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In the Woold: Saskia Hamilton's Dutch Roots

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ABSTRACT Saskia Hamilton (1967–2023) was perhaps mostly known for her masterly edited letters of Robert Lowell, but she was first and foremost a poet in her own right. This essay traces how Hamilton both hid and revealed autobiographical details in her first three volumes, based on memories from the summers of her youth spent on a farm, the Woold, in the east of the Netherlands together with her Dutch grandparents, aunts, uncle, and cousins, it traces how the Dutch stories of her childhood also poignantly merge with the realization of her untimely death in her forthcoming *All Souls*.

KEYWORDS Saskia Hamilton, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, American Poetry, Transnationalism

I met Saskia Hamilton at a Robert Lowell conference in Fribourg, Switzerland in March 2017, and was immediately impressed by her warm personality and wisdom. Later that year we met again in Amsterdam where we talked over coffee; about poetry, history, and how our families had been affected by World War Two. I vividly remember that when we parted ways that day that this must be the beginning of a deep, long-lasting friendship between us. We corresponded off and on afterwards, and she gave me valuable advice about an essay I wrote about Lowell in Amsterdam. Yet that meeting was the last time I saw Saskia. When I was asked to write a piece about her following her death, I consented immediately, although I realized that there are people who have known Saskia much longer and better than I had. While writing this essay, I had the pleasure of meeting and talking to some of Saskia's beloved Dutch family members, including Saskia's mother, Elise Wiarda, her aunt Claar Hugenoltz-Wiarda, her uncle

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Just Wiarda, her cousin Arent van Wassenaer, and a family friend, Michiel ter Horst. I am grateful for their kindness and willingness to share stories about, and to Louise van Wassenaer-Wiarda for providing the photograph of Gerard Wiarda and Amice (Fig 2). It felt awkward calling Saskia anything but by her first name.

*

What Nova Scotia was to Elizabeth Bishop, the Woold was to Saskia Hamilton. In 1961, her grandparents, Gerard Wiarda and Sandra Moltzer, bought a small farm in that hamlet of Winterswijk, in the eastern part of the Netherlands (see Wiarda, Just 70). Saskia was born six years later in Washington D.C. where she also grew up, but—along with her older brother John—she spent nearly all of her childhood’s summers at that farm, or in the woodlands around it. Visiting the Woold must have been as much of a culture shock for Saskia as it had been for Bishop traveling back and forth from Worcester, Massachusetts to the Canadian maritime province. Born and raised in Washington DC, she was a city person all her life, and she adored New York City, her hometown. Yet from all accounts, being in the Woold was also a homecoming of sorts, which Saskia cherished for the rest of her life, and which informed her poetry as well as her literary scholarship. Her grandmother was a poetry lover who declaimed poetry in Dutch and English to young Saskia. Her grandfather was a Dutch Supreme Court judge who was appointed to the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg a year before Saskia’s birth. (see Wiarda, Just 72). He too had a passion for literature, and a knack for finding exactly the right words in his much-esteemed verdicts. His law and literary friends comingled with Saskia and the rest of the Wiarda family at the Woold.

Saskia’s volume *Corridor* (2014) is bookended by two poems both called “Night-Jar” which take us straight to the woodlands outside of the Woold. The poems look identical because of the same arresting opening phrase—“Hawking for moths”—and similar endings where the night-jar has suddenly disappeared. Yet they are not the same. The first one centers on the night-jar making itself known at dusk, while the second one is set at dawn. Saskia opens her volume with the closing of the day, in other words, and ends the volume with the beginning of day. This is telling for Saskia’s poetry in general, which often revolves around transience and

endurance. Like Bishop's "The Armadillo" and Lowell's companion piece "Skunk Hour," Saskia's poems about the crepuscular creature are universalized, but they also evoke a meaningful locale that reveals something about their author. Significantly, the night-jar is—like Saskia—a summer visitor in the Netherlands from another continent. With its greyish and chestnut-colored plumage, it can hardly be detected on the ground. Saskia dedicated the first of the "Night-Jar" poems to Charles Donker, a Dutch artist and acquaintance of the Wiarda family who made at least four etchings depicting the unobtrusive bird, two of which Saskia owned. In one of these, which hung in the guestroom of her New York apartment, the bird indeed blends into the background, as Saskia suggests in her poem (Fig. 1).



