On the reception of Netherlandish art in late eighteenth-century classicist aesthetics

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CLASSICISM generally refers to a sympathy with Antiquity, its art and the qualities associated with ancient culture. The vagueness of such an indefinite description explains the frequent abuse of the word and the confusion it often evokes. Taking a span for at least one millennium, already the source of classicist inspiration itself — ancient culture — is as varied and rich in different styles and nations as later European culture, which was profoundly influenced by its antique heritage. Depending on the admirer's preferences, and his cultural and sociological situation, Antiquity offered on each occasion a source of both iconographic and stylistic inspiration, fitted to meet the era's aesthetic prejudices. During the eighteenth century, however, a historical awareness, which would introduce the notions of style and style epochs for the first time in the historiography of art, came into existence. Consequently, historicism drastically changed the artist's attitude towards the classic canon. From then onwards, artists and theoreticians would question the universalistic standards of ancient art and those of its immediate successor, the art of the Italian Renaissance, while stressing more often the particular qualities of Northern traditions, which were considered as being opposed to or at least different from the idealist tradition of the South. These concerns are of extreme relevance to the evaluation of Netherlandish art and the assessment of its supposed 'classicism', for critics would later approve or disapprove of Netherlandish art, not merely as the product of incompatible choices of style (antique versus modern), but as the creation of another national character (Southern versus Northern).

Evidently, not one single antique source can be determined by the general notion of 'classicism'. Even when considering that the historicist mindset was not always as extant as it was during the last three centuries, one has to admit that the so-called 'classicism' of one generation to another may indeed greatly differ. Every age and individual artist seeks the appropriate example that fits his needs, be his source book a catalogue of ancient Greek art, that of Rome or yet another tradition. But that choice, fortunately, is never fully arbitrary. Other

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factors determine one preference over another and not in the least the way by which the finally elected sources are integrated or interpreted. This reality may add to the ambiguity of notions like 'classicism' and 'antique revival', but at the same time may help to understand the specificity of certain traditions and thereby may even deny them the epithet 'classicist'.

To take the case at stake in the present survey difficulties are numerous. In the history of art critique and theory both Flemish and Dutch art of the 1500s–1700s have been typically eulogised for specific qualities which were considered opposite to those commonly associated with the classical art of Antiquity and its Italian progeny. It is observed that national background would gain more importance during the last three centuries, as one of those determining factors that make an artistic tradition classicist or disallow to become so. Today we do not feel much inclined to embrace the idea of different nations being at variance in the very essence of their cultural habits and beliefs. In the same way our generation might be quite dispassionate about such questions whether this or that tradition may be called 'classicist' or not. But as far as we are still concerned with the scientific apparatus, which allows us to better understand and appreciate art of all sorts, these issues do matter. Theory and its history may help us to enlighten the confusions our subjective inclinations and political biases have created.

During the history of European culture art theory produced a consensus about what classic art is and should be. Without many difficulties these classic qualities might probably be summarised as harmony, clarity, restraint and idealism. Classicist aesthetics favour horizontality over verticality, line over colour, straight lines over curves, frontal over diagonal compositions, and compositional flatness over perspective depth. Its iconography prefers serenity and moral seriousness to the picturesque or the anecdotic. Having ethic and aesthetic implications, classicism is in short designated with the famous dictum by the prominent classicist theoretician Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768): 'noble simplicity and sedate grandeur'. One could fairly point out, though, that Winckelmann's definition already suffers from a partial vision of what ancient culture is and what it has been in its 'best' period, and that by no means present-day critics should feel themselves complied to his dogmas. But an all-purpose description of classic aesthetics, such as the forgoing, offers an accurate touchstone to place different sorts of classicism into a broadspectrum. It might therefore be of some interest to a general survey of the reception of antique or classic influences by Netherlandish practitioners and theoreticians of art, to study the reception and estimation of the Dutch and Flemish Schools by their critics, in particular those who profiled themselves as custodians of the classic tradition. The doctrinaires of late eighteenth-century classicism might offer an exemplary case. In this contribution we will confine ourselves to a somewhat randomly assembled, yet representative company. By explicating some general aspects of the aesthetics of these authors, we may in the end even conclude that some traditions should be denied a notion as 'classicism', Netherlandish art in particular.

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The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns

At the end of the seventeenth century, a notorious debate reached its summit. The 'Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns' was a hot item at the newly reformed Royal Academy in Paris by then, but intellectuals from all over Europe took part in the following decades.[1] Ever since the 'risorgimento dell'arte' in the Italian *quattrocento*, antique art was considered the highest expression of human culture and therefore was to be taken as the single best example to all arts. The remainder of ancient civilisation and the new discoveries steadily added to them, were to form a fixed canon of exemplary works by which artists had to be instructed. During centuries men of letters and artists from all over Europe would make their Grand Tour and visit the treasures of Italy. Italian High Renaissance art would become in its turn a worthy example for European art, both borrowing its reputation from its direct descent of Antiquity and adding to the worthiness of ancient art itself. In Italy the aesthetic monopoly of ancient Roman art would never be endangered much, precisely because a strong patriotic concern guaranteed so. The case would be much different elsewhere in Europe, especially in Northern parts. Once national awareness had become more important during the seventeenth century throughout Europe, the association between Antique and Italian art turned into a dangerous deliberation with regard to the supremacy of classicist aesthetics.

