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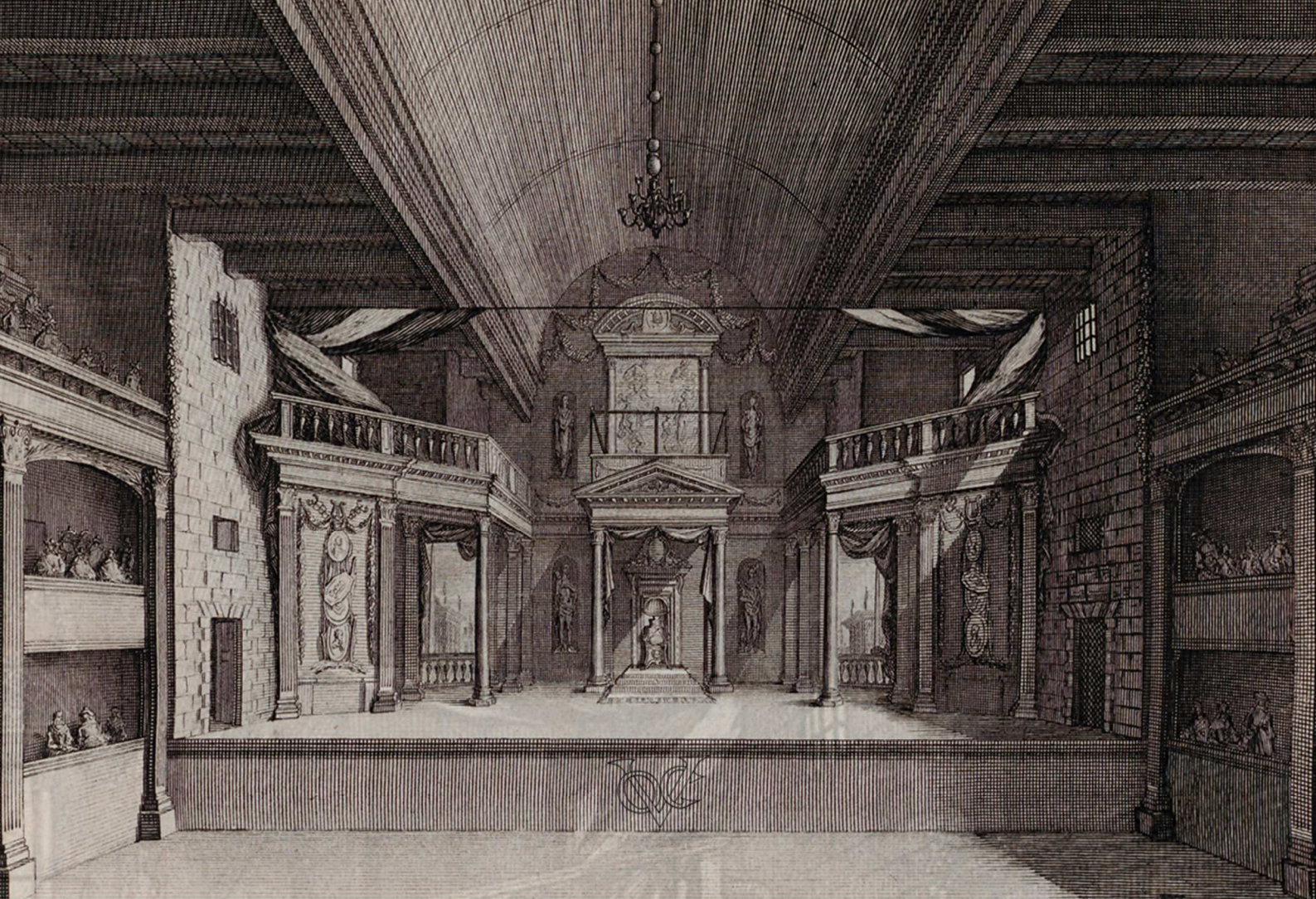


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Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient

*A Study of Representation and
its Information Circuits, c. 1650-1780*

MANJUSHA KURUPPATH

Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient

A Study of Representation and its Information Circuits, c. 1650-1780

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My tryst with drama began at the early age of four when I landed a role in a nativity play. I now forget what I was cast as, but I distinctly remember being allotted the role (which came with no dialogues) only because the organizers were convinced that I could not sing, dance or act. Subsequent years saw me acting (this time surprisingly with dialogues) in plays ranging from the Panchantantra to a college production of Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat. It took a while before realization hit me that I was probably better off writing about the stage than performing on it. My doctoral thesis will of course be the test of whether my judgement was a sound one.

My incredible journey of writing this thesis begins and ends in Leiden where, having spent six years of my life, can easily qualify as my second home. I confess to being far more familiar with streets and places in Leiden than in any other town. I shall sorely miss walking down the Rapenburg and catching the sun outside the University Library. The Encompass Programme was my passport to this town. It gave me the wonderful opportunity of pursuing my post-graduate and doctoral degrees at the University of Leiden. Professor Jos Gommans who supervised my Master's thesis (and consequently was my doctoral supervisor in which capacity he cannot be thanked as per university regulations) put me on the track of exciting research, Professor Leonard Blussé and Alicia Schrikker helped me find my feet academically and my fellow Encompassers provided me with the necessary social distraction. Marijke van Wissen was friend, financial adviser and mum all rolled in one. Because of her absolute incapability of turning down a request for help and because of my constant need for advice, I was almost a permanent fixture in her office. I cannot thank her enough.

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INTRODUCTION

Dutch drama, it appeared had ushered the world onto its stage. While a slave girl of Angolan extraction was cast as a character in Gerbrandt Adriaensz Bredero's early seventeenth-century drama, *Moortje* (1615), P.C. Hooft's *Granida* (1605) told of love between a Persian princess and shepherd, and Nicolaas Simon van Winter's 1774 play *Monzongo of de koningklyke slaaf* was set in the Spanish Americas. Dutch playwrights in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had taken to heart Vondel's verses: "*The world is a stage,/ Each plays his role and receives his share.*"¹

Variety it so happens was not the only interesting feature of Dutch drama in the period. Three playwrights in the Republic—Joost van den Vondel, Frans van Steenwyk and Onno Zwier van Haren—ensured that their dramas gave cause for greater bewilderment. They dramatized historical events in Asia which were either contemporaneous or within a century of their own lifetimes. Joost van den Vondel took up the Manchu conquest of Ming China in 1644 as the subject for *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (1667), Frans van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan of de verovering van het Mogolsche Rijk* (1745) rehearsed Nadir Shah's invasion of India in 1739, and Onno Zwier van Haren drew the attention of his readers and spectators to the Dutch conquest of Banten in 1682 in his 1769 play titled *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam*.² In these dramas, the playwrights cited names and recalled events with such precision that contemporaries who watched or read these literary pieces could easily have believed that these dramatists had witnessed the episodes that they wrote about firsthand. In truth however, whether these playwrights had ever so much as ventured beyond the precincts of the Dutch Republic let alone that of Europe is suspect. Their modest travel experiences notwithstanding, the historical events they sought to dramatize took place in China, India and Java, all which were a part of the Company's Orient—that expanse of Asia "from the Cape of Good Hope to Deshima" which was opened up to Dutch cultural mentalité by the Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie, or the Dutch East India Company in their

¹"De werelt is een speeltooneel, Elk speelt zijn rol en krijgt zijn deel." Olfert Dapper, *Historische beschrijving der stad Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1663), 442.

²Joost van den Vondel, *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (Amsterdam: Abraham de Wees, 1667); Frans van Steenwyk, *Thamas Koelikan, of de verovering van het Mogolsche rijk* (Amsterdam: Izaak Duim, 1745); Onno Zwier van Haren, *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam, Treurspel in vijf bedrijven* (Leeuwarden: Abraham Ferwerda, 1769).

mercantile pursuits in these waters from 1602 to 1796.³ The playwrights were inhabitants of a historical setting where the necessity to travel eastwards in the quest for information about the Orient had become redundant. This was an age when news about Asia came knocking on their doors in the Republic instead. These playwrights were beneficiaries and their plays examples of the “global traffic” of information facilitated by the Dutch East India Company in the period.⁴

It is these three dramas written by “stay-at-home” playwrights, enamoured by historical events in Asia, that *Dutch Drama and the Company’s Orient* takes up for examination. It investigates the nature of the representation of the Orient in these plays and the manner in which the characterization of this spatial and cultural entity called the Orient in these texts was influenced by the channels that these dramatists relied on to gather information for their works. Owing to the palpable linkages with the Dutch East India Company that these plays exhibit, this work examines the role of the enterprise in this dissemination of information, the production of Orientalist imagery, and the formulation of Dutch Orientalism. Metaphorically put, the study envisages the Dutch East India Company as an umbilical cord relaying information about the Orient from Asia through its membranous interior before it found expression in the Dutch Republic in the medium of drama. It thereby peruses the multiple mediations that this travelling information experienced in the hands of the agents involved at various points in the process of transfer, and the transformations it underwent owing to the influence of the literary genres, which clothed and conveyed this information.

Seldom are the keywords that this work is built around — namely drama, representation, information brokerage and the institution, the Dutch East India Company — invoked in the same context. Although the disciplines of literary studies and history are known to engage with two or even three of these elements, drama and representation generally belong in the toolbox of literary critics while the latter concepts are decidedly familiar terrain for historians of early modern Asia. Literary scholars have increasingly come to study representation in literary works armed with the understanding that they constitute “records of cross-cultural encounter,” but their academic pursuits in this direction have invited

³Bert Paasman, “De geschiedschrijving van de Indische-Nederlandse literatuur uit de Compagniestijd: taak en problemen,” in *Europa buitengaats: Koloniale en postkoloniale literaturen in Europese talen, Deel 1* ed. Theo D’haen (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2002), 35.

⁴I borrow the term “global traffic” from Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London’s Theatre of the East 1576-1626* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

criticism.⁵ They have often been accused of reifying literary texts and representations contained therein at the expense of submerging the historical contexts of actual encounter and overlooking the actors who facilitated and partook in this process of interaction. Betty Joseph's observation of a marked lack of interest in "using the official documents of colonialism (such as the archives of the English East India Company) for cultural, literary and feminist studies" may be considered symptomatic of this disdain for the historical. But the strongest critique of this trend in literary studies emerges from the pen of the historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam.⁶ Such scholarly endeavors, Subrahmanyam argues, in their undivided attention to the text and representation, cause "historical actors [to] disappear, as it were into a textual miasma."⁷ When literary critics are criticized for evincing a peculiar insensitivity to the historical landscape, historians of early modern Asia and European expansion in the period may likewise, with a few exceptions, be blamed for displaying a lack of interest in turning to literature when exercising their craft. Historians may have ventured so far as to have employed genres such as the travelogue to inform their works, but for the most part poetry and drama have yet to be recruited into projects of historical writing on early modern Asia.

In engaging these three themes—drama, representation and information brokerage in relation to the Dutch East India Company—within the margins of a single study, *Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient* aims to redress this disconnect between the two fields of enquiry: history and literary studies. The primary object of my study is to sketch the relationship between the Dutch Republic and the Company's Orient in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. My study is steeped in the domain of literary studies in its interrogation of how the Orient came to be represented in three works of drama in the Dutch Republic and the discourses they generated in comprehending the Other. The strong historical dimension of my work draws from the fact that I evaluate how historical episodes that took place in Asia were conceptualized in these plays. Such an engagement allows me to stress the idea that information and images of the "Other" borne in these works of drama come with crucial prehistories. Here, I take a cue from the literary scholar Ros Ballaster's deceptively simple yet

⁵M.G. Aune, "Review Article: Early Modern European Travel Writing after Orientalism," *The Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5, 2 (2005), 121.

⁶Betty Joseph, *Reading the English East India Company, 1720-1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 7.

⁷Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Noris," in *The Worlds of the East India Company* eds. H.V. Bowen, Margarete Lincoln, Nigel Rigby (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 70.

heavily loaded phrase, “narrative moves.”⁸ I subscribe to Ballaster’s proposition that stories possess an inherent propensity to travel. I argue that the plays that I study—*Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan* and *Agon*—which were authored by “stay-at-home” playwrights centrally revolved around the idea of transfer. The manner in which these dramas brought to life three historical events that occurred in seventeenth-century Asia, depended on and was significantly influenced by an inter-continental transport of narratives about these events. For information and imagery, these dramatists relied on first hand narratives and travel accounts about the Orient that were published in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These first-hand accounts were, in turn, often cumulative works which appealed to other sources, of which a chief source was often the official documentation of the principal go-between between the Dutch Republic and Asia in the period, the Dutch East India Company. The archives of the VOC at times constituted the mother narrative of these travelogues, pamphlets, and histories, which entered the Dutch print market and on other occasions, produced significant contemporary accounts about happenings in Asia. This corpus of information was informed by the Company’s encounter with the Asian polities that it interacted with and was the outcome of complex systems of information procurement and brokerage which involved the participation of multiple agents, both European employees of the Company and native informants. Because of their palpable Oriental content these dramas were, as a consequence, the products of processes of information transfer that originated in the Dutch East India Company’s engagement with Asia.

Plainly put thus, my study emphasizes the idea that as representations of the Orient these plays reveal well-worn trails of information and perspective transfer. It recapitulates the history of information travel about three historical events in seventeenth-century Asia from the time of their occurrence until their recruitment by three Dutch playwrights in works of drama and the discourses about the East that were created as a consequence. Emphasis is here laid on both the “software” of information travel in the nature of representation and perspectives of the Orient that they carried, and the “hardware” involved in the process in the form of its information networks and the historical actors who fed them. The novelty of my study stems from the fact that it straddles the disciplines of history and literary studies while still venturing into a realm that they both have left uncharted. It engages the literary genre of drama traditionally ignored by historians of early modern Asia and bypasses past literary studies by emphasizing the fact that a principal and undeniable determinant in the way Asia

⁸Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orientals : Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7-8.

came to be represented in literary works in the Dutch Republic was the nature of the VOC's historical encounter with Asia. My study therefore makes sketching "genealogies of discourse" its principle agenda; an exercise that the historian Peter Rietbergen notes has not yet been attempted.⁹ To this end, it engages a wide range of primary sources. Apart from the three works of Dutch drama which constitute the principal focus of my study, it relies on a healthy stock of print literature published in the Dutch Republic in the form of other works of drama, pamphlets, travelogues, first hand narratives, and histories, and it heavily exploits the archives of the Dutch East India Company.¹⁰

Representation and Information Transfer

Studies of representation are not the barren wastelands they once were and the consuming interest for the concept today is to be ascribed to Edward Said's incredibly influential theory of Orientalism. First conceptualized in his book of the same title in 1978, Said's theory of Orientalism deploys the crucial interface between the Foucauldian equation of power and knowledge towards understanding the ideological basis of western imperialism.¹¹ Orientalism according to Said, is the textual conception of the Orient by Europe from the standpoint of relative superiority. The knowledge that this articulation engendered is perceived to have assumed the form of a discourse dictated by binarisms that were closely related to the power relations between the Occident and the Orient.¹² When texts to Said constitute a corpus in which the subordination of the Orient to Western domination is both conceived and reinforced, literature of European authorship have gained currency as testimonies of understandings of the (European) Self in relation to the (Oriental) Other based on their interactions with the latter.¹³

A compelling premise, Said's theory of Orientalism has left an indelible impression in the field of humanities. Early modern literary critics and historians have however responded to the theory in ways that makes it essential that we first discuss how Saidian Orientalism has been received by literary scholars before addressing the reception of the theory by historians of early modern Asia and, especially, the Dutch East India Company. Said's theory has

⁹P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, "Varieties of Asia? European Perspectives, c.1600-1800," *Itinerario* 25, 3/4 (2001), 86-87.

¹⁰ All VOC archives cited in this dissertation were consulted at the National Archives (henceforth referred to as NA) in The Hague.

¹¹Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Edition ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹²See Introduction. Ibid., 1-28.

¹³Said defines Orientalism as "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological...texts." Ibid., 12; Aune makes this inference in the context of travel literature, but this estimation, one argues, applies to written texts in general. Aune, "Review Article: Early Modern European Travel Writing after Orientalism," 121.

constituted an irreplaceable point of departure for critics delineating the character of the representation of the Other in early modern literary works but the relationship between Said's theory of Orientalism and early modernity has of late, turned sour.¹⁴ Literary scholars in recent years have exhibited wariness towards embracing the theory in its entirety. The complete rejection of the theory in favour of more congenial post-colonial postulations such as Homi Bhabha's notion of alterity has signified a necessary theoretical move for Daniel Vitkus.¹⁵ Nicolas Dew in his work on Orientalism in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century France on the other hand, does not deny the workings of paradigm in the context of his study, but only that, he argues, it existed in a different form. He goes on to note that "we still lack a model for thinking about the Orientalism of the pre-Enlightenment period."¹⁶ This remark captures the quandary that early modern literary scholars experience in evaluating a period in time that, they reckon, constituted a distinct historical context with a wholly different set of power dynamics than what are found in the political configurations that took root in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Visibly different geopolitical conditions they argue, governed the playing field in a period when future imperialists such as Britain, in their seventeenth century avatar as the English East India Company only lurked in the margins of Asian power. Illustrative of this standpoint is Robert Markley's inference which emphasizes the peripheral character of Europe's position "in an Asian-dominated world" in the period.¹⁷ Bereft of a colonial reality, Pompa Banerjee notes: "we need to scrutinize these early exchanges as being caught in asymmetrical, contingent, and shifting cultural formations."¹⁸ It is precisely this evaluation of the character of early modern encounter in which both power balances and identities are regarded as having been far less delineated than in the modern world that has generated such attention for go-betweens – renegades, and the like – people who with their presumably cosmopolitan mobility trespass and subsequently call into question the boundries that Saidian dualisms carefully draw. The consequence of this revision of the character of early modern interaction has been looking beyond the theory of Orientalism which emphasizes on irreconcilable differences between East and West to adopt a theoretical understanding which embraces concepts such as "hybridity," "alterity," "traffic," and

¹⁴ I have been considerably informed in by M.G. Aune's article in the inferences I draw in this section. "Review Article: Early Modern European Travel Writing after Orientalism."

¹⁵ Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 12-13.

¹⁶ Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

¹⁷ Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination: 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁸ Pompa Banerjee, *Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travelers in India* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

“exchange,” for vocabulary.¹⁹ Richmond Barbour articulately lends support to this perspectival stance when he says “to efface hybridity, and reduce multiple alliances and antagonisms to an overriding dualism, is also to miss what is essential about precolonial engagements.”²⁰

When Markley and Vitkus call for an estimation of the early modern period as a relatively alien realm as compared to the subsequent era of full-blown colonialism, they suggest that the impetus for European representations lay elsewhere. The English discourse, according to Markley, was constructed in a climate in which England possessed mercantile interests in the Orient and their disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the Asian polities it traded with resulted in the representation of the Orient as “a fantasy space for mercantile capitalism.”²¹ Although these and other theoreticians distance themselves from Orientalism in their perspectives on representation, they by no means imply a radical break from the theory. They acknowledge that some early modern European estimations of the Orient were inherently false. Early modern discourse of the “Other” may not have been celebrations and justifications of conquest, but to the extent to which they were evocations of strength, they constituted “a discourse without colonialism” and “imperial rhetoric without territorial possession.”²² Quite clearly, this early rhetoric laid the groundwork for later ideologies of empire and those traits that by the nineteenth century defined Asia in the European mind. Concepts of Oriental Despotism as a perceptibly Oriental form of government or effeminacy as a distinctly Oriental behavioural trait had their origins in this period. Recent readings of early modernity in the realms of both representation and encounter give the period a tangible connection with the subsequent era while still emphasizing its exceptionalism.²³

I register my accord with this recent wave of opinion which marks out early modernity as a different era with its own dynamics of encounter with and representation of the Other. However, we must bear in mind that a majority of these theoretical postulations are formulated within the context of early modern English literature. They have been conceived principally to explain the English encounter with the East where they do rightly to emphasize the modest political stature of the English East India Company through the seventeenth century and even until the mid-eighteenth century following which there was a radical shake-up in their

¹⁹Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Vitkus, *Turning Turk*; Ania Loomba, “Delicious Traffick: Alterity and Exchange on Early Modern Stages,” in *Shakespeare Survey 52: Shakespeare and the Globe*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁰Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 5.

²¹Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination: 1600-1730*, 4.

²²Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, 17; Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 6.

²³Barbour’s notion of “proto-Orientalism” is an example of this tendency. Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 99.

fortunes in the East. When the Dutch East India Company features in my study in many incarnations: as historical actor, chronicler and informant thereby rendering the mercantile organization the unmistakable protagonist of my story, it invariably calls for the deployment of a theoretical template which varies from the framework endorsed by the aforementioned scholars. This owes to the fact that the histories of the VOC and her English counterpart differ significantly. Daniel Vitkus is right in pointing out that any discussion of the British colonial empire in the seventeenth century is rendered obsolete by what he calls, its “material reality.”²⁴ The same however cannot be said about the VOC. The geographical expanse of the Company’s operations in Asia was such that no single label can convincingly capture the startling pluralism of the corporation’s extra-European interactions. The Dutch East India Company’s Asian encounter was an aggregate of differing experiences that were directly correlated to the measure of mercantile and imperial clout they possessed vis-à-vis the polities they interacted with.²⁵ The Company’s interests in Deshima in Japan where they were subject to stringent restrictions of trade, movement, and interaction with the Japanese constitutes one end of the spectrum, while her tenure in Formosa (present-day Taiwan) as an avowed imperialist during her five-decade presence on the island forms the other. It is the nature of the Dutch interaction with Formosa and parts of the East Indies, too, where she enjoyed all-but uncontested dominance that amplifies the differences between the EIC and the VOC in the period. The Dutch East India Company had had its first taste of imperialism as early as the 1620’s in the Banda Islands, and attained her prime in her wars against Macassar (1667), Mataram (1677) and Banten (1684). The success that the British endeavor at imperialism and conquest met with in the battles of Buxar and Plassey in the Indian subcontinent in the 1750’s and the 1760’s had thus been anticipated by the Dutch nearly a century before in the East Indies.²⁶

It is the same notion of variety that comes to the fore when we consider the locations of the episodes that were subsequently dramatized—China, India, and Banten. The Dutch East India Company interacted with each of the three places to varying degrees. The kingdom of Banten on the island of Java transitioned from being a competitor to the Dutch for a great part

²⁴Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 5.

²⁵Leonard Blussé, “De Chinese Nachtmerrrie: Een terugtocht en twee nederlagen,” in *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, eds. Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (Leiden: KITLV, 2002), 12.

²⁶ As H.V. Bowen notes, “the transformation of the Company from traders to sovereign is, of course, quite clearly discernible from even the most cursory examination of the military and political events that unfolded in India after 1740.”H.V. Bowen, “No longer mere Traders: Continuities and Change in the Metropolitan Development of the East India Company, 1600-1834,” in *The Worlds of the English East India Company*, ed. H.V. Bowen, Margarete Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002), 19.

of the seventeenth century to virtually conquered territory in 1682. The Mughal Empire retained its position as a powerful trading partner of the Company before its gradual subjugation by the English East India Company towards the second half of the eighteenth century. China, in contrast to both Mughal India and Banten was the strong-headed dame who rejected the advances of the Dutch East India Company, who remained the persistent suitor. When the nature of Dutch relations with one Asian power was perceptively different from its interactions with another, conceptualizations such as “a discourse without colonialism” principally framed by academics to relate to the experiences of the English East India Company in Asia retain their explanatory value only with regard to certain manifestations of the Dutch encounter in Asia; in other contexts they are quite unhelpful.²⁷ They help us grasp the Company’s manifestation as a potential merchant in China and as a trader in the Mughal Empire but they fail to take into account the third avatar of the VOC as imperial actor in Banten. Recent histories on early modern Asia however provide us with a theoretical template that acknowledges the plurality of encounters that the VOC’s presence in Asia encapsulated.

Prior to broaching this subject however, we might take a small detour to briefly reflect on why Dutch literary studies fails to provide us with an explanatory apparatus to engage with the VOC’s two-century presence in Asia. The reason is that the engagement of scholars of early modern French and English literature with Saidian Orientalism has not been replicated in the Dutch case. With the exception of the works of Christine Dohmen on the subject of eighteenth-century print literature and Jan de Hond on nineteenth-century representations of the Orient, academic advances in this direction have been modest at best, and the most significant studies on literature pertaining to the Dutch East India Company such as Bert Paasman’s *De Indisch-Nederlandse literatuur uit de VOC tijd* and E.M. Beekman’s *Troubled Pleasures*, have chosen to remain aloof from Said’s theory of Orientalism.²⁸ The themes of representation and ideology find no mention whatsoever in Paasman’s work while Beekman adopts a strictly “aesthetic” approach in his study of the metamorphosis of Dutch literature from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and he makes explicit that an engagement with the

²⁷ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, 17.

²⁸ Both Dohmen and De Hond reject the application of Said’s theory in the themes they engage with. De Hond does not subscribe to Said’s theory as he considers it as being far too fraught with problems to incorporate in his study. Dohmen on the other hand emphasizes the fact that it was similarities with the East rather than irreconcilable difference that eighteenth century Dutch print literature sought to convey to its audiences. Jan de Hond, *Verlangen naar het Oosten: Orientalisme in de Nederlandse cultuur ca. 1800-1920* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2008); Paasman, “De geschiedschrijving van de Indische-Nederlandse literatuur uit de Compagniestijd”; E.M. Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures: Dutch Colonial Literature from the East Indies 1600-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Christine Dohmen, *In de schaduw van Scheherazade: Oosterse vertellingen in achttiende-eeuws Nederland* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2000).

ideological content of the literary texts he studies does not feature on his agenda.²⁹ The other approach to Orientalism by Dutch literary academia has been one of criticism. Although Siegfried Huigen, who studies the situation of South Africa (which remains relevant in this context because the Cape was an important “watering station” for VOC ships travelling to or from the Orient) in the early modern Dutch imaginary, is open to applying the theory, he has expressed reservations about its applicability. Huigen’s scepticism towards embracing the theory springs from its complete rejection of the role of “empiricism” in the creation of perspectives of the Other and its extravagant emphasis on the “representer,” when attention as Huigen notes, is also due to the “recipient” of the manufactured information.³⁰ The study of early Dutch literature therefore has been rather unaffected by the wave of representational studies that has engaged the research of other European literatures. In consequence, ruminations on the character of the encounter of the VOC with Asia have been lacking.

We are nevertheless adequately compensated by the nuanced evaluations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made by historians of early modern Asia. Studies grappling with the issue of Europe’s encounter with Asia in the early modern period have come a long way since K.M. Panikkar crafted the idea of “the Vasco da Gama Epoch,” which underlined the destructive potential that the European presence in Asia possessed and put to use and Holden Furber’s counter-proposition of the notion of the “Age of Partnership,” which, suggested a sort of idyllic, friction-free interaction between the East and West. Scholars have of late, reached a middle ground in their estimations of this cross-cultural encounter, as seen in Subrahmanyam’s concept of “contained conflict” and C.A. Bayly’s notion of “conflict-ridden symbiosis,” both of which envisage the relationship between the Companies and early modern Asia as having been one of “violence”—one that was persistently fraught with tensions, though of often manageable proportions.³¹ In their views on Orientalism, these scholars have tended to keep the theory at arm’s length or to broach it, to their minds, with necessary circumspection. Rietbergen has done little to conceal his distaste for the theory.³² Also evincing his suspicions for the potency of the theory is Marcus Vink, who states that “many contacts...occurred on a level plain and were not forged in a context of unequal power

²⁹Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures*, 5-6; Paasman, “De geschiedschrijving van de Indische-Nederlandse literatuur uit de Compagniestijd.”

³⁰Siegfried Huigen, *De weg naar Monomotapa: Nederlandstalige representaties van geografische, historische en sociale werkelijkheden in Zuid-Afrika* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 58.

³¹I base my evaluation of these theoretical trends on Marcus Vink, ed. *Mission to Madurai: Dutch Embassies to the Nayaka Court of Madurai in the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 4, *Dutch Sources on South Asia c.1600-1825* (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 44.

³²P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, “Orientalisme: een theorie van ficties - de fictie van een theorie? Een poging tot contextualisering en herinterpretatie,” *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 111(1998).

and subordination. Moreover, non-Europeans were not passively produced by hegemonic projects, but were active agents themselves whose choices and discourses were of fundamental importance in shaping the encounter.”³³ If it is the presumably faulty conjectures that Saidian Orientalism makes regarding the character of the actual early modern encounter that turns Vink into a critic, Subramanyam evinces a much warranted concern for the dangers that “the literary turn” (of which the theory of Orientalism is an example) poses to the study of the past. According to him, a blatant manifestation of this is, as previously noted, its gross neglect of historical actors.³⁴

Early modern historians have primarily looked askance at the theory of Orientalism but Subrahmanyam’s and Vink’s cultural histories of early modern Asia have still courted the theme of representation. We encounter, in the work of the former, a theoretical model that helps us evaluate the representations of Asia that emanated from the Dutch encounter with the continent. Subrahmanyam argues that early modern Companies “as political actor(s)...produced political discourse(s).”³⁵ He demonstrates that the resulting discourses sought recourse to categories (and here he finds common ground with early modern literary critics) such as effeminacy and Oriental despotism in conjuring up conceptions of Asia.³⁶ The images, Subrahmanyam notes, were born and informed in their standpoints by the character of the interaction of the early companies with Asia which in the period was characterized by “contained conflict.”³⁷ Drawing on Subrahmanyam’s proposition, I contend that the Dutch East India Company during its tenure generated an institutional discourse that was influenced by an encounter with Asia which was in effect an admixture of trade, diplomacy, belligerence, and aspirations of commerce and conquest. A plethora of voices, I concede, surface in the records of the VOC and appraisals of the polities that they interacted with contained in this archive admittedly range from the sympathetic to dispassionate to denunciatory. I nevertheless argue that Company rhetoric still attained the quality of a discourse owing to the preponderant reliance of this corpus of knowledge on recurrent perceptions and familiar

³³Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 37.

³⁴“Subrahmanyam, “Frank Submissions,” 70. The theorizations of Subrahmanyam which I refer to in this section draw principally from two articles by the author: “Frank Submissions” and “Forcing the doors of Heathendom” of which the first concerns the English East India Company’s experiences at the Mughal court and the second, the VOC’s interaction with Asia. The articles suggest that Subrahmanyam applies one model to comprehend the relations of the two companies in the Orient. “Forcing the Doors of Heathendom: Ethnography, Violence and the Dutch East India Company,” *The Wertheim Lecture 2002* (2003).

³⁵Although construed in the context to grapple with the English experiences at the Mughal court, his estimations evidently framed to make sense of the Dutch East India Company encounter with Asia establish a pivotal connection between Company and discourse.

³⁶Subrahmanyam, “Frank Submissions,” 75, 95; “Forcing the Doors of Heathendom,” 8.

³⁷ “Even before the age of high imperialism, other more subtle forms of conflict and violence shaped the relationships and the consequent representations that emerged.” “Forcing the Doors of Heathendom,” 23.

understandings of Asia. These stereotypes, which tended to deprecate, I argue, often took the form of Orientalist binaries.

When discussing the character of the Dutch East India Company's interaction with early modern Asia, previous conceptualizations—whether of an “age of partnership” or “contained conflict”—fail to pay heed to the diversity of the Dutch Asian experience in the early modern period, thereby permitting its application in relation to China, Mughal India and Banten. The Company in its dealings pursued a policy of aggressive mercantilism.³⁸ Trade constituted the basis of the Company's relations with Asian polities, and aggression was deployed if needed, if the odds were in their favour and if the Dutch reckoned that the expenditure of gunpowder was worth the potential return. The settlement and colonization practices that the Dutch resorted to in places such as Formosa and Java were consequences of the successful pursuit of their policy of aggressive mercantilism and their exclusion from trade in the Chinese mainland represented the failure of their policy of aggression to yield returns. Dominance in early modern Asia was not the premeditated intent of the VOC, but it sometimes followed in their pursuit of trade. Such an evaluation liberates assessments of the Dutch-Asian encounter from persistent references to later histories of imperialism in the territories we engage with to evaluate this period. This, I believe is an object that recent literary studies still have to contend with owing to their continued usage of terminology such as “orientalism before empire,” which references the later imperial phase.³⁹

With regard to the impact that this territorial plurality had on the Dutch discourse on the Orient, I argue that the Company, informed as it was by its various encounters with these polities, was capable of devising region-specific appraisals of China, Mughal India, and Banten. The VOC's emphasis on religious tensions and religious apostasy in their annals on Banten alone is a case in point. The Company, regardless of this plurality it permitted into its perspectival frame, could still subscribe to a standard vocabulary of representation in their assessments and appraisals of the three very different territories. Effeminacy, for instance, was a feature that the Company's archives frequently attributed to the royal courts of Ming China and Mughal India. Subramanyam also points out that change of perspective was an inherent feature of the discourses that were engendered.⁴⁰ In the case of the Dutch East India Company therefore, the temporal stretch of their presence in Asia which spanned over two

³⁸This idea is reminiscent of Marcus and Vink's “merchant-warrior” and Ashin Dasgupta's appraisal of the European-Asian interactions in the period, when he says, “the European used force to win privileges and exclude competition wherever he could.” Ashin Dasgupta, “Review of Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38, 2 (1979), 316.

³⁹Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France*, 6.

⁴⁰Subrahmanyam, “Frank Submissions,” 70.

hundred years ensured that their perceptions of Asia did not constitute a series of static, unchanging images. Although the Company appraisals of the polities in which they interacted changed over time, I argue their evaluations of Asia could still remain derogatory and that transformations in perspective simply meant opting for one negative appraisal instead of another. The Company's conceptions of Oriental governmentality for instance shifted between an estimation of Asian states as tyrannical and autocratic and an appraisal of their potentates as weak with little or no authority over their subordinates. In general, I argue that the Company discourse was able to transcend the temporal and territorial constraints that the VOC's engagement with Asia brought with it.

The fundamentals of formulating a discourse derived from the process of information acquisition about various events in Asia by the Dutch East India Company. This practice of hoarding news for the sake of protecting one's interests in the region depended on the element of dialogue which invariably characterizes these encounters of information exchange. As Nicholas Dirks' study on the reports of Colin Mackenzie, an eighteenth-century colonial administrator in Southern India reveals, the onus in such transactions did not always lie with the European and native correspondents could sometimes exert a preponderant influence on the acquisition of information.⁴¹ Parallel to the Dirks' summations are the findings of Eugene Irschick who in his study of information gathering in the colonial context of Southern India, argues that it is hard to discount the role of the British subjects in this undertaking.⁴² While the imperial facet which features in Irschick's observation is to be contextually deployed, his reading is particularly relevant in this study because the VOC revealed a reliance on local informants in the acquisition of information. In underlining and illustrating this factor of dependency, the study rescues a set of historical actors from historical obscurity—the native informants, who together with lower level VOC employees constituted the grass-roots personnel involved in the Company's information gathering. With a reliance on native agents for the acquisition of information also came a dependence on pre-existing channels of information acquisition in China, India, and Java which procured information for the Company together with networks of their making. By demonstrating the processes of information gathering involved, the study sheds light on mechanisms that states and individuals in China, India, and Java employed to gather, dispense, and share information, and

⁴¹Nicholas B. Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants : Biography of an Archive," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 279-313.

⁴²Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1-13.

it thereby contributes albeit modestly, to the growing body of literature on the subject. While the study emphasizes the role of native agents as co-participants in the process of information manufacture, it unearths other narratives on the same historical events that the Dutch chronicled but that were manufactured by Asian agents in the kingdoms of Mughal India and Banten, or those constructed by European actors outside of the Dutch East India Company such as the Jesuits in the case of China. Insights into these alternative stories and histories which one may arguably refer to as constituting “counter-discourses” to the Company’s manufactured version of events, provide a better perspective on the character of the information and the nature of representations that travelled through the Dutch East India Company circuit.

Deliberating on the impact of the VOC discourse on perspectives of Asia in the Dutch Republic, I argue that this bundle of perspectives, like raw information itself made an oceanic passage. It crossed the boundaries of company documentation to inform, mould and transform the Dutch Republic’s imagination of the Company’s Orient. The measure to which its influence was felt in Patria was relative and displays variations in each of the case studies engaged with. As is captured in Marshall McLuhan’s phrase, “the medium is the message,” a principal determinant in determining the extent of the impact of the discourse was the character of the genre through which this information was conveyed to the reading or play-going public in Europe.⁴³ Unlike the archives of the VOC, which were produced for a familiar and closed audience for the purpose of institutional upkeep and advancement, genres such as the travelogue were prepared for consumption by a general audience in the Dutch Republic. The audience to which these genres catered determined which strands of the Dutch-Asian encounter they chose to retain in their pages and which they sought to reject. Print literature on the Orient is generally known to have been capable of accentuating images of Asian otherness, but owing to its literary and performative aspects, drama was particularly influential in creating portrayals of encounter that hinged on the element of difference. Richmond Barbour for instance notes “public theatres—novel, increasingly important institutions of popular fantasy—encouraged binaristic thinking” and this, Mita Choudhury in her study on eighteenth century British theatre observes, owed to the organic relationship between the medium and “the notions of location, territory, space and the concomitant cultural dialectics of Self/Other...”⁴⁴ Drama in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was

⁴³ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London, 1966), 2nd edition, 7-21.

⁴⁴ Mita Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theater 1660-1800: Identity, Performance, Empire* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 21; Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 5.

moreover a genre strictly governed by rules of plot, characterization and portrayal. This played a key role in regulating the content of plays and thus in determining which images of the Orient merited inclusion, rejection, or modification in these works. Genre apart, the playwrights and authors of travelogues and histories played onerous roles in determining the composition of their works and the notions of the Orient they embodied. The production of a Dutch discourse on the Orient in consequence, I argue, was a multi-dimensional process engaging several agents producing information (native informants, company officials, authors, playwrights), various genres packaging the information produced (Company reports, published accounts such as travelogues and histories, drama), and numerous audiences consuming this information (Company superiors, and the Dutch reading and theatre-going public).⁴⁵ It is this process that this study brings to centre-stage.

Organization

The first chapter introduces the principal actors in the production: the Dutch East India Company as the chief courier involved in the production and/transfer of information and the *Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*, the Amsterdam playhouse which dictated the tone, form, and character the dramas came to assume and thereby dressed the information in ways distinct from how their predecessors would have imagined. Chapters two, three, and four are dedicated to studies of Joost van den Vondel's *Zungchin*, Frans van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* and Onno Zwier van Haren's *Agon, Sultan van Banten*, respectively. As the anatomy of information transfer and the resultant changes, mutations and transformations of this data constitutes the thrust of my thesis, it dictates the manner in which I conceive the writing of each of these chapters. The chapters follow a standard plot: a) they all begin with an analysis of the play as the final destination of the itinerant information; b) the works published in the Republic which effectively functioned as sources for the making of these dramas are subsequently studied; c) travelling backwards in time and through space, the interrogation then leaves the confines of the Republic and returns to the Orient where the information was originally assembled. Here, the historical forces that dictated the direction and outcome of the political revolutions are outlined; d) the Dutch East India Company archives which either informed these travel accounts or constituted contemporary depictions

⁴⁵ I regard the category of published accounts as comprising of both histories and travelogues. It may be argued that this category does not constitute a literary genre in itself. I justify my inclusion of histories and travelogues in this category on the grounds that these works constituted a distinct stage in the transfer of information about the Orient to Europe. The audiences that they catered to and the representational tactics that they resorted to in characterizing the Orient were also similar.

of the episodes are then dealt with; e) lastly, I return to the dramas to consider those factors, political, economic, personal, and genre-related that determined the makeup of the plays. Wherever possible, I have attempted to shed light on native agents who were co-participants in the process of information manufacture, and to detect other narratives either manufactured by Asian agents or constructed by actors extraneous to the Dutch East India Company to provide better perspective on the character of the information and nature of representations that travelled through the Dutch East India Company circuit.

Chapter One

THE REPUBLIC, ITS STAGE, AND ITS EAST INDIA COMPANY

Introduction

Avaricious Amsterdam with all her sweet children,
Braggs all too imprudently about her fat moneybag.
The mean frugality that was always her idol,
Makes the chicken lay not eggs but excrement.¹

Willem van Focquenbroch's seventeenth-century verse about the untranslatability of Amsterdam's wealth into welfare is spiked with dark satire and raging bitterness. Yet, these are also the words of a poet who bore witness, albeit a grudging one, to the abundant affluence that the city came to exhibit in his time. Fortune had smiled on seventeenth-century Amsterdam as never before and prosperity had stormed in this city like an obstinate tenant who refused to vacate until the century had passed. Her affluence owed much to her preeminent position in international trade, a fact vigorously endorsed by various forms of cultural expression in the period. She was represented in painting, poetry, and print as the triumphant dame who wore her prosperity with a nonchalant air and easy modesty even as she was mobbed by hawkers from the world over eager to win her approval for the wares that they brought with them. This constituted the subject of the pediment of the city town hall in the period and Jan Vos set this image in verse in his poem *Vergrooting van Amsterdam* when he wrote:

And now the world in the seaside city appeared;
Accompanied by her daughters, of unsurpassable worth:
Yellow America abounding with gold and silver mines;
Turbaned Asia, the largest part of the world;
Black roasted Africa swarming with tigers, dragons, lions;
And the city-rich Europe, renowned for its intelligence.²

¹“t Geldzuchtig Amsterdam, met al haar zoete kijers,/ Stoft al te moedig op haar opgevulde tas./ De magere gierigheid, die steeds haar afgod was,/ Maakt dat dit hoen niets legt dan stront in plaats van eiers.” This verse features in Willem Godschalk van Focquenbroch's poem “*Op Amsterdam*.” Arie Jan Gelderblom, *‘k wil rijmen wat ik bouw: Twee eeuwen topografische poezie* (Amsterdam: Em. Querido's Uitgeverij, 1994), 12.

Like Jan Vos, foreign visitors to Amsterdam acknowledged the role that the city's unparalleled enterprise and mercantilism played in transforming her into the foremost trading place in Europe. "For their shipping, trafficke and commerce by sea, I conceive no place in the world comes near itt," wrote the Englishman Peter Mundy whose travels brought him to the Dutch Republic in 1640. Observing the character of Dutch trade, he surmised that her enterprise emerged from the deft execution of her role as middle man in the international purchase and sale of commodities.³

That her seventeenth-century commerce took her merchants beyond her traditional engagement in the Baltic trade to the Levant, the East and West Indies was not the only indicator that the Dutch Republic's much lauded "Golden Age" had begun.⁴ She registered an impressive rise in population, a growth in urbanization, increased agricultural productivity and high standards of living.⁵ In the cultural realm, the Republic displayed similar momentum. It was in the seventeenth century that the Republic sired majority of her literary stalwarts, and her "artistic achievement and innovation in art" in the period, as Jonathan Israel notes, "proceeded on a scale, and with an intensity, which has no parallel in any other time and or place, in history."⁶ The Dutch Republic in the same period established herself as a centre of learning in continental Europe with the institution of the universities of Leiden (1575), Franeker (1585), Harderwijk (1648), Groningen (1614), Utrecht (1636), the Amsterdamse Atheneum (1632) and the Kwartierlijke Academie van Nijmegen (1655-1679). Among the crop of home-grown intelligentsia was the mathematician Christiaan Huygens. Others from abroad who came to espouse and propagate their often radical ideas in the

²Julie Hochstrasser also refers to this trend in representation where she draws on the example of the Amsterdam Town Hall to illustrate this point. Julie Berger Hochstrasser, "The Conquest of Spice and the Dutch Colonial Imagery: Seen and Unseen in the Visual Culture of Trade," in *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce and Politics in the Early Modern World*, eds. Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 181-82. "Nu quam de werrelt by de waterstadt verschijnen; Zy was verzelschapt van haar dochters, groot van waard: Het geel' Amerika, vol goudt en zilvermijnen; 't getulbandt Azia, het grootste deel van d'aardt; Het zwart'gebraad' Afrijk', vol tygers, draaken, leeuwen; En 't steederijk Euroop, beroemt door schranderheid." Jan Vos, *Vergrooting van Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lascaille, 1662), D3r-v.

³Richard Carnac Temple, ed., *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667, vol. 4, Travels in Europe, 1639-1647* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1925), 71.

⁴P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, *A Short History of the Netherlands: From Prehistory to Present Day*, 3rd ed. (Amersfoort: Bekking Publishers), 88-93. For this section on the history of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I have drawn on the following works: Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); A.T. van Deursen, "The Dutch Republic 1588-1780," in *History of the Low Countries*, eds. J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts (New York: Berghahn, 2006); Luuc Kooijmans and Carly Misset, "Van rebellen tot 'koningen in eigen huis': Opstand, regentenbewind en politieke cultuur," in *Geschiedenis van Holland: 1572 tot 1795, deel 2*, eds. Thimo de Nijs and Eelco Beukers (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002); J. Huizinga, *Nederland's beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw: Een schets* (Haarlem: H.D. Willink en Zoon, 1941).

⁵Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 307-60.

⁶*Ibid.*, 548.

Republic included the philosophers René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza.⁷ In contrast to the startling maturity of Dutch material, social, cultural and intellectual life in the seventeenth century, as a state the Dutch Republic that emerged from the revolt of the Northern Provinces against Spain in the Eighty Years War (1568-1648) was still a novice. The attainment of statehood by the Dutch Republic was a gradual process. It had assumed the semblance of a state in the Union of Utrecht (1579) when seven provinces dissenting against Spanish authority pledged to constitute a union guided by their emphatic rejection of Spanish overlordship.⁸ Provisions were still made in this union for the preservation of their individual autonomy whereby policy-making by the state was to be the result of consensus. Just as the Dutch Republic emerged in the thick of this long, protracted war with Spain, which only saw a brief respite in the twelve-year truce between 1609 and 1621, war constituted an important feature of the Dutch Republic's foreign relations for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As circumstances demanded, she promiscuously courted England, France, Prussia and even Spain and the Habsburg territories as friends, or cast them as enemies. Although the Republic had settled her differences with Spain in 1648, she came to bear many more battle scars before the century drew to a close. The Republic fought three Anglo-Dutch wars and battled France in the Dutch-Franco War (1672-1678), and the Nine-Years War (1688-1697). Contrary to common perception, Dutch trade flourished in the midst of war and when peace in the period eluded its neighbouring states of England and France, prosperity naturally came to the Republic.⁹

Just as her international relations were overshadowed by war, the character of the Republic's internal politics was marked by a large measure of strife. The States-General, the principal decision-making council of the Republic which was representative of all the provinces in the country carried deep fault lines as far as its functioning was concerned. The Union's most prosperous province, Holland played a dominant if not overbearing role in the States-General which caused considerable strain in her relationship with the other provinces. This conflict tended to manifest itself in the interaction between the Pensionary, who as the delegate of the States of Holland in the States General championed the cause of the province of Holland in the council, and the Stadholder, the principal military and judicial authority in the Republic.¹⁰ The position of Stadholder later became a hereditary office that came to ly

⁷Descartes lived in the Dutch Republic intermittently between 1618 and 1649.

⁸Van Deursen, "The Dutch Republic 1588-1780," 148-49.

⁹Huizinga, *Nederland's beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw: Een schets*, 31; Van Deursen, "The Dutch Republic 1588-1780," 169.

¹⁰Van Deursen, "The Dutch Republic 1588-1780," 150-51.

with the descendants of William the Silent and the House of Orange. Power at times rested in the hands of the States General dominated by the province of Holland and the Pensionary as in the First Stadholderless Era between 1650 and 1672 and the Second Stadholderless Era from 1702 to 1747. At other times, power lay with the Stadholder and the Orangists who strove to undermine the influence of the province of Holland in the States-General. These struggles for primacy sometimes had dramatic consequences. Johan van Oldenbarneveldt who served as the Pensionary of Holland for a good thirty years from his appointment to the post in 1586, was executed in 1618 after his relationship with the then-Stadholder Prince Maurice van Nassau turned sour. A similar end befell a subsequent successor to the post of Pensionary, Johan de Witt and his brother Cornelis de Witt, in 1672, although their deaths were at the hands of an angry mob.

The culture of contention in the Dutch Republic was further fuelled by another combustible – religion. A significant factor in igniting the Dutch revolt, religion continued to play an enduring role in Dutch social and political life after independence.¹¹ Although the Dutch Republic endorsed then Reformed faith in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most religious minorities were largely free of persecution and could practice their religion in private so long as it posed no threat to civic order.¹² The primacy of religion in the Republic was reflected in the manner in which it galvanized and underlined political alliances and divisions. The Arminian-Gomarist controversy, which began as a dispute in 1603 between two Leiden theologians, Jacobus Arminius and Franciscus Gomarus, over the doctrine of predestination assumed drastic political proportions. It brought to light the precipitous political divide between Oldenbarneveldt and Prince Maurice just as it raised crucial questions about who possessed a stronger hold over society, the state or the clergy.¹³

The pulpits, courts and councils were without doubt venues where such altercations and disputes were sounded out, but the Republic's markets, too, became sites of intense political discussion. The Dutch Republic was home to an informed public and a lively "culture of public discussion" where "conversation, chat, debate, council, meeting [...] were the terms which denoted what may be called the social core (of the Republic)."¹⁴ One reason why there was such a proliferation of opinion was because the people of the Republic were

¹¹Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 390.

¹²Kooijmans and Misset, "Van rebellen tot 'koningen'," 31.

¹³Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 391.

¹⁴ "Gesprek, praatje, debat, rond, vergadering, ruggesprek, stemming, bijeenkomst, conventikel-het zijn evenzoveel termen die verwijzen naar wat de kern van de sociale cultuur van 1650 mag worden genoemd..." Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *1650: Bevochten eendracht, Nederlandse cultuur in Europese context* (Den Haag: Sdu, 1999), 219.

wholesale consumers of print culture. The position of Amsterdam in the realm of print in the seventeenth century was nothing short of hegemonic where she catered to a larger Western European clientele apart from her home readership.¹⁵ This predominance, as A.H. Laeven indicates in his study of the Dutch press, is revealed in the bewildering turnout of Dutch publishers at the Frankfurt book fair in the period.¹⁶ That the Dutch should embrace print culture so emphatically in this period was a natural turn for the country to take because of its commendable levels of literacy. Anywhere between 59 to 71 percent of the male population, and 22 to 59 percent of the female population, of Amsterdam were literate, with the levels of literacy being higher among the “Amsterdam born” as compared to the immigrants to the city.¹⁷ The consequence of the collusion of a thriving print culture with the fact that the Republic was home to a fairly literate populace was that information of any political consequence in the Republic was swiftly disseminated to the public. It was principally through pamphlets that public opinion was both generated and reflected upon, but another medium courted politics with equal ardour and transformed itself into a potent political critic was the Amsterdam playhouse, the *Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*.¹⁸ Vondel’s drama *Palamedes* (1625) which was a dangerous condemnation of Oldenbarneveldt’s execution was staged in the Schouwburg in 1665.¹⁹

The lively atmosphere of political discussion that was such a predominant feature of seventeenth century became far more pronounced in the latter half of the eighteenth century when the country’s politico-economic and socio-cultural landscape began to exhibit conspicuous symptoms of decline. The question of when the Dutch Golden age came to a close is a subject of some discussion but events of the early eighteenth century suggest that the gilt was chipping already off.²⁰ The economy, it now appeared, could not thrive when muskets were being fired and the Republic’s engagement in a series of wars beginning with the Spanish War of Succession (1701-1713) left the state coffers bare. Agriculture was in decline, trade was no longer a lucrative undertaking, and her urbanization showed imminent

¹⁵John E. Wills, Jr., “Author, Publisher, Patron, World: A Case Study of Old Books and Global Consciousness,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 13(2009), 386-87.

¹⁶A. H. Laeven, “The Frankfurt and Leipzig Book Fairs and the History of the Dutch Book Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries “ in *Le Magasin de l’univers: The Dutch Republic as the Centre of the European Book Trade*, ed. by C. Berkvens-Stevelinck (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 192.

¹⁷Frijhoff, 1650: *Bevochten eendracht*, 237.

¹⁸Craig Harline observes “major events and controversies were almost always accompanied by a flood of pamphlets.” Craig E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 10; Frijhoff, 1650: *Bevochten eendracht*, 174.

¹⁹Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772*, 129.

²⁰Huizinga plots the decline of the Dutch Republic to the War of Spanish Succession. Huizinga, *Nederland’s beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw: Een schets*, 51-52.

signs of slowing down. Prosperity, the catchphrase of the seventeenth century, was giving way to penury.²¹ In the half-century rule of the regents who held the reins of power from 1702 to 1747 (the Second Stadholders era), the Republic's economy lolled in the doldrums. Popular discontentment expressed itself in the form of a surging pro-Orangism and an increasing clamour for the restoration of the Stadholder. The appointment of Willem IV and subsequently his son, Willem V, as Stadholder failed to stem the tide of economic decline or quieten public unrest. The eruption of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), accompanied as it was by the continued economic downturn gave way to the Patriot Revolution, which sought the radical reshuffling of power structures in the Republic with greater political representation for the people. Although the state was able to temporarily stifle this dissent when Prussian troops entered Dutch territory to reestablish order in 1787, circumstances appeared irreversible with the French invasion of the Dutch Republic in 1795.

The Dutch East India Company

The seventeenth-century Republic produced persons of renown in various spheres of human activity, yet the Republic's most famous seventeenth-century progeny was the Dutch East India Company, whose fortunes closely followed that of the mother country. "The bloom of the Republic," wrote Busken Huet, "was gauged by the rise and fall of the actions of the Company," an enterprise that was created by a prodigious stroke of early-seventeenth-century Dutch business acumen.²² What began as ambitious expeditionary voyages to Asia under Cornelis de Houtman in 1595 and other early India Companies in the following five years attained a sure footing with the establishment of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1602.²³ In her bid to dominate the intra-Asian trading network, a venture in which the Portuguese were immensely successful before her, and in the attempt to fashion herself as the principal supplier of Asian commodities to Europe, the VOC gradually carved for herself a vast trading empire in the East. She cast her net wide to envelope the Cape of Good Hope and a staggering expanse of Asia and for nearly a century, the Company was so immensely

²¹Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 970-1018.

²²Conrad Busken Huet, *Het land van Rembrandt: studies over de Noordnederlandse beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Agon, 1987), 463.

²³I have referred principally to the following works for the history of the Dutch East India Company. Femme S. Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company: Expansion and Decline* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2003); J.R. Bruijn, F.S. Gaastra, and I. Schoffer, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries, vol. 1, Introductory Volume* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987); Els M. Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006). As the forerunners of the VOC, the early companies such as the Middelburgse Compagnie and the Veerse Compagnie were founded with one and the same intention of initiating trade with and in Asia. See Bruijn, Gaastra, and Schoffer, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping* 1-8.

successful in her eastern ventures that contemporary onlookers appeared convinced that the corporation possessed the Midas touch. She dabbled in the traffic of various commodities, the foremost of which were spices – a trade that she came to lord as Europe looked to her to satisfy their demand for cinnamon, pepper, nutmeg and clove.²⁴ As if trade were not enough, she undertook daring conquests in Asia. Apart from establishing Batavia in 1619 as the nerve centre of the Company’s governance and commerce in the region and virtually subjugating the island of Java by the end of the century, the VOC doused English hopes of planting their flag in the East Indies, ousted the Portuguese from their settlements in Ceylon (1640-1656), Cochin (1663) and Malacca (1641) and effectively colonized Formosa for a good forty years (1624-1662). In addition, the Company controlled the Moluccas (1621) and Makassar (1668).²⁵ Company flags also fluttered atop the factories they had set up in territories where they did not mix their policy of trade with conquest – Mughal India, Siam, Bandar Abbas in Persia, Mocha in Yemen and Deshima in Japan.²⁶ Her profits rose in tandem with her political successes. Neither territorial conquests nor favourable monetary returns were perpetual. Trade with China remained an ever-elusive prospect and the loss of Formosa in 1662 was an embarrassing reversal to the forward march of Dutch expansion in Asia. The Company revenues from trade too were susceptible to occasional dips and the debt they incurred in the Rampjaar of 1672 is legendary, yet the Company retained its position as “the world’s largest trading organization of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”²⁷

Together with the territorial possessions and profits she amassed, the Company played a dominant role in the Republic. She was responsible for putting a significant many in the United Provinces and other parts of continental Europe on her payroll and the sheer breadth of her undertakings and the staggering size of her infrastructure invited references to her being “a commonwealth within a commonwealth.”²⁸ Highlighting the indispensability of the Company to the Republic in the realm of military assistance, an English traveller in the period remarked “this company is a buckler and defence for the Commonwealth upon all urgent occasions.”²⁹ The prominent seventeenth century author in Amsterdam, Olfert Dapper

²⁴Bruijn, Gaastra, and Schoffer, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping* 191-93.

²⁵See Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 37-65.

²⁶“The expansion of the Company in the various areas of Asia was very different, sometimes aggressive and military, sometimes purely commercial.” Ibid., 39.

²⁷Ibid., 27,149 (the quote). The *Rampjaar* or “year of disaster” saw the Dutch Republic in a state of immense vulnerability. The military strength and resolve of the Republic were put to the test when it was attacked by the English, French, and Bavarian armies. The Dutch had to defend themselves on all sides.

²⁸William Carr, *Travels through Flanders, Holland, Germany, Sweden and Denmark* (London: Randall Taylor, 1693), 34.

²⁹Ibid., 45.

concurred when he noted in his work *Historische beschrijving der stad Amsterdam* that “this Company . . . relieves the Fatherland’s burden of war to no small degree.”³⁰ With regard to how valuable the Company was in shoring up the Republic’s profits and contributing to her economic well-being, Femme Gaastra notes that the VOC undeniably oiled the wheels of the economy, particularly in the eighteenth century.³¹

While the tale of the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century is one of steady and uninhibited ascent, scholars generally accept that the enterprise, like the Republic itself was in decline in the eighteenth century. As its industriousness and zeal diminished, she was superseded by more enterprising organizations like the English East India Company and exposed to biting criticism in the Fatherland. While “reform” was the familiar word on the minds and lips of the Company administrators in the mid eighteenth century, it remained more a matter of deliberation and policy with little visibility in the realm of application. With the issue of its decline hardly addressed, the VOC threatened to be overrun by the self-defeating trends of corruption and nepotism. Moreover, according to Els Jacobs, the Company lost its astuteness in deciphering the character of the European market and catering to it.³² With the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War in the 1780s, it became increasingly evident that the Company was far too ill to be resuscitated.³³ When the war drew to a close, she found herself neck deep in debt - a staggering sum of 55 million had to be paid back to creditors.³⁴ By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Company had ceased to exist.

³⁰“De selve maetschappy...verlicht niet weinig het Vaderlandt van den last des oorloghs...” Olfert Dapper, *Historische beschrijving der stad Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1663), 449.

³¹“As the eighteenth century proceeded, the importance of the VOC for the national economy increased, because the Company trade remained at a higher level while other sectors decreased.” Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 173. For a perspective that is quite on the contrary, see I. J. Brugmans, “The East India Company and the Prosperity of the Republic “ in *Dutch Authors on Asian History: A Selection of Dutch Historiography on the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, eds. M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, M.E. Van Opstall, and G.J. Schutte (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1988), 328.

³²Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia*, 291.

³³*Ibid.*, 293.

³⁴“Not until 1785 were the old activities more or less resumed, but the Company owed a debt of 55 million, a figure it increased to 184 million before its demise.” H.T. Colenbrander, “France and the East India Company in the Period of the Patriots,” in *Dutch Authors on Asian History: A Selection of Dutch Historiography on the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, eds. M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, M.E. Van Opstall, and G.J. Schutte (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1988), 98.

The Dutch East India Company: The Merchant and Manufacturer of Information³⁵

The VOC is better known for its role in trade but the Company also assiduously engaged itself in production. In the two hundred years that the Dutch East India Company sailed the seas, it created, what the historian H.V. Bowen (writing about the English East India Company) described as a “paper empire.”³⁶ The archives of the VOC, which is perhaps the largest compendium of data about the Orient produced in the period by a single organization was built by a multitude of clerks in diverse Company establishments across Asia, from the lodges instituted in Siam, Banjarmasin in Borneo, Palembang in Sumatra, and Patna in Mughal India; the fortresses built in Timor, Padang and Cochin; to the larger settlements of the enterprise that were set up in Ceylon and Batavia. The archives generated by the Company which amount to some “twenty-five million pages,” were the outcome of the tireless effort to write out its existence in Asia.³⁷ Far from constituting an inexplicable fancy on the part of the Company scribes, this will to write represented the organization’s efforts to capture its mercantile experience in Asia on paper and the reports generated from this exercise formed the very backbone of the Company presence in the continent. There existed, in the words of Adrien Delmas, “a definite proximity...between narration and decision making” in the Company archives as these reports constituted precious footholds for its employees to generate a record of the circumstances of their trade so as to inform future action.³⁸

The resulting “literary snapshots” of its Asian trade and existence were created not merely to satisfy the archival needs of each of the factories that generated them; this documentation was also relayed through an immense and impressive network of correspondence that bound together all of the Company’s interests in Asia.³⁹ In this web of organizational communication, a system gradually developed in which every factory

³⁵ Two works have proven indispensable in formulating the contents of this chapter namely: Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, *A Century of Advance, book 1: Trade, Missions, Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993); John Landwehr, *VOC: A Bibliography of publications relating to the Dutch East India Company 1602-1800* (Utrecht: H&S, 1991).

³⁶H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain 1756-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 169.

³⁷Clifford James, “Review of Orientalism, by Edward Said,” *History and Theory* 19, 2 (1980).

³⁸Adrien Delmas, “The Role of Writing in the first steps of the Colony: A Short Enquiry into the Journal of Van Riebeeck, 1652-1662,” in *Contingent Lives: Social Identity and Material Culture in the VOC World*, ed. Nigel Worden (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2007), 504. I thank Kate Ekama for drawing my attention to the works of Delmas.

³⁹For outlining the channels of correspondence laid down by the VOC, I have relied on Jos Gommans, Lennart Bes, Gijs Kruitzer, *Bibliography and Archival Guide to the National Archives at The Hague (The Netherlands)*, vol. 1, *Dutch Sources on South Asia c.1600-1825* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001); Jurrien van Goor, “Bron en geschiedschrijving: De generale missiven der VOC,” *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 17(1990); I borrow the term “literary snapshots” from Pompa Banerjee, “Postcards from the Harem: The Cultural Translation of Niccolao Manucci’s Book of Travels,” in *The ‘Book’ of Travels : Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250-1700 : Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions*, ed. Palmira Johnson Brummett (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 242.

constituted a point of departure and a destination of correspondence, and their links with the other end of the information apparatus, the Gentlemen Seventeen in Amsterdam or Zeeland mostly flowed through the VOC's nerve centre in Asia, Batavia. Some Dutch settlements however which were mostly their regional headquarters in the Indian subcontinent, Persia and the Cape of Good Hope enjoyed direct correspondence with Patria in addition to corresponding with Batavia.⁴⁰ As the dispatches moved along the Company's information pipeline, they were drained of their verbosity and irrelevant detail and the more they gravitated towards brevity and conciseness. The pint-size servings that finally reached the Gentleman Seventeen offered a condensed view of the conditions of their trade and settlements in Asia. This documentation allowed the Company directors to scrutinize and grasp the essential workings of its distant mercantile and expansionist endeavours and they channelled their orders and directives through the same information network to their Asian holdings via Batavia. With due acknowledgement to the latitude that the vast distances between Company factories afforded these settlements in exercising any sort of administrative autonomy, this channel of correspondence constituted the means by which the tentacles of the decision makers both in Amsterdam and Batavia penetrated and influenced the functioning of these settlements. It allowed each of these establishments in turn to keep their superiors apprised of the goings-on in their premises and vicinity. This communication artery, together with an inter-factory correspondence network, made Company settlements across Asia in effect the limbs of the larger mercantile organism that was the Dutch East India Company.

This relentless reporting, which the VOC encouraged to no small degree, may be grasped from the nature of the "instructions" left behind by Isaac van Theye in Castle Victoria, the headquarters of the Company in the islands of Ambon in 1680 to his successors.⁴¹ Laying out the duties of a Company clerk in a point-by-point job description, the report explained that "the ordinary work of the clerk," comprised of "making copies of resolutions [of the Governor and Council of Ambon], the daily journal [of the Castle], incoming and outgoing letters [that the settlement dispatched or was in receipt of] and the register of the Company subjects." The report included (with the fastidiousness characteristic of the Company's writing practices) a precise description of the kind of format, style and

⁴⁰I thank Lennart Bes for pointing this out to me.

⁴¹"Het ordinaire werk, door de klerken te copieeren, bestaat in een dubbeld stel van de volgende papieren, namelyk Resolutien, Dag-register, afgaande en aankomende brieven, en Beschryvinge der Zielen." *Memorie by forme van Instructie, ter ordre van den E. Heer Gouverneur Robert de Vicq, opgesteld door Isaac van Theye, Onderkoopman, en Oud Secretaris van gemelde zyn E., tot narigt voor den presenten Secretaris, S. Balthasar Bolle, en den Gesworen Clerq, Isaac de Visscher. François Valentyn, Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, deel 2: Beschryving van Amboina* (Dordrecht: Joannes van Braam, 1724; repr., 2002), 323-30, for quotes see 24.

paper to be used in composing each of these reports. Reflecting on the necessary diligence that the clerk was expected to demonstrate, the directive forewarned that the person appointed to the post of clerk had to brace himself to the prospect of sometimes working additional hours.⁴² While Van Theye's "instructions" is characteristic of the prodigious industry that went into generating the Company's reservoirs of information, these guidelines are to a large measure also emblematic of the trends of reporting, writing, and correspondence followed in all the forts and factories of the VOC across Asia. Although the content generated by these systems of communication was logically susceptible to the politico-economic conditions in the territories in which they were located, reports were similar in form. All the Company factories subscribed to a prescribed set of correspondence practices and each factory of the VOC thereby constituted a site of information production, ravenously consuming paper and guzzling ink to produce the very same "resolutions, the daily journal, incoming and outgoing letters" described by Van Theye.

An overview of the writing that flowed from the clerks' pens in Ambon in 1681 permits us to apprehend the miscellaneous nature of records that were produced in a Company factory and the variety of subjects they addressed. Apart from the presence of the customary reports such as the factory diary and the register of Company subjects that also featured in Van Theye's advice on record-keeping, a good many of the reports were "missives" from Robbert de Vicq, Governor of Ambon in Castle Victoria, to his superiors, the Governor General and Council in Batavia.⁴³ Other records include correspondence from De Vicq in Castle Victoria in Ambon to Company merchants and military men under his authority. One such report is "Instructions issued by the honourable De Vicq to Captain Jan Struijs in the expedition to Boero on 5th May 1681."⁴⁴ Communication flowing inwards into Castle Victoria took the form of letters and "requests" addressed to De Vicq from his subordinates. While trade quite understandably was the principal subject of discussion in these reports, political and diplomatic matters like the details of treaties concluded by De Vicq with the potentates of the Amboina islands constituted an important part of the correspondence.

Should this description of the records of the factory in Ambon suggest that the Company correspondence were concerned solely with the Company's actions, an appraisal of the Ambonese *dag-register* should dispel this illusion. This factory record displayed a peculiar earnestness to chronicle the political frictions of neighbouring islands, even though

⁴² "...of wel 's avonds tot 7 en 8 uren by de kaars laten schryven..." Ibid., 24.

⁴³ Robbert de Vicq served as Governor of Ambon from 1678 to 1682.

⁴⁴ NA, VOC 1368, "Instructions given by the honourable De Vicq to Capiteijn Jan Struijs as a briefing during his expedition to Boero," Dated 5 May 1681, fols. 129-135.

these did not directly involve the Company. Here too, the Ambon records exhibited a set pattern detectable in Company documentation whereby the enterprise produced “detached eyewitness accounts” of episodes such as wars and conquests in which the VOC was not concerned, but which were nevertheless deemed consequential for their trade and diplomacy in the long run. The Company sponsored the production of a narrative of Nadir Shah’s invasion of India in 1739 (an episode discussed at length in Chapter 3) for the same reason and it was this Company tendency to chronicle Asian events in detail that renders VOC records unparalleled as resources for informing modern day understandings of these historical happenings.

It was this same need to get a grasp of the territories that they traded with or sought to recruit into their domain of trade that made writing about virtually every Company operation in Asia be it an exploratory voyage, a punitive expedition, or a diplomatic embassy to a local court, kingdom, or principality just as important for the VOC as the undertakings themselves.⁴⁵ The centrality accorded to keeping written accounts of these expeditions is evident in the compilation of a set of guidelines published in the form of a placard in the Dutch Republic in 1669. With the rather explicit title: “A statement for the merchants and other officers wherein they, in composing their reports, will have to attend to punctually informing the Gentleman Seventeen, her masters about everything,” it plainly announced the intention of tutoring Company employees on the character of acceptable and necessary reporting in their bid to “know the country.”⁴⁶ That these instructions did not fall on deaf ears is evident in the degree to which the “six principal points” outlined by the placard were followed by most reports. The dedication with which the Company employees assigned the task of keeping these records performed their duties is evident in the papers kept by the merchants Pieter de Goyer and Jakob de Keijser in the course of their embassy to the Manchu court in Peking in 1655. Their records consisted of a travel journal for every leg of the journey together with summaries of issues that they reckoned the Company had to know about.⁴⁷ It appears, however, that the VOC-sponsored culture of reporting did not always

⁴⁵ I here rely on Delmas’ inferences. Delmas, “The Role of Writing in the First Steps of the Colony,” 209.

