make much sense to understand the wide acceptance of the racial doctrine as a sign of the decline of the critical faculty or even, as Huizinga also did, to attempt a scientific refutation. In our post-truth era we have also found out that merely providing the correct information is not always the best answer to counter the effects of fake news and disinformation (Coper 2022).

Nonetheless, the whole problem deserves far more reflection, if only because the purveyors of *alternative truths* often also hanker after scientific respectability. Huizinga’s refutation of the racial doctrine is still valuable for its simplicity. He pointed out the fallacy that race theorists assume the exclusively biological determination of alleged spiritual race qualities while there is no way to disentangle the effects of race and culture. Nor was he blind to the fact that racial theories were developed and used for political purposes, as can be seen from this ironic commentary:

The argument of race in cultural conflicts is always self-praise. Has a race-theorist ever made the startling and shaming discovery that the race to which he deemed himself to belong is inferior? The motive is always

exaltation of self and kin over others and at the expense of others. The racial thesis is always hostile, always anti, a bad sign for a doctrine which claims to be scientific. The racially inspired attitude is anti-Asiatic, anti-African, anti-proletarian, anti-Semitic. (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 54)

This is after all not so different from the view of his great-nephew Ter Braak, who saw the racial theory of the Nazis as a doctrine of rancour, born from pure *ressentiment*.

At critical moments it is important to deny the peddlers of unscientific theories the academic respectability they so much desire. For Huizinga, such a critical moment arrived in April 1933, when he was rector of the University of Leiden (the entire episode is described in Otterspeer 1997). At that time a week-long international student conference was being held at Leiden, of which Huizinga in his capacity as rector was the honorary chair. The conference had been organized by the International Student Service (ISS), bringing together student delegations from France, Great Britain, and Germany next to Dutch students. The purpose was to promote mutual understanding through a free exchange of views among the participating students – which a few months after Hitler's accession to power reflected a rather naïve idealism. At the last moment, the composition of the German student delegation changed to the extent that it no longer consisted of students but only of non-students and former students. It was led by Johann von Leers, a convinced Nazi who in the following years was to become a leading official charged with antisemitic propaganda in Germany (Wegner 2007). During the conference, Huizinga was informed that this person was the author of an antisemitic pamphlet entitled *Forderung der Stunde: Juden 'raus!* ('The call of the hour: Out with the Jews!'), which contained a passage in which Christian parents were warned about Jews intent on committing ritual murder of Christian children. After Von Leers confirmed that he was indeed the author of this pamphlet (it also transpired later that he did not believe the ritual murder myth himself but had no scruples about using it for political propaganda), Huizinga expressed his revulsion and contempt and asked him to no longer avail himself of the hospitality of the university. The conference was terminated early, one day before the scheduled ending. The affair led to a diplomatic row between the Netherlands and Germany and ruffled the feathers of the board of Leiden University, but Huizinga defended his decision by pointing out that "a university [...] has to maintain different standards in questions of honour and dignity than a government" (Otterspeer 1997, 400). Although often castigated by his critics for being unabashedly apolitical, Huizinga did not fail to take decisive action at a critical moment when the respectability of the university was at stake. He refused to grant politically motivated pseudoscience the academic status it demanded.

### The limits of reason and the limits of deconstruction

Huizinga’s criticism of the disavowal of the intellectual principle as the defining tenet of his age did not stem from an overweening rationalism. He was fully aware of the limitations of our intellectual faculties but held that the all-out attack on reason undertaken by so many different schools of thought was disingenuous and even self-contradictory. After all, it always amounted to a futile attempt of *reasoning* reason away, of using the instruments of reason against itself: “To take the anti-noetic [=anti-intellectual] principle seriously and consistently [would be] to deny oneself the power of speech” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 72).

We have also seen that Huizinga had a strong aversion against the relentless urge to unveil and debunk, a seemingly characteristic feature of the modern age. In 1938, he briefly toyed with the idea that modern thought should submit to voluntary self-restraint by refraining from *boring and prying* into layers of consciousness that to him appeared beyond the competence of human reason. Could the 20th century, he asked almost half in despair, perhaps retreat behind “the line Kierkegaard-Dostoevsky-Nietzsche” and start from there all over again (Huizinga 1950 [1938], 455-456)? Although his answer was negative, there is no doubt that this imagined return to naivety and lost innocence would have been an attractive option to him. His reluctance to bore and pry into the deepest layers of consciousness probably had to do with his sense of Christian piety. For Huizinga, faith in human reason was ultimately founded on “a living metaphysical [read: religious] belief” (Huizinga 2019 [1936], 71).

In the 21st century, the French philosopher Luc Ferry also wonders whether we must still follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche and the modern-day *masters of suspicion* like Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze by continuing the seemingly interminable deconstructive work of unmasking the idols of humanism and reason. He holds that the “tireless pursuit of Nietzschean deconstruction” leads in the end only to an uncritical accommodation of the existing economic reality of global capitalism (Ferry 2019, 203-207).

Huizinga probably would have agreed. In *Homo ludens* he criticized the *shameful misconception* that economic forces and material interests determine the course of the world:

This grotesque over-estimation of the economic factor was conditioned by our worship of technological progress, which was itself the fruit of rationalism and utilitarianism after they had killed the mysteries and acquitted man of guilt and sin. But they had forgotten to free him of folly and myopia, and he seemed only fit to mould the world after the pattern of his own banality. (Huizinga 1949 [1938], 192)



The *shameful misconception* may thus become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once all our idols and mysteries have been killed, it would seem indeed that the world lies finally open to the blind and unrestrained technological dynamics of global capitalism.

### Acknowledgements

The initial impetus for writing this article was given by Ton van Helvoort, who first suggested that Huizinga’s cultural criticism might be relevant for understanding present-day science scepticism. I also want to thank Ernst Homburg, Cees Willemsen, Lubica Učník, Leon Pijnenburg, Cor van der Weele, and two anonymous reviewers for critical comments on an earlier version.

### References

- Aerts, Remieg. 1996. Prometheus en Pandora: Een inleiding tot cultuurkritiek en cultuurpessimisme. In *De pijn van Prometheus: essays over cultuurkritiek en cultuurpessimisme*, edited by Remieg Aerts & Klaas van Berkel, 10-66. Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij.
- Berling, Reinier F. 1935. *Antithesen: vier studies*. Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Boterman, Frits. 1992. *Oswald Spengler en Der Untergang des Abendlandes: cultuurpessimist en politiek activist*. Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum.
- ter Braak, Menno. 1934. *Politicus zonder partij*. Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar.
- ter Braak, Menno. 2019 [1937]. *Het nationaalsocialisme als rancuneleer*. Amsterdam: Van Oorschot.
- Brolsma, Marjet. 2015. ‘Het humanitaire moment’. *Nederlandse intellectuelen, de Eerste Wereldoorlog en de crisis van de Europese beschaving (1914-1930)*. PhD diss., University of Amsterdam.
- Cassam, Quassim. 2019. *Conspiracy theories*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Collins, Harry, Robert Evans & Martin Weinel. 2017. STS as science or politics? *Social studies of science* 47.4: 580-586.
- Cooke, Lucy. 2022. *Bitch: A revolutionary guide to sex, evolution & the female animal*. London: Doubleday.
- Coper, Ed. 2022. *Facts and other lies: Welcome to the disinformation age*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- van Duinkerken, Anton. 1967. *Gorter, Marsman, Ter Braak*. Utrecht: Het Spectrum.
- Ertel, Christian. 1938. Von der Phänomenologie und jüngeren Lebensphilosophie zur Existentialphilosophie M. Heideggers. *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* 51.1:1-28.
- Ferry, Luc. 2019. *A brief history of thought: A philosophical guide to living*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
- Geyl, Pieter. 1963. Huizinga as accuser of his age. *History and theory* 2.3: 231-262.
- Gombrich, Ernst H. 1973. Huizinga’s Homo ludens. *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 88.2: 275-296.
- Henrard, Roger. 1963. *Menno ter Braak in het licht van Friedrich Nietzsche*. Hasselt: Heideland.

- Hermans, Willem F. 1968. Kan de tijd tekens geven? *Raster* 2: 121-142. [https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/\\_ras001196801\\_01/\\_ras001196801\\_01\\_0013.php](https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_ras001196801_01/_ras001196801_01_0013.php). Accessed May 16, 2022.
- Horton, Richard. 2022. Offline: COVID-19 as culture war. *The Lancet* 339: 346.
- Hughes, Henry S. 1952. *Oswald Spengler: A critical estimate*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Hughes, Henry S. 1961. *Consciousness and society: The reconstruction of European social thought 1890-1930*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1935. Voorwoord to *Antithesen: Vier studies* by Reinier F. Beerling, unpagged. Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1949 [1933]. Natuurbeeld en historiebeeld in de achttiende eeuw. In *Verzamelde werken* Volume 4, by Johan Huizinga, 341-359. Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1949 [1938]. *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Translated by Richard F.C. Hull. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1950 [1935]. In de schaduwen van morgen: Een diagnose van het geestelijk lijden van onzen tijd. In *Verzamelde werken* Volume 7, by Johan Huizinga, 313-428. Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1950 [1938]. Der Mensch und die Kultur. In *Verzamelde werken* Volume 7, by Johan Huizinga, 442-459. Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1950 [1940]. Conditions for a recovery of civilization. In *Verzamelde werken* Volume 7, by Johan Huizinga, 467-476. Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1955 [1924]. *The waning of the Middle Ages*. Translated by Frits Hopman. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1957 [1924]. *Erasmus and the age of Reformation*. Translated by Frits Hopman. New York: Harper Torch Books.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1968 [1905]. The aesthetic element in historical thought. In *Dutch civilisation in the 17th century and other essays*, by Johan Huizinga. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans, 219-243. London: Collins.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1968 [1947]. My path to history. In *Dutch civilisation in the 17th century and other essays*, by Johan Huizinga. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans, 244-276. London: Collins.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1972 [1926]. *America: A Dutch historian's vision, from afar and near*. Translated by Herbert H. Rowen. New York: Harper & Row.
- Huizinga, Johan. 2010 [1935]. Letter to Menno ter Braak, August 1, 1935. In *Briefwisseling tussen Menno ter Braak en J. Huizinga 1928-1939*, edited by Stichting Menno ter Braak. <https://www.dbnl.org/titels/titel.php?id=braa002brie25>. Accessed May 16, 2022.
- Huizinga, Johan. 2019 [1936]. *In the shadow of tomorrow: A diagnosis of the modern distemper*. Translated by Jacob Herman Huizinga. Providence, RI: Cluny Media.
- Huizinga, Leonard. 1963. *Herinneringen aan mijn vader*. Den Haag: J.H. Leopold.
- Huxley, Julian. 1949. *Soviet genetics and world science*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- de Kadt, Jacques. 1948 [1938]. Georges Sorel: Het einde van een mythe. In *Verkeerde voorkeur*, by Jacques de Kadt, 119-325. Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot.
- de Kadt, Jacques. 1991 [1936]. De deftigheid in het gedrang. In *De deftigheid in het gedrang: een keuze uit zijn verspreide geschriften*, by Jacques de Kadt. Edited by Maarten C. Brands, Ronald Havenaar & Bart Tromp, 83-106, Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot.
- Kastein, Gerrit W. 1938. De sociologie van het denken. *Mensch en maatschappij* 14.2: 81-95.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. Why has critique run out of steam? *Critical inquiry* 30.2: 225-248.
- Lukács, Georg. 1981 [1954]. *The destruction of reason*. Translated by Peter Palmer. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

- Mann, Thomas. 1948. Nietzsche in the light of modern experience. *Commentary*, January-February 1948. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/thomas-mann/nietzsche-in-the-light-of-modern-experience-part2/>. Accessed May 16, 2022.
- Mannheim, Karl. 1936. *Ideology and utopia: An introduction to the sociology of knowledge*. Translated by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Marsman, Hendrik. 1941. *Verzamelde gedichten*. Amsterdam: Querido.
- Marsman, Hendrik. 1979 [1926]. De verhouding tussen leven en kunst. In *Verzameld werk: Critisch proza*, by Hendrik Marsman, 595-598, Amsterdam: Querido.
- Marx, Karl. 1859. Preface to a contribution to the critique of political economy. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>. Accessed May 16, 2022.
- Meja, Volker & Nico Stehr, eds. 2016 [1990]. *Knowledge and politics: The sociology of knowledge dispute*. London: Routledge.
- Merton, Robert K. 1968. Karl Mannheim and the sociology of knowledge. In *Social theory and social structure*, by Robert K. Merton, 543-562, New York: The Free Press.
- Oreskes, Naomi & Erik M. Conway. 2010. *Merchants of doubt*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.
- Otterspeer, Willem. 1997. Huizinga before the abyss: The Von Leers incident at the University of Leiden, April 1933. *Journal of medieval and early modern studies* 27.3: 385-444.
- Popper, Karl R. 1974 [1945]. *The open society and its enemies*, volume 2: Hegel & Marx. London: Routledge.
- du Pree, Carla. 2016. *Johan Huizinga en de bezeten wereld: De rol van de publieke intellectueel tussen twee wereldoorlogen*. Leusden: ISVW.
- Richter, Steffen. 1980. Die “Deutsche Physik.” In *Naturwissenschaft, Technik und NS-Ideologie: Beiträge zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte des Dritten Reiches*, edited by Herbert Mehrrens & Steffen Richter, 116-141, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1970. *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. Translated by Denis Savage. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Romein, Jan. 1950. Huizinga als historicus. In *Tussen vrees en vrijheid*, by Jan Romein, 212-241. Amsterdam: Querido.
- Sassen, Ferdinand. 1938. *Wijsbegeerte van onzen tijd*. Antwerpen: Standaardboekhandel; Nijmegen-Utrecht: Dekker & van de Vegt.
- Skidelsky, Edward. 2008. *Ernst Cassirer: The last philosopher of culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- van Stokkom, Bas. 1990. *Georges Sorel: De ontzuivering van de Verlichting*. Zeist: Kerckebosch.
- Wegner, Gregory P. 2007. A propagandist of extermination: Johann von Leers and the anti-semitic formation of children in Nazi Germany. *Paedagogica historica* 43.3: 299-325.
- Wesseling, Henk. 2011. *A cape of Asia: Essays on European history*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.
- Wiardi Beckman, Herman Bernard. 1931. *Het syndicalisme in Frankrijk*. Amsterdam: Querido.
- Wight, Colin. 2018. Post-truth, postmodernism and alternative facts. *New perspectives* 26.3: 17-29.

### About the author

Henk van den Belt was for many years assistant professor of philosophy at Wageningen University (Netherlands). After his retirement in May 2019, he migrated to Western Australia, where he was granted an Honorary Research

Fellowship in the School of Humanities at the University of Western Australia in Perth. He has a broad interest in the history, philosophy and sociology of science and technology.

Author's contact: henkvdbelt53@gmail.com

### **Un « puissant courant » d'anti-intellectualisme.**

#### **Johan Huizinga, son époque, et la nôtre**

L'incursion de Johan Huizinga dans la critique culturelle, *In the shadow of tomorrow* (1935/1936), a bénéficié d'un accueil plutôt unilatéral. Elle a été largement interprétée comme une série de plaintes conservatrices sur la technologie moderne et la sur-organisation, sur la détérioration des normes morales et la décadence du style et du bon goût, ainsi que sur l'engloutissement croissant de la vie civile par les exigences de la politique de masse. Les critiques ont également été déçus par l'appel de Huizinga à la catharsis spirituelle et à l'ascèse comme remède à cette prétendue crise de la civilisation occidentale. Si tous ces éléments sont bien présents dans le récit de Huizinga, ils ne touchent pas au fonds de son diagnostic de la crise culturelle. Il désigne lui-même le « désaveu du principe intellectuel » comme le point focal de son diagnostic. Non seulement telle ou telle école de pensée avait rejeté son adhésion à la raison, mais de nombreuses tendances divergentes s'étaient fondues en un « puissant courant » d'anti-intellectualisme. C'était, selon Huizinga, la caractéristique déterminante de l'époque, et elle était à l'origine de la crise culturelle. Elle offre des parallèles et des contrastes intéressants avec notre propre ère « post-vérité » de désinformation, de fausses nouvelles et de théories du complot. Cet article vise à une reconstruction détaillée et à une contextualisation de l'essentiel du diagnostic de Huizinga sur la crise de la civilisation occidentale. Il établit également quelques parallèles provisoires avec l'époque actuelle.

### **Een "machtige stroom" van anti-intellectualisme: Over Johan Huizinga, zijn tijd en onze tijd**

Johan Huizinga's proeve van cultuurkritiek, *In de schaduwen van morgen* (1935), heeft een nogal eenzijdige receptie genoten. Zij is vooral geïnterpreteerd als een serie klachten van een ouderwetse conservatief over moderne techniek en overorganisatie, de verlaging van morele standaarden, stijl- en decorumverlies en de toenemende overheersing van het maatschappelijk leven door de eisen van een op de grote massa gerichte politiek. De critici waren ook niet onder de indruk van Huizinga's roep om een geestelijke katharsis en ascese als oplossing van de vermeende

crisis van de westerse beschaving. Hoewel al deze elementen inderdaad in Huizinga's uiteenzetting aan te treffen zijn, raken zij toch niet de kern van zijn diagnose van de cultuurcrisis. Zelf bestempelde hij de “verzaking van het kennisideaal” als het brandpunt van zijn diagnose. Het was niet enkel dat deze of gene denkrichting zijn trouw aan de rede had opgezegd, maar dat verschillende tendensen waren samengevloeid in één “machtige stroom” van anti-intellectualisme. Voor Huizinga was dit het centrale kenmerk van zijn tijd dat aan de basis van de cultuurcrisis lag. Zijn tijdsdiagnose toont interessante overeenkomsten en verschillen met onze eigen vermeende *post-truth* tijd van desinformatie, *fake news* en complottheorieën. Dit artikel beoogt een gedetailleerde reconstructie en contextualisering van de kern van Huizinga's diagnose van de crisis der westerse beschaving en probeert mogelijke parallellen met de huidige tijd te schetsen.



# Representations of a Nation? Comparing the Dutch 1956 National Monument and the 2021 National Holocaust Monument of Names

*Leah Niederhausen*

The Dutch National Holocaust Monument of Names was inaugurated in Amsterdam in September 2021. Reciting, for the first time, all 102,162 known names of Jewish, Sinti and Roma Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, the monument is the latest Dutch national World War II monument. The earliest one is the National Monument at Amsterdam's Dam Square, completed in 1956. Following James E. Young's claim that national monuments express national memories, this paper investigates both monuments' relationship with the Dutch national memory of World War II, comparing the monuments' expressions with other acts and artefacts of commemoration in the 1950s and today: Remembrance Days, rituals, other monuments, and texts. I argue that the National Monument aligns more with other acts and artefacts of commemoration in the 1950s than the National Holocaust Monument of Names does today, due to a rise of transnational acts of commemoration since the early 1990s. Consequently, I argue that in the global age, national World War II monuments can serve as important markers of (trans)national memory dynamics. This, in turn, asks for a shift of our contemporary understanding of the expressive potential of World War II monuments.

Key terms: Monuments; World War II; Holocaust; national memory; transnationality.

The Dutch National Holocaust Monument of Names (*'Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument'*) was inaugurated in Amsterdam on September 19, 2021.<sup>1</sup> Reciting, for the first time, all 102,162 known names of Jewish, Sinti and Roma

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers, as well as Professor Petra van Dam, Professor Bettine Siertsema, Dr. Callie Long, and Krystyna Henke for their feedback and support.

Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, the monument is the latest Dutch national World War II monument. The earliest one is the National Monument (*'Nationaal Monument'*) at Amsterdam's Dam Square, completed in 1956.

National monuments are part of what Aleida Assmann calls the national memory—a national framework that institutionalizes national memory norms and self-images of the past. After World War II, most European nations, including the Netherlands, created national memories of the war corresponding to national self-images as glorious resistance fighters or innocent victims. These memories were produced in monological national contexts, mostly isolated from memory productions in other countries. However, since the beginning of the new millennium, national memories of World War II are increasingly entering cross-border dialogues, leading to the creation of transnational memories of World War II (Assmann 2016, 197 – 200).

According to James E. Young, this increasing globalization of memory landscapes has resulted in national World War II monuments losing their ability to express national memories. This, in turn, causes them to fail as national markers of memory as they do not include all the different layers of national memory referring to them (Young 2016, 14 – 16). However, I argue that national monuments can still serve as expressions of national memory and furthermore, hold potential to express ongoing dynamics of national memories in the global age, rather than just focussing on their expression of temporal specificity. I analyze this shift of national memories expressed in national World War II monuments by comparing the Dutch 1956 National Monument with the 2021 National Holocaust Monument of Names. Describing and analyzing both monuments with regard to their expression of the Dutch national memory, I compare these expressions to other acts and artefacts of commemoration in the 1950s and today: Remembrance Days, rituals, other monuments, and texts. Thereby, I do not only explain the differences of both monuments but reflect on the changing potential of national monuments to express national memories.

### **The transformation of national Holocaust memories in Europe and their representation in national monuments**

The concept of national memories goes back to the notion of collective memories, coined by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s (Halbwachs 1985, 2). According to Halbwachs, memories are not only individual. Instead, individual memories in a community also influence each other and therefore “all individual memories are socially framed” (Bottici 2010, 340). Halbwachs states that collectives shape memories of individuals, thereby creating a collective memory that individuals share within their own memories (Halbwachs 1985, 2). Assmann develops this



concept of collective memory further by distinguishing between communicative, cultural, and political memory. Communicative memory is constituted by matters of socialization and communication within social groups. Cultural memory is materialized or expressed in symbols such as Remembrance Days, monuments, traditions, or texts. Political memory combines aspects of communicative and cultural memory in a top-down framework that institutionalizes memory norms. On a national level, this political memory can be referred to as the national memory, which is the paradigm I am focussing on for this research (Assmann 2006, 210 – 237).

Together with Sebastian Conrad, Assmann argues further that “until recently, the dynamics of memory production unfolded primarily within the bounds of the nation state” (Assmann & Conrad 2010, 2). As Christopher Daase highlights, after World War II, most European national memories formed around self-images of either glory or victimhood (Daase 2010, 19). However, scholars such as Assmann, Natan Sznaider, Daniel Levy and Dan Diner respectively argue that the global turn at the beginning of the new millennium caused a broadening of memory productions which Assmann and Conrad summarize as:

The globalization process has placed a question mark over the nation state as the seemingly natural container of memory debates [...] synchronic interactions and entanglements are of increasing importance, as memory debates not only unfold within national communities of pride or attrition but are connected across borders. (Assmann & Conrad 2010, 6)

Within the development of transnational cross-border memories, the Holocaust plays a crucial role as marker of collective and globalized identity. In their concept of “cosmopolitan memory,” Sznaider and Levy describe the Holocaust as “the new founding moment for Europe” (Sznaider & Levy 2006, 137). Chiara Bottici states that a collective European memory can only start from a collective memory of the Holocaust while Diner argues for the Holocaust as a bond of a shared history for EU member states (Bottici 2010, 339; Diner 2007, 39). The place of the Holocaust in the core of EU memory politics is also expressed in the organization of the EU itself. Since 2005, acknowledging the Holocaust as shared European history has become conditional for becoming a member state and therefore conditional for “being European” (Assmann 102, 103; Mark 2011, xvi).

However, the creation of a “European community of memory” with the Holocaust as its central symbol for a “common painful past” poses the threat of generalization and therefore the exclusion of other Holocaust memories (van der Laarse 2013, 73; 2017, 156; Mark 2011, xvi). Especially in Eastern European states, the dominant Western narrative of the uniqueness of the Holocaust clashes with local and national memories of World War II. The end of the war did not mean

liberation, but the beginning of another dictatorship – of Stalinism. As a result, many countries in Eastern Europe see themselves “as suffering from two regimes of terror lasting from 1939 to 1989” (Van der Laarse 2013, 74). In response to these competing memories of past conflicts, Michael Rothberg regards the memory of the Holocaust as an opportunity for creating “multidirectional memories” of past conflicts that refer to rather than exclude each other (Rothberg 2009, 14).

Nevertheless, an increase of transnational acts of commemoration and therefore a broadening of national memories due to globalization is evident. Assmann describes this phenomenon as “dialogical remembering” (Assmann 2013, 195-200). The question is what this means for national monuments of World War II. As mentioned above, national monuments are part of what Assmann calls the cultural and national memory; they are the material expression of a nation’s self-image. As such, “these sites remember the past according to a variety of national myths, ideals, and political needs. [...] All reflect both the past experiences and current lives of their communities, as well as the state’s memory of itself” (Young 1993, 1-2). While Assmann highlights the importance of human carriers for the development of dialogical and transnational memories, she and Conrad also state that “some memories are currently anchored on a national level in museums and monuments” (Assmann & Conrad 2010, 6). Due to monuments’ materiality – this does not apply to, for example, digital monuments – they cannot physically traverse national borders as easily as individuals. As Lowe notes “[...] when the world changes, our monuments – and the values that they represent – remain frozen in time” (Lowe 2020, xvii). They remain as material focal points of mostly national debates of past and present (Carrier 2005, 7).

Responding to this contradiction of national memories developing rapidly and national material monuments remaining still, Young states that “in an age that denies universal values [...] there can be no universal symbols, the kind that monuments once represented” (Young 2016, 14). Because there are fewer shared values in a society that could be expressed in a monument, according to Young, a national monument today “succeeds only insofar as it allows itself full expression of the debates, arguments, and tensions generated in the noisy give-and-take among competing constituencies driving its very creation” (Young 2016, 16). Consequently, if national monuments do not include all these different debates, arguments, and tensions, they fail.

While I agree with Young that the globalization of the European memory landscape indeed influences national World War II monuments, I do not think this has to mean the failure of these monuments as representations of national memories. Rather, I believe that the differences that national monuments show compared to other commemorations can serve as a material expression of

ongoing processes of national memories. Hence, I argue that in the global age, national World War II monuments can serve as important markers of (trans)national memory dynamics. The development that the expressions of national monuments show more differences in relation to other national acts and artefacts of commemoration is not a reason to dismiss the monuments' importance for expressing national memories but to highlight their potential for expressing dynamic changes in these memories. This, in turn, asks for a shift in our understanding of national monuments as expressions for national memories at a specific point *in* time to understanding them as expression for developments of national memories *over* time.

These material dynamics of memory become visible when we compare the National Monument and the National Holocaust Monument of Names, especially in their relation to other acts and artefacts of commemoration. As the Dutch national memory of World War II is increasingly nuanced and multi-faceted, it becomes more and more difficult to include all these facets in one monument, which, according to Young, is desirable. In the following descriptions and comparison of both monuments, I question Young's statements by highlighting the variety of Dutch World War II commemorations today that have evolved from a more monological narrative of Dutch resistance and victimhood in the 1950s.

### **The National Monument on Dam Square**

Soon after the liberation of the Netherlands on May 5, 1945, voices emerged calling for a national monument as a permanent reminder of the suffering that the nation of the Netherlands had to endure during the German occupation. Plans were made for a national monument that in the words of then Prime Minister Willem Drees,<sup>2</sup> "represents our country's unity, the fight of our people as one" (Raaijmakers 2017, 78).<sup>3</sup> The first component of the monument – a curved stone wall built in 1946 – on Dam Square in the heart of Amsterdam, housed eleven urns, each in its niche. Soil from all Dutch provinces, taken mainly from execution sites where Dutch people were murdered during the war, fill each urn. Three years later, a twelfth urn was added with soil from Indonesia (the former Dutch East Indies) to recognize the suffering of Dutch citizens under the Japanese occupation (Lowe 2020, 82). Since 1988, this suffering in the Dutch East Indies is remembered in a monument of its own, the *Indisch Monument* ('Indies Monument') in The Hague. There is no urn with soil from a concentration camp. In 1952, a delegation of Dutch Auschwitz survivors had travelled to the former camp site and returned

---

<sup>2</sup> Officially the title is *minister president*.

<sup>3</sup> Original: "[...] *de eenheid van ons land, dat de strijd van ons volk als één geheel symboliseert.*"

with an urn filled with ashes. They were not allowed to add the urn to the monument (Van der Laarse 2017, 149). By deciding not to include ashes from concentration camps, Jewish suffering is actively excluded in the National Monument's focus on a generalized Dutch victimization and resistance.



Figure 1. The National Monument. Photographed by author.

The narrative of collective Dutch victimhood and resistance continues in the second compound of the monument, a tall stone column twenty-two meters in height, added in 1956. On May 4, 1956, Queen Juliana officially inaugurated the monument as the National Monument, as shown in Figure 1. She was joined by, amongst others, Amsterdam's mayor Arnold Jan d'Ailly and director of the National Monument Commission Marie Louis van Holthe tot Echten (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-16). The column portrays four stone sculptures by Dutch artist John Rådecker, three in one row and one on top, as seen in Figure 2. The sculptures of two men on both sides portray the intellectuals' and workers' resistance. They frame the group of the chained men in the middle symbolizing Dutch suffering in general during the war. Moreover, the crucifixion of one of the

portrayed men is a Christian reference. Christian influence also is apparent in the sculpture on top of the men, a woman with child reminiscent of Mary and Jesus and symbolizing rebirth. The wreath above her head stands for victory and the doves for hope and peace, another Christian allusion. As Lowe contends: “The Dutch resisted oppression. They were unified in their suffering. They were faithful to an ideal. And in the end their suffering paid off: they were rewarded with victory, peace and the opportunity for rebirth” (Lowe 2020, 83).



Figure 2. Detail of the National Monument. Photographed by author.

As such, The National Monument focuses on the representations of collective Dutch suffering and heroism without acknowledging victim groups of the Holocaust (Lowe 2020, 82). The design as well as the expression of the National Monument is characteristic of Western European national World War II monuments in the early post-war years. Another example is the Memorial to the Combatants of France (*Mémorial de la France combattante*) in the Parisian suburbs, located at a former execution site of thousands of people, most of them connected to French resistance. Charles de Gaulle unveiled the monument in 1960. Like the National Monument on Dam Square, the Memorial to the Combatants of France commemorates national resistance against German occupation, as well as collective French suffering. Moreover, like the National Monument, it combines a column with Christian allegories and human remains of victims. Contrary to the Dutch National Monument, the French monument also contains an urn with ashes from concentration camps (Wiedmer 1999, 34-37).

### Comparison to other acts and artefacts of commemoration in 1956

According to Assmann, parts of a collective memory, in this case a national memory, can be expressed in mainly four ways: Remembrance Days, rituals, monuments and texts (Assmann 2006, 54). To analyze the relation of national monuments and memories, the question is whether these other expressions of a national memory concerning World War II correspond to the expression of collective Dutch suffering and resistance as portrayed in the National Monument.

The two main Dutch Remembrance Days regarding World War II are *Dodenherdenking* ('commemoration of the dead') on the evening of May 4, and *Bevrijdingsdag* ('liberation day') on May 5. They are oriented toward the liberation of the Netherlands on May 5, 1945 and have been celebrated every May since 1946. *Bevrijdingsdag* was conceived as an initiative of the Dutch state to celebrate the liberation of the Nazi occupation. Today, it still is characterized by major festivities. *Dodenherdenking*, however, was initiated by former Dutch resistance fighter Jan Drop who wanted to dedicate a Remembrance Day to the commemoration of his murdered comrades. He soon received broad public support and in 1946 *Dodenherdenking* and *Bevrijdingsdag* were celebrated for the first time. Since 1948, both days are organized together and commemorate not only resistance fighters but fallen Dutch soldiers as well (Raaijmakers 2017, 34, 51). The inauguration of the National Monument was embedded in the *Dodenherdenking* in 1956 (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-16).

Apart from laying wreaths and having two minutes of silence, one of the main rituals during *Dodenherdenking* is the visiting of graves of World War II victims throughout the country. The first of these sites that continues to be commemorated annually is the Waalsdorpervlakte, the flat open area in the dunes near The Hague where between 250 and 280 Dutch resistance fighters were executed during the war. When, in 1948, the Dutch government became jointly involved with organizing *Bevrijdingsdag*, it also arranged the inclusion of graves of fallen soldiers. In 1956, this ritual did not include sites where other victim groups lost their lives, such as the Jewish population (Landstra & Spruijt, 42-61).

The National Monument was inaugurated at the end of an influx of around 1,500 World War II monuments unveiled in The Netherlands between 1945 and 1955. Their dominant expressions are suffering, consolation, sacrifice, strength, and victory (Van Vree 2002, 64). I highlight only two examples here. The *Bevrijdingsglas* ('liberation glass') at the *Sint-Janskerk* ('Saint John Church') in Gouda, eight meters tall, was created by Dutch artist Charles Eyck and unveiled in 1947. Around the image of a group of people greeting the Allies with raised Dutch flags, various wartime horrors are depicted. German soldiers are shown as snatching young men from their families, while the Dutch population is presented

as innocent victims and brave resistance fighters (Van Vree 2009, 23-25). Another monument emphasizing the resistance of the Dutch population is the *Verzetmonument* ('Resistance Monument') in Delft. Unveiled in 1950, it portrays a larger-than-life statue of a woman with a torch in her right hand made from bronze (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2022a). The plinth reads: "For those who fell in resisting the enemy in the years 1940-1945. You who fell for our freedom, we want you to be with us and that your presence will later inspire our children" (Resistance Monument 2022).<sup>4</sup>

The speeches around the inauguration of the National Monument were characterized by nationalism and the heroic role of resistance fighters. Amongst others, this was expressed in the speeches during the National Monument's inauguration by Prime Minister Willem Drees who reminded the public of the sacrifices they had to make to finally overcome the German occupation and by Marie Louis van Holthe tot Echten, who expressed that the Dutch population during the war "essentially valued their lives less than their striving for freedom. The reign of terror of the conqueror has not been able to enslave them" (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-16).<sup>5</sup>

Thereby, resistance victims were highlighted while the Jewish genocide was not recognized. There was no acknowledgment for marginalized victim groups like the Jewish, Sinti and Roma populations. The exclusion of Jewish suffering in the Dutch national memory of World War II in the early post-war years was later described by Jewish survivor Gerhard Durlacher:

The language for our experiences was missing. The worn-out words that were there, stayed behind our teeth, for hardly anyone was there to receive them and hardly anyone would listen, let alone understand. They would spoil the intoxication of liberation and expose further self-deception. (1985, 87)<sup>6</sup>

After returning from concentration camps, the few Dutch-Jewish survivors were largely ignored, their suffering equalized with that of the non-Jewish Dutch population (Duindam 2018, 157). In what Dienne Hondius calls the "resistance

---

<sup>4</sup> Original: "Voor hen die vielen bij het wederstaan van de vijand in de jaren 1940 – 1945. Gij, die voor onze vrijheid viert wij willen, dat jij met ons zijt en dat uw tegenwoordigheid straks onze kinderen bezielt."

<sup>5</sup> Original: "De allermeesten hebben in wezen hun leven minder geacht dan hun smachten naar vrijheid. Het schrikbewind van de overweldiger heeft hen niet vermogen te knechten."

<sup>6</sup> Original: "De taal voor onze belevenissen ontbrak. De afgesleten woorden die er waren, bleven achter onze tanden, want vrijwel niemand was er om ze in ontvangst te nemen en vrijwel niemand wilde luisteren, laat staan begrijpen. Zij zouden de bevrijdingsroes vergallen en verder zelfbedrog ontmaskeren."

norm,” the Jewish experiences of the Holocaust were subordinated to those of the Dutch resistance (2003, 79). For example, resistance fighters would receive a life-long pension, whereas Jewish survivors did not even have the possibility to claim back their apartments if they were now inhabited by non-Jewish Dutch families (Hondius 2003, 79-80).

Public acknowledgement of the Holocaust only emerged in the 1960s, when attention was increasingly drawn to Jewish suffering during World War II, starting with the Eichmann trial being broadcast in 1961, and the term Holocaust gaining increasing public prominence. Other milestones during that decade were the publication of Jacques Presser’s history of the persecution of the Dutch Jews, *Ondergang: De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom* (‘Ashes in the wind’), published in 1965, and the opening of the *Hollandsche Schouwburg* (‘Dutch theatre’) as a Holocaust memorial in 1962 (Held 2019, 27; Van Vree, Berg & Duindam 2018, 12). This former Amsterdam theatre used to be the location from where tens of thousands had been deported to the concentration camps (Van Vree, Berg & Duindam 2018, 9-12). In short, while in the early post-war years Dutch victimization had been generalized, in the 1960s the Jewish Holocaust became salient. In an opposing development compared to the 1940s and 1950s, non-Jewish Dutch people now even identified with Jewish victims. Thus, the symbol of Anne Frank as innocent victim became a national symbol of identity (Van Vree 2001, 71). Yet, the acknowledgement of Jewish suffering did not publicly challenge the Dutch national self-image as victim and resistance fighter as expressed in the National Monument. Moreover, the Jewish population was simply included in the broader victimization. This can be seen in Loe de Jong’s successful TV-series *De Bezetting* (‘Occupation’), which was broadcast between 1960 and 1965. The series portrayed the Dutch nation as a collective victim that with significant effort had resisted the occupation (Wielenga 2009, 324).

The recognition of the genocide of Sinti and Roma people in the Netherlands took even longer than the acknowledgement of the Jewish Holocaust. In 1978, the first monument to commemorate the 220 Sinti and Roma from the Netherlands who perished in the concentration camps was unveiled at the Amsterdam Museum Square. *Hel en Vuur* (‘hell and fire’), referring to the Sinti and Roma term *Porajmos* (‘consumed by fire’), was the first specific Sinti and Roma monument in the world. Not until 2000 were reparations paid by the Dutch state to Sinti and Roma communities (De Wagt 2021, 29-33). All in all, the expression of the National Monument aligned with other acts and artefacts of commemoration in 1956. The narrative of Dutch victimhood and resistance went mostly uncontested, allowing for its materialization in the National Monument.



### The National Holocaust Monument of Names

The Dutch National Holocaust Monument of Names was inaugurated at the Weesperstraat in Amsterdam on September 19, 2021. Initiated by the Dutch Auschwitz Committee under the leadership of its president Jacques Grishaver, a Dutch-Jewish Holocaust survivor, it was designed by Polish-Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind, a son of Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivors. Libeskind is also known for his design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the new World Trade Centre complex in New York (Foray 2020, 26). Consisting of two-meter-high walls made from 102,162 bricks, the labyrinth-like National Holocaust Monument of Names forms the four-letter Hebrew word לזכר ('In memory of') on a square of one hundred times twenty meters, as seen in Figure 3. Inscribed on each brick are the name, date of birth and age at the time of the murder of the Holocaust victims, as shown in Figure 4. For the first time, every single one of the known 101,942 Jewish as well as the 220 Dutch Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust from the Netherlands would be remembered by name in a monument. On top of the brick walls are mirrors following the shape of the walls (National Holocaust Monument of Names 2022).

The inscription on a brass wall reads:

This is a place of commemoration and mourning, of remembrance and contemplation – a warning for all generations, all over the world, now and in the future. Through the names written here, the victims are not forgotten. They will never be forgotten. (National Holocaust Monument of Names 2022)

Around the walls are patches filled with white pebble stones. In Jewish tradition, visitors are asked to put these pebble stones in front of a wall, commemorating the dead. The first pebble stone was placed by King Willem-Alexander during the inauguration ceremony on September 19, 2021. Well-known politicians such as prime minister Mark Rutte and Amsterdam's mayor Femke Halsema followed. They were accompanied by a group of some ten Dutch survivors of the Holocaust. Televised interviews before the inauguration as well as conversations with King Willem-Alexander afterwards, made these survivors and their life stories the focus of the event (NOS 2021).



Figure 3. The National Holocaust Monument of Names. Photographed by author.

Preceding the monument's inauguration was a remarkable and highly emotional debate. The idea for the National Holocaust Monument of Names originated in 2005, when Jacques Grishaver visited the reopening of the Dutch Pavilion in Auschwitz which included a Wall of Names of over 60,000 Holocaust victims from the Netherlands who were murdered in Auschwitz (De Wagt 2021, 12). Grishaver is the chairman of the Dutch Auschwitz Committee, an organization founded in 1956 by Dutch Holocaust survivors to support and ensure the commemoration of the Holocaust in the Netherlands. When the Committee handed in an official request for a National Holocaust Monument in Amsterdam's former Jewish neighbourhood, the municipality of Amsterdam refused at first. The mayor at the time, Job Cohen, stated in 2009 that it was not desirable to have two monuments both commemorating the Holocaust close to each other (Catz, de Swaan and Vuisje 2019, 8).

Cohen was referring to the monument of names in the *Hollandsche Schouwburg*, also located in the Jewish neighbourhood which I describe more in detail later. However, in 2010 a newly elected municipal government accepted the Auschwitz Committee's request for a monument of names (De Wagt 2021, 208). One year later, Daniel Libeskind visited Amsterdam to give the annual *Nooit Meer*

*Auschwitz* ('Auschwitz never again') lecture, also organized by the Auschwitz Committee. When speaking with Grishaver about the planned monument of names, Libeskind spontaneously offered to design the monument, calling it "*schandelijk*" ('outrageous') (de Wagt 2021, 214), that Amsterdam did not already have a National Holocaust Monument for Jewish victims. In 2014, Libeskind presented his first design for the monument, a contorted construction of dark concrete and high walls. This design was meant for the Wertheimpark, also in the Jewish neighbourhood. The location had been chosen by the municipality in coordination with Libeskind (De Wagt 2021, 215). However, the idea to install the monument in the Wertheimpark led to an immense debate. It was argued that the monument of names would take away from Jan Wolkers' 1977 *Nooit Meer Auschwitz* monument that is already located in Wertheimpark. After multiple legal proceedings, the municipality changed the monument's location to the nearby Weesperstraat. However, the debate about the monument's location had begun a debate about whether a National Holocaust Monument was even necessary. In 2019, Petra Catz, Abram de Swaan, and Herman Vuijsje published an anthology that opposed the idea of a National Holocaust Monument of Names, expressing concern that there were already enough Holocaust monuments in Amsterdam, especially in the former Jewish neighbourhood, and that the monument was too expensive and unoriginal (Catz, De Swaan & Vuijsje 2019, 7-12). This debate yet again encapsulated the levels of disagreement regarding the memory of World War II in the Netherlands today.

The National Holocaust Monument of Names is meant to express the Dutch national memory of World War II. It focusses on the Jewish, Sinti and Roma Holocaust victims as central to this national memory, not resistance fighters. Contrary to the National Monument that portrays a collective suffering of the Dutch population, the aim of the Monument of Names is not to represent something that many people can relate to but to express individual stories of the Holocaust victims by naming them. These individual stories are then placed in a national embedded structure, using brick as the main material. Brick is known as a typically Dutch material used in most Dutch city centres. Furthermore, the monument is located at Weesperstraat, in the heart of the former Jewish neighbourhood in Amsterdam and the later entrance to the Jewish ghetto (De Wagt 2021, 70; 213). Before World War II, the exact site was the place of nine brick houses, homes to Jewish families of the working class. By choosing this position, the monument again underlines its representation and expression of Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, highlighting especially the Jewish victims. In the mirrors on top of the walls, a connection is created between the Jewish neighbourhood before World War II and the monument's context today, reflecting the names of the victims in the current city of Amsterdam.

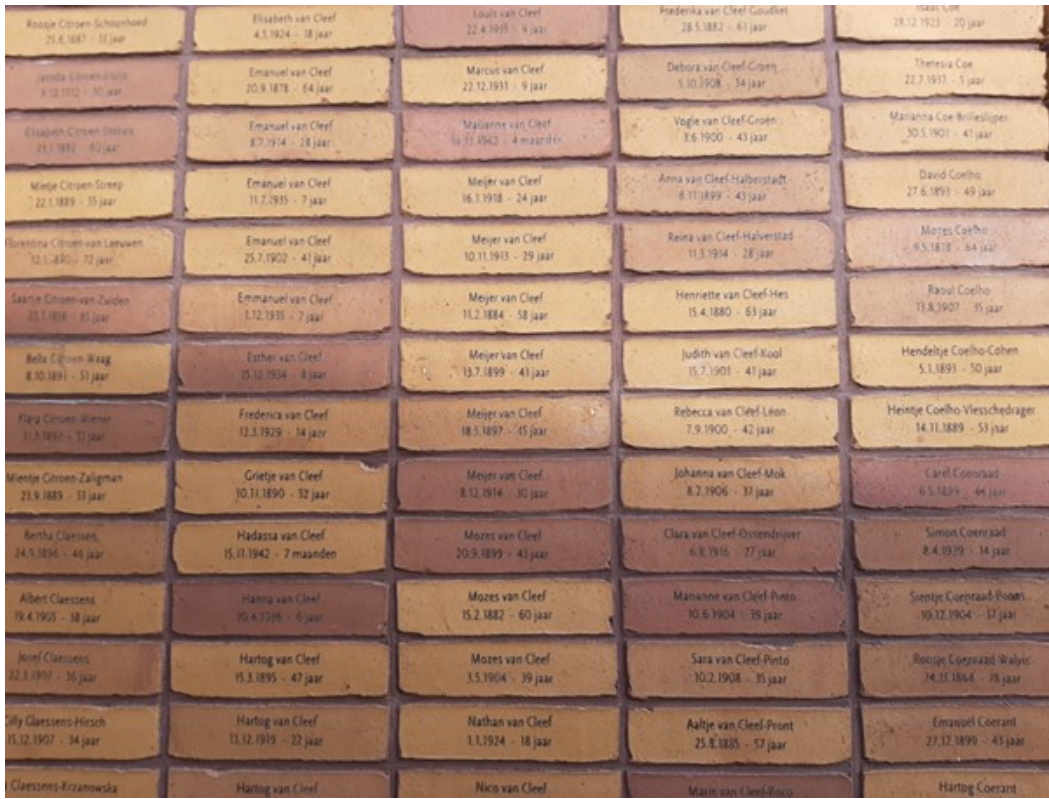


Figure 4. Detail of the National Holocaust Monument of Names. Photographed by author.

In its design and dedication, the National Holocaust Monument of Names follows a recent trend of other Holocaust monuments in the Netherlands. The act of calling out names of the deceased has been a Jewish mourning tradition for centuries. In the early years after the Holocaust, Jewish communities in the Netherlands had already built monuments of names to remember the terrors of World War II, for example in the cemetery of the Jewish community *Gan Hasjalom* ('Garden of Peace') in Hoofddorp. However, Jewish people created these monuments for Jewish people. They were neither part of the public sphere nor presented a public Dutch national memory of World War II. In the 21st century, this has changed as the naming of Jewish victims has become more prominent in Dutch commemorations of the Holocaust.

One of the main monuments of names in the Netherlands is the Wall of Names in the *Hollandsche Schouwburg*, referred to earlier. Opened in 1993, the wall identifies the more than 6,700 surnames of Jewish Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, some representing individual victims, others representing hundreds of victims with the same surname (Duindam 2018, 187-188). Other monuments of names followed. In 2012, the city of Haarlem unveiled a monument presenting the names of 715 murdered Jewish Haarlem citizens; since 2015, a monument

remembering the 1,239 Jewish Holocaust victims from Utrecht can be seen close to the former Utrecht Maliebaanstation where trains left for transit camp Westerbork; in Amstelveen, a monument of names for the murdered Amstelveen Jewish citizens was inaugurated in 2020 (De Wagt 2021, 18-21).

It is remarkable that in 1945 Jewish sculptor Jaap Kaas unsuccessfully presented a monument of names to the commission in charge of the creation of the National Monument. Kaas' proposal was rejected as too provocative and instead the *Monument van Joodse Erkentelijkheid* ('Monument of Jewish Gratitude') was opened in 1950, symbolizing Jewish gratitude towards the Dutch society that had helped to protect them (De Wagt, 48). Due to this dedication, the monument today is subject to major controversies which Roel Hijink and Gerrit Vermeer describe in more detail (2018). The fact that a monument of names for the Dutch-Jewish victims of World War II was rejected in 1945 and realized 76 years later underlines the notion of monuments of names being a part of a contemporary monument culture as well as a development in the Dutch national memory of World War II.

### **Comparison to other forms of expressed national memory today**

The main purpose of the National Holocaust Monuments of Names is the commemoration of Holocaust victims from the Netherlands. Other acts and artefacts of commemoration express different facets of a Dutch national memory of World War II.

As noted earlier, *Dodenherdenking* and *Bevrijdingsdag* are the most prominent Dutch Remembrance Days of World War II and are still being observed today. However, since 2005 there is another World War II Remembrance Day, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, honouring the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on that day in 1945. The day of remembrance was established by the United Nations in 2000 and adopted in 2005 by the European Union. While *Dodenherdenking* and *Bevrijdingsdag* focus mostly on Dutch victims, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorates all Holocaust victims of all countries (Assmann 2016, 157). In the Netherlands, one central aspect of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day is the annual *Nooit Meer Auschwitz* lecture, organized by the Auschwitz Committee since 2004. Each year, one respected international speaker is invited to give a lecture on the Holocaust and its commemoration today. Over the years, eighteen speakers from ten different countries have been invited. In 2020, the former German president Joachim Gauck was selected, highlighting the Holocaust as a shared past that needs a shared commemoration: "Opponents of any form of totalitarianism can

be allies in addressing and denouncing crimes against humanity, as well as in processing them” (2020, 7).<sup>7</sup>

Gauck also played a role in the 2012 *Dodenherdenking*. Whereas in 1956 the graves that were visited during *Dodenherdenking* were mainly those of Dutch resistance fighters and military soldiers, during the last decades, an increasing number of soldiers from other countries have been commemorated. In 2012, for the first time, graves of German soldiers, the perpetrators, were included in *Dodenherdenking* in IJsselsteyn. Furthermore, one day later, Gauck, who at the time was still the German president, was invited to visit the official *Bevrijdingsdag* ceremony together with the Dutch king, Willem-Alexander, and to deliver the traditional *Bevrijdingsdag* speech. It marked the first time a non-Dutch head of state was invited to speak during these commemorations (Raaijmakers 2017, 12-13). In 2021, Angela Merkel was the second one (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2021b). The inclusion of a German representative, already discussed in 1995 but rejected at the time by the Dutch public, expresses a changed attitude towards shared commemorations with Germany today (Raaijmakers 2017, 205-206).

The increased acknowledgement of other nations’ World War II victims is also noticeable in other monuments today. On the one hand, an increase of Dutch monuments commemorating Holocaust victims from the Netherlands can be noted, often in the form of monuments of names. On the other hand, an increase of monuments in remembrance of other groups is manifest. In 2005, *De Plaque voor Poolse militairen* (‘Plaque for Polish soldiers’) in Bourtange was unveiled, commemorating six Polish soldiers who fell at the site in 1945 (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2021c). Furthermore, in 2021, a new visitor centre was opened at the main site of graves of German soldiers in IJsselsteyn, offering lectures on the lives of some 32,000 German soldiers buried there (Volksbund 2021). Not only fallen soldiers from other countries have been increasingly remembered in recent years, but victims of World War II in general. In 2018, the abstract *Monument aan het Columbusplein* (‘Monument at the Columbus square’) was unveiled in Amsterdam, remembering “*hen die leden, hen die stierven, hen die streden*” (‘those who suffered, those who died, those who fought’). The monument does not commemorate one specific national group but aims at including all victims of World War II (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2021d).

When the National Monument was inaugurated in 1956, Prime Minister Willem Drees spoke about Dutch people as part of a nation that had suffered and made sacrifices to finally overcome the occupation (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-

---

<sup>7</sup> Original: “*Tegenstanders van elke vorm van totalitarisme kunnen alleszins bondgenoten zijn bij het aanpakken en aanklagen van misdrijven tegen de menselijkheid, evenals bij de verwerking ervan.*”

16). In 2020, the current prime minister, Mark Rutte, for the first time officially apologized to the Jewish population for the share of the Dutch state apparatus in the Holocaust: "Today, while the last survivors are still among us, I apologize on behalf of the government for its actions at the time" (Rijksoverheid 2020).<sup>8</sup>

Rutte thus acknowledged a more differentiated picture of the narrative of collective Dutch victimhood during the war, namely that the suffering of Holocaust victims is not to be equated with that of the general Dutch population as it was in the early pre-war years. Furthermore, he stated that the Dutch state should have helped its Jewish population more, arguing against the broad and uncontested image of the Dutch as universal resistance fighters articulated in 1956. Prior to Rutte's apology, Queen Beatrix in 1994 had already questioned this myth of the majority of the Dutch participating in the resistance by stating that some had actively looked away from crimes instead of helping (Wielenga 2009, 262). Still, Rutte's speech in 2020 was the very first public apology from the Dutch state to the Dutch Jewish population. Five months later, on the occasion of the 2020 *Dodenherdenking*, King Willem-Alexander criticized his great-grandmother Queen Wilhelmina, saying that she could have done more to protect Dutch-Jewish citizens during the war (Het Koninklijk Huis 2020).

The debate around the Dutch past during World War II is also thematized in contemporary texts, especially in Chris van der Heijden's (2001) monograph *Grijs verleden* ('grey past'), in which he criticizes the dominant view of Dutch resistance during World War II, stating that the war cannot be simplified as only good and bad but contains multiple shades in-between (2001, 9-20). The increasing internal national debate about a Dutch obligation to take responsibility for its role in World War II can also be seen in the rise of cases of restitution of looted property. Before and after the deportations, Dutch Jews were systematically deprived of all their property (Aalders 2005, 168). In the early post-war years, little attention was given to matters of restitution, concerning mostly objects that were returned to the Netherlands after having been found in other countries, mainly Germany. Only after increased interest in restitution in the 1990s, culminating in the 1998 Washington Principles, a Dutch restitution commission was established in 2001. The commission does research on independent restitution claims but also investigates the art collection of the Dutch state itself (Campfens 2021, 59-61). This, in turn, expresses an increasing awareness of a Dutch obligation to actively engage with the historical injustices of World War II.

---

<sup>8</sup> Original: "Nu de laatste overlevenden nog onder ons zijn, bied ik vandaag namens de regering excuses aan voor het overheidshandelen van toen."



The evermore diverse and nuanced picture of a Dutch national memory concerning World War II is developing today. The narrative of Dutch resistance and martyrdom is still present but is increasingly contested by other aspects of remembrance. The National Holocaust Monument of Names represents Holocaust victimhood. Even though this Holocaust victimhood is certainly dominant in a Dutch national memory of World War II today, there are other aspects that are not included in the monument.

### **Conclusion**

At the time of its inauguration in 2021, the National Holocaust Monument of Names aligns less with other acts and artefacts of Dutch national commemoration than the National Monument did in 1956, as these acts and artefacts are transnationally broadening in an increasingly globalized European memory landscape of World War II.

In 1956, the political memory of the Netherlands concerning World War II was monological; by and large it was not interconnected with the memories of other states, but it had a truly national quality. Publicly, the war was perceived as a collective period of suffering and resistance to finally overcome the war horrors (Van Vree & Van der Laarse 2009, 7). In the national memory of that time, it was hardly acknowledged that only a minority of the Dutch population had been active in the resistance, merely around 25,000 people and that it was not the Dutch resistance that had liberated the country but the Allies (Barnouw 2010, 80). Furthermore, the suffering during the war was generalized in a narrative of collective Dutch victimhood. Imprisonment and the murder of marginalized groups such as the Jewish, Sinti and Roma population were not acknowledged (Van Vree & Van der Laarse, 7). Because there was little exchange between separate groups, either with other nations or within the Dutch nation, the national memory in its public expressions at that time was not diverse. Thus, when the National Monument was inaugurated in 1956, it was possible to represent the main essence of that national memory by expressing a generalized Dutch martyrdom and resistance.

This picture has changed. From the 1960s onwards, the Holocaust gained prominence in public and academic debates. In the following decades, the Dutch victim group became more differentiated, emphasizing marginalized groups. Still, for a long time, commemorative acts continued to happen mainly in a national context (Held 2019, 23-26).

The beginning of the new millennium signified a turning point in the memory formation of World War II in Europe (Assmann 2016, 197). As shown, transnational acts and artefacts of commemoration in the Netherlands have



increased since then. By acknowledging the victims of other nations, their suffering is increasingly included in the national memory. January 27 is not a Remembrance Day for the Dutch victims of World War II but an acknowledgement of the suffering of different nations as well. This acknowledgement is also expressed in dedicating monuments to other nations' victims like the *Plaquette voor Poolse Soldaten* or the *Monument aan het Columbusplein*. An increase of memory globalization also is demonstrated through the invitation of Gauck, president of the perpetrator country which had occupied the Netherlands, to hold the main speech on *Bevrijdingsdag* in 2012 and the *Nooit Meer Auschwitz* lecture in 2020 (Van Vree 2009, 24-25). This is especially remarkable because the idea of German participation in *Bevrijdingsdag* had been rejected by the Dutch public in 1995 (Raaijmakers 2017, 205-206). It illustrates that there is a shift in Dutch public opinion towards a transnational dialogue with other states that identify as victims as well as with perpetrators.

In the Netherlands the rise of a dialogue between victims and perpetrators is not only developing with other nations but within the nation as well. While in 1956 the nation was mainly portrayed as encompassing innocent yet resistant victims, current debates increasingly raise the question of the role of the Dutch state as well as of individual people during the war. This is shown in the speeches by Queen Beatrix in 1994 as well as by Mark Rutte and King Willem-Alexander in 2020, and in the current rise of restitutions of looted property at the behest of the Dutch government. Therefore, in 1956, mostly nationally focused commemorations of collective Dutch victimhood could be materialized in the National Monument. However, due to a rise of transnational acts of commemoration, in the last number of years, a variety of perspectives has become a part of Dutch World War II commemorations. These different perspectives make it more difficult to all be included in one national monument which explains why the National Holocaust Monument of Names aligns less with other expressions of the national Dutch memory today than the National Monument at Dam Square did in the 1950s.

Young sees this development as a sign of failure of national monuments to be expressions of national memories and that for national monuments to succeed they need to include all different layers of national memory connected to them. I argue that it is not the national monuments that need to change but our understanding of them. When national memories were produced mainly in monological national contexts, different expressions of national memory mostly aligned with each other. Therefore, the National Monument mostly aligns with the Dutch national memory at the time of its inauguration in the 1956. Today, however, as memory productions are becoming increasingly globalized, the relation of national monuments and memories has changed. Due to the

development of multiple diverse facets of national memory, national monuments cannot include all these facets anymore. However, this does not mean that they cannot express national memories at all. To the contrary, by showing differences in relation to other acts and artefacts of commemoration, national World War II monuments today can serve as markers of ongoing memory processes. Thus, when we look at national World War II monuments today, we not only must ask ourselves the question what is there but what is not there. Only by including this view on national monuments in our notion of national memories, can national World War II monuments truly contribute to our understanding of ongoing memory dynamics in the global age.

## References

- Aalders, Gerard. 2005. Organized looting: The Nazi seizure of Jewish property in the Netherlands, 1940 – 1945. In *Networks of Nazi persecution: Bureaucracy, business and the organization of the Holocaust*, edited by Gerald D. Feldmann & Wolfgang Seibel, 168-188. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Assmann, Aleida. 2006. *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Assmann, Aleida. 2016. *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention*. Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Assmann, Aleida & Sebastian Conrad. 2010. Introduction. In *Memory in a global age: Discourses, practices and trajectories*, edited by Aleida Assmann & Sebastian Conrad, 1-16. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barnouw, David. 2010. *Die Niederlande im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Eine Einführung*. Münster: agenda.
- Bottici, Chiara. 2010. European identity and the politics of remembrance. In *Performing the past: Memory, history, and identity in modern Europe*, edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree & Jay Winter, 335-353. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Campfens, Evelien. 2021. *Cross-border claims to cultural objects: Property or heritage?* The Hague: Eleven International Publishing.
- Carrier, Peter. 2005. *Holocaust monuments and national memory: France and Germany since 1989*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Catz, Petra, Abram de Swaan & Herman Vuisje. 2019. Inleiding. In *Bedenkt eer gij herdenkt*, edited by Petra Catz, Abram de Swaan & Herman Vuisje. 7-12. Amsterdam: Lecturis.
- Daase, Christopher. 2010. Addressing painful memories: Apologies as a new practice in international relations. In *Memory in a global age: Discourses, practices and trajectories*, edited by Aleida Assmann & Sebastian Conrad, 19-31. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Diner, Dan. 2007. *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse: Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Duindam, David. 2018. Site of memory, site of mourning. In *Site of deportation, site of memory: The Amsterdam Hollandsche Schouwburg and the Holocaust*, edited by Fran van Vree, Hetty Berg & David Duindam, 155-190. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Durlacher, Gerhard. 1985. *Strepen aan de hemel: Oorlogsherinneringen*. Amsterdam: Querido.
- Foray, Jennifer. 2020. The liminal spaces of liberation: Remembering 1945 in pandemic times. *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 40.2: 17-38.