The propagation of an aesthetic canon of exemplary works had been possible only because of a universalistic attitude towards art. If antique art was claimed to be exemplary to all artists from whatever nation or era, it was tacitly assumed that there is a certain — though perhaps not completely comprehensible — notion of absolute beauty in aesthetics. It was exactly this supposition that became criticised more often. When during the seventeenth century theoreticians — both in literature and in the visual arts — began to contest those claims about the pre-eminence of antique art, it was not antique art as such that was attacked, but the universalistic beliefs by which it had been made canonical. The most important argument set out by the Moderns, as the critics were called, was exactly that one single canon of principles, valid to all nations and all times, might not hold. The forming of a new accommodated national canon was thus required.[2] Under the reign of Louis XIV, a fervent competition found place in which modern artists explicitly challenged the repute of their antique predecessors. The devotees of patriotic feelings precisely argued that too narrow a tribute to Italian and antique traditions hindered the progression of their own particular culture. The Moderns especially embraced such historicist theories as those by Dubos and Montesquieu.[3] The main argument was deducted from the new doctrine of climatology: since antique art had come into existence in a climate that differed considerably from the one in Northern Europe, it was no longer deemed to be a universal example. Still, some reacted, advocating antique art and its universal qualities. The partisans of the Ancients stressed the universality of classic qualities of style. They pointed out that the national champion of French art, Poussin, owed his excellence precisely to classic ideals of style, much the opposite of those of for example — and in particular — Rubens. The

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debate would become highly significant to the subsequent development of art and art theory, though it revealed at the same time some of the issues concerning Antiquity and its application that had been implicit so far.

The patriotic argument

The patriotic argument was never out of the debate. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) drew on this with ardour.[4] In his journal *On Art and Antiquity* he concluded: 'Thus the original artist may be described as the one who treats the subjects around him in an individual and national, and lastly, a traditional way [...] and so I hope to find patriotism in, to which every state, country, province, even town is entitled, for just as we bring out the character of the individual which consists in not being controlled by circumstances but controlling and conquering them, so we rightly recognize in every people or group a character which manifests itself in an artist or other remarkable man.'[5] Notably Rembrandt was seen by Goethe as such a self-aware and sovereign artist: 'Rembrandt practised the highest gifts of the artist using only the material and occasions of his immediate surroundings, without ever being in the slightest aware that there had ever been Greeks and Romans in the world.'[6] Furthermore, Goethe speaks with great admiration of such artists as Memlinc, Lucas van Leyden and Quentin Massys, precisely because they were free from foreign influences. And as for those sixteenth-century Dutch artists who pioneered in Italy, as for example Jan van Scorel and Martin van Heemskerck, Goethe explicitly discounted the effect that Italian and classic art might have had on them: they 'developed their talents in Italy, but nonetheless cannot deny that they are Netherlanders. Here the example of Leonardo da Vinci, Correggio, Titian and Michelangelo is felt, but the Netherlander remains a Netherlander, indeed, his national characteristics are so dominant, that in the end he shuts himself in his magic circle and rejects all foreign culture.'[7]

Goethe admired Winckelmann profoundly. Both authors acknowledged national differences and the specific peculiarities of each nation. They held the Northern culture of the Germanic part of Europe as dissimilar and in some way conflicting with the Latin spirit. However, unlike Winckelmann, Goethe precisely esteemed and defended the peculiarity of Northern art. Winckelmann instead refuted this dissimilitude, taking the side of Latin and Greek classicism. Whereas Goethe respected the Germanic autonomy towards anticophile and Italianising sentiments in its own right, Winckelmann mocked Teutonic lumpiness and sharply condemned its going astray from classic proportions and Italian high style. In 1776 Goethe remarked in a short notice the following: 'When Rembrandt presents his Madonna and Child as a Dutch farmer's wife, any little critic can see that this goes quite contrary to history, which relates how Christ was born in Bethlehem, in the land of the Jews. "The Italians have done far better," says he. But how? Did Raphael paint anything more, or other, than a loving mother with her first and only child?'[8] To Goethe it was of no relevance whether historical circumstances were reconstructed with appropri-

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ate archaeological requisites, but what did count, was the emotional evocation of the theme being represented. However, such an evocation may and should differ in each country. In the Low Countries the Blessed Virgin could be a Dutch maid amongst cattle and 'buried to the neck in straw'; in Italy, however, there is no objection to her being depicted in a more polite and 'traditional' fashion.

Winckelmann opposed this completely. In the *Considerations on the Imitation of the Greeks*, he mainly dealt with such issues. This first work of his was published in 1755 and immediately reprinted in 1756. To this reprint Winckelmann added a critique, the so-called 'Sendschreiben', which an anonymous opponent was claimed to have sent to the author. In fact, Winckelmann wrote the letter himself, giving him the opportunity to anticipate criticism and settle with the arguments his adversaries might come up with. As a consequence, his tone is evidently polemical. Winckelmann wrote: 'In regard to form and beauty no principle can be adopted but the taste of Antiquity. Otherwise someone would give his Aphrodite the features of a French girl; another would give her a hooked nose and another yet would draw her pointed and spindly fingers. Such a goddess would gaze at us with Chinese eyes [...]. Without much eruditeness one would be able to figure out the native country of the artist, by merely looking at a figure.'[9] Here we find an important opposition, which explicitly relates to the traits of Dutch art. It is the antagonism of classicist universalism versus nationalistic sentiments. Confuted by one, praised by the other, these national peculiarities are notably extant in Dutch art.

The concept of nationality as an art historical tool

By the time Winckelmann published his writings, much of the issues that had been discussed vigorously by authors such as Roger de Piles were commonplaces. At the same time the vehemence of those earlier days at the Paris Academy had cooled down. Despite the fact that Netherlandish art had supplied the participants with grateful examples for their arguments, the discussion does not seem to have pursued as intensely in the Low Countries as it did in France. In his 1707 *Groot Schilderboek* Gerard Lairesse did mention the difference between what he called 'modern-schilders' and 'antiek-schilders', but his classicist theories did not find much support amongst his fellow countrymen. It is somehow exemplifying that the Dutch adherents of the 'modern' style did not worry much about theoretical elaborations. It is likely that at that time they did not feel the need to legitimise their national artistic habits, as their colleagues did in France. This attitude would change, however, by the end of the century.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the debate about the Ancients' preeminence over the Moderns recurred, in the Netherlands no less than elsewhere in Europe.[10] Whereas the patriotic argument in favour of the Modernists' cause originally had only been an argument, it now turned into a major issue, in particular for Dutch authors. Not the opposition Antique versus Modern art but rather classicist versus national art, Dutch versus foreign art, became the major cause of their distress. Italian and French art happened to be more classicist, as

