

[ Background Conversations ]

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>> So our final speaker is Arthur der Weduwen, who is a historian specializing in history of media, news, and the book. He earned his PhD at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, where he is currently a postdoctoral research fellow. His first major project, for which he won three prizes, was the compilation of the first bibliography of 17th-century Dutch newspapers, published by Brill in 2017. Current projects include a general history of the library, to be published in 2021, and two forthcoming books -- two forthcoming books, this is a busy young man -- on the early history of newspaper advertising. His latest book, co-authored with Professor Andrew Pettegree, is the first comprehensive study of the book trade in the 17th-century Dutch Republic, published this year by Yale. And it's called "The Bookshop of the World, Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age." And we do have a few copies of it available for you as well. So Arthur.

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>> Stephanie, many thanks for the very kind introduction, and thank you all for coming here today, of course, and a big thanks to Max again for all the extremely smooth and efficient organization here. Now, we've heard a lot of nice things about Rembrandt, wonderful stories from some of his early years, but I would like to start here today at a real low point in Rembrandt's life: in 1656, when he's forced to declare bankruptcy. Now, by this point, Rembrandt had really fallen a long way and an inventory was made of all the possessions left in his house. Now, this included a cornucopia of furniture, of artistic props, of things like pikes and crossbows, of paintings, of course, but also of 22 books. Now, do we know what some of these books were. It included Flavius Josephus's history. It included an old Bible. It included a book of German military drills, clearly something he might have used for some of his compositions. And also 15 unnamed large items. And here, of course, on the right, one of his very early paintings, I think 1626. And you see there in the bottom right, a huge pile of books. And I think this is generally one of the ways in which he may have been using some of these. But really when we think about these 22 books, and Rembrandt around this time, that this relatively speaking for Amsterdam was a tiny library, and in some ways a fitting mark of his near destitution. For by this point, the Dutch Republic was a land that was absolutely teeming with books. Its publishers produced some of the most fabulous books of the age. And not only that, but in the 17th century, the Dutch published more books per capita than any other book-producing nation. For these reasons, it's all the more surprising that it's taken quite a long time for the true history of the book trade to be written in the Dutch

Golden Age. And in a way -- I don't want to lay blame here -- but perhaps we've been dazzled a bit too much by the great Dutch painters of the era and we've seem to have overlooked the quieter revolution going on in a bourgeois homes of Dutch citizens. And this revolution was the way in which books and prints were moulding and reshaping Dutch society.

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Now, it is said that Dutch homes found space for perhaps 3 million paintings on their walls in this century. They certainly produced many more books, perhaps as many as 350 million. They traded at least 4 million of these books at auctions. Now, this is really the story that Andrew Pettegree and I have tried to tell in the book here, "The Bookshop of the World," as Stephanie said, you see here the English edition published by Yale, and then the Dutch edition as well. But I would like to tell you that the title of this book is not the title that we envisaged. We originally called this book Trading Books in the Age of Rembrandt. And we thought this was a nice idea, a nice title. And both publishers of the English and the Dutch edition didn't like this at all, for different reasons. The Dutch publisher thought liked Rembrandt, but they thought it might be sort of drowned out by all the other fantastic Rembrandt books there, so they wanted something different. Whereas Yale -- and this is quite, you know, a bit shame face, to be honest -- they said, well, it's not really clear really enough Rembrandt, I think people won't know what we're talking about when we're talking about Rembrandt. So you need something that forces us into the 17th century and into the Dutch Golden Age. So Rembrandt clearly not popular enough. Which is surprising to me and certainly, I mean, this audience here, anyway. So Rembrandt is not in the title of the book. But because we had this title, we have written Rembrandt all throughout the book. So if you go through the book, in multiple chapters, we find Rembrandt -- at his bankruptcy. We find him at Latin school. And of course, we talk about education there. We find him in the world of prints and we find him in the worlds of business publishing and relating here predominately to his debts. And, of course, if we go to many Rembrandt paintings, we do find a large number of items there. Having said that, we also use Rembrandt as a little bit of a departure. Because I think, at least relative to his peers in this period, I don't think Rembrandt was all too interested in books, especially later in his career. And I think if you compare it to some other artists, I would say that books are almost conspicuously absent from the entire oeuvre that he produced. But if books are present in his paintings, then they tend to be exactly the books which have always attracted most attention from scholars. And those are substantial, massive, and magnificent books. Books like these. Like the wonderful 1112 Volume Blaeu Atlas. Truly one of the most significant publishing projects of this period. It's the largest atlas to be produced in this era.