FIG. 1 Charles Donker, *Nachtzwaluw (Geitenmelker)* (ca. 1988), RP-P-2018-578, T. Cornips Bequest, Haarlem. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. © Charles Donker.

Despite its inconspicuousness, the nightjar will announce itself—through its song and in flight—time and again. It is magnificently present “against the dark / easterly light of the trees,” Saskia writes in the second “Night-Jar” poem (*Corridor* 62). In consciously formal, antiquated diction, Saskia suggests in the first that like “the worn stone markers of old bishopric,” the night-jars are:

[. .] ceded
 to sentries of the forest: thence their fall,
 one by one: thence centuries under-
 foot of branch and brush and peat. Near us,
 but where, it's gone: past the rides. (*Corridor* 62)

The verb “fall” can denote the birds’ deaths. Like camouflaged soldiers, they have guarded the forest with their lives until they die in the line of duty. Yet it may also depict how the night-jar dramatically falls from the sky at dusk and dawn hunting for those moths. The night-jar made Saskia see how she—like all of us—is part of something larger, something ancient that has continued to this day and will go on, even when we are gone. The night-jar is both an absence and a presence, like Saskia herself has become, and perhaps always was: visiting the Woold every summer and then leaving again, and coming back, until it stopped altogether.

Saskia also transformed the journey to the Woold into poetry. It includes “Conspecifics” in *Divide These* (2005) and “Inroads” and “Flatlands” from *Corridor* (2014). It is remarkable that in “Conspecifics,” Saskia provides some literal details about the trip by mentioning the place names “Amsterdam” and “Arnhem,” but that such particulars are absent in the two later poems. It suggests a complex process of revealing and concealing explicit autobiographical details that preoccupied Saskia throughout her life. Like “Night-Jar,” “Flatlands” has a poem of the same name. This is also a typical feature of Saskia’s poetry, as in *Divide These* she reuses the titles of poems even more frequently. The second “Flatlands,” whose title is a synonym of her mother’s country’s name, the Netherlands, follows “Inroads” in *Corridor*. The two poems talk to each other, and they also face each other; on the *bladspiegel*, the ‘page mirror’ as we would say in Dutch.

The poems are instances of the same perennial journey eastward, which Saskia took at least once a year. This second “Flatlands” echoes Bishop’s canonical poem “The Moose” albeit in an inverted way (see Bishop, *Complete Poems* 169–173). Whereas Bishop’s speaker travels from

provincial Nova Scotia to the city of Boston, Saskia leaves behind the urban waste of Washington DC, New York City, or Schiphol Airport for “the always classical landscape” of the Woold (*Corridor* 15). Saskia’s aunt, Claar Hugenoltz-Wiarda, has told me that she used to pick up Saskia and her brother from the Amsterdam airport to take the 100-mile drive east together, to the farm in “the wood with its innumerable pathways” (Hamilton, *Corridor* 15). Later, Saskia also undertook the same journey to Winterswijk by train, as is evident from both “Flatlands” and “Inroads.”

Like Bishop in “The Moose,” Saskia delights in observing the quaint behavior and speech patterns of the travelers, and other particulars that strike her at the train station and during the journey. Instead of a moose dramatically stopping the bus, as in Bishop’s poem, Saskia follows pigeons that are traversing “platform 7 for the 8:28” (*Corridor* 14). The speakers of “The Moose” and “Inroads” are equally punctilious about schedules and timetables. As Saskia gets closer to the Woold, though, she loses all track of time. Her mind in “Flatlands” is initially whirling like “the mixer / turning cement” which she observes from the window of the train, presumably because of jetlag, fatigue, or the general busyness of city life. Eventually though, nature take over, quite literally in “Inroads,” where “plants encroach on the tracks,” “moss encroached on trees,” and “ivy and holly joined in dominion.” Yet, nature also takes over metaphorical possession of the passengers’ psyches in “Flatlands.” The train travelers appear anxiously aware of “danger” at the beginning of the journey, another parallel to Bishop’s well-known poem. Yet, by the end of the poem “everyone’s asleep,” as in “The Moose.” Even the proximity of the Woold had a way of calming Saskia.

