

WINNER: 2014 ISCH ESSAY COMPETITION

Manifestations of the Flying Dutchman: On Materializing Ghosts and (Not) Remembering the Colonial Past

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The Flying Dutchman is one of those cultural icons like Dracula or Batman: many people will know of him, even if they have never read or seen any specific book or film in which he features. Current audiences, depending on their cultural tastes, may know the Flying Dutchman from one of the recent *Pirates of the Caribbean* films (2006–7), where he makes an appearance as Davy Jones, captain of the ghost ship that can sail under water; from the *SpongeBob SquarePants* cartoons; or from performances of Richard Wagner's opera *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843). Among the recent manifestations of the Flying Dutchman (*Vliegende Hollander* in Dutch) in the Netherlands are the attraction by that name which opened in 2007 in the country's largest theme park, the Efteling, and his various appearances in the south-western city of Terneuzen, which profiles itself as the 'city of the Flying Dutchman' because several adaptations mention Terneuzen as the infamous captain's birthplace.¹ The Flying Dutchman is a ghost ship, doomed to sail the oceans forever, so much seems certain. Sometimes the name refers to the ship, sometimes to its captain, identifying the man with his means of transport.

Nowadays the Flying Dutchman is firmly embedded in Dutch national cultural memory, as Charlotte Dematons's *Nederland* (2013) testifies, a bestselling picture book about all kinds of historical and cultural aspects of the Netherlands in which the Flying Dutchman features on the first page.² Moreover, the story of the Flying Dutchman

Cultural History 4.2 (2015): 187–205

DOI: 10.3366/cult.2015.0093

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www.eupublishing.com/journal/cult

has been anthologized in *Canon met de kleine c* (Canon with the small c).³ This canon with fifty stories and songs was published as an accompaniment to the official historical canon that has been taught in Dutch primary and secondary schools since 2008. The Flying Dutchman story accompanies the so-called historical window about the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or VOC). Stressing the importance of stories in constructing and transferring cultural memory, the authors collected the stories and songs for use in history lessons because stories ‘stick better’, as they state in their introduction.⁴

This function of stories for the construction and transference of cultural memory makes the Flying Dutchman interesting research material. What, if anything, connects these and other manifestations of the Flying Dutchman? How can we interpret this ghostly figure of the Dutchman? What does he signify? Why is he a ghost? How Dutch is he? These questions will be at the heart of this article. I am interested, first, in how appearances of the Flying Dutchman can be interpreted as shaping national stereotypes and notions of national identity. After all, the Flying Dutchman is Dutch, which raises the question of what ‘Dutch’ means in different contexts and periods. In its focus on cultural representations of national character, this analysis can be situated in the field of imagology, with the note that it exceeds the traditional imagological object of literature, as will become clear.⁵ In analysing the many different forms the Flying Dutchman takes, textually and materially, my approach is derived not only from literary studies but also from the history of material culture and from cultural studies.

With regard to the issue of national identity, I am interested especially in how the story of the Flying Dutchman mediates the cultural memory of the colonial past. As a ghost story about a sailing ship from colonial times, the Flying Dutchman stages and negotiates confrontations between past and present at the story level. The phantom ship called the Flying Dutchman is a spectre haunting the present, and we might ask ourselves which particular aspects of the past are haunting. Following María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, who stress the epistemological dimensions of the ghost, stating that ‘it has insight to offer’, I will conceive of the spectre as a conceptual metaphor that helps us to understand which aspects of the past have become spectral and why. At the same time, Peeren and del Pilar Blanco remind us of the ghost’s unruliness, because as a present absence ‘its own status as discourse or epistemology is never stable, as the ghost also invokes what is placed outside [knowledge], excluded from perception’.⁶

Not only does the Flying Dutchman stage a confrontation between past and present *within* the story, between the ghost and the other characters, but each of its many versions also revisits the past and offers a new representation of it, often in some way relating to the Dutch colonial past. As such, these repeated re-mediations can be considered a form of mnemohistory, as defined by Jan Assmann: ‘Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the storylines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past.’⁷

Thus, mnemohistory is ‘reception theory applied to history’, writes Assmann, with the understanding that ‘[t]he past is not simply “received” by the present. The present is “haunted” by the past and the past is modelled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present.’⁸ The fictive character of the story does not detract from its value as mnemohistory, for, as Assmann confirms, mnemohistory is more interested in the actual relevance of the past than in the past for its own sake. This idea of the actual relevance of the past could provide a way of understanding the popularity of the Flying Dutchman in specific periods, such as the early nineteenth century or the 1920s and 1930s.