⁴⁶ *Memorie voor de kooplieden en andere officieren, waer op sy, in ‘t stellen van haer rapporten, sullen hebben te letten, omme de Heeren Bewinthebberen, haer meesters, van alles punctuelijk te onderrichten* (Middelburgh: Pieter van Goetthem, 1669).

⁴⁷ NA, VOC 1220, “Report of the Merchant Jakob Keijser submitted to the Governor General Joan Maetsuijcker and the Council of India relating the incidents that occurred since 1655 in Canton, on the journey to Peking and of the negotiations that took place at the imperial court between the imperial councillors and the representatives of the Company,” fols. 175-252; NA, VOC 1220, “Notes and Records of the occurrences during the journey from Canton to the imperial city of Peking in relation to the greatest cities and governments of the five provinces en route namely Canton, Kiansij, Nankin, Xantum, en Peckin,” fols. 253-293, and NA, VOC 1220, “Notes and

reap rich dividends for the enterprise in terms of information it harvested. This was blatantly obvious when Company employees were ordered to write descriptions of territories that had already been exhaustively described. In circumstances such as these, the authors either admitted their inability to cough up new information that could be useful to the enterprise as Pieter van Hoorn made clear in his report on the embassy to China between 1666 to 1668, or they resorted to recycling old material as seen in the case of Adolf Bassingh's account on the Nayakas of Madurai in Southern India in 1677.⁴⁸ Irrespective of the outcome, the Company was admittedly able to institute prescribed practices of information generation, a fact that the ambassador Isaac Titsing reiterated in his confession of "depart [ing] from the normal fashion of reporting" when writing about his embassy to China in the last decade of the eighteenth century.⁴⁹

Chronicling Asia was thus a crucial element in the correspondence practices of the Company, which generated genres of reporting which were solely committed offering incisive readings of Asian events in journals and other written descriptions. When Asian territory, trade, and ethnography became subjects that this organizational archive reflected upon, Asians featured not merely as those written about or represented, but as active agents in the construction of this archive. The 1681 Company records of Ambon can again be cited in confirmation of this, in particular a letter titled "Account of two sailors and an Ambonese in relation to the loss of a hired sloop sent from Ambon to Ternate."⁵⁰ Just as an Ambonese was here recruited as an informant to furnish the Company with an explanation about a perceptively minor matter, a multitude of natives - kings, slaves, merchants, governors, prisoners, mercenaries, spies, friends, foes, somebodies and nobodies leave their imprints in the Company records as informants to or correspondents of the enterprise. This ensured that the VOC archives were effectively manufactured by Company employees, with a native contribution which was at times both conspicuous and pronounced.

The Company played a singular role not merely in the production of information about the Orient, but also in the dissemination of this information in Europe. The documentation of

records on the happenings and negotiations with the Great Cham (present emperor of Tartaria and King of China) as have taken place since our arrival in Peking on July 17, 1656," fols. 294-409.

⁴⁸ NA, VOC 1269, "Report on the Embassy to Peking submitted by Pieter van Hoorn to the Governor General and Council of India on 16 November 1669," fol. 273r; Marcus Vink, ed., *Mission to Madurai: Dutch Embassies to the Nayaka Court of Madurai in the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 4, *Dutch Sources on South Asia c.1600-1825* (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 123-24.

⁴⁹Cited in R.M. Dekker, "Dutch Travel Journals from the Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Lias. Sources and Documents relating to the Early Modern History of Ideas*, 22 (1995).

⁵⁰ NA, VOC 1368, "Relaesje van twee matrosen en een Amboinees wegens 't verliesen van een gehuijrede chialoup van Ambon nae Ternate gesonden den 9 October 1681," fols. 121-123.

the VOC was intended to remain in the organizational grids of the Company, but a portion of this information invariably dribbled into the public sphere in the Dutch Republic thereby familiarizing its inhabitants with the Orient – the Company’s Orient. That the keys to the dissemination of information about Asia to Europe should now fall into the lap of the Dutch East India Company owed not only to the VOC’s formidable position in Asia, but it also owed to the predominance of Amsterdam’s print industry. The Oriental onslaught of information in the Republic and other parts of Europe came in the form of news-sheets, news-prints, pamphlets, ethnographies, treatises on Asian flora and fauna, first-hand narratives of voyages and ship-wrecks, entries in periodicals and almanacs and the familiar genre of the travelogue, almost all of which, reveal varying degrees of indebtedness to the archives of the Dutch East India Company for the information they bore.⁵¹ As a result, it may be argued, that the Company came to initiate its own culture of reporting.⁵² In so doing, it became Asia’s information corridor to Europe.⁵³

The first impulses to read and reflect on the Company’s Orient evolved from the same necessities that generated the growth of pamphlet literature in the Dutch Republic. As Rien Goettsch observes, trade was principally responsible for giving birth to forms of information media such as pamphlets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. “Tradesmen,” he notes, “wanted to know where the merchant vessels were, how the profits stood and whether there was the threat of war and so forth.”⁵⁴ The Republic’s curiosity about conditions in the Orient was a spin-off from similar concerns. Early seventeenth-century periodicals and news-sheets, as Donald Lach and Edwin van Kley note, informed the public of historical events in Europe, Asia, and the rest of the known world when performing their customary function of updating them about the progress of the Company in the region.⁵⁵ The 1655 pamphlet titled “Relaes...over de goeden standt der Nederlanders” for instance announced that Dutchmen had cause for celebration because “a fleet of thirteen ships from the East-Indies were expected to

⁵¹Schama refers to the Dutch Republic as having been “surprisingly literate for its time...” Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Collins, 1987), 4.

⁵²“The VOC became the most important sponsor of new information networks.” Ryan Walsh, “Johan Nieuwhof’s Cathay: Aspects of Inventing a Travelogue in Early Modern Europe,” *Outstanding Honors Theses* 35(2011), 5.

⁵³Willem Walter, “De V.O.C en de verzamelaars,” in *De Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie in Amsterdam: Verslag van een werkgroep*, ed. F.M. Wieringa (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1982), 192.

⁵⁴ “Met de opkomst van de handel, wordt de vraag naar informatie groter. Kooplui willen weten waar de handelsschepen zich bevinden, hoe de oogsten er voor staan, of er oorlog dreigt, enzovoort.” Rien Goettsch, “De eerste columnist: Hendrik Doedijs en de Haagse Mercurius,” *De Gids* 145(1982), 361.

⁵⁵Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, *A Century of Advance, book 1: Trade, Missions, Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 449. Also see Edwin J. van Kley, “News from China: Seventeenth Century European Notices of the Manchu Conquest,” *The Journal of Modern History* 45, 4 (1973), 562.

arrive in the Fatherland, a number that [had not] been seen in many years.”⁵⁶ As much as the information generated was stimulated by the Republic’s desire to know the nature of the Company’s trade in the region, it was prompted equally by the Company’s desire to tell of its exploits in the Orient in the realms of both trade and conquest. The illustrated sibling of the news-sheet, the news-map, was critical in this. With its almost self-explanatory illustrations, the medium catered to the need of the literate and illiterate alike, and as Kees Zandvliet writes, it lifted spirits in the Republic in the early 1600’s by heralding news that the nascent Company was conquering its enemies and becoming a territorial power in Asia at a time when most expected it to exhibit teething troubles.⁵⁷ Pamphlets, too, outlined the Dutch naval successes abroad in narrative form. They were a source of contentment for their compatriots in the Republic that their home corporation was swiftly overtaking her European competitors in race for expansion in the East. The publication of a host of these pamphlets coincided with the sharp crest in the Company’s expansion graph in the 1660s and 1670s with her conquest of a number of Portuguese settlements. The nature of this reportage that was however made available to the public in these circumstances is baffling to say the least owing to the generous and often unnecessary detail they tended to reveal. Published in the wake of the takeover of Makassar, the pamphlet “Kort verhael van Macassar” not only described the battle in great length but also sought to burden its readers with the knowledge of every clause of the treaty that was subsequently signed by the Company with the humbled party.⁵⁸ The obligation that the VOC felt in making “its” information known in the Republic devolved from the “claiming agenda,” that Delmas attributes to all early modern trading companies.⁵⁹ To these companies, publishing about their eastern advances became the print equivalents to planting their flags on conquered territories. The Company came clean about its eastern conflicts in print not only when they culminated in victory, but it also exploited the medium when these conflicts involving other European powers spiralled out of control threatening to destroy the peace between the two concerned parties at home. Shortly after the Amboina Massacre and the conquest of Bantam, both of them incidents where England and the Dutch Republic flirted

⁵⁶“Relaes volghens den teneur van seeckere brief, over den goeden standt der Nederlanders in Oost Indien,” (Amsterdam, 1655).

⁵⁷Kees Zandvliet, *Mapping for Money: Maps, Plans and Topographic paintings and their role in Dutch Overseas expansion during the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1998), 68-93.

⁵⁸*Journael of kort verhael van ‘t begin, voortganch en eynde des oorloghs tusschen den koningh en verdere regeeringe van Macassar, en de Nederlandtsche geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie, in de jaren 1666/1667/1668 en 1669 voorgevallen*, (Amsterdam: Marcus Doornick, 1669).

⁵⁹Adrien Delmas, “Writing History in the Age of Discovery according to La Popeliniere, 16th and 17th Centuries “ in *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, eds. Siegfried Huigen, Jan Jong, Elmer Kolfin (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 314.

dangerously with the possibility of war with one another, a profusion of pamphlets were noticeably deployed by the respective companies on either side of the English Channel as instruments to enlist the sympathy of their compatriots at home.

Where propaganda seems to have been the principal object in the production of Oriental reportage in the Republic, the Company had brokered the passage of information about the Orient into print. And where they had not and in most circumstances they did not, it was the insatiable thirst of the Dutch reading public for tales of the strange and unknown Orient that created a lucrative situation where individuals were scrambling to author accounts and publishers were scurrying to print matter relating to the Orient. Genres such as news-prints, news-sheets, pamphlets, and almanacs no doubt made commendable informants and story-tellers, but in the virtual rampage of the travelogue in the seventeenth-century print space of the Dutch Republic, certain genres it appeared slaked the curiosity of their countrymen better than others. If statistics are to be believed, travel accounts soaked up most of the attention that Dutch readers were willing to dish out to printed material. "Literature of travel and voyages," C.R. Boxer writes, "was to remain an outstanding feature of Dutch publishing for the next hundred years."⁶⁰ The surging popularity of tales of travel moreover coincided with the rise of the country's exploratory zeal, "allowing them [the Dutch]," in the words of Rob Nieuwenhuys, "to participate in the seventeenth century's single most important adventure, the discovery of other worlds."⁶¹ Of all the new additions that seemed to be made to Europe's world map in the seventeenth century, the Orient attracted the most attention. The accounts of Willem Ysbrantsz Bontekoe, Cornelis Houtman, Jacob van Neck and Joris van Spilbergen, all of them Oriental travelogues were among the ten most popular travel accounts that were published in the period and to suit the needs of its many readers, Dutch publishers rolled out stories of travel in Asia in all possible formats, ranging from the pocket size editions to others in large unwieldy formats which could only be appreciated while standing before a lectern.⁶²

The appeal of Oriental narratives and travelogues lay in the novelty and the otherness of this landmass, a fact that authors and publishers affirmed and corroborated with all earnestness one after another. When the publication of accounts such as the *Journael van Bontekoe* sent the cash-registers ringing, it also told of the popularity that "disaster stories"

⁶⁰C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 161-62.

⁶¹Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Mirror of the Indies: A History of Dutch Colonial Literature*, ed. E.M. Beekman, trans. Frans van Rosevelt (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1982), 13.

⁶²Victor Brilleman, "Reisjournalen en boekhandel in het zeventiende eeuwse Amsterdam," in *De Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie in Amsterdam: Verslag van een werkgroep*, ed. F.M. Wieringa (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1982), 236.

enjoyed in the seventeenth-century and publishers brought out tales about disasters by the dozen.⁶³ Readers eager for such narratives could lay their hands on pamphlets which told of how the city of Patna fell prey to a fire or of the damage unleashed by an earthquake that struck the island of Ambon in 1674.⁶⁴ But even avid readers with a curiosity about Asia or tales of destruction could not singlehandedly sustain the market generated in the seventeenth-century Republic. There were noticeably other clientele. The *Curieuse beschrijving* by Pieter van der Burg, who had served the VOC as bookkeeper and junior merchant on the Coromandel Coast, identified its target audience as comprising of what it referred to as “curious persons and also those who were forced by misfortune to try the waters,” thereby implying that these travelogues also constituted guidebooks for those in the employ of the Company.⁶⁵

A majority of these printed works spanning across all genres owed their provenance to the archives of the VOC as regards both form and content. E.M. Beekman accords customary genres of writing employed by the Dutch East India Company parental status when tracing the genesis of “colonial literature” in Patria and this owed, as Marijke Barend-van Haeften states, to the fact that the templates of form employed in the records of the VOC were faithfully retained when these works were printed in the Dutch Republic.⁶⁶ When we speak of content, the Company’s contribution to these works is equally marked. VOC propaganda, which was responsible for unleashing an entire flood of pamphlets into the public sphere, also liberated entire reports from the anonymity of the Company archives. As Rietbergen notes, works such as François Caron’s influential *Beschrijvinge van het machtige koninckrijcke Japan* were made available to readers in the Republic.⁶⁷ As was the purpose of the pamphlets to inform the Republic of the VOC’s magnificent profits and stupendous victories, these accounts were unveiled to the public with the purpose of selling an image of the enterprise to the Republic as

⁶³I here borrow from Simon Schama’s discussion on the Republic’s penchant for tales of disaster. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 28-34.

⁶⁴“Verhael vande schrickelijcke brandt der stadt Pattana int koninghrijck Bengala in Oost-Indien, Geschied den 13 Juny 1651: Overgesien naer den originelen brief,” (1651); “Waerachtigh verhael van de schrickelijcke aerdbeyvinge nu onlanghs eenigen tyd herwaerts, ende voornaementlijck op den 17 February des Jaers 1674 voorgevallen in en ontrent de eylanden van Amboina,” (Gedruckt naer de cotype van Batavia, 1675).

⁶⁵Pieter van den Burg, *Curieuse beschrijving van de gelegenheid, zeden, godsdienst, en ommegang van verscheiden Oost-Indische gewesten en machtige landschappen, en inzonderheit van Golkonda en Pegu* (Rotterdam: I. Naeranus, 1677), note to the reader.

⁶⁶E.M. Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures: Dutch Colonial Literature from the East Indies 1600-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 5; Marijke Barend-van Haeften, “Van scheepsjournaal tot reisverhaal: Een kennismaking met zeventiende-eeuwse reisteksten,” *Literatuur* 7(1990), 223.

⁶⁷P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie 1602-1795: ‘s wereld’s eerste multinational tussen commercie en cultuur* (Amersfoort: Bekking en Blitz uitgevers, 2012), 92. Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld : De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee 1600-1800* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2012), 85.

the Gentlemen Seventeen saw fit. In cases where the Company renounced its role as puppet-master in prompting the publication of works on Asia, printed matter still revealed an association with the VOC. Narratives and very often pamphlets moreover floated explicit claims of having relied on Company documentation for their information which, they asserted, was either conveyed by Company ships returned from the Indies, originated in official “missives,” or was procured from knowledgeable people stationed in the East. A third set of accounts, particularly travelogues, could never free themselves from the influence of the Company for the simple reason that a majority of the authors were former employees of the VOC. Lured by the profits to be made by publishing their accounts, soldiers, stewards, physicians, and clergymen in the service of the VOC discovered their creative side on their return to the Republic and turned authors of accounts of travel. These works, unlike many pamphlets, did not feel the need to summon the support of credentials to prove the authenticity of their accounts. The veracity of their works was taken for granted as it was generally assumed that these authors had penned down their experiences in the East when in the service of the Company. Irrespective of whether the entire gamut of Oriental accounts had convinced the public of their credibility by their connections with the Orient and the Company, many of these publications included text copied from original VOC correspondence ranging from excerpts from dagregisters to correspondence between Company servants. *‘t Verwaerloosde Formosa* by Frederick Coyett, the disgraced governor of Formosa who was held responsible for the loss of the colony to the Chinese in 1662, represented one of the most audacious efforts to lift correspondence from Company records for public viewing. The work carried two appendices which groaned under the weight of reports drawn up and resolutions made in Castle Zeelandia as well as correspondence between the Company fortress in Formosa, with Batavia and other VOC settlements in Siam and Japan.⁶⁸

Given to believe that Company documentation either influenced or constituted the mother narrative for much of the printed matter on the Orient which was made available to the Dutch reading public, what, we may ask, happened to the indigenous correspondents and informants of the Company? In the exodus of VOC reports into the various genres of printed matter which were packaged for a home audience in the Republic, what was the fate of the

⁶⁸Frederik Coyett, *‘t Verwaerloosde Formosa, of waerachtig verhael, hoedanigh door verwaerloosinge der Nederlanders in Oost-Indien, het eylant Formosa, van den Chinesen mandorijn, ende zeerover Coxinja overrompelt, vermeestert, ende ontweldight is geworden : begrepen in twee deelen* (Amsterdam: Jan Claesz. ten Hoorn, 1675); This work however pales in comparison to François Valentyn’s *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* which carries a bewildering amount of original Company correspondence.

native voices which freely inhabited the archives of the Company? When assessing the number of indigenous voices which reached Dutch audiences, one may readily surmise that it was only a fraction of the Company's actual number of native informants and correspondents who drifted into the Republic's print space. That class of natives who made the cut were mostly Asian potentates and policy makers whose correspondence and agency were referenced when they served to detail the provisions of peace treaties which either acceded victory to the VOC or signified momentous transformations in the political equilibrium of the region or when they pointed to the goodwill which existed between the Company and the potentate in question.⁶⁹ A second context where these voices were permitted to thrive in print were in circumstances where their invocation helped reinforce the truth-quotient of these accounts – a fact which is particularly true of those texts and treatises which posited themselves as revelations of previously unknown aspects of the Asian civilization or knowledge systems. In *De open-deure tot het verborgen heydendom* by the Dutch clergyman Abraham Rogerius, a work hailed as “the most perceptive and comprehensive European description of South Indian Hinduism up to that time,” the author duly acknowledged the contribution of two natives, Padmanabha and Dammersa who supposedly explained to him, the mysteries of heathendom.⁷⁰ Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein similarly chose to inaugurate his twelve volume botanical treatise, *Hortus Malabaricus* (1678-1693) with the testimonies of his four native informants Itty Achudan, Ranga Bhat, Appu Bhat, and Vinayaka Pandit, written in their native tongues.⁷¹ Rather than constituting earnest displays of gratitude on the part of these authors, such evocations are more likely to have been shaped by the necessity to shore up the authenticity of the information contained in these texts. Kings and informants apart, few other natives survived this passage into print. Most were summarily

⁶⁹See for instance “Drie translaet-brieven, uyt het Maleyts geschreven door Radja Goa, Crijn Tello en Linkis, Coningen op ‘t Lant van Macassar, aen den Ed. Heer Gouverneur Generael Joan Maetsuycker, en de E.E. Heeren Raden van India, ontfangen den 14 Augusti 1669 per ‘t Jacht Cabbeljauw’ which feature in *Journael of kort verhael van...des oorloghs tusschen den koningh en verdere regeeringe van Macassar, en de Nederlandsche geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 22-24. The five volumes of François Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* are swamped with such correspondence. For the Company's correspondence with the king of Ternate for instance, see François Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indien, deel 1: Vervattende een naaukeurige en uitvoerige verhandelinge van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten benevens een wydlustige beschrijvinge der Moluccos, Amboina, Banda, Timor, en Solor* (Dordrecht: Joannes van Braam, 1724), 342.

⁷⁰Cf. Edwin J. van Kley, “Asian Religions in Seventeenth-century Dutch Literature,” *Itinerario* 25, 3/4 (2002), 57. See dedicatory epistle in Abraham Rogerius, *De open-deure tot het verborgen heydendom : ofte waerachtigh vertoogh van het leven ende zeden; mitsgaders de religie, ende gods-dienst der Bramines, op de Cust Chormandel, ende de landen daar ontrent* (Leyden: François Hackes, 1651).

⁷¹Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus : Continens Regni Malabarici apud Indos celeberrimi omnis generis plantas rariores*, vol. 1 (Amstelodami: sumptibus Joannis van Someren et Joannis van Dyck, 1678).

removed, perhaps, in the interest of maintaining a swifter narrative pace where elements such as these, which were seen to burden the account, were excised.⁷²

When assessing the massive quantities of organizational correspondence which migrated into print, the constant claims of the emphasis on secrecy which is said to have dominated the Company's position on information sharing seems overrated or even superfluous. But this understanding, one must readily admit, can only devolve from the vantage point where the number of works which did make it into the print sphere in the Republic is alone taken into account. Of the "twenty-million pages" of Company archives that were generated, the proportion of information that reached the Dutch public was however merely a drop in the proverbial ocean. That said, taking up the question about why this information entered the print sphere outside the Company's self-orchestrated program of propaganda finds an answer in Meilink-Roelofs's inference that the correspondence pipeline of the VOC were susceptible to leakages in Asia and to a lesser extent in the Dutch Republic.⁷³ Company personnel in both realms and printers and publishers in the Republic came into possession of official VOC documents which was subsequently deployed in the print sphere.⁷⁴ If we take account of the issue of information slippage, we come to understand how unpublished VOC records came to feature in the works of Isaac Commelin and Olfert Dapper.⁷⁵ On another front, this transfer of information from Company records to published accounts helps explain why Company employees became authors with such frequency. The call to write and publish was heeded by personnel from all rungs of Company service but a significant number who took up the pen had, when working of the enterprise held positions of importance. Jeremias van Vliet, whose account of Siam was brought out by printers in 1692, possessed a distinguished record of service in Asia.⁷⁶ Before being appointed member of the Council of Batavia, he had held high ranking positions in the Company factories in Siam and Malacca. For Van Vliet and many others like him, such positions of predominance in the Company administration are likely to have fortified their ability to lay their hands on choice Company documents. More important, their rank and situation indicate that they may have

⁷²Emmer and Gommans suggest that the retention of native agency in the Republic's printed texts on the Orient was more a seventeenth century phenomenon than one of the following century. See Emmer and Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand*, 85.

⁷³M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Van geheim tot openbaar: een historiografische verkenning. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar in de geschiedenis van de West-Europese Expansie overzee ...aan de Universiteit Leiden op 6 November 1970* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1970), 6.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵See C.R. Boxer, "Introduction to the Facsimilie Edition of Isaac Commelin's *Begin ende Voortgangh*," in *Dutch Merchants and Mariners in Asia, 1602-1795* (London: Variorum, 1988), 11; Wills Jr, "Author, Publisher, Patron, World: A Case Study of Old Books and Global Consciousness," 406.

⁷⁶Jeremias van Vliet, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge van het Koningryck Siam* (Leiden: Frederick Harinck, 1692).

possessed the necessary clout to secure the consent of the Directors of the VOC to have their accounts published on their return to the Republic. The other less fortunate employees-turned-authors relied on the willingness of their colleagues to part with their caches of private papers that they had amassed during their stint in Company service. In a display of forthrightness, the physician Daniel Havart in his *Op-en ondergang van Coromandel* (1693) acknowledged that he had recruited “the help and loyal support of some friends who provided [him] with the necessary papers, notes and passages necessary for [his] work.”⁷⁷ Havart, however, may be seen wanting in his exhibition of gratitude when compared to François Valentyn, who insisted on including the names of his “information lenders” in his introduction to Volume 3 of the *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indien*.⁷⁸ By incorporating some of the correspondence that they had parted with in their original form in his work, Valentyn also succeeded in fashioning them as semi-protagonists in his narrative, particularly when their contributions took the form of voyages or expeditions that these correspondence couriers had headed or undertaken.

The sheer magnitude of the VOC’s enterprise and the staggering amounts of information that it produced had evidently made it impossible to protect its correspondence behind locked doors. Their archives thus became immensely vulnerable to falling into private hands and their publication was a natural consequence. Yet, to imagine that the Company did not sanction or endorse their publication seems unlikely particularly if we set this phenomenon of information leaks against the stringent measures that the VOC employed to either prohibit publications which in some way constituted a threat to the enterprise or to safeguard information that was crucial to their monopoly in the east. Consider for instance, the publication of the *Atlas Major* or the *Grand Atlas* by the Company’s official cartographer, Johan Blaeu. In showcasing the most current cartographic information that the Republic was in possession of, Blaeu’s *Atlas* might for all facts and purposes be seen as having constituted a blatant exposure of the Company’s cartographic secrets about its Asian holdings. But this evidently was not the case as the Bewindhebbers were careful to ensure that Blaeu’s atlases did not divulge the cartographic contours of Asia as inferred by the Company in its entirety to the Dutch public. The maps contained in Blaeu’s volume on Asia which its consumers

⁷⁷Havart makes this assertion with regard to his description of the Southern Coromandel: “op ‘t verzoek van den bekostiger dezes druks te rade geworden, Zuyder Coromandel mede te beschrijven, gelijk het ook volvoerd is, door de hulpe, en trouwe bystand eeniger vrienden, die my (weinig tijds om de Zuyd gewoond hebbende) van nodige papieren, schriften, en stukken, tot dit werk vereysshende hebben voorzien, en alzo mede tot den opbouw van dit gestel hun beste gedaan, waar voor ik haar altoos pligt-schuldig dankbaar zal blijven...” Daniel Havart, *Op- en ondergang van Coromandel, in zijn binnenste geheel open, en ten toon gesteld* (Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn, 1693), voorreden aan den lezer.

⁷⁸ See Preface. François Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, deel 4: Omstandig verhaal van de geschiedenissen en zaaken het kerklyke ofte den godsdienst betreffende, zoo in Amboina* (Dordrecht: Joannes van Braam, 1726).

glanced and paged through were thus tamer versions as compared to those which filled the shelves of the Directors of the Company.⁷⁹ The story of Blaeu's *Grand Atlas* is a perfect example of the VOC's ability to impose quarantine on information crucial for its functioning, but the Company was also capable of greater exhibitions of ruthlessness in protecting their information interests. The *Bataviasche Nouvelles* (1744-1746), which was "the first Batavian newspaper" and perhaps the first-ever periodical published in the Dutch colonies, was strangled at birth when the Directors in Amsterdam caught wind of it.⁸⁰ The fear that it would disseminate information injurious to the enterprise had been responsible for their brutal deed.

The Company clearly did not flinch from protecting their interests when they needed protecting. This torrent of travelogues which boldly flaunted their connections with the Company and offloaded large shipments of Company correspondence for the perusal of its readers had to be sanctioned by its directors. Many of these works carried dedicatory epistles in honour of the mighty and powerful who were at the very helm of Dutch society. Mayors and other important officials of the numerous Dutch cities featured as recipients in these dedications by the dozen. Wouter Schouten's book of travels were dedicated to the mayors of Haarlem, Jacob van Bucquoy's *Zestien jaarige reize naa de Indien* (1757) to Jakob Roman, the Director of Amsterdam's city orphanage and Zeyger van Rechteren framed the dedicatory epistle of his 1635 account to sound the praise of the States of the Province of Overijssel.⁸¹ The authors, in a metaphor commonly used in these dedications, referred to their texts as "paper children."⁸² Such references reveal the power that patrons possessed to further the fortunes of a book and that of its authors even as it also told of how dependent authors were on the goodwill of their patrons to see their works enter the market. When powerful people and institutions were invoked in texts as dedicatees, its authors went to great lengths to extol the greatness of these addressees. Despite the staunch refutations of these authors that such dedications did not carry the faintest traces of flattery, they undoubtedly did. The dedicatees were after all very influential men who had it in their power to dramatically change the fortunes and further the careers of these authors. Little surprise then that in the mid-

⁷⁹C. Koeman stresses that "a fundamental distinction should...be made between Blaeu's commercial cartographic activities such as atlases and wall maps and his manuscript map designed for the Dutch East India Company navigators". C. Koeman, *Joan Blaeu and his Grand atlas* (Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, 1970), 24-25.

⁸⁰Cf. Adrienne Zuiderweg, "Oost-Indische nouvelles tijdens de VOC," *Indische Letteren* 17(2002), 14-15.

⁸¹Wouter Schouten, *Wouter Schoutens Oost-Indische voyagie* (Amsterdam: Jacob Meurs en Johannes van Someren, 1676); Jacob de Bucquoy, *Jacob de Bucquoy's zestien jaarige reize naa de Indien* (Haerlem: J. Bosch, 1757); Zeyger van Rechteren, *Journael ghehouden door Zeyger van Rechteren* (Zwolle: Frans Jorrijaensz en Jan Gerritsz, 1635); See Landwehr, *VOC*, 136, 42, 52.

⁸²Schouten, *Wouter Schoutens Oost-Indische voyagie*, see opdracht.

seventeenth century, the brothers, Cornelis and Johan de Witt should be identified as dedicatees in the works of Philippus Baldaeus, and Olfert Dapper respectively.⁸³ These authors obviously knew on which side their bread was buttered. As Demmy Verbeke notes, “the name of a powerful patron could add considerable authority to a publication.”⁸⁴ Yet, the principal object of these dedications within the context of our discussion on Company secrecy and their sanction to publish was that many of these works, as the accounts of Pieter van den Broecke, Rogerius and Bontekoe illustrate, were dedicated to the Directors or representatives of the Dutch East India Company themselves.⁸⁵ With such vivid endorsements in place, the VOC could hardly brook ignorance of these works. They were evidently aware of these accounts, those whose names were invoked perhaps relished the fact that their names appeared in print, and they quite naturally permitted their publication. They also had little reason to retract their patronage from these works especially when some authors claimed that their accounts are also conceived to bring greater fame to the enterprise. This would lead us to surmise that although the Company did not take too kindly to the prospect of information about its Eastern activities, ventures, interests and possessions entering into the public sphere, it did not prevent the publication of those which promoted the enterprise or did it little harm.⁸⁶ The VOC therefore arbitrated knowledge allowing the passage into print, that information which it sanctioned or did not threaten to draw flak onto the enterprise.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thus witnessed a profusion of printed matter which, propelled directly or indirectly into the Republic’s print space by the Dutch East India Company, extricated the Asian landmass, its inhabitants and ethnography from the realm of the unknown and fashioned it to become a palpable geographical entity to the early modern Dutch mentalite. As is perhaps typical of information itself, the knowledge borne by these texts were not destined to live out its existence in these works alone. It was compelled to live on. As Joan-Pau Rubiés has usefully noted, “the importance of the genre of travel literature in

⁸³Philippus Baldaeus, *Naauwkeurige beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel, der zelve aangrenzende ryken, en het machtige eyland Ceylon* (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius van Waasberge en Johannes van Someren, 1672); Olfert Dapper, *Gedenckwaerdig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye op de kust en in het Keizerrijk van Taising of Sina* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1670).

⁸⁴Demmy Verbeke, “The Dedicatory Epistle in an Historical Perspective: A Brief Overview,” *De Gulden Passer: Tijdschrift voor Boekwetenschap* 89, 2 (2011), 272.

⁸⁵Rogerius’ work was dedicated to the Directors of the Chamber of Amsterdam. Rogerius, *De open-deure tot het verborgen heydendom : ofte waerachtigh verdoogh van het leven ende zeden; mitsgaders de religie, ende godsdienst der Bramines, op de Cust Chormandel, ende de landen daar ontrent*; Willem Bontekoe and Dirck Raven, *Journael ofte gedenckwaerdige beschrijvinghe vande Oost-Indische reyse van Willem Ysbrantsz Bontekoe van Hoorn* (Hoorn: Isaac Willemsz, 1646); Pieter van den Broecke, *Korte historiael ende journaelsche aenteyckeninghe, van al’tgheen merck-waerdigh voorgevallen is, in de langhduerighe reysen, soo nae Cabo Verde, Angola, &c. als insonderheydt van Oost-Indien* (Haerlem: Hans Passchiers van Wesbusch, 1634). See Landwehr, VOC, 134, 202, 408.

⁸⁶Rietbergen, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 92-93.

this period lies... in the variety of forms and purposes it inspired.”⁸⁷ Sure enough the surge of travelogues which constituted the “primary” rung of works on the Orient presented the Dutch academia and literati with a surfeit of Oriental themes, imagery and events to draw from in composing “derivative” works. Rubiés’s inference, one must note, holds true not merely for travelogues, but also a broad spectrum of literature which includes new-prints, news-sheets, pamphlets, almanacs and scientific treatises on science. All of these genres were information packages which were or claimed to been informed by first-hand experience or observation and constituted the first flush of information about the Company’s Orient in the Dutch Republic. When evaluating the second rung of printed works which were written predominantly by arm-chair travelers who recruited the information contained in the first hand narratives, Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans’ appraisal of this corpus of literature in *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld* proves useful.⁸⁸ According to Emmer and Gommans, the key to understanding these works lies in taking note of the fact that the character of knowledge about the Orient in Europe underwent a transformation. The initial process of the consumption of Oriental information in the Republic which was facilitated by the first rung of printed works was now followed by the process of gestation. The Republic, they note, now took on the character of a sorting office which no longer only gathered information about the Orient, but mostly “ordered” it.⁸⁹ Incidentally this “phenomenon” coincided with the abdication of the VOC from its position of Europe’s principal courier of Oriental information. It came to the fore at a time when the Company’s wells of Oriental information dried up in the last decades of the seventeenth century and the stream of original Dutch accounts in the Republic’s print space reduced to a trickle.⁹⁰ This bid to classify information as Emmer and Gommans note, took the form of world histories, eighteenth century histories of the Dutch East India Company and philosophical tracts on world religion. Abraham Rogerius’ treatise on heathendom for instance was roped in to substantiate the postulations of another Dutch clergyman Balthazar Bekker in his then inflammatory work on religion, *De betoverde weereld* and Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein’s *Hortus Malabaricus* was employed by Carl Linnaeus when drawing

⁸⁷ Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe,” in *Travellers and Cosmographers: Studies in the History of Early Modern Travel and Ethnology*, ed. Joan-Pau Rubiés (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 5.

⁸⁸ This section draws significantly from Emmer and Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand*, 84-88.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹⁰ Lach and Van Kley states that the Dutch East India Company ceased to be a major player in the production of Oriental accounts from the 1670s onwards. Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, book 1, 493-507.

up his *Species Plantarum* (1753).⁹¹ In response to the different attire that knowledge about the Orient in the Dutch Republic had changed into, the literary and performative genre of drama embraced this transformation in a slightly varied form. Dramatists who constituted an enthusiastic audience to first-hand accounts on Asia went forth to process the information they bore for the stage.

The Amsterdamsche Schouwburg

The opening of the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg, situated no more than half a mile away from the East India Company House did not quite mark the beginning of theatre in the Dutch Republic. Theatre had been a regular aspect of Amsterdam's cultural life where its inhabitants had been accustomed to watching performances staged by travelling troupes of actors or by the city's own drama societies.⁹² The Schouwburg in itself drew from the legacy that was bequeathed unto it by two of the foremost drama societies in Amsterdam, De Eglantier and Het Wit Lavendel. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, these societies had exhibited such vigour and creativity in the drama they produced that in their literary value and creative worth, they set the bar of Dutch drama so high that subsequent generations of dramatists would tire in attempting to prove their literary equals.⁹³ The Schouwburg which in 1637 became the stage where this exuberance was later showcased was also a spinoff from the Doctor Samuel Coster's plan in 1617 to bequeath unto the city what the Schouwburg itself later came to be – "the first permanent municipal theatre of the Netherlands."⁹⁴ Although Coster's theatre, Nederduytsche Academie survived a mere five years, the subsequent undertaking in the form of the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg was immensely successful as a cultural marker and a space for entertainment in the city of Amsterdam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and beyond. Symptomatic of the rousing reception that the institution received in the hands of the city's inhabitants, spectators were allowed the opportunity of watching as many as 226 plays in the first three decades of the playhouse's existence and the

⁹¹Balthasar Bekker, *De betoverde weereld* (Amsterdam: Daniel van den Dalen, 1691). On Linnaeus and Van Reede, see H.Y. Mohan Ram, "On the English edition of Van Reede's *Hortus Malabaricus* by K.S. Manilal (2003)," *Current Science* 89, 10 (2005), 1677.

⁹²Ben Albach, *Langs kermessen en hoven: Ontstaan en kroniek van een Nederlands toneelgezelschap in de 17e eeuw* (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1977), 14-16.

⁹³M.B. Smits-Veldt, "Reilen en zeilen der rederijderskamers te Amsterdam begin zeventiende eeuw," in *Een theatergeschiedenis der Nederlanden: Tien eeuwen drama en theater in Nederland en Vlaanderen*, ed. Rob Erenstein (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 157.

⁹⁴Cf. George W. Brandt, *German and Dutch Theatre: 1600-1848* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993), 338 (the quote); Albach, *Langs kermessen en hoven*, 19-22. The brainchild of Samuel Coster called the Academie was a short-lived enterprise.

Schouwburg's annual turnover sometimes hit the 11000 guilder mark.⁹⁵ To keep up with the changing trends of theatre in Europe, the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg as a venue underwent many transformations. The Old Schouwburg was razed to the ground in 1665 and it made way for a new Schouwburg which held out greater possibilities for showcasing "plays which laid emphasis on the visual-theatrical approach."⁹⁶ In 1722, the building was subject to further renovation and the Schouwburg was forcibly relocated to a new building on the Leidscheplein two years after an accidental fire razed the old structure to the ground in 1772.

The Schouwburg as a venue may have undergone drastic changes, but as an institution it was reasonably successful. It enjoyed a commendable run in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was forced to close its doors to the public during the period only for three short intervals. In each of these instances, the pressing need to discontinue performances had risen from political or other circumstances, rather than from causes which emerged from within the Schouwburg itself. While it was the pestilence that had played spoilsport in 1664, all subsequent closures: the eight month moratorium on performances in 1665-1666, the five year period of inactivity endured by the Schouwburg from 1672 onwards and the 1747-1748 closure were all warranted by the Republic's foreign wars.⁹⁷ Although political issues were mostly to blame for the standstill in the functioning of the Schouwburg, the temporary inertia that it caused to the fortunes of the playhouse was, as Kornee van der Haven and Henk Duits note, no small cause for jubilation for one section of the population who usually had a role in accelerating the decision to close down the Schouwburg – the clergy. The disposition of clerics towards the playhouse and its repertoire was one of thinly veiled disapproval, as theatre to them, was an unchristian practice and "of heathen origin."⁹⁸ In what was persistently a disposition of simmering skepticism, their opposition tended to boil over into outright denunciation, particularly in the seventeenth century when the repertoire included plays whose thematic content drew from the bible and was regarded as sacrilegious. If the Schouwburg therefore failed to sufficiently entertain the city's inhabitants, the polemical

⁹⁵ See <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/> . Information regarding the income of the playhouse is cited in J.A. Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772* (Amsterdam: S.L. van Looy, 1920), 123-24.

⁹⁶ Cf. Rick Elenbaas, "De verbouwing van de Amsterdamsche Schouwburg (1663-1665) in relatie tot het repertoire, het publiek en de toneelorganisatie," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 20(2004), 297; Albach, *Langs kermissen en hoven*, 109-10; Brandt, *German and Dutch Theatre: 1600-1848*, 412-13.

⁹⁷ Albach, *Langs kermissen en hoven*, 110; Henk Duits, "De moeizame relatie tussen kerk en toneel in de zeventiende eeuw," in *Een theatergeschiedenis der Nederlanden: Tien eeuwen drama en theater in Nederland en Vlaanderen*, ed. R.L. Erenstein (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 180; Kornee van der Haven, *Achter de schermen van het stadstoneel: Theaterbedrijf en toneelpolemiek in Amsterdam en Hamburg 1675-1750* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2008), 83-84.

⁹⁸ Duits, "De moeizame relatie tussen kerk en toneel in de zeventiende eeuw," 179; Van der Haven, *Achter de schermen*, 131.

tussles between the proponents of theatre and its critics were alternative sources of amusement.

The schedule of the performances at the Schouwburg in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries underwent frequent changes but theatregoers could be sure to be beckoned into its portals on weekdays to spend their evenings enraptured in drama.⁹⁹ These patrons of the Schouwburg moreover were given no reason to feel guilty for indulging their passion for theatre as the few stuivers they spend on a performance went to charity. This owed to the fact that the city's almshouses were the financial beneficiaries of the Schouwburg's functioning and these institutions also took on the charge of running the playhouse intermittently in this period.¹⁰⁰ The appeal of the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg cut through all social divisions making it an alluring medium of entertainment for all the city's inhabitants. This underscored the fact that drama as a genre and a means of disseminating knowledge possessed an edge over the book. Drama, as Bettina Noak puts it was, "an important form of knowledge that cannot be acquired from books but emerges from a process of interaction between characters on the stage and spectators in the audience."¹⁰¹ The genre further widened its reach by rescuing knowledge from the book, which was a literate stronghold and imparting it to the masses. The Amsterdamsche Schouwburg with its popularity quite evidently brought with it benefits generally associated with medium. In ensuring that the plays performed at the Schouwburg were available for purchase at the venue in their printed form, the playhouse played a dual role as far as the dissemination of knowledge was concerned - it diffused knowledge in both forms, in performance and in print.¹⁰² Playwrights seem to have relied on numerous printers to bring out their books such as Vondel who in his long career used the services of no less than two printers, but the late seventeenth century brought about a change in this practice.¹⁰³ Printers officially affiliated to the Schouwburg came to monopolize this privilege.¹⁰⁴ Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* which was penned in 1745 was therefore brought out by one such printer, Izaak Duim who was accorded the privilege from 1729 to 1780.¹⁰⁵

The first three decades of the seventeenth century are equivocally considered by literary scholars to have been the springtime of Dutch drama. This was the period which saw

⁹⁹Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772*, 123-24.

¹⁰⁰Van der Haven, *Achter de schermen*, 34.

¹⁰¹Bettina Noak, "The Representation of Language and Body," in *Joost van den Vondel: Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age*, eds. Jan Boemendal and Frans Willem Korsten (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 115-16.

¹⁰²Albach, *Langs kermis en hoven*, 36.

¹⁰³Willem Blaeu and Abraham de Wees were two of the publishers of Vondel's works.

¹⁰⁴Anna de Haas, *Het repertoire van de Amsterdamsche Schouwburg, 1700-1772* (Amsterdam: Shaker, 2001), 3.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

the rise of the most accomplished dramatists that the Republic ever produced – Samuel Coster, P.C. Hooft, Gerbrandt Adriaensz Bredero and Joost van den Vondel. Because all of these playwrights produced literary masterpieces by the dozen in this early period, the subsequent phase, the period of the First Schouwburg ranging from the institution of the playhouse until the building was renovated in 1672 continued to thrive on the delectable assortment of drama that was doled out in this pre-Schouwburg era.¹⁰⁶ Although classical tragedy as a genre gained the upper hand in the first Schouwburg period, comedies, farces and baroque drama were still integral parts of the repertoire.¹⁰⁷ Classical tragedy “with [its notions of] the unity of time, five act play, long tales told by the messenger and chorus” was the favoured genre with Vondel who wrote most of his plays in this style.¹⁰⁸ The character of the plays performed in the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg underwent a transformation that was nothing short of dramatic with the institution of the literary society, *Nil Volentibus Arduum* in 1669. Armed with significant clout and the object to revamp the nature of Dutch drama, the Society laid down guidelines for both the writing and performance of plays in the Republic. In a series of deliberations contained in their writings such as Andries Pels’s 1681 treatise titled *Gebruik en misbruik des tóóneels*, their stance on the purpose of drama and the desired form it was to take on were lucidly explicated. Theatre was perceived as a vehicle for instilling virtuosity in its spectators, and the educative purpose of theatre was privileged at the expense of its entertainment potential. Their perspective that the stage could not be used for performing plays which relied on the bible for thematic content or dramas that verged on sedition colluded with those of the clergy.¹⁰⁹ Apart from its “puritan-moralistic” position on the role that Dutch drama and the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg were to play, they privileged a genre based on French theory - French Classical Tragedy.¹¹⁰ Dutch drama in the following decades paid the cost for the ardor of *Nil Volentibus Arduum* and the perseverance with which they sought to enforce their tenets. In popularizing a theory of drama which stressed on the emulation of French drama as produced by the most renowned practitioners of French classical tragedy– Racine, Voltaire and Corneille, *Nil Volentibus Arduum* engendered a

¹⁰⁶Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772*, 99.

¹⁰⁷R. van Stipriaan, “Komische toneel en vermaakcultuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden in de zeventiende eeuw,” in *Een theatergeschiedenis der Nederlanden: Tien eeuwen drama en theater in Nederland en Vlaanderen*, ed. R.L.Erenstein (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 167-69; Also see Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772*, 92-93; Anna de Haas, *De wetten van het treurspel: Over ernstige toneel in Nederland, 1700-1772* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), 4-11.

¹⁰⁸Cf. Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772*, 92-93.

¹⁰⁹A.J.E. Harmsen, “Toneelschrijven als ambacht,” in *Een theatergeschiedenis der Nederlanden: Tien eeuwen drama en theater in Nederland en Vlaanderen*, ed. R.L. Erenstein (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 267.

¹¹⁰I borrow the term “puritan-moralistic” from Albach, *Langs kermessen en hoven*, 121.

pervasive culture of imitation.¹¹¹ It was after 1766 as G.P.M. Knuvelde notes that other genres such as bourgeoisie drama and melodrama came to make an appearance but even in this period, French Classical tragedy still held its appeal among theatre goers and continued to draw playwrights to write in the genre.¹¹²

Dutch Drama and the Orient

The Orient in English and French drama in the seventeenth and eighteenth century has been a subject of growing scholarly interest. While Michelle Longino's *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* is compellingly demonstrative of this phenomenon in the French case, Bridget Orr's *Empire on the English Stage 1660-1714* and Richmond Barbour's *Before Orientalism* are good examples of the trend in the realm of English drama.¹¹³ The Dutch scenario in contrast presents a somber picture. Save for *De Oostersche Schouwburg* by C.G. Brouwer, academic interest on the subject of the Dutch stage and the Orient has been short shrift.¹¹⁴ This relative inattention to the subject hardly does justice to the quantitative and qualitative engagement of Dutch drama with the Orient as the Republic may lay claims to exhibiting the same enthusiasm that France and Britain displayed in welcoming the Orient into their dramatic texts and playhouse repertoire. When French dramatists such as Molière in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670) and Racine in *Berenice* (1670) brought the Orient into full view of the French theatre-goer and Voltaire in the eighteenth century scripted a string of plays such as *Zaïre* (1732), *Mahomet* (1736), and *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (1753) which were set in the Orient, several English dramatists ensured that English stage was not found wanting in Oriental content. The seventeenth century playwrights John Dryden, Elkanah Settle, Delarivier Manley and Mary Pix displayed a lively interest for the Orient as did the eighteenth

¹¹¹Ben Albach, *Jan Punt en Marten Corver: Nederlandsch tooneelven in de 18e eeuw* (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen en Zoon, 1946), 31.

¹¹²G.P.M. Knuvelde, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde, deel 3* (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 1973), 273-79.

¹¹³Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Michelle Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London's Theatre of the East 1576-1626* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁴C.G. Brouwer, ed. *De Oostersche schouwburgh, deel 2: Den grooten Tamerlan (1657): Mahomet en Irena (1657) : Timooridische en Turkse tragedies* (Amsterdam: D'Fluyte Rarob, 1992); C.G. Brouwer, *De Oostersche Schouwburgh, Deel 1: Sultan Osman (1623) en Bedroge bedriegers (1646), Turkse tragedies van Kemp en Kroes* (Amsterdam: D' Fluyte Rarob, 1994); C.G. Brouwer, *De Oostersche Schouwburg, deel 3: Achmet en Thamas Koelikan* (Amsterdam: D' Fluyte Rarob, 1993). See afterword of Volume 1 for a brief overview of Oriental tragedies.

century dramatists Edward Young, John Hughes and Aaron Hill.¹¹⁵ Some of the works of the latter group of playwrights were heavily influenced by French drama.¹¹⁶

Dutch playwrights in the same period looked to the Orient to provide them with plots, settings and cast and if we are to prop up this claim with numbers, E. Oey-De Vita and M. Geesink's *Academie en Schouwburg* which features a list of plays that were performed at the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg between 1617 and 1665 indicates that about four Oriental dramas took to the stage in this period.¹¹⁷ *Het repertoire van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg, 1700-1772* yields a list of another 20 plays and C.G. Brouwer places his estimate of the number of Dutch plays that dealt with the "Islamic Orient" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at twenty five plays thereby landing us a modest number of Oriental Dutch dramas either scripted and/or performed in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹¹⁸ Prominent playwrights in the day such as Vondel in the seventeenth century and Claas Bruin in the eighteenth moreover set at least one of their plays in the East.¹¹⁹ Most of the attention to the Orient in these plays was directed to the Ottoman empire and Persia and dramas such as Abraham Kemp's *Sultan Osman* (1623), Coenraed Droste's *Achmet* (1708), Willem van der Hoeven's *De dood van Sultan Selim, Turkse Keizer* (1717), N.W. op den Hooff's *Aben-Zaid, Keizer der Mogollen* (1738), Jan Nomsz's *Soliman de tweede* (1775) stand to justify this claim. Yet the geographical imagination of Dutch drama extended beyond the Near East. Antoine Marin Le Mierre's *La veuve du Malabar* (1770) and August von Kotzebue's *Die Indianer in England* (1790) which were both plays translated for the Dutch public as *De Weduwe van Malabar* and *De Indiaanen in Engeland* by Jan Frans van der Schueren in 1785 and J. Houtkamp in 1791 respectively brought the East Indians onto stage. Antonides van der Goes's *Trazil of overrompelt Sina* (1666) in turn ensured that the Dutch

¹¹⁵The Oriental plays authored by Dryden, Settle, Manley and Pix are *Aureng-zebe* (1675), *The Conquest of China* (1676), *The Royal Mischief* (1695) and *Ibrahim* (1696) respectively. George Sherburne and Donald F. Bond provide the list of plays authored by Young, Hughes and Hill. They scripted *Busiris* (1719), *Siege of Damascus* (1720) and *Zara* (1735) respectively. George Sherburne, Donald F. Bond, eds. *A Literary History of England, vol 3: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 895. For a list of late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century English plays which concerned the Orient, see Louis Wann, "The Oriental in Elizabethan Drama," *Modern Philology* 12, 7 (1915). All of Voltaire's plays listed here were translated into Dutch.

¹¹⁶Sherburne, *A Literary History of England*, 895.

¹¹⁷See section titled "Alfabetisch register van het repertoire van de Eerste Amsterdamse Schouwburg." E. Oey-de Vita and M. Geesink, *Academie en schouwburg: Amsterdams toneelrepertoire, 1617-1665* (Amsterdam: Huis aan de drie grachten, 1983).

¹¹⁸See "Titelregister van gespeelde stukken." De Haas, *Het repertoire van de Amsterdamsche Schouwburg; Brouwer, De Oostersche Schouwburgh, deel 1: Sultan Osman (1623) en Bedroge bedriegers (1646), Turkse tragedies van Kemp en Kroes*, 281.

¹¹⁹Claas Bruin authored *De deugdzame hoveling* (1720).

imagination of China extended far beyond its associations of the empire with porcelain and silk.

Several factors conspired to usher the Orient onto Dutch stage. Oriental plays frequented the Schouwburg because they were expedient choices as far as performing dramas were concerned. The Orient inevitably constituted the exotic and provided the perfect means of enhancing the visual aspect of drama. The “spectacle” in Dutch drama held an exalted status because it catered to “a public which saw drama more “for the eyes” than “for the ears.”¹²⁰ The Orient was as a consequence featured in all her visual splendour and in the Schouwburg’s use of Asian costumes and settings; she exuded her otherness to an optimum. Oriental clothing was one of the principal “types of drama costumes” worn by its actors and the Schouwburg’s closet in 1688 for instance featured “a Moor’s dress with feathers” and “a red Turkish pendent cloth, lined with red satin.”¹²¹ The response that was perhaps elicited in the Schouwburg’s spectators when watching actors move across stage dressed in seemingly outlandish costumes is captured in P. Nederhoven’s 1667 drama *‘t Verwarde Huwelyk*. When the character Anselmus is confronted with Geronte who having spent many long years in Constantinople is dressed as a Turk, his reaction is marked by both honest curiosity and outright ridicule. “But, why are you dressed in such strange attire? Or are you attending a ballet, that you go disguised?” he asks.¹²² Costumery, as is herein evident played no small role in accentuating the novelty of the Orient but the element of spectacle was also enhanced by stage settings which in the context of Oriental plays meant transporting the spectator to locales that were quintessentially Eastern. The playwright Abraham Kemp for instance envisaged the action in his drama *Sultan Osman* being played out not only in the Ottoman court but also within the seraglio.¹²³

What also ensured that Oriental drama possessed certain longevity in the Dutch theatre scene were the changing trends in Dutch drama. It was to the benefit of Oriental drama that Dutch theatre exhibited a remarkable porosity to outside influences. Periodically prone to taking a fancy for theatre cultures of other European countries, Dutch theatre offered foreign plays to its audiences either in translation or adaptation. Spanish and English drama enjoyed

¹²⁰ In achttiende-eeuwse termen: het publiek ziet liever toneel “voor het oog” dan “voor het oor.” De Haas, *Het repertoire van de Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*, 13.

¹²¹ “Tot de Schouwburgbrand (1772) waren de tooneelcostuums te verdeelen in een viertal typen: Modern, Oostersch of Turksch, Romeinsch en Oudhollandsch of Spaansch.” Albach, *Jan Punt en Marten Corver*, 28; Brandt, *German and Dutch Theatre: 1600-1848*, 435.

¹²² “Maar, waar toe u gekleet in zulk een vreemd gewaad?/ Of danst gy een Ballet, day gy voor mom dus gaat?” P. Nederhoven, *‘t Verwarde Huwelyk* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lascailje, 1667), 29. I thank Ton Harmsen for bringing this work to my attention.

¹²³ It was in 1639 that the Amsterdamsche Schouwburg’s repertoire featured *Osman*.

considerable popularity in the early seventeenth-century Schouwburg and in the 1670s, Dutch playwrights discovered their passion for French drama. By the end of the eighteenth century when Dutch drama was recovering from her French stupor, German and Spanish drama began to make modest forays into the Dutch scene. The Schouwburg's fetish for foreign dramas meant that the Oriental plays of these foreign theatre cultures also found a place in her repertoire. Serwouter's *Den grooten Tamerlan* (1619) which was arguably the most performed Oriental drama in the two-century period that we deal with was modelled on a play by the Spanish playwright Luis Vélez de Guevaras and at least three plays scripted by Joannes Nomsz in the 1770s and 1780s which were set in the Orient were adaptations of French dramas.¹²⁴

Thematically, the Schouwburg's Oriental plays were fictitious and were built entirely on the fundamentals of the playwright's creativity, but a commendable number were based on historical episodes. History and the classics had always been ready-reckoners for Dutch dramatists in search of plots for their plays and tales which drew from the Republic's own past such as P.C. Hooft's *Geeraerdt van Velsen* (1613) and Joost van den Vondel's *Gysbrecht van Amstel* (1637) which brought to life, a tale of intrigue and murder from Amsterdam's thirteenth century history. The adaptations of these tales from books for the stage were as much a renewed rumination about these episodes as it was a celebration of the erudition and wide reading of the playwrights who wrote them. When eighteenth-century Dutch playwrights were smitten by an infectious enthusiasm to translate French works of drama into the Dutch language, their seventeenth-century counterparts were wont to "embellishing [their] verses with smatterings of great learning."¹²⁵ Apart from the genuine appreciation and deference that they evinced for these persons and trends, the fact that the scripting of historical plays were also reminders to audiences of how knowledgeable and well-informed the playwrights were did not go unnoticed to them.

While it is precisely this tendency which set the stage for the inception of Oriental historical drama in the Dutch Republic, the growth of this genre also owed to two other elements. The first was the inherent trait of theatre to reflect on political, social and cultural issues which concerned contemporary society. This on one hand endowed theatre with the

¹²⁴*Den grooten Tamerlan* was performed 27 times between 1617 and 1665 and at least 24 times between 1700 and 1772. See Oey-de Vita and Geesink, *Academie en schouwburg: Amsterdams toneelrepertoire, 1617-1665*, 169; De Haas, *Het repertoire van de Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*, 208. The plays by Joannes Nomsz referred to in this context are *Zoraster* (1768), *Zaire* (1777) and *Soliman de tweede* (1775).

¹²⁵See J.W.H. Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei in de Nederlandse tragedie 1600-1720* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2003), 24; Cf. J. H. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century and other Essays*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (London: Collins, 1968), 67.

role of social responsibility but this engagement was not without financial gain. Writing and staging plays on topical themes and episodes that generated popular interest meant larger audiences and greater profits. The Schouwburg as a potential commentatorial space on society and politics was brought to an end by Nil Volentibus Arduum. The literary society in 1669 decreed that the Schouwburg had no place for plays with themes of religious and political import, just as it ruled that the playhouse would no longer stage dramatizations of historical episodes which were less than a hundred years old. Nil Volentibus Arduum may, with this directive, have threatened to evict Oriental historical drama of a contemporaneous nature from the Schouwburg but contrary to what might be believed, contemporary Oriental history continued to be courted by playwrights. The playwrights Coenraed Droste and Frans van Steenwyk defended their engagement with recent history in their plays *Achmet* (1708) and *Thamas Koelikan* (1745), both of which were set in Asia, on the grounds that “the proximity of time can be transgressed by the distance of the land [where the play was set to that of the Dutch Republic].”¹²⁶ Scripting and staging Oriental historical drama was thus a solution for those who wanted to circumvent the rules of theatre by addressing contemporary history and yet not draw flak for doing so. A second factor, which is a necessary precondition for the scripting of Oriental drama based on the recent historical past, was an interaction between the Dutch Republic and the Orient which facilitated the conveyance of information about the Orient to the literati in the Republic. Abraham Kemp’s play, *Sultan Osman* exemplified the manner in which the relations between the Dutch Republic and the Ottoman Empire by means of the Levant trade of the early seventeenth centuries resulted in the playwright dramatizing an episode from the empire’s history which preceded the scripting of the play by only a few years.¹²⁷

The Dutch East India Company however, when evaluated in the context of these inferences comes forth as an anomaly. If we take into account its two century existence and its role in punctuating Dutch economic and cultural life, its impact on Dutch drama seems minimal. When the VOC should have promised the Republic’s dramatists a rich haul of historical episodes to spin their dramas from, from the very first time its ships were launched in the seas until the enterprise was heavy-heartedly wrapped up in the late eighteenth century, there were no more than five dramas that were written in the Republic which dealt with

¹²⁶“Men vindt hierin oock eenige kennis van den aert en seden van een Volck, dat soo ver van ons woont dat men door de afgelegentheyd van ‘t land de nabyheyt van den tijdt, waerin het gebeurt is, ligt kan overstappen.” Cf. Preface to Coenraed Droste’s *Achmet* (1708) in Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 18.

¹²⁷The play concerns itself with political upheaval in the Ottoman empire in the early seventeenth century. Brouwer, *De Oostersche Schouwburgh, deel 1*.

contemporary historical episodes from the Company's Orient. Of these five, three are taken up for study in this work namely Vondel's *Zungchin*, Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* and Van Haren's *Agon*, *Sultan van Bantam*. The fourth play in this rather restricted category, is Joannes Nomsz's *Antonius Hambroek of de belegering van Formosa* (1775) and the fifth is Joannes Antonides van der Goes's *Trazil* (1667) which adapts the same historical event for drama as Vondel's *Zungchin*. Nomsz's *Hambroek* is briefly dealt with in the afterword and Van der Goes's *Trazil* merits modest attention in Chapter Two which principally centres on Vondel's *Zungchin*. This study as a consequence confesses to not having accorded either of these two plays the attention that they rightfully deserve but one reckons that these plays should constitute projects for future research.¹²⁸ Two plays which were, what we might understand as contemporary historical drama, forfeit attention in this study for valid reasons. The first is Pieter de Vries's *Jan Pieterszoon Coen* (1762). Because Batavia was the locale where the drama was both scripted and performed, the conditions of its composition and reception are rendered vastly different from those taken up for study.¹²⁹ The second is Gerrit van Spaan's *Opkomst van de Oost-Indische Compagnie* which according to N.P. van den Berg defies all perception of constituting a drama.¹³⁰ Preferring not to reflect on a concrete historical episode or event but rather recapitulate the chief achievements and conquests of the Company, Van Spaan's *Opkomst* becomes no different to the many eulogies that were composed in the Republic in praise of either the Company or its servants.

Now that the three principal actors of my study namely the Dutch Republic, the Dutch East India Company and the Amsterdam Schouwburg have been introduced, the stage is set to study the plays, *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan* and *Agon*. The lights dim and the curtains open.

¹²⁸ Another work which might belong in this category of plays is Dirk van Hogendorp's *Kraspoeol of de slaaverny* (1800). However, the play which is undoubtedly inspired by the practice of slavery in the East Indies does not appear to have dramatized an actual historical episode.

¹²⁹ Bert Paasman, "De geschiedschrijving van de Indische-Nederlandse literatuur uit de Compagniestijd: taak en problemen," *Indische Letteren* 7 (1992), 179 (footnote).

¹³⁰ N.P. van den Berg, "Het tooneel te Batavia in vroegeren tijd," *Tijdschrift voor Indische taal, land en volkenkunde* 26 (1881), 324.

Chapter Two

**WHEN VONDEL LOOKED EASTWARDS: JOOST VAN DEN
VONDEL'S *ZUNGCHIN* (1667)¹**

Introduction

When Xaianga, a lady of the court, recounts the suicide of the Ming royal family, her depiction of the event is tragically beautiful. The emperor Zungchin who commanded the subjects of the fifteen provinces of China now gently swayed in the breeze. He had hanged himself from a plum tree in the royal orchard suspended from a stocking. The empress Jasmine dangled by his side and princess Pao who lay dead in her bedchamber had succumbed to a stab in her chest from the emperor's dagger. This poetic end marks the demise of the three-century Ming rule of Imperial China in the play, *Zungchin*.² Credited to the Dutch Republic's greatest playwright, Joost van den Vondel, *Zungchin* was Europe's "first literary Chinoiserie" and Vondel's only attempt at Oriental drama.³ And it was a contemporaneous affair that got Vondel's ink flowing. The overthrow of the Chinese dynasty in 1644 (the event he dramatized) preceded the writing of the play by a mere twenty-three years.

As the decline of empires goes, the story of the fall of the Ming dynasty is a familiar one featuring many of the same factors that brought the curtains down on the careers of great imperial dynasties before her.⁴ The Ming rulers from the reign of the Wanli Emperor (r.1573–1619) onwards, displayed the same perilous reticence as might be expected of rulers of empires lumbering towards their decline.⁵ Their reigns were marked by soaring personal expenditure while the empire quietly suffered neglect. Famine and disease wiped out a portion

¹ An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "When Vondel Looked Eastwards: A Study of Representation and Information Transfer in Joost van den Vondel's *Zungchin* (1667)," in *Shifting the Compass: Pluricontinental Connections in Dutch Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Jeroen Dewulf, Olf Praamstra and Michiel van Kempen ed. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 91-111.

² The play was first published in 1667: Joost van den Vondel, *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (Amsterdam: Abraham de Wees, 1667). All references to the content of the play are in keeping with this version and the work was referred to on <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/VondelZungchin1667.html>. When citing the work, mention shall be made of the verse number alone.

³ Cf. Arie Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein: Nederlandse literaire chinoiserie en het westerse beeld van China 1250-2007" (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 2007), 98.

⁴ For this section, I have relied on Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (London: Hutchinson, 1990).

⁵ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 16-21; Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 11.

of the population.⁶ Those who survived were left disillusioned and willing to throw their support behind anyone who promised a better future. The economic downturn in Ming China came in the form of a contracting silk industry which had formerly flourished. The empire, in addition, was no longer in receipt of the large amounts of silver that had entered her economy as payment for the silk she exported abroad.⁷ By the time the Chongzhen emperor ascended the throne in 1627, the empire balanced dangerously on a precipice. Internal rebellion mushroomed in various parts of the empire and Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong, who in the 1630s assumed leadership of these violent expressions of anti-Ming sentiment looted and pillaged the territories they subjugated.⁸ The weakness of the empire in the period was such that Li and Zhang were able to usurp Ming authority in Shaanxi, Henan and Sichuan and become rulers in their own right.⁹

While these factors sapped the vitality of the empire, some more swiftly than others, the true nemesis of the Ming Empire lay beyond the frontiers of the empire – in Manchuria. Nurhaci, a Jurchen tribesman of vision and tenacity, united the various tribes in the region under his able leadership. In 1616, he established a dynasty known as the latter Jin. By 1621 the Manchus had captured the Chinese territory of Liaoyang and following the death of Nurhaci, his successors Hong Taiji (r.1626-43) and Dorgon (1612–50) who took on the mantle of leadership in 1643 displayed a comparable if not greater desire for expansion than their illustrious predecessor.¹⁰ When Ming armies failed to prevent the Manchus from penetrating the Great Wall, Chinese cities fell one after another to the latter. In June 1644, when the Ming army could no longer face the Manchu forces, and Peking was still recovering from the invasion of the rebel leader Li Zicheng, the Manchus burst into the imperial city and inaugurated the Qing chapter of Chinese history. In subsequent decades, the rest of the empire accepted Manchu suzerainty. All contesting political and military entities that questioned the legitimacy of Manchu rule in the form of rebellion and wars of resistance waged by Ming loyalists, and provincial secession, were gradually crushed. In 1683, Manchu authority extended as far as Formosa (present-day Taiwan) situated off the coast of the Chinese mainland, when the successors of Cheng Zhenggong (referred to as Coxinga in the VOC records) who had forced the Dutch East India Company from the island in 1662 were themselves driven out.

⁶Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 20-21.

⁷*Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁸*Ibid.*, 22.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Dorgon played the role of regent until the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644-1661) who was six years of age at the time of his father's death in 1643 attained majority.

“Qing,” the name chosen by the Manchus for their dynasty, means “pure” but the political revolution in China was one that was sullied beyond imagining.¹¹ The empire in this period experienced destruction of inconceivable magnitude and suffered a staggering loss of human life. In the six-decade-long process of regime change, China had witnessed innumerable wars, sieges, skirmishes, routs and conquests, each weaning its rulers of their grip over the vast empire. It was without doubt the capitulation of Peking in 1644 with the death of the Chongzhen emperor that dealt a deathblow to the Ming dynasty’s claims of kingship to China. All subsequent opposition that the Manchus had to suppress to ensure that their claims to suzerainty over the empire stood uncontested was merely the last contortion of a dying empire.

In a span of two months, the capital city witnessed two conquests and the establishment and fall of two dynasties. In April 1644, as the news of the rebel Li Zicheng’s advance towards the imperial city reached the Chongzhen emperor, his court was plagued by indecision. Although fervently deliberated, proposals for the emperor’s flight to the southern city of Nanjing were not carried out and the last attempts to muster together an army to confront the aggressor frittered away. By the evening of 24 April, the eve of Li’s takeover of Peking, when the mood in the capital at the impending overthrow of the dynasty swung from apprehension to helplessness, the royal palace witnessed a bloodbath. Members of the imperial household who had not taken flight were either put to the sword by the emperor, or took their own lives just as the emperor did the following morning. Li’s tryst with kingship was brief, and his exit from Peking was as swift as his entry had been. He fled the imperial city in June on realizing that his army stood no chance against the superior arms of the Manchus, which had been strengthened by their alliance with the Ming general Wu Sangui, who changed sides on learning of Li’s capture of Peking. On 6 June 1644, the city passed into Manchu control.

“One’s Company, Two’s a Crowd”: Representation in *Zungchin*¹²

Vondel’s play chronicles this tale of dynastic fall, the suicide of the royals and the ensuing persecution of that group of European observers in China who witnessed the revolution at close proximity – the Jesuits. It melancholically envisions the last and fateful night of

¹¹For reference to the meaning of term “Qing,” see Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 206.

¹² The quote is Andy Warhol’s.

Zungchin's life.¹³ The rebel leader Lykungzus lays siege to the city of Peking, which causes the troubled emperor to summon Adam Schall and his retinue of Jesuits to the court. He asks them to pray for the deliverance of the empire. While the Jesuits worry what the brewing political turmoil would spell for the future of the Christian mission in China, the court is plagued by rumours of treason, the truth of which is later confirmed. When the emperor realizes that the fall of the city is inevitable, before committing suicide he ensures the flight of his three sons so that the dynasty may not die out with him. The victorious Lykungzus assumes the throne and the spirit of Francis Xavier appears to the Jesuits warning them that the tumult is not over. He foresees the death of Lykungzus, the slaughter of the three Ming descendants and the victory of the Manchus over China. The last, he cautions, will have varying consequences for the future of the Jesuit order in the empire.