This influence is perhaps most apparent in “*Zwijgen*,” a short—almost aphoristic—poem that revolves around the meaning of a single Dutch word. The poem describes how the speaker falls asleep before “a wall of books” which quiets everything down in the room, even the speaker herself. When she wakes up in the middle of the night, they will her not to speak, and to remain silent. Saskia translates the Dutch verb “*zwijgen*” in her poem as “*still*,” which she has italicized. Yet on the Poetry Society of America webpage, she admitted that the word is essentially untranslatable in English:

The primary meanings of the verbs ‘to silence’ and its softer cognates ‘to quiet’ and ‘to hush’ don’t capture it either. To quiet or quieten

is to soothe or calm. To silence is to compel someone (or some animal) to silence, to suppress noise or speech, to overcome in argument; its other uses are rare. The width of common meanings of *zwijgen* is broader—to pass over in silence, to be still or quiet, to keep one’s counsel—and encompasses many kinds of silence, silences that are internal, that are closed or open, that conceal or that simply keep the peace. ‘Reserve’ or ‘reticence’ gives a better idea of some of it sense—circumspection or discretion, for instance, or disinclination to speak, or avoidance of saying too much. (“In Their Own Words” np)

“In the attics and rafters of its intimacies,” the English language “has no accommodation for” this Dutch expression “for falling silent,” Saskia concludes with a gorgeous, complex trope (*Corridor* 46). She presents a language as being like a house, presumably with many rooms. The more common words and sayings reside in the living room, bedroom, or kitchen, but the uncommon ones hide away in the attic. Saskia’s cousin Arent van Wassenauer has mentioned that it is unlikely that “*Zwijgen*” is set in the farmhouse of the Woold. Although books could be found in all rooms of that house, there was only one room with a “wall of books,” which was her grandparents’ bedroom. It is more likely that Saskia conjures up her maternal grandparents’ home in The Hague in “*Zwijgen*” where she also often stayed over during her childhood.

The use of foreign words in a poem or other written text or speech is called ‘code-switching.’ The topic is undertheorized in the context of poetry, although Jahan Ramazani has written a fascinating chapter in which he surveys the field, shows how widespread the phenomenon is, and suggests a preliminary typology for codeswitching in poetry. “*Zwijgen*” is an unusual example of code-switching in English-language poetry, as it only occurs in the title and the poem proper is a *leçon par l’exemple* of what the foreign word means. Ramazani distinguishes two kinds of poetic codeswitching. Whereas “code-stitching” connects two different linguistic codes within one poem, “code-skipping,” shows the “contrastive” qualities that languages may have (201). “*Zwijgen*” is more an example of code-skipping, as it emphasizes a “split” and “contrast” between English and Dutch (Ramazani 202). The final lines almost read as a rebuke that English vocabulary does not have a word as elegant and polysemous as “*zwijgen*”. Ramazani suggests that codeswitching occurs so frequently in

twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry because of “intensified globalization of the past century or so, with multitudes on the move, whether as elective or forced migrants” (193). Being half-American and half-Dutch, Saskia’s linguistic reality was even more complicated than that which Ramazani suggests.