To give an exhaustive overview of the history and dissemination of the Flying Dutchman would be beyond the scope of this article: the sheer amount of adaptations, re-mediations and translations, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, renders this impossible. After a discussion of the first manifestations of the ghost, I will therefore zoom in on instances which enable me to answer the question of how the Flying Dutchman helped shape the – mostly British and Dutch – cultural memory of the colonial era and how he became a Dutch national figure. I will pay special attention to the moments when the ghost materializes: when the Flying Dutchman seems to lose its spectral character and becomes a real object or person. For, ostensibly unrelated to the ghost story, the Flying Dutchman has for many decades been the slogan of KLM (the Royal Dutch Airlines) and is also an epithet that expresses admiration and national pride in sports achievements. Dutch gymnast Epke Zonderland, winner of the gold medal at the 2012 Olympic Games, and soccer player Robin van Persie are only the latest in a long line of sportsmen – among whom are tennis players, speed skaters and cyclists – who have been called the Flying Dutchman. This labelling of objects and people as Flying Dutchmen is not exclusively a Dutch phenomenon; in the English-speaking world many different things, ranging from trains to ploughs,

have received, and been advertised with, the label Flying Dutchman. I will explore these moments of materialization, in the Netherlands and abroad, after a survey of how the ghost came into 'being'.

First appearances

Allegedly derived from centuries-old nautical folklore, the first written references to the Flying Dutchman actually appear only around 1800. Scholars agree on the English provenance of the legend and the likeliness that it was fabricated around 1800, that is, much later than when the story is usually situated – namely in the seventeenth century.⁹ The attribution of a national identity to the captain and his ship only makes it more likely that the legend's origin lies outside the Netherlands: only in an international context do nationalities and national characteristics become significant.¹⁰ The travel story *A Voyage to Botany Bay* (1795), (falsely) attributed to the then-famous British convict George Barrington, mentions the apparition for the first time. The narrator recounts a story about a foundered Dutch ship haunting the Cape of Good Hope: 'the supposed phantom was called the Flying Dutchman'. He credits the story to frightened Dutch sailors who first witnessed the ship, and 'from the Dutch the English seamen got the infatuation', but, as the clear-headed narrator adds, this superstition should be attributed to a large intake of 'the Holland's', that is, Dutch gin.¹¹ Next there are poems, by the Scottish doctor and linguist Dr John Leyden (1775–1811); the Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779–1852), a friend of Lord Byron; and Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832).

In his *Scenes of Infancy* (1803) Leyden turns the Flying Dutchman into the first ship involved in the slave trade: 'Stout was the ship, from Benin's palmy shore / That first the weight of barter'd captives bore'. He adds the explanation that in this 'common superstition of mariners ... the crew of this vessel are supposed to have been guilty of some dreadful crime, in the infancy of navigation; and to have been stricken with pestilence'.¹² Moore transports the setting across the Atlantic in his 'Written on Passing Dead-man's Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Late in the Evening, September' (1804) and postulates that the Dutchman can sail with no wind: 'Her sails are full,–though the wind is still / And there blows not a breath her sails to fill!'¹³ Later versions tend to stress the opposite: the Flying Dutchman is so terrifying because it can even sail with full sails in a storm. Walter Scott, a good friend of Leyden's, refers to the legend in his narrative poem *Rokeby* (1812); in his version murder was committed on board the ship, and as in Leyden's poem the plague breaks out among the crew, which

explains not only the ship's doom but also the reason all ports are closed to it. In these poems the references to the Flying Dutchman are relatively brief. The Dutchman is a ship rather than a character and does not form the central subject of the poems. The supposed origin of the legend is elaborated on (Barrington) or explained in footnotes (Moore, Leyden, Scott), which testifies to the fact that the legend was not widely known as yet. The explanation for the Dutchman's doom is murder or the slave trade; his Dutchness is not commented on.

The first prose version appeared in 1821, in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, at the time a hugely popular satirical magazine to which authors like Shelley and Coleridge contributed. The 1821 story, called 'Vanderdecken's Message Home, or The Tenacity of Natural Affections', is the first extensive version, told from the perspective of British sailors.¹⁴ The British ship encounters the ghost ship in Table Bay, near the Cape of Good Hope. In the midst of a storm the strange ship sends down a little sloop, with the Dutch captain, called Vanderdecken, in it. He begs the British sailors to carry home some letters from him and his crew. The British men recognize the addressees to be long dead, and the addresses long gone, and so it becomes clear that the Dutch men are ghosts. Vanderdecken and his men stand crying on deck and depart the ship, leaving their letters on board. The British regard this as an ominous sign, but to their relief the letters are soon blown overboard and they can continue their journey safely.