Despite the play's intractable gloom, it fails to stir the pathos that such a tragedy would normally elicit in the reader. According to P. Minderaa, this flaw stems from the fact that Vondel's *Zungchin* comprises not one but two narratives that parallel to one another in the play.¹⁴ The fall of Ming China, he argues, constitutes the first narrative. This is populated by the royal family and courtiers who are confronted with the siege of the city and its subsequent takeover. The second narrative underscores the role of the Jesuit priests at the Ming Court, in acknowledgement of their dedication to "deliver nonbelievers from blind idolatry and shake off [their] yoke of abysmal slavery."¹⁵ It might be assumed that the two narratives are employed by Vondel to form the contents of a singular and coherent story because both, the fates of the Ming royals and the Jesuits are intertwined. As servants of the dynasty, the Jesuits are as threatened by Lykungzus as Zungchin is. Yet the assertion that Vondel engages two narratives is evident in the direction that discussions about the play have taken among academics who have long debated whether or not Vondel's *Zungchin* is a *missie-spel*, that is a drama glorifying the labours of the Christian mission. The literary scholars J.F.M. Sterck and Jansen Schoonhoven assert that *Zungchin* is a *missie-spel* based on their study of Vondel's familial connections with the Jesuit, Adam Schall, and their analysis of the

¹³ Studies which have significantly influenced my reading of Vondel's *Zungchin* are P. Minderaa, "Het treurspel *Zungchin* belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde* 79 (1963), 115-34; W.A.P. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah: Een verkenning van Vondel's dramas naar continuïteit en ontwikkeling in hun grondmotief en structuur, deel 3: Koning David-Spelen-Noah* (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1962), 951-81; Edwin J. van Kley, "News from China: Seventeenth-Century European Notices of the Manchu Conquest," *Journal of Modern History* 45, 4 (1973), 561-82.

¹⁴ Minderaa, "Het treurspel *Zungchin* belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 118.

¹⁵ "Om ongeloovigen, uit blinde afgodery/ Verlossende, het juk van 's afgronts slaverny." Verses 17-18.

drama.¹⁶ Seeking recourse to the same narrative however, P. Minderaa and W.A.P. Smit choose to disagree.¹⁷ The lop-sidedness in this discussion is hard to miss. The contention is not whether Vondel favoured the Ming or the Jesuit tale: rather, the dispute hinges on whether *missie-spel* is an appropriate descriptor for *Zungchin*. This implies an acceptance even on the part of the “anti *missie*–*spellists*,” that although they challenge the centrality of the Jesuit mission in the play, there is no denying their prominence in the drama. To stress the importance of this discussion when appraising the nature of representation of the “Other” in the play is to apprehend the fact that its verdict determines what Vondel’s object in writing his play was and which of the two narratives he intended to privilege, his Ming or his Jesuit one.

The narrative-scape of Vondel’s *Zungchin* should be revisited to determine which of the two positions best describes the drama and in addition to evaluate the role of the Chinese narrative in a play. If space allotted in the drama is an indicator of importance, the emphasis on the Chinese story is unquestionably the primary focus of the play. Yet the strength of this argument, which presumes the privileging of the Chinese narrative in the drama, weakens in the face of its overpowering Christian allegory that features in both the renditions of the Jesuit chorus and in the Ming narrative. When the Queen having borne witness to frightful predictions, perceives them to be signifiers of future catastrophe, Schall brushes aside her worry and advises her to take her cue from “Europe, enlightened from above” and to trust in the ways of the Almighty.¹⁸

Schall’s advice to Empress Jasmine not only signals the way in which Christian metaphors lace the Ming narrative, but it also indicates, as inferred by Van Kley, that the Ming and the Chinese tales are recruited by Vondel for the fulfilment of a higher ideal: the emphasis on the doctrine of “divine providence.”¹⁹ When Vondel identifies his protagonist not so much in the Ming emperor or in the Jesuit mission but at the level of Christian cosmological abstraction in the concept of the “divine providence,” its resonance is felt in the realm of characterization. Zungchin and his adversary Lykungzus assume life-sized proportions.²⁰ Zungchin is as repulsively miserly as he is helpless, and Lykungzus, despite his

¹⁶J.F.M. Sterck, “Bij het missie-tooneelspel *Zungchin*,” in *Oud en nieuw over Joost van den Vondel: Verspreide opstellen* (Amsterdam: De Spieghel, 1932), 77-81; E. Jansen Schoonhoven, “Een missionair treurspel van Vondel,” *De Heerbaan: Algemeen Zendingtijdschrift* 11, 5 (1958), 191.

¹⁷Minderaa, “Het treurspel *Zungchin* belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei,” 118-19; Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 91-92, 451-52.

¹⁸“Doorluchtste keizerin, Europe, klaer verlicht/Van boven, bout geen hoop van voorspoet op gezicht.” Verses 583-584. Also see verse 610.

¹⁹Van Kley, “News from China,” 567, 579.

²⁰For a description of *Zungchin*’s characterization, see Minderaa, “Het treurspel *Zungchin* belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei,” 117. On the question of Jesuit agency, see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 465, 491.

audacity in overthrowing a dynasty, still feels faint when assuming the throne. The decision to populate his play with a sombre cast of characters was presumably a conscious effort on the part of Vondel. Had the playwright inhabited his play with loud character types such as virtuous defenders of the regime and rapacious raiders, he might have deprived his protagonist, the concept of “divine providence” of attention and agency.

With Zungchin and the Christian mission subordinated to the Almighty, there is little in the drama to either consider it worthy of the *missie-spel* label or be convinced that Vondel’s primary interest in scripting his play was to focus on the fall of the Ming Empire. On the contrary, it is the Christian character of the drama that draws one’s attention. The religious bent of the play is made more obvious when Chinese heathendom, viewed as a creation of the wily snake in the Garden of Eden, is seen as the obstacle to the proselytization efforts of the Jesuits in China.²¹ Vondel moreover draws a parallel between the Middle Kingdom and Rome, and refers to China as “the Asiatic Europe,” thereby regarding the Orient as malleable enough to help illustrate a European and Christian view of the world.²² When the playwright considers an Oriental theme worthy of Christian treatment, the task of gauging the principal thrust of the drama is hardly perplexing. Vondel incorporated China into a universe that he understood and defined in largely Christian and fatalistic terms. In so doing, he endorsed the idea that Europe and Asia were similar and or even alike. Both were pawns in the hands of the Almighty and both awaited a destiny dispensed by him.²³

Historicity in Vondel’s *Zungchin*

Some tales are true, others make good drama.²⁴ But it required no creativity on Vondel’s part to come up with the story of the Ming emperor stringing himself from a plum tree. History had already authored this script and modern-day histories conceive of the episode and the circumstances leading to it in much the same manner that Vondel does.²⁵ The historical script therefore is a reiteration of Vondel’s own: of the rise of internal rebellion which came

²¹ For Vondel’s take on the Chinese religion, see Verses 409-452; Also see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 496-97.

²² “Och kon men ‘t Aziaensche Euroope/ Herbaeren door het hemelsch zaet,” Verses 169-170.

²³ Blue states that “this work like many of Vondel’s plays was intended as a vehicle for his religious beliefs.” Gregory Blue, “Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission in Vondel’s *Zungchin*,” in *Western Learning and Christianity in China: The Contribution and Impact of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, S. J. (1592-1666)*, ed. Roman Malek (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 1998), 976.

²⁴ I draw this model of comparing the fictional with the historical from Balachandra Rajan, “Appropriating India: Dryden’s Great Moghal,” in *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999).

²⁵ For an understanding of the “historical interpretation” of the set of events that Vondel reflects on, I rely on Frederic Wakeman, Jr., “The Shun Interregnum of 1644,” in *From Ming to Ching: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China*, eds. Jonathan Spence and John E. Wills, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

knocking on the doors of Peking, Zungchin's decision to end his life, the short-lived interregnum of Lykungzus, and the dawn of Qing rule. Vondel's characterization of Zungchin and Lykungzus also drew from life. Modern-day interpretations acknowledge that the emperor did indeed possess some reprehensible traits and that Lykungzus did not possess the most admirable qualities.²⁶ Vondel's image as a stickler for conformity to historical detail however cannot be pushed too far and it is important to remember that the playwright deviates from the facts in two instances, both times recruiting the Jesuits into his story of the Ming. The Jesuits in Vondel's *Zungchin* walk the royal pavilions and comfort the anxious queen in the hour of crisis.²⁷ Vondel's privileging of the Society in this way can be contrasted with modern histories that all but ignore the Jesuits when discussing the twilight of the Ming Empire.²⁸ Secondly, noting the gradual growth of Jesuit influence in the Ming court, particularly under Adam Schall, historians would argue that the position of imperial advisor that Vondel confers on the German Jesuit is an exaggeration.²⁹ For Schall, who was still busy expanding the Jesuit presence in the Ming court in the 1640's, this much-coveted position could in 1644 have only been an aspiration.³⁰ Vondel then clearly modeled Schall's role in Ming circles on that of his subsequent station in the court of the first Manchu emperor, Shunzhi. When this Jesuit is known to have headed the department of astronomy and was supposedly a guide and councillor to the emperor who was still a young boy, Manchu rule in China inaugurated what Dauril Alden calls "the era of Adam Schall."³¹ These elements display Vondel's apparent rejection of historical exactitude but before considering the extent to which the playwright wandered from the historical narrative, we must consider an entire generation of works on the Manchu conquest.

Reading *Zungchin* shortly after it was published may have triggered an inadvertent yawn because the tale of imperial collapse in China was in the 1660's decidedly stale. In

²⁶See *Ibid.*, 46-47, 67-72.

²⁷Adrian Hsia, "The Literary Reception of Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* (1654) in Europe," in *Martino Martini S.J. (1614-1661) und die Chinamission im 17. Jahrhundert*, eds. Roman Malek, et al. (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2000), 118.

²⁸Although studies on the Jesuits on China speak of the aid extended by the Jesuits to the Ming dynasty during the crisis decades of the 1630s and the 1640s, histories which focus on the Ming collapse hardly do so owing to the marginality of the Jesuit intervention in this historical plot.

²⁹Adrian Hsia suggests that it was influence of the Jesuits at the court of Prince of Fu, a Ming who was raised to the throne in Nanjing by the Ming loyalists following the death of Zungchin in 1644 that formed the template for the Vondel's characterization of Adam Schall. Hsia, "The Literary Reception of Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* (1654) in Europe," 118. I believe the Manchu case is more convincing.

³⁰Dauril Alden however notes that the Jesuit progress in Peking during the period of the late Ming was marked by a rising number of believers in the royal establishment and the participation of these missionaries in expanding the artillery supplies of the Ming army. Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond 1540-1750* (Stanford:Stanford University Press, 1996), 143-45.

³¹*Cf. Ibid.*, 145.

tracing the history of reporting on China's regime change in the seventeenth-century Republic, Edwin J. van Kley shows that the Dutch press was smitten by Sinophilia. It closely followed the fall of Ming China for almost three decades.³² Following the 1650 publication of the *Hollantsche Mercurius* and the Jesuit Martino Martini's *De Tartarischen Oorlog* in 1654 (a translation of his Latin work *De Bello Tartarico* printed in the same year) which broke the news of the Ming collapse to the Republic, the story is said to have become a regular feature in later accounts about China. Many publishers and authors began incorporating either parcels of Martini's text or the account in whole into their works on the empire.³³ This meant that the average Dutchman who yearned to read about the conquest in the 1660s was spoilt for choice. Athanasius Kircher's compilation of Jesuit works on China titled *Toonneel van China* (a 1668 translation of his Latin *China Illustrata*) carried a brief account of the event. Johan Nieuwhof imported a modified version of the Jesuit work into his book *Het Gezantschap* (1665) which was an account of the author's travels as a member of the Dutch East India Company's embassy to the Manchu court from 1655 to 1657.³⁴ The Dutch translation of Johan Blaeu's *Atlas Sinensis* (1664) bore Martini's account in entirety.³⁵ If the source of the Jesuit dimension in *Zungchin* is thus to be found, it is to be looked for in this European preoccupation with China, which centres on the Ming collapse which preceded the writing of Vondel's play. All these works (with the exception of Nieuwhof's *Het Gezantschap*) came with a Jesuit label in terms either of authorship or their historical source. The implication of Jesuitical mediation in the transport of the tale to the Dutch press was the inevitable introduction of a Jesuit valorization narrative into the story of the conquest. Frequently referred to in these works amidst their descriptions of burning Chinese cities ravaged by war were updates on the numbers proselytized or the growing number of churches in the land.³⁶ This Siamese twin effect in these texts where the themes of conquest and Christianity were

³²Van Kley, "News from China." Another work which revisits the history of China in Dutch print prior to the writing of Vondel's *Zungchin* is Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*. This section is indebted to both these works.

³³*Hollandse Mercurius, het eerste deel* (Haerlem: Pieter Casteleyn, 1650), 25; Martinus Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch* (Delft: Jacob Jacobz Pool, 1654). The work was originally published in Latin as *De bello Tartarico historia* (Antwerp: Balthazaris Moreti, 1654). All subsequent citations made from the work refer to the Dutch translation.

³⁴Athanasius Kircher, *Toonneel van China* (Amsterdam: Johannes van Waesberge, 1668). The work was originally published in Latin as *China monumentis qua sacris quâ profanis, nec non variis naturæ & artis spectaculis, aliarumque rerum memorabilium argumentis illustrata* (Amsterdam: Johannes van Waesberge, 1667). All subsequent citations refer to the Dutch translation: *Toonneel van China*. The complete title of Nieuwhof's account reads *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665).

³⁵Joan Blaeu, *J. Blaeus Grooten atlas, oft werelt-beschryving, in welke 't aertryck, de zee en hemel wordt vertoont en beschreven, deel 9* (Amsterdam: J. Blaeu, 1664).

³⁶See Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 159, 173, 197; Also see *Hollandtsche Mercurius* 5 (1654), 117.

seemingly inextricable from one another was therefore reproduced wholesale by Vondel. To contend that Vondel relied slavishly on the historical record in writing *Zungchin* is wrong, for the playwright also had a significant part to play. What makes us certain that Vondel the playwright was a determinant in fashioning the contents of his drama is that no precedents can be found for his fabrication of Schall's access to the inner circle of the Ming emperor. This perhaps had to do, as Sterck suggests, with Vondel's personal motivations; his status as a fresh convert to Catholicism or his shared Cologne connections with Schall.³⁷ Furthermore, the story of China's political woes had whetted public interest in the fall of Ming China to the extent that another playwright, Antonides van der Goes, also picked up his pen to tailor news of the episode for the stage and Van der Goes had a different story to tell, in both substance and spirit.³⁸

Two Playwrights, One Tale

Authored in 1666, a year before Vondel's *Zungchin* was published, Van der Goes's *Trazil of overrompelt Sina* appeared posthumously in 1685.³⁹ *Trazil* begins where *Zungchin* ends. *Zungchin* captures the epic fall of the Ming dynasty. *Trazil* chronicles its aftermath where the protagonist, the rebel Trazil (who in Vondel's play is called Lykungzus) briefly savours kingship before the Tartar Xunchi seizes the capital and reveals his plans for world domination. Strange as it seems that two playwrights should simultaneously dramatize a historical event that occurred in another part of the globe for the stage, the plays differ markedly despite their common plot. The two playwrights were led to recreate the fall of the Ming Empire for the very reason that the political turmoil in China captured so much print space in the Dutch Republic. The Chinese throne saw three occupants in an astonishingly short span of time. The monstrosity of the spectacle where an emperor forced himself into the embrace of a noose and the culprit responsible for the emperor's act of cowardice ascends the throne only to swiftly part with the imperial trophy and meet with the same fate he dispensed

³⁷Both Vondel and Adam Schall were from Cologne. Sterck, "Bij het missie-tooneelspel *Zungchin*," 77-81. Scholars place the playwright's conversion to Catholicism as having taken place somewhere between 1638 and 1641. Some literary histories classify Vondel's literature as having been products of two phases: the pre- and the post-conversion phases. See Frank Baur, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden, deel 4* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Teulings, 1948); Frank Baur, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden, deel 5* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Teulings, 1952).

³⁸For works published on China in the period, see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 452-55.

³⁹The work referred to in this context is Joannes Antonides van der Goes, *Trazil of overrompelt Sina* (Amsterdam: Jan Rieuwertsz, 1685). For my reading of the play, I employ that version of the play found at <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/Trazil.html>. Accessed on 25th May 2013. When citing the work, mention shall be made of the verses alone. My appraisal of *Trazil* has been significantly influenced by J.C. Brandt Corstius, "Zungchin en Trazil," *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 93 (1946).

to his predecessor undeniably left a lasting impression in the minds of those acquainted with the episode. Had there been yet another deposition, accession to the throne in China might have been seen as akin to a child's game of musical chairs. This capriciousness of fate that the fall of the Ming Empire was a bitter reminder of, prompted Vondel to champion the notion of "divine providence" in *Zungchin* with uninhibited furore. As J.C. Brandt Corstius notes, Van der Goes was more moved by the profanities of the conquest and *Trazil* is tainted with blood, seasoned with vengeance, and infested with treason.⁴⁰ The divine is however not banished entirely from Van der Goes's literary canvas. God is invoked, rebuked, appealed to, and slandered. In *Trazil*, the Almighty is still the prime mover of events in the mortal world, but for Van der Goes, the machinations of God are not the only explanation for the course of events in China. God to him is the principal agent among many. That Van der Goes's conception of China proceeds on very different lines than Vondel's is revealed in his treatment of the Jesuits. The Jesuits are certainly not Van der Goes's protagonists, and their characterization in the drama is not clear-cut.⁴¹ He features them as martyrs while audaciously juxtaposing this sympathy-evoking image of the Jesuits with tales of their inglorious deeds. Sketching the nature of the mission in Peru, Mexico, and Panama, Van der Goes alleges that they "drenched the land with blood and packed the sea with corpses."⁴² These acts, he notes, constituted casualties in the Jesuit pursuit of Christian souls. Van der Goes thus lavishes the Jesuits with praise just as he scalds them with criticism.

Van der Goes's stark ambivalence towards the Jesuits is striking but more noteworthy is the global dimension of his drama. He harks back to the fate of kings like Montezuma in the Americas, alludes to the plight of the Christians in Hirado, Japan, and makes reference to the early Dutch voyagers who set out to chart a route to Asia through the Arctic Ocean. Apparent in all three instances is his keen grasp of world history and *Trazil* as a result offers its audiences brief visitations to various parts of the globe during their excursion to contemporary war-torn China. When transforming a subject that was geographically constrained into one which addressed contemporary world concerns, the playwright's masterstroke lies in the manner in which he concludes his play. The curtains fall on the Manchu ruler Xunchi, fresh from his victory over Peking confessing that his thirst for glory can only be quenched with his elevation to the status of world conqueror. Xunchi's pronouncement is evidently concocted to

⁴⁰According to W.J.A. Jonckbloet, Van Lennep did not regard the play as one for the faint-hearted. The gore and macabre contained in the drama is such. W.J.A. Jonckbloet, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde, deel 4: De zeventiende eeuw* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1890), 359; Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein," 102.

⁴¹Brandt Corstius, "Zungchin en Trazil," 66; Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein," 102.

⁴²"Het land met bloet gemest, de zee gepropt met lijken." Verse 887.

stir the anxiety of its readers that Europe was now to be overrun by the Tartars. Van der Goes hoped to invoke was the same terror that the legendary fourteenth-century conqueror Tamerlane, who was also referred to as a “Tartar,” was known to have struck in the heart of his contemporaries. But just as soon as the distress is provoked, it is set to rest. The Tartar discloses his intentions to “besiege the cursed Mahomet in Byzantium and sink the land of the circumcised with their crescents and moon standards in a sea of blood,” thereby reassuring audiences that it is Europe’s arch enemy, the Ottomans that Xunchi stands poised to fight.⁴³ Van der Goes’s act of turning a probable foe into a friend in Xunchi’s proclaimed plan to annexe the Ottoman Empire suggests that *Trazil* was a plain extension of an anti-Ottoman rhetoric for which he was already well known. His two works of poetry – “Zeetriomf der Venetianen over de Turken” published in 1666, the same year that *Trazil* was scripted, and “Nederlaeg der Turken” which followed five years later carried a similar perspective.⁴⁴ The first is an earnest prayer in support of Venice in her protracted struggle against the Ottomans in the Cretan war (1645-69), and the second is a celebration of the setback that Algerian piracy received in 1671 at the hands of a Dutch naval expedition. *Trazil* was in effect part of a literary trend intended to propagate the notion of the Ottomans as a threat to Europe that should be eradicated. If we overlook the anti-Ottoman dimension that pervades these works, what is still fascinating in Van der Goes’s literary endeavour is his remarkable ability to tie two disparate but nearly contemporary events with one another – the establishment of Manchu rule in China with the war of the Venetians with the Ottomans in the Mediterranean.

The Benefits of Extensive Reading: Vondel and the Sources for *Zungchin*

Vondel in the pages of *Zungchin* may not have been as avid an armchair traveller as Van der Goes was in *Trazil* but the former certainly looked out as far as China when scouting for themes for his play. Never having left the precincts of Europe like Van der Goes, yet demonstrating in his work remarkable insight into the historical events in an empire on the other side of the globe, meant that Vondel had poured over contemporary works to find the right ingredients to mould his literary piece. Scholars have identified four works as the primary sources for Vondel’s play: the Jesuit Martino Martini’s *De Bello Tartarico*; Athanasius Kircher’s *China Illustrata*, a compilation of Jesuit reports on China; Johan Nieuwhof’s *Het gezantschap*, an account of the author’s travels as a member of the VOC

⁴³ “Vervloekte Mahomet bestoken in Byzanzen,/En doen ‘t besnedendom, met haer gehoornde maen/En maenbannieren, in een bloedzee ondergaen.” verses 2368-70.

⁴⁴For these works of poetry, see *Alle de gedichten van J. Antonides van der Goes* (Amsterdam: Nicolaas ten Hoorn 1714; repr., 3rd).

embassy to the Manchu court from 1655 to 1657; and the Jesuit Schall's description of China entitled *Historica narratio*.⁴⁵ Although the candidature of Schall's and Kircher's works as having constituted sources have been debated, scholars unanimously agree that it was Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* that left an indelible imprint on the play.

An evaluation of the aforementioned texts reveals that the appraisals of past scholars are not wide off the mark.⁴⁶ The play bore out a general image of China as contained in these accounts. China commanded the respect of Vondel's sources as it did of other seventeenth-century chroniclers who were convinced that the empire with its civilizational accomplishments was comparable if not superior to Europe.⁴⁷ Second, the preponderantly Jesuit authorship of Vondel's sources explains the intrusive presence of the mission and Catholic motifs in *Zungchin*.⁴⁸ The play moreover came to reveal the individual impression of each of the sources that Vondel had appealed to. The prints and information in Kircher's *China Illustrata* shaped the imagery employed by Vondel in his drama and the influence of *Het Gezantschap* trickled into *Zungchin* in the form of minor narrative embellishments.⁴⁹ Of all the sources however, it is Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* that held Vondel under a spell. Perhaps the most influential account on China in the seventeenth century, *De Bello Tartarico* was first published in 1654. As David Mungello suggests, it was a work "aimed at popular appeal" and it succeeded brilliantly.⁵⁰ Its shelf life in the European print market lasted another three decades in which period it underwent nine translations elevating its author Martini into the league of "the most translated historians."⁵¹ A compilation of loosely strung together tales of war in seventeenth-century China, the work was a snapshot of the empire groaning under the weight of conquest.

⁴⁵Martini, *De bello Tartarico historia*; Kircher, *China monumentis*; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*; Johann Adam Schall von Bell, *Historica narratio de initio et progressu missionis Societatis Jesu apud Chinenses ac Praesertim in Regia Pequinensi* (Viennae: Cosmerovius, 1665). Secondary studies that have considered the question of the sources of Vondel's *Zungchin* are Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 968-70; Sterck, "Bij het missie-tooneelspel *Zungchin*," 78-79; Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 452-59; Minderaa, "Het treurspel *Zungchin* belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 126-28; J.A. Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's *Zungchin*," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal en Letterkunde* 22, 14 (1903), 37-44.

⁴⁶The following discussion does not take Schall's account into consideration as past studies conclude that this work contributed little to *Zungchin*.

⁴⁷For a laudatory vision of China, see Kircher, *Toonneel van China*, dedicatory epistle.

⁴⁸When these Jesuit accounts freely intertwined the valorization of their evangelical mission with their knowledge about China in their accounts, Vondel, a recruit into the Catholic fold seems to have naturally followed suit. See Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 159, 173.

⁴⁹For the list of similarities that *Zungchin* exudes in comparison to Kircher, see Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's *Zungchin*," 42-44. Blue rightly sees the provenance of Vondel's play in Nieuhof's and Martini's works. Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 969.

⁵⁰David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985), 110.

⁵¹Peter Burke, "Translating Histories," in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Peter Burke and R. Po-Chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 140.

Zungchin's debt to *De Bello Tartarico* is enormous and the parallels between the two works have been amply demonstrated by Blue, Worp and Smit. Their examination of the literary piece reveals that Vondel was unfailingly faithful to his source and modelling his play on the basis of Martini's work in terms of plot and detail.⁵² Vondel's apathy for discovering protagonists and antagonists amongst his cast was shared by Martini. His *Lykungzus* and *Zungchin* were characterized in a manner where they invited the audiences' sympathy and abhorrence at the same time.⁵³ Incidentally, the organizing principle of "divine providence" in Vondel's play too was a hand-me-down. This term in Martini's work that highlighted the Almighty's hand in governing the events in China was elevated to become the watchword of Vondel's drama.⁵⁴ Despite *Zungchin*'s remarkable adherence to *De Bello Tartarico*, Vondel was not averse to literary innovation and did at times deviate from Martini's work.⁵⁵ But regardless of these brief departures from *De Bello Tartarico*, Martini's work indisputably remained, as Blue aptly labels it, Vondel's "ultimate source".⁵⁶

Batavian Holidays and Information Packages: Martino Martini and the VOC

So long as we take *Zungchin* to be Vondel's adaptation of *De Bello Tartarico*, the possibility of finding the VOC as a source for Vondel's drama appears slim. This is more so because Nieuhof's account, which constitutes the VOC's most convincing claim to being a source to the drama, also draws heavily on Martini's account. Save for a modest section in the text that can be credited to its author, *Het Gezantschap* was more a systematic compilation of detail skimmed from *De Bello Tartarico* and other influential Jesuit works on China published in the day.⁵⁷ At this juncture, therefore, when the likelihood of establishing the VOC as a source for *Zungchin* seems remote, a prudent means of investigating the role of the VOC in the making of the play would be to unearth the implicit association of Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* with the VOC but this is a daunting task. For one, the fortunes of the Jesuits and the VOC in Imperial China in the seventeenth century were very different. The Jesuit presence in China dated back to the last quarter of the sixteenth century, but it was only in the seventeenth

⁵²See Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's *Zungchin*," 37-42.

⁵³A similar inference is made in Adrian Hsia, "The Literary Reception of Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* (1654) in Europe," in *Martino Martini S. J. (1614-1661) und die Chinamission im 17. Jahrhundert*, eds. Roman Malek and Arnold Zingerlie (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2000), 125.

⁵⁴Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 21-23. Blue refers to the congruence of Vondel's and Martini's works on the question of "divine providence." Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 969.

⁵⁵Even in circumstances where Vondel departs from Martini's account, the playwright was most prone to consulting the other sources he had at hand. See Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's *Zungchin*," 42-44.

⁵⁶Cf. Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 968.

⁵⁷Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 454-56.

century that they acquired a firm footing in the empire. By 1641, the Jesuits had converted nearly 70,000 Chinese, and with their expertise in the sciences they attained visibility in the Ming court.⁵⁸ Their efforts to bring nonbelievers into the faith were accompanied by equally pronounced attempts to publicize and disseminate information about their China mission in Europe.⁵⁹ The European reading public through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were besieged by a barrage of Jesuit accounts on China.⁶⁰ Their role as “the only westerners who could plant themselves in the empire” gave them an unrivalled access to information and made them “monopolistic conduits of knowledge between Europe and China.”⁶¹ Little surprise, then, that the story of the conquest should arrive in Jesuit packaging; they were after all the principal sources of information for Europe about the empire.

While the Jesuits occupied a comfortable position in the heart of the empire, the Dutch East India Company struggled in vain to get a footing on its periphery. The VOC initially subscribed to the misguided policy of employing force to press Ming China to open her doors to trade and engaged in acts of piracy along the Chinese coast in the 1620s.⁶² These acts of aggression failed to shake the Chinese of their resolve to close their territory to Dutch traders but as a concession, they permitted the VOC in 1624 to trade in Formosa.⁶³ The Dutch remained eager to establish direct commercial relations with China in the next decades, but until the 1650s the uncertain political situation in the empire with the Ming-Qing conflict left the Dutch at a loss to decide the appropriate means of establishing diplomatic contact with the empire. It was only when the Qing dynasty was securely settled that the Dutch renewed their attempts to obtain trading privileges by means of embassies to Peking in 1655–56 (in which Nieuhof took part), 1666–67 and 1685–87, and intermittent trade missions to Fuzhou in the 1663–66 period.

⁵⁸For the number of converts in mid seventeenth-century China, see Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond 1540-1750*, 143-44. Due to the efforts of the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci in 1601, Jesuit presence came to pervade the capital, Peking. In subsequent decades, they served in the Imperial Bureau of Astronomy, aided in the manufacture of artillery under the Ming dynasty and became advisors to the Shunzhi emperor of the Qing dynasty. Andrew Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542 to 1742* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 118-77.

⁵⁹C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London:Hutchinson, 1977), 83.

⁶⁰Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, book 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1564-66.

⁶¹ Cf. J. Barten, “Hollandse kooplieden op bezoek bij concilievaarders,” *Archief voor de Geschiedenis van de Katholieke Kerk in Nederland* 12(1970), 75; Ashley E. Millar, “The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers between Europe and China 1582-1773: Shaping European Views of the Middle Kingdom,” *Working Papers* 105, 7 (2007), 4.

⁶²John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666-1687* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 40.

⁶³John E. Wills, Jr., *Pepper, Guns and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China 1662-1681* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 21-23.

The exclusion of the Dutch from the mainland had repercussions on the character of the information about China coursed through their information networks, both in terms of what was available to the VOC through its own channels and the news that was relayed to the Dutch public by the Company. The flows of information about China into the Company circuit rose and ebbed in tandem with the VOC's direct dealings with the empire and there were demonstrably three phases of contact with China in this context. The periods of direct contact with the empire first—during the 1620s when the Dutch raided along the Chinese coast and again during the diplomatic phase from the 1650s to the 1680s—were the most productive in terms of the information crop they harvested.⁶⁴ Reports of sailing expeditions to the South China Sea, some of which, like Bontekoe's *Journal*, were published for Dutch readership, were products of the first phase of direct interaction, while Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap* was an example of the second period.⁶⁵ Although informative in their own right, in terms of what they revealed about China, the Dutch accounts pale in comparison to the Jesuit authored works. The descriptions in the early accounts tend to be rather sketchy and show none of grasp or erudition that most Jesuit works demonstrated in their descriptions of the Kingdom.⁶⁶ The interim period, from the late 1620s to the early 1650s, marked the advent of a second and significant phase for the VOC as far as news collection from China was concerned. In the absence of direct links with the empire, the Dutch found alternative sources of information procurement. Batavia was a significant destination for the Chinese junk trade throughout the seventeenth century but this trading link does not seem to have catered significantly to the Company's information needs.⁶⁷ It was instead, the trade relations between mainland China and Dutch Formosa that the Company looked to, to be informed about happenings in the Ming Empire.

⁶⁴When the policy of confrontation yielded no spectacular gains, the Dutch saw an alternative in diplomacy. For the early tactics used by the Company, see *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁵Willem Bontekoe and Dirck Raven, *Journal ofte gedenckwaerdige beschrijvinghe vande Oost-Indische reyse van Willem Ysbrantsz Bontekoe van Hoorn* (Hoorn: Isaac Willemsz, 1646).

⁶⁶This observation made in the context of accounts written by European traders on China in general is valid particularly in relation to the early works of the VOC. Ashley E. Millar, "Authority and Parenthood: How Facts on China's Political Economy travelled to and within Europe during the Enlightenment," *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 6, 2 (2009), 15. An exception to the rule was Cornelis Matelief, "Historische verhael vande treffelijcke reyse gedaen near de Oost-Indien en China," in *Begin ende voortgangh, van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie, deel 2*, ed. Isaac Commelin (Amsterdam: Jan Jansz, 1646). See Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, vol. 3: A Century of Advance, book. 3: Trade, Missions, Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 469.

⁶⁷ Although the Chinese junk trade predated the Dutch presence in the East Indies, the Dutch only saw trading potential in this trading circuit from the end of the seventeenth century. It was then that the Dutch came to increasingly rely on these merchants to procure the merchandise that they desired from mainland China. This gave the junk trade a significant fillip and this trading system was to last until the mid-eighteenth century.

Apart from the vastly different situation of the Jesuits and the Dutch in the Chinese empire, which strongly influenced the independent channels of information transfer that they created, the Jesuits and the Dutch were also unlikely bedfellows. Each regarded the other as heretical, and the Jesuits for their part shared an intimate relationship with the prime antagonists of the VOC in seventeenth-century Asia—the Portuguese. The Jesuit enterprise was patronized by the Portuguese crown, thanks to which the Jesuit relationship with the Estado da India was a lucrative collaboration. They served the imperial and mercantile ambitions of the Estado as translators, interpreters and diplomats and in return, the Jesuits used the imperial and trading clout of the Estado to their advantage, particularly in cultivating their own trading interests in the region.⁶⁸ In the course of the seventeenth century, the Dutch came into conflict with the Portuguese in Asia and the former devoted their energies to transforming the character of the Asian waters from a Portuguese maritime empire into a Dutch one. Portuguese possessions across the breadth of Asia from the Moluccas and Makassar to Ceylon and Malabar fell into Company hands.⁶⁹ It was one of these confrontations that set the tone for the encounter between Martini and the VOC. The Jesuit strayed into Dutch captivity.

Amidst the alternating positions of war and uneasy peace that characterized the Luso-Dutch relationship in Asia in the first six decades of the seventeenth century, the 1650s saw the outbreak of a fresh round of conflict. In 1651, a decrepit Dutch ship sailing to Japara gained possession of a Portuguese vessel. At Batavia, the Dutch realized that the prize catch in this seizure was the Jesuit Martino Martini who was found aboard. The Dutch, who had until then only heard and learnt of the war in China from Chinese traders in Formosa, realized that this Jesuit who had spent long years in the empire was likely to be their most credible informant.⁷⁰ The Governor General and Council of Batavia lost no time in realizing the value of their captive and in their resolution dated 16th July 1652 resolved to grant the Jesuit passage to Europe on the next ship setting sail to Patria until which time, he was to be housed in the Dutch settlement.⁷¹ Martini sailed to Europe in February 1653 and in the time he spent in Batavia; the Dutch culled a critical piece of information from the Jesuit regarding China. On receipt of this news there was a palpable excitement among the Dutch administrators. In

⁶⁸ See Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, book. 1, 169-70; Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond 1540-1750*, 528-67.

⁶⁹ Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, 109-11.

⁷⁰ Much of this information concerning Martini's sojourn in Batavia and the impact the information he bartered had on Batavia was referred to in Leonard Blussé, *Tribuut aan China: Vier eeuwen Nederlands-Chinese betrekkingen* (Amsterdam: Cramwinckel, 1989), 61.

⁷¹ NA, VOC 675, "Resolutions of the Governor General and Council of Batavia," Dated Tuesday 16 July 1652, unnumbered.

December the same year, the Gentlemen Seventeen were briefed on the matter and Batavia politely added the directors could benefit from a private audience with the gentleman who was in possession of unmistakably important information and this meeting materialized with Martini's arrival in Europe in 1653.⁷²

Martini's encounter with the VOC is to be seen within the larger context of VOC-Jesuit relations in the early modern period. Irrespective of the natural antagonism which existed between the two enterprises owing to their religious differences, their relationship in Asia was hardly lacking in pragmatism. As Karel Davids notes, there were numerous instances where both parties were willing to cooperate and capitalize on the strengths of the other so long as their own interests were safeguarded and furthered in the process.⁷³ In Martini's case, he traded information which carried prospects of significant commercial benefit for the Company in return for his safe passage to Europe and a monetary reward. The Dutch were informed that the Manchus had established their rule in China and that they had warmed up to admitting the policy of free trade and Canton was to be the destination for prospective merchants who sought to benefit from it.⁷⁴ Martini's information inaugurated a new phase in Sino-Dutch relations. The Dutch hopes of initiating trade with the empire which had hit a low in the 1630s and 1640s suddenly received a fillip. On receipt of this information the Dutch fitted out an embassy headed to the Ming court in 1655 to reap the promise of Martini's news bore.⁷⁵

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Although not downplaying the significance of Martini's information, the VOC had kept itself informed about the Ming Empire's litany of misfortunes since their eruption decades before. In the 1630s, in what they probably regarded as an interim arrangement until the empire could be persuaded to open their ports to Dutch commerce, the VOC began trading in commodities

⁷² See Reniers VII, 24 December 1652, W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneur Generaal en Raden aan heren XVII der verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. 2: 1639-1655 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 606-07; J.J.L. Duyvendak, "Review of Henri Bernard S.J.'s *Les sources mongoles et chinoises de l'atlas Martini, 1655* by Henri Bernard S.J.," *T'oung Pao* 1, 3 (1950), 200.

⁷³ Karel Davids, "Van VOC-mentaliteit naar jezuïeten mentaliteit: De Societas Jesu als schrikbeeld, partner en ijkpunt voor de Oost-Indische Compagnie" in *Alle streken van het kompas: Maritieme geschiedenis in Nederland*, eds. Maurits Ebben, Henk den Heijer and Joost Schokkenbroek (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2010), 131-146.

⁷⁴ Blussé, *Tribuut aan China*, 61.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

with Chinese merchants arriving in Formosa.⁷⁶ In their correspondence with Batavia, the Company servants at Castle Zeelandia, the fortress they built on the island, were soon able to speak of heartening numbers of Chinese traders who arrived on junks from the coastal provinces of the Ming Empire to offload their shipments of silk, porcelain, rice, salt and other commodities into the Company's warehouses on the island.⁷⁷ At the same time, Formosa's commercial relations with China meant that that the island became Batavia's window into the empire. Chinese captains and merchant shipowners that made the 112-mile crossing from the mainland to the island became the eyes and ears of the Company relaying news of significant events in Ming China either orally or in written correspondence. When the VOC's expectations of being allowed to trade in China surged, they also became couriers who carried the Company's letters to the governors of the coastal provinces requesting access to Chinese ports and conveyed the often ambiguous replies of the Chinese officials back to the VOC.⁷⁸ A merchant who features in the *dagregister* of Castle Zeelandia as both courier and informant was Hambuan, "one of the Company's main sources of silk and sugar in China."⁷⁹ He was often able to offer the Dutch considerable insight into conditions on the mainland. In 1637, the Company identified him as having been a source of useful advice on "various aspects concerning the trade with Taiwan, how and in what manner the trade could be conducted, the constitution of the Chinese empire, the crops [that were grown in the empire] in the current year [and] the good prospects of a stable trade with the Chinese."⁸⁰ When Hambuan's role as informant and courier to the Company for almost a decade was tragically cut short by a

⁷⁶The possibilities of the Dutch trading at Chinese ports and establishing a settlement on the mainland were still being vigorously pursued in the 1630s. See J.L. Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan 1629-1662, vol. 1: 1629-1641* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986).

⁷⁷The Company's *dagregister* which kept a record of events for 1639 for instance recorded the arrival of Chinese trading junks in Formosa and their return to China almost every other day. *Ibid.*, 452-84. Dutch presence in Formosa hinged on their understanding that if the Japanese were to part with their silver; they would do so only for Chinese silk. The importance of Japanese silver for the VOC derived from the fact that this was the chief form of payment used by the Company in their intra-Asiatic trade. Ryuto Shimada, *The Intra-Asian Trade in Japanese Copper by the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 132.

⁷⁸The Chitoo ("military" officer) of Haytingh, the Hayto ("admiral") of Chinchieu (Quanzhou) and the Joukick ("local administrator") of Amoy (Xiamen) were some of the officials who were in correspondence with the Dutch in the 1630s. The meanings of the titles were referred to in the glossary of Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol. 1: 1629-1641*, 508-12.

⁷⁹Cf. Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 9 (in chapter titled "The Birth of Co-colonization"). A footnote of the Zeelandia *dagregisters* describes him as "a Chinese merchant and a confidant of the Company." Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol 1: 1629-1641*, 46 (footnote). For letters from Hambuan to the Company see *Ibid.*, 311-16.

⁸⁰"Met voorzeyde joncquen become mede schrijvens van den coopman Hambuan aen d'E. heer gouverneur geadresseert, in d'welcke aenroert diverse poincten den handel met Taywan concernerende, hoe ende in wat train d'selve moet ende can gehouden werden, d'constitutie van 't Chinee rijck, de gewassen deses jaere aldaer, de goede apparentie van eenen welgestabileerden handel herwarts over." Entry dated 4th March 1637, Blussé et al., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol 1: 1629-1641*, 311.

drowning accident in 1640, the Dutch continued to be provided with information by another merchant from the mainland named Jocksim.⁸¹

The long-drawn-out war that the Ming Empire was waging against the Manchus and native rebel groups was of significance to the Dutch because the destruction and mayhem that it brought with it reduced the quantity of silk and porcelain that they received in Formosa from mainland Chinese traders. As a consequence, information about the conflict featured both in the news that the merchants relayed directly to the Company in Formosa and in the correspondence from the mainland officials that these traders brought with them to the island. At a certain juncture in 1633, when negotiations for trading rights gave more than a little reason for optimism when corresponding with Ming officials, the Dutch made overt gestures of friendship “promising to...support his royal majesty (if it should please him), with new inventions of [Dutch] firearms that could cause substantial damage, a party of gunners and soldiers to use against the Tartars.”⁸² The offer of Dutch cooperation was put forth at a time when the empire seemed open to the prospect of the Dutch traders conducting brisk trade in their port towns. This was a proposition that seems to have died a premature death, but it nevertheless makes apparent that a Dutch collaboration with the Ming dynasty to beef up their defences when their suzerainty was under threat was seriously considered at a time when the Portuguese in Macau were known to meet China’s requirements for artillery and firearms. In the information that the Chinese merchants shared with the Dutch East India Company, news of the conflict mostly concerned the increasing demand for leaders on the warfront, which caused provincial governors to absent themselves from the areas under their jurisdiction.⁸³ Ample evidence of political troubles in the empire also reached the Dutch in the form of news about how the state was struggling to finance their war effort.⁸⁴ When by the late 1630s, the Ming confrontation against both domestic rebels and the Manchu invaders was already hastening towards the takeover of Peking in 1644, the information that these merchants traded to the Company concerned the rapidly contracting trade amidst the destruction brought on by the war.

⁸¹For news of Hambuan’s death see, “Aanvullende informatie voor de periode 20 maart tot 6 november 1640.” *Ibid.*, 500.

⁸²“...belooven wij...Zijne Conincklijke Mayesteyt (zoo ‘tselfe hem aangenaam zoude zijn) met nieuwe inventiën van geschut, daar groot gewelt met can gedaen werden, partije bosschieters ende soldaaten, om teegens den Tartar te gebruyeken, secundeeren.” Entry dated September 10, 1633. *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸³Entry dated 9 March 1643, J.L. Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan, vol. 2: 1641-1648* (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1995), 56.

⁸⁴News of the state’s tottering financial situation was brought by Mandorin Limbingh who features as one of the few informants to the Company who was not a merchant. Entry dated 9th March 1637, Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol. 1: 1629-1641*, 316-17.

The Company was especially eager to keep informed about the rise of their infamous adversary, Zheng Zhilong (or Iquan to the Dutch). Born in coastal China and having lived in Portuguese Macau, Manila and Hirado in Japan, Zheng was a man of the sea and intensely familiar with China's international trading networks. He was consequently drawn into the notorious world of piracy in the Chinese seas when serving the Dutch in Formosa.⁸⁵ With time and a compelling combination of guile and enterprise, he had in the 1630s established a firm grip on Chinese commerce overseas whereby Chinese shipping to foreign shores including Dutch Formosa emanating from the province of Fujian came under his thumb. For Dutch interests on the island thus, Zheng's clout in China's maritime trade made him an individual whose moves had to persistently be logged.⁸⁶ From their post in Fort Zeelandia, the Dutch followed the news of Zheng's admission into the Ming administration when the Chinese government decided to confer a veneer of legitimacy to his activities and rid themselves of a notorious outlaw by luring him onto their side by granting him official status. When absorbed into the bureaucracy as Admiral in 1627 with charge over the naval fleet of Fujian and elevated to the position of "provincial military commander" of Fuzhou in 1636, Zheng too was ordered to redeem the empire from both local banditry and the Tartar onslaught.

In all of these circumstances, news of the battles, skirmishes, and wars that the Ming waged merely skittered in the Company's cache of information acquired from the Chinese merchants. This signalled that the principal imperial worry in the form of the rise of numerous threats to Ming suzerainty was a reality, which to the Dutch, was being played out to the distant background. The marginality of the war in these information exchanges indicated that the Dutch in Formosa were in fact, peripheral observers to whom issues that concerned the Chinese seaboard such as new official appointments in the coastal provinces and the changing imperial stance on Dutch trade in China were of greater importance than problems that plagued either the hinterland or the northern reaches of the empire, which were the theatres of local rebellion and the Ming Manchu confrontations in the 1630s and 1640s. At most times hence, the war was only fleetingly mentioned in the Dutch-Chinese interaction in Formosa. There were however occasions where the information that the merchants brought to the island was astonishingly detailed. In reference to the astounding victories amassed by the Tartars during their incursions into the empire in 1638, Jocksim's junks on March 24, the same year

⁸⁵Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese*, 6-9 (in chapter titled "A Scramble for Influence").

⁸⁶Blussé characterizes "the relationship between him [Zheng] and the VOC" as one of "remarkable hatred and love." According to him, "the two parties were dependent on one another but still wanted to pursue their own interests." Blussé, *Tribuut aan China*, 48-49.

mediated the relay of information to the Dutch that the upheaval in the empire was beyond containment. They also brought news of the tactics that the invading armies put to use to both win the war and capture support for their rule.⁸⁷ Also, the Company's knowledge of the takeover of Peking in the spring of 1644 (which constituted the crux of Vondel's drama) was based on "tidings that were received [in Formosa] on a daily basis."⁸⁸ The Dutch on the island learned of this momentous change no more than six months after the episode had occurred. Although Formosa's dispatch to Batavia in December the same year detailing the information that had just come into their possession framed the episode as a likely fabrication, Batavia nevertheless passed it on to the Gentlemen Seventeen in Amsterdam. The *Generale Missiven* dated 23 December 1644 carried an exceptionally brief sketch of the dynastic change which read: "...they [the Chinese] say the King is dead and many compete for the throne [and] that the Tartar making use of the situation makes considerable progress in China."⁸⁹ Interestingly, the information passed on by merchants from the mainland to Formosa that was subsequently dispatched to Batavia was not very different from the version of the episode that Martini palmed off to the Company a decade later. The sketch of events that was procured through the Company's Formosan channel may, to use a phrase that contemporary chroniclers favoured, have qualified as "a true and exact account" of the takeover of the capital. It possessed all the elements generally associated with the tale of the fall of Peking – Li Zicheng's takeover of the city with the help of treachery, the suicide of the King, the post-regicidal continuation of the Ming struggle, and the ultimate victory of the Tartars. There is little doubt that in relaying information of the conquest of the capital the Company servants at Castle Zeelandia had established that the Formosan channel of information was a reliable one. Whether the character of the information that reached the VOC or the period in which it was received was conducive to proactive policy-making by the Company is debatable. As far as the VOC was concerned, the objective was to negotiate with the central authority in China for trading rights on the mainland. The information of supreme importance for the Company consequently was whether the Tartar invasion of China qualified as a raid or outright conquest, and whether the

⁸⁷Entry dated 24 March 1639. Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol. 1: 1629-1641*, 454. For the losses suffered by the Ming in the hands of the Manchus in 1638, see Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 142.

⁸⁸ NA, VOC 1148 Taiwan, "Copy of the resolution in Castle Zeelandia to Antonio van Diemen, Governor General of India dated October 25, 1644," ff. 265 r-265v; See "Account or summary drawn from successive letters and other papers received from Formosa since December 2, 1644." J. de Hullu, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Kasteel Batavia, Anno 1644-1645* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1903), 143.

⁸⁹NA, VOC 1147, A. van Diemen, C. van der Lijn, S. Sweers, Paulus Croocq en Simon van Alphen, Batavia, 23 December 1644, fol. 56. Referred to in Shaogang Cheng, "De VOC en Formosa, 1624-1662: Een vergeten geschiedenis, deel 2: bijlage" (PhD diss., University of Leiden), 224.

Tartar ruler had decided to descend from his saddle and ascend the throne of China or merely retire on horseback to Manchuria with a magnificent booty. While by the end of 1644, the Company recognized the fact that the Ming dynasty had been displaced from Peking, the ultimate consequence of the Tartar incursions into Chinese territory remained a subject of intense speculation. It was only in 1651 with the arrival of Martini in Batavia that the Dutch became certain that a single and stable regime had established control over China and felt reassured enough to initiate diplomatic contact with the imperial court.

The impact of the information that Martini passed on to the VOC was acutely felt at the level of policy, however there is little trace of it on paper. The archives reveal little about Martini's stay in Batavia or the character of his interaction with the VOC officials. They do however showcase the Company's remarkable skills of persuasion in coaxing the Jesuit to part with the information he had gathered about the empire during his residence in China and which was intended for publication in Europe. Testimony to this effort is the presence in the VOC archives of the early drafts of what Martini would publish in 1654 as *De Bello Tartarico*, and in 1655 as the *Atlas Sinensis*.⁹⁰ Although the Company came into possession of the manuscripts authored by Martini in Latin during his period of captivity in Batavia, they were translated into Dutch by VOC scribes only as late as 1655, by which time the *Atlas Sinensis* was in press and *De Bello Tartarico* had been available to the European reading public for a year.

As momentous as Martini's forced holiday in Batavia was for the Dutch in evaluating the possibilities of direct commercial contact with China, the Jesuit's encounter with the VOC is equally important in the realm of news transfer. Martini's unexpected presence in Batavia resulted in the confluence of two information networks, the Jesuit channel of information transfer and the Company's circuit of newsgathering. Although the VOC possessed a rather self-sufficient channel of information procurement to keep abreast of the developments in China by means of their Formosan connection, it perceived the news that Martini was in possession of as superior to their own and thereby proceeded to employ it to their advantage. Thus the VOC did not enter Vondel's text via *De Bello Tartarico*, as an information donor but by aiding in the transfer of information quite literally by conveying Martini and his manuscript of *De Bello Tartarico* to the Dutch Republic.

⁹⁰Martinus Martini, *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam: J. Blaeu, 1655). The draft versions of the *Atlas Sinensis* and *De Bello Tartarico* in the VOC archives are NA, VOC 1206, "Corte beschrijvinge van het uijtterste Asia....", fols. 271r-325v and NA, VOC 1206, "Korte historisch verhael vande gedenckwaerdighste geschiedenisse voorgevallen in't groote ende seer vermaerde coninckrijk China...." fols. 326r-359r, respectively.

Although the presence of the VOC in Vondel's *Zungchin* via Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* is marginal, the Company appears to have contributed to the making of Vondel's *Zungchin* through yet another circuit. This is revealed in a single but crucial detail in Vondel's drama. The conclusion of the play foresees the persecution of the Jesuits at the hands of the Qing dynasty.⁹¹ Writing the play in 1667, Vondel was here alluding to the persecution of the mission under the Qing regime from 1663 to 1668.⁹² Curiously, this episode is recounted by none of the putative sources to Vondel's play, which suggests that the playwright's reading might have been far wider than is presumed to be.⁹³ One account that does make reference to this period of persecution in China and should be considered as another source to Vondel's play is the Flemish Jesuit Cornelius Hazart's *Kerckelycke Historie*, also published in 1667.⁹⁴ Interestingly, this account credits a report to Gentlemen Seventeen dated 30 January 1666 by VOC Governor General Johan Maetsuycker, who was Catholic by faith, as the source for this information.⁹⁵ The VOC archives reveals that Maetsuycker had in turn received this information from reports sent by a Dutch trading mission which was sent to Foochow under the stewardship of Constantijn Nobel in 1665.⁹⁶ In this confluence of the Jesuit and the Dutch channels of information, the VOC was a source of information for Vondel's play and the principal agent involved in information gathering and its transfer. The Jesuit account was in this instance a grateful beneficiary of this information and a conduit of transfer to Vondel's play.

Discourses, Dispositions, Despotisms: Imagining the Middle Kingdom

Zungchin is intriguing to say the very least. Peer behind the layers of literary detail and there lies a riveting history of information travel through pathways instituted by two enterprises with strong moorings in Asia. Apart from formulating the news circuits through which this

⁹¹ See Verses 1601-1606.

⁹² On the Jesuit persecution in China, see Ross, *A Vision Betrayed*, 172-74.

⁹³ While the detail is understandably omitted in *De Bello Tartarico* which was authored a decade before the persecutions, news of this phenomenon also fails to feature in Kircher's *China Illustrata* which was published in 1667, the very year that *Zungchin* was authored.

⁹⁴ Cornelis Hazart, *Kerckelycke historie van de gheeele wereldt, deel. 1* (Antwerp: Michiel Cnobbaert, 1667).

⁹⁵ Ibid., 482. The report alluded to in the context is Maetsuyker XXXV, 30 January 1666. See W. Ph Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneur Generaal en Raden aan heren XVII der verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, vol. 3, 1655-1674* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1968), 493. Barten contemplates the possibility of the VOC as having been the source to Vondel's information about the Jesuit persecutions, but fails to identify the channel by which this was made possible. See Barten, "Hollandse kooplieden op bezoek bij concilievaders," 81.

⁹⁶ NA, VOC 1252, "Missives sent by Nobel and the Council of Hocksieu (Fuzhou) dated 28 February 1665," pp. 192-195 and NA, VOC 1253, "Missives sent by Nobel and the Council of Hocksieu (Fuzhou) dated 31 October 1666," pp. 1876-1877. For the translation of the first report, see John E. Wills, Jr., "Some Dutch Sources on the Jesuit China Mission, 1662-1687," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu* 54 (1985), 285-86. Wills' article is one of the many studies that explore Dutch-Jesuit interaction and collaboration in the period.

information coursed until it drained into the literary piece, these enterprises also constituted the sources of information to the drama. The VOC makes a justifiable claim as an information donor to the play but it is the Society of Jesus that is its principal informant. Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* as demonstrated in the past sections had provided nearly all the brick and mortar that went into the building of the play. Together with this percolation of detail that sprung from the two sources, these enterprises left a mark on the drama in the form of their perspectival intrusions into the literary piece.

The prolonged intercourse of the Dutch East India Company and the Jesuits with the Middle Kingdom created for these enterprises conceptions about the empire. As regards the VOC, these views mostly replete in their private correspondence were occasionally laid out before the public eye in the reports of its employees which went into print. The Jesuits also generating a significant amount of covert institutional correspondence had all through their tenure in China from the late 1500s until the dismantling of the society in the late 1700s tirelessly churned out literature about the empire for the European print market.⁹⁷ When comprehending these perspectives about China that were engendered by the interaction of the Jesuits and the VOC with the empire, the concept of a discourse seems an attractive category whose application in the context is not without justification. Systematization and consistency, which were the defining terms of the concept, were characteristic of the textual representative strategies of both enterprises. Encounters with China generated knowledge for the Company administration which served as a roadmap for their future interaction with the empire and similarly, there was a pressing need for standardization in the Jesuit generated accounts in Europe, as consistency meant credibility which was crucial for selling the pursuits of the Society to the European reading public.⁹⁸ Less discernible and therefore open to debate is the question whether we are to here perceive the presence of single European discourse or to acknowledge the existence of two visibly variant institutional discourses. In other words, we ask whether we should be receptive to the fact that the varying objectives and histories of encounter of the two enterprises with China could cause them to imagine the empire differently thereby engendering two distinct discourses. If not, would we be sufficiently justified in collapsing these so called institutional imaginings to perceive these conceptions as

⁹⁷Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3: *A Century of Advance*, Book 4: *East Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1564-66.

⁹⁸The standardization drive in Jesuit accounts on China is apparent in Basil Guy's assertion that the Jesuits in the early seventeenth century manufactured "a version of geography, history and civilization in the Orient [which] was reinforced through successive generations of [their] propaganda." Basil Guy, "Ad maiorem Societatis gloriam: Jesuit Perspectives on Chinese mores in the 17th and 18th centuries," in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, eds. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 74.

a part of a larger all-encompassing category of a European discourse about the Middle Kingdom? The means of resolving this knotty issue would be to line up the arguments that support both positions for evaluation before settling for an answer. While this question will be addressed intermittently, a second and more important concern also calls for reflection. Paying heed to the theory of Orientalism, we ask whether or not the Jesuit and VOC perceptions about China instituted formulaic conceptions of the empire that came to dictate the manner in which Europe subsequently imagined China.

Addressing the theme of discourse, a prudent defence of the argument that the VOC and the Society of Jesus generated independent and varying visions of China might begin with the understanding that the merchant and priest were unlikely to conjure up similar images of the empire. Illustrative of their varying sensibilities are the differing observations that two servants of these different enterprises made on the trivial yet telling theme of what the Chinese empire lacked. The Jesuit Alvarez Semedo whose account was published in the mid-seventeenth century, was convinced that the Chinese lacked nothing but religion.⁹⁹ When Olfert Dapper's *Atlas Chinensis*, an account of the Company's voyages in China from 1662 to 1665 under the stewardship of Balthasar Bort, was tempted into a similar exercise of appraising China's wants, it summarily announced that if there was anything the Chinese needed, it was "Indian spices."¹⁰⁰ The ideological foundations of the two enterprises which determined the very different standpoints, from which they viewed China, also influenced the thematic content of their accounts. Spurred on by their religious vision, it was commonplace for the Jesuits to litter their works to references to churches and conversions or to engage in descriptions that foretold promisingly of the advent of Christianity into the Middle Kingdom.¹⁰¹ Accounts written by the servants of the VOC on the other hand consciously abstained from incorporating a religious rhetoric in their accounts or even postulating a religious premise to rationalize the events they narrated. In consequence, even the fall of the Ming dynasty, which the Jesuit Martinus Martini was tempted to ascribe to "divine

⁹⁹Alvaro Semedo, *The History of that Great and Renowned Monarchy of China* [Relação da propagação da fe no reyno da China e outros adjacentes] (London: E. Tyler, 1655), note to the reader.

¹⁰⁰I employ the English translation of the work, which incorrectly identifies Arnoldus Montanus as author instead of Olfert Dapper. The account reads, "we can justly call China a little world, and compare it to a precious gem in the midst thereof, in which more riches are found than in the whole earth besides: All that is wanting in China are Indian spices, or drugs." Arnoldus Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis: Being a Second Part of a Relation of Remarkable Passages in two Embassies from the Dutch East India Company of the United Provinces to the Viceroy Singlamong and the General Lipovi and to Konchi, Emperor of China and East Tartary*, trans. John Ogilby (London: Tho. Johnson, 1671), 465. Following the loss of Formosa to the Chinese pirate, Zheng Chenggong, the Dutch realized that any attempt to reclaim the island involved collaborating with the Manchus who too saw Zheng as an obstinate foe. The Balthasar Bort expedition was an expression of this policy of Dutch military cooperation with the Manchu dynasty. Wills, *Pepper, Guns and Parleys*, 29-34.

¹⁰¹Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 159, 173, 174, 197.

providence” was perceived by Nieuhof as the connivance of “the vicissitudes of fortune” and had no religious connotations.¹⁰² Also registering the institutional differences were the narrative terrains of the Dutch and the Jesuit accounts. Ashley Millar and Jonathan Spence perceptively note that the Company accounts were realistic chronicles of encounter that illustrated the lived experience of Dutch interaction with the empire.¹⁰³ The Jesuit narratives, encyclopaedic in content and mostly impersonal in character, instead provided the reader with a panoptic view of China.

As palpable as these differences between the Company and Jesuit discourses on China might be, the argument that both had a fair share of commonalities and constituted a part of the grander European discourse has merit. For one, the accounts of the VOC as discussed earlier reveal a dependency on Jesuit information thereby negotiating the differences that the varying institutional affiliations brought with them. Johan Nieuhof no doubt typifies the trend of the Company’s profligate borrowing from Jesuit accounts, but private reports of the VOC too conceded their indebtedness to Jesuit knowledge on China. As many as twenty years after Martini’s eventful stay in Batavia, Pieter van Hoorn chose to open his report about his embassy to the Manchu court in the years 1666 to 1668 with a section titled “In praise of Martini,” which acknowledged the Jesuit’s contribution to opening up China to the Company. Here, he applauded the reliability of the Jesuit’s observations about China, which he claimed were corroborated by his own experiences there.¹⁰⁴ In the similarities that these borrowings were bound to bring about, the most striking is what has been referred to by Lach and Van Kley as a feature typical of seventeenth-century accounts on China - their sublimely positive image of the empire.¹⁰⁵ Jesuit chroniclers were wont to opening their accounts with laudatory passages and their admiration for various facets of the Chinese civilization was a pervasive feature in their writings. This convinced contemporary European readers that China was in no way inferior to a prelapsarian Eden where a father-like emperor at the helm of an educated bureaucracy who possessed an immaculate sense of justice ruled over a people accomplished in the arts and sciences. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) noted with satisfaction that “of all the

¹⁰² Cf. John Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company of the United Provinces to the Great Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, trans. John Ogilby, 2nd ed. (London: John Ogilby, 1673), 252. Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 184-85 (in chapter titled “Algemeene beschrijving van ‘t ryk Sina”). For Martini’s appraisal of the causes that led to the fall of the Ming dynasty, see Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 21-23.

¹⁰³ Millar, “Authority and Parenthood,” 15. Spence sees in the reports of the Dutch on China, the advent of “realistic reportage” on the empire in Europe. Jonathan Spence, *The Chan’s Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 42.

¹⁰⁴ NA, VOC 1269 Batavia, “Report on the Embassy to Peking submitted by Pieter van Hoorn to the Governor General and Council of India on 16 November 1669,” fol. 273r.

¹⁰⁵ For instance see Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, Book. 4, 1566.

pagan nations known to Europe, I know of no people who fell into fewer errors... than did the Chinese,” and Martini writing in 1644 dubbed China as the “noblest and oldest” of all nations.¹⁰⁶ The representative strategy of portraying China as a land of enviable traits was mimicked by the Company chroniclers. The *Atlas Chinensis* deemed its people “very ceremonious, civil and modest,” and in his estimation of the empire Nieuhof quoted Ricci almost verbatim in declaring that “of all the heathen sects which are come to the knowledge of those in Europe, we have not read of any who are fall’n into fewer errors than the Chinese...”¹⁰⁷

The tendency to wax eloquent about China was arguably a European habit even before the Jesuits and Company servants put quill to paper. Previous bids to envision China for Europe such as Marco Polo’s thirteenth-century *Il Milione* and sixteenth-century Portuguese accounts on the Middle Kingdom had already been disposed to glorifying the government, natural bounty, morality, and civilizational achievement of the empire, thereby creating a reservoir of images about China for the Jesuits and subsequent observers to draw from.¹⁰⁸ While these enterprises had evidently worked within the strictures of what may be seen as a formulaic European discourse on China, as Lach and Van Kley note, the Jesuits are to be credited with contributing to this mode of representation a deeper, better defined, and more persuasive image of the virtues of Chinese civilization.¹⁰⁹ This was further supplemented by the VOC, though in modest measure.

Discerning Oriental Dispositions: Tartar Bloodbaths and Chinese Bookishness

Amidst the flattering repertoire of images that constituted China in the VOC and Jesuit mentalité, imaginings of the empire that were less complementary found two avenues for expression. The first is a feature to which Chi-Ming Yang in her recent study on eighteenth-century English perceptions of China ascribes considerable importance to – the emphasis on

¹⁰⁶Louis J. Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci* (New York: Random House, 1953), 93. Blaeu’s section on China which was Martini’s *Novus atlas Sinensis* in translation opened its statement to the reader with the words, “None, but the ignorant and inexperienced can deny that Asia is the noblest of all lands...but Asia too has no part older, nobler or better governed than its most extreme [territory].” Blaeu, *J. Blaeus Grooten atlas*, note to the reader.

¹⁰⁷Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 186; Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 441.

¹⁰⁸For an analysis of the perspective contained in the account of Marco Polo, see Spence, *The Chan’s Great Continent: China in Western Minds*, 3. In his reading of accounts such as Juan González de Mendoza’s *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China* which was first published in Spanish in 1585, Donald Lach asserts that the basic tenor of the work was one of admiration. Donald F. Lach, *China in the Eyes of Europe*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 763-64.

¹⁰⁹Lach and Van Kley state that “the image of China projected through both the ethnohistories and the Jesuit letters becomes progressively more adulatory.” Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, Book 4, 1566.

effeminacy.¹¹⁰ Yang mostly traces the source of the conflation of this feature in the English rhetoric to seventeenth-century texts on China that were preponderantly Jesuit and VOC in origin. When Yang underlines the centrality of effeminacy in discerning the Chinese disposition in these texts, one goes a step further to argue that the concept was suddenly hoisted in the seventeenth century to a position of unprecedented significance. Jesuit and VOC mediation tremendously bolstered the role of effeminacy as a stereotype that later European writers took as a characteristic feature of the Chinese, thus ensuring that it became a mainstay in the repertoire of European perspectives on China.

The concept of effeminacy seeped into the most predominant Jesuit and VOC accounts on China, and the writings of the Jesuits Matteo Ricci, Ferdinand Verbiest (1622-88), and Martino Martini were symptomatic of this tendency. Company accounts such as Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap*, Dapper's *Atlas Sinensis* and Matthijs Cramer's *Borts voyage naerde kust van China en Formosa* (1670), a book of verses in praise of the Bort expedition to China, also confessed to having been influenced by this theory of effeminacy. In the eyes of its Jesuit and VOC authors, this trait meant more than the absence of virility. Martini may have appealed to its plainest meaning when he testified that "physical strength" was not a trait that the Chinese were endowed with.¹¹¹ Other seventeenth-century observers endowed the term with attendant traits to construct a well-developed theory that helped explain various facets of the Chinese civilization.¹¹² Effeminacy, considered an unfortunate corollary of the empire's high civilization, was at one level posited as a societal malady where China's bookish and lettered lot denoted a potentially languorous people. It was to this interpretation that Verbiest subscribed when he reasoned that the Chinese were in the throes of "a characteristic effeminacy."¹¹³ Just as it seemed to help comprehend China's societal faults, it also aided interpret her foreign policy. Matteo Ricci expressed incredulity at China's lack of interest in expansionism and her single-minded concern merely to preserve her existing boundaries and this compelled him to compare the empire's apparent listlessness to Europe's expansionist zeal.¹¹⁴ With effeminacy's aid, China's historical trajectory of being repeatedly

¹¹⁰Chi-ming Yang, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1760* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011).

¹¹¹ Martini rehearses Aristotle's observation in this context in his *Novus Atlas Sinensis*. Blaeu, J. *Blaeus Grooten atlas*, 7.

¹¹² A number of the traits referred to here are engaged with in Yang, *Performing China*, 32-51.

¹¹³Ferdinand Verbiest, et al., *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors of China, including the two journeys into Tartary of Father Ferdinand Verbiest, in the suite of the Emperor Kang-hi*, trans. Earl of Ellesmere (London: Hakluyt Society, 1854), 11.

¹¹⁴ Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci*, 54-55. A similar perspective is aired in Matelief, "Historische verhael vande treffelijcke reyse gedaen near de Oost-Indien en China," 106.

vulnerable to conquest by the invading nomads from beyond its northern borders also became clearer. The *Atlas Chinensis* perceived China's pacifism and susceptibility to invasions to be the results of her military inaptitude. It noted that the Chinese had been cured of their inadequacies on the battlefield only after they had bowed to the Tartar conquest.¹¹⁵ Further, the Chinese aversion to warfare could be rationalized as being both a cause for and consequence of effeminacy and high civilization. "The Chinese is of an affable and peaceable disposition, addicted to husbandry, and loving all good arts and sciences..," wrote Nieuhof insinuating that the Chinese were more given to poring over a book than wielding a sword.¹¹⁶ The most significant spinoff in terms of characterization from the conjecture of Chinese effeminacy was, as Adrienne Ward and Yang have noted, the ability of the trait to distinguish the Chinese from their seminomadic northern invaders.¹¹⁷ Although Ward argues that the representation of both groups of people were at times contingent, they were mostly perceived as possessing remarkably contradictory traits – the civilized, polished and lettered Chinese in their sedan chairs were compared to the uncivilized, battle-hardened barbarians on horseback who were notorious for their savagery.¹¹⁸ Nieuhof reckoned "that they [the Tartars are] in effect a nation of plunderers and robbers," and when describing the death and mayhem unleashed by the Manchu conquest, Matthijs Cramer wrote,

Here, the curtains to all atrocities are drawn,
 No tyranny too great that that has not been enacted here,
 In villages and towns, yes, all the countryside
 Feel the sword and arrow; and bow and distress and death and fire.¹¹⁹

The Tartars may have been savage but commentators were quick to argue that these distinctions between the Chinese and the Tartar were not irreconcilable and that the power of the Chinese civilization was such that it could domesticate their barbarian invaders and render

¹¹⁵ Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 428.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 250; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 181 (in the chapter titled "Algemeene beschryving van 't ryk Sina").

