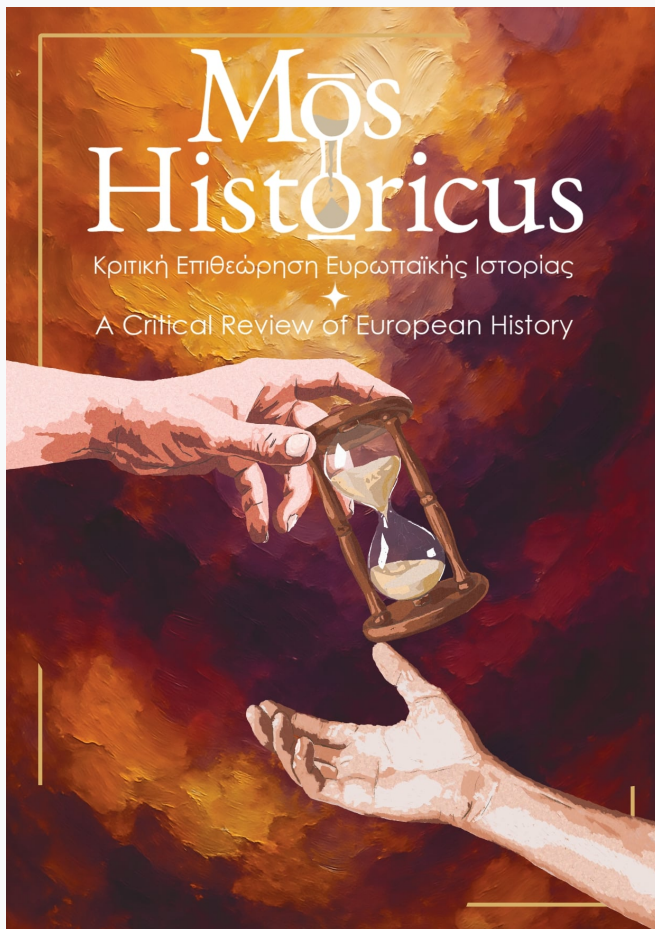


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'The common ties of our Religion...and strict Commerce': John Dryden's *Amboyna* (1673) and its religious preservation of the Old World

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“The common ties of our Religion...and strict Commerce”: John Dryden’s *Amboyna* (1673) and its religious preservation of the Old World

«Οι κοινοί δεσμοί της Πίστης μας... και του αυστηρού Εμπορίου»: Η *Amboyna* (1673) του John Dryden και η θρησκευτική αναπαράσταση του Παλαιού Κόσμου

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ABSTRACT: After the Restoration (1660), the political atmosphere found an outlet in the newly reopened theatres as the rise in explicitly titled political plays shows that the public may have developed an appetite for the affairs of state(s) on stage. By closely reading John Dryden’s tragedy *Amboyna* (1673) – a tragedy based on a historical event in colonised Indonesia which continued to haunt the British cultural memory in posterity – this paper seeks to analyse the ways in which religion was instrumental to political support and trade dominance and the role religious differences played in constructing representations of otherness and imperial myths of masterfulness. As Dryden prompted his audience to political action in the play’s concurrent Third Anglo-Dutch War, dramaturgy spoke to the audiences, not least because of the achronic appeal of politics in the symbolic realm.

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Η Δικαία Γαβαλά έλαβε το διδακτορικό της τον Ιανουάριο του 2023 από το Πανεπιστήμιο του Αμπερντίν, έχοντας διατελέσει υπότροφος του διεπιστημονικού ερευνητικού κέντρου του ιδίου Πανεπιστημίου, Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law. Η έρευνά της αφορά το Αγγλικό θέατρο του 17ου αιώνα και την πολιτική θεωρία του Αγγλικού Εμφυλίου Πολέμου, εστιάζοντας στον αγγλικό ρεπουμπλικανισμό και τις συζητήσεις του επί σκηνής. Είναι επίσης πτυχιούχος του Τμήματος Αγγλικής Γλώσσας και Φιλολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών. Η Δικαία αυτό τον καιρό διδάσκει μαθήματα Σαίξπηρ καθώς και Παγκόσμιας Δραματουργίας για το Τμήμα Θεατρικών Σπουδών του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών ως εντεταλμένη διδάσκουσα. Η πιο πρόσφατη δημοσίευσή της αναφέρεται στην ποπ κουλτούρα και την ψυχανάλυση: Gavala, D., «‘Let it Go’: Revising the Princess story in Disney’s *Frozen*», *Gramarye* 15 (2019), σ. 67-79. Email: dikaia.gavala@yahoo.gr

Keywords: Anglo-Dutch war, commerce, Catholicism, republicanism, drama, seventeenth-century

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: Μετά την Παλινόρθωση (1660), η πολιτική ένταση βρήκε διέξοδο στα θέατρα που άνοιξαν ξανά πρόσφατα, καθώς η αύξηση των δραματικών έργων με σαφή πολιτική θεματολογία καταδεικνύει την πιθανή επιθυμία του κοινού να παρακολουθεί τα πολιτικά δρώμενα επί σκηνής. Μέσω της επισταμένης μελέτης της τραγωδίας *Amboyna* (1673) του John Dryden, μια τραγωδία βασισμένη σε ένα ιστορικό γεγονός που διαδραματίστηκε στην αποικιοκρατούμενη Ινδονησία και έμεινε χαραγμένη για πολλά χρόνια στη βρετανική πολιτιστική μνήμη, το παρόν άρθρο επιδιώκει να αναλύσει αφενός τους τρόπους με τους οποίους η θρησκεία έπαιξε καθοριστικό ρόλο στην εμπορική κυριαρχία και την πολιτική, και αφετέρου τον ρόλο που έπαιξαν οι θρησκευτικές διαφορές στην κατασκευή των αναπαραστάσεων της ετερότητας και των κυριαρχικών ιμπεριαλιστικών μύθων. Καθώς ο Dryden ώθησε το κοινό του σε πολιτική δράση στον Τρίτο Αγγλο-Ολλανδικό Πόλεμο, η δραματολογία μίλησε στο κοινό, κυρίως λόγω της άχρονης γοητείας της πολιτικής στη συμβολική σφαίρα της θεατρικής αναπαράστασης.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Αγγλο-ολλανδικός Πόλεμος, εμπόριο, Καθολικισμός, ρεπουμπλικανισμός, θέατρο, δέκατος έβδομος αιώνας



The Amboyna massacre: longevity on stage and reception history

Opening with Virgil's inscription, *manet altâ mente repostum*,¹ John Dryden's tragedy *Amboyna* (1673) attempts precisely that: to preserve a memory deeply embedded in the mind. The Amboyna massacre was culturally engraved in the national consciousness and evoked since the incident itself in 1623 to the early nineteenth century and frequently re-circulated through pamphlets, engravings, woodcuts, tragedies, comedies and prose fiction as it came to signify a forewarning against the ingratitude of other nations with competing interests to the

¹ John Dryden, *Amboyna* (1673) (London, London, London: , 1673), [9], 65 p. *ProQuest*, 20/11/2020, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2138574339?accountid=8155>. Hereafter, I will be referring to the play by using Act, Scene and Pages.

