

Caspar Barlaeus. *The Wise Merchant*. Ed. with intro. by Anna-Luna Post. Tr. with notes by Corinna Vermeulen. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019. 134 pp. + 7 illus. €29.99/\$37.50. Review by MICHAEL J. REDMOND, UNIVERSITY OF PALERMO.

As an oration presented at the inauguration of the Athenaeum Illustre, a precursor of the University of Amsterdam, the *Mercator sapiens, sive oratio de conjungendis mercaturae et philosophiae studiis* is notable in the context of Renaissance humanist writing for its unique effort to link the tangible profits of commerce with the more abstruse benefits of classical study. For Caspar Barlaeus, keen to gain the support of the city's financial elite for the new educational institution, the wise merchant needs to recognize "the importance of literature and the humanities in conducting trade" (111). The appeal of such rhetoric to the local audience, as Anna-Luna Post sets out in her incisive critical introduction, ensured that the oration was rushed into print soon after it was presented in January 1632, and it continued to circulate extensively throughout the seventeenth century in both Latin editions and Dutch translations. The concern with the cultural formation of traders makes the oration an outlier even in the exceptionally varied literary and academic career of Barlaeus, a Dutch polymath who had constantly reinvented himself as a minister, professor of philosophy, doctor, poet, and private tutor. There is no doubt, as Post shows, that Barlaeus had significant motivations for seeking the favor of Amsterdam's merchants. The successful launch of the Athenaeum Illustre allowed Barlaeus to return to a prestigious academic position after being excluded from his professorship during the Counter-Reonstrant repression thirteen years earlier. The astute rhetoric of Barlaeus has retained its allure in recent historical studies of the Dutch Golden Age, where fleeting references to the now archetypal figure of the wise merchant serve to epitomize all the economic and cultural aspirations of the period.

It is easy to read the representation of classical humanism in the *Mercator sapiens* in transactional terms. After establishing the need for a more accessible critical edition, Post's introduction surveys the

life and career of Barlaeus, the origins of the Athenaeum Illustre, and concludes with a substantial discussion of the oration. The problematic legal status of the Athenaeum Illustre, set up in de facto competition to the exclusive privileges of the University of Leiden, underlines that there was a very real need for Barlaeus to present a convincing business case for a school that was precluded from offering academic degrees. Alongside the complaints coming from Leiden, seeking to frustrate the challenge to its monopoly on Dutch higher education, there were significant doubts about the viability of Amsterdam's "lesson market" (38). For Barlaeus and Gerard Vossius, the other professor hired to launch the school, the risks of moving to a fledgling institution in a city without an academic tradition were compensated by the well-paid opportunity they had been offered to escape previous career obstacles arising from their Remonstrant sympathies. After being fired from his position as Professor of Logic at Leiden, Barlaeus had attempted to retrain as a medical doctor before going on to make a living as a private tutor and panegyric poet. Consequently, taking into account the market conditions in Amsterdam, both Barlaeus and Vossius took great care to promote the practical utility of learning, choose attractive lecture topics, and schedule the activities of the Athenaeum Illustre at convenient times for the city's merchants. Much of Barlaeus' inaugural oration focuses on the specific economic benefits of individual fields of study, illustrated by frequent allusions to the works of Aristotle and other familiar figures. The focus here is on how "the human faculty for trade and that for philosophy work together in the best of ways," rather than any innate value of scholarship (77). Appealing to the self-interest of the merchant class, Barlaeus represents classical humanism as a lucrative source of inside information on the guiding principles of human relationships and the natural world. The foregone conclusion of his catalogue of ancient knowledge, consistent with his pledge that the classically educated trader "is able to handle himself better in any business," is that "the wealthiest cities cannot do without schools, teachers, libraries and the instruments of wisdom" (113).

Yet what stands out in this new edition of the *Mercator sapiens*, presenting an English translation for the first time in parallel with the Latin text, is the extent to which Barlaeus openly concedes that his panegyric of the profit motive is only "an enticing bait" for his busi-

ness minded audience (77). For although making such an evocative text available to a wider scholarly readership is important in and of itself, given the oration's potential value for studies of early modern mercantile culture, Post's introduction also provides a necessary correction to more superficial citations of the figure of the wise merchant in recent historical research. By neglecting the rhetorical complexity of the oration's apparent commercialization of knowledge, Post argues, "Like Barlaeus' audience, historians have been frequently reeled in by this bait" (16). Instead, even as he self-consciously exploits the mindset of "a city devoted to financial gain," Barlaeus redefines the profit of scholarship in terms of the overriding importance of pure wisdom (77). Significantly, as part of its bait and switch strategy, the oration concludes by enjoining the young students of the school to "not think it splendid to have the shine of silver or gold around you, but to shine with the light of learning" (123).

This critical edition succeeds in providing us with a fuller understanding of the *Mercator sapiens*. Along with the substantial introduction, extending more than fifty pages, there is a brief account by Corinna Vermeulen of the principles guiding the presentation of the Latin text and the style of the English translation. The prefatory material is supplemented with attractive period illustrations depicting the life of Barlaeus, the publication of the oration, and the founding of the Athenaeum Illustre. A short bibliography and index conclude the volume. The editorial contributions also include useful footnotes, keyed to the lines of the facing English text, that make manifest the dense network of classical allusions deployed by Barlaeus. While some scholars may lament the absence of any discussion of potential alternative renderings of specific Latin terms and phrases in these notes, the English translation is a viable starting point for future studies of the oration. In the case of the facing Latin text, Vermeulen has opted to modernize the punctuation of the original 1632 edition and introduce new paragraph separations to highlight its overall rhetorical structure. It is clear that great efforts have been made here to produce an accessible edition for today's readers, even though some of the English phrasing can leave an awkward impression on occasion.

All in all, this is a welcome volume that may encourage greater interest in the *Mercator sapiens* from a wider range of early modern-

ists, given the influence of Dutch merchants in many diverse European historical spheres. In this light, it is especially laudable that the publisher of the volume has made the text freely available in pdf form from the University of Amsterdam Press website via a Creative Commons license.

Erik R. Seeman. *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. ix + 329 pp. + 25 illus. \$39.95. Review by WILLIAM J. SCHEICK, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

Death is perfectly natural; life after death is perfectly unnatural. The former is utterly observable, whereas the latter remains remotely imperceptible. Neither fact, however, has prevented deep human sentiment from enthusiastically affirming the reality of an afterlife as well as imagining that state as a perfected version of corporeal existence. Over time, various religious beliefs (both official and unofficial) have morphed in one way or another to accommodate the mind's ego-driven longing to live forever.

It is easy enough to take on faith what is already profoundly desired. Even so, who among believers in an afterlife would not welcome some inkling of verification, especially coming from deceased loved ones bearing good news? This question pervades Erik R. Seeman's readable, thoughtful, and evenhanded *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*. Seeman finds that early American reports of ghostly apparitions during the first half of the seventeenth century reveal a widespread belief in a permeable boundary between this world and the next.

Sometimes, in fact, seventeenth-century friends or relatives made pacts, with each person promising a postmortem contact with the remaining, living member. Various personal narratives recorded the fulfillment of such promises—comforting, not scary accounts. Of course, Protestant clergy expressed skepticism. Wary of Roman Catholic taint in reports of ghostly apparitions, they insisted that no tormented souls ever wandered from purgatory, which did not exist. Church leaders fretted over whether apparitional encounters were merely imagined by the bereaved or, perhaps, were dangerous delu-