

Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World. Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven CT/London: Yale University Press, 2019, 496 pp., ISBN 9780300230079).

This volume on Dutch book history successfully combines the academic interests and wide-ranging research of two well-known scholars in the field of the history of printing culture: professor Andrew Pettegree of St Andrews University, a leading specialist in the European Reformation, news circulation, and the world of early modern European printing, and Dutch scholar Arthur der Weduwen, a St Andrews postdoctoral research fellow and expert in the history of communication, the rise of public opinion, and Netherlandish periodical and ephemeral publications. This productive co-authorship delivers a substantial and ambitious book, drawing on their combined knowledge of European printing culture and book history¹, and is in dialogue with a tradition of rich scholarship on the world of Dutch printing culture.²

The text begins with a contextual introduction, enumerating key facts on Dutch printing culture and highlighting the significant and ubiquitous role of books and reading in the very fabric of Dutch society. This prelude also explains the overall objective of this survey: an attempt to ‘make room for books’ within the Dutch Republic’s grand narrative, where, according to the authors, the whole dimension of printing has been generally overlooked and underrated, and remains in fact under-documented, despite the considerable sources of printed materials and archival records available in libraries and repositories in the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark and Ireland. This documentary evidence reveals the massive, even spectacular output – quantitatively speaking – of Dutch printed materials, as well as its pioneering marketing and extensive consumption and circulation: unprecedented and unparalleled in seventeenth-century Europe.

The reconfiguration of a more dynamic and complex picture of the Dutch seventeenth-century printing world raises a fundamental question: which books truly made the Dutch Golden Age? To avoid commonplace claims, such as the generalized assumption that only the most prestigious Dutch editions – carefully collected and therefore well-preserved in today’s libraries – played a prevailing role within the Dutch printing culture, the authors draw on a myriad of vivid examples to reconstruct a more complete and integrated panorama of the lost world of cheap print. This chronicle of ephemera includes pamphlets, single-sheets, almanacs, short religious texts, prayer-books, catechisms, textbooks, ABC’s, student dissertations, and

other broadsheet announcements of events like graduations, as well as the everyday printing of government administration, such as ordinances and proclamations.

This fragmented and frequently elusive world was in fact tremendously lucrative for publishers and printers, and thus eagerly (and successfully) marketed to the prosperous and aspiring members of Dutch society during the Golden Age. Therefore, these more ephemeral publications – along with the famous editions produced by leading publishing families such as the Blaeus, Janssonius and Elzeviers – formed an intricate universe of circulating texts in both vernacular and Latin editions, encompassing a wide range of reading practices: from everyday popular culture and devotion practiced in the majority of Dutch households, to erudite academic life displayed at the five universities of the Dutch Republic (particularly the eminent University of Leiden) as well as other educational institutions.

Indeed, the authors frequently mention a central paradox to remind us of the strange fortunes of countless printed materials: the fact that ‘the books that were most valued by their owners at the time have often survived least well today’ (17), in contrast to precious, scholarly editions which were eagerly collected, and yet not much read (as hundreds of surviving relatively untouched copies suggest). This undeniable if often overlooked fact has underpinned a distorted image of the Dutch Republic’s printing world.

In terms of sources, besides the surviving copies of printed materials normally preserved in libraries with historical holdings, the authors draw upon a series of archival records encompassing catalogues of the distinctive Dutch book auctions, book-related paid advertising in early modern Dutch newspapers, inventories of people’s possessions after they died, and catalogues of publishers’ stock. The resulting output estimations are impressive, to say the least.

To reshape our whole traditional picture, this book offers solid and well-documented arguments and examples throughout its lengthy four sections, totalling sixteenth chapters, all framed within a well-explained historical context which sheds light on the full ‘social life’ of Dutch publications: production, commercialisation, circulation, reception and the extensive use or misuse of printed materials in essential aspects of the Dutch Republic’s daily life.

1 Flavia Bruni and Andrew Pettegree (eds.), *Lost Books: Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden/Boston MA 2016); Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven CT/London 2014); Arthur der Weduwen, *Dutch and Flemish Newspapers of the Seventeenth Century, 1618-1700*, 2 vols (Leiden/Boston MA 2017).

2 Lotte Hellinga et al. (eds.), *The Bookshop of the World: The Role of the Low Countries in the Book Trade, 1473-1941* (Het Goy-Houten 2001); Paul Hoftijzer, *Exploring the Heritage of the Elzeviers, 1658-1713: A Tale of Fonts* (Amsterdam 2013); Ton Croiset van Uchelen and Paul Dijstelberge (eds.), *Dutch Typography in the Sixteenth Century: The collected works of Paul Valkema Blouw* (Leiden 2013).

All the provided data is structured to present a more comprehensive picture of the multifaceted Dutch book industry, grounded in everyday as well as scholarly output. The case studies cover a wide corpus of publications, ranging from libellous pamphlets subverting Johan van Oldenbarnevelt's policies; to incendiary texts fuelling the bitter theological-political dispute between Remonstrant and Contra-Remonstrant communities; to exciting travel journals, accurate nautical handbooks, and magnificent atlases produced by Dutch explorers and cartographers, all evoking the new role of Dutch navigation in the world; and, not least, the enduring literature of devotion, published in the vernacular, so fervently read by Dutch congregations and written not only by Dutch ministers but by English Puritan writers as well.

Other substantial publication genres were textbooks or schoolbooks written by schoolmasters (who could become bestselling authors like Willem Bartjens); children's books, filled with woodcuts illustrations of animals or adventures; the meticulous calligraphy handbooks; and editions of the classics fundamental to the cultivation of Latin studies, especially in practical pocketbook formats. Finally, the institutional and scholarly publishing instigated by governing bodies or educational centres like the universities provided a large amount of work – not to mention coveted contracts – to Dutch publishers throughout the nation. Together, all of these case studies build up an overall picture of the printing world within the confessional, political, institutional, educational, commercial, artistic, and cultural dimensions of Dutch society, particularly during the seventeenth-century.

Finally, I must admit that because of my own interests in the transatlantic circulation of Netherlandish print culture, I was thrilled to read this volume, and learned a great deal. But I also suspect that this book will appeal to a broad, non-specialized public. The authors' prose is not only coherent and well-structured, but on top of that their occasional insertion of rhetorical humour results in a pleasant and fluid reading experience.³ Hence the book promises a successful communication with potential readers who are not necessarily from the world of academia. In sum, this outstanding book may well become an instant classic on Dutch book history.

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3 Such as the subsection in chapter two named 'Don't mention the war' (57-61), which evokes the memorable episode of Fawltly Towers.