British one, evoked specifically to tilt memory and provoke a stance against whatever political incidents of the time.

On 27 February 1623, Gabriel Towerson, the chief factor or merchant of the English East India Company in Amboyna, (modern Maluku in Indonesia), was beheaded by command of the local Dutch governor, Herman van Speult. Nine other Englishmen, ten Japanese and one Portuguese shared Towerson's fate. The charges brought against them were that they planned to kill Speult and overwhelm the Dutch garrison of Fort Victoria as soon as an English ship appeared in the roadstead to support them. The authenticity of the plot has strongly been disputed since its contemporary times to today.² The incident demonstrates the commercial antagonism between the British Empire's enterprise and the Dutch Republic's VOC (Dutch East India Company, Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) which escalated into a proxy war which resulted in damaging the position of the East India Company in Southeast Asia permanently. By closely reading this play, I would like to focus on and tease out the following: that the flagrant anti-republicanism of the play works by identifying the VOC representatives as republicans in Dryden's time and that the play closely associates the Dutch and the Spanish with Catholicism and anti-Catholic stereotypes—even though at that time of the incident itself, the Reformation in the Netherlands had already taken place and been established. Overlooking this, the play targets Dutch toleration, which is a testament to the many historically accurate elements that frame the play. Lastly, that common Christianity was long believed to be the peacemaker and, indeed, was for a time between the two nations but with the Dutch Republic's rebellion against their old monarchy, as the play insinuates, their thirst for profit knows now no bounds; a propaganda used to justify on religious and political grounds how the conflicting, profitable interests in the area between the two colonisers brought them to war many times.

On the eve of the Third Anglo-Dutch war, the new Lord Chancellor, the first earl of Shaftesbury, emphasized England's traditional rivalry with the United Provinces and stressed the war "was absolutely necessary and unavoidable," because the United Provinces were "the common Enemies to all Monarchies, and I may say, especially to ours, their only Competitor for Trade and Power at Sea, and who only stand in their Way to an Universal Empire."³ What Shaftesbury strove to do in Parliament, Dryden tried to accomplish on stage.

² Discussing the authenticity of the conspiracy according to correspondence among the main historical actors if the incident, English and Dutch historiography as well as statistics and numbers of profits made and un-made for the British Empire in the South East Asia from the 1620 to 1680s, see D. K. Bassett, "The 'Amboyna Massacre' of 1623", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 1:2 (1960), pp. 1–19.

³ Blair Hoxby, *Mammon's Music: Literature and Economics in the Age of Milton*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn. and London 2002, p. 320, 180.

The play opens with a dedication to Thomas Clifford, 1st Baron Clifford of Chudleigh who sat in the House of Commons from 1660 to 1672. It was probably Clifford – “skillfully building parliamentary support for the Second Anglo-Dutch War” – who suggested that Dryden write *Amboyna, or the Cruelties of the Dutch to the English Merchants*.⁴ As Lord Treasurer, he ensured that Dryden was paid his usual salary despite the notorious Stop of the Exchequer in 1672, in an arbitrary move against the property of bankers which, in combination with the growing suspicion that Charles II may have had secret dealings with Louis XIV, made public relations efforts like Dryden’s necessary. We can date the play’s first performance with certainty only to the period between June 1672 and May 1673. Its text was sold, appropriately enough, at the New Exchange, the London shopping arcade.

Dryden’s stance toward the politics of his time was no secret. His royalist patrons, as well as works of monumental praise to the King,⁵ leave little room for doubt. *Amboyna* has been interpreted as anti-Whig propaganda. However, as pointed out by several critics, the story’s cultural imprint made it a symbolic point of reference that could target and speak against the political rivals to the nation, whoever those might have been considered to be at that particular point in time.⁶

The cultural imprint of the incident was long-lasting. Critics and historians establish that the public was largely aware of the story:

“The Amboyna business had already become ubiquitous by the 1650s, well known to populations as diverse as raucous audiences at London plays or English soldiers bent on revenge, and the peace of 1654 had done little if anything to hinder the story’s spread.”⁷

The popularity of the tale cannot be disputed as it even outlived the occasions of the Second (1665–67) and Third (1672–74) Anglo-Dutch Wars. Alison Games notices the two tracks on which the story moves; “[T]he political lesson of Amboyna, articulated during times of conflict with the Dutch and in six new *True Relations* [the original first pamphlet that brought the incident home] that appeared between 1665 and 1781, continued to be one of ingratitude’ and

⁴ Hoxby, *Mammon's Music*, *ibid*, p. 320, 180

⁵ Such as *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), alluding to the Exclusion Crisis of 1680-1681.

⁶ Anne B. Gardiner, "Dating Dryden's "Amboyna": Allusions in the Text to 1672-1673 Politics", *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre Research*, 5:1 (1990), p. 18; Alison Games, *Inventing the English Massacre: Amboyna in History and Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020. Hoxby, *ibid*; Anthony Milton, "Marketing a massacre: Amboyna, the East India Company and the public sphere in early Stuart England.", in P. Lake and S. Pincus (eds.), *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England* Manchester University Press, Manchester 2007, pp. 168-190.

⁷ Games, *ibid*, p. 148.

in ‘popular culture,’ that of ‘cruelty, a result of the emotional impact of the illustration of the tortured trader and what readers took to be most significant about the episode.’⁸

For twenty years the Dutch and English East India Companies competed throughout the Indian Ocean in search for dominance in the spice trade. The conflicts over nutmeg and cloves in Banda and the Moluccas, as well as pepper and gum Arabic, were of significant profit. Their forced partnership in 1619, a decision of employers due to their ties to Europe, placed the English in a subordinate position and the conspiracy conflicts began cropping up.