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Now, these are the books that have often stood at the centre of attention to what the Dutch could produce in this period. But a book

like this would cost the equivalent of an annual salary for all but the most affluent citizens in the 17th century. And really what fuelled the book trade in this period was a steady and recurring trade in the sort of books that might be careful and considered purchases of an artisan or a bourgeois household, which would buy three or five books a year. And these were books they bought for use. A book for medical recipes, to ensure the health of their households. A book on accounting to help their son to a better job. And most of all, books as part of their religious life. These sort of books tell us not only how the Dutch lived their lives but who they actually were. But these these humbler books are the books that have become almost invisible in a story of the Dutch Republic. And I would like to elaborate on that point a little bit today. And the reason for that is that these were generally books which were not destined for posterity. They were intended to be used every day or regularly and then worn out and replaced. Few of these books have made it through the centuries to take their place on the shelves of a library. And those that do survive are almost invariably the single surviving copy of a print run of 500, 800, maybe even 5,000. So this book that we wrote is partly an exercise in reversing this historical invisibility and provide more context on the true extent of Dutch book production. for it's really these cheaper, humbler books that take us closest to understanding the heart and soul of the complex and contradictory society that is the Dutch Republic.

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Now, why was the potency of these smaller books not recognized on scholarship on the Dutch Republic? This is partly an issue that, before the digital age, it was impossible to reconstruct quickly or relatively quickly a corpus of surviving print that's scattered around some 8,000 libraries and archives worldwide. And this is something that we've been trying to do at St. Andrews, and reconstruct on a global scale the holdings of early printed books and to compare records and thereby buildup a far greater body of sources. Generally, bibliographers say, if they're looking at German books, they will look in German libraries, but not necessarily as much in libraries in other countries. So this is something we've been trying to do specifically for the Dutch Republic. But it also became very clear to us in an early stage that if we are to fathom this new book world, we could not rely solely on what survives today. We must also hunt for what we call "lost books." Books which were indeed printed and published in this period but do not survive today. And I'm going to show you some of the techniques with which we've been doing that a little bit later. Now, why do many of these books not survive? Well, partly this is an issue of library collecting culture. Libraries, particularly the large scholarly libraries visited by historians, tend to collect a certain sort of book. Very often the books that professional men and serious collectors would most value, like this beautiful Blaeu Atlases, big, serious books of scholarship, often in scholarly languages. And this specifically excluded the sort of books favoured by craftsmen and more humble bourgeois households when these were

being produced. If we think of Sir Thomas Bodleian, the creator of the famous Bodleian Library in Oxford, when he founded this, he specifically forbade his librarian to accession what he described as idle books and ruffraff. And by that he meant books in English. [laughter] Now, this was much the same in the lovely Library of Leiden, which is specifically designed really for use by its professors to consult big, expensive reference works. Around the time that Rembrandt was a student at Leiden, the library was not formally opened to students. It was closed to students for a period, for about 25 years. This was really a professorial resource with almost no vernacular books, books not in Latin or Greek or Hebrew or Arabic. Then again, the people who bought more humble books didn't take very good care of them either. The sort of little religious texts, prayer books, and catechisms or almanacs, these were all books that really made up the trade in this period, but they were books that were heavily used and then discarded.