¹¹⁷ Adrienne Ward, *Pagodas in Play: China on the Eighteenth-Century Italian Opera Stage* (New Jersey: Associated University Press, 2010), 86-88; Yang, *Performing China*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Ward infers that the stereotypes that were conceptualized to comprehend both groups of people were not static and fixed. Yet one would argue that the Chinese were more prone to being depicted as effeminate as were the Tartars as savage. Ward, *Pagodas in Play*, 86-88.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 255; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 188-89 (in the chapter titled "Algemeene beschryving van 't ryk Sina"); "Hier opent de gordijn van alle gruw'lijckheden,/ Geen tyranny te groot, die hier niet wert geleden,/ In dorpen en in ste'en, ja't heele platte landt/ Voeldt klingh, en pijl; en boogh, en noot, en doodt, en brandt." Matthijs Cramer, *Borts voyagie naerde kust van China en Formosa* (Amsterdam: Pieter Dirksz, 1670), 88.

them susceptible to its most seductive yet lethal trait - effeminacy. As a result, both Martini and his textual protégé, Nieuhof, noted how the Chinese subjects infected and overpowered their conquerors with their civilizational decadence almost as a form of retribution for their subordination.¹²⁰

Effeminacy was certainly not deployed for the first time in the formulations of the Jesuits and later the VOC. The concept and its many manifestations such as China's aversion to war had already caught the imagination of commentators who had attempted to comprehend the Chinese civilization before the Jesuits did. Marco Polo had made mention of this contemptible fault of the Chinese in the thirteenth century and the accounts of the sixteenth-century Augustinians Martin de Rada and Juan Gonzales de Mendoza had drawn the attention of Europe to the fact that the brilliance that the Chinese demonstrated in numerous fields was not replicated in the realm of warfare.¹²¹ Yet it was the Jesuits and the VOC who are to be credited with the effort of giving the notion significance. Apart from the novel manner in which the seventeenth-century chroniclers worked the term to function as a threshold to the Chinese civilization, what won the concept renewed attention was the historical conjuncture that manifested itself in the period. The first dimension of the conjuncture is, as Ward and Yang rightly observe, the coincidence of the Jesuit and VOC involvement with China during the empire's revolution of 1644, whereby Europeans became witnesses to this landmark event in Chinese history.¹²² In recounting the political turbulence that imperial China underwent, these commentators fell back on their denominational and institutional affiliations to comprehend the causes and the consequences of the war. As discussed previously, Martini ascribed the outcome to the Almighty while Nieuhof threw his weight behind destiny. Yet the manner in which effeminacy as a trait seemed peculiarly appropriate in discerning the event was not lost on these chroniclers. Effeminacy permitted them to argue that the rise and fall of a dynasty was not written in the stars alone but that it could be ascribed to human disposition. Repeating Martini's emphasis on "divine providence," with its Catholic undertones, might have offended Nieuhof's sensibilities, but

¹²⁰Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 5-6; Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 251; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 182 (in the chapter titled "Algemeene beschryving van 't ryk Sina").

¹²¹Lach, *China in the Eyes of Europe*, 786; Marco Polo and Rustichello from Pisa, *Travels of Marco Polo*, (1903).

¹²²Although Ward recognizes the impact of the war in China on European representations of the Chinese and the Manchus, she argues that it helped demolish the straight-jacketing that was otherwise prevalent in European textual representations. Ward, *Pagodas in Play*, 88; Yang argues that the "invasion[...]" came to symbolize China's resiliency." Yang, *Performing China*, 33.

employing the theme of effeminacy may have seemed the better alternative.¹²³ More important, both writers realized that no spectacle could better legitimize their subscription to the theory of effeminacy. The Manchu conquest had after all, it seemed, brought alive all the traits associated with the concept - the vulnerability of the Chinese to the Tartar invasion, their impotency in warding off the attacks of their northern invaders and the Manchu successes in battle. If effeminacy provided a plausible explanation for the dramatic turn of events, the second dimension of the historical conjuncture which was the forcefulness with which the Jesuits planted the idea of Chinese effeminacy in the European imagination. Jesuit works on the empire (and to a far lesser extent VOC accounts) irrevocably strengthened European assumptions of Chinese frailty, their aversion to warfare, and Tartar brutality.

Their strategies of representation reaped spectacular results. The image of the Chinese as civilized and effete and of the Tartars as warrior barbarians vulnerable to the charms of their effeminate subjects was reproduced in the subsequent centuries with startling fidelity. The introduction to Engelbert Kaempfer's *The History of Japan* published in 1728 projected effeminacy as a principle marker of difference between the Chinese and Japanese and another eighteenth-century account, the *Driejaarige reize naar China* reaffirmed the effeminate ways of the last Ming ruler, the Chongzhen emperor.¹²⁴ The work alleged that the emperor's self-imposed seclusion within the four walls of his harem with only his concubines as company was a practice that was least conducive to good governance. Effeminacy as a label also proved to be a surprisingly versatile concept. In the hands of some later chroniclers, its value as an explanatory device capable of describing varying historical circumstances made it a tantalizing tool. On other occasions, shifts in perspective that came with time ensured her repeated evocation. As the first cracks appeared in the imperial edifice of Manchu China in the nineteenth century signalled that the decline of yet another dynasty in China approached, many observers took as its cause the Manchus' vulnerability to effeminization. Sir John Francis Davis's popular work titled *The Chinese* (1836) noted that two Manchu rulers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had "in their comparative indolence" eschewed the

¹²³Millar states that the theory of the Manchu susceptibility to sinicization allowed the Jesuits to still abide by their theory of "China's historical stagnation" which the conquest would have otherwise crushed owing to the radical change it signified. Millar, "The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers," 39.

¹²⁴The publication of the English version of Kaempfer's text preceded the publication of the Dutch translation of the work by a year. Interestingly, the Dutch version does not reproduce this perception of the Chinese. *The History of Japan: Giving an Account of the Ancient and Present State of that Empire*, vol. I, trans. J.G. Scheuchzer (London: Printed for the translator, 1728), xxiii; Everts Ysbrants Ides and Nicolaes Witsen, *Driejaarige reize naar China, te lande gedaan door den Moskovischen afgezant, E. Ysbrants Ides, van Moskou af, over Groot Ustiga, Siriania, Permia, Sibiriën, Daour, Groot Tartaryen tot in China* (Amsterdam: Pieter de Coup, 1710), 234-35(note).

vigour exhibited by their predecessors and scouting for an explanation for this condition, *The Westminster Review* of 1840 reasoned that the Tartars were rendered more vulnerable to Chinese charms because of the racial affinities they shared with the latter group.¹²⁵ Interestingly, when the drama of imperial decline was rehearsed this time, the nineteenth-century observers borrowed from their predecessors the explanatory tool of effeminacy alone. Propositions of religion and destiny, which seventeenth-century chroniclers had used to explain Ming decline found no takers. To post-enlightenment writers who “placed human volition rather than divine providence at the centre of the historical process,” faults in human disposition explained circumstances better than divine agency or chance did.¹²⁶

The most notable deployment of the term effeminacy came with the eighteenth-century description of China by Lord George Macartney, who headed a 1793 trade embassy to China, a British venture whose failure has been perceived as a cause for the historic Sino-British confrontations of the nineteenth century - the Opium Wars.¹²⁷ When Macartney caught sight of the Manchu attire, he was supposedly astonished by how “effeminate” it was and the embassy’s draughtsman, William Alexander, was forced to a similar conclusion when he observed that the “effeminate” Chinese trooper was no match for his European counterpart.¹²⁸ The usage of the term “effeminate” in the context of the Macartney embassy is significant because the Earl had in the course of the diplomatic undertaking toyed with the possibility of an outright war against the Manchu empire, and the term had moreover been deployed in the context of estimating the relative martial prowess of the parties involved.¹²⁹ Effeminacy had therein been roped into the vocabulary of British imperial expansionism and was employed to describe what the British subjects saw as a beleaguered and floundering foe.¹³⁰ Apart from fostering a vision of a frail dynasty that compared poorly with its prospective European adversary, the English trade in opium in China whipped up new associations between effeminacy and the Chinese. Nineteenth-century English tracts such as *Opium and Opium*

¹²⁵“China: Its Early History, Literature, and Language; Mis-translation of Chinese Official Documents; Causes of the Present War,” *The Westminster Review* 34, 2 (1840), 273; John Francis Davis, *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and its Inhabitants*, vol. 1 (London: Charles Knight and Co, 1836), 172-73.

¹²⁶Cf. Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

¹²⁷Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain’s Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 67.

¹²⁸Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 28; James J. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 201-02.

¹²⁹Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*, 201-02.

¹³⁰According to Benjamin Fischer “he (Macartney)...viewed the country with an imperialist eye.” Benjamin Louis Fischer, “Opium Pushing and Bible Smuggling: Religion and the Cultural Politics of British Imperialistic Ambition in China” (M.Phil diss., University of Notre Dame, 2008), 175.

Appetite popularized the notion that effeminacy was an inextricable trait of the vegetating Chinese opium eater and Suvendrini Perera in her reading of Thomas de Quincey's 1821 autobiography titled *Confessions of the Opium Eater* underlines the manner in which the work considered the consumption of opium conspicuously Chinese because of its connotations of effeminacy.¹³¹ Thus it was thanks to the Jesuits and the VOC that effeminacy became a watchword in the vocabulary of subsequent China commentators. As such, the concept invariably conferred an Orientalist perspective as Edward Said understood the term.

Begetting Sinister Children: Benevolent and Oriental Despotisms

Effeminacy, the apparent fault in the Chinese character, was the first Orientalist intrusion into the VOC's and Jesuit representations of China; the second was their understanding of the empire's political organization and nature of governance. The political make-up of no extra-European society, it might be argued, received as much attention as did the Chinese notions of rule and kingship in the early modern period. Chroniclers who were generally unperturbed in arbitrarily clumping together most Oriental societies under the heading of Oriental Despotism single-mindedly popularized the notion of China as different by projecting her system of government as a "benevolent manifestation of despotism."¹³² The reasons for such a characterization, many scholars point out, is to be found in the leverage it provided in legitimizing the modus operandi of the China observers, the Jesuits, in winning Christian converts.¹³³ By envisaging the Chinese government as a well-ordered, pyramidal structure, the Jesuits were able to justify their policy of proselytizing the ruling elite at the apex through a policy of acculturation so that the faith would subsequently trickle down to the general population at the base.¹³⁴ In the Jesuit representation of China's political apparatus, two elements were repeatedly emphasized as being characteristic of the empire's governance: the absolute rule of the monarch, a feature continuously recalled in Jesuit accounts from Francis Xavier's reference to the emperor as "a single sovereign whose will is absolute" to Martini's

¹³¹Calkins Alonzo, *Opium and the Opium-Appetite* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 113; Suvendrini Perera, *Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 112.

¹³²Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism: Botero to Montesquieu," *Journal of Early Modern History* 9, 1-2 (2005), 126-27.

¹³³Millar, "The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers," 13-14; Gunther Lotte, "China in European Political Thought, 1750-1850," in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), 67-68.

¹³⁴Lotte, "China in European Political Thought, 1750-1850," 67-68. Thinking aloud on the proselytization plan that he sought to institute, Francis Xavier wrote, "We shall inform the sovereign first, and then his subjects, in the name of the King of Heaven, that henceforth they must not worship the devil, but God." Henry James Coleridge, ed., *The Life and Letters of St. Francis Xavier*, vol. 2 (London: Burns and Oates, 1872), 497.

and Verbiest's reiteration of a similar evaluation in their appraisal of the emperor as the supreme authority of the state; and the compassionate rule of the emperor.¹³⁵ The projection of the nature of the Chinese state along these lines allowed the Jesuits to rationalize the fall of the Ming dynasty as being the outcome of the gross violation of this ideal form of government. The Chongzhen Emperor's avarice could be seen as having flouted the rules of paternal and altruistic rule. Similarly, a later European chronicler would recall that the emperor's "blind attachment to unfaithful magistrates and soldiers" exceeded all permissible limits and could indicate that his absolute authority and his ability to reign in his bureaucracy had been compromised, thus giving way to weakness and a debilitating dependence of the emperor on the imperial edifice.¹³⁶ The Jesuits envisioned the sort of Benevolent Despotism found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China as a highly desirable model of governance which Europe could do well to emulate. Ironically, when their information about the empire came to fuel eighteenth-century Enlightenment speculations on good and deplorable forms of government, as Ashley Miller has pointed out, they were employed not only to support the arguments of China sympathizers, who like the Jesuits, subscribed to the idea of the virtuous Chinese state, but also to fortify the counterclaims of critics who thought China should be included among the already well-populated category of Oriental Despotisms.¹³⁷

Benevolent Despotism caught the fancy of the Jesuits but how did their fellow European observers in the VOC envision Chinese governance? Laura Hostetler's analysis of Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap*, which narrated the events of the embassy to Peking in 1656, is instructive.¹³⁸ The record of Nieuhof's experiences, she observes, indicated a deeply vexed relationship between the centre and the provinces in the Middle Kingdom, where the imposition of central authority on the provinces was marginal and incomplete.¹³⁹ The suggestion of the imperial state's loose grasp over its provincial limbs is echoed in Dapper's *Atlas Chinensis*. In their portrayal of provincial governors, the chapters in *Het Gezantschap* and the *Atlas Chinensis* devoted to recounting the experiences of the embassies and expeditions of the VOC delegations in China subtly point to the glaring defects in the empire's central authority. These state officials who mediated the interaction of the Company

¹³⁵Coleridge, *The Life and Letters*, 373; Verbiest, et al., *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors*, 125-26; Blaeu, *J. Blaeus Grooten atlas*, 14; Kircher, *Toonneel van China*, 202.

¹³⁶The work attributes these words to Adam Schall who is said to have made this reference in the context of a conversation with the Manchu emperor, Shunzhi. Verbiest et al., *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors*, 41-42.

¹³⁷Millar, "The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers," 1-5.

¹³⁸Laura Hostetler, "Mapping Dutch Travels to and Translations of China: Jan Nieuhof's Account of the First East India Company Embassy, 1655-57," *Horizons: Seoul Journal of Humanities* 1, 2 (2010).

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 158-59.

representatives with the imperial court were caricatured as enterprising entrepreneurs guilty of engaging in rampant corruption and private trade. *Het Gezantschap* alleged that the Governor of Canton claimed that the VOC's request for free trade could only be bought through bribery. This advice, the Dutch reckoned was not motivated by the Governor's desire to ensure the success of the embassy but to fatten his own purse.¹⁴⁰ The embassy of Pieter van Hoorn encountered similar instances of provincial authorities enriching themselves. Agents of the viceroy of Fuzhou exhibited an eagerness to engage in clandestine trade when they, as the *Atlas Chinensis* notes, offered to sell the Dutch, "white raw silk," a commodity whose "transportation was strictly forbidden by the emperor."¹⁴¹ In his private correspondence to the Amsterdam Chamber, Pieter van Hoorn described Singlamong, the Governor of Fuzhou, as "being regarded the greatest merchant in China who like Coxinga had opened outlets across the entire empire and whose representatives were to be found in all the principal trading centres."¹⁴² In stark contrast to the somewhat sterile Jesuit views of an immensely supreme and rather secure monarchy, it was a corruption-ridden and potentially subversive government that the Dutch encountered in their engagement with imperial China.

That the Dutch perception of Chinese imperial governance was contrary to the Jesuit understanding of the system is to be attributed in part, as Walsh and Millar discern, to the very different character of the Company's interactions with China.¹⁴³ According to Walsh, the bickering, brawls, and negotiations of the VOC servants with their Chinese counterparts and lower-level bureaucrats occasioned a more "realistic" perspective of China.¹⁴⁴ This, Walsh notes, allowed the Company to tear away the heavy veil of idealism with which the Jesuits draped their China. A second reason why the Dutch were prompted to characterize their relationship with China differently must also have had to do with the fact that both Nieuhof's and Van Hoorn's embassies were failures. In reporting to the Council of Batavia and the Gentleman Seventeen in Amsterdam, they could therefore attribute their lack of success to the fact that the provincial governors exceeded their authority and liberally engaged in corruption. Although there is no questioning the fact that the Dutch were able to create an alternative

¹⁴⁰Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 112; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 167 (in chapter titled "Nauwkeurige beschrijving van 't gezantschap").

¹⁴¹Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 218.

¹⁴²"Voorts wert desen coning Singlamongh gehouden voor den grootsten coopman van China en gelijck Coxin zijn winkels door het gantsche rijck had verspreiden so bevonden over al in de principaelste handelplaetsen de factours van ditto coninck." NA, VOC 1269 Batavia, "Report about the Peking embassy by Pieter van Hoorn submitted to the Governor-General and Council of India on November 16, 1669," fol. 281v.

¹⁴³Ryan Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay: Aspects of Inventing a Travelogue in Early Modern Europe," *Outstanding Honors Theses* 35 (2011), 7-8; Millar, "Authority and Parenthood," 15.

¹⁴⁴Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay."

image of Chinese governance, the extent to which this characterization constituted a supple counter-position to the Jesuit formulations is suspect. The VOC perception of a trouble-ridden Chinese bureaucracy undoubtedly flits across their narratives about their experiences in China. However, the more visible, plain-for-all-to-see appraisals of the monarchy contained in their general evaluations of Chinese society replicate the Jesuit stance on Chinese governance. Nieuhof self-assuredly subscribed to the idea of the Chinese monarch's absolute rule when he declared that "the emperor of China commands over the lives and estates of all his subjects, he alone being the supreme head and governor; so that the Chinese government is absolutely monarchical."¹⁴⁵ Dapper's vision of the Chinese polity was moulded on similar lines.¹⁴⁶ The similarity of the Company's observations to the Jesuit position may be attributed to the unassailable position that the Jesuit conceptualizations of China enjoyed in the European public sphere, and as Walsh notes, the quest for credibility in the VOC narratives demanded their alignment with the Jesuit view.¹⁴⁷ Overhauling the Jesuit perspective for the Company accounts therefore seems not to have been an option, and even if the VOC's alternative imaginings of the Chinese state were articulated in Company accounts, they only featured in its obscure narrative alleyways. At this juncture, it might be worth pondering whether the Dutch would have been able to detach themselves from their dependency on the Jesuit discourse and forcefully sell their idea of China to readers in Europe had they enjoyed a more dominant relationship with or a more intrusive presence in China. Under the circumstances that then existed, the Dutch discourse dwelt in the shadow of the Jesuit one.

Not surprisingly, when Nieuhof's evaluations of China were deployed to substantiate the political debates of subsequent centuries, it was his conspicuous appraisal of China's political character that theorists took note of. In *China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe*, Walter Demel states that when the seventeenth-century German philosopher Samuel von Pufendorf sat down to develop his notion of the monarch, it was Nieuhof's characterization of the Chinese emperor as an "absolute" sovereign that he appealed to.¹⁴⁸ More intriguingly, according to Demel, Nieuhof's depiction of the "Son of Heaven" might also have aided Montesquieu when he drew up his theory of Oriental Despotism.¹⁴⁹ If this inference is true, this means that the apparent contradictions in Nieuhof's account, which held

¹⁴⁵Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 141; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 1 (in chapter titled "Algemeene beschryving van 't ryk Sina").

¹⁴⁶Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 392.

¹⁴⁷Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay," 7.

¹⁴⁸Walter Demel, "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe, 1570-1750," in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Thomas H. C. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), 55.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 56.

out the possibility of helping conceptualize what might have been a far more subtle theory of government, where the authority of the sovereign could in practice be defied by governors like Singlamong, who established for themselves parallel commercial empires, had been overlooked. And the outcome instead was the more prosaic theory of Oriental Despotism.¹⁵⁰

To recapitulate the principle arguments posed above, the Dutch East India Company and the Society of Jesus were predisposed to describing China in superlatives, but their evaluations of the Middle Kingdom nevertheless provided room for certain derogatory perceptions of the empire. These wafted into their theses about the empire in their postulations of effeminacy and Benevolent Despotism. Although effeminacy was not a novel stereotype in the seventeenth century, it was innovatively deployed by the enterprises as a concept that encapsulated many aspects of Chinese life. The historical conjuncture of the Chinese civil war with the Jesuit and VOC presence in the empire, and the influential Jesuit reporting in Europe further ensured that the label of effeminacy remained a staple in the European endeavour to envision China in later centuries. Unlike the first perspective, which had been deliberately evoked by the Jesuits and the VOC to understand the workings of the empire, the second was a project gone awry. The enterprises had understood Benevolent Despotism to be the framework that explained Chinese governance, but they had in the eighteenth century unwittingly sired the influential theory of Oriental Despotism that rudely contradicted their own. Reflecting on the theme of discourse, one could argue that the commonalities between the Jesuit and VOC perspectives were far too many to allow for any delineation that recognizes these enterprises as manufacturers of two independent discourses. Institutional and denominational differences sometimes lent an air of difference to these accounts, but the variations that ensued were largely superfluous and the perspectival kernel of the Jesuit and VOC accounts remained the same. Both were self-professed admirers of the empire, both endorsed the notion of effeminacy, and both seemingly agreed that the Chinese state was best described as a Benevolent Despotism. The VOC did offer an alternative opinion about how the imperial machinery functioned because their experiences with the empire were commercial rather than evangelical. The Company also portrayed the empire differently because explanations had to be found that accounted for the failure of the Dutch embassies that brought these characterizations back home. When they ventured to put forth a varied visualization of the empire, it was an attempt that was too reticently and half-heartedly formulated to either displace the Jesuit viewpoint or to be taken into consideration when

¹⁵⁰See Chapter titled “East Asia in the Early Modern European Imagination” in David Martin Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

counter-theories were being formulated in the eighteenth century. The Jesuit and VOC imaginings of China therefore neatly fell in line with the larger European discourse, but they nevertheless constituted an important milestone in the way in which certain images of China were reworked to fire the imagination of later China observers.

Arms or Amiability: To Talk or Terrorize the Chinese into Trade

Before we return to Vondel's *Zungchin* to evaluate the nature of characterization in the play in the light of the perspectives exhibited in its sources, we must take a small detour to evaluate the nature of the VOC's relationship with China. The Company's interaction with the empire must be seen within the larger context of Europe's interaction with Asia in the early modern period. Here, China features as an anomaly in many respects. As we have already noted, the empire in this period hardly elicited the disdain of the European observer in the seventeenth century. It was instead regarded as the embodiment of progress and was an object of European awe. Even when the VOC groaned and grumbled about the levels of corruption that infested China's administrative structure, few of their complaints were heard back in Europe. Most were confined to the pages of the Company archives. The nature of European penetration into China in the period was another cause for exceptionalism. Save for the Jesuits and the Portuguese in Macau, China was mostly isolated from European presence and like the VOC, the English East India Company another corporation and forerunner of imperialism, was yet to establish direct trade with the empire. To academics who write mostly with reference to the English East India Company, these unique circumstances of interaction have been reflected in the sphere of representation. Where these Europeans envisaged their relationship with China in writing, Yuhai Han and Matthew Hale claim that their views were "not at first militarily and economically invasive" and contained "no trace of western essentialization of the Orient."¹⁵¹ In a similar vein, Robert Markley's *The Far East and the English Imagination*, which takes into account the oddities of the Chinese case, states that the laudatory European accounts of East Asia were devoid of a hegemonic imaginary that "traditional postcolonialism" associates with the period.¹⁵² To him, "the Far East ...serve[d] as the fantasy space for mercantile capitalism."¹⁵³ When deliberating on where the Dutch East India Company's encounter with China features in the equation, Laura Hostetler's analysis of

¹⁵¹Yuhai Han and Matthew Hale, "Speech without Words," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 15, 2 (2007), 389.

¹⁵²Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination: 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 4.

Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap* is once again useful for our study. Reflecting on the trials and tribulations that the De Keyser embassy in China experienced without complaint, she remarks "the ambassadors and their party must have felt quite at the mercy of forces over which they had no control."¹⁵⁴ The difficulties that she sees Nieuhof and the other embassy delegates as having endured in China, where they could hardly comprehend their environment, also pervades the *Atlas Chinensis*. The Bort expedition (1663-1664), a heavily armed fleet dispatched by Batavia to assist the Manchus in combatting their imperial dissidents on Formosa were left idling in Chinese waters, as the Manchus continued to send heavily garbled replies regarding their commitment to fulfilling the Dutch demands of trade. The sense of Dutch vulnerability that brims over in these accounts has lent itself to arguments of scholars such as Robert Markley and Ryan Walsh who have appealed to such works to argue that "travelogues, if anything, underscore the fragility and uncertainty of early modern European networks."¹⁵⁵ Evidently, such an evaluation contests the recent academic trend of tracing the roots of later imperial imaginings to this period, as is implicit in Anthony Pagden's remark that European engagement with China was fired by "thinly veiled colonizing ambitions."¹⁵⁶

Walsh is no doubt correct in stating that these texts, most of which are published travelogues, reveal the insecurity of Dutch enterprise in China. An evaluation of the Sino-Dutch encounter solely on the basis of these travelogues is nevertheless misleading because the Company archives, which are equally instructive about the Dutch disposition towards China tell a markedly different story. The instructions issued by the Council of Batavia to the early seventeenth-century Company expeditions to China and the *Beschrijving van de Oost Indische Compagnie*, a comprehensive sketch of the history of the VOC in Asia compiled by Pieter van Dam in the early eighteenth century show the Company's perennial efforts to consider the approach they should adopt in their disposition towards China.¹⁵⁷ Whether the empire was to be coaxed or coerced into consenting to the Dutch setting up shop in the Middle Kingdom was the burning question that Company policy makers grappled with in the course of the seventeenth century. In other words, Dutch strategy in engaging China in the period oscillated between three policy points. The first was diplomacy and the second termed as "the middle path" (*de middelweg*) was conceptualized as a method of feigning adherence

¹⁵⁴Hostetler, "Mapping Dutch Travels," 171.

¹⁵⁵Cf. Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay," 25; Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination: 1600-1730*, 1-21.

¹⁵⁶Anthony Pagden, ed. *Facing Each Other: The World's Perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the World*, vol. 1 (Sydney: Ashgate, 2000), xvii.

¹⁵⁷Pieter van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie, boek 2, deel 1*, ed. F.W. Stapel ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1931), 671-767.

to Chinese dictates while pursuing their own interests.¹⁵⁸ The third, which is the one that should arouse our greatest interest, was the option of deploying violence against the imperial entity.

Aggression first entered the vocabulary of Dutch policy considerations when in his instruction to the Reijersoon expedition in 1622, Governor General Jan Pieterszoon Coen grimly observed that “friendship” had failed to shake the Ming dynasty from their refusal to allow Dutch trade in the empire and “that nothing short of the violence of war will obtain [for us] either an audience or trade.”¹⁵⁹ The alternative he proposed were *plunderstochten* or raids aimed at impairing Chinese coastal commerce. As a result of these orders, the coast of Fukien was tormented from 1622 to 1624 by VOC raids.¹⁶⁰ Although the policy of violence was discarded in favour of diplomacy after the Dutch were granted the right to trade in Formosa, it remained a latent option in rhetoric. It was often evoked in the deliberations of the VOC, which contemplated using violence when diplomacy proved inadequate in helping the Dutch attain their objectives. Still clamouring for trading rights in 1630, the VOC was tempted to see the wisdom in the “argument of ...Coen...that amiability would never bring the Company trade, only commanding respect and authority would.”¹⁶¹ The persistence with which the VOC considered violence as a feasible option has implications for the manner in which we conceptualize Sino-Dutch encounter in the early modern period. It dispels the image of the VOC as a reticent enterprise daunted by the might of the Chinese empire and instead creates the notion of the Company as self-assured enough to challenge the empire to a contest on the battlefield.

The formulation of force as a matter of Company policy is also instructive about how the VOC perceived its imperial adversary. It plainly meant that the Company did not consider China as an unassailable fortress, and it shows that far from being intimidated by the empire, the Company was keenly attuned to its troubles and woes. In fact, Coen’s proposal for the use of arms against China came at a time when the empire was most vulnerable; the Ming Empire in the 1620s was evidently in a pitiable state, riven by a self-destructive disunity from within and assaulted by calamitous invasions from without.¹⁶² Apart from exhibiting the presence of mind to prey upon the empire when its strength was ebbing, the Dutch were well aware that

¹⁵⁸For the Company’s contemplations on adopting the “middle path”, see *Ibid.*, 692.

¹⁵⁹“...maer de Chinesen met gewelt aentasten, zoo haest sulcx noodich is ende bij den raedt goodt gevonden wordt, also voorzeecker verstaen dat niet dan met gewelt van oorloge handel noch gehoor becommen zullen.” NA, VOC 1077 Batavia 2, “Instructions issued to Commander Cornelis Reijersen and the Council of the fleet sailing to China,” fol. 219v. Also see fol. 214r.

¹⁶⁰Wills Jr, *Embassies and Illusions*, 40.

¹⁶¹Van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie, boek 2, deel 1*, 697.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, 682.

the strength to which they would attribute their roaring successes in Asia was the empire's Achilles heel – their naval might. They marvelled at the disdain that China, like other landed Asian polities, possessed for seafaring and the sea and they briefly contemplated replicating the deeds of the infamous Chinese pirate, Iquan (Zheng Zhilong) because of the handsome returns that piracy on China's seas promised.¹⁶³ And the scorn that was naturally evinced when a naval power appraised an empire that suffered a curious case of thalassaphobia is captured in Matthijs Cramer's book of verses, which contemptuously noted that "the Tartars are in the sea timid, fearful, and faint hearted...Who have been trained to neither man the junks nor sail the sea."¹⁶⁴

If at this juncture we reckon that the Company regarded China's unassailability as no more than a myth, the question then is whether the Company took up arms for the attainment of modest mercantile aims or whether we are to read in this exhibition of belligerence a prehistory to a later colonialism? We might be beguiled into believing that the Company tinkered with the prospect of outright colonization if we take into account the frequency with which Company records reflect on the Chinese wariness in getting into too cosy a relationship with the "red-haired barbarians."¹⁶⁵ They feared, so we are told, that it might bring upon them, the fate of subjugation that other territories which allowed a Dutch presence in their kingdoms came to suffer. Also buttressing this argument is the evident discomfort that the Jacob de Keyser embassy of 1656 revealed when it discussed with the Chinese, the VOC's expansionist urges. Anticipating questions by the imperial enquiry panel on the touchy subject of Dutch territorial acquisitions in Asia, the Company delegates resolved to present the Dutch as liberators who were fortuitously granted territorial gifts when they rescued beleaguered Asian potentates from Portuguese tyranny.¹⁶⁶ Although this perspective might suggest a colonizing intent on the part of the Company, one can more easily make a counter argument. Despite his aggressive rhetoric, even the most outspoken exponent of the policy of aggression, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, defined the objectives of the Company's 1622 "raids" in rather narrow terms. His instructions to the Reijersen expedition read,

¹⁶³Ibid., 697.

¹⁶⁴"De Taters zijn in see verleege bange bloede...Die noch op joncken, noch op zee slaen zijn geleert." Cramer, *Borts voyage*, 74-75.

¹⁶⁵NA, VOC 1081 Canton, Entry dated January 24, 1623 in Cornelis Reijersen's diary of his voyage to China, fol. 59r; Also see Van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie, boek 2, deel 1*, 698.

¹⁶⁶NA, VOC 1220 Canton, "Report of Jacob de Keijser to the Governor General Joan Maetsuijcker," fols. 284v-286v.

[it] appears that this is the best time to force the Chinese with violence to [either] confer unto us a suitable place on her coast or come trade with us and cease her dealings with our enemies and feigning friends.¹⁶⁷

Coen's objective thus was limited to wresting a trading post from the Chinese emperor, whose authority we may note was still uncontested. We would here reckon that the VOC still articulated their objectives in mercantile terms. These were rather modest aims, particularly if we compare the Dutch agenda with the rhetoric overheard in the official circles of Spanish Manila in 1583 when, "a Spanish invasion of China in order to conquer and convert the Middle Kingdom," seemed to be the next logical step for the Spaniards to take in their relations with the empire.¹⁶⁸ We might then debunk the theory that there was an underlying colonial intent in the Dutch aggression against China. Nonetheless, we must appreciate the fact that the VOC was willing to put to action their policy of aggressive mercantile expansionism, which had reaped high dividends for the enterprise in other parts of Asia in the context of China.¹⁶⁹ Although as Blussé notes, "violence in relation to a stronger Asian opponent [like China] did not fall within the grand strategy of the Company," European mercantile enterprises were sometimes known to commit such acts of daring.¹⁷⁰ For instance, one can draw a parallel between the aggression indulged in by the Dutch East India Company in their raids on the Chinese coast with that of the Child's War of 1686-1690, when the English East India Company entered into a confrontation with the Mughal Empire.¹⁷¹ The English, like the Dutch could only commit to a policy of aggression due to their superior powers at sea and like the Dutch, whose piratical advances on the Chinese coast yielded no spectacular results, the British severely underestimated the strength of the Mughal reprisal and received a drubbing from Emperor Aurangzeb. Although both naval ventures concluded as sordid debacles, they were bold attempts of two seventeenth-century European mercantile enterprises to test the waters, so to say, and gauge the returns that a policy of aggression

¹⁶⁷"...schijnt het voor ons als nu den bester tijt te wesen om de Chinesen met geweld te dwingen ons een bequame plaetse omtrent haer custe te verleen en dan met ons te commen handelen ende haer handel bij ons vijanden ende geveijnsde vrienden near te doen laten..." NA, VOC 1077 Batavia 2, "Instructions issued to Commander Cornelis Reijersen and the Council of the fleet sailing to China," fol. 220r; Also see Van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie*, boek 2, deel 1, 682.

¹⁶⁸This was the brainchild of the Jesuit Alonzo Sanchez. John W. O' Malley et al., eds., *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2000), 345.

¹⁶⁹Leonard Blussé, "De Chinese Nachtmerrrie: Een terugtocht en twee nederlagen," in *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, eds. Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (Leiden: KITLV, 2002), 210; Barend Noordam, "Military Intelligence Gathering and Early Modern Warfare: The Dutch East India Company and China in the early 17th Century," (forthcoming), 2.

¹⁷⁰Blussé, "De Chinese Nachtmerrrie," 210.

¹⁷¹G. Z. Refai, "Sir George Oxinden and Bombay, 1662-1669," *The English Historical Review* 92, 364 (1977).

unleashed against an imperial polity could fetch them. That said, the view of European insecurity in early modern Asia advanced by Markley and Walsh loses its clarity and makes way for the understanding that the Dutch East India Company was the embodiment of a measure of self-assurance and daring that fell short of colonial ambition. The Company's bark was arguably worse than its bite as aggression featured far more boldly in their correspondence than it did in actual Company policy. Force which was seen in the 1620s as the preferred means of convincing the empire to open their doors to Dutch trade, was by the mid-1630s no longer a priority. The Company resorted to diplomacy and even tried a hand at collaboration as the Dutch proposition to grant military aid to the Ming in 1633 and the Bort expedition in 1663-64 make clear. The Company then clearly was open to employing every trick in the book to initiate trade with an empire regarded as essentially unassailable.

The Playwright Sorts and Sieves: Motives behind the Scripting of *Zungchin*

The explanations for why Vondel wrote his play and why he imagined it in the way he did can be ordered in two categories. There are elements in *Zungchin* that were solely ascribable to Vondel and his ideological conception of the world, and there were others that derived from the character of seventeenth-century Dutch culture and society in general. It also goes without saying that the socio-cultural factors in the Republic which exerted an influence on *Zungchin* also had a part to play in the making of Van der Goes's drama *Trazil*. As far as detecting how much of Vondel's worldview features in *Zungchin* goes, the play's connection with its sources harbours the answers. Although *Zungchin* came to reflect the sources with a high degree of exactitude in the manner in which the Chinese revolution was sketched, Vondel felt less obliged to replicate his sources' perspective. His decision to focus on the notion of "divine providence" (which incidentally was also a theme borne by the play's chief source, *De Bello Tartarico*) meant that the common conceptions of China in the sources could not be freighted wholesale into the play. Instead, the compatibility of the ideas with the basic thrust of the drama seems to have been a necessary precondition for their inclusion in the literary piece. The idea of Benevolent Despotism that the Jesuit and VOC writers marketed as the form of government that characterized China was at odds with Vondel's objectives. If "divine providence" was to be emphasized in the drama, it was to be contrasted with a convincing picture of human folly. The portrayal of Zungchin as the miserly king whose lust for wealth lost him his kingdom thus seemed like the sort of characterization that was more in tune with Vondel's intent rather than Benevolent Despotism and the valorised form of governance it

implied.¹⁷² When Vondel rejected Benevolent Despotism as a constituent in his drama, he also saw no appeal in its contradictory image of Oriental Despotism. Thus despite his avarice, Zungchin did not devolve into the stereotypical Oriental despot but was instead represented as a hapless victim in the jaws of malicious misfortune.

Vondel's evocation of the Almighty mediated the passage of perspectives from the sources he employed into his drama but making "divine providence" as the principal thrust of the play came at a price. It diminished the visibility of the Chinese tale. As past scholars have convincingly argued, the Chinese-ness in *Zungchin* was submerged in a sea of biblical allusions, classical references, and Christian imagery, and in their vulnerability to the designs of the Almighty, the Chinese were consequently like their European brethren in the drama, the Jesuits.¹⁷³ Vondel's emphasis on the divine might strongly tell of a Jesuitical influence but his plays fell within the ambit of religious drama and as W. A. P. Smit suggests, "the significance of divine rule" was a favoured and recurring theme in his plays.¹⁷⁴ It may then be argued that the prioritization of a Christian imaginary was already a familiar one in his literary corpus. When the play then propagandizes Vondel's religious beliefs at the cost of marginalizing the Chinese elements in the drama, *Zungchin* is stripped of its novelty as being Europe's first "literary Chinoiserie."¹⁷⁵ It instead presents itself as having been a space for the rehearsal of the playwright's theological conceptions as articulated in his previous literary endeavours.

Zungchin replicated certain features characteristic of Vondel's other dramas. It was moulded in staunch adherence to the rules of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which as Jan Konst observes made a deep impression on the playwright's literary works in the post-1640 period.¹⁷⁶ For the playwright then, whose dramas were, as James Parente puts it, "theological truths in Aristotelean garb," similarities between *Zungchin* and other plays scripted by Vondel in this period were bound to occur.¹⁷⁷ For instance, the principle of *peripeteia* or the drastic reversal in fortune which constituted the core of dramas such as *Salomon* (1648) and *Noah* (1667) also

¹⁷²Zungchin's miserly nature, as a characterization that Vondel eventually settled on also had its origins in the playwright's sources, see Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 117.

¹⁷³"But the Chinese of *Zungchin*, in spite of his conscientious study of Martini and Kircher, remained soul-less puppets which he had not the showman's skill to manipulate so dexterously as to make them seem real and alive." A.J. Barnouw, *Vondel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 204-05.

¹⁷⁴Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 608 (appendix).

¹⁷⁵Pos refers to *Zungchin* as the constituting the first instance of "literary Chinoiserie" in the west. Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein," 98.

¹⁷⁶J.W.H. Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei in de Nederlandse tragedie 1600-1720* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2003), 122.

¹⁷⁷Cf. James A. Parente, Jr., *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 146.

formed the basis of *Zungchin* when it dramatized the Chinese emperor's fall from power.¹⁷⁸ Yet *Zungchin*'s similarities to other plays in the Vondelian canon went far beyond those engendered by the playwright's mere compliance to the strictures of Aristotelean drama.¹⁷⁹ W.A.P. Smit's incisive examination of Vondel's masterpiece *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637) alongside *Zungchin* reveals that the latter drama was a pale imitation of the former – in plot, verse, dramatic technique, and in its emphasis on “divine providence.”¹⁸⁰ *Zungchin* was then arguably old fare.

Vondel's ideological leanings and the character of his literary oeuvre determined the form that the drama *Zungchin* took, but as Sterck notes, the personal networks and relationships that the playwright cultivated were also partially responsible for his choice of subject.¹⁸¹ As an Amsterdammer and the city's most celebrated literary figure, the playwright's association with the Republic's most illustrious corporation, the Dutch East India Company was inevitable. Many of his literary works chronicled the achievements of the VOC and its personnel in Asia and the playwright even arranged for his son to enter Company service when the latter squandered away his family fortune and found himself deep in debt.¹⁸² While his VOC connections made Asia a familiar entity in his literary oeuvre, his knowledge of the Chinese empire did not spring solely from the published sources that he relied on. As past academics have argued, the Jesuits were in part responsible for Vondel's interest in and knowledge about China. Members of the Jesuit mission came to share a close friendship with the playwright and some of them divulged evident China connections. Apart from Adam Schall, who it is believed, suggested to the Nieuwhof embassy in Peking that he knew Vondel in person, Philip Couplet, another Jesuit who had spent many years in China, also counted among Vondel's acquaintances.¹⁸³ These individual associations that Vondel possessed on a Eurasian if not global scale was arguably typical of the seventeenth century which registered a greater movement of individuals to other parts of the world than ever before. It was perhaps

¹⁷⁸Karel Portman and Mieke B. Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuwe vaderland voor de muzen: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1560-1700* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008), 534. See also Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 464.

¹⁷⁹P. Minderaa observes that *Zungchin* was similar to *Koning David herstelt* which was authored by Vondel in 1660. Minderaa, “Het treurspel *Zungchin* belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei,” 116. Also see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 501.

¹⁸⁰Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 482, 501-02.

¹⁸¹J.F.M. Sterck et al., eds., *De werken van Vondel, vol. 10: 1663-1674* (Amsterdam: De Maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur, 1937), 13.

¹⁸²Karel Schoeman, *Handelsryk in die ooste: Die wereld van die VOC, 1619-1685* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2009), 137; Jan ten Brink, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1897), 433-34.

¹⁸³Sterck, et al., *De werken van Vondel*, 13; Leonard Blussé and R. Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuwhof's beelden van een Chinareis* (Middelburg: Stichting VOC publicaties, 1987), 28. Nieuwhof, *Het gezantschap*, 162 (in a chapter titled “Nauwkeurige beschrijving van ‘t gezantschap”).

this network that motivated Vondel to centre his play on China because these acquaintances with experiences of East Asia made the otherwise alien plot and setting suddenly seem intimate and familiar.

All of above factors underscore Vondel's own intervention in the drama. The historical and ideological content that the play's sources bore were scraped, chiselled and sculpted by Vondel to suit his ideological and literary needs. We might therefore accord a dominant role to Vondel's artistic licence in determining the content of his drama. However, we still need to acknowledge that the Republic produced not one but two plays that dealt with the pernicious political processes that took root in seventeenth-century China. This suggests that there were other larger social and cultural trends at work in the Republic that laid the groundwork for the Vondel's and Van der Goes's flights of fancy. Both *Zungchin* and *Trazil* were consequences of a cloudburst of information about China that rained on the Dutch print space between the 1640s and the 1660s. As was elaborated in a previous section, the writing of the two plays followed closely on the heels of a landslide of printed accounts that focussed on China's political distress. The plays of Van der Goes and Vondel were thus the result of the happy marriage between Dutch publishing and the Dutch Republic's curious citizenry who hungered for news about the world. While both plays can be seen as the result of a healthy flow of information about China into the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, they also reflected the popular prejudices of contemporary Dutch society. Vondel chose to reject the allocation of conventional traits to the Chinese, and he did not consider effeminacy the peculiarly Chinese trait that his sources had imagined it to be. In Vondel's view, this characteristic was an affliction of all of humanity, who shorn of agency, was irrevocably subordinated to the dictates of the Almighty.¹⁸⁴ In contrast to the liberty that Vondel exercised in rejecting certain imaginings inherent in the sources, an element that he transplanted in its pristine state into his drama was the image of the merciless Tartar. His reference in the play to the tartar king as the "cruel Cham" highlights the visions of atrocity and mayhem that China's northern invaders generated for the playwright.¹⁸⁵ Although scant attention is paid to the Tartars in *Zungchin*, their impact on Vondel's literary imagination was significant. Two of his other plays, *Lucifer* (1654) and *Maria Stuart* (1646), refer to the Tartars even though the

¹⁸⁴While *Zungchin* was evidently at the mercy of God's will, the fact that the Jesuits too, were in the same position is mentioned in Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 463-65.

¹⁸⁵ "Die, schier dry eeuwen achter een,/ Den wreeden Cham keerde onverdroten,/ Hoe vreeslijk hy in 't velt verscheen." Verses 138-140.

context of these dramas hardly necessitated a reference to them.¹⁸⁶ In both instances, he used a literary strategy that Antonides van der Goes had also deployed in *Trazil*. He mentioned the Tartars in a context where the Turks too merited reference. When it is widely known that Vondel's treatment of the Turks in his literary frame was anything but sympathetic, it can be reasoned that the Tartars elicited Vondel's aversion for the same reason – heightened feelings of animosity towards the Turks affected the Republic and all Christian Europe in this period.¹⁸⁷ Vondel's and Van der Goes's choice of the Orient as the setting for their dramas also had the impress of another notable seventeenth-century trend. The preface to *Zungchin*, although mostly a contemplation of the rather weighty philosophical problem of the inconstancy of empires, gives us a lead in this regard. Vondel admits to having been positively surprised that a political revolution of the scale of that which gripped China could take place in his lifetime. To his literary sensibilities, if there was any event that could match the demise of the Ming dynasty either in magnitude or in consequence, it was the fall of Troy. The title-page of the 1667 edition of *Zungchin*, as a consequence, carried Virgil's famous words capturing the pathos of the destruction of the ancient city: “*venit summa dies, et ineluctabile tempus*” (the supreme day has come, and the inevitable hour). Vondel specialists such as Minderaa have pointed to the trope of destruction which featured time and again in his plays.¹⁸⁸ Yet, one is inclined to believe that the playwright's Oriental project is indebted to a greater degree to the impression that the political situation in China made on his mind than previous literature acknowledges because Van der Goes, too, took to reflecting on the character of the disaster that befell China. Like Vondel, this young playwright borrowed from Virgil and the title page of his play *Trazil* bore another of the Roman poet's phrases: “*Urbs Antiqua ruit multos dominata per annos*” [The old city has been ruined after many years of subjugation]. Very tellingly, Van der Goes also closed his drama with the lines– “so that no empire in the world remains unchanged.”¹⁸⁹ The manner in which both Vondel and Van der Goes dealt with their subjects, hardly hiding their bewilderment at the enormity of the Chinese revolution, perhaps mirrored the common reaction of spectators in the Republic who were acquainted with the episode. Readers in the Dutch Republic like Van der Goes and

¹⁸⁶“En dit gezalfde hooft den Schotten niet een bede,/ Een nootbe, van geen Turck, noch Tarter, woest van zede.” Joost van den Vondel, *Maria Stuart of gemartelde majesteit* (Te Keulen: D'Oude Drukkerye, 1646). Also see dedicatory epistle in Joost van den Vondel, *Lucifer* (Amsterdam: Abraham de Wees, 1654).

¹⁸⁷For Vondel's disposition to the Turks in his literary works, see Jean Weisgerber, “Orientalisme in de 17de-eeuwse tragedie,” *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke academie voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde* 120, 1 (2010), 10-11.

¹⁸⁸See Minderaa, “Het treurspel *Zungchin* belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei,” 119.

¹⁸⁹“Zoo blijft geen heerschappy ter weerelt onverandert,” verse 2372.

Vondel who were informed about this takeover were as horrified as they were astonished at the magnitude of the affair.

The fixation with the theme of disaster was a cultural preoccupation in the seventeenth-century Republic. Reflecting on the social character of the United Provinces in the early modern era, Simon Schama highlights the manner in which themes of misfortune, disaster and extraordinary occurrences such as the stranding of whales on the beaches of the Republic and curious comet sightings became staple subject matter of the Republic's print and visual spaces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁹⁰ The forcefulness with which news of ominous events and happenings intruded into Dutch culture betrays the strong sense of foreboding that played on the societal mentalité. According to Schama, the paintings of Rembrandt, prints by Jan Saenredam, the writings of Jacob Cats and miscellaneous almanacs all confirmed the sense of gloom that had descended on the Republic. When it can be argued that Vondel and Van der Goes reflect in their dramas on the enormity of the Chinese crisis, there is little doubt that *Zungchin* and *Trazil* also carried a whiff of the same apocalyptic foreboding characteristic of the Dutch in the period. *Zungchin* however, was a better embodiment of this trend than *Trazil*. The melancholic tenor of the play, the playwright's identification of the temporality of human affairs as the backbone of *Zungchin*, and his decision to stud the drama with references to apparitions, premonitions and portents were, as Schama reminds us, all elements of unprecedented weight in the Dutch psyche in the period.

While we might on one hand conclude that it was Vondel's and Van der Goes's fixation with disaster as a reflection of a wider cultural preoccupation that was the principal motive behind the writing of the play, there is reason to believe that the motives that encouraged these playwrights to court China, like their thematic engagement had a global reach. The Dutch obsession with writings about China in the mid-seventeenth century had after all shown a characteristic commitment of reflecting on the Chinese crisis particularly for the empire's own disaster quotient. The theme of disaster infused the narrative of the *De Bello Tartarico* with its meticulously chronicling of warring armies, the fighting across the breadth of the empire, and the collateral damage seen in smouldering villages and deserted towns. Subsequent publications of the 1650s and the 1660s bore sensational titles such as *Het verwoest Sina, door den wreedten Tartar* which promised to deliver an abundance of

¹⁹⁰ See Chapter titled "Feasting, Fasting and Timely Atonement" in Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Collins, 1987), 130-50.

devastation.¹⁹¹ In his article “The Crisis in the Arts of the Seventeenth Century,” Peter Burke suggests that the period between the 1640s and 1660s saw an unprecedented series of disasters.¹⁹² Political uprisings were experienced in places as diverse as Mexico and the Mozambique, and contemporary European works of literature according to Burke dwelled on these disasters thereby functioning as registers of the general sense of tumult which engulfed the world. Significantly, Vondel’s *Zungchin* which Burke takes as an example of this phenomenon, Van der Goes’s *Trazil*, the publication of Martini’s *De Bello Tartarico* in 1654 and the continued presence of the story of the Chinese revolution in European texts for the next two decades all occurred in Burke’s era of “crisis” of the 1640s to the 1660s.¹⁹³ Surely then, it was the element of disaster that Vondel and Van der Goes sought to draw the attention of their readers to, and the disaster motif, it may be argued, was the key to Vondel’s and Van der Goes’s dramas. It was the Chinese brand of the political turbulence that got these playwrights to experiment with the new.

Vondel’s play *Zungchin* and his projection of “providence” as the principle thesis in his drama is deeply illustrative of the character of Dutch culture in the period at another level. The United Provinces in the seventeenth century upheld the Calvinist faith as its state religion and passed stringent anti-Catholic laws, thereby highlighting the marginalization of the Catholics in the post-reformation and post-revolt Dutch society. Yet, as Charles H. Parker notes, the Republic held the peculiar distinction in Europe for “allow[ing] for a more moderate coexistence among people of all religious persuasions.”¹⁹⁴ The concurrence of such paradoxes was carried forth into the Dutch print scene. Although Vondel’s other dramas such as *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637) met with piercing criticism because of its overtly Catholic content, *Zungchin*, which employed China to project the Catholic notion of *providentia* was curiously immune to censure.¹⁹⁵

Zungchin, to conclude the section, presents a bleak picture. The freshness of theme was juxtaposed with the familiarity of dramatic technique and theme. “Divine providence,” a

¹⁹¹The work which was a reprint of *De Bello Tartarico* evidently sought to sell copies of the work by capitalizing on its intriguing title. Martinus Martini, *Het verwoest Sina, door den wreedten Tartar* (Schoonhoven: Leendert van Heck, 1660).

¹⁹²Peter Burke, “The Crisis in the Arts of the Seventeenth Century: A Crisis in Representation,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, 2 (2009), 252-53.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁹⁴Charles H. Parker, “Cooperative Confessionalism: Lay Clerical Collaboration in Dutch Catholic Communities during the Golden Age,” in *Catholic Communities in Protestant States. Britain and the Netherlands, c. 1570-1720*, eds. Benjamin Kaplan, et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 21.

¹⁹⁵For the reaction triggered by Vondel’s *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, see Eddy Grootes and Riet Schenkeveld-Van der Dussen, “Vondel’s Dramas: A Chronological Survey,” in *Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679): Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age*, eds. Jan Bloemendal and Frans Willem Korsten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2.

pet theme of Vondel and the principle object of *Zungchin* determined which perspectives that the sources bore were carried over into the play. The notion of the terrible tartar was retained while the themes of Benevolent Despotism and Chinese effeminacy were ignored. The theme of “divine providence” thus constituted the backbone of the play, and the character of the drama owed more to its playwright than to its sources. Vondel’s debt to his sources in terms of detail in the writing of *Zungchin* is too large to ignore, but the ideological standpoint of the playwright and the style of drama that he favoured had immeasurable influence on the play. While one reckons that the fact that Vondel possessed personal contacts in China might have encouraged the playwright to think of the empire as a setting for a play, there were other factors that also help explain why another play on China followed closely on the heels of *Zungchin*. While the Republic’s four-decade love affair with China in print ensured that the China story was too current and dramatic a theme to go unnoticed by the state’s playwrights, the heightened consciousness in the seventeenth-century Republic about the contemporary world as being one where an incredible amount of turmoil had to be contended with lent itself to determining the tenor of the dramas *Zungchin* and *Trazil*. While contemporary trends in the Dutch Republic influenced Vondel’s decision to choose China as a setting for his drama, he was the final arbiter of the play’s form.

Conclusion

Zungchin is one of Vondel’s lesser known plays. Contrary to its inconsequential existence in the Vondelian canon, *Zungchin* as the dramatization of the fall of the Ming dynasty twenty-two years after the event when the embers of the conflict were still burning is intriguing as it points to a curious connectedness in the period. The sheer immensity of the spectacle of the Chinese revolution made chroniclers of its European observers in Asia. There followed a period of Dutch fascination with the story of dynastic ruin in China and a slew of works on the theme made their way into print in the mid-seventeenth century. This textual efflorescence had the effect of making the playwrights among their compatriots adapt the story to drama and Joost van den Vondel was one of them.

The transport of the tale from the battlefields of China to the bookshelves of Europe and Vondel’s own literary piece had two institutional enterprises with strong moorings in Asia to thank for their existence – the Society of Jesus and the Dutch East India Company. Although their objectives were strikingly dissimilar, both organizations understood information to be a crucial commodity for furthering their ambitions in the East and became conduits of information and news about Chinese events to European readers. Of the two

entities, it was the Jesuit network that exercised a disproportionate influence on Vondel's text; the VOC on the other hand influenced the play through rather inconspicuous pathways. Together with the information about the Chinese revolution that the Jesuit and VOC chronicles ferried back to Europe was also perspectival baggage which carried their views about the empire. Considerable space was devoted to emphasizing the excellence of the Middle Kingdom, but these accounts also contained their evaluations of the Tartar and the Chinese dispositions and their understanding of the character of Chinese governance. With the repeated evocation of these perceptions in their annals and the long shadows these evaluations came to cast on later European appraisals of China, these conceptions were what Edward Said might have referred to as being perceptively Orientalist.

In conceptualizing China in the manner they did, the political and ideological differences between the Jesuits and the Dutch East India Company did not make them architects of two divergent discourses. Rather, their perceptions of China coincided. The reason for this lay not so much in their consensus in thought but rather in the varied relations of the enterprises with the empire. The position of the VOC as late comers on the China scene coupled with their peripheral dealings with the empire signalled their arguably inferior capabilities in gathering information. Although the Company presence in Formosa ensured a steady stream of news about China in VOC records from the 1630s to the 1660s, they nevertheless regarded the Jesuits as being in possession of far more credible information about the empire. The outcome was a dependence on Jesuit information and a persistent reiteration of the Society's views in their accounts of China. Although a different history of interaction with the Middle Kingdom afforded the VOC the opportunity of distancing themselves from the Jesuit perceptions of China, the dominance of the Jesuit narrative called for them to fall in line with the prevailing mode of thought. Alternative VOC imaginings of the character of the Chinese government that the VOC was able to conjure up were therefore submerged in their accounts to allow greater attention for those views which converged with the Jesuit conceptions of the Chinese emperor as a Benevolent Despot.

The Company's interaction with China determined their role as agents of information transfer but their political relations with the empire are also instructive in evaluating the character of the VOC's encounter with China. An element of disdain pervaded the Company chronicles in their reflections of their relations with the empire, and Dutch muskets and cannons were occasionally put to use against the Chinese. Yet the self-assuredness of the Dutch rhetoric was devoid of imperialistic designs. Neither is there any evidence that the VOC was an insecure mercantile power intimidated or overwhelmed by the might of the

Chinese empire. The Company instead, presented itself in its relations with China as a trading enterprise that at times was willing to call Asian polities to contest on the battlefield because war, like fortune, could sometimes yield unexpectedly good results.

Zungchin, the literary child of the Sino-centric print frenzy that gripped the Republic, was sure to inherit some of its parental genes. The predominantly Jesuit character of the play's sources won for the order a marked presence in the play. While Vondel reaped material details from his sources, in relation to the perspectival borrowings the playwright exercised greater thrift. As a result, the play only replicated the sources' evaluation of the Tartars while other elements were overlooked. Notwithstanding the fact that notions like Oriental Despotism (which was evidently a Frankenstein monster that the Jesuit and VOC theory of Benevolent Despotism seemed to have sired) and Chinese effeminacy endured longer in European appraisals of China, in relation to *Zungchin*, they reached a dead end. The discourse about China conceived by the Dutch East India Company and the Jesuits about China had therefore failed to penetrate into Vondel's drama. Authorial discretion here was the key factor which determined the passage of perspectives from source to stage, and for Vondel, the theme of "divine providence" played the role of arbiter. While *Zungchin* as a predominantly Catholic play conceived in a land which officially subscribed to the Reformed religion sheds light on the social character of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, Vondel's motivations in writing the drama were many. The play and the playwright typified the convergence of various phenomena in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and world – the presence of individual intercontinental connections created by global institutional networks, a robust print culture, a keenness in the Republic for information about the wider world, and a heightened consciousness about local and global disasters. The notion of "divine providence" in the drama indicates that Vondel's motives were also had a personal dimension. The presence of this concept in the play also makes way for a realization - it was a theme which frequented a number of Vondelian plays and it was deployed in *Zungchin* together with dramatic technique which was also bereft of newness. *Zungchin* then was a play built on borrowed goods – as the last work of an aging playwright; it was forgettable because the novelty of setting was submerged to make the play feel like any other of the Vondelian ones.

Chapter Three

CASTING DESPOTS IN DUTCH DRAMA: THE CASE OF NADIR SHAH IN VAN STEENWYK'S *THAMAS KOELIKAN* (1745)¹

Introduction

The conqueror-statesman Nadir Shah Afshar, otherwise known as Tahmasp Kuli Khan, caused a furore in the eighteenth-century world. If destiny had deemed him protagonist in the political theatre of Asia, the Dutch playwright Frans van Steenwyk in 1745 chose him as the lead character in his play *Thamas Koelikan*.² This literary piece was an example of the European obsession with the conqueror in the 1730s and 1740s.³ Numerous histories were published about Nadir Shah and new editions of older works rolled off the presses with updates of his latest victories and conquests and the European public relished it all. Describing the enthusiasm surrounding Nadir Shah, Frederick Bernard notes, “until 1740...and the galvanic deeds of Frederick (of Prussia), the one man whose exploits seized the attention of Europe and marked him as a ruler worthy of note was Kuli Kan, Shah of Persia.”⁴ As compelling as the heightened interest in the Persian ruler in the 1730s and 1740s is the association of Nadir Shah from the 1750s onwards with a phenomenon that China too, as we have seen, came to be associated with from the eighteenth century – Oriental Despotism. Visible in an array of European works including those of Byron, Tennyson, and John Stuart Mill, Nadir Shah came to symbolise Oriental Despotism at its worst and for centuries after, this image remained unchanged.⁵

¹ An earlier version of this chapter appeared as “Casting Despots in Dutch Drama: The Case of Nadir Shah in Van Steenwyk’s *Thamas Koelikan*,” in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.4, No.2 (April, 2011), 241-286.

² *Thamas Koelikan* (Tahmasp Kuli Khan) meaning “Slave of Tahmasp” was the name that Nadir Shah acquired when he won the favour of the ruler of Persia, Shah Tahmasp in 1722. Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah : A Critical Study Based Mainly upon Contemporary Sources* (Jalandhar: Asian Publishers, 1993), 26. Although Nadir is known to have discarded the name, *Thamas Koelikan* on assuming the throne of Persia, this name and its many variants continued to be used. P.J. Bearman, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), see entry on Nadir Shah. Despite using the name *Thamas Koelikan* in the title, the playwright resorts to the name Nadir Shah when referring to the ruler in the text of the play. To avoid confusion, I use the name *Thamas Koelikan* when referring to the play itself and Nadir Shah when referring to his personage.

³ See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Un Grand Dérangement: Dreaming an Indo-Persian Empire in South Asia, 1740-1800,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 4, 3/4 (2000), 354.

⁴ Frederick V. Bernard, “The History of Nadir Shah: A New Attribution to Johnson,” *The British Museum Quarterly* 34, 3/4 (1970), 95.

⁵ See John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, 1869), 61; Canto the Ninth. Verse XXXIII in George Byron’s *Don Juan* (published between 1819 and 1824) in Lord Byron, *The Poetical Works of*

The Plot (The Historical and the Literary)

In 1745, the well-known Amsterdam playwright Frans van Steenwyk published and staged his play, *Thamas Koelikan*.⁶ Unlike his more popular plays such as *Ada, Gravin van Holland en Zeeland* (1754), *Thamas Koelikan* was in many ways evasive.⁷ The play, we learn, was not popular. The Schouwburg authorities decided to stage the play only three times in 1645 (the year that the play was scripted) and once again in the following decade.⁸ Little known in its own time, the play has elicited no scholarly interest apart from customary inclusions in encyclopaedias of Dutch literature.⁹

Thamas Koelikan was based on the story of Nadir Shah's invasion of India, six years prior to the scripting of the play. In 1738, having usurped the Persian throne and amassed spectacular politico-military victories in West Asia, Nadir Shah Afshar stood poised to invade Mughal territory.¹⁰ The once great empire that lay before Nadir Shah in this crucial period had lost much of its vigour – so much so, in fact, that the paradigm of decline, has until recently, been the dominant lens for viewing this century of Mughal rule.¹¹ During the three decade reign of Muhammad Shah from 1719 to 1748, the court was riddled by factional politics, provincial governors of regions such as Bengal and Awadh were gradually detaching themselves from imperial control and Mughal territory became victim to frequent Maratha incursions from the Deccan.¹² It was amidst these troubled times that a Persian army led by

Lord Byron (New York: Humphrey Milford, 1914), 758; Alfred Tennyson's *The Expedition of Nadir Shah into Hindostan* (1827) in Alfred Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 108-10.

⁶The title of the original reads Frans van Steenwyk, *Thamas Koelikan, of de verovering van het Mogolsche rijk* (Amsterdam: Izaak Duim, 1745). I use the republished version of the play: C.G. Brouwer, ed. *De Oostersche Schouwburg, deel 3: Achmet en Thamas Koelikan* (Amsterdam: D' Fluyte Rarob, 1993). All references to the content of the play are in keeping with the latter publication.

⁷Ben Albach, *Helden, draken en comedianten: het Nederlandse toneelleven voor, in en na de Franse tijd* (Amsterdam: Uitg. mij. Holland, 1956), 26.

⁸Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 198.

⁹*Ibid.*, 199; Apart from two unpublished articles on the theme by Brouwer, other works only briefly refer to the play. For instance see Jan te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde, deel 5*, 2nd ed. (Haarlem: De erven F.Bohn, 1924), 292-93.

¹⁰The 1730s witnessed the ascent of Nadir Shah as statesman and military commander. After donning the role of regent to the son of the deposed ruler, the Safavid Shah Tahmasp for four years, he assumed the throne in 1736. In these years he undertook immensely successful military campaigns against the Turks and the Russians. Jadunath Sarkar, *Nadir Shah in India* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1973), 14-15; Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 80-95.

¹¹Present day historians have offered several explanations for the decline of the Mughal Empire ranging from religious policies of later monarchs to defective revenue strategies. In recent years, the paradigm of "decline" has been increasingly contested with scholars such as Muzaffar Alam preferring to read the affliction of Mughal India in the eighteenth century, as "reconfiguration" rather than decline. Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 299-318. For an overview of the historiography of Mughal decline, see 2-10.

¹²Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707) has often been regarded as the last of the capable Mughal rulers. Between the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and the accession of Muhammad Shah in 1719, five Mughal princes sat on the throne of Delhi. For a discussion of Mughal decline in the period, see John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge:

Nadir Shah, with his son Nasr Allah Mirza attacked in May 1738.¹³ The invasion began with the capture of Kabul and Peshawar but it was only with the capitulation of Lahore in January 1739 that the Mughal court woke up to the fast approaching threat.¹⁴ The confrontation between the two armies culminated in the historical battle of Karnal (24 February 1739), which resulted in the decisive defeat of the mammoth yet inferior Mughal army. With the Persian blockade on the Mughal camp still intact, both parties entered into talks over a settlement with the Mughal noble Nizam al-Mulk as mediator. When the negotiations failed, the emperor and his nobles were taken prisoner and Nadir Shah set forth for Delhi. Nadir's peaceful entry into the capital assumed a violent turn when a rumour of the Persian ruler's murder took root in the city. The invading army soon became a target of the city's mobs. Persian retaliation followed. In what has often been seen as a grim re-enactment of Tamerlane's sack of Delhi in 1398, over twenty thousand residents lost their lives.¹⁵ After the riches of Delhi had been siphoned off and a marriage bringing together the Mughal and Persian royal houses was conducted, Nadir Shah restored Muhammad Shah to the Mughal throne and on 16 May 1739 set forth on his journey back to Isfahan.

Among the many who watched the invasion of India with bated breath were the servants of the Dutch East India Company, which by the mid eighteenth century had been trading in the Mughal province of Bengal for over a century in raw silk, textiles, sugar, opium and saltpetre.¹⁶ With the establishment of its first trading post in Bengal in the 1630s, the VOC's trade in the region soon grew. *Farmans* (entitlements) were acquired from the Mughals permitting them to establish trade and Dutch factories were set up at numerous places such as Kasimbazar, Patna and Chinsura with its headquarters at Hoogly.¹⁷ Patna, in Bihar, was another important centre. Apart from its significance in the realm of trade, the settlement, owing to its proximity to the Mughal capital, was an important source of

Cambridge University Press, 1993), 281; Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: People's Pub. House, 1972), 244-46; Richard B. Barnett, *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 40-41. The Marathas put themselves on the political map of India under the aegis of their leader Shivaji, who in the later decades of the seventeenth century came into conflict with the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. Capitalizing on the weaknesses of the Mughal Empire in the course of the eighteenth century, they carried out a series of raids in northern and eastern India. These campaigns detrimentally affected Company trade in Surat and Bengal. See Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal state, 1526-1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 63-64; Ashin Dasgupta, "Trade and Politics in 18th century India," in *Trade, Finance and Power, The East India Company: 1600-1858*, vol. 4, ed. Patrick Tuck (London: Routledge, 1998), 55, 66.

¹³Nasr Allah Mirza was the second son of Nadir Shah.

¹⁴For the account of Nadir Shah's invasion into Mughal territory, I employ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 122-55.

¹⁵Sarkar, *Nadir Shah in India*, 75, 85.

¹⁶Om Prakash, *Encyclopaedic History of Indian Freedom Movement Series: Dutch in India* (New Delhi, India: Anmol, 2002), 271.

¹⁷George D. Winus and Marcus P.M. Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified : The VOC (the Dutch East India Company) and Its Changing Political Economy in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 22-23.

information for the Dutch about developments in the Mughal heartland.¹⁸ The Bengal trade of the VOC proved lucrative. Raw silk and opium, which were both products that the VOC relied on their settlement in Bengal to procure, were indispensable and highly profitable commodities in the Company trade in Asia.¹⁹ While the Company was able to secure and maintain an edge over its rivals in the Bengal trade in the seventeenth century, the later period proved less favourable.²⁰ Their trade in the region began to contract and as the gloom set in into the Company affairs in Bengal in the eighteenth century; the VOC was in for more bad news. As a rule, conditions of trade were linked to the well-being of the kingdom and the invasion of India by Nadir Shah soon announced itself.²¹

The plot that Van Steenwyk settled on for his play, *Thamas Koelikan* bore semblances of similarity and difference to the historical invasion that he modelled his play on.²² The drama dwells on the aftermath of Nadir Shah's successful siege of the Mughal city of Lahore. Instead of proceeding ahead and conquering all of Indostan as any astute statesman would, Nadir Shah renounces his future plans for conquest and his claim to the spoils of war. He presents the Mughal ruler, Mahomet with a generous proposition – the marital union between his son Nasser and the Mughal princess, Milko. Mahomet however fails to appreciate the generosity of his benefactor and plots to assassinate him. In the classic battle between good and evil that ensues, good prevails. Nadir escapes unscathed and even conquers his burning desire to punish Mahomet for his treachery. The curtains fall with Nadir calling for peace between the empires of Persia and Indostan.

In view of Nadir Shah's association with despotism, the backdrop of Van Steenwyk's play seems ideal. No spectator could have demanded a setting more congenial than war to witness a despot engage in the darkest of human deeds of slaughter and blood-shed. Paradoxically, though, the playwright involves himself in a counter-exercise. Van Steenwyk's

¹⁸See Kumkum Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society in Early Modern India. Bihar: 1733-1820* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 15.

¹⁹ Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 257-258.