Dryden’s play has been favoured by literary critics thanks to its setting, themes, and characters, which reflect the anxieties of Englishness in a globalising era. It was neither the first nor the last dramatic work on Amboyna, as “the very first effort to depict the story on the London stage had been suppressed in 1625, and subsequent works in that decade only touched on the incident.”⁹ In 1633, an EIC (East India Company) employee named Walter Mountfort wrote about the incident in a play but struggled to get his play licensed. The Master of Revels, Henry Herbert, excised passages that pertained to the Dutch, and licensed the text. Another attempt was made by James Shirley in 1630, whose play was published in 1633 and 1659 with no reference to Amboyna, but to the punishments the Dutch had concocted there, and by William Davenant in 1653–54, another English poet laureate and playwright, who aimed to persuade “the Puritan Parliament to reopen England’s theaters by pointing out how much it would inspire spectators if they could see, among other things, the cruelties of England’s enemies enacted on stage”.¹⁰ Davenant thus exhibited that theatre appealed to the symbolic realm in which politics operated and that it could prove instrumental in the nationalist pedagogy of the English people. This set a precedent for Dryden’s attempt to get licenced with now-explicit references to the event and adding a romance plot, according to the dramaturgical conventions of his time.

The Amboyna incident, as immortalised in drama, rather influenced political decision-making. The English government struggled for thirty years to receive restitution for the Amboyna Massacre. In England, the English traders who had survived the conspiracy trial became the key witnesses for the East India Company playing a role, therefore, in securing restitution on behalf of the company relying on the publication of both old and new Amboyna pamphlets, as well as new illustrations, especially during the 1650s and the First Anglo-Dutch

⁸ Games reports that there have been incidents of violence against the Dutch incited by the story (149).

⁹ It seems that the playwrights thought the London audience but also theatre goers would understand the allusions to Amboyna. For the complete genealogy of the story in print and stage see Alison Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Games, *ibid.*, p. 152.

War. The Treaty of Westminster resolved all outstanding claims in 1654. However, the play itself does not figure more than once in the *Term Catalogues 1668-1709*, therefore it is safe to assume it was not reprinted as such during that period documented by the catalogues. It seems that it was the 'reality' of the story, as documented in the pamphlets, rather than the fictionalised-theatricalised version staged by Dryden that took hold of the reading public.

However, satire and comedy took part in this ideological reconstruction of memory, as several examples show. Published in 1679 *The Cloak in its Colours, or The Presbyterian Unmasked*, was a pamphlet against religious hypocrites which reproduced and constructed the memory of the stereotypical Protestant hypocrite (in his disguise and mask) as a satire on the rejection of the republican period. *The Rump* by John Tatham (1660 printed) presented the hypocritical upstarts and *The Committee, or The Faithful Irishman* by Robert Howard (1665) presented a gloomy Puritan dominated by his wife. Abraham Cowley's *Cutter of Coleman Street* (performed in 1641 and again in 1660-61) targeted the fifth monarchists' coup. Paul Hammond highlights John Dryden's role as a historiographer through his translations of Latin works, an intellectual who strove to shape collective memory and warn the reading public against Whig positions in alarming representations of 1681 as a repetition of 1641. Paul Hammond claims Dryden not only was aware of Miltonic texts but also directly responded to and emulated them¹¹—something also evident in *Amboyna*'s use of republican tropes of othering.

The Anglo-Dutch wars were reported in deeply partisan terms. The 1678 and 1679 reprinting of L'Estrange's *An Account on The Growth of Knavery* was explicitly anti-Catholic propaganda; L'Estrange attacked Milton through his allusion to the sons of Belial: a personification Milton himself had drawn from the Hebrew Bible in *Paradise Regained* (1671). Early Restoration texts presented those rebellious actors as sons of Belial renouncing God for Satan (Cromwell too), the usage canonized in the Book of Common Prayer. Any disrespect toward the king is heinous—Belial is connected to the court: charming and false, hollow.⁴⁶³ Belial is presented as a gross cavalier, the same allusion used in *Absalom and Achitophel* for Slingsby Bethel: to present one as resolutely corporeal and thus undermine him as a citizen (able of more elevated ideas). Biblical history held the rhetorical power to stigmatise one's opponents, and Dryden was no stranger to this textual effect.¹²

¹¹ Paul Hammond, 'Dryden, Milton, and Lucretius', *The Seventeenth Century*, 16 (2001), pp. 158-76, 160.

¹² See Laura Lunger Knoppers, 'Satan and the Papacy in *Paradise Regained*.' *Milton Studies*, 42 (2003), pp. 68–85 and *ibid*, *Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration England*, University of Georgia Press, Athens 1994.

The ideological background of the thematic structure of the play

Among appalling and grotesque depictions of the Dutch, the play stages the first rape depicted in a Restoration play as the act of the son of the VOC governor. In 1673, in the throes of war, Dryden experienced no difficulty getting the play on stage. Staying true to his own sensationalist drama, he portrayed scenes of torture and insinuations that the Dutch are cannibals. It overall stayed true to the one unchanging imprint Amboyna had already left to the public: the torture. Whether the play bore any consequence for the Third Anglo-Dutch war, or whether it simply reflected a hatred built up during the previous years, remains unclear. Between 1688 and 1713, the story was deployed by English writers to critique internal opponents; examples include the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when the English deposed James II and invited William of Orange and his wife, Mary, James's eldest daughter, to rule in his place; and the struggle to end British participation in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), a European conflict sparked by disputes about who should acquire the Spanish throne.¹³ The Tories—initially as supporters of the Stuart monarchy, and later as opponents of continued involvement in the war—re-circulated printed accounts of Amboyna to critique the Whigs:

“James had been on the throne for only three years, but he had failed to secure enough support and his religious faith concerned those troubled by a Catholic head of the Church of England. As early as the 1670s a Whig interest had developed among those opposed to his future ascension to the throne. Their opponents, Tories, were willing to accept James as their monarch. The Amboyna story turned out to be a helpful way for Tories to indict Whigs, becoming a proxy for domestic conflict, and especially so when William and Mary invaded England in 1688.”¹⁴