- Gauck, Joachim. 2020. Nooit Meer Auschwitz Lezing, 22 Januari 2020 in Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen. [https://www.auschwitz.nl/media/pdf\\_bestanden/2020\\_NMA-lezing\\_Gauck\\_nederlands.pdf](https://www.auschwitz.nl/media/pdf_bestanden/2020_NMA-lezing_Gauck_nederlands.pdf). Accessed June 29, 2022.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1985. *Das kollektive Gedächtnis*. Translated by Holde Lhoest-Offermann. Frankfurt Main: Fischer.
- van der Heijden, Chris. 2001. *Grijs verleden: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog*. Amsterdam & Antwerp: contact.
- Het Koninklijk Huis. 2020. Toespraak van Koning Willem-Alexander. <https://www.koninklijkhuis.nl/documenten/toespraken/2020/05/04/toespraak-van-koning-willem-alexander-nationale-herdenking-4-mei-2020>. Accessed August 23, 2022.
- Hijink, Roel & Gerrit Vermeer. 2018. Het Monument van Joodse Erkentelijkheid, Tekenen van trots en schaamte. *Amstelofamum* 105.2: 51-67.
- van der Laarse, Rob. 2017. Bones never lie? Unearthing Europe's age of terror in the age of memory. In *Mapping the 'forensic turn': Engagements with materialities of mass death in Holocaust studies and beyond*, edited by Zuzanna Dziuban, 143-168. Vienna: New Academic Press.
- Landstra, Menno & Desmond Spruijt. 1998. *Het Nationaal Monument op de Dam*. Amsterdam: Landstra & Spruijt.
- Levy, Daniel & Natan Sznaider. 2006. *The Holocaust and memory in the global age*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lowe, Keith. 2020. *Prisoners of history: What monuments to the Second World War tell us about our history and ourselves*. London: William Collins.
- Marcel, Jean-Christophe & Laurent Mucchielli. 2010. Maurice Halbwachs's mémoire collective. In *A companion to cultural memory studies*, edited by Astrid Erll & Ansgar Nünning, 142-149. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Marcuse, Harold. 2010. Holocaust monuments: The emergence of a genre. *American Historical Review* 115: 53-89.
- Mark, James. 2010. *The unfinished revolution: Making sense of the communist past in Central-Eastern Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei.a Delft, Verzetsmonument. <https://www.4en5mei.nl/oorlogsmonumenten/zoeken/1333/delft-verzetsmonument>. Accessed February 6, 2022.
- Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei.b Angela Merkel: 5 Mei-Lezing. <https://www.4en5mei.nl/archieven/inspiratie/angela-merkel-5-mei-lezing-2021>. Accessed October 20, 2021.
- Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei.c Bourtange, Plaquette voor Poolse Militairen. <https://www.4en5mei.nl/oorlogsmonumenten/zoeken/2603/bourtange-plaquette-voorpoolse-militairen>. Accessed October 17, 2021.
- Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei.d Amsterdam, Monument aan het Columbusplein. <https://www.4en5mei.nl/oorlogsmonumenten/zoeken/4262/amsterdam-monument-aan-het-columbusplein>. Accessed February 6, 2022.
- NOS. 2021. Onthulling Nationaal Namenmonument. [https://www.npostart.nl/nos-onthulling-nationaal-holocaust-namenmonument/19-09-2021/POW\\_05079726](https://www.npostart.nl/nos-onthulling-nationaal-holocaust-namenmonument/19-09-2021/POW_05079726). Accessed October 23, 2021.
- Raaijmakers, Ilse. 2017. *De stilte en de storm: 4 en 5 mei sinds 1945*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Rijksoverheid. 2020. Toespraak van Minister-President Mark Rutte bij de Nationale Holocaust Herdenking, Amsterdam. <https://bit.ly/3iakNO2>. Accessed June 29, 2022.

- Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multidirectional memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Volksbund: Gemeinsam für den Frieden. 2021. Deutsche Kriegsgräberstätte Ysselsteyn. <https://www.joc-ysselsteyn.eu/nl/duitse-oorlogsbegraafplaats-ysselsteyn/>. Accessed October 17, 2021.
- van Vree, Frank. 2001. Denkmäler ohne Sockel. Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Transformation der historischen Kultur in den Niederlanden. *Jahrbuch / Zentrum für Niederlande-Studien* 12: 59-80.
- van Vree, Frank. 2009. De dynamiek van de herinnering: Nederland in een internationale context. In *De dynamiek van de herinnering: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context*, edited by Frank van Vree & Rob van der Laarse, 17-40. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.
- van Vree, Frank & Rob van der Laarse. 2009. Ter inleiding. In *De dynamiek van de herinnering: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context*, edited by Frank van Vree & Rob van der Laarse, 7-15. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.
- van Vree, Frank, Hetty Berg & David Duindam. 2018. Introduction. In *Site of deportation, site of memory: The Amsterdam Hollandsche Schouwburg and the Holocaust*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- de Wagt, Wim. 2021. *Vijfhonderd meter namen: De Holocaust en de pijn van de herinnering*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Wiedmer, Caroline. 1999. *The claims of memory: Representations of the Holocaust in contemporary Germany and France*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Wielenga, Friso. 2009. Die ‚Guten‘ und die ‚Bösen‘: Niederländische Erinnerungskultur und nationale Identität nach 1945.“ In *Kriegserfahrung und nationale Identität in Europa nach 1945: Erinnerung, Säuberungsprozesse und nationales Gedächtnis*, edited by Kerstin von Lingen. 246-264. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Winter, Jay. 2010. Introduction: The performance of the past: Memory, history, identity. In *Performing the past: Memory, history, and identity in modern Europe*, edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree & Jay Winter, 11-34. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Young, James E. 1993. *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Young, James E. 2016. *The stages of memory: Reflections on memorial art, loss, and the spaces between*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

### About the author

Leah Niederhausen is a Research Master student of global history at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam, Netherlands). She focuses on questions concerning the materialization of memory and the role of material objects in post-conflict situations. Since 2021, she has served on the editorial board of the VU journal *CODEX Historiae*. Currently, she is also part of the university-led research group “Looted Art: Provenance Research and Restitution in the Netherlands” that is focused on issues concerning Nazi-spoliated art, as well as colonial and war-related theft more broadly.

Author’s contact: [leah.niederhausen@gmail.com](mailto:leah.niederhausen@gmail.com)

### **Représentations d'une nation? Comparaison entre le Monument national néerlandais de 1956 et le Mémorial national des noms de l'Holocauste de 2021**

En septembre 2021, le Mémorial national des noms de l'Holocauste a été inauguré à Amsterdam. En répertoriant pour la première fois tous les noms connus des 102.163 Juifs, Sinti et Roms des Pays-Bas assassinés par le régime nazi, il est le mémorial national néerlandais le plus récent de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Le plus ancien est le Monument national de la place du Dam, achevé en 1956. Suivant la thèse de James E. Young que les monuments nationaux représentent des souvenirs nationaux, cet article étudie la relation des deux monuments avec une mémoire nationale néerlandaise de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Pour cela, les monuments seront comparés avec d'autres actes et artefacts de mémoires des années 1950 et d'aujourd'hui: des jours de commémoration, des rituels, d'autres monuments et des textes. Je prétends que le Monument national était plus en cohérence avec d'autres actes et artefacts de mémoire des années 1950 que le Mémorial national des noms de l'Holocauste le fait aujourd'hui et que cela est dû à la montée des actes de mémoire transnationaux depuis le début des années 1990. Par conséquent, je soutiens qu'à l'ère de la mondialisation, les monuments nationaux de la Seconde Guerre mondiale peuvent être des marqueurs importants de la dynamique de la mémoire (trans)nationale. Ceci, à son tour, demande un changement de notre compréhension contemporaine du potentiel expressif des monuments de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

### **Representaties van een natie? Een vergelijking van het Nederlandse Nationaal Monument van 1956 en het Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument van 2021**

In september 2021 werd te Amsterdam het Nederlands Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument ingehuldigd. Het monument, dat voor het eerst alle 102.162 bekende namen van Joodse, Sinti en Roma Holocaustslachtoffers uit Nederland vermeldt, is het meest recent nationaal Nederlands Tweede Wereldoorlog monument. Het eerste monument was het Nationaal Monument op de Dam in Amsterdam, dat in 1956 werd voltooid. In navolging van James E. Young's bewering dat nationale monumenten het nationale geheugen uitdrukken, onderzoekt dit artikel de relatie van beide monumenten met het Nederlands nationaal geheugen van de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Daartoe worden de uitingen van de monumenten vergeleken met de andere herdenkingen in de jaren vijftig en nu: herdenkingsdagen, rituelen, andere monumenten en teksten. Ik betoog dat het Nationaal Monument in de jaren vijftig meer op één lijn ligt

met andere herdenkingen dan het Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument met herdenkingen van vandaag de dag als gevolg van de opkomst van transnationale herinneringsdaden sinds het begin van de jaren negentig. Bijgevolg betoog ik dat nationale monumenten over de Tweede Wereldoorlog in het globale tijdperk belangrijke markers kunnen zijn van (trans)nationale herinneringsdynamieken. Dit vraagt op zijn beurt om een verschuiving in ons hedendaagse begrip van het expressieve potentieel van monumenten met betrekking tot de Tweede Wereldoorlog.

**Review**

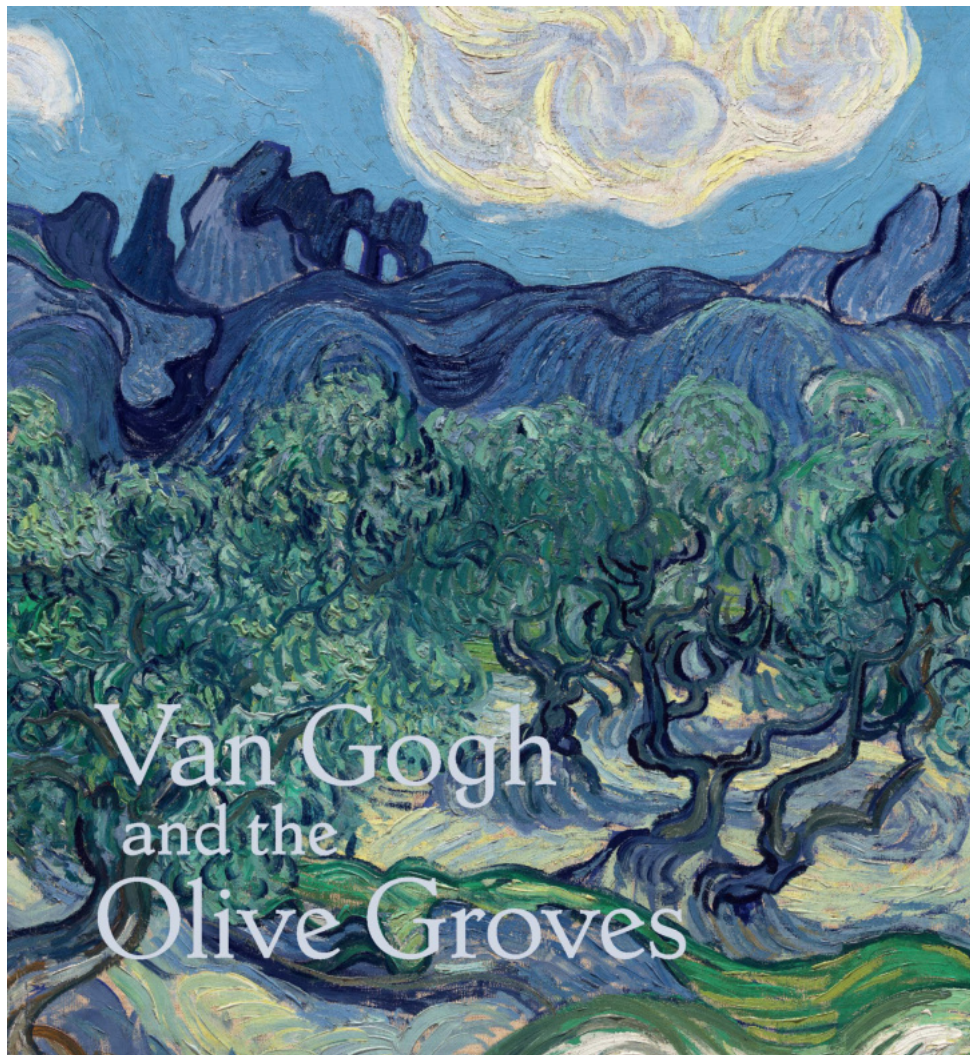
**Nienke Bakker and Nicole R. Myers (eds):**

***Van Gogh and the olive groves***

Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2021. 216 p.

ISBN 9780300260076

*Reviewed by Cliff Edwards*



*Van Gogh and the olive groves*, edited by Nienke Bakker of Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum, and Nicole R. Myers of the Dallas Museum of Art, sets a high standard for future catalogues of art exhibitions and the cooperative work of museums, curators, conservators, and teams of scientists and technicians involved in such complex projects. Thankfully, the completed work is so arranged that it can easily be read and viewed on many levels: from an appreciation of Van Gogh's creative variations on the olive groves he painted while living in the Asylum at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence from June to December of 1889, to discussions of the artist's intent, to microscopic images of details of these paintings that help determine the materials used by the artist, the chemistry of the paints, and the colour changes or interventions that have occurred over time.

As the volume can be approached in many ways, according to the viewer/reader's interests, I would suggest that the general reader begin with a careful reading of the directors' foreword on pages 11 through 13 and then turn to the essay by Nicole Myers. The latter initiated the study ten years ago at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, where Mary Schafer, its paintings conservator, planted the seeds that led Myers to join forces with the Van Gogh Museum's Nienke Bakker to gather the experts and pursue the Olive Grove project. One might then choose among the five expert essays and careful scientific descriptions of issues regarding Van Gogh's materials and changes in the appearance of the paintings that have occurred with time. All featured works are in full-colour, and many cover the entire ten by eleven-inch pages. The volume concludes with several helpful aids: a checklist of the paintings in the exhibition, a six-page index, a page of technical abbreviations, and a page of copyright and illustration credits.

Five essays by Van Gogh scholars, including the project's two directors, are found on pages 19-73, immediately preceding the catalogue of the paintings of the olive grove series. An indication of the directions taken in those essays may be of special interest to potential readers: Essay One, just over four pages long, by Nienke Bakker, Senior Curator of Paintings at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, is titled "Between hope and agony: Van Gogh at the Asylum." The setting of this private clinic to which the artist admitted himself is described, his personal loneliness in a rocky landscape with mountains, wheatfields, and olive groves. The doctor described Van Gogh as suffering attacks of epilepsy and "acute mania with visual and auditory hallucinations" (20). Bakker believes the clinic's routine had "initially had a salutary effect" (20), as did his surroundings, including the olive groves, once he was allowed outside the walls. His hearing of Gauguin and Bernard's "Synthetist experiments" (21) gave freer rein to his own imagination, through crises and delusions, and word of his friend's imagined biblical scenes with olive trees led him to seek safety not in mysticism, but in nature and the past.



Essay Two by Teio Meedendorp of the Van Gogh Museum is titled “The olive groves in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.” The essay gives a background on the history of the olive tree in Greece, southern France and beyond, describes olive production, uses of olive oil, and the harsh conditions that led to the decline of olive groves.

Essay Three is by the director, Nicole R. Myers, Interim Chief Curator and the Barbara Thomas Lemmon Senior Curator of European Art at the Dallas Museum of Art. The 16-page essay is titled “Symbolism and seriality: Van Gogh and the olive groves.” Focusing on the 15 paintings of the series of Olive Groves painted at Saint-Remy, Myers discusses the role that a series of related subjects in paintings play in the total work of Van Gogh. Olive orchards allowed the repetition of a theme and its colourful changes linking the seasons, displaying its silver foliage greening between blue sky and orange ploughed soil. Myers describes the mysterious character of olive groves that from Greco-Roman antiquity represented the Tree of Life, yet also had a key place in the Bible and provided the Gethsemane setting with an angel where sorrow and triumph were linked in the life of Jesus. Myers emphasizes the critical moment in November when Van Gogh learned that Gauguin and Bernard had painted imagination-driven images of Jesus in the Garden of Olives. Van Gogh scathingly denounces those images as straying “far from reality” (38). Myers views him turning at this point from his friends’ imaginative abstraction and adding the figures of women he has seen picking the olives in his new paintings, a “direct substitute for biblical figures” (41). Here Van Gogh has come to a summation of his exploration, a “manifesto of his artistic credo” (43). The role of art in a modern society involves living with nature and offering spiritual consolation to human beings.

Essay Four by Louis van Tilborgh of the Van Gogh Museum is titled “Van Gogh, olive trees, and his search for what turned out to be a modern pastoral.” Van Gogh’s admiration for Puvis de Chavanne opens the way to a blending of present and past, a link to Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, and finally to an elegiac tone, a pastoral genre, pure faith before dogma.

Essay Five, by the team of Kathrin Pilz and Muriel Geldorf, is titled “Creating olive groves in Saint-Rémy: A comparative study of Van Gogh’s painting technique and materials.” The essay provides and explains charts on the basic sizes and composition of the olive tree paintings, the pigments identified in these paintings, and changes over time including the impact of restoration and the aging of materials.

In closing, this beautiful volume, *Van Gogh and the olive groves*, provides powerful images of an important series of Van Gogh’s paintings along with expert guidance on the pivotal place of these paintings in the artist’s quest. Further, it invites us to understand the changes the paintings have undergone over time. For

many of us, the volume opens new ways to enjoy and learn from the arts, and a new appreciation of the many whose careful labour and creative thinking make art available to us.

### **About the reviewer**

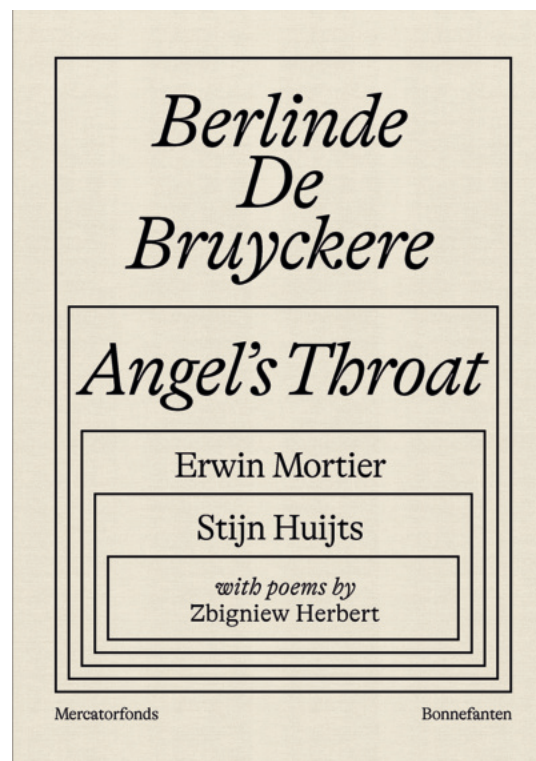
Cliff Edwards served as Powell-Edwards Distinguished Professor of Religion and the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond (Virginia, USA) until his retirement in 2020. Born in 1932 in Southampton, New York, he earned degrees from Drew University, Garrett Theological Seminary, and the Ph.D. from Northwestern University. He studied at the University of Strasbourg in France, The University of Neuchatel in Switzerland, Oxford University in England, the Hebrew-Union School of Bible and Archaeology in Jerusalem, and Daitokuji Zen Monastery in Kyoto, Japan. As a Coolidge Fellow he spent two terms doing research at Columbia University's art libraries. Among the books he has written are *Christian being and doing* (Methodist Church, 1966), *Everything under heaven: The life and words of a nature mystic, Issa of Japan* (Virginia Commonwealth University, 1980), *Van Gogh and God* (Loyola University Press, 1989), *The shoes of Van Gogh* (Crossroad Publishing, 2004), *Mystery of The Night Café* (State University of New York Press, 2009), *Van Gogh's ghost paintings* (Cascade Books, 2015), and *Van Gogh's second gift* (Broadleaf Books, 2020).

## Review

**Berlinde De Bruyckere, Erwin Mortier & Stijn Huijts:**  
***Angel's throat***

Brussels/Maastricht: Mercatorfonds/Bonnefanten, 2021. 144 p.  
ISBN 9780300257724

*Reviewed by Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans*



The book *Angel's throat* is a compelling assemblage of visual art, prose and poetry. A sequence of photographs of Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures is interspersed with short stories by Erwin Mortier and poems by Zbigniew Herbert. De Bruyckere's own essay and an art-historical contribution by Stijn Huijts complete

the volume which appeared as a catalogue to accompany the exhibition of the same name at the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht. The book explores – in words and images – the disparate meanings sedimented around the figure of an angel. It might seem risky to embark on the fraught theme of the immortal, celestial being as this could easily fall prey to hackneyed images and metaphors. The book manages to avoid that risk by using the figure of an angel as an opportunity to touch on and speak about its opposite, namely the materiality of things and the unavoidability of death.

The volume is not the first collaboration of De Bruyckere with a writer. In 2013, the Belgian artist published two books co-authored with J. M. Coetzee, of which the first, *Allen vleys* ('We are all flesh'), appeared with MER. Paper Kunsthal as an artist book (De Bruyckere & Coetzee 2013a). The second, *Cripplewood/Kreupelhout* is an exhibition catalogue of the Belgian Pavilion during the 55th edition of the Venice Biennale (De Bruyckere & Coetzee 2013b). The South African writer also served as the curator of the exhibition. The email correspondence between the artist and the writer, included in *Cripplewood/Kreupelhout*, attests to a close collaboration and an exchange of ideas between the two authors at all stages of the preparations for the exhibition and the book. This collaborative mode of the creative process is continued in *Angel's throat*. As De Bruyckere explains in a note towards the end of the volume, she invited the Belgian writer Erwin Mortier to engage with her work by, as she puts it, writing around it, rather than about it (141). The question of what primacy to accord the literature and art is of little relevance here. Mortier wrote his short stories specifically for De Bruyckere's angel series while they were still in the making. She continued working on the sculptures while reading the stories as they arrived one by one. Mortier's prose and De Bruyckere's visual art organically grew into one complex work.

It is again Coetzee, as De Bruyckere explains, who drew her attention to the poetry of Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998). After *Cripplewood/Kreupelhout*, she made a sculpture of a satyr from the Greek mythology named Marsyas, inspired by Herbert's poem *Apollo and Marsyas*.<sup>1</sup> As it transpires, Mortier also shares this fascination for Herbert's work. Accordingly, the title of the book, *Angel's throat*, comes from the poem "Preliminary investigation of an angel" by Herbert which is also included in the volume (39-40).<sup>2</sup> Herbert's poetry, and especially his view of the world, seem crucial for this book. In extending the collaborative mode of work,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Apollo i Marsjasz* ('Apollo and Marsyas') was published in 1961 in Herbert's collection of poems *Studium przedmiotu* ('Object study').

<sup>2</sup> The poem, included in *Angel's throat* in the English translation by Alissa Valles, originally appeared under the Polish title *Przesłuchanie anioła* in the 1969 volume *Napis* ('Inscription').

De Bruyckere's long-term engagement with material remnants of life reaches an intriguing new stage.

The book opens with a close-up of one of the angel's feet – dirty, with long, unkempt nails. This image is the first in the visual essay based on De Bruyckere's new series *Arcangelo* and *Sjemkel*, photographed by Mirjam Devriendt. The feet of *Arcangelo I* seem to levitate in the air, although it is difficult to determine exactly how as his body is covered with a blanket made of animal skin. Only his legs are partly visible. The subsequent photographs reveal a series of human-like figures of *Arcangelos* (*Arcangelo I, II* and *III*) and seemingly organic shapes of *Sjemkels* (*Sjemkel I, II, III* and *IV*). The photographs show details of the sculptures, views from the artist's studio, and occasionally give a glimpse of the creation process. A view of a pot on a little electric stove, two pairs of hands carefully sowing a piece of an old blanket or a nearly abstract picture of a splash of paint on an uneven surface add a sense of a painstaking and concentrated working process. The sculptures are made of wax and epoxy, which give the human figures an appearance of real flesh. In the case of the *Sjemkel* sculptures, which are made of blankets mounted on silicone molds, the presence of a living being is only suggested in the organic shape of the sculpture and the texture of the animal skins. The sculptures look like pieces of old coats and bedspreads which grew organically into a corpse of a living animal. This hesitation between a living being and a thing, or between something heavenly and something earthly, is equally manifest in the poetry of Herbert.

The two poems included in the book, "Preliminary investigation of an angel" and "Seventh angel," come from two different collections published by Herbert in 1969 and 1957 respectively. There are several other poems by the Polish author which deal with the theme of angels or, more broadly, with biblical subjects. The tone of these poems is almost always ironic and imbued with allusions to the present or recent past, namely the reality of socialist Poland and the memory of war and occupation. If there is something that connects the recurring motif of the angel, it is the variance and unorthodoxy with which the biblical figures are portrayed. In "Preliminary investigation," the angel appears to be an innocent victim subjected to brutal interrogation. In "Seventh angel," he is *Shemkel*, an imperfect, shadowy and nervous member of the angelic order and the one who was repeatedly "fined" for "illegal import of sinners" (44).

At the beginning of "Preliminary investigation," the angel is "still all composed of light" (39), but the violent blows inflicted on him by his oppressors pull him out of his heavenly being into a painfully material form. Tortured in this way, he is forced to plead guilty to an offence he did not commit, or in the words of Herbert, he is "incarnate into guilt" (39). The following is the passage in the poem from which the book's title is taken: "leather throat of an angel/ is full of

gluey agreement" (39). Not only does the throat of the angel become tangible, but his compliance, too, gains a physical quality.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in "Seventh angel," *Shemkel's* nimbus is "old" and "threadbare" (45), evoking the quality of worn and shabby animal skins used by De Bruyckere.

To Herbert, Angels are not necessarily good and well-meaning creatures. The less than perfect *Shemkel* is castigated by the other, impeccable members of the angelic council. In another poem, not reprinted in this book, angels appear to be merciless guards segregating mothers from their children or even confiscating their favorite things after their death, because, apparently, salvation will take place individually.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, these diverse figures of angels are an opportunity to speak about other things. Often, these other subjects are a covert commentary on political matters of the time, while simultaneously they allow for a reflection on the nature of reality and the human agency within it. It is therefore particularly refreshing to reconsider Herbert's poems next to Erwin Mortier's prose. Of the four short stories included in the volume, only two mention angels. Mortier amplifies Herbert's unrestrained urge to variegate the images of angels, but his stories turn to folk tropes and personal memories linked to these celestial beings. In *Revelations speak in hiatuses* (9-11), angels are said by the older relatives to be the invisible artists painting with frost on the windows on a winter night. *Angel maker* (128-131) is a story of a retired midwife who used to help destitute girls to abort unwanted children. Those unborn children become, in the eyes of a group of local women ruminating about her, little angels.

It is in the reflection on the lives of things as well as on the nature of language and writing where Mortier really meets Herbert and De Bruyckere. In *Revelations*, he masterfully describes household objects remembered from his childhood as they manifest their indifference towards the mortal beings. Clothes hidden in the closet have the ability to remember their users: "coats still showed the bend in the arms of those who had worn them" (10). In *The Lillies*, language appears as a second skin (23) and in *Sometimes he comes to me* as a robe covering the fear of meaninglessness (106-107). When penetrated by death, the language will reveal to the author the muteness of all things (23).

Both Mortier and Herbert point at the tendency of seemingly immaterial entities – such as concepts and language – to stick to the material things. De Bruyckere's sculptures achieve the opposite. The ostensibly inanimate objects,

---

<sup>3</sup> In the translation by Alissa Valles the angel's "agreement" becomes "gluey," but the Polish original ("*lepki*") could be translated as 'viscous.' Viscosity is, as Timothy Morton recently argued, that quality of reality by which things cannot be fully separated from each other or from the observer (Morton 2013, 27-37).

<sup>4</sup> I am referring here to the poem *U wrót doliny* ('At the gate of the valley') published in the collection *Hermes, pies i gwiazda* ('Hermes, dog and star') in 1957.

even when shown in the process of their manufacturing, acquire an aspect of living creatures. As such, *Angel's throat* is a remarkable instance of artistic and literary collaboration, in which things and words find each other in their contagious impurity.

## References

- De Bruyckere, Berlinde & J. M. Coetzee. 2013a. *Allen vlees* ('We are all flesh'). Ghent: MER. Paper Kunsthalle.
- De Bruyckere, Berlinde & J. M. Coetzee. 2013b. *Cripplewood/Kreupelhout*. Brussels: Mercatorfonds.
- Morton, Timothy. 2013. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and ecology after the end of the world*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

## About the reviewer

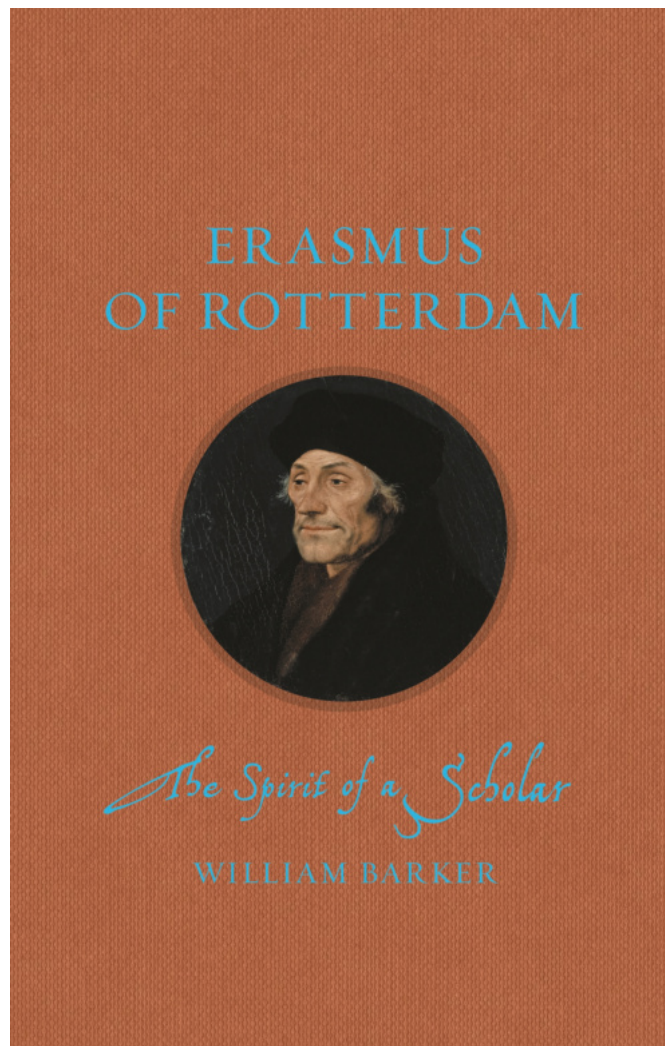
Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans teaches contemporary art, photography, and new media at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB, Belgium). Her research interests include photography and art theory, media archeology, documentary practices, postcolonial theories, visualizations of grass-roots protest movements, as well as Eastern European cultures, history, and representations. She is the author of *Images performing history: Photography and representations of the past in European art after 1989* (Leuven University Press, 2015).





**Review**  
**William Barker:**  
***Erasmus of Rotterdam: The spirit of a scholar***  
London: Reaktion Books, 2021. 310 p.  
ISBN 9781789144512

*Reviewed by Riemer A. Faber*



Erasmus of Rotterdam was the most famous humanist in Northern Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the series of *Renaissance Lives* published by Reaktion Books would not be complete without an account of the life and writings of this Dutchman. In a handsomely produced book his latest biographer, Professor William Barker, does not disappoint: taking into account the most recent scholarship, painting a colorful picture of a complex life, and writing in a fluid, highly readable style, Barker – already known to us for his fine English edition of Erasmus’ *Adages* in the series *Collected Works of Erasmus* – offers the reader a splendid introduction to the life and writings of Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536).

Barker presents Erasmus as the model humanist scholar who promoted the Renaissance values of ethical behaviour in public life, of applying the lessons of history, and of eloquent writing (8-9). Taking advantage of the emerging culture of the book and the growing Republic of Letters – that is, the community of like-minded, literate scholars for whom he labored and yearned – Erasmus promoted an “unusually individual and ethical Christian faith” (11). While many of his contemporaries sought academic positions or permanent ecclesiastical offices, Erasmus maintained complete freedom of thought and expression by avoiding such restrictive appointments. He remained, in Barker’s words, “an autonomous sole operator” (13).

Erasmus believed that the most accurate picture of a writer’s life is formed from a careful reading of his written works. About the Roman orator and thinker Cicero he states: “if a man had lived in familiar discourse with Cicero (to take him as an example) for several years, he will know less of Cicero than they who do by constant reading of what he wrote converse with his spirit every day” (15). The fact that Erasmus believed the same could be said about himself is illustrated by Barker in an engaging interpretation of a well-known portrait by Albrecht Dürer: the viewer’s attention is drawn to a text in the engraving that announces that while the likeness is that of Erasmus, “his writings show him better” (17-18). Putting this conviction into practice, Erasmus is “strikingly present” in all his writings, engaged as it were in a direct conversation with his reader (17). Indeed, Erasmus perceived writing as a form of interpersonal discourse: for him the Latin *sermo* (speech, word) implies dialogue and mutual interaction. Consequently, Erasmus sought carefully to control both the content and the printing of his own works: from the learned editions of the church fathers to the smoothly crafted letters and ironic social commentary, it is Erasmus’ writing that best reveals the spirit of this scholar. For this reason, Barker is right to give ample treatment to Erasmus’ major works, including *The praise of folly* (96-108), *Handbook of the Christian soldier* (69-73), *Adages* (90-94) and the Latin-Greek edition of the New Testament (122-135). And while Erasmus carefully controlled his self-representation through his writings, so that the humanist we come to know is to

a large extent the product of his own creation, Barker does offer fleeting glimpses into his character. We learn of Erasmus' constant pecuniary concerns (80-83), his self-absorbed worrying over health or advancing years (84-5), and his hypersensitivity to criticism (169-175).

Interestingly, Barker views the events in Erasmus' life not as forming an uninterrupted, continuous narrative but as consisting of three major episodes, and he dedicates one chapter to each: 1. Preparation (1466-1500), a period of learning, travel and developing friendships; 2. Publication (1500-1516), when he pursued a program of writing and of reforming the Church; and 3. Affirmation (1516-1536), when Erasmus "doubled down" (24) through revisions of his works and the ongoing epistolary program. Regarding the first episode, what little we learn of Erasmus is mainly through his self-representation in the extant letters and other writings. We do not know much about Erasmus' early years, his parents, or his upbringing, and the few reflections that Erasmus does provide are at times contradictory. It was a period when Erasmus applied himself to the study of texts and language. During this phase he published *The antibarbarians* (45-50), which Barker describes as "a call to those who belong to the emerging Republic of Letters to work together for a new order" (48). This ideal collaboration would benefit all levels of education, encourage personal appropriation of ancient texts, and edify both state and Church. The acme of this phase of Erasmus' life was a stay in England, where he interacted with fellow humanists, including John Colet and Thomas More for whom he later published *The praise of folly* (1511).

The period from 1500-1516 was marked by further publication, and republication of revised editions and reworked materials. Now Erasmus more confidently advances his biblical learning, which he applied especially to the New Testament portion of the Latin Vulgate and which culminated in the publication of the magisterial *Novum Instrumentum* (1516). During this productive period Erasmus also wrote other works, and Barker adeptly draws the reader in as he describes the *Adages* (first edition 1500), the wildly popular and influential collection of ancient proverbs, and the *Handbook of the Christian soldier* (1503), which offers encouraging instructions in moral and religious renewal modeled on the teachings of Christ. The markedly personal and ethical tone in these writings is seen by Barker as "deceptively modern" and having a practical appeal (73).

While other students of Erasmus depict the third episode, which lasted from 1516 until Erasmus' demise in 1536, as a period of personal tragedy when Erasmus was obliged to defend himself against attacks from Protestant and Roman Catholic critics alike, Barker describes it as a time when Erasmus affirmed his humanist program through the publication of new editions: "he continued to use his own presence as a way for readers to engage with humanist ideas and Christian faith" (144). In this section of the biography a clearer picture emerges of

the personality of Erasmus from the many extant letters, the reflections and depictions of his admirers in both art and text, and from the, at times, caustic exchanges Erasmus had with his opponents – most notably Martin Luther, with whom he clashed over the freedom of the human will (amply discussed by Barker on p. 208-231).

An important theme in this biography is an underlying search for the current relevance of Erasmus' life and career. According to Barker, Erasmus' scholarship continues to resonate today "because of the ethical and spiritual framework in which it was offered" (14). In some respects, not unlike our own, Erasmus' age was a transitional one, when travel, communication, social values and religion experienced profound shifts. Throughout the book Barker seeks to show not only "what a scholar in the humanities actually does" and "how much of our current practice is descended from our great predecessor" but also "how and why we have moved away from him" (22). Erasmus anticipates the modern academic insofar as his relationship with those in power was marked by a tension between simultaneously criticizing and celebrating that power and wealth (76). And Erasmus' prolific epistolary interactions hold our interest as they form a kind of precursor to the social media networks of our own day, with their uncomfortable juxtapositioning of matters private and public (153). Thus, in the final, fourth chapter, Barker concludes that while Erasmus' Christian humanism may hold little appeal in the post-modern, post-literary age, his spirit of irony, social criticism and his sense of "moral urgency" (264) continue to inform contemporary thought. And whereas the ideals of Renaissance humanism, of a cosmopolitan, liberal life are beyond the concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Erasmian commitment to the betterment of society through education and personal development remains an ideal.

The comprehensive biography is enhanced with illustrative materials that add to the pleasure of reading it; furthermore, a descriptive chronology recapitulates the complex itinerary of Erasmus' life and places his major publications on a handy timeline (267-270). Included also is a select, up to date bibliography of primary and secondary sources (291-297), as well as an index (302-310). In sum, this book is recommended reading for both experts and novices in the era of the Renaissance.

### **About the reviewer**

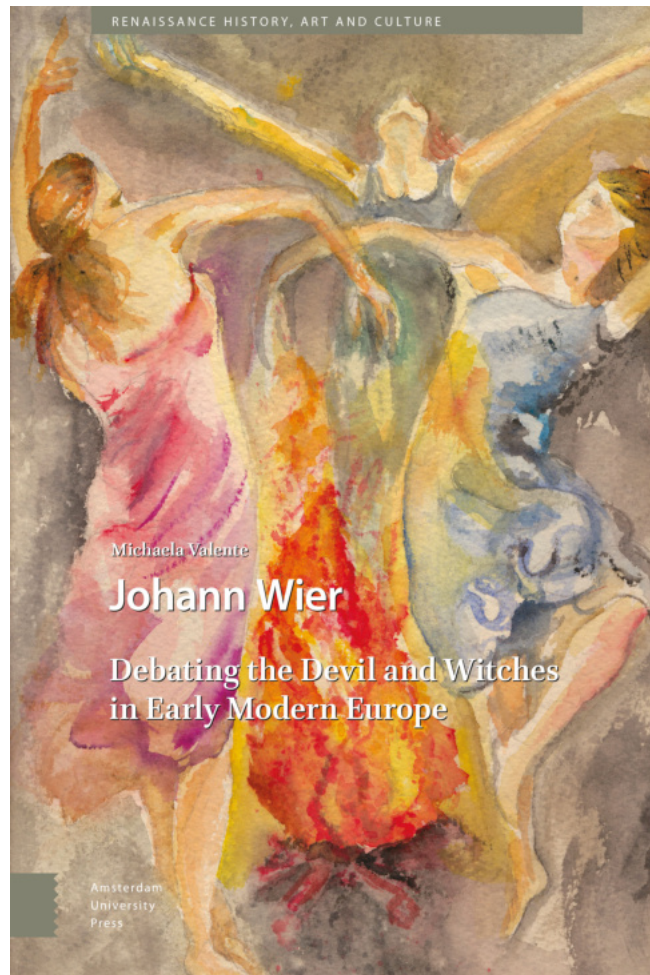
Riemer A. Faber is professor in the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada), where he teaches Greek and Latin language and literature. His research includes neo-Latin writings of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries; he has published an edition of Erasmus' *Annotations* on the Epistles

to the Galatians and Ephesians (University of Toronto Press, 2017). He serves as member of the editorial board of the *Collected works of Erasmus*.



**Review**  
**Michaela Valente:**  
***Johann Wier: Debating the devil and witches  
in early modern Europe***  
Theresa Federici (trans.)  
Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022. 263 p.  
ISBN 9789462988729

*Reviewed by Hans de Waardt*



In 1563 Johan Wier (1515-1588), first physician to Duke William of Cleves, Jülich, and Berg (1516-1592), published his *De praestigiis daemonum* ('On the delusions of demons'). I prefer to spell his first name with just one n, as he himself did in signing his correspondence (see for instance the photo of a letter sent on July 12, 1582, in Dooren 1940, 134). In his book Wier stated that it was senseless to prosecute and execute human beings for witchcraft. In the region where he lived, that is the Low Countries and the Rhineland, it was almost exclusively women who fell victim to such trials. To exonerate them he underlined that nature could only obey the rules laid out by God and that therefore no human being was able to do what these females were accused of. When their spells did seem to be effective, it was not they but demons that brought this about. According to him women were generally too feeble minded to understand what they were doing when performing witchcraft. Females who themselves believed they were guilty and confessed without pressure or torture were suffering from melancholia, an excess of black bile that darkened their minds. Supported by Roman law he underlined that such mental issues pulled away the legal basis for criminal actions against these 'demented old women' ("*vetulas illas dementatas*," Wier 1563, 24) as he termed them. Instead of torturing them into confession and sentencing them to be burnt, they should be handed over for treatment to professional physicians like himself.

Wier's views came under heavy attack from some of his readers, but received a warm welcome from others. In this monograph the Italian scholar Michaela Valente, associate professor of Early Modern History at La Sapienza, Università di Roma, focuses on an analysis of Wier's arguments on the one hand and the debate he instigated on the other. In two senses her book really is a classic history of ideas. Classic in the sense that it ties in with a long and respected tradition, but also classic because the result of her minute probing is a new standard for the way in which the debate between Wier and his opponents should be understood.

After 1563 five new editions of the Latin version of *De praestigiis* were issued, each time reviewed, sometimes very drastically. Apart from major changes in the layout, Wier also introduced alterations in the content. In each of the five new editions sentences, paragraphs, even whole chapters were reformulated, added, or removed. Soon after its first appearance an unauthorized translation was issued which prompted Wier to publish a vernacular version of his own in 1567, a second edition of which appeared in 1578. This text in lower German may be considered a book in its own right on grounds Wier himself disclosed in his foreword where he wrote (in my translation): 'In the Latin version much has furthermore been written that not everybody can put into words or understand in the German language. [...] Many things that for scholars can be phrased in Latin,



cannot be served to simple people [...] Whoever reads my German books and compares these to the other ones, will discover much that is not mentioned or described in the Latin version' (Wier 1567, Vorred, b\*ijj). In her Introduction, Valente explains in terms not very dissimilar to Wier's considerations why this English edition is not simply a translation of the Italian original, *Johann Wier: Agli albori*: "This work was first published in 2003. [...] In that edition the reader can find a number of detailed studies and references to original sources. The current text is different, updated in respect of new research, and aimed not only at academic readers" (11). It is, in my view, a pity that readers who are unable to understand Italian can now not check her statements by an inspection of the sources. Be it as it may, this English version is indeed less voluminous than the Italian one that counts vi + 337 pages.

The main results of Valente's initial investigations are still the backbone of her description. After a rather short and, as will be discussed later in this review, not exactly flawless survey of Wier's biography, Valente shifts to a meticulous analysis of Wier's argumentation in *De praestigiis*, his intellectual sources, and the debate his book engendered. It is beyond the scope of this review to sum up all the views by opponents and supporters whose reactions she discusses. But a few of them may be mentioned here. For example, there is the Lutheran pastor Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) who had had an essential role in the Lutheran Reformation of the Duchy of Württemberg. Brenz held that Anabaptists should not be executed and had also proclaimed that it was futile to persecute supposed witches for causing devastating storms. This of course caused Wier to believe that he could enlist him as an ally, but to his disappointment Brenz replied that witches should be punished because they had the wish to cause havoc for their community.

Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), first physician to the Reformed Elector of the Palatinate and professor at the University of Heidelberg, proved to be an even more outspoken opponent of Wier's views regarding the witch trials. This Zwinglian colleague of Wier argued that even if witches were in themselves powerless, they should be executed, nevertheless. The demonic pact made them guilty of apostasy and by asking demons to harm fellow human beings they had caused mishap, which was enough reason to execute them.

The French lawyer and political philosopher Jean Bodin (ca. 1530-1596) went a major step further than Brenz or Erastus by accusing Wier of himself being an accomplice of Satan. Valente stipulates that the gap between Wier and Bodin stemmed for a large part from the fact that the physician from Cleves and Jülich based much of his argumentation on the New Testament, whereas the French lawyer preferred the Old Testament as a basis for his argumentation. Wier's God

was always willing to forgive, while Bodin's supreme being was a vengeful judge unwilling to show mercy.

The Croatian philosopher Paulus Scalichius (1534-1573) attacked Wier for the reason that by acknowledging that the human soul and demons were corporeal beings the physician had opened the door to a road that ended in atheism. Basing his answer on the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine monk Michael Psellus, Wier replied that the devil's corporeality was of a spiritual nature. Demons were therefore unable to take on material bodies and people who believed to have seen such a physical demonic presence were the victims of phantasy.

The quality of Valente's analysis of the reception of Wier's plea is doubtlessly of a very high level. However, I am afraid that my assessment about other parts of the book is less favourable. The number of larger and smaller errors as well as inaccuracies in the other sections is slightly disturbing. Some of these issues were, by the way, already present in the Italian original. For instance, in the index of both editions the first name of this reviewer is given as 'Hand'. I readily admit that this manual consistency does not pose a grave danger to the understanding of the text, but also that I find it a bit annoying. A similar error occurs on p. 27 where the Dutch physician Jan Jacob Cobben is introduced, whose dissertation on Wier appeared in Dutch in 1960 and in English in 1976 (Cobben 1976). According to Valente he was a neurologist, whereas he was in fact a radiologist. In the context of this monograph this again may be minor, but inaccuracies like these erode confidence in the author's work. The same effect occurred by the remark that in 1562 Wier's employer established a university in a town called "Duisberg" (49). Certainly, the Duke of Cleves and Jülich has invested much time and energy in his efforts to found a university in Duisburg, correctly spelled with a second u, but this project failed and it was only in 1655 that such an institution opened its doors there.

Other errors are not so inconsequential. A sentence on p. 65 about the number of Latin editions of *De praestigiis* is indeed confusing: "Over the following 20 years, eight Latin editions were published (1563, 1564, 1566, 1568, 1577, and 1583)." I only count six edition years here and that is actually the correct number. One would, by the way, expect the editors of Amsterdam University Press to notice such a slip of the pen. More serious is the claim that the Palatinate "largely adopted Wier's recommendations concerning witch trials" (183), which is simply wrong. Already in the year 2000 the German historian Jürgen-Michael Schmidt concluded in his detailed dissertation about the history of the witch trials in that part of Germany, that the absence of such trials there had nothing to do with Johan Wier (Schmidt 2000, 124-125, 137-38). Already a year before the first appearance of *De praestigiis*, so in 1562, the Elector's chancellor Christoph Probus had made it the Palatinate's official policy to prevent all witch trials.

I am afraid that Valente's appraisal of the influence that Johan's youngest brother Matthias has exerted on Wier's thinking is also not flawless. Matthias acted as a spiritualist guide for his two brothers Johan and Arnold and several other people. Gary Waite and I have argued that it was initially the Dutch spiritualist prophet David Joris who inspired Johan and Matthias. But in 1555 or 1556 Matthias assumed an independent role as spiritualist guidesman and his oldest brother fully accepted his guidance. After Matthias's death in 1560, three collections of his letters, sayings and other texts were issued that enable us to reconstruct his line of thinking ([Wier, Matthias], *Dat boeck der sproecken*, ca. 1560; [Wier, Matthias]. *Eyn kort Bericht*, 1563; [Wier, Matthias], *Grondelicke onderrichtinghe*, 1579). According to Valente, Matthias "participated in the Reformation, and was in contact with the main reformer theologians" (57). But none of his letters were addressed to a leader of the Reformation, not to Calvin or Bullinger, not to Melanchthon, not even to Menno Simons, the reformer whose thinking was in some respects quite close to his. Even more, in one of his letters he in no uncertain terms rejected Calvin's dogma of the predestination and there is not a trace of Luther's *sola fide* ('through faith alone') in his texts. Matthias himself explained that his inspiration came from the medieval mystical writings of Tauler, Thomas a Kempis, and the *Theologia Deutsch*. A true Christian, he held, should purify himself by austerity, abstinence, and mortification. In other words, a true believer had to earn salvation by the quality of her or his life and that fitted in more with the Catholic view on how to achieve salvation.

Valente gives a similar overhasty statement when she claims, "there is incontrovertible evidence that [...] Matthias was connected to" (58) the Family of Love, but the existing evidence does not warrant such an indisputable conclusion. What happened was that Johan had received from fellow courtiers some texts written by Hendrick Niclaes, the founder of the Family, and had passed these on to his brother. After reading this third hand information Matthias rejected the contents on the basis that initially Hendrick Niclaes had followed the right path but had then gone astray and was now too "carnal." Niclaes tended to demand ever more obedience from his followers, which caused his family to fall apart. A few years earlier this had also happened among David Joris's followers when the Wier brothers also broke off their relations with him. So, it is highly unlikely that they, after leaving one authoritarian leader, namely David Joris, submitted themselves to a following one in the person of Hendrick Niclaes.

But despite these and other similar errors Valente reaches the conclusion "that Wier ascribed to a form of doctrinal indifferentism that defies all definition" (59). She attributes this to the combined influence of Wier's former teacher Agrippa, of Erasmus, the Irenicist Flemish thinker Cassander, and the Family of

Love. If in this summing up, “the Family of Love” were to be replaced by “David Joris and especially Matthias Wier,” I could agree with this assessment.

So, all in all my review of this monograph is of a mixed character. We can applaud the sections in which Wier’s book and the intense debates it engendered are analyzed, but other sections should be handled with considerable caution.

## References

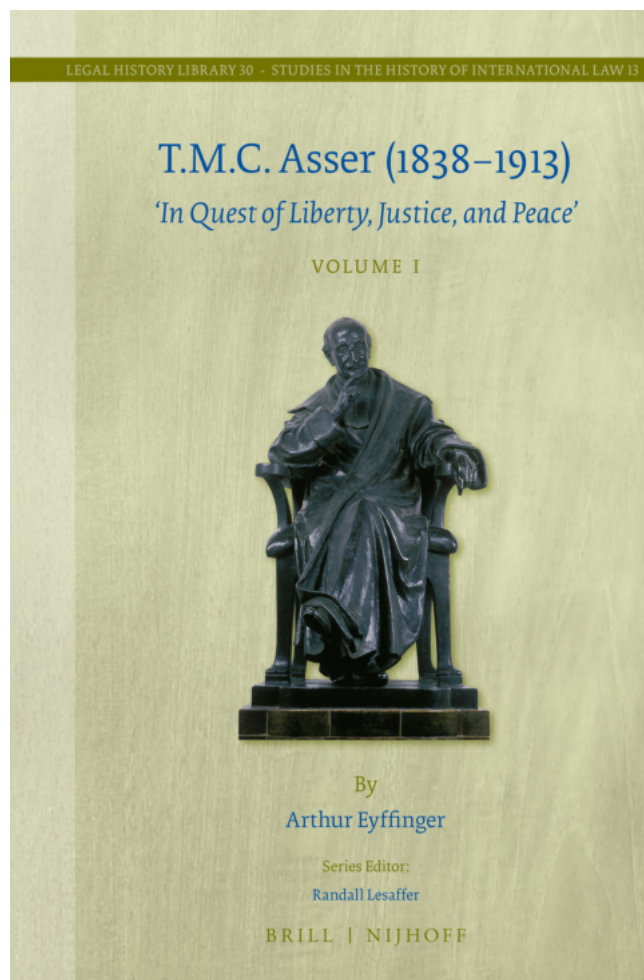
- Cobben, Jan Jacob. 1976. *Jan Wier, devils, witches, and magic*. Translated by Sal A. Prins. Philadelphia: Dorrance.
- Schmidt, Jürgen-Michael. 2000. *Glaube und Skepsis: Die Kurpfalz und die abendländische Hexenverfolgung 1446-1685*. Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.
- Valente, Michaela. 2003. *Johann Wier: Agli albori della critica razionale dell'occulto e del demoniaco nell'Europa del Cinquecento*. Firenze: L.S. Olschki.
- Dooren, Leonard. 1940. *Doctor Johannes Wier: Leven en werken*. Aalten: De Graafschap.
- [Wier, Matthias]. Ca. 1560. *Dat boeck der sproecken inhoudende veel schone onderwysingen* [...]. Rotterdam: name not stated.
- [Wier, Matthias]. 1563, *Eyn kort Bericht um to kommen tot den waren Gehoor dess levendigen Woirdtz Gotz* [...]. [Wesel]: [Pieter Anastasius de Zuttere].
- Wier, Johan. 1563. *De praestigijs daemonum, et incantationibus, ac veneficiis, Libri V*. Basel: Oporinus.
- Wier, Johan. 1567. *De praestigijs daemonum. Von Zauberey, wo her sie iren Ursprung hab* [...]. Name and place not stated.
- [Wier, Matthias]. 1568. *Grondelicke onderrichtinghe van veelen hoochwichtighe artuculen* [...]. Vianen: Dierick Wullem.

## About the reviewer

Hans de Waardt studied medieval history at the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands). In 1991 he received his doctorate from Erasmus University in Rotterdam for his dissertation about the history of witchcraft *Toverij en samenleving. Holland 1500-1800*, which was supervised by prof. dr. Willem Frijhoff. He has worked as a history teacher at schools for secondary education and as a postdoc researcher and assistant professor at Erasmus University, the Faculty of Medicine of Utrecht University, and the Faculties of Humanities and Medicine of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, where he also coordinated a Master’s program of medical history. His publications in Dutch, English, German and French are on the history of witchcraft, medical history, the history of universities, and the radical Reformation. Currently he is working on a biography of Johan Wier, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century physician who is known for his plea against the witch trials, as well as a tract against the limitless aggressiveness that dominated the wars of religion, and a number of medical case histories.

**Review**  
**Arthur Eyffinger:**  
***T.M.C. Asser (1838-1913):***  
***'In quest of liberty, justice, and peace'***  
Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2019. 2 volumes. xlvii, 1955 p.  
ISBN 9789004375727 (hardback, set) /  
ISBN 9789004397972 (e-book)

*Reviewed by Joost Blom*



Tobias Asser's name is probably unfamiliar to most people. Some readers of this journal may be acquainted with the T. M. C. Asser Institute, an inter-university research centre on international law in The Hague, or they may happen to have come across the fact that Asser is, so far, the only Dutch recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize (1911). The fame of lawyers, no matter how eminent they are in their profession, rarely extends beyond the legal sphere. Yet here is a monumental biography of a man who achieved prominence entirely as a lawyer — not as a businessman or a holder of public offices — and died more than a century ago. Why does he deserve our attention?

Arthur Eyffinger, former head librarian at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (1988-2003) and an expert on the history of international law, answers that question decisively. He shows how central a role Asser played in the formation of international legal ideas and institutions, and how profound Asser's legacy has proved to be. That legacy includes the status of The Hague as, in some ways, the most notable centre of international legal life. The seat of the ICJ is there. Several other international legal tribunals are based in the city, as are various intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions concerned with international law. Asser was one among many leading figures, over the decades, who helped bring about The Hague's pre-eminence, but it is hard to imagine that, without him, it could have happened in the way it did.

Eyffinger gives us much more than the story of a lawyer — and networker — of international renown. This is a *life and times* study of a quality and scale that make it an extraordinary scholarly achievement. Its superb sweep, breadth of interest, and richness of detail have almost a 19<sup>th</sup>-century expansiveness about them. Among many other things, it offers an absorbing portrait of Dutch society and Dutch politics in Asser's time. For all the international ramifications of Asser's career, his life and work were centred in Amsterdam and, later, The Hague, and the Dutch setting receives full attention at every turn.

The Assers were a Jewish family that came to Amsterdam from Germany in the 1660s. They rose to prominence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Tobias was the fourth generation to make a successful career in law. The account of the history of the family, and that of the Dutch Jewish community, is fascinating.

Tobias's intellect and energy were remarkable early on. He completed his legal studies with a highly praised dissertation on Dutch constitutional law and foreign policy. At the same time, when still only twenty, he wrote a treatise on the Economic Concept of Value that won him a prize and national scholarly attention. Almost as soon as he was qualified to practise, he took over his father's law firm (the father had just been appointed a judge). The practice of law was the core of Asser's professional life from then (1860) until 1893, when he was appointed to

the Council of State and left Amsterdam for The Hague. His son, and then his grandson, carried on the law firm until it was absorbed by another in 1966.

Once Asser gets his career underway, the narrative shifts from chronological to thematic, in order to cope with the fact that, almost from the start, he pursued parallel avenues of endeavour that overlapped for the rest of his life. The threads have to be pulled apart to see them clearly. Every so often, a chapter fills in the personal story, including his happy marriage to his first cousin, Jeanne; their four children; and the friendships, often with professional colleagues, that meant the most to him. Eyffinger has made ample and fruitful use of the very extensive Asser family archive, which became available to the public while he was writing the book. Asser himself hardly ever threw any records away, and the family, especially some of the women, were enthusiastic and engaging writers of journals and letters, many of which survive.

Asser's law practice, central though it was for him, is not analyzed in the same detail as the many other sides of his legal life. That is probably due to the private nature of legal practice, which makes source material very scarce. A law practice's records essentially belong, not to the lawyer, but to the client. However, a parallel public legal career opened for Asser almost at once. In 1862, he was appointed to a professorial chair at the Amsterdam *Athenaeum Illustre*, which in 1877 became the University of Amsterdam. He held his professorship until 1893. His publications, although well-regarded for their forward-looking and practical outlook, were not voluminous and did not include the typical academic *magnum opus*. Asser nevertheless achieved an immense reputation, which rested above all on his sustained success as an organizer. He was a pivotal figure in the origin of some of the most important legal institutions of his own time, and of ours.

He threw himself into one initiative after another. Typically — and naturally, given how small the Dutch legal scene is — these were projects that brought together colleagues from multiple countries. He seemed to know all the right people and how to win them over to his ideas. Most importantly, he had a finely honed ability to keep pressing ahead. His drive was controlled by tact and patience. He had an exceptionally acute sense of the possible, and he would pursue the goal even if the effort took many years. People obviously liked working with him, certainly because of his attractive personality, but also, as repeated episodes in his story suggest, because he typically did more than his share of the heavy work and could be counted on to do it with consummate skill.

Asser was a founder and lifelong member of each of the two leading organizations of experts in international law, the *Institut de Droit International* and the International Law Association. They were formed in the same year, 1873, with complementary objectives and memberships (mostly academics in the *Institut*, a

broader range of legal professionals in the Association). They continue today, their prestige undiminished.

His favourite branch of the law was private international law. It is concerned with how legal systems can do justice in private matters that implicate the laws of more than one country. Many of the problems in this field are highly complex, and there is no international consensus as to how they should be solved. Each jurisdiction is free to deal with them as it sees fit, and the result is an uncoordinated patchwork of approaches that make planning difficult. Asser conceived the idea of convening, in The Hague, a series of international conferences to build consensus as to the right way to handle particular issues, such as (to name one of the most intractable areas) enforcing civil judgments from foreign courts. The agreed rules would be laid down in treaties among the participant nations.

He persuaded the Dutch government to support the conferences, the first of which was held, with Asser as president, in 1893. Other conferences followed. They demonstrated that real progress could be made, even if gradually and painstakingly. Remarkably, they continue today. In 1955, the Hague Conference on Private International Law was set up by member states as a permanent institution. Membership now stands at eighty-nine states. (Canada is a member, and a very active one, at that.) Its diplomatic conferences have crafted a series of multilateral Hague Conventions — by now there are 40 of them — that underpin the progressive harmonization of private international law. If any one institution is Asser's monument, it is this.

The original Hague Conferences on private international law came to be seen as a successful diplomatic model for working out internationally agreed solutions to difficult legal problems. The model's prestige led The Hague to be chosen as the host, and Asser as a principal organizer, for the first (1899) and second (1907) Hague Peace Conferences. These were aimed at strengthening the laws of war and at promoting disarmament. Their main objectives were not achieved — two World Wars in the next 40 years attest to that — but the conferences did produce some beneficial long-term results. The most important was a greater acceptance of international legal tribunals as a means for settling disputes. The conferences set up a Permanent Court of Arbitration (which still exists), which was joined, after World War I, by a Permanent Court of International Justice (now the ICJ). That the city became the seat of these courts (their home, the Peace Palace, opened in 1913) is directly attributable to the Hague Peace Conferences. Asser's Nobel Peace Prize paid tribute to the role he played, in his many capacities, in the movement for international justice.

Arthur Eyffinger's treatise gives us an absorbing study of an important Dutch legal figure. At the same time, it virtually constitutes an encyclopedia of the



formative years of international legal institutions that still shape our world. Anyone wanting to know about these subjects or about any part of them — the book is very clearly laid out and well-indexed — could have no better guide.

### **About the reviewer**

Joost Blom is professor emeritus of law at the Peter A. Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia (UBC, Canada). He took his LLB at UBC, a BCL at Oxford, and an LLM at Harvard. He joined the UBC Law Faculty in 1972, was dean from 1997 to 2003, and retired from full-time teaching in 2017. He has taught courses in private international law, contracts, torts, and intellectual property, and he has published widely in those areas. He is the co-author, with P. T. Burns, of *Economic torts in Canada*, 2nd ed. (LexisNexis, 2016). He has held visiting academic positions at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, York University's Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, the University of Melbourne Law School (Australia), and the University of Trier (Germany). Joost Blom was awarded a King's Counsel (KC) title in 1985 (British Columbia), served as an elected bencher of the Law Society of British Columbia from 2004 to 2011, and is now a Life Bencher. He is also a titular member of the International Academy of Comparative Law.



