Introduction

J.P. Vander Motten

My present work is to make an Essay towards the conjoining of two Languages of those nations whom Nature by the propinquity of their situation, and Providence by mutuall traffick, and an intermixture of the Inhabitants, have brought to a necessity of endeavouring the understanding of one anothers speech.¹

This is how Edward Richardson, possibly glancing at the lingering resentment in the wake of the Anglo-Dutch Wars, summed up the aim of his three-part English-Dutch grammar-cum-dictionary, entitled Anglo-Belgica. The English and Netherdutch Academy, first published at Amsterdam around 1677. Ambitiously designed to teach “things worthy to be known in Morality, Laws, Medecin & Merchandise” (*7v), Richardson’s Academy by and large shared its target reading-public with Henry Hexham’s dictionary published thirty years earlier i.e. “Studenten, Kooplieden, Factoors, ende alle de ghene van onse Engelschen die begeerigh zijn om de Nederduytsche Spraecke te leeren.”² A veteran who had served in the United Provinces, Hexham (fl. 1601-1650) found the (religiously inspired) motivation for his work in the “Love, Correspondencie, Traffick, and Trading which is betwene our two Nations” (*3r). Richardson situated his linguistic efforts in a field of similar works, thereby appropriating a scholarly lineage that included John Wilkins (1614-1672), who had developed a universal language scheme in his Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language (1668); Gerardus Vossius (1577-1649), the famous grammarian and rhetorician; and John Wallis (1616-1703), a mathematician and author of an (often reprinted) Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae (1653). The unmistakably international note struck by Richardson and Hexham serves to remind us of the sharp awareness, on the part of many seventeenth-century writers, of the long-standing links between England and the Netherlands and the magnitude of the cultural debt both nations were perceived to owe each other.

Modern scholarship has gone a long way towards unearthing and interpreting the evidence in connection with this “correspondence” and “mutual traffic” in virtually all areas

¹ Richardson, “To the Reader”, *5v. “The Bookseller to the Reader” is dated 13 November 1676.
² Hexham, Dedication to Bartholomaeus van Wouw, *2r-v. (“students, merchants, agents and all our fellow-Englishmen desirous to learn the Netherdutch tongue”)
of human activity, including literature and culture. Over the past fifty or sixty years, cultural contacts have frequently though not exclusively been investigated in general terms and, almost inevitably, in the context of such matters as international politics, continental travel and exile. Commenting on the Englishman’s lack of “spontaneous enthusiasm for other people’s history”, Charles Wilson in 1945 claimed that “of all the foreign influences which have been brought to bear on English life, few have been more powerful, more profound and more lasting than that of the Dutch, who … helped to shape not only our economic institutions, but our ideas on architecture, art, science, agriculture, to say nothing of our conceptions of philosophy, theology, and law.”³ John J. Murray, too, in his bird’s eye view of the military, economic, scholarly, religious, artistic and other influences which “helped shape the flow of British life”, concluded that “the Low Countries were the bridge over which many European concepts and customs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries crossed into England.”⁴ And K. H. D. Haley has noted that the British presence in the United Provinces was responsible for a cross-Channel traffic that included “paintings and painters, books and newspapers and maps, tiles and delftware, turnips, cabbages and tulips, Dutch ribbon looms, the example of brick buildings, and models for Dutch gables, barns and furniture.”⁵ More recently, Robert Munter and Clyde L. Grose have posited that, as far as England’s “internal development” was concerned, “travel literature was of far-reaching significance and … the resulting impact of this flood of travel imprints has been quite underestimated”.⁶ Whereas the mid-century Royalist exile, according to P. H. Hardacre, “exercised real, if minor, effects on political thought and governmental methods”, the royalists’ stay abroad (especially in France) did have the important effect of introducing them to foreign literatures and continental scientific circles.⁷ The generally accepted view has been summed up by C. C. Barfoot and Richard Todd, the editors of a collection of essays devoted to the Low Countries as a cultural crossroads: “in order to understand early modern European cultural history one cannot afford to neglect ’the great emporium’” –Oliver Goldsmith’s commercial metaphor for the United Provinces.⁸