The story spread like wildfire. The *Blackwood's* story introduced several elements – like the captain's name and the motif of the undeliverable letters – that would be recycled and adapted by many other authors. The story would be anthologized throughout the nineteenth century and appeared in German translation only two months after its first publication.¹⁵ Adaptations by Washington Irving ('The Storm Ship', 1822; 'Adventure of the Black Fisherman', 1824; both short stories), the German poet Heinrich Smidt ('Der ewige Segler', 1822, poem) and British writers Thomas Hood ('The Demon-Ship', 1826, poem) and Edward Fitzball (*The Flying Dutchman*, 1827, drama) added to the popularity and dissemination of the legend. The German poet Heinrich Heine, who probably saw Fitzball's successful melodrama in London, presents his own ironic retelling of the story in *Aus den Memoiren des Herren von Schnabelewopski* (1835).¹⁶ Heine in turn inspired Richard Wagner to write his opera *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843) – an inspiration that Wagner would later erase from his memoirs because of Heine's Jewishness.¹⁷

The first Dutch adaptation of the legend appeared in 1836 in a poem by J. J. A. Goeverneur ('Het vliegend schip'). Translations of Irving had reached the Netherlands already by 1827, however, as a reviewer of Goeverneur's work remarked in 1837 that it is through Irving that the story had become so famous.¹⁸ The publication of *The Phantom Ship* (1837–8) by Frederick ('Captain') Marryat, then a hugely popular writer of naval fiction, solidified the Flying Dutchman's fame all over Europe: translations into French, Dutch, German, Italian and Danish were published well into the nineteenth century.

A first explanation of the veritable boom of Flying Dutchman adaptations in the first decades of the nineteenth century, one which has been suggested before, reads the story within the context of fierce competition between Britain and the Netherlands in their colonial ambitions.¹⁹ After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, other European nations tried to gain access to the East Indies. The Dutch VOC, established in 1602, soon acquired a monopoly in the spice trade. The Dutch established trading settlements and fortifications in the East, often with use of military violence towards both natives and competitors such as the British.²⁰ What stuck in the British collective memory for a long time was the 1623 Ambon massacre, in which ten British men were killed. By 1795, however, after four Anglo–Dutch wars and with French occupation at home, the Dutch supremacy on the seas was over. During the fourth Anglo–Dutch war (1780–4) the VOC lost many trading posts, and in 1799 it went bankrupt owing to mismanagement and corruption.

The ghostly Dutchman then, as a version of British mnemohistory, marks a breach between a by-then-backward past and a modern present: the new hegemony of the British colonial fleet turns the Dutch ship into a spectre of the past. This function of the spectre as operating on the cusp of modernization can be found in many novels from the first wave of gothic literature (commonly situated between 1764 and 1820), the pre-eminent cultural mode for employing the supernatural.²¹ Like many gothic stories, the Flying Dutchman legend stages an encounter with the past, and it does so from a British perspective.

Another explanation for the popularity of the Flying Dutchman in the first half of the nineteenth century – and this reading has not been suggested before, as far as I know – comes from the perspective of technological history. The Flying Dutchman deals with the forces of historical globalization, in which, just as in the present, speed, mobility and technological advance are crucial. These factors could determine

the outcome of the rat race between Britain and the Netherlands for colonial expansion. In the seventeenth century the Dutch developed a type of cargo ship (the *fluyt*, or flute) that was faster than those used by their competitors; this turned out to be an important factor in their commercial success.²² By the 1820s, however, when the first prose versions of the story appeared, it had become conceivable that the Flying Dutchman as a symbol of speed – a sailing ship with full sails in a storm – could become a ghost of the past: dreams of a new technology were already coming true. The first models of ships powered by steam engines were being built as early as 1776, and in June 1819 the first hybrid of sailing ship and steamship crossed the Atlantic. Though the final blow for the sailing ship would come only in 1869 when the Suez Canal opened, nostalgia for the age of sailing is perceptible in several adaptations of the Flying Dutchman, for example in the aforementioned *The Phantom Ship* (1837–8) by Frederick Marryat. Marryat had served in the British navy during the Napoleonic Wars and had acquired first-hand experience in adapting a steam vessel for naval operations in Burma in 1823.²³ In this reading of the Flying Dutchman, gothic spectrality is constituted by the contrast between a traditional means of transport, the sailing ship, and its modern successor.