**Review**

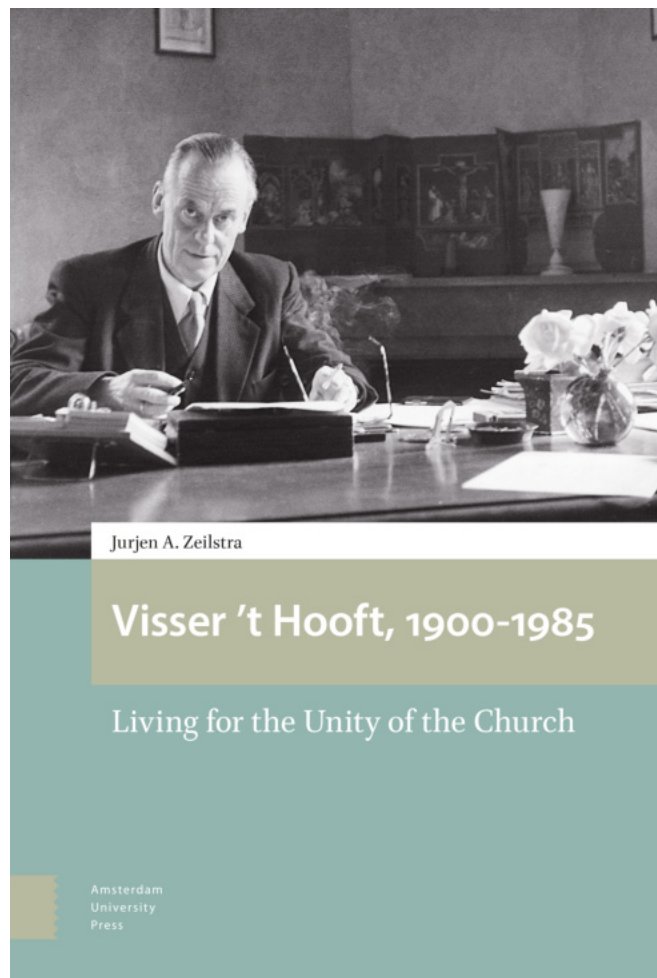
**Jurjen A. Zeilstra:  
*Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985:  
Living for the unity of the Church***

Henry Jansen (trans.)

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 597 p.

ISBN 9789463726832

*Reviewed by John A. Vissers*



Jurjen Zeilstra's comprehensive biography of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch church leader Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985) documents in detail the life and contribution of a man often described by journalists as the pope of the ecumenical movement and one of the best-known Dutch theologians outside the Netherlands. He was also known as an acerbic theologian, and a difficult person. Originally produced in Dutch as a doctoral dissertation for the Free University of Amsterdam in 2018—*Visser 't Hooft: Een leven voor de oecumene – Biografie 1900-1985* ('Visser 't Hooft: A life for ecumenism — biography 1900-1985')—Zeilstra's biography is the first critical academic study of Visser 't Hooft's complete life. Zeilstra makes use of broad historical perspectives and detailed biographical research to tell Visser 't Hooft's story in relation to the ecumenical movement from the 1930s to the 1980s.

Who exactly was Willem A. Visser 't Hooft? He was one of the founders of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its first general secretary from 1948 to 1966 (Zeilstra, 19). Zeilstra describes Visser 't Hooft's personal and public life in a clear and straight-forward narrative. Born at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Haarlem in the Netherlands, Visser 't Hooft came from a patrician and Remonstrant background which taught him to think and act independently, especially as he studied theology at Leiden. Early in his life, through his involvement in the Dutch Christian Student Society (NCSV), he came to believe that the Christian church could be much more than it was—namely, that the church could be one, united in faith and work, and that a fragmented Christendom in Europe militated against the flourishing of the churches and the whole inhabited world (that is, the oikumene). This ecumenical vision was his life-long passion and vocation (Zeilstra, 31).

Following his graduation, Visser 't Hooft married Henriëtte Philipine Jacoba (Jetty) Boddaert in 1924. Visser 't Hooft was employed for fifteen years in student work, first as the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) international secretary for youth, and later by the WSCF (World Student Christian Federation). He was a brilliant and energetic organizer with an international vision. However, "It was not the ideal of internationalism" that drove him, "but how he could live out the Christian faith with young people from various countries" (Zeilstra, 63).

In the 1920s and 1930s, Visser 't Hooft was deeply influenced by both the theology of the Social Gospel in America and the theology of the Swiss Reformed Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968), especially Barth's sharp critique of the German Christian churches under Hitler. Visser 't Hooft's involvement with the YMCA and the WSCF also placed him at the center of the rising ecumenical movement where he had an increasingly influential voice. Zeilstra mentions that "Given his vision and character" the developments in this period made him the

logical choice “for the position of general secretary of the planned World Council of Churches” (Zeilstra, 67).

At the time of his appointment in 1938, Visser 't Hooft was only 38 years old. The WCC was not formally constituted until after World War II in 1948, but the young theologian was actively engaged in promoting church unity in wartime. Visser 't Hooft tried to keep ecumenical networks alive, especially for the members of the German Church Resistance against the Third Reich; however, this was not an easy task. He was often placed in the difficult position of having to account “for both the church’s silence and its speaking out” within Germany and across Europe (Zeilstra, 148). Visser 't Hooft took the position that the WCC provisional committee “could, indeed, not speak *on behalf of* the churches, but it could speak *to* the churches” (Zeilstra, 158). Not everyone agreed, especially Karl Barth, who wanted the churches to speak out forcefully against the German Christians. Nevertheless, Visser 't Hooft was relentless in promoting the unity of the church “as a counter to a world ripped assunder by violence” (Zeilstra, 147). Based in his apartment in Geneva, he worked with churches, parachurch agencies, NGOs, and governments, including his own Dutch government in exile. His public statements and articles inspired some and offended others. But through it all, he was seen as a reliable representative of the ecumenical movement and his influence grew (Zeilstra, 147).

The years of the Second World War between 1942-1944 were particularly challenging for Visser 't Hooft and the churches, and Zeilstra devotes an entire chapter to them (Zeilstra, 201-250). During this period, Visser 't Hooft’s involvement moved beyond ecumenical activism to political involvement. He was instrumental in setting up the Swiss Road for the movement of people and communications back and forth between the civilian and military resistance in the Third Reich and the allied nations of Europe. He tried to advance his own vision of “how the war could bring revival for reconstruction,” which he continued to believe would be rooted in a spiritual revival of united Christian churches across Europe (Zeilstra, 201). This vision was never realized, mostly because many of the churches with which Visser 't Hooft worked were themselves deeply implicated in supporting the war and its evils, in many cases having helped create the very conditions for the war itself. It was during this time that he worked as an advisor to the Dutch government in exile in London and experienced disappointment in what he considered to be his own government’s unwillingness to act more decisively.

Immediately after the war, Visser 't Hooft poured his energies into reconciliation and reconstruction, primarily through the founding of the World Council of Churches, which had been delayed by the war. In his role as general secretary, he exercised a unique style of diplomatic leadership as he coordinated

the efforts of the churches in responding to the post-war efforts to rebuild a responsible society. He was an activist—and a pragmatist—as he sought to implement the World Council's programs. But he was no longer acting provisionally in the service of a movement; the WCC rapidly became an institution with an international reach (Zeilstra, 291). Nevertheless, Visser 't Hooft continued to be driven by his vision of ecumenism in which "the unity of the church was not an ideal to strive for but a starting point—a reality, in his view, given by God in Jesus Christ to humanity" (Zeilstra, 251).

The founding assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 was the apex of Visser 't Hooft's career. It was the culmination of what he had worked toward from his earliest days as a student Christian worker, and it solidified the basis of his influence for the next two decades. From 1948 to his retirement in 1966, Visser 't Hooft played a central role in every aspect of the WCC's work. His theological vision, accompanied by his strong-minded style of leadership, shaped the WCC's approach to issues like interreligious dialogue, the Cold War, and international crises in South Africa, Cuba, and Cyprus. On December 8, 1961, he appeared on the cover of the weekly news magazine *Time* as a "World Churchman" leading "The Second Reformation" (Zeilstra, 349-350).

Notwithstanding this international acclaim, Visser 't Hooft's vision for a united church that would signal a revived Christianity in the service of a suffering world never materialized. Instead, after 1960, secularization accelerated, especially in his native Holland. Many places that had been colonized by Christian missionaries became independent. The theological influence of Barth waned, and a younger generation of church leaders began to emphasize liberation and social justice as core elements of the Christian message. By the time he retired in 1966, Visser 't Hooft's influence was in serious decline.

In Chapter 7, Zeilstra describes one area where Visser 't Hooft found success: he persuaded the Eastern Orthodox to become members of the World Council of Churches. Already in his 1933 book, *Le catholicisme non-romain* ('non-roman catholicism'), he had concluded that the inclusion of Eastern Orthodoxy was indispensable to the success of the WCC (Zeilstra, 361). Their entry into the WCC was complicated, and initially delayed by the Cold War. But in 1961, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox churches of Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland, together with 19 other churches primarily from Africa, were accepted into the WCC (Zeilstra, 384-385). This changed the character of the WCC which until then was primarily a European and North American Protestant movement. Once again, this was the realization of Visser 't Hooft's strategic vision for ecumenism that had been adopted at the meeting of the WCC's Central Committee in Toronto, Canada in 1950:

The member churches of the World Council consider the relationship of the other churches to the Holy Catholic Church which the creeds profess as a subject for mutual consideration. Nevertheless, membership does not imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word (Zeilstra, 375-376).

In theory, this meant that any church—Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, or Roman Catholic—could join the WCC without compromising its own ecclesiological convictions concerning the others. The inclusion of the Eastern Orthodox was a significant development which has had a continuing significance to the present day. Russia's war with Ukraine in 2022 created serious divisions between the Orthodox churches in Russia and Ukraine which the WCC has tried to mediate, unsuccessfully.

At the same time as the Orthodox churches were accepted into the WCC, the "Toronto strategy" created the opportunity—from the side of the WCC—for the Roman Catholic Church to join. Visser 't Hooft campaigned extensively for this and he leveraged his friendships with fellow Dutch Roman Catholic leaders Jo Willibrands and Frans Thijssen to make it happen, especially during Vatican II (1962-1965) (Zeilstra, 401). Under the papacy of John XXIII, it looked as if this might be possible, but successive popes beginning with Paul VI through to Benedict XVI led the Roman Catholic Church away from membership in the WCC. Today, Pope Francis has cultivated a more ecumenically friendly spirit on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, but the Church's deeply held conviction that it is the one true church and that others are, at best, separated siblings, together with Rome's organizational, bureaucratic, and institutional inertia, make it highly unlikely that the Roman Catholic Church will ever join. The waning influence of the WCC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century makes it even more unlikely.

The work of the World Council was Visser 't Hooft's life, which made it difficult for him to retire. He did so officially in 1966 but he continued his involvement to varying degrees right up until his death in 1985. It made Visser 't Hooft angry to see theological themes such as the centrality of Jesus Christ and the radical rejection of syncretism, which were of critical importance to him, set aside by the next generation of ecumenical leaders. The General Assemblies of Uppsala (1968), Nairobi (1975), and Vancouver (1983), did not go as he wished. Some began to see him as a bitter old man, in declining health, suffering from the loneliness caused by his wife Jetty's death.

Zeilstra's account of Visser 't Hooft's life and work is compelling. Its 597 pages contains more details about Visser 't Hooft's public life than might interest the average reader, and less about his personal life than one might expect. It is an academic study, to be sure, in the realm of ecclesiastical history and theology, but

it is accessible in this translation to the English reader, and it tells the story of an important Netherlandic leader whose life and work had global significance. It builds on existing full-length biographies, including Visser 't Hooft's autobiography *W.A. Visser 't Hooft, 1900-1985* (2000), Jan Schubert's *Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985): Oikumene und Europa* ('Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985): Ecumenism and Europe') (2017), and Michael Kinnamon's recent theological study, *Unity as prophetic witness: W.A. Visser 't Hooft and the shaping of ecumenical theology* (2018). The recent studies advance Visser 't Hooft research beyond the earlier commemorative writings and scholarly articles which focus on specific aspects of Visser 't Hooft's life and legacy as an ecumenical leader.

In common with these studies, Zeilstra's book focuses on Visser 't Hooft as the pre-eminent ecumenical leader of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is written from the perspective of appreciative criticism. It tackles difficult issues carefully, but at many points it begs further questions. For example, did Visser 't Hooft and the emerging WCC networks of the 1930s and 1940s do enough to defend the rights of the Jewish people, or was Visser 't Hooft too concerned with losing the support of the German churches? Was Visser 't Hooft self-aware of the extent to which his authority was grounded in his elite status in Dutch society and his role as a leader in a Eurocentric white male Christian civilization? By the 1960s the center of gravity for the Christian movement shifted south and it seems clear that Visser 't Hooft was never comfortable with post-colonial Christianity. Now, almost forty years after his death, most Christians live in the majority world, outside Europe and America. Visser 't Hooft also resisted, especially later in his life, attempts to accept feminism and its implications for the Christian tradition.

Finally, like most effective leaders Visser 't Hooft knew his own mind, he had confidence in his own opinions, and he was brilliant at making ideas live in the plans and programs he developed with a cohort of like-minded church leaders. As General Secretary he listened, he cultivated collaboration, but he also often imposed his own will on the WCC. In this way, Zeilstra's biography shows how Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft often truly acted as the pope of the ecumenical movement. This was a Dutchman who left his mark on the world church. Visser 't Hooft's legacy will continue to be studied by historians and theologians because his life and work are integral to the ecumenical movement, and the ecumenical movement is inextricably bound up with the international politics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **About the reviewer**

John Vissers is professor of historical theology at Knox College, University of Toronto (Ontario, Canada). Until recently he was Principal of Knox College (2017-

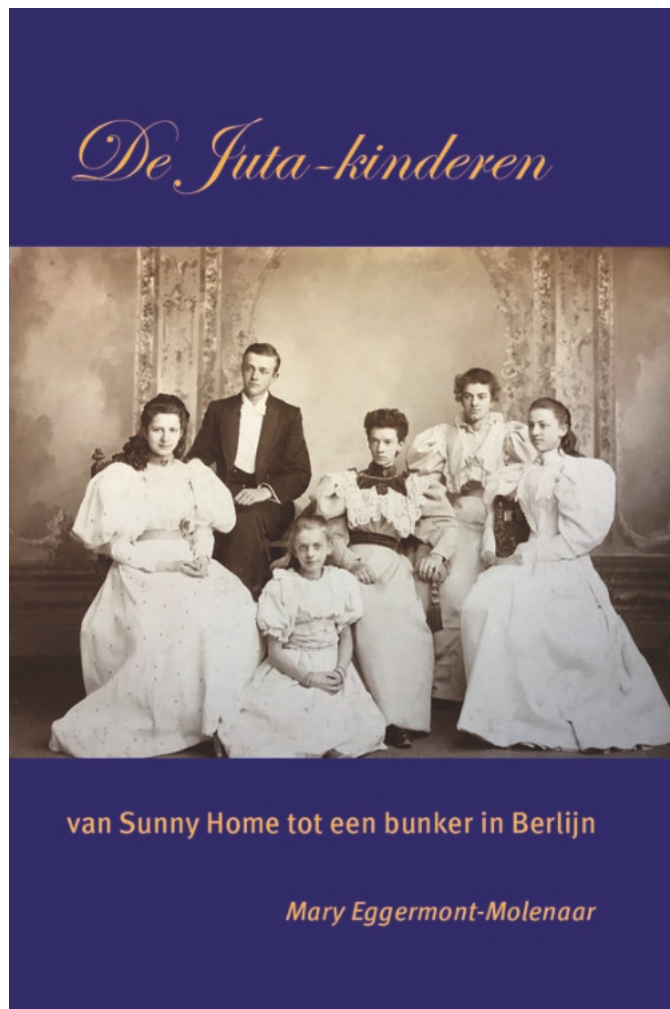


2022) and previously also Principal at The Presbyterian College at McGill University (1999-2013) in Montreal. In 2012-2013 he served as Moderator of the 138<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. His books include *The neo-orthodox theology of W. W. Bryden* (James Clarke and Company, 2011) and the co-edited, with Richard R. Topping, *Calvin @ 500: Theology, history, and practice* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011). He has written widely in the areas of Reformed Protestant history, theology, and spirituality. He is a graduate of the University of Toronto (B.A.), Knox College (M.Div.), Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Theol.), and the Toronto School of Theology (D.Theol.). In 2012 he was awarded the degree Doctor of Sacred Theology, *honoris causa*, by the Montreal Diocesan Theological College at McGill University in recognition of his contribution to Reformed theology and ecumenical theological education.



**Review**  
**Mary Eggermont-Molenaar:**  
***De Juta-kinderen van Sunny Home tot een bunker in Berlijn***  
Leiden: Gingko, 2021. 205 p.  
ISBN 9789071256974

*Reviewed by Paul Knevel*



### Popular family history in practice

“What does this book tell us about public history?” With this question posed by the editor of the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* in mind, I, a public historian, started reading Mary Eggermont-Molenaar’s *De Juta-kinderen*. Soon the question itself proved to be an elusive one. Public history is often seen as the practice of history outside of academia, or in the words of Lyle Dick (2009), as the “historical practice [carried out] of, by, and for the people” (7). What then has Eggermont-Molenaar’s book to do with public history?

Clearly, the book does not fit into the traditional academic historical practice, with its problem-driven approach, its historiographical perspective, and its academic transparency, demonstrated in footnotes and discussions with other historians. Eggermont-Molenaar just wants to write about the lives of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch merchant and his eight children (seven daughters and one son). During the research for a former book, she stumbled upon some remarkable stories about the family of the first owner of Sunny Home, the wooden house in Leiden in which Eva Biesheuvel and her husband, the well-known Dutch writer Maarten Biesheuvel, had lived for almost twenty years. Why not tell their stories? ‘Why not also narrate about the wool trader Juta, his children, a single grandchild, limited to their (school) work and their vicissitudes? These stories rollercoaster on the plagues, tuberculosis and world wars of the first half of the twentieth century.’ (“*Waarom ook niet verhalen over de wolhandelaar Juta, zijn kinderen, een enkel kleinkind, dit beperkt tot hun (school)werk en hun wederwaardigheden? Deze verhalen rollercoasteren over de plagen, tuberculose en wereldoorlogen, van de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw*” [10]).

But does this starting point alone make the book an example of an historical practice outside of academia? As an author, Eggermont-Molenaar can hardly be defined as an academic outsider: working as a translator in Canada and being the author of eleven history books in English and Dutch, she is clearly a professional in her own right. Being the prolific writer she is, her *De Juta-kinderen* is nonetheless in style and content miles away from the popular history books we know so well from non-fiction bestsellers-lists, the works of authors like Geert Mak and Suzanna Jansen in the Netherlands and Daniel Francis and Margaret MacMillan in Canada. In her book, Mary Eggermont-Molenaar doesn’t use the literary techniques so characteristic for those authors or doesn’t seem to have any of their narrative ambitions. The topics covered in *De Juta-kinderen* are big and important: the lives of Juta’s children center around health and diseases, social change and women’s suffrage, war and even Nazi-war crimes and Holocaust. But presenting a well-crafted, suspenseful family story mirroring the period (1871-1971) and themes she is dealing with seems not to be its author’s aim. Eggermont-

Molenaar is clearly not writing popular history *for* the people in the grand style of for instance Geert Mak's *De eeuw van mijn vader* ('My father's century').

The book is rather rooted in the practice of genealogy and family history; it offers a collection of life-stories, organized by the generational logic of the family tree and driven by the available archival records, mostly generated by the *rites de passage* of someone's life: birth, school, marriage, work, and death. The availability of these archival records, more than the author's perspective or interests, confine the topics covered, the narrative and sometimes even the composition of the book. When the author, for instance, finds more information about Andreas van der Stok, the husband of Betsy Juta, the oldest daughter of progenitor Herman Jute, than fit in the chapter (2) devoted to her, she simply adds an appendix to this chapter: 2a. This strategy leads, time and again, to digressions and an eagerness to quote extensively from the sources found. As such, *De Jutakinderen* amply demonstrates the lure of the archive.

It may be seen as a characteristic trait of popular family history. "Family historians do not so much make a cult of the archive as act as its slaves," Martin Bashforth (2012, 203) once stated. It is this (sometimes blind) trust in and dependence on archival sources that have given genealogists and family historians such a bad name among academic historians. For a long time, academics (but not Bashforth, for that matter) have distanced themselves from the activities of these so-called amateurs and ridiculed them for wallowing too easily in "self-indulgent nostalgia" (Evans 2020, 311), and "seeking emotional connections with the past lives of their forbears" (Evans 2020, 317). Popular family history certainly has its flaws. It represents a mode of historical knowing that might be considered conservative and profoundly Western, based as it is on archives, family linearity and often heteronormative norms (Evans 2020, 318; De Groot 2015). Moreover, it misses the complexity, layering and transparency of the analyses, source criticism and argument that characterize academic historical research. But what is the point of *not* taking the historical pursuits of so many people (history *by* and often, as we shall see, *of* the people) seriously on its own terms? It is here, that public history can offer a different perspective.

Over the last number of decades, a booming interest in genealogy and family history has manifested itself. Millions of people all over the world are actively involved in genealogy or family history as a hobby; for them it is a form of "serious leisure," a means of both enjoyment and education (De Groot 2015, 103). But there is more at stake. As various quantitative and qualitative surveys of the popular meaning of the *past* in different (Western) countries have shown, most of those outside academia explore history above all through family stories, memories, objects, photographs and places. This preferred approach includes

Canadians, as Margaret Conrad, Jocelyn Létourneau and David Northrup (2009) concluded in their survey about the ways Canadians orient themselves to the past:

An impressive number of Canadians are making conscious efforts to preserve the past by passing on heirlooms, preparing scrapbooks, keeping diaries, writing family histories, researching genealogies, or visiting places from their family's past. Although Canadians report that they see a number of different pasts as important, including the past of the country [or of the country of their birth – pk], the past of there is far and away the most important past. (33)

People feel at home with the past, to rephrase the results of another survey (Rosenzweig & Thelen 1998), but the past people feel connected with is often "intimate and personal" (18), and as such helps to address questions about relationships, identity, immortality, and agency (36). These observations underline the importance of history as a social activity. History, as Raphael Samuel (2012) once famously stated, is not "the prerogative of the historian" [or even] a historian's 'invention' [...] It is, rather, a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands" (8). Whoever wants to understand contemporary historical culture simply cannot ignore the practice of doing family history.

Seen from this perspective, *De Juta-kinderen* offers some interesting insights into such a practice. Although Eggermont-Molenaar does not write about her own family, her research is so firmly rooted in the ways most people examine their own family's history that it reveals enough about the lure and peculiarities of doing family history in practice. One of the main appeals of family history is undoubtedly that it individualizes the past. Considered from the perspective of a past family member, abstract topics can become palpably close. Partly this explains, too, the *cult of the archive* among many practitioners of family history, because, as the historian Ludmilla Jordanova (2000) stressed when she introduced the concept a long time ago, "the archive implies a kind of intimacy with particular aspects of the past that are more personal, individual, private and hence worth looking at precisely because they concern 'real life'" (187). Reconstructing the lives and vicissitudes of a past family member from original sources can, indeed, be an addictive and enriching experience, giving ample opportunities for "affective engagements" with the past and reflections about one's own life (Evans 2020, 317).

For most practitioners of family history these engagements with the past are closely intertwined with their own identity. This is obviously not the case in *De Juta-kinderen*, as the author is not dealing with her own family. But the stories she narrates give her nonetheless many starting points for reflections about past

conditions, choices made, and lessons to be learned for our own life and our future. She even writes a personal letter to one of Juta's children: Hermana Cornelia, who died when she was only eight months old (163-165). The shocking Nazi-careers of the husband of Arnoldina Johanna Juta, Siegfried Louis Emanuel Taubert, and of their son-in-law Ernst-Robert Grawitz, lead understandably to a different type of reaction. In response to their involvement in the Holocaust and the Nazi-terror, Eggermont-Molenaar not only warns against the contemporary dangers of alt-right and fascism, but also reflects on the inability of many to learn from history and the so-called dark side of many a family's history: 'By the way, the stories about the Tauberts and the Grawitzs are not nearly as "unusual" as I thought, when I see how many people were involved in all those terrible things. How many family stories also contain such black chapters? How many family stories to be written in the future will contain chapters like this?' (*Overigens zijn de verhalen over de Tauberts en de Grawitzen lang niet zo 'apart' als ik dacht, als ik zie hoeveel mensen bij al die verschrikkelikheden betrokken waren. Hoeveel familieverhalen bevatten ook zulke zwarte hoofdstukken? Hoeveel familieverhalen die nog geschreven zullen worden gaan dit soort hoofdstukken bevatten?*) [161]).

These reactions illustrate well how doing family history is often far more than a non-committal leisure activity: the engagements with a family's past help to stimulate one's historical consciousness, once described as 'the multiform and often inarticulate feelings and thoughts about the past in relation to the present' (*de veelvormige en vaak ongearticuleerde gevoelens en gedachten omtrent het verleden in relatie tot het heden*) (Van Vree 1998, 8). Moreover, Eggermont-Molenaar's reflections seem to underline the observation by Tanya Evans (2020) that most family historians "are using stories about their ancestors' past lives to argue for better lives to themselves, families and people less fortunate than themselves, in the present. They are using their research to learn more about the impact of structural disadvantage and social inequality and to share that knowledge with others" (321). As such, family historians contribute to what Dave Thelen (Rosenzweig & Thelen 1998) has called a participatory historical culture, "in which using the past could be treated as a shared human experience and opportunity for understanding, rather than a ground for suspicion and division" (190). Maybe, it is an overly optimistic view, but it is tempting one.

In its assumptions, methods and aims, family history thus clearly differs from academic history; these are, in many ways, two different worlds of engaging with the past. Academic historians can, nonetheless, learn much from these "thousand different hands" (Samuel 2012, 8). As members of the family they are researching, popular family historians have access to the kind of expertise, knowledge and research data that is often hard to get at for academic historians: family's private archives, frequently a heterogenous collection of written

documentation, photographs, stories, memories, and the like. Moreover, as family members they know how that archive functions, as it were: how objects and documents are linked together, which meaning specific objects have had for specific family members, how stories circulate, and others are silenced in family circles. They reveal, in other words, “the lived reality of remembrance in family life” (King & Hammett 2020, 246-247). Again, as an outsider, Eggermont-Molenaar, can only hint at how history is constructed and created within the Juta family. But thanks to internet, email, social media, and the digitization of archives, she, nonetheless, has gained access to essential parts of their private archive (intriguing photographs, documents, objects). The spirit of volunteerism in the family history community is strong. It helps her to supplement the information from more official public archives, and thus gives her an opportunity to colour the lives of the seven daughters of Herman Juta. There are still many gendered silences in the stories Eggermont-Molenaar presents, but at least we become aware of what it must have meant to be a female poet in the male-dominated literary culture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, how women played a crucial role in social issues like the fight for suffrage or the care for refugees, and how they otherwise tried to shape their own agency. Giving voice to often marginalized groups in more official archives is without any doubt one of the most important contributions of popular family history to our understanding of the past. Given the fact that family history is no longer the obvious privilege of the elite, its practice has become not only history *by* the people, but often also history *of* the people. It gives the practice a radical potential, as Evans (2020) has argued: their engagement with the past has the potential to reveal “the power relations that have worked to marginalize the activities of women in the past and present” (313) and to share their new knowledge about “the impact of structural disadvantage and social inequality” (321) with others.

The past, indeed, is too important to be left to professional historians alone. Popular family history matters.

## References

- Bashforth, Martin. 2012. Absent fathers, present histories. In *Public history and heritage today: People and their pasts*, edited by Paul Ashton, & Hilda Kean, 203-222. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Conrad, Margaret Jocelyn Létourneau & David Northrup. 2009. Canadians and their pasts: An exploration in historical consciousness. *The Public Historian* 31.1: 15-34.
- de Groot, Jerome. 2015. On genealogy. *The Public Historian* 37.3: 102-127.
- Dick, Lyle. 2009. Public history in Canada: An introduction. *The Public Historian* 31.1: 7-14.
- Evans, Tanya. 2020. The emotions of family history and the development of historical knowledge: Rethinking history. *The Journal of Theory and Practice* 24.3-4: 310-331.



- Jordanova, Ludmilla. 2000. *History in practice*. London, New York: Oxford University Press.
- King, Laura & Jessica Hammett. 2020. Family historians and historians of the family: The value of collaboration. In *Making histories*, edited by Paul Ashton, Tanya Evans & Paula Hamilton, 235-250. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg.
- Rosenzweig, Roy & Dave Thelen. 1998. *The presence of the past: Popular uses of history in American life*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Samuel, Raphael. 2012. *Theatres of memory: Past and present in contemporary culture*. London, New York: Verso.
- van Vree, Frank. 1998. *De scherven van de geschiedenis: Over crisisverschijnselen in de hedendaagse historische cultuur*. Amsterdam: Vossiuspers AUP.

### **About the reviewer**

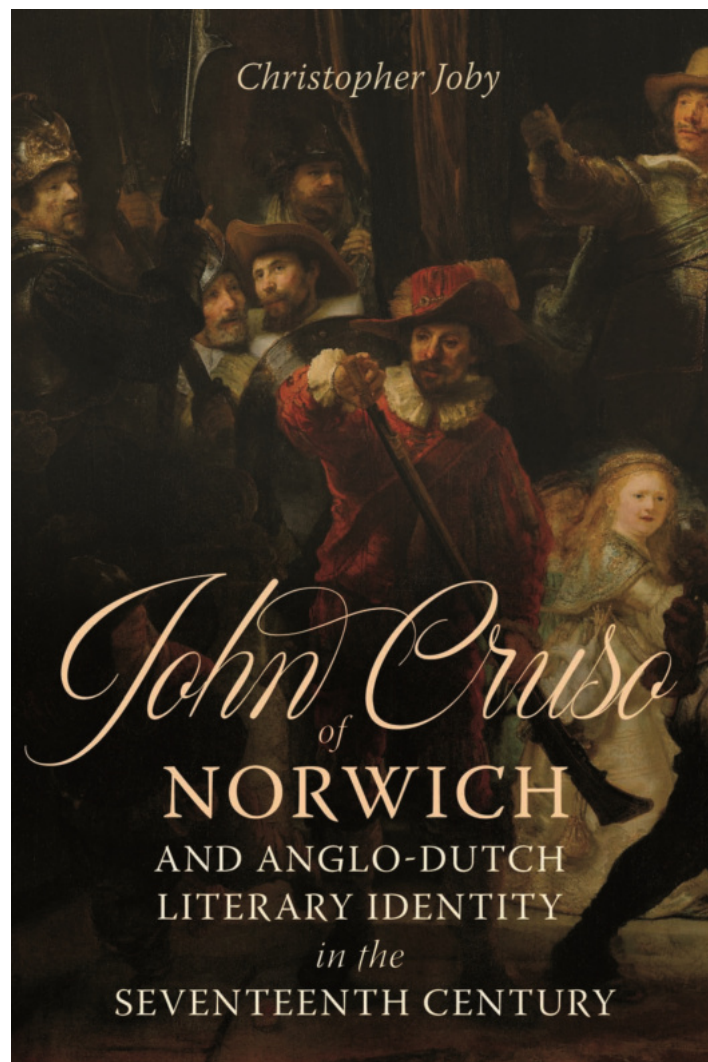
Paul Knevel is associate professor of public history at the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands). As a university-based public historian, he is the author of various popular history books, has advised Dutch history museums and public history organizations and written scripts for a television series on the history of Amsterdam. He has also written numerous academic articles on the Dutch reception of the American tradition of public history, the work of Pierre Nora and history on television. His historical research focuses on urban history, memory, and sense of place. Two of his more recent publications include the book chapter “*The Occupation and beyond: Presenting, doing and watching history on Dutch television since 1960*” (in Paul Ashton, Tanya Evans and Paula Hamilton, eds., *Making histories* [De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020]) and the article “*Sophiatown as lieu de mémoire*,” (2015) *African Studies* 74.1:51-75.



**Review**  
**Christopher Joby:**  
***John Cruso of Norwich and Anglo-Dutch literary identity in  
the seventeenth century***

Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2022. 387 p.  
ISBN 9781843846147

*Reviewed by Ole Peter Grell*



Bearing in mind that Christopher Joby has already written extensively about John Cruso and the Dutch community in Norwich, one would expect this monograph to offer important new information about him and his role and significance for the Anglo-Dutch community in Norwich in particular and in England more generally. Furthermore, the book promises to place John Cruso within the wider framework of the Anglo-Dutch literary community of the period. Unfortunately, in both respects it proves disappointing. The book is focussed nearly exclusively on John Cruso and his family where it has little new to add, while making only modest use of other Anglo-Dutch authors of the period.

Joby has mined the archives in Norwich to find new information and sources about John Cruso, but the results are meagre. The first chapter is dedicated to John's father, Jan, who had fled Flanders for Norwich in the 1570s or 1580s and set himself up as a cloth merchant in the city. From the outset Joby builds up the Cruso family, culturally as well as economically, often based on little or no evidence. The fact that Jan named his second son Aquila is taken as proof that Jan was familiar with both Latin and Greek. This chapter sets the tone for a book light on sources and facts and rich on speculation and conjecture. The second chapter is dedicated to John Cruso's schooling of which unfortunately we know nothing. He may have attended the Norwich Free Grammar School, as suggested by Joby, but we have no evidence to support that. Joby rests his assumption on the fact that Bishop John Cosin, who had attended the Norwich Grammar School, referred to John Cruso as his *ancient friend* in 1668. Joby sees this as evidence that the bishop had known Cruso since their school days and therefore proof that John Cruso had also attended the Norwich Grammar School. However, Cruso might just as well have attended a good secondary school in the Dutch Republic, boarding with relatives, as done by a number of well-to-do Dutch refugees. The fact remains we know nothing about John Cruso's schooling. Despite that, Joby repeatedly states that John Cruso had received a classical education at the Norwich Grammar School which informed his life and literary output.

Similarly, the third chapter on John Cruso's early adult life rests on little or no evidence. In fact, nothing is known about John Cruso until 1613 when he was registered as a member of the Dutch Church in London before returning to Norwich in 1615, the year his father transferred his freedom of the city to him. We know nothing of where he spent his teens and early twenties. He may have spent time in Amsterdam like his younger brother, Timothy, who became a member of the London Dutch Church in 1616. John is, however, likely to have spent time in London before 1615, possibly as a trainee merchant with one of the many Dutch merchants in the city. That, at least, might explain why no attestation was needed when he became a member of the London Dutch community.

Among the few things known about John Cruso is that he was listed as a member of the Dutch militia in Norwich from 1616, following in his father's footsteps. Apart from a couple of insignificant notices about him in the records of the Court of Chancery and in the Norwich records, we have no evidence of John Cruso's activities before 1622.

The fact that Cruso was among the 26 contributors to the elegy, *Klacht-Ghedichten*, for the recently departed minister of the Dutch Church in London, Simon Ruytinck, which was published in Leiden in 1622 would indicate his talents as an occasional poet who was recognized within the Anglo-Dutch community. Joby offers a complicated explanation why John chose to write his elegy in Dutch rather than Latin, as used by his university educated brother, Aquila, rather than the simple and obvious reason that John Cruso was limited to the vernacular having at best a very limited knowledge of Latin. His knowledge of classical authors is more likely to have been acquired through translations.

John Cruso was undoubtedly a successful cloth merchant in Norwich as repeatedly emphasized by Joby. His interests in military matters and poetry came second to that. Within the Anglo-Dutch community and among English friends in Norwich he was recognized as a talented poet who might contribute to an occasion or a volume. To put him alongside Shakespeare, as done in the prologue of this book strikes me as excessive even if Joby's statement that he does not intend to claim that Cruso reached *the same literary heights* is taken into account.

We have more information about John Cruso in the years leading up to the publication of his first and most important military work, *Militarie instructions for the cavallrie*, published in 1632. By 1627 he had become an elder of the Dutch Church in Norwich and a captain of the Dutch militia in the city. This was also the period when he began writing poetry in English. Here, as with his poetry in Dutch, Cruso appears as an occasional poet who like some of his Anglo-Dutch contemporaries could produce a verse for the right occasion. Apart from three elegies to his friend, the Norwich minister Lawrence Howlett, which were never published, we only have a couple of short English verses by Cruso published in the second edition of his *The art of warre* (1642). I am not convinced that Cruso's modest poetic output justifies the extensive treatment given to it here.

The best chapters of this book are those dedicated to Cruso's military writings. To a considerable extent they have benefited from the many publications on warfare which have appeared over the last decade. However, even here the author cannot refrain from speculation, suggesting that John Cruso might have served as a soldier on the Continent during the period from around 1608 to 1613 when we know nothing about his activities. The fact that Cruso never referred to any military experience in his publications clearly proves that he did not serve as a cavalryman or soldier. All military writers of this period made sure that their

military experiences were referred to thereby adding weight and importance to their publications.

We know that Cruso was a successful Norwich merchant, socially and culturally ambitious, and with a strong interest in military matters. His military writings, however, were primarily translations and his *Militarie instructions for the cavallrie* was a compilation based on other military writers. He was clearly an appreciated occasional poet, who could write in both English and Dutch, but lacked the educational background to master Latin. He was part of a group of Anglo-Dutch merchants who shared wider cultural and literary interests; even so, this book seeks to make too much of him.

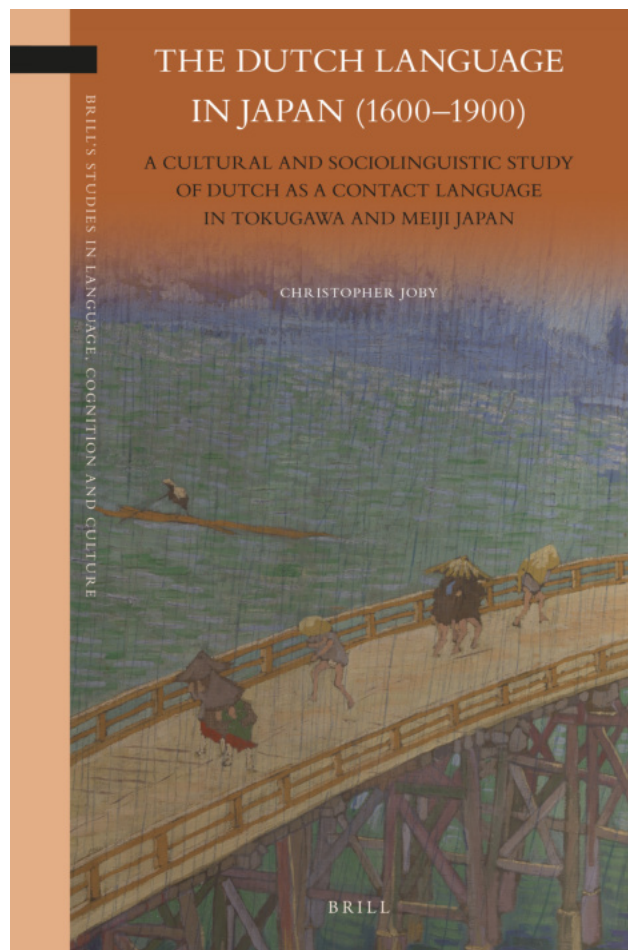
### **About the reviewer**

Ole Peter Grell is emeritus professor of early modern history at the Open University (UK). His interests are in European social and cultural history in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. He works on early modern European Calvinism, Anglo-Dutch relations, and the Reformation of northern Europe. He also retains a strong interest in early modern history of medicine, especially medicine and religion, health care, and the significance of natural philosophy for early modern medicine. He is a general editor of the book series *History of Medicine in Context*, published by Routledge.

**Review**  
**Christopher Joby:**  
***The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900): A cultural and  
sociolinguistic study of Dutch as a contact language in  
Tokugawa and Meiji Japan***

Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021. 494 p.  
ISBN 9789004436442

*Reviewed by Ivo Smits*



Quite a few Japanese begin their day with a *kōhii* ('coffee') and end it with a *biiru* ('beer'). The names of both these drinks are loanwords from Dutch, and both words have been in use in Japan for over two centuries. In between drinks, the Japanese are likely to have used a *pen* ('pen'), another loanword from Dutch that is a good two hundred years old. These are but some of the tidbits that one can glean from Christopher Joby's new, rich book *The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900)*.

Many may be aware that between 1639 and 1854 the Dutch were the only Europeans with whom early modern Japan traded. Apart from the Chinese, nobody else was allowed access to the country. One consequence was that news about what was happening in the world, especially in Europe, and developments in Western sciences, was very much filtered through the Dutch and entered the country via the Dutch trading post in Nagasaki. Therefore, in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a new field emerged, called 'Hollandology' (*rangaku*), in which Japanese researchers who wanted to gain more in-depth knowledge of Western knowledge devoted themselves to learning the Dutch language. Thus, both trade and academic studies necessitated familiarity with the Dutch language, studied by the several thousands of professional interpreters working in Nagasaki and Hollandologists throughout the country. As a result, several Dutch loanwords entered the Japanese language. Estimates differ, but some 170 are still in use today in modern Japanese. These loanwords are but one consequence of this prolonged language contact. However, the role of the Dutch language in Japan during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) was much more diverse than simply furnishing words.

Joby's book is a comprehensive answer to his simple question, "what happened when Dutch came into contact with other languages in Tokugawa Japan?" (4, 429). It is a question, curiously, not often asked. The ambitious undertaking of its complex answer builds on Joby's longstanding knowledge of the early modern varieties of Dutch outside the Low Countries. Three of his other books are *The multilingualism of Constantijn Huygens, 1596-1687* (2014), *The Dutch language in Britain, 1550-1772* (2015), and *John Cruso of Norwich and Anglo-Dutch literary identity in the seventeenth century* (2022). *The Dutch language in Japan* builds on previous partial studies by other scholars dealing with or touching on the presence of Dutch in Tokugawa-period Japan. His impressive bibliography shows that he has gone to extraordinary lengths to cover relevant academic literature, even if a number of Japanese publications are omitted, and he provides a handy index of relevant early modern Japanese sources. However, Joby's book is more than the first book-length synthesis of what has been studied before. It is a systematic and exhaustive description and analysis of different aspects of language interference in early modern Japan and



what we may learn from this about the interactions between people. Such individuals were almost exclusively men. Joby does refer in passing to the Japanese sex workers whose clientele were the Dutch traders sequestered on the artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki harbour. However, we have very few records of their use of Dutch. Yet we know that these women, too, were speakers of what Dutch traders at the time referred to as *Japansch-Nederlandsch* ('Japanese-Dutch'), the creole language specific to the international world of early modern Nagasaki.

Joby's interest lies in the social history of language, and his historical approach to a large degree informs the structure of his book. It is bookended by chapters that are very much chronologically organized, with thematic chapters about aspects of language contact in between. The first two chapters describe the presence of Dutch in early modern Japan, especially the early stages, and focus on the people who employed Dutch, introducing the sources on which a study such as this one must ultimately base itself. Joby takes care to note that there were many non-Dutch speakers of Dutch, not only Japanese but others of several European and Asian nationalities who found themselves in Japan and made use of varying degrees of Dutch. This is followed by two chapters on "The many uses of Dutch in Japan" and "Language contact." Here and elsewhere, Joby emphasizes that language contact involved many languages: Japanese, Portuguese (the Portuguese had been a presence in Japan in the period 1543-1639), Latin, Malay, varieties of Sinitic (classical Chinese), Korean, Ainu, German, Russian, Manchu, French, and English. All these languages had some, albeit often very small, role in *interference* in both Dutch and Japanese texts. A larger point of this book is that language contact must always be viewed in the context of multilingualism.

While professional interpreters and sex workers in Nagasaki interacted with Dutch traders on an almost daily basis and while a handful of Hollandologists could meet members of the Dutch embassy when they visited Edo (as Tokyo was then called), most language contact and especially its most far-reaching instances occurred through and in books. Because of the practically exclusive link between books in Dutch and the professional use Japanese readers made of them, it was men who activated such language contact. The poet Ema Saikō (1787-1861), one of the rare women to compose poetry in literary Sinitic, illustrates such a gender division in a double portrait of two readers when she describes her aged father, a doctor trained in 'Dutch medicine' (*ranpō*), and herself with Chinese books: "The old father studies books from Holland; / his child reads verses from the Tang and Song" (adapted from Saito 1998, 116). During the late 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than a thousand Dutch books (often themselves translations from French, for example) were

translated into Japanese. Joby demonstrates how such translation projects resulted in a deep engagement with the Dutch language.

Joby's longest chapter, which deals with the lexical, syntactic, and graphic interference by Dutch in the Japanese language, is rather technical in especially its comprehensive listing (over 600 entries!) of varieties of loanwords. Even so, it is instructive in, for instance, its observation that the Japanese struggle to indicate the agent in passive clauses was aided by the Dutch word *door* ('by'), translated with the compound suffix *ni yotte* ('by'); this is still a dominant grammatical construction in modern Japanese. Gratifying to see in a book about language contact, Joby also notes that Japanese borrowed a number of grammatical terms from Dutch, following the principle of *loan translation* (for example, *mōchō*, 'appendix,' but a compound literally meaning 'blind' and 'bowel,' from the Dutch *blinde darm*). In other words, the language to describe language also became indebted to Dutch.

The final chapter deals with the swan song of Dutch in Japan after that country opened its borders to other foreigners. Dutch went with a bang: mid-19<sup>th</sup> century negotiations between Britain and Japan were conducted through translations from and to Dutch as mediating diplomatic language. Also, Dutch was a steppingstone to learn other European languages. But the usefulness of Dutch had withered by the end of the century.

*The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900)* is a dense, yet eminently readable book that underscores the enormous importance of language contact in the development of languages. Joby's history on the sustained contact between the Dutch and Japanese languages is both a fascinating tale of a not very widely known fact of Japanese immersion in the Dutch language and an exceedingly convincing argument for further studies of multilingual language contact.

## References

Sato, Hiroaki. 1998. *Breeze through bamboo: Kanshi of Ema Saikō*. New York: Columbia University Press.

## About the reviewer

Ivo Smits is professor of Arts and Cultures of Japan at Leiden University (Netherlands). He teaches about literature and film in Japan. He studied at the universities of Leiden, Cambridge, and Tokyo, as well as Waseda University, and was visiting faculty at Yale University and Tōhoku University. He specializes in traditional Japanese literature, especially classical court poetry in both Japanese

and Sinitic, while he has also translated the poetry of several contemporary Japanese poets into Dutch. As a Dutchman working on traditional Japan, he has a particular interest in the historical relations between the two countries. His publications include: “A forgotten Aesop: Shiba Kōkan, European emblems, and Aesopian fable reception in late Edo Japan,” in *Studies in Japanese Literature and Culture* 3, 2020); “Genji’s gardens: Negotiating nature at the Heian court,” in *Oxford studies in philosophy and literature: Murasaki Shikibu’s The tale of Genji* (Oxford University Press, 2019); “La dynamique sino-japonaise (*wakan*) à l’époque Heian” (*Médiévales* 72, 2017); two chapters in *The Cambridge history of Japanese literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); and (with Leonard Blussé and Willem Remmelink) *Bridging the divide: 400 years The Netherlands-Japan* (Teleac/NOT & Hotei Publishing, 2000).



## Recensie

Jelle Stegeman:

### ***Grote geschiedenis van de Nederlandse taal, 2 delen***

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 1282 p.

ISBN 9789462989252 (hb) / e-ISBN 9789048541768

*Gerecenseerd door Marijke van der Wal*



Jelle Stegemans *Grote geschiedenis van de Nederlandse taal* is de bewerking van zijn Duitstalig handboek over Nederlandse taal en taalcultuur, dat onder de titel *Handbuch Niederländisch* met de respectievelijke ondertitels *Sprache und Sprachkultur von den Anfängen bis 1800* en *Sprache und Sprachkultur von 1800 bis heute* in 2014 en 2016 is gepubliceerd. Wat biedt deze omvangrijke Nederlandse taalgeschiedenis (in het vervolg aangeduid als *GGNT*) de lezer?

### *Opzet en presentatie*

Bij het samenstellen van wat Stegeman in zijn voorwoord een biografie van het Nederlands noemt, heeft hij zich gebaseerd op “onderzoek van specialisten op de meest uiteenlopende gebieden van de neerlandistiek” (5) zoals dat te vinden is in eerdere geschiedenissen van het Nederlands en publicaties over taalhistorisch onderzoek. De opzet van de *GGNT* vertoont overeenkomsten met andere taalgeschiedenissen in de gebruikelijke chronologische presentatie (slechts een enkele auteur zoals Strang [1976] volgt de omgekeerde chronologie) en de aandacht voor de historische context van taal naast de interne taalgeschiedenis. Stegemans verdere aanpak en keuzes worden verantwoord in het inleidende eerste hoofdstuk. Daar blijkt het ontstaan en de ontwikkeling van het Algemeen Nederlands, de standaardtaal dus, het centrale onderwerp van de *GGNT* te zijn. Dat is een conventionele keus, die impliceert dat dialecten, regiolecten en sociolecten alleen aandacht krijgen “als ze van belang zijn voor de beschrijving van de ontwikkelingsgang van het AN” (35). Het zou volgens de auteur niet doenlijk zijn geweest om de historische taalvariatie te verwerken, ondanks de beschikbaarheid van specialistische studies waarnaar wordt verwezen (zie p. 36). Ook historische meertaligheid en taalcontact komen slechts zijdelings ter sprake, vanwege de huidige stand van wetenschap. De keus voor het Algemeen Nederlands roept bij de lezer vragen op voor de periodes waarin zo’n supraregionale taal nog niet lijkt te bestaan. Het zou verhelderend zijn geweest om daarop in te gaan en ook hier het fenomeen geschreven versus de gesproken taal te bespreken.

Hoe presenter je meer dan tien eeuwen Nederlandse taalgeschiedenis? De taalinterne periodisering van Oudnederlands en Middelnederlands is in hoofdstuk 3 (tot 1150) en 4 (1150-1500) terug te vinden. Het daarop volgende Nieuwnederlands van de eerste drie eeuwen wordt gesplitst in hoofdstuk 5 (1500-1650) en 6 (1650-1795). De 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw heeft een originele externe periodisering gekregen: de afsplitsing van België vormt een scharnierpunt tussen de hoofdstukken 7 (1795-1830) en 8 (1830-1900). Voor de 20<sup>ste</sup> en 21<sup>ste</sup> eeuw is de Tweede Wereldoorlog de voor de hand liggende cesuur in hoofdstuk 9 (1900-1945) en 10 (1945-heden). Binnen de hoofdstukken 3 tot en met 6 is een bepaalde systematiek gevolgd. Elk hoofdstuk begint met informatie over de historische

context, presenteert vervolgens teksten uit de betreffende periode en geeft tenslotte de interne taalgeschiedenis weer met een overzicht van taalkenmerken. De ruime opname van representatieve contemporaine teksten is opmerkelijk in vergelijking met andere Nederlandse taalgeschiedenissen, die zich veelal beperken tot enkele tekstvoorbeelden ter illustratie van specifieke verschijnselen. Het tweede deel van de *GGNT* met de hoofdstukken 7 tot en met 10 is vrijwel geheel gewijd aan de ruim opgevatte externe taalgeschiedenis. Slechts enkele taalinterne vernieuwingen die zich sinds het begin van de 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw voltrokken, krijgen aandacht in hoofdstuk 10 (1149-1175). De *GGNT* sluit af met hoofdstuk 11, dat onder de titel “Open einde” ingaat op de consolidatie, status en vitaliteit van het Algemeen Nederlands.

#### *Middeleeuwen en nieuwe tijd (deel 1)*

De *externe taalgeschiedenis* omvat de historische context zoals de politieke en culturele situatie en het functioneren van taal in verschillende domeinen. In hoofdstuk 3 komen de politieke situatie in de Merovingische en Karolingische tijd en de bronnen en taalfuncties van het Oudnederlands aan bod. In hoofdstuk 4 is er, naast de politieke context en de bronnen en taalfuncties van het Middelnederlands, aandacht voor communicatie in het Middelnederlands. Ook wordt de bovenregionale werkzaamheid van de Middelnederlandse schrijftaal besproken. De politieke situatie, het Nederlands als communicatiemiddel en de bronnen en taalfuncties zijn eveneens vaste elementen in de hoofdstukken 5 en 6. In hoofdstuk 5 met de ondertitel “De ontwikkeling van het Nieuwnederlands tot een bovenregionale cultuurtaal in de vroege tijd (1500-1650)” komen scholing en geletterdheid en verschillende aspecten van taalstandaardisatie aan de orde zoals het functioneren van het Nederlands in de domeinen van wetenschap, kunst, godsdienst en literatuur en de codificatie met spellingregelingen, grammatica’s en woordenboeken. Consolidatie en reglementering, termen in de ondertitel van hoofdstuk 6, zijn begrippen waarmee de late 17<sup>de</sup> en de 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw herhaaldelijk zijn getypeerd. Hier zijn taalnormen en de toenemende beregeling van het Nederlands vanzelfsprekende onderwerpen. Niet alleen wetenschap en literatuur, maar ook het domein van de journalistiek wordt nu behandeld. In de afdeling met gekozen contemporaine teksten krijgen journalistieke teksten een plaats naast de categorieën literatuur, brieven, geschiedkundig werk en religieuze teksten. In elk hoofdstuk wordt de *interne taalgeschiedenis* uitvoerig gepresenteerd in de volgorde grafemen en klanken, syntaxis en morfologie en lexicon. De beschrijvingen zijn meestal gebaseerd op overgeleverde primaire teksten (taalgebruik dus), maar in hoofdstuk 5 zijn ze voornamelijk ontleend aan contemporaine spellinggeschriften en grammatica’s. Dat maakt een vergelijking

van taalkenmerken uit het tijdvak 1500-1650 met de gegevens uit andere periodes enigszins problematisch.

### *Nieuwste tijd (deel 2)*

Deel 2 beschrijft de politieke en maatschappelijke situatie van de 19<sup>de</sup> en 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw en biedt in feite een uitgebreide cultuur- en literatuurgeschiedenis met aandacht voor de pers, het theater en publicaties in boekvorm. Bij de behandeling van de functies van het Nederlands is de literatuur dominant, wellicht iets te dominant. Het gaat om de mogelijke invloed van deze media en van eveneens post, telegraaf, telefoon en mobiliteit, later ook film en radio, op de consolidatie en verspreiding van het Algemeen Nederlands.

De eerste door de overheid geïnitieerde taalregelingen kwamen tot stand in de Franse tijd: Siegenbeeks spellingregeling (1804) en Weilands grammatica (1805). De spelling Siegenbeek ging gelden voor de overheid en in het onderwijs. De interessante vraag of deze overheidsbemoeienis ook effect had op andere terreinen zoals bijvoorbeeld het privé-domein of journalistieke geschriften, wordt in de *GGNT* niet gesteld. Toch is daar onderzoek naar gedaan, waarin de invloed van Siegenbeeks spelling overtuigend is aangetoond voor het taalgebruik in kranten, dagboeken en privé-brieven (zie Krogull 2018). Latere spellingregelingen, grammatica's en woordenboeken komen onder de titel "verdere codificatie en inventarisatie van het Nederlands" uitvoerig aan de orde (840-864). Een belangrijk algemeen thema voor de tweede helft van de 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw is de afstand tussen de schrijftaal en de gesproken taal en het streven naar modernisering van de schrijftaal door pedagogen, grammatici en auteurs als Multatuli en de Tachtigers. Een minder plechtige schrijftaal en een verdere modernisering van de spelling zijn te vinden in eerste helft van de 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw. Die periode wordt in hoofdstuk 9 gekarakteriseerd als de doorbraak van het AN, waarbij dichters en schrijvers worden gepresenteerd als vernieuwers van de taal (969-978).

Het tiende, zeer uitvoerige hoofdstuk draagt de titel "Eenheid in verscheidenheid," ongetwijfeld bedoeld als typering van de taalsituatie van 1945 tot heden. Toch is verscheidenheid iets wat de lezer ook opvalt aan de inhoud van dit hoofdstuk. In de lijn met de eerdere hoofdstukken wordt het functioneren van het Nederlands in de verschillende media en domeinen beschreven. Modernisering van de spelling en taalexperimenten in de literatuur krijgen eveneens een plaats. Naast de al genoemde aandacht voor taalinterne vernieuwingen in het Nederlands bevat dit hoofdstuk een uitgebreid gedeelte over de beoefening van de neerlandistiek (1057-1076), alsook een bespreking van het Nederlands in Suriname en de Nederlandse Antillen (1094-1108). Het Nederlands in overzeese gebieden hoort zeker thuis in de *GGNT*. Het is ook verspreid in de hoofdstukken 5, 6, 7 en 9 aan de orde gekomen (406-409; 619-



624; 831-840; 966-969). Hier rijst de vraag of een behandeling in een apart hoofdstuk niet overzichtelijker en inzichtelijker zou zijn geweest.

#### *Samenvattend en concluderend*

Anno 2022 denkend over een nieuwe geschiedenis van het Nederlands, heb ik het ideaalbeeld van een inclusieve taalgeschiedenis voor ogen, een taalgeschiedenis met veel aandacht voor de diversiteit van het daadwerkelijk taalgebruik. Dat is niet alleen het literaire taalgebruik en het taalgebruik van de hogere sociale klassen, maar ook het diverse en alledaagse taalgebruik van mannen en vrouwen uit midden- en lagere klassen van de samenleving. Een inclusieve taalgeschiedenis zou ook aandacht moeten hebben voor historische meertaligheid en taalcontact. Om aan deze wensen te voldoen kan gebruik gemaakt worden van historisch-sociolinguïstisch onderzoek dat de laatste decennia is verricht aan de Universiteit Leiden en de Vrije Universiteit Brussel, maar er is ook lopend en nog te verrichten onderzoek nodig om tot een dergelijke taalgeschiedenis te komen. De *GGNT* mag dus niet naar dat ideaalbeeld beoordeeld worden. Het is een conventionele taalgeschiedenis, die na de bovenstaande bespreking nog de vraag oproept naar de relatie tussen de inhoud en het beoogde lezerspubliek.

Het lezerspubliek is in het voorwoord getypeerd als “lezers die specifieke taalhistorische informatie zoeken” en “diegenen die zich een algemeen overzicht willen verschaffen van de ontwikkelingsgang van het Nederlands” (6). Die typering zegt weinig over de achtergrond van lezers. Of het nu beginnende dan wel gevorderde vakgenoten zijn of algemeen geïnteresseerden, ik heb op twee punten twijfels over de geschiktheid van *GGNT*-gedeeltes. Allereerst betreft dit de gedeeltes over de geschiedenis van de neerlandistiek (829-831; 982-986; 1057-1076). De vakgeschiedenis is een apart terrein dat niet direct in een taalgeschiedenis gezocht zal worden en dat daarom buiten de *GGNT* had kunnen blijven. Iets anders is of de beoogde lezers de geboden uiteenzettingen goed kunnen volgen. In het algemeen is dat het geval, zeker waar het de externe taalgeschiedenis betreft. Voor de beschrijving van de interne taalgeschiedenis kan het lastiger zijn en hangt het enigszins af van de voorkennis van lezers. Er is echter één negatieve uitzondering: het nog niet besproken hoofdstuk 2 over de Germaanse genen van het Nederlands. Het gedeelte over prehistorie, Romeinse tijd en het ontstaan van Westgermaanse taalvariëteiten is leesbaar en interessant, maar het vervolg over de doorwerking van het Indogermaans respectievelijk het Germaans in het Nederlands is veel te uitvoerig over gereconstrueerde stadia en klankwetten (80-114). Die informatie is voor niet in de historische grammatica ingevoerde lezers ontoegankelijk. Voor die voorgeschiedenis had beperking tot de oudste overgeleverde Germaanse teksten (het Gotisch) in plaats van de behandeling van gereconstrueerde taalfasen verhelderend kunnen zijn. Een

laatste kanttekening heeft te maken met de functie van de *GGNT* als handboek. Een handboek is ook een wegwijzer voor uitdieping en verdere literatuur. Het is wat lastig om die verdere literatuur voor specifieke onderwerpen te vinden, aangezien gedetailleerde verwijzingen in de hoofdstukken ontbreken. Er zijn aan het slot van de *GGNT* wel enkele pagina's met algemene filologische hulpmiddelen toegevoegd (1209-1216).

Uit het voorafgaande is duidelijk geworden wat de omvangrijke *GGNT* te bieden heeft. Daaraan valt nog toe te voegen dat de keus van de contemporaine teksten bij elke periode herhaaldelijk verrassend is, zeker in het tweede deel. Denk bijvoorbeeld aan krantenberichten over De Leidse buskruitramp en Alexandrine Tinnés speurtocht naar de bronnen van de Nijl. De *GGNT* ziet er in de twee gebonden, mooi uitgevoerde delen beslist aantrekkelijk uit en het blijkt een gedegen overzichtswerk met een rijke inhoud. Het handboek is de prijzenswaardige prestatie van één auteur, die de stand van wetenschap over een breed terrein heeft overzien en weergegeven.

## Referenties

- Krogull, Andreas. 2018. *Policy versus practice: Language variation and change in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch*. Utrecht: LOT.
- Strang, Barbara M.H. 1976. *A history of English*. London: Methuen.

## Over de recensent

Marijke van der Wal is professor emeritus of History of Dutch at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics (LUCL) (Netherlands). Her publications cover the fields of historical linguistics, the historiography of linguistics, and historical sociolinguistics. Among her publications are *Geschiedenis van het Nederlands* (with Cor van Bree) (Het Spectrum, 2002) and *De moedertaal centraal: Standaardisatie-aspecten in de Nederlanden omstreeks 1650* (Sdu Uitgevers, 1995). Her sociohistorical linguistic research focuses on ego-documents and language history from below. She directed the *Letters as loot: Towards a non-standard view on the history of Dutch* research programme, which successfully explored the extraordinary source of Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century private letters, kept in the National Archives (Kew, UK). Sociohistorical linguistic highlights are *Letters as loot* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014) and the co-edited *Touching the past: Studies in the historical sociolinguistics of ego-documents* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013), both publications with Gijsbert Rutten. As a result of fruitful collaboration with the Leiden Institute for Dutch Language (INT), the *Letters as loot* corpus and an additional collection of

letters were launched, both with search facilities (<https://brievensbuit.ivdnt.org> and <https://brievensbuit2.ivdnt.org>). She is editor, together with Terttu Nevalainen (University of Helsinki), of the *Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics* book series, published by John Benjamins Publishing Company.