I argue that the Dutch were not only a proxy for the Whigs but, at the time of Dryden's play, a proxy for republicans, both English and non-English. The comparison between Venice, another competing republic, and Amsterdam, aiming to link two contemporary republics, should not be overlooked in the play itself. Dryden's heroes overtly blame Dutch roguery on the rebellion of their fathers. Upon witnessing the inhumane tortures the Dutch inflict on his comrades, as well as pages and women bystanders, captain Towers cries out:

“TOWERS. Are you Men or Devils! ...your Fathers all are damn'd for their Rebellion; when they Rebell'd, they were well us'd to this: these Tortures ne're were hatch'd in Humane Breasts, but as your

¹³ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, *ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Countrey lies confin'd on Hell, just on its Marches, your black Neighbors taught ye, and just such pains as you invent on Earth, Hell has reserv'd for you." (Act V, Scene I, page 326)

The prologue emphasises that the English should not hesitate to answer to the Dutch's insult even though 'With those...the same Religion are':

"What injuries soe'r upon us fall,
 Yet still the same Religion answers all:
 Religion wheedled you to Civil War,
 Drew English Blood, and Dutchmens now wou'd spare:
 Be gull'd no longer, for you'l find it true,
 They have no more Religion faith—than you;

 Interest's the God they worship in their State,
 And you, I take it, have not much of that,
 Well Monarchys may own Religions name,
 But States are Atheists in their very frame." (Prologue, n. p.)

The prologue builds an implication that States – that is Commonwealths – rather than monarchies, are by default atheist, in their perception of political power as secular rather than divinely ordained. In this way, even common Protestantism is insufficient to establish peaceful relations among states that worship 'interest,' not least because religion can be a source of internal violence, with the example of the Civil War. The Dutch characters tend to use religious language ironically as the fiscal exclaims that the English's "assistance (against the Spaniards), which was a Mercy, and a Providence to us, shall be a Judgment upon them' as the Governor of Amboyna, Harman, comments that 'they wou'd needs protect us Rebels, and see what comes to themselves'.¹⁵ Although it is a governor and a state official who speak, they expose their conspiracy to the audience admitting they are rebels. The implication is that they rebelled against their monarchy, lacking religious conviction.

¹⁵ Act I, Scene I, Page 75.

The English and the Other

Then, the playwright establishes the right of the English to govern the island on the grounds that “they were first discoverers of this Isle, first Traded hither, and show'd us the way.”¹⁶ The legitimacy of English governance evokes a constitutional theory of conquest; here, however, the first inhabitants are nowhere to be found; the island is “discovered”. The sole representation of them, Ysabinda, converts to Christianity to marry Towerson. Ysabinda, the double Other – both a female character and a native – neutralises her third form of otherness; her being non-Christian status. Ysabinda finds herself a woman of colour amidst white men and, in a response to Towerson after her rape, appears to have internalised her inferior status as well as the sexual assault, perceiving as her own sexual sin rather than of the men who committed it:

“YSAB.

Oh never, never, I am not worthy now;

My soul indeed is free from sin, but the foul speckled stains

are from my body ne'r to be wash'd out, but in my death.

Kill me, my Love, or I must kill my self;

else you may think I was a black Adulteress in my mind, and some of me consented.” (IV. III. 61)

As Towerson stresses that suicide is noble for Heathens but not for Christians, it is underlined that, though baptised, the Oriental Other remains the Other; religious conversion does enable the legal acceptance of an interracial marriage but the culturally ingrained racism runs deep as seen in the way Ysabinda makes a distinction between her body and soul, condemning her body as stained by the sin of the rapist. Her knowledge of the Bible merely enables Ysabinda, in a self-undermining way, to even further place the blame on herself—lest Towerson think she was a willing participant in the sexual act. The “Black adulteress” is a recognisable allusion to the story of a woman who had been caught in adultery, and brought forth to Jesus. The Pharisees asked Jesus whether they should stone her, according to the Law Moses commanded, while Jesus responded, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 7:53-8:11). Ysabinda’s internalised inferiority—based on her Indian race amidst a stage of white men—makes her read the story of the adulteress as a story of blame not of redemption, and makes her associate sexual assault with female moral deviation, which raises

¹⁶ Act I, Scene I, Page 75.

the question: is religious identity to be superseded by race in this play? What weighs more heavily in cultural terms? Among the play's many 'Others,' who is more *Other* than the rest?¹⁷

Nonetheless, on a scale dramaturgically tipped in her favour, Ysabinda has beauty, youth and wealth; all valuable additions to her commodity value, her marketability, as conveyed by the line "she loves your Countryman, but they are not disposers of her person." She disposes of her beauty the way a man freely disposes of his labour.¹⁸ Overall, the opening act takes pains to establish who adheres in which faith. The Dutch are quite vocal in their faith:

"HARMAN (Governor). [T]hey [the English from this Isle] may give the King of Great Brittain a Verbal satisfaction, and with submissive fawning promises, make show to punish us, but interest is their God as well as ours: to that Almighty, they will sacrifice a thousand English Lives, and break a hundred thousand Oaths, e're they will punish those that make 'em rich, and pull their Rivals down."
(Act I, Scene I, Page 6)

Rather than of common Christianity, interest serves as the god of the colonial enterprise. Here, the discriminatory propaganda against the Dutch is founded neither on any moral superiority of the English nor on any enlightened quality of the nation, but rather on an Otherness defined by the omnipresent common interest.

However, if there is a pillar of redeeming light for the English colonials, it is Captain Towerson: a merciful man "to chuse of all mankind," as Beamont, the English merchant, claims. Towerson is someone who always provides help and comfort and pardons his foes and 'wins them to his love'¹⁹; his only fault is being unsuspecting and naïve, seeing good in all. Dryden steadily reinforces this image of the main hero as the perfect Christian, to the extent that parallels with Jesus may be drawn, as the Dutch Governor – who is to conspire against him and execute him, as the audience already knows from the historical event's retellings – kisses him:

"HARMAN SENIOR. Now by my faith you ask too little friend, we must have more then bare Commerce betwixt us: receive me to your bosom, by this Beard I will never deceive you.

¹⁷ Ysabinda's violation can also be read in postcolonial terms. According to Mathilde Alazraki, displacing the diplomatic and military conflict over the Spice Islands onto the body of an Eastern woman, to be either won over by love or conquered by force, Dryden delivers a deeply political message aiming to fuel anti-Dutch sentiment. In Mathilde Alazraki, "'To guard this Paradise from any second violation': Ysabinda and the Eastern female body as contested territory in Dryden's *Amboyna* (1673)", *XVII-XVIII. Revue de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, 79 (2022).