²⁰Biplab Dasgupta, "Trade in Pre-Colonial Bengal," *Social Scientist* 28, 5/6 (2000), 63.

²¹ Ashin Dasgupta observes a correlation between the eighteenth century economic crisis and the decline of the Mughal dynasty. Dasgupta, "Trade and Politics in 18th century India," 46.

²²The spellings of the names of characters in the play vary from the standard spellings of the names of these historical figures as we know them today. I retain the spellings/names employed by Van Steenwyk when referring to the characters in the play, and use the standard spelling when referring to the historical personages. I make an exception in the case of the historical figure Shah Tahmasp, the ruler of Persia restored to the throne by Nadir Shah in 1729 and later deposed and executed by the latter in 1732. Although the play uses the name Thamas, I employ the name Shah Tahmasp to not confuse the ruler with Nadir Shah who was known as Thamas Koelikan (Tahmasp Kuli Khan).

Nadir Shah exemplifies not barbaric bloodlust but compassion. The playwright creates for his protagonist an image of righteousness, which finds expression in the deeds of the conqueror. Nadir Shah's desire for conquest is said to have been driven neither by greed nor the lust for territory. The siege is legitimately pressed by Nadir's need to punish Mahomet for his violation of their treaty. This covenant, which pledged Mughal support for the Persian kingdom at a time of distress, was disgracefully violated by Mahomet, who thereby "rightfully" inviting upon his kingdom, the wrath of Nadir Shah's forces. In creating his protagonist, Van Steenwyk does more than invest his actions with righteousness; he shows Nadir Shah to be extremely compassionate. Although Mahomet shows himself to be completely undeserving of Nadir's trust and forgiveness on more instances than one, the Persian does not punish the Mughal or seek reprisal. Also bearing witness to Nadir Shah's innate virtue is his retained respect for his adversary, Mahomet. When Nasser (Nadir's son) mocks Mahomet in Nadir's presence, Nadir reprimands him:

Do not despise him [Mahomet] too much, lament his misfortune.
 If I were raised in lechery like he,
 Lived in lavish grandeur and wantonness,
 And lent a foolish ear to a flattering court,
 I shall be no less than he, haughty, disloyal and cowardly.²³

In Van Steenwyk's frame, the greatness of the Persian ruler is not extolled by the personage of Nadir Shah alone. Every character in the play contributes to the aura of magnanimity associated with Nadir, be it through Nasser's boundless respect for his father, the unconcealed praise of the Mughal courtier Nizamelmoluk's (Nizam al-Mulk) for the ruler, or Mahomet's recognition of his adversary's virtue. In his abhorrence of war, predilection for peace and chivalry Nadir Shah in the play is an aberration and qualifies in the least for providing the prototype of Oriental Despotism. Nadir Shah is instead endowed with all the trappings of an able ruler. The rationale for such a representation is not difficult to discern. In his preface to *Thamas Koelikan*, Van Steenwyk wrote, "it is desired that such compassion [that shown by Nadir Shah] is replicated by the Christian kings," thus implying that the playwright regarded the nature of governance enjoyed by Nadir's subjects was far superior to that experienced in Europe.²⁴

²³Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 109, verses 51-55.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 104, 197.

Although Van Steenwyk refrains from investing the character of Nadir Shah with the traits of an Oriental Despot, it is clear that Van Steenwyk is not ignorant of the trope, but is instead painfully aware of it. When showcasing his understanding of kingship, Van Steenwyk posits Nadir's governance in opposition to a degenerate condition of government similar to Oriental Despotism in which the former emerges victorious. While Shah Tahmasp, the Persian ruler who was deposed by Nadir Shah only receives passing mention, it is in the character of Mahomet that the trope of Oriental Despotism is constructed. Nadir is courageous, self-effacing and virtuous while Mahomet drowns in a myriad of vices: wantonness, effeminacy and cowardice. He embodies the Eastern propensity for laziness and debauchery and revelling in his seraglio.²⁵ However, this degenerate condition is not irreversible and can be remedied and Nadir is the cure to this condition of depravity. Resolving the situation in Persia with his able governance, his redemption of India takes on the form of "rectified" restoration. Before leaving India, Nadir imparts valuable advice to Muhammad Shah:

Will you cast away the splendour and folly from your palace now that your disasters have bred on this luxury?

Will you, through honourable governance

Show your people that you have become fortunate as a result of your disaster?²⁶

Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* thus envisions the invasion of Mughal territory as an epic contest between able rule and Oriental Despotism in which Nadir Shah, the invader becomes guide and teacher in instituting good governance in the realm of Mahomet, the quintessential Oriental Despot and reluctant pupil.

Incidentally, this characterisation that Van Steenwyk sold to the public reflected a contemporary view of Muhammad and Nadir Shah. Accounts of Nadir Shah published in Europe in the 1730s and 1740s lauded the exploits and genius of the Persian nearly as much as Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* did. The play's only point of departure from other contemporary works was that they did not share Van Steenwyk's unbridled laudation for Nadir. But although others disapproved of Nadir's complicity in deeds he had little to be proud of, they were impressed by his conquests, capabilities on the battlefield and sense of justice. This tendency is best captured in the work titled *The History of Thamas Kouli Kan*,

²⁵Ibid., 197-98.

²⁶Ibid., 187, verses 1569-72.

Sophi of Persia, published in the year 1740.²⁷ When chronicling the suppression of dissent within Nadir's own dominions, the work underlined the morbidity of the punishment meted out to "the rebel Ashraf whom he [Nadir Shah] took prisoner and beheaded, after having put out his eyes."²⁸ Yet the same work, in a rather contradictory vein insisted that Nadir Shah "imitate[d] Tamerlan in what he had extraordinary and laudable, without any of his ill qualities."²⁹ Van Steenwyk's view of Nadir Shah as virtually inimitable in the virtues he possessed was also not without precedents.³⁰ Dennis De Coetlogon's satire *Diogenes Rambles*, published in 1743, enumerated the positive traits of Nadir Shah and insisted that his character was "a proper lesson of instruction... to some of our sullen European princes, who, except an intriguing minister, or a favourite concubine, can never be said to converse with anything in human shape."³¹ Not only did contemporaries echo Van Steenwyk's portrayal of Nadir Shah, but they also endorsed his caricature of the conqueror's political opponents. In these works too, Muhammad Shah and Shah Tahmasp represented the depths of degeneration while Nadir was the epitome of good governance. Openly airing their disdain for Shah Tahmasp, who was "besieged by women" and Muhammad Shah who engaged in similar acts of debauchery, these works agreed that their deteriorating governments demanded replacement and soon.³² Van Steenwyk therefore was not alone in his narrative strategy of situating the trope of Oriental Despotism on the weak shoulders of Muhammad Shah and Shah Tahmasp. His contemporaries had done the same.

Despite the complicity of the works of the period in furthering the Oriental trope, it is their perspective of Nadir Shah that merits attention. These works were yet to formulate the association of Nadir Shah solely with arbitrariness, whim, and utmost cruelty. They rest on the view that if Nadir was a man of vice, he was also a man of worth whose merits outweighed his faults. The incrimination of the individual and the association of Nadir with his vices alone is a product of subsequent decades. Francois Lambert in his 1753 publication,

²⁷*The History of Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi of Persia. Translated from the French* (London: Printed for J. Brindley, 1740).

²⁸*Ibid.*, 102; Ashraf was a Ghalsai leader who instituted Afghan rule in Persia when he overthrew the Safavids in 1725. He remained king until his ouster and death in the hands of Nadir Shah in 1729. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 42-45 and 334.

²⁹*The History of Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi of Persia*, 107.

³⁰Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 104, 197.

³¹Dennis De Coetlogon, *Diogenes's Rambles or, Humorous Characters of the Most Noted People at Present in the World* (London: Printed for T. Cooper, 1743), 27.

³²*The History of Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi of Persia*, 103; James Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah: Formerly called Thamas Kuli Khan, the Present Emperor of Persia*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1742), 131. Although the reference to the slothful nature of Muhammad features in Fraser's account, as contents of correspondence between Delhi and Kabul, the letter appears to be a reconstruction rather than a translation of actual correspondence.

Curious Observations, claimed that “no prince ever governed Persia in so despotic a manner,” and by the late eighteenth century, Nadir Shah was understood as the “Asiatic standard,” a benchmark of cruelty against which the depravities of other Oriental princes was measured.³³ While writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century had begun associating Nadir Shah with Oriental Despotism, those of the nineteenth century delighted in it. Lord Byron underlined the arbitrariness of the “Costive Sophy” in his epic poem *Don Juan* and in envisioning the magnitude of disaster perpetrated by Nadir in India, Tennyson wrote “the land like an Eden before them is fair, but behind them a wilderness dreary and bare.”³⁴ Undoubtedly, literary works had fallen prey to a particular straight jacketing in the representation of Nadir Shah, but so too did works of history. Even Laurence Lockhart’s scholarly study *Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based on Contemporary Sources* does not escape the lures of this enticing representation. In the opening statement of his work, he refers to Nadir, together with others “who overran vast stretches of country ravaging, killing and destroying” as “scourges of humanity.”³⁵ With time, therefore, the virtues associated with the ruler such as industriousness and magnanimity which had earned him the respect of his contemporaries had faded into oblivion.³⁶

While Nadir Shah does not seem to have elicited the interest of later Dutch literary works, the separation of the conqueror from a flattering image of righteousness in the 1750s and after is a significant feature in the works of British poets, authors, and historians. The subsequent image of the monstrous and blood-thirsty invader may thus be attributed to the demands that colonialism, and more specifically British colonialism in territories such as India, made upon the characterisation of the Orient and its rulers. While Metcalf speaks of how the notion of Oriental Despotism moulded imperial consciousness in British India, studies on the works of literary figures such as Tennyson convincingly demonstrate the complicity of these literary works in providing colonialism with intellectual respectability.³⁷

³³Claude François Lambert, *Curious Observations upon the Manners, Customs, Usages, Different Languages, Government, ... of the Several Nations of Asia, Africa, and America*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for G. Woodfall etc, 1753), 227; John Adams, *A View of Universal History from the Creation to the Present Time*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for G. Kearsley, 1795), 35 (second section of the work).

³⁴Tennyson, *The Expedition of Nadir Shah into Hindostan* (1827) in Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, 110. Also see Herbert Sherring’s 1913 poem titled *Nadir, the Persian* in Herbert Sherring, *Nadir the Persian and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1913); Byron, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, 758.

³⁵Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 1.

³⁶Revisionist histories which contend the application of the label of “decay” to the eighteenth century hold the prospect of evaluating the nature and impact of campaigns such as that of Nadir Shah differently. One such instance is Jos Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710-1780* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁷Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 7. For a study on Tennyson’s perspective about the Orient, see David G. Riede, “Tennyson’s Poetics of Melancholy and the Imperial Imagination,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 40,

How, then, is the sympathetic wave of the 1730s and 1740s to be understood? Several trains of thought are worthy of consideration. At one level, as much as the Saidian view of the late eighteenth century as marking the rise of institutionalised Orientalism helps us explain the later vilification of Nadir Shah, it also enables us to understand the earlier benign view of the conqueror. As works authored in the mid eighteenth century, they were products of a phase in which European views of Asia were still fluid and mutable unlike the period to follow. At another level, once again having recourse to Said, “sympathetic identification” in the history of literary representations of the Orient was not entirely new.³⁸ In his words, “an eighteenth-century mind could breach the doctrinal walls erected between the West and Islam and see hidden elements of kinship between himself and the Orient.”³⁹ Stepping back from the orbit of Saidian Orientalism, two other biographical factors should be considered. The first is a perspective repeatedly aired in contemporary accounts which modern day scholars also endorse – that Nadir Shah shortly before his demise “lapsed into obsessive avarice, rage, and cruelty” thereby becoming a leader to be detested.⁴⁰ While this understanding helps explain the subsequent demonization of Nadir Shah, it remains to be probed whether the ailment of the Persian contributed to the image or whether it was the image which subsequently gave rise to such a characterization. Secondly, the death of monarchs is known to lead to profound changes in their portrayal.⁴¹ Jurgen Osterhammel in his study on Nadir Shah identifies the demise of the conqueror as the fault line that separated the genial portrayals of Nadir from the severe ones that followed.⁴² To a discerning eye, this inference would imply that the consequences of Nadir Shah’s death had a bearing on how he was later perceived. Despite the remarkable deeds of his career where he locked horns with three noted empires in the day, the Ottoman, the Mughal and the Russian, Nadir Shah had failed to institute a dynasty or consolidate his conquests and instead left Persia in the same weakened state in which he

4 (2000), 670-71. It is also important to note that simultaneous to the demise of Nadir’s image of a man of virtue, was the exclusion of Nadir Shah from the annals of history. Michael Axworthy dates Nadir’s descent to anonymity to the Victorian era. Michael Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, From Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), xvi.

³⁸Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 118.

³⁹Ibid; Endorsing the peculiarity of the epoch for the manner in which it regarded the Orient, Rousseau and Porter suggest that “the exotic provided a potent focus for vicarious identity.” G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 13. Other Oriental personages who were rehabilitated in the period included Tamerlane. See John Richardson, “Nicholas Rowe’s Tamerlane and the Martial Ideal,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 69, 2 (2008), 286.

⁴⁰See Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 257; Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, From Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant*, xv (the quotation).

⁴¹For the illustration of a similar trend in the characterization of the rulers of Mysore in Southern India, Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan, see Amal Chatterjee, *Representations of India 1740- 1840: The Creation of India in the Colonial Imagination* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1998), 201.

⁴²Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens : Europa und die Asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 1998), 218-28. This section was translated for me by Jos Gommans.

found it. The admiration for Nadir Shah hence, had thrived on the contemporariness of his valour and victories. So long as Nadir continued on his conquests unhindered, he was gazed at with a star-struck eye. With his death however, the transience of his exploits became evident, his charm wore off, and he yielded to the stifling embrace of Oriental Despotism.

Van Steenwyk, Dryden, and their Sophies

If Nadir's waltz with virtue in *Thamas Koelikan* is to be discerned, a comparison of the play with a kin on the other side of the English Channel becomes irresistible. Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* bears an uncanny resemblance to an English play, John Dryden's *Aurang-Zebe* (1675), written seven decades earlier.⁴³ The parallels between the two are striking. Both plays had Oriental monarchs for protagonists who were contemporaries of their respective playwrights. Both were also surprisingly positive appraisals of rulers who were otherwise condemned for their cruelty and vice. In a compelling study of Dryden's play *Aureng-Zebe*, Balachandra Rajan demonstrates Dryden's complicity in what he calls "the Orient's infernalization."⁴⁴ This, he argues, is because Dryden had overstepped his limits as far as his characterization of Aurangzeb was concerned. In a depiction that was a far cry from how contemporaries perceived the Mughal, he cast Aurangzeb as the virtuous monarch.⁴⁵ In the process, Dryden is said to have "define[d] India as the site of the utterly other" and fulfilled the self-serving intent of "construct[ing] examples for England."⁴⁶ In the light of extraordinary similarities, *Thamas Koelikan* may be subjected to a similar study.⁴⁷ Van Steenwyk maintains a wilful silence about the massacre that Nadir undertook in Delhi and instead presented his protagonist as someone who relinquished war for peace. The playwright similarly submerges the tales of loot and plunder that Nadir perpetrated in the Mughal capital and presents Nadir as someone who took from Delhi, what was rightfully his.⁴⁸ Also paradoxical is the case of Milko, who in Van Steenwyk's play is the niece of the Mughal ruler, Mahomet. Milko, in reality, was the unfortunate wife of Muhammad, who in order to

⁴³John Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe* is an English restoration drama written in 1675 based on the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb who ruled Mughal empire between 1658 and 1707.

⁴⁴The work referred to in the context is Rajan's illuminating chapter titled Balachandra Rajan, "Appropriating India: Dryden's Great Mughal," in *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macauley* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999), 67-77, here 67.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 8, 68.

⁴⁷This section builds on a number of leads provided by Brouwer in his pithy epilogue to the play in the discrepancies that feature in Van Steenwyk's work.

⁴⁸To quote Voltaire: "He carried away more treasures from Deli, than the Spaniards took at the conquest of Mexico." Voltaire, *The General History and State of Europe*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Printed by Sands etc, 1758), 384. Also see Iqtedar Alam Khan, "The Middle Classes in the Mughal Empire," *Social Scientist* 5, 1 (1976), 33.

save her honour took her own life before Nadir's forces had reached the gates of Delhi.⁴⁹ Van Steenwyk's Milko ironically is the reason why India is spared. Enamoured by her loyalty to her kingdom, Nadir Shah not only renounces his plans of conquest but also unites princess Milko with his own son in matrimony.⁵⁰

Also significant is that although Nadir's siege of Lahore in January 1739 forms the backdrop of Van Steenwyk's drama, the thematic props to which he resorts in weaving his tale are borrowed from a later event, Nadir's entry into Delhi in March 1739. The marriage of Nadir's son to a Mughal princess, the rumour of Nadir Shah's death, and the suicide of the queen (which the play refers to in passing) were all episodes which took place within the context of Nadir's expedition to Delhi.⁵¹ Curiously, when Van Steenwyk writes about the siege of Lahore liberally borrowing from Nadir's expedition to Delhi, he glosses over the bloodbath and massacre that ensued. He justifies the terror unleashed by the Persian conqueror as righteous reprisal, and the gore that accompanied it is stifled. The siege of Lahore that features in Van Steenwyk's work is hence in actuality; the fangless and tamer tale of Delhi with its more sinister aspects washed and ironed out. So, when Rajan states that Dryden's *Aurang-Zebe* "ignore[s] the events in India that the text overwrites and comprehensively reverses," Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* can be said to be guilty of precisely the same charges.⁵²

Rajan involves himself in yet another exercise, which is the comparative study of Dryden's literary work and its source. He reveals that Dryden's representation of the historical figure Aurangzeb departs radically from that depicted in its source, Francois Bernier's travel account titled *The History of the Great Revolutions of the Empire of the Great Mogol*. This complete denial of its source by the drama *Aurang-Zebe* fortifies Rajan's claim that "Dryden pillage[d] Indian history."⁵³ If one imposes a similar study on *Thamas Koelikan*, one encounters Van Steenwyk's forthright reference to the source of his work. Although the author omits mention of its title, it is likely that the work in question is a Dutch account, *Verhaal wegens den inval* published in the year that Van Steenwyk attributes to the

⁴⁹A *Genuine History of Nadir-Cha, present Shah or Emperor of Persia formerly call'd Thamas Kouli-Kan.*, (London: Printed for J. Watts, 1741), 37. Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 197.

⁵⁰Contemporary texts no doubt chronicle the marriage of Nadir's son, Nasr Allah to a Mughal princess. She nevertheless remains anonymous in these accounts. *A Genuine History of Nadir-Cha*, 44; Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 197.

⁵¹While many sub-plots were drawn from the events which originally took place in Delhi, others episodes as Brouwer notes took place in Karnal. Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 197.

⁵²Rajan, "Appropriating India," 70.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 76.

publication of his source – 1740.⁵⁴ The *Verhaal* was subsequently translated into English the following year as *A Genuine History of Nadir-Cha*.⁵⁵ As the source to Van Steenwyk's play, the *Verhaal* is therefore the key to the character sketches of the two Asian potentates in *Thamas Koelikan*.

Passage to (Mughal) India: Information Transfer and its Resultant Discourses

The *Verhaal* no doubt contributes to the theme of representation. But it also sheds light on the intricate process of information transfer whereby political events in Asia shortly afterwards became published news in Europe. This is because the *Verhaal* was originally compiled in the Dutch factory in Hoogly (Bengal) on the orders of Jan Albert Sichterman, director of the Dutch possessions in Bengal from 1734 to 1744.⁵⁶ This manuscript was later dispatched in 1739 as a part of the VOC documentation from the Dutch factory in Bengal to the High Government in Batavia and subsequently to Amsterdam where it was published in 1740 as the *Verhaal*.⁵⁷ The other East India connection is that the patron of Van Steenwyk's play

⁵⁴*Verhaal wegens den inval van den Persiaanschen Schach Nadir anders Thamas Gouli Gan in het Mogolsche Ryk, geduurende de jaaren 1738 en 1739* (Amsterdam: Harmanus Uytwerf, 1740). The title translates as "An Account of the Invasion of the Mughal Kingdom by the Persian Shah Nadir otherwise known as Thamas Gouli Gan in the years 1738 and 1739," and the work will henceforth be referred to as the *Verhaal*. I thank Jos Gommans for drawing my attention to this work. Van Steenwyk mentions in his foreword that he employs two works to write his play, the influences of both of which, he claims are evident in his work. He however claims that his reliance on the second source was marginal. Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 104. My understanding of the *Verhaal* as the source to the play contradicts Brouwer's reading of *The History of Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi of Persia* (1740) as the source to the play. My positing the *Verhaal* as the source to Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* is justified on the grounds that the *Verhaal* offers the possibility of reconstructing the sources it relied on to the minutest detail indicating that the *Verhaal* was an "original" account and not a derivative of other works circulating in Europe in the period. The most telling detail which establishes beyond doubt that the *Verhaal* was the source to Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* is the *Verhaal*'s reference to Milko (as the wife of Muhammad Shah but reference to the name nevertheless which Van Steenwyk borrows), a feature absent in the other texts published in 1740, the year that Van Steenwyk ascribes the publication of his source to. *Verhaal*, 95; NA, VOC 2455, fol. 263r. The only other works in the period which carry the name Milko were the English translation of the *Verhaal* titled *A Genuine History of Nadir-Cha, Present Shah or Emperor of Persia formerly call'd Thamas Kouli-Kan* (1741) and *The History of Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi of Persia* (1740) attributed to De Claustre. One suspects that this volume of the *Sophi of Persia* which Brouwer identifies as the source to the play borrowed substantially from the *Verhaal*. Not only does it make reference to Muhammad Shah's wife Milko (also mentioned by Brouwer), but it also incorporates a Persian letter sent by Nadir Shah to the Governor Hattembeecq (Hatim Beg) which the account explicitly mentions was received in Bengal. I base these inferences on my consultation of the Italian translation of the work. André de Claustre, *Istoria di Thamas-Kouli-Kan, Sofi di Persia. Tradotta dal Francese, vol. 2* (Londra, 1741), 85, 5. This second volume, as the title page of the account shows, was published in 1741; For the said letter sent from Nadir Shah to Hatim Beg in the *Verhaal*, see pp. 13-21.

⁵⁵*A Genuine History of Nadir-Cha*.

⁵⁶See NA, VOC 8787, Bengalen, pp. 271-350. While the title of the *Verhaal* does not reveal Sichterman's role in its compilation, the title-page of the 1741 English translation of the work, *A Genuine History of Nadir-Cha* does so.

⁵⁷Two copies of the draft version of the *Verhaal* are NA, VOC 2455, Bengalen 2 fls. 236-288 and VOC 8787, Bengalen, pp. 271-350 titled "A treatise concerning the invasion of the Mughal Kingdom by the Persian King Nadir Shah in the years 1738 and 1739, his conduct in the capital Delhi and his departure to Persia extracted from successively received letters etc written in the Persian language on the orders of the Director of Bengal, Jan

Johannes Abeleven was a servant of the VOC, stationed at Surat and incidentally also at Bengal.⁵⁸ His brother, Arnoldus Abeleven after initiating his career with the VOC in Asia concluded service as one of the Gentlemen Seventeen – a position that he held for eighteen years and one can only presume that this had an impact on the speed with which the manuscript of the *Verhaal* reached the printing press.⁵⁹

The *Verhaal* is a fairly succinct account. It commences with a comprehensive sketch of Nadir's rise to power followed by an extensive engagement with his invasion of Mughal territory. The work concludes with Nadir's sojourn in the Mughal capital and his journey back to Isfahan. The narrative of the *Verhaal* is interspersed with translations of letters originally in the Persian language. Some of these letters also feature in the appendix of the work. A significant number of these letters are *Raqams*, or edicts, issued by Nadir Shah to his elder son Rida-kuli Mirza, who was entrusted with the viceroyalty of Persia in Nadir's absence, as well as to other Persian governors and his subjects informing them of his victories on Mughal soil. Other translations include reconstructions of the correspondence between Nadir and Muhammad, and excerpts from a diary kept in Isfahan. Quite similar to how other contemporary European works imagined Nadir Shah and distinct from how Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* perceived the ruler, the Persian on the *Verhaal*'s palate is not entirely the epitome of virtue. The *Verhaal* instead invites its readers to view Nadir Shah as a particularly complex individual. Evidently in awe of Nadir Shah's achievements, the author details numerous instances of his benevolence such as his magnanimity in treating his vanquished adversary with the respect due to a person of his status. Yet, the account refuses to eulogise its protagonist and does not shrink from enumerating tales of the cruelty that Nadir perpetrated in Delhi. The morbidity of Nadir's actions is captured in the description the *Verhaal* provides of the manner in which the Persian reacted to the large-scale killings in the capital. The account observes that when the Persian soldiers were about their work slaying the residents of Delhi, Nadir Shah was not agitated and ruffled in the least.⁶⁰ He bore the countenance of a spectator watching a pantomime. The distinct shades of grey evident in the depiction of Nadir Shah are

Albert Sichterman." Because the manuscript of the *Verhaal* is a near replica of the printed *Verhaal*, all references and citations to the work henceforth are in keeping with the printed version of the account, unless mentioned otherwise. When citing the *Verhaal*, mention shall also be made of the relevant pages in the manuscript where the citation can be found.

⁵⁸Johannes Abeleven's career with VOC lasted for nearly two decades between 1711 and 1729 and he principally served in Company settlements in the Indian sub-continent. Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 103.

⁵⁹Frank Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azië in de 18e eeuw : meer in het bijzonder in de vestiging Bengalen* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto/Repro-Holland, 2005), 251; Johan E. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam: 1578-1795, vol. 2* (Amsterdam: Israel, 1963), 1025; Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 197.

⁶⁰*Verhaal*, 105-06, NA, VOC 2455, fol. 267r.

conspicuously absent in the account's sketch of the Mughal ruler. Muhammad Shah is not only shown to have been irresolute, untrustworthy, and a slave to the opinions of all and sundry, but the *Verhaal* is also aware that the image of the vanquished monarch cannot be complete without depicting the markings of an Oriental Despot. Muhammad Shah is thus credited with a standard Eastern upbringing, in the midst of the harem, which quite naturally told on the qualities he later came to possess. He was fainthearted, effeminate and his mannerisms were "living examples of the braggery of Eastern rulers and the conceit of the Mughal emperors."⁶¹ Quite predictably, his bloated pride receives a beating with Nadir Shah's invasion leaving him a shaken if not wiser ruler. With the Mughal ruler grovelling in such pitiable traits, the disdain with which the *Verhaal* sees the emperor is all too obvious.

The *Verhaal* is unsettling for several reasons. Its presumed insight into the character traits of the two monarchs and proximity in time to the episode it narrates raises questions about the informants and sources that inform the original manuscript and the published work. The title page of the *Verhaal* indicates that the account was "translated and compiled from Persian letters" allocating to the letters which accompany the work, a primal role in the construction of its narrative.⁶² Yet a close reading of these letters suggests otherwise. This correspondence functions only as a prop for the *Verhaal*; it devotes little space to the characterization of the two rulers and its contribution to the narrative is marginal. The primary source for the *Verhaal* is instead to be found in the archives of the VOC in a stream of correspondence that the Dutch factory in Hoogly received between October 1738 and September 1739, which was roughly the period of the invasion.⁶³ The character of this set of letters differs considerably from the Persian letters appended to the *Verhaal*. The latter are predominantly Persian newsletters issued to Persian governors and the Persian public and

⁶¹Ibid., 39; NA, VOC 2455, fol. 245v.

⁶²"...vertaalt en opgesteld uit Persiaansche brieven..." *Verhaal*, frontpage.

⁶³ Endorsing the above inference is NA, VOC 2455, "Letter dated 17 November 1739 from Bengal addressed to the Gentlemen Seventeen in the United Provinces," fols. 3v-4r. It reads, "We take the liberty of referring to the appended copies of the said letters, which were dispatched on February 10th, 20th....this year which together comprise a complete description of all that has occurred in this kingdom since 30th October last year. Since we last had the opportunity of writing to your Honor, a remarkable invasion has taken place where the Persian King Thamas Coulijchan or Nadir Cha (as he now calls himself) has with a handful of soldiers defeated the Mughal army which was unparalleled in numbers. The Mughal was forced to cede his entire kingdom and all he possessed. Such is mentioned in the accompanying account which has been [compiled] from successive letters from Delhi which have been received here and has for a large part, been confirmed by the *Regams* (Raqams) received from Gamron by boat which have duly been incorporated in the appendix." This description is however misleading on one account. Its reference to Delhi as the source of the correspondence and Persian as the language of correspondence is not to be taken at face value. As later discussions should demonstrate, the letters originated from various parts of the Mughal empire and it is also unlikely that all the correspondence that Hoogly received was in the Persian language (as mentioned in the front-page of the *Verhaal*), primarily because they were also in receipt of letters authored by Europeans. This second charge however is a speculation.

relayed to Hoogly from the Dutch factory in Gamron (Bandar Abbas).⁶⁴ Only a few of these letters make an appearance in the Company documentation in Hoogly outside the *Verhaal*.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the letters that constitute a source for the *Verhaal* were written by miscellaneous authors residing in various parts of the Mughal Empire in Persian, the language of the Mughal elite in the period. The translations of these letters were subsequently incorporated in the Company archives as letters and papers that Batavia received from Bengal.⁶⁶ The second source for the *Verhaal* is the Falck manuscript, which comprises a lengthy correspondence dispatched to the Dutch factory in Patna. This manuscript never made its way into the official archives of the VOC and features instead in the private papers of a VOC servant in Bengal, Otto Willem Falck.⁶⁷

The fact that the *Verhaal* written in the Dutch factory in Bengal drew from twenty-four letters in all, all of which pertained to the invasion and were received by the VOC in the course of a year alone, indicates the graveness with which the Dutch in Bengal viewed Nadir Shah's expedition. The Dutch indeed had every reason to be anxious. In the least, the invasion meant the disruption of trade routes rendering it unsafe for travelling traders with armies fanning the countryside and the Company possessions such as Patna, which were vulnerable to attack, would need additional defences.⁶⁸ Worse still, like the implications the Manchu conquest had for China, Nadir's invasion could result in a change of guard in Delhi with the overthrow of the existing Mughal dynasty making additional demands on the Company if they sought to stay afloat. New alliances would have to be fostered, existing privileges renewed and expensive embassies organised to the court bearing even more valuable gifts. If under

⁶⁴ See previous footnote.

⁶⁵ See NA, VOC 2427, follows page 549 but not assigned a number; NA, VOC 2399, fols. 214-220.

⁶⁶ Most of these letters despite providing a wealth of information have neither been studied nor employed by historians. The only study which incorporates some letters (two to be precise) of this collection as correspondence also received in the Dutch factory in Surat is Willem Floor, "New Facts on Nadir Shah's Campaign in India," in *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in honour of Iraj Afshar*, ed. Kambiz Eslami (Princeton: Zagros, 1998).

⁶⁷ O.W. Falck's (1738-1814) career is a classic example of rising from positions of modest standing within the Company apparatus to finally rise to the apex. Having set sail to Asia in 1756, he held very forgettable posts in the Company's settlements in Bengal. He ended his association with the enterprise as one of the Bewindhebbers of the Company. Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* 255; Jos Gommans, Lennart Bes, and Gijs Kruijtzter, *Dutch Sources on South Asia c. 1600 – 1825: Bibliography and Archival Guide to the National Archives at The Hague* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 137; The Falck manuscript comprises of two sheaves, of which the second constitutes the relevant source in the context. The first is a five page letter titled *Brieff geschreven door een geheimschrijver van zekere ambassadeur tot Constantinopelen betreffende Thamas Coulichan*. The prospect of this letter as having constituted a source is likely but because it provides a sketch of Nadir Shah's early life, it could have informed no more than the first three pages of the *Verhaal*. See NA, Archives of O.W. Falck. 2.21.006.48, Inv. No.5.

⁶⁸ The Company took active steps to beef up security in Patna in the period. NA, VOC 8785, "Report from Bengal dated 30 October, 1738," p. 415. The British and French were confronted with similar concerns regarding the security of their factories at Patna in the period. Sukumar Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal: From 1704 to 1740*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Graphic Art Press, 1969), 77.

normal circumstances, correspondence was valued, it could by no means be under-estimated in the event of war. The need for information therefore assumed new dimensions with Hoogly tapping all possible channels in the quest for news. In view of the twenty-four letters that Hoogly had received, periodically briefing them on the advances of Nadir and the counter-activities of the Mughals, their efforts had met with moderate success.

In the invasion correspondence received by the Company, a crucial source was Sampatram, whose letters constituted a quarter of this corpus of information. As a resident of Shahjahanabad (Delhi), Sampatram had succeeded his brother Dakhniram as the Company's correspondent in the capital.⁶⁹ Not only did his letters carry crucial information about the invasion, but they also bore intimate details of the audiences granted at the court, the faujdaris (military offices) awarded, and other intricate details of Mughal court politics. In imparting such confidential news, Sampatram persistently pleaded that Hoogly exercise the utmost caution in either circulating or using the information he had sent.⁷⁰ Most of his letters were addressed to the Merchant and Chief of the VOC factory in Patna, Bartholomeus Aukema, who in turn dispatched the correspondence to Hoogly in Bengal. Aukema himself sent periodic updates that the factory in Patna had received from the capital to Hoogly, ensuring that an alternative channel of information procurement was well in place.⁷¹ Company servants and official correspondents aside, the VOC at Hoogly also had recourse to the system of intelligence services characteristic of eighteenth-century India. According to C.A. Bayly, "each significant ruler maintained news-writers at the courts of other big players, and expected to receive their emissaries."⁷² Participating in this world of information procurement was another correspondent, Raijjoegel Kiswor (Raja Jugal Kishor) the vakil or representative of the imperial viceroy of Bengal at the Mughal court.⁷³ Although his letters were addressed

⁶⁹The *Generale Missiven* dated 24 October, 1736 mentions of the death of Dakhniram and marks the first reference to Sampatram, which gives us a rough idea of when Sampatram began his tenure as correspondent with the Company. Abraham Patras VI. 24 October 1736. Jurrien van Goor, ed., *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*. vol. 9: 1729-1737 ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1988), 773. The nature of the relationship between Dakhniram and Sampatram remains ambiguous. When Sampatram identifies himself as the "brother" of Dakhniram in his correspondence, the Company records refer to him interchangeably as "brother" and "nephew" of the aforementioned. See NA, VOC 8786, Bengalen, p. 778; NA, VOC 2469, Bengalen 2, p. 347. For mention of these scribes, see Dasgupta, "Trade and Politics in 18th century India," 47.

⁷⁰NA, VOC 2469, "Persian Missive written by Sampatram on 19 July, 1739," Bengalen 2, pp. 350-351.

⁷¹In the said period, Aukema authored two of the many letters dispatched to Sichterman, NA, VOC 8786, pp. 121-127 and NA, VOC 8786, Bengalen, pp. 765-771.

⁷²Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32.

⁷³The Vakil, who Michael Fisher describes as "entrusted representative or agent," wrote "reports which included advice and counsel, as well as prediction and rumour." Michael H. Fisher, "The Office of Akhbār Nawīs: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, 1 (1993), 50. Raja Jugal Kishor was a seasoned diplomat. He had served three successive viceroys of Bengal. Ishrat Haque, *Glimpses of Mughal*

to his master, Shuja Khan (Shuja-ud-Din Khan), they invariably fell into Dutch hands, though precisely how remains a subject of speculation.⁷⁴ While the interception of the letters by the VOC seems a distant likelihood, more convincing is the possibility that the recipients of such letters willingly shared or traded information with the Company. Mohammad Mohassen writing from Lahore for instance, addressed his letter to Mohammad Semman who, Company records described as “residing in the [Dutch] factory in Patna,” and unmistakably therefore in the services of the Company.⁷⁵ If the Company was not necessarily the recipient of the letters in some cases, in others instances they were not the only recipients. Joseph Devolton, a Frenchman who sent the Company two letters on the events in Delhi in late 1738 seems to have catered to the information needs of the French East India Company as well in the same period.⁷⁶ This Frenchman who offered his services at the Mughal court as physician had considerable access to inside information also appears to have authored the second source to the *Verhaal*, the so-called Falck manuscript.⁷⁷ Another European who features as a correspondent in the Company annals is an Italian named Toretti who resided in Patna but about whom little else is known.⁷⁸ The Company’s stack of letters also came to include newsletters from Delhi, which may have been either official newsletters or private ones.⁷⁹

Writing in times of war and political uncertainty occasioned foreboding and prayers for the future. This inadvertently caused the letter-writers to speculate about the qualities of the Mughal emperor, and the invader. Amidst such deliberations, a detectible difference enters the frame. The *Verhaal*’s perspective on events displayed the distinct stamp of the Company’s own, and by the same token differed starkly from that revealed in a majority of the letters. While the stories they told were similar, the accompanying baggage of inferences made and estimations drawn differed, indicating the presence of two distinct discourses at work: the Mughal discourse inherent in the letters authored by the correspondents, native to the Mughal

Society and Culture: A Study based on Urdu Literature in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co, 1992), 32.

⁷⁴ Shuja-ud-Din Khan was the Subahdar or Viceroy of Bengal from September 1727 to March 1739.

⁷⁵ NA, VOC 8786, “Letter from Muhammad Muazzamin in Lahore to Muhammad Zaman residing in the Factory at Patna written in the 21st year of the king’s [Mohammed Shah’s] reign,” pp.112-117.

⁷⁶ Subrahmanyam, “Un Grand Dérangement: Dreaming an Indo-Persian Empire in South Asia, 1740-1800,” 337-78. Also see Laurence Lockhart and De Voulton, “De Voulton’s Noticia,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 4, 2 (1926), 223-45. For the letters sent by Devolton available in the Company records, See NA, VOC 8786, pp. 111-112.

⁷⁷ NA, O.W. Falck 5. Despite its vague titling as “the letter sent by a certain Frenchman to the factory at Patna,” the letter may for indubitable reasons be attributed to Devolton, the most evident being the translations from a manuscript *Verdadeira e Exacta Noticia* in the Portuguese language by Lockhart in his article “De Voulton’s Noticia” which is attributed to Joseph Devolton. The manuscript employed by Lockhart appears to contain the same information as the correspondence in question. Lockhart and De Voulton, “De Voulton’s Noticia,” 229-41.

⁷⁸ NA, VOC 2427, fols. 301r- 302v.

⁷⁹ See NA, VOC 2469, pp. 536-538; NA, VOC 8787, pp. 896-904; NA, VOC 8786, pp. 117-121. Because the authorship of these letters remains ambiguous, I desist from including them in my discussions.

empire, whose letters came into Dutch possession, and the Company discourse which featured in the annals of the Company written in Hoogly, ranging from the minutes of the Bengal Council to the *Memorie* of the retiring Director of the VOC possessions in Bengal, which subsequently percolate in the *Verhaal*.

The Mughal Discourse

When the Mughal correspondents pour out their concerns about the invasion, their letters are redolent with anxiety and apprehension. Aware of the ambiguity of circumstances that struck the empire and the uncertainty of future events, their letters teem with prayers which centred on their ruler, Muhammad Shah. A despondent spectator to a series of Mughal reversals, Raja Jugal Kishor jubilantly announced to his patron on 11 February 1739 that “his majesty has emerged victorious for the first time and if God so decrees, the enemy shall soon be defeated.”⁸⁰ Mellekhebbiebolla exuded similar optimism when he hoped that strength of the Mughal army would reflect favourably on the outcome of battle.⁸¹ Wishing the emperor well was also Muhammad Muazzam who offered a quick prayer for Muhammad Shah before reflecting on the price rise and inflation which had rocked Lahore during the invasion.⁸² While such imprecations mark these letters off as evident bearers of goodwill, they shy away from offering a critique of empire. They do not bemoan the circumstances that gripped the homeland, save for a single instance: the letter of Sampatram to the Company shortly after the departure of Nadir Shah from Shahjahanabad. He complained that “the invasion was caused only due to the disunity of the nobles, and otherwise,” he reasoned, “who would dare contest the might of Hindostaan [India]”. He added that “it is only through guile and deceit that the thunderstorm that destroyed so many souls had approached the city.”⁸³ Surprisingly, Sampatram chose to point an accusatory finger at the nobles alone for the way things stood. The emperor on the other hand not only escapes unscathed but he is perceived as a hapless victim amidst the turmoil at court. Mohammed Shah therefore assumes a curious place in the native discourse. In comparison to the *Verhaal*, which holds the Mughal responsible for inviting the invasion upon the empire, the Mughal correspondents thought differently.

⁸⁰NA, VOC 2469, “Missive from Rai Jugal Kishor to Shuja-ud-Din Khan received in Murshidabad on 15 March 1739,” pp. 551-552.

⁸¹NA, VOC 2469, “Letter from Malik Habib Allah from Shahjahanabad to the Qadi of Hoogly written on 11 February (1739) in the 21st year of the King’s reign and received in Bengal on 15 March (1739),” pp. 544-545.

⁸² “Letter from Muhammad Muazzam,” p. 116.

⁸³NA, VOC 2469, “Letter from Sampatram to Bartholomeus Aukema, Merchant at Patna dated 31 July, 1739,” Bengalen 2, pp. 351-52.

Evidently indulgent of the emperor, they invoked the ruler only in their prayers and levied not an iota of criticism against him.⁸⁴

One wonders how such a perspective is to be explained. It is unlikely that the native correspondence is indicative of widespread respect and awe of the emperor among his Mughal subjects. Other contemporary Mughal historians chronicling the invasion or writing about Muhammad Shah did not hesitate to voice their contempt for the emperor. The *Seir Mutaqherin*, written in the last decades of the eighteenth century, lamented the virtual inefficacy of Muhammad Shah who, it noted, “thought only of passing his time in pleasures and delices.”⁸⁵ Towing a similar line of thought was Muhammad Shah’s contemporary Anand Ram Mukhlis, who captured the troubled years of 1638-39 in writing. Mukhlis, as Ernest Tucker reveals held Nadir Shah in greater esteem than he did his own monarch.⁸⁶ Also valid is the speculation that the “positive” view of the emperor stemmed from fact that the authors of this “war time correspondence” where the correspondents feared that their letters might be intercepted and read, resulting in unhappy consequences for their authors if their views were deemed unsupportive of the regime. The plausibility of this position is also suspect. Jittery though Sampatram might have been that the news he sold the Company might fall into wrong hands, he did indeed trade in highly sensitive information. It is therefore unlikely that he was reluctant to criticize the emperor to the Company. Moreover, Sampatram’s own take on the invasion had a few supporters among contemporary Mughal literati. The *Iqbalnama* compiled in the same period attributed the misfortunes that had befallen the country to the ominous alignment of the planets on the eve of the invasion.⁸⁷ Because the devastation was divinely ordained, the critique of Muhammad Shah in the work amounted to no more than a minor rebuke. In effect, the perceptions contained in the Mughal correspondence arguably reflected the actual views of its authors and were not necessarily determined by the precarious

⁸⁴One wonders whether such a disposition also suggests that these native correspondents were Mughal loyalists. While J.F. Richards discerns such a pattern among “professional administrators” in the Mughal Empire, one reckons that it was a phenomenon more widespread. J.F. Richards, “Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara D. Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 256.

⁸⁵Attributed to Syed Gholam Hossein Khan, *Seir mutaqherin* (1780) details the eighteenth-century history of the Mughal Empire. Syed Ghulam Hossein Khan, *A Translation of the Seir mutaqherin : or, View of Modern Times, being an history of India, from the year 1118 to year 1194 (this year answers to the Christian year 1781-82) of the Hedjrah*, trans. Nota-Manus (Lahore: Sheikh Mubarak Ali, 1975), 245.

⁸⁶Ernest Tucker, “1739: History, Self, and Other in Afsharid Iran and Mughal India,” *Iranian Studies* 31, 2 (1998), 208. For more on Mukhlis, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Discovering the Familiar: Notes on the Travel-Account of Anand Ram Mukhlis, 1745,” *South Asia Research* 16 (1996), 141.

⁸⁷Syed H. Askari, *Iqbalnama : By an Anonymous Contemporary Writer* (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1983), 177, 184. The *Iqbalnama* chronicles the history of the Mughal Empire in the first half of the eighteenth century. An anonymous compilation, it derives from two predominant works: Sheodas’s *Shahnama Munawwar Kalam* and Khushhalchand’s *Nadiru-uz- Zumani*. See introduction to Askari’s *Iqbalnama*.

conditions of their dispatch and reception. Quite in contrast to their engagement with the Mughal ruler, one is met with an extraordinary silence when examining the native correspondence for their opinions of the Persian ruler Nadir Shah. While they refer to the advance of the Persian forces and the plunder and chaos that accompanied it, Nadir is all but ignored. This suggests that these correspondents sought only to deliberate on those aspects of the invasion that related to their own ruler, rather than its perpetrator.

In sum, the discourse which featured in the Mughal correspondence adopted a vision that was indulgent of Muhammad Shah. Their engagement with their emperor was counterpoised by their silence regarding Nadir Shah. The Company however, as recipients of this Mughal correspondence and the discourse it contained, had a different take on both the emperor and the Persian.

The Company Discourse of the Dutch Factory in Hoogly (Bengal)

On 25 March, 1744, the Director of the Dutch possessions in Bengal, Jan Albert Sichterman was discharged from Company service.⁸⁸ Before he sailed to the fatherland, he left behind, a *Memorie* to his successor, as was customary. This report outlined the dismal conditions of Dutch trade in Bengal and conceded that it was now in a far worse state than what it had been when he had inherited the mantle of Director ten years before.

By what means can one administer a remedy to the decay [in trade] when its causes are beyond our reach and control.... We can only pray that the Almighty spares us the pain he has inflicted on us in the past years.... However, hope for this is scant, as long as the reins of governance remains in the hands of the present King of Delhi. His weakness and incapacity is added to by the disunity of his nobles and viceroys, who fight one another for supremacy....One witnesses the pitiable state of war, home and abroad, which despite affecting all of his lands, has distressed Bengal more.⁸⁹

The stance of the Dutch factory at Hoogly with regard to the Mughal ruler could not have been better summarised. Sichterman was convinced that Muhammad Shah had to take a significant share of the blame for the Company's fall in profits in Bengal. So long as the Mughal remained the scapegoat of the Dutchman's musings, his image in the Company

⁸⁸J.A. Feith, *De Bengaalse Sichterman* (Groningen: B.v.d. Kamp, 1914), 5; Wiet Kühne-van Diggelen, *Jan Albert Sichterman: VOC-dienaar en 'koning' van Groningen* (Groningen: REGIO-PROject, 1995), 75.

⁸⁹NA, VOC 8795, "Memorie submitted by Sichterman in 1744," pp. 953-955.

reports during the invasion years could hardly fare better. The result was a rhetoric drastically different from the summations of the Mughal correspondents. Reports of the Council of Hoogly to the Gentlemen Seventeen and their correspondence with the Dutch factory at Patna all showed the Mughal ruler in poor light. A fairly typical example is a letter dispatched by Hoogly to the Counsel of the Amsterdam Chamber in February 1739 informing him of the political climate in the Mughal Empire: “Because of the *slack* [emphasis added] rule of the present Mogol [Mughal], the Merhettijs [Marathas] or the Southern rebels have had the audacity to roam the hinterland.”⁹⁰ The same passage proceeded to record yet another political development: “Several ruinous and unfavourable principles have crept in due to the *negligent* [emphasis added] rule of the king.”⁹¹ This letter exemplified a tendency revealed in almost all the Company reports. They referred to Muhammad Shah as cowardly (*lafhartige*), and the choice of words consistently used to describe conditions at court and the empire such as debauchery (*ongebondenheden*) and disarray (*wanordres*) consolidated their image of the emperor as a failed statesman.⁹² In view of the unflattering characterization of Muhammad Shah in the annals of the Company in Hoogly, it is not hard to see where the *Verhaal* (also a product of the Company establishment at Hoogly) in its treatment of the Mughal got its vision of rampant despotism.

The image that Muhammad Shah earned for himself in the Company records was not solely warranted by his actions or inaction during the critical years of 1738 and 1739. It was the result of the Company’s two-decade-long engagement with Muhammad Shah. The emperor was first subject to the Company gaze in 1721 when all opposition was uprooted and his claim to kingship stood uncontested.⁹³ The VOC was optimistic about the consequences of his enthronement for the empire but their enthusiasm was short-lived and as early as 1722, the *Generale Missiven* expressed serious doubts about Muhammad Shah’s capabilities as a ruler.⁹⁴ By the time of the invasion, the Company was armed with an arsenal of images with which the Mughal was to be handled. They showed additional flair of incorporating fresh news of the emperor into their existing view. One such piece of information that underwent modification was a description that featured in the letter of Malik Habib Allah. “The king having sensed this [Nadir’s decision to advance into Mughal territory] has departed, with his

⁹⁰ NA, VOC 2427, “Letter from Sichterman to Counsel Westerveen dated February 1739,” fol. 9v.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 9v.

⁹² NA, VOC 2455, fol. 4r–5r.

⁹³ Zwaardcroon, Castelij, De Haan, Timmerman, Faes etc, IX, 15 January 1721. W.Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneur Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. 7: 1713-1725 (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 529.

⁹⁴ Zwaardcroon, Castelij, De Haan, Faes, Huuysman etc, XIV, 20 January 1722, *Ibid.*, 591; NA, VOC 1951, fols. 1372r-v.

son on the 18th of *Shawwal* or the 10th of January to Lahoor [Lahore]. The king has instituted an army of 10,000 cavalry under the command of his son and has gifted him a palanquin, a turban laced with precious stones and a carriage bedecked with pearls.”⁹⁵ The episode later incorporated in the *Verhaal* was retold as follows:

When all of this [the fall of Lahore] was brought to the notice of Muhammad Shah, it opened his eyes. He began to consider the threat with greater gravity realising that he had to confront a dangerous enemy and one who was offended by him. He saw that the triumphant king [Nadir Shah], who had earned fame with war and fortune, now approached leading a victorious army to dethrone him. There was general dismay among the subjects and astonishment in his kingdom. For these reasons, he [Muhammad Shah] decided to appoint his son Ametcha as general of his army and fetched him thus in a splendid manner from his palace in a palanquin bedecked with diamonds and pearls and showered him with precious gifts.⁹⁶

In the face of Malik Habib Allah’s presumably harmless observation of the “gift-giving” that accompanied the Mughal war-efforts, the attention of the Company writers focused elsewhere. They projected the irony that the spectacle embodied – the sheer absurdity of the emperor plagued by minor trifles such as courtly etiquette while the enemy stood brandishing their swords at the frontier. In consequence, the Company while dependant on Mughal correspondence for the information it contained, devised their own schema of how events and most importantly individuals were to be assessed and represented, which resulted in a profound critique of the emperor. Here, Muhammad Shah was not, as the Mughal correspondents saw him, a ruler who could be sympathised with. In failing to live up to the Company’s sensibilities of the “ideal,” the emperor was instead endowed with a farcical and despotic image tailored to provoke the distaste of the Company’s administrators in Batavia and Amsterdam and of the readers of the *Verhaal*.

For all the attention that Muhammad Shah enjoys in the Company’s writings, Nadir Shah merits no more than a few references. One of the remarks about him pointed to the indelible impression that the Persian’s war tactics made on Hoogly, and the others alluded to the notoriety he came to acquire.⁹⁷ Like the *Verhaal*, the records were less consistent in their

⁹⁵Letter from Malik Habib Allah, p. 544.

⁹⁶*Verhaal*, pp. 65-66; NA, VOC 2455, fols. 251r-v.

⁹⁷See VOC 2455, fols. 3v-4r. The three references are the “berugten Persiaaen veldheer” (the infamous Persian general), “de tyranicque huijshouding van den Persiaanen koning Nadircha” (the tyrannical conduct of the

portrayal of Nadir than they were in their depiction of Muhammad Shah. In contrast to the sharp delineation of finding the Mughal wanting in all the traits that made a good ruler, the representation of Nadir was more ambivalent, vacillating between admiration and horror.

Now that the Company discourse stands explicated, one might ask what accounted for the varying dispositions of the Company to the two sovereigns who graced the pages of their official records and the *Verhaal*. To understand the animosity of the Company establishment in Hoogly towards Muhammad Shah and his nature of governance, it seems worthwhile to reflect on the lively debate that has raged over representation and Oriental Despotism.⁹⁸ Functioning on the premise that “all representation is misrepresentation,” one set of scholars endorse the view that “phantasmic” notions of the East such as Oriental Despotism were faulty and were conceived by the European observer to either provide a critique of European politics or provide the necessary rationale for colonial domination.⁹⁹ Thomas Metcalf for instance speaks of how Oriental Despotism was creatively used to reflect on worrisome political trends in Europe.¹⁰⁰ Scholars such as Joan-Pau Rubiés however contend this position and question the duplicity of the European intention of engaging the Orient.¹⁰¹ Rubiés concedes that the concept of Oriental Despotism has little truth to it but he adds that there is no denying the fact that this idea was born out of honest intellectual pursuit on the part of the European observer.¹⁰² Just as the motives of misrepresentation have come under scrutiny, other scholars have even denied the inherent fallacy in European representations of the Orient. Michael Curtis in his recent work suggests that Despotism was indeed an Oriental phenomenon and testimonies of its presence in the Orient that European observers took back to their audiences at home constituted anything but falsehood.¹⁰³

Evaluating the Dutch disposition towards Mughal governance in the light of this debate indicates that there are two approaches worthy of consideration. The first approach is to take Sichterman at his word and attribute the slump in Dutch trade in Bengal to the

Persian king Nadir Shah) and “den roemzugtige vorst Nadercha” (the fame hungry Nadir Shah). See NA, VOC 2427, fol. 10r; NA, VOC 2455, fol. 154r and NA, VOC 8786, p.758 respectively.

⁹⁸As Adrienne Ward notes, the debate “focus[es] on the motives, mechanisms and consequences of the representation for the representer.” Adrienne Ward, “Eastern Others on Western Pages: Eighteenth Century Literary Orientalism,” *Literary Compass* 1, 1 (2004), 2-4

⁹⁹“All representation is, in some sense, a misrepresentation.” Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 74. “Despotism is the concept of a phantasm.” Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan’s Court: European Fantasies of the East*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1998), 30.

¹⁰⁰Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.

¹⁰¹Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism: Botero to Montesquieu,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 9, 1-2 (2005), 109-80.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁰³Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 71.

declining Mughal control over the empire – a claim convincingly augmented by the suggestions of modern day historians who argue that Dutch in the 1740's failed to replicate the dominance they had demonstrated in the Bengal trade in the late seventeenth century.¹⁰⁴ Sichterman's spirited allegation is bolstered by the coincidence of Muhammad Shah's reign (from 1719 to 1748) with the proposed period of decline in the Dutch trade. It is reasonable therefore to conceive the critique of the Mughal as having been caused by the frustrations of a mercantile power attempting to thrive amidst unfavourable circumstances. Nevertheless, a subscription to this thesis raises a host of complexities. It assumes that the Company archives quite rightly regarded Mughal rule as weak therefore implying that imperial decline alone was responsible for the ebbing fortunes of the Dutch. It also suggests that the Mughal state was indeed labouring under the despotic ways of Muhammad Shah thereby supporting Micheal Curtis' simplistic stance "that Oriental Despotism [was] not an arbitrary exegesis...but rather reflect[ed] perceptions of real processes and behaviour in those [Oriental] systems."¹⁰⁵

A second approach may be formulated by heeding Ashin Dasgupta's reminder that approaching the Indian reality through the European peephole alone can sometimes be deceptive.¹⁰⁶ Perceptions of the Company could well derive from a host of other factors apart from the overtly stated ones such as self-serving intent is convincingly demonstrated by Sanjay Subrahmanyam who argues that "knowledge about the Mughals was created at the same time that the Portuguese/Europeans acted out their at times Machiavellian conceptions of politics on the Mughals and other polities in the region," indicating that their rhetoric reflected political equations on the ground.¹⁰⁷ To see the truth in Subrahmanyam's observation, one need only to consider the frequency with which Mughal rulers and imperial viceroys became targets of criticism in the *Memories* or final reports of the Dutch Directors in mid-eighteenth-century Bengal. While Muhammad Shah was the butt of Sichterman's criticism, Sichterman's predecessor, Jacob Sadelijn, came down heavily on the *Moorse regenten* or the Muslim governors who he denounced for their "brutal and avaricious regime," and a later director, Jan Huijgens lamented that "the constitution of the government" showed no signs of strength and stability.¹⁰⁸ Further, this proclivity of the Company to view the

¹⁰⁴Dasgupta, "Trade in Pre-Colonial Bengal," 63.

¹⁰⁵Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, 71.

¹⁰⁶Ashin Dasgupta, "Indian Merchants and the Western Indian Ocean: The Early Seventeenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 19, 3 (1985), 483-86.

¹⁰⁷Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction: Mughals and Franks in an Age of Contained Conflict," in *Mughals and Franks : Explorations in Connected History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

¹⁰⁸See NA, VOC 8769, "Memorie by the retiring Director Sadelijn to his successor Berenaart written in 1732," p. 458; NA, VOC 2763, "Memorie of the retiring Director Jan Huijgens to his successor Jan Kersenboom written in 1750," p. 448.

Mughals with hostility was not limited in space to Bengal or in time to the eighteenth century. James Tracy's reading of how the VOC perceived and chose to write of their interactions with the seventeenth-century Mughal government from Surat, their factory on the west coast of India betrays similar tendencies.¹⁰⁹ Mughal rulers were either depicted as despots or as weak potentates who were either oblivious of or chose to ignore the extent to which the local administrators sidestepped their own power and authority.¹¹⁰ Tracy reasons that the hostility that the Dutch came to experience for local authority was fostered by "the continuing warfare between Christendom and Islamdom."¹¹¹ The nature of the Mughal monarchy seen manifesting in the eighteenth century from Bengal however differed from Surat's view of the Mughals in the previous century, when it was characterised variably by weaknesses and absolutism. The image of a ruthless and arbitrary monarch was virtually absent and had instead given way to a less menacing but equally despised model of the effeminate ruler.

In his article, Tracy also observes that the incompetent functioning of the Company settlement in Surat was often blamed on the short-comings of native authority in the Mughal Empire rather than on the lack of industriousness and mercantile acumen of the Company servants themselves.¹¹² The suggestion that such indictments of the native government could often deflect attention from Company weaknesses proves indispensable in revealing the other reason for Bengal's apathy for Muhammad Shah. As C.R. Boxer notes, Bengal had long acquired disrepute as a haven for private trade which with Dutch participation in the opium trade threatened to acquire greater dimensions.¹¹³ And Sichterman, for all the anguish he expressed over the Dutch situation had also dirtied his hands in the thriving private trade during his directorship between 1734 and 1744. He returned to the Republic a Dutch "Nabob," acquired enviable landed property back home and flaunted a formidable collection of porcelain, crystals and Japanese lacquer work.¹¹⁴ While there may well have been linkages between the Mughal crisis and the simultaneous decline in Dutch revenues, it must be stressed that projecting blame on Mughal governance was a clever ruse for deviating attention away

¹⁰⁹James D. Tracy, "Asian Despotism? Mughal Government as Seen From the Dutch East India Company Factory in Surat," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3, 3 (1999).

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 269-77.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 256.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 203-04.

¹¹⁴This description of Sichterman's opulent lifestyle features in Kühne-van Diggelen, *Jan Albert Sichterman*, 7, 81-102; Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 173. The reference to Sichterman as "Nabob" is made in C. J. A Jorg, "Jan Albert Sichterman: A Groninger Nabob and Art-Collector," *Itinerario* 9, 2 (1985), 178-95.

embezzlement and private trade on the part of the Company servants that weakened the system.

With regard to Nadir Shah, explaining his near invisibility in the Company records in Hoogly is not difficult. Compared to the familiarity with Muhammad Shah that the Company was occasioned by his long reign, Nadir's exit from India was as swift as his excursions into the territory allowing the Company no more than a "brief acquaintance" with the man. The more restrained handling of Nadir Shah's portrayal and his "acquittal" from the image of the despot stemmed therefore from their marginal familiarity with Nadir Shah. Further, Nadir's invasion, despite posing a threat to Dutch possessions, especially the factory at Patna had failed to materialise into reality, therefore relegating the Dutch to mere spectators while the events of the invasion unfolded onstage at a safe distance from them. Had Nadir decided to march eastwards to Patna following the sack of Delhi, or westwards to the Dutch factory in Surat, the characterization of Nadir Shah would have arguably been different.¹¹⁵ And then too, there was the appreciation that the Company documentation exuded, much of which can be attributed to the Dutch stupefaction at the unparalleled feat that Nadir Shah performed – the rout of the Mughals. And as the *Verhaal* indicates, the authors of the account were equally aware of the successes that marked Nadir's early career – the usurpation of the Persian throne and his string of victories against the Turks.¹¹⁶ Engaging in uninhibited speculation, one also wonders whether Hoogly had conducted itself any better than what was expected from a trading post in an empire as they contemplated a force that had virtually destroyed the entity, who they had been haggling with for power, privileges and the lot. Mughal European relations was, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam aptly labels it, one of "contained conflict," where in fostering trade, the use of violence fell well within their line of vision.¹¹⁷ As the content of the mid eighteenth-century *Memories* of Dutch Directors in Bengal indicate, both Mughal and local authority made a poor impression on the Dutch administrators at Hoogly and native administrators were often projected as having been antagonistic to Dutch trading interests. For instance, Jacob Sadelijn, the Director in Bengal between 1727 and 1731 confessed that it was time the Dutch showed the regents that they were fully capable of wresting what they wanted

¹¹⁵A parallel, not altogether inappropriate is the label that the Marathas won themselves as *rovers* (raiders) in the frequent threats they posed to the Dutch factories in Patna, Surat and Hoogly. The *Generale Missiven* of 1743 refers to them as *rovers* and *Memorie* of Jan Albert Sichterman accuses them of *stroperije* (theft). See Thedens VIII, 5 April, 1743, Jurrien van Goor, ed., *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 10: 1737-1743 ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 2004), 1060. Also see VOC 8795, p. 950.

¹¹⁶Oosterhammel speaks of how it was then commonplace in Europe to evaluate Nadir Shah positively based on his many achievements. Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens*, 218-28.

¹¹⁷See Subrahmanyam, "Introduction: Mughals and Franks in an Age of Contained Conflict."

through armed confrontation.¹¹⁸ In contrast to their rhetorical bluster however, the Dutch in Hoogly quite pragmatically realized the futility of challenging the Mughals to battle. Quite naturally then, they perceived the defeat of a dynasty, which they repeatedly confessed did not make the best trading partner, as heralding the advent of a new dynasty and consequently new possibilities for trade and negotiation.

These propositions put forth by the Dutch Directors of Bengal in the period to deploy force against the Mughal Empire are to be seen within and as a part of a larger trend. By the third decennia of the eighteenth century, as Holden Furber observes, the Company's profit margins failed to impress its shareholders and an enquiry was instituted under the guidance of Gustav Baron van Imhoff to ascertain the causes for decline.¹¹⁹ In the "considerations" on Company affairs that he later submitted, he asserted that "the Company had in the past carried out a series of conquests to establish its might in Asia which had rendered governance more difficult."¹²⁰ He therefore appealed "that the Company be seen not as a merchant but rather a trading nation capable of preserving its authority."¹²¹ At one level, the clause sought greater power for the Company administration in Asian territories that were already in Dutch control. But couched in the appeal was also the emphasis on the need to protect and further the Company's interests vis-à-vis the Asian polities they traded with and the kingdoms they traded in, which as one would gather also recommended the use of force. Van Imhoff, was therefore engaging in the same rhetoric as his subordinate, Sichterman who in 1744 (approximately the same time that Van Imhoff submitted his recommendations), had complained about the abject helplessness he experienced in dealing with the downward spiral of Dutch trade and other Dutch directors had reckoned that only force and firepower would turn the tables in their favour. Hence, Nadir was in a sense the embodiment of the deft and successful use of force, that the Dutch could have seen themselves employing. In any case, Nadir was, to the Company, an unstoppable force and result was seething admiration.

The European Correspondence

It has been argued in the prior sections that the invasion correspondence presents a picture of two distinct discourses: the Mughal correspondence whose rhetoric failed to capture the

¹¹⁸See NA, VOC 8769, "Memorie by the retiring Director Jacob Sadelijn to his successor Berenaart written in 1732," pp. 466-467.

¹¹⁹Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient 1600-1800* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 140-141.

¹²⁰J.J. Steur, *Herstel of ondergang: de voorstellen tot redres van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, 1740-1795* (Utrecht: Hes, 1984), 44.

¹²¹*Ibid.*

imagination of their recipients; and that of the VOC factory at Hoogly, who in turn conjured a varying discourse. In this discussion, however, a category of invasion correspondence, namely those authored by European individuals has forfeited attention. In the Company records, there are a mere six letters written by the Dutch Merchant at Patna Bartholomeus Aukema, the Italian residing in Patna, Toretti and the Frenchman Devolton in Shahjahanabad which is half the number of letters dispatched by the Mughal correspondents.¹²² Within the broader domain of discourse on the invasion by the self and the other, it would not be wrong to intuitively presume that these letters owing to their “European authorship” should show proximity to the Company discourse. However, these letters defy these presuppositions and exhibit themselves in a manner that neither justifies their inclusion into the native discourse nor their support to the Company’s cause. This is to say that the letters of European authorship are neither structured by the sympathetic undertones of the Mughal correspondence nor the condescension contained in the writings of the Company scribes in Hoogly.¹²³ While this is sufficiently demonstrated by Devolton’s correspondence, which is devoid of the disparaging references to Muhammad Shah, that the Hoogly records are liberally peppered with, another example highlighting the difference between Aukema’s correspondence and the Company views on his dispatch should explicate this. As the capital Delhi began unravelling bewildering events in quick succession, Bartholomeus Aukema with his strategic presence at Patna, noted that the startling tales he had heard were indeed true: “The news from Delhi confirms the information we have received that the Persian ruler under the name of Nadercha [Nadir Shah] has proclaimed himself king of the land and Mhamet Sjah [Muhammad Shah] has been imprisoned.”¹²⁴ In response, Hoogly made known its estimation of the situation: “Your successively received letters dated the 9th, 11th, 22nd of March have informed us of the cowardly manner in which the Mogol Mhametcha [Mughal Muhammad Shah] has ceded the throne to the ambitious Nadercha [Nadir Shah].....”¹²⁵

The Company’s systematic campaign to incorporate the two rulers into their self-devised frames of perception saw an unlikely informer in Aukema. In neither painting Nadir Shah as the favoured nor Muhammad Shah as the forsaken, Aukema’s correspondence spoke

¹²²Despite constituting only a small section of the invasion correspondence, the *Verhaal* seems to have substantially gleaned upon Devolton’s twenty-eight page correspondence (the Falck Manuscript) for its description of the Mughal-Persian negotiations in Karnal and the events in Delhi thereafter.

¹²³While it is to be noted that this correspondence does refer on the acute lack of efficiency of the Mughal troops and Muhammad Shah’s lack of leadership in the time of crisis, they are devoid of the contemptuous appraisals of the emperor that frequent the Hoogly records.

¹²⁴NA, VOC 8786, “Missive written by Merchant and Chief Bartholomeus Aukema together with the Council of Patna to Director Jan Albert Sichterman and the Council of Bengal in March 1739, p.766.

¹²⁵NA, VOC 8786, “From Bengal to the Merchant Bartholomeus Aukema dated 16 April, 1739,” p.758.

of a certain aloofness in comparison to the characterization tactics that the Company servants downstream in Hoogly relished in. Similarly, it distanced itself from the Mughal correspondence in neither replicating its relenting optimism nor engaging in explicit prayers beseeching the emperor's deliverance from defeat.

The letters of European authorship thus model themselves as the proverbial fly on the wall. The fact that the Dutch merchant in Patna, despite his affiliation to the Company could steer clear of the motifs of representations that were familiar to the Company scribes in Hoogly raises the question whether one can in fact speak of an institutional discourse where the ways of seeing of the Dutch East India Company constituted a single monolithic whole? One would contend that although this case serves as a poignant reminder that certain irregularities latched themselves to representation tactics of the Company, broader categories such as the Company discourse may still be salvaged. Tracy's account on Mughal Despotism in Company accounts in seventeenth-century Surat when combined with the current inferences of the views of Mughal despotism from eighteenth-century Bengal presents a picture of a certain innegotiability in the tenor of Company characterization (despite subtle changes in the nature of the portrayals). Company views vis-à-vis the Mughals had persistently remained disparaging and hostile, suggesting both coherence and linearity in the images they had come to hold with regard to the royalty of the realm they traded in. Hence, while it is to be acknowledged that these divergent views such as Aukema's did occasionally appear in the correspondence of the Company, their documentation otherwise exhibited homogeneity with regard to their perspective of the Mughals.

In sum, the Company discourse despite certain affinities with Mughal accounts, showed inexorable contradictions to the Mughal correspondence it relied on and similarly, followed a different trajectory of representation in comparison to its European correspondents. The Company discourse as formulated in Hoogly thus was both independent of and in blatant contrast to the views embodied in its sources, the Mughal and European correspondence and it was the views of the Hoogly establishment that entered the *Verhaal*. It was with this discourse that the manuscript version of the *Verhaal* would leave the hands of the Company writers in Hoogly, enter into print and later (with a measure of prodding from his patron) inspire Frans van Steenwyk to write *Thamas Koelikan*.