The story in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* stresses what gets lost in this globalization process of increasing expansion: the connection to home. The 'tenacity of natural affections', the story's subtitle, points to what is at stake. As the Dutch sailors phrase it, 'country nor relations cannot be so easily forgotten'.²⁴ But really what they fear is that, despite their legendary speed, their country and relations will have forgotten *them* before they return. The Flying Dutchman and his men are sad; they weep when they discover their letters cannot be delivered. Why would these tragic ghosts be frightening to the British sailors? My interpretation is that they fear the same could happen to them. The spectre, present and absent at once, reminds them of the potential instability of their own being. Their reign could end, and homelessness would be their worst fate.

In the *Blackwood's* story the colony does not seem to play an obvious role. In studies of the spectral in colonial and postcolonial literature, most often the spectral is interpreted as an expression of the unsettled histories of what has been repressed in the unequal power relations between colonizers and colonized or between the colonial and the postcolonial periods. There are many examples of such spectral relations in (post-)colonial literature: from the repressed truth of Bertha Mason's presence in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) to the

way the colonized haunt the imperial metropolis in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) and the fear of miscegenation in Louis Couperus's *The Hidden Force* (1900), to give just a few examples.²⁵

Other than in Leyden's poem, where the Dutchman is evoked as the first ship involved in the slave trade, an act marked as criminal for which the crew is punished, the *Blackwood's* Flying Dutchman seems to be different from such (post-)colonial ghosts in that the colony is literally absent, never to be reached, and thus, paradoxically, this spectral manifestation of European – in this case Dutch – presence outside Europe is denied one of the defining characteristics of colonialism, namely settlement. In Elleke Boehmer's widely accepted definition, colonialism is 'the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands, often by force'.²⁶ The Flying Dutchman's doom is that he will never be able to set foot on land: neither his homeland nor the colony. Stuck halfway, at the Stormkaap, Cape of Good Hope, neither here nor there, he is a liminal figure whose purpose for travelling is not mentioned, whose relations with the colony are not addressed. There is no mention of cargo or even destination in the *Blackwood's* version.

However, the association of the Flying Dutchman with the slave trade was to be taken up again by the British poet Thomas Hood, known for his humorous verse, in his long poem 'The Demon-Ship' (1826). It is clear that the story in *Blackwood's*, published five years previously, had by then become the standard version of the narrative, so that Hood can announce in the introduction of his poem that he will do things very differently: 'And as for the Flying Dutchman, my notion is very different from the popular conception of that apparition, as I have ventured to show by the opposite design.'²⁷

In 'The Demon-Ship', the narrator, whose ship almost sinks during a storm, is rescued by another ship. When he regains consciousness, the crew that has just rescued him looks most frightening to him:

Hags, goblins, demons, lemures, have made me all aghast, –
But nothing like that GRIMLY ONE who stood beside the mast!
His cheek was black – his brow was black – his eyes and hair as dark;
His hand was black, and where it touch'd, it left a sable mark;
His throat was black, his vest the same, and when I look'd beneath,
His breast was black – all, all, was black, except his grinning teeth.
His sooty crew were like in hue, as black as Afric slaves!
Oh, horror! e'en the ship was black that plough'd the inky waves!²⁸

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To this narrator, clearly, no greater horror is imaginable than to find himself on a ship full of black men, who are explicitly associated with 'Afric slaves'.²⁹ This horrifying blackness is contagious, or so it seems, for it extends to the ship and even to the 'inky' waves. In the end the poem provides comic relief when it turns out that the ship that rescued the narrator is actually a ship carrying coal:

Loud laugh'd that SABLE MARINER, and loudly in return
His sooty crew sent forth a laugh that rang from stem to stern –
...
With shriek and yell, and oaths as well, like Demons of the Pit.
They crow'd their fill, and then the Chief made answer for the whole; –
'Our skins,' said he, 'are black, ye see, because we carry coal'.³⁰

The captain reassures the narrator that he will see his homeland again: 'You'll find your mother sure enough, and see your native fields.'³¹ By implication, we may assume that the blackened crew will also see their 'native fields' again, unlike the horrifying 'Afric slaves' of the past. Playing into the same fear of homelessness as in *Blackwood's*, Hood's version of the Flying Dutchman turns matters around by shifting the fear of blackness from a phantom of the past – the slave trade had been abolished in 1807, while the poem was published in 1826 – to what we may call a phantom of the future. Coal, the fuel of the modern industrial age, quite literally replaces the imagery of slaves aboard a ship in this poem. Historically, this poem stages both the transition from the sailing age to the industrial one and that from the age of the slave trade to its abolition.³² It connects these two aspects of modernization in the image of demonic blackness. Though modern technology may seem as frightful as the atrocities of the past, ultimately its modernity is a source of comfort.