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much as Dutch art was likewise considered realist. No matter how intensely the polemic may have been pursued late into the nineteenth century, Dutch authors seem to have been more concerned with matters of state and the political connotation of one standpoint over another. It may even be questioned whether the discussions in Holland had any relevant impact on contemporary artists and their practice at all.[11] Authors such as Jacob Otten Husley († 1795) appear to have performed not so much as art theoreticians, as they did in their capacity as politicians, rather concerned with the standing of Dutch art and therefore with the repute of their nation at large.[12] The flowering of the arts in France and Italy embarrassed the Dutch theoreticians of the time with what they felt as a malaise of their national school. Their writings deal with alternative ways to overcome that unfortunate position. What is most important to our present subject, is that the case shows precisely how Dutch theoreticians around 1800 felt about the peculiarities of their own native tradition and that they considered Netherlandish art being very different from other European traditions indeed. This was even more the case with foreign theoreticians who likely did less worry about the regard of Netherlandish art.

Incontestably the nationalist party of the 'Patriots', as they were called, had its opponents in the Netherlands, without whom, of course, no discussion whatsoever would have been possible.[13] But this is not questioned presently. The sheer fact that at the end of the eighteenth century there was a growing number of authors who drew the national card, proves already our point: Netherlandish art could be considered essentially different from that of the rest of Europe, noticeably that of Italy and France, both by foreign and Dutch critics. By focussing on the debate outside the Netherlands and the way in which foreign critics discriminated Netherlandish art, we have a reliable indicator of how the Netherlandish artistic tradition was seen as a whole during this period of renewed enthusiasm for the Ancients and their supposed classicist aesthetics.[14] More than the debate within the Netherlands, the foreign disputants' writings show which artists were taken as representatives of Netherlandish culture and which were considered the most outstanding characteristics of that culture.

We might disapprove of nationalistic arguments today, but we cannot deny that in earlier eras art theory to a great extent borrowed from patriotic feelings and pseudo-scientific doctrines of temperament and climate. The end of the eighteenth century is no exception and even seems to excel in patriotic rhetoric. Moreover, since the relation of one particular artistic tradition to the whole of European art is examined here, we will persist to make use of the concept of national character as an art historical tool. Not to claim certain metaphysical certitudes, but to understand the patriotic argument of the authors we are studying. At least we continue to see that late eighteenth-century classicist theoreticians generalised about Northern culture as being very different from their ideals. As its representatives precisely these artists who excelled by their realism and un-Italian-like manner, were put forward. Consequently, exceptions as Lairesse or Caesar van Everdingen, were almost never taken into account, but genre painters, as Adriaen Brouwer, Adriaen van Ostade and Jan Steen, were denounced as being typical representatives of the uncouth art of the Netherlands.

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Classicist idealism versus Netherlandish naturalism

A possibility to escape from universalistic classicism — and not unlikely the most evident — was to counter its high-spirited idealism with realistic imagery and a taste for things of common life. Goethe's appreciation for Dutch art was founded on its common sense. Netherlandish art established itself by its independence from abstract ideals of foreign relics, and to Goethe — as to many nationalistic critics after him — men of genius like Rembrandt and Rubens were to be hailed as colossuses of Northern aesthetic sovereignty. Advocating the starkness of their subjects or the rather bold manner in which these were embodied, Goethe fiercely exclaimed: 'You find Rubens' women too fleshy? I tell you they were *his* women, and if he had populated heaven and hell, air, earth and water with ideal forms, he would have been a poor husband and they would not have been the mighty flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.'[15] Considering that commonplace opinion on Rubens having painted exclusively corpulent female nudes, it is quite startling to read the painter's own oratory against the obese decadence of his time: 'The chief reason why men of our age are different from the antients is sloth and want of exercise; for most men give no other exercise to their body but eating and drinking. No wonder therefore if we see so many paunch-bellies, weak and pitiful legs and arms, that seem to reproach themselves with their idleness.'[16]

Goethe thus seems to have misinterpreted Rubens' own intentions by taking him for a national hero independent from antique prescriptions. Rubens did esteem classic idealism above ordinary home rule. At least, he did so theoretically. Unlike Goethe, Winckelmann was fairly parsimonious with compliments on Rubens' baroque pragmatism. But theoretically he agreed with the latter's classicist ambitions. Winckelmann put forward almost identical arguments as Rubens: 'The most beautiful body of ours would perhaps be as much inferior to the most beautiful Greek one, as Iphicles was to his brother Hercules. The forms of the Greeks, prepared to beauty, by the influence of the mildest and purest sky, became perfectly elegant by their early exercises. Take a Spartan youth, sprung from heroes, undistorted by swaddling cloths; whose bed, from seventh year, was the earth, familiar with wrestling and swimming from his infancy; and compare him with one of our young Sybarites.'[17] Winckelmann implicitly referred to an ongoing debate in which the little manifesto of Rubens took a part, for the piece was made public in 1708 by Roger de Piles in his *Principles of Painting*, which Winckelmann excerpted in detail.