The Politics of Representation in Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan*

Re-reading Van Steenwyk's piece in the light of its source, the *Verhaal*, engenders a distinct notion of familiarity; aspects of the content and rhetoric of the *Verhaal* are distinctly

reminiscent in *Thamas Koelikan*. Familiar features of the plot such as the motives for the conquest of Mughal India and Nadir Shah's inclination for peace are retained and the character portraits of the two monarchs as envisaged in the *Verhaal* are also preserved. The play bears testimony to Nadir Shah's magnanimity and the despotic Mahomet continues to battle his many vices. But just as the reader gets lured by the prospect of the playwright's unconditional adherence to his source, the image of Van Steenwyk as the avowed loyalist to the *Verhaal* vanishes and Van Steenwyk the dramatist makes an appearance. What ensues is a series of discrepancies and fabrications that Van Steenwyk was earlier and justifiably accused of. Dead and suicidal queens become peace-loving princesses, marriages of political expediency become marriages of love and the invasion of India is mangled and sold to the regular theatre-buff as the siege of Lahore.¹²⁶ These disparities were foreign to the *Verhaal* and were products of Van Steenwyk's imagination alone. Therefore, the play in re-enacting a battle in a distant land in itself becomes a space contested by his loyalty to his source on one hand and his creative itch on the other.

What accounted for these distortions that Van Steenwyk so willingly introduced into his text? To be sure, many of the facts that the play ignored and new circumstances that it occasioned may reasonably be explained in view of Van Steenwyk's piece as a literary product whose objective was entertainment. Moreover, theatre as a performance-oriented genre brought with it certain constraints. Presenting a play in theatrical time meant that audiences could not be told of Nadir Shah's conquest in entirety or the manner in which unfolded over a span of eight months in Mughal territory.¹²⁷ Yet, these factors fail to account for the more dramatic departure of Van Steenwyk from his source, the *Verhaal*. This was playwright's perception of his protagonist where Nadir personified all that there was to be emulated, and exemplified little of what was to be detested. In this catharsis of the Persian, the single most notorious act of Nadir Shah, namely the carnage of Delhi, provoked censure from even the seemingly benign commentators on Nadir Shah (the compilers of the *Verhaal*) is erased. This radical departure of Van Steenwyk from his source evidently derived from his intention to package *Thamas Koelikan* as a lesson in virtue. And instructions on virtue had no place for gory spectacles, and Van Steenwyk was therefore called upon to weed out a few obstacles such as the carnage of Delhi that stood in his way of telling the story of the

¹²⁶It is also important to note that the fictitious villain, Alikan in *Thamas Koelikan* is in many ways modelled on the Mughal minister Sa'adat Khan, who the *Verhaal* holds guilty for treachery. Van Steenwyk also attributes to Alikan, acts that the *Verhaal* does not implicate Sa'adat Khan for such as his role in manufacturing the rumour of Nadir Shah's death. Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 197.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

righteous Nadir Shah. While retaining in Muhammad Shah the traits of an Oriental Despot like the *Verhaal* does, Van Steenwyk hence strays from his source's nuanced image of Nadir Shah to project the ruler as virtually faultless. But before estimating Van Steenwyk's purposes of representation on this one count alone, it is necessary that the circumstances which deemed such portrayals, distortions and erasures be analysed. What explains Van Steenwyk's literary licence and his representational tactics that warranted his lessons on virtue on one hand, and his quest for "compassionate" statesmen on the other?

Van Steenwyk's intention of privileging the instruction on morals in *Thamas Koelikan* strongly reflected the ideological grasp that the drama society, *Nil Volentibus Arduum* had on Dutch drama in the eighteenth century.¹²⁸ In regarding his drama to be a vehicle of moral instruction, Van Steenwyk replicated the society's conception of theatre as a bastion of virtue and the Schouwburg as an institution entrusted with the responsibility of teaching its audiences to be virtuous, morally sound individuals.¹²⁹ Apart from its preoccupation with morality, the play also replicated the dramaturgy of the time in the distinct Gallicism it exhibited. Like the Frenchification of Dutch society which had caused a scholar to sourly remark that "eighteenth-century Dutch culture was an imitation of everything that was French," Dutch drama was also bitten by the French bug.¹³⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, French classical tragedy in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found favour with playwrights in the Dutch Republic and it was also a preferred style with Van Steenwyk. Not only was his play *Leonidas* (1788) modelled on the French play *Iphigenie* (1675) written by playwright and exponent of French Classical Tragedy, Racine but *Thamas Koelikan* was also written in the same style.¹³¹ Van Steenwyk's play, like the "Frenchness" of his times and trade therefore, was set in the French Classical mould.

Apart from the Frenchness of form, the play in its preface took a jibe at European rulers by suggesting that they lacked the qualities that Nadir possessed.¹³² This suggested that the drama came with strong political undertones. Yet, the fact that Van Steenwyk should direct his message of virtue to kings is baffling because what purpose would such a representation have served the playwright, a citizen of a political space with a "fully

¹²⁸For a discussion on *Nil Volentibus Arduum* and the impact it had on Dutch theatre, see Chapter One.

¹²⁹Kornee van der Haven, *Achter de schermen van het stadstoneel: Theaterbedrijf en toneelpolemiek in Amsterdam en Hamburg 1675-1750* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2008), 129-45; Anna de Haas, *De wetten van het treurspel: Over ernstige toneel in Nederland, 1700-1772* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), 218-19.

¹³⁰Christoffel van Schoonneveldt, "Over de navolging der Klassieke-Fransche tragedie in Nederlandsche treurspelen der achttiende eeuw" (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1906), 4.

¹³¹G. Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, vol.5 (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1910), 512.

¹³²Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 104.

republican regime”?¹³³ The Dutch Republic in 1745, the year in which the play was published and performed was firmly in the Second Stadholder- less era (1702 – 1747), which was a “government without the presence of a monarchical element in the form of a Stadhouder.”¹³⁴ It is therefore likely that the playwright sought to provide a critique of monarchy, a form of government beyond the frontiers of the Republic, in states such as France and Prussia in the period. But subscribing to the view that Van Steenwyk was peering over the fence of his little Republic, addressing monarchical concerns still appears problematic. This is because despite the foreword and its allusions to monarchy, the virtues that Van Steenwyk seeks to propagate in the content of his play seem to be republican ones. Republicanism occupied a prominent position in eighteenth-century Dutch discourse and within the broader domain of this ideology its Classical strand disseminated by thinkers such as Lieven de Beaufort was popular in the early eighteenth century.¹³⁵ As Dorothee Sturkenboom and Joris van Eijnatten have noted, Classical Republicanism brought with it new ideas about politics and representation. Regents, according to this ideology, were not the only class of people who could lay claim to power and commoners too could become leaders of men so long as they were virtuous.¹³⁶ *Thamas Koelikan* exudes the impress of this ideology. Van Steenwyk chose a protagonist of lowly origins whose right to the throne sprang from his desire to serve his subjects, while the rulers of royal descent, whose claims to leadership derived from birth and illustrious bloodlines such as Shah Tahmasp and Mahomet, were either humbled or overthrown. Moreover, the greatest victory that Van Steenwyk grants Nadir Shah is not the victory over the Mughal dominions but the conquest of Mahomet’s pride. The emperor who initially resents the proposed marital union between the Mughal princess, Milko, and Nadir’s son, Nasser, owing to his disdain in “associating his august house with the lowly family of Thamas Koelikan” is finally forced to toe the line.¹³⁷ Similarly, the traits of luxury and ambition, which were elements that Lieven de Beaufort strongly disapproved of, emerge in *Thamas Koelikan* as the hurdles that Van

¹³³Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806*, ed. R. J. W. Evans, Oxford History of Early Modern Europe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 960.

¹³⁴Wyger Velema, “Ancient and Modern Virtue Compared: De Beaufort and Van Effen on Republican Citizenship,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30, 4 (1997), 438.

¹³⁵De Beaufort (1675-1730) was a member of the ruling class in Zeeland. He was the author of the work *Treatise on Liberty in Civil Society* (1737) and was a proponent of Classical Republicanism. Wyger Velema, “That a Republic is better than a Monarchy: Anti-Monarchism in Early Modern Dutch Political Thought,” in *Republicanism : A shared European heritage*, vol. I, eds. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19-23; Joris van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 204-05.

¹³⁶Dorothee Sturkenboom, “Historicizing the Gender of Emotions: Changing Perceptions in Dutch Enlightenment Thought,” *Journal of Social History* 34, 1 (2000), 63; Van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord*, 205.

¹³⁷Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 146-47, verses 850-51, 59-60.

Steenwyk's actors contend with.¹³⁸ Luxury had enervated the Mughal Empire, and it was in the conquest of personal ambition that Nadir Shah had emerged supremely victorious. When reinstating Mahomet to the Mughal throne, Nadir urges him to renounce his hedonistic lifestyle, and setting the tone for the play, Van Steenwyk's dedicatory epistle describes Nadir as "the valiant Thamas Koelikan ...who surrenders his self-interest to his superior virtues".¹³⁹ In its content thus, the play replicates a rhetoric that was familiar to Lieven De Beaufort, a Classical Republican of the day.¹⁴⁰

The second factor that calls into question the perspective that monarchs were Van Steenwyk's intended audience is the fact that circumstances in the Dutch Republic in the period were themselves in dire need of critique and commentary. Between 1702 and 1747, the United Provinces underwent what Jonathan Israel calls the "Age of Decline." All areas of the Dutch economy – its trading system, urban economy and agriculture – were riddled by crisis.¹⁴¹ Contemporaries therefore had enough reason to engage with domestic concerns rather than entertain issues from beyond the frontier. Thirdly, some in the early eighteenth-century Republic associated economic well-being with virtue and moral well-being and as Wijnand Mijnhardt notes, the writer and ideologue "Justus van Effen perceived the cause of decline as moral."¹⁴² Van Effen, a contemporary of Van Steenwyk stressed the importance of virtue in his influential publication, *Hollandsche Spectator*. As a clear reaction to the Republic's Francophilia, Van Effen also used his journalistic writings to spearhead a campaign to generate pride in the average Dutchman about his "Dutchness." Quite evidently then, any well-read Dutchman of Van Steenwyk's time was immensely familiar with the concepts of "virtue" and "Dutchness."¹⁴³ And virtue it was that Van Steenwyk sought to

¹³⁸ Velema, "That a Republic is better than a Monarchy," 21-22.

¹³⁹ Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 103, 87: lines 1569-70.

¹⁴⁰ Despite an adherence of certain facets of the play to De Beaufort's views, one aspect of the work appears less confirmatory and requires elaboration. In the third act, Van Steenwyk has Nadir persuasively defend the usurpation on the grounds that he became king by popular mandate. Usurpation however was never prescribed by De Beaufort as a means of acquiring political power. The theme therefore is problematic because the playwright appears to support the takeover. Nonetheless, one would argue that the play does not venture beyond the precincts of De Beaufortian ideology because the playwright, in reality, does not condone the act of usurpation. This is evident in the foreword of the play where Van Steenwyk offers an explanation for his standpoint on the takeover as expressed in the corpus of the play. He reasons that Islam took a different and less condemnatory view of usurpation. In this, the playwright reveals his true precepts where usurpation, under normal circumstances was an act worthy of denunciation thereby once again declaring his presumable allegiance to the De Beaufortian ideology.

¹⁴¹ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 959-85.

¹⁴² Wijnand W. Mijnhardt, "The Dutch Enlightenment: Humanism, Nationalism and Decline," in *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. W. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 208.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 206-09; According to Velema, "the proper interpretation of the republican citizen's virtue became one of the central issues in Dutch public discourse in the early decades of the eighteenth century." Velema, "Ancient and Modern Virtue Compared," 438.

resuscitate making it highly probable that these morals that Van Steenwyk saw as absent and hoped to breathe life into were Dutch ones.

In discerning the purposes of representation in Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* thus, the play functions as a microcosm of an entire cultural orientation revolving around the primacy of virtue that drew from several sources: dramatic conventions and prevailing notions of the roots of Dutch decline. When assessing the political connotations of the play, several factors suggest that the authorial intentions lay in addressing domestic concerns in contrast to Van Steenwyk's aired intention of preaching to monarchs (evidently from beyond the frontier). Nevertheless, one cannot lightly brush off Van Steenwyk's mention of the monarchy as an unintended or purposeless reference, but instead consider it implicit to his aims of reflecting on his home government in dealing with Dutch Republicanism. This is to say that Van Steenwyk lauds Dutch republican virtues in *Thamas Koelikan*, an object which was accomplished not merely in the ideals that Van Steenwyk promotes in the play, but also by means of a critique of monarchy in envisioning lessons for its non-Dutch practitioners. This argument is largely substantiated by Wyger Velema's reading of Republicanism in the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic as having been often complemented and propped up by a parallel trend of anti-monarchism. Velema states that "since the days of Louis XVI..., the French monarchy was viewed as the perfect embodiment of all the evils of monarchical rule and the very opposite of everything that republicanism had stood for."¹⁴⁴ Therefore, *Thamas Koelikan* in the engagement with Dutch republicanism provides a critique of monarchism and thereby re-enacts the well-rehearsed strategy of the "affirmation of home-grown values by means of a negative evaluation of another."¹⁴⁵

If an explication of Van Steenwyk's purposes of representation has covered new ground, it reveals that the Oriental space was appropriated, in violation of historical "fact", to re-enact visions of the national self. Therefore, when recalling Balachandra Rajan's allegation that it was "self-interest" that drove Dryden to write his drama and that although *Aurang-Zebe* was a play set in the Mughal Empire, it was in reality a commentary on Restoration England, it holds true for Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* as well.¹⁴⁶ Concluding on the above premise alone however is to leave the story partially unsaid. Certain other facets of the story are to be attended to. The basic plot in *Thamas Koelikan* was one that had been experimented

¹⁴⁴Velema, *Republicans*, 2-3. Velema also notes that De Beaufort had little regard for the nature of the French government.

¹⁴⁵Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters, A Critical Survey* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 156.

¹⁴⁶Rajan, "Appropriating India," 67-77.

with before. The English playwright Nicholas Rowe had employed a similar story in his drama which centred on the Oriental ruler who Nadir Shah is often compared to – Tamerlane. In Rowe’s *Tamerlane* (1701), Tamerlane played the part of Nadir in *Thamas Koelikan* while the Ottoman ruler Bajazet was cast as his anti-thesis. Like *Thamas Koelikan*, *Tamerlane* too revolved around a reformer-conqueror who tames the vanquished and sets his house in order.¹⁴⁷ To discern how alike *Tamerlane* and *Thamas Koelikan* were in characterization, we only need turn to a commentary on Rowe’s drama in an 1824 edition of the play which observed, “Tamerlane and Bayazet [in the play] are the two opposing powers of good and evil, the angels of light and darkness, the one all gall and vinegar, the other all milk and honey.”¹⁴⁸ When the two plays exhibit strong similarities, we can only speculate about whether these commonalities were purely coincidental or whether Van Steenwyk had borrowed from Rowe’s drama. The fact nevertheless remains that the principal template that Van Steenwyk had used was not new to European drama. The theme that Van Steenwyk adopted for his play was also conventional at another level. It was one that the European public was familiar with – of an empire in decline. Tacitus writing in the early second century A.D. had exposed the vermin in the imperial woodwork, Montesquieu in a similar exercise in 1738, recalled the damaging effects of “luxury” on the Roman Empire and Gibbon once again reflected on the theme of fallen empires in the late eighteenth century.¹⁴⁹ The template of decadent polities could also be employed for the Orient, because “like the Roman and Spanish they [the Orient] presented powerful images ...of the problems besetting universal monarchies,” which the audience despite the “Orientalness” of the play could identify with.¹⁵⁰

Despite the possibilities of identification that Oriental subjects held out in this regard, the play cannot be understood in entirety, without recognising the curious endeavour on the part of Van Steenwyk in engaging the Oriental space as the setting to the play and the Oriental, Nadir Shah as protagonist.¹⁵¹ One would argue that Van Steenwyk’s engagement

¹⁴⁷For an analysis of Rowe’s play, see Richardson, “Nicholas Rowe’s *Tamerlane*,” 269-289.

¹⁴⁸Nicholas Rowe, *Tamerlane: A Tragedy*, Orberry ed. (London: W. Simpkin, 1824), iv. Although there were a fair number of plays which dramatized the Tamerlane – Bajazet encounter such as Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* (1587-1588) and the Dutch play *Den grooten Tamerlan* (1657) by Joannes Serwouters, it is Rowe’s *Tamerlane* that *Thamas Koelikan* resembles. I thank Jos Gommans for bringing the parallels between *Tamerlane* and *Thamas Koelikan* to my attention.

¹⁴⁹Arthur Quinn, “Mediating Tacitus: Gibbon’s Adaptation to an Eighteenth Century Audience,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984), 53-68; Alan Macfarlane, “Montesquieu and the Making of the Modern World.” 24.

¹⁵⁰Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 43.

¹⁵¹The play no doubt bears connotations of otherness. Van Steenwyk for instance offers an explanation why Milko, an Islamic princess destined to seclusion in the harem finds herself unveiled in the enemy camp. Despite the presence of such arguments which suggest that Van Steenwyk makes no effort to negotiate the difference between the two worlds, he retrieves for the Occidental stage, an exemplar from the other side whose virtues were worthy of emulation. This curious mix of opposites where “difference” could go hand in hand with

with the theme cannot be seen as evolving from the agenda that came with it or the prospect of Orientalness as a novelty alone. Instead, it derives from the understanding that *Thamas Koelikan* was written and staged at a time when Europe was momentarily blinded by Nadir Shah's exploits. Although we may never know whether the spectators or readers of *Thamas Koelikan* had heard of Nadir Shah, the playwright was acutely aware of the fame of his protagonist and this was the element he sought to capitalise on. He grabbed the attention of his audiences signalling the popularity of his protagonist and in his dedication to his patron, he refers to Nadir Shah as the intimidating yet alluring "Asian Terror".¹⁵² Apart from riding the waves of Nadir's popularity which was a pan-European phenomenon, Van Steenwyk's view of Nadir Shah as an exemplar, as indicated earlier also had its share of sympathisers. Against this background of the European preoccupation with Nadir Shah, one also cannot discount the possibility of the literary piece having been born out of the sheer interest of the patron of the play, Johannes Abeleven and his brother and shareholder of the Amsterdam Chamber of the Dutch East India Company, Arnoldus Abeleven. Such an interpretation is a plausible one because how else does one explain the transport of story of the invasion from the Company records whose spectatorship comprised only of the Haagse Boesogne (the advisory committee of the Gentlemen Seventeen) to the *Verhaal* on one hand, and the passage of the tale yet again from the *Verhaal* to the play *Thamas Koelikan*? Moreover Johannes and Arnoldus Abeleven were "Old Indies Hands" who had had careers in the East, and *Thamas Koelikan* could well have been a product of the brothers' nostalgia for the Asian shores which in turn had thrived on the interest of their compatriots in the phenomenon called Nadir Shah.

Conclusion

Unmasking the mode of representation in the play is to confront the image of a virtuous Nadir Shah on a crusade to liberate despotic Mughal Empire. In analysing the motives for such, it is contended that the characterization of the two rulers derived from the ideological bearings that the play carried, to the consequence that the play flouted certain features of the story that it borrowed from its source – the *Verhaal*. The conceptual freight of the play was characterized by Van Steenwyk's need to engage with republican ideals by pointing to the failings of monarchism in its want for virtue. But to claim that all representation in Van Steenwyk's play was modelled to suit the authorial intention of reflecting on the Dutch national self, overlooks

"emulation" is addressed by Brown in her study on eighteenth-century English literature. See Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 199-200.

¹⁵²Brouwer, *Achmet en Thamas Koelikan*, 103.

two aspects which were responsible for the play's presentation into the Amsterdamsche Schouburg: the character of the period in which the play was produced and the efforts of the Abeleven brothers in propelling the story of Nadir Shah's invasion of the Mughal Empire to take stage. This essay thereby engages the debate on Oriental Despotism and representations of the Orient contending that while self-reflexivity constituted the playwright's motive in scripting the play, the remarkable popularity of the protagonist in Europe at the time, and the personal interest of the Abeleven brothers could have played no small part in the enterprise.

Reading Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* within the context of information transfer is akin to the appraisal of a globe trotter who had finally discovered the pleasures of sedentary existence. The tale of the invasion had travelled half the world with its origins in Persian edicts and the correspondence dispatched by European (Italian, French and Dutch) and Mughal correspondents stationed in the Mughal Empire suggestive of the multicultural mosaic, within which news of the invasion was produced. This correspondence, in the hands of the Dutch East India Company factory at Hoogly had led to the compilation of the manuscript version of the *Verhaal*. This work later printed in the Dutch Republic had constituted the source for Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan*.

In this linear traffic of the content of the story, the architects of the first tier of information production, namely the European and Mughal correspondents had allowed their standpoints with regard to the two monarchs, Nadir and Muhammad Shah to take root in the work. This was also true of the subsequent vectors who handled the tale in transit. The content of the story thus metamorphosed to assume distinct imprints of the world-view of the authors/compiler at every turn. The Mughal observers revealed a sense of despondency at the outcome of events and pledged their support to their emperor, Muhammad Shah. The European observers were strangely dispassionate about the invasion they chronicled, thereby raising questions about the sharp delineations one usually confronts of the East and West when dealing with encounters between the Self and the Other. A crucial juncture in this passage of information transfer was the reception of the correspondence of the Mughal and European correspondents by Company scribes in Hoogly and the compilation that followed. This stage was momentous because the characterization of the two monarchs was subjected to a perspectival dismantling whereby portrayals inherited from prior sources were transformed or purged. Information was systematised and the work was now imbued with the Company's own reading of events. It may be reasoned that the portrayal of Muhammad Shah in the *Verhaal* was dictated by a history of animosity to the Mughal ruler and their anxieties over the difficulties of engaging in trade in troubled circumstances. All the same, the characterization

also deflected attention from the Company's structural weaknesses such as private trade in the period. The image of Nadir Shah, owing to his brief sojourn in the empire was less delineated in comparison to that of his Mughal counterpart, but it revealed the admiration of the Company for the exploits of the Persian. This presumably reflected the desire of the Company to exhibit a similar show of force, a perspective which was revealed time and again in the *Memories* of the retiring governors of the Dutch possessions in Bengal in the period. The Company therefore was not the impartial observer who passionlessly wrote of the invasion which took place in their backyard, but had instead allowed their political equations and other factors operating at the ground level to filter into the *Verhaal*. Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* as one of the final destinations in the chain of information transfer borrowed many of the Company's views on the episode, while introducing, dislocating, and transforming many others.

Within the sequence of information transfer, the trope of Oriental Despotism announces its entry in the *Verhaal*. In view of Bengal's concerns as explicated above, the account showed Muhammad Shah as the prototypical Oriental Despot while it treated the conqueror, Nadir Shah, ambiguously. Despite the categorical reworking of several aspects of the *Verhaal* in Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan*, an element that was retained in its unaltered form was the image of the despotic Muhammad. The "Orientalist" imaginings of the Company discourse were thereby carried over in their unadulterated form into the play. As a result, the on-site apprehensions and dispositions of the Company concern in Hoogly were now, by means of the *Verhaal* and *Thamas Koelikan* transplanted into the literary and performative space of the Dutch Republic in full view of their literate and theatre-going compatriots. The *Verhaal* also broke out of the narrow confines of the Republic and its limited Dutch readership in its subsequent English translation, *A Genuine History of Nadir-Cha* which placed the text within the reach of the Anglophone world.¹⁵³ With the *Verhaal* (in Dutch and in translation) and *Thamas Koelikan* joining the profusion of works about Nadir Shah in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, the Company had as a result inadvertently fashioned itself in Europe as a commentator and advocate of the prevalence of Oriental Despotism in Mughal India.

¹⁵³*A Genuine History of Nadir-Cha*. The work was printed again in Dublin the following year. One suspects that De Claustre's *Istoria di Thamas-Kouli-Kan, Sofi di Persia* (1741) in its second volume which describes Nadir's invasion in the Mughal Empire also drew from the *Verhaal* for its content.

Chapter Four

**SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE: ONNO ZWIER VAN HAREN'S
AGON, *SULTHAN VAN BANTAM* (1769)¹**

Introduction

In the plays of Vondel and Van Steenwyk, the Orient had manifested in different incarnations. While in Vondel's *Zungchin*, the Orient was forsaken in favour of God, Van Steenwyk centred *Thamas Koelikan* on an Oriental king who his Dutch audiences may have yearned to call their own. Although the VOC was the principal agent in conveying the Orient onto the Dutch stage, it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that the time seemed ripe to allocate the enterprise itself a role in Dutch drama. When it made a rather belated debut on the stage in 1769, the VOC was curiously cast in a role whose characterization was to be berated by audiences. The Company was counter-intuitively cast as a villain that fed on sovereign Asian kingdoms to quell its hunger for domination while the protagonist of the drama was an "Oriental" who was courageous, virtuous, and wise. The playwright responsible for this act of daring was Onno Zwier van Haren, and his play, a work regarded as one of the first Dutch anti-colonial texts was *Agon, Sultan van Bantam*.

The play is wary of the colonialism and strident expansionism of the Dutch East India Company. These views are not hidden away in the literary crevices of the 1,500 odd verses of the drama. Rather, Van Haren's work wears its anti-colonial and anti-Company credentials on its sleeve and the entire play is awash with this, at the time, unorthodox rhetoric. *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam* describes the travails of the last bastion of indigenous rule in the Indies as it battles the giant wave of Dutch imperialism before succumbing. The nemesis of the kingdom of Banten, which has long withstood the covetous gaze of the Dutch East India Company in Batavia, comes in the form of a succession feud. When Sultan Agon decides to abdicate, he resolves to partition his kingdom between his two sons, Abdul and Hassan, so that neither is left discontented with his inheritance. Just as Agon proceeds to put the

¹The complete title of the play reads Onno Zwier van Haren, *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam, Treurspel in vijf bedrijven* (Leeuwarden: Abraham Ferwerda, 1769). All references to the content of the play are in keeping with the G.C. de Waard, ed. *Onno Zwier van Haren: Agon, Sulthan van Bantam, Treurspel in vijf bedrijven*, 2nd ed. (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979). When citing the work, mention shall be made of the verse number alone. After the 1769 publication of the play, Van Haren brought out a revised edition in 1773. Pieter van Schelle and Van 's Gravenweert published reworked versions of the play in 1786 and 1825 respectively. It was twice translated into French, first in 1770 and then in 1812.

proposed plan of succession into force, his elder son, Abdul, reckons he has lost the most from his father's unfair decision and seeks the aid of the VOC. The Dutch East India Company readily support Abdul's cause and dispatch a fleet commanded by Saint Martin to force Agon into submission. The old King stands his ground and together with his younger son, Hassan, refuses to give in without a fight. War commences and it takes its toll on the kingdom. Bantam is lost and the curtains fall with a dying Agon – a victim to Abdul's patricide – reprehending the consolidation of Dutch rule in the Indies.

Van Haren's *Agon* is a full-throated denunciation of the subjugation of what it perceives is the last gasp of resistance against a fast expanding Dutch imperialism. Not only is the subject audacious, but Van Haren imbues many of its characters with an aversion for the Dutch East India Company. A measured version of this animosity is worn by Sultan Agon who when despising the "cold Europeans," still admires their propensity for victory and the might of their arms.² A more virulent strain of critique is harboured by the Makassar princess, Fathema who is betrothed to Prince Hassan. With the Dutch responsible for her fall from princess to asylum-seeker in Bantam after they wrested the kingdom of Makassar from her father, her losses included her kingdom, her title, and her family. To Fathema, abhorrence of the Dutch is not a state of mind but an article of faith. Upon Abdul's proposal of marriage, she agrees to consider the offer provided he swears an oath to destroy the Company. She envisions the demise of the VOC in raptures of cold delight:

Swear that you shall fight to avenge me on this coast,
Until you burn Batavia within her walls,
Until she falls before me with her Castle destroyed!
That I may trample on the smoking rubble of the most exquisite building
That I may tread on the heart of the foremost woman,
And that I might see the dogs feed on the blood of the gentlemen of the Council of the
Indies,
And thus Fathema's vengeance might be unparalleled in the East!³

²It is this latter argument which helps explain Agon's recruitment of the renegade Jan Lucas van Steenwyk's services in the kingdom of Bantam. See verses 71 (citation), 842.

³"Tot gy Batavia verbrand in haare wallen,/ Met haar Casteel verwoest voor my zult nêr doen vallen;/ Dat 'k op de rookend' as van 't pragtigste Gebouw/ Kan trappen op het hart van de voornaamste Vrouw,/ Dat ik de honden 't bloed van Indiëns Raën zie drinken,/ En dus Fathema's wraak in 't Oosten mag uitblinken!" verses 469-474.

More forceful than the arresting imagery with which Van Haren infuses his narrative is the degree to which the stock phrases conventionally deployed in literary works by Westerners to comprehend and describe the east are put at the disposal of the Bantenese. The Dutch are described as “tyrants,” Agon refers to the Council of Batavia as a bunch of “dishonourable foreigners,” and to the unforgiving Fathema, they are “the scum of Europe.”⁴ Although the play is cynical about Dutch participation in the East and comes in such unapologetic packaging, Van Haren tempers his denunciation of the VOC by choosing as his principal instigators Abdul, the imperious son itching to assume the throne of Bantam, and Jan Lucas van Steenwyk, a renegade Dutchman who goads the errant Abdul into vicious action. When both Abdul and Van Steenwyk commit heinous and inhuman crimes (patricide by the former and violence against a woman by the latter), Van Haren leaves his audience at a loss to decide which of the two is more depraved implying that malevolence was no less a feature of the liberty-loving Bantenese than it was of their Dutch oppressors. To further dampen his anti-Company position, Van Haren introduced the person of Saint Martin. The Dutch commander is a gentleman and successful military commander, respected by friends and foes alike. As the benign face of the Company, he articulates an eloquent defence of the enterprise he works for. Reacting to Fathema’s and Agon’s cynicism about the Company, Saint Martin draws their attention to Dutch triumphs in wars against Eastern potentates that won for the Company glory, spices, and submission:

From where the morning her first rays shows,
 Until where the sun disappears from sight in the west!
 Malacca, Coromandel, Ceylon and Malabar,
 Theatre of Dutch bravery in the gravest peril!⁵

Here, the play perplexes. Was Van Haren torn between pursuing an anti-VOC position and casting the Company in a favourable light? Perhaps not. The pro-Company rhetoric seems half-hearted and the reception of Saint Martin’s vindication of the Company is a case in point. Unconvinced by the commander’s reasoning, Agon reminds him of the VOC’s past military failures – the loss of Formosa (1662) and their futile siege on Macao (1622) – which the

⁴ “Maar ‘k min in Hassan ook syn haat voor die Tirannen./Het is de raad van die eerlose Vreemdeling:/’t Schuym van Europa zal Fathema wetten geeven!” See verses 285, 784 and 937 respectively.

⁵ “Van daar de Morgenstond vertoond haar eerste stralen,/ Tot daar de Son in ‘t West voor ‘t oog schynd neêr te daalen!/ Malacca, Cormandel, Ceylon en Malabaar,/ Toneel van Neêrlands moed in ‘t bloedigste gevaar!” verses 1109-1112.

Dutch would rather have the Sultan forget. Saint Martin's gallant efforts to convince his adversary of the Company's worthiness are thus in vain. The most convincing evidence that renders such an interpretation of the play incontestable is the manner in which Van Haren chooses to conclude his piece. The last words on Agon's lips are

“Virtue and courage have been expelled from the East,
And I surrender the craven East as prey to her tyrants.”⁶

Despite his temporary departure from his critical stance, Van Haren stays loyal to his original intention – to expose the Company's notoriety.

Agon, Sulthan van Bantam also offers a glimpse of Van Haren's perspective on the origins of Dutch imperial might. Saint Martin believes that Dutch power in the Indies was built on the daring exploits of its commanders, Cornelis Houtman and Jan Pieterszoon Coen, whereas Agon deemed their success a natural consequence of native discord. If these factors together facilitated the imperial bloom for Van Haren, the playwright also deliberated on what gave the Dutch an edge over the Easterner.⁷ The Company is a formidable adversary thanks to its weapons, which Eastern potentates could combat only with their numbers, their valour, and on a more cynical note, gold. “And money is indeed the God of the Europeans,” reasons Agon alluding at once to the fact that it was the Dutch appetite for profits that sent their ships plying the Eastern waters and that proved to be their undoing.⁸ Deliberations such as these about the beginnings, strengths and weakness of Dutch presence in the East are instructive but are not as remarkable as Van Haren's evaluation of the character of European domination in the East. The Dutch presence in the Orient as seen through the eyes of Agon is an excursion at best – they invade, they conquer, they perish. The strengths that kept them in good stead and guaranteed their initial successes dissipate with their continued exposure to the tropics. “Effeminized by the sweltering heat, and drunken in opulence” like the Portuguese before them, the Dutchman in their stupor subsequently pass the baton of power to other European colonizers astute enough to wrest it from their weakened hands.⁹ Agon's prophecy foreseeing

⁶ “De Deugd en Dapperheid zyn uit het Oost gebannen,/ En ‘k laat het laffe Oost ten prooy aan syn Tyrannen!” verses 1509-1510.

⁷ Andre Lefevere, “Composing the Other,” in *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London: Routledge, 2002), 90-91.

⁸ “En ‘t geld is inderdaad de Europeërs God.” Verse 764. When Hassan sends a native spy to Batavia to investigate the details of Abdul's treaty with the Dutch, he declares “...gold bares all secrets/ And everything can be bought from those people [the Dutch] with money.” Verses 399-400.

⁹ “ Verwyfd door ‘t heet Climaat; en drunken in de Weeld./ Zo ras weer uit het West een nieuw gebroedzel kooft.” verses 204, 231 (the quotes). Also see verses 195-208 and 215-232.

the rout of the Dutch in the Indies is noteworthy for two reasons. It conceptualizes what Lefevere describes as the organic character of colonialism.¹⁰ Comprising of the sequence of “rise, greatness, and fall;” the conclusion of the imperial chapter of one power can only mean the beginning of the colonial career of another.¹¹ The second and more remarkable aspect that devolves from the Sultan’s understanding is Van Haren’s quiet endorsement of the corrosive character of the Eastern climate. The observation, in its affinity to Orientalist thought should be no cause for bewilderment. After all, philosophers of the eighteenth century such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Alexander Dow had explained with competence in their works of literature that the chief cause for European exceptionalism and their dominance over the Orient was the varying character of their “climate and soil.”¹² So, when Van Haren sees the heat, dust, and humidity in Java weakening Dutch ardour, and sapping their virility, he too had caught the perspectival flu called “geographical determinism,” which in the words of Ranajit Guha, “had cut into eighteenth-century thought.”¹³ Quite prudently, we are not told whether Agon is a fellow sufferer of this Eastern malady. This is a minor respite to Van Haren’s support to the theory of “geographical determinism,” which is the lone strain of Orientalist thought in an otherwise stoutly argued indictment of colonial ambition.

Bad Blood over Banten: The English and Dutch Hostilities in Print

When civil war broke out in Banten in the 1680s, there were also others wrestling with similar feelings of aversion towards the VOC– the English. Anti-Dutch sentiments among His Majesty’s subjects peaked in this period. Servants of the English East India Company had been unceremoniously shunted out of their factory in Banten by the VOC amidst an internal succession struggle in the kingdom. To add insult to injury, the Sultan (who the English argued was a minion of the Dutch) brusquely ordered them to never come trading in the kingdom again. Outraged as they were at the uncivil behaviour of their fellow Europeans, the English vowed not to take this effrontery lying down and they went instead to the press. In the next years, *The Civil Wars of Bantam* (1683), *A Short Account of the Siege of Bantam* (1683) and *A True Account of the Burning and Sad Condition of Bantam in the East Indies* (1682) painted for the English public a picture of the imperious and roguish Dutchman who schemed to annihilate the legitimate trade of the English in Asia by intervening in the native conflicts

¹⁰Lefevere, “Composing the Other,” 85.

¹¹According to Lefevere, “he [Agon] predicts the fall of the Dutch in a never-ending cycle, but one that will not bring any advantage to the peoples of Asia themselves.” Ibid.

¹²Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris: Mouton and Co, 1963), 25-28.

¹³Ibid., 28.

of bickering Asian rulers to their advantage. As early as 1684, newspapers such as the *London Gazette* had begun using the short hand of the “business of Bantam” to refer to the Banten episode assuming – and rightly so – that the public was by then fairly well-informed about the facts of the case.¹⁴ The public outburst that the affair caused was reminiscent of the uproar over the Ambon Massacre of 1623 because the villains were the same and the villainy alarmingly similar – the Dutch had rudely evicted the English from yet another trading post in the East Indies.¹⁵ The wound in this instance was deeper. Just before the war broke out, when the Ambassador of Banten disembarked in England to pay his respects to the King of England, the episode drew generous public attention. Local craftsmen in London saw business prospects in the diplomatic visit and sold “true effigies of his excellency the Ambassador from the King of Bantam.”¹⁶ “An Heroic Poem to the King” commemorating this trans-continental interaction concluded by gleefully envisioning the prospect of the English overtaking the Dutch in trade in the Indies: “In vain they Fret, in vain the Nations Rail, / To see the Indies down our River Sail.”¹⁷ Now of course, the English had to grudgingly accept that if any river was to witness an increased traffic in commodities from that part of the world, it was going to be a Dutch one.

But just what had happened in the 1680s that made the Englishmen complain to the public back home about the countenance of the Dutch bully in the East Indies?¹⁸ For the tale to be told, one must look back to the birth of Batavia, that settlement on the River Chilliwong on the western coast of Java founded by the VOC, which in the early seventeenth century was still a political upstart in the region. In the establishment of this Dutch town, a competitor was born to the state of Banten, a port kingdom situated at close proximity to this new European settlement. By asserting its independence from the suzerainty of the kingdom of Mataram,

¹⁴The complete titles of these works are “The Civil Wars of Bantam: or, An Impartial Relation of all the Battels, Sieges and other Remarkable transactions, Revolutions and Accidents that happened in the late Civil Wars between that king and his eldest son,” (London: H.C., 1683); *A Short Account of the Siege of Bantam and its Surrender to the Rebels, who were assisted by the Dutch and their Fleet, in the East Indies. In a letter from an English Factor to a Merchant in London*, (London: John Smith, 1683); “A True Account of the Burning and Sad Condition of Bantam in the East-Indies in the War begun by the Young King against the Father, and of the Great and Imminent Danger of the English Factory there; in a Letter from a Member of the Said Factory, to a Friend in London, by the last Ship; which arrived on Saturday the 23th of this instant September 1682,” (London: S.T. , undated); “Untitled,” *London Gazette*, December 11-December 15 1684.

¹⁵Interestingly Shankar Raman notes that the massacre on Ambon which elicited a similar outcry in England was in the period referred to as “the business of Ambon.” Shankar Raman, *Framing “India”: The Colonial Imaginary in Early Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 197.

¹⁶“Untitled,” *Loyal Protestant and True Domestick Intelligence*, June 3 1682, 2.

¹⁷“An Heroick Poem to the King upon the Arrival of the Morocco and Bantam Embassadors, to His Majesty of Great Britain in the Year 1682,” (London: Francis Hicks, 1682), 8.

¹⁸The brief history of the Banten-Dutch relation contained in this section is based on Bernard H. M. Vlekke, *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia*, revised ed. (The Hague: W. van Hoeve Ltd, 1959), 176-82; M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300*, 2nd ed. (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1993).

Banten in the mid sixteenth century, had emerged in the words of Kathirithamby-Wells, as an “international entrepôt.”¹⁹ For commodities, Banten beckoned to her bazaars sugar, spices, and a significant quantity of the pepper produced in the Indies, and for traders it drew to her shores, rivals to the Dutch East India Company – not only English, Danes, and French, but merchants from other parts of Asia such as Arabs, Gujaratis and Turks. As Batavia vied for and sought to usurp Banten’s lucrative spice trade, the two entities grew increasingly wary of one another, and both parties enthusiastically took to undermining the other commercially. Their lifelines as trading centres depended on it. Banten levied periodic prohibitions on the export of pepper to the VOC’s capital in the Indies and Dutch blockaded the Sultanate from time to time in an effort to impair Banten’s trade. Animosities came to a head with the accession to the throne of Sultan Abdulfath Abdul Fattah Agung in 1651. Although diplomatic relations were sometimes resorted to when it suited the commercial interests of both parties, in his three-decade reign, Agung ensured that the Company’s weapons never rusted from disuse. He attacked Batavia in 1656 and upset the political configuration shaped up by the Dutch in Java in the 1670s when he aggravated the discord prevailing between the kingdom of Mataram and her client principality, Cheribon. He embittered the Company yet again when in 1678 he supported the rebellion of Trunajaya against Amungkurat II, the ruler of Mataram and a vassal of the VOC. These confrontations proved indecisive until the end of the century. A simmering factionalism erupted in the court of Banten in the 1670s from the irreproachable differences between Agung and his elder son Prince Haji and both parties soon came to realize that a clash of arms was inevitable. War broke out in 1682 when Agung, who had relinquished power in 1680, attempted to reclaim the throne. Presumably with the aid of English arms, Agung attacked the city of Banten, causing the beleaguered Prince Haji to flee into the embrace of the Dutch. With the intervention of the Company, the tables turned – the VOC broke the siege, rescued Sultan Haji, ordered other European merchants in Banten to vacate the city, and forced Agung and his loyalists into flight. Close on the heels of the fugitive Sultan, the VOC pursued Agung first to Tirtayasa and then into the forests that flanked the kingdom of Banten. In 1683, Agung, weary of war, sued for peace and was kept hostage by the VOC until his death a decade later. Sultan Haji in the following year became the signatory of a treaty by which he acknowledged his vassalage to the VOC, consented to

¹⁹J. Kathirithamby-Wells, “Banten: A West Indonesian Port and Polity during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The South-East Asian Port and Polity. Rise and Demise*, eds. J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), 108.

the payment of a colossal amount in reparations and allowed the Company a monopoly on the purchase of pepper in the kingdom. The Company flag was planted on Banten's soil.

The Dutch conquest of Banten should have entitled them to a certain amount of self-praise. Christopher Frick, a surgeon in the service of the Company who accompanied the Dutch fleet to Banten at the time of the siege thought so when he confessed in his travel account, "I have not but many times been amazed at how this glorious kingdom whose trading port is one of the most exceptional in the world and which existed from 1582 to 1685 should so easily fall into the hands of the Company."²⁰ But the Dutch did not seem ecstatic about the victory, and even if they had been, their celebration was effectively drowned out by the English lamentations over the episode. Far from celebrating their accomplishments, Dutch pamphlets like the *Antwoort van de vergadering van de seventiene*, which carried the official response of the Dutch to the English accusations and was presumably drafted by the Company's advocate Pieter van Dam, and the *Verhaal van de gepasseerde tusschen de Engelsche en Hollanders in en ontrent Bantem*, were more concerned about rebutting off English accusations.²¹ They were concerned about justifying their intervention in the Banten War than with displaying satisfaction over the victory.²² While the pamphlet wars raged and the written communication between the English and Dutch became a regular feature in the periodical, the *Hollandsche Mercurius* between the years 1682 and 1686, the episode also invaded the travel account.²³ The earliest was the polemically-tinted though unpublished narrative of Reynier Adriaensen, presumably written in 1690, which seized every opportunity to parade the English complicity in instigating the civil war and allying themselves with

²⁰"k heb my dickmael niet weynigh verwonderd dat dit seer heerlijk koninghrijck waer van in de gantsche weereld des koophandelshalven soo veel te seggen is geweest soo light van tsederdt jaer 1582 tot 1685 aen de Hollandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie is overgegaen." Christophorus Frikius, Elias Hesse, and Christophorus Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen nae en door veelerley gewesten in Oost-Indien*, trans. S. de Vries (Utrecht: Willem van de Water, 1694), 71.

²¹"Antwoort van de vergadering van de seventiene, representerende de generale Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost Indische Compagnie aen de hoogh mogende heeren Staten Generael, Der Vereenigde Nederlanden," (Paulus Matthijsz door ordre van d'edele heeren Bewinthebberen der Oost-Indische Compagnie, Onge-dateerd); "Verhael van het geene gepasseert is wegens 't innemen van Bantem, tussen de Engelse en Hollanders in en omtrent Bantem," (S.n.S.I., 1683).

²²See "Antwoort van de vergadering van de seventiene, representerende de generale Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost Indische Compagnie aen de hoogh mogende heeren Staten Generael, Der Vereenigde Nederlanden," 10.

²³See *Hollandse Mercurius, het drie en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1682), 250-52; *Hollandse Mercurius, het vier en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1683), 44-58; *Hollandse Mercurius, het vijf en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1684), 266-69; *Hollandse Mercurius, het ses en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1685), 153-54; *Hollandse Mercurius, het seven en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1686), 1-41; *Hollandse Mercurius, het acht en dertigste deel*, (Haerlem: Abraham Casteleyn, 1687), 123-47.

Sultan Agung.²⁴ This suggests that the Dutch were still smarting under the English accusations of high-handedness even a decade after the event. *De drie aenmerckelijcke reizen* of 1694 written by the aforementioned Frick, also carried an eye-witness account of the siege of Banten written by Elias Hesse, another German and keeper of the Company's mine records. Adriaensen's account aside, this work constitutes the most elaborate narrative of the Banten affair. Those works that G.C. de Waard and Bert Paasman have identified as sources for Van Haren's *Agon*, *Sulthan van Bantam*, were all published in the course of the seventeenth century - Abraham Bogaert's *Historische reizen* (1711) and volume four of François Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1726), which dwell on the event in some detail, and *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff* (1701) which briefly recounts certain events in post war Banten.²⁵ Van Haren, who as M.A.P. Meilink Roelofs notes, holds the rare distinction of having employed the archives of the VOC when penning many of his works, made an exception in the case of *Agon*.²⁶ Instead of plunging into the archives to retrieve information about the Banten war, he relied on these travelogues for details about the episode.

Because the Banten affair was an episode involving two antagonistic nations, England and the Dutch Republic, there were predictably two conflicting versions of the story. The English version held that the civil war was an outcome of years of careful calculation on the part of the Dutch. In their descriptions of Agung's offensive on Banten and the VOC, the Dutch version accorded a generous role to English mercenaries and ammunition. Both powers also spent their energies trying to argue the legitimacy of their respective "protégés" claims to the throne. The English emphasized the ludicrousness of privileging the son's claims to the

²⁴The manuscript of *De overtreffelijcke reijse gedaen door Reynier Adriaensen* is housed in the Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum in Amsterdam. I have consulted the transcribed version of the work which features in Bram Cocquyt, "De overtreffelijcke reijse gedaen door Reynier Adriaensen: Leven als soldaat in de Oost, (1681-1689)" (Licentiaat in de Geschiedenis, Universiteit Gent, 1999).

²⁵De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 18-19; Bert Paasman, "De Indisch-Nederland literatuur uit de VOC-tijd," *Europa buitengaats: Koloniale en postkoloniale literatuuren in Europese talen* ed. Theo D' Haen (Bert Bakker: Amsterdam, 2002), 88. The fact that Van Haren relied on François Valentyn's work to no small degree when writing *Agon* is addressed by Van der Vliet. Pieter van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren (1713-1779) : Staatsman en dichter* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1996), 311. The complete titles of the works that have been identified as sources are François Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a: Beschryving van Groot Djava, ofte Java Major* (Dordrecht: Joannes van Braam, 1725; repr., 2003); Abraham Bogaert, *Historische reizen door d'oostersche deelen van Asia* (Amsterdam: Nicolaas ten Hoorn, 1711); *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeeltens des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*, 2nd ed. (Hoorn: Feyken Rijp, 1704). The principal grounds on which these scholars assert that Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff constitute the sources to *Agon*, *Sulthan van Bantam* is that these works feature in the list of sources which Van Haren claims to have employed to author a biography of the Governor General Joannes Camphuis which also recalls the Banten Civil War. Onno Zwier van Haren, *Proeve, op de levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche doorlugtige mannen: behelzende het leeven van Joannes Camphuis, Haarlemmer* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1772).

²⁶M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Van geheim tot openbaar: een historiografische verkenning. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar in de geschiedenis van de West-Europese Expansie overzee ...aan de Universiteit Leiden op 6 November 1970* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1970), 7.

throne over his father's and the Dutch in turn reminded the English of the injustice implicit in Sultan Agung's act of reversing his decision to abdicate and recognize his son as king in 1680. While the English and Dutch accounts contradicted one another for obvious reasons, among the different Dutch accounts, there are an intriguing number of inconsistencies. Some are minor, such as the claim put forth in Frick's and Hesse's accounts that Haji was not in fact the elder son of Agung, but the younger; but others were perceptively capital. Bogaert's travelogue, which keenly followed the "official version" of the story as prepared by the Dutch attorney Pieter van Dam, strongly emphasized the inadvertent character of the Dutch involvement in the war, which came about as a then-undesirable consequence of an unanticipated chain of events in the kingdom.²⁷ Adriaensen's account on the other hand omitted this crucial detail and suggested that the war with Banten had been the only intention of the Dutch, which might be one reason that the account remained unpublished. Whatever the variations these accounts came with, they were all victors' tales that told of how the Dutch had tamed an obstinate foe. This almost seemed a natural position for Dutchmen to take until the publication of *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam*.

Antecedents to Agon's Anti-Colonial Indictment

Had any of these authors who recorded the events of Banten in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries lived to read Van Haren's play, they might have been singularly appalled. Plainly put, Van Haren vandalized the story, and as G.C. de Waard's and W.M.F. Mansvelt's studies amply reveal, facets of the episode were reshaped until the tale was turned on its head.²⁸ If the authors of the sources that Van Haren presumably used to write his drama, Bogaert, Valentyn, and De Graaff could have drawn the playwright into conversation, they would have liked to remind Van Haren that Sultan Agung displayed none of the relentless bravura that Agon exhibited in the pages of the drama. Agung had instead surrendered after fighting a two-year-long war with the VOC. They also might have liked to inform Van Haren that his portrayal of Van Steenwyk did not accord with their characterization of the renegade. Their accounts may have made mention of his having "turned Turk" in his circumcision and his having embraced Islam, but in contrast to the revolting villainy that Van Haren attributes to the man, the sources do not denounce the renegade, although apostasy was always regarded

²⁷Compare the account of the Banten War authored by Pieter van Dam which features in the 1686 issue of the *Hollandse Mercurius* with the version of the event contained in Bogaert's work. *Hollandse Mercurius, het seven en dertigste deel*, 1-39; Bogaert, A. *Bogaert's historische reizen*.

²⁸De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 25-27; W.M.F. Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," *De Gids* 84, 4 (1920), 313.

a highly despicable act. Valentyn, for example, sought to erase the shame of Van Steenwyk's desertion of his faith and country and to convince the reader of the renegade's contrition for his actions. He concluded his description of the man by noting, "he later returned to us [the Dutch East India Company], re-embraced Christianity, and died in Batavia on 16 October 1711."²⁹

The third aspect in Van Haren's account that might have positively intrigued his sources is the character, Fathema. They might have been sure to point out that their accounts only referred to women in the collective, as ladies of the harem. And here, they might have sheepishly confessed to having paid inordinate attention to the women of the harem almost as if they had felt obliged to say a word or two about the King of Banten's women. Bogaert noted with ill-concealed scorn that when under siege, "the young king [Sultan Haji], irrespective of the fact that he had no more than three hundred men by his side, was in the company of a larger number of women which," he noted "symbolized the splendour of the Eastern court" and Valentyn informed his audience that when Sultan Agung laid down his arms, thus bringing the Banten war to a close, the vanquished ruler did not endure imprisonment alone.³⁰ "All his women" supposedly partook in his piteous state of captivity.³¹ The wives and concubines of Banten's royals also drew the attention of other contemporaries. Elias Hesse confirmed that Sultan Haji took delight in a similar transport of women. He recalled the fact that the King's women were amply represented in a royal procession he had witnessed in Banten in 1683.³² If tales of the king's queens, concubines, and other women in his service thronged the Dutch accounts affirming stereotypical notions of Oriental rulers and their well-populated harems, they also offered enticing glimpses into the erotic spectacles that took place behind the latticed screens of the secluded spaces. Hesse engrossed his readers with the tale of a Dutch woman whose sensibilities were deeply aggrieved when one of the King's concubines salaciously "bared her breasts and asked whether she desired to see more."³³ The red-faced lady, we are told, was positively scandalised. The obscenity implicit in the act of the concubine, the accounts suggest was only to be outdone by the king himself. The Dutch Resident Joan van Hoorn, Valentyn tells us, returned from a visit to the Banten court in 1685 with the impression that Sultan Haji, contrary to his station and upbringing, was

²⁹Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 215.

³⁰Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 148. Bogaert was clearly relying on Christoph Frick's account to make this evaluation. See Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen*, 39.

³¹Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226.

³²Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijke reysen*, 287.

³³"Eene onder haer in de tegenwoordigheyd van des gedaghten Admirael's Gemaelin ontblootende haere Borsten; en vraeghde hoe offe noch niets meer begeerden te sien. Doch 't wierd niet aengenomen." Ibid.

no stranger to “the use of inordinately foul brothel-language in High Javanese.”³⁴ Among the others who displayed a fixation with Bantem’s harem was the painter-traveller Cornelis de Bruyn who visited Banten in the first decade of the eighteenth century. He opened up the space of the harem and its concubines to the voyeuristic gaze of European readers in illustration. His sketch recording his presence in the Banten court is populated by a surfeit of women, some of whom reveal their breasts in much the same way that Hesse’s cheeky concubine startled the poor Dutch woman.³⁵ In an apparent contrast to Van Haren’s sources, and other contemporary accounts and illustrations of Banten, in which women only serve as consorts to the King but whose identities were otherwise erased, Van Haren’s female protagonist, Fathema, was made of greater grit and mettle than any of the male characters that populated his cast.

If we wager that there was an element of consensus between the sources and *Agon*, it lay in their characterization of Agung’s elder son, Sultan Haji, who features in the drama as the detestable Abdul. Despite being an ally of the Company and having afforded the VOC an opportunity to intervene in Banten, none of the Dutch sources take kindly to this rebellious ruler. They may not have charged him with fratricide but they certainly thought him capable of this abominable act. They testified that the VOC had to take steps to ensure that once defeated and taken captive, Agung did not become a victim of his son’s “bitterness.”³⁶ They attributed to Sultan Haji traits commonly associated with Oriental despotism – an insatiable imperiousness and cruelty verging on sadism in the assortment of punishments he meted out to dissidents.³⁷ While the caricature of Sultan Haji as the remorseless and sadistic son persisted in all the sources as it did in *Agon*, Christoff Frick offers a slightly variegated portrayal of the ruler. Together with his understanding that Sultan Haji could never claim to have been a compassionate ruler, Frick also depicted him positively as the itinerant prince eager to experiment with unconventional forms of government.³⁸

Van Haren’s imagining of the East as divesting the Dutchman of his superior qualities and rendering him a slave to luxury and opulence constitutes a second borrowing. This was seemingly predicated on De Graaff’s commentary on the Dutch East India Company’s east and its various facets in *De Oost-Indische Spieghel* which was published as an appendix to his travel account. In a biting critique of Batavian society, De Graaff painted a dismal image of

³⁴Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226-27.

³⁵See illustration in *Cornelis de Bruin’s reizen over Moskovie door Persie en India*, (Amsterdam: Willem en David Goeree, 1711), centrefold between pages 382 and 83.

³⁶*Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226.

³⁷Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijcke reysen*, 65,69.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 39.

the populace's gradual descent into Eastern depravity. It was the lifestyle of its mestizo women that De Graaff projected as capturing the wantonness that was breeding in the Dutch Indies. The indigenous culture he darkly recalled had infected the Batavian households to the extent that even the child-rearing practices that the city's women adopted were no longer even faintly Dutch. In drawing attention to the orientalization of the Dutch in the Indies, De Graaff seemed to allude to the twilight of Dutch rule that Van Haren prophesized in the pages of *Agon*.³⁹

Apart from the drama's consensus with its sources on two counts, it was for all intents and purposes a counter-construction of the tale of Banten. The origins of the civil war where the dissensions between the father and son had simmered for a while before boiling over was snipped, the aftermath of the battle in Agung's surrender to the Company was cropped, and the complex relationship between both parties and their respective European allies was jettisoned altogether.⁴⁰ The Bantanese, who in Frick's account, were the masters of deceit were valorised; the Dutch, who the sources were at pains to project as the righteous victors, were denounced; and the episode originally comprehended as an ode to Dutch bravery in the Indies was inverted to be read as an epitaph to Dutch morality in which Van Haren held that his countrymen sacrificed themselves before the high alter of imperiousness in the Indies.⁴¹

Admittedly, the provenance of Van Haren's fiery anti-colonial or even anti-Company rhetoric in *Agon* cannot be found in these Dutch sources to the play. The English, we might remember, had in the thick of the Banten conflict composed a scathing critique of the Company. The precedents to the radical thought processes contained in the play might then be found in the aspersions cast by the English East India Company on the involvement of their European rivals in the civil war. The English and Van Haren seem to share the same perspective on the VOC on many counts. The English pamphlet titled *An Impartial Vindication of the English East India Company* took the same stance as the playwright on the causes for the civil war and the character of the Dutch engagement in the confrontation. The work alleged that "it was the encroaching, restless, covetous humour of the Dutch Company" that stoked their expansionist zeal in the Indies.⁴² This, it argued, was sufficiently quenched

³⁹Marijke Barend-van Haeften and Hetty Plekenpol, eds., *Nicolaas de Graaff: Oost-Indise Spiegel* (Leiden: KITLV, 2010), 73-75.

⁴⁰De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 25-28.

⁴¹See Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijcke reysen*, 50. This reading of Van Haren's drama is similar to what Meijer posits when he says: "In *Agon*, the Dutch are unqualified villains, the Javanese are the heroes." Reinder P. Meijer, *Literature of the Low Countries: A Short History of Dutch Literature in the Netherlands and Belgium* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 169.

⁴²English East India Company, *An Impartial Vindication of the English East India Company from the Unjust and Slandorous Imputations cast upon them in a Treatise intituled A Justification of the Directors of the Nederlands*

by their intervention in the disputes of the local rulers which it sourly noted “[was] an old practice of the Dutch.”⁴³ The work also parroted the play’s perspectives on the consequences of the conflict by noting that the Dutch were trampling on Banten’s sovereignty in the same manner that they “[had] enslaved and held in slavery above fifty such kings within eighty years past in those eastern parts of the world.”⁴⁴

But notwithstanding the apparent similarities, the English sources do not anticipate the drama’s morally driven anti-colonial indictment. Incredulously at odds with the general anguish that the *Impartial Vindication* reveals at Dutch covetousness, the work asked “whether it was not more prudent, (since they had the noble places of trade in India already) to sit down quietly and let their Neighbours peaceably imploy their industry to gain a penny by their leavings.”⁴⁵ That the English in their critique of the VOC did not reproach the logic of expansionism, but merely lamented the fact that they had been beaten to the task by the Dutch becomes more apparent when the *Impartial Vindication* alleged that Sultan Agung, already wary of the happenings in Banten, had notified Charles II of England of a Dutch conspiracy brewing in his kingdom: “he [Sultan Agung] wrote to his late Majesty long before the surprize of Banten, that the Dutch were contriving to enslave him and his country, as they had done all his Neighbour Princes; but that he would be a slave to none but to his late Majesty of Glorious Memory.”⁴⁶ Clearly then, *Agon*’s pungent critique of the Dutch East India Company had no antecedents either amongst his sources, or in the English post-Banten polemic. It was the drama’s own.

Accounts of Travel and Travelling Company Correspondence

In a touch of amusing irony, Van Haren’s *Agon* despite its fiery anti-colonial rhetoric was based on sources that were associated with the enterprise the playwright wants his audience to detest in his drama. François Valentyn was for a great part of his career, a clergyman in the services of the VOC stationed on the island of Ambon. Bogaert served the Company in various capacities in their settlements across Asia and visited Banten between 1702 and 1703. On leaving Company service he began a writing career in the Republic and by his death in

East India Company; As it was delivered over unto the High and Mighty Lords of the States General of the United Provinces (London: J. Richardson for Samuel Tidmarsh, 1688), 136.

⁴³Ibid., 12-13.

⁴⁴Ibid., 91.

⁴⁵Ibid., 137.

⁴⁶Ibid., 92-93.

1727, he had authored over twenty works of history, poetry, and drama.⁴⁷ De Graaff earned his bread and butter as a surgeon aboard Company ships. Always on the move owing to the nature of his profession, he had visited virtually every VOC settlement. Other telling signs of association with the VOC also characterize his work. The dedicatory epistle of his account marks out the directors of the Hoorn Chamber of the enterprise as having earned the “gratitude” of the publisher of the work, Feyken Ryp.⁴⁸ Both aspects indicate that De Graaff’s publication enjoyed the patronage of and was sanctioned by the Company.

In view of the ties of association that these authors share with the Dutch East India Company, the pertinent question that follows is how influential the VOC was in determining what went into the pages of these three works? Virtually any scholar who has reflected on Valentyn’s *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* has commented on its lack of originality and his dependence on Company documents to write his monumental work is an ill-kept secret. Labelled by E.M. Beekman as “an intellectual magpie,” Valentyn was a far better collator of information than he was an author, and as Habiboe tells us, his debt to the Dutch East India Company for the information that featured in his account was enormous.⁴⁹ Apart from the multiple ways in which he put official VOC documentation and the private papers of its personnel to use in his work, Valentyn realized how the *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* would benefit from his contemporaries who in the course of Company service in the Indies amassed vast reservoirs of knowledge about Asia and the workings of the enterprise.⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, C.R. Boxer calls for a re-evaluation of our understanding of Company secrecy regarding their activities in the East – the imprints left behind by the VOC in the *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* were such.⁵¹ De Graaff’s *Reizen*, in contrast, presents a picture of a straight-forward first-person narrative based on experience which was not overly dependent on outside borrowings. A few precious references in the account however suggest that, as

⁴⁷A.J. van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden. Deel 2. Eerste en tweede stuk* (Haarlem: J.J. van Brederode, 1854), 768; P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok, eds., *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek. Deel III* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1914), 131-33.

⁴⁸See dedicatory epistle in *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeelten des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*. The work was first published in 1701.

⁴⁹ Cf. E.M. Beekman, ed. *Fugitive Dreams: An Anthology of Dutch Colonial Literature* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 59; R.R.F. Habiboe, *Tot verheffing van mijne natie: Het leven en werk van François Valentyn, 1666-1727* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2004), 97-99.

⁵⁰To fathom the extent to which François Valentyn’s *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* was dependent on Company documentation; one need only look to the official correspondence of the Dutch East India Company which has been incorporated in Volume 4a of the work which also features Valentyn’s narrative on Banten. The volume contains the particulars of the treaty signed by the Company with the kingdom of Mataram in 1646 and correspondence between the King of Abyssinia and the Governor General of the VOC in 1675. Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 98-99, 321; Habiboe, *Tot verheffing van mijne natie: Het leven en werk van François Valentyn, 1666-1727*, 97-99.

⁵¹C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 164.

with Valentyn, oral communication played a role in the making of his travel account. One of his fellow conversationalists, he notes, was Hendrik Laurenszoon van Steenwyk, who featured in Van Haren's cast with a slight change of name as Jan Lucas van Steenwyk.⁵²

Agon's third source, Abraham Bogaert's *Historische Reizen* has a lot in common with Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*. Both works demonstrate uncanny similarities to the official Dutch narrative of the 1682 siege of Banten which was published in the Republic as part of the pamphleteering that emerged in the wake of the English outcry over their expulsion from the port polity. Both accounts tell of an episode that occurred in Banten when the Dutch sought Sultan Agung's response to their proposal for mediation between father and son. As the battle-ready Dutch awaited the answer that was to determine the character of Dutch intervention in Banten's civil war, they encountered an Englishman who presumably spoke on behalf of the Old Sultan and behaved most reprehensibly. A part of the conversation that ensued between the unnamed Englishman and the Dutch features in a 1688 English tract titled *An Impartial Vindication of the English East India Company*, which was a translation of a Dutch pamphlet. It reads, "But after having advanced a little, they [the Dutch] met with some Europeans, who asked them by the mouth of an Englishman, why they [the Dutch] intermeddled with the differences between the two kings."⁵³ When Bogaert and Valentyn recast the episode in their accounts, the choice of words they employed was similar.⁵⁴ One can assume that the Dutch pamphlets of the 1680s, which were drafted in the Republic, were informed by the reports of the VOC that had been dispatched to the United Provinces from Asia. The attempt to recreate the chain of information transfer by embarking on the mission to find reference to this obnoxious Englishman at the lower level of information gathering is successful. According to the 1682 Batavia Dagh-register, a letter from Saint Martin, commander of the Company forces in Banten to Batavia dated 27 March refers to a

⁵²*Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeelten des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*, 184. When Bogaert like De Graaff names the renegade, Hendrik Laurensz. van Steenwyk; Valentyn refers to him as Henrik Lucaszoon Caardeel, van Steenwyk. Van Haren's choice of Jan for the renegade's first name appears rather arbitrary. To avoid confusion owing to the handful of names that we are presented with, the chapter shall henceforth refer to renegade, both the historical figure and dramatic persona as Van Steenwyk.

⁵³This description features in a report titled "The Commissioners Instructors their first paper presented to the Lords Commissioners Decisors" and was submitted on 13th October 1685 by the Dutch representatives, G. Hooft, Jacob van Hoorne, S.V. Bloquery and A. Paets in Company, *An Impartial Vindication*, 73. I have been unable to find the original Dutch pamphlet on which this English version is based.

⁵⁴"Deze, een weinig voor gestapt, gemoetteden eenige Europeanen, en weird hen door den mond van eenen Engelsman afgevraagd: waarom zy hen kwamen te bemoeien met de verschillen van die twee koningen? Zy antwoorden, dat ze als vrienden kwamen, om den vrede tusschen vader en zoon te bevorderen." Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 151. Compare the above description with Valentyn's sketch of the same episode: "Deze, daar op afgegaan zynde, quamen eenige Europeers te gemoet, die hen door een Engelsman afvraagden, wat zy met de geschillen van dese twee koningen te doen hadden, en waarom zy zich daar mede bemoeiden? Zy gaven tot antwoord, dat zy quamen als vrienden, om die beide vorsten, waar 't mogelyk, te verzoenen." Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 223.

conversation that took place on the 24th of the same month between Company personnel and, as the letter put it, “the three Europeans from Carangatoe who were representatives of Pangeran Pourbija [Sultan Agung’s younger son].”⁵⁵ The commander’s correspondence like the subsequent print versions of the Banten war thus affirmed that such an exchange did indeed happen before war broke out the following day, 25 March 1682.

As Saint Martin’s telling of the episode corresponds closely with the accounts of Valentyn and Bogaert, we might entertain the notion that these accounts were based on Saint Martin’s letter, which constituted lower level Company documentation. Although this is a plausible scenario, it is more likely that Bogaert and Valentyn learnt of the tense exchanges that took place between the Dutch and the English from the Dutch version of the pamphlet, *An Impartial Vindication*. I substantiate this assertion on the grounds that we can hardly tell the Bogaert, Valentyn and pamphlet versions of the episode apart – the accounts rehearse the pamphlet version of the story verbatim. The pamphlet was arguably based on – though a polemical rendition of – the Saint Martin letter. The episode of the Englishman had thus travelled from the Saint Martin letter (1682) to the pamphlet *An Impartial Vindication* (1688) in which it manifested in a palpably different form. It subsequently went on to feature in the accounts of Bogaert (1711) and Valentyn (1726) with no further transformations in the characterization of the confrontation. When in possession of four near similar versions of a small but significant episode in the Banten war written at completely different times, we are presented with a classic example of the migration of what one might call “hard fact” from Company documentation to the travelogues. We must note, however, that not all events that appear in the published accounts can be corroborated in the Company archives. The reasons for this range from the greater propensity of writers of travel accounts to fabricate information to the varying levels of importance that authors accorded to different episodes.⁵⁶

⁵⁵See “Short summary of the missive from Major Isaack St. Martin and Council dated 27 Maart 1682 to His Honours [the Governor General and Council of Batavia]” in W. Fruin-Mees, *Dagh-register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer te plaetse als over geheel Nederlands India anno 1682* (Batavia: G. Kolff, 1928), 378-79. The minor details on which Saint Martin’s letter differs from the English pamphlet and the accounts of Bogaert and Valentyn relate to the conversation that ensued between the two parties and does not confirm whether any of the “Europeans” that the Dutch met were in fact Englishmen.

⁵⁶Valentyn’s aforementioned tale about the foul mouthed Sultan is one such example. Although Valentyn mentions that the event took place in 1685 and affirms that Johan van Hoorn, the then Councilor of the Indies was a witness to the episode, one fails to find a parallel reference to the event in the Company archives. The Company records which address the affairs of the kingdom of Banten for the year 1685 make reference to only a single instance where the Dutch were granted audience by the Sultan. The Dutch were here represented by their Commander St. Martin in a meeting which took place on the 21 November, 1685. An account detailing what transpired in the meeting was relayed to Batavia in a dispatch which reached the following day. Joan van Hoorn finds no mention in this report. See NA, VOC 1417, “Report from St. Martin to the Governor General and Council dated 21 November, 1685,” fols. 2015v-2018 r; Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226-27.