Hood's poem is the first in which the Flying Dutchman takes on futuristic elements. The spectral sailing ship transforms into a machine of the future that has arrived in the present. This substantiation from ghost into matter, established by reversing temporality, characterizes many later manifestations of the Dutchman. In Britain and its (former) colonies, as well as in the Netherlands, this transformation turns out to be a way of accrediting the Flying Dutchman with positive characteristics.

The Dutch Flying Dutchman

In the versions I have discussed so far, the Dutchman is an other: a criminal, pathetic, dangerously contagious, spectral or demonic figure

observed or encountered by British subjects. For Dutch authors, he would therefore not seem a particularly attractive figure to adapt, let alone to turn into a national hero. Yet this is what Dutch writers would try to achieve.

The subtitle of the first original Dutch version by the poet J. J. A. Goeverneur, 'A National Legend', already articulates this ambition to appropriate the legend. His poem 'Het vliegend schip' ('The Flying Ship', 1836) sets the moment the Flying Dutchman is doomed just before the ship reaches its home port, Texel, which was an important harbour during VOC times.³³ Here the Flying Dutchman is still a spectral other, whose crew is doomed as soon as the overconfident sailors, who believe nothing can harm them now, blasphemously cry out that not even God can prevent them from getting home. The lyrical 'I', an external narrator, blames the Dutch sailors for their blasphemy and firmly connects their sinful behaviour to their disregard of the fact that their 'rich cargo' has been acquired in 'Guinea', with blood on their hands. Goeverneur's Flying Dutchman evokes a strong sense of colonial guilt in the poignant image of the victims the Flying Dutchman has made: 'There a corpse rises; a hundred more lift themselves from the pit, and pile up, black as jet, a dam of corpses'.³⁴ The poem then relates a meeting of another Dutch ship with the ghostly Dutchman, centuries later, which serves as a moralistic moment for the Dutch sailors, who are ultimately saved by their unshaken faith. Though critical of these historical acts of Dutch colonialism, Goeverneur simultaneously relegates the colonial guilt to an indeterminate and possibly unhistorical past by labelling his poem a national *legend*.

The cantata *De Vliegende Hollander* (1874) by Dutch composer Richard Hol, with lyrics by the poet J. E. Banck, carries the same subtitle as Goeverneur's poem, 'Een Vaderlandsche legende', and is dedicated to Prince Hendrik of the Netherlands. These apparent signs of patriotism do not preclude the Flying Dutchman from figuring as a slave ship. In his preface Banck makes clear that with his lyrics he intended to paint the 'blood stain of slavery'. Though the Dutchman in Hol's cantata is still a ghostly other, he is also becoming a sort of hero, a figure to identify with as a national symbol. The Flying Dutchman 'saves' the enslaved when he is cursed: roaming the seas is to be preferred above a life in chains.

In later adaptations in the first half of the twentieth century by prominent writers like Hendrik Marsman, Martinus Nijhoff, Herman Heijermans, Jef Last, Simon Vestdijk and Maurits Mok, the Flying Dutchman would become the subject of the story, the main character and often the narrator. A detailed discussion of these literary



Fig. 1 KLM advertisement, 1920–1, ‘No legend but reality’. Design: A. M. Güthschmidt. Collection ReclameArsenaal RA/00674, www.reclamearsenaal.nl.

adaptations is beyond the scope of this article, but increasingly the Dutchman becomes a figure to identify with, portrayed, for example, as the founder of the Dutch Republic fighting the Spanish, as a communist hero or as resisting the German Nazis. Let me instead turn to a materialization of the Flying Dutchman outside the literary domain that undeniably contributed to bringing about this positive persona in the Netherlands.

With the arrival of another, even faster means of transport – aeroplanes – the Flying Dutchman really becomes a Dutch national symbol in which the association with advanced technology, speed and mobility is put firmly in place. Arjun Appadurai has pointed out how nations cohere imaginatively by using ‘a system of semiotic recognition and communication, composed of such simple items as flags, stamps, and airlines’.³⁵ From the 1920s to at least the 1960s, KLM used the Flying Dutchman in their advertisements and even painted the name on their aircraft. In one of the company’s first advertisements, the ghost ship’s transformation into a futuristic machine is made visible (Fig. 1). Now it is a Dutch pilot who represents modernity.