¹⁸ Act I, Scene I, page 75.

¹⁹ Act I, Scene I, Page 8.

BEAMONT. [aside] I do not like his Oath, there's treachery in that Judas colour'd Beard."
(Act I, Scene I, Page 12)

The Judas analogy works as a foreshadowing of what is to come. Towerson, however, is the only one who can inspire “aw upon 'em [the Dutch] in his worth, which they both fear and reverence”.²⁰ The first introduction of this divinely-inspired mortal to the audience has him ordering letters dispatched “to our Plantations...This to Cambello, and to Hitto this, this other to Loho. Tell 'em their Friends in England greet 'em well; and when I left 'em, were in perfect health.”²¹ Towerson is already sorting out the plantation bodies/achievements left in perfect health: the master has returned; his healing, relieving qualities already figuratively proven. Christian brotherhood is the peacekeeper of Towerson’s and any man of honour should uphold; commerce cooperation is as good as a godly command:

“TOWERSON. [To the Dutch] The common ties of our Religion, and those yet more particular of Peace, and strict Commerce, betwixt us and your Nation, exacted all I did, or could have done.” (Act I, Scene I, Page 9)

Towerson, as if talking directly to the audience, alludes to the Third Anglo-Dutch war:

“This Ile yields Spice enough for both; and Europe, Ports, and Chapmen, were to vend them... ‘Tis true, the World was never large enough for Avarice or Ambition; but those who can be pleas'd with moderate gain, may have the ends of Nature, not to want: nay, even its Luxuries may be supply'd from her o'erflowing bounties in these parts: from whence she yearly sends Spices, and Gums²², the Food of Heaven in Sacrifice. And besides these, her Gems of richest value, for Ornament, more than necessity.”
(Act I, Scene I, Page 11)²³

Thus, on the one hand, the play castigates the Dutch as worshippers of profit; yet, on the other hand, it ends by galvanizing the English into going to war in pursuit of their commercial interests. Who worships Mammon in the end?

²⁰ Act I, Scene I, Page 9.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Gum Arabic which was used in the large-scale production and dissemination of printed cotton and linen textiles from the late seventeenth century—a resin derived from certain types of acacia trees widely cultivated in northern Senegal and Mauritania at the time. Despite the fact that they did not have direct access to Atlantic trade, European manufacturers nevertheless depended on this trade, as there was simply no suitable substitute for gum. See Jutta Wimmmler, “From Senegal to Augsburg: Gum Arabic and the Central European Textile Industry in the Eighteenth Century”, *Textile history* 50:1 (2019), pp. 4–22.

²³ The abundance of the island and by extension of the archipelago is key to the setting of the imperial stage: it draws from those ancient and those early modern discussions of the Orient as the place where, as no labour was required to yield such produce, the people naturally get lazy. See Helen Lynch, *Milton and the Politics of Public Speech*, Ashgate, Farnham and Surrey 2015.

Political reasons behind the propagandistic depictions-otherings

Amboyna is a play with political aims that, without claiming to represent any republican stance, in fact first exhibited the genuine fear and awe the Dutch Republic must have stirred by antagonizing English imperial enterprises, even before the crisis of succession and, secondly, that it was particularly threatening that this antagonist was a republic and therefore, it must have appealed to sentiments persisting after the Restoration of monarchy or civic values already entrenched in the popular print and stage. It is rather significant that the Spanish character Perez appears briefly—enough though for the playwright to adorn him with traits such as greed, subservience and cuckoldry— yet he is quickly elevated to a man of honour for sparing Towerson's life, denying the “hire of blood” he initially takes on as “Judas” of the three hundred quadruples, having found out that the captain would pay him what owed.²⁴ Thus, the sole real Catholic in the play emerges as a hero by the end, while the rest of the characters burdened with anti-Catholic slanders do not. This shows that, in Dryden's writing, the signifier (the Dutch) seems at first to have an unpredictable relation with the signified (Catholics); yet the signified remains constant, while within the linear socio-cultural context of the play the signifier shifts (the Whigs, the republicans, the national enemies), and in turn the signifier “Catholic” takes on different and unpredictable signifieds (absolutist, paganistic, greedy, subservient, rebel, atheist).

In fact, religion shapes every representation, whether of the virtuous English or the satanic, greedy Dutch, depicted with stereotypical anti-catholic colours as gruesome, ritualistic devotees, even cannibals.

“The character Harmon (the VOC governor, an obvious variant on the historical figure, Herman van Speult) requested the candle used for torturing the English so that he could light his pipe at the very point where the candle's wick had fed on English fat. He then passed the candle along to a merchant, who exclaimed, “oh the Tobacco tastes Divinely after it.” In Dryden's repugnant image, the Dutch fed their smoking habit with English fat and ingested English drippings with their tobacco. Dryden's depiction evoked the language deployed by the English merchants at Batavia who had scorned the Dutch as ‘Canniballs’.”²⁵

In a later play, on the aftermath of the Popish Plot, Nathaniel Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1681), the Fecialian priests in Act IV act as a parody of the Catholic mass.²⁶ The priests burn

²⁴ Act III, Scene I, page 39.

²⁵ Hoxby, *Mammon's Music*, *ibid*, p. 154.

²⁶ David M. Vieth, "Psychological Myth as Tragedy: Nathaniel Lee's 'Lucius Junius Brutus' ", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 39:1 (1975), pp. 57-76.

and crucify men, and drink their blood before the eyes of civil Vinditious whose shock makes him apostrophise Rome. Read as a Whig play in mainstream criticism, Lee's *Brutus* is interpreted as combining Catholic sentiments with the Torry eyeing of the French court. But how do those stereotypes appear in *Amboyna*? The Dutch are presented with the same tropes previously applied to Catholics in propagandistic prints, despite being divided between Catholicism and Protestantism. Dryden shows us the basis of this link later in the text:

“BEAMONT (the English merchant). In the first place you [the Dutch] shew'd your ambition, when you began to be a State: for not being Gentlemen, you have stollen the Arms of the best Families of Europe...your Ingratitude, you have in part acknowledg'd it, by your laughing at our easy, delivery of your Cautionary Towns: the best is, we are us'd by you, as well as your own Princes of the House of Orange, We and They have set you up, and you undermine their Power, and circumvent our Trade.”
(Act II, Scene I, Page 400)

Dutch ambitiousness led to their republicanism then; their titles are merely a blasphemy against England's God-inspired monarchy. The reference to the approaching House of Orange is on Dryden's part another call to arms for the third Anglo-Dutch war—though history disproved him, based on what rather seemed to be an invitation to William and Mary to take over, who in turn provided the foundations for a limiting of the powers of the Crown, something the republicans could work with.²⁷ The Dutch fiscal responds that they work according to their interests and Beamont swoops in an attack on religious affronts:

“BEAMONT. That leads me to your Religion, which is only made up of Interest: at home, ye tolerate all Worships, in them who can pay for it; and abroad, you were lately so civil to the Emperor of Pegu, as to do open sacrifice to his Idols.