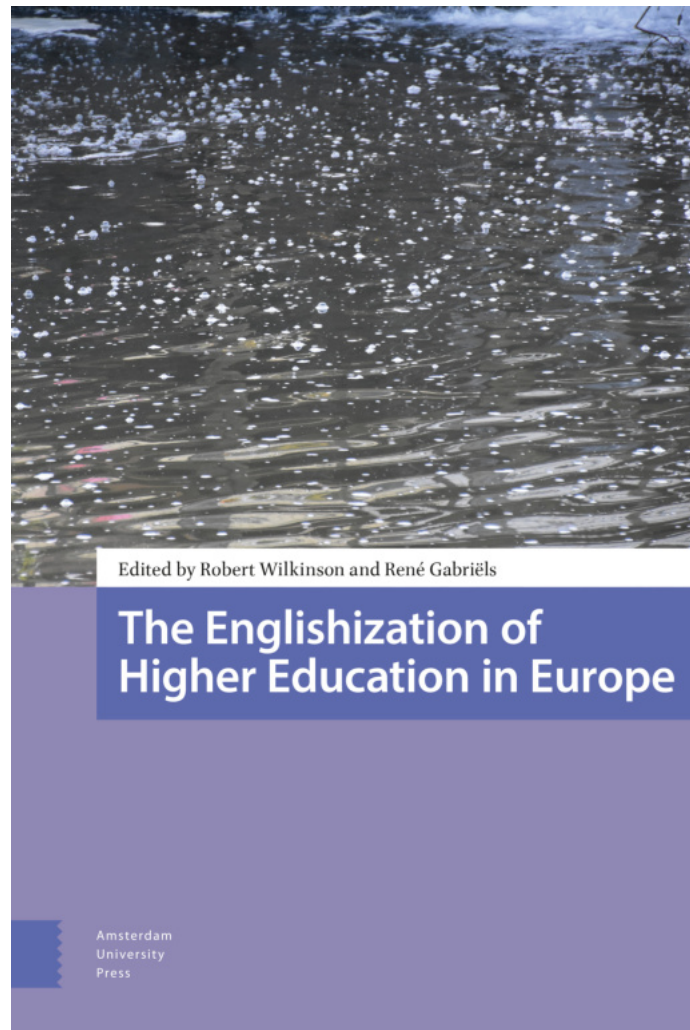
## Review

**Robert Wilkinson and René Gabriëls (eds):  
*The Englishization of higher education in Europe***

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 381 p.

ISBN 9789463727358

*Reviewed by Rias van den Doel*



Across the globe, the spread of English in higher education has raised concerns about its impact on the role and position of other languages, and it is this issue that a new book has sought to address from the perspective of 15 different Continental European countries. As is clear from the book's title, introduction and conclusion, the key term employed in this volume to discuss this development is that of *Englishization*. However, as emerges from the 16 different contributions to this volume by 29 European scholars (not only from the European Union but also Switzerland and Russia), Englishization as a concept itself is not entirely uncontroversial. Taking their cue from a precursor study by Lanvers and Hultgren (2018), some contributors define this in neutral terms, as "the growing use of English as a medium of instruction" (Soler & Rozenthal 2021, 58). Others, the editors included, present it as an inherently problematic phenomenon that poses a threat to the position of both national languages and European multilingualism. Used in this way, the editors emphasize, the term is far from neutral, and should be seen as "evaluative-descriptive" (Gabriëls & Wilkinson 2021, 16). However, not all contributors are convinced that Englishization can in fact be observed as an "empirical phenomenon" – Dimova, Hultgren and Kling (2021) view it primarily as a proxy for debates about deeply significant "social, political and economic anxieties" (145). For others, it is embedded in widespread pragmatic, utilitarian and even consumerist attitudes to language use, where the role of English as a convenient complement to a far more "dominant" national language remains largely unquestioned (Dannerer, Gaisch, & Smit 2021, 282-3). In fact, some contributors tend to avoid the term altogether, making clear that it is rarely used in their countries, or only in the context of lexical borrowing. Others suggest that the term is inapplicable because of the low volume of English-language programmes offered in their countries, is avoided by policy-makers intent on disguising their internationalization agendas, or has been hijacked by populists. Consequently, some contributors tend to employ terms such as "EMI" (English-medium instruction) or "EME" (English-medium education) instead – which are also common elsewhere.

The different conceptualizations of Englishization in Europe illustrate the wide range of scholarly approaches, local perspectives and public discourses presented and examined in this volume. The diversity of approaches may come as a surprise to anyone expecting a fairly uniform treatment of the growth of English-language courses in higher education in terms of attitudes and practices, using similar methodologies and allowing clear comparisons between the countries under investigation. For this reviewer, at any rate, it was not an unwelcome one. Of course, in all the countries discussed, there is likely to be a range of views on English in higher education as either an opportunity, a threat, or both. Still, the extent to which stakeholders identify with such positions will be strongly affected

by local ideologies and practices, possibly rendering straightforward cross-country comparisons less feasible or informative. The set-up as it is generously allows for significant local differences, with one chapter outlining how ambivalent attitudes in France are partly informed by a desire to contain or even compete with Englishization rather than engage with it, and another on how in Denmark, ideological debates about language displacement have over time given way to constructive responses in both policy and practice. While it is suggested that in Latvia, stakeholder discussions are not centred around challenging the role of English as much as on debating the extent to which the state should take an explicit position on this, an important takeaway from the Polish contribution seems to be that as far as Englishization is concerned, the situation is “suboptimal” and more should be done to encourage it (Cierpich-Kozieł & Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2021, 270).

For those interested in comparing and contrasting the different contributions, the present volume is a treasure trove, but the richness and diffuseness of the data make it difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions. For instance, the chapter on Flanders stresses that Dutch-speaking lecturers and students are quite positive about the use of English in higher education, despite top-down language policies pursued by the Flemish government to contain this. At the same time, the German chapter emphasizes that, in the absence of any specific policies aimed at discouraging Englishization, there is widespread grassroots support for English among students, their parents and the general public, despite the concerns voiced by German academics. Interestingly, such differences between countries may be seen as supporting the claim that resistance to Englishization at a governmental level is more typical of “small” languages, if Dutch (with 24 million speakers or more) is to be construed as the latter. According to this generalization made by Van Parijs in the concluding chapter, opposition in countries with “big” languages is more common at the level of teachers and administrators (2021, 363). However, the examples of Austria and the German-speaking part of Switzerland, also discussed in the present volume, indicate widespread general support for English at all levels. This appears to be motivated by a utilitarian approach to both English and German rather than individuals’ concerns about their proficiency, or with elevating or maintaining the status of their first language. Admittedly, the contributions from Spain, Russia and Italy confirm the absence of any widespread concern about the threats posed by Englishization to those countries’ majority languages at the national level. This, however, is not the picture emerging from the chapter on France. As Le Lièvre (2021) makes clear, despite stringent language policies at the French national level, grassroots support for protection of the French language from English is quite limited (110). And there is a further twist: while these policies promote

French monolingualism at home, internationally France appears to pursue a policy of multilingualism in order “to build a barrier against English and preserve its own identity” (Le Lièvre 2021, 109).

Railing against Englishization as a threat to multilingualism while simultaneously rallying support for the state or majority language (to protect it not just from English, but also from other languages, regional or otherwise) seems a kind of doublethink that has almost become a trope in Englishization discourse. Indeed, there is no denying that the common practice of English-medium instruction as an exercise in “English-only” reductionism is hardly conducive to the multilingualism promoted by EU institutions, or to what the editors have coined the polyglot “legacy of Mithridates” (Gabriëls & Wilkinson 2021, 12). Still, teaching in English on the European continent necessarily involves interaction between speakers of languages other than English, and as such it is inherently less “monolingual” in orientation than in any native-speaker majority context in Britain or the US. At the same time, some critics have wondered to what extent there is real on-the-ground support for multilingualism in Europe, instead of being an exercise in “wishful multilingualism” (Kuteeva 2020, 42). In their chapter on Austria, Dannerer, Gaisch and Smit (2021) even go so far as to claim that most European countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are presently characterized by a “monoglossic habitus plus English” (282-283), thus implicitly raising the question of which multilingual mindset is actually being threatened by English-medium instruction. In short, invoking multilingualism as an argument against Englishization is not unproblematic – especially if reinforced by claims that identity is strongly connected to the national language, which helps to safeguard social cohesion and democratic institutions, as some contributors do (e.g., Gabriëls & Wilkinson 2021, 26; Van Parijs 2021, 356).

As the chapters on Belgium and Switzerland make clear, not every European country has a national language that citizens derive any identity or stability from, nor is this true of those speaking regional languages, as in multilingual Spain (Lasagabaster 2021). The role of regional, heritage or immigrant languages is not amply discussed in other contributions to this volume – apart from the chapters on Northern Europe – but it should be recognized that some Europeans feel more of a need to identify with majority languages than others. To give just one example: instead of claiming that students with an immigrant background will be extra challenged by English since they are already struggling with the national language – a common trope of Englishization discourse in the Netherlands and Flanders, for instance (Gabriëls & Wilkinson 2021, 21; Van Splunder 2021, 49; Van Parijs 2021, 356) – it could be considered that those with less investment in the national language may see English as an escape from the language hierarchies to which they have been subjected. (There are examples



from East Asia that show a similar pattern, but that would be outside the scope of this review.) In fact, one could even speculate that, if universities in border regions tend to be more supportive of Englishization, as seems to be the case in the Netherlands, this may also be because they heed the call of the national language less. Apart from other reasons, this could be due to an increased awareness of other languages and language users directly across the border, to perceptions of regional language marginalization, or merely to the structural participation of their regions in European cross-border cooperation.

As readers of a journal on Netherlandic studies might like to know, the different languages of the Netherlands do not feature largely in the Dutch chapter (written by the editors themselves). In a volume concerned with linguistic justice, this may perhaps be seen as an omission, but the chapter makes up for this by highlighting the socio-economic forces and management philosophies that have helped to launch English-medium instruction as an industry in its own right – perhaps more so than in other countries. (In fact, there are conflicting reports in the different chapters as to which country is the top purveyor of EMI in Europe.) The editors' emphasis on the pervasive influence of the neo-liberal New Public Management, with its focus on market mechanisms, is a salutary reminder of the lack of financial support and autonomy facing academic communities in the Netherlands and elsewhere, and of the counterproductive policies sometimes adopted as a result. A possible risk of such an analysis, however, is that the perceived managerial support for Englishization is pitted against that of other stakeholders, potentially understating the level of widespread tacit support for these measures.

While Edwards (2016) has convincingly demonstrated that Dutch attitudes to English are overwhelmingly positive, with only a small anti-English minority, the chapter on the Netherlands may contribute to the perception of a consistent and widely shared public debate. There has indeed been some controversy – perhaps best illustrated by the court case discussed in this chapter by a private organization against two universities in the East and South-East of the country – but the chapter fails to emphasize that the case was lost, or indeed that the organization's views have not remained unchallenged. It is true that the court case helped to draw public attention to universities' liberal interpretation of language policy legislation, both in the media, political discourse, and academic work (Edwards 2020). Nonetheless, the present chapter presents the opposing sides of the debate somewhat one-dimensionally, emphasizing the idea of managerial collusion with naive student support for Englishization (especially those students described as privileged "global nomads") versus a groundswell of "eminent" (but presumably less privileged) academics defending the nation's language (Wilkinson & Gabriëls 2021, 249-250).

If stronger arguments are needed to support the premise that Englishization has been imposed top down in response largely to economic considerations, this can be fleshed out by discussing the financial support institutions are actually prepared to earmark for English-language programmes. One can think of staff and student training as the hidden costs of Englishization, and it would help to know to what extent resources are in fact allocated to this. Or are such provisions rationalized out of existence by appeals to self-reliance and expectation management (which are free)? Be that as it may, the fact remains that a number of contributors do indeed highlight the lack of training and support given to students and staff, raising questions about the quality of EMI implementation and the consequences for teacher and student anxiety (for example, Drljača Margić 2021, 312, 318; Lasagabaster 2021, 82-87).

If a book uses the term Englishization in its title, as opposed to more neutral designations such as EMI or EME, some polemic must be expected – and it is instructive to see how the case for or against is made by some of the contributors, with different arguments and approaches. If some chapters focus on ideology and others on practical ramifications, that could be a reflection on how the debate has played out in different European contexts. As such, the present volume makes a significant and much-needed contribution to this. While it does leave the reader with a good many questions, it could also inspire research into institutional support for Englishization *on the ground*. This line of inquiry may shed light on the question of whether the growing use of EMI is prompted by the desire to promote English-only monolingualism, by a laissez-faire business model that minimizes investment in quality control and assurance, or by an idealism-driven endeavour to internationalize academic interactions. This reviewer recognizes that multiple choice may not be the best format to answer this.

## References

- Cierpich-Kozieł, Agnieszka & Elżbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld. 2021. The Englishization of Polish higher education. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 259-280. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Danner, Monika, Martina Gaisch & Ute Smit. 2021. Englishization 'under the radar': Facts, policies, and trends in Austrian higher education. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 281-306. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Dimova, Slobodanka, Anna Kristina Hultgren & Joyce Kling. 2021. Englishization in Danish higher education: From critical to constructive conceptualizations. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 143-162. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

- Drljača Margić, Branka. 2021. Englishization of Croatian higher education: Conceptualizations, manifestations, and implications. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 307-327. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Edwards, Alison. 2016. *English in the Netherlands: Functions, forms and attitudes*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Edwards, Alison. 2020. Language policy and the law: How Dutch universities legally justify English-medium instruction. *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics* 9.1-2: 38-59.
- Gabriëls, René & Robert Wilkinson. 2021. Introduction: The tension between monolingualism and multilingualism. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 11-36. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Kuteeva, Maria. 2020. If not English, then what? Unpacking language hierarchies at university. In *Language perceptions and practices in multilingual universities*, edited by Maria Kuteeva, Kathrin Kaufhold & Niina Hynninen, 27-55. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lanvers, Ursula & Anna Kristina Hultgren. 2018. The Englishization of European higher education: Foreword. *European Journal of Language Policy* 10.1: 1-11.
- Lasagabaster, David. 2021. EMI in Spain: Striving to maintain a multilingual balance. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 77-96. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Le Lièvre, Françoise. 2021. An ambiguous picture: The Englishization of higher education in France. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 97-120. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Soler, Josep & Kerttu Rozenvalde. 2021. The Englishization of higher education in Estonia and Latvia: Actors, positionings, and linguistic tensions. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 57-76. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- van Splunder, Frank. 2021. Higher Education in Flanders: English as the 'other' language. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 37-56. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Van Parijs, Philippe. 2021. Englishization as a trap and a lifeline. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 355-367. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Wilkinson, Robert & René Gabriëls. 2021. Englishization of Dutch higher education: Divergent language policies and practices. In *The Englishization of higher education in Europe*, edited by Robert Wilkinson & René Gabriëls, 37-56. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

### About the reviewer

Rias van den Doel was educated at Utrecht University (Netherlands) and Trinity College Dublin (Ireland), and has taught English and sociolinguistics to university students in the Netherlands, Spain, Poland and China. He is now affiliated to Utrecht University, where he runs courses in World Englishes, English language teaching (ELT) in Europe and Asia, and pronunciation training. He has been involved in faculty work to help facilitate and regulate English-medium instruction (EMI), and has co-authored a recent report on EMI in the Netherlands. His chief research interest is linguistic diversity and its ramifications for ELT and EMI.



**Recensie**  
**Piet van Sterkenburg:**  
***Rot zelf lekker op: Over politiek incorrect en ander  
ongepast taalgebruik***

Schiedam: Scriptum, 2019. 192 p.  
ISBN 9789463191500

*Gerecenseerd door Inge Genee*



Bij ons thuis mocht vroeger absoluut niet gevloekt of gescholden worden. Mijn moeder was een schooljuf die altijd zeer gespist was op beschaafd taalgebruik. Mijn vader kwam uit een boerengezin waar iedereen dialect sprak behalve hij, omdat hij als kind al impliciet begrepen had dat je daar niet verder mee kwam in de wereld. Standaard Nederlands spreken, met nette woorden, was belangrijk in onze doorzonwoning in een uit de polder gestampte nieuwbouwwijk.

Natuurlijk hadden mijn broertje en ik daar geen boodschap aan. Maar omdat we toch brave kindjes waren gebruikten we in huis niet de expliciet verboden woorden, maar we maakten onze eigen scheldwoorden. Ik herinner me uitdrukkingen zoals: “Afgekloven zolderraampje!” Of: “Afgesleten dakkapel!” Of: “Afgezakte trapeuning!” Nu ik ze zo opschrijf zie ik een patroon – dat had ik toen niet door. Er was een periode dat we de scheldwoorden uitspraken met een soort zangerige intonatie die we imiteerden van Zweedse kinderseries op de televisie. Dat Zweedse zingen deden we jaren later ook nog en ons kleine zusje deed daar ook lekker aan mee.

Ietsjes later, toen we wat dapperder waren geworden, gebruikten we woorden waarvan het begin op een scheldwoord leek maar dat dan bij nader inzien toch niet bleek te zijn. Zoals: “Wel Godf...ried van Bouillon!” Of: “Kuh...dootje!” Mijn moeder begon haar wenkbrauwen alvast te fronsen als ze het begin hoorde maar het eindigde met hilariteit onzerzijds als het weer was gelukt haar voor het lapje te houden.

Op de middelbare school werd ik me bewust van het bestaan van een aparte thuistaal en schooltaal. De thuistaal was keurig, en er kwamen geen scheldwoorden of vloeken in voor, maar de schooltaal, die overal op school gebezigd werd behalve in de klas, zat juist vol met de ergste vloek- en scheldwoorden die we maar kenden. Vooral *fuck*, *shit* en *kut* waren populair in het hok in de kelder waar we onze schoolkrant *De Paperclip* in elkaar draaiden, in palestijnsjaals gehuld vergaderingen van de PLO (Pius Leerlingen Organisatie) organiseerden, en sommigen (ik niet hoor!) niet eens zo heel erg stiekem een stickie rookten. Soms vergat ik om te schakelen als ik thuis kwam en dat veroorzaakte dan natuurlijk problemen. Ook leerde ik in die tijd dat er volwassenen waren die andere regels hadden dan mijn ouders: sommige leraren waren zelf ook langharig tuig, en daar mocht je in de klas gewoon doorvloeken als je maar stil was tijdens het bekijken van *The Last Waltz* gedurende lestijd.

Mijn eigen kinderen hadden jaren later een heel andere benadering. Als nageslacht van twee wetenschappers die zich met taal en literatuur bezighouden hadden ze al veel te vroeg begrepen wat “metataal” is. Ze zeiden dingen als: “Ik zeg niet “fuck” tegen jou, ik heb het over het woord “fuck,” dus dan is het geen vloek en mag ik het gewoon zeggen.” (Dit belangrijke concept zou eens goed moeten worden uitgelegd aan politiek-correcte Noord-Amerikanen die

tegenwoordig iedereen aan de schandpaal nagelen die verboden woorden bezigt ongeacht de context waarin dat gebeurt, bijvoorbeeld als ze voorkomen in de titel van een besproken boek, of het expliciete onderwerp vormen van een lezing of college. Maar dit geheel terzijde.)

Al deze zaken gingen door mij heen bij het lezen van het in 2019 verschenen boek *Rot zelf lekker op! Over politiek incorrect en ander ongepast taalgebruik*, door de Nederlandse taalkundige Piet van Sterkenburg. Van Sterkenburg is emeritus hoogleraar Lexicologie aan de Universiteit Leiden. Hij was wetenschappelijk directeur van het Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie, en tevens jarenlang jurylid van het Groot Dictee der Nederlandse Taal. Zijn hele leven heeft hij wetenschappelijk werk gedaan aan de woorden van de Nederlandse taal, en vloeken en schelden hebben daarbij zijn speciale interesse gehad. *Rot zelf lekker op* is niet voor mede-wetenschappers bedoeld, maar voor iedereen die geïnteresseerd is in de Nederlandse en Vlaamse taal en ook wel eens een creatief scheldwoord of politiek niet-correcte uitdrukking bezigt.

Dit is niet de eerste keer dat Piet van Sterkenburg over vloeken en schelden schrijft. Zijn magnum opus op dit gebied is *Vloeken: Een cultuurbepaalde reactie op woede, irritatie en frustratie*, oorspronkelijk gepubliceerd in 1997 met een tweede sterk gewijzigde druk in 2001. Deze pil van 715 pagina's is zeer aan te raden voor mensen die van lijstjes houden, want na een inleiding van zo'n 200 pagina's bestaan de volgende ongeveer 450 bladzijden uit een alfabetische lijst van Nederlandse en Vlaamse vloeken voorzien van handige en interessante annotaties, beginnend met *aambeï* op pagina 223 en eindigend met *zwimzwam* op pagina 676. Voor wie meer wil weten is er een uitgebreide bibliografie en als je er dan nog niet genoeg van hebt is er ook nog een index. Het inleidende deel behandelt interessante onderwerpen zoals de geschiedenis van schelden en vloeken vanaf de Middeleeuwen, de maatschappelijke functie van vloeken, en verschillen binnen en tussen Nederlandse en Vlaamse dialecten. Ondanks de wetenschappelijk opzet ervan is het zeer leesbaar, en het is bovendien vrijelijk verkrijgbaar via de website [etymologiebank.nl](http://etymologiebank.nl).

In 2008 publiceerde Van Sterkenburg *Krachttermen: Scheldwoorden, vervloekingen, verwensingen, beledigingen, smeekbeden en bezweringen*, en in 2009 verscheen *Vloeken is niet meer wat het geweest is*. In dat laatste boekje, meer een groot essay eigenlijk, betoogt hij dat vloeken vroeger meer het karakter van godslastering had, maar dat vanwege de ontkerkelijking dat soort termen tegenwoordig minder kracht hebben, en dat vloeken meer een uitdrukking van al dan niet heftige emotie is geworden. In plaats van verwijzingen naar god komen er in modernere vloeken en verwensingen meer verwijzingen voor naar ziektes (*krijg de klere cq. tering*), geslachtsdelen (*kut, lul, klote*), en uitwerpselen (*pis, stront*).

*Rot zelf lekker op* bouwt voort op deze eerder gepubliceerde werken. Het leukste deel vond ik eigenlijk de index. Het boek eindigt met een lijst van haast 30 pagina's waarin alle termen die in de tekst genoemd worden op alfabetische volgorde zijn opgenomen, gevolgd door een verwijzing naar de pagina(s) waar ze verder behandeld worden. Daar vinden wij juweeltjes zoals *aambeienschoffelaar*, *augurklul*, *afgelebberde flubberkut*, *God zal mij kreukelen*, *houtvlot (je tante, moeder of zuster op een)*, *door de mieren uitgelikte pismicht*, *sakkerpietjes*, enzovoorts. Natuurlijk is het teleurstellend dat de creaties van mij en mijn broertje niet in die lijst voorkomen, maar verder kun je aan die index veel plezier beleven.

De titel van *Rot zelf lekker op* is ontleend aan een berucht incident tijdens de Algemene Beschouwingen in de Tweede Kamer in 2018, waarbij Geert Wilders tegen de voorzitter van de politieke partij *Denk*, Tunaham Kuzu, "Rot zelf lekker op" zei. Hij zei nog andere minder frisse dingen, die ik hier liever niet herhaal. *Rot zelf lekker op* begint met een hoofdstuk waarin wordt uitgelegd wat Van Sterkenburg precies verstaat onder "politiek correct" cq. "politiek niet-correct," en waarin hij ook uitlegt hoe hij voor dit boek nieuwe data heeft vergaard om zijn enorme verzameling nog verder uit te breiden. Eind 2017 heeft hij via de Stichting Nederlandse Dialecten een vragenlijst verspreid, waarop hij 1.307 responsen kreeg, ongeveer gelijkelijk verdeeld tussen Nederland en Vlaanderen, met een klein aantal antwoorden van mensen die elders geboren waren.

De hoofdstukken 2-5 gaan over schelden. Hoofdstuk 2 legt uit wat (uit)schelden eigenlijk is en geeft een overzicht van de soorten scheldwoorden die we zoal kennen. In dit hoofdstuk bespreekt Van Sterkenburg ook een aantal taalkundige en semantische aspecten van schelden, en de relatieve frequentie en gevoelswaarde van de meest voorkomende scheldwoorden, zoals die naar voren komen uit de enquête. Bovenaan de lijst van woorden "met heftige gevoelswaarde" (38) vinden we wellicht niet tot onze verbazing *hoer*, gevolgd door *neger*, *homo*, *makaak* (een Vlaams scheldwoord dat voor mij nieuw was), *mongool*, en *klootzak*. De lijst van "meest beledigende of kwetsende woorden" (38) begint ook met *hoer*, gevolgd door *teef*, *slet*, *debiel*, *klootzak* en *lul*. Hoewel op de validiteit van de statistische gegevens misschien wel wat aan te merken is, zoals ik hieronder verder uitleg, suggereert dit resultaat toch dat schelden gebaseerd op sekse, huidskleur of afkomst, seksuele geaardheid, intellectuele beperkingen, en vermeende karakterslapte het meest voorkomen.

De hoofdstukken 6-9 gaan over vloeken en vervloeken. Hoofdstuk 6 is een inleiding op dit onderwerp, waarbij Van Sterkenburg het punt herhaalt dat vloeken tegenwoordig vooral een uitdrukken van al dan niet heftige emoties is. Vloeken kunnen hun oorsprong hebben in godslastering (bastaardvloeken) of juist niet (profane vloeken) en vervloekingen of verwensingen zijn vloeken die gericht zijn op een specifieke persoon.



De hoofdstukken 10-14 gaan over de semantische domeinen waar de meeste van onze scheld- en vloekwoorden vandaan komen: lichamelijke afscheidingen, seks, ziektes, dood, racisme, seksisme, en islamofobie. Hoewel de individuele voorbeeldwoorden soms onverwacht en humoristisch zijn, zijn die domeinen niet onverwacht.

Een laatste hoofdstuk over beledigende gebaren is een mooie aanvulling, die nog eens benadrukt dat gebaren ook een deel van onze taal zijn, en dat je er dus ook mee kunt vloeken en schelden. Welbekende gebaren zijn de opgestoken middelvinger, waarvoor je nog een boete kunt krijgen als je dat tegen een politie-agent doet. Andere veelbetekenende gebaren zijn het ontbloten van het achterwerk en dat naar degene die je wilt beledigen toekeren, en natuurlijk diverse gebaren voor seksuele handelingen. Van Sterkenburg vestigt kort de aandacht op culturele verschillen in de interpretatie van gebaren. Het laten zien van de zool van je schoen is in sommige culturen beledigend, en de duim-en-wijsvingel-cirkel die in Nederland “prima!” betekent heeft kennelijk in Duitsland de betekenis “klootzak.” Oppassen dus in multiculturele situaties. Dit onderwerp leek mij zeer interessant en ook relevant gegeven de veranderende samenstelling van de Nederlandse samenleving en de vele buitenlandse reizen die Nederlanders maken. Ik had er graag nog wat meer over gelezen.

Dit boek is expliciet geschreven voor een algemeen publiek. Van Sterkenburg zegt zelf dat hij daarom bijvoorbeeld geen literatuurverwijzingen heeft opgenomen in de tekst, hoewel er wel een korte lijst van “Meest gebruikte bronnen” is (161-164). Dat is een goede oplossing. Als mede-taalkundige had ik hier en daar wel graag de specifieke bron van een bepaalde opmerking willen weten, maar ik snap dat ik niet tot de centrale doelgroep behoor. Een lastig aspect van boeken die geschreven zijn door wetenschappelijke specialisten maar gericht op een algemeen publiek is dat ze toch het cachet van de wetenschappelijke achtergrond van de auteur dragen, en daardoor meer gewicht hebben dan boeken geschreven door niet-specialisten. Het is moeilijk om wetenschappelijk werk voor een niet-wetenschappelijk publiek onder woorden te brengen. Wat laat je weg, wat moet er absoluut in, wat moet je extra uitleggen of op een andere plaats dan waar je het voor een specialistenpubliek zou doen? Hoe populariseer je zonder te oversimplificeren? In *Rot zelf lekker op* is dit evenwicht naar mijn mening niet altijd even goed gevonden.

Het grootste probleem is de onduidelijkheid van de rol van de enquête. Helaas is de volledige vragenlijst niet opgenomen, en we weten ook vrijwel niets van de achtergrond van de respondenten. De kritische lezer blijft daardoor zitten met de vraag hoe representatief de antwoorden waren. Je kunt je gemakkelijk voorstellen dat bepaalde groepen in de samenleving nou niet echt geneigd zullen zijn om een vragenlijst van een dialectinstituut in te vullen, en dat andere

groepen daartoe juist wel geneigd zijn. Van Sterkenburg zegt niet of hij demografische informatie heeft verzameld over de respondenten, behalve uit welk land ze kwamen. Het wordt geleidelijk duidelijk dat behalve zijn eigen eerdere publicaties, en die van anderen, het internet ook een belangrijke bron van gegevens is geweest, maar er worden geen details gegeven over hoe systematisch dat deel van het onderzoek was. Van Sterkenburg geeft zelf aan dat hij niet naar volledigheid heeft gestreefd, maar hij had wel wat explicieter mogen aangeven wat de mogelijke beperkingen van zijn methode voor gevolgen zouden kunnen hebben voor de representativiteit van het materiaal.

Dit probleem wordt goed zichtbaar in de korte sectie over islamofobie (149-150). De eerste zin luidt: “Veel Nederlanders vinden de islam een bedreiging van onze identiteit en ze zijn bang voor de invloed van moslims op onze samenleving” (149). Het gebruik van de bezittelijke voornaamwoorden is veelzeggend. Door te spreken over “onze identiteit” en “onze samenleving” positioneert Van Sterkenburg zich impliciet in het kamp van de “Nederlanders,” waar de islam apart van staat. Als hij neutraal had willen zijn had hij kunnen zeggen: “Veel Nederlanders vinden de islam een bedreiging van hun identiteit en ze zijn bang voor de invloed van moslims op de samenleving.” Dit lijkt misschien een klein punt en overdreven politiek correct, maar door deze formulering te kiezen kiest Van Sterkenburg een specifiek perspectief op islamofobisch vloeken en schelden. In deze sectie over islamofobie worden alleen scheldwoorden voor moslims door niet-moslims behandeld. Maar dat riep bij mij de vraag op: Zijn er ook scheldwoorden die gebruikt worden door moslims voor niet-moslims? Hoe noemen “zij” “ons”? Is er ook een scheldwoord voor een islamofob, om maar wat te noemen? Of voor een moslim die zich teveel aan de meerderheidscultuur heeft aangepast? Het ontbreken van “de andere kant” van het islamofobie-verhaal doet dan de vraag rijzen hoeveel moslims de vragenlijst hebben ingevuld. Ik mis het perspectief van de tweede- of derde-generatie Nederlandssprekende moslim(a). En waarom is er bijvoorbeeld in hoofdstuk 7 over bastaardvloeken (godslasteringen) geen enkel niet-(judeo-)christelijk voorbeeld? Meer informatie over het demografische profiel van de respondenten die de enquête invulden zou wellicht licht hebben kunnen werpen op dit soort vragen.

Een tweede aspect waar de balans tussen populariseren en simplificeren in mijn optiek niet goed gelukt is, is in de illustraties. Illustraties zijn nuttig als ze een extra visueel perspectief bieden dat iets toevoegt aan de tekst. Sommige illustraties doen dat, maar andere, naar mijn mening de meeste, doen dat niet. Vele van de illustraties hebben niet eens een onderschrift, en het is onduidelijk waarop in de tekst ze betrekking hebben of waar ze vandaan komen. Nu kun je natuurlijk van mening verschillen over of die illustraties leuk zijn of niet, maar soms hebben ze mogelijk een negatief effect. Ik noem slechts één voorbeeld. De

foto van een vrouw en een meisje in zwarte burqa's tussen twee zwarte vuilniszakken functioneert als noodzakelijke illustratie van de haatmail die begint met: "Ik zei dat ze drie mooie kinderen had" (56), maar datzelfde kan niet gezegd worden van een foto van zes in burqa's gehulde vrouwen op een bankje naast een meisje met een korte broek en onbedekt hoofd in de sectie over islamofobie (150). Aangezien het punt hier niet is het beledigende karakter van zulk soort visueel materiaal, is het enige effect van dit plaatje het bevestigen van vooroordelen over moslims. Ik merk op dat er in de hele tekst geen foto voorkomt van een moslimman in een "soepjurk" (ook een scheldwoord).

Ondanks deze minpuntjes heb ik het boek met plezier gelezen en denk dat het voor een algemeen publiek dat geïnteresseerd is in de woordenschat van de Nederlandse taal zeker de moeite waard is. Voor degene die na het lezen hiervan nog meer wil weten raad ik het genoemde dikke boek *Vloeken* aan, van dezelfde auteur.

## Referenties

- van Sterkenburg, Piet, Petrus, Gijsbertus, Jacobus. 2001. *Vloeken: Een cultuurbepaalde reactie op woede, irritatie en frustratie*. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers. Tweede sterk gewijzigde druk. [https://etymologiebank.nl/pdf/2001\\_Sterkenburg\\_Vloeken.pdf](https://etymologiebank.nl/pdf/2001_Sterkenburg_Vloeken.pdf).
- van Sterkenburg, Piet, Petrus, Gijsbertus, Jacobus. 2008. *Krachttermen: Scheldwoorden, vervloekingen, verwensingen, beledigingen, smeekbeden en bezweringen*. Schiedam: Scriptum.
- van Sterkenburg, Piet, Petrus, Gijsbertus, Jacobus. 2009. *Vloeken is niet meer wat het geweest is*. Brussel: VubPress.

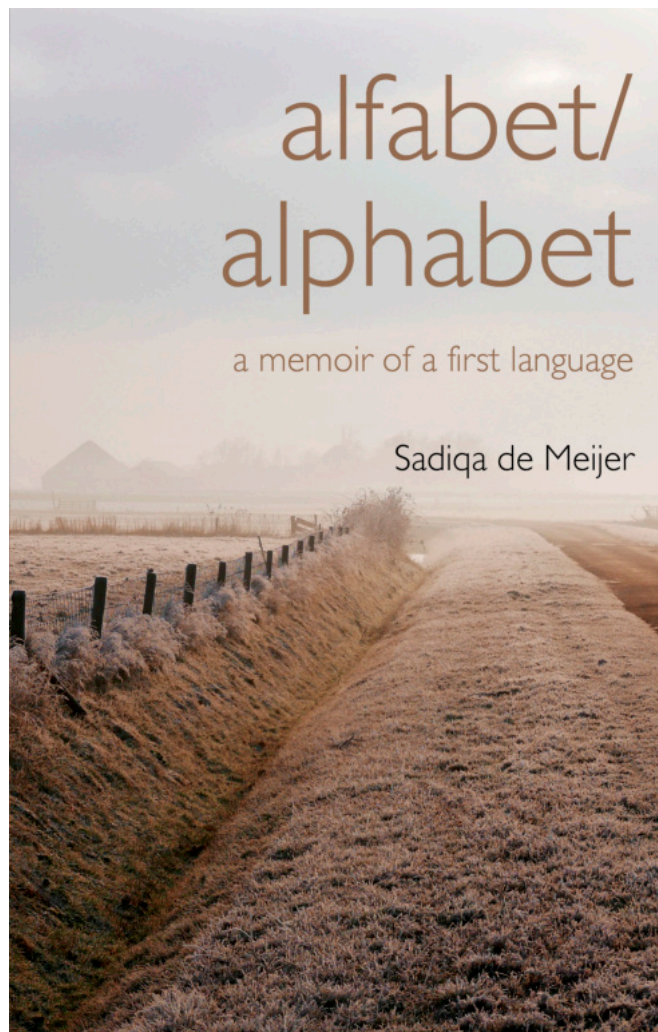
## Over de recensent

Inge Genee is hoogleraar taalkunde aan de University of Lethbridge in de Canadese provincie Alberta. Ze heeft neerlandistiek en taalkunde gestudeerd aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam, waar ze ook een eerstegraads lesbevoegdheid behaalde en in 1998 promoveerde op een proefschrift over syntactische verandering in het Middeleeuws Iers. Sinds haar verhuizing naar Canada in 1997 heeft ze zich steeds meer toegelegd op de studie van het Blackfoot, een bedreigde inheemse Algonkische taal die gesproken wordt in Alberta en in de Amerikaanse staat Montana. Haar belangrijkste werk richt zich op het ondersteunen van lokale pogingen tot het beschermen en versterken van deze taal, onder andere door het maken van online hulpmiddelen zoals woordenboeken en lesmateriaal (zie <https://blackfoot.algonquianlanguages.ca/>). Ze was hoofdredacteur van *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* van 2011 tot 2019. Ze is co-editor van *Papers of the Algonquian Conference*, en heeft

gepubliceerd in wetenschappelijke tijdschriften zoals *Canadian Journal of Linguistics/Revue canadienne de linguistique*, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *English Language & Linguistics*, *General Linguistics*, *Language*, alsook *Linguistic Discovery*, *Linguistics*, *Linguistic Typology*, en *Written Language and Literacy*. Ook publiceerde ze samen met Blackfoot spreker Lena Heavy Shields Russell de verhalenbundel *Ákaiṣinikssiṣṣi / Blackfoot Stories of Old* (First Nations University of Canada & University of Regina Press First Nations Language Readers Memoir 3, 2014). Ze werkt nu aan een pedagogische grammatica van het Blackfoot.

**Review**  
**Sadiqa de Meijer:**  
***alfabet/ alphabet: a memoir of a first language***  
Windsor: Palimpsest Press, 2020. 158 p.  
ISBN 9781989287606

*Reviewed by Stephen Cain*



In the author's note to Sadiqa de Meijer's *alfabet/ alphabet* she writes that she "was born in Amsterdam to a Dutch-Kenyan-Pakistani-Afghani family, and moved to Canada as a child" (157). In her two earlier books of poetry, *Leaving Howe Island* (2013) and *The Outer Wards* (2020), De Meijer explores aspects of this complex identity, while also examining her position as a settler in Canada in the former book, and her experience of maternity in the latter. It is with this new collection, however, subtitled "a memoir of a first language," that she most directly addresses her Dutch identity, claiming "Dutch is indeed my mother tongue./ My pulse music, my bone resonator, my umbilical ligature [...] My language of lullaby and nursery rhyme" (11).

While she does briefly consider some Punjabi she learned as a child, for the majority of the book De Meijer focuses on how the Dutch language has shaped not only her poetry and poetics, but how she understands the world and her life. Moreover, she is exacting in conveying what type of Dutch has formed her: "The language I speak is *Nederlands*, *NAY-der-lahnts*, in three descending pitches. Of the lowland; low or humble or meek [...] The utterances of my people who used to dwell on hillocks, lone islands in the floodplains of the sea [...] In storms, the rains and whitecaps lashed their walls. Was it any wonder that the words they made would sound like phlegm?" (29).

Structured as an abecedarium—with 26 chapters in alphabetical order—each essay is titled with a Dutch word and its English equivalent, for example: *natuur/ nature*, *tijd/ time*, or *liefde/ love*. This gesture alone is of interest, especially when readers notice that some words are shared between the languages, like *bitter/ bitter*, or when the book concludes with the word *zwijg*, which De Meijer convincingly argues is untranslatable into English.<sup>1</sup>

One great surprise (and pleasure) of the book is that the titles of the essays often have only tangential relationships to their subjects. They are only occasionally direct meditations on "love" or "time." More often the reader needs to puzzle why a chapter called *yoghurt/ yogurt* is about reading to a child, or why a discussion of Friesland and its dialect is entitled *uier/ udder*.

As both a poetics and memoir, *alfabet/ alphabet* covers a lot of territory and many diverse subjects. There are wonderful invocations of immigrant family life, both tough and moving, as well as humorous examples of the defamiliarization of a European's move to Canada (milk comes in bags here! electrical outlets look like human faces!). And there is the perhaps expected growing awareness of the inconsistencies of the English language as De Meijer learns to speak it (why is "union" not pronounced "onion" she wonders). Elsewhere she recounts travels back to the Netherlands, and does not sugar-coat

---

<sup>1</sup> Approximations for a partial capture of the word's meaning in English are 'be silent,' 'shut up,' or 'withhold language.'

a possible “return to an idealized homeland” narrative, instead describing encounters with neo-Nazis and recalling childhood neighbours who called her and her mixed-race siblings *vuilnisbakkenras*, “the word for mongrel, which translates literally as garbage-can-race” (42).

The majority of the essays, however, do focus on language and poetry. De Meijer discusses Dutch poets who have influenced her—such as P. A. de Genestet, M. Vasalis, Leo Vroman, Ida Gerhardt, Herman de Coninck, and Martinus Nijhoff—and the phonology of the Dutch language and how it affects its poetry. There are also descriptive passages of the sounds of each letter in Dutch; for example, G is “the notorious *ghay* [which has] a guttural, scraping sound which exists in Arabic as well, but not in English. Imagine a porous k. In northern Dutch, the letter originates in the throat; the windpipe tightens in a brief gargle” (47). And there are examples of De Meijer’s own poetry, such as the delightful list-poem *chronisch/ chronic*, which is a description of “what Dutch sounds like to my English-speaking friends,” including “Throaty, phlegmy, a little bit spitty,” or “An English recording played backward,” and “Like socialism” (15-18).

As insightful as De Meijer’s observations are, it sometimes struck me, especially for a Canadian writer and in a book produced by a Canadian publisher, that she appeared to be digging around issues that other Canadian poets and critics have been examining for some time. For example, her discussions of the maternal and poetry has resonance with Daphne Marlatt, Susan Holbrook, and Nicole Brossard. When she discusses the connection between language and landscape, suggesting that the sound of *Nederlands* is a result of that people’s connection to the sea and the rainfall of western Netherlands, one may be reminded of Dennis Lee’s work on national inflections of language as drawn from the land in his essay “Cadence, country, silence.” When De Meijer describes her first moments of arriving in Canada as child, she writes, “*Waar ben ik* (where am I?) was the question that burned in me” (27), appearing to confirm Northrop Frye’s famous claim that the immigrant-writer’s first question is not “Who am I?” but “Where is here?” without directly acknowledging him. Most of all, I wished that there might have been some conversation with the work of Aritha van Herk whose lyrical essays are similar to De Meijer’s, especially the piece “Of dykes and boers and drowning” which also explores the influence of the Dutch language on Van Herk’s life and writing in Canada.

To be fair, however, De Meijer is a primarily a poet and not an academic, and shouldn’t be expected to address generations of poetic exploration in Canada. And she is indeed a fine poet, bringing her poetic ear to almost every essay in the collection, and always being attentive to sound, intonation, and rhythm. Her own translations of the Dutch poets she discusses are also first rate, and she explains her word choices and translation decisions in an engaging manner. At one point

she describes the poetry of Ida Gerhardt as being like a finely-designed wooden box for its precision and proficiency—a statement that could be equally applied to De Meijer’s own writing (as well as to the beautiful design of *alfabet/ alphabet* itself, courtesy of Ellie Hastings of Palimpsest Press).

As of this writing, *alfabet/ alphabet* has won the 2021 Governor General’s Literary Award for Nonfiction, so reviewing the book now feels a bit like coming late to a great party. Yet, in composing this I hope I have conveyed just how strong a collection *alfabet/ alphabet* is, and how deserving De Meijer is of the accolades she has received. She has already proven herself to be a talented poet, and she has now clearly established herself as powerful essayist and memoirist. *alfabet/ alphabet* is not just an extremely pleasurable read, but is also an important statement on the poetics of translation and provides a valuable service in introducing several modern Dutch poets to an English readership.

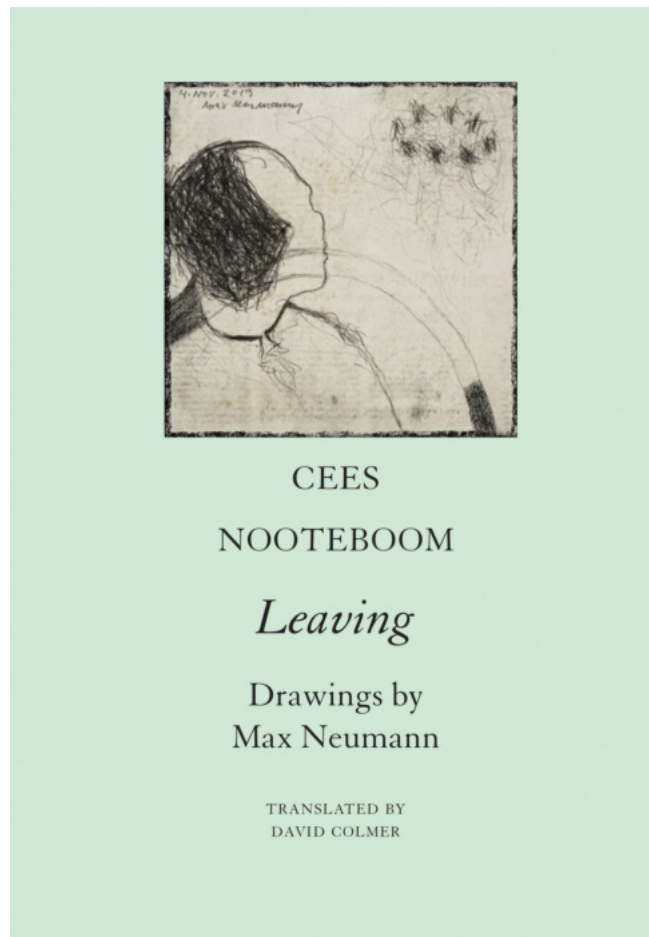
### **About the reviewer**

Stephen Cain is an associate professor of English at York University where he teaches Canadian and avant-garde literature. He is the author of five collections of poetry—including *American Standard/ Canada Dry* (Coach House Books, 2005) and *False Friends* (Book\*hug Press, 2017)—and is the editor of *bp: beginnings* (Book\*hug Press, 2014), the collected early poetic sequences of bpNichol.



**Review**  
**Cees Nooteboom:**  
***Leaving: A poem from the time of the virus***  
Drawings by Max Neumann  
David Colmer (trans.)  
London: Seagull Books, 2021. 80 p.  
ISBN 9780857428837

*Reviewed by Désirée Schyns*



In the year 2020, Dutch author Cees Nootboom (b. 1933, The Hague) who considers poetry at the heart of his oeuvre, and who published a new collection of poems (*Vos*) in February 2022, published a small volume with the very unambiguous title: *Afscheid*. The subtitle *Gedicht uit de tijd van het virus (A poem from the time of the virus)*, makes us realize that the three series of eleven poems have been written during the pandemic. As the poet says in his afterword, the poems he started to write at the beginning of 2020 took another turn, not only because of the pandemic, but in the first place because he was given a folder of drawings that brought to his mind a pre-Socratic text by Empedokles. The drawings Nootboom refers to are made by the German artist Max Neumann and connect with the lines by Empedokles in the fourth and eleventh poem in the first series of *Afscheid*. Neumann had already inspired and accompanied Nootboom for the creation of *Zelfportret van een ander* (1993), a series of prose poems, translated in 2018 by David Colmer as *Self-portrait of an Other*. The distinguished Australian translator David Colmer, who was awarded several prizes for his translations of Dutch poetry into English (among others the James Brockway Prize for his oeuvre in 2021), is also the translator of Nootboom's *Licht overal* from 2012 (*Light everywhere*, 2014) and *Monniksoog* from 2016 (*Monk's eye*, 2019). It is no surprise that he is responsible for the transferring of the poems in *Afscheid*, published in English under the title *Leaving* with 33 drawings by Neumann, unlike the Dutch original which appeared without Neumann's visualizations. In the Dutch original Nootboom announces that the drawings were meant to be published in the English translation ("*De tekeningen die bedoeld waren voor de engelse vertaling van David Colmer die bij Seagull Press zal verschijnen, zijn gemaakt door schilder Max Neumann*"). This draws attention to the unique way in which Nootboom's work circulates in translation: some of his volumes of poems are published in a different form than the original Dutch publication (like *Leaving*), some of his collections of essays contain different pieces chosen from his work in different countries (for instance *Nootbooms hotel*, translated as *Nomad's hotel* in English) and his collected works are not being published in the original language but in German translation (with Suhrkamp Verlag).

In *Leaving*, death is present from the beginning of the first series, but in the first poem the poetic voice is still lingering in the familiar setting of the house and garden in Menorca, Spain, where Nootboom lives during the summer, and where many of the scenes of the recently translated *533: A book of days* are situated: "the bare fig against the wall/with the thousand-year-old stones" (3). But then the poet moves to a disturbing dreamlike realm of childhood memories and the trauma of the war years in The Hague, the city of his birth: "He'd seen that in the war, defeated soldiers/ in retreat, frightened, dirty, the mouths/ that sang so heartily when they marched in/ now closed" (5). In the second series, the poet

stages himself in the contemplation of some of Neumann's disquieting drawings of heads, which become a sort of grimacing and monstrous procession of humanity: "No love here, only violence,/loneliness, melancholy, the form/ of an animal, a man accompanied by/ his guillotine, a child without a mouth" (35). Gradually, in the third series, individual death appears, the end of personal life: "What had you hoped/ to preserve? The sound of a voice,/ the memory of a shoulder" (57). The last six poems of the series illustrate the act of leaving itself: not only they describe an inexorable march that merges with time, on a path deserted by all, but in their form, with increasingly short lines, they progress towards absence, nothingness, towards "no one" – the last words of the volume; "Blind I walk on, a grey dog/ in the cold. This must be it,/ the place I say goodbye to myself/ and slowly become/ no one" (71).

In *Leaving*, Neumann's haunting drawings and Nootboom's poems form a poetic connection, like in poem 6 of the second series where Nootboom evokes "A ship founders right through a face,/ a rotting source, a three-master/ through closed eyes, who/ is the creator?" (37) beside a drawing of a figure of death who wears a foghorn and whose face is reminiscent of Death in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. Another example of the poetic connection is poem 4 of the second series where Nootboom describes "a transparent body menaced/ by the executioner's helper" (33) next to a drawing of an executioner beside an axe which hangs off the paper like the axe of a guillotine.

Beyond the artist's drawings and the poet's words that match very well in this volume, there is also a strong connection between the Dutch poet and the Australian translator. Thanks to several contributions on translation, we have an idea of David Colmer's translation poetics. In an interview he granted me in the winter of 2021, Colmer, who is also the translator of the acclaimed poetry by the Dutch-Caribbean poet Radna Fabias (*Habitus* 2021), said that translation is above all an interpretation of words and lines that are anchored in a place, time, society and culture of a non-English-speaking audience. In his view, poetry translation means that the voice of the foreign-language author must become his, or in the case of Fabias, her voice in English. Thanks to the intimate conversation with and knowledge of Nootboom's poetry and also thanks to the collaboration with the poet, Colmer found a rhythm and tone for the lonely and somber voice in *Afscheid*. As in his other collections of poetry Nootboom raises metaphysical questions and his poems explore limits, not only in a logical sense, but also in relation to Dutch grammar. Colmer is able to follow Nootboom very closely, while also transforming the lines which become new living material in a new language. Translation is not a sterile copy of the original but entails interpretation. For instance: "*Soms bedrieglijk normaal zoals de moeder / van dode soldaten, dan weer een schim naast/ een wrak, het oneigenlijke kent vele personen, de droom is*

*een boze/verzinner*" (26). The translator has a preference for the word "spectre" for "*schim*" ("shadow") and has chosen "the unreal" for "*het oneigenlijke*." His translation as a form of recreation of the poetry in English becomes visible in "a cast of thousands" for "*vele personen*," and "*de droom is een boze/ verzinner*" where the dream becomes a noun and is no longer a person: "dream, a malevolent/ imagination" – "At times deceptively normal like the mother/ of a dead soldier, then a **spectre** beside/ a wreck, **the unreal has a cast**/ of thousands, dream, a malevolent/**imagination**" (33).

*Leaving* is a striking example of translation as transformation for a new reading audience. In translation not only words and lines are enveloped in a new language, covers and paratexts are also newly framed. Whereas *Afscheid* is a small volume with a black shimmering cover with a photograph in which we can discover part of a stone sarcophagus taken from a György Kurtág CD, *Leaving* is larger, with a light green cover and a drawing by Neumann in black and white. The covers appeal to different senses when we read Nootboom's poetry about desolation and beauty. The cover's drawing in the English edition depicts a head gazing at an indistinct swarm of birds. Seeing and contemplation are very important themes in Nootboom's oeuvre (see also *Der Augenmensch Cees Nootboom* by Daan Cartens, 1995). On the Dutch cover the photograph shows two ears carved in ancient stone that possibly refer to the mystery of human life and suffering for which there is no answer. It is as if Nootboom suggests that God is deaf and blind. His poems are indeed evocations of a struggle with time, impermanence and eternity, especially in *Leaving* where absence and death have a strong presence. As in other poems, Nootboom takes inspiration from surrounding nature, like shells, fig trees and stones. The poet breathes life into these lifeless things. Meditating on the stone photograph and on the relation between art and life, Nootboom asks in the first poem of the third series: "Is the stone listening,/ does it hear when I ask what it means?/ I keep quiet. I want to know what it hears and/ hear silence" (51). In *Leaving*, the Dutch poet speaks to us in a strong voice, evoking all our senses thanks to the empathic, creative translation by David Colmer.

### **About the reviewer:**

Désirée Schyns is an associate professor at Ghent University (Belgium), where she teaches translation French-Dutch and Translation Studies. She is director of the Research Group TRACE (Translation and Culture) and has published widely on translation and memory, translation and testimony, and translation in a postcolonial context. She is the author of *La mémoire littéraire de la guerre d'Algérie dans la fiction algérienne francophone* (L'Harmattan, 2012); and co-

editor of *Translation in exile* (2018), *Denken over poëzie en vertalen, de dichter Cees Nootboom in vertaling* (Academia Press, 2018), *Zwemmen in talen* (Poëziecentrum, 2020) and *Translating memories of violent pasts* (forthcoming 2022). She is also a literary translator from French into Dutch and is currently collaborating on the translation of Marcel Proust's *Les soixante-quinze feuillets et autres manuscrits inédits* (2021).



## Review

**Pieta van Beek and Annemarié van Niekerk:  
*My mother's mother's mother: South African women's  
writing from 17th-century Dutch to contemporary  
Afrikaans***

Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2019. 958 p.  
ISBN 9789087283186

*Reviewed by Callie Long*



To hold the nearly one-thousand-page book *My mother's mother's mother: South African women's writing from 17th-century Dutch to contemporary Afrikaans* by Pieta van Beek and Annemarié van Niekerk, in my hands, is to sense a deep, enduring lifeblood of some seventy women - their language and their cultures - whose stories, across centuries, are represented in this volume. As someone whose mother tongue is Afrikaans, and with maternal ancestral links to the Netherlands, I cannot help but be moved by the exceptional feat that is this scholarly work that brings together a diverse series of historical and more contemporary narratives from across the ages. Comprising a collection of missives and stories that have “never before” (21) to the authors’ knowledge, “been documented as extensively in a single volume” (21) - *My mother's mother's mother* reflects a wealth of deeply personal thinking and writing that dates back to 1652. The text wholly exemplifies the thoughtful women whose stories the reader encounters, and who come alive through their unique voices.

The post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (1995) reminds us that discourse is always material in effect, and a reiterative process that normalizes and regulates that which it dominates. Each narrative, therefore, whether grounded in the real or the fictive, accomplishes something exceptional - it raises up voices that have fallen outside of the ambit of the so-called truth of discourse, having been systemically and discursively displaced and silenced for a good part of the nearly four hundred years covered by the text. Filled with stories of grief and resignation, but also joy and defiance, the narratives provide extraordinary insight into South Africa’s disquieting and troubled history of colonization through to its modern-day democracy, achieved in 1994 when apartheid ended. The stories trace an arc that encompasses what the Canadian scholar Sara Kastner describes in relation to the late Zimbabwean author, Yvonne Vera, as a tradition of testimonial “silence-breaking [that represents] therapeutic economies of narrative” (2016, 1). As such, this substantial scholarly volume brings to light and engages with the profound legacy of the assorted and diverse narratives that serve as testimony of and a bearing witness to multiple histories of struggle, pain, and silencing and displacement, across political and social divides. *My mother's mother's mother* bears witness to the lives lived and still being lived - the voices preserved first in Dutch, and then, after a transition period as the women adjusted to new linguistic and cultural contexts, spilling forth in a panoply of Afrikaans.

For Van Beek, the text is a culmination of a passion for language, and a curiosity about the lives of the “first Dutch-speaking women” who had made the southern tip of the African continent their home, “and those who followed in their footsteps” (18). Van Niekerk’s passion burns as bright as Van Beek’s, kindled by her love for “women’s voices in literature, and the stories behind those voices” (19). Even though we have not met in person, Van Niekerk and I have been



tangentially connected via social media for many years, and hers is a voice - through her considerate and considered social commentary and journalism - that I am familiar with and enjoy. I am therefore not surprised that *My mother's mother's mother* illuminates the alienating disparities brought to bear on the women whose voices are lifted up in the narrative - disproportionate and asymmetrical inequalities that split them into the ethnic and cultural groupings that were, and continue to be so endemic to this country with its troubled history.

Above all, *My mother's mother's mother* is an ode to the women who have made their lives within the context of the vast social and political discriminatory inequalities that systemically favoured white women (and more so those from the white middle class after 1948, when white South Africans voted into power a nationalist and supremacist government that would rule the country for 46 years), to the exclusion of women of colour. As the authors note, the text is not aimed at lifting up the writing of "generations of women and their writing" as an unbroken "string of blue beads" (a phrase borrowed from the eponymous title of the 1999 book *'n Stringetjie blou krale* by the first woman of colour to publish in Afrikaans, E.M.K. Dido), but illustrates the deep "fractures and discontinuities in the chain of voices" (Van Beek & Van Niekerk, 25-6). Dido's writing about displacement - both geographically and as a means to illuminate the different forms of silencing - is a testament to the complexity of taking a political stand, writing both in (her mother tongue) and against the "language of oppression," Afrikaans (759). The first so-called voice we encounter in the text contains the words of Eva/Krotoa (her real name), as captured and entered in the diary by Jan van Riebeeck, the colonial administrator of the Cape of Good Hope in service of the Dutch East India Company from 1652. What is remarkable about this entry is that Van Riebeeck, according to Van Beek and Van Niekerk, mostly referred to women in the collective, and if they were not white, remained nameless and anonymous. Eva/Krotoa, who is named "after the biblical Eve, the 'mother of all human beings'" and is quoted either directly or indirectly in his diary, is the exception - she is a powerful woman in her own right (124). Eva/Krotoa's words are book-ended by the work of the contemporary poet Ronelda Kamfer, whose poems, the authors note, have been described as creating "a sense of inevitable expression, as if [...] they have existed since the beginning of time" (quoting Charl-Pierre Naudé, 879-80). As with Dido's narrators, Kamfer's speaker in the poem "Kuns en culture" ('Art and culture') takes the language of the oppressor, and not without pain, lays bare how troubling the relationship to language is, and how steeped it is in so much more than signs that we understand as words. The speaker points to the panic about "'n taal" ('a language') in view of not only being ashamed to speak a language (Afrikaans), but more negatively still, as someone whose mother tongue is Afrikaans, to be excluded from "'cultural' events" that would mark and

celebrate it (Van Beek & Van Niekerk, 882-3). For the speaker, the panic and ensuing “*geraas*” (‘loud noise’) is not about language, but instead the fear-induced cleaving, by some, to the past, as would a baby clutching its “bottle” (882). In between these two narrative representations are a trove of others - some stepping “out of the shadows” in the form of the poetry by the women of the Bosman family, to those of such well-known Afrikaans writers and poets as Ingrid Jonker, Antjie Krog, and Rachele Greeff (244). The collection, however, compels me to ask what the ethical obligations are that must follow on from an engagement with the text, given that this kind of witnessing encompasses both the act of bearing witness to the imperceptible, and that of acting as an eyewitness to lives lived as the contemporary philosopher Kelly Oliver (2001) proposes. There is an unbreakable thread that weaves together both testimony - especially “from those othered by dominant cultures” (Oliver 2001, 8) - and witnessing that transcends a demand for recognition. Instead, as Oliver (2004) argues, such testimonies bear “witness to a pathos” and compassion beyond a need “to be seen,” that asks for an ethical engagement with the stories of the women in which lasting and permanent remnants of the past continue to play out (79).

To characterize the writings as stories is to also engage with the inherent liminality of a narrative that is as much about an ongoing journey through the South African historical, political, social, and cultural landscapes that stretch out over some four hundred years, as one that takes us to and across social thresholds. Van Beek and Van Niekerk, as custodians, in this instance, of the some seventy voices contained in *My mother's mother's mother*, offer the reader moments that invite reflection - to pause and then balance at that very intimate and complex intersection of language and culture, to witness how societal hierarchies can be dissolved, and even reversed to make place for the new. *My mother's mother's mother* heralds something special. The scholarly text is never about endings, but always about beginnings, each uniquely revealing a step into the future, through the past.

## References

- Dido, Elsie Katie Maria. 1999. *'n Stringetjie blou krale*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and punish*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House.
- Kastner, Sarah. 2016. “Only words can bury us, not silence”: Reading Yvonne Vera’s difficult silences. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 17. 2: 213-230. doi: 10.1080/17533171.2016.1171472
- Oliver, Kelly. 2001. *Witnessing: Beyond recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Oliver, Kelly. 2004. Witnessing and testimony. *Parallax* 10. 1: 78-87. doi: 10.1080/1353464032000171118

**About the reviewer**

Carmen (Callie) Long holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Humanities (Brock University, Ontario, Canada), applying her doctoral research and her background in journalism, media development and organizational communications to her work as a professional communicator. One of her more recent publications includes the book chapter “Bearing witness to epistemic injustice: Joan Baxter’s *The mill*” (in Rob Alexander & Willa McDonald, eds., *Literary journalism and social justice* [Springer, 2022]). She co-edited, with Gillian Paterson, the book *Dignity, freedom, and grace: Christian perspectives on HIV, AIDS, and human rights* (World Council of Churches Publications, 2016).