The caption ‘no legend but reality’ confirms the successful materialization of the spectre, equating matter to what is not only real but also true (as opposed to a legend). The Flying Dutchman ceases to be figuratively flying and takes on a positive meaning, thus becoming a source of national pride. The modernist author Martinus Nijhoff, inspired by this KLM poster, would write his version of the Flying Dutchman (a commission from Leiden’s Student Society, 1930). In his introduction to the play, Nijhoff describes how the encounter between the Dutchman and the pilot in this advertisement made him wonder about the lasting appeal of legends in these times of what he calls technical perfection. He observes that the legend is used to familiarize us with the mythical new technology and that ‘the pride of technology’ lies in its ability to materialize what was ‘floating around’ in oral tradition.³⁶ He takes this as a reproach to himself as a modern(ist) poet, who has failed to do what technology has already done: to materialize legends into modern poetic shapes. Nijhoff feels he should rescue the Flying Dutchman, which is ‘obscure[d] from legend to fairy tale, from fairy tale to ghost story, and then slowly darken[ed] into the mists of unconscious torments’.³⁷ For Nijhoff, Dutch national identity should be de-spectralized, and he sees it as his personal task to place himself in the service of ‘shaping a figure who wanders in our popular consciousness unborn’.³⁸

The Flying Dutchman as a national symbol connected to aviation would be a long-lasting one. During the Second World War, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) dropped anti-Nazi propaganda leaflets (in Dutch) called *De Vliegende Hollander*. That the official magazine of the Royal Dutch Air Force has been titled *De Vliegende Hollander* ever since 1945 underscores Appadurai’s argument about how simple symbols make up a national identity.

Linking aeroplanes to liberation from occupation (like the RAF leaflets) once again, the poster in Figure 2 incites *oorlogsrijwilligers* (war volunteers) to enlist for service against Japan in the Dutch East Indies. With the knowledge of hindsight – the Japanese capitulated in August 1945, after which the Dutch army would engage in a bloody colonial war (1945–9) with the aim of restoring Dutch sovereignty and repressing the Indonesian claim for independence – this poster takes on a particularly wry undertone. It is seldom shown so explicitly that the Flying Dutchman as a nationalist symbol is not just a vessel sailing between the motherland and its colonies (especially in the East) but is putting territories under national surveillance by force.

In remarkable contrast to the modern warfare in the previous image, only two years later another KLM poster shows a flying clog, a typical



Fig. 2 'The Flying Dutchman helps liberate the Dutch East Indies', 1945.
Design: Paul Brand. Collection War Posters 1933–1946, AG/00488, Royal Dutch
Library/NIOD.

Dutch symbol (Fig. 3). Here, the vehicle itself is neither technologically advanced nor a symbol of speed. The Flying Dutchman is advanced, so the spectator is encouraged to think, because it is a carrier of many nationalities, here depicted in stereotypical ways. Published at the time the United Nations had just been established, once more the Flying Dutchman becomes a symbol of modern values but now of a more peaceful and commercial kind.

Conclusion

In the Netherlands the Flying Dutchman would appear in advertisements for other objects associated with speed and mobility, such as children's carts, ice skates, bicycles and portable radios, well into the 1970s. By lending an aura of supernatural achievement and national pride to material objects, this commercial use of the Flying Dutchman undeniably contributed to his positive imago in the twentieth-century Dutch context. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the Dutch appropriated and de-spectralized the Flying Dutchman. The first 'materialized' Dutchman in English newspapers appeared as early as 1831, when a 'new coach to London in twelve hours' was advertised in the *Birmingham Gazette*.³⁹ Flying Dutchman racehorses, trains, ploughs and ink pens would follow.⁴⁰

It would be tempting to conclude that when the Flying Dutchman is used in a commercial rather than a cultural context, the colonial dimension is lost, in both the Dutch and the English instances. The inversion of temporality from ghost of the past to ghost of the future, as first and explicitly established in Thomas Hood's poem 'The Demon-Ship' but tacitly used in advertisements later on, would explain this 'loss of memory'. Of the two vying readings of the spectre put forward here, staging colonial history versus staging technological advancement, the second thus seems to be the more dominant throughout the history of continuous re-mediation and adaptation of the Flying Dutchman. When the ghost materializes, the focus seems to shift from the present's fraught relation to the past to its imagination of the future.

Still, the colonial dimension is seldom far away, as not only the 1945 poster for the recruitment of war volunteers aggressively makes clear but also the repeated use of pictures of sailing ships in other advertisements. These tend to leave out the references to the slave trade that were present in the nineteenth-century Dutch versions by Goeverneur and Banck, however, and rather stress a celebratory version of the colonial past, a past that was – and still is – called the Dutch Golden Age ('Gouden Eeuw', the age of the VOC).