There are more similarities between the baroque painter and the classicist theoretician. In his short essay Rubens demonstrated himself as a fervent 'laudator temporis acti': 'I conclude, however, that in order to attain the highest perfection in painting it is necessary to understand the antiques, nay, to be so thoroughly possessed of this knowledge that it may diffuse itself everywhere.'[18] And he continued that we 'cannot consider the antique statues too attentively nor study them too carefully; for we of this erroneous age are so far degenerate that we can produce nothing like them: Whether it is that our grovelling genius will not permit us to

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soar to those heights which the antients attained by their heroick sense and superior parts; or that we are wrapt up in the darkness that overclouded our fathers.' Compare this to Winckelmann's notorious statement: 'There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequalled; I mean, by imitating the ancients […] But then we must be as familiar with them as with a friend.'[19]

Winckelmann too argued that the ancient practice of physical exercise was to be held responsible for the inimitable beauty of their sculpture. Together with Rubens, he loathed the obese lassitude of his day and age. Unlike Rubens, however, Winckelmann added that the corporal viciousness of modern man was not the result of indolence only, but the predestined attribute of Northern nations. He even went as far as denouncing the harshness of the Northern tongue, brimming with consonants and unpleasant articulations.[20] To Winckelmann, race and climate determined bodily beauty and intellectual capability to discern universal beauty: 'To the Greek climate we owe the production of taste, and from thence it spread at length over all the politer world.'[21] Alas, Winckelmann went further, good taste is the privilege of Southern nations, especially the Greeks, and inconceivable to Northern Europe: 'taste was not only original among the Greeks, but seemed also quite peculiar to their country: it seldom went abroad without loss, and was long ere it imparted its kind influences to more distant climes. It was, doubtless, a stranger to northern zones, when painting and sculpture, those offsprings of Greece, were despised to such a degree, that the most valuable pieces of Correggio served only for blinds to the windows of the royal stables at Stockholm.'[22] The difference with Rubens is that because of his radical climatologic argument, Winckelmann could claim that not nature, as long as it is Northern, but antique sculpture gives direct access to the realm of absolute ideal beauty. He refuted the proposal that modern artists are no less able than their antique predecessors to study physical beauty by observation of present-day sportsmen and bathers.[23] Exactly because of ancient corporeal incomparability, their sculpture is far fitter to be studied by modern-day artists. At the risk of rendering stiff figures and producing works of art that lack vividness, ancient sculpture offers the best example of ideal beauty. Rubens on the other hand, warned for 'the smell of stone' and pointed out the importance of the 'difference of shades; where the flesh, skin and cartilages, by their diaphanous nature, soften, as it were, the harshness of a great many outlines.'[24]

Winckelmann accounted for the charming play of light and shadows, but only to a certain extent. He was not very fond of 'those little fancies […] that make Netherlandish painters so over-priced.'[25] On the contrary, such painters merely try to enchant with their meticulous illusionism, he laconically pointed out: 'The scrutiny of these masters was in search for but the smallest details in nature: one carefully restrained oneself to put the slightest hair otherwise than it was discovered, so as to deceive the most critical eye, when possible, even the looking glass.'[26] The works of such artists are not worth their value on the market, since they will be mercilessly judged as gems: the slightest stain will devaluate its value. Winckelmann thus showed himself quite hostile to Netherlandish art so that his imaginary opponent described him in the 'Sendschreiben' as someone who is 'abhorred by each thing Dutch.'[27] The 'sophisticated flesh' by

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Caspar Netscher or Gerard Dou did not find much approbation, neither did the 'ivory carnation' by Adriaen van der Werff, whose illusionist tissue contradicts the idealism of a genius alike Raphael.[28]

Classicist line over Dutch colour

Rubens was too highly esteemed a genius of art to attack frankly. However, when classicist fanatics as Winckelmann mentioned 'the great Rubens' it is notably because of the latter's allegorical imagination, secondly because of his skills as a draughtsman. Rubens was never hailed as an example of those typical classicist qualities as restraint and sedateness. It is in fact because of Rubens' allegorising merits that he received any esteem whatsoever. As opposed to Jacob Jordaens' naturalism, Winckelmann welcomed Rubens' elevation of nature into sublime images: 'As for the sublime in painting, Jordaens — that man of a more vulgar rank — by no means may be compared to Rubens, his superior. He never achieved the latter's perfection, because he could not free himself from nature. […] He has painted nature, as he found it.'[29] Jordaens was however recognised because of his colouration, but the classicists did not esteem this merit very highly. Despite the fact that Rubens was not taken for as great a colourist, it did not prevent him from being viewed as superior to Jordaens, since classicist aesthetics favoured line over colour and thus valued Rubens' talent for drawing. Still, not even Rubens was deemed to have been able to realise the ideal abstractness that is in the outlines of ancient art. He as well was still too much attached to illusionist resemblances. Winckelmann asserted that 'the great Rubens has gone far astray from the outline of Greek bodies and particularly in those works that he made before his stay in Italy and before he studied the Ancients.'[30]

In comparison to Jordaens, Rubens may not have been taken for a colourist. But when competing with artists as Poussin, he was undoubtedly the personification of painterly colourism. In fact, at the end of the eighteenth century, some issues of the *Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns* were rehearsed. The *Quarrel of the Colour* yet increased the gap between the Northern mania for colouration and the antique preference for clear outlines. Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), the most eminent of neo-classicist painters, unquestionably took the poussinists' side, and did not highly esteem the Rubenist tradition of the North.[31] After the collapse of the Terror Regime of his friend Robespierre, David was, among other charges, accused of having wished to divide the paintings of Rubens, which were at the Louvre, into pieces.[32] On the other hand, when some years later Napoleon proposed to name the hall in which his paintings of the *Imperial Coronation* would be exposed, the 'Galerie de David', in analogy to the 'Galerie de Rubens', the painter replied that Rubens had been far greater a painter than Mary de Medici had been a queen, whereas Napoleon was much more greater an emperor than he, David, was a painter.[33] Rubens was still held in some consideration by the classicist, again, because of his allegorising capabilities, but it is clear that David's modesty was as true as his blandishments were concealed. At the time the painter, being exiled from reactionary France, was proposed to