Few cultural historians today will want to quarrel with these conclusions. The familiar concept of the United Provinces as a storehouse and a country of diffusion has been perhaps

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³ Wilson, 12.
⁴ Murray, 854. Murray used the terms “Flemish” and “Dutch” interchangeably to denote “present-day Northern Belgium and the United Netherlands.” (837)
⁵ Haley, 12.
⁶ Munter and Grose, 31.
⁷ Hardacre, 360-66.
⁸ Barfoot and Todd, 9.
best captured in the phrase “intellectual entrepôt”, first used by G.C. Gibbs in 1971. Focusing on the significant role played by the Dutch Republic’s French-language newspapers in shaping European political opinion, Gibbs’s argument was that “by fostering and habitually practicing a free trade in the circulation of erudition, the United Provinces performed an invaluable service to European scholarship”\(^9\). Lisa Jardine’s *Going Dutch* is one of the latest contributions to the debate, re-examining from a slightly provocative angle the English cultural debt. Reflecting on the continuous contacts between English and Dutch scientists, the cross-fertilization in art and music, and the importance of “the other players in the cultural exchange play”, Jardine wondered: “Does each country...possess a distinctive, coherent, homogeneous set of tastes, attitudes and beliefs at any given moment in history...? Or is a national culture rather a medley of influences, a rich mix of blended and intersecting tastes and styles, based on a dialogue amongst the many participating individuals who find themselves mingled at any given point on the globe, at any particular time?”\(^10\)

It is, in a sense, this notion of “mingling” (Richardson’s “intermixture”) that lay at the basis of the research project from which the essays in this issue grew. The underlying proposition was: if, by general consent, English state formation in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was modeled upon the Dutch example, to what extent did this also hold true for seventeenth-century English literary culture? And if this was a hypothesis too comprehensive to investigate in detail, might it not be worthwhile not only to study which ideas were being exchanged and transferred but also under whose aegis, in what social contexts, and through which channels such give-and-take came about? Our premise has been that cultural exchanges usually crystallized around a number of meeting-points, where the English came into contact with members of the continental intelligentsia, and that these meeting-points in themselves deserved closer study. Any discussion of the long- or short-term impact of these encounters would indeed be incomplete without an examination of such factors as the socio-economic (or other) relationships between the participants involved, the public or private dimension of their contacts, and the circumstances of their access to the ideas picked up and handed on. Instead, then, of applying the term “entrepôt” to a large geographical area, as in Gibbs’s definition, we have sought to use it as an umbrella term for a variety of *loci* of cultural interaction, of different size, social composition, and artistic significance. While the focus has throughout been on the Low Countries, these *loci* are all expressions of the “powerful supranational structures, movements and influences” that

\(^{9}\)Gibbs, 327.
\(^{10}\)Jardine, xvi-xviii.
promoted the “development of a genuine European culture”: the religious and cultural ‘internationals’ (Catholicism and noble courts, respectively), the Republic of Letters, the world of art, and the international networks of refugees, exiles, and expatriates.11