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Fig. 3 KLM advertisement, 1947–8: ‘The Flying Dutchman’. Design: Paul Erkelens. Collection ReclameArsenaal, RA/00667, www.reclamearsenaal.nl.

Finally, there could be a mnemohistorical dimension to the dissemination of the Flying Dutchman itself as well. My first explorations of newspaper databases in the Netherlands and English-speaking countries suggest that the term *Flying Dutchman* is used especially in regions and periods characterized by contact between Dutch- and English-speaking groups, such as Iowa (where many Dutch colonists lived), South Africa and the East Indies. More research into these sources is needed to substantiate this claim, but it seems likely that the Flying Dutchman's dissemination itself can be regarded as a product of colonial expansion and intercultural relations.

Notes

1. The cultural historian Peter Rietbergen has pointed out the importance of the leisure industry in cultural remembrance. See 'De VOC herdenken?', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 115:4 (2002), pp. 504–24. In 2014–15 I carried out a research project in cooperation with the city of Terneuzen, funded by the Dutch Science Foundation NWO: 'The Flying Dutchman: From (Inter)National Symbol to Local Hero' which has resulted in a book for a general audience: *De Vliegende Hollander en Terneuzen: van internationaal symbool tot lokale legende* (Vlissingen, Netherlands: Den Boer|De Ruiter, 2015).
2. Charlotte Dematons, *Nederland* (Amsterdam: Lemniscaat, 2013; also in an English edition, *Holland*). This textless book was published together with *Duizend dingen over Nederland/ A Thousand Things about Holland*, which elaborates on the many references to historical events and sites, songs and famous (historical and fictional) characters in the drawings.
3. Theo Meder and Ruben Koman, *Canon met de kleine c* (Bedum, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Profiel, 2008).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
5. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (eds), *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); Joep Leerssen, 'Imagology: History and Method', in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology*, pp. 17–32.
6. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, 'Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities', in: idem (eds), *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 9.
7. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 9.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
9. Gerrit Kalff, *De Sage van den Vliegenden Hollander naar behandeling, oorsprong en zin onderzocht* (Zutphen, Netherlands: W. J. Thieme, 1923), p. 3; Theo Meder, 'In Search of the Dutch Lore of the Land: Old and New Legends throughout the Netherlands', *Folklore*, 122:2 (2011), pp. 117–34 (122–3). A search in Early English Books Online and Eighteenth Century Collections Online confirms that there is no earlier reference.
10. The name that is often given to the captain – Vanderdecken – already indicates that we have an English fabrication here, as there is no such Dutch name, nor has there ever been a VOC captain with that name. See the database of

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- VOC travels: 'The Dutch East India Company's Shipping between the Netherlands and Asia 1595–1795', <http://www.historici.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/DAS/search> (accessed 5 May 2015). See also the database of Dutch family names: 'Nederlandse Familienamenbank', <http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/nfb/> (accessed 5 May 2015). Vanderdecken actually sounds remarkably similar to Voltaire's Dutch slave owner Vanderdendur, portrayed in *Candide* (1757): that is how Dutch sounds to foreign ears, apparently.
11. George Barrington, *A voyage to New South Wales; with a description of the country; the manners, customs, religion, &c. of the natives, in the vicinity of Botany Bay*. By George Barrington, now Superintendent of the convicts at Paramatta. (London, 1795), p. 45–47. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of Utrecht (accessed 5 June 2015).
 12. John Leyden, *Scenes of Infancy: Descriptive of Teviotdale* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1803), pp. 91, 175–6, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008967439> (accessed 5 May 2015). Though not known as an abolitionist himself, Leyden was probably familiar with the work of the Scottish doctor Thomas Winterbottom, who was one of the first to write about the medical practices of Africans and about the terrible conditions on slave ships. Leyden had published an account of European travels in northern and western Africa in 1799, in which he mentions Thomas Winterbottom's brother Matthew; see Tamsin Lilley, 'Remembering Slavery: South Shields' Links to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade', June 2008, p. 3, http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/slavery/_files/research-zone/South_Shields_and_the_Slave_Trade.pdf (accessed 5 May 2015).
 13. Thomas Moore, *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems* (London: Carpenter, 1806), pp. 321–2, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001423327> (accessed 5 May 2015).
 14. 'Vanderdecken's Message Home, or The Tenacity of Natural Affections', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 9:50 (1821), pp. 127–31.
 15. 'Vanderdeckens Botschaft in die Heimath, oder die Gewalt der Verwandtenliebe', *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, 11 July 1821, pp. 658–9, 666–7. The story from *Blackwood's* was anthologized for the first time that same year in *The Atheneum, or The Spirit of the English Magazines*, 9:10 (1821), pp. 376–81.
 16. For an account of Heine's encounter with the legend, see James Q. Davies, 'Melodramatic Possessions: *The Flying Dutchman*, South Africa, and the Imperial Stage, ca. 1830', *Opera Quarterly*, 21:3 (2005), pp. 496–514 (pp. 496–7 and n. 1). Though Heine himself writes that he saw the play in Amsterdam, Davies convincingly shows that it must have been in London.
 17. See Stephen McClatchie, 'The Flying Dutchman, the Wandering Jew, and Wagner's Anti-Semitism', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 81:4 (2012), pp. 877–92.
 18. Anon., 'Gedichten en rijmen, van J. J. A. Goeverneur', *De Gids*, 1 (1837), pp. 455–9.
 19. Meder, 'In Search of the Dutch Lore'; Kalff, *De Sage van den Vliegende Hollander*.
 20. See Els M. Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië: De handel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18de eeuw* (Zutphen, Netherlands: Walburg, 2000). According to Jacobs, this first period of the VOC fighting its way into existing trading networks was followed by a period of more regular trading.
 21. For a sustained elaboration of this view of the gothic mode in Victorian literature, see Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