FISCAL: Yes, and by the same token you English were such precise fools as to refuse it.

BEAMONT. For frugality in Trading, we confess we cannot compare with you; for our Merchants live like Noblemen: your Gentlemen, if you have any, live like Bores; you traffick for all the rarities of the World, and dare use none of 'em your selves; so that in effect, you are the Mill Horses of Mankind, that labor only for the wretched Provender you eat: a pot of Butter and a pickl'd Herring is all your

²⁷ National identity images often linked portraits of Junius Brutus and William III: The relationship between these two ...suggests that just as Brutus acted to restore liberty, so too did William III, the expulsion of the Tarquins and the Stuarts being commensurate acts of national liberation...This canon of ancient figures invokes the celebration of classical political legislators encountered in key texts such as Machiavelli's commentaries on Livy's Discourses. (Champion 106). In Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722*, Manchester University Press, 2003.

Riches; and in short, you have a good Title to cheat all Europe, because in the first place, you cosen your own Backs and Bellies.”²⁸

Religious toleration, the levelling of nobles to merchants, and stinginess are the vices of the Dutch in this excerpt. However, this cultural attack on the Dutch Republic was not always the case. Republican politicians—such as Slingsby Bethel—had supported the alliance between England, Denmark, and the United Provinces in the aftermath of the Second Anglo-Dutch war. This alliance aimed to check the expansion of France in the Spanish Netherlands, as well as Colbert’s aggressive trade and naval policies:

“This alliance had the support not only of courtiers like Sir William Temple...but of opposition politicians and dissenters, who found France’s absolutist government, its Catholicism, and its protectionist trade policies threatening. Slingsby Bethel affirmed that it was in the “Foreign Interest of England ” to hold “firm to their present tripple League, and in that especially to Holland ” because England and Holland were of “one and the same Religion” and because the “greatness” of Dutch trade was no adequate excuse for ruining the United Provinces...The “world” could afford “matter enough to satisfie both” England and the United Provinces. Such a claim was more credible in 1671 than it might have been fifty years earlier because the English East India Company felt less resentful about its poor access to the Moluccas (or Spice Islands) now that it was driving a successful business on the Indian peninsula in goods such as calicoes. The House of Commons duly voted money for the Triple Alliance in its session of 1670-71. Little did it know that the king had already secretly committed himself to join France in a war of aggression against the United Provinces. *In the Dutch republic he saw a threat to monarchy*. In an alliance with France, on the other hand, he saw an opportunity to establish a more absolutist monarchy by eliminating his own dependence on parliamentary financing. He was willing to prepare for England’s Catholicization and to abet Louis XIV’s plans to seize some of the provinces of the Netherlands in return for a French subsidy and the expectation that, in wresting some trade away from the Dutch, he might increase his own customs revenues.”²⁹

Therefore, the Dutchman's “otherness” – as a religious, political, ethnic polarity to Englishness – is established not only through the language of the play but also in the general periphery of history-relating narratives of the time, whether in pamphlets or plays. This sought to create a sense of belonging to Englishness, potentially threatened by the ongoing contact with the colonies, and the circulation of European print in a country that figured one of the highest literacy rates of Europe at that time. Attempts to define what it meant to be English – following the tumultuous regime changes of the 1640s on to the absolutist tendencies of Charles II in the 1660s and his co-dependency on France’s financial support on to the 1680s – paint a picture

²⁸ Act II, Scene I, Page 400.

²⁹ Hoxby, *Mammon's Music*, *ibid*, p. 179. Emphasis added.

that is challenging for the modern audience to fully grasp. Within the play itself, the identity of the “other” keeps shifting. The multiple signifiers that change the sign of the “other” reveal exactly that the mechanism of propaganda is an ideological mechanism and therefore subject to critical thinking.³⁰ The presence of multiple ‘others’ is to be understood as contrasting as a whole to Englishness.

The language of trade and (dis)honourable imperialists

Religion was thus instrumental in securing political support, which was in turn necessary to establish trade dominance. *Amboyna* amply exhibits the pervasiveness of trade as it informs the network or relationships. The play’s first four acts provide substantial historical information regarding Portuguese, Dutch, and English claims to the Malay Archipelago as well as the operational details of their trade there.

“Thus we learn that the Dutch raised the price of pepper once they wrested the trade from the Portuguese, that they have forced the English East India Company to accept only £80,000 in compensation for £500,000 worth of damage done in just one year; and that, according to a recent treaty of 1619, they are supposed to be dividing the trade of the East Indies with England, taking two-thirds for themselves and leaving one third to the English. The Dutch have abused the terms of that treaty, we hear, by forestalling English shipments to Europe.”³¹

Trade also permeates the language of characters. In this colonial backdrop, where the natives make a single appearance to dance for the return of the English captain Towerson, it pays to search for characterisation through discourse. Ysabinda responds to Harman Jr’s advances that she does ‘not weigh by bulk’ and though the Dutch have the advantage in Ambon island, she still prefers Towerson to him.³² Harman Jr offers a profitable transaction by requesting then that Towerson “yield[s]” Ysabinda to him so that the captain’s “[f]actories shall be no more opprest, but thrive in all advantages with ours; your gain shall be beyond what you cou'd hope for from the Treaty,” to which Towerson responds:

³⁰ Though I do use the term “other” I understand it is an anachronism at large. Yes, underprivileged people existed historically but subjectivity was understood completely differently than the way we understand it today and, to put it simply, matters of identity were understood differently—the individualistic light on the self was still becoming formulated.

³¹ Hoxby, *Mammon's Music*, *ibid*, pp. 181-2.

³² Act II, Scene I, Page 16.