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There's a couple up here, and these are -- I'll just run you through some of the examples that have been highlighted in our story. They are books like this. On the right you have a Dutch school book, a really horrible book, It's called "The Mirror of Youth," in translation. Which is a dialogue between a father and son about all the atrocities of the Dutch Revolt. And it's got quite graphic, very cheap woodcuts all throughout, some of which are repeatedly used in totally random scenes. But this is an incredibly cheap book that would have been standard reading at all Dutch vernacular schools. And you see it's -- I think this is the 15th impression, and we only have two other impressions surviving before this edition. On the left, you have a Dutch-French dictionary. And this is an extraordinary item, held in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which was part of a find of a Dutch naval expedition, to find a northeast passage to the Indies in the late 16th century. And the sailors took with them Bibles and catechisms and also this dictionary. And when the expedition failed and they had to sail back, they left this behind. So this was found in the 19th century in Novaya Zemlya, in the north of Russia, in the little house that they had built. And it's come back to the Rijksmuseum. Again, and this dictionary is the only surviving example of this entire print run of this item. Then we've got catechisms. Again, very practical, very treasured, practical books. We've got stories of the great exciting Dutch voyages of the period. Which, of course, really, really sparked the imagination, as you can imagine, of many young boys and girls of this time. And an even more humbler, very daily pieces of print. On the left here, this is an incredibly common genre. On the left here, you see a wedding broadsheet. Now, this is a poem written by someone to celebrate a wedding of two of their friends. And it's printed just as a placard on a single side. And these were standard fare in the Dutch Republic. If you went to a wedding -- well, these days we have a photographer. In the 17th century, you would have a wedding poem. Sometimes you would have

three or four different ones. And it was specific writers who would produce hundreds of these throughout the period. But again, rarely they don't survive. And then another aspect of the Dutch print trade, an example on the left there, is really an incredibly competitive and dynamic newspaper market. This was really the period of the invention of newspaper, of newspaper advertising. And the Dutch had about 50 different newspapers in this particular period. But these too rarely survive.

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Now, with a sort of broader global perspective, we should not forget books which were destined for foreign audiences. Because in this period, Dutch books not only were produced for Dutch audiences but for customers all across the European continent. And Dutch booksellers really dominated the international trade at this point. They had branches in Scandinavia and Germany. And some publishers catered exclusively for this market, often in religious texts, like on the left-hand side here. This is a Hungarian edition of the Psalms printed in Amsterdam. And on the right, you have a German Lutheran Bible, specifically produced for the markets in what is now roughly Prussia and Northern Germany.

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Now, these sort of books, again, they don't tend to survive in Dutch libraries but they do tend to survive in libraries in Germany and Hungary, etc. But we also begin to touch here on a little bit of a paradox that's playing here. And it's the fact that some of the books in our great libraries survived so well because -- precisely because they were not much read. [laughter] And in a way, it's a strange paradox that the books that were most valued by owners in this period have often survived least well today. Then there is a second paradox that I would like to talk about, and that's the fact that the books that made reputations in this period were not necessarily the books that made publishers a lot of money. Dutch publishers were so successful in conquering international markets precisely because they chose not to publish certain books. So you never see sort of great Latin legal works being printed in the Dutch Republic, because that was a market that was absolutely swamped by editions from Lyon, by editions from Venice or Southern Germany. So what the Dutch did, they bought these books cheaply abroad, took them to Amsterdam and Leiden and then re-exported them at higher prices. And the way they worked in the market for whale blubber, they did the exact same thing with books. It's just another commodity. And one particular family captures this paradox really well, and that's the Elzevir family of Leiden and Amsterdam. Which is founded by a guy called Louis Elzevir who arrives in Leiden 1580, practically bankrupt. But he quickly begins to sell books to the university professors and develops a relationship with them and he starts to make some money then. And he establishes dynasty that really dominates the international trade in the Dutch Republic. Elzevirs are most famous for publishing Galileo, on the left here the example, when his publications were forbidden in Italy. For publishing the likes of Balzac, you have there on the