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become an honorary member of the *Société des Beaux-Arts* of Ghent in 1814, he was very commending about the Flemish School.[34] Yet, David's conclusion was quite frank. In a letter to his friend Antoine-Jean Gros, David is open-hearted: in the Low Countries — which were at that time to be temporarily reunited — by a natural predisposition people are gifted with a talent for art and painting. Alas, ever since the 'sublime man of genius', Rubens, spoiled the craft and the character of their art, David noted acerbically, Netherlandish art did not reach the highest level of painting any longer.[35] What is striking, however, is the stress put again on the Flemish sense for colour. In the same letter, in which he recommended a young painter to Gros, David blindly trusts that prejudice: 'I am not familiar with his work, but I trust that as a Fleming he will undoubtedly have a taste for colour.'[36]

Colour is the province of Netherlandish painting — it is repeated over and over again. And because, for some, colour is the quintessence of painting as such, Dutch painting is the best of all. Winckelmann recollected the topic and had his challenger of the 'Sendschreiben' reiterate the commonplace drearily, so as to scorn its claims: 'Is not the enchantment of colour essential, to such a degree that no painting may delight without it? Colour makes up for many faults, or has them not even being noticed. Together with the understanding of light and shadows, colour makes the great value of Dutch painting. […] Connoisseurs know how far the famous Poussin got in colour… And those who support the cause of Rome and Latium, should recognise the Dutch painters as their betters.'[37] Winckelmann acknowledged the Dutch invention of oil painting and the splendour of Netherlandish landscape painting that borrows its brilliance from the subtle colourful technique.[38] At the same time, however, he disparaged the popularity of a van der Werff 'whose works are weighed with gold'; only unrefined men would value his soft strokes more than a flawless drawing by Poussin.[39]

Antique mythology makes no excuse

According to Winckelmann and his classicist generation, it is not colour, but composition and drawing that made Rubens an esteemed painter, first and foremost his allegorical inventiveness. To such a degree that the painter was compared to the hero of classicist devotion, Homer. Winckelmann lauded the genial artist's imagination: 'According to the inexhaustible abundance of his mind, Rubens made paintings as Homer made verses. He is affluent to profusion; he pursued the magnificent unequalled.'[40] Particularly the Luxembourg Gallery — which David had seen rather scattered — was admired for its visionary symbolism. On several occasions Winckelmann complained about the vast amount of poor allegories that were concocted during the forgoing centuries. The desire for a new mythology and judicious symbolism was that urgent that Winckelmann recorded a completely new collection of shrewd allegories, by means of which he hoped to be of use to contemporary art.[41] The pitiable inventions of Cesare Ripa did not receive much clemency: they were ill-conceived, dreadful riddles without substance. Winckelmann harshly condemned these

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too obvious and blunt attempts of emblematic wit. Although authors like Jacob Cats and Roemer Visscher were not mentioned explicitly, it is clear that their 'Sinnepoppen' were not welcomed much.

One might depict any artistic attempt, somehow borrowing from antique tradition, with the notion 'classicism'. It is true that antique mythology inspired generations of artists, in the Low Countries as well. But as we have observed, classicism is not only a matter of iconographic convalescence, if at all. To late eighteenth-century theoreticians, such as Winckelmann, issues of style are of fairly greater importance. As a matter of fact, pseudo-mythological recycling as in Ripa's *Iconologia* was vigorously rejected. According to classicist art theory, Antiquity had to be a spiritual example, not the superficial appearance of which had to be incorporated, but its very essence, both morally and aesthetically. Rather than investigating which themes or motives were borrowed from ancient myths, it is therefore imperative to stress that the use of the notion 'classicism' should fairly evoke an interest in the antique state of mind, whether it was restituted and, if so, in what way. Taking that into account, we might come to understand that Dutch art has never really escaped from superficial antiquarianism.

David deplored how the high genre of history painting was lost in the Low Countries since Rubens. It might be questioned, however, whether the manner of Netherlandish art was suited for the genre at all. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), for example, stated his doubts unambiguously: 'The painters of the Dutch school have still more locality. With them, a history piece is properly a portrait of themselves; whether they describe the inside or outside of their houses, we have their own people engaged in their own peculiar occupations, working or drinking, playing or fighting. The circumstances that enter into a picture of this kind are so far from giving a general view of human life that they exhibit all the minute particularities of a nation differing in several respects from the rest of mankind. Yet, let them have their share of more humble praise. The painters of this school are excellent in their own way; they are only ridiculous when they attempt general history on their own narrow principles, and debase great events by the meanness of their characters.'[42] To Reynolds, Dutch art essentially opposes the general ideas that construe the high style and which are embodied by history painting, namely abstractness and universality, both in subject matter as in the way of depicting. The 'same local principles', Reynolds continues, are found in Dutch landscape painting: 'Rubens himself, who has painted many landscapes, has sometimes transgressed in this particular … However, Rubens in some measure has made amends for the deficiency with which he is charged; he has contrived to raise and animate his otherwise uninteresting views, by introducing a rainbow, storm, or some particular accidental effect of light.'[43]

Winckelmann and Reynolds appreciated Rubens' elevating abilities; but they discarded the typically Dutch low life scenery of cabinet-sized genre painting and even the 'otherwise uninteresting' because of too realistic landscapes. The descriptive anecdotic is the opposite of the classicist preference for edifying universalism. The enlightening task of art was a classicist prerequisite that was rehearsed time and again. To Winckelmann, good art has the connoisseur ponder the ideas it brings to expression. He was no admirer of idiosyncratic

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allegories, such as the quibbling emblemata of renaissance and baroque erudites. Art had to be clear, simple and straightforward. Art is a vehicle of thought, not of pleasure or exhibitionist craftsmanship, neither the toy of self-indulging scholars, and surely ought not to serve the pleasure of vulgar sentiments. It is then rather surprising to notice that Winckelmann's admirer Goethe fancied the typically anecdotic genre. 'He who wants to be general ends up by being nothing at all,' Goethe wrote, 'limitation is as necessary to the artist as to anyone who wants to create something significant. Sticking to the same subjects, to his cupboard of old household utensils and marvellous rags, is what has made Rembrandt unique.'[44] This fondness of the picturesque detail went quite far. Discussing an engraving by Hendrik Goudt after Adam Elsheimer's *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis* (1609–10), Goethe pointed out the different accessories that create the charming atmosphere of the rural picture: the 'grandfather chair' in which Jupiter is seated, the landlord and his wife, serving 'in their usual way', and foremost the luscious eye catcher of an erotic woodcut on the wall. And then the high-spirited chief of German Classicism concluded: 'If this touch is not worth a whole warehouse of genuine antique piss-pots, I will give up thinking, writing and working.'[45] This note, however, was not made public during Goethe's lifetime; one should, moreover, not pay too much attention to the polemics of a young Sturm-und-Dranger — in his later days Goethe would collect himself a warehouse of those 'antique piss-pots'.