“Hold, you mistake me Harman, I never gave you just occasion to think I wou'd make *Merchandise* of Love; Ysabinda you know is mine, contracted to me e're I went for England and must be so till death.”
(Act II, Scene I, Page 18)

As Ysabinda cannot be bought, Harman Jr sets a plot with the Fiscal, isolates her and rapes her. As his conscience plagues him, the Fiscal consoles him by debating how little value Ysabinda had anyway:

“FISCAL. Those Fits of Conscience in another might be excusable; but, in you, a Dutchman, who are of a Race that are born Rebels, and live every where on Rapine; Wou'd you degenerate, and have remorse? Pray what makes any thing a sin but Law; and, What Law is there here against it? Is not your Father Chief? Will he condemn you for a petty Rape? The Woman an Amboyner, and what's less, now Marry'd to an Englishman: Come, if there be a Hell, 'tis but for those that sin in Europe, not for us in Asia; Heathens have no Hell.” (Act IV, Scene I, Page 69)

The absence of Hell signifies the absence of Law. Ysabinda explains to Towerson what happened to her as matters that ‘Indians cou'd not guess, till Europe taught’ which leaves Towerson wondering ‘Am I condemn'd to be the second man, who e'r complain'd, he vertue serv'd in vain?’ and he reassures that her she is still ‘as innocent, and holy, as if your being were all soul and spirit, without the gross allay of flesh and bloud.’³³ Ysabinda’s prelapsarian native state is emphasised, and Towerson’s virtue, though unrewarded, is explicitly Christian—not merely because he remains pure. ‘Self-homicide, which was in Heathens honour, in us is onely sin’ he says to his wife when she starts uttering agonizing metaphysical questions: “I thought th' Eternal Mind had made us Masters of these mortal frames; you told me he had given us wills to choose, and reason to direct us in our choice; if so, why should he tie us up from dying, when death's the greater good?”³⁴

Towerson’s wish to avenge Ysabinda’s rape imagines Harman Jr as another of the worst of ‘ten thousand Devils damn'd for less crimes then he, and Tarquin in their head, way-lay his Soul, to pull him down in triumph, and to shew him in pomp among his Countrey-men.’³⁵ But he is no Brutus, rather a “Sword of Heaven...a fiery Cherub, to guard this Paradise from any second Violation”.³⁶ It is the representative of God who is going to exact revenge on this Tarquin, not the Republic, in a simile that defines the hero by opposition to the classical tropes yet is attracted by their allure to the popular imagination.

³³ Act IV, Scene I, Page 60

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Act IV, Scene i. Page 62.

³⁶ Ibid.

After Towerson kills Harman Jr, Harman Senior, the Dutch Governor, decides that ‘great advantages must with some loss be bought’ and arrests the English captain and his merchants by extracting by torture testimonies from Japanese men that the English were plotting an attack to the Dutch fort. Hence, for the Dutch Governor, even his son’s death offers him the opportunity for a ‘rich Trade which I this day have purchas'd with his death’.³⁷

The ‘Old World’ versus the New: Restoration and anti-republican sentiment

This reading of the play delineates through definition by contrast the representation of an antagonistic historical republic, and the roles religious differences played in constructing undermining representations on the one hand, and imperial myths of masterfulness. Dryden’s loyalist and anti-republican play gives us a version of virtue inspired by piety and scripture, and a “Tarquin” in Harman Jr completely indifferent to public affairs to subsume the political antagonism beneath a love plot and—surprisingly enough for this playwright—the love plot below a commercial, imperialist rivalry—perhaps closer to what the newspapers ringing the metropolis might have reported on Amboyna and Dryden’s contemporary Anglo-Dutch war. Beamont voices the anti-republican feelings of the play when bravely inviting the tortures:

“BEAMON. Wee'l shame your Cruelty; if we deserve our Tortures, 'tis first for freeing such an infamous Nation, that ought to have been slaves, and then for trusting them as Partners, who had cast off the Yoke of their lawful Sovereign.” (Act V, Scene I, Page 76)

Men who cast off their King are not men to be trusted; they are ungrateful men, the play insinuates. The play circles back to the theme of ingratitude and urges the English not to forget, and not to help in any other nation’s fortification again.

Since the Dutch Republicans are portrayed as atheists, it could be argued that there is already present a “cleansing” of the godly strands of republicanism before Toland’s historiographic intervention. But in the 1670s secular state-making did not imply sobriety but rather anarchy. The marginalisation of republicanism has already begun and perhaps it was owed heavily to the antagonism between the two countries. As Jonathan Scott writes, the relations between those two nations allowed a “transformative process – both creative and destructive – called Anglo-Dutch-American early modernity” which drew elements from the practices of both:

³⁷ Act V, Scene I, page 69.

“One, the bulk trades, owed nothing to England but drew upon the resources and earlier trading practices of the Dutch North Sea coast and Hanseatic towns. Another, Britain’s North American plantations, were primarily Anglo-Scots-Irish Protestant in inspiration, but indebted to the United Provinces for their spiritual and physical establishment, as well as for their early supply...[M]odernizing revolutions (agricultural, commercial and fiscal-political-military) pioneered in the Netherlands and then applied and adapted in Britain. Thus the process which made Industrial Revolution possible was regional, transnational and trans-Atlantic; a revolutionary product of the Anglo-Dutch-American archipelago, with the consequences of which the world is still coming to terms.”³⁸

Dryden’s *Amboyna* strives to preserve an old world: a world where native inhabitants have been made absent and where unchecked monarchy is the only preserver of Law. Towerson fiercely objects his arrest as the English “are not here your Subjects, but your Partners: and that Supremacy of power you claim, extends but to the Natives, not to us

... Your base new upstart Common-Wealth shou'd blush, to doom the Subjects of an English King, the meanest of whose Merchants wou'd disdain the narrow life, and the Domestick baseness of one of those you call your mighty States.” (Act V, Scene I, Page 80)

By associating domestic life with the commonwealth, Dryden performs a rhetorical attack that leaves the republic devoid of its core, that is, the public space where civic men act, but also confirms that he was aware—and knew his audience would be too—of the vital relationship between those two. Another testimony to confirm that theatre was a space where political ideas were thriving on is Towerson’s last words to the Dutch: “We have friends in England who wou'd weep to see this acted on a Theatre, which here you make your pastime.”³⁹ In the playwright’s own words theatre is able to, and even should, incite political passions, warn and instruct the nation. Towerson dies after uttering a prophecy, before his beheading, like another John the Baptist:

“An Age is coming, when an English Monarch with Blood, shall pay that blood which you have shed: to save your Cities from victorious Arms, you shall invite the Waves to hide your Earth, and trembling to the tops of Houses fly, while Deluges invade your lower rooms: Then, as with Waters you have swell'd our Bodies, with damps of Waters shall your Heads be swoln; Till at the last your sap'd foundations fall, And Universal Ruine swallows all.” (Act V, Scene I, Page 87)

The play ends with this religious culmination and the epilogue.