When our quest for palpable connections, that is, the transfer of “concrete” information from Company documentation to published accounts that served as sources for the play, is rewarded, we might explore the possibility of looking for connections and associations at the level of perspective. In the context of our analysis of perspectival linkages, I choose to focus on three subjects: the character of Sultan Haji, Bantanese women and apostasy. Just as these were issues to which the published sources and Van Haren’s *Agon* attached varying degrees of importance, the same themes received considerable attention in the Company archives. But when the perspectival connections between the travel accounts and Company documentation are examined, the information acquisition practices of the Company with respect to Banten need to be addressed. This is because the perspectives the Company came to hold of Banten were after all generated from a network of information gathering in which both natives and Dutchmen participated as information brokers.

Making the Other’s Business One’s Own: Information Gathering and Intelligence Acquisition

Although the history of the VOC’s mercantile activities in Banten date back to 1603, it was only in the mid seventeenth century that Dutch commercial interests in the kingdom were secure.⁵⁷ The vagaries of the political relationship between the two entities had in the intervening decades disrupted the Company’s operations in the kingdom. Banten was virtually at Batavia’s doorstep and this, as Johan Talens has noted, ensured that the correspondence between the Dutch chief in the factory in Banten and the Governor General and Council in Batavia was brisk and regular.⁵⁸ In the decade before the war, Willem Caeff, the Dutch merchant stationed in the kingdom sent out no less than a letter a week to Batavia. These dispatches were formulaic in their composition. They recorded the trading practices and profit margins of the Sultan, their European trading competitors such as the English, French and Danes and local and other foreign merchants. Other subjects that merited attention were of a more confidential kind. Information about changing political alliances and news of crucial happenings in the palace that could in some way determine Banten’s political posture were brought to Batavia’s notice. In 1678, the Governor General was notified that Sultan Agung had granted audience to the emissary of Amangkurat II of Mataram. Indicative of the effective

⁵⁷Ibid., 219-21.

⁵⁸Johan Talens, *Een feodale samenleving in koloniaal vaarwater: Staatsvorming, koloniale expansie en economische onderontwikkeling in Banten, West-Java 1600-1750* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), 36.

lines of espionage that the Company was able to lay, Batavia was informed of all that transpired in the course of the envoy's visit to the Banten court.⁵⁹

The Banten dispatches reveal a great deal about the character of Dutch surveillance. The letters were mostly written in the first person by the Dutch factor, who told of episodes and events he had witnessed or had been a part of. In instances he relied on informants, native or otherwise, he remained discreet about them. These information brokers who relayed information to the Dutch factor in the kingdom that subsequently made up the content of the letters sent to Batavia are thus inconspicuous in the correspondence in times of peace. If they surfaced, it was in times of war. The year 1677 marked one such moment. When the kingdom of Mataram already rankled by weak governance fell prey to a powerful rebellion staged by Trunajaya, a prince from the island of Madura who had set his eyes on the throne of Mataram, the kingdom began emitting the odours of a dying state.⁶⁰ As Banten and Batavia, both full-blooded expansionists in the period closed in to claim their share of the beleaguered kingdom, they threw their support behind opposing sides in the battle. Tensions hit a new high and war clouds gathered. Under this situation of increased political duress, the factor in Banten spoke of his information brokers with greater openness and references to informants suddenly infiltrated the Banten dispatches. Many still had their identities shrouded in anonymity and the correspondence in the period continued to attribute much of the information they received to informants who they plainly referred to "a certain spy" or "our secret court correspondent."⁶¹ When political alignments underwent a shift in the late 1670s, the channels of information procurement metamorphosed accordingly. Abdul (later Sultan Haji) whose dissensions with his father had been evident since 1674, was gravitating towards the Company and his attempts to display his commitment to establishing a friendship with the VOC included sharing information with the enterprise.⁶² When the Company found a native

⁵⁹ NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 28, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1779r.

⁶⁰ While the Dutch supported the cause of the crown prince of Mataram, Amangkurat II who later was successful in stamping out the rebellion, Trunajaya was aided by Banten. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 73-79; Barbara Watson Andaya, "Political Developments between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 441.

⁶¹ NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob Van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 18, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1773r; NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated November 3, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1830r; Also see entry dated July 24 in F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts India anno 1679* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1909), 335; See entry dated September 28 in F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts India anno 1678* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1907), 528.

⁶² In 1674, Batavia in their correspondence to the Gentlemen Seventeen reported what appears in retrospect to have been the first signs of a breach in the relationship between father and son. Implying that the familial quarrel was hardly petty, Batavia wrote: "[the differences between father and son] has caused such a riot that [Sulthan

informant in the King, confidential conversations between father and son came to be broadcast in Batavia's boardroom. It became Company knowledge in 1678 that "[Sultan Haji's] father had warned him that when the Dutch have brought everything in the East to their liking, they would war with Bantam and whether [under such circumstances] it was not best that they first began [the hostilities]."⁶³ When the Company satisfactorily drew Sultan Haji into their ring of espionage, the Company "steward and interpreter" named Huigh Booy performed the role of emissary between Abdul and the Dutch representative in Banten.⁶⁴ Huigh Booy was also an informant in his own right and shared information that Abdul was unwilling to divulge. Shortly before the disagreements between father and son flared in the 1680s, an alternative centre of power emerged – in Tirtayasa. When Agung and his loyalists flocked to Tirtayasa, it assumed the face of a rival settlement to Banten. Consequently, the Company's tentacles of espionage had to penetrate yet another royal establishment. This was accomplished by recruiting a Muslim cleric called Abdulha who at the behest of the Company frequently commuted between the two courts procuring mostly military intelligence for the VOC. He focussed on subjects such as the strength of Agung's fleet, and the manner in which his faction was mobilizing its troops. In recognition of Abdulha's contribution, one Banten dispatch referred to him as "our trusted priest."⁶⁵ The case of Abdulha is instructive in another context as it demonstrates the fact that engagement in espionage could also cause the loyalties of those involved in the exercise to be questioned. In April 1678, Batavia aired its misgivings about the Company's growing dependence on Abdulha to cull intelligence from Tirtayasa and went so far as to suggest that the cleric was a double agent.⁶⁶ The Dutch merchant in Banten promptly replied that Batavia's suspicions were misplaced. This response supposedly quelled Batavia's apprehensions, as the services of the "old court spy" were once again recruited

Haji] was determined to play Amok and take out his anger on the Christians there." Dispatch dated November 17, 1674 sent from the Governor General and Council in Batavia to the Gentleman Seventeen. See J.K.J. de Jonge, *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag over Java, derde deel* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1872), 124.

⁶³"Nadat de jonge Sultan verleden weer op Turtiassa bij zijn heer vader geweest is en weder geretourneert, is ons angedient dat de oude Sultan gewaerschout zijn, wanneer de Hollanders alles na haer sin om de oost sullen gebracht hebben, dat zij dan Bantam ook den oorlog sal aendoen en off het niet best soude zijn dat zij nu eerst begonden." NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated November 29, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1835r.

⁶⁴The Company records refer to Huigh Booy as "bottelier en tolck." I thank Dr Wagenaar for having clarified what the term "bottelier" meant. NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated November 20, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1833v. Biographical information available on Huigh Booy is scant. Talens records that he did not survive the war. Talens, *Een feodale samenleving*, 93(fn).

⁶⁵ NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob Van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 18, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1773v.

⁶⁶NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Jacob Van Dijck and Willem Caeff in Bantam dated April 7, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fols. 1783v-1784r.

during the Banten war.⁶⁷ When the espionage networks of the Company seem to have relied on both native and Dutch informants, Sultan Agung was not far behind. In April 1678, the Dutch factor informed the Governor General and Council that the interpreter Huigh Booy when on a regular trip to gather intelligence in Banten had stumbled on information that led him to believe that Agung had his own well-established moles in Batavia. The Dutch feared that the proceedings of high-level meetings in the Company headquarters had as a consequence become enemy knowledge.⁶⁸

With the commencement of war in 1681, the Dutch capture of Banten, and the retreat of Sultan Agung and his faction to Tirtayasa, the landscape of surveillance and espionage underwent a change. The Company continued to heed to the news shared by traditional sources of information such as people of power in the royal house, a role filled during the war by Keij Agus Ronus Raja, *Mantri Anum* (subordinate minister) to Sultan Agung, and other regular sources of information such as the spy Abdulha.⁶⁹ What dramatically changed was the manner in which fugitives and defectors suddenly appear in the Company annals as informants palming off copious amounts of information to the Dutch. These sources carried news of immense strategic value such as the layout of Tirtayasa, the strength of Agung's garrison, and the Sultan's military plans. The slave Anthonij Gomes, who after serving masters in Batavia and Banten, was forced to flee to Tirtayasa during the war informed the Company that although there was a likelihood of an increase in the numbers of Agung loyalists, the Sultan was seriously wanting in military strength.⁷⁰ Massaboe, one of the few women who turned informant attributed her calling to her unfortunate decision to "venture out to pluck vegetables."⁷¹ This had led to her imprisonment in Tirtayasa and she returned to apprise the Dutch of the manpower Agung had at his disposal and to tell of Banten's own inquisitiveness about the military strength of the Dutch. The character of Dutch correspondence during the war therefore exhibits a marked change from that prior to the war. Unlike the pre-war phase, when the Dutch factor and other recruits fulfilled the intelligence

⁶⁷NA, VOC 7528, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 24, 1684 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," Batavia 2, section 3, p. 64.

⁶⁸NA, VOC 1340, "Letter sent from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated May 13, 1678 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 1793r.

⁶⁹NA, VOC 7659, "Report concerning the situation of and happenings concerning the enemy put down in writing as it was reported to Capitein Joncker from a certain Keij Agus Ronus Raja who arrived here on the evening of 24 October 1682," p. 700.

⁷⁰NA, VOC 7659, "Report regarding the situation and circumstances in Pontangh Turtiassa as was orally pronounced by a certain slave who arrived here from Turtiassa on 13 August, 1682," p. 499-501.

⁷¹NA, VOC 7659, "Translation of a Javanese story drawn up by Pangerang Souda Ningrat for the Major on August 7, 1682 told by a woman named Massaboe who had been kidnapped nearly two months ago when she had gone to pluck vegetables and who now returned," p. 514.

needs of the Company, owing to its natural tendency to displace populations, the war made every fugitive man, woman, and child a potential informant. Correspondence from both periods are informative not merely about the character of information that coursed through these channels, but the motivations that turned persons into information brokers, and the systems of surveillance and information gathering both permanent and ad hoc that the Dutch had instituted to procure information about Banten and later Tirtayasa. It was against this backdrop of information acquisition that the Company's perspectives on Banten came to be formed. Among the myriad themes that the official VOC records deliberated upon in their relations with Banten, the character of Sultan Haji, the role of women in the royal household, and the issue of apostasy enjoy a certain prominence.

Salacious and Sordid Spectacles: Representation of Banten's Women and Sultan Abdul

The entry of the journal recording the progress of the war dated 29 August 1682 reads, "In the afternoon the Sultan [Haji] had announced to the Major that he was of the intention to visit the mouth of the river with his wives in order to call upon Captain Joncker and his spouse." The description of the king's procession that follows suggested that the entire palace had gathered on the streets of Banten to accompany their sovereign in this social exercise:

he together with his 4 principal wives sat in a palanquin which was suffered by 16 fugitive natives with yellow skirts, red trousers and similarly coloured hats that they were accustomed to wearing. Two more palanquins followed with his children and a company of soldiers from Bali marched ahead with their spears pointing upwards followed by a company of European musketeers under Lieutenant Miville with flying standards and drum beats, and shortly after the King's bodyguards and the *Soura nagaras* [Javanese soldiers] followed, and then came a long retinue of royal maid servants, who carried one thing or another...⁷²

⁷²"...in der agtermiddagh lieten er zulthan de heer maijoor aendien en dat van meninge was, nevens zijn vrouwen, een keer nade boom te doen, omme den capit. Joncker en zijn Ega te gaen besoecken, daer op alles ter geleijde van zijn ho: wiert vervaerdigt, werdende ontrent ter 4 uren door den heer maijoor en eenige der gequalificeert ministers tot buijten de casteels poort geconduijseert, alwaer sigh nevens 4 zijner voornaemste vrouwen in een palanquijn begaf die van 16 weggelopen swarten met geele rochies rode broecen en sodanige mutsen gehabitudeert getorst wiert, daer aen nogh 2 palanquijs met zijn kinderen daar volgden, marcherende voor uijt een comp. balijers met hun spietsen opwaerts gevolgt van een comp. Europese musquettiers onder Luijten. Miville met vliegende vendels en slaende trommels, er korts daer agter 's conincx lijff guarden en soura nagaras, daer een lange rije van conincklijk dienstmeijden agter na quamen, die den een agter der ander ijetwes droegen..." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated 29 August, 1682 in "Journal, delivered by the ship Princess Maria which arrived in Tessel on June 27, 1685 detailing the occurrences before, during and after the conquest of the

As an episode recorded by the VOC scribe to emphasize the pomposity involved in the spectacle or perhaps to underline the court's ability to mobilize such manpower for the purpose, the act to chronicling the Sultan's "visit" was perhaps also driven by the same need that had led Elias Hesse and Christoph Frick to describe similar processions in their travel accounts – to draw attention to the numerous women who featured as participants in the event.⁷³ As in the works of Valentyn, Frick, and Hesse, references to women frequently punctuate the seventeenth-century Company records on the kingdom of Banten. They register the plentitude of women who populated the royal Bantanese space in their roles as wives, concubines, and maid-servants to the sovereign. According to official VOC reports, the female presence in the company of the Sultan was considerable when visits were paid to his majesty by Dutch representatives. Royal women also seem to have accompanied the sovereign when these diplomatic gestures were returned – in the King's visits to the lodgings of the Dutch captain. Certain royal events by implication suggested the attendance of the palace women such as the pleasure trips organized by the King to the River Pontang. As Company records note, they also partook in the less agreeable undertakings of the Sultan. On the 6 April 1683, the royal women were expected to join their sovereign in witnessing the execution of Dutch deserters. When the royal entourage failed to arrive on time, the Company went ahead and carried out the executions in their absence.⁷⁴

The purported likeness between the official accounts and the travelogues in that they both refer to the numerous women who featured in Banten's royal household, it appears, is the only commonality they share in their representations of Banten's women. In alluding to the female company of the Sultans of Banten, and excitedly peddling the erotic tales that supposedly took place in the inner chambers of the palace, the accounts of Valentyn, Frick, and Hesse reiterated what Mary Roberts calls "orientalist myth-making."⁷⁵ The tale of Johan van Hoorn's experience in the royal harem as chronicled in Valentyn's account might be doubted, and the truth in Hesse's story about the royal woman's indecent exposure can also be

city of Bantam as have happened in the aforementioned settlement and in the region since March 6, 1682 until May 20, 1684," p. 371-372.

⁷³Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijcke reysen*, 119, 286-87.

⁷⁴"Omtrent tien uren, zijn de vooren verhaelde deserteuren geexecuteert en met de coorde aen een galge gestrafft, datter de doot an gevolgt is, waer na de coninck omtrent een groot half uur, met sijn wijven en verdre geheel stoet verschijnt meijnende met de executie tot sijn comste gewaght sou werden." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated April 6, 1683 in "Journal, delivered by the ship Princess Maria," p. 674.

⁷⁵Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 226-27; Frikius, Hesse, and Schweitzer, *Drie seer aenmercklijcke reysen*, 39, 286-87; Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.

questioned because there is no corroboration of it in the Company records. This leads us to believe that these travel accounts merely reinforced the “image...of the Sultan’s palace as a proverbial site for sexual excesses, sadistic entertainment, and private, pornographic spectacle.”⁷⁶

In contrast to the travelogues which in their depiction of women seem to have been playing to the expectations of a European readership back home, the Company records adopted a certain matter-of-factness in their descriptions of women. The reason that these entries on the palace’s female populace feature in the Company documentation in the first place was because certain matters such as the marital affairs of the royal family were of crucial importance to the Company. The marriage alliances of the Bantanese royals were of consequence for the VOC at one level because the Company had to tend to certain practical matters such as acquiring suitable presents. At another level, these marital alliances had implications for the forging, strengthening, or disrupting of political associations and could thereby have an impact on the political equilibrium in the region. A clear example of the tilting and turning of political alliances on the basis of marital ties surfaces in the manner in which the generally amiable relations between Sultan and the Makassarans who had sought asylum in his kingdom turned sour when he took one of their women as a bride.⁷⁷ On other occasions when references to women tended to infiltrate the VOC narratives, they plainly registered the presence of women in the Sultan’s company without venturing to deliberate on the spectacle at length.

While it might be accepted that the Company descriptions of the royal women were generally prosaic, they did at times veer towards the standpoint similar to that found in the travelogues. In March 1675, the Dutch factor Caeff was determined to frustrate the Sultan’s attempts to secure the temporary services of Monsieur Blauwet, the diamond cutter in Batavia. He justified efforts to prevent Blauwet from setting foot in the kingdom when he wrote to Batavia, “this king and the nobles allow such professionals many liberties with their women because of whom they may defect and adopt the foul Muslim faith.”⁷⁸ The VOC

⁷⁶Cf. Daniel J. Vitkus, ed. *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England: Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk, The Renegado* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 13. Vitkus makes this remark in the context of a discussion on the Ottoman harem but one reckons that this applies to Oriental harems at large.

⁷⁷NA, VOC 1313, “Letter from Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated March 20, 1675,” fol. 658v; J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India anno 1675* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1902), 93. After the fall of Makassar to Dutch authority, Banten experienced a heavy influx of Makassaran asylum seekers. See Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 78.

⁷⁸NA, VOC 1313, “Letter from Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated March 20, 1675,” fols. 658v-659r.

records also carry examples of its servants displaying their indignation at the manner in which the King's interaction with the royal womenfolk impeded the day-to-day agenda of the Company. In his letter dated 27 September 1678, Willem Caeff intimated to the Governor General that the King's attention to his consorts had frustrated the interpreter Huigh Booy's attempts to secure an audience with the ruler.⁷⁹ But for these occasional exceptions, the official narrative generally lacks the sensational lustre of the travelogues' tales. In this regard, the VOC records at times offer a suitable counterpoise to the tendency of the travel accounts to distort their observations of Banten. Bogaert claimed that Sultan Haji valued his female company more than he did his male company, thereby generating for the European reader, the image of a ruler who immersed himself in his harem when his kingdom was plunged in war.⁸⁰ The official documentation in contrast espoused a more complex view of the women associated with the palace. When the King prepared to hand over local deserters to the Company during the war, the official documentation noted, "his majesty immediately commissioned some women thither to fetch their swords and [take] them to [the Company lodge]."⁸¹ The narrative thus implied that women in the royal household were known to take up various kinds of employment including military duties. In so doing, the records of the Company suggest that Banten exudes similarities to seventeenth-century Mataram where, as Barbara Watson Andaya notes, "courts used women as sentinels."⁸²

Just as Company documents appeared prosaic in their representations of Banten's royal women, in distinction to the tendency of the travel accounts to drape their women subjects in stereotypical harem imagery, both the Company records and the travelogues stayed loyal to their respective representative strategies in the depiction of the Company protégé Sultan Haji. Caricatured as an Oriental despot and the epitome of cruelty, the travelogues of Frick and Valentyn appealed to character of the Sultan's dispensation of punishment to exemplify their stance. The punitive measures implemented by the Sultan against those who had fled his rule, they agree, were as capricious and unmerciful as they were uncalled for.

⁷⁹NA, VOC 1340, "Letter from Resident Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated September 27, 1678," fol. 1823v.

⁸⁰Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 148.

⁸¹"...heeft zijn majesteijt opstonts eenige vrouwen derwaerts gecommiteerd om hare crissen aftehalen en hier te brengen." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated May 31, 1682 in "Journal delivered by the ship Princess Maria," p.195.

⁸²Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 176. Although travel accounts were predisposed to sensationalize their observations of the Bantense harem and its women, these narratives did at times seem aware of and also drew attention to the fact that women in the courts dispensed several functions. Yet when such evaluations cohabited with others in the same textual space, these appraisals were muted and overrun by others which tended to depict the court and its women in stereotypical terms.

Johan Talens who in his work *Een feodale samenleving in koloniale vaarwater* also deliberates on the characterization of Sultan Haji rightly points out that Company documents, unlike the accounts of travel, could evaluate the Sultan's bloodletting from a different vantage point.⁸³ According to Talens, Company servants sought recourse to Machiavellian reasoning in comprehending the King's actions as an end that justified the means.⁸⁴ Although acknowledging the validity of Talens inference, one argues that official documentation offer far more clues in terms of their estimation of the King's brand of justice as well as the benefits that the Company accrued from the actions of the King than is enumerated in Talen's study. When in May 1683, the persons responsible for the murder of six Dutch soldiers who had gone missing were apprehended, the King was convinced that the assailants could only pay for the act with their lives and ordered their execution. Under these circumstances, "the honourable [Dutch] commander tendered a request to the Sultan through Pangeran Ningrat that if the execution was still to take place, that the village be kindly informed [about the event] in the evening with the beating of a gong and be told to appear at the *alon alon* [the following] morning to watch the criminals be punished as was promised."⁸⁵ In this instance, apart from positioning themselves as collaborators in a brand of justice that Valentyn and Frick so vehemently decried in their travelogues, the VOC also prescribed the nature of punishment that they wanted to see dispensed. Interestingly, Company documentation also cites an instance that corroborates this viewpoint. In 1685, the King was faced with the prospect of passing judgement on a native of Banten who had taken the life of a Dutchman, and shortly afterwards the Company had to preside over a case in which a Dutch soldier was the assailant and a King's subject the aggrieved party. In response to the King's decision that his erring subject had to pay for the murder he committed with his life, the Dutch factor in Banten also faced with the prospect of punishing their soldier candidly confessed: "we find ourselves rather embarrassed as on what grounds we can pass judgment or give sentence in comparison to the immediate justice executed by the Sultan regarding the fatal injury of our aforementioned soldier."⁸⁶ Thus, as an ally to the Sultan of Banten and a lawmaker in its own

⁸³Talens, *Een feodale samenleving*, 177-78.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵"waerom den E: Commandeur zijn hoogheit door pangeran ningrat deed versoecken, in gevalle de executie nogh te geschieden stont het nogh desen avont met het slaen van de gom door de negorie liefde te laten bekend maecken, op datse daer van verwittight, morgen op den alon alon moeten verschijnen, ende misdagen sien straffen dat belooft is aen te dienen.." NA, VOC 1399, Entry dated May 7, 1683 in "Journal delivered by the ship Princess Maria," p. 693; Pangeran Dipaningrat was Sabandar of Banten. See Ibid., 58(fn). The *alon alon* is the palace courtyard.

⁸⁶"wij vinden ons al vrij wat verlegen op wat voedt wij haar te regt stellen en zullen konnen sententieren in eenige vergelijckinge van de parate justitie die den sulthan over 't dodelijck quetsen van voorsz: onsen soldaat

right, the VOC appears to have been complicit in the Sultan's methods of punishment, and even recognized an element of injustice in the nature of punishment they meted out to their own subjects and the character of justice that they desired the Sultan to dispense to those who harmed the servants of the Company. Here too, the Company records revealed that they were not marked with the same perspectival stripes as the travelogues, which in their representation of Haji merely strengthened the already prevalent image of the Oriental Despot as one who was keen on spilling blood as he was in populating his harem. If there was another subject on which the perspectives contained in Company documentation hardly aligned with those in published accounts, it was the issue of apostasy.

Anxieties over Apostasy: The Company and Its Renegades

Valentyn chose to close his lamentably short account of Banten with a tale of two renegades: one a Bantanese woman who paid for her apostasy with her life, and the other, the familiar Henrik Lucaszoon Caardeel (Van Haren's Jan Lucas van Steenwyk), who remoulded his religious identity a second time and "returned to ... [Batavia] on his own."⁸⁷ In invoking this juxtaposition of two similar acts of apostasy with strikingly different outcomes in his account, Valentyn's intention was perhaps to show the merciless manner in which Banten dealt with her renegades where the Sultan had deemed death suitable punishment for a woman who had forsaken Islam. In evoking the case of Cardeel, his point was to highlight the power Christianity possessed to beckon former believers back into her fold. What is less apparent in the tale yet crucial to our study is the fact that Cardeel's apostasy was the object of neither denunciation nor ridicule in the *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*. Valentyn may have fallen short of condoning Van Steenwyk's conversion, but he certainly does not appear to have despised it. It was with this same impartial air that Bogaert and De Graaff dealt with the most illustrious Dutch renegade in the East Indies.⁸⁸ We might surmise that Van Steenwyk was accorded the treatment he was because he was a success story.⁸⁹ He had successfully metamorphosed from being a Batavian mason to a Bantanese noble. While these authors were evidently impressed

heeft geexcuteert..." NA, VOC 1417, "Letter from Van der Schuur to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated 19 August, 1685," fols.1991r-1991v.

⁸⁷ Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Deel 4a*, 228.

⁸⁸ The stance that Valentyn, De Graaff and Bogaert take on Van Steenwyk is reminiscent of the evaluation that Sanjay Subrahmanyam offers in his reading of the manner in which sixteenth century Portugal dealt with her renegades in print. Subrahmanyam notes that if fame and fortune had smiled on these apostates once they had relinquished their past identities; their tales were told rather amiably. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 249-50.

⁸⁹ Bogaert, *A. Bogaert's historische reizen*, 134-35; *Reysen van Nicolaus de Graaff, Na de vier gedeelten des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa*, 184.

by Van Steenwyk's achievements and apparently unperturbed by his act of apostasy, the Company accounts had a different tale to tell.

In the annals of the VOC, Banten is appraised with a mixture of hostility and malevolence. Although the trade that entered Banten's port and the staggering sums of investment and profit margins of the Sultan's own mercantile ventures in different parts of the world established the kingdom as Batavia's greatest competitor and her dealings with the Company's European rivals such as the English marked her out to be an unrelenting foe, her identity as an adversary was intensified by another element.⁹⁰ This lay in her generating a phenomenon exemplified in the career of Van Steenwyk.⁹¹ This renegade's life, commendably pieced together by F. de Haan from the Company archives over a period of twenty-five years, is intriguing.⁹² He is shown to have almost impulsively forsaken his religion and his identity as a Batavian "free citizen" to start a new life as the Muslim Wiragoena in Banten in 1675. In contrast to Van Steenwyk's modest standing in Batavia, Wiragoena in the Sultanate was soon identified by the kingdom's aristocrats as being one of them.⁹³ Underlining his commitment to his new life and religion, a 1678 letter from the Dutch factor in Banten noted that Wiragoena had become a religious mentor to more Dutchmen who were in the process of adopting the Islamic faith in Banten.⁹⁴ Although Wiragoena refashioned himself as a Christian and resident of Batavia in 1688 – some thirteen years after his conversion to Islam – the earlier phase exposed a fundamental problem that the VOC had to wrestle with: the desertion and apostasy of "its subjects."⁹⁵ The people who disappeared from the VOC settlement and surfaced in the Sultanate included Company employees, slaves and free citizens. Where these runaways did not flee Batavia voluntarily, the VOC alleged that

⁹⁰Describing how the fortunes of both entities affected one another, F. Colombijn notes, "Banten and Batavia behaved like a pair of scales: if one rose, the other had to sink and vice versa..." F. Colombijn, "Foreign Influence on the state of Banten, 1596-1682," *Indonesia Circle* 50 (1989), 25. The *Generale Missiven* in the years 1675 to 1678 persistently referred to Banten's flourishing commerce or expressed remorse at the manner in which this rival prevented Batavia from attaining her actual trading potential. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 4: 1675-1685 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 37,168,189,205,303.

⁹¹Van Steenwyk is referred to by the name of Hendrick Lucassen van Steenwyk in the records of the Dutch East India Company. NA, VOC 1313, "Letter from Willem Caeff in Bantam dated March 20, 1675 to the Governor General and Council in Batavia," fol. 658v.

⁹²F. de Haan, *Priangan: De Preanger-Regentschappen onder het Nederlandsch Bestuur tot 1811*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalialia* (Batavia: Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1910), 192-96. Although De Haan has gleaned much of what is available on Van Steenwyk in Company documentation to write a biographical note on Van Steenwyk in his work, there still is information about the renegade in the VOC archives and this has been incorporated in this section.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 192. NA, VOC 1313, "Letter from Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated 20 March, 1675," fol. 658v.

⁹⁴For details see entry dated November 30. De Haan, *Dagh-Register Casteel Batavia anno 1678*, 696-97; De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalialia*, 192.

⁹⁵De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalialia*, 193.

they were “forcibly taken away” and official documentation often blamed the Bantanese for these “abductions.”⁹⁶ While transgressors of all kinds were a cause for concern for the administration, renegades invited the greatest attention. Persons who defected to Banten, sought refuge at its court, and demanded to be circumcised were accorded greater visibility in the VOC archives than any other category of fugitives.

Apostates were deserters and the act of apostasy usually followed desertion. It was those who first fled Batavia that later converted to Islam. Unlike desertion however, apostasy did not imply the mere rejection of former loyalties. It was a transgression of a more serious kind where former religious affiliations were also discarded. Turning renegade in the annals of the VOC was a thus highly despicable act and the deep disdain that renegades seemed to elicit in their records is illustrative of the apprehensions that early modern Europe had about Islam. In the words of Ania Loomba, “Islam was the spectre haunting Europe ... [which] provide[d] Christianity with a frightening image of alterity.”⁹⁷ The crime implicit in the act of apostasy was the gross violation of the boundaries between the self and the detested Other and according to Jonathan Burton, “conversion to Islam amounted to an act of betrayal and subversion.”⁹⁸ As Maria Augusta Lima Cruz’s article on the Portuguese in early modern Asia and G.V. Scammell’s study of Europeans in the Indian Ocean have in general demonstrated, apostasy in the early modern period was a rampant phenomenon.⁹⁹ It blighted all European trading entities that had dealings with non-European polities and the Dutch were well acquainted with the issue of Company reprobates “crossing over.” The VOC also confronted apostasy at their settlements in Ballasore (present day Orissa in India), Surat, and Gambron (Bandar Abbas), where Company servants turned renegades with such a frequency that their relationship with the local administrations were often strained.¹⁰⁰ What caused Company subjects to transgress their religious boundaries as apostates and forsake former loyalties as

⁹⁶Cf. Letter dated October 10, 1679 from the Governor General Ryklof van Goens and the Council of the Indies to the Directors of the Dutch East India Company (Gentleman Seventeen) in J. K. J. de Jonge, *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag over Java, vierde deel* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1873), 21.

⁹⁷Ania Loomba, “Delicious Traffick: Alterity and Exchange on Early Modern Stages,” in *Shakespeare Survey* 52: *Shakespeare and the Globe*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 203.

⁹⁸Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Delaware: Rosemont, 2005), 16.

⁹⁹Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, “Exiles and Renegades in Early Sixteenth Century Portuguese India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 23, 3 (1986), 249-62; G.V.Scammell, “European Exiles, Renegades and Outlaws and the Maritime Economy of Asia c. 1500-1750,” *Modern Asian Studies* 26, 4 (1992), 641-61.

¹⁰⁰Van der Lijn, Caron, Reiniers en Caen IV, 21 december 1646. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneur Generaal en Raden aan heren XVII der verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, vol. 2: 1639-1655* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 291; Camphuys, Hurdt, Van Outhoorn, Pit, Van Hoorn, enz.XI, 13 december 1686. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, vol. 5:1686-1697* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 55; Van Hoorn, Van Riebeeck, Van Swoll, De Wilde, Douglas, enz.IX, 30 november 1705. W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, vol. 6:1698-1713* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 379.

deserters was the promise of better employment. Jean Gelman Taylor observes, “the VOC was but one possible employer for Europeans. All around the archipelago kings were adding to their staff coachmen, grooms and men skilled in languages, commerce, crafts, music, warfare and the management of markets.”¹⁰¹ Although acquiring political influence in a native kingdom in the manner in which Van Steenwyk did was an accomplishment few other renegades and deserters could boast of, as Linda Colley reveals in her study of British deserters, most were prompted to abandon their inherited identities by the promise of enhancing their wealth and station.¹⁰² Matthijs Timmerman who defected to Sultan Agung shortly after the outbreak of war in 1682, dispatched a letter to the Dutch troops urging them to follow in his footsteps. What prompted his flight were better living conditions or so he claimed when he wrote to his former compatriots: “I have arrived in a good harbour, thanks be to god, and I am treated extremely well by the King. He has given me all that I have wished for.”¹⁰³

Scholars seeking to discount Said’s theory of Orientalism have invoked the phenomenon of apostasy in the early modern period. They argue that the freewheeling renegade who abandoned one faith and culture for another demonstrates the artificiality of the boundaries conceptualized by Saidian dualism. Daniel Vitkus who theorizes on these lines suggests that in “embody(ing) cultural flexibility, mobility and adaptability,” the renegade blatantly undercuts the bipolar conception of the relationship between the East and the West which is implicit in Orientalism.¹⁰⁴ We might in this context share Vitkus’ misgivings about Orientalism and its inability to explain apostasy, as it is the fickleness of identities that is powerfully emphasized in the lives of the renegades in Banten. Upon the renunciation of his identity as a Dutchman, Van Steenwyk aka Wieragoena, is said to “have become a complete Javanese.”¹⁰⁵ Company servants recorded sightings of him “with a Koran under his arm” and the ease with which he fit into his new identity is vividly illustrated in the fact that he was

¹⁰¹Jean Gelman Taylor, *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 171.

¹⁰²Linda Colley, “Going Native, Telling Tales: Captivity, Collaborations and Empire,” *Past and Present* 168 (2000), 184-85.

¹⁰³“...dese is om uw te doen weeten, dat ick op een geode haven aengeland ben, god zij danck, en werd ick vanden Coningh seer wel getracteerd, hij heeft mij alle het geen gegeven, dat ick wenschte...” NA, VOC 7659, “Translation of the letter which arrived from Tirtayasa on July 10, 1682 which was sealed by one Arija Soera de Marta in red lacquer, runs as follows,” p. 526-527.

¹⁰⁴Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 22.

¹⁰⁵De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalialia*, 193.

comfortable enough to engage in fraudulent schemes in the royal court of Banten.¹⁰⁶ On 8 March 1683, he earned royal displeasure when it was found that he was lining his pockets by “smuggling” dairy products under the very nose of the Sultan.¹⁰⁷ The manner in which Van Steenwyk reinvented himself places him in the category of early modern individuals, “who,” in the words of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “made a smooth and rapid transformation from being merely rooted inhabitants ...to being cosmopolitans and therefore citizens of the world.”¹⁰⁸ That identities in the period could be worn so lightly as to be shed at one instance and put on again at another is also evident in the life of “a Batavian citizen” Hans Adams. On absconding from the VOC settlement, “Adams [who] had hidden himself with the French in Banten...could not flee with the Danes to Coromandel had now let himself be circumcised by Pangaran Pourbaja [the younger son of Sultan Agung].”¹⁰⁹

However evident the flux of identities in apostasy might be at the ground level, the binaries conceptualized by Orientalism do not lose their applicability completely. The VOC officialdom still seemed to swear by a black and white conception of the world and sought to counter any process or person who deviated from the norm. This, we might theorize was manifest in their policies and in the perspectival realm. Determined to stem the tide of outward traffic of Company subjects to the neighbouring kingdom, the Company devised measures to punish offenders and dissuade others from following suit. Deserters and apostates who during the war were unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of the Dutch were mostly sentenced to death by hanging. One of very rare instances where the Company deviated from this policy came during the war. When the Sultan Abdul faction of the Banten royalty turned friends from foes, the Dutch issued blanket pardon to those deserters and renegades who had joined the forces of their newfound ally. This seems to have been the context in which Van Steenwyk “was granted pardon.”¹¹⁰ The effect that this had on the characterization of the renegade is reflected in the manner in which he went from being referred to as “the mason who has forsaken the religion” (*de affgevalen metselaar*) in the pre-pardon records to the

¹⁰⁶“...vertreckende den Sulthan doen weder in ordre na zijn apartement gaende den gerenegerde pangiran wiera goena voor uijt met Mahomet’s gesz: alcoran onder den arm...” NA, VOC 1399, “Journal, delivered by the ship Princess Maria, p. 459.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, p. 645-646.

¹⁰⁸Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 173.

¹⁰⁹“seker Batavia’s borger, Hans Adams, hem omtrent 2 maenden by de Francen op Bantam schuyt gehouden hebbende en met de Deenen na Cormandel niet konnende wegh geraken, had sich nu by de pangeran Pourbaya laten besnyden...” J. A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands-India anno 1677* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1904), 142.

¹¹⁰This decision of the Company which was favourable to Van Steenwyk is dated to March 29, 1682 but the renegade returned to Batavia much later. De Haan, *Priangan*, vol. 1, Deel. 2: *Personalia*, 192.

more forgiving “the Dutch aristocrat” (*de Hollandse Pangiran*) in the post-pardon annals of the Company.¹¹¹ It is perhaps this transformation in the VOC’s perception of Van Steenwyk that the travel accounts went on to reiterate when they recalled his tale without a show of ill feeling.

Van Steenwyk’s pardon was forced by the exigencies of war and constituted an exception to the Company’s general policy of responding with punitive action. The usual punishment was death, but the Company sought to discourage the flight of its subjects by negotiating their return with the King of Banten. While desertion was no doubt a touchy issue, apostasy was a more significant cause of contention between the two states. The Batavian administration vigorously pursued the handover of her renegades and Banten showed just as much obstinacy in turning down her requests. A deadlock over the matter was responsible for derailing the peace negotiations between the two polities that followed the Dutch blockade of Banten in 1657.¹¹² Similar tales of failure also haunted the Dutch in their frequent visits to the Banten court to request the return of their apostates and the Sultan remained firm in his refusal to turn them over. The inability of the Company to come to an understanding with Banten regarding the fate of its renegades and the manner in which the issue impinged upon its relationship with Banten lends literal meaning to Jonathan Burton’s understanding of “the renegade [as] the fundamental symbol of Christianity’s struggle with Islam” because Banten and Batavia were unable to defuse political tensions due to their disagreements on the issue of apostasy.¹¹³

Company documents concerning apostasy drip with contempt and it is here that the perspectival stance of the Company regarding apostasy comes to light. Far more than the erring renegade, it was the polity that granted the miscreant asylum or in many instances beckoned him into their fold (as was the case or as the Dutch liked to believe) that was the

¹¹¹De Haan, *Dagh-Register Casteel Batavia anno 1678*, 718; NA, VOC 7659, “Translaat berigt uijt het maleitsch door den schrijver van Capiteijn Joncker te samen gesteld soodanig als het selve door voorm. Capiteijn Jochim Michielsz. en den Hollandsen Pangiran opgenomen is bij drij persoonen op den 12 Augustij [1682] van Turtiassa overgeomen,” p. 494.

¹¹²The decade of peace between the VOC and Banten between 1645 and 1655 was rudely brought to an end when Sultan Agung launched an attack on Batavia the following year. The Dutch reprisal came in the form of the blockade of Banten in 1657. Following this spate of violence, repeated attempts of the Company to bring Banten to the negotiating table failed and a principal element which put a spoke in the wheel was the issue of the restitution of renegades. It was only in 1659 that both parties consented to a peace treaty whose terms were acceptable to both parties. Still, Banten refused to concede to the return of Dutch apostates which the Company seemed to have grudgingly accepted. De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, lv-lxiv.

¹¹³Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 220. When speaking of apostasy, it is necessary to remind ourselves that the phenomenon is to be seen in relation to the value that Southeast Asia attached to manpower. As Anthony Reid remarks “the key to Southeast Asian social systems was the control of men.” Anthony Reid, “Introduction: Slavery and Bondage in Southeast Asian History,” in *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 8.

object of intense VOC resentment. As Company records suggest, the Dutch believed that apostasy among their fellow Dutchmen was not merely sanctioned but actively pursued by the king. The Dutch factor for instance wrote “by keeping and protecting our fugitives, they stop at nothing to ensure that our own inlanders want to convert to her religion on their own will.”¹¹⁴ When reflecting on Banten’s passion in seizing its personnel, Company documentation also commented on the vulnerability to and consequence of its countrymen becoming renegades. As explained before, the Dutch were convinced that Bantanese women had a significant part to play in making apostates of Dutchmen.¹¹⁵ Likewise, when Caeff in 1678 organized the escape of a Dutchman from Banten who alleged that he was fleeing a “forced conversion,” the factor wrote to his superiors that he had “claw[ed] this blood from the Mahommedan and rescue[d] him from depravity.”¹¹⁶ The binaries were here apparent. The Company records envisaged the Muslim Bantanese to lying in wait to lure the vulnerable Dutchman into his depraved embrace, a position that displays the traditional apprehensions that Western Christendom had about Islam – and one that persisted as the flight of renegades and flux of identities it implied continued.

The visions of apostasy adopted in the accounts of Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff was therefore starkly at odds with the VOC’s perception of the issue. The only similarity between their otherwise conflicting perceptions of apostasy lay in the fact that the travel accounts seemed to have adopted the tenor of forgiveness in their characterization of Van Steenwyk. This feeling of clemency only crept into the Company accounts following their decision to redeem Van Steenwyk of his past act of apostasy; until that time it was a cause of nagging embarrassment and anger for the VOC. In the equanimity with which the travelogues addressed the issue, they ignored the Company’s apprehension about the phenomenon so manifest in both its policies and its perspectives.

The Other Side of the Story: Banten’s View of Batavia

If we agree that the Company attitude towards apostasy displayed all the suspicion and hostility of the early modern European view of Islam, we might wonder how Banten perceived the Dutch. Religion, it is generally accepted, was an inextricable element in the

¹¹⁴“...maer het aanhouden en protegeren van onse fugitiven, laaten sy daerom egter niet na, selfs met onse eygen inlanders als se haer maer willen tot haer geloof begeven, ende laten besnyden...” Letter from the Governor General Joan Maetsuyker and the Council of the Indies to the Directors of the Dutch East India Company dated November 28, 1676. De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, 156.

¹¹⁵NA, VOC 1313, “Letter from Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated 20 March, 1675,” fols. 658v-659r.

¹¹⁶De Haan, *Dagh-Register Casteel Batavia anno 1678*, 718.

comportment of certain Southeast Asian polities in their relationship with the Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For instance, Anthony Reid and David Morgan note, the alliance of Aceh with the Ottomans in the mid sixteenth century to stave off a Portuguese incursion appealed to, “the idea of a unified counter crusade in the name of Islam.”¹¹⁷ When the Dutch in the seventeenth century trailed the Portuguese as expansionists in Southeast Asia, political hostilities once again came to be articulated by states such as Makassar using the language of religion and the term “kafir” or infidel came to be applied to the Dutch as well.¹¹⁸ The question whether Banten like Aceh and Makassar was antagonistic towards the Dutch based on religious difference in the seventeenth century is in part answered if we consider the dynamics of religious definition which took root in the kingdom. Although Islam had long been established in Banten when its leadership fell into the hands of an Islamic dynasty in 1527 and when it was declared a Sultanate in 1638, the subscription to religious motifs to underline the identity of the state was accentuated during the reign of Sultan Agung.¹¹⁹ As Claude Guillot notes, “symbolically Sultan Agung sent his first ocean going vessel to Mecca; whilst his son, is credited as having been the first of the Archipelago’s sovereigns to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca.”¹²⁰ “The establishment of...formal indicators of Islamic identity” and the “state sponsorship of Islam,” Michael Fenner argues, were significant features of Sultan Agung’s regime while Ota Atsushi points out that it was in this period that Banten situated itself within “an Islamic network in a Muslim world.”¹²¹ Just as Banten and her royals seem to have undertaken a conscious project of self-fashioning employing elements drawn predominantly from the realm of religion to sculpt their own and their kingdom’s identities, VOC records affirm that Islam played a significant role in determining the kingdom’s disposition towards the Dutch in the seventeenth century.

Company records suggest that Dutch saw much of their hostility emanating from or being compounded by religious difference and they also believed that Banten’s antagonism

¹¹⁷David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid, “Introduction: Islam in a Plural Asia,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Eastern Islamic world : Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

¹¹⁸Anthony Reid, “Early Southeast Asian categorization of Europeans,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounter between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 284; C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London Hutchinson, 1977 reprint), 153-54.

¹¹⁹See Claude Guillot, *The Sultanate of Banten* (Jakarta: Gramedia Book Publishing Division, 1990), 11-35.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

¹²¹R. Michael Feener, “South-East Asian Localisations of Islam and Participation Within a Global Umma, c. 1500-1800,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 3, eds. David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 485; Ota Atsushi, “Imagined Link, Domesticated Religion: The State and the Outside Islamic Network in Banten, West Java c. 1520-1813,” in *Large and Broad: The Dutch Impact on Early Modern Asia*, ed. Yoko Nagazumi (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2010), 14.

towards Batavia sprang from the same source. The Bantenese, too, supposedly envisioned the “self” against the Dutch Other on religious lines. Apostasy, as previously discussed, was a touchy issue between the two states. This owed, the Company documentation tells us, to the widely held view in Banten that renegades “were under the protection of the Koran and [hence] they were never to be handed over to non-believers.”¹²² We are sufficiently apprised of just how sensitive the issue of proselytization actually was from the story the goldsmith Mattheus Rick brought back to Batavia in 1665 about his conversion to Islam in Banten. Apart from repenting his decision to have crossed religious lines, he told Company officials of the degree to which Banten’s royals abetted his apostasy. According to Rick, “the Sultan had promised him great things and had tonsured and washed his head with his own hands.”¹²³ By suggesting that the Sultan was an active participant in the ceremony of Rick’s conversion, he alluded to the manner in which apostasy kindled the religious fervour of Banten’s royals.¹²⁴ It was also said that Sultan Ageng relied on Islam for decisions on matters of statecraft, and the Company often felt that Banten’s displays of belligerence towards Batavia were religiously grounded and based on the Koran.¹²⁵

When Koranic injunctions and religious differences were considered to have determined Banten’s disposition towards Batavia, the Company also held the Bantenese guilty of whipping up the anti-Dutch sentiments of the neighbouring kingdoms by projecting the Dutch as infidels.¹²⁶ This was the political stratagem that Banten attempted to use in 1655, when she sought external support in her war against the Dutch. The VOC alleged that they witnessed a second deployment of this tactic during the Mataram crisis in the 1670s when they came into possession of correspondence between Agung and an ally of the VOC, Amangkurat II, and sultan of Mataram. In evident approbation of Amangkurat II’s alliance with the Dutch, Agung wrote to the former: “God wills that you, my younger brother will raise the standard (that is the faith of the Prophet Mohammed) so that the faith may grow, will become and remain strong.”¹²⁷ Like these early confrontations, the Banten civil war was

¹²²Cf. De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, lx. The Dutch were confronted in 1678 with a similar reply when they demanded the restitution of fugitive slaves. NA, VOC 1340, “Letter dated 9 July, 1678 from the Resident Caeff in Bantam to Governor General and Council of Batavia,” fols. 1802v-1803r.

¹²³J. A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia van’t passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands India anno 1665* (‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1894), 2.

¹²⁴The VOC accounts suggest that conversion to Islam in Banten involved both tonsure and circumcision.

¹²⁵De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, derde deel*, lv.

¹²⁶Guillot, *The Sultanate of Banten*, 42.

¹²⁷ “zoo wil Godt u gebeden en u versogt hebben, dat gy, myn jonger broeder oprigt den standaart (dat is het geloof van den prophet Mahomet) opdat dat geloove magh toeneemen ende krachtig syn en blyven.” This features in “Translation of a letter written by the Banthamse Sultan Agon to the Sousouhounangh Amancourat Sinnepatty Ingalaga, and received in Japara on the 22nd of April 1678 per de Sourouans which the Sousouhounan

projected to have been borne its share of religious inspiration. Batavia in December 1683 informed the Gentlemen XVII that “a certain letter written by or on behalf of the old and former King of Bantam ...had been sent to all the Eastern Kings and greats requesting that they arm themselves to champion the interests of the Islamic faith and to [rise up in] general revolt against the Company.”¹²⁸ Moreover, Agung was shown to have strummed on religious strings to both justify his cause and discredit the political pursuits of his son, Abdul. He assaulted his son with the very same reasoning which had allowed European renegades to be traditionally chastised. Agung alleged that in his alliance with the Dutch, Abdul had crossed over into the ranks of the non-believers and had thereby ceased to be a believer himself. In the midst of the war, when Agung seemed to have appropriated for his faction the ideological weapon of fighting a righteous war and when garnering greater support for his cause was crucial, he attempted to infiltrate the ranks of the pro-Dutch army in Banten using similar reasoning.¹²⁹ Agung appealed to their religious affiliation to invoke their sympathy for his cause and urged them to “stand steady in [their] religion and not forget the faith of the prophet of God.” If the top brass of Abdul’s command could be eliminated, Agung promised that this would be the ultimate proof of their religious commitment.

The above section makes the case that Banten in their understanding of their Other were no different from the Dutch. But having “to read cross-cultural contact solely from the evidence of European texts” when presenting a sketch of Banten’s notions of the self and the Other is an ironical exercise.¹³⁰ There is however an escape from this morass and a solution to this dilemma. Two works of Bantenese origin allow us to widen our vision and thereby permit the indigenous voice into our reading of how the Bantenese perceived the Dutch – the *Sadjarah Banten* for which Hussain Djajadiningrat provides a useful summary and commentary and the *Sajarah Banten Kecil* which is considered an alternative version of the former and for which Titik Pudjiastuti has provided a recent translation in Bahasa

Amancourat had sent to Bantam a few months previously,” De Jonge, *Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag, vierde deel*, 210.

¹²⁸“...te onderscheppen en in handen te krijgen seeckere brieff, door ofte vanwege den ouden en gewesen Koningh van Bantam, ten tijde dat wij de rheede beset en beslooten hadden, ges[chreven] en gesonden aan alle de oosterse Coningen en groten, tenderende om deselve tot voorstand van ‘t Mahomethaans gelove te armeren tot een generalen opstand tegen d’E. Compagnie.” Cornelis Speelman, Balthasar Bort, Anthonio Hurdt, Willem van Outhoorn, Joannes Camphuys, Marten Pit, Nicolaas Schagen en Joan van Hoorn, Batavia, 31 December 1683. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, vol. 4: 1675-1685, 604.

¹²⁹NA, VOC 1399, See entry dated October 27, 1682, “Journal delivered by the ship Princess Maria,” p. 489.

¹³⁰Su Fang Ng, “Dutch Wars, Global trade, and the Heroic Poem: Dryden’s *Annus mirabilis* (1666) and Amin’s *Sya’ir Mengkasar* (1670),” *Modern Philology* 109, 3 (2012), 359.

Indonesia.¹³¹ Even so, the employment of these texts is fraught with complications. Supposedly authored in 1662, the *Sadjarah Banten Kecil* was a product of Sultan Agung's reign.¹³² This lends credibility to its evocation in the context but fails us on the grounds that it was written two decades before the turbulent years of 1682-1685 and does not therefore chronicle the war of Banten itself. Although the second work, *Sajarah Banten Kecil* (henceforth *SB Kecil*) makes up for the shortcomings of the first by giving the Banten war admirable coverage, it is dated to the nineteenth century. Despite the apparent complexities that these works bring with them, I believe the two texts are useful because they provide the oft-neglected native perspective on Bantenese-Dutch relations. In addition, these works provide useful reflections on the self and Other in Bantenese literature.

The *Sadjarah Banten* chronicles the port kingdom's Islamic history. As a mid-seventeenth century text that concentrates on events in Banten's recent past, the kingdom's turbulent relation with the Dutch inevitably receives attention. It chronicles the advent of the Dutch in Java and records the Company's wars with the kingdoms of Mataram and Banten.¹³³ The corpus of the text admittedly frustrates our attempts to rake up an elaborate view of their perceptions of the Dutch. Whether this is attributable to the character of the chronicle itself or whether this is to be blamed on Djajadiningrat's summary of the work proffered by Djajadiningrat (which I employ), I cannot tell. Nevertheless, it is clear that in Banten's estimation, a predominant source of the VOC's strength in their conflicts with other Southeast Asian polities lay in its weaponry.¹³⁴ Another significant inference that one draws from the work is that the Bantenese regarded their conflict with the Dutch as having been ignited by the religious differences between the two parties. Very tellingly, holy war and the question of the disposition of believers towards non-believers were subjects that the conclusion of the chronicle wrestles with.¹³⁵

Despite its having been written in the nineteenth century, the second work the *SB Kecil* provides an interesting take on the Banten war. Written in verse, the work conceives of the war as one incited by an imposter, Raja Pandita, who posed as Pangeran Dankar (Sultan Haji) and recruited the aid of the Dutch in the war against Sultan Agung. While the war raged

¹³¹Hoessein Djajadiningrat, "Critische beschouwing van de Sadjarah Banten: Bijdrage ter kenschetsing van de Javaansche Geschiedschrijving" (PhD diss., Universiteit Leiden, 1913); Titik Pudjiastuti, *Sajarah Banten: Suntingan dan Terjemahan Teks KBG 183* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional RI, 2010). I thank Uji Nugroho, Mareta Kartikasari and Maria Ingrid for translating the latter text for me and helping me understand its contents.

¹³²I follow Djajadiningrat's estimation here. Djajadiningrat, "Critische beschouwing van de Sadjarah Banten," 7-8.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 39, 47, 68.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 44.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

in Java, the real Pangeran Dankar – who contrary to his father’s wishes had set out on the Haj and was stranded on the island of Poetri – is oblivious of the furore that has erupted in his absence. By the time Sultan Haji returns to Banten, the kingdom has sustained defeat at the hands of the imposter and the righteous son is filled with remorse. The chronicle does not end with the depiction of Sultan Haji’s anguish but continues on to unravel the subsequent history of Banten. The chronicle displays certain core characteristics all through. It subscribes to a non-linear understanding of history, mythical figures in the form of angels and djinns freely roam the narrative and the tale of the Banten war, which is essentially a seventeenth-century occurrence, includes events and people from the kingdom’s eighteenth-century history. Tubagus Buang, one of the leaders of the Banten rebellion of 1750, for instance, rubs shoulders with Sultan Agung and is posited to have been the chief opponent to the Dutch in the work’s interpretation of the Banten war. The work furthermore turns a blind eye to Sultan Haji’s revolt against his father and instead attributes his actions to an imposter. Although *SB Kecil* vindicates Sultan Haji of his complicity in igniting the Banten war, the same cannot be said about the chronicle’s assessment of the role of the Dutch. Reinforcing the fact that Banten’s hostility towards Batavia was fed and fattened by religious antagonism, the work refers to the Dutch as “kafirs.”¹³⁶ Portrayed as mercenaries whose sole motive for war was a desire for profit, and their victory is depicted to have been the outcome of base deceit.¹³⁷ Little admired in the *SB Kecil*’s take on the war, the Dutch are also projected as the antagonists in the chronicle’s depiction of subsequent political events in the kingdom.

Whether we turn to the annals of the VOC or to its own chronicles, Banten can clearly be said to have been on the same page as the Dutch. Both parties accorded certain significance to the role of religion in determining their political posture. It was without doubt the presence of new actors and the growing competition for power in Southeast Asia which forced states to reformulate their political policies so as to protect their polities from new threats in the region. The political vocabulary of the kingdoms of Banten, Makassar and Aceh thus increasingly came to feature the term “jihad” in the period. What made mapping hostilities using the compass of one’s faith irresistible was that religion constituted one of the principal markers of difference between many kingdoms in Southeast Asia and the Dutch. Not only did religion permit the rulers of these states to sway the sentiments of their own subjects, but as the kingdoms of Aceh and Banten successfully demonstrate, it also provided them with a platform to cement coalitions with other local kingdoms to fight the Europeans in the name of

¹³⁶Pudjiastuti, *Sajarah Banten: Suntingan dan Terjemahan Teks KBG 183*, 83, 93.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 94-95.

Islam. The Portuguese also promoted their religion openly and often resorted to faith to justify their military incursions into the region. The Company's condescension for Islam was more covert and was rarely projected as a reason to go to war. Their documentation instead, as we have seen, was the destination for their raging condescension.

Although Banten and the Dutch took a dim view of one another, the tale of the two port cities does not quite end there. It is easy to be distracted by the rhetoric of hostility in Company documentation and in the characterizations of the Dutch in the chronicles of the kingdom of Banten and thereby turn a blind eye to the contradicting realities that characterized their relationship. Pull away this curtain of unmitigated antagonism and we encounter a more complex scenario. Religious rhetoric was deployed by both parties only where there was gain. In other instances it was returned into its original packing and stowed away. Faith was not factored into the equation either when Sultan Agung allied himself with the English, another group of "non-believers," or when the Dutch in turn inducted Haji (another "Mahomedan" into their camp) during the Banten War. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has written in the context of the Portuguese in Southern India, "the religious zeal was always tempered by a pragmatic spirit," and the same can be said about the relationship between Batavia and Banten.¹³⁸ The Company rhetoric of unbridgeable boundaries between themselves and Banten and the formulation of policies which reinforced this belief were flagrantly violated by Company deserters and apostates who made Banten their home. This illustrates the wide gap that existed between the choices that individual subjects of the Company made and the institutional rhetoric of the enterprise as a whole.

Apart from the general promiscuity in the Banten-Batavia relationship that the fugitives make apparent, the governments of Batavia and Banten, that is the VOC and the Bantenese royal family openly explored possibilities of grooming other forms of diplomacy for fostering amicable relations with one another. These constructions of camaraderie came in the form of the constant want on the part of Sultan Agung and his aristocrats for Western curiosity and other favours which the Company mostly satisfied against payment. In the three decades that Agung sat on the Banten throne, he revealed a hearty appetite for pistols and poffertjes (tiny comet-shaped Dutch pancakes).¹³⁹ Other things that greatly amused the Sultan were clocks, "a little clove oil," and "rope twelve thumbs thick for his ship" – all of which

¹³⁸Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 111.

¹³⁹J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands-India anno 1659* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1889), 191, 97.

were commodities which he relied on the Company to provide.¹⁴⁰ His courtiers had their own demands. The list of commodities that Dutch were expected to supply in 1659 included “three large Persian sheep with big tails.”¹⁴¹ In some cases, the Company did not play the part of the helpful neighbour too convincingly. The VOC’s refusal to entertain such requests or the delays they caused in dispatching the requested goods was received by the Sultanate with consternation. In other instances, the Company willingly obliged Banten’s demands. As further evidence of the Sultan’s reliance on the Dutch, the Sultan’s own trade with other parts of Asia depended on his acquisition of VOC “sea-passes.”¹⁴² Bantanese aristocrats and their family when travelling to foreign destinations sometimes sought passage on Dutch ships.¹⁴³ The Dutch motivation in encouraging this dependence lay in protecting and fostering their interests in Banten. The VOC moreover nursed the hope of recruiting Agung. As a consequence, parallel to the high walls of rhetorical hostility that both parties rigorously built, they also laid down channels for peaceful interaction and engagement. Thus, if the relationship between Banten and Batavia took on any definite form, it was an uncomfortable coexistence between rhetoric and policies of hostility on the one hand and a reality of interdependence, camaraderie and opportunistic alliances on the other.

To conclude the section, the accounts that constituted the sources of Van Haren’s *Agon* show evident associations with the Dutch East India Company in terms of the connections that its authors possessed with the enterprise and in the context of the “factual” linkages in their accounts, which drew heavily on Company documents in Batavia. Yet in comparison to the records of the VOC, the image of Banten in the travel accounts seems to have been based on an almost different reality. While similar subjects seem to have caught the attention of both the official records and the print literature, they were dealt with in entirely different ways. The Company’s anxiety over apostasy turned to equanimity in the travelogues, while their matter-of-fact descriptions of Banten’s women gave way to a heightened sensationalism and stereotypical imagery in the travel accounts – a feature of the genre that undoubtedly drew from their constant need to anchor their narratives on Banten in the familiar tropes of the Orient. What the printed accounts thus took back into Van Haren’s study bore similarities and differences to Company documentation.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 197. NA, VOC 1277, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated July 6, 1670,” fol. 1129r; NA, VOC 1290, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Willem Caeff to the Governor-General and Council in Batavia dated January 25, 1673, fols. 137 r-v.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 255.

¹⁴²NA, VOC 1277, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Willem Caeff to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated May 30, 1670, fol. 1115v.

¹⁴³NA, VOC 1264, “Report from the Resident in Bantam, Ocker Ockerse to the Governor General and Council in Batavia dated June 15, 1667,” fols. 705r-707v.

Intentions, Influences, and the Inevitable Scholarly Tussles

Blame it on scholars' love for debate but as a rule, arguments ensue every time the issue of authorial intentions is raised. An equally invigorating scholarly discussion has erupted when Van Haren's reasons for penning *Agon* have been put to question. Digging through the mound of explanations that scholars have offered for Van Haren's writing the play, we principally deal with two equally well-argued but contradictory claims. The first is the more apparent. In what is admittedly an attempt to trace a genealogy of anti-colonialism in the Dutch Republic, the literary critic J.A.F.L. van Heeckeren hails Van Haren as the "forerunner of Multatuli," judging *Agon* as comparable to *Max Havelaar*, Douwes Dekker's famous nineteenth-century denunciation of Dutch rule in the Netherlands Indies.¹⁴⁴ Ewald Vanvugt aligns himself to this perspective when he regards the eighteenth century as having produced a number of anti-colonialists, including apart from Van Haren, Jacob Mossel, Governor General of the VOC from 1650 to 1661 and first director of the Opium Society and the Republic's poet-playwright Jan de Marre both of who had displayed differing degrees of disaffection towards the colonial policy of the Dutch East India Company.¹⁴⁵ As one might expect, it is not merely the resonant hatred implicit in the pronouncements of Fathema and *Agon* for the VOC in Van Haren's drama that have allowed these scholars to see reason in the prospect of the playwright's identity as a critic of the Company. Van Haren's daring reimagining of the story of Banten, as past sections readily indicate, corroborates their stance. With its loathing for the imperial urges of the Dutch East India Company on moral grounds, *Agon* is easily distinguished from its sources: it has as its protagonist Agung, the single greatest contender to Dutch domination in Java in the period, it slanders a renegade who the sources had sought to rehabilitate; and it plucks a woman from the obscurity of the harem to make her secondary protagonist. Rewardingly supportive of the anti-colonial thesis is also the fact that the drama was quite in sync with ideological currents prevalent at the time the play was written – the late eighteenth century.

Disaffection with colonialism was a muse for many dramatists of Van Haren's time and before. John Loftis in his study of the English playwright Richard Sheridan's *Pizarro* (1799), a play which reprehends the Spaniard, Francisco Pizarro for the excesses committed in the New World makes mention of other dramas such as Voltaire's "*Alzire ou les*

¹⁴⁴J.A.F.L. van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli," *Taal en letteren* 4 (1894).

¹⁴⁵Ewald Vanvugt, *Nestbevuilers: 400 jaar Nederlandse critici van het koloniale bewind in de Oost en de West* (Amsterdam: Babylon-De Geus, 1996), 47-49, 58-60.

Americains" (1736) which put their anticolonial grievances on stage.¹⁴⁶ The Spanish seem to have received the lion's share of criticism, and for the French and English playwrights of these dramas, a denunciation of the another nation's imperial practices must have been an agreeable and a usually non-bothersome option. But this should in no way suggest that the condemnation of the colonial policies of one's own country was unheard of. One recalls the debate which erupted in the England with the trial of Warren Hastings.¹⁴⁷ An episode of the late eighteenth century and therefore closer to Van Haren's time, the corruption of the employees of the English East India Company was brought to the national radar and these scandals resonated in the realm of fiction. The new breed of "Nabob Literature," which, as Renu Juneja notes, was drenched in satire hit the stands and made protagonists of English East India Company servants who had chanced upon substantial fortunes in the East.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, the rhetorical strategies of Van Haren in *Agon*, *Sulthan van Bantam* correspond with those contained in this genre of English writing which created new caricatures of the quintessential Britisher in India. Juneja states that in the pages of the Nabob literature, "It is the British who are arrogant, cruel, avaricious. The Indians...when they appear we see them as unindividualized victims of oppression."¹⁴⁹ Juneja further argues that these works held the view that, "the East ha[d] corrupted these men."¹⁵⁰ There were parallel trains of anti-colonial thinking in other parts of Europe at the time, including Van Haren's *Agon*.

If we concede that a vehement critique of Dutch expansionism in the Indies is the predominant thrust in *Agon*, we come face to face with Shankar Muthu's characterization of the Enlightenment as being unique for its variety of public opinion.¹⁵¹ For probably the first time, as Muthu observes, a critic of colonialism was not a lone voice in the public sphere, but suddenly there was an entire chorus of them.¹⁵² The character of the period allows him to consider the era as worthy of the label of a "historical anomaly."¹⁵³ Apart from its anti-colonial clamour, the period showed other signs of being somewhat atypical. Sympathetic

¹⁴⁶John Loftis, "Whig Oratory on Stage Sheridan's Pizarro," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 8, 4 (1975), 457.

¹⁴⁷According to Loftis, Sheridan's play *Pizarro* was modeled to deliberate on the notoriety that the English East India Company had won itself for its conduct in eighteenth century India. Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Renu Juneja, "The Native and the Nabob: Representation of the Indian Experience in Eighteenth Century English Literature," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 27, 183 (1992). Also see chapter titled 'Eighteenth Century Orientalism' in Jyotsna G. Singh, *Colonial Narratives, Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 52-78.

¹⁴⁹Juneja, "The Native and the Nabob," 183.

¹⁵⁰Ibid; This theme of "going native" as it features in *Agon* is broached in Lefevere, "Composing the Other," 87-88.

¹⁵¹The work referred to in this context is Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁵²Ibid., 1-10.

¹⁵³Ibid., 3.

approaches towards the Orient emerged and one of the many who especially demonstrated this tendency was Voltaire, in whose *Candide*, *La Princesse de Babylone* and *Essai sur le moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, among other works, the East featured as a respectable entity.¹⁵⁴ In his discussions on tolerance, Voltaire proved himself no more an admirer of the imperial practices of the Dutch than Van Haren. He considered the Dutch massacre of the Chinese in 1740 where over a thousand Batavian Chinese lost their lives comparable to the Roman emperor Nero's infamous Jewish persecutions.¹⁵⁵ Taking notice of Voltaire's membership in the club of anti-colonial faction of the Enlightenment and his criticism of the Dutch brand of colonialism makes it easier to understand Van Haren's own position with respect to the play. The literary critic Gerard Knuvelder states that "Van Haren was a great admirer of Voltaire" and Pieter van der Vliet maintains that the impression of Voltaire's literary works cannot be missed in *Agon*, *Sulthan van Bantem*.¹⁵⁶ If the ideological inclinations contained in *Agon* reflected Voltaire's own philosophical standing, it also claimed kinship with the work of another exponent of anti-colonialism – Abbé Raynal. Considered to be the perfect embodiment of Enlightenment opinion in its critique of colonialism, Raynal's explosive *Historie philosophique et politique et des établissements et du commerce des Europeens dans les deux Indes* (1770) expressed dismay at the policies of the VOC in the Indies.¹⁵⁷ On the issue of the reparation payments demanded by the Dutch on the conclusion of the Banten War, Raynal wrote:

Though the expedition was brisk, short, and rapid, and consequently could not be expensive, they contrived to make the charges of war amount to a prodigious sum. The situation of things would not admit of a scrutiny into the sum demanded for so great a piece of service and the exhausted state of the finances made it impossible to discharge

¹⁵⁴Edelstein refers to these works as defying the traditional or predominant European perspective of the "derogatory" east. Dan Edelstein, "Hyperborean Atlantis: Jean- Sylvain Bailly, Madame Blavatsky, and the Nazi Myth," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 35 (2006), 268.

¹⁵⁵T. Smollett and M.D.T. Francklin, eds., *The Works of M. de Voltaire. Translated from the French* (London: Printed for J. Newbery etc, 1764), 74-75.

¹⁵⁶G.P.M. Knuvelder, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde, deel 3* (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 1973), 277; Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 315-16.

¹⁵⁷ I refer to the 1782 English translation of the work: Abbé Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Printed for W.Gordon etc, 1782). On the estimation of Raynal's work within the context of the Enlightenment, see Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 590-614.

it. In this extremity, this weak prince determined to entail slavery on himself and his descendants, by granting to his deliverers the exclusive trade of his dominions.¹⁵⁸

Thus his rhetoric seems no different from what Van Haren articulated in his drama *Agon* which was translated into French in 1770, the same year that Raynal took to villifying European colonizers in his *Historie de deux indes*.

Just as Van Haren allowed the ideological winds then blowing across Europe to brush across his play, he may also have mimicked stylistic elements of French drama. Critics denounced *Agon* for its “un-Dutchness” in a period that was paradoxically a phase in Dutch literary history when dramatists reeled in a daze of heady Francophilia.¹⁵⁹ For all intents and purposes, Van Haren had modelled the play almost flawlessly. Like Van Haren’s *Thamas Koelikan*, his five act play was written in Alexandrine verse, strictly observed the unities of time and place, and adhered to the other rules of French Classicism, the genre widely practiced by eighteenth-century Dutch dramatists.¹⁶⁰ The only stylistic feature in the drama that could have possibly grated on critics was its ending. *Agon*, the epitome of righteousness, was sent to his grave while Abdul, the loathsome son, was installed on the throne. Van Haren concluded the play in a fashion that Aristotle’s *Poetics* did not regard permissible or fit.¹⁶¹ Whatever the truth in the critics’ charge of the presence of an adulterating Frenchification in the play, *Agon* and Van Haren’s other works revealed an honest debt to French drama.¹⁶² Busken Huet, Jos Smeyers and H.J. Vieu-Kuik have usefully pointed out that Van Haren’s borrowings from the French playwrights, Racine and Corneille in his choice of plot and cast in *Agon* were rife.¹⁶³ Whilst *Agon* merely carried resemblances to French plays, the playwright also adapted the French play *La boîte de Pandore* (1720) for the Dutch stage in his *Pietje en Agnietje of de Doos van Pandora* (1779).¹⁶⁴ If one were to consider the fact that the English poet, Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* also merited the playwright’s attention who considered

¹⁵⁸Raynal, *A philosophical and political history*, 183-84, also see 380 (index).