The use — or misuse if you will — of ancient mythology, to Winckelmann and Reynolds, makes no excuse for what are essentially genre scenes. Such pictures are the very travesty of classicism: apart from superficial iconography, there is an explicitly stylistic opposition between the classic elevating sternness and the anecdotic vulgarity of tellers of tales. This is not the same as claiming that the classicists would have had no interest in the Dutch' craftsmanship whatsoever, neither that they were not even charmed by their skilful handling of the brush. But they deplored that this proficiency was wasted on unworthy subjects. 'Amongst the Dutch painters,' Reynolds wrote, 'the correct, firm, and determined pencil, which was employed by Bamboccio and Jan Miel on vulgar and mean subjects, might without any change be employed on the highest, to which, indeed, it seems more properly to belong.'[46] An artist should not use his talents to show of his skills, nor should he bluntly depict profane scenes, even less should he wrap them in ancient dress. If he seeks to put his skills in service of edifying morals by following the classic adage to both please and teach, he should not disguise whatever he wants to teach by means of obscure allegories.

An academic 'cold war'

In 1933 Erwin Panofsky published his only article on seventeenth-century Dutch art.[47] It is a piece of ingenious iconological interpretation in which the unsurpassed hermeneutist elaborates his analysis from an almost irrelevant detail in Rembrandt's *Danae* from 1636. Panofsky would become fairly successful with his scrutinising process, explaining his notion of 'disguised symbolism' that, to

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him, marks out Netherlandish art. His proposal holds for the matter of Early Netherlandish Painting. But it is striking that the scholars, who dealt with the art of the Golden Age, were at first rather reticent about adopting Panofsky's methods. Until then, Dutch art had primarily been valued because of its sheer aesthetical qualities, not so much because of its 'symbolism'. Art historians were used to point out the painterly aspects of Dutch art, its beautiful visualisation of the soft play of light and shadows, its rendering of delicate slopes of tissue and flesh. To them, the *Danae* was in the first place, a beautiful nude, and only secondly a theme from ancient mythology. This aestheticist approach, by which ancient mythology was taken as an excuse, in a way, reminds of Goethe's pleasure with the Elsheimer picture.

The stance of Dutch art history would change, however. Since the 1970s it has become common practice to steadily recuperate Netherlandish genre painting considerably, by arguing that the burlesque scenes of drunken peasants are to be understood differently from what had been the case until then. References were made to the accordance of the iconography with contemporary literature, such as the moralising emblamata of Roemer Visscher. The exposition held in 1976 at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam marked the beginning of the new trend.[48] Under the guidance of Eddy de Jongh the next generation of scholars showed that beneath the surface of what at first sight were shallow depictions of floral tribute or brawling inebriates, Dutch artists of the seventeenth century had deliberately concealed more profound meanings. As a consequence, much of the criticism uttered in the earlier days could be discarded, such as the harsh denunciations of classicist theoreticians of the Dutch's earthiness.[49] However, only a few years later, in 1983, Svetlana Alpers published her epoch-making study on what she called the 'visual culture' of the Dutch Golden Age.[50] Alpers reacted explicitly against the 'recent rash of emblematic interpretations of Dutch art.'[51] Instead, she initiated the idea of Dutch art being a 'descriptive art' as opposed to Italian art, which she labelled as 'narrative'. Dutch art, according to Alpers, was not to be interpreted as a bearer of meaning, but as a visual achievement, typical of Dutch culture.

The iconological approach has been of great value for the interpretation of Netherlandish art from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One could hardly call the grotesque exoticism by Bernaert van Orley an example of 'descriptive realism', let alone the phantasmagorical work by Hieronymus Bosch. Likely, the same subsurfacial sense is to be looked for in seventeenth-century genre and still life painting. But my point is not in the meaningfulness, the literacy, so to speak, of Dutch art. Neither do I propose to answer the question whether this at first sight blunt descriptive art as it is, bears a greater or lesser deal of allegorising moralism beneath its superficial appearance. My concern is the question whether this art may or may not be entitled 'classicist'. Even if it were categorically proved that Dutch artists of the seventeenth century made use of emblematic motives or that their peculiar iconography were to be identified as borrowings from Antiquity, even so, this is as such no guarantee to denounce their art as 'classicist'. As we have shown, late eighteenth-century theoreticians were not very fond of those intricate rebuses, which they at times compared to occult hieroglyphs, but more often merely dismissed as the affected phrases of a poor intellect.

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One cannot deny that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ancient material was intensely used all over Europe, both by men of letters and visual artists. But the motivation to do so might have differed greatly from region to region, and even at an individual level. One could point out that Constantin Huygens certificated literary evidence about the receptiveness of his countrymen to ancient culture. But then again, Alpers ripostes reasonably enough that 'it is true that by the seventeenth century Italian words and texts had permeated Northern Europe and had even been taken up by a few artists and writers. But this produced a split between the nature of the art being produced in the north […] and the verbal professions of treatises as to what was art and how it ought to be made. It was a split, in short, between northern practice and Italian ideals.'[52] In so far I agree with Alpers' basic intuition that the terminology and analytic system assembled for the study of Italian classicism, cannot be applied to Dutch art without further preface. Furthermore, Alpers' thesis seems to imply a correlation between the iconological approach and the tendency to look for classicist qualities in Netherlandish art on the one hand, and between the aestheticist view — which she represents — and the denial of classic virtues to Dutch painting on the other hand. This association is probably exactly the effect of what we are deliberating here, namely the essentially idealist nature of classicism, striving for meaningfulness, as opposed to realism, at ease as it is with art that ventures nothing more than to be pleasant to look at.