The avowed method has been, through a microscopic view of the issue, to uncover and place into context previously unstudied sites of cultural encounter, in the hope of contributing to a more diversified picture of English participation in intellectual life in the Low Countries, including the Spanish Netherlands. Enriched by substantial immigration, this cultural dynamics obviously manifested itself primarily in the North but it has gradually become recognized that arts, scholarship and technology in the South did not come to a grinding halt after the fall of Antwerp (1585) or the Peace of Münster (1648). Instances of interaction and co-operation have a way of turning up in unexpected places and contexts, involving writers, artists, merchants and others, whose ideas and careers have never before been associated. Cross-cultural contacts manifest themselves in multitudinous guises requiring a meticulous study of both printed and unprinted sources, or a new consideration of familiar materials. And case-studies can be more revealing of larger patterns than sweeping overviews. Taken together, the essays collected here lay claim to meeting some of the requirements laid down in Stephen Greenblatt’s recently published “cultural studies manifesto”: (1) “mobility must be taken in a highly literal sense”; (2) “mobility studies should shed light on hidden as well as conspicuous movements of peoples, objects, images, texts, and ideas”; (3) “mobility studies should identify and analyze the ‘contact zones’ where cultural goods are exchanged”; (4) “mobility studies should account in new ways for the tension between individual agency and structural constraint”; and (5) “mobility studies should analyze the sensation of rootedness.”12

The emphasis in the essays below is indeed as much on the transit places that enabled the to-and-fro of cultural exchange as it is on the nature of the products exchanged—the writings, the precious goods, and the literary ideas that are part and parcel of so-called “high culture”.

Caroline Bowden’s essay is concerned with the visual and verbal culture of the seventeenth-century English convents on the continent. Fertile breeding-grounds of early modern feminine writing, convents were also of uncommon interest for the mediating cultural role they played in Flemish society, a role as yet not fully recognized. J.P. Vander Motten and Katrien Daemen-De Gelder’s essay shows, through the case of Sir Tobie Matthew, Catholic apologist, hagiographer, and biographer of one of the Antwerp Carmelite nuns, how an English convent’s religious interests went hand in hand with the artistic resources made

11 Frijhoff and Spies, 61-62.
12 Greenblatt, 250-53.
available by the local community as well as the literary ambitions of an exiled writer. If monasteries and convents, despite their supposed seclusion, contributed appreciably to cross-cultural exchanges, the private homes of merchants in Amsterdam and Antwerp, as Marika Keblusek argues in connection with Joachim de Wicquefort and Diego Duarte, were no less influential in using “a shared language of cultural pursuits” to further their commercial aims. One of the least investigated of meeting-places has been the health resort of Spa, a popular concourse located at the crossroads of the Spanish Netherlands, the United Provinces and the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, and Olivia Smith’s essay explores the way that this watering place functioned as a setting for both real and imaginary cultural encounters.

Various types of discourse, both those addressed to a scholarly and classically educated audience and those meant for a wider readership, throughout the century functioned as channels for the confrontation of ideas. Philip Major demonstrates how Sir William Lower’s dramatic works, printed at The Hague, negotiated the pressures put on the exiled writer by Royalist ideology, Dutch court culture and “foreign” (essentially French) influences. And Tessa Whitehouse’s essay assesses the impact on the English dissenting academies of the Dutch theologian Hermann Witsius’ reading methods, developed in the non-dogmatic intellectual climate of Utrecht and Leiden. A neglected force working in the opposite direction, the contemporary Ghent newspaper press not only informed its middle-class reading-public of political developments across the Channel but, as Sien Uytterschout and Marianne Van Remoortel argue, remarkably enough did so in the guise of socio-cultural news items providing accounts of London theatrical life.

All but one of the essays in this issue were presented as papers at a colloquium organized in May 2010, as part of a four-year research project entitled “The Northern and Southern Netherlands as a Literary and Cultural ‘Entrepôt’ for Seventeenth-Century British Letters, 1603-1688”, coordinated at the English Department, Ghent University, in collaboration with the University of Leiden, and funded by the “Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek” (Flemish Research Council). One practical lesson learnt from the project is that a systematic investigation of cultural entrepôts should be the object of multidisciplinary collaboration. Until new evidence adds to our knowledge of the seventeenth-century “contact zones” between England and the Low Countries, we may not be in a position to establish a reliable entrepôt typology, one that accounts for the variety of cultural meeting-points mapped out here and elsewhere. But it is hoped at least that the essays below will help us move in that direction.
References


