

*The Royalist Republic: Literature, Politics, and Religion in the Anglo-Dutch Public Sphere, 1639–1660.* Helmer J. Helmers.

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Helmer Helmers's monograph addresses a perplexing paradox of mid-seventeenth-century geopolitics: why did the Dutch Republic, which had long struggled to free itself from the grip of Spanish monarchy, support the Royalist cause in Britain during the

1640s and 1650s rather than its republican opponents? His study offers some novel answers through a wide variety of texts, the most important being the Dutch translation of the *Eikon Basilike*, and by invoking a common discursive political space in which these texts were translated, circulated, and read. This is thus a contribution to the rising tide of transnational studies and histories of print culture. In Civil War scholarship transnationalism has principally presented itself in the “three kingdoms” approach to British history, which developed from the 1990s — a kind of internal transnationalism within multiple monarchies. This study, by contrast, owes more to the determinedly European approach of Jonathan Scott’s *England’s Troubles* (2000), which is an important referent here, and before that to scholarship on the “general crisis” of the seventeenth century.

Helmets’s stimulating and thought-provoking book charts the shifting relationship between England (and, more problematically, Scotland) and the United Provinces across the 1640s and 1650s. Initially Parliamentarian-Covenanter opinion gained most traction within a vibrant culture of Dutch translations of English texts. These mostly took the form of official declarations at first but soon more topical publications were rendered into Dutch, encouraging debate and discussion on events across the North Sea and their implications for coreligionists and political sympathizers in the Dutch Republic. A fundamental shift occurred with the triumph of the Independents in 1647–48, however, and something of a climacteric was reached with Charles I’s execution. This horrified moderate opinion in the United Provinces and was attended by an outpouring of Dutch-language pamphlets, poems, plays, and prints that ruminated on Charles’s fate and lambasted those who had usurped power. Agents of the new English republic, such as Walter Strickland, tried to cement a political alliance in the early 1650s, but their failure and the outbreak of the First Anglo-Dutch War meant that anti-Parliamentarian sentiment and its literatures continued to dominate public discourse. Particular opprobrium was directed at Oliver Cromwell, who was presented as a devil-like figure of guile and deception.

Helmets’s book throws much interesting light on the dynamic world of Dutch topical writing on events in Britain, which has hitherto been neglected by historians of the mid-seventeenth century. He makes a strong case for greater interest in such material and what it can tell us about the political and religious debates that spilled across national boundaries. The work also shows convincingly that historians have been rather too quick to attribute pro-Stuart sentiment within the republic to the impulses of Orangism. Helmets also makes the telling point that historians of English royalism have perhaps been looking in the wrong place for their subject during the 1650s. Defeated and hounded at home, Royalists recognized that their best hope lay in mustering Continental support, and they found fertile ground in (parts) of the United Provinces that squared the circle of a recently established republic supporting monarchical restoration.

Other claims are more problematic. Arguing for a hybridized “royalist public sphere” between England and the Dutch Republic often seems to be elevating connections and

consonances through an extraneous theoretical superstructure. It implies a homogeneity and coherence to the discourses that the text itself often undermines. The social reach of the works under review could have been interrogated more extensively and evaluation of reception is often read off from production in some questionable ways. Helmers's collapsing of anti-Parliamentarianism into royalism is equally problematic. The text is at its most persuasive when discussing Dutch texts as Presbyterian mobilizations making common cause with their coreligionists in England and Scotland. The royalism of the post-1648 period is perhaps too heterogeneous to do much analytical service beyond the fact that constituencies with common enemies often derided them in similar ways. The much-vaunted move beyond national frameworks also exposes some blind spots in the work, raising questions such as why Scottish interests and actors go missing for large parts of the text. Do the Irish have a role to play beyond the bogeymen? And why is there so little mention of the Southern Netherlands?

Despite these issues, this is a rich and scholarly book that opens up new bodies of material for future research and raises important questions about the supranational dimensions of polemical debate in the mid-seventeenth century.

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