**Review**

**Jef Last:**

***Mon ami André Gide***

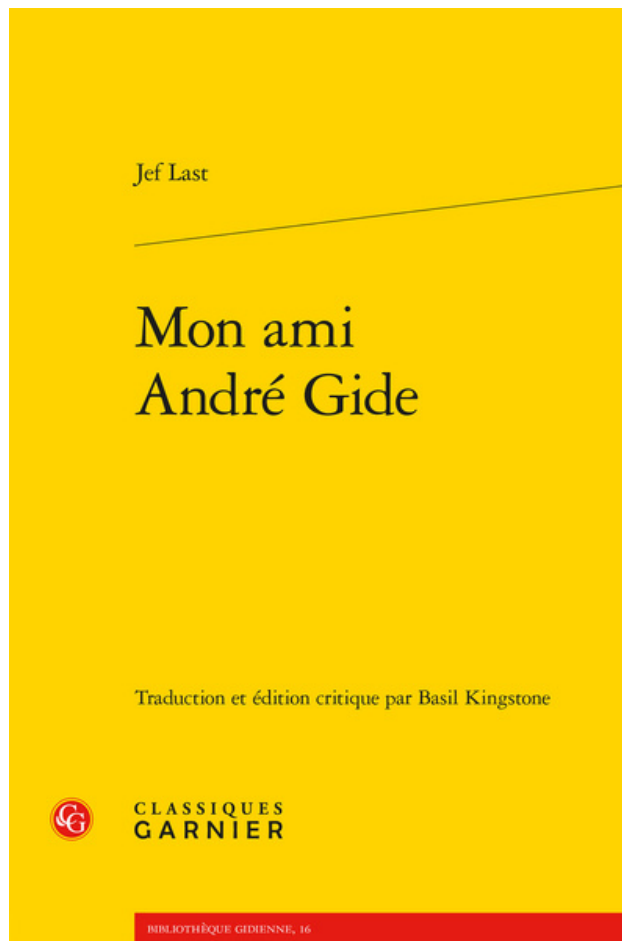
Basil Kingstone (traduction et édition critique)

[Bibliothèque gidienne sous la direction de Peter Schnyder, 16]

Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021. 246 p.

ISBN 9782406109143

*Reviewed by Leonid Livak*



The Dutch writer and journalist Josephus Carel Franciscus Last (1898-1972), better known in cultural historiography as Jef Last, rose to prominence in the 1930s, first as an activist and propagandist of the international communist movement, and then as its vilified defector. It is this latter quality of a renegade from a political religion that gives Last's reflections on his friendship with André Gide, another apostate from Stalinism, their pugnacity and bald take on the French author's intellectual and emotional idiosyncrasies. Originally published in Dutch, in 1966, and hitherto untranslated, Last's retrospective impressions of the final two decades of Gide's life are a source of valuable biographical information. Yet one is hard pressed to treat this text as a straightforward memoir or eye-witness testimony. The narrative filters factual reportage through extensive speculation about the motives behind Gide's existential, artistic, and intellectual choices, all of it against the backdrop of Jef Last's autobiography whose purpose is to justify and legitimize the Dutch author's quarrel with the revolutionary Left.

The narrative falls roughly into four parts, not always following formal chapter segmentation. The first tells the story of the friendship's early years, interspersed with extended digressions about the role of homosexuality in Gide's life and work. The second part recounts Gide's political pilgrimage to the USSR, in the summer of 1936, most of which Last witnessed first-hand as the French writer's travel companion. The third part deals with Last's participation in the Spanish civil war, an experience that did much to accelerate his falling-out with communism. The final part accounts for the author's interactions with Gide throughout the 1940s, including their joint trip to post-war Germany.

The friends, far removed in their aesthetic views, had been initially brought together by shared political and sexual passions that combined a quest for social justice with a challenge to social mores. Such pairing of ideology with sex was a source of tensions, since Gide's and Last's investment in radical leftist politics, embodied at the time by the culturally retrograde Marxist dictatorship on Europe's eastern fringe, sat quite awkwardly with their homoerotic proclivities. To be sure, while homosexuality was a constant topic of conversations between the two married men (21, 23), they were never lovers, as Gide fancied adolescent boys, the younger the better (Last never stops pointing this out). Having abandoned the communist faith, Gide's friend retained the mental habits underlying Marxism's preternatural appeal in intellectual circles, namely simplistic reductiveness posing as informed analysis and the self-righteous conviction of being in possession of ultimate yet hidden knowledge that fully explains human behavior. (The reader will take as an unwitting compliment Last's dismissive remark that Gide did not study Marx thoroughly enough [73].) If in his communist period Jef Last followed the Marxist catechism, which located the hidden sources of human conduct in the economic structure of society, in his post-communist

years he replaced economics with sexuality, but his analysis hardly became more nuanced.

Arrogating the role of Gide's analyst with such confidence as to recall the famously opinionated narrator of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale fire*, Jef Last makes statements to the effect that his friend's "entire oeuvre, in all its aspects, was meant only to show that a pederast could also be a great and accomplished man" ("[...] toute son oeuvre, avec toutes ses facettes, devait servir seulement à démontrer comment le pédéraste peut être en même temps un homme grand et complet" [23]). Readers who are not outright discouraged by this assertion will be interested to learn that the French writer's "wanderlust, his admiration for Dostoevsky, his hatred of the bourgeois which at a certain moment nudged him toward communism, and his longing for unattainable amoral spontaneity, all this finds an explanation in his predicament as a married pederast" ("[...] son amour des voyages, son admiration pour Dostoïevski, sa haine de la bourgeoisie qui à un moment l'a poussé dans le communisme, et son désir d'une spontanéité amoral que qu'il ne pouvait pas se permettre, s'expliquent tous par sa position de pédéraste marié" [31]). Although aware of André Gide's formative experience in the company of Oscar Wilde (23, 32), Jef Last, whose aesthetics hailed from the Stalinist ideal of *proletarian literature*, may never have heard of modernism, that transnational cultural community whose ethical and aesthetic quests had shaped Gide as an artist and thinker. The Russian representatives of that cultural community had been driven into silence or exile before Last began his pilgrimages to the *paradise of workers and peasants* in the early 1930s.

Last's analytical preamble casts Gide's trip to the USSR in a fresh light, although the reader will not always agree with the conclusions suggested by the narrator. Students and aficionados of Gide's oeuvre will undoubtedly find the second part of Last's narrative the most interesting and informative. Last furnishes enough new detail about Gide's tour of the USSR, at once farcical and scary, to make the most inventive dystopian satirist pale with envy. Suffice it to mention the Leningrad opera performance which stopped midway and resumed from act one because Gide arrived late (84); or the recycled welcoming banner hung in a show of spontaneous outpouring of joy in each provincial Soviet city Gide visited (he recognized it by a stain and a tear [105]). At times the details are comical, as when the head-on collision of Gide's and Last's sexual preferences with conservative Stalinist mores (the country had criminalized homosexuality shortly before their arrival) is reflected in the crooked mirror of the awkward attempts by their Soviet handlers to cater to Gide's sexual proclivities (99, 103). That this is done by Soviet bureaucrats desperate to sway a foreign opinion-maker in favor of the *homeland of the victorious proletariat* imparts to Gide's journey something uncannily Gogolian. Readers familiar with the photographs of the radiant André

Gide surrounded by adoring Soviet youths or contemplating, atop Lenin's mausoleum, a march of scantily-clad young athletes, may find almost gratifying Jef Last's claim that it was the French writer's sexual predicament which made him keen not only on young men but also on "the international issues of the youth" ("[...] à cause de son caractère pédéraste [...] Gide s'intéressait passionnément, pas seulement aux jeunes gens mais aussi aux problèmes internationaux de la jeunesse" [34]). Why else indeed would this aesthete and individualist dwell on such vacuous balderdash and waste time on trips to *international youth fora*, as the one Last describes at the end of his narrative?

The new information Last provides about Gide's trip to the USSR also tells another story, albeit unintentionally. The country they visit is plagued by youth homelessness resulting from the state-induced famine in the areas resistant to agricultural collectivization. Homeless minors are omnipresent on the streets of the Soviet cities visited by Gide's retinue, and no secret is made that these are the lucky survivors of the Ukrainian famine (53, 118, 121). The inordinate attention the wine-and-dined foreigners pay to these vulnerable youths (only boys are mentioned) casts a particularly sinister pall over Gide's journey, despite Last's best efforts to depict the traveler as a clairvoyant observer of Soviet conceits. Given Last's relentless insistence on Gide's sexuality, such socializing with street children cannot but recall the French writer's dalliances in search of sexual liberation in the Maghreb. Waxing poetic about a Moroccan trip he took with Gide prior to their journey to the USSR (70-73), Last makes an unwitting rapprochement between Gide's Soviet and North African adventures. Both are united in the unspoken and unsavory connotations of sexual exploitation practiced by European tourists in exotic and impoverished lands where they can count on willing underage subjects and on the connivance of local authorities.

Students of European intellectual history will no doubt find in Last's narrative a valuable supplement to François Furet's (1995) magisterial account of the long and tortuous story of the European intelligentsia's infatuation and subsequent disappointment with the Marxist credo. One precious detail stands out, namely the growing fear experienced by Jef Last throughout his last trip to the USSR in Gide's company and the resultant sense of relief and safety this card-carrying communist felt when their plane landed in Nazi Germany, of all places, so the travelers would catch their connecting flights (123). Although, on Party orders, Last unsuccessfully tried to stall the publication of Gide's *Return from the USSR*, his own impressions from the trip can serve as helpful annotations to Gide's book, filling some gaps in the French writer's circumspect critique of the communist experiment.

The French translation of Last's narrative by Basil Kingstone reads smoothly. Kingstone has outfitted the volume with annotations and an annex



containing six of Last's previously unpublished letters to André Gide (1939-1946). The annotations will be useful for the general readership, while specialists in European cultural history will find them lacking in pertinence and precision.

## Reference

Furet, François. 1995. *Le passé d'une illusion. Essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle*. Paris: Robert Laffont/Calmann Lévy.

## About the reviewer

Leonid Livak is a professor in the Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures and the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto (Ontario, Canada). His research expertise ranges from Russian-French and Russian-Jewish cultural history to exilic and modernist studies. He has published four critical editions, numerous articles, and four monographs: *In search of Russian Modernism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), *The Jewish persona in the European imagination: A case of Russian literature* (Stanford University Press, 2010), *Russian émigrés in the intellectual and literary life of interwar France* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), and *How it was done in Paris: Russian émigré literature and French Modernism* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003). He was recently elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. For the academic year 2021-22 he was chosen by the Région Île-de-France for the research appointment "Chaire d'excellence internationale Blaise Pascal", under the auspices of the Eur'Orbem Centre, Sorbonne University, to research and write the cultural history of the Russian emigration in France during the Second World War. Leonid Livak's new book, *Études sur l'histoire culturelle de l'émigration russe en France* (2022) has been recently published by Eur'Orbem Éditions, Paris.



## Review

**Alisa van de Haar and Dirk Schoenaers (eds):  
*Francophone literature in the Low Countries (1200-1600)***

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 168 p.

ISBN 9789463721080

*Reviewed by Adrian van den Hoven*



This work contains six scholarly contributions of which five are in English, while the last one is in French. In addition, twenty-two copies of manuscripts, frontispieces, statistics, and the like, are included. The first article, “Een bouc in walsche, a book written in French,” written by the editors, functions as the general introduction. In it, they stress the “omnipresence of French in the Low Countries” and “consciously use the term francophone lower case f) to refer to the use of French in the pre-colonial context of the Low Countries” (4). They indicate that in “the Burgundian Netherlands francophone authors moved between regions with ease” and that “within francophone areas of the Low Countries each area had its own particular dialect” (7). French literary texts produced in the Low Countries were firmly rooted in the local soil but also embedded in cross-regional and/or international networks and texts in French, Latin, and Dutch were as interrelated and mobile as their authors (22-24).

In her article, “The production and reception of French literary manuscripts in thirteenth-century Flanders,” Lisa Demets notes that,

medieval texts could be multifunctional: they were first aimed at a courtly milieu but also reached additional audiences and manuscripts produced in monastic contexts moved into an urban environment; [aside from] monasteries, the centres of learning were the courts [... while] urban and noble elites in Flanders shared Picard French as a common cultural language. (33)

Demets adds: “The production of French manuscripts was mainly concentrated in the south: the traditionally francophone region and also the County’s administrative centre” (38). But, by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Bruges became the leading supplier of French manuscripts: “[When] the Counts of Flanders moved their political centre to the north Flemish industries followed suit: Ypres and subsequently Ghent and Bruges became economic hotspots [and] the County’s main trading centre, specializing in luxury goods such as manuscripts” (39).

The famous “*molet Mout sont vallant cil de Gand*” (‘How magnificent are the people of Ghent’) describes the golden age of the Ghent elite (45). Demets concludes that “most of the modest number of multilingual manuscript cases discussed here are Latin-French examples [...] although we know that the court environment was multilingual, including Dutch speaking administrative functionaries” (46).

Hannah Morcos’s chapter, “Compilation as palimpsest: Tracing origins of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César in Liber Floridus*,” indicates that this “earliest French chronicle was composed in the region of medieval Flanders in the first quarter of the thirteenth century” (61). Morcos adds:

The first redaction [...] largely followed [...] Orosius' *Historia adversus paganos* [and the] prologue [...] suggests that it will begin with the first man and continue [up into] contemporary Flanders. [However,] the work concludes [...] with Caesar's activities in Gaul, fifty-seven years before the birth of Christ. (62-63)

She focuses on "the different ways the author of the *Histoire ancienne* exploited and integrated material from Lambert's *Liber Floridus*" (65). The point is made that in one of the sections "of the *Histoire ancienne* the Frank's origin is traced back to Noah," (68) while in other manuscripts "the genealogies of the Franks are repositioned so that the histories of Troy, Rome, and the Franks form a series" (69). Morcos also explains that Alexander's "visit to Jerusalem represents a key part of the rehabilitation of the negative portrayal of Alexander in Orosius. And from Lambert's version of the *Epitome* it inherits the characterization of Alexander as a proto-Christian" (86). Morcos concludes that:

The layers [of] material extracted, re-contextualized and translated in the *Histoire ancienne*, the reworked witness of the *Liber Floridus* used by the *Histoire ancienne*'s compiler and the sources compiled [...] by Lambert underline the palimpsestic nature of medieval compilation. (90)

Catherine Emerson's contribution, "Brabant, Holland and confessions in the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles: Regional stereotypes and provincial commonplaces," observes that these tales "have been repurposed with a Burgundian setting to fit the collection" (96). And that,

the tales set in Holland and Brabant reveal that, while Holland is presented as 'other' from the male aristocratic society of the Burgundian ducal court, Brabant is treated as local even when tales with similar themes are set in both regions. (96)

Its author claims that these tales deal with "recent events" which are still "fresh in people's mind" and that "they are the products of the lands within the Burgundian sphere of influence" (97). But these claims are in fact "quite dubious" because "most were inspired either by originals or by fabliaux that had circulated previously in French" (98). The first tale "deals with a husband who, suspicious of his wife's wealth during his absence in the Holy Land, disguises himself as a priest to hear her confession" [and] "not surprisingly it has been given a Burgundian location since this is a common strategy adopted to nativize texts" (100). Another tale is situated "in Holland" and also "features the sacrament of confession" (100). Emerson wonders if the fact that both tales query "the status of truth and the spoken word in confession" is due to the "linguistic difference between the

francophone tales and the Dutch-speaking characters that are featured in them” but remarks that the example of “*Dat Bedroch der Vrouwen*” (‘the deceit of women’) “shows that Dutch speakers’ access to the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* did not regard this feature as the exclusive property of francophone literary culture” (101-102).

She considers the definition of Brabant as “fluid but that ‘Holland’ is seen as ‘exotic’” (109). Sometimes a tale refers “to a genuine event [such as] tale 6 that took place in Brussels and, although the city is not specifically mentioned, it is strongly implied as the plot features a statue of the Archangel Michael, to whom the jealous husband makes an offering” (110).

Ana Pairet’s article, “From Lyons to Antwerp: *Paris et Vienne* in the Low Countries,” indicates that, “A survey of vernacular materials printed before 1500 reveals the key role played by printers in the Low Countries in disseminating Francophone romances throughout Northern Europe” (117). Further, “the text and rubrication of the *Istoire du tres vaillant chevalier Paris et de la belle Vienne* (Antwerp, Gheraert Leeu, May 15, 1489) closely resembles those of the second French imprint and first illustrated edition (Lyons, Mathias Huss, 1485)” (105). Clearly then, “The Dutch printer was instrumental in the European dissemination of *Paris et Vienne*, [...] published in both French and Dutch in May 1487, then in Low German in 1488” (118). Pairet highlights “textual and paratextual transformations from the French *editio princeps* (Lyons, c. 1480) in Leeu’s first three editions in French, Dutch, and Low German [in order to] illuminate [...] the ‘radiant’ circulation of *Paris et Vienne* in multiple European vernaculars” (120), and in order to “better ascertain the respective role of the Lyons and Antwerp French editions in the printed transmission of the romance,” she provides a list of all seven “known fifteen-century editions” (125). Pairet concludes that,

[the] printed transmission of *Paris et Vienne* in the Early Modern period lays bare transnational patterns of cross-cultural exchange within and beyond Europe [...and that] Leeu’s multilingual adaptation of *Paris et Vienne* offers a rare example of triangulated cross-cultural transfers. (133-134).

Renaud Adam’s article, “Le roman médiéval d’expression française dans les anciens Pays-Bas entre 1550-1600,” points out that Gutenberg’s invention of the modern printing press “did not sound the death knell of the Middle Ages” and that an “analysis of the titles printed between 1550 and 1600 and their peritexts [...] will contribute to a better understanding of the supposed rupture with the medieval literary [which in fact [navigates] between ‘old romances’ and ‘new language’” (137).

A first graph shows that of “some 150 titles of profane literary works [...] 101 were printed in Antwerp” indicating its dominant role between 1550 and 1600

(139-140); the next shows the unevenness of this production and that “only eleven fitted [the] category of medieval romance” (141). Adam concludes that “the break with the literary tradition of the Middle Ages was not as abrupt as one might have thought” and since many “books were lost, making proper estimates of print runs [is] difficult” (143) but that nevertheless, “Plantin did produce 1600 copies of *Reynaert de vos*” (145) a work put on the Index in 1570” (146).

Adam also discusses the Antwerp printer Jan van Waesberghe, who published an updated version of *Quatre fils Aymon* in 1561 and who stressed that the “tale was beautiful, entertaining and very old” (147). He also started “using Roman type,” a phenomenon that “dates back to 1520-1540” (149). Adam concludes that the Antwerp printer “Jean Bogard’s esthetic choices clearly show that he wanted to reach a public that appreciated old tales [...] and therefore he used Gothic type” (153). However, “Jan van Waesberge focussed on a public more interested in French romances of the second half of the sixteenth century. Hence, he ‘modernized’ the French of *Quatre fils Aymon*” (154).

In conclusion, *Francophone literature in the Low Countries (1200-1600)* is a collection of excellently researched essays, whose authors make an important scholarly contribution that experts will greatly appreciate.

### **About the reviewer**

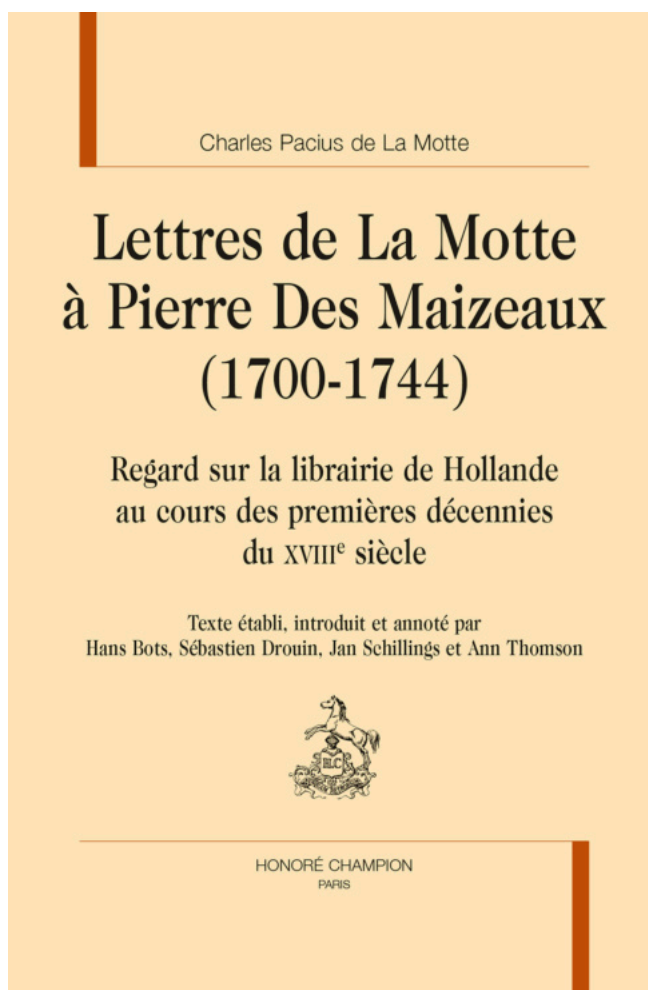
Adrian van den Hoven is professor emeritus at the University of Windsor (Ontario, Canada). He earned his doctorate in comparative literature (French, English and American literature) from the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium). Founding editor of the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises*, as well as founding executive editor of *Sartre Studies International*, he wrote and published many articles on Netherlandic topics, and produced numerous articles on Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. In addition, he translated and edited several works by Sartre from French into English, including *Truth and existence* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), *Hope now: The 1980 interviews* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), and (with Basil Kingstone) *It is right to rebel* (Routledge, 2017), as well as the co-edited books (with Ronald Aronson) *Sartre alive* (Wayne State University Press, 1991) and *We have only this life to live: The selected essays of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York Review Books, 2013).





**Compte rendu**  
**Charles Pacius de La Motte :**  
***Lettres de La Motte à Pierre Des Maizeaux (1700-1744)***  
Hans Bots, Sébastien Drouin, Jan Schillings et Ann Thomson (éd.)  
Paris: Honoré Champion, 2021. 682 p.  
ISBN 9782745356031

*Compte rendu par Julien Perrier-Chartrand*



Les *Lettres de La Motte à Pierre Des Maizeaux (1700-1744)*, établies, introduites et annotées par Hans Bots, Sébastien Drouin, Jan Schillings et Ann Thomson, présentent la correspondance entre Charles Pacius de La Motte et Pierre Des Maizeaux. Cette relation épistolaire a, comme le souligne le sous-titre de l'ouvrage, la grande vertu de proposer un « regard sur la librairie de Hollande au cours des premières décennies du XVIIIe siècle ».

Le volume est constitué de deux parties, une introduction critique et la correspondance annotée. Dans un premier temps, l'introduction, divisée en quatre sections, propose un aperçu des enjeux et du contexte de rédaction des lettres. C'est ainsi que la première section, intitulée « présentation des correspondants », offre d'abord de brèves biographies de La Motte et Des Maizeaux. Les informations contenues dans cette partie présenteront un grand intérêt pour la majorité des lecteurs qui, à moins d'être des spécialistes des réseaux de transmission du savoir dans la République des Lettres, ignorent sans doute qui étaient ces deux acteurs du champ littéraire. La présentation établit, entre autres, que les deux correspondants occupaient des fonctions équivalentes à celles que l'on nommerait aujourd'hui réviseur-correcteur (La Motte) et éditeur scientifique (Des Maizeaux). La seconde section, intitulée « regard sur la librairie de Hollande », informe le lecteur sur le fonctionnement de l'édition hollandaise – et particulièrement amstellodamoise – dans la première moitié du siècle des Lumières, tout en précisant les apports de la correspondance étudiée dans la connaissance de ce fonctionnement. On y apprend, par exemple, de quelle manière les libraires concevaient leurs stratégies commerciales et envisageaient la concurrence entre librairies nationales.

La troisième section, intitulée « Les grandes éditions » présente, pour sa part, les projets d'éditions critiques auxquels participent les deux correspondants. La Motte et Des Maizeaux, ont, notamment, proposé au cours de leur collaboration des éditions de Pierre Bayle, de Saint-Évremond et de Boileau, ainsi qu'un ouvrage rassemblant des traductions de théologiens anglais et un *Recueil de diverses pièces sur la Philosophie, la Religion naturelle, l'Histoire, les Mathématiques [...] Par Mrs Leibniz, Clarke, Newton & autres auteurs célèbres*. La quatrième section propose, comme il se doit dans ce type d'ouvrage, les principes d'établissement du texte adoptés par Bots, Drouin, Schillings et Thomson. Enfin, l'introduction scientifique est complétée par une bibliographie des œuvres citées dans la correspondance, par une bibliographie des sources utilisées pour l'établissement du texte et par une liste des journaux mentionnés dans les échanges épistolaires.

Dans un second temps, l'ouvrage propose la correspondance proprement dite. Celle-ci est constituée de plus de 300 lettres, dont la très grande majorité (298 sur 318) a été rédigée par Charles de La Motte. « Il s'agit là, comme le

soulignent bien les éditeurs, d'un volet de la correspondance passive de Pierre Des Maizeaux », si bien que le lecteur découvre en grande partie les pratiques de la librairie de Hollande par le méticuleux truchement du réviseur-correcteur. Sur le plan scientifique, les lettres sont accompagnées d'un savant appareil de notes qui contextualisent les échanges et éclaircissent les nombreuses obscurités que peut potentiellement présenter au lecteur une conversation érudite et trois fois centenaire. Précise, pratique, fonctionnelle, cette conversation porte principalement sur l'établissement des textes auxquels travaillent les deux épistoliers et sur le rapport qu'entretiennent les deux hommes avec leurs libraires-éditeurs. Elle présente de plus deux individus qui, dans leur désir de partager leur savoir et leur passion au reste de l'Europe, « font [...] figure d'intermédiaires, voire de passeurs, alors qu'ils contribuent à la circulation des textes et des idées grâce aux livres auxquels ils collaborent (p. 23) ». La Motte se constitue ainsi comme un intermédiaire européen d'une importance relative, puisqu'il constitue le relai essentiel entre des Maizeaux, qui produit ses travaux d'érudition depuis son exil anglais, et de multiples libraires de Hollande.

L'introduction et les annotations de Bots, Drouin, Schillings et Thomson sont, il faut le souligner, bien documentées et très instructives, si bien que le lecteur, même néophyte, saura toujours se situer dans les *Lettres de La Motte à Des Maizeaux*. Il s'agit, en somme, d'un ouvrage fort bien réalisé, suivant avec une grande rigueur les conventions de l'édition critique. Toutefois, il faut aussi le mentionner, les échanges entre La Motte et Des Maizeaux, portant souvent sur des points de détail, sont d'une aridité pouvant susciter la lassitude.

J'ai fait les corrections que vous m'avez mandées dans votre lettre. Mais il y a une de ces corrections qui m'a un peu embarrassé. Vous m'écrivez qu'au lieu de « Saint-Denis du Guât » il faut mettre « Saint-Denis le Guât ». Dans votre copie, vous avez écrit ce dernier mot « Guast » et M. Silverstre l'a écrit de même. Cela m'a déterminé à mettre « le Guast », d'autant plus qu'on écrit toutes les lettres des noms propres (p. 164).

En revanche, comme le soulignent bien les éditeurs scientifiques dans leur introduction, cette correspondance « renseigne non seulement sur la librairie hollandaise, mais aussi plus largement sur les pratiques quotidiennes des presses, et notamment sur la collaboration trans-Manche, dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle (p. 18) ». Cet ouvrage n'offrira donc rien de neuf au lecteur s'intéressant à l'histoire des idées au siècle des Lumières, mais il ne s'en présentera pas moins comme une mine de précieux renseignements pour celui qui cherche à connaître l'histoire de l'édition hollandaise et des pratiques de révision.

### **Notice biographique**

Julien Perrier-Chartrand est professeur de littérature au département d'études françaises de l'université Concordia à Montréal. Son premier ouvrage, intitulé *Le théâtre du sang* (Honoré Champion, 2018), porte sur les représentations et les fonctions de la littérature de fiction dans les traités français sur le duel des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Dans le cadre de ses recherches actuelles, il étudie les rapports entre politique et poétique dramatique au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, la mise en place des violences coloniales dans les récits de voyage ainsi que les représentations de l'Ancien Régime dans la culture populaire contemporaine, notamment la bande dessinée.

## Review

**John Hines and Nelleke IJssennagger-van der Pluijm (eds):**

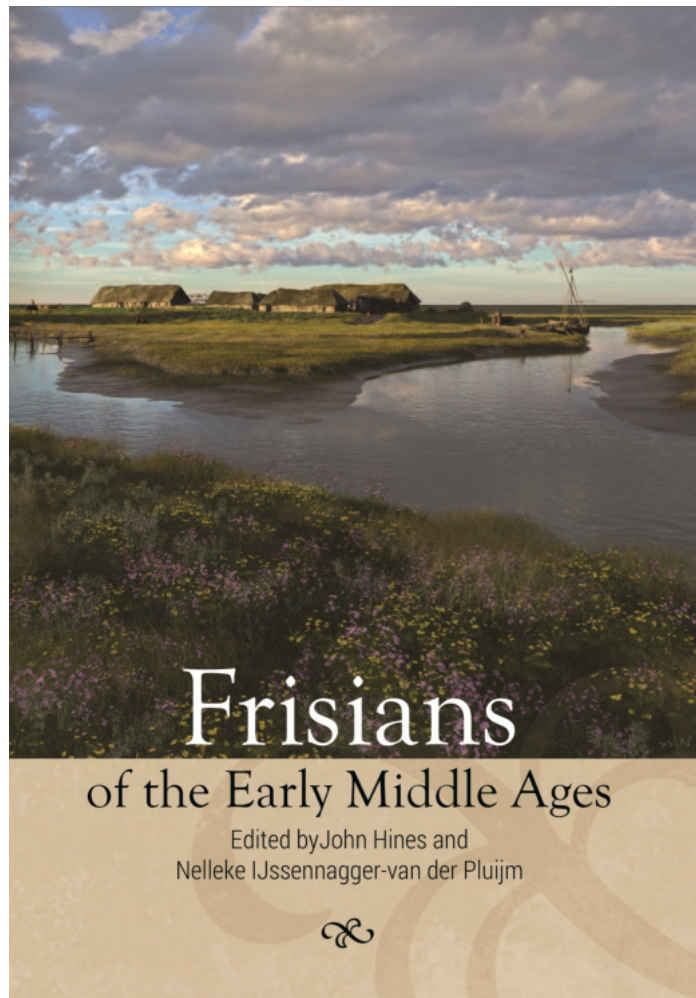
***Frisians of the Early Middle Ages***

[Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology, vol. 10]

Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021. 423 p.

ISBN 9781783275618

*Reviewed by Catherine Hills*



This book is a collection of papers resulting from a symposium held in 2018 in Leeuwarden, Friesland, Netherlands. This was an interdisciplinary event, with papers from historians, archaeologists, and linguists on the topic of Frisians in the Early Middle Ages. It forms the latest in a series of published symposia on early medieval peoples of western Europe and it shares the format of the previous volumes by including discussion by the contributors as well as their individual papers. In some previous volumes the discussion sections reflect the reality of wide-ranging and sometimes not well focussed debate. This volume has been well edited, with discussion confined to mostly brief and relevant comments. However, this still amounts to a total of about 70 pages and after skim reading most of the discussions I remain unconvinced they contribute significantly. I am also cautious about the concept of historical archaeoethnology, described by the founder of the series, the late Giorgio Ausenda, as the recovery of the life-styles and sociocultural conditions of past populations. This seems to me to be the aim of archaeology, no need for an extra name.

However, the papers themselves are interesting and well informed. The theme which links them is that of the extent to which it is possible to identify separate ethnic groups in the early medieval period and, specifically, the meaning of the name "Frisian" at that time. It clearly referred to people living in the southern coastal regions of the North Sea in parts of what is now the Netherlands and north Germany, but beyond that it is more difficult to be precise. The identification of separate peoples in the past has often been based on a simplistic concept of ethnicity and national identity derived from traditional histories, which is at odds with much current scholarship. Instead of clearly separate groups defined by common genetic heritage, geographical location and material culture, we perceive fluid situations and changing relationships with complicated connections to material culture and language. The papers in this volume convey that complexity, perhaps at the expense of the clarity non-specialist readers might prefer.

An important initial point is that the Frisians recorded very occasionally by classical authors may not have been directly connected with those who appear in later written sources. Between the two is a period between the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD when archaeological evidence indicates there was a break in occupation in the coastal region, although not in other parts of the modern Netherlands. The possibly Celtic-speaking Frisii mentioned by Tacitus seem to have disappeared to be replaced after this hiatus in settlement by Germanic-speaking people who had moved westwards along the coast from the Elbe-Weser region. Traditionally these would be named as Anglo-Saxon and equated with people who also moved across the North Sea to England, but that version of events has been significantly problematized, by, amongst others, Annet Nieuwhof

whose analysis of ceramics, presented in one of the papers, provides part of the evidence for the new story, together with excavations of sites which show a break in occupation.

Historical sources are reviewed in papers by Ian Wood and Robert Flierman. They show that much of our information comes through the prism of Christian hagiography and Frankish politics. The best internal written source is the Frisian law code, surviving only in a late version but argued by Hans Nijman here to have an 8th century origin. Other papers include detailed presentation and analysis of specific topics: archaeological evidence including tools, textiles, wooden artefacts, pottery, and brooches; runic inscriptions; language, while others consist of more conceptual discussion: maritime connectivity, religion. A paper by Bente Majchczack reviews recent field work on the north Frisian islands, off the coast of Jutland, where survey and excavation have provided new information. In the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, these islands were connected both with Ribe, to the north, and with the other Frisian regions to the south. All of the papers are worth reading and based on current research, but in a short review there is not space to give detailed accounts of each.

Perhaps the most substantial paper is by Gilles de Langen and J. A. Mol on landscape and trade. They outline the palaeogeography of Frisia, building on recent research by P. C. Vos (Vos & Knol 2015). They highlight the difference between west Frisia west of the Vlie, the western part of the modern Netherlands, and central and northern Frisia, the focus of most of their research. Here occupation lay mostly on a narrow coastal region, separated from inland regions by extensive bogs and subdivided by small streams and rivers. This was a land where transport was only practical via boat. This fragmented landscape prevented the creation of large, concentrated landholdings and the population had a considerable degree of autonomy. The role of the historically recorded leaders Aldgisl and Radbod is discussed in this context. 19<sup>th</sup>-century maps are used to define the size and shape of earlier settlements and fields. The authors take issue with some earlier accounts of this region as depending on cattle, whereas they argue for a mixed economy including arable, playing down the importance of cattle. Some substance for this argument can be found in evidence not included in this paper that limited isotopic evidence suggests that some cattle were not local to the site where they were found. Otherwise faunal remains from excavated sites produce varying proportions of cattle and sheep (Prummel 2001). A more common perception of early Frisia than the view they contest emphasizes sheep, not cattle, on the salt marsh, providing wool for the textiles which historical sources record. Mol and de Langen also argue against the common identification of Frisians as synonymous with traders and point out that the major trading centres, notably Dorestad, lie outside the coastal region, and that “there are no

indications of independent trading settlements in the Frisian regions before the tenth century” (112). Their conclusion that this was “an agricultural landscape with mixed farms basing their existence mainly on agricultural production” (115) seems to play down the role of trading to an extent belied by some archaeological evidence. Distributed across the Netherlands are imported items, such as lava quernstones from the Rhineland or glass vessels in settlements, and beads from as far away as India in burials. The people who lived on the coast were used to travelling by boat and they acquired non-local goods, presumably in exchange for products like wool. Trading could have been a seasonal activity for some members of the community, with some parallels to initial Viking activity in later centuries, with no obvious need for specialized settlements. An interesting and thought-provoking paper.

An earlier collection of papers on early Frisia (Hines & Ijsseknagger 2017) had the same publisher and editors, and shared half of the same authors. There is some, but not too much, direct overlap of content, for example in Nicolay’s papers in both volumes. The previous book had a wider geographical remit, including more comparative discussion of connections around the North Sea and the Baltic, especially with England, and also more papers relating to language history. The initial paper by Knol and Ijsseknagger is a clear and succinct introduction to the topics discussed in both volumes, whereas the 2021 volume is more detailed and sometimes assumes specialist knowledge in the reader. The editors explain that the 2021 volume is designed to focus on the internal diversity of the Frisian areas. Its strengths are in detailed discussion of landscape and historical sources. Both volumes have good archaeological papers and discussions of runic inscriptions. The text and illustrations of both are good, though some of the maps in the more recent volume are over reduced, requiring a magnifying glass to read river names.

Overall, both are interesting collections of papers. As a non-Frisian specialist, it was helpful to have the 2017 book to hand when reading the 2021 volume, but to a great extent they are complementary as intended. Both show the range and depth of recent and current scholarship relating to an area which has often been underplayed, seen as between and peripheral to the Carolingian empire, Britain, and Scandinavia. Here it can be seen as making its own independent contribution to early medieval Europe.

## References

- Hines, John & Nelleke Ijsseknagger, eds. 2017. *Frisians and their North Sea neighbours*. Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Prummel, Wietske. 2001. The significance of animals to the Early Medieval Frisians in the Northern coastal area of the Netherlands. *Environmental Archaeology* 6:73-81.



Vos, Peter, C. & Egge Knol. 2015. Holocene landscape reconstruction of the Wadden Sea area between Marsdiep and Weser. *Netherlands Journal of Geosciences* 94.2: 157-83.

### **About the reviewer**

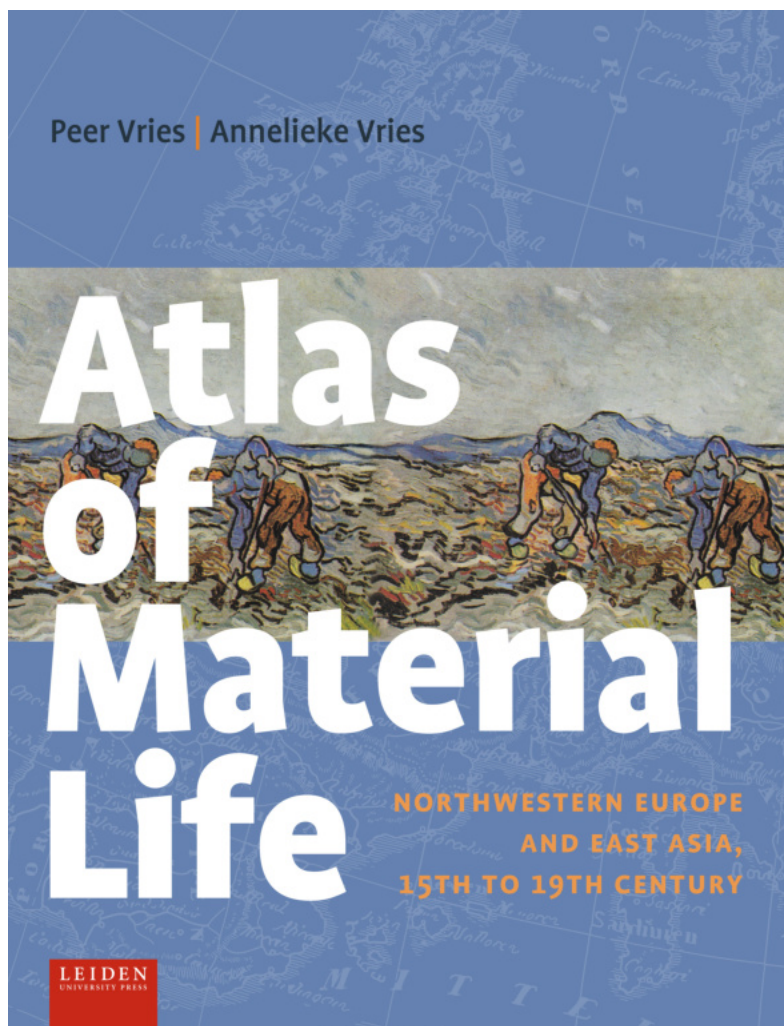
Catherine Hills is a retired academic archaeologist. She was a senior lecturer for many years in the Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge (UK), and is a Fellow Emerita of Newnham College, Cambridge. Her research is focused on the archaeology of the first millennium AD in north western Europe, especially around the North Sea, including Anglo-Saxon England. She directed the excavation of a large 5<sup>th</sup>-century cremation cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham, Norfolk, a site which throws some light on the recorded migration of peoples across the North Sea to Britain, the so-called "Adventus Saxonum." The topics of other publications include "Spong Man," the lid of a cremation urn in the form of a seated ceramic figure; animal and runic stamped decoration on pots; small copper alloy boxes in 7<sup>th</sup>-century female graves with ornament indicating use as Christian reliquaries; the relationship between history and archaeology and the presentation of archaeology to the public.



**Review**  
**Peer Vries and Annelieke Vries:**  
***Atlas of material life: Northwestern Europe and East Asia,***  
***15th to 19th century***

Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020. 340 p.  
ISBN 9789087283544 / e-ISBN 9789400603929 (e-PDF)

*Reviewed by Milja van Tielhof*



As the title can seem a bit puzzling, let me start by saying that this is a reference book on early modern global history in which an extraordinary amount of data is presented in a visual form. The vast number of maps, tables, graphs, and figures are meant to be core elements of the book, which explains why the authors call it an atlas. The first author wrote the text, and the second author created the visualizations. There is another reason why this book differs from ordinary reference books or textbooks. Its aim is to describe basic data and not engage in discussions, so its goal is to show and not to prove, as is explained in the introduction (9-10). The book is meant for students and others interested in the field of global economic history and the authors emphasize that it is no more than a first introduction to the vast literature on this subject. The data have been selected because of their importance in debates on the emergence of modern economic growth, more specifically the debate on the Great Divergence between Europe and Asia. Geographically, the focus is on Great Britain, the Dutch Republic, China, and Japan, but there is also information relating to other countries. The book covers the period between the 15th to the 19th century and focuses on economic and other material aspects of life. Five chapters on geography and demography, energy, resources, agriculture, and exchanges are followed by three chapters on growth and its sources. The ninth chapter documents the Great Divergence or great gap that emerged in the long 19th century as a consequence of the fact that only a small part of the world began to experience sustained economic growth. Finally, there is a brief chapter comprised of a review and some reflection.

The authors are well equipped for their ambitious undertaking. Peer Vries has been teaching global history for more than twenty years and was professor of Global Economic History at the University of Vienna before his retirement in 2016. Annelieke Vries is an experienced mapmaker, trained as a geographer and a cartographer. Description and visualization of data is of course not neutral, even if only basic facts are considered. Therefore, it is only right that the first author is clear about his position in the Great Divergence debate. Even the Review and Reflection chapter, at the end of the book, reads like a firm conclusion. The section argues that the chance of an industrial revolution occurring in Great Britain was incomparably higher than in China, as the differences between the countries were substantial, both in the economy and society, and what is more, increasing in the 18th and 19th centuries (320-321). But readers are invited to use the material in the book to reach their own conclusions.

This book is impressive because of its wide scope, treating numerous aspects of the economic and societal history of very different countries over a long period. Best of all, however, is the fact that the data are systematically selected and presented in ways that make worldwide comparisons possible, especially

between Europe and Asia. One can find a table on life expectancy at birth in Europe and Asia from the 16th to 19th century, tables on tax revenue per capita in Britain, the Dutch Republic, France, Spain, China, and the Ottoman Empire 1650-1899, along with a graph showing real per capita incomes in China, Japan, India, Britain, and four other European countries from 1500-1950 (35, 260, 281). This comparative approach also reveals how little we know about China and Japan, compared to the vast and detailed scholarly work that has been done on western countries, especially Great Britain and the Netherlands. The situation is much better than when Kenneth Pomeranz wrote his influential *The Great Divergence* in 2000, but it is still very uneven. The atlas presents predominantly quantitative data, although many interesting facts of a more qualitative nature are also found. Almost in passing, for example, a remark is made that the increasing use of eyeglasses was important from an economic point of view, as it could add about fifteen years to the working life of people dependent on good eyesight (52). A shortcoming of the book is the absence of an index which makes it difficult to find information like this in the printed book. A list of the maps, graphs, tables, and figures is also lacking, which is remarkable since the atlas is meant as a reference book. Fortunately, Project MUSE and other eBook platforms are hosting the PDF version.

It was a very good choice to match the text with a variety of figures, considering the increasing popularity of data visualization. The figures are attractive and effective, giving the reader quick impressions of important historical developments. An infographic, for example, shows diseases Europeans introduced in the Americas, followed by a graph conveying the demographic collapse of the Native American population of Central Mexico after the arrival of the Europeans (142-143). More cheerful maps show European cities with printing presses in 1500, mechanical clocks around 1350-1380 and in 1450, and universities founded before and after 1500 (221, 222, 227). The importance of the steam engine is effectively illustrated by a graph showing the maximum capacities of prime movers, including the power of an adult man, a fully-grown horse, a waterwheel, and a steam engine (289). For non-Asian readers the maps of Asia are particularly helpful, like those showing the dividing line between the rice and wheat cropping area in China, China's physiographic macro-regions, or the expansion of the Ching Empire in several phases (123, 246, 277).

The book addresses a wide range of aspects, including health, migration, and military strength, but the authors inevitably also had to limit themselves. People interested in gender history may be disappointed, as there is nothing on women or gender in the table of contents. Scattered passages on this theme are mostly very short, and readers are supposed to understand "workers" as including women and children, which denies the role of gender in labour relations (212). A

little more attention is paid to environmental issues. This is welcome as we are now in the midst of another major transition, not so much involving the emergence of modern economic growth, but rather environmental degradation, climate adaptation, drinking water shortage and declining biodiversity. The atlas has several relevant passages, such as on deforestation, the use of animal manure and night soil, and sustainability in Tokugawa Japan (85-93, 176-178).

Despite some of the criticisms mentioned, this book could be very useful for students and scholars exploring the immense literature on the Great Divergence debate. The authors have done an excellent job by opening up the field of global economic history in this way.

### **About the reviewer**

Milja van Tielhof is senior researcher at the Huygens Institute for History and Culture of the Netherlands in Amsterdam. She is a specialist in economic and environmental history of the Netherlands and has published mostly on overseas trade, water management and peat winning. Her latest book is a synthesis on the political culture of Dutch water management in the Middle Ages and early modern period: *Consensus en conflict: Waterbeheer in de Nederlanden 1200-1800* (Uitgeverij Verloren, 2021). Since 2020 she is engaged in a project on the history of fresh water in towns in the period of 1550-1850, a cooperative initiative of the Huygens Institute and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). This project focuses on the effects of weather and climate, such as severe droughts and frost, on the provision and use of urban fresh water.

## Review

Marc van Alphen, Jan Hoffenaar, Alan Lemmers and  
Christiaan van der Spek:

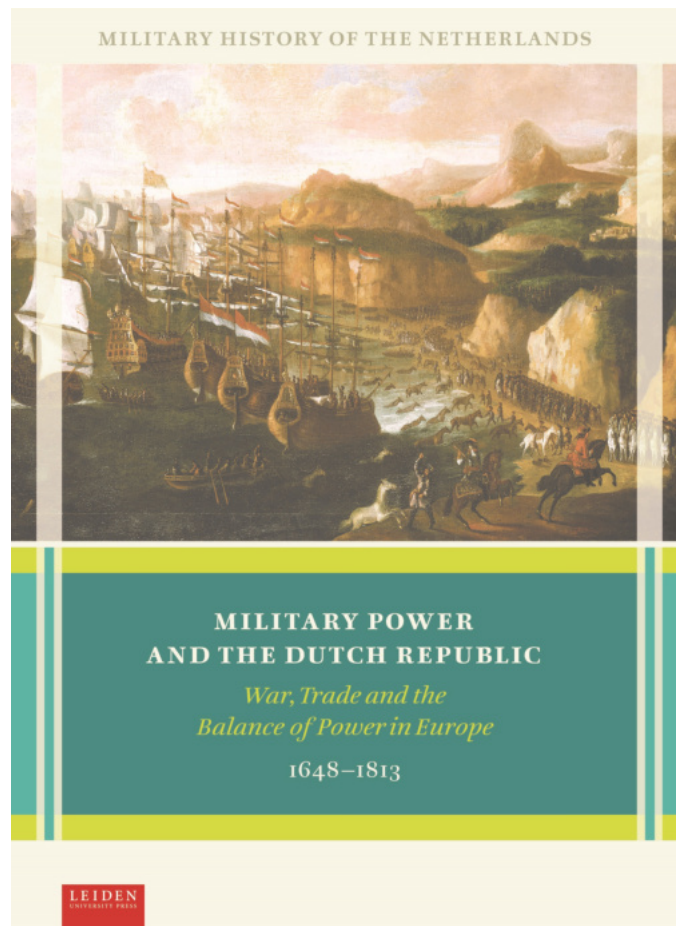
***Military power and the Dutch Republic: War, trade and the  
balance of power in Europe 1648-1813***

Paul Arblaster and Lee Preedy (trans.)

Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2021. 549 p.

ISBN 9789087283650

*Reviewed by Jonathan Israel*



This is not just a very useful, but an important volume with a distinctly original approach to its subject and, what is more, is beautifully produced, its 549 pages being unusually well laid out with a luxuriously large number of well-chosen illustrations (many of them in colour) and numerous excellent graphs, maps, diagrams, and tables. Since very few books of this kind of military history, that is military history thoroughly and illuminatingly integrated into general political and social history of the country concerned, get written, it is definitely something of a landmark in both general and Low Countries historiography. As the tendency in Dutch historiography has often been to separate the 17<sup>th</sup> from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the timeframe adopted adjoining the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> also often gives rise to surprising and illuminating perspectives.

Many historians have waxed lyrical about the cultural and economic achievements and the social distinctiveness of the Dutch Republic, one of Europe's smallest but most important states in early modern times, and all of them have noted in passing, that rarely has such a small and affluent but highly vulnerable country had to struggle so frequently and exhaustively to protect itself and maintain its independence from larger, more populous, and basically more powerful neighbours. But hardly any historians have taken the trouble systematically to focus on the Republic's structures of military and naval power and examine how these relate to the other dimensions of its history. The Introduction rightly mentions Jaap Bruijn, on the naval side, and Olaf van Nimwegen, regarding the army, as among the very few substantial precursors. I myself am rightly criticized for giving attention, in my general history of the Republic, to the major battles and wars but for barely touching "on how the army and navy operated or which developments impacted the armed forces" (465).

Marc van Alphen, who is responsible for three of the eight main sections, entitles the first chapter, dealing with the Anglo-Dutch Wars and the 1688-89 Glorious Revolution, "Looking seaward (1648-1689)." He skillfully places the remarkable developments in the navy characteristic of this period against the broader background. Johan de Witt emerges as the statesman who contributed most to the *professionalization* of the Dutch navy and privileging the navy over the army, but at the same time left the Republic more exposed on the landward side than ever. It is striking, too, that the army, besides being downgraded from 1648 to 1672, largely ceased, despite a few technical improvements, to reflect that innovative, creative tendency which was such striking a feature of the Eighty Years' War period. The second chapter, also by Van Alphen, "Facing territorial threats (1689-1748)," convincingly shows how, as a result of William III's policies, the navy was effectively subordinated to the British navy, from 1689, while the army now became the major tool of the Republic's defense and international role. But the death of William, in 1702, also had the effect of subordinating the Dutch



army to Britain's growing primacy in the coalition opposing Louis XIV, leading to a marked decline in its capabilities after the Peace of Utrecht (1713), while the navy by the 1740s, despite the absence of a Stadholder and reduced Orangist influence during the so-called Second Stadholderless period (1702-47), and supposed increased emphasis on the Republic's maritime interests, had become a mere shadow of what it had been in 1700 (let alone 1688). This was true both in terms of a much-reduced number of warships and their dwindling size and relative firepower.

In the third chapter, "The Republic as a second-class power (1748-1795)," Max Lemmers vividly demonstrates how the dwindling and loss of capability of both the army and navy negatively affected the role and status of the Republic as a European power, a condition to which it seemed condemned for the long-term by a mix of financial pressures and the loss of the old Barrier, the string of fortifications and fortified towns skirting the southern Netherlands manned by the Dutch alongside Britain and Austria. On the positive side, the resulting pursuit of neutral status did keep the United Provinces out of wars for more than thirty years (1748-80). But this in turn contributed to the growing and soon disastrous vulnerability of the Republic in the 1780s and 1790s. In the fourth chapter, "The gradual loss of independence (1793-1813)," Christiaan van der Spek discusses the further decline in status which led to the Dutch forces becoming little more than a minor adjunct to French power and the ambitions of Napoleon.

But it is in Part Two of the book, "Organisation, finances, tactics, personnel and society 1648-1813," that the real importance of this volume lies. The mass of detail gathered about the actual functioning of the armed forces and their social context is truly innovative, far-reaching in implication and impressive. The fact that it was the ability of the Republic to raise higher levels of taxation than neighbouring countries that chiefly explains its high status as a military power down to 1713 is heavily emphasized and closely analyzed. Chapter Five, again by Van der Spek, on organization and finances, reveals, among other things, an officer corps in the post-1713 Dutch army, bloated in size, especially in the upper ranks, in relation to the overall size of the army due to it becoming a key source of patronage and support for the House of Orange. It was the resulting favouritism, corruption, and declining quality of the officers, and their often being either too young or too old for their positions, rather than foreign origin or restricted (mostly noble) class background, which chiefly contributed to the decline in the Republic's military effectiveness. Another key factor was intensifying divisions, especially after 1780, between Orangists and anti-Orangists on whether to give priority in spending to the army or navy.

In the sixth chapter, "Military Action," Jan Hoffenaar innovatively compares Dutch technology and tactics at sea with their tactics and technology on

land. In both cases loss of combat experience, declining quality of officers, lapsing of training schedules, and failure to keep up with all the latest developments in technique, especially in the field of gunnery, massively contributed to the steady decline in capability and effectiveness. Chapter Seven, again by Van Alphen, looks, as far as the available sources allow, at the sociology of the Republic's soldiers and sailors, providing fascinating details about enlistment, pay, lodgings, training or lack of it, and so forth. Soldiers were paid less than sailors and were among the lowest-paid employees in the country. At times, the number of foreigners in the army reached 60%. Though most army recruits were older, boys as young as sixteen could sign on with the consent of their parents. The final chapter, "Civilians and the military," again by Van der Spek, makes a fitting conclusion to an excellent volume. The section with final observations rightly stresses one unique and highly distinctive feature of the Dutch Republic, distinguishing it from the rest of Europe but creating insuperable difficulties that no other nation faced: the United Provinces *had* to assign a major proportion of its resources to both its sea and land forces and, due to its republican consultative character, found itself unable ever to give clear priority to one or the other over the long term but continually wavered divisively between the two.

### **About the reviewer**

Jonathan Israel graduated from Queens' College, University of Cambridge, in 1967 and wrote his Ph.D. dissertation based at St Antony's College, University of Oxford, and the Colegio de México, Mexico City, under the direction of Hugh Trevor-Roper. He taught early modern, and in particular Dutch, history at British universities from 1970 to 2000, at Newcastle, Hull and from 1974 at University College London. Among his works are *Dutch primacy in world trade, 1585-1740* (Oxford University Press, 1989) and *The Dutch Republic: Its rise, greatness, and fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995). Since 2000 he has been a research professor at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (New Jersey, US), and has published a series of works on the Enlightenment.

**Review**

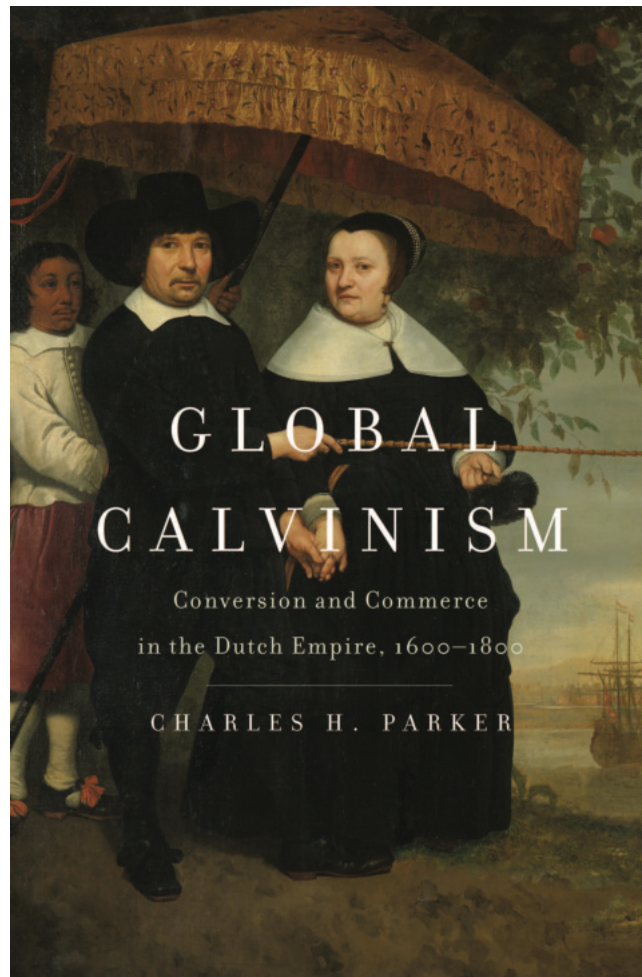
**Charles H. Parker:**

***Global Calvinism: Conversion and commerce in the Dutch  
empire, 1600-1800***

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022. xiii+390 p.

ISBN 9780300236057

*Reviewed by Guido van Meersbergen*



Histories of the early modern Dutch empire have tended to consign religious aims and activities to the margins. Inspired by profit motives and characterized by political pragmatism, the common understanding goes, the Dutch East and West India Companies (VOC and WIC) presided over Reformed Protestant institutions in areas under their direct control yet showed little enthusiasm for proselytization. A recent survey volume captures this view when it concludes that “any spread of the Dutch variant of Protestantism arising from Dutch expansion overseas was purely incidental” (Emmer & Gommans 2021, 100). Charles Parker’s impressive new study challenges and complicates this widely held assumption by offering the first comprehensive overview of Calvinism’s place in early modern Dutch colonialism across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Its main arguments are twofold. First, Calvinism and its missionary aims were firmly embedded into the fabric of Dutch colonial expansion. Second, Calvinist entanglements in empire and global missionary encounters left a decisive mark on Protestantism in the Dutch Republic. Both claims support Parker’s larger historiographical point that a global lens is necessary to appreciate how two of the defining phenomena of early modern Europe, the Reformation and Enlightenment, took shape through interactions with religious cultures from around the globe.

*Global Calvinism’s* focus on reciprocal connections results in an integrated account of Calvinism as it developed in the Dutch Republic and in a diverse range of locations across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. Chapter 1 provides a chronological overview of the Reformation in the Netherlands and the development of a Dutch Calvinist presence outside Europe, introducing readers to VOC expansionism in the Moluccas, Java, Formosa (Taiwan), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, and South Africa; and WIC colonization in West Africa (Elmina in Ghana), north-eastern Brazil, New Netherland, and Caribbean islands including Curaçao. This is followed in chapters 2 to 4 by thematic treatments of specific issues as they played out across these various contexts, that is church organization and the relations between colonial governments and Calvinist ministers; Calvinist understandings of conversion and missionary strategies; and the role of language politics and translation projects in the Dutch empire. Chapters 5 and 6 then shift the focus to intellectual developments in the Dutch Republic, mapping out how increased contact with non-Christian traditions gave rise to a comparative outlook on religion and the construction of the universal category of “paganism,” which was mobilized by both orthodox and heterodox Calvinist thinkers in the fierce theological debates of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Parker is at his best when discussing the standpoints of a wide array of Calvinist authors, including well-known advocates of Dutch imperial expansion such as Hugo Grotius, Willem Uselincx, Godefridus Udemans, and Joannes de Laet; the overseas ministers George Candidius, Justus Heurnius, Abraham Rogerius,

Philippus Baldaeus, and François Valentijn; the Calvinist theologians Gisbertus Voetius and Johannes Cocceius; and the heterodox Protestant thinkers Pierre Bayle and Balthasar Bekker. His deep knowledge of the Reformation and Calvinist theology permeates the book and underpins expert analyses of doctrinal disputes and theological debates sparked by the challenges of taking Calvinism beyond Europe. In colonial societies around the world, ministers were faced with practical questions such as: what ought to be the criteria for neophytes to receive baptism and participate in communion? Can and should both sacraments be divided? And what does proper Christian conduct look like in pluralistic cultural settings? The Calvinist approach to conversion that emerged did not focus on quick wins but centred on the more gradual process of community formation, in which prospective converts had to demonstrate basic familiarity with Reformed doctrines and show willingness to commit to standards of Calvinist moral discipline before being baptized. In the Netherlands, meanwhile, the constant stream of information about non-Christian religions led to novel ways of thinking about God, the devil, nature, and religious diversity. Whilst some Calvinists employed the newly emerging transhistorical understanding of paganism to tar all religious rivals with the brush of idolatry and atheism, others were encouraged to take more relativistic positions which served to destabilize Calvinist dogmas. As Parker convincingly shows, the global framework of Dutch colonialism thus figured prominently for Calvinists and Calvinism at home.

Yet how prominently did Calvinism and its missionary aims figure in the policies and practices of the Dutch commercial empire? The answer to that question depends largely on geographical context. It is clear from Parker's analysis that a mutually supportive relationship existed between the Dutch Reformed Church and the VOC and WIC, with the trading companies providing the conditions for Calvinist ministers to propagate their faith and ministers propping up corporate empire building by serving as instruments of colonial governance. Particularly in the provision of schooling, poor relief, and the promotion of a Protestant social order through religious instruction, marriage, and moral disciplining, Calvinist clergymen made vital contributions to civic government in areas under direct Company control. Consequently, their influence was most noticeable in the Moluccas, Batavia, Ceylon, and the short-lived colonies of Formosa and Brazil, whilst leaving little or no mark on VOC activities in the major Asian empires of Persia, Mughal India, China, and Japan. Reformed communities remained small and the number of conversions low in most areas where the Dutch were active. In the Atlantic, Calvinist proselytizing did not take off anywhere outside Brazil; and in Asia, the VOC's concerns about alienating non-Christian rulers and populations limited the scope for missionary activity. As Parker explains, the negative communal consequences of adopting a new religion also

disincentivized Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists against converting. Consequently, the greatest number of conversions took place in areas where a prior Catholic missionary presence had already resulted in a large indigenous Christian population, particularly in Ceylon, which counted nearly 200,000 nominal Christians in the late 18th century. Batavia and Ambon each counted upwards of 10,000 Reformed Christians in the same period, both those of European descent and Asians enticed by the opportunities of marriage with a European, greater access to poor relief, or, in the case of enslaved people, the improved prospects of manumission which conversion offered.

