

Esther van Raamsdonk, *Milton, Marvell, and the Dutch Republic*. Routledge Studies in Renaissance and Early Modern Worlds of Knowledge (London: Routledge, 2020, 270 pp., ISBN 9780367520571).

Recent years have witnessed a welcome recognition amongst early modernists of the need to move beyond national narratives and analyses. This allows historians to research political, religious, economic, social and cultural entanglements in and outside Europe and to explore transnational phenomena. Not the least fruitful avenue for such investigations involves Anglo-Dutch relations. These are perplexing because they not only reveal strong evidence about amity, interactions and influence, but also offer indisputable proof of various forms of cultural stereotyping and political, religious and economic tensions. The multicausal antagonisms between Britain and the Dutch Republic resulted in many moments of crisis and ultimately led to three wars in the second half of the seventeenth century.

These facts necessitate historians to think carefully about how best to characterise the contradiction-ridden relationship between these two states and their societies. It almost certainly requires breaking down disciplinary boundaries, because the conclusions that emerge from studying Anglo-Dutch economic relations, for example, might not correspond with those that follow from an analysis of the two countries' intellectual or cultural ties. It is in this context that Esther van Raamsdonk's *Milton, Marvell, and the Dutch Republic* proposes an intriguing way forward by employing an 'imagological method' and a 'transnational framework' (6). This means she focusses on how one place was imagined, discussed and perceived in another setting, something that in this case involves the study of the 'Dutch presence in English culture where it has previously been unnoticed or undervalued' (16).

More specifically, Van Raamsdonk concentrates on two vitally important poets and polemicists, John Milton (1608-1674) and Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), to connect the study of intellectual history and the trans-continental 'Republic of Letters' with other fields and sub-disciplines (such as political and diplomatic history), and to traverse a period from the British civil wars (1642-1651) to the late seventeenth century. Her central aim is to suggest that Milton and Marvell provide opportunities to move beyond a 'them and us' dichotomy and to demonstrate how both men – and by extension other contemporaries – were 'immersed in a cross-channel culture' (27). Van Raamsdonk insists on the 'transnational nature of intellectual and artistic culture, and the degree to which Britain and the Dutch Republic inhabited a shared literary space' (72). In the case of these two literary giants, this culture involved travel as well as personal acquaintances, and professional

responsibilities as well as literary influences. All of these things are detected at the level of language, in the substantive issues addressed by their literary productions, as well as in their political activities. At the same time, Van Raamsdonk also seeks to demonstrate how such cultural exchange worked ‘both ways’, by tracing in turn the impact of Milton and Marvell upon Anglo-Dutch relations (42).

The book’s chapters range widely in terms of methods and texts. For example, Marvell’s *The Character of Holland* (1665) is interrogated by Van Raamsdonk to suggest that, however much he was willing to rehearse familiar stereotypes of the Dutch, his prose also implies ‘eager engagement with the Dutch language’ (42). At a material level, Van Raamsdonk uses the famous dispute between Milton and the Leiden scholar Claude Salmasius over the regicide of Charles I in 1649 to demonstrate the popularity of Milton’s books, which were advertised in Dutch newspapers and praised by Dutch commentators (Chapter 2). More than one Dutch ambassador visited Milton in London, either to compliment him on his efforts or to purchase copies of his book in bulk. Elsewhere, the author attempts to identify similarities between the poetry of Milton and Marvell, on the one hand, and the works of Dutch authors like Joost van den Vondel and Constantijn Huygens on the other, not least through a comparative analysis of different versions of the Samson story. Here, Van Raamsdonk suggests that while Milton and Vondel had very different intentions, they nevertheless employed similar tools.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore in much greater depth the possibility that the perspectives of Milton and Marvell on religion, particularly on issues like toleration, betrayed engagement with if not exactly a replication of Dutch Arminian arguments that challenged Calvinist claims about predestination and emphasised instead the possibility of human free will. Finally, the author turns her attention to the political and global context of Anglo-Dutch relations in Chapters 6 and 7. These featured prominently in Milton’s professional career in the early 1650s when he was working for the republican Council of State as the first Anglo-Dutch War approached, and more allusively in his later poetry. Marvell addressed the Anglo-Dutch relations more directly, notably in his ‘Painter’ poems, which represented an explicit response to the war of 1665-1667. Here, Van Raamsdonk aims to tease out how imperial expansion and entanglements in the East Indies impinged upon the thinking of these two authors, not least by prompting unease about colonialism and trading competition. Furthermore, she points out that their responses to the moral and economic issues involved – such as attitudes to spices as well as to profit – need to be understood as implicit commentaries on the Dutch, as contemporaries would have recognised. Ultimately, Van Raamsdonk’s goal is to suggest that the views of Milton and Marvell on the Anglo-Dutch wars were more complex and equivocal, and much less bombastic than those of some other contemporaries, such as the English poet John Dryden.

Van Raamsdonk's book is thus both focused and wide-ranging. There are occasional slips, however. An example is the author's suggestion that the Dutch scholar and diplomat Lieuwe van Aitzema learned of Milton's plea for press freedom in *Areopagitica* (1644) through one of his speeches in the English Parliament (52). This is not quite indicated in the cited quotation and it cannot have been true, since Milton was never a Member of Parliament. *Areopagitica*, in fact, was a fictive speech. In terms of personal connections, moreover, one wonders whether more could have been said about other possible influences and encounters whether in regard to Milton's contacts with Calandrini and the Dutch church in London (as explored by Paul Sellin many years ago), or in terms of the visit of Lodewijk Huygens to London in the early 1650s, as part of a Dutch diplomatic mission.<sup>1</sup> Such men might have proved vital in terms of Milton's awareness of Dutch culture. Beyond this, Van Raamsdonk's central challenge involves how to detect and calibrate 'influence'. While the book is most sure-footed and most rich at the level of textual readings and literary analysis, here too questions arise. It might be worth considering the importance of English Arminianism, which had many strands beyond those associated with William Laud in the 1630s. Milton's engagement with Arminian ideas was perhaps as likely to have been instigated by radical parliamentarian preachers like John Goodwin as it was by Dutch authors. More generally, the literary approach inevitably involves an element of speculation and what are explicitly referred to as 'tantalising hints' (147). Van Raamsdonk is open and honest on this front and makes a legitimate case that, in exploring the 'impact' of Anglo-Dutch relations on these two canonical authors, influences were not 'always direct, or even obvious'. Nevertheless, she insists that they are 'visible in the right light' (217). Making this case might usefully have involved a more robust methodological discussion, in order to tease out and clarify the different kinds of analysis involved, the various modes of thinking about cultural and exchange, and the distinct ways of discerning reciprocal cultural 'influence'.

Nevertheless, the book is most definitely thought-provoking and it certainly makes a persuasive case that in the seventeenth century 'the mutual influence of the United Provinces and England was multifaceted, fluid, and understood through assorted lenses and biases' (217). As such, Van Raamsdonk demonstrates very clearly the fruitful possibilities that exist for further cross-disciplinary work which explores the rich and complicated history of Anglo-Dutch relations in the early modern period.

Jason Peacey, University College London

1 Paul R. Sellin, 'Caesar Calandrini, the London Dutch, and Milton's quarrels in Holland', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 31:3 (1968) 239-249. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3816668>; Fred

Bachrach and Robert G. Collmer (eds.), *Lodewijk Huygens: The English Journal 1651-1652* (Leiden 1982).