“Towerson’s prophecy presents history in the future tense: the Netherlands had just flooded their territories in an attempt to forestall the French armies who were advancing as part of the Third Anglo-

³⁸ Jonathan Scott, *How the Old World Ended: The Anglo-Dutch-American Revolution 1500-1800*, Yale University Press, 2020, p. 299.

³⁹ Act V, Scene I, Page 84.

Dutch War. It has the effect both of confirming the connection between the events of Amboyna and the present war and of making that war seem like the foreordained punishment for an old crime, not the result of a policy hatched in secret negotiations between two monarchs with absolutist ambitions.”⁴⁰

The last lines of the epilogue likens the playwright to Cato holding up a Punic fig in the Roman senate to incite war against Carthage, as in the same way he wants through this play to lay the story before their eyes and boldly exclaims: “All Loyal English will like him conclude, Let Caesar live, and Carthage be subdu’d”. Anachronistically then, Dryden makes parallels England to an Imperial rather than Republican Rome.

The political impact of the play

If the play’s effectiveness is to be measured by whether it succeeded in inciting political passions of war, it could be said that already, in its time, opposition politicians and public opinions were realising from the Third Anglo-Dutch war that commercial and diplomatic campaigns would have been more effective. “Whether at home or abroad, popery and absolutist government were starting to seem like greater threats than Dutch commerce— especially when, after the passage of the anti-Catholic Test Act, both the duke of York and Lord Clifford resigned their offices rather than take Anglican communion.”⁴¹ The campaigns over Amboyna exhibit that public opinion and state affairs could be invoked not merely as a confrontation between “a state of representational authority and a bourgeois public sphere”.⁴² The expansion of trade and commerce not only was not hurting seventeenth century republicanism but was rather helping the state. Steven Pincus argues that although historians such as J. G. A. Pocock focused on the republicanism of James Harrington and John Milton which was suspicious of commerce, there were other thinkers supporting the new commercial society.⁴³ While eighteenth-century republicans were alarmed about the corruption of luxury, paper stocks, and credit, they differentiated between commercial acts in the service of only private interests and those benefited of the public, which was a welcome feature of a republican state.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Hoxby, *Mammon's Music*, *ibid*, p. 188.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 190.

⁴² Anthony Milton, "Marketing a Massacre", *ibid*, pp. 168-190, 185.

⁴³ Steven Pincus, 'Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth', *The American Historical Review*, 103:3 (1998), pp. 705-36.

⁴⁴ See Justin Champion, “‘Mysterious politicks’: land, credit and Commonwealth political economy, 1656-1722” in Daniel Carey (ed.), *Money and Political Economy in the Enlightenment*, Voltaire Foundation, Oxford 2014, pp. 117-62.

Anthony Milton argues for the introduction of trading companies (not only the colonial ones) into the ideological and cultural (political and economic) historiography of the period as they existed between a conceived public sphere or mercantile interest while being dependent on the state.⁴⁵ The relations to those republicans in Europe reflected the relationship with these ideas at home; Dryden's *Amboyna* seldom gets mentioned among the rest of his heroic dramas in edited volumes on Restoration drama; the heroes are merchants, the acts consist of merely one scene each, the characters are a handful: there was an instrumentality, a haste to make a point in this commissioned drama which did not appeal to contemporary critics of style. The play indeed had an impact on the politics of that era. According to Pincus, even though naval wars were economic disasters to the English state and despite the many objections from political and nonconformist pamphleteers of that time who had the common sense to declare that the sea was big enough for both nations, the lasting imprint of the incident, as memorialised through cultural means, enabled the public acceptance of the war:

"The tragedy of Amboyna - an event memorialized in plays, skits, poems, and squibs in the early 1670s - made certain that every social stratum of English society was aware that the basis of Dutch prosperity was 'the bloody and inhumane butcheries committed by them against us'. It was clear that 'the artifice and undue practices of the Hollanders', 'their lies and cheats', aimed only 'to supplant all our foreign trade'. All of this, convinced supporters of the restored monarchy that the Dutch republic was indeed seeking universal dominion."⁴⁶

But if it seems a one-sided propaganda against the Dutch and for the war, *Amboyna* works on many levels thanks to the story's cultural appropriations. It exhibits an Other of successful imperial command at a time when the naval bolstering of England was largely owed to the Commonwealth period.⁴⁷ The all-pervasiveness of religious matters cannot be missed. Religious fears, so inherently connected to national liberty, reach as far as to a world far in the Pacific Ocean where it regulates alliances. It is rather unclear whether trade interest dictates the religion-based Otherings or the other way around. The East India Company stands for the nation where neither kings nor virtuous men are present to defend it; but the great polemical speech act is made, and made by the playwright himself as he orates to the audience and asks from them to act politically.

Amboyna, given its historical context, was Dryden's nearest attempt at historiography rather than dramaturgy, while it stayed in line with much of his work, in offering an effort to

⁴⁵ Anthony Milton, "Marketing a Massacre", *ibid.*, pp. 168-190, 185.

⁴⁶ Steven Pincus. "From Butterboxes to Wooden Shoes: The Shift in English Popular Sentiment from Anti-Dutch to Anti-French in the 1670s", *The Historical Journal*, 38:2 (1995), pp. 333-61.

⁴⁷ See Jonathan Scott. *How the Old World Ended*, *ibid.*

sway public opinion. It twists the word ‘virtue’ from its seventeenth-century understanding as a political value to private, bodily, clerically-prescribed virginity and the word ‘enlightened’ as a religious characterisation for piousness. The “city” is the Empire and the interests of one company are identified with the interests of the nation; domestic men look inwards, the play seems to say, at the governance of home – or, of Home, the country – but “public men” should look across the Atlantic and thrust their energies there. Cultural ideology enabled the instrumentalization of religion in serving political and, ultimately, commercial interests.

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