In focusing chiefly on the perspectives of ministers and consistories, *Global Calvinism* is naturally slanted towards the small group of actors for whom “proselytizing among pagans and Moors” (64) was a priority. As such, the book stops short of offering a larger reassessment of the Dutch trading companies and the role of religious motivations in driving their activities, and occasional inaccuracies when referencing names, dates, and places suggests that Parker is on less familiar terrain when discussing the VOC’s presence in Asia. Furthermore, his attempts at placing Calvinist proselytization within a global comparative framework by drawing parallels between European and Asian empires are commendable but remain underdeveloped. These limitations notwithstanding, the book productively situates Calvinism as part of larger global currents of imperial expansion and confessionalization. It amply demonstrates that the spread of Reformed Christianity in the Dutch empire was far from incidental, but rather resulted from sustained efforts by Calvinist ministers working under the aegis of the VOC and WIC. At the same time, the old consensus that missionary activity was limited in scope and impact and held only marginal importance to the overall aims of the trading companies probably still holds. Indeed, Parker confirms as much when concluding that “the most far-reaching effects of overseas missions” (281) were not the establishment of Calvinist enclaves in Asia, but the impact which increased familiarity with global religious beliefs and practices had on Reformed Protestantism in the Netherlands.

### **About the reviewer**

Guido van Meersbergen is assistant professor in early modern global history and director of the Global History and Culture Centre (GHCC) at the University of Warwick (UK). He is the author of *Ethnography and encounter: The Dutch and English in seventeenth-century South Asia* (Brill, 2022), and co-editor of *Trading companies and travel knowledge in the early modern world* (Routledge, 2022). His research focuses on the Dutch and English East India Companies, cross-cultural diplomacy, and early modern travel and ethnography. He is currently co-editing

the diaries of the Sir William Norris Embassy to Mughal India (1699-1702), which will be published by the Hakluyt Society. With colleagues in Sweden, he also coordinates the Global Diplomacy Network, which aims to foster a comparative and transregional understanding of the development and practice of inter-polity relations across the globe in the early modern period.





## Reviews

**Pieter C. Emmer and Jos J. L. Gommans:**

***The Dutch overseas empire 1600-1800***

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 466 p.

ISBN 9781108647403

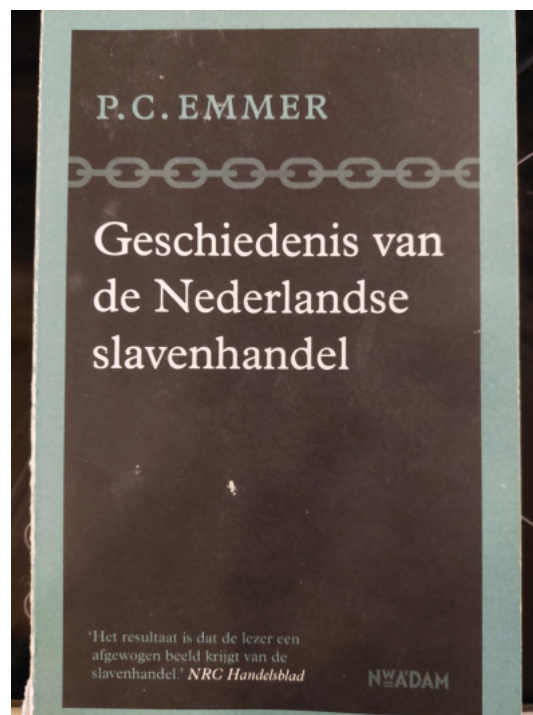
**Pieter C. Emmer:**

***Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse slavenhandel***

Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2019. 336 p.

ISBN 9789046824368

*Reviewed by Paul M. M. Doolan*



Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans' *The Dutch overseas empire 1600-1800* is an impressive global account of Dutch trade, warfare, and cultural encounters in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The two University of Leiden historians have produced a worthy extension of C. R. Boxer's seminal work of over half a century ago, *Dutch seaborne empire*. Their book is divided into three main sections, dealing in turn with the metropole, the Atlantic world and Asia. It provides a richly detailed and coherent image of how the Dutch impacted the non-European world, as well as how non-Europeans impacted Dutch identity.

The United Provinces of the Netherlands of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was, according to the authors, unique in Europe for being a republic (they ignore Switzerland) and for being "the largest trading empire in Asia" (59-60). The prosperous state was run, not by a hereditary aristocracy but by a merchant elite who possessed an almost "blind faith in what the market and trade could achieve" (2). They rightfully regard Hugo Grotius as the founder of international law and "the most important ideologue behind both the emergence of the Republic and its overseas empire" (11). The writers accept the metaphor of the beehive representing the structures and values of this busy republic, with Amsterdam emerging as the origin of a new consumer mass market as well as an artistic and cultural hub and the most important centre of world news: "Nowhere were as many words and images printed as in Amsterdam" (80).

However, the Dutch interest in the world did not stem exclusively from acquisitiveness but also flowed from a protestant attempt to interpret God's work through artistic and scientific observation. We are offered an intriguing account of Dutch botanists interpreting God's book of nature by means of assembling, classifying, and studying exotic plants in the magnificent new gardens of Leiden and Amsterdam. Not only were Dutch painters, like Rembrandt, admirers of Mughal art, but Dutch painters found employment at the Safavid court in Isfahan while Mughal painters proved to be receptive to Dutch artistic ideas. If the links with overseas empire are not always crystal clear, the historians are to be applauded for their attempt to make visible an entangled history in which Europeans and non-Europeans have equal agency. This is why, presumably, the cover of the book is not an image from a Dutch Old Master, as one might perhaps expect, but rather a Mughal miniature depicting a meeting between Dutch and Indians. The attempt to shift perspective from the provincial to the global is admirable.

One of the many pleasures of reading this book emanates from the global perspective that the authors bring to their subject. They demonstrate that the empire may have been Dutch, but it was an empire "in which numerous peoples from Europe, Asia, America and Africa actively participated" (5). We learn, for instance, that by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most sailors in the Dutch East India

Company (the VOC, short for '*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*'), were Chinese, Javanese and Bengali. The entanglement between Dutch and non-European becomes most obvious in the strongest section of the book, that dealing with Asia. Here we find an excellent overview of how the VOC was just one of many players vying for domination in Java. The authors admit that the success of the Dutch around Batavia was greatly due to Chinese support: "One could even use the term co-colonisation" (286). Dutch success against the Portuguese in Sri Lanka was possible because they worked with local allies. The VOC prospered in India thanks to a relationship between the Dutch and the Mughals that was "mutually beneficial" (311). The VOC emerged as a major carrier of goods across the Indian Ocean, but "Indian brokers were crucial to their success" (315). Similarly, Dutch merchants in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea depended on "the existing network of Indian merchants" (342). This does not suggest that the VOC's presence in Asia was exclusively benign. The authors correctly point out that on the Banda Islands the Dutch implemented an "extermination policy" (276). The islands were repopulated by Europeans and enslaved persons but remained "a kind of remote Dutch 'heart of darkness'" (282).

The authors maintain the same approach of highlighting non-European agency when it comes to their analysis of the Atlantic World. For instance, they point out that European power in Africa never extended beyond the walls of European coastal forts. Their business dealings, in the slave trade for instance, depended on maintaining the goodwill of local leaders. But what I found most uncomfortable is the authors' attempt to correct our view of New World Slavery.

In a "Note on terminology," Emmer and Gommans reject the use of the term "enslaved person" (x). The historians offer a justification for retaining the term "slave," but I suspect that they simply consider the newer term to be an example of politically correct culture. It is clear from their discussion of Dutch slavery that they reject any ideas that could be associated with political correctness. Emmer and Gommans argue that too often slave plantations have been depicted as concentration camps. On the contrary, they maintain, "slaves had the freedom to do as they themselves wanted" (160) in the late afternoons and evenings and weekends. They could travel to the market and go visit friends. They could fish, hunt and garden and could sell their produce. This explains why most enslaved in Dutch plantations remained "loyal to the slavery system" (160-166). Furthermore, we are told that slavery on the Dutch Antilles "was more humane than that in the plantation colonies" (181). *Even more humane*, I found myself thinking. I was taken aback by their description of Johan Maurits, governor-general of Dutch Brazil, "a liberal man who accepted Portuguese colonists" (194). This is the same Johan Maurits who played a pivotal role in initiating the Dutch trans-Atlantic slave trade. Yet, all the two historians can offer on this point is:

“After the conquest of a part of Brazil, the demand for slaves increased” (215). This intimates that the trade in human misery was entirely deterministic and free of human agency.

Turning to Piet Emmer’s account of the slave trade, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse slavenhandel*, I’m afraid my discomfort only grew. Of course, Emmer condemns the slave trade as one of the blackest pages of Dutch history, but he is too quick to relativize. He maintains that the enslaved Africans were not the only victims, because the European sailors on board the slave ships had an even higher death rate than those who were enslaved. He argues that the slave societies of the Americas were more peaceful than European society, with its bloody wars, ignoring the hundreds of wars against the native peoples of the Americas and the systemic violence of slavery itself. He describes the gruesome manner in which Dutch sailors put to death the leader of a slave revolt, Essjerrie Ettui, but then tells us that these were cruel times and needlessly gives a couple of examples of African cruelties. Emmer asserts that there is absolutely no reason to believe that enslaved females were prone to sexual abuse on the slave ships. His evidence for this is weak and speculative – he claims that the sailors would have been too weakened by tropical diseases. Apparently, they would have been able to sail a ship filled with enslaved Africans across the ocean but would not have had the energy to engage in sexual violence. Elsewhere, Emmer admits that of the 1,500 trans-Atlantic journeys completed by Dutch slave ships, about 300 experienced revolts. He informs us: ‘That is a fifth and that is a whole lot’ (“*Dat is een vijfde en dat is heel veel*”) (144). His analysis of why this was the case doesn’t stretch much further than that truism. He does mention that the Commercial Company of Middleburg issued an instruction that ship’s crews were not to sexually abuse enslaved females. Emmer is oblivious to the fact that such instructions would not have been needed if the sailors, according to his reasoning, had indeed been too weak to engage in rape.

Emmer continually squeezes the evidence until it fits his argument. Stating that Africans dominated the slave trade, he claims that the goods that European slavers paid in exchange for humans had to be of excellent quality, because African slave brokers were ‘extremely fussy’ (“*uiterst kieskeurig*”) (86). However, when making the argument that European guns had little negative impact on African society, he claims that they were mainly ‘old guns that often were already broken’ (“*oude geweren die vaak al kapot waren*”) (92). The fussiness of the Africans is now forgotten. We must believe that for a couple of centuries African slave merchants were happy to receive old, broken guns in exchange for human cargo. Never mind that Emmer admits that when examining the shipping inventories, ‘it is not possible to know if [the guns] worked well’ (“*niet op te maken of ze nog goed functioneerden*”) (87). Sometimes his contradictions appear in succeeding

sentences. He claims: 'No Dutch slavers themselves had ever attempted to turn an African into a slave' ("*Geen van de Nederlandse slavenhalers heeft ooit geprobeerd zelf Afrikanen tot slaaf te maken*" (109). But the very next sentence reads: 'Occasionally they would kidnap a free African' ("*Incidenteel kidnapten ze wel een vrije Afrikaan*") (109), and then tells of one kidnapped African who was put to work on a slave plantation before being rescued by means of payment (109). So how could he claim that this had never happened?

Emmer argues that the Atlantic slave trade, which forcibly transported 12 million Africans to the Americas had a negligible impact on Africa – 'Without the arrival of the European slave ships African society would not have been very different' ("*Zonder de komst van de Europese slavenscheppen had de Afrikaanse maatschappij er niet veel anders uitgezien*") (105). He then contradicts this, by claiming that if the trans-Atlantic slave trade had not happened, it may have been that Africa would have been unable to feed its population (106). This twisted logic implies that the slave trade actually saved people! In this counter-factual approach, he concludes that the only thing that can be said with certainty is that 'without the European slave trade the number of slaves in tropical Africa would have been even greater than it was and also the slave trade within Africa and North-Africa and the Middle-East would have been bigger. Statements about other effects are speculations' ("*zonder Europese slavenhandel het aantal slaven in tropisch Afrika nog wat groter zou zijn geweest dan al het geval was en dat ook de slavenhandel binnen Afrika en naar Noord-Afrika and het Midden-Oosten dan omvangrijker zou zijn geweest. Uitspraken over andere effecten zijn speculaties*") (114). Emmer is oblivious to the fact that this is speculation on his part. We simply do not know what would have happened if history had taken a different course. It is interesting to speculate, but he mistakes his opinion for certainty.

Emmer defends the thesis that the Dutch economy did not profit from slavery. On average, it was worth no more than 0.005 percent of the annual GDP, he maintains. Yet Brandon and Bosma (2019) demonstrated that in 1770 the slave trade contributed 5.2 percent to the Dutch GDP. Their names do not appear in Emmer's list of references. No doubt, they are shunned due to their political correctness.

Emmer uses the term *political correctness* when dealing with current historical ideas that seem to him unbalanced and emotional (Emmer, 2004, 2011). Perhaps Emmer's aversion to political correctness accounts for the glaring absences in the secondary literature in his book. He relies a great deal on works published between the 1970s and the mid-1990s. The first five chapters of his book contain 16 references to secondary literature, but none of these were written in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Amidst the current culture wars that have weaponized

history, Emmer's volume has been widely touted in the Dutch press as an attempt to offer a balanced view. It is anything but.

### References

- Brandon, Pepijn. & Bosma, Ulbe. 2019. De betekenis van de Atlantische slavernij voor de Nederlandse economie in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw. *TSEG/Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 16.2: 5-46. <https://doi.org/10.18352/tseg.1082>
- Emmer, Piet. 2004. Geschiedenis en politieke correctheid. *Kleio: Tijdschrift van de vereniging van docenten in geschiedenis en staatsinrichting in Nederland* 45.3: 2-5.
- Emmer, Piet. 2011. Opinie: Slavernij. *Mare: Leids Universitair Weekblad*, October 12. <https://www.mareonline.nl/achtergrond/opinie-slavernij/>

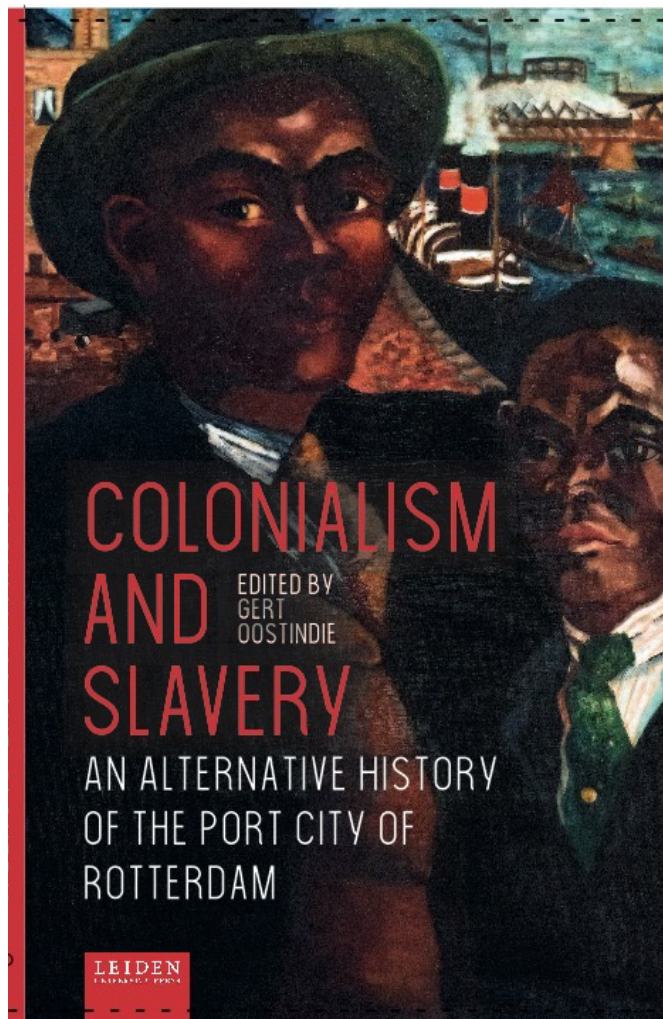
### About the reviewer

Paul Doolan is originally from the Republic of Ireland. He holds a master's degree in history from the University of Groningen (Netherlands) and a doctorate in Dutch colonial history from the University of Konstanz (Germany). He is the author of *Collective memory and the Dutch East Indies: Unremembering decolonization* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021). He has taught history in international schools in the Netherlands and Japan and currently teaches in Zurich, Switzerland.

**Review**  
**Gert Oostindie (ed):**  
***Colonialism and slavery: An alternative history of the port  
city of Rotterdam***

Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2021. 248 p.  
ISBN 9789087283704

*Reviewed by Jeroen Dewulf*



Rotterdam's history has traditionally been narrated as that of a relatively small port city that thanks to the entrepreneurial acumen and hard labour of its residents grew into one of the world's largest harbours. This success story has been associated with a group of energetic business leaders and civic administrators, whose tribute to the city is honored in the names of streets, buildings, and companies. That many of those who were once heralded as exemplary citizens built their careers and fortunes at the expense of others in faraway lands is an uncomfortable message that this proud city is only reluctantly coming to terms with. This is even more so related to the bombing of Rotterdam at the onset of the Nazi invasion and the subsequent reconstruction that fostered a narrative of victimhood and resilience. To complement and/or correct this self-perception with a focus on oppression and guilt is not an easy process, hence the fierce reactions to the suggestion of Peggy Wijntuin—a city councilor of Afro-Surinamese descent—that it was time for Rotterdam to face its contribution to the Dutch colonial history and its involvement in the slave trade.

The latter was long perceived as a typical Amsterdam debate. It was, after all, in that city that both the East- and West-India Companies were founded and that the elite benefitted most from the Dutch overseas expansion. Moreover, Amsterdam is today home to the nation's largest African-descendent community and has traditionally been governed by a leftist-liberal majority that is keen on honoring the city's international reputation as a bulwark of progressiveness. Similar to what happened in relation to a correction in the traditional Dutch commemoration of World War II by including a focus on the suffering of the nation's Jewish population, Amsterdam proved again to have played a pioneering role by not only starting a debate on the painful legacy of the slave trade and colonialism but also by disseminating this debate at a national level, including in Rotterdam. Significantly, eleven years after Amsterdam had inaugurated its monument to commemorate the victims of the slave trade, Rotterdam unveiled its slavery commemoration monument in 2013. The latter was designed by Alex da Silva, a representative of the city's large immigrant community with roots in the Cape Verde islands, where the transatlantic slave trade from Africa had once been initiated.

One of the results of the discussion on slavery and colonialism in the Netherlands' second largest city is this collected volume under review. It has been edited by Gert Oostindie, director of the Leiden-based Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (*KITLV*, in Dutch, which stands for *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*) that was tasked with carrying out the investigation of the city's involvement in slave-trading practices as well its support to the Netherlands' colonial policy. The volume has nine chapters that investigate colonial connections in the city's history of shipping and



trade, industry and finance, missionary work, migration, and culture from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The chapters are abridged and translated versions of separate studies that were originally published in Dutch, which occasionally led to the repetition of information that could have been avoided with stricter editing.

Considering its history as an industrial seaport, the book unsurprisingly revealed how Rotterdam played a key role in the transportation and commercialization of colonial products such as tobacco and sugar. It also highlighted the city's contribution to the flow of capital, insurance policies, and financial services that sustained colonial enterprises and slave-trading operations. All of this started at the onset of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch overseas expansion, with Rotterdam being assigned one of the six chambers of the East India Company and, together with Delft and Dordrecht, forming the Maas Chamber of the West India Company, and continuing for three centuries, until the final years of the Netherlands' colonial era. The book also revealed how several important figures in the development of Rotterdam into a major hub in global maritime trade made significant contributions to Dutch colonialist and slave-trading endeavours. Examples are Cornelis Matelief, who, as the 17<sup>th</sup>-century admiral of the East India Company fleet, was responsible for the choice of Jakarta as the capital of Dutch operations in Asia; former mayor Josua van Belle, who was director of the East India Company and, together with his brother Pieter and Balthasar Coymans, acquired the *asiento* ('monopoly contract') of the Spanish slave trade; Jean de May Sr., who, as a major investor in the West India Company, was responsible for the development of the Rotterdam sugar industry; Herman van Coopstad and Isaac Rochussen, who founded the city's largest slave trading company, Coopstand & Rochussen, that bartered goods of nearly three million guilders in West Africa, a quarter of which consisted of guns and gunpowder; Fernand Whaley Hudig, who was a major investor in Surinamese plantations; and Anthony van Hoboken, who led the foundations for the private shipping trade between the Netherlands and the East Indies. Yet the book also shows that, early on, Rotterdam was the home of people who voiced critical opinions about the oppression and enslavement of people in overseas possessions. Among them was Pieter Paulus, who, as the mayor of Rotterdam and chairman of the Assembly of the Batavian Republic, explicitly condemned slavery in 1797 and the remarkable coalition of female members of the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Liberal and Protestant Réveil movement, who jointly formed the Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee.

While it does not come as a big surprise that much of the city's wealth originates from stakes in the East and West India Company or that Rotterdam helped lay the foundations for the worldwide maritime network that fueled the Dutch colonial expansion, the investigating team of historians also uncovered a wealth of new information that is little known, even to experts in the field. Before

this study, few people may have been aware that the first Dutch ship to circumnavigate the globe, the *Mauritius*, came from Rotterdam; that the Maas Chamber of the West India Company had its own trading post in the mouth of the Sierra Leone River before it was put in charge of governing the Caribbean island of Saint Eustatius; that most of the capital for the creation of the (Prussian) Brandenburg African Company came from Rotterdam; that the city once was a hotbed for Protestant missionary activities in Dutch colonies; or that the Rotterdam-based *Afrikaansche Handelsvereniging* ('African trading association') was the second-largest investor in Leopold II's public company for the colonization of Congo.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding uncovered in this book is the European character of the city's contribution to colonization activities. Significantly, it reveals that Rotterdam imported more coffee and sugar from French than from Dutch colonies. Other examples of this European colonialist entanglement are the Rotterdam branch of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century British Fellowship of Merchant Adventures, the development of the Dutch-British steamship services provided by the *Rotterdamsche Lloyd*, and the Dutch-Scottish investment company *Colin Campbell, Dent & Company* that was heavily involved in the development of the Surinamese plantation economy, most notably in the district of Nickerie and its capital Nieuw-Rotterdam.

The authors also show how colonial products, routes and people changed Rotterdam's economy, population, and city shape. Pauline K.M. van Roosmalen takes the readers on a fascinating walk through traces of Rotterdam's colonial past, some of which survived the 1940 bombing, while Esther Captain highlights the contributions of colonial and postcolonial migrants to the transformation of Rotterdam, and Alex van Stipriaan reflects on the survival of mental legacies, such as racism and stereotyping, as a result of three hundred years of colonization. The book concludes with a message of hope in a chapter dedicated to the city's annual Summer Carnival, a celebration of the city's super diverse character that the Afro-Caribbean scholar Francio Guadeloupe interprets as an event where ossified identity patterns and binary categorizations can be overcome and where the discovery of new commonalities and bonds between all Rotterdammers is encouraged.

This decision to end the book with an encouragement to look for what binds rather than divides the citizens of Rotterdam corresponds to the conciliatory spirit of Wijntuin's motion. Yet, Wijntuin also made clear that the latter cannot succeed without the acknowledgment of the city's involvement in and contribution to a history of oppression and exploitation. In this respect, this alternative history of the port city of Rotterdam will hopefully prove to be a

valuable document to present to future generations as, what Wijntuin calls, “an instrument for combatting ignorance” (11).

### **About the reviewer**

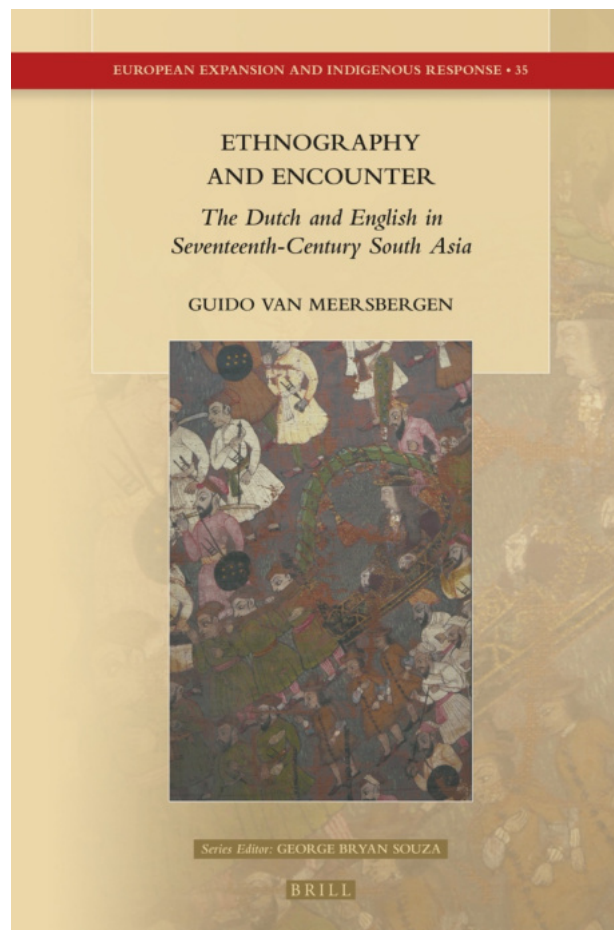
Jeroen Dewulf is Queen Beatrix Professor in Dutch Studies at the University of California, Berkeley (US). His most recent book publications include *Afro-Atlantic Catholics: America's first Black Christians* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), *The Congo in Flemish literature: An anthology of Flemish prose on the Congo*, co-edited with Luc Renders, (Cornell University Press, 2020), *From the Kingdom of Kongo to Congo Square: Congo dances and the origins of the Mardi Gras Indians* (University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2017), and *The Pinkster King and the King of Kongo: The forgotten history of America's Dutch-owned slaves* (University Press of Mississippi, 2017).



**Review**  
**Guido van Meersbergen:**  
***Ethnography and encounter:***  
***The Dutch and English in seventeenth-century South Asia***

Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. 316 p.  
ISBN: 9789004471696 (hb) / ePDF 978904471825

*Reviewed by Zoltán Biedermann*



*Ethnography and encounter* comes cautiously packaged as a cultural history of cross-cultural interactions driven by Dutch and English expansion in Asia. The author, assistant professor of Early Modern Global History and co-director of the Global History and Culture Centre at the University of Warwick, promises a study of “the making of corporate ethnography and the ways in which Company agents’ ideas about and understanding of Asian peoples and societies informed their approaches to cross-cultural contact” (2). The comparative approach to Dutch and English corporate writing – a rarely-taken path – will be of interest to cultural and political historians alike. It sheds light on the vast textual production that took place beyond the cabinets of the better-known travel writers and geographers. The professed objective of the author is, following the historians Stuart Schwartz and Markus Vink, to identify “implicit ethnographies” (10) and make them “explicit” (11). This effort takes up much of the first and second parts of the book, offering a valuable addition to the already vast literature on the pre-history of Saidian Orientalism. It also prepares the ground for a tentative but exciting exploration, in the third and especially the fourth part of how the cultural production of English and Dutch company servants may have fed into political decision-making, ultimately contributing to the growth of European colonialism in Asia.

Chapter 1 lays the foundations by placing Dutch and English authors firmly on common ground. Beyond their shared Renaissance heritage (with an emphasis on Aristotle’s *Politics* and classic humouralism), Van Meersbergen highlights the comparable institutional preoccupations of the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) and the *East India Company* (EIC). These organizations cultivated similar anxieties as they strove to grow operations thousands of miles away from their headquarters. Their respective leadership wished to understand, at a distance, the opportunities and the challenges arising in each particular micro-region. Northern Europeans simply did not know enough, despite a whole century of Portuguese activities and textual production, about the power structures and social conventions shaping trade. The Dutch and English leaderships also wished to make sure that their employees behaved in ways that would be acceptable to Asian host societies, but without leading them down the path of assimilation. Anxieties about mingling would soon become a key tenet of European writing about expansion and empire.

Van Meersbergen excels at exploring the cultural assumptions and representations at play in texts while placing them firmly in their institutional contexts. As shown in chapter 2, if the VOC and the EIC “developed a set of institutional writing and archiving practices responsible for generating, disseminating, and solidifying information about Asia” (71), this was done, on the surface at least, to streamline organizational processes and increase predictability.

In fact, many texts produced in the East responded to explicit instructions written in Europe. Despite some important differences, both companies fomented comparable textual productions and archival practices, although these ended up feeding into the wider circulation of texts and ideas in early modern Europe. The author is right to point out that, while the logics of textual production were organizational, neither the VOC nor the EIC became “closed circuits” as texts ended up being moved, copied, printed and used “in pursuit of opportunities” (91).

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the challenges faced by Dutch and English company servants in Asian ports. The focus here is on “affective responses such as anxiety and prejudice” (98), and how stereotypes blossomed precisely as Europeans sought Asian intermediaries that they might trust. Van Meersbergen draws attention to how a series of disputes especially in India in the early 1620s produced a pattern of uneasy “mutual accommodations” (126). Van Meersbergen then illustrates, with abundant recourse to remarkable narrative sources (for example, the diary of Johannes Bacherus, now in the National Archive at The Hague), how northern Europeans learned to represent themselves in the context of diplomatic receptions, especially at the Mughal court. The explorations, in chapters 5 and 6, of how Dutch and English individuals engaged in the complicated system of bestowals of robes of honor (*khil’at*) and the circulation of gifts (from relatively common goods to genuine rarities) are particularly impressive. The research is solid, the prose lively and readable, the combination of European and (some) Asian perspectives productive. The author’s willingness to go beyond the famous instance in which Thomas Roe voiced concerns about receiving robes opens windows onto a wide field of different reactions. The rich archival base also promises further revelations in years to come from a historian capable of combining Dutch and English sources in creative ways.

Historians engaged in current debates about early colonialism and racialization will feel inspired to take the arguments in this fine book further. Any study of Dutch and English expansion in Asia remains incomplete, of course, without a grounding in the Iberian experience. Repeatedly, this reviewer was struck by how certain intellectual and political processes described in *Ethnography and encounter* already appear in earlier materials. Secondly, while this book is very much about European stereotyping and othering, the question does arise of what the input of Asian interlocutors may have been. It would be plausible, for instance, to assume that certain local brokers would have worked to denigrate others. While Asian inputs are rarely made explicit in the sources, it may be possible to trace them by reading between the lines (Van Meersbergen himself has recently become involved in work to decolonize traditional readings of European travel literature). Thirdly, the gradual appearance of a racialized vocabulary in 17<sup>th</sup> and

especially 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch and English writings calls for follow-up supported by a robust and fully up-to-date conceptual framework. Dutch and English considerations in Asia about heritability, for example, resonate with the colonization of the wombs of enslaved Black women in the Atlantic, as described recently by Jennifer Morgan (2021) in *Reckoning with slavery: Gender, kinship, and capitalism in the early Black Atlantic*. In fact, the question of “why?” arises in many passages of Van Meersbergen’s wonderfully rich study: why, ultimately, did European organizations place such an emphasis on ethnographic writing, if not to create a basis for domination? Is that why no similar corpus emerged on the other side?

Above all else, *Ethnography and encounter* makes for exciting reading because it raises questions about the cultural divergences that undermined European-Asian communications from the onset. Dutch and English men were a tiny minority at the mercy of Mughal functionaries and dignitaries, and they felt awe at what they observed. Yet amongst themselves, they kept fantasizing about using violence against non-Europeans whom they systematically characterized as treacherous, effeminate, despotic, and deserving of being treated brutally. The question thus becomes whether the formula of “fragile equilibrium” (127) does more to clarify the situation than to obscure the fundamental asymmetries developing at the time. Van Meersbergen himself hints at the existence of “asymmetrical sites of exchange” early on in the book (4), and describes “the complex concurrence of intense day-to-day crossings and exchanges with periodic outbursts of hostility” (138). He shows how “the barriers to trust posed by prejudice and unfamiliarity could be overcome, at least partially, through a mixture of institutional provisions, established routines of social communication, long-term relations with the same individual or family-based network, and communal accommodation” – but also how “violence, both physical and rhetorical, remained part of this story” (139). In fact, the violence only kept growing. Chapters 7 and 8 delve into the processes of empire building at Madras (EIC) and in Ceylon (VOC), raising crucial questions about the intellectual and political mechanisms that, here, as in so many other parts of the world, lead from writing to colonization.

*Ethnography and encounter* is a quietly suggestive, timely book with abundant potential for follow-up. Many readers will find it to contain materials urgently to be revisited, because they speak to some of the most pressing questions of our time. A note of praise is also due for the inclusion of colour illustrations and carefully produced maps. While this is a book by a Dutch historian based in part on Dutch materials, it goes very decidedly beyond the remit of any specialist subfield, raising questions that will be of interest to all historians and



cultural analysts studying global connections and disconnections in the early modern world.

### **Reference**

Morgan, Jennifer. 2021. *Reckoning with slavery: Gender, kinship, and capitalism in the early Black Atlantic*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

### **About the reviewer**

Zoltán Biedermann is professor of Early Modern History at the School of European Languages, Culture and Society at University College London (UK). He studies early global interactions, with a focus on 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese empire building in Asia and a broader interest in European expansion. He has worked comparatively with Dutch, English, and French sources, including travel accounts, geographical works, imperial projects, and maps.

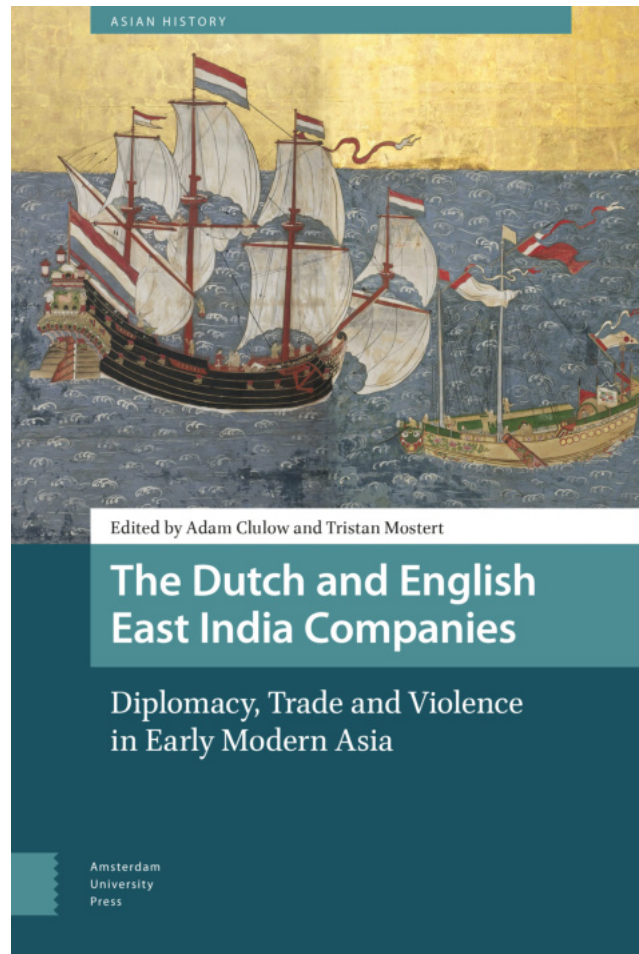


## Review

**Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (eds):  
*The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy,  
trade, and violence in early modern Asia***

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018. 262 p.  
ISBN 9789462983298

*Reviewed by Suzanne Moon*



*The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, trade, and violence in early modern Asia* is an absorbing collection of essays that offers readers valuable insights into the Asian activities of these two influential companies. The editors point out that the very nature of these companies has always been elusive. Are they bodies politic? Commercial enterprises with political features? Inspired by and following the work of Leonard Blussé, the articles address these broad questions by offering richly detailed explorations of the companies in action, attending to the ways they navigated (successfully or not) existing Asian commercial and military networks. What unites the essays is their shared interest in how the English East India Company (EIC) and the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) crafted the essential relationships needed to operate in the complicated and changing Asian commercial and political environment. Each essay explores how and why these companies structured their interactions the way they did and how their choices did (and sometimes did not) affect their exercise of power in the region. The volume's well-chosen, well-researched, and well-written articles are valuable for experts and newcomers to the field alike.

The volume gains coherence from the shared focus of each article on the tricky business of establishing, maintaining, and sometimes coping with the unintended consequences of diplomatic and commercial relationships. The focus on relationships and networks helps undercut historiographic tendencies to either overplay or underplay the power of the companies in Asia. The editors argue in their helpful introduction that scholars should seek a middle ground, something that the essays in this volume do. We see the companies by turn succeeding with their strategies, muddling through unanticipated fallout of their choices, and failing. The companies operate (sometimes to their regret) on limited or wrong information, are drawn into relationships they did not anticipate, and struggle with the many common problems that Asian states also had, such as managing military logistics or careful management of their relationships with more powerful political actors. One of the benefits of focusing on relationships and networks is that East-West binaries that have informed some earlier historiography quickly vanish from sight. Instead, the articles depict diverse and sometimes ad hoc political and mercantile alignments that created shifting forms of dependence and interdependence, mutual advantage, and competition. Strong primary source research undergirds these stories, offering fascinating detail to these on-the-ground (or on-the-water) explorations of the companies' activities.

The book is divided into three sections as indicated by the subtitle: diplomacy, trade, and violence. The articles gain coherence by highlighting shared themes that amplify the volume's larger aims: the establishment of functional relationships through interested intermediaries, the challenges of being a (not

quite) sovereign in Asian networks, and the often-ad hoc response they necessarily had to employ in the face of a complex political world.

The section on diplomacy emphasizes the on-the-ground processes of coping with the unexpected, the obstructive, and often their lack of knowledge about getting things done in Asia. Tristan Mostert's article about the VOC's political alliances in the eastern Malay Archipelago demonstrates efforts to operate in areas far from politically stable enmeshed companies into complicated and combative alliances and enmities, constraining although not determining their choices. Guido van Meersbergen explores the diplomatic engagements of both companies with provincial officials in Bengal and Orissa during the Mughal period. Van Meersbergen convincingly demonstrates that these provincial engagements were extraordinarily important for establishing their presence, even more important perhaps than the grand embassies directed at central authorities. Fuyuko Matsukata explores VOC's failures to establish diplomatic relationships with the Tokugawa Shogunate on the VOC's desired terms and their transition to working with merchants as go-betweens instead. The essay highlights the changing political dynamics within Japan, about which the VOC was largely ignorant, and the challenges presented by the VOC's odd political identity. Each article helps show how diverse (and occasionally ad hoc) the strategies were for creating political alliances, the varied group of actors and go-betweens needed, and the unintended consequences of those choices.

Although the section on trade has only two articles, they complement each other well. Ghulam Nadri investigates the companies' relationships with Indian merchants, exploring interdependencies and strategic alliances that could result in mutual advantage (thus motivating Asians to work with the companies). Nadri shows how the companies' abilities to offer protection to Asian merchants proved to be an important service that could cement contractual relationships as trade became more violent in this period. However, Nadri never loses sight of the continued existence of strong competition for markets. The company, for all of its military power, could not simply roll over existing commercial networks. Martha Chaiklin makes this point by examining the ivory trade between Africa and Surat (employing a skillful and welcome emphasis on material culture), demonstrating how and why this trade was so resistant to disruption by European actors hoping to shift Surat's trade to Bombay. The balanced treatment of company power that the editors argued for is particularly evident in both of these essays.

In the final section, the authors focus on violence, one area of company activity in which VOC and EIC arguably held some demonstrable advantages (in certain times and places) over their Asian counterparts. However, the articles continue to give us a balanced view on why and how those advantages might or might not translate to real power. Martine van Ittersum explores the process of

treaty-making in both Asia and North America, arguing that far from being documents meant to ensure peace, most treaties were focused on acquiring rights to trade and territory. They tended to shift or structure patterns of warfare rather than eliminate conflict. Adam Clulow offers a fascinating look at the VOC's mainly failed attempt to use Japanese mercenaries to compensate for their insufficient numbers of military personnel. I appreciated the way that this essay corrects any image of the companies as unstoppable military juggernauts. This essay offers us a "best-laid plans" story that emphasizes the challenges of keeping up their military strength in Asia and the hybrid Asian-European character of that work. Peter Good completes the section by offering a detailed look at the EIC's entanglements with Nader Shah of Persia, who sought their help to create a modern fleet. The EIC's strategic aid was essential to the growth of this Asian power – another story that breaks down old-fashioned East-West binaries in useful ways.

The volume ends with a valuable historiographic discussion about the East India Companies from Tonio Andrade. It offers a thought-provoking look at scholarly trends and some cogent thoughts about where the field is going. It makes for a satisfying conclusion to an excellent volume.

*The Dutch and English East India Companies* avoids the serious pitfalls that often trip up edited collections. The articles share an overarching perspective that gives them a collective coherence while offering usefully diverse vantage points from which to understand the history of the VOC and EIC in Asia. I strongly recommend it.

### **About the reviewer**

Suzanne Moon is associate professor in the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine at the University of Oklahoma (US). She has published on Indonesian colonial and post-colonial history and is currently completing a book about technology in Southeast Asian history.

## Review

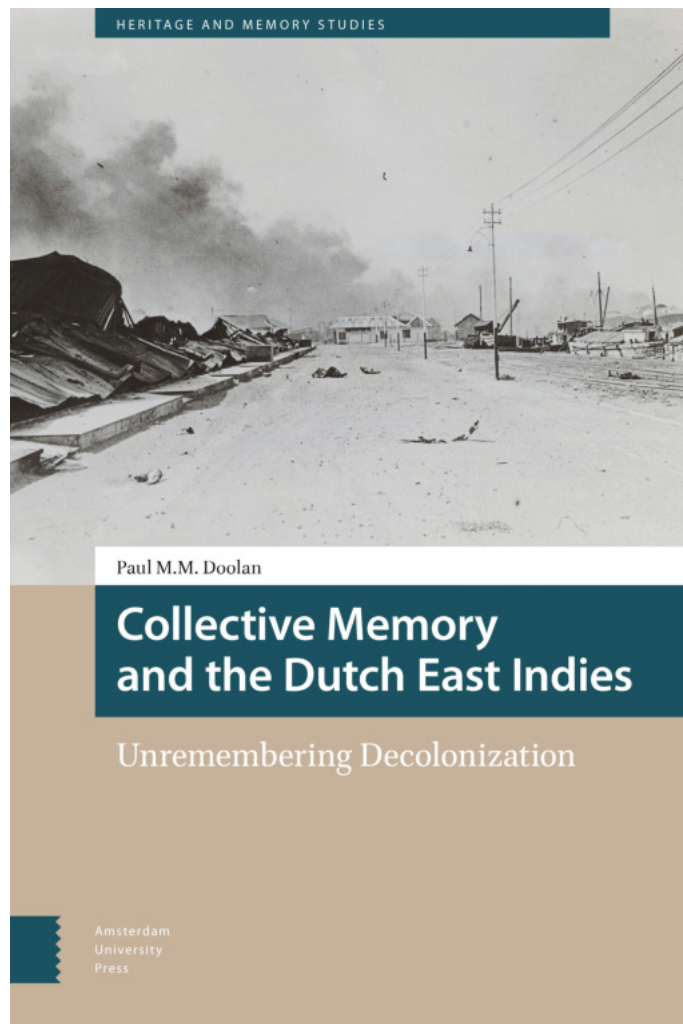
Paul M. M. Doolan:

***Collective memory and the Dutch East Indies:  
Unremembering decolonization***

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 334 p.

ISBN 9789463728744

*Reviewed by Liesbeth Rosen Jacobson*



Lately, the subject of the decolonization war in Indonesia (1945-1949) finds itself repeatedly at the centre of public and media attention. With the publication of several groundbreaking studies, such as Gert Oostindie's *Soldaat in Indonesië* in 2015, Remy Limpach's *De brandende kampongs van generaal Spoor* in 2016, and David van Reybroucks *Revolusi* in 2020, the discussion about the alleged structural nature of massive violence and the occurrence of war crimes seems to have broken new ground. These books were also explicitly meant for a more general interest reading audience, beyond the purely academic readership. Thus, after decades of collective amnesia, silencing and obscuring by historians as well as journalists, veterans and politicians, the conclusions of the books mentioned above seem to reveal a rather inconvenient historical reality: war crimes did occur, and massive violence took place on a structural, rather than on a merely incidental basis. Of course, evidence is sketchy and in the confusing circumstances of a guerilla war spread out over several islands, not every Dutch soldier was involved in extreme violence.

With his book, Paul M.M. Doolan addresses the creation of this repressed or covered-up collective memory, sketching quite accurately the process of the collective silencing act of this inconvenient truth in media outlets (newspapers, tv series, radio bulletins) as well as in novels and historical accounts. He convincingly labels this process with a novel word, *unremembering*, in the introduction. He clearly distinguishes it from, on the one hand, *dismembering*, which means breaking up the past in structured parts to make sense of it, and on the other hand ordinary remembering. In this sense, *unremembering* means not entirely forgetting, but the memories are temporarily stored in "a cold storage, awaiting the trigger that would result in involuntarily rememberings" (20).

This reminded me of another publication that recently appeared, namely the edited volume by Ron Eyerman and Giuseppe Sciortino, *The cultural trauma of decolonization: Colonial returnees in the national imagination*. In that book, the authors use the conceptual framework of cultural trauma to understand the short and long-term consequences of decolonization for the people directly involved along with the following generations. They "argue that even extreme forms of suffering become traumatic only if they are interpreted and made meaningful to an audience in terms of wider symbolic structures" (Eyerman & Sciortino 2020, 7), available in that particular society. It would have been interesting to link the concept of cultural trauma to Doolan's term *unremembering* to explore whether and how they overlap. Certain traumatic elements of decolonization were apparently hidden from public view for a long time. As such, they could not become a cultural trauma and the *unremembering* could go on for decades. Adding the (in my view) missing explanatory, theoretical link (why could this



*unremembering* endure for such a long time) could clarify that aspect of Doolan's work.

Despite my observation, this is quite an impressive, courageous, and ambitious attempt to sketch the whole process of the development of collective (un)remembering. Doolan does this by systematically referring to various expressions and representations in which the seminal 1969 interview with veteran Joop Hueting in the Dutch national TV-program *Achter het nieuws* justly receives ample attention. It was the first time that a mainstream Dutch audience learned about the atrocities that took place in the Dutch East Indies just before its formal decolonization in December 1949. Broadcast media coverage, novels, and memoirs, as well as the academic historical field are meticulously analyzed and contextualized. Doolan furthermore describes the reception of novels or scholarly monographs by including excerpts from reviews of these books in prominent Dutch newspapers. It creates a complete and detailed overview, covering all facets. It also provides for the necessary nuance, as the author points to early, cautiously described critical notes concerning the official governmental statement of the *Excessennota* of 1969, asserting "that the armed forces in general behaved in a correct manner" (149). For example, Doolan is quite critical of what he calls "the historian guild" (199) in Dutch academia, but he also admits that at an early stage some historians, such as Joop de Jongh, Petra Groen and Stef Scagliola carefully began to write about some horrific acts of actual warfare while the consensus had been for decades that professional historians would limit themselves to studies about diplomacy and politics. To that end, they would only use formal legalistic terminology (as found in the official colonial archives), they would avoid sweeping statements, and refrain from speculation and controversial claims for which they could not offer sufficient proof.

Unfortunately, in such an elaborate and in-depth analysis, the criteria on which the selection of representations of collective memory (whether it is a tv series, documentary film or novel) is based, are not entirely clear. At times, some cherry picking appears to have occurred. In addition, while the book gives a complete view of all important publications and related events (for example, the controversial Poncke Princen affair is covered as is the Boomsma affair), the list of these representations also gives the impression of a rather random catalogue without establishing any proper links to the fascinating conceptual framework of *unremembering* presented in the introduction. Some clustering in the catalogue and references to the conceptual framework presented in the introduction in the form of sub conclusions after every chapter would have helped here.

Further, I would like to note the rather brief conclusion. In fact, it ends with a rather unsatisfying remark about the statements of Gert Oostindie, Jonathan Verwey and Irene Hoogenboom who argued that "repatriates, military veterans,

Dutch politicians and Indonesian authorities had obstructed investigation of the war” (303). Doolan contends that Oostindie absolves Dutch historians of the responsibility for unremembering and with that statement he writes in the last sentence that “the conclusion of the present study disagrees” (303). I feel that this is a rather disappointing and unsatisfying sentence with which to finish. It represents a loose end, and a couple of lines explaining this rather bold statement, while summarizing and highlighting the main innovative points of this study, would have been of enormous help here.

Also, I think it is a pity the timespan of the study ends in 1995. Since then, many more interesting studies and popular accounts on the colonial period and the decolonization war in the former Dutch East Indies have emerged which deserve proper analysis by Doolan. He does refer to the publication of *Revolusi* in the final pages, but it is more of an afterthought than a real assessment. An example of another cultural artefact which would have fit Doolan’s analysis perfectly is the recent Dutch movie *De Oost* (‘The East’) (Taihuttu, 2020), in which the infamous Dutch military officer Raymond Westerling and his notorious warfare method on Celebes (now Sulawesi) are portrayed.

Another important element which would have added even more to Doolan’s already quite thorough work is the presentation of the results of a large-scale research project funded by the Dutch government, *Independence, decolonization, violence and war in Indonesia, 1945-1950* (Ind45-50, n.d.), undertaken by three leading Dutch research institutes, the NIOD (Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies), the KITLV (the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) and the NMHI, (Dutch Institute for Military History). The pivotal official announcement of that project’s research results took place on February 17, 2022. Although Doolan mentions the project on the last page of his book, unfortunately he neglects to analyze the process that led to the creation of the project, nor does he give an assessment of its preliminary results. Notably, the new insights provided by the research changed the official viewpoint of the Dutch government on its role in the decolonization war. On the same day of the presentation of the research findings, Prime Minister Mark Rutte made an official statement: he apologized deeply to the people of Indonesia for the structural violence during the decolonization war. He also added an apology to all those in the Netherlands who were touched in any way by the violence (NOS 2022).

In short, I very much hope that these more recent representations can be included in a discussion in a revised edition of the book *Collective memory and the Dutch East Indies*. To me, the process of *unremembering*, which continued for decades after the end of the decolonization war in 1949, as Doolan systematically

and convincingly argued, truly seems to be on the edge of breaking down in February 2022.

## References

- Eyerman, Ron & Guiseppe Sciortino, eds. 2020. *The cultural trauma of decolonization: Colonial returnees in the national imagination*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ind45-50.org. n.d. <https://www.ind45-50.org>. Accessed November 8, 2022.
- NOS. 2022. February 17, Rutte: Diepe excuses aan bevolking van Indonesië <https://nos.nl/video/2417781-rutte-diepe-excuses-aan-bevolking-van-indonesie>. Accessed November 8, 2022.
- Taihuttu, Jim, director. 2020. *De Oost*. New Amsterdam Film Company. 2 hr., 17 min. <https://newams.com/work/the-east/>

## About the reviewer

Liesbeth Rosen Jacobson studied social history at Leiden University (Netherlands). In 2012, she graduated cum laude with a Research Master thesis about the decolonization experiences of the Parsis, a former colonial elite in British India. In 2018, she received her PhD from Leiden University, publishing her doctoral dissertation as a book: *The Eurasian question: The colonial position and postcolonial options of colonial mixed ancestry groups from British India, Dutch East Indies and French Indochina compared, 1900-1975* (Verloren, 2018). Currently, she is working as an assistant professor in economic and social history at Utrecht University.



**Review**  
**Rutger Bregman:**  
***Humankind: A hopeful history***  
Elizabeth Manton and Erica Moore (trans.)  
New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2020. xviii+461 p.  
ISBN 9780316418539 (hc) / 9780316498814 (pb)

*Reviewed by Michiel Horn*



Soon after the attack on the Twin Towers and other targets on September 11, 2001, a complete shutdown of air traffic over North America began. Hundreds of flights were cancelled or diverted. Gander, Newfoundland, became the halting place for 38 flights, and 6,700 passengers and crew became involuntary visitors to the small town. They numbered more than half the total population of Gander, but its people famously rallied round to feed and accommodate the strangers who had landed among them. The heartening experience became the inspiration for a 2012 musical, *Come from Away*, by Irene Sankoff and David Hein, which has been a great success all over Canada and the United States. (Having seen it, I strongly recommend it.)

It is strange that the Gander experience has not made it into *Humankind: A hopeful history*, for it is precisely the sort of feel-good story the reader tends to find in its pages. Its author, Rutger Bregman (b. 1988) is a young man in a hurry. Having taken an M.A. in history, he chose to become a journalist and public intellectual and has already made a name for himself. He is probably best-known for his 2017 book *Utopia for realists (Gratis geld voor iedereen, 2014)*, which proposes a Universal Basic Income, a 15-hour working week and open borders as the conditions for a better world. In addition, his appearance at Davos in January 2019, when he identified tax avoidance by the super-rich as a central problem, and his February 2019 clash with Tucker Carlson of Fox News (Carlson suffered a meltdown) certainly made waves. His latest book, now available in a fine translation by Elizabeth Manton and Erica Moore that accurately captures the breezy and engaging informality of the Dutch original (*De meeste mensen deugen, 2019*), seeks to demonstrate his belief that most people are basically good. They will, Bregman asserts, care for and look after the interests of others, even in times of crisis. He rejects what he sees as the opposing belief, namely that human beings are basically selfish and that looking after number one is our default mode.

Right at the outset Bregman overstates his case. His “radical idea” has been “denied by religions and ideologies, ignored by the news media and erased from the annals of world history” (2), he claims, and this although it is “legitimised by virtually every branch of science, ... corroborated by evolution and confirmed by everyday life” (2). What is this radical but overlooked idea? “That most people, deep down, are pretty decent” (2). This is radical? In some circles, perhaps. Has it been overlooked? Hardly. It has been a staple of meliorist thinking for at least a couple of centuries.

Bregman shows how his idea operates in many circumstances, and states that it can be captured in “ten rules to live by” (379). These conclude the book, and they generally make good sense. I suspect, however, that Bregman could have penned the rules without preceding them with almost four hundred pages of argument and anecdote, especially because they do not always demonstrate the

points he is trying to make or do so in a way that is easily challenged, such as his fanciful account of the fate of Easter Island. His persistent thesis is that people, left to their own devices, will do good. They can do evil, but not with any ease: "...If you push people hard enough, if you poke and prod, bait and manipulate, many of us are indeed capable of doing evil. ... But evil doesn't just live just below the surface; it takes immense effort to draw it out. And most importantly, evil has to be disguised as doing good" (170). To Bregman this helps to explain such enormities as the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide and, at a more modest level, the findings of the notorious Milgram experiment. Those who participated in these events were conformists who thought they were doing the right thing.

This strikes me as both facile and jejune. The centrally important argument between Daniel Goldhagen and Christopher Browning about German behaviour during the Holocaust is absent from *Humankind*. Indeed, there is no systematic discussion of the nature of good and evil and the actions prompted by them, or any analysis of the principles of ethics and the good life. Bregman may think this unnecessary: he knows what he likes, altruism and cooperation, for instance, and he is willing to take Jean-Jacques Rousseau's word about the origins of what he doesn't like: agriculture, urbanization, social and economic inequality, state oppression. But is this more than a statement of Bregman's personal preferences and dislikes? I much prefer his point of view to Ayn Rand's, for example, but should he ignore, as he does, her influential assertion that altruism harms humanity?

A famous line from Goethe's (1808) *Faust* captures a balanced assessment of humankind: "*Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust ...* ('Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast') (Part 1, 1112). Bregman acknowledges that humans are complex creatures, with a good side and a bad side. We are capable of both altruism and egoism. The question, for us as for Faust, is which side we turn to. Here the concept of nudging, as proposed by the legal philosopher Cass R. Sunstein – he is not mentioned in *Humankind* – would have been helpful to Bregman. Regulations and policies that promote, but do not compel, socially desirable behaviour can encourage humans to make more good and fewer bad decisions. Will this produce utopia? Very probably not. Of course, there is no broad agreement as to what utopia should look like.

*Humankind* is not the major contribution to thought and policy-framing that Bregman seems to believe it is. However, it is worth reading, and if the author's reach has exceeded his grasp, if human beings are not as good as he believes they are, if the future does not look as bright as in his Panglossian vision: what of it? It is churlish to speak ill of those who would think well of us, who in any case think better of us than we believe ourselves to be.

## Reference

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, von. 1808. *Faust*. Tübingen: Cotta.

## About the reviewer

Professor Emeritus of History Michiel Horn was born in the Netherlands and came to Canada with his family in 1952. He studied at Victoria College (University of British Columbia, B.A.), Freiburg University in Germany, and the University of Toronto, where he earned a Ph.D. in history. He taught for many years in Glendon College of York University (Toronto, Canada). His books include *The dirty thirties: Canadians in the Great Depression* (Copp Clark Publishing, 1972), *The League for Social Reconstruction* (University of Toronto Press, 1980), *A Liberation album: Canadians in the Netherlands, 1944-1945* (with David Kaufman) (McGraw Hill, 1980), *Academic freedom in Canada: A history* (University of Toronto Press, 1999), and *York University: The way must be tried* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2010). During the last twenty years he has become a literary translator. Among his translations are *Philosophy for a better world (Filosofie voor een betere wereld, 2009)* by Floris van den Berg (Prometheus Books, 2013), and (with John Irons) *At the edge of the abyss: A concentration camp diary (Dagboek geschreven in Vught, 1977)* by David Koker (Northwestern University Press, 2014). He is currently translating a major work in European political history written by Wim Blockmans. He is University Historian, a Senior Fellow of Massey College, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He served as national president of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies for eight years. In 2002 he received the Milner Memorial Award from the Canadian Association of University Teachers “in recognition of his distinguished service in the cause of academic freedom.”



## Review

**Piet de Rooy:**

***Ons stipje op de wereldkaart: De politieke cultuur van  
modern Nederland***

Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2014. 414 p.

ISBN 978028450400

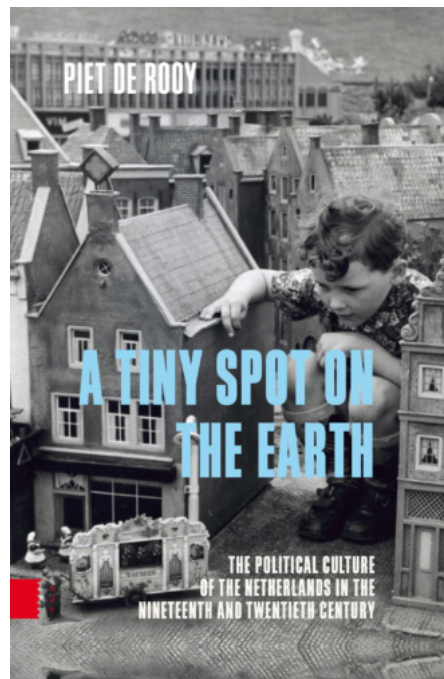
***A tiny spot on the earth: The political culture of the  
Netherlands***

Vivian Collingwood (trans.)

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015. 401 p.

ISBN 9789089647047

*Reviewed by Edward Anthony Koning*



Winner of the 2014 *Prinsjesboekenprijs* for the best book on Dutch politics, *Ons stipje op de waereldkaart* (or *A tiny spot on the earth*, in its English translation) chronicles the history of Dutch political culture since the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Acclaimed historian Piet de Rooy zooms in on key events during this time span to contest the notion that there is such a thing as a unique Dutch political culture of compromise and accommodation (the so-called *poldermodel*) that has stayed relatively unchanged over time. Instead, so he argues, the nature of Dutch politics has undergone considerable change, and in this process has been deeply influenced by foreign influences.

In eight substantive chapters, De Rooy argues that modern Dutch political culture has developed through four phases. Chapters 1 and 2 are dedicated to the first of these four: the period starting at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the spirit of the French revolution led to the adoption of the 1798 constitution, and ushered in an understanding of politics that elevated parliament (at the time named the National Assembly) as the key body for decision-making and representation, demanded a strict separation of state and church, and offered a clearer delineation of the scope of citizenship. This new republic was of course short-lived because of the French annexation, but even after Napoleon's fall and the creation of the monarchy, this political culture, as De Rooy argues, essentially lived on without fundamental change.

Such change would come in the period surrounding the adoption of a new constitution in 1848 and the ensuing "battle for the political culture and the nature of the nation state" (87) between liberal Thorbecke and protestant Groen van Prinsterer. In this second phase of Dutch political culture, described in detail in Chapter 3, a system emerged in which constitutional rules superseded popular sovereignty, an aristocratic political elite operated "without any bond with the voter" (290), and societal associations assumed larger political prominence.

In the third phase, Dutch political culture became more divisive, mostly as a result of the actions of Abraham Kuyper, who founded the first Dutch political party in 1879. Chapter 4 describes Kuyper's political activities in detail, showing that they forced other political forces to organize themselves in groups as well and thereby made divisions among politicians, and by extension, citizens more visible. The political culture was rapidly changed from one in which people were no longer just 'citizens' (*staatsburgers*) but rather 'party supporters' (*partijgangers*). An equally important aspect of this cultural change was the renewed importance of religion in politics, considering that many of the new political divisions were formed precisely along religious lines. Chapter 5 describes the difficulties that socialists and feminists experienced in the new order in which politics was shaped by parties and ideologies. These difficulties led many socialists to abandon the pursuit of a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and instead embrace the more

pragmatic solution of forming a social-democratic party (the SDAP). The feminists were forced to mostly pursue their political goals through associational activity, largely because they were unable to find common ground with the social democrats. Chapter 6 documents the culmination of the most fragmented phase of Dutch politics, when the divisions between different political groups were further institutionalized under the system of pillarization.

