

Vermeer's hat review essay

[Economics](#), [Globalization](#)



In *Vermeer's Hat: The seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, Timothy Brook uses Vermeer's paintings to show the effects of trade on the world and the overall globalization occurring. Brook argues that this globalization had begun in the seventeenth century. He takes a look at Vermeer's paintings, and uses them as windows into seventeenth century history to discuss further topics of interest. Through every painting, it leads to a door that causes a discussion point of the history of the world. Brook starts the story setting out in the city of Delft in the Netherlands.

This author does not simply restate history facts we all know, he goes much deeper than that, getting to the heart of each painting and the history shown throughout each one, proving his arguments to be true. Through every painting, it led to a door that caused a discussion point of the history of the world. In Brook's third chapter, he goes on to discuss the painting *Young Woman Reading a Letter at an Open Window*. The title itself is very self-explanatory. The painting has a young woman who is looking toward a window while reading a letter.

Also in this painting is a table draped with a tablecloth and a spilt bowl of fruit lying on top of it. The bowl of fruit is what Brook uses as a window into the seventeenth century, specifically the Chinese porcelain, and how it began to become a part of Dutch life. Brook argues that the VOC (Dutch East India Company) had begun their interest and trade for porcelain shortly after 1600. He backs up his argument stating that among the most successful potters were those from Delft, who were descendants from the sixteenth century. Brook says,

" They brought their knowledge of ceramics production with them and were able to set up kilns in Delft's renowned breweries, many of which had been forced to close down as working-class taste shifted from beer to gin. In these newly converted potteries, they began to experiment with imitations of the new ceramic aesthetic coming from China, and buyers liked what they produced". (78) This shows you that this new change of potteries, and porcelain originated in the seventeenth century, and Brook has a good understanding of the globalization that is occurring.

Through the make and trade of porcelain, Dutch people were becoming more global, and opening their trade to other countries such as China, Europe, and Spain. It also proves that his arguments are completely valid. He has his facts straight and does not only tell you, but shows you through the paintings the history involved to back him up. In chapter five, School for Smoking, it does not directly deal with one of Vermeer's paintings, however,; it takes a look at the Delft manufactured Chinese plate, which leads to a discussion about tobacco.

He Brook states that tobacco started in Europe due to Portuguese sailors, and from there it spread, and soon became was in high demand. Through this sudden outburst of a need for tobacco, it made way for a growth in the global community, eventually being a contribution to the opium phenomenon. Brook states, " From this new labor arrangement, a new system of trade emerged. Tobacco (along with sugar) was a crop that could be used to make the Americas profitable, while Africa supplied the labor to make plantation production in the Americas feasible and South American silver paid for goods shipped from Europe and the Americas to Asia.

Together the three prime commodities of the age—silver, tobacco, and slaves to mine the first and harvest the second—set the foundations on which the long-term colonization of the Americas rested. ” (132) Brook connects tobacco to the reason more plantations were built, and why slaves were needed more than before and how it helped the colonization of the American world. He states that tobacco started in Europe due to Portuguese sailors, and from there it spread and soon became was in high demand.

Chinese people thought that tobacco had medicinal purposes, while Native Americans thought that tobacco connected you to a supernatural world. If we skip back a little, in the first chapter of *Vermeer's Hat: The seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, Brook discusses Vermeer's first painting, *View of Delft*. This painting is one of the only outdoor scenes Vermeer had painted that is still in existence. The first window Brook opens for his readers in this painting is a view of the city of Delft.

This painting shows the river harbor in Delft. Brook first uses the herring buses in this painting to open a window into the seventeenth century. Herring buses Timothy Brook states herring buses in *Vermeer's Hat*, are, "three-masted vessels built to fish for herring in the North Sea" (12). The herring buses give Timothy Brook a window to talk about the climate change and sickness in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In these two centuries, the temperatures were falling all over the world, creating increased sickness and shorter crop seasons.

In *Vermeer's Hat*, Brook says that the two herring boats in the painting are evidence of climate change. Brook also uses Vermeer to talk about the exchanges in the seventeenth century. He states that one of the benefits of

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the climate changing was the southward movement of fish stocks in the North Sea. This gave the fisherman more success. Another window Brook uses to open up the seventeenth century are the roofs of the buildings in this painting. In particular, he uses a warehouse, known as the Dutch East India Company, or as they call it the VOC.

The VOC was as Brook states in Vermeer's Hat, "The world's first large joint stock company, the VOC was formed in 1602 when the Dutch Republic obliged the many trading companies popping up to take advantage of the Asian trade boom to merge into a single commercial organization" (15). This company gave huge advantages for the Dutch for maritime trade in Asia. It became one of the most powerful companies for business enterprises in the seventeenth century. Brook talks about how the VOC even affected a painter such as Vermeer's life.

The VOC for many Dutch meant a better life. Due to this maritime trade, advances in technology were made. A couple discoveries were the magnetic compass, which allowed sailors to lose sight of the land and still know approximately where they were, paper, which that helped merchants to keep track of records, and gunpowder, which helped them make military advances. All of these windows Brook opens show the interchanging ideas, products, and climate. Brook I think Brook did well backing up his arguments about globalization.

He uses evidence, and facts, and history, to prove everything. It is all quite logical as well, explaining how things have begun to change into a more modern world with exchanges of ideas and such. Brook shows us that all of these globalizations we think of such as fast communications, and high tech

objects all started from the beginning globalization of the seventeenth century. And none of this occurred due to big companies and millions of people, it started by a few men who opened up routes and communications for us.

As a college undergraduate student myself, depending upon your area of interest, I would recommend this book to others. I have never been interested in history, but it is quite interesting the way Brook uses random objects and buildings in Vermeer's paintings to show the globalization occurring. So I would say if you love history or art definitely read this book. Even if you do not love either one of those, read it. You will definitely appreciate it, and have a much better understanding of seventeenth century history after reading it.

This book is an easy read, with not a lot of hard vocabulary to have to understand as well. Reading this book makes you realize where all the trade and new ideas came from. Holly, You make some good points. I made some suggestions and corrections. Your paper should have no extra spacing between each paragraph (it should be 0pt between each one). Also, you jump around a little in the body section. You may want to just move your discussion of the earlier chapters to the beginning of the body section, so that the body then flows from the earlier to the later chapters. Good job though. - Ms. Perry