Saskia has explained that she was not raised bilingually, although she was exposed to the Dutch language her entire life. “Dutch is not my mother tongue, but it is my mother’s tongue,” she quipped wittily (Hamilton, “In Their Own Words” np). Saskia’s mother, Elise Wiarda, left the Netherlands for the United States to work as an au-pair at the age of 18 (see Wiarda, *Exploring* 61). She soon met John Andrew Hamilton, Jr., a writer and editor, whom she married in 1960. When they divorced soon after Saskia’s birth, Saskia’s mother stayed on in the United States. Her father wrote editorials for South Carolina’s *The Post and Courier* and occasionally wrote articles for *The New Criterion*, also on poetry, so Saskia’s love for poetry certainly did not just stem from the Wiarda side of the family. Yet being raised by a Dutch mother and being close to a family that spoke another language from the one in which she was raised intensified Saskia’s interest in the limitations and possibilities of what language can express. Later in life, Saskia actively studied “a small group of Dutch poets and writers,” most notably Rutger Kopland (1934–2012) whose “Mens en schaaap” she translated in *Corridor*. The way in which Saskia translated those Dutch poets for inspiration is similar to why Robert Lowell translated European poets in *Imitations* (1960).

Like Bishop, Lowell had a considerable influence on Saskia’s own poetry. This is not surprising considering she spent so many of her working years editing three bulky volumes of his and his circle’s letters as well as a new edition of his volume *The Dolphin*. Several poems in *All Souls*, Saskia’s volume that will be published posthumously by Graywolf Press this year, reveal Lowell’s imprint most clearly. The first of these prepublications was “All Souls.” Published in 2020 in *The New York Review of Books*, it consists of four unrhyming sections, each titled by a year—“1586,” “2010,” “1947,” and “1977”—in a non-chronological order. In style and appearance, the four parts resemble the kind of poems that Lowell wrote in his volumes *History* (1973) and *For Lizzie and Harriet* (1973).

They contain fragments of what Saskia herself had recently read, her work as an editor in the archives as well as personal, family stories that

sometimes overlap with events in world history, just as Lowell did in those volumes. Yet whereas Lowell could be brazen in revealing highly intimate details from his life with his second wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, and his daughter, Harriet Lowell, Saskia is considerably more cautious in her approach. When writing these poems, Saskia appears to have internalized her own definition of the concept of “*Zwijgen*,” as the poems about her family consist of “many kinds of silence, silences that are internal, that are closed or open, that conceal or that simply keep the peace.” They conceal almost as much as they reveal, in fact, but they nevertheless reflect some life lessons Saskia took from the Woold.

Only the final poem of the “All Souls” quartet is set at the Woold, but all four parts are faintly connected to each other, and at least two others—“1586” and “1947”—resonate with Dutch stories that Saskia presents. The last segment, “1977,” is a loose sonnet, the kind of which Lowell wrote hundreds of, especially towards the end of his life. It presents a childhood memory as in a snapshot from when Saskia would have just turned ten years old. It offers a vivid description of the “garden and lawn, arbor / and house” at the Woold (np). Six children drink juice “under the apple tree,” while flies are buzzing and “white butterflies” flutter “among the buddleia,” just next to the farmhouse. Like Lowell’s poem “In Memory of Arthur Winslow” from *Land of Unlikeness* and “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Deveraux” from *Life Studies*, Saskia’s poem centers on her maternal grandfather, whom she evokes in the opening and closing lines of her poem. In the first line, he reprimands a “crow,” which “took a cracker” from one of his grandchildren (“All Souls” np). It is tempting to read this scene symbolically. Like the “flies” that buzz around in Saskia’s poem, the crow can be seen as a harbinger of death as it often features as the embodiment of grief in literature, most famously in Ted Hughes’s *Crow* sequence.

Such a reading would be consistent with two other parts of “All Souls” where the English poet and military man Sir Philip Sidney in “1586” and Peik ter Horst, a family friend of the Wiarda family in “1947” meet their untimely tragic deaths. Moreover, at the end of the summer of 1977 which Saskia evokes in her poem, Lowell died of a heart attack in front of Elizabeth Hardwick’s doorstep in New York City, Saskia’s hometown. Lowell does not play a part in the scene at Woold that Saskia depicts in “1977,” but he does speak in the “2010” section of “All Souls” where Saskia quotes him saying: “I give you simply what you have already” (np).

