

## In Love with the Neighbours Opposite

### Lisa Jardine's Enthusiasm for the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

Lisa Jardine's *Going Dutch* can confidently be described as a hymn of praise to the Netherlands. The only discordant note is on page 232, where she quotes the seventeenth-century English poet Andrew Marvell who described Holland as a miserable piece of land created by the stubborn Dutch. It was, he wrote, no more than the 'off-scouring of British sand' ... 'this indigested vomit of the Sea'.

That England, or 'perfidious Albion' as we Dutch called it, harboured strong anti-Dutch sentiments was well known. In 1623 the Dutch had killed a number of Englishmen rather unpleasantly in Ambon and this 'Amboyna massacre' was to sour relations between the two nations for decades. In the seventeenth century England and Holland fought three wars that included some extremely bloody sea battles. The thick-skulled Dutchmen even had the insolence to sail up the Medway in 1667 and destroy part of the English fleet at Chatham. The Surveyor of the Navy complained at the time that it seemed as if 'the Devil shits Dutchmen'. In the eighteenth century things were not much better. The Dutchman with his 'boorish manners' figured consistently in political cartoons as an idle pipe-smoking peasant or fisherman. Or as a bloated, over-fed frog.

But now all of a sudden there is Lisa Jardine, who has rediscovered our lowland country and, as *Going Dutch* bears witness, has fallen unconditionally in love with it. Lisa Jardine is an English professor of history at the University of London. She is the author of numerous books, including one on the architect Christopher Wren and another about the scientist and architect Robert Hooke. She is a public figure who sits on adjudicating panels, writes reviews in the press, gives talks on the radio, appears on TV and is a member of several historical councils and committees. In 2008 she was a visiting research fellow at the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies in The Hague.

*Going Dutch* has been written with great enthusiasm. The author loves her subject. Her main theme is

the cultural interaction between the Netherlands and England in the seventeenth century, 'the ongoing to-and-fro exchange of ideas, influence and taste'. She focuses particularly on the connections between the English royal House of Stuart and the Dutch Stadholders, especially William III, and her book opens dramatically with his invasion of England in 1688, the so-called 'Glorious Revolution'.

Stadholder William III (1650-1702) was the son of Mary Stuart, daughter of the English King Charles I. He was also married to a Stuart, another Mary, the daughter of Charles II's brother James. So he had close ties with the English royal house. After the eighteen-year Republican interlude Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660, and when he died in 1685 he was succeeded by his brother James. The problem for most Englishmen – as Anglicans – and also for the Dutch was that James was a Roman Catholic. Were he to adopt an anti-Protestant policy in alliance with France it could be very dangerous for the Netherlands.

However, for a couple of years there did not seem to be much cause for concern because his Queen either had miscarriages or her children died young. If James were to die his daughter Mary, the wife of William III of Orange, would succeed him on the throne. But on 10 June 1688 the birth of a baby son appeared to guarantee a Catholic succession in England. The Protestant world was in uproar.

Jardine now describes how a well-oiled machine was set in motion. Spurred on by leading British Protestants, William III assembled a fleet and an army of invasion, and in November, in great secrecy, 500 ships with ten thousand sailors and hundreds of horses set sail from Hellevoetsluis. The soldiers, horses, cannon, munitions and provisions landed in Torbay on the south coast of England and, although delayed by torrential rain, finally made their way to London. James took to his heels and went into exile in France. In the following year William and Mary were proclaimed King and Queen of England, and until his death in 1702 William remained the successful leader of Protestant Europe against the constant expansionism of Louis XIV.

Lisa Jardine is surprised at how easily this Dutch

military invasion was papered over and forgotten. She concludes that it was because of the careful preparation and the refined propaganda of William III. The underlying power politics and the military action were cleverly legitimised. A political manifesto had been drawn up beforehand to justify the whole operation: England was being threatened, the laws were being trampled on and the invasion was in fact a liberation. Ten thousand copies of this manifesto were printed in the greatest secrecy and distributed immediately after the invasion. Triumphant propaganda pamphlets also helped to seal its success.

After this political introduction, Jardine guides us into the field of culture, which is what the book is really about. We read about important painters such as Van Dyck, Jan Lievens, Honthorst and Peter Lely who all crossed the Channel to make their living in England. The Commonwealth period between 1642 and 1660 when England was ruled by Oliver Cromwell and later by his son receives a great deal of attention. Many leading royalists fled to the Netherlands, including the heir apparent himself, later Charles II, and many of the nobility, with or without their art collections. There they absorbed Dutch culture and exploited it in England after the Restoration.

A second period of intensive cultural exchange began after William became King, when hundreds of courtiers and practising artists followed him to England. Jardine discusses the artists' commissions, gardens that were laid out, houses that were built in the classic Dutch style and art collections that were brought over from the Netherlands.

One of the later chapters is devoted to the natural sciences. Among the Dutchmen who were members or correspondents of the Royal Society, founded in 1660, were Anthony van Leeuwenhoek, Jan Swammerdam and Christian Huygens. Jardine considers that Huygens' reputation has been somewhat exaggerated by historians. In the development of the pendulum clock and the pocket watch more credit should be given to her hero, Robert Hooke.

The book closes with a somewhat unrelated chapter on the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam, which was conquered by the English in 1664 and has been



William III, King of England  
(1650-1702). Frontispiece from  
*Life and Times of William the Third  
and History of Orangeism* (1890).

called New York ever since. Optimistic, but equally out of tune, is the Conclusion in which Jardine continues the theme of collaboration up to the present day with the merger of Hoogovens and British Steel in 1999.

Jardine writes in her Introduction that her book deals with the cultural interaction between the Netherlands and England. But in practice she confines herself to court circles, to the elite. That allows the Huygens family to play a central role: Constantine the Elder who was Secretary to the Stadholders Frederick Henry and William II, Constantine the Younger, Secretary to William III, and his brother Christian the brilliant physicist. Among the Dutch it is commonly accepted that Constantine Huygens the Elder was a genius, but for English readers he needs an introduction and Jardine uses every opportunity to provide that. He was an expert in the fields of painting, garden design, architecture and music and advised the stadhol-

ders on all these subjects. He had come to know England through his diplomatic missions and, as Jardine repeatedly tells us, spoke English fluently. He also translated John Donne into Dutch.

*Going Dutch* has the feel of an edited set of introductory lectures aimed at the general reader on cultural links between England and the Netherlands. For those with some knowledge of the seventeenth century it contains little that is new. Jardine relies on printed and in particular English language sources and even they are fairly modest in scope: 'I have barely scratched the surface of my subject.'

That subject is fascinating, but it has much, much more to offer. Anglo-Dutch exchanges existed much earlier, and were not restricted to aristocratic circles. Many important Dutchmen do not receive a mention. Where is Hendrick Vroom of Haarlem, who was commissioned to design the tapestries commemorating the defeat of the Spanish armada? Where are the two world-famous marine painters William van de Velde, father and son, who moved to England in 1672 and became painters to the court? English students went *en masse* to study in Leiden. Why is there no mention of John Locke who lived in the Netherlands for five years? And where is Bernard Mandeville, the Rotterdam physician and philosopher, who went to live in England? The only reason that I can think of for these omissions is that the original starting point was the role of the Huygens family. Jardine seems to have excluded anyone without a Huygens connection.

The book is therefore not exhaustive. On the other hand, it is a sincere and welcome declaration of love of the Netherlands, and for English readers it is an attractively written eye-opener.

Roelof van Gelder

*Translated by Chris Emery*

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