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## **Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient**

Kuruppath, M.

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**Author:** Kuruppath, Manjusha

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## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“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 stont 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> She registered an impressive rise in population, a growth in urbanization, increased agricultural productivity and high standards of living.<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup>Julie 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 schrandtheit."

Jan Vos, *Vergrooting van Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lascaille, 1662), D3r-v.

<sup>3</sup>Richard 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.

<sup>4</sup>P.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).

<sup>5</sup>Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 307-60.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 548.

Republic included the philosophers René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> The position of Stadholder later became a hereditary office that came to ly

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<sup>7</sup>Descartes lived in the Dutch Republic intermittently between 1618 and 1649.

<sup>8</sup>Van Deursen, "The Dutch Republic 1588-1780," 148-49.

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

<sup>10</sup>Van 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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)."<sup>14</sup> One reason why there was such a proliferation of opinion was because the people of the Republic were

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<sup>11</sup>Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 390.

<sup>12</sup>Kooijmans and Misset, "Van rebellen tot 'koningen'," 31.

<sup>13</sup>Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 391.

<sup>14</sup> "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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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*.<sup>18</sup> Vondel’s drama *Palamedes* (1625) which was a dangerous condemnation of Oldenbarneveldt’s execution was staged in the *Schouwburg* in 1665.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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

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<sup>15</sup>John 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.

<sup>16</sup>A. 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.

<sup>17</sup>Frijhoff, *1650: Bevochten eendracht*, 237.

<sup>18</sup>Craig 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.

<sup>19</sup>Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772*, 129.

<sup>20</sup>Huizinga 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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<sup>21</sup>Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 970-1018.

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

<sup>23</sup>I 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 Veenese 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.<sup>24</sup> 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).<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.”<sup>27</sup>

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.”<sup>28</sup> 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.”<sup>29</sup> The prominent seventeenth century author in Amsterdam, Olfert Dapper

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<sup>24</sup>Bruijn, Gaastra, and Schoffer, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping* 191-93.

<sup>25</sup>See Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 37-65.

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

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 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.

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

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

concurrent 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.”<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

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.<sup>32</sup> With the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War in the 1780s, it became increasingly evident that the Company was far too ill to be resuscitated.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Company had ceased to exist.

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<sup>30</sup>“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.

<sup>31</sup>“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.

<sup>32</sup>Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia*, 291.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>34</sup>“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 Information**<sup>35</sup>

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.”<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup> In this web of organizational communication, a system gradually developed in which every factory

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<sup>35</sup> 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).

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

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

<sup>38</sup>Adrien 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.

<sup>39</sup>For 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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

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<sup>40</sup>I thank Lennart Bes for pointing this out to me.

<sup>41</sup>"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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> May 1681."<sup>44</sup> 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

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

<sup>43</sup> Robbert de Vicq served as Governor of Ambon from 1678 to 1682.

<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.”<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> It appears, however, that the VOC-sponsored culture of reporting did not always

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

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

<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

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."<sup>50</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>48</sup> 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.

<sup>49</sup>Cited 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).

<sup>50</sup> NA, VOC 1368, "Relaesje van twee matrosen en een Amboinees wegens 't verlies van een gehuijrd 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.<sup>51</sup> As a result, it may be argued, that the Company came to initiate its own culture of reporting.<sup>52</sup> In so doing, it became Asia’s information corridor to Europe.<sup>53</sup>

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.”<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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

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<sup>51</sup>Schama 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.

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

<sup>53</sup>Willem 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.

<sup>54</sup> “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 Doedijns en de Haagse Mercurius,” *De Gids* 145(1982), 361.

<sup>55</sup>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: 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.”<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> 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

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

<sup>57</sup>Kees 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.

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

<sup>59</sup>Adrien 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.”<sup>60</sup> 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.”<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup>

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”

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

<sup>61</sup>Rob 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.

<sup>62</sup>Victor 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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> 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

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

<sup>64</sup>“Verhael vande schrickelijcke brandt der stadt Pattana int koninghrijch Bengala in Oost-Indien, Geschied den 13 Juny 1651: Overgesien naer den originelen brief,” (1651); “Waerachtigh verhael van de schrickelijcke aerdbevinge 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).

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

<sup>66</sup>E.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.