Alpers' study was received with much commotion, both by notorious aestheticist allies such as Ernst Gombrich, as by adversaries amongst the iconologists. By the latter, her methods were considered manipulative and unscientific.[53] Feelings ran high so that one even ventured to speak of an academic 'cold war' between these two traditional, yet competing art historical methodologies.[54] No matter how it may be, at least the unequivocal way of putting things made Alpers' study advantageous. At times, art history would benefit greatly from more of these clear-cut opinions, if only because of reminding about the importance of so-called commonplaces and neutralising scholarly anxiousness with being subjective.

Dutch classicism?

The millennium exhibition on 'Dutch classicism' challenges some of our present considerations.[55] The organising committee under the direction of Albert Blankert wanted to exhibit 'the other face of the Golden Age'. Their basic claim is that during the seventeenth century several Dutch artists opposed the caravaggist mannerism of the Utrecht School — which was in vogue at the time — and therefore deliberately choose to work in a more restraint mode. These artists, one argues, were in their age esteemed as the cream of the Dutch School, only to get into oblivion later on — they are 'famous but neglected'.[56] To prove the relevance of these forgotten masters, Blankert shows how they obtained important commissions from the Dutch Court and from influential men like Huygens. The resulting implication of that thesis is evidently that art practice

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during Holland's Golden Age was not as homogeneously 'Dutch-like' as is generally stated, but instead shows a great diversity of styles, from which classicism was certainly no odd exemption. This may be true as for architecture.[57] The ambitious projects for building the *Huis Ten Bosch* and the Amsterdam Town Hall, show important parallels with contemporary European classicism. The iconographic and compositional programmes for the interior decoration and the stylistic qualities required by its supervisor Jacob Van Campen, however, may have been largely inspired by classicist sentiments, but it is too much of a supposition that 'these requirements and the results in terms of painting merit the epiteth "classicist".'[58]

Blankert's two major grounds bear upon the apparent disparity between these 'classicist' painters and those who worked in the caravaggist fashion. Firstly, there is the divergent way in which both factions handled light and colour: the brilliant tones of the classicists as opposed to the dark chiaroscuro and earthy browns of the latter. Secondly, the subject matter differs, for the single most important criterion of the exhibition makers to include an artist in their overview is precisely the iconography. Most of the masters shown are history painters.[59] Apart from these two observations, only occasionally compositional issues are brought into the discussion, while typically classicist demands for unity and 'sedate grandeur' are too less reckoned with. The lost painting by van Honthorst, for example, *Diana and her companions, hunting* (1627) might bring to mind the Arcadian settings of Poussin, but its 'energy congealed … into taut lines' does not in the least 'anticipate Jacques Louis David'.[60] On the contrary: David is explicitly quoted because of his frieze-like compositions that embody the classicist predilection for frontal compositions.[61] It appears that the standards for identifying an artist as a classicist were not exercised in the most demanding way. At several occasions Blankert concedes that some of the included masters somehow stray from 'pure' classicism, but that he nevertheless comprised them.[62] This probably explains why he prefers to speak of a 'classicist tendency' over his originally used designation of an autonomous classicist 'style.'[63]

Blankert reacted to what he called the 'corypheocentrical' perspective before.[64] We must agree that art history must never blindly espouse the judgments of earlier generations. Neither should scholars exclusively endorse the coryphées that were appointed by past prejudices. But at times we might also accept that our predecessors had good reasons to 'neglect' famous artists of past times. Apart from subjective aesthetic judgement, though, it is anyhow insecure to segregate groups of artists from their backgrounds and impose on them distant designations. All in all, the work done by Blankert and his collaborators is highly valuable, but some of their motivations probably apply to what Alpers meant when, twenty years earlier, she wrote that 'the Italian bias is still evident today in the writings of those art historians who are anxious to demonstrate that Dutch art is like Italian, that it too had its classical moment, produced its significant history paintings, that it too signified.'[65]

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Dutch visionary naturalism as a Romantic interpretation

Apart from the grave declarations by classicist doctrinaires, such as Winckelmann and Reynolds, more moderate opinions were ventured in that passionate epoch. We have already learned that Goethe was rather pleased with Dutch art. One has to be judicious, though, in how to understand these appraisals. It is a recurring statement that the reassessment of Dutch art at the end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century is due to the Romantic empathy with the humble beauty of the common and the sublime of nature, above the works of men. Dutch art with its portrayal of simple people, its impressive land and seascape painting, its occupation with emblems of vanity, would have appealed to Romantic melancholy. Thus, one might argue, too narrow a focus on late eighteenth-century authors, who condemned Dutch art, is at least one-sided, if not completely designing. We will therefore benefice our cause by looking more into detail at the motivations of the Romantics in appraising Dutch art and at the precise nature of that consideration.

Together with William Blake, Henry Fuseli is probably the most important representative of the ambiguous relation between Neo-Classicist and Romantic art.[66] In a 1801 lecture to the Royal Academy of London, Fuseli hailed Rembrandt as 'a genius of the first class *in whatever relates not to form* [my italics],' and he continued that 'none ever like Rembrandt knew to improve an accident into beauty, or give importance to a trifle.'[67] To our surprise, Fuseli adds that 'Holland was not made to comprehend his power.' Fuseli did of course thereby not intend to say that the Dutch were unfamiliar with the genre of accidental things and trifles, but that Rembrandt had 'no followers' precisely in adding intellectual qualities (importance) to the mere accidents of common life and by conferring significance upon ordinariness. Not so much the fact that Rembrandt, too, adopted the realist devotion to things of common life and the accurate depiction of recognisable contemporary objects, made his work tower over that of his countrymen, but precisely the distinctively spiritual way in which he imbued the insipidity of the common with thought. It reminds us of Reynolds' apology of Rubens' landscapes.