right. And for publishing Descartes. But what we also know is that the Elzevirs were extremely tight with their authors and always drove an incredibly hard bargain. And they drove the hardest bargain of all with some very young authors, and those were Leiden University students, who had to publish their disputations at the university. Often several a year as they were practising and leading up to their promotion. And the Elzevirs could set particular prices because they had a monopoly on these particular dissertations. So there were many complaints about both the quality of the printing for these and the high rates that they set. But this is really where the Elzevirs made most of their money. But the reason this hasn't been recognized it's because only about 15% of all the dissertations originally published have no longer survived today. So if Rembrandt was defending a disputation when he was a student -- which is certainly possible -- it has not survived. But we shouldn't say that's particularly unusual.  
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Now, the Elzevirs also made a big market in the trade in Latin classics, small format Latin books, which were -- as we've heard before, in the Latin School these were essential reading. So again, you have a large captive market with students who constantly need books. And as we know, students often throw away books. So this is a market where you constantly need new editions. So that's another aspect of that. And finally, the Elzevirs also made a particular claim to fame by being some of the very first booksellers to hold specific book auctions and publish printed auction catalogues of these sales. And on the left side here, you have the earliest printed auction catalogue in the world. This is the catalogue of the books of the Dutch statesman Philips van Marnix, which was auctioned in Leiden in 1599. Now, the auction market was a big boon for the Dutch book trade because it injected a certain cash flow in the business. This was a society in which credit and book exchange -- so selling books for other books -- was the main means of trade. But in auctions, you had to pay cash. So this was a very welcomed injection for many booksellers. But it also promoted collecting. And it promoted the growth of personal libraries. Because as soon as people realized that they could invest in books -- that is they could build up a library, say, of 1,000 items, but comfortable in the knowledge that when they died, their heirs could then sell their library and make a decent return on all that investment. So libraries were both practical but they were also a relatively safe bet. And this is really what we see starting in the 17th-century. We know of over 4,000 book auctions that took place during this period, all with printed catalogues like these. But these catalogues also provide a glimpse into another paradox, if not some of the hypocrisy of Dutch book-selling business. Now, like most early modern countries, the Dutch Republic had a system of book censorship, forbidding the printing of subversive and unorthodox religious works, which you were not allowed to print, buy, or sell. But then again, if we look at some of these auction catalogues, we start to find things like this. Which are specific sections in the auction catalogues of libri prohibiti, or forbidden

books. So these were separately marketed to an audience to say, this is really the good stuff. [laughter] This is what you want to buy. And this just went on happily ever after. While the magistrates of Leiden were the first to ban the publications of Spinoza in the Dutch Republic, Leiden was also the town where almost all auctions with libri prohibiti were held. Including from some libraries owned by Leiden's magistrates. So it's a funny world. You have to be careful.  
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These auction catalogues also allow us to reconstruct the corpus of books published in the Dutch Republic in the 17th-century. And from many of these catalogues and other contemporary references, Andrew and I and our team in St. Andrews have now accumulated references to almost half a million books sold at auction or marketed for sale in catalogues in the Dutch Republic in the 17th-century. Now, this provides us with really interesting material, because we can compare this to the corpus of books that we know of that does survive and find some of these lost books, some of these lost items.

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I should say, this also involves the use of newspaper advertisements. Which when they were first introduced in the Netherlands, are almost exclusively for announcements for newly-published books. And I'll just show you a couple of examples. Oh, this is very neat too. Obviously, this is a beautiful, gorgeous Dutch still life you see here. Wonderful spread of delicacies you could eat in the 17th-century. But if we look very closely, there's also a book here. Does anyone see it? Does that help? This is a title page of an Amsterdam almanac, which is being reused as a pepper cone [laughter]. And as you can see here, the detail on the almanac is fantastic, really precise. You've got the beautiful coat of arms that you can just make out and a nice red and black double printing. And we specifically know that this was a widespread use, because we have a reference from Pierre Bayle, the French philosopher. When he's insulting about a fellow scholar's publication. He says, oh, I tried to get this guy's book, but it's so bad that all the copies have already been sold to the spice sellers to be rolled up into little rolls. [laughter] So this was a common practice.

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I'll give you one example here, and that is the example of an extremely popular devotional work by a Lutheran minister called Johann Habermann, translated into Dutch. This was really for the Lutheran community in the Netherlands. Very popular book. These are three surviving examples, including this lovely -- in the center, this lovely heart-shaped book. Which is a real rarity to see it like that. Christian prayers. So we know of 11 surviving editions of Habermann's works printed in the Dutch Republic in this period. But we have found another 47 in catalogues and then another eight lost editions in newspaper advertisements. So from 11, we have gone to 66 different editions. And this is really how you can transform what you know of particular popularity of authors, and therefore also of relatively of their use within Dutch society.