<sup>67</sup>P.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.<sup>68</sup>

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

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<sup>68</sup>Frederik 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.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> 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

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<sup>69</sup>See for instance “Drie translaet-brieven, uyt het Maleys 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.

<sup>70</sup>Cf. 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).

<sup>71</sup>Hendrik 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.<sup>72</sup>

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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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

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<sup>72</sup>Emmer 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.

<sup>73</sup>M.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.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>See 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.

<sup>76</sup>Jeremias 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.”<sup>77</sup> 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*.<sup>78</sup> 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

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<sup>77</sup>Havart 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 Cormandel, in zijn binnenste geheel open, en ten toon gesteld* (Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn, 1693), voorreden aan den lezer.

<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> The authors, in a metaphor commonly used in these dedications, referred to their texts as "paper children."<sup>82</sup> 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-

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<sup>79</sup>C. 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.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Adrienne Zuiderweg, "Oost-Indische nouvelen tijdens de VOC," *Indische Letteren* 17(2002), 14-15.

<sup>81</sup>Wouter 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.

<sup>82</sup>Schouten, *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.<sup>83</sup> 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.”<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> 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

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<sup>83</sup>Philippus 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).

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

<sup>85</sup>Rogerius’ 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.

<sup>86</sup>Rietbergen, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 92-93.

this period lies... in the variety of forms and purposes it inspired.”<sup>87</sup> 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 be 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.<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> 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

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<sup>87</sup>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.

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

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>90</sup>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).<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> 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 late came to be – “the first permanent municipal theatre of the Netherlands.”<sup>94</sup> 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

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<sup>91</sup>Balthasar 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.

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

<sup>93</sup>M.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.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. George W. Brandt, *German and Dutch Theatre: 1600-1848* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993), 338 (the quote); Albach, *Langs kermis 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.<sup>95</sup> 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."<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> 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."<sup>98</sup> 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

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<sup>95</sup> 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.

<sup>96</sup>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 kermessen en hoven*, 109-10; Brandt, *German and Dutch Theatre: 1600-1848*, 412-13.

<sup>97</sup>Albach, *Langs kermessen 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.

<sup>98</sup>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.<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup> 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."<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup> Printers officially affiliated to the Schouwburg came to monopolize this privilege.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup>

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

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

<sup>100</sup>Van der Haven, *Achter de schermen*, 34.

<sup>101</sup>Bettina 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.

<sup>102</sup>Albach, *Langs kermessen en hoven*, 36.

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

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

<sup>105</sup>*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.<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup> 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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> 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

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<sup>106</sup>Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg: 1496-1772*, 99.

<sup>107</sup>R. 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.

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

<sup>109</sup> A.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.

<sup>110</sup> I borrow the term “puritan-moralistic” from Albach, *Langs kermissen en hoven*, 121.

pervasive culture of imitation.<sup>111</sup> 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.<sup>112</sup>

### **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.<sup>113</sup> 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.<sup>114</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>113</sup>Bridget 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).

<sup>114</sup>C.G. Brouwer, ed. *De Oostersche schouwburgh, deel 2: Den grooten Tamerlan (1657): Mahomet en Irena (1657) : Timoeridische 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.<sup>115</sup> Some of the works of the latter group of playwrights were heavily influenced by French drama.<sup>116</sup>

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.<sup>117</sup> *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.<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> 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 Kotzbue'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

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<sup>115</sup>The 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.

<sup>116</sup>Sherburne, *A Literary History of England*, 895.

<sup>117</sup>See 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).

<sup>118</sup>See "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.

<sup>119</sup>Claas 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.”<sup>120</sup> 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.”<sup>121</sup> 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 Huwelijk*. 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.<sup>122</sup> 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.<sup>123</sup>

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

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<sup>120</sup> 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.

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

<sup>122</sup> “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.

<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup>

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 *Geeraerd 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."<sup>125</sup> 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

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<sup>124</sup>*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).

<sup>125</sup>See 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].”<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup>

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

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<sup>126</sup>“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.

<sup>127</sup>The 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.<sup>128</sup> 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.<sup>129</sup> 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.<sup>130</sup> 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.

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<sup>128</sup> Another work which might belong in this category of plays is Dirk van Hogendorp's *Kraspoel 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.

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

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