Saskia borrowed this sentence from the final line of Lowell's poem "The Vanity of Human Wishes," Lowell's version of Juvenal's tenth *Satire* (Lowell, *Collected Poems* 412). She also quoted it in a footnote to *The Dolphin Letters* (see note 3, 440). By the time that "All Souls" appeared in *The New York Review of Books* in 2020—the semi-monthly magazine that Hardwick and Lowell incidentally had helped found—Saskia had just published the correspondence of *The Dolphin Letters*, an exquisitely edited volume that culminates with Lowell's death in the summer of 1977. So, when writing "All Souls," both the year 1977 and Lowell's death were on Saskia's mind. They must have conjured up her personal recollections of that summer.

The lines and connections in "All Souls"—between America and the Netherlands, between the past and the present, between Saskia's personal and professional lives, between what she read and did in her own life, between the literal and the symbolic, and between the living and the dead—are at times hard to fathom. Like the fine "feathery trichomes" of the "nettles" in the Woold garden, though, they are subtly there for us to observe and understand if we are willing to look closely ("All Souls" np). It was Lowell, Saskia realized, who pointed the way for her to write in a more directly personal and autobiographical way than she had done in *As for Dream* (2001), *Divide These* (2005), and *Corridor* (2014). He did so by simply reminding her what she already had, which started with the Dutch stories she had heard and experienced at the Woold during those long summer days.

The four separate but interconnected parts of the "All Souls" sequence in *The New York Review of Books* seem to have been the inception of the volume that will be published by Graywolf in the fall of 2023. When writing these, Saskia presumably did not know that she was ill, although the tone of several parts is elegiac. In the course of 2023, more parts of the volume were published where Saskia does hint at her illness. The prepublications of *All Souls* in *The New Yorker* and *The Yale Review* also allude to her life with her son Lucien in New York without divulging private details, as Lowell probably would have:

The child moved through the hour
 from fridge to table to fridge again
 with sure command, small strength and purpose,
 all his might against the magnetic

door gasket. Consented to being dressed,
 consented to the descent of stairs,
 step over step, to meet the bus,
 moving torso, hips, this way and that
 in an early dance to the tune
 of protest, clutching a black train as he boarded
 and the driver swung the doors shut
 and I waved at the children pressing their faces
 to the windows as it drove towards the river.
 May they all be covered by feathers. (Hamilton, "Drawn from
All Souls" np)

Saskia allows us to see the world from her mind in the final months of her life: from a hospital bed, while visiting her son's school, and lovingly how her "boy touches your arm in his sleep / for ballast." Even the seemingly mundane observation how he walks to and from the refrigerator is full of motherly care. Watching the children, including her son, leave for school, she wishes them the softness and care of "feathers." Are these night-jar feathers, crow feathers, or both? Saskia's new style is personal and intimate, but crucially she has retained elements of "circumspection or discretion" that typify all of her poetry. Saskia understood the art of "*Zwijgen*."

The crow in "1977" may be a harbinger of death which will ultimately claim all souls, but it was not just a symbol. Saskia's uncle, Just Wiarda, and her cousin, Arent van Wassenaer, shared a photograph with me in which Saskia's grandfather admonishes a crow by raising his index finger of his right hand at the bird for stealing a cracker (Fig. 2). The tame crow belonged to Arent's brother, Diederik van Wassenaer, and it often engaged in such shenanigans. It was called "Amice," as Saskia recalls in her poem, and was named after how Arent's and Diederik's father Otto addressed Huib Drion, who had been his PhD advisor. Drion, who was a Dutch Supreme Court judge, a law professor, as well as a literary critic, was also a frequent guest at the Woold, and got along particularly well with Saskia. He even dedicated an essay to the 18-year-old Saskia in 1985, which analyzed seven ways to look at an omission in Odysseus's story of his travels. It was no doubt inspired by Wallace Stevens's poem "Thirteen Ways to Look at a Blackbird," which the aging Dutch judge and aspiring American poet must have been talking about.