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And we can do this for multiple different sorts of texts, but generally it concerns religious works. In my conclusion, I just want to return to the city of Leiden. And a few years ago, I came across a very interesting source in the archive of the city. Which -- and this reveals the instruction of the magistrates of Leiden to their town criers. These were the individuals who were charged with proclaiming the law and who could also be employed by citizens to make announcements. So you've lost your dog, your child's run away, you would go to the town criers of Leiden to go out on the streets and make this news known. And here again, we have a lovely bird's eye view of Leiden. And these are the 51 locations in red dots where the town criers had to make their announcements. So first of all, this is just interesting to see in terms of the cityscape, you know, where do they have to go. They're generally proclaiming on bridges, which particularly carry voices, of course, quite well. And it gives you some sense to what extent the magistrates of the city were also involved in engaging with their public, with their community in this particular period. But why this is also interesting is the fact that in all Dutch cities -- and this is a unique thing in this period compared to other countries -- these town criers would also have been carrying with them bundles of printed posters and printed fliers. Which they would post up at these locations in their wake, so that people could then, if they had missed the announcement, it would be posted up there for them to read. And Leiden was actually one of the first cities where the municipality was really determined to make sure that all their communications were printed. After the siege of Leiden, they actually set up a press in the city hall, the Raadhuis press, where they produced documents like this. The one that's on the left here is a receipt to a citizen who has contributed a fourth loan to the war fund to help fight the Spaniards. And on the right, you have a regulation of the guild of the butchers of Leiden. So these range really from the high political to really the mundane regulations of the city. But these are absolutely crucial documents, because they, in a way, are some of the prints that I think affect the daily lives of citizens to the greatest extent. Now, Rembrandt, too, had personal experiences with such humble notices. And here, you have the printed notice of his bankruptcy sale from 1656, which would have been plastered all over Amsterdam. And you have here also crucially -- to think about the interaction between print and oral communication -- on the bottom here, you have the Dutch phrase "zegget voort," pass on the word.

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If you start to look in Dutch paintings of the period, you also start to see, these posters were truly everywhere. Here's two examples, one from the Beurs in Amsterdam, the financial heart of the city. And if you look in the top -- see if I can get my pointer -- posters all over here, posters up on that wall there. And here we go to the toll house in Amsterdam. If you come out to the train station in Amsterdam, this would have been roughly in that location. And again, this is where



all incoming ships would pay their toll dues and they would share information. So this was a real hub where lots of printed posters would be found. So if we start to think of these cities as constantly being plastered by print. You start to see how ubiquitous this is and how important it is for all these printers also to stay in business. So finally, if anyone ever questions why some of these little books or ephemeral posters matter, then we only need to consider what I think in my opinion is the most influential book of the Dutch Golden Age. And this is a very little book. It's a small quarter pamphlet of roughly 40 pages, printed in The Hague. And interestingly enough, printed in English. Now, this is the declaration of Prince William III of Orange, in which he justifies his invasion of England. Now, this pamphlet was printed in advance of the invasion of 1688. And it was printed in total secrecy. It was, however, printed in a massive print room. He printed over 50,000 copies of this in English, to take with him with the Armada. So that once they arrived in England, they could distribute it around to justify this military invasion. And there's this wonderful exchange between the English ambassador in The Hague and King James II and VII of England and Scotland, where James says, you must get this declaration. We must know what it says so we can start a response before the invasions happen. And so the ambassador here says, you know, I'm really trying my best. I'm trying to get to this declaration. But the printer of the states -- because they're paid so well by the authorities -- are not to be corrupted. I can't bribe them. And I've even seen that some of his servants can be bribed, but they too will not endanger their lucrative places in this business. And he says, I will leave no stone unmoved. And then there's another letter a week later where he says, no, I'm sorry, I really couldn't get hold of the copy. [laughter] It gets even worse too, because when James finally has a copy, when William has already set sail, he reads it and he's so angry, he throws it in the fireplace. And then he he needs to get a second copy because he forgot what it says. So he has to borrow Princess Anne's copy. So it's total disaster. But really, you know, this little book that played a significant role in the formulation of the English Bill of Rights of 1689. It was direct passages were cited from this to say, this is what William said when he invaded, so this will be our constitution. And really with that bill, I think we see the true formation of modern Western political democracy. And that change I think was the achievement of a century-long of Dutch experiments and experience in the world of books and printing. And in that sense, it's a testament to the power of the press and the influence of the book on the culture of the 17th-century. Thank you.

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