¹⁵⁹The *Nieuwe Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* was remorselessly exacting in its review of the stylistic aspects of the drama, *Agon*. It read: “hoeveel toegevendheid men ook wille gebruiken, men vindt zich, dat stuk doorbladerende, genoodzaakt te zeggen, het verzenmaken en rijmen is ‘s mans werk niet.” Cited in G. P. M. Knuvelde, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde*, 5th ed., vol. 2 (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 1971), 569-70; For the influence of French drama on Dutch literature, see F. A. Snellaert, *Schets eener geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* 4th ed. (Utrecht: Beijers, 1866), 181-201.

¹⁶⁰Jan te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, Deel 5, 2nd ed. (Haarlem: De erven F.Bohn, 1924), 514; De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 25.

¹⁶¹Te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, Deel 5, 442-43.

¹⁶²See Busken Huet, “De Van Haren’s,” 28.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 39,48-49; Jos Smeyers and H.J. Vieu-Kuik, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden*, vol. 6 (Amsterdam: Standaard Uitgeverij, 1975), 189-90; Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 315; Te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, Deel 5, 442.

¹⁶⁴Busken Huet, “De Van Haren’s,” 27.

the work worthy of translation, Van Haren may very well be taken for a man who had his finger on the pulse of international literary trends.¹⁶⁵ The idea that *Agon* can be grouped with those late eighteenth century works that slammed their mother countries for their colonial policies would only seem rational.

Van Haren, Fence-sitting, and the Other Side

Notwithstanding the evident validity of the anti-colonial stance, another branch of scholarship represented by Pieter van der Vliet has displayed wariness towards unthinkingly embracing such a position. Others such as W.M.F. Mansvelt assert that the play has not the slightest trace of the anti-colonialism claimed by its proponents.¹⁶⁶ What has allowed this opposition to flourish has been an act of clever mischief on the part of the playwright himself. In contrast to the unflinching anti-colonialism that *Agon* professes, Van Haren's other literary works betray a more ambivalent attitude towards the Dutch East India Company and their colonial enterprise in the East. The story of Banten's civil war, in the playwright's literary oeuvre surprisingly came in two versions. As Mansvelt points out, the same hand that circumvented the story of Banten in *Agon* recorded another version of the event in a later work, his *Proeve, op de levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche doorlugtige mannen : behelzende het leeven van Joannes Camphuis, Haarlemmer* (1775), the biography of a member of the Council of Indies during the Banten War who later became Governor General of the VOC possessions in Asia.¹⁶⁷ While the playwright might in this work have retained his sympathy for the father Sultan who was the tragic hero of his drama and bemoaned the subsequent turn of events, he displayed full knowledge of the episode as recounted in his sources. *Proeve* thereby implicates Van Haren for the invention of detail but his work *Het Vaderland* in the reading of Mansvelt presents a more serious allegation – that Van Haren held contradictory views about the Company.¹⁶⁸ In contrast to the steadfast anti-colonialist that the Van Haren of *Agon* appears to be, *Het Vaderland* shows a playwright who is a committed propagandist for the enterprise and a sincere admirer of its conquests and victories in the Indies. The very acts of the VOC he denounced in *Agon* he eloquently praised in *Het Vaderland*, when he writes:

¹⁶⁵Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 374; Te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, Deel 5, 514.

¹⁶⁶Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 307-19. Also see Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 316-17.

¹⁶⁷Van Haren, *Proeve, op de levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche doorlugtige mannen*; Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 312-13.

¹⁶⁸Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 312-13.

See how Batavia began!
Here Van Dam punishes the Makassars,
And there Van Goens tames the Malabars!
Here, Hulft dies on the battlefield, but conquers Ceylon!¹⁶⁹

While the playwright might here appear sympathetic to the Company's exploits and even adopts a congratulatory tone when applauding their successes, in *Van Japan, met betrekking tot de Hollandsche natie en de Christelijke godsdienst* he sought to combat the prevailing view in Europe that the Company had worked hand in glove with the Japanese in orchestrating the seventeenth-century massacre of Christians.¹⁷⁰

Also causing us to doubt the strength of Van Haren's anticolonialist stance or even his commitment to such a position is the fact that no other of Van Haren's works save for *Agon* espouses the anti-colonial cause. All his other works (most obviously his other tragedy, *Willem de Eerste* (1773), and the eulogy *Lijkrede op Willem IV* (1766), both of which were written in honour of members of the House of Orange) parade his credentials as an unwavering loyalist.¹⁷¹ Van Haren's literary oeuvre also resists any sort of explanation that hinges on the possibility that the playwright underwent an ideological shift during which his admiration for the Company either spiralled into disdain or vice versa. Although such an explanation might have served to explain the dizzying diversity in opinion that the playwright expresses with respect to the VOC, the prospect of its application is rendered futile. *Agon* was published in 1769, the same year that *Van Japan* and *Het Vaderland* appeared in print with their lavish praise on the Company and its undertakings in Asia.¹⁷²

The inconsistencies in Van Haren's oeuvre apart, what allows those scholars who doubt the drama's anti-colonial leanings to further maintain their position is an episode the impact of which on the author's life makes it pertinent to any question about authorial intention. In 1760, the playwright, a friend of the royalty and one who had held influential

¹⁶⁹ "Zie hoe Batavia begon!/ Hier straft Van Dam de Macassaran,/ Daar temd Van Goens de Mallabaran/ Hier sneuveld Hulft, en wint Ceylon!" Onno Zwier van Haren, *Aan het vaderland* (Leeuwarden: Abraham Ferweda, 1769), 90. Also cited in Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 316.

¹⁷⁰ Onno Zwier van Haren, *Van Japan: Met betrekking tot de Hollandse Natie, en de Christelyke gods-dienst* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1775).

¹⁷¹ See Willem Gerard Brill, *Nederlandsche spraakleer*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1866), 101. Snellaerts refers to Onno Zwier van Haren together with his brother Willem van Haren as having been "vurige minnaars van hun vaderland..." Snellaert, *Schets eener gescheidenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, 199-200.

¹⁷² *Van Japan* was first published in French in 1769 as *Reserches sur la conduite de Hollandois au Japan relativement a la Religion Cretienne*. It appeared in translation for the Dutch readership in 1775 as Onno Zwier van Haren, *Van Japan: met betrekking tot de Hollandse natie, en de Christelijke Gods-dienst* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1775). See Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 352.

political offices in his own right, was accused – from within his own family – of an incestuous relationship with his daughters. The chief complainants were his son in law, Johan van Sandick, and Willem van Hogendorp, who was betrothed to his daughter. The episode triggered uproar among the upright eighteenth-century gentry and had the rumour mills grinding for weeks; but the playwright may have been the victim of a political conspiracy hatched by his political rival, the Duke of Brunswijk.¹⁷³ Van Haren's fall from grace and loss of influence was swift. The reason why this charge of incest has been found a worthy tool to help understand the narrative content of the play is because, as Busken Huet argues, "all [Van Haren's] writings have been written to blot out the impression of the events of February 1760 as far as possible."¹⁷⁴ Moreover, this personal tragedy is said to have had no small bearing on the play, *Agon*. When Sultan Agon in the drama was also a victim of familial treachery and unjust expulsion from office, the playwright and his protagonist were fellow-comrades in suffering.

Closing in on Van Haren's Intentions

We might here pause, take a step back, review the rhetorical arena and lament the woeful complexity implicit in determining Van Haren's intentions in authoring the drama. Is Van Haren to be taken for an avowed loyalist or an unrelenting critic of the Company? If the gaping inconsistencies in the playwright's literary oeuvre prevent us from applauding the provocative anti-colonialism that colour the drama, his revisionist history of Banten requires us to reconsider our subscription to any theory that downplays the drama's anti-colonial content. Under these circumstances, I propose a reading of the play which reconciles these two seemingly non-negotiable but equally valid positions.

I argue that Van Haren never intended to write an anti-colonial drama. The crackling criticism of both colonialism and the Company in *Agon* was undoubtedly a response to the anti-colonial tendency in literary circles elsewhere in Europe, a trend to which Van Haren seemed to have been receptive, although that was not strictly his object. It constituted collateral damage. *Agon* hardly reflected Van Haren's views of the Company. *Het Vaderland* which appreciatively recorded the Company's eastern conquests and *Van Japan* which articulated a moving defence of the Company were better representatives of his ideological

¹⁷³Smeyers and Vieu-Kuik, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden*, deel 6, 189; Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 310.

¹⁷⁴Busken Huet, "De Van Haren's," 43; Rob Erenstein, "Onno Zwier van Haren en *Agon*, Sulthan van Bantam," *Scenarium* 2 (1978), 42; G. Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, vol. 5 (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1910), 501-02. Mansvelt subscribes to this point of view when he writes: "Agon is ...in the first place de apology of Van Haren." Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 314.

standing. In the latter work, Van Haren even deliberated on the colonization methods of the Company and argued that they fell short of their potential in Ceylon. The island, he argued would have made for an ideal “settlement-colony.”¹⁷⁵ *Agon* on the other hand was conceived of as an ode to the aging Javanese monarch and a eulogy to his resolve to protect the independence of his domains. The contempt for the aggressive imperialism of the VOC, a rhetoric that *Agon* indisputably carries, was the result of Van Haren’s attempt to bring to life the agony of this potentate, while at the same time (as previous scholars have argued) lending voice to his own personal tragedy. Van Haren may certainly have meant to chastise the Company for its highhandedness in the Banten affair, in which he indisputably saw Sultan Agon as the aggrieved party, which explains the unprecedented step of upholding the ruler as the protagonist at the cost of marginalizing the Company. The belligerent critique of the enterprise that ensued however was an unintended consequence.¹⁷⁶ I argue, in other words that a subtle distinction needs to be made between the ideological bent of the playwright on one hand and the anti-colonial sentiments of the drama on the other. The latter characteristic entered the literary piece owing to the nature of the subject and influences of the period when the play was written.

This reading of the play can be substantiated on two grounds. First, the claim that Van Haren unwittingly overlooked the play’s stern anti-colonialist message relies on the same reasoning that scholars have employed to criticize the view that the play was a literary crusade against colonialism – Saint Martin’s response to counteract Sultan Agon’s criticism of the Company.¹⁷⁷ Van Haren presumed (and in retrospect wrongly so) that Saint Martin’s dialogue would suffice to quell any outrage that Agon’s ignominious estimations of the Dutch may have caused his audiences.¹⁷⁸ Secondly, the playwright seems to have remained remarkably indifferent to the drama’s ideological content and contemporaries although aware of its anti-Company stance were not particularly offended by it. On publication, the drama did not ruffle any feathers and Van Haren’s critics chose instead to train their guns on trivialities such as the drama’s stylistic aspects. The periodical, *Nieuwe Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1770) which was remorselessly exacting in its review of the play’s literary content curiously chose

¹⁷⁵Van Haren, *Van Japan*, 104(footnote). Although Van Haren attributes these views to “a foreigner” who he is supposed to have struck a conversation with, it is certain that Van Haren subscribed to these views as well.

¹⁷⁶Van der Vliet usefully notes that “one forgets far too easily that the critique of a policy per se need not have to mean (that it was a) colonial critique.” While this evaluation is close to my own thesis, Van der Vliet essentially considers the drama (both the intended object and the outcome) to not have been anti-colonial. Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 316.

¹⁷⁷ Saint Martin had recalled the successes of the Company in Asia to counter Agon’s denunciation of the enterprise.

¹⁷⁸Erenstein, “Onno Zwier van Haren en Agon, Sulthan van Bantam,” 60.

only to describe Van Haren's views about the Dutch East India Company rather than deliver their verdict on his ideological stance.¹⁷⁹ Convinced that his drama was in need of fine-tuning, the playwright sought only to assuage his critics. In the 1773 edition of the work, the drama's rhyme and verse were altered, but its colonial criticism was retained with all the vituperative bite of the original.¹⁸⁰ The first audiences to have been decidedly squeamish about the play's ideological content were its nineteenth-century public who knocked the play off the repertoire in the *Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*.¹⁸¹ In 1890, the newspaper *Java Bode* similarly expressed its discomfiture with Van Haren's glorification of "this Sundanese Despot," and four years later, the literary scholar J.A.F.L. van Heeckeren caught the scent of the Multatulianesque anti-colonialism in the drama, thereby igniting the debate that we have in our hands today.¹⁸²

If it was not Van Haren's design to devote his literary energies in *Agon* to critiquing colonialism and the Company, what might his intent have been? The analogies between the drama and Van Haren's own life are far too overpowering to downplay the estimations of scholars such as G.P.M. Knuvelde who argue that "Agon is another Van Haren."¹⁸³ The playwright had indeed, as he suggests, contrived to make the play a literary canvas on which he inscribed his life in an effort to plead his innocence in the incest controversy. The drama's message of vigorously resisting any form of aggressive imperialism on the other hand carries an inherent universalism that, as Mansvelt notes, also made it a lesson for the Dutch Republic.¹⁸⁴ Another relevant object of the playwright was to provide a commentary on an ideological and political tussle that was played out within the boardroom of the Council of the Indies in Batavia just as the war with Banten raged in full steam.¹⁸⁵ This is a point to which G.C. de Waard and Pieter van der Vliet refer fleetingly and which most other scholars seem to have ignored. When Saint Martin features as one of the few Dutchmen worthy of admiration in *Agon*, the drama might easily be seen as an extension of a project that Van Haren embarked upon in his biography of Joannes Camphuis, the governor-general of the VOC from 1684-1691. As De Waard notes, Van Haren sought to express ideological support for the governor-general and his clique which included Isaac de Saint Martin, Joan van Hoorn and others. The

¹⁷⁹See *Nieuwe Vaderlandsche Letter-Oefeningen*, deel. 3, stuk. 1, (Amsterdam: A. van der Kroe, 1770), 238-39.

¹⁸⁰See Onno Zwier van Haren, *Proeve van Nederduitsche treurspellen, getrokken uit vaderlandsche gebeurtenissen* (Zwolle: Simon Clement, 1773). This work carries the revised version of the drama.

¹⁸¹Erenstein, "Onno Zwier van Haren en Agon, Sulthan van Bantam," 59; Maria A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Nederlandse literatuur: een geschiedenis* (Groningen: Nijhoff, 1993), 337.

¹⁸²"Een Oud-Indische Treurspel I," *Java Bode: Nieuws, Handels en Advertentieblad voor Nederlandsch-Indie* December 3, 1890; Van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli."

¹⁸³Knuvelde, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde*, deel 2, 567.

¹⁸⁴Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 314.

¹⁸⁵Van der Vliet, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 316-17; De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 36.

policies of Camphuis's predecessor, Cornelis Speelman during whose tenure as governor-general, the war had begun did not appeal to the playwright.¹⁸⁶ When Speelman was governor-general, and Camphuis was a councillor of the Indies in his council, they seldom saw eye to eye on various policy points. Their political feud is mentioned in Company records such as Pieter van Dam's *Beschrijving van de Oost-Indische Compagnie* as well as in Van Haren's sources such as François Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* thereby providing the playwright with the information he desired to cement his literary alliances. Valentyn was exceptionally eloquent in his estimation of Camphuis, who he described as "virtuous, upright, very honourable, god-fearing and obliging," but showed greater thrift in positively evaluating Speelman's tenure.¹⁸⁷ The diplomat J.P.J. du Bois's *Vies des Gouverneurs Generaux* published in 1763 (which Van Haren may have very likely read) reproduced Valentyn's appraisals of the two administrators. He described Camphuis as "obliging, upright, pious and god fearing" while regarding the Speelman era as having been rather lacklustre.¹⁸⁸ According to Mansvelt, with Van Haren's sources providing him with the necessary information to cement his literary alliances, the playwright clearly preferred the intellectual Camphuis and his clique, including individuals like Saint Martin, over Speelman.¹⁸⁹ It is also fitting to read Van Haren's engagement with these personages who were all drawn from the VOC's seventeenth-century history together with fact that all of Van Haren's literary engagements involving the Dutch East India Company, namely *Agon*, *Proeve* and *Van Japan* were situated

¹⁸⁶Cornelis Speelman was Governor General of the VOC from 1681-1684. Evidences of this political feud may easily be gleaned from contemporary Company records such as the *Dagh-Register van Batavia*. See Fruin-Mees, *Dagh-register Batavia anno 1682*, introduction. For an overview of Camphuis' tenure as Governor General which also speaks of his association with Saint Martin and Van Hoorn, see "Camphuys (Joannes)," in *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biographisch Woordenboek*, eds. P.C. Molhuysen, P.J. Blok, and K.H. Kossmann (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1924), 263-64. Although Mansvelt makes mention of the difference of opinion between Camphuis and Speelman regarding the Dutch involvement in Banten, he does not refer to the factionalism and infighting which raged within the Council of Batavia in the period. See Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 317.

¹⁸⁷Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*, *Deel 4a*, 317. Of Speelman, Valentyn wrote, "he did not win as much fame in his role as Governor General, than he did as member of the Council of the Indies and Director." *Ibid.*, 311. It may however be noted that Van Haren spoke highly of Cornelis Speelman's early exploits such as his role in the conquest of Macassar in 1669 and of his subsequent intervention in the war with Mataram. A similar estimation of Speelman is born in Pieter van Dam's *Beschrijving van de Oost-Indische Compagnie* which regarded the man's administrative capabilities rather poorly. Van Dam deemed him a better subordinate than leader. Pieter van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oost Indische Compagnie*, *deel 3*, ed. FW.Stapel ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1943), 22-23.

¹⁸⁸J. P. J. Du Bois, *Historische beschrijving der reizen of nieuwe en volkome verzameling van de allerwaardigste en zeldzaamste zee en land-togten*, vol. 20 (Amsterdam: J. Roman et al, 1765), 265, 83. The work was originally published in French in 1763 as *Vies des Gouverneurs Generaux avec l'abrégé de l'histoire des établissements Hollandois aux Indes Orientales*. I have employed the Dutch translation.

¹⁸⁹De Waard, *Onno Zwier van Haren*, 36; Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 311.

in this very period, which is widely considered to have been the Company's heyday.¹⁹⁰ In authoring these works, Van Haren harked back to a glorious past: *Proeve* reflected genially on the governance of Camphuis, who was an enlightened seventeenth-century administrator, while *Tot Japan* defended the character of the Dutch, which eventually won them their exclusive presence and trading rights in Japan. Unlike *Proeve* and *Tot Japan*, *Agon* filled not one but two roles. As a sub-narrative to the fall of Sultan Agon, the drama traced the rapid expansion of the Company and thereby recalled a brilliant yet bygone era. The play also expressed regret at the decline of the VOC which Van Haren saw unfolding in his lifetime, sentiments which as we have seen before were articulated in three forms: it predicted that the Dutch would replay the Portuguese decline in Asia; it lamented the gradual indigenization of the Dutch which it equated with degeneration; and it claimed that Dutch greed, which was the motive for their expansionism would also lead them to ruin.¹⁹¹ This perspective that Van Haren seemed to express encapsulated the general sense of dejection with which the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic had come to view their Eastern trading corporation.

Although not aggrieved by the VOC's imperial appetite, which is the general picture that Van Haren's work seemed to convey, people within the Company and the Dutch Republic, cast a critical eye on the habits of life that it had engendered in the east. Like Van Haren, they sensed the Company's impending downfall and that this sombre state of affairs was in part caused by the character of its employees. A rhetoric both publicizing and critiquing the staggering levels of corruption and luxury indulged in by Company servants featured in Dutch print across the eighteenth century. This coincided with the Company's own concern to arrest the phenomenon. Their internal correspondence stressed the need to set its house in order and Governors-General Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff and Jacob Mossel in the second half of the eighteenth century attempted to relieve Batavia of its notoriety for lasciviousness.¹⁹² De Graaff's *Oost Indische Spiegel* which was undoubtedly the inspiration for Van Haren's notions about Asia's corrupted Dutchmen, went through numerous editions under various titles through the eighteenth century. Two editions of the *Beschryving van Batavia* which bore incredible likeness to the work were published in the 1640s suggesting

¹⁹⁰ According to Van Heeckeren, Van Haren engaged with this particular period in Dutch history because "he [Van Haren] want[ed] to teach [us] how the history of the institution of [Dutch] might in the Indies was written with blood and tears." Van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli," 330.

¹⁹¹ On the subject of indigenization, see Lefevere, "Composing the Other," 87-88.

¹⁹² Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 66-93. J.J. Steur, *Herstel of ondergang: de voorstellen tot redres van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, 1740-1795* (Utrecht: Hes, 1984), 36-37; Also see NA 1.10.03, Collection Alting 42, "Memorie ter verhandeling van de staat en het belang der E. Comp op hare respectieve kantoren Julij 1753," p. 1.

that it had become commonplace to speak of the sloth that had taken root among their compatriots overseas.¹⁹³ Jan de Marre's poem *Batavia* (1740) recorded the affluence of its society with a chord of disapproval, and the same Du Bois whose assessments of the Company's administrators are likely to have influenced Van Haren's take on the Banten episode alleged that "the excessive wealth and opulence that [held] sway in these Indische settlements and especially in Batavia ha[d] become like a plague for public well-being."¹⁹⁴ If these works convincingly sounded out the unsavoury extravagances of the Dutchmen abroad to their eighteenth-century audiences, the more articulate and resounding critique of the enterprise emerged within years after the publication of the drama with the rise of the Patriots in the Dutch Republic in the 1770s.¹⁹⁵ Along with their staunchly anti-Orangist ideology and new notions of political participation came a deep-seated scepticism about the workings of the Dutch East India Company. Anti-colonialism was never a part of their agenda, but the Patriots were convinced that the VOC was a malfunctioning enterprise plagued by many evils such as corruption. The call for greater accountability by its employees was as a consequence a predominant feature of the early Patriotic rhetoric of the 1770s, and a pamphlet from this period, the *Redenkundig Berigt* slammed the VOC for speedily rushing towards its own demise by recruiting what it called "fortune-seekers" into its service.¹⁹⁶ Just as the wall of secrecy surrounding the ailments of the Company suddenly seemed to have been razed and all eyes were drawn to the Company's ill-health, people were emboldened to reflect on the causes for the susceptibility of the Dutch in Asia to take on behavioural traits that varied from those they bore at home. In contrast to earlier Company servants-turned-travel writers such as De Graaff, who gingerly hinted at the East's propensity to debauch its European sojourners, Johan Splinter Stavorinus, whose travels in Asia coincided with the scripting of Van Haren's drama, drew a comparison of the conduct of an employee of the English Company and his Dutch counterpart reserving praise for the former and criticism for the latter. He even aired

¹⁹³*Beschryving van Batavia, met des zelfs Kasteel en Publyke Gebouwen als mede van de regeringe der stadt, en van de inwoonders, waar in onder anderen aangetoond wordt de grote hovaardy der Hollandsche en Oost-Indische vrouwen, hare manier van huishouden, opvoeden der kinderen, en bestieren der slaven en slavinnen*, (Amsterdam: Dirk Swart, 1741). A second edition was published the following year.

¹⁹⁴For Jan de Marre's take on Dutch depravity, see Lefevere, "Composing the Other," 87. "De onmatige weelde en overdaad, die in dese Indische bezittingen en vooral te Batavia heerste, was als een pest voor het gemeene welzyn geworden..." Du Bois, *Historische beschrijving*, deel 20, 402.

¹⁹⁵As a political force in the Republic, the Patriot movement acquired importance enough to later constitute a threat to the Orangists and subsequently allied itself with the French upon their occupation of the Republic in 1695. See G.J. Schutte, "De Nederlandse Patriotten en de kolonien: Een onderzoek naar hun denkbeelden en optreden 1770-1800" (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1974).

¹⁹⁶*Redenkundig berigt wegens de ware oorzaak van 't bederf, mitsgaders de middelen van redres der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie door den Indischen Patriot*, (1773), 14-15; Schutte, "De Nederlandse Patriotten," 26-28.

his fears about the virulence of the Asian malady in this context. Europe too, he feared was not insulated to its effects. In his 1793 account he sourly noted:

The spirit of liberty which animates a Briton in his own country, is repressed as little here as there. This is diametrically opposite to the stiff and obnoxious formality, which takes place at Batavia, in the company of the governor general, and the counsellors of India... It would be well, if this conduct remained solely confined to the Asiatic regions, which gave birth to it; but, unfortunately, we see it continued by purse-proud individuals, when they return to a country, where, from the most ancient times, it is known to be in perfect contradiction to the genius and temper of the inhabitants.¹⁹⁷

Stavorinus chose to base his view of the eighteenth-century Dutchman abroad upon an ideal state situated in the distant past, but for most deliberations on the demise of the VOC in print, including those of Van Haren, the ideal state lay in the recent past – the previous century. The debilitating state of the VOC in the eighteenth century may have been a palpable reality, but the sense of dejection and unease with the Company's fortunes felt by Van Haren and his contemporaries in the period is also tied to the feeling of ruination that engulfed the eighteenth century Dutch Republic in general. The sense of disillusionment with contemporary circumstances, aptly termed as "nostalgic idealism" by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt was resonant in the moralist Justus van Effen's call in the 1730s for the return to pristine values of the past.¹⁹⁸ It was also discernible in the philosopher Elie Luzac's complaint that it was not respectable enterprise that dictated the character of eighteenth-century commerce, but the rush to create fortunes.¹⁹⁹ The Patriots too harped on the achievements of the previous century to underline the dismal conditions they beheld in their own time. The pamphlet *Voor en aan de Geïnteresseerden* reflected nostalgically on how their seventeenth-century hot-bloodedness had fuelled their successful forays in the East, and the *Plan of welmeenende voorstelling* lamented the devastating impact that the decline of

¹⁹⁷J.S. Stavorinus, *Reize van Zeeland over de Kaap de Goede Hoop, naar Batavia, Bantam, Bengalen, enz* (Leyden: A. en J. Honkoop, 1793). I cite from its English translation titled *Voyages to the East-Indies; by the late John Splinter Stavorinus*, vol. 1, translated from the original Dutch by Samuel Hull Wilcocke (London: Printed for G.G. and J. Robinson, 1798), 146.

¹⁹⁸Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt, "Introduction," in *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment and Revolution*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 6; James L. Schorr, *The Life and Works of Justus van Effen* (Wyoming: University of Wyoming, 1982), 30-38.

¹⁹⁹Wyger R.E. Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism in the Dutch Republic: The Political Thought of Elie Luzac* (Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1993), 141.

the Republic had on its naval might.²⁰⁰ This fatalism, which dominated the Dutch mentalite impinged on Van Haren's other works like it did on *Agon*. In his play *Pietje en Agnietje*, which retold the mythical tale of Pandora's folly in opening the box of worldly sorrows, Van Haren mourned the fact that the Republic of his age had "languished in the desire for luxury, faithlessness and violence."²⁰¹ When *Agon* thus recounted the events on Java in a time when the Dutch advance on the island was akin to an invasive weed and when it foresaw for the Company a gloomy future characterized by decline and subsequent eviction, it is clear that the "nostalgic idealism" that weighed so heavily on the eighteenth century Dutch psyche had also taken its toll on the playwright.²⁰² "Nothing to [Van Haren]," Mansvelt opines, "was more painful than the waning glory of the old Republic, and he desired nothing more passionately than the restoration of the old glory."²⁰³ The notion of decline is thus absolutely fundamental to an understanding of the reasons why the play was authored.

In our enthusiasm to unravel Van Haren's intentions within the contours of the "anti-colonial" debate, a significant element in the drama has forfeited our attention, namely, why Van Steenwyk, a character whose tale of apostasy was told with much zest and approbation by Van Haren's sources, should be caricatured in *Agon* as the mind behind Abdul's misdoings. In his study on the reactions that apostasy elicited in English drama, Nabil Matar notes, "In England, the renegade developed into an important dramatic type...unlike other villains, the renegade was heinous because he was the enemy from within."²⁰⁴ His argument that dramatists adopted views that were mostly condemnatory also helps explain the Dutch situation. Van Haren's take on apostasy repeated a presumably general Dutch contempt for renegades captured in a saying popular in the eighteenth century - *Een renegaat is nog steeds erger dan een Turk* (A renegade is still worse than a Turk).²⁰⁵ Nicolaes Wassenaer's annual journal *Historisch verhael aller gedenkwaardige geschiedenissen* published in the 1630s, and

²⁰⁰A. Douglas, "Voor en aan de geïnteresseerden in de Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, wegens gedaane aanbieding tot middelen van redres dier maatschappy," (1785), 41-42; Nicolaas Hoefnagel, *Plan of welmeenende voorstelling ter verbetering van Neerlands zee-weezen* (Amsterdam: Dirk Schuurman, 1779), vi-vii.

²⁰¹Cf. Busken Huet, "De Van Haren's," 30.

²⁰² Van Heeckeren points to the fact that the tendency of "looking back" at the seventeenth century from eighteenth is rife in Van Haren's drama. Van Heeckeren, "Een voorganger van Multatuli," 329-30. Busken Huet states that this was a predominant theme in Van Haren's drama *Pietje en Agnietje*. Busken Huet, "De Van Haren's," 30.

²⁰³Mansvelt, "Onno Zwier van Haren: Geen voorloper van Multatuli," 310.

²⁰⁴Nabil Matar, "The Renegade in English Seventeenth Century Imagination," *Studies in English Literature* 33, 3 (1993), 490.

²⁰⁵One finds no less than three works from the period which bear this saying: Jan A. Bakker, *De jonge reiziger door Nederland*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Langeveld, 1797), 195; Betje Wolff, *De bekkeriaansche dooling op eene geheel nieuwe wyze dat is proef ondervindelyk wederlegd* (Hoorn: Tjallingius, 1775), 10; Cornelius van Engelen, *De Filosooph*, deel 2 (Amsterdam: P. Meijer, 1766), 378.

thus temporally far removed from the drama similarly condemned renegades when it broke news of the death of the Dutch pirate and apostate, Samsone.²⁰⁶ Speaking of the unchristian burial that the pirate had received at the hands of his crew, Wassenaer sought to convey to his readers that misfortune befell those guilty of acts as ungodly as religious conversion. While Van Haren's and Wassenaer's works neatly align with Nabil Matar's assessment of apostasy as perceived in English works, the Dutch attitude towards renegades was more varied. S. de Vries' *Handelingen en geschiedenissen voorgevallen tusschen den staet der Vereenigde Nederlanden en dien van de Zeerovers in Barbaryen* (1684) which recounted the history of the famed French pirate Soliman Reys readily shows this. Revealing the same forgiving disposition as Valentyn, Bogaert, and De Graaff (whose works had informed *Agon*), De Vries was not severe in his appraisal of the pirate's act of apostasy because he turned Christian and had in his last days become irredeemably hostile to his former kin, the Turks.²⁰⁷ We might then draw the conclusion that the act of "crossing over" elicited multiple reactions in the Republic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as *Agon*, and other works suggest. We might also surmise that the choice of Van Steenwyk for antagonist may have been a more incidental one that said little about Van Haren's opinion about Van Steenwyk's deeds. When the plot demanded an antagonist, Van Steenwyk may have seemed the ideal choice – he was attached to Sultan Haji's household and the notion of renegade carried conventional associations with the element of deception.

Conclusion

In 1769, Van Haren's *Agon* resuscitated the tale of the Banten War of the 1680's. Apart from the agitation that the war caused the ruling class in the Republic who defended their actions against the calumny of the outraged English, the conquest had gone down in Dutch memory as a feat of enterprise, courage and determination. And then came *Agon*, which played havoc with this prevailing image. Enterprise became imperiousness, courage cunning, and determination deception. In eliciting feelings of shame and disapproval for the character of the Dutch East India Company and its servants, the play was unprecedented. It was genuinely critical of the Dutch and not surprisingly, it was a pale shadow of the accounts of Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff, works that supplied the raw material for this explosive tale. While

²⁰⁶Nicolaes Wassenaer, *Historisch verhael aller gedenkwaardige geschiedenissen*, vol. VIII: van Octobre des jaers 1624 tot April des jaers 1625 voorgevallen sijn (Amsterdam: Jan Jansz), 108-09.

²⁰⁷S. de Vries, *Handelingen en geschiedenissen voorgevallen tusschen den staet der Vereenigde Nederlanden en dien van de zeerovers in Barbaryen* (Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn, 1684), 362-64.

there are no doubt intersections to be found in their perspectives, *Agon* had in comparison to its sources, conceptualized the Banten war in as radical a manner as was possible.

The sources to the drama, which were all authored in the early eighteenth century (decades before the play was written), were laudatory of the Dutch involvement in the war. This was a conceivable standpoint no doubt, because their authors shared strong bonds with the enterprise. The Company was employer to Valentyn, Bogaert and De Graaff, and in the instance of Bogaert, it was also patron. Connections between the works they wrote on the Banten war and Company documentation are also apparent allowing us the opportunity of plotting a roadmap of information travel from the archives of the VOC to the accounts of the trio. These authors employed pamphlets on the war that were published in the Republic in the 1680s. The pamphlets, for the information they bore, had in turn relied on the archives of the VOC which were created at the ground level in Batavia and Banten in the course of the conflict. At the perspectival level, the records of the VOC, which chronicled the same episodes as the published accounts wrote about, carried well-developed perspectives on subjects which the travelogues had also addressed. The issues of apostasy, Banten's women and Sultan Haji's sadism were also dealt with extensively by Company scribes in their official reports. If the perspectival differences between *Agon* and its sources on various themes were acute, the disparities in characterization between the Company records and the travel accounts are equally glaring. The images that Batavia created of her neighbouring kingdom of Banten were dictated by the nature of her interaction with the Sultanate. Before the war of 1682 landed the port kingdom into the lap of the Dutch, Batavia's relations with Banten was one of uneasy peace interspersed by periods of open confrontation. This feeling of profound hostility which the Company felt for her rival in trade for a frustratingly long period of time sculpted her vision of her troublesome neighbour which was consummately expressed in her standpoint on apostasy. Perceived as a phenomenon that was predicated on the religious differences between Batavia and Banten, and as one that grossly undermined the authority of the Company, apostasy was a practice that they combatted both in policy and rhetoric. Despite the unrelenting religious tensions experienced by Banten and Batavia towards one another, both polities seem to have simultaneously experimented with cooperation and co-existence with one another. The published accounts however fail to allot narrative space to either outlining these complexities and inconsistencies that plagued the Banten-Batavia relationship or to reflect on the anxiety that the Company experienced in battling the phenomenon of apostasy. Divulging another contradiction, Company documentation also chose to view Sultan Haji and the royal women differently. Born out of actual day-to-day interaction with the

kingdom of Banten, portrayals of the King, his concubines, maid-servants and other women attached to the royal household were neither unremittingly critical nor overtly simplistic and on the contrary were marked by a rich variation in representation. Clearly here, it was the element of genre which brought in the difference in rhetoric and the variation in perspective. Company documentation as institutional correspondence conceived Banten differently from published accounts as the genres that they belong to differed and the audiences they catered to varied.

The travelogues in their notions of Banten was an attestation of the prevailing stereotypes in Europe about despotism and the Oriental harem and *Agon* in its contradictions to these works constituted subversive content. The only two contexts in which the sources left a dent on the drama were in the context of informing the playwright of the infectiousness of Eastern depravity. Van Haren dispelled the image of a playwright toiling under the weight of “received wisdom” about the East which he felt compelled to replicate, and *Agon* became the ideal example of a drama which not only weaned itself of its sources but grossly contradicted their evaluations. That said, the anti-colonial daring which the play showcased was an accident. It contested the representative strategies that characterized its sources with startling conviction thereby blending into the climate of discontentment that contemporary literary works in England and France had begun to exemplify. While this evidence bolsters the argument of the “anti-colonialists” that Van Haren’s intention lay in deriding the enterprise, the character of playwright’s literary oeuvre indicates that his commitment to such a stance was shaky or better still, non-existent. The controversy over the playwright’s incestuous deeds had a bearing on the play and with the drama’s fixation with the Company’s seventeenth century past and the pessimism regarding its future, it adhered to the dominant eighteenth century Dutch narrative of past greatness and the progressive deterioration of the present.

CONCLUSION

If the success of *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan*, and *Agon* is gauged by their reception by the general public, they were admittedly unsuccessful plays. But they lay claim to success of a different kind. This study argues that in dramatizing contemporary historical events in Asia, each of these plays was the embodiment of a lively and complex process of information transfer from and about the Orient. The plays were third generation retellings of the stories they told. The themes that they dealt with had been written and rewritten about, imagined and reimagined by scribes of the Dutch East India Company and by authors of published histories and accounts of travel to Asia. These dramas, as a result, constituted a phase in the evolution of information and images about the Orient in the Republic. The Dutch stage, in consequence, became a register of the VOC's encounter with Asia.

Charting the transcontinental passage and metamorphosis of Oriental information and imagery in this channel constituted the crux of this study. It is revealed that this phenomenon, like the Oriental plots that the plays dealt with, had its beginnings in Asia in the workings of the VOC. As a committed chronicler as it was trader, the historical events that *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan*, and *Agon* engaged with invited the Company's undivided attention. The fall of Ming China and the defeat of the Mughals by Nadir Shah were thought to have significant consequences for VOC trade in these domains. In the Banten war, the Company was protagonist and the stakes were, quite logically then, far greater. In the acquisition of information about the political crises in Mughal India and Banten, the VOC displayed consummate skill. It integrated itself into established channels of information procurement in these kingdoms and recruited the services of native, Dutch and other European informants. The Company displayed greatest variety in its information gathering practices in Mughal India. The knowledge shared with them by their European correspondents De Voulton and Toretti and their paid agent, Sampatram in Delhi was supplemented by intercepting official and personal correspondence of other parties. In Banten, an Islamic cleric, Abdulha and a Company steward, Huigh Booy were indispensable sources of information for the Company. During the war, the VOC experienced a landfall of information about their adversary's activities when the number of their informants increased tenfold. The Company's efforts to tap information in Mughal India and Banten are also instructive of the cultures of information acquisition which were already in place in the two polities. In Mughal India, the Company

benefitted from the system of open and sanctioned espionage in the royal courts and in Banten, they succeeded in penetrating the royal establishment and the crown prince and ministers counted among the Company's informants. China presented a different picture. In their role as aspiring merchants with limited direct access to the mainland, the Dutch were incapable of tapping into traditional lines of communication and instead developed alternative means of information gathering. They relied on the knowledge of the Jesuits who had access to inner imperial information and simultaneously capitalized on the trading concessions they were granted on the island of Formosa which it used as a news collection centre. Information about events in the empire was relayed by the Chinese captains of ships trading with the Dutch on the island.

The scribal endeavours of the Company to record these episodes were not innocent acts of documentation. In conceptualizing the character of these historical events, Company documentation reveals that they were capable of drawing their own estimations of encounter and their archives bore the visions and perceptions that the VOC came to create of these polities and the events that occurred. These evaluations were independent of the manner in which their informants (with the exception of the Jesuits) conceived these episodes. Any discussion of the role of native informants in the Company's information acquisition practices, as a result, ends here because there were clear limitations to the extent to which the Company's sources were perspectival informants to the archives of the enterprise. This was particularly true of the Mughal case where the VOC developed a markedly different view of Nadir Shah's conquest in comparison to the perspective that their sources held of the event.

As three very different kingdoms – China, Mughal India and Banten – were subjects of representation, the imaginings of these entities should have exhibited visible variations. This was true only to an extent. Batavia's persistent loss of Company subjects to the kingdom of Banten prompted its documentation to paint its rulers as religious bigots. This was however a prejudice that was absent from the Company's estimations of China and Mughal India. Despite the variability that it sometimes displayed in its appraisals, the Company was far more disposed to deploying certain stereotypes across polities. Effeminacy constituted one such trope and this was imaginatively used to comprehend political processes both in China and Mughal India. This suggested that the Company subscribed to more generalized understandings of political processes in Asia as opposed to generating empire-specific characterizations. Contrary to the insensitivity they showed to spatial difference in their representations, their evaluations of each of these polities on the temporal front were more

vulnerable to change. Company reports in the eighteenth century branded Mughal authority as effeminate contrary to their seventeenth-century appraisals of the then Mughal rule as arbitrary. In both circumstances however, the government was regarded as despotic. This indicated that although the character of the empire had, in the eyes of the Company demonstrably transformed from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, it still elicited their censure. In view of the VOC's proclivity to employ standard stereotypes in their understandings of Asian polities which were replicated and reinforced with time, their representative strategies generated a discourse about the Orient. This discourse was arguably able to transcend temporal and territorial constraints and thereby negotiated the pluralism that their Asian experience provided them with.

The Company discourse, I argue in my study, was a chronicle of encounter as the relationship of the enterprise with each of these polities significantly influenced the perceptions they developed. Their marginality in the Chinese empire, for instance, meant that their discourse was far from original and relied instead on Jesuit appraisals of the Middle Kingdom. True to their nature as mercantile reports intended for a closed audience, Company documentation reflected the interests, concerns and frustrations of the enterprise in their images of the Orient. Batavia's half-century long friction-ridden relationship with Banten prompted Company servants to depict the kingdom in their records poorly. Likewise, as James Tracy has noted in the context of Surat, the VOC's inability to pursue trade on their own terms in Mughal India, and the failure of their diplomatic missions to China had implications on the manner in which their archives represented these empires and their administrators. In the case of Banten, we are rendered capable of evaluating the Dutch-Asian encounter from the perspective of the kingdoms which interacted with the Dutch. Just as Company documentation reveal that the Dutch were immensely wary of the Bantenese and that the Islamic faith of the latter was a significant reason for their enmity, contemporary kingdom chronicles suggest that the Bantanese possessed similar levels of antagonism towards the VOC which were also predicated on religious difference. This faith-driven hostility which marked Banten's perceptions of the Dutch was consistent with patterns of ideological warfare waged by contemporary South-east Asian kingdoms against the Dutch and Portuguese.

The diverse character of the Dutch encounter set its tryst with Asia was on a vastly different footing as compared to the experience of the English East India Company. Scholars have pointed to a marked disjuncture in the self-assuredness of the English rhetoric as

compared to the actual vulnerability in their position in Asia in the early modern period. In the Dutch case, I argue that the confidence and belligerence that the Company displayed in their rhetoric was put to practice when afforded an opportunity to do so. The easy translation of this ideological aggression into actual confrontation in the Banten war and in their piratical raids on the Chinese coast in the 1620s underscores the fact that the Dutch East India Company pursued a policy of mercantile expansionism in early modern Asia where its trading objectives were vigorously pursued with or without the use of arms where returns came in the form of trading concessions or territorial acquisitions.

Just as Company documentation became records of these events which befell these kingdoms, these historical processes merited the attention of a second category of literature – the popular genre of the published account. The reliance of this corpus of literature on the Company archives ranged from absolute dependence (as seen in the case of the Persian invasion on Mughal India where the printed account, the *Verhaal* was a virtual reproduction of the VOC chronicle on the episode) to a more marginal reliance (which was the case with Dutch travel accounts on the Banten War). Irrespective of the varying levels of indebtedness of this genre of literature to VOC documentation for both the information and Oriental imagery, they invariably carried tangible links to the enterprise. It was the employees of the Company who often turned authors of these histories and accounts of diplomatic missions and travel. Save for a few similarities, the genre of the published account displayed differences to Company documentation in their perceptions of the Orient. This feature is attributed to the fact that the genre catered to a distinct audience – the general public. These accounts contended with a tyranny of representation where there was a pressure to reproduce the already prevailing ideological constructions of the Orient in Europe. This explains why authors like Johan Nieuhof despite witnessing the virtual independence of the governors of the southern provinces in China from the control of central authority, still subscribed to the Jesuit thesis of a centralized Chinese government. The Jesuits monopoly over the European imagination of China in the period had typecast the empire in such a manner that only adherence to this script won acceptance for these subsequent accounts. Following in the Jesuit footsteps, these print accounts also endorsed notions of the effeminate Chinese and the battle-hardened Tartar. Responding to a similar need to comply to other images of Asia already popularized in Europe, the tropes of Oriental Despotism and effeminacy were introduced into their descriptions on Banten while other images such as the unsettling religious antagonism between the port kingdom and Batavia, and the embarrassing tales of apostasy which were

subjects of considerable deliberation in the Company records were effaced from the print accounts. Visions in Company records which were, on the other hand, congenial with well-endorsed conceptions of the Orient such as Mughal despotism were retained, and if needed, even exaggerated. Irrespective of the changes in imagery which latched on to perspectives of the Orient in these accounts, this genre clearly accentuated images of difference between the Orient and the West, given the propensity of this category of literature to present trends detected in these empires as being traits that were typically Oriental and therefore characteristic of not only China, Mughal India or Banten but of the Orient on the whole.

If the transport of the tales into print literature marked a transformation in the nature of information and imagery conveyed, the migration of this content from these accounts into works of drama had similar consequences. Unlike the print account which mostly registered changes in the domain of the representation of the Orient, in the case of drama, the plot too was exposed to alteration. Symptomatic of this tendency was Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan*. The play did not so much as hint at the notoriety that his protagonist, Nadir Shah had acquired during his campaign to Mughal India despite the source's keen reflection on the bloodbath and plunder that followed in its wake. Van Steenwyk's act of glossing over the deeds of the Persian points to the centrality enjoyed by the rules of drama in fashioning the content of plays which took to the stage. A more potent determinant, however, of what was retained in the pages of the play and what was not was authorial discretion. *Zungchin* was written to fit into Vondel's oeuvre, display his religious convictions, reveal his personal networks, and illustrate his conception of the world; *Thamas Koelikan* to draw attention to political processes in the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic and highlight the importance of virtue; and *Agon* to reflect on the Republic's past greatness and to mitigate the shame that the accusation of incest caused its playwright.

We might establish that the twin phenomena of metamorphosis and movement constituted the essence of our three dramas, but it also seems reasonable to contemplate over other questions that this study raises. These dramas may have brought the Company's oriental encounter onto the Dutch stage, but to what extent was the character of the VOC's relations with the Orient as seen in their documentation showcased in these three plays? The results on this front are mixed rendering us rather incapable of drawing a definite conclusion. Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan* tends towards one end of the spectrum and is a convincing example of how the Company's anxieties in Mughal India could be reflected in the literary productions they indirectly sired. Their perception of the Mughal ruler, Muhammad Shah as a

despot was after all reprised by Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan*. Banten on the other hand is situated at the other end of the spectrum. It presents a defiant scenario where all the vectors in the chain of information transfer – Company records, travel accounts and Van Haren's play *Agon* – developed what seem to have been virtually independent estimations of the kingdom of Banten. Therefore, although dramas did sometimes feel the impress of the character of the Company's encounter with Asia, the authors of published accounts and the playwrights possessed a significant amount of agency to reconceptualise and re-envision the character of Dutch encounter and the historical episodes they recalled.

A second question that emerges is to what extent *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan*, and *Agon* – albeit numbering a modest three plays – can be used to gauge the changing conceptions of the Orient in the Republic owing to the two to five decade distance between the scripting of each of them. Although these plays demonstrate that with time, the Republic familiarized itself with the Orient; this rising acquaintance did not translate into a simultaneous surge of identification but quite the contrary. The notion of similitude between Europe and the Orient was the cornerstone of the seventeenth-century play *Zungchin*, and the mid-eighteenth century drama, *Thamas Koelikan*. *Zungchin*'s theory of divine providence possessed a strong universalistic message. To Vondel, the Chinese in the drama were no different from the Europeans and they were just as vulnerable to the wrath of God as were the Jesuits. Van Steenwyk too hopped on this ideological bandwagon of universalism in *Thamas Koelikan* by regarding Nadir Shah (as also noted by Brouwer) as the kind of leader who was an asset to any state, European or otherwise. By the second half of the eighteenth century however, this understanding of palpable correspondence which pervaded these two plays was replaced by a rising comprehension of difference between East and West. *Agon* was a drama based on the "sympathetic identification" of the playwright with the tragic native hero of his drama, but the drama still conceptualized the Dutch encounter with the Orient in orthodox binarisms.²⁰⁸ An East devoid of expansionist urges was compared to a mercenary west and the East with a pernicious climate with the potential to corrupt was pitted against the corruptible West.

Bring another play, *Antonius Hambroek of de belegering van Formosa* (1775) into the equation and the notion that the late eighteenth-century Republic perceived that the East and West to have had little in common is further corroborated. Joannes Nomsz' *Hambroek* was

²⁰⁸Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 118.

the fifth and last of the quintet of plays on the Company's Orient in the era.²⁰⁹ After *Hambroek*, Dutch playwrights no longer looked to contemporary history from the Company's Orient for either subjects or inspiration to write their plays. Like *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan*, and *Agon*, Nomsz' *Hambroek* dealt with the unsavoury business of regime change. It was set in the turbulent year of 1662 when the Dutch were ousted from their island colony of Formosa by the Chinese pirate Cheng Zhenggong. The play glorified the heroism of the Dutch missionary, Antonius Hambroek who chose martyrdom over the surrender of his compatriots on Formosa to their Chinese invaders. The larger setting of the drama however was the ignominious loss of Dutch Formosa which was a colossal debacle and an embarrassment to the otherwise illustrious career of the VOC in Asia. Like *Agon*, *Hambroek* was scripted in the late eighteenth century and dramatized the Dutch encounter with the Orient but the two plays could not have been more different. The Dutch, who were Van Haren's deplorable villains were Nomsz' charismatic heroes and when an Oriental was the epitome of virtuosity to Van Haren, it was another Oriental, who to Nomsz, embodied the depths of villainy. Despite a sea of difference between the two plays, an island of similarity remained. Joannes Nomsz like Van Haren conceived the East-West encounter in binaries. In his drama, the selfless and pious Hambroek was contrasted with his nemesis, the vile Coxinga, the Christianity of the Dutch was hailed and the heathendom of the locals deplored, and the avaricious Chinaman was pitted against the liberty-loving Dutchman. When Van Haren and Nomsz built fences between the East and West compared to the bridges between the two entities that Vondel and Van Steenwyk so naturally saw, the characterization of the Orient in Dutch drama had undergone a change over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Orient began to look stranger with time and the East and West to the eighteenth-century Dutch mentalite were certainly drifting apart.

Such an inference falls in line with the estimations of Edward Said and Jurgen Oosterhammel who see a definite break in late eighteenth century in the manner in which Europe came to perceive the Orient. When Said alludes to the fact that this growing conviction of difference between East and West coincided with the rise of imperialism, it brings another issue into the fray. Would we be sufficiently justified in employing the term Dutch Orientalism to comprehend this phenomenon of writing about and comprehending this space called the Orient that the plays, the travel accounts and Dutch East India Company documentation encapsulated? We have good reason to argue that the use of the category

²⁰⁹I also take into account Van der Goes' *Trazil* which takes the number of plays up to five.

“Dutch” in the context is both misleading and faulty as the entire process ranging from the production of Oriental imagery to its dissemination was hardly contained within the contours of the Republic. It instead possessed a strong European character. Not only was the Dutch East India Company was a multi-national enterprise which attracted a significant percentage of its labour from outside the Republic, but the Society of Jesus who were the architects of a discourse on China which the VOC subsequently went on to borrow were also pan-European in character. Moreover, accounts such as the *Drie aenmerkelijke reizen* which chronicled the Banten War was first published in German before its Dutch edition was brought out and Nieuhof’s *Het gezantschap* which was a best-seller in its time catered to a large audience outside the Dutch Republic in translation. In a similar vein, the *Verhaal* on Nadir Shah’s conquest was also translated to English and Van Haren’s *Agon* twice appeared in French. With the involvement of both agents and audiences extraneous to the Dutch Republic, it is virtually impossible to deny the phenomenon its European dimensions and conceive the phenomenon as being distinctly Dutch.

We might divest the phenomenon of its Dutch label but we cannot disregard the applicability of the term Orientalism in the meaning that Said lends to the term. I corroborate this stance on two counts: Firstly, the images of the Orient which were generated reveal a consistency which Said attributes to the phenomenon and secondly, these conceptions of the Orient which were created provided the ideological leverage necessary for subsequent imperialist endeavour. It was previously argued that the transport of images from Company archives to printed accounts to works of Dutch drama was infused with an obvious dynamism and despite the continuing metamorphosis of Oriental imagery that the Orient experienced in the hands of the Company scribes, authors of print account and the playwrights with often radical outcomes (as *Agon* makes clear), certain images of Asia witnessed continued reiteration. The gradual association of the Orient with despotism for instance illustrates the impact that some of these images had on later observers. Van Haren’s efforts to present Sultan Ageng as protagonist of his drama, *Agon* and glorify his reign were for instance decried in the nineteenth century, as it was by then reckoned, that Ageng being an Oriental could not have been anything but a despot. Although these images were vulnerable to the impact of the genres that carried them, they, as might be revealed, did generate conceptions of Asia which were immensely durable. Needless to say, certain imaginings of the Orient created, fashioned and propagated by VOC documentation, published accounts and the plays fed into a European repertoire of images of the Orient, which with time and continued rehearsal became its

defining features. These conceptions soon became useful tools in the hands of later imperial ideologues although not necessarily always Dutch ones. Considering the imperial career of the government of the Netherlands in Java the following century, the idea of Bantanese despotism floated by the travel accounts sat so well with the public that Van Haren's characterization of the ruler evoked distaste. Other characterizations such as the notions of Chinese effeminacy and Mughal despotism, as previous chapters have shown, were well received and reiterated by commentators, mostly British, who by the end of the eighteenth century were considering expanding their presence in China and simultaneously carving an empire for themselves in India.

The Company's orient on the Dutch stage was an elaborate production. Those who laid a justifiable claim to taking the curtain call were the *Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*, the Dutch East India Company and individual agents in the form of native informants, servants of the Dutch East India Company, authors of travel accounts and histories and the playwrights. Their efforts had ensured that stories of the Manchu conquest, Nadir's invasion and the fall of Banten travelled great distances through various literary genres and were disseminated to audiences in very different settings in the literary and performative genres. The passage of these tales and perceptions of the Orient that were invariably generated, from Asia to Europe, was a perilous one. Some conceptions weathered the hazards of the journey and continued to be rehearsed in the subsequent genres which carried them. Others died in the process while still a third category of representations were conceived during this passage. Just as these tales possessed an inherent propensity to travel (a tendency that had created these intriguing chains of transfer in the first place), those conceptions which revealed a startling resilience and continued to survive proceeded forth to fire the imagination of later generations of writers and ideologues. In the long-running drama of conceptions of Asia in the European mentalite, these notions of the Orient continued to play significant roles, long after the protagonists of the historical episodes in Asia had played their parts and exited the stage.

Samenvatting

Deze studie bestudeert drie, in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw geschreven, Nederlandse toneelstukken: Joost van den Vondels *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (1667), Frans van Steenwyks *Thamas Koelikan of de verovering van het Mogolsche Rijk* (1745) en Onno Zwier van Harens *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam* (1769). Alle drie de stukken werden door “thuisblijvers” in de Republiek geschreven over min of meer contemporaine historische gebeurtenissen in Azië. Nam Vondel als onderwerp van zijn *Zungchin* de Mantsjoe verovering van Ming China in 1644, Van Steenwyk verhaalt in zijn *Thamas Koelikan* over de invasie van Nadir Sjah in Mughal India in 1739. Met meer afstand tot de beschreven gebeurtenissen herinnert Van Haren in zijn *Agon* zijn lezers en kijkers aan de Nederlandse verovering van Banten in 1682. Getuige deze toneelstukken, deden deze auteurs hun voordeel met de door de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) gefaciliteerde mondiale informatie uitwisseling van die tijd.

Deze studie onderzoekt de manier waarop deze toneelstukken de Oriënt representeren en hoe dit werd beïnvloed door de door de auteurs gebruikte informatiekkanalen. Daarmee volgen we op de voet de informatiestroom ten aanzien van drie specifieke nieuwsgebeurtenissen in zeventiende-eeuws China, India en Java, vanaf de gebeurtenissen zelf tot het moment waarop de auteurs deze in hun toneelstukken inpassen. Vervolgens worden de daaruit voortkomende vertogen van het Oosten geanalyseerd. Deze studie onderzoekt meer in het bijzonder de veranderingen die deze informatiestroom onderging als gevolg van de meervoudige bemiddeling door allerlei tussenpersonen alsmede onder de invloed van de verschillende literaire genres waarin de informatie werd uitgedrukt en verpakt. Het uiteindelijke doel van deze exercitie is het blootleggen van de zeventiende- en achttiende-eeuwse relatie tussen de Republiek en de door de Compagnie geconstrueerde Oriënt. Voortbouwend op de geconstateerde verbinding tussen de toneelstukken en de VOC wordt nader onderzocht in hoeverre de Compagnie heeft bijgedragen aan de verspreiding van de informatie, aan de vervaardiging van Oosterse stereotypen, en daarmee, aan de totstandkoming van een Nederlands Oriëntalisme. Door het in samenhang en in één studie behandelen van deze vier onderwerpen – theater, representatie, informatiebemiddeling en VOC – wil *Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient* een bijdrage leveren aan het herstellen van de verbroken relatie tussen twee onderzoeksvelden: geschiedenis en literatuurstudies. Dit alles tegen de theoretische achtergrond van Edward Saïds concept van het Oriëntalisme, en de

daaropvolgende uitwerkingen, die de aard van Europa's ontmoeting met de Oriënt bezien vanuit het centrale idee van representatie.

In de onderhavige studie wordt betoogd dat alle drie toneelstukken – *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan* en *Agon* – draaien om het idee van de overdracht. De manier waarop deze stukken de politieke crises in Ming China, Mughal India en Banten tot leven brengen was afhankelijk van de intercontinentale overdracht in de verslaglegging van die crises. Dit proces voltrok zich veelal in drie fasen. Voor het verwerven van beeld en informatie borduurden de auteurs voort op de in die tijd beschikbare, in Europa gepubliceerde verhalen over de Oost. Deze verslagen uit de eerste hand waren op hun beurt vaak weer verzamelwerken waarvan de auteurs zich beriepen op weer andere bronnen, vooraleerst op de officiële documentatie van veruit de belangrijkste intermediair tussen de Republiek en Azië in de deze periode, de VOC.

Soms kunnen al deze gepubliceerde reisverslagen, pamfletten en andere verhandelingen over Aziatische nieuwigheden inderdaad worden teruggevoerd naar een moederverhaal in de VOC-archieven. Dit omvangrijke corpus aan informatie kwam voort uit een complexe, door de VOC gehanteerde systematiek van nieuwsgaring en bemiddeling, in China, India en Java, bediend door zowel inheemse, Nederlandse als andere Europese informanten. In de interpretatie en verbeelding van deze nieuwsgebeurtenissen trokken de dienaren van de Compagnie hun eigen conclusies. Zij hadden daarbij de neiging om Aziatische vorstendommen te karakteriseren met enkele standaard stereotyperingen die in de loop de tijd al maar werden herhaald en daarmee versterkt. Met deze “representatie strategieën” genereerden de VOC-dienaren een samenhangend vertoog over de Oriënt. Dit vertoog vormt een kroniek van ontmoetingen waarbij de beeldvorming significant werd beïnvloed door de verhouding tussen de Compagnie met elk van deze vorstendommen. Dit vertoog is daarmee ook een getuigenis van het feit dat de VOC een commerciële expansiepolitiek in vroegmodern Azië voerde, waarin men verwoed – al dan niet met geweld – handelsdoelstellingen nastreefde met als resultaat handelsconcessies en/of regelrechte territoriale acquisitie.

Gepubliceerde boeken vormen de tweede categorie van historische documentatie. Alhoewel ook deze werken op uiteenlopende niveaus teruggaan op het VOC-archief, vertonen ze in de perceptie van de Oriënt toch een aantal verschillen. Auteurs van gedrukte werken accentueren over het algemeen het onderscheid tussen Oost en West. Deze neiging kan worden toegeschreven aan het feit dat deze werken, bedoeld voor een algemeen publiek in de

Republiek en daarbuiten, moesten wedijveren met een veelheid aan reeds bestaande representaties, waardoor er altijd druk bestond om de dominante ideologische constructies van het Oosten te reproduceren. Markeert de overdracht van verhalen in de gedrukte literatuur een transformatie in de aard van de informatie en de beeldvorming, de migratie van de inhoud van deze werken naar toneelstukken had overeenkomstige consequenties. Registreren we in de gedrukte bron vaak louter een verandering in de representatie van de Oriënt, in het geval van het toneelstuk veranderde ook het verhaal zelf. Terwijl deze veranderingen meestal zijn toe te schrijven aan de discretie van de auteur, kunnen hier ook andere factoren aan ten grondslag hebben gelegen, zoals allerlei persoonlijke agenda's alsmede de noodzaak om zich te conformeren aan de vigerende dramaturgische regels.

Als antwoord op de vraag in hoeverre *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan* en *Agon* kunnen worden gebruikt om de veranderende opvattingen over de Oriënt in de Republiek te meten, stel ik in deze studie dat de Republiek zich allengs vertrouwd maakte met de Oriënt. Het dient te worden opgemerkt dat zich deze intensievere kennismaking niet heeft vertaald in een toenemende identificatie, maar in plaats daarvan, juist heeft geleid tot een groeiende cognitieve kloof tussen Oost en West. Wanneer we reflecteren op de toepasbaarheid van de term "Nederlands Oriëntalisme", dan moeten we ons realiseren dat er goede redenen zijn om te beargumenteren dat het hele proces van Oriëntalistische beeldvorming en de verspreiding daarvan zich niet louter en alleen binnen de landsgrenzen van de Republiek voltrok, maar dat dit proces bovenal een sterk Europees karakter droeg. Op twee punten bevestigt deze studie de toepasbaarheid van het concept Oriëntalisme in Saidiaanse zin. Ten eerste, onthullen de gegenereerde beelden van de Oriënt de consistentie die Said hieraan toeschrijft; ten tweede, leverden deze geconstrueerde concepten van de Oriënt de noodzakelijke ideologische munitie voor het toekomstige imperialisme.

Summary

This work examines three Dutch plays written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries namely Joost van den Vondel's *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (1667), Frans van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan of de verovering van het Mogolsche Rijk* (1745) and Onno Zwier van Haren's *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam* (1769). These plays written by “stay-at-home” playwrights dramatized historical events in Asia which were either contemporaneous with or not far removed from their playwrights' times. Joost van den Vondel took up the Manchu conquest of Ming China in 1644 as the subject for *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (1667), Frans van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan of de verovering van het Mogolsche Rijk* (1745) rehearsed Nadir Shah's invasion of Mughal India in 1739, and Onno Zwier van Haren drew the attention of his readers and spectators to the Dutch conquest of Banten in 1682 in his 1769 play titled *Agon, Sulthan van Bantam*. These playwrights were beneficiaries and their plays examples of the “global traffic” of information facilitated by the Dutch East India Company in the period.

This study investigates the nature of the representation of the Orient in these plays and evaluates how this characterization was influenced by the channels that these dramatists relied on to gather information for their works. It recapitulates the history of information travel about three historical events in seventeenth-century China, India and Java from the time of their occurrence until their recruitment by three Dutch playwrights in works of drama. It analyses the discourses about the East that were created as a consequence. The study peruses the multiple mediations that this travelling information experienced in the hands of the agents involved at various points in the process of transfer, and the transformations it underwent owing to the influence of the literary genres, which clothed and conveyed this information. This is done to the eventual end of sketching the relationship between the Dutch Republic and the Company's Orient in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the dramas under study exhibit linkages with the Dutch East India Company, this work examines the role of the enterprise in this dissemination of information, the production of Orientalist imagery, and the formulation of Dutch Orientalism. In engaging these four topics—drama, representation, information brokerage and the Dutch East India Company—within the margins of a single study, *Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient* aims to redress the disconnect between two fields of enquiry: history and literary studies. This study is undertaken against the theoretical

backdrop of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism and subsequent postulations which evaluate the nature of Europe's encounter with the Orient based on representation.

This study argues that the three plays—*Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan* and *Agon*—revolved around the idea of transfer. The manner in which these dramas brought to life the political crises in Ming China, Mughal India and Banten depended on an inter-continental transport of narratives about these events. This was often a three stage process. For information and imagery, these dramatists relied on first hand narratives and travel accounts about the Orient that were published in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These first-hand accounts were, in turn, often cumulative works which appealed to other sources, of which a chief source was the official documentation of the principal go-between between the Dutch Republic and Asia in the period, the Dutch East India Company.

The archives of the VOC at times constituted the mother narrative of these travelogues, pamphlets, and histories, which entered the Dutch print market and on other occasions, produced significant contemporary accounts about happenings in Asia. This corpus of information was the outcome of complex systems of information procurement and brokerage employed by the VOC in China, India and Java and it involved the participation of native, Dutch and other European informants. In conceptualizing the character of these historical events, the servants of the Company drew their own estimations. They displayed a proclivity to employ standard stereotypes in their understandings of Asian polities which were replicated and reinforced with time. Their representative strategies, as a result generated a discourse about the Orient. This discourse was a chronicle of encounter and the relationship of the enterprise with each of these polities significantly influenced the perceptions they developed. The discourse was also testimony of the fact that Dutch East India Company pursued a policy of mercantile expansionism in early modern Asia where its trading objectives were vigorously pursued with or without the use of arms where returns came in the form of trading concessions or territorial acquisitions.

The second category of literature which documented these historical processes was the published account. Although these works reveal varying levels of indebtedness to the Company archive for information, they displayed differences to Company documentation in their perceptions of the Orient. Published accounts accentuated images of difference between the Orient and the West. This tendency is attributed to the fact that these works, meant for the general public in the Republic and beyond, contended with a tyranny of representation where

there was a pressure to reproduce the already prevailing ideological constructions of the Orient in Europe. If the transport of the tales into print literature marked a transformation in the nature of information and imagery conveyed, the migration of this content from these accounts into works of drama had similar consequences. But unlike the printed account which mostly registered changes in the domain of the representation of the Orient, in the case of drama, the plot too was exposed to alteration. While authorial discretion was mostly responsible for this change, a host of other factors such as personal agendas and the necessity to adhere to the rules of the stage also influenced the playwrights' decision to reimagine the events they wrote about.

On the question of the extent to which *Zungchin*, *Thamas Koelikan*, and *Agon* can be used to gauge the changing conceptions of the Orient in the Republic, the study argues that with time, the Republic familiarized itself with the Orient. However, this rising acquaintance did not translate into a simultaneous surge of identification but instead led to a growing comprehension of difference between the East and West. Reflecting on the applicability of the term "Dutch Orientalism" to comprehend this phenomenon of writing about and comprehending the Orient, one has good reason to argue that the entire process ranging from the production of Oriental imagery to its dissemination was hardly contained within the contours of the Republic. It instead possessed a strong European character. On two counts we cannot disregard the applicability of the term Orientalism in the meaning that Said lends to the term. Firstly, the images of the Orient which were generated reveal a consistency which Said attributes to the phenomenon and secondly, these conceptions of the Orient which were created provided the ideological leverage necessary for subsequent imperialist endeavour.

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Curriculum Vitae

Manjusha Kuruppath was born on 25th August, 1984 in Mudis in Tamil Nadu, India. She pursued her Bachelor's degree in History at Stella Maris College, Chennai and her Master's degree at the University of Hyderabad. In 2007, she was awarded the Encompass Scholarship to pursue a Bachelor's degree in History at the University of Leiden. She completed her Research Master's degree in History in 2010 following which she enrolled in the doctoral programme.

Propositions for the PhD dissertation titled *Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient: A Study of Representation and Information Transfer, c. 1650-1780* by Manjusha Kuruppath

1. Early modern Dutch drama felt the reverberations of events that not only took place in the Dutch Republic but also of those which occurred as far away as India and China.
2. The VOC was without doubt the Dutch Republic's Asian correspondent in the early modern period.
3. The VOC pursued a policy of aggressive mercantilism in Asia. Trade constituted the basis of their relations with Asian polities, and aggression was deployed if it was reckoned that the expenditure of gunpowder was worth the potential return.
4. The Dutch East India Company's Asian encounter was an aggregate of differing experiences that were directly correlated to the measure of mercantile and imperial clout they possessed vis-à-vis the polities they interacted with. The Company could however still subscribe to a standard vocabulary of representation in their assessments and appraisals of various territories in Asia.
5. The passage of stories and perceptions of the Orient from Asia to Europe was a perilous one. Some conceptions weathered the hazards of the journey while others succumbed to it. A third category of representations were conceived during this passage.
6. The label 'early modern' needs rethinking because it invariably impels historical research to anticipate the advent of the modern period.
7. The gap between literary and historical studies needs to be bridged. There is far too much potential in this collaboration than meets the eye.
8. Ignore Edward Said and you overlook the elephant in the room. An engagement with his theory is productive to both admirer and critic.
9. Well stocked library plus helpful librarian equals happy historian.
10. Cycling is an art. Non-artists take the bus.

Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient

A Study of Representation and
its Information Circuits, c. 1650-1780

Manjusha Kuruppath