This system collapsed in the 1960s, ushering in the last phase in De Rooy's analysis. Chapter 7 argues that the culture of the '60s and the process of European integration reduced the prominence of political parties, which saw a rapid loss of members and followers, and of political ideologies, which became decreasingly relevant to people's identities. In Chapter 8, De Rooy argues that this process continued in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The arrival of populism (in particular, the emergence of Pim Fortuyn) created an additional blow to the position of so-called mainstream parties, and the convergence among the political elite on a wide range of issues (from European integration to the reasonable limits of the welfare state) signified the end of ideologies.

Anyone with an interest in Dutch political history will enjoy this book. It does not only offer a novel take, but it is also engagingly written, filled with interesting anecdotes and vivid descriptions. As such, the book is much more accessible than many academic texts that sometimes lose their punch in the weeds of academic jargon, theorization, and methodological reflections. At the same time, the choice for this style also comes with disadvantages. It leaves little space for clarification on the precise meaning of key concepts or the exact procedures by which evidence has been selected and analyzed. As a result, at times the book does not fully demonstrate its key claims or becomes a little unclear on what exactly those claims are in the first place. In short, the book is not always clear on its concepts, its methods, and its arguments. Let me briefly discuss each in turn.

To begin, the goal of the book to describe the nature of Dutch political culture is made a little difficult by the lack of a clear definition of what this term means. De Rooy eschews a definition of politics altogether – “what ‘politics’ is resists definition” (14) – and adopts a very encompassing definition of political culture, described as “the underlying layer of politics” (11), and involving “the political system, with the constitution at its heart” (14), “civil society” (14), and “the general attitude of the population” (14). Since it is difficult to imagine anything that is not captured under this definition, the precise focus of the investigation is unclear and some of the book's claims are confusing (for example, comments like “this intense change in society would have important consequences for the political culture” [232] are difficult to understand because

in De Rooy's understanding 'society' itself is part of the 'political culture' in the first place).

Relatedly, the book does not explain the methods on which the analysis depends. The author seems to invoke laws, political declarations, religious texts, campaign speeches, memos from politicians and political advisors, societal descriptions, testimonials from citizens, and even key contributions to political philosophy from non-Dutch authors to describe Dutch political culture. But the reader is not given much information why this specific evidence is invoked. It is therefore difficult to assess whether they truly convey the 'political culture' of the time, or rather present a minority view. Similarly, the book does not offer a clear justification for focusing on the specific events around which the analysis has been centred. The reader is left wondering why events such as the Great Pacification of 1917, Troelstra's mistake, or the German occupation, that many introductory textbooks to Dutch politics identify as crucial to Dutch political history, are mentioned only in passing.

Some of these issues are also reflected in the argumentation. As summarized at the beginning of this review, my understanding is that De Rooy sees the history of modern Dutch political culture as one that exhibits relatively little change most of the time but is punctuated by four turning points ushering in distinct stages (this seems to be communicated most clearly on p. 9 and pp. 290-293). At the same time, every one of the eight main chapters seems pitched as describing an important change. For example, Chapter 2 seems to be part of the same 'phase' that Chapter 1 documents but is called "A new society is being created here" and includes the transition from republic to monarchy and the secession of Flanders. Chapters 5 and 6 apparently describe the same phase as Chapter 4 but document important changes to the political culture such as the spread of socialism and feminism, and the process of pillarization, which may have been an outgrowth of party formation but surely denotes a very different type of political order. Similarly, while the link that De Rooy draws between the process of depillarization in Chapter 7 and the advent of populism in Chapter 8 is plausible, it seems a bit of a stretch to describe these as representative of a fundamentally unchanged political culture. In other words, it is not entirely clear whether the book identifies four or eight (or any other number of) stages in the history of Dutch political culture.

Something similar can be said about the central argument of the book. The introduction presents the key contribution as objecting to the view of "political scientists [who presented] the past of the Netherlands ... with too great an emphasis on continuity and too little focus on the far-reaching changes that occurred ... in the structure and conduct of politics" (8-9). Similarly, the summary on the back insists that the book's key message is that the common description of

Dutch political culture as revolving around a *poldermodel* and ‘consociational democracy’ is a “myth” and that history included “revolution..., shocks, and convulsions, rife with rivalries.” At the same time, the book at times points at precisely the type of continuity and Dutch exceptionalism that it apparently argues against. This is most clearly the case in the last two pages. Here, De Rooy first emphasizes that Dutch political culture is different (and indeed, more compromise-oriented) because “the Netherlands was a small country... [which] made it possible to maintain a democratic regime [but implied] military weakness... This weakness meant that it was very important to remain united, [which] resulted in a high level of social pressure on the political debate; an almost principled preference for moderation, if not mediocrity” (296). And the book’s very last sentence emphasizes “those things that, despite all of the changes, have remained constant in Dutch political culture over the last two centuries: a generally pragmatic mode of interaction, the weightlessness of the past, and the awareness ... of being but a ‘tiny spot on the earth’” (297).

In the end, however, these quibbles should not detract from the praise the book so deservedly has received. It offers a compelling and original account of modern Dutch political history that is bound to engage all interested readers and inform many future analyses.

### **About the reviewer**

Edward Koning is associate professor of political science at the University of Guelph (Ontario, Canada). He received his master’s degree in political science at Leiden Universiteit (Netherlands) and his PhD at Queen’s University (Kingston, Ontario, Canada). Most of his research investigates the politics of immigration, specifically in Northwest Europe and North America. He is the author of *Immigration and the politics of welfare exclusion* (University of Toronto Press, 2019), and has published in leading academic journals (including *Comparative European Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, and *Journal of Public Policy*) on a variety of related issues, including anti-immigrant politics, institutionalist theory, public opinion on immigration, and citizenship policy.



**Review**  
**Gert Oostindie and Alex van Stipriaan (eds):**  
***Antilliaans erfgoed***  
[Vol. 1. Toen en nu; Vol. 2. Nu en verder.]  
Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2021. 282 p.  
ISBN 978908728355<sup>1+2</sup>

*Reviewed by Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger*



This two-volume set on Antillean heritage, edited by two well-known Dutch historians, Gert Oostindie (Leiden University) and Alex van Stipriaan (Erasmus University Rotterdam), intends to give a general overview concerning the dynamics of the creation of the cultural heritage of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, the so-called Leeward ABC islands. The volumes present the first outcome of the research project “Travelling Caribbean Heritage” (TCH), begun in 2016 with the financial support of the *Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* or *NWO* (‘Dutch research council’). The editors invited long-standing specialists on Antillean cultural issues, such as Rosemary Allen, Liesbeth Echteld, Wim Rutgers, and Ronnie Severing, all scholars working (or emeriti) at their respective local universities, and several other researchers. They also include texts written by artists and professionals of art and art history based in the Antilles and the Netherlands.

In the first volume, subtitled “Then and now,” nine essays (and an introduction), examine issues from the past up to the present. Overwhelmingly relevant is the topic of slavery, although according to the historian and activist Jeanne Henriquez in Curaçao until around 2000 “it was still extremely sensitive to talk about slavery and its heritage” (II, 48). If we accept this statement, it is understandable that slavery and the cultures of the slave-made (*‘slaaf-gemaakte’*) people are more or less the focus of the book. And, of course, this topic is related to racism, in which discussions on the indigenous, Indian, Lebanese, Haitian, Chinese, and other national and/or ethnic associations mostly remain outside the critical scope of the contributions. One could find slavery on all three islands in colonial times, officially until 1863 – that is for more than 350 years. It was different on each of the islands and culturally most impactful in Curaçao, which was traditionally a centre for (illegal) slave trade with the surrounding Latin American countries.

The second volume also includes nine essays (and an introduction, as well as an epilogue). Most important is the relatively new interest in the Antillean heritage in the museum context, which is discussed in the texts written by Dyonna Bennett, Annemarie de Wildt, Artwell Cain, and Valika Smeulders. The Maritime Museum, the Curaçaoan Museum, the Jewish Cultural Historical Museum, the Museo Kura Olanda, the Tula Museo, the Museo pas di Pal’i Maishi, and the Museo di Tambú Shon Cola are in Curaçao.<sup>1</sup> And the diversity of their topics regarding the museum world in Aruba draws attention: Museo Histórico Arubano, Community Museum, Industriemuseum, National Archeological Museu, and Arikok National

---

<sup>1</sup> Tula was the name of the leader of the slave revolt in 1795 and Shon Cola (Nikolaas Obispu Susana, 1016-2003) was the name of the most important *tambú*-singer ever known. The latter is an unofficial musical genre which expressed sharp critical commentary regarding society in Papiamentu in the past, while after the Second World War a revival of *tambú* took place.



Park (AMA). The volume also contains an essay on the Antillean heritage in the museum in the Netherlands, where this focus has only been introduced in the last decade.

At least as relevant is the essay “Nation building and nation branding, 1920-2000” on Papiamentu, the everyday language of the Antillean islands (135-161). Officially a Creole language and spoken by the local citizens, it developed from a negatively valued dialect into one of the three official languages (Dutch and English being the other two) in Curaçao. This essay echoes the overall tone in the two volumes, that is, to avoid too many controversial issues. Especially concerning Papiamentu this is really a void when looking at the educational system. The efforts of making this language socially acceptable have been immense. For instance, the Kolegio Erasmo Skol di Fundeshi, founded in 1987, and counting now more than three hundred pupils, however, is not even mentioned. This college has expanded from being merely a primary school to offering education at the secondary school level, that is to say, vocational education (since 1997) and a pre-university curriculum (since 2018). The school offers bilingual education (Papiamentu and English) with Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams. The three schools, each at a different location, also teach Dutch, Spanish and English as a subject matter and at the pre-university level offers a choice between French and Mandarin. Although today Papiamentu is taught at the primary and secondary level at most of the schools on the island, the Kolegio Erasmo has pioneered the way and continues to do so under much more difficult financial conditions than the public schools, making this a unique case in the Caribbean in general.

That the editors and collaborators repeatedly use the concept *postcolonial* might suggest that they elucidate the conflicts that come along with that process. The ABC islands did not experience a significant independence movement; solely Aruba managed to obtain a *status aparte* (‘special status’) and this already by 1986. Luc Alofs is the only one to touch upon some of these efforts in his essay on the UNESCO link with the strategies on cultural heritage in the Antilles. He connects these with the necessity to educate the Antillean schoolchildren by way of offering relevant projects, outlining some models.

Placed between the different contributions, the editors included a repeated section of “Eleven voices,” commenting on “Cultural sources, slavery and identity,” “Migration and identity,” “Festivals and stories,” “Relations,” “Different sorts and measures of cultural heritage,” “Ethnicity and gender,” “Language,” “Spirituality and rituals,” and the “Nation.” These voices emerge as personal underpinnings of the topics and also contain some controversial issues, besides mentioning specific information.

Notwithstanding these voices, they do little to change the impression of the general tendency to not quite fully engage with important issues in these volumes. Their overall perspective is a Dutch one, as the editors admit in the introduction. In their opinion, the pandemic has had a huge impact on the economic situation of the islands, because tourism – their most important source of income – imploded, making these countries even more dependent on the Netherlands than before.

In that way, these well-written and illustrated editions give a useful and proper overview of certain aspects of the creation of the cultural heritage, with the editors summarizing as a general conclusion that it might be deployed for nation building and nation branding without losing itself as part of a commercial process of folklorization. But they also mention that this aim meets considerable obstacles: a lack of means, vision and support from the official island institutions and an absence of a cultural awareness in the younger generation. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, the priority is to develop a broader story of the culture and history of the Transatlantic Kingdom (II, 2). Therefore, we can hardly wait for the results of the second stage in the TCH project which, as the editors announce, will focus on Caribbean relations of the Antillean heritage. They might include research published in English and Spanish, and not only in Dutch (or in Papiamentu, which is rare), and emphasize the Antillean version of Caribbean conflictive issues, so typical for the cultural history of this region, not only in the past but also today (for instance the relationship with the European Union) in a global perspective. Perhaps they could be published in English, a widely used language at the university level in the Antilles as well as in the Netherlands, so that scholars can get a glimpse of the fact that having a postcolonial approach grounds in the effort of decolonization of the cultural strategies and the mind, not only in the Antilles but equally in the Netherlands.

### **About the reviewer**

Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger is an independent scholar affiliated with the Justus-Liebig-University of Giessen (Germany), specializing in cultural histories of Africa (Spanish and Portuguese), Latin America, and the Caribbean. She has been a university lecturer in Europe (the Netherlands and Germany), the United States (University of Maryland, College Park) and Latin America (Chile, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Costa Rica). She translated into German and introduced two poetry volumes of Nancy Morejón: *Ruhmreiche Landschaft* (2020) and *Wilde Kohlen* (2021) and edited and translated the anthology *Augen* (2020). Recent book publications include *Modern slavery and water spirituality: A critical debate in Africa and Latin America* (Peter Lang, 2017); “Asia en América Latina,” a special issue of *la Revista crítica de*

*literatura Latinoamericana*, co-edited with Kim Beauchesne and Koichi Hagimoto (Tufts University/Centro de Estudios Literarios Antonio Cornejo Polar, July 2018); *Caribbean worlds-Mundos Caribeños-Mondes Caribéens*, co-edited with Gabriele Knauer (Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2020); *Geografías caleidoscópicas. América Latina y sus imaginarios intercontinentales*, co-edited with Koichi Hagimoto (Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2022). Recent chapter and journal articles include “‘Holland’ in the Caribbean: Voids between the Spanish-speaking world and the Lower Countries” in *New perspectives on Hispanic Caribbean Studies*, edited by Magdalena López and María Teresa Vera-Rojas (Springer, 2020); “Papiamentu-strategies and Négritude in Curaçao: The lives and work of Cola Debrot and Frank Martinus Arion” (2021) in *PerspectivasAfro*.



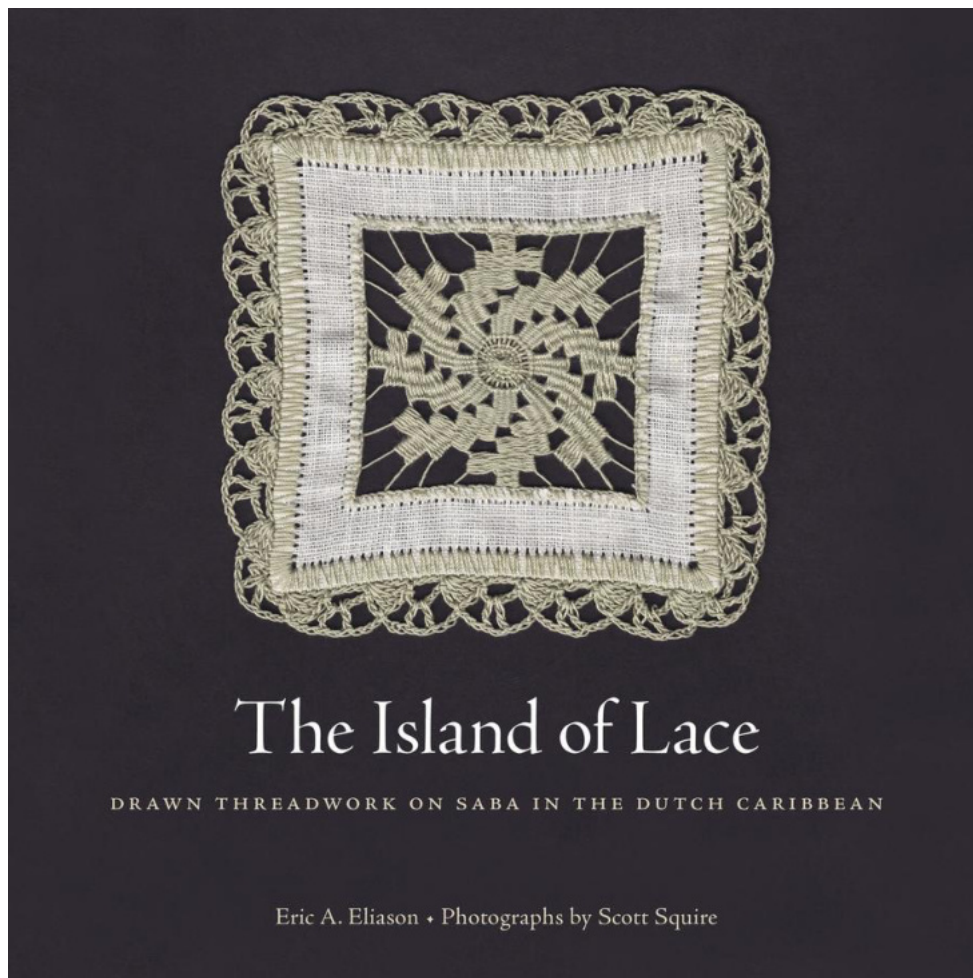
**Review**

**Eric A. Eliason:**

***The island of lace: Drawn threadwork on Saba  
in the Dutch Caribbean***

Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2019. 196 p.  
ISBN 978908728355

*Reviewed by Ryan Espersen*



Deftly combining the anthropology of Saba lace with the meticulous care of an art historian, *The island of lace: Drawn threadwork on Saba in the Dutch Caribbean* fills a critical gap in Saba's cultural history that has never been the subject of a thorough study. Saba, a small, steep volcanic island of just 13 square kilometres, was settled by the Dutch in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century but never developed into a plantation economy or a trade centre like its neighbouring islands. Rather, most residents, along with enslaved Africans, subsisted through agriculture and fishing. While originally conceived as a follow-up to the author's first work, *The fruit of her hands: Saba lace history and patterns*, the book combines thorough research of the origins, economic development, and cultural relevance of Saba lace through time, together with an exhaustive index of new and surviving patterns. Nearly three hundred figures are included, with notable emphasis on Saba lace practitioners both past and present. Eliason's work is divided into three sections.

The first, and most novel, discusses the origins of Saba lace, and the local economic conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that incentivized Saba women to profit from lace production as Saba became known as the island of women from the number of men working abroad. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Saba women exported lace to their own zealously guarded clients in the U.S.A. to account for thirty to forty percent of Saba's annual GDP. Literate women found great leverage in this enterprise, allowing them to find new American clients while keeping their addresses a closely guarded secret. Those that were illiterate, consequently, found themselves working for literate client-address holders to create a new working class on Saba exclusive to women. The 1930s saw attrition of their American client base from the Depression and following further disruption to global trade during World War II, Saba lace production was no longer a viable industry on the island. Lace production gradually shifted to a hobby, and its practice declined steadily until a small revival by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of the tourism industry. Saba lace is now publicly promoted by a small cadre of women on the island known as the *lace ladies*.

The second section is a thorough photographic database of known Saba lace patterns organized by corners, borders, pattern stitches, fillet work, and some miscellany. All patterns are described according to their common name, and in many cases, their evolution is traced according to individual practitioners through time.

The third section discusses the cultural continuity of Saba lace, and profiles present-day Saba lace practitioners, including oral histories of their families and their identity relative to the craft. This work is an important contribution towards preserving and promoting Saba's intangible cultural heritage (ICH), as well as the extent of unique ICH practices across the Caribbean Netherlands. *The island of lace* is particularly timely as Saba lace was recently selected as one of the island's

three elements submitted for inscription into the Dutch National UNESCO ICH register. For a second printing, a list of figures is desirable, along with a revision of the bibliography as some references are incorrect. This book will be of great interest to Caribbean art historians, anthropologists, and tourists to Saba alike.

### **About the reviewer**

Ryan Espersen's work has focused on the historical and pre-Columbian archaeology of the Dutch Caribbean and the northeastern Caribbean over the past fifteen years. His research focuses particularly upon power structures, ideology, powered landscapes, and how these relate to the material record. He received his PhD from Leiden University (Netherlands) in 2017, lived on the island of Saba in the Dutch Caribbean from 2011 to 2018, and founded the Saba Archaeological Center (known as SABARC) in 2012 as a youth-centered NGO to help Sabans participate in the discovery of their own history through archaeology. Over the years as Saba's resident archaeologist, he grew SABARC into a museum with a fully furnished archaeology lab and artifact storage facility. He led surveys and excavations on over fifty terrestrial and maritime archaeological sites between Saba and St. Eustatius, and along with the Saba Conservation Foundation and the Island Government of Saba, led the establishment of the Saba Heritage Trail and the Saba National Park, both of which were opened by the Dutch Royal family. He also served as Saba's representative to the Dutch Caribbean UNESCO working group, is a member of the Dutch Caribbean maritime heritage working group with the Dutch Ministry of Culture, and the French Caribbean maritime history working group with the Université des Antilles in Martinique. Since February 2022 he is a Marie Curie fellow with the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research at the University of Cambridge, and lead researcher for the multidisciplinary project "No dollar too dark: Piracy, privateering, and illegal slave trading in the northeast Caribbean, early 19th century." His research has been published in *Antiquity*, *Historical Archaeology*, the *Journal of Archaeological Science*, and the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*.





**Review**

**Marcel Weltak:**

***Surinamese music in the Netherlands and Suriname***

Scott Rollins (trans)

Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2021. 222 p.  
ISBN 9781496816948 (hc) / ISBN 9781496834881 (pb)

*Reviewed by Corinna Campbell*



In the foreword to the original Dutch publication of Marcel Weltak's *Surinamese music in the Netherlands and Suriname*, the late Dr. Lou Lichtveld speculates that the book was an outgrowth of the Dutch sentiment, *wachtensmoede*—tired of waiting. Lichtveld mourns how, “year after year so many (ear- and) eyewitnesses disappear from the stages and society, whose observations and memories remain unchronicled and the results of their professional experience lost forever” (xxxv). No doubt his dismay finds resonance among many fans of Surinamese music, who participate in a vast and vibrant music scene that has largely eluded scholarly recognition and critical study. Lichtveld concludes the foreword by suggesting that *wachtensmoede* may also serve as both a rationale and apology for the book's “sometimes fragmentary or incomplete contents”—better, in his estimation, to move forward and provide a record upon which others can build than to withhold what one has to share for its omissions or shortcomings. *Surinamese music in the Netherlands and Suriname*—an English translation of the earlier volume, now available via University of Mississippi Press (2021)—calls attention both to the necessity of filling such lacunae in the public record, and the challenges in doing so.

Journalist Marcel Weltak and his fellow chapter contributors undertook a daunting task in this slim volume: to provide an overview of Surinamese music as a whole—across genres and including contributions from the Amerindian, Creole, Maroon, Hindustani, and Javanese populations that form the basis of the national cultural narrative—from the colonial era to the present day, both in Suriname and among Surinamers in the Netherlands. It would be unrealistic to expect comprehensiveness. The book provides musicians and fans with ample opportunities to correct, debate, and to point out omissions. Nonetheless, it offers a welcome chance to take a broader view of Surinamers' musical engagements. Taken as a whole, the book effectively demonstrates a stunning variety of musical activity that can in some way be considered ‘Surinamese’, and gestures to musical circulations and interconnections that make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Given such a diverse musical landscape, even the most ardent audiophile is bound to be more familiar with some of these musical roots and branches than others; there is much to gain from reflecting on the composite, and few available resources to aid in the task.

This is a re-issue of the initial 1990 publication, translated into English by Scott Rollins, with additional introductory content and expanded appendices and back matter. Those familiar with the original Dutch edition will find that the body of the book is not significantly revised or expanded, save for a short chapter on Surinamese classical music. The book is divided into two main parts, labeled Origins and Development, respectively. Each of these is parsed into bite-sized chapters lasting in general only a few pages, covering prominent styles or

individuals from across the musical landscape. Weltak is the book's primary author; chapter contributions are provided by Ponda O'Bryan, Dr. J. Ketwartu, Herman Dijo, and Guilly Koster—all active participants in the musical scenes on which they write. It bears reiterating that the body of the book retains its original historical vantage point— within Parts I and II, accounts of the 'present-day' date to 1990, with no citations or annotations added.

Translator Scott Rollins reports, "Weltak stated that the publisher's brief [to the original, 1990 publication] was to produce a book with a more popular "coffee table" feel to it, devoid of excessive footnotes and bibliography" (viii). The back matter to the 2021 edition (consisting of five appendices, two glossaries, and an extended bibliography) are clearly intended as a counterweight. Whereas the lack of explanation and citation in the text restricts one's ability to treat Weltak's book as an authoritative source, the additions to the back matter give the motivated reader ample leads to explore on their own. The bibliography constitutes a sizeable offering of scholarship pertaining to Surinamese music. It is easy to imagine what complications may have dissuaded University of Mississippi Press from releasing the cassette that accompanied the 1990 publication as a playlist or audio supplement, but the audio/visual and discographical resources are ample and wide ranging. I was glad to see some deeply influential but also controversial musicians included in the discography, even if they didn't make it into the book's text. Among them are John Touwslager (Papa Touwtjie), whose distinctive blend of dancehall and rap put its own Surinamese spin on themes of gangster identity and political corruption in the wake of the Interior War (1986-92), and the *kaseko/kaskawi* band Aptijt, whose album "Boeke" (2005) has ignited lively debate about sexual empowerment and respectability politics. Adding some annotations to explain how these and other artists relate to Surinamese music as a whole would enhance the discography, making it a richer and more user-friendly resource.

Given that the book's format leaves space enough for only a snapshot of each selected topic, invested readers can anticipate experiencing some frustration about the curatorial decisions made in the text. For me, Weltak's discussion of The Suriname Conservatory and his brief mention of the Maroon popular genre, *aleke*, illustrate the point. Roughly one page is devoted to the recently founded Suriname Conservatory, with nearly half of that space taken up with discussion of the challenges of its operation owing to its small size, and their need to supplement their in-person instruction with virtual lessons with musicians abroad. Hardly any attention is paid to the fact that there now exists a music institution that includes Surinamese musical traditions as a fundamental part of its core curriculum, or discussion of how they approach such a task. Especially considering the topic of the book, this seems like a missed opportunity.

Whereas the conservatory example can be attributed to our different narrative preferences, Weltak's statements about *aleke* are brief to the point of being misleading. Widely attributed to the Ndyuka Maroons, the popular music style *aleke* is the result of musical collaborations between Maroon and (predominantly) Creole laborers, particularly in the Cottica region of Suriname. It is a stylistic synthesis of many forms, including *loonseï*, *kawina*, and *maselo*, and has been a mainstay of the Maroon popular music scene since the late 1950s and early 1960s. No musical description or discussion of *aleke*'s founding is included in this book, except for its listing in the glossary of musical styles as: "Rootsy, drum-based music created by and for young Ndyuka maroons, descendants of runaway slaves living in the interior who moved to the coastal towns" (147). Its only mention in the body of the text occurs under the subheading, "Developments in Suriname since 1990," where Weltak alludes to innovations to the genre—undertaken by the Maroon cultural organization, Kifoko, as well as other (unnamed) musicians, the latter having "modernized *aleke*, mixing it with other genres. The most important new element in *aleke* turned out to be *kawina*, after all" (xx). No further explanation is given. These oversimplifications impede one's understanding of *aleke*'s many influences, musical features, and place in a musical chronology. This despite the substantive research on the genre by Kenneth Bilby, Andre Pakosie, and Andre Mosis, among others.

These two critiques are both drawn from Weltak's "Introduction to the new volume," but the underlying issues relating to structure and citation run throughout the book. Of course, all writing is a selective endeavour, but when space on the page comes at such a premium and existing resources are so scarce, each omission or choice in wording cannot but loom large. While this creates circumstances ripe for censure, critics (myself included) will do well to remember that extensive critique can do as much to starve a much-needed discussion as encourage it. It is far better to add one's own contributions to the conversation than to cut it short.

And indeed, this book has a lot to offer. For all the names I would have liked to see but didn't, there were many that I was unaware of but am glad to know. Interspersed with the expected historical information, definitions, and instrument classifications in the "Origins" portion of the book are some refreshing details. Herman Dijo's discussion of how Javanese indentured workers created their own gamelan made of iron will be of broad interest, as will be the influence of Trinidadian steel pan music on Surinamese gamelan playing. Weltak's writings on church music, choirs, and *bazuinkoor* ('choir of trumpets') is particularly rich in detail, addressing specific hymnals that were used and regional preferences regarding the language and musical setting of worship. Where they arise, such details are hidden gems, subtle enough that they are likely to escape musical

grand narratives, but potentially hugely beneficial for a musicologist or historian who is willing to jump down those rabbit holes.

Weltak's passion for Surinamese jazz shines through in the latter half of the book; interspersed with his own commentary are numerous quotes from archival sources and musicians who were active in this scene. Again, I was most taken with the details—how saxophonist Kid Dynamite's distinctive tone was produced on a nearly unplayable mouthpiece, for instance, or Eddy Veldman's method of transposing kaseko rhythms onto the drum set. Weltak's comments about past demands and racialized preconceptions within the Dutch music industry and their effect on Surinamese musicians offer considerable food for thought.

The last few years have seen a number of projects aimed at filling in the gaps in Suriname's musical history by highlighting various Surinamese cultural icons. The NAKS Afro-Surinamese cultural organization sponsors an annual exhibit of Surinamese icons; Weltak, Koster, and Robin Austin co-authored a book and CD set (In de Knipscheer and IKO Foundation, 2016) devoted to Suriname's musical torchbearers; Diedrik Samwel's publication *Sranan Gowtu: Iconen uit de Surinaamse muziek* (Nigh & Van Ditmar and Top Notch, 2015) is comprised of substantive biographical essays on musical icons including many discussed in this book. These, too, are helping to create a public record through which Suriname's musical history can emerge and gain focus. For all the advantages of a biographical format, *Surinamese music in the Netherlands and Suriname* remains an important counterbalance, through which musical scenes can be remembered as complex and deeply interconnected spaces that involve fans, critics, and industry personnel alongside musicians—full of supporting players as well as shining stars.

### **About the reviewer**

Corinna Campbell is associate professor of music at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts (US). She is the author of *The cultural work: Maroon performance in Paramaribo, Suriname* (Wesleyan University Press, 2020), and winner of the Society for Ethnomusicology's Joann Kealiinohomoku Award for dance research for her essay "Modeling cultural adaptability: Maroon cosmopolitanism and the Banamba contest" in *Maroon cosmopolitics: Personhood, creativity, and incorporation*, edited by Olivia Da Cunha (Brill, 2018). Her research among the Suriname Maroons has addressed topics including music-dance interconnections, national and nationalist performance, and popular (re)presentations of 'traditional' genres, for instance in folkloric and competition settings.



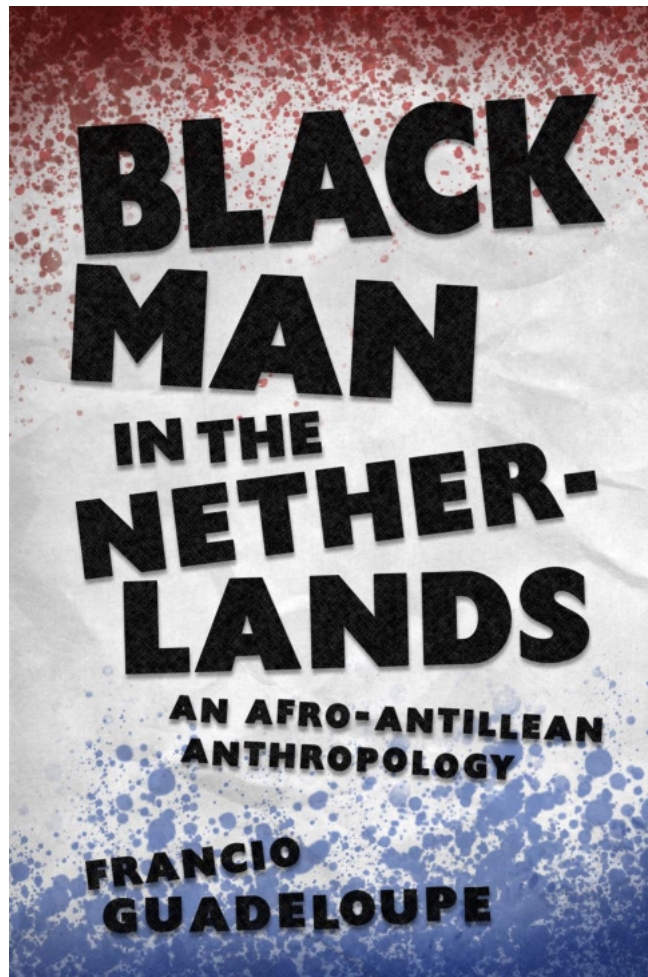
**Review**

**Francio Guadeloupe:**

***Black man in the Netherlands: An Afro-Antillean anthropology***

Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2022. 226 p.  
ISBN 9781496837004 (hc) / ISBN 9781496837011 (pb)

*Reviewed by Jason N. Vasser-Elong*



Growing up in a Western society has been difficult for me. As a child, I could not put a finger on what it was that bothered me, but I knew that it was how others treated me that contributed to continued discomfort and feelings of isolation. I would not learn that what I was experiencing was racism until I became a young adult, initially unaware that what I experienced was as much an individual pain as it was a collective one. In Francio Guadeloupe's work *Black man in the Netherlands: An Afro-Antillean anthropology*, there is a parallel experience that exists, that unless I traveled to the Netherlands to experience it for myself, would be lost to me.

In the opening sentence of the preface of his book, Guadeloupe suggests imagining for a moment writing from a different place in the world, tapping into a point of view shared with other people of color: "If I had been born and currently lived in a country that needed academic odes to remind its complacent inhabitants of the racial oppression of people who look like me, this essay would have been a Negro spiritual" (xiii). Thus, aligning himself to African Americans, to me. He goes on to reference "Jim Crow, the new Jim Crow, and post 1960's forms of White Supremacy, this essay would have been a blues" (xiii).

While exploring Guadeloupe's world, I could not help but notice my own. I too grappled with the question of who I was in the context of where I was born. I too found wisdom in the lyrics of KRS One, but never thought that hip-hop, as big as it was, reached the listening ears of our brothers and sisters across the world. I found striking similarities to how Guadeloupe's friends showed love to one another. I recognized it immediately. "The practice of artistically code switching, as we imitated urban pop icons' way of dressing and carrying themselves while we also played 'the dozens' with our ethnic inheritance, is the wider point of connection between the clip I am watching, the wisdom of my grandmother, and my teenage years" (15-16). Code switching is a way of life for many (dare I say all) minority groups, especially those of African descent. We find ourselves, like Francio Guadeloupe, walking the line, trying to appease our masters.

The sad reality is that, like him, I too live and survive in a hostile world, most people of color do. And when he remarks on the multicultural nature of the Netherlands, I envision the same melting pot of the United States that is always ready to serve its citizens with rhetoric in place of action. Sure, there have been gains in race relations, but the legacy of colonialism and slavery are ever-present. The evergreens in the forest of possibility.

Guadeloupe anchors his theoretical framework with the words of W.E.B. DuBois: "To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word" (Du Bois [1903] 2007,1). In this, DuBois has opened up about the line he walks as those around him, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, try and ease the



obvious tension in the room (albeit because of him) and even though he did nothing to cause the tension, nothing other than be there.

Guadeloupe goes on to compare the ideologies of W.E.B. DuBois with C.L.R. James and his experience living in a Europe, which is still decolonizing. America is a young country and, in many ways, stands in the shadow of England as both grapple with their colonial pasts. But scholars like Guadeloupe, DuBois, James, and others, were people of color first. The choice to tackle racism is one that I would argue none of these scholars wanted to make, but better to have the oppressed to speak for themselves than someone speaking for them. Their works live on as testimonies to how one analyzes marginalization.

To quell the feeling of isolation, Guadeloupe is in conversation with DuBois, James, Fanon, and others, and there is power in those conversations. Guadeloupe articulates how easy it can be for racists to dismantle self-efficacy, as he quotes Fanon, who expresses vividly how it feels to be dehumanized: “My body given back to me sprawled out, distorted...clad in mourning” (Fanon 1967,112, cited in Guadeloupe 2022, xxi).

One of my obsessions while living as a Black man in a post-colonial context is the notion of home. On this, Guadeloupe's opinion of home is both refreshing and challenging. For Guadeloupe, the Netherlands is home. And his rebuttal is complex when he says “I startle them when I push back that Netherlands is my home, for it is a Dutch Caribbean Island...And even if they think of the Netherlands as European, they must reckon with the fact that “Europe is no longer white and never will be again...All of us are faced with a stark choice: we can rail against European evolution, or we can help to smooth its process” (xxix). I have yet to iron those wrinkles out for myself but have at least considered thinking differently about where home is and where it can and should be. One of the challenges that comes along with this concept is the idea of dual consciences.

Guadeloupe interprets W.E.B. DuBois' idea of a dual consciences as a more creole experience, leaning more towards James's view when Guadeloupe states in the introduction: “I tell my academic peers that I am beginning to realize that this way of claiming the kingdom and the wider North Atlantic is one of the under acknowledged visions that luminaries like the political theorist C.L.R. James hinted at, when he provocatively called himself a black European” (xxvii).

He understands that DuBois was trying to make sense of the liminal ways in which members of the African Diaspora have often struggled with identity and feels that his theory of a duo consciousness needs to be revised or at revisited in a modern context. He frames *Blackness* and *Whiteness* conceptually around access and influence. Guadeloupe contends: “To repeat, in my Marxist way of thinking, Black and White are concepts I employ to hierarchically categorize a person's station in the capitalist order. Skin complexion is of little relevance here.

I categorize wealthy blacks like Jay-Z or Oprah Winfrey as White, while pink-skinned Poles who migrate to the Netherlands to work for next to nothing are best described as Black" (xxxii). While I do not agree with the logic, from a Marxist or capitalist point of view it makes perfect sense. Be that as it may, neither Jay-Z nor Winfrey were born billionaires. In fact, based on what I know of Jay-Z from his music and commentary, he was born in the projects and sold drugs. For her part, Winfrey was raised on the South Side of Chicago, in an impoverished area reserved for black people and other minorities. I would not go so far as to categorize them as white, even though they are billionaires, for the simple reason that I am sure their contemporaries never let them forget that they are Black.

Also interesting to me is the alignment with how the notion of Tarzan has made a mockery of our *nativeness*. I love how Guadeloupe addresses that: "What got to me was being implicitly likened to Tarzan by locating me in de tropen, a Dutch translation for the tropics, which carries with it exotic racialism" (40). In many cases, Western civilization validates the idea of a Tarzan while invalidating our Africanness. It reminds me of a poem I wrote in which I share Guadeloupe's disdain for that mockery:

#### King of the Jungle

I don't know what to make of Tarzan,  
as I type it – its underlined red to capitalize his name,  
but Elong is nowhere in the dictionary.

I don't know what to make of Tarzan,  
swinging from vine to vine, beating his chest  
and I surmise for the same reason  
I am glad to have never been a Rhodes Scholar,  
as prestigious as it may seem –

I take the A train back and forth to Aethiopia,  
back and forth through Ithaca,  
back and forth to the Nile valley and Kemet  
and the mastabas in the courtyard.

I don't know what to make of Tarzan,  
who would suspect that there is danger  
in a screaming white man in the trees?  
and the world accepts this motif,  
accepts his apeish manner  
of knuckling the ground when he walks  
but I am the monkey, the signifying monkey

Jack Johnson, the first heavyweight champ of color  
 The Big Smoke who was made to be a giant Gorilla  
 Black Animal in the heart of New York City,  
 A King Kong or Homo giganthropithicus  
 somewhere getting studied  
 in Tuskegee.

I don't know what to make of Tarzan  
 I don't buy the brand of the English  
 wearing the mask of the African  
 that can be removed  
 and then that same mask,  
 my face,

is the subject of internet bravado and minstrel  
 and that I can only be black and American  
 and hip hop and jazz and pop  
 and dancing around all cool like  
 and smooth and hip and eating chicken and drinking Hen  
 and the moment I confess that I am African –  
 there is an explanation as to why I am not

I am put back in the box, back in the chicken yard  
 back in the plastic – how does one reconcile  
 how does one wrestle with being wild  
 how does one cope with value bestowed  
 like I am some actor in a play portraying the role of the primitive  
 while there is some white man in the jungle  
 or some white woman playing Cleopatra;  
 when will it be ok for me to swing from trees  
 to beat my chest and not get shot.  
 (Vasser-Elong 2018, 111)

Whether it's about a billionaire or a person living in the projects, Western society maintains a hierarchy that places people of color at the bottom, leaving little room to view those of us who do make it out of poverty as anomalies, and that is a shame, especially considering that the Western world's economy was built on the backs of enslaved Africans. Moreover, beyond the division of class, what spoke the loudest to me from Guadeloupe's beautiful work was that our experiences growing up, trying to survive the European spaces in which we lived, were hauntingly similar; almost mirror images of one another. The lesson underneath the scholarship was that we are not alone, not any one of us. The experience of marginalization is not unique to the Netherlands any more than it is

unique to the United States, and those who find themselves on the margin, walking in the middle, do so in community with others.

This book addresses the notion of race in a visceral, personal way. For me, it is like looking into an orange mirror, undergoing someone else's experience of being Black in a different part of the world. It is unique in its honesty and rawness. Guadeloupe opens the door to his world and invites the reader in, offering personal accounts of lived experience that is also supported by scholarship. This book fits in the centre of the literature on race and decolonization because it is in conversation with scholars like Fanon and DuBois, as well as those of us who may never be considered scholars but have a similar experience all the same.

## References

- DuBois, William Edward Burghardt. 2007. *The souls of Black folk: Essays and sketches*. New York: Oxford University Press. First published 1903 by A.C. McClurg and Company.
- Vasser-Elong, Jason N. 2018. *Shrimp*. New York: 2LeafPress.

## About the reviewer

Jason Vasser-Elong is an assistant teaching professor of English and African American Studies in the Pierre Laclède Honors College at the University of Missouri, St. Louis (US), and a doctoral student in its College of Education. There, he also received a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing and studied cultural anthropology, as well as African Diaspora studies. He is the author of *Shrimp* (2Leaf Press, 2018), a collection of poetry that analyzes identity in a post-colonial context. His articles "Perfect water" (2021) and "Treading the Atlantic" (2016) were published in the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*. For an academic presentation of the latter article at the American Anthropological Association's 2021 annual meeting, he received a General Anthropology Division travel award. He has also contributed articles to *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *The Saint Louis American* newspapers. His poetry has been included in various anthologies and most recently in the *New Square* literary journal and in *SAPIENS*, an online anthropology magazine, for which he serves as a poet-in-residence for the year 2022.

## Review

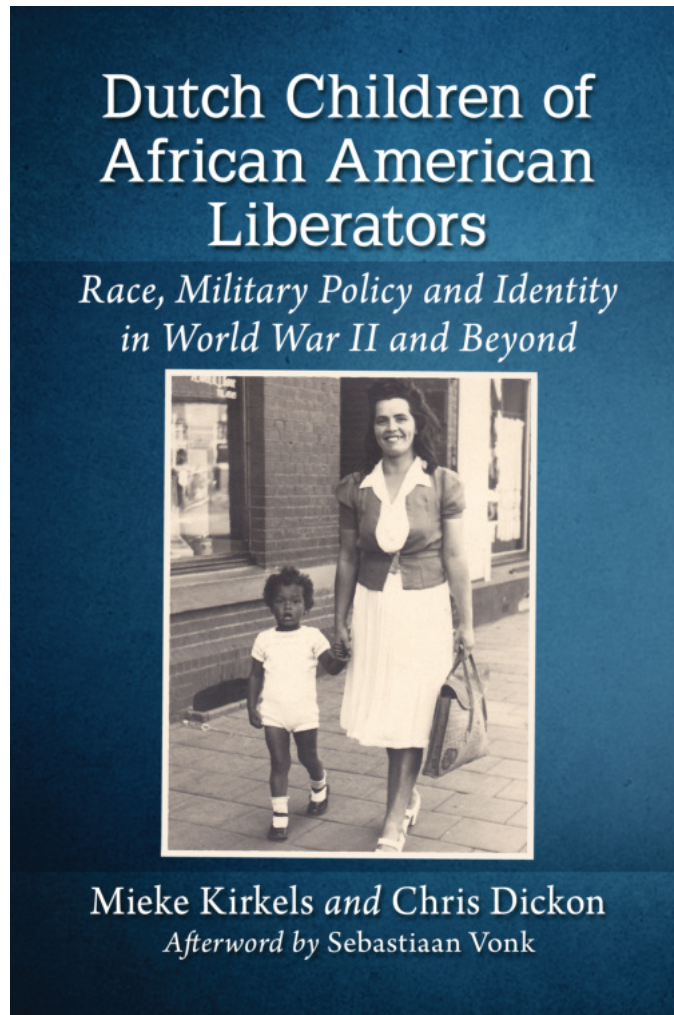
**Mieke Kirkels and Chris Dickon:**

***Dutch children of African American liberators: Race,  
military policy and identity in World War II and beyond***

Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2020. 250 p.

ISBN 9781476676937

*Reviewed by Allison Blakely*



This book is an English version of the book *Kinderen van zwarte bevrijders* ('children of black liberators') by Mieke Kirkels, published in the Netherlands in 2017, and here revised and translated with coauthor Chris Dickon. Although it would be unrealistic to expect any book to cover the full scope of its ambitious subtitle, this work does succeed in highlighting a dimension of the human cost of WWII in the Netherlands that has not received the attention it deserves. Its narrative centers on the lives of 12 out of an estimated 70 bi-racial children born just after the end of WWII in the Dutch province of Limburg, who were the offspring of relationships that developed between African American soldiers and Dutch women in that region during the period when American troops took the lead in freeing the Netherlands from German control there. As signalled by the title, the authors give special attention to the role that racial thought and racism have played in this story.

For the sake of comparison, the authors also look at analogous developments in Germany, England, and Austria by devoting two brief chapters on England and another whose focus is Germany. The number of what the British called "Brown Babies" was estimated to be around 1,700 that about 22,000 British women and American men overall had parented over the course of the war. The source for the respective numbers in Germany is a news report on a conference convened in 1953 to discuss the disposition of some 3,000 black "Occupation Children" in West Germany then entering elementary school, out of around 90,000 with a parent from among the Allied troops that had passed through during the war. The very rough estimate for Austria is that out of the occupation children of American servicemen, around 500 were bi-racial. The chapter on Germany, "Occupational babies," characterizes the German disposition toward the mixed-raced children, including Austria as well, as focused mainly on adoption as a solution – either within Europe or in the United States.

In the Netherlands, the Liberation Children's Association was founded in 1984 by children of white liberation soldiers from the United States, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Canada, for mutual assistance in locating their fathers. They estimated that in the early years of the 21st century there were about 8,000 liberation children in the Netherlands, with over 6,000 of those by Canadians, who had contributed heavily during the war's final stages in Normandy, parts of Belgium and the southern Netherlands. This Association had little luck tracking down the fathers. A summary remark by the authors regarding the fate of the "Brown Babies" of England seems equally apt for those in the other countries treated: "Most would lead lives as outsiders starting in childhood and without the full force of social, religious and government support available to all children and parents in those circumstances" (11). In all the countries some of the descendants

have remained active in trying to find out more about their fathers into the 21st century.

The book's Chapter One, "War babies," starts off a bit slowly due to an unusually detailed elaboration on the local Dutch history and geography, ranging back to 4000 BC. While thoroughly interesting, there and in some later places in the book such digressions may distract some readers from the book's main subject matter. However, Chapter One plus Chapter Two, "Social reality and military policy," a concise commentary on racism against Blacks in American history and the treatment of African Americans in the U.S. military, and Chapter Three, "Liberation and slavery," set the stage for an engaging discourse through the rest of the book on its main motif: a clash between Dutch tradition and pragmatism and American racism against Blacks, including Black American soldiers serving abroad. Through this approach this work provides insights concerning racism from an unusual perspective that is broader than the standard treatment. Describing what life in the Netherlands was like for the bi-racial children who remained, the authors compared it to:

The middle ground journey of *Zwarte Piet* through the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of the Dutch people might describe the adult experiences of the children of the *Zwarte Bevrijders*, the Black American liberators, since coming of age in the 1950s and early 1960s. For many, they were present, but not entirely so. Their identities were confused. Some struggled for most of their lives, and most would look for their fathers, or whatever they could at least learn about their own identities, with varying degrees of success. (155)<sup>1</sup>

Those descendants who have been associated with the American Cemetery established in the village of Margraten in the southeastern corner of the Netherlands have played the central role in this project of identification and commemoration. The third largest in Europe for soldiers who died in WWII, this cemetery holds the remains of by some counts as many as 10,000 buried or memorialized on a wall listing the missing. The burials there first began in late 1944 when 260 Black gravediggers were tasked with burying between 4,000 and 5,000 unidentified soldiers (69). The authors have identified 172 African Americans among them. The liberator descendants treated here have made this site a rallying place, especially on American Memorial Day. Some have written

---

<sup>1</sup> Black Pete ('*Zwarte Piet*') in Dutch folklore is their Santa Claus figure's black servant. See Blakely (2000) regarding its racial history.

books mentioned in this one that represent a form of catharsis for some of the authors.

The special attention the two authors devote to the racial dimensions brings out some facets of the historical developments and notable personalities most readers will find new. Some passages are especially powerful in contrasting the liberation of the Dutch taking place and the glaring display of the lack of freedom of Black American soldiers, such as in the grateful acceptance of the Black liberators by the Dutch in their celebrations, as opposed to the U.S. Army's persistent exclusion of its Black soldiers. To its credit, the Army had published a classified pamphlet titled *The command of Negro troops* in February 1944 that acknowledged inherent challenges in the appropriate assignment of Black troops. For instance, it pointed out that while there were stark disparities in the performance of black troops on the Army General Classification tests given to all inductees over a six-month period in 1943 (aimed at determining which would be technicians, and which physical laborers), there were mitigating circumstances. The Army admitted that the disparity in education alone could support its presumption that the consistently lower scores of black soldiers did not mean they could not be trained and overcome those weaknesses. However, the pamphlet went on to conclude that, while it was not advancing a theory of racial superiority, for practical reasons it insisted on what it considered the practical, positive value of segregation. Some of the bi-racial children pointed out the inferior treatment of the Black troops in housing and job assignments in the immediate aftermath of the German occupation. The black soldiers were assigned as watchmen and kitchen workers; and were sleeping in barns with concrete floors while whites were in houses. And the Dutch also noticed a tension between the Black and white soldiers.

In the officially still fully segregated military forces, Black American soldiers were in general restricted to such non-combat duties as cooks, mechanics, road building, digging ditches, and unloading supplies from docks, trucks, and airplanes. The soldiers who fathered the children in this study were part of a storied truck convoy system popularly known as the Red Ball Express, that provided Allied forces over 400,000 tons of supplies in the late months of 1944 under harrowing road conditions as the Allied forces moved swiftly across Europe in the wake of the D-Day Normandy Invasion. Around 75 percent of the drivers were African American, notwithstanding their portrayal in the popular movie *The Red Ball Express* (1952) that celebrated that heroic war effort. It featured Sidney Poitier as a Black driver, alongside Jeff Chandler as a captain, but gave the impression that most of the drivers were white. This was consistent with the fact that little note has ever been made of some 900,000 African Americans having served in Europe alone during WWII, leaving the impression that it was an almost



exclusively white victory. Some suffered injuries from the pace and long hours of that effort that troubled them for the rest of their lives.

The authors do a good job of giving concrete examples of just how complex and contradictory the War Department's racial policy was. The most colorful figure of all used to illustrate this is General George Patton, who is shown to be a staunch white supremacist, but whom they describe as a "conditional racist" (79) in practice. Because of his fierce determination to win military victories at all costs, he at times employed black soldiers in combat roles, contrary to the Army policy of restricting them to menial duties, and was even willing to giving them emergency field promotions in rank in combat situations where white officer ranks were depleted through casualties to a point where what was most needed was a soldier with demonstrated leadership skills, regardless of colour or the standard rules. This happened to one of the soldiers who fathered one of the bi-racial children featured here. Jefferson Wiggins was a 19-year-old farm boy, just promoted to first sergeant before the Battle of the Bulge when he was given a field promotion by General Patton to first lieutenant against his own will, placing him in command of 960 men without having had any prior leadership experience close to that level of responsibility. War necessities would also result in some 2,000 Black soldiers being reassigned to combat roles toward the end of the war. Several of these are among the 172 buried at Margraten. Patton also took pains to have some Black judges in courts martial trying black soldiers, and was responsible for developing Black tank battalions despite privately expressing the belief that Blacks were not quick minded enough to function on a par with whites.

In Patton's case it was not just Blacks that he considered inherently inferior. The authors quote from one biography that states that in his early career, while serving in the Pancho Villa Mexican expedition, he observed that the Mexican poor peasants should be exterminated because: "they were so far behind they will never catch up they are lower than the Indians. They have absolutely no morals" (79). They also point out, however, that in Harry Truman's correspondence during WWII the words "nigger" and "coon" occur just as in Patton's and those of other white leaders of the time.<sup>2</sup> Truman would, however, evolve into a supporter of integration. Under the circumstances, Patton's views on Jews are particularly ironic and troubling against the backdrop of what would come to be the Holocaust. After an investigation of displaced persons camps Patton had been put in charge of in southern Germany, President Truman

---

<sup>2</sup> The terms "nigger" and "coon" are among several devices white supremacists have historically employed to dehumanize Black people so that the white public could find it easy to embrace their enslavement as property for hundreds of years, followed by their continued mistreatment based on skin color after formal emancipation.

complained in a letter to General Dwight Eisenhower that the liberated Jews were being treated little better than they had been by the Nazis. Having been made aware of this, Patton noted in his diary entry of September 15, 1945, that the criticism appeared to assume “that the Displaced Person is a human being, which he is not, and this applies particularly to the Jews, who are lower than animals” (80).

The well justified condemnation of racism Americans displayed in these events may leave the unfair impression on some readers that the European societies, apart from Nazi Germany, were far less racist than America. This is misleading in many respects. For example, the conclusion the authors draw from a comparison of the practice of slavery in American history and that by the Dutch is highly dubious in asserting:

In Dutch sensibilities, slavery was an economic expedient. It was not *ostensibly* a racial or power subjugation of humans deemed to be inferior or subhuman. Without an apparent basis or racial animus, it would be easier for Blacks and whites to live and work together. The Dutch values of family were proactively transferred to Blacks with this kind of inclusion. (43)

A related recent study by Mosterman (2021), titled *Spaces of enslavement* and focusing on the Netherlands, persuasively refutes this widely held view. With respect to all modern European societies and those they founded in the Americas, it is important to keep in mind that they all draw deeply from the same Western tradition of racial thought. There is ample scholarly evidence that, while modern European societies where class is a more important basis for discrimination than colour eschewed the practice of slavery at home, their treatment of slaves abroad was just as inhumane as that practiced in the United States. Further evidence of the pervasiveness of this shared tradition of racism can be seen in the similarity between France’s treatment of its Black troops in WWII and the example this book describes about the U.S. Army’s behaviour in Margraten. In preparation for the victory march into Paris by French forces, General Charles De Gaulle issued orders ensuring that the soldiers marching in celebration of its liberation were overwhelmingly white French, as opposed to including the French Black colonial troops who in fact were the most prominent in the final surge to defeat the German resistance in the South of France (Echenberg 1990, 98-99).

The authors are also far off the mark in estimating that in 1939 England was nearly 100% white, with only around 8000 blacks that were centered mainly in port cities (113). Even conservative estimates posit a population of roughly that size in London alone in the late 18th century; and some estimate that for England as a whole the figure may have been as high as 30,000 by the end of that century (Dabydeen, Gilmore, & Jones 2007, 272).

The authors do allow that race relations there were not as good as the British media claimed; and they offset the singularly negative image of the United States by mention of Eleanor Roosevelt's courageous example of a prominent, influential American leader who was championing racial equality. This work is well worth reading as a reminder of how long-lasting the human suffering inflicted by war can be and it is an especially timely message in our present era when numerous world societies are experiencing major efforts to ban the reading and teaching of history, and to routinely engage in arbitrary warfare.

### References

- Blakely, Allison. 2020. Attacking *Zwarte Piet*: Dutch folklore and racial history. *Berlin Journal* 34: 15-17. <https://www.americanacademy.de/attacking-zwarte-piet/>
- Dabydeen, David, John Gilmore & Cecily Jones, eds. 2007. *The Oxford companion to Black British history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Echenberg, Myron. 1990. *The Tirailleurs Senegalais in French West Africa 1857-1960*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Mosterman, Andrea C. 2021. *Spaces of enslavement: A history of slavery and resistance in New York*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

### About the reviewer

Allison Blakely is a professor emeritus of European and comparative history at Boston University (US). His doctorate, in Russian history, is from the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of *Blacks in the Dutch world: The evolution of racial imagery in a modern society* (Indiana University Press, 1994); and *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian history and thought* (Howard University Press, 1986), which was a winner of an American Book Award. Among his numerous chapters in edited anthologies is "Blacks in the U.S. diplomatic and consular services, 1869-1924" in *African Americans in U.S. foreign policy: From the era of Frederick Douglass to the age of Obama*, edited by Linda Heywood, Allison Blakely, Charles Stith, and Joshua C. Yesnowitz (University of Illinois Press, 2015). He is a former president of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and serves on the editorial board of its journal *The American Scholar*. He further serves on the National Council for the Humanities, to which he was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2010. In previous government service he was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals for his service as a captain in Army Intelligence in Vietnam in 1967-1968.



**Review**

**Jan Schneider:**

***In de hel van Birma: Ooggetuigenverslag uit de kampen langs de Birma-Siam spoorlijn 1942-1945***

Amsterdam: Balans, 2019. 160 p.

ISBN 978-9463820066 (pb)

*Reviewed by Eveline Buchheim*

JAN SCHNEIDER

**In de hel  
van Birma**

*Ooggetuigenverslag uit de kampen langs  
de Birma-Siam Spoorlijn 1942-1945*

Woord vooraf **GEERT MAK**  
Bezorgd door **HANS D. SCHNEIDER**



The construction of the Burma-Siam Railroad impacted the lives of many people who were forced to build it and it very often also affected their families. The Japanese military needed the railway because transporting their war supplies via the sea route along Singapore had become too dangerous for them. An already existing plan to connect two railroads between Thanbyuzayat in Myanmar and Non Pladuk in Thailand was revived and construction started in May 1942. It was not an easy job. The missing trajectory was 415 kilometers long and a large part went through a virtually uninhabited tropical monsoon forest. The construction of this railroad is known as one of the most reprehensible projects of the Japanese occupiers. Once the railroad was finished, the prisoners continued to work on maintenance and repair, living in the camps along the trail.

Because of the high number of associated deaths, caused by the harsh circumstances, as well as the poor quality and scarcity of the food that contributed to illness, the railroad is also known as the Railway of Death. The more than 60,000 prisoners of war working on the Burma-Siam Railroad originated from the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, and America. Their average death rate is estimated at 20%. A much larger group of men who worked on the railroad were Asian *romusha*, a Japanese word for laborer, but in practice these men were forced laborers. Their number is estimated to have been between 200,000 and 300,000 men, with an average death rate of at least 50%.

Eyewitness reports are among the most insightful documents for getting a sense of what it was like for the men who were forced to work on the railroad. The archive of NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide in Amsterdam contains a collection of more than 300 diaries written by prisoners of war and interned civilians in Japanese camps during the Second World War. A small part of this collection is written by Dutch forced laborers at the Burma-Siam Railroad, while the library at NIOD also holds a collection of their memoirs and books. Together with historical studies, such personal documents provide a vivid idea of how the prisoners suffered. *In de hel van Birma* ('in Burma's hell'), published in 2019, is a welcome addition to the already existing publications.

*In de hel van Birma* is based on a set of documents that Carel Jan Schneider, better known under his writer's name F. Springer, discovered in 1983, a few years after the death of his father Jan Schneider (1905-1981). What turned out to be his father's personal wartime archive was packed in the cover of an instruction book for Greek grammar and vocabulary (in Myanmar Jan managed to study some Greek), neatly tied together with red and white thread. It contained different handwritten and printed texts, letters, pictures, Japanese paper money, and a few other items. Jan Schneider was made prisoner of war in Bandung on the island of Java at a time when he worked in that city as a German teacher at the *Christelijk Lyceum* ('Christian high school'). He was widely known for the textbook *Deutscher*

*Wortschatz* ('German vocabulary'), a volume used in Dutch secondary education for many decades. In 1931, a week after his marriage to Corrie Lücht, the couple moved to the Dutch East Indies. Their three sons were born on Java and Schneider taught at secondary schools in Jakarta (then called Batavia), Malang, and Bandung.

Although their father occasionally told them stories about what he ironically called his 'sleepover at the Japs' ("*logeerpartij bij de Jap*") (10), none of the sons knew of the existence of these papers in which he described his experiences. The central document in the collection describes Jan's experiences in the different camps along the railroad line. Although Jan Schneider kept a diary while he was at the railroad, the Japanese guards confiscated it in May 1944. Undeterred, he started over, once more making notes in the margins of a book, but soon again stopped doing that. He even decided to erase these notes because he considered it too risky if the Japanese guards would discover another piece of his writings. On September 3, 1945, after his release, he shared with his wife what the abandonment of his diary and notes meant to him: 'everything is gone. Those yellow scoundrels didn't grant us anything' ("*Alles weg. Die gele gluiperds gunden ons niets*") (132).