FIG. 2 "The crow took a cracker and my grandfather / scolded it." Saskia's grandfather, Gerard Wiarda, with Amice, summer of 1975, Courtesy of Louise van Wassenaer-Wiarda.

The autobiographical background information of “All Souls” help reveal Saskia’s working method, but they also deepen our understanding of the poem and of *All Souls* in general. For “1977,” Saskia used a family snapshot, which Lowell also often did for inspiration. Saskia also incorporates family stories and her own reading for her teaching and her editing as material for her last poems, as “1586” shows. Searching one day in a dictionary for the difference between the words “necessity” and “need,” Saskia stumbles across a reference to the English poet and soldier Sir Philip Sidney who was wounded at the Battle of Zutphen while fighting the Spaniards in the Netherlands at the beginning of the Eighty Years War for Dutch independence: “an ‘unfortunate hand’ sent forth a bullet / that broke the bone in his thigh,” Saskia writes, quoting Fulke Greville’s eyewitness account in his biography of Sidney (“All Souls: A Poem” np). Greville detailed that although Sidney was “thirstie with excess of bleeding,” he refused to drink immediately as he observed another wounded soldier who was in a direr need for water (Greville 128). “*Thy necessity is greater than mine,*” the gallant Sidney uttered, words that Saskia quotes (Greville 130). Less than a month after being shot, Sidney “died in Arnhem on the baker’s street,” Saskia mentions matter-of-factly in the last line of “1586” (“All Souls: A Poem” np). Sidney’s self-abnegation is certainly worthy of a poem, but it is intriguingly the story that Saskia omits from hers that makes “1586” so moving.

This is because Greville’s chronicle of Sidney’s death resonates profoundly with the dramatic wartime experiences of Saskia’s grandmother’s best friend, Kate ter Horst. Another frequent visitor in the Woold, ter Horst had become an unlikely heroine of the Battle of Arnhem nearly 20 years before Saskia’s birth. During Operation Market Garden in September 1944, the home of the ter Horst family, a rectory next to the Oosterbeek church, became the frontline as Allied troops that descended on Arnhem from multiple sides failed to conquer the bridge at Arnhem, the famous bridge too far. Ter Horst had converted her home into an infirmary for wounded British soldiers, as she moved to the basement with her young children. Husband Jan ter Horst, who had given the Allied forces valuable reconnaissance information during the Battle of Arnhem, was cut off from his family during the agonizing aftermath. The Oosterbeek rectory was targeted for days, but after the last remaining British troops had escaped

south across the Rhine River, Kate demanded to see a German officer and insisted that the wounded British soldiers be evacuated, which indeed happened. After the war, Kate and Jan were awarded multiple medals for their bravery. Kate was nicknamed the Angel of Arnhem, an epithet she disliked, as her son Michiel ter Horst mentioned to me, but that she nevertheless accepted in the name of all Oosterbeek women who helped the liberators.

Saskia grew up on these and other war stories. Her two aunts had stayed at the Oosterbeek rectory two weeks before Operation Market Garden (see Hugenoltz-Wiarda 31), and Saskia considered the ter Horst family part of her own family. She became more intimately acquainted with Kate ter Horst's story when she helped Sophie Lambrechtsen-ter Horst sift through her parents' correspondence to compile a new edition of her mother's memoir. What makes "1586" so poignant is that one memory that Kate ter Horst recollected in that memoir is an eerie repetition of what happened to Sidney. When Kate ter Horst offered berry juice to the wounded General Frank King, at their beleaguered home during those trying days in Oosterbeek, he declines to drink it: "No, thank you," the general responded, signaling that there would be "none for the boys." (Ter Horst 43). Sidney's water in 1586 becomes Kate ter Horst's berry juice in 1944, which trickles through to the juice the children sip in the Woold in 1977. Not only was Saskia a master of "zwijgen," she had also learned how to omit details—thanks in part to Drion and Odysseus perhaps—to make her poems elusively haunting without making them inscrutable.