22. André Wegener Sleeswyk, *De Gouden Eeuw van het fluitschip* (Franeker, Netherlands: Van Wijnen, 2003).
23. W. A. B. Douglas, 'Marryat, Frederick', in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/marryat_frederick_7E.html (accessed 5 May 2015).
24. 'Vanderdecken's Message Home', p. 129.
25. For interpretations of these three novels, see respectively Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985), pp. 243–61; Julian Wolfreys, 'Introduction', in Richard Marsh, *The Beetle*, Julian Wolfreys (ed.) (Toronto: Broadview, 2004), pp. 9–34; and Pamela Pattynama, 'Secrets and Danger: Interracial Sexuality in Louis Couperus's *The Hidden Force* and Dutch Colonial Culture around 1900', in Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (eds), *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 84–107. A title such as Ann Laura Stoler (ed.), *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) also hints at this spectral relationship between colonizers and colonized.
26. Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.
27. Thomas Hood, 'The Demon-Ship' in *Whims and Oddities, in Prose and Verse: Second Series* (1827; London: Moxon, 1871), pp. 213–17 (214).
28. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
29. According to Davies, in South African performances of the melodrama *The Flying Dutchman*, the Dutchman was also blackened, to show his inferiority to the English. Davies suggests this ethnicizing of the Dutchman is another sign of how much the British despised the Dutch in the early nineteenth century. Davies, 'Melodramatic Possessions', p. 507.
30. Hood, 'The Demon-Ship', p. 217.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
32. The abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire would not arrive until 1833.
33. Johan Jacob Antonie Goeverneur, 'Het vliegend schip', in *Gedichten en rijmen* (Groningen: Van Boekeren, 1836), pp. 94–106.
34. 'Dáár rijst een lijk omhoog; nog honderd and'ren beuren / Zich uit den afgrond op en staplen, zwart als git, / Een' dam van lijken op'; *ibid.*, pp. 95–6. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
35. Appadurai, cited in John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 83.
36. Martinus Nijhoff, *De Vliegende Hollander: Een Waterfeestspel* (Leiden: Van Doesburgh, 1930), p. v.
37. 'Vertroebelen van legende tot sprookje, van sprookje tot spookvertelling, en verduisteren dan langzamerhand in nevels van onderbewuste kwellingen'; *ibid.*, p. v.
38. 'In dienst te stellen voor de vormgeving van een gedaante, welke in ons volksbewustzijn ongeboren rondwaart'; *ibid.*, p. vi.
39. *Birmingham Gazette*, 18 April 1831, p. 1. See <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000196/18310418/023/0001>, (accessed 5 May 2015).
40. A possible crossover from spectral ship to actual speed demon could have happened as early as 1827, on occasions where horse races commenced

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with performances of the *Flying Dutchman* melodrama. See this advertisement: 'THIS EVENING, Horse Racing for the Clarence Cup, and other Prizes. The performance will commence with THE FLYING DUTCHMAN AT ISLINGTON; or The Phantom Ship. After which, a new comic ballet dance, called IRISH LILTS. To conclude with the popular melodramatic romantic legend, called SIXES'. *The Times*, 26 June 1827, p. 2, available from *The Times* Digital Archive (accessed 5 May 2015).

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