Upon arrival in Bangkok, at the end of August 1945, he immediately started to put to paper his experiences as a prisoner of war. He wanted to replace his diary while his memories were still vivid. Although in a letter to his father he called this text a report, his sons referred to it as diary entries because they thought the writing had the appeal of a diary. Jan Schneider states that he wrote the report for his wife, but throughout the text it becomes clear that he also wrote for himself. His main reason is that he does not want to forget what happened during those years of crisis; he is convinced that his experiences on the railroad will be decisive for his spiritual development even though at the time of writing he realizes that he cannot know the ultimate influence on his life yet. While writing, he was still amazed about what his pal Piet de Jongh habitually called his 'criminal optimism' ("*misdadig optimisme*") (30). This part of the archive covers the period until 28 September 1943; apparently in Bangkok he was not able to finish the report completely. Nevertheless, one of the sons, Hans D. Schneider, managed to give a more or less complete overview of his father's time in the camps along the railroad, essentially completing his father's story with the help of two long letters and a chronological overview of his imprisonment as gleaned from the archive.

The importance of the impact of their father's experiences at the Burma Railroad for the family is maybe best illustrated by the fact that all sons used their father's recollections in their own work: the eldest son, Carel Jan, wrote about it, the middle son, Eric, cited from it in a speech on the occasion of the annual commemoration of the war in the Pacific on August 15 at the Indies Monument in

The Hague in 1988, and the youngest son, Hans Diederik, prepared the manuscript for the publication of this book.

On March 31, 1946, the family was finally reunited in Bangkok. Two-and-a-half months later they traveled back to the Netherlands on board of the MS Ruys. They left behind shattered dreams, while ahead an insecure future awaited them. Jan Schneider considered the trip home catastrophic and insightful at the same time. He called it his last camp and refers to the foolish inspections aboard as ‘just like in Japan’ (“*tout comme chez Nippon*”) (112). The book has only 160 pages, which can seem a quick read, not in the least because Schneider has a clear and evocative writing style. Nevertheless, it offers ample food for thought, remaining with the reader for a long time.

Even though he very much realizes that he cannot describe the exact mood of the moments that he wrote about his wife and sons when he was at the railroad, he vividly recalls how he repeatedly wrote: ‘O God, please let this ordeal end’ (“*Mijn God, wanneer komt er een eind aan deze ellende*”) (31). Because of the strongly contemplative nature of the author, this book is more than just an eyewitness account. Jan shows us the crucial role that his faith had for him in the camp, making the reader feel the strength he drew from religious and intellectual practices and the importance of forming *kongsi* (the connections made with a small group of individuals that helped each other) in the camp. In his book Jan emphasizes how culture and inner refinement can overcome cruelty. At the same time, it becomes clear how even though he managed to suppress the experiences as a prisoner of war, the demons of the past kept haunting him until the end of his life.

### **About the reviewer**

Eveline Buchheim received her doctorate in 2009 from the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), where she studied cultural anthropology. She is a senior researcher at NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam. She has published on women’s contributions to empire, fraternization between the Dutch and the Japanese during the Pacific War and its legacies, heritage tourism, and the mental institutions in the Netherlands under German occupation. Recently, she co-authored (with Satrio Dwicahyo, Fridus Steijlen, and Stephanie Welvaart) *Sporen vol betekenis / Meniti Arti: In gesprek met ‘Getuigen & Tijdgenoten’ over de Indonesische onafhankelijkheidsoorlog / Bertukar Makna bersama ‘Saksi & Rekan Sezaman’ tentang Perang Kemerdekaan Indonesia* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022), which was the result of a project conducted under the auspices of ‘Witnesses & Contemporaries’, and part of the



series on 'Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia 1945–1950'.



## Review

**Mirjam Schwarz and Hans Bouman:  
*'Ik hoop dat alles weer gewoon wordt': Het aangrijpende  
verhaal van een Joods meisje in Winterswijk tijdens de  
Tweede Wereldoorlog***

Amsterdam: Luitingh-Sijthoff, 2020. 304 p.

ISBN 9789024576555

*Reviewed by Katja Happe*



Occasionally it happens that a person finds documents from the time of World War II. Sometimes that individual will dig deeper, looking for answers to questions that inevitably arose. These days, the discovery of documents frequently finds place while sorting through papers in the family home when parents are moving into a retirement home (as happened in this case). At times, the clear-out occurs because elderly people have passed away. Those cleaning and arranging the old belongings may be so gripped by what they have found that they start researching the stories behind the uncovered documents, including interesting-looking letters and pictures. They might want to know more about their ancestors, wishing to share the information with their own family as a kind of legacy. In a few instances the documents reveal that they are not merely dealing with the individual family's history as such but need to be put in a larger context.

Of course, not every family history involving World War II merits publishing a book for a larger public. Who married whom, when were the children born, which jobs were usually chosen, and where did everybody live? These questions might be interesting for family members, but probably not so much for those without such a connection. However, the story told here is worth putting into a book.

To begin, it is an account of a young Jewish woman living in the Dutch town of Winterswijk, which is close to the German border. It is about her struggle to survive the persecution of the Jews by the German occupier in the Netherlands between 1940-1945, as well as about her love for Wolfgang, a Jewish refugee from Germany. There is no happy ending, as both perished in the Holocaust.

One could conclude that the book presents just another narrative of a Jewish Dutch girl in the occupied Netherlands. There are many similar stories, of which the most well-known is of Anne Frank, but there are Klaartje de Zwarte-Walvisch, Etty Hillesum, Ellen Schwarzschild, and Helga Deen as well. All their stories are really worth telling, but so is Thea's story, captured in the book under review. Reading her diary entries enables the reader to grow up with Thea, to read about the internal problems of the family, the conflicts with her sisters and parents, her social life in Winterswijk, her concerns about first love and eventually having a boyfriend, but also about her life in a well-to-do merchant's family, and her obligation to help in the family's shop. The diary gives insight into Thea's feelings. Sometimes the problem she perceives could be regarded as a trifle in our own times. However, her diary entries reveal that these were major problems particular to a young Jewish girl in the middle of the last century. Further, the reader is drawn into a world full of dangers facing Jews during the time of the occupation. Thea expresses her concerns about various hiding places and the experiences she encounters with each successive family, staying briefly with each. She voices her sadness about being apart from the ones she loves, her family, her

friends, and Wolfgang. In her diary she raises questions that can be found in almost every other diary of that time: Was it really necessary to go into hiding? How could one survive with insufficient means? Why did the Jews have to leave their homes and what happened to their belongings? Will there ever be an end to this? And when?

This is only one part of the stories the book discloses. Another important element is that Mirjam Schwarz and Hans Bouman embed Thea's story in what is happening around her on a larger scale. This is riveting information for the reader. The town of Winterswijk with its special setting close to the German border and its history as part of the Dutch textile-industry will be unknown to most readers, revealing a perspective of Dutch Jewish history through the ages along with the rise of antisemitism and national-socialist feelings and politics in a rural town. It emphasizes that anti-Jewish influences and thoughts are not limited to bigger cities like Amsterdam, Den Haag, or Utrecht, but flourished in the 1930s in small rural towns as well. It did not make a difference that the people of Winterswijk had good contacts and often family bonds with those in nearby Germany. From the start, they experienced the rise of the NSDAP and growing exclusion of Jews from the German society and their persecution. The authors identify the public's growing fascination with national-socialist ideas. The reader is led to understand how the people that Thea knew from childhood on became hostile to her family and profited from the new, discriminatory ideas. Dutch police and Dutch administration workers, politicians and economic leaders of the area gradually changed their behaviour towards Jews, even if they personally had known the affected people (in this case Thea's family) for ages. Profiting and leveraging economic success, even at the expense of others, seems to have been worth more than supporting traditional connections and old friendships.

The third crucial section of the book tells the story of a very unusual and ultimately unsuccessful hiding place around Winterswijk. To go into hiding and to disappear completely from the sights of the occupiers and their associates was one of the few options Jews had to avoid deportation to the so-called East where labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps awaited. More than 20,000 Jews in the Netherlands tried to survive the period of occupation in this way. Jews hid in attics and in cellars, they used fake names and documents to pretend not to be Jewish, and parents gave their children to Christian foster parents. There were many such attempts to evade the occupying authorities. Nevertheless, more than half of the Jews who went into hiding were betrayed or discovered and sent to extermination camps. In the surrounding area of Winterswijk, in a nature reserve with a moor and forests, a group of twenty Jews, children and adults alike, including Thea's boyfriend Wolfgang, built sheds, and tried to live their life out of sight of the occupiers. Unfortunately, such a big group needed food and living

outdoors even in a rather remote area did not go unnoticed, with distant neighbours and helpers aware of the situation. It was only a matter of weeks before the group was discovered, with the German and Dutch police capturing most of the hidden people. The sheds were destroyed. Wolfgang could escape the authorities once more, finding another hiding place in Amsterdam, where Thea joined him soon after. Their joint hiding place remained viable only for another few weeks. At that point, Thea's diary ended.

The story of an outdoor hiding place is quite unique in the history of hiding in the occupied Netherlands. Together with Thea's personal story recorded in her diary, it is even more remarkable. Embedding it in the history of Winterswijk in the period of occupation is an interesting and striking approach taken by Mirjam Schwarz and Hans Bouman, making the book a highly recommended read for anyone interested in the story of the occupied Netherlands and the personal tales of Jews who found themselves in this situation.

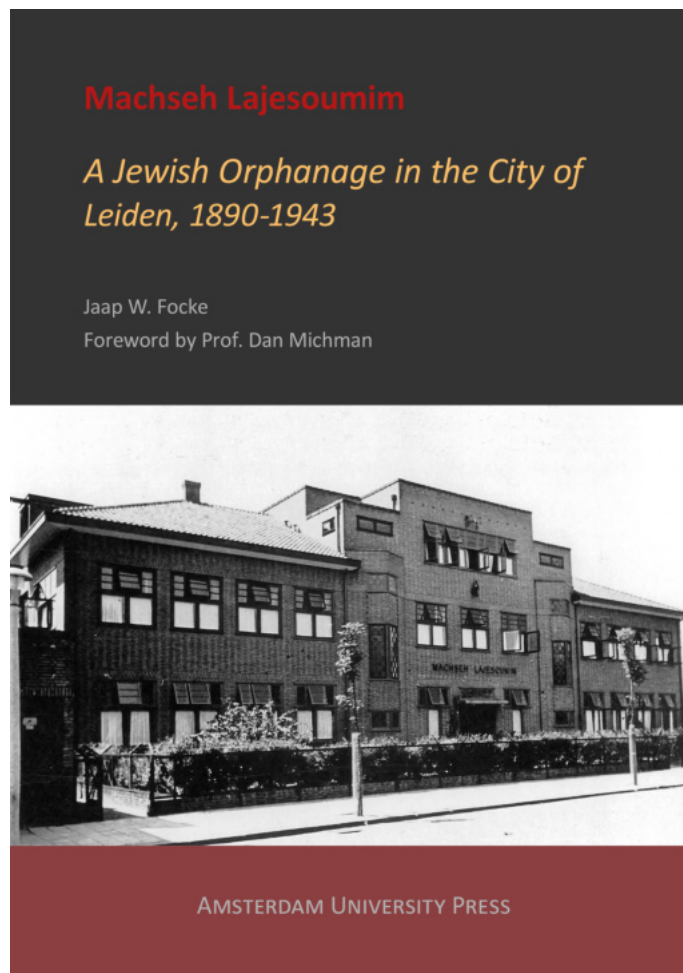
### **About the reviewer**

Katja Happe is a historian. From 2012-2015 she was an academic researcher at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg (Germany) as part of the Chair for Modern History of Prof. Ulrich Herbert. She conducted a study sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft on the history of the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, resulting in the book *Viele falsche Hoffnungen* (Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017). Subsequently, it was published in Dutch as *Veel valse hoop: De jodenvervolgung in 1940-1945 Nederland* (Atlas Contact, 2018). Prior she was responsible for collecting and commenting on the Dutch documents for the document collection project "The persecution and murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany, 1933-1945." She has been working intensively on Dutch history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the relations between Germany and the Netherlands, beginning with her doctoral dissertation in 2004, *Deutsche Staatsbürger in den Niederlanden 1918-1945* (University of Siegen). Since 2019 she is director of the concentration camp memorial site in Ladelund in northern Germany. In 2019/2020 she was appointed as the Cleveringa-chair at the University of Leiden (Netherlands).

**Review**  
**Jaap W. Focke:**  
***Machseh Lajesoumiem: A Jewish orphanage in the city of  
Leiden***

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 355 p.  
ISBN 9789463726955 (hc) / e-ISBN 9789463726957 (pdf) / Open  
Access e-book <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/51066>

*Reviewed by Peter Tammes*



The writing of this dedicated book dates to 1971 when an investigation started to examine what had happened to a Jewish orphanage in March 1943 when all children and staff were deported to the Nazi transit camp Westerbork. Several investigations by others contributed to “preserving the memory of the orphanage and its inhabitants” (xvii, 314) resulting in the book *Machseh Lajesoumiem* or *toevlucht voor wezen* (‘refuge for orphans’) authored by Jaap W. Focke, who gratefully acknowledged the work of all the “predecessors” and the willingness of Holocaust survivors to talk.

Following the belief that “people are really dead if they are not remembered anymore by anyone” (312), the primary objective of the book was providing the names and faces of all the 168 children who lived at least for a couple of months in the orphanage from 1929 onwards when the orphanage moved to a new building. Many children and staff could be identified by the overwhelming collection of photographs gathered over time in different (private) collections; hence, many (group) photos are printed in the book.

*Machseh Lajesoumiem*, originally established in 1890 in the City of Leiden in the province of South Holland, was one of the seven Jewish orphanages in the Netherlands around that time. Since the other Jewish orphanages were for older children, the Leiden orphanage was specifically to cater to children who were younger than six. The second chapter in the book describes the difficult first decades of the orphanage mainly due to inappropriate housing. From the early 20th century onwards, there were plans to relocate the orphanage, but it was not until 1929 that a new building designed by architects Buurman and Oesterman was built. Some 25 children moved to the new building at the corner of Roodenburgerstraat and Cronesteinkade. The number of actual orphans among the 168 children who had lived in the orphanage from 1929 onwards was very small. Mainly, these were children who had at least one parent (usually the mother) or children whose parent(s) were unable to support them.

In four chronologically ordered chapters, the small-scale history of the Leiden orphanage in the new building, until its liquidation in 1943, is told through the stories of a few selected children who are followed until their deportation to Nazi camps in the East; their individual stories across different chapters can be tracked via references to paragraph and figure numbers. About a year before its closing, the couple Hijme Stoffels and Emile Stoffels-van Brussel became the orphanage’s new neighbours. Owing to his many travels across Germany in the 1930s, Hijme Stoffels had no illusions about the Nazi’s intentions and through his connections he sought to help Jews to escape the Nazi persecution; after the war the couple was honoured at Yad Vashem (recognition for the Righteous among the Nations). Several times Stoffels had warned and strongly advised Nathan Italie, the orphanage director, to find hiding places for the children and his family, but



these warnings fell mostly upon deaf ears. Italic would not abandon the children by going into hiding himself and he did not want to do anything illegal.

Early 1943, it became clear that Jews in institutions were not safe anymore, as some medical institutions were forced to close. On March 17, 1943, the Leiden orphanage was dissolved, and 59 children and staff members were forcefully taken to Westerbork. Since Piet de Vries, one of the residents at the orphanage, arrived in 1935 after his non-Jewish father died, Stoffels set in motion a reclassification procedure of his Jewish status, which resulted in Piet's release from Westerbork. Similarly, Stoffels was successful in getting Hans Kloosterman's status reclassified. These reclassification procedures are well-documented in the book, and they show that this was a difficult and long process; for some too long, such as for Piet's sister who was deported. Within less than a week after their arrival, already 34 of them, including 9 staff members, were deported to Sobibor. Of the 59 children and staff, only Piet and Hans were not deported, while just two survived the deportations; nearly all were murdered in Sobibor in 1943.

A separate chapter describes the fate of some children who had left the orphanage in the 1930s or early 1940s. Among Jews caught in the first round-up in Amsterdam in February 1941 – as a revenge for street fights in the Jewish neighbourhood – was Karel van Santen who had left the orphanage around 1937. Together with 388 others, Karel was deported to Mauthausen where he soon perished and became one of the first Jews from the Netherlands to become a victim as a result of the Nazi regime. Karel's sister Esther had left the orphanage in 1939 but returned in September 1942 as these institutions were then still seen as safe places. She left again in February 1943, a few weeks before its liquidation, and survived the war in hiding (*'onderduik'*). A few others tried to escape to Switzerland or Spain but were caught and deported from Belgium and France to Nazi camps. Detailed narratives in another chapter describe how nine (former) orphanage children survived the Holocaust. These stories show different ways of escaping Nazi persecution; by getting (temporary) exemption from deportation, finding hiding places, fleeing to safe countries, reclassification of Jewish status, or getting false identity papers.

The list of (former) orphanage children at the end of the book provides information on who survived and who was murdered when and where. About 26% of all children who had lived in Machseh Lajesoumiem in the 1930s and 1940s and still lived in the Netherlands when Nazi Germany invaded, survived the Holocaust; this percentage is close to the national Jewish survival rate of about 27%. Though, it seems that among the (former) orphanage children the age group 0-5 had the lowest survival rate (13%), while the age group 15-30 the highest (31%) and the age group 6-14 had a survival rate (23%) in between those two age groups. This contrasts with the overall picture of survival of Jews in the Netherlands; the

youngest age group had lower chances of being deported, while the age group 6-14 had higher chances of being deported than other age groups (Tammes 2019). The lower chances of survival for the youngest children in this case might be attributed to the fact that many of them still lived in the orphanage in 1943.

The individual stories in the book provide some insight in the conditions and circumstances determining the fate of the children during the Nazi German occupation. This book fits in with the work done lately by remembrance organizations such as the Jewish Monument, Camp Westerbork Memorial Centre, and Project *Oorlogslevens* ('war lives') to give victims a name, a face, and a history. It also aligns with the current notion in Holocaust research to return Jewish people their agency by describing and analyzing their choices and actions or survival strategy to escape the Nazi persecution (Finkel 2017), including the offered help and small gesture of aid and protection known as *social reactivity* (Sémelin 2019; Burzlaff 2022), using individual-level data. With the focus on collecting and merging individual stories or data from several sources, it appears that remembrance efforts and academic research are being linked in the Netherlands. This can lead to developing a comprehensive view and a better understanding of the Holocaust. For as Jaap W. Focke rightly observes in his book, "that process has not been concluded to this day" (289).

## References

- Burzlaff, Jan. 2022. Silence and small gestures: Jews and non-Jews in the Netherlands (1940–1945). *Contemporary European History* 1–15. doi.org/10.1017/S096077732100076X
- Finkel, Evgeny. 2017. *Ordinary Jews: Choice and survival during the Holocaust*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sémelin, Jacques. 2019. *The survival of the Jews in France, 1940–44*. Oxford: Holt.
- Tammes, Peter. 2019. Associating locality-level characteristics with surviving the Holocaust: A multilevel approach to the odds of being deported and to risk of death among Jews living in Dutch municipalities. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 188.5: 896–906. doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwz015

## About the reviewer

Peter Tammes is an honorary researcher in the Population Health Sciences at Bristol Medical School, University of Bristol, and a senior research officer at the Office for National Statistics (UK). He received his PhD from the Department of Sociology at Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands) and was awarded the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation's Research Prize 2004 for his research on the Holocaust. Using original registration lists of Jewish inhabitants in 1941–42, as well as post WWII victimization lists and other administrative sources, this research

resulted in the first systematic overview of variation in Holocaust victimization rates among Dutch municipalities, while statistical analyses of the data improved understanding of these local differences. Follow-up research focused on differences in survival chances of Jews in the Netherlands related to individual socio-demographic characteristics and contextual factors. His research findings are published in a range of journals, including *Social Science History*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, *European Journal of Population*, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, and *American Journal of Epidemiology*. In addition, his blog “Anne Frank and the Holocaust: How death rates varied across the Netherlands under Nazi occupation” was published online in *The Conversation*. Among his other publications are a booklet on the Jews of his home village Bergen in the Netherlands during WWII, *‘U draagt geen ster’: De vervolging van Joodse inwoners in Bergen* (Bonneville, 2005) and a biographical article on the Jewish entrepreneur Salomon Frenk from Rotterdam, “Het ondernemersleven van Salomon Frenk (1915-1999),” in *Rotterdams Jaarboekje 2008* (Stadsarchief Rotterdam, 2008).



## Review

**Hans Blom, David J. Wertheim, Hetty Berg and  
Bart T. Wallet (eds):**

***Reappraising the history of the Jews in the Netherlands***

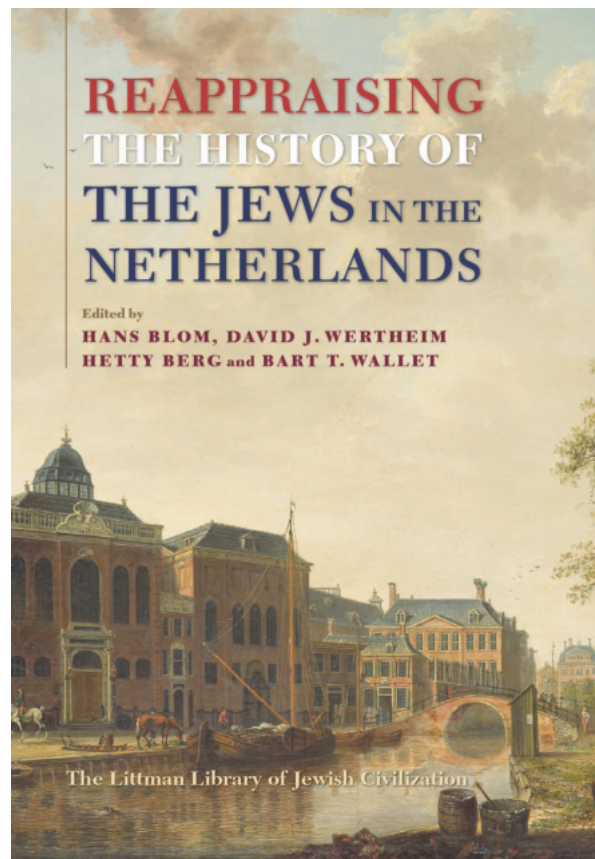
David McKay (trans.)

London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization with Liverpool

University Press, 2021. 625 p.

ISBN 9781786941879

*Reviewed by Dan Michman*



On the eve of the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany in May 1940, the first volume of a planned collective two-volume comprehensive, up-to-date history of Dutch Jewry was published: Hendrik Brugmans and Alejandro Frank (1940), *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland (tot circa 1795)*. The second volume never appeared, due to the Holocaust and its results, which affected Dutch Jewry more than any other west-European country: about 75% of the Dutch Jewish community was exterminated, including some of the authors. It took more than five decades until a similar project was undertaken and published (in one volume), covering also the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: *Geschiedenis van de joden in Nederland* (1995; English edition: 2007).<sup>1</sup> The contributors to this volume were scholars from the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Israel (Ben M.J. Speet, Daniel M. Swetschinski, Jonathan I. Israel, Yosef Kaplan, Rena F.G. Fuks Mansfeld, J.C.H. [Hans] Blom, Joel J. Cahen, Peter Romijn and Chaya Brasz).

The volume under review here is an updated and amended version of the former one, and was originally published in Dutch in 2017, 22 years after the former edition. The chapters written by the original authors were updated by them – some more than others – including new insights and adding more recently published scholarly literature. The editors themselves write in their preface that “four of the chapters have been completely rewritten by the original specialists, and three chapters as well as the introduction have been completely rewritten by new authors. All the others have been updated to take account of new scholarship,” and therefore “we consider it a new publication rather than a revised edition” (vii). The authors who did not participate in the original volume are current eminent Dutch scholars: Irene Zwiep, who rewrote the chapter which was originally written by the late Fuks-Mansfeld, and Bart Wallet, a recently appointed professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Amsterdam, who rewrote two chapters, formerly written by Fuks-Mansfeld and Brasz. The introduction, too, originally written by the late Leiden University professor Ivo Schöffner, has been replaced by an introduction written by David Wertheim, the director of the Menasseh ben Israel Institute for Jewish Social and Cultural Studies in Amsterdam. Beyond the texts themselves, the book includes three maps and eight tables, an extremely beautiful visual essay (between pages 456-457), an extensive bibliography (43 pages), an index of names of persons and a general index of places, organizations and institutions, and topics. The size of the book and the fact that it is imbued with chromo paper gives the book a special allure, turning it almost into an album.

---

<sup>1</sup> Another volume, though with a different approach, was published several years earlier by this author, his late father, and another scholar — in Hebrew: *Pinkas Hakehillot: Holland* and in Dutch: Jozeph Michman, Hartog Beem and Dan Michman, *Pinkas. Geschiedenis van de joodse gemeenschap in Nederland*.

The volume consists of nine chronologically ordered chapters. It starts with the Middle Ages (written by Speet), when there was no permanent settlement of Jews in the Low Countries (the Netherlands as a well-defined political entity also did not exist yet). Chapters 2-4, written by Swetchinski, Kaplan and Israel, deal with the permanent open settlement period of Jews in the Netherlands from the end of the 16th century until the middle of the 18th century. Examined are social, economic, demographic, religious, and cultural aspects, and they are set within the broader context of Dutch and general Jewish history of the time. Jews arrived in the Netherlands from various directions: from the Iberian Peninsula and from Central and Central-East Europe. The backgrounds of these areas are essential to be described for the understanding of the religious and cultural character of the emerging Dutch Jewish communities and their social and professional structures. The Portuguese (that is, Sephardic) community was especially influential in the economic and intellectual spheres, far beyond Amsterdam, and some of its members have left a far-reaching impact on philosophy and an ongoing imprint on the perception of Dutch Jewry by outsiders, inside the Netherlands (on painters such as Rembrandt) as well as outside the country.

Chapter 5, rewritten by Zwiép, covers the period of the transition of the status of the Jews in the country. The Dutch State itself underwent a political transition from the Dutch Republic consisting of a coalition of provinces to the Batavian Republic — a more unified entity established after the French conquest (1795), afterwards to a kingdom under Louis Napoleon (Napoleon Bonaparte's brother), then to being annexed by France, and finally, upon the liberation from France, to the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was also a period of economic decline. For the Jews, too, this was a period of deep change on all fronts. This chapter, now called "From nations to citizens [...] in the shadow of enlightenment," was titled "Enlightenment and emancipation" in the original edition. It deals with the increasing accommodation and acculturation of Jews and the change in their political status from belonging to two Jewish "nations" (the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi ones) to citizens, due to the official emancipation in 1796. Moreover, from a situation in which Jewish communities were actually separate entities all over the country, they were now unified (in 1808) into an overall countrywide organization called consistory, which after the liberation would be transformed into two so-called church associations ('*kerkgenootschappen*') — a High-German ('*Hoogduitsch*,' that is, Ashkenazi) and a Portuguese one. The author of this chapter expands specifically on intellectual aspects: the question to what extent the German Jewish Enlightenment ('*Haskalah*') was influential and provoking deep changes in the Dutch Jewish community as it did in the German states. She also pays attention to the Jews in the Dutch colonies Surinam and Curaçao. What I missed in this fine chapter by

itself is the integration of Jews into Dutch society via non-political venues: Jewish-gentile cooperation in the criminal world on the one hand, and the acceptance of Jews into Freemason lodges on the other. On these issues there are some fine studies.

Chapter 6 deals with the period 1814-1870 and was rewritten by Bart Wallet. In the original version, the period 1814-1840 was actually skipped, and the period 1840-1870 was characterized as *moeizame aanpassing* ('laborious adaptation'). Wallet now provides a much broader description and deeper analysis of the entire period since the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands until 1870. The sub-title of this chapter is now called "Centralization and nationalization of the Dutch Jews." Wallet emphasizes that in this period "the national Dutch authorities were more actively involved in the Jewish community and Jewish life than at anytime before or since (apart from the occupation period, 1940-45, of course)" (201). The end of this period is set by the fact, that the authorities "withdrew once and for all from [active interference in] Jewish life and Dutch Jews had to stand on their own two feet" (250). The author deals with demography and geography (including the colonies), provides charts of the structures of the Jewish communal organization, sheds light on the shift in the discourse of Dutch Jews from (western) Yiddish to Dutch, on education, on Jews in the Dutch army (especially during the Belgian uprising in 1830), on the state of the poor, on conversions, on social and economic mobility, on religious developments and culture, on the Jewish press, and on the connections of Dutch Jews with the broader Jewish world. One can conclude this period by describing it as being the decisive phase of shaping a Dutch Jewry.

The title of chapter 7, which covers the period 1870-1940, has remained the same: "Dutch Jews, the Jewish Dutch, and Jews in the Netherlands," and its authors, Blom and Cahen, remained the same. Yet, the contents are extensively updated in view of remarks on the former version and the extent of new research that was done since 1995, and it is the longest chapter in the volume. In a way, this chapter demonstrates the enormous social and cultural loss, both of the Jewish community and of Dutch society at large, because of the Holocaust. In this period "The Netherlands underwent a process of accelerated change, expansion, and prosperity" (251). It is important to mention here that the Netherlands was not involved in World War I, yet as part of Europe, it experienced the consequences of the war in political and economic ways. In this period the processes of integration, acculturation, and assimilation of Jews and the Jewish communities continued, yet they had their limits. Dutch Jewry grew demographically, and many Jews were involved in the new political world that emerged, although because of the segmented (which in Dutch is called *verzuild*, meaning 'pillarized') structure of society, Jews could align themselves only with



the liberal, socialist, and communist parties and associations, and not with the Protestant and Catholic ones. Especially in the social-democratic political organizations (some unions and the Social Democratic Labor Party – SDAP), some prominent leaders were Jewish. Yet, percentages of intermarriage with non-Jews, though growing, remained quite marginal until the 1930s. Dutch Jewry also underwent a strong secularization process, yet most Jews remained officially aligned with the orthodox communities' organizations for the purposes of birth (circumcision for boys), marriage, and burial practices. This chapter provides a multifaceted picture of a dynamic and rapidly changing Dutch Jewry characterized by diversity, and it is impossible to delve into particulars within the limits of this review.

Chapter 8, "The war, 1940-1945," written by Romijn, is relatively short in view of the importance of this period in the overall history of Dutch Jewry. As stated in the beginning of this review: about 75% of Dutch Jewry were murdered by Nazi Germany, more than the percentage of any other western European country, and close to the percentage of the most victimized countries in Europe, such as the Baltic countries, Poland, and Greece. The relatively smooth process of the persecutions and deportations to the death camps should essentially be attributed to the German *machinery of destruction* (a term coined by Raul Hilberg), yet the role of the Dutch bureaucracy and society cannot be underestimated. This aspect of the occupation period continues to haunt Dutch society and Dutch scholarship on the Holocaust. Within the larger picture of general Holocaust historiography, the Netherlands stands out regarding the fact that it is a nation about which, probably more than is the case for any other country, comprehensive histories (that is, overviews) have been written (the first one, by Heinz Wielek, appeared already in 1947). There are at least eight of these overviews, two of them also available in English (by Jacques Presser and Bob Moore). Moreover, there is a wealth of research on this period. Consequently, this chapter, even though updated in comparison to the earlier edition, kept itself to a summarizing overview and to a minimum of bibliographical references. As such, it can serve as a helpful introduction to this period for foreigners, especially for Holocaust courses at universities and colleges outside the Netherlands. Nevertheless, one curious point deserves to be mentioned here, which is the title "the war" that is given to this chapter. For decades, this was indeed the accepted term for this period in the Netherlands in general, and it was used also by Dutch Jews. However, since the mid 1990s, when the first edition of this book appeared, the terms Shoah and Holocaust have gradually been embraced also in the Netherlands. Consequently, a new museum on this period which will open in 2023,

is called the National Holocaust Museum. For the non-Dutch readership, it would have been better to have changed the title.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 9, the second longest chapter in the book, on the post-Holocaust era, was entirely rewritten by Wallet. It is much longer than the original chapter in the first edition. This is justified because another quarter century has passed and considerable research on this period — historical, sociological, and demographical — has been carried out. For those who are interested in the current face of Dutch Jewry, this may probably be the most useful chapter. The chapter deals with the restoration of rights for the survivors, returnees from camps and those who had been in hiding; the reconstruction of Jewish life; demography and the social position of the Jews and the balance between the Jewish community in Amsterdam and those in the rest of the country (center and periphery); the ties with and approaches towards Israel and Zionism, including *aliya* ('emigration to Israel'), and the more recent repercussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; post-war and recent antisemitism; religious affairs and internal polarization; the Jewish-Christian dialogue; the memory and commemoration of the Holocaust and the renewed issue of restitution and compensation since the 1990s; and more.

In conclusion, this new overview of Dutch Jewish history reflects changes and turns in historical approaches as well as the growth of research on multiple aspects of Dutch Jewish history. Cultural, economic, and religious history receive more attention, broader international Jewish contexts are integrated into the proposed interpretations, and more space is devoted to Dutch Jews in the Dutch colonies (Surinam, the Caribbean, and the former Dutch Indies, which is present-day Indonesia). In the wake of newer trends in historiography in general, among them the embracing of anthropological insights, special attention is given to the multiple identities of Dutch Jews in various locations and at different times. This rich book will undoubtedly remain the most authoritative textbook on the history of Dutch Jewry for many years to come. It is wholeheartedly recommended.

## References

- Blom, Johannes Cornelis H., Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld & Ivo Schöffer, eds. 1995. *Geschiedenis van de joden in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Balans.
- Blom, Johannes Cornelis H., Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld & Ivo Schöffer, eds. 2007. *The history of the Jews in the Netherlands*. Translated by Erica Pomerans & Arnold J. Pomerans. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

---

<sup>2</sup> For an overview and analysis of the terminology for the period of the Nazi anti-Jewish campaign see my article "Why is the Shoah called "the Shoah" or "the Holocaust"? On the history of the terminology for the Nazi anti-Jewish campaign."

- Brugmans, Hendrik & Alejandro Frank. 1940. *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland (tot circa 1795)*. Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf.
- Michman, Dan. 2021. Why is the Shoah called “the Shoah” or “the Holocaust”? On the history of the terminology for the Nazi anti-Jewish campaign. *Journal of Holocaust Research* 35.4: 233-256.
- Michman, Jozeph, Hartog Beem & Dan Michman. 1985. *Pinkas Hakehillot: Holland* [Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.
- Michman, Jozeph, Hartog Beem & Dan Michman. 1999. *Pinkas. Geschiedenis van de joodse gemeenschap in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Contact. First published 1992 by Kluwer.

### About the reviewer

Dan Michman, born in Amsterdam, is professor (emeritus) of modern Jewish history and the former Chair of the Arnold and Leona Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research, Bar-Ilan University (Israel); he is also Head of the International Institute for Holocaust Research and Incumbent of the John Najmann Chair in Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. His publications, available in twelve languages, cover a broad range of topics regarding the Shoah, its historiography, representations and impact; and regarding the history of Dutch Jewry. His authored and co-authored, edited and co-edited books include *The Jewish refugees from Germany in the Netherlands, 1933-1940* (PhD dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1978 [in Hebrew]); *Het liberale jodendom in Nederland, 1929-1943* (Van Gennep, 1988); *Pinkas: Geschiedenis van de joodse gemeenschap in Nederland* (Uitgeverij Contact, 1999); *Holocaust historiography: A Jewish perspective: Conceptualizations, terminology, approaches and fundamental issues* (Vallentine Mitchell, 2003); *Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Belgium* (Yad Vashem, 2005); *De la mémoire de la Shoah dans le monde juif* (CNRS, 2008); *Holocaust historiography in context: Emergence, challenges, polemics and achievements* (Berghahn Books, 2008); *The emergence of Jewish ghettos during the Holocaust* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); *The religious cultures of Dutch Jewry* (Brill, 2017); *Hiding, sheltering and borrowing identities: Avenues of rescue during the Holocaust* (Yad Vashem, 2017); *Emotions, imaginations, perceptions, egos, characteristics: Egodocuments in Dutch Jewish history* (Amphora Books, 2021); *Jewish solidarity: The ideal and the reality in the turmoil of the Shoah* (Yad Vashem, 2022).



## Review

Rudolf Dekker:

***Plagiaat en nivellering: Nieuwe trends in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving over de Tweede Wereldoorlog***

Amsterdam: Panchaud, 2019. 103 p.

ISBN 9789082673067

***Plagiarism, fraud and whitewashing: The grey turn in the history of the German occupation of the Netherlands, 1940-1945***

Amsterdam: Panchaud, 2020. 101 p.

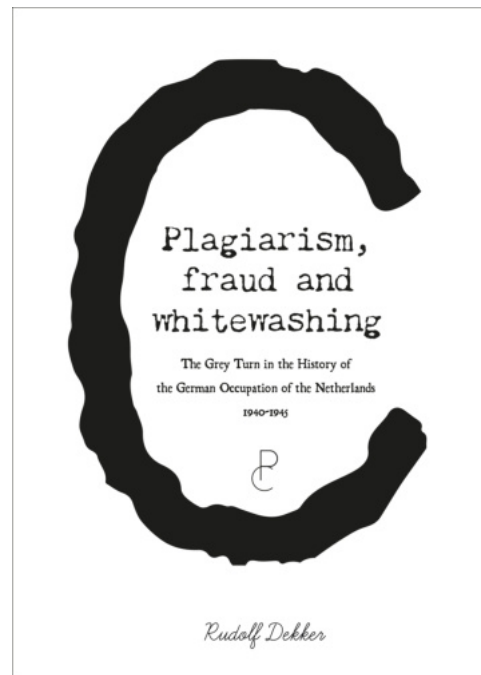
ISBN 9789082673074

*Reviewed by Remco Ensel*

## Plagiaat en nivellering

Nieuwe trends in de  
Nederlandse geschiedschrijving  
over de Tweede Wereldoorlog

Rudolf Dekker



Rudolf Dekker made a name for himself as one of the figureheads of early modern cultural history, with a special focus on individual life courses and the use of autobiographical sources such as diaries, memoirs, and letters. In recent years he has broadened his attention to include contemporary history, including covering various current, sometimes thorny, issues. This latter qualification certainly applies to the case that is the focus of *Plagiarism, fraud and whitewashing*,<sup>1</sup> which involves potential instances of fraud and, more broadly, recurring violations of generally accepted ethical standards. The booklet is an indictment of the way in which the Dutch television maker and historian Ad van Liempt has built up great authority thanks to a long series of books that, in the form in which they were published and generated publicity, were either created by a questionable method or by a publicity campaign that dwarfed the work of less powerful colleagues. Van Liempt's influence as a public historian extends to spreading a revised view of World War II history, one that Dekker opposes. The questionable approach, the revisionist trend and Van Liempt's powerplay as media favourite are here succinctly yet judiciously examined in relation to each other.

Plagiarism is probably the original sin in the humanities. It is therefore also the most deadly and painful disgrace to an historian. Due to the weight of a public indictment, it is important to act with the utmost precision and prudence. However, it is certainly no reason to ignore complaints. Fraud is more than uncollegial and petty behaviour: incidents can be part of a pattern and closely intertwined with unequal power relations. Dekker points out in his book that this last aspect, power inequality, certainly was an issue in the case studies he has collected.

To be sure, Ad van Liempt is not some run-of-the-mill popular historian. He has regularly been compared to Loe de Jong, the patriarch of Dutch public history. Van Liempt is a powerful man who "writes faster than his shadow" (14).<sup>2</sup> One difference with De Jong is that Van Liempt's books and television work on WWII mainly functioned in the domain of public history. Somewhat to my surprise for example, none of his best sellers have been reviewed in the leading journal *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review*. In this respect it has the same status as the work of Geert Mak. This changed when Van Liempt decided to turn one of his projects, a biography of Albert Gemmeker who had been commander of transit camp Westerbork, into a PhD project. Van Liempt and his supervisors came under academic scrutiny and already existing critics joined forces. Earlier in 2022, the *BMGN* decided to devote a special issue to Van Liempt's work and *the affair*.<sup>3</sup> A

---

<sup>1</sup> The earlier Dutch edition is titled *Plagiaat en nivellering*.

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from the book under review refer to the English language edition: *Plagiarism, fraud and whitewashing*.

<sup>3</sup> See volume 137.

second stimulus for the concentration of criticism was the storm that erupted after Van Liempt's firm endorsement of a family memoir in which the war crimes of a grandfather and father were whitewashed through flawed historical research and lack of reflection.<sup>4</sup>

Dekker demonstrates that Van Liempt's work is characterized by an absence of or at least inadequate recognition of other people's work, that is, historians with less media power. This is not the result of carelessness but of a structural approach that can exist in part thanks to a loose network of colleagues who do not speak out, out of disinterest, loyalty, or self-interest, plus an unwillingness on the part of Van Liempt to take up the charges. But are the three books discussed by Dekker indeed based on plagiarism as indicated in the title? As a member of my university's examination board for many years, I have seen many cases of classic plagiarism among students. By this I mean carelessly copying pieces of text under pressure without sufficient citation, occasionally disguised by, for example, translating English texts literally into Dutch. If the student is unfamiliar with the rules—a common objection at hearings—then the university is of course the place to learn the prevailing mores of the scientific community. This classic plagiarism is not the kind in question here – at least it is not discussed as such. Instead, in each of the more extensively dissected studies, there is a demonstrable lack of recognition and even a conscious concealment of earlier, often better, research.

Van Liempt either copies an idea or appropriates the research and then communicates how he came up with the idea and carried out his work completely independently. The book about the Red Cross is illustrative of this approach. A project was started for a book about the problematic history of the Red Cross in WWII followed by a complimentary jubilee book about the Red Cross in general, in the latter case with Van Liempt as co-author. Regina Grüter, who would be the researcher for the first book, agreed to submit chapters on behalf of the jubilee book because her in-depth study would be published first anyway. When the publishing order was reversed, Grüter's data ended up in a book without any acknowledgment for her work whatsoever. In the huge media attention that ensued, Van Liempt managed to not only *not* mention Grüter by name, but also to ignore his co-author, Margot van Kooten. Van Liempt has left a trail of similar incidents, some of which have gone public. In some instances, these border on classic plagiarism or extensive paraphrasing without giving due credit. In a book about the Maliebaan in Utrecht, Van Liempt's book follows the unique structure

---

<sup>4</sup> See Isabel van Boetzelaer's *Oorlogsouders: Een familiechroniek over goed en fout in twee adellijke families*. A reply to this book came from Chaja Polak (2018). This case revolves around the "grey turn" – the tendency to minimize the difference between victim and perpetrator – that Dekker also discusses in his book.

of a previously published in-depth study by Wout Buitelaar (29-36). Dekker here introduces the strategy of the “pawn sacrifice,” the single footnote that operates as a cover up to a more extensive dependence on a specific work (33).

In the past year, the Royal Netherlands Historical Society (*Koninklijk Nederlands Historisch Genootschap* or KNHG) has turned the spotlight on fraud. Its findings have now been captured in a report (Noordink & Van der Zeijden 2022). The report speaks of plagiarism when an author creates ‘the appearance that the text is an original and personal contribution’ (“*de schijn wekkend dat de tekst een eigen en originele bijdrage betreft*”) (Noordink & Van der Zeijden 2022, 8-9), and furthermore classifies the ‘theft of ideas’ (“*ideeëndiefstal*”) as fraud (9). Both disqualifications fall under the heading of ‘(un)ethical reuse of scientific research’ (“*[on]ethisch hergebruik van wetenschappelijk onderzoek*”) (Noordink & Van der Zeijden 2022, 4).

Let’s return to the Red Cross. Van Liempt completely appropriated Grüter’s research, literally did not mention her name and instead always spoke as if he had collected the findings himself. When asked how he came up with the topic of the Maliebaan study, Van Liempt answered: “All (my books) start with the same question: why has nobody studied this subject before?” (34).

An allegation of fraud may require a delicate response, yet it should not be a reason to set the findings aside as too problematic. There is a growing awareness that the theft of ideas and data and the lack of acknowledgement should be understood in the context of structural unequal power relations, based on academic hierarchy, gender, or age. Doing research and writing ultimately should be done from a place of realization that the historian is part of a community, that historical research and publishing are based on a precarious balance between intensive research and individual creativity on the one hand and building on and contributing to a collective project on the other. Every text or public discussion must make this precarious balance visible. It becomes difficult to value research in cases where transparency is lacking. And the research becomes exponentially more problematic when transparency about sources is deliberately obscured.

## References

- van Boetzelaer, Isabel. 2017. *Oorlogsouders: Een familiechroniek over goed en fout in twee adellijke families*. Meppel: Just Publishers.
- Noordink, Willem & Sarah van der Zeijden. 2022. *Plagiaat en onethisch hergebruik onder Nederlandse historici: Een proefboring*. Edited by Antia Wiersma and Inger Leemans. <https://knhg.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Plagiaat-en-onethisch-hergebruik-onder-Nederlandse-historici.-Een-proefboring.pdf>
- Polak, Chaja. 2018. *De man die geen hekel had aan Joden: Een botsing met het verleden*. Amsterdam: Atlas Contact.



### About the reviewer

Remco Ensel teaches cultural history at Radboud University in Nijmegen (Netherlands), and coordinates a research project on the history of science with the NIOD Institute of War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies. He earned his PhD from the University of Amsterdam with his dissertation *Saints and servants in southern Morocco* (Brill, 1999). He has authored articles and books on 20<sup>th</sup> century visual nationalism, antisemitism, and Holocaust remembrance. Among his most recent publications is *Anne Frank on the postwar Dutch stage: Performance, memory, affect* (Routledge, 2022). He also co-edited (with Nancy Adler and Michael Wintle) *Narratives of war: Remembering and chronicling battle in twentieth-century Europe* (Routledge, 2019), and (with Evelien Gans) *The Holocaust, Israel and 'the Jew': Histories of antisemitism in postwar Dutch society* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017).



## Review

Rosemary Sullivan:

***The betrayal of Anne Frank: A cold case investigation***

Toronto: HarperCollins, 2022. 400 p.

ISBN 9781443463041

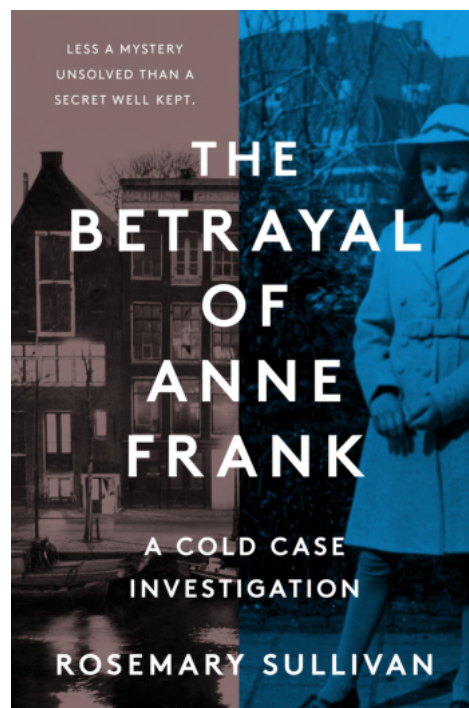
***Het verraad van Anne Frank: Het baanbrekende onderzoek van een internationaal coldcaseteam in Nederland***

Hans E. van Riemsdijk and Marijke Gheeraert (trans.)

Amsterdam: Ambo|Anthos, 2022. 408 p.

ISBN 9789026346392

*Reviewed by Bettine Siertsema*



### **The betrayer of Anne Frank and the power of the media**

As a teenager I used to devour stories about the great mysteries in human history. Who was the man in the iron mask imprisoned during the reign of Louis XIV? What happened to Hitler's right-hand man Martin Bormann? Who was Jack the Ripper? What happened aboard the abandoned ship *Mary Celeste* in 1871? These are all enigmas, to date unsolved. The question that Rosemary Sullivan's book tries to answer would not be out of place on this list of great mysteries. Who betrayed the Frank family in their hiding place at the secret annex of Prinsengracht 263?

Sullivan is a skilled Canadian author who has earned recognition for her published works of poetry and biography, lacking however prior knowledge of the Netherlands or the Holocaust. At first sight, it appears that she did a commendable job with this piece of historical nonfiction, which she was commissioned to write. It reads like a detective story — and small wonder, since both its terminology and working method were borrowed from that genre by the project's initiators, Thijs Bayens and Pieter van Twisk, and the project's "lead case agent" (12),<sup>1</sup> Vince Pankoke, a retired FBI special agent. Bayens and Van Twisk — a filmmaker and journalist, respectively — amassed significant funding (a subsidy from the municipality of Amsterdam and advance payment from publishers) and assembled a team of criminologists, computer and forensic experts, and a number of young historians at the start of their careers; but they did not include a single established, let alone reputable, Holocaust historian.

Pankoke treated the mystery of the Franks' betrayal as a criminal cold case and focused on three crucial dimensions: knowledge, motive, and opportunity. First, all previous theories regarding the source of the betrayal were carefully examined: the notorious Ans van Dijk, who was sentenced to death after the war because she had betrayed dozens of fellow Jews; the warehouse's manager, Willem van Maaren; a former business partner of Otto Frank, Tonny Ahlers; the sister of one of the helpers who was in love with a German soldier; indiscreet neighbors; or just plain bad luck, since according to one theory the raid was supposedly aimed at exposing black market trade, not Jews in hiding. All of those suspects and theories were carefully weighed and found wanting. Only one name remained, which had been mentioned in an anonymous note that Otto Frank, the only survivor of the eight people in hiding in the secret annex, had received after the war. Frank himself barely took any action in response to the note, and certainly not toward the person who was named. Perhaps he was aware that all kinds of

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the term used in the Dutch edition of the book under review. Quotations from the book refer to that edition.

rumors and allegations were circulating in the postwar period for various reasons, mostly to leverage some type of advantage over other people.<sup>2</sup>

When the cold case investigation was completed and Sullivan finished her book, a sophisticated media campaign was launched. Major news outlets received advance copies only after agreeing to sign strict confidentiality agreements, making them unable to fact-check elements of the story before its official release. And so, on January 16, 2022 — the day of the book’s release in the United States — the news was made public on the CBS television program *60 Minutes* that Anne Frank and her family had been betrayed by a Jewish notary named Arnold van den Bergh (Wertheim 2022). It admirably profiled the work of the cold-case team and used interviews with Bayens, Van Twisk, Pankoke and team researchers as proof of its claim. Many of the 1,200 newspapers worldwide that published this news story stressed in their headlines that it was a Jew who was guilty of the betrayal, without any reservation about the factuality of the allegation.

The next day, when the news was announced in the Netherlands, initial criticism by historians and representatives of the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Anne Frank House began to take hold, gradually gaining intensity. In retrospect, the editors-in-chief of the Netherlands’ most respected newspapers, *Volkscrant* and *NRC*, expressed regret over having signed an agreement of strict secrecy before publication, which enabled the conclusion of the cold case team to be disseminated unfiltered and unverified.<sup>3</sup>

Two months after the publication of Rosemary Sullivan's book, six well-known historians specializing in aspects of the Dutch persecution of the Jews, led by Professor Bart Wallet, presented a report in which the conclusions of the cold case team were thoroughly analyzed and refuted (Wallet et al. 2022a, 2022b).<sup>4</sup> The criticism basically boiled down to the fact that the team had suffered from tunnel vision, and neglecting to critically evaluate the sources. Whatever fit the theory was assumed to be true; what did not fit was dismissed as irrelevant. If the team’s prime suspect had been treated with the same judiciousness accorded the other theoretical options, the conclusion never would have been so unequivocally that “the notary did it.” But now, the anonymous note led to all sorts of assumptions that gradually seemed to have metamorphosed into purported facts. That no well-informed historians were included in the investigation avenged itself. They could have shielded the cold case team from erroneous assumptions.

To name the most important of those erroneous assumptions: the Jewish Council, of which the notary Van den Bergh was a member, had no lists of hiding

---

<sup>2</sup> For readers of Dutch, see Droog (2022) for criticism on the dubious value attached to the anonymous note.

<sup>3</sup> This regret was expressed in the TV program *Argos Medialogica* of June 7, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> See for the English version of the report Wallet et al. (2022b).

addresses, even though this was suggested after the war by an interpreter accused of collaboration. Obviously, such a source, aimed at exonerating himself, should be regarded with suspicion rather than taken at face value. Thus, there is no sound basis upon which to assume that Van den Bergh possessed the necessary knowledge required for the Franks' betrayal. There is plenty to blame the Jewish Council for, particularly its advice to heed the call to report for so-called labour (an obvious euphemism) in the East and not go into hiding; but the accusation that the Jewish Council itself betrayed people in hiding to the Germans is so outrageous that it should be expressed only on the basis of ironclad and watertight evidence. That is not the case. Obviously, neither the cold case team nor the writer can be blamed for not having taken note of Bart van der Boom's (2022) major study of the Jewish Council, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, since that book was published after their work had been completed; nevertheless, earlier studies of the Jewish Council, no more than Van der Boom's work, give any indication that such a form of betrayal ever took place.

The Jewish Council's *Sperren*, the temporary exemptions from deportations, were revoked in the summer of 1943; subsequently, Arnold van den Bergh found a hiding address for his children. When in January 1944 his Calmeyer application came to naught (an effort to attempt to deny his Jewish descent),<sup>5</sup> he and his wife went into hiding as well, in the village of Laren. This is how the family survived the war. The fact that the cold case team could not find any trace of evidence that Van den Bergh had been in a concentration camp made him suspicious to the team, ignoring the obvious explanation. Would this suspicion also apply to the estimated 25,000 other Dutch Jews who survived in hiding? It is bitter enough as it is that only such a small percentage of the entire Dutch-Jewish population of 140,000 was able to escape deportation and annihilation

That Van den Bergh had sought safety by going into hiding meant that the element of "motive" was absent. In that situation, he would have done everything in his power not to draw attention to himself. His being in hiding is mentioned in two books, one by Raymund Schütz (2016) about the notarial profession during the war, and the other by Petra van den Boomgaard (2019) about the Calmeyer cases. The granddaughter of the notary, Mirjam Gorter, also reported the family's being in hiding to cold case team members, but they chose to ignore her information.

The remaining dimension of the case to be investigated was "opportunity." He had good contacts with high-ranking Nazis because he had been involved as a notary in the sale of the massive Goudstikker art collection to Hermann Göring;

---

<sup>5</sup> Calmeyer was an official involved in researching the Jewish ancestry of persons applying to be "de-Jewishized." Van den Bergh had almost succeeded in obtaining that de-Jewishized status permanently when he was betrayed by the non-Jewish notary who was to take over his practice.

he therefore could have had direct telephone access to SS Lieutenant Julius Dettmann, the person who allegedly received the call about people in hiding at Prinsengracht 263 on the morning of August 4, 1944. As far as the cold case team was concerned, Van den Bergh's role in the Goudstikker affair made him suspicious one way or another. Contrary to what they claim, however, Van den Bergh was not himself active as an art dealer. The fact that he simply did his job and notarized deeds until February 1941 — when Jews were expelled from the profession — does not make him a suspect in any way either, although the book implies otherwise. ('The cold case team came across documents showing that in 1940 Van den Bergh was still acting as a notary on numerous transactions' [258-259]).<sup>6</sup> Van den Bergh may have been in contact with Göring in 1940, but that does not justify the assumption that he was on good terms with high-ranking Nazis in 1944, apart from the question of whether that category would include Dettmann. It seems that the picture of Van den Bergh painted by the cold case team makes him fit the age-old image of a wealthy Jew who slyly uses contacts and circumstances to his advantage. That Van den Bergh was well off cannot be denied, but an examination of his pre- and post-war activities reveals that he was an engaged member of the Jewish community who used his knowledge and business contacts in the service of socially and economically disadvantaged fellow Jews. The book assumes that his alleged betrayal could have been a *quid pro quo*: in exchange for the betrayal of the Frank family, his own family was to be left in peace. Protecting his family as a motive could be considered an extenuating circumstance, but that does not remove the faint odor of the anti-Semitic stereotype in his portrayal.

The Dutch publisher Ambo Anthos responded to the counter-report by immediately withdrawing the book from publication and sale, while the German publisher abandoned publication altogether after severe criticism by leading German historians. The North American publisher HarperCollins apparently did not consider taking the same step as Ambo Anthos, although the counter-report by Bart Wallet et al. (2022a, 2022b) is available in English, while its initial presentation was conducted in English, making it readily available to a global audience. In any case, the damage has already been done. The reputation of a respectable and—until proven otherwise beyond a shadow of a doubt — innocent person has been irreparably damaged, especially in countries beyond the Netherlands, where the Dutch uproar barely made the newspapers.

---

<sup>6</sup> Dutch version in *Het verraad van Anne Frank*: "Het coldcaseteam stuitte op stukken waaruit bleek dat Van den Bergh in 1940 nog altijd optrad als notaris bij tal van transacties" (258-259).

There are many lessons to be learned from the whole affair: a history lesson about source criticism, for example, and the necessity of contextualization when investigating cases from the past; a legal lesson about tunnel vision and the value of the presumption of innocence; a media ethics lesson about the dangers of the media that allow themselves to be seduced into going along with pledges of secrecy in the expectation of gaining an interesting scoop, as well as how commercial interests can contaminate sound research. (Tellingly, already during the fundraising stage, prior to the project's launch, a promise was made that a definitive perpetrator would be named, while a number of well-known experts listed in the application for funding as being part of the investigation, but who were only consulted once, now want nothing to do with the whole project.)

Of course, there are some praiseworthy aspects to be noted. The book is well written, and the reader cannot help but be captivated by the unfolding story of the cold case team's quest. The book offers valuable insights concerning the gradual development of the persecution of the Jews, from the first seemingly innocent measures to the later brutal raids and imprisonment, including the cunning ways the Nazis pressured Jews who were caught hiding to betray fellow Jews, as well as the shockingly easy way in which some Dutch individuals were tempted by financial rewards, albeit astonishingly low sums, to inform on neighbours or acquaintances. The book elicits admiration and compassion for Otto Frank and no less for Arnold van den Bergh who before and in the early years of the war sought ways to flee the country, and when that proved impossible, looked for other ways to escape the fate designed for them by planning the hiding place, and by trying for the Calmeyer status. It also shows how the American government created all kinds of difficulties to prevent European Jews from entering the country, even those who were more than capable of providing for themselves. In many cases, such as the Frank family, the delay it caused proved disastrous.

Initially the cold case team intended to present its research in a series of documentaries. It is unclear at the time of this writing, in July 2022, whether that will ever happen. If it does, we can only hope that there will be ample room for the voices of refutation in the counter-report to be heard.<sup>7</sup>

## References

- Argos Medialogica*. 2022. Het verraad van Anne Frank. *HUMAN / VPRO*, June 7. <https://www.vpro.nl/argos/media/kijk/afleveringen/medialogica/2022/aflevering-1.html>
- van der Boom, Bart. 2022. *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad: Een geschiedenis van de Joodse Raad voor Amsterdam 1941-1943*. Amsterdam: Boom.

---

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Ruth Wassinger for her valuable feedback and linguistic improvements.



- van den Boomgaard, Petra. 2019. *Voor de nazi's geen Jood: Hoe ruim 2500 Joden door ontduiking van de rassenvoorschriften aan de deportaties zijn ontkomen*. Laren: Verbum.
- Droog, Bart F. M. 2022. De datering van het anonieme briefje. De canard van 'Het verraad van Anne Frank'. De Tweede Wereldoorlog als industrie (3-IV). *Reporters Online*. <https://reportersonline.nl/de-datering-van-het-anonieme-briefje-de-canard-van-het-verraad-van-anne-frank-de-tweede-wereldoorlog-als-industrie-3-iv/>
- Schütz, Raymund. 2016. *Kille mist: Het Nederlandse notariaat en de erfenis van de oorlog*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Wallet, Bart, Petra van den Boomgaard, Bart van der Boom, Raymund Schütz, Laurien Vastenhout & Aaldrik Hermans. 2022a. *Rapport: De Joodse notaris en de beschuldiging van verraad. Kritische analyse van argumentatie en brongebruik in 'Het verraad van Anne Frank'*. [https://divtprfbggt2m.cloudfront.net/2022-03/Onderzoeksrapport\\_NL\\_Anne\\_Frank.pdf](https://divtprfbggt2m.cloudfront.net/2022-03/Onderzoeksrapport_NL_Anne_Frank.pdf)
- Wallet, Bart, Petra van den Boomgaard, Bart van der Boom, Raymund Schütz, Laurien Vastenhout & Aaldrik Hermans. 2022b. *Report: 'The betrayal of Anne Frank': A refutation. Critical analysis of the argumentation and use of historical sources*. Translated by VVH business translations. [https://admin.spui25.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Refutation\\_ENG\\_PDF.pdf](https://admin.spui25.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Refutation_ENG_PDF.pdf)
- Wertheim, Jon. 2022. Investigating who betrayed Anne Frank and her family to the Nazis. *60 Minutes*, January 16. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/anne-frank-betrayal-investigation-60-minutes-2022-01-16/>

### About the reviewer

Bettine Siertsema was, until recently, assistant professor of history at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (Netherlands), where she also earned her PhD. Her scholarship focuses on Holocaust literature and testimony. In English, she recently published *The rescue of Belsen's diamond children* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), "The tension between fact and fiction in Holocaust literature" in *Interdisciplinary Journal on Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 8 (2022), "The Dutch hiding experience in fiction" in *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 40.2 (2020), as well as articles on Etty Hillesum, female Holocaust perpetrators, and the "grey zone" in memoirs and fiction. She also co-edited (with Marc De Kesel and Katarzyna Szurmiak) *See under: Shoah. Imagining the Holocaust with David Grossman* (Brill, 2014). In Dutch, she authored books on the religious views in diaries and memoirs of the concentration camps, such as *Uit de diepten* (Skandalon, 2007), as well as on early Dutch testimonial literature of the Holocaust, including *Eerste Nederlandse getuigenissen van de Holocaust 1945-1946* (Verbum, 2018). Most recently, she contributed a chapter on Dutch diaries written in hiding, titled "Onderduikdagboeken: Anne Frank in perspectief," in *Een joods kind dat weet van eeuwen heeft': Anne Frank als vluchteling, schrijfster en icoon*, edited by Martin van Gelderen and Frank van Vree (Prometheus, 2022). Her essays on Holocaust literature are collected in *Verhalen van kwaad* (Verbum, 2018).