1672 is known in Dutch history as the Year of Disaster. Following the simultaneous declarations of war by France, England, and the bishoprics of Munster and Cologne in April, the Dutch Republic was thrown into turmoil. The domestic situation had been tense for months, with the Prince of Orange pressing for advancement, which the formidable Grand Pensionary of Holland, Johan de Witt, had denied him and his House ever since the beginning of the stadholderless period, two decades earlier. Now beset by enemies on all sides, those tensions quickly rose. As the Dutch lines of defence crumbled before the might of the French armies during the summer, inhabitants of the eastern provinces fled westward. At sea, the brilliant De Ruyter held out against the combined English and French fleets; on land, utter defeat seemed inevitable.

It was that perennial enemy of the Dutch – water – that saved them. While Louis XIV entered Utrecht, last minute inundations created vast artificial lakes that turned Holland into an island and stopped the French advance. Nobody could foresee in that desperate summer, however, that Holland, the richest and most powerful province, would remain a safe haven, and the mood darkened dangerously. Riots erupted throughout the country, as the people blamed the Regents for the disaster. City magistrates were forced by popular demand to declare themselves for the restitution of the Prince of Orange as stadholder,
and in July, the States of Holland complied. After the appointment, Johan de Witt increasingly became the object of popular fury. De Witt survived one attempt on his life in June, but on 20 August, he and his brother Cornelis were assassinated by a furious mob in The Hague. Their bodies were ripped apart, cannibalized and what remained was put on display to show the world that the men who had ‘sold the country’ for their own benefit had been punished for their crimes.

It should come as no surprise that 1672 and the murder of the De Witt brothers figure large in Dutch historiography. Both the war and the assassination have been thoroughly researched in Dutch-language publications. In several respects, Michel Reinders’ *Printed Pandemonium* is a valuable addition to the existing literature. In the first place, as the first monograph in English to deal with an episode whose importance extends widely beyond the Dutch borders, *Printed Pandemonium* offers a point of access to a new readership.

More importantly, Reinders adds a new perspective by focusing on the role of print in the developments of 1672. This is no mean feat: more than 1,600 different pamphlets were published in this single year, and not only is Reinders the first to have studied and categorized them all as a single corpus, he also deftly relates them to correspondences, diaries and other sources. Whereas most previous studies used the 1672 pamphlets mainly as illustrative material, Reinders analyses their function as a vehicle of public opinion and as such as a force that helped to shape the dramatic events of a violent and frightful year.

*Printed Pandemonium* has had a long genesis. It is ultimately based on Reinders’ eponymous 2008 PhD thesis, of which a popularized Dutch-language adaptation appeared in 2010 as *Gedrukte chaos*. The English scholarly edition now published by Brill (as part of the inestimable Library of the Written Word series) at last makes Reinders’ fascinating work available for an international audience. The book amalgamates reworked selections of the thesis and translations from the popular edition, and certainly combines the virtues of both: *Printed Pandemonium* is written in a clear, vivid, and accessible style and utterly well-documented.

Yet catering for a new audience also introduces new problems. Quite understandably, Reinders feels obliged to offer a lot of context for those unaccustomed to Dutch seventeenth-century history, and although he does so with great panache, it does hamper the argument, which stood out clearer in his previous book. The introduction illustrates this most clearly. Starting with a sort of vignette to announce his subject (‘the relationship between political upheaval (…) and the press’ in 1672), it continues to offer a range of short paragraphs that serve to introduce the politics, book market, and social structure of