This project takes its place in a long tradition of research into the early modern period in the Departments of English and Modern History at the University of Ghent. It builds on the methodology and conclusions of the FWO-project “Englishmen adrift: The English presence in the Southern Netherlands, 1603-1660” (Department of English, 2003-2006), and engages closely with ongoing research under the auspices of the BOF-project “Across the Channel: The Southern Netherlands as safe haven for English exiles” (Department of Modern History, 2005-2009). Central to these two interdisciplinary projects are those English men and women who for whatever reason fled their country during the seventeenth century and found sanctuary in the Southern Netherlands. In the first project attention is paid to the intellectual and cultural aspects of their exile in the Spanish Netherlands. In the second project the religious and political objectives and activities of these English exiles will be analysed. Research into “Englishmen adrift” has demonstrated that cultural exchange frequently crystallized around a number of “meeting-points” at which the British – not the English only – came into contact with prominent members of the “national” and international intelligentsia. These findings have shown that as far as the literary dimension is concerned, intellectual and cultural contacts between Britain and mainland Europe in the early modern period have been only very summarily investigated. The objective behind the present research project is thus to fill the lacunae through an in-depth study of the Southern and the Northern Netherlands as a repository or dynamic storehouse for continental conceptions of literary ideas, which contributed to the development of seventeenth-century literary traditions in English.

As far as the cultural contacts between Britain and the Northern Netherlands are concerned, the project will draw on the scholarly expertise at the University of Leiden, and particularly the Department of English Language and Culture, the Sir Thomas Browne Institute and the Institute for Art Historical and Literary Studies. As assistant textual editor associated with the cutting-edge Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) Prof. R. Todd is engaged with manuscript-based textual research into the rough draft translations of Donne’s poems in Constantijn Huygens’ holograph (1630, 1633). The current project is also closely related to Prof. M. Keblusek’s research into the book culture of British royalist exiles in The Netherlands (1640-1660) and to her project “Double Agents: cultural and political brokerage in early modern Europe” (University of Leiden, NWO-Vernieuwingsimpuls (2001, ongoing), in which the dissemination of political, intellectual and cultural goods and services plays a central role. In her forthcoming book Minds of Winter: Book Culture and Literary Life of British Royalists in the Netherlands 1640-1660 Professor Keblusek also pays close attention to the English courts of Elizabeth of Bohemia and Mary Stuart in The Hague.