The most poignant example of this is "1947," which is an exquisitely moving elegy which not only pays tribute to a fallen family member but also to the fortitude of the Wiarda and ter Horst families, and the love and grief that binds them. Like Bishop and Lowell, Saskia mastered the elegiac genre superbly, as was already evident from her 2012 poem "On the Ground," in which she honors Joshua Shackleton, the son of one of Saskia's Dutch cousins. Both poems teeter on the edge of the "ineffable"—a word that Saskia uses in "On the Ground" (*Corridor* 39)—as she takes great pains to avoid "saying too much," to quote her own definition of "zwijgen" once again ("In Their Own Words" np). Yet as the poet in the family, Saskia nevertheless felt compelled to voice the communal feeling of loss and grief occasioned by the tragic death of Peik ter Horst. Playing

with a friend “in a meadow by the river” on an “autumn day” in 1947, Kate and Jan ter Horst’s son jumps from a tree,

onto a mine that had once—though the field
had been swept, they all thought—been laid there
by an unfortunate hand. (“All Souls: A Poem”)

Peik is killed instantaneously, and his friend Henk dies a few hours later. Saskia’s reuse of Greville’s euphemistic phrase “unfortunate hand” is terribly fitting. Peik’s cruel death linked the ter Horst family even more to the British families and veterans that for decades afterwards would visit Arnhem and Oosterbeek to commemorate the deaths of their loved ones.

In the months before she died, Saskia revisited the Woold vicariously in her New York apartment, trying to capture in words the inspirational family members and visitors she had encountered in the summers of her youth (Fig. 3). Assisted by her friend Catherine Barnett, Saskia shaped and structured her final poetic testament with characteristic care and determination. In the final, prose poetry section of *All Souls*, “Museum Going,” she details how the Woold summers typically ended with visits to “the Kröller-Müller, the Mauritshuis, and the Rijksmuseum” (69). By that time, Saskia’s mother had come over from America as well, lending those museum visits “a ritual quality of reunion and impending departure” (69). Saskia conjures up her grandfather in “Museum Going,” and how when he “leaned on his cane, the floor would give a little” (72), as well as his friend Huib Drion who occasionally accompanied the Wiardas on these museum visits. She dwells on his wartime heroics when he was a law student in Leiden, and subsequently on his writings on Proust, who in turn wrote on Vermeer, whose paintings the adults stare at in the Mauritshuis and at the Rijksmuseum. We move with Saskia from one Dutch memory to the next as if we are meandering from one room in a museum to the next.

Like Lowell, Saskia was mesmerized by Vermeer’s paintings when she was an adult, albeit for different reasons than he let on in his poem “Epilogue.” In an unpublished lecture, Saskia admitted that she was attracted—not surprisingly—to “the ontological depth, the silence, the stillness” of Vermeer paintings, and that the Dutch master knew what to leave out. (Hamilton, Unpublished Lecture np). As a child, though,



FIG. 3 Saskia Hamilton in the Woold, summer of 1976. Courtesy of Just Wiarda.

those long museum visits also evoked in Saskia a sense of “longueur and hunger” (75). What the children, including Saskia, were really looking forward to were the “pannekoeken,” the Dutch pancakes, which they ate afterwards “in the sun and shifting clouds” (75). In the final nine months of Saskia’s life, her mother, Elise, took care of her daughter, and of Saskia’s son at their New York apartment. Nearly every morning, Elise made them those kinds of “pannekoeken,” Saskia’s favorite food. Although Elise herself was not well either, it was evident that Saskia’s necessity was greater than hers.

Diederik Oostdijk is Professor of English and American literature at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. He has published widely on American poetry and the memory of World War Two, including two books: Among the Nightmare Fighters: American Poets of World War II (2011) and Bells for America: The Cold War, Modernism, and the Netherlands Carillon in Arlington (2019). He is currently writing a book about a Jewish art dealer who became embroiled in Hitler’s Führermuseum.

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