The same goes for Goethe's account of Dutch art. In a short notice of 1816 his appreciation of Ruysdael is precisely for the poetical genius of the painter, as someone able to visualise meaning. The *Waterfall*, to Goethe, is an allegory of the harmonious suspense of the human soul. Likewise, Goethe understood the *Cloister* and the *Cemetery* as metaphorical settings for human 'Sehnsucht', contemplating the transience of things. To Goethe, Ruysdael was a Poet and likewise he held Rembrandt for a Thinker.[68] Perhaps Goethe was right with his reading and possibly Netherlandish art has indeed had its moments of idealism, in spite of the classicists' charges. But we should also take into account the fact that Romantic enthusiasm repeatedly suffered from 'Hineininterpretierung'. We have not forgotten about Goethe's erroneous interpretation of Terborch's *Paternal Admonition*… Moreover, even the Romantics admitted that the recognition of Rembrandt's and Ruysdael's spiritual geniuses cannot just be conferred on the vast majority of their national contemporaries. Friedrich Schlegel, brother to the founding father of the

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Romantic Movement August Wilhelm, for example, commended these colossuses highly, but he strongly condemns the vulgarities of the less talented, who excel in 'sensual baseness, the yearning for deceiving verisimilitude and the mannerist handling of colour, straining after mean effect.'[69]

It would appear that the coryphées of Dutch art attained their extraordinary position for a great deal precisely because they still attended to the prerequisites of the high genre, incorporating classicist ideals of large format history painting; thus not thanks to their local traditions, yet in spite of them. But if this hazardous conjecture were true, one might wonder how not the artists that are surveyed in Blankert's exhibition attained that position, who evidently comply far more with classicist academism. The restraint of Lairesse would have been a more proper solution for edifying moralism, than Rembrandt's often confronting images. In fact, Lairesse and his kinsmen shared that illustrious position indeed, until Johann Dominik Fiorillo and later on Gustav Waagen, would deny them the esteem of the world.[70] It was, however, the synthesis of time-bound form with timeless content, which probably appealed to the Romantics. Not only did Rembrandt prove his much-appraised autarchy from foreign taste, but also did not dedicate his skills to vulgar pleasures by choosing elevated subject matter. Thus he was to become the favourite of the Romantics, who in this regard appear to have more in common with the classicist academism of Reynolds than is generally accepted. Both classicism and romanticism represent the transcendental ambitions of the visual arts, each according to its own standards. As for these ambitions, both classicism and romanticism oppose realism and naturalism. The fact that both the classicists and Romantics of the late eighteenth century condemned Dutch genre painting, might have us conclude that we may rightly call that art realist. However, because some Dutch artists, in their realism, pursued spiritual goals, we might even consider them as 'romantic' exceptions within the Dutch tradition. By no means, though, are we entitled to attribute them the epithet 'classicist'.

Most of the art surveyed in Blankert's exhibition borrows its 'classicness' from the meagre fact that it depicts themes of ancient mythology or endeavoured the high genre of biblical and history painting. This is, however, not enough of an argument to identify its style as 'classicist'. Even if the artists, who Blankert sought to bring back into the open, worked in a more restraint way and embraced French academism, we must not dismiss the fact that foreign critics, such as Winckelmann, Reynolds, Fuseli and others, did not consider them as representative of the Dutch School in general. Perhaps this 'other face' of Netherlandish temperament was nothing but the ephemeral effigy of a brief and fleeting mood.

Proper use of terminology

During the latter half of the twentieth century art history has fortunately been successful in re-establishing the lesser talents of Netherlandish art. The renown of celebrated national heroes as Rubens, Vandyke, Rembrandt and Vermeer,

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however, remains unchallenged. It has been undertaking indeed to have also the lesser gods come into the open and to discriminate into such ambivalent notions as the 'Flemish' or the 'Dutch School', the 'tradition of Rubens' etcetera. The work that has been done meanwhile, has been fruitful and is still decidedly promising. But it remains undoubtedly difficult to defy the prejudices of nineteenth and early twentieth-century taste. The nationalist argument, for instance, was rehearsed at each occasion when aspects of progress and decline were deliberated. This is no wonder, since the possible charge that the artistic tradition of one's native ground could summit only in periods of decline, strikes at the heart of likely every man, even of those who might not feel very patriotic at all. Art historians are no exception to this general human inclination. Thus it was to be expected that periods, in which much stress was put on classicist demands, would cause Dutch theoreticians to react. Patriotic authors then claimed that they did not recognise these idealist standards in their national art, and that they should not either. Netherlandish art differs from the art that is inspired by Italian idealism indeed, but not so to its disgrace, on the contrary, they claimed. At some occasions, such great importance to the notorious realism of Netherlandish art was attached that during the nineteenth century some authors stated that the true Rebirth of the Arts was to be found in the North, in the Low Countries where oil painting and colourism were invented. Not the renewed appreciation of ancient culture, but a new and modern sense of reality, it was claimed, was the very essence of renaissance art and culture. This idea of a 'Renaissance of the North' was pioneered by Jacob Burckhardt.[71] Burckhardt was still a fanatic supporter of Italian art and its supremacy, but by gauging the idea of a typically renaissance visual culture and burgher commonsense realism, some authors went astray. From Louis Courajod up till Svetlana Alpers, these authors maintained that the art of the North is typified by realism and thus by continuity, unlike the evolving processes in Italy, from early Netherlandish painting onwards, to the genre and still life pieces of the late seventeenth century.[72] Because of their generalisations, though, they fastened suspicion of having been driven by patriotic or even nationalist causes.[73] As a reaction, art historians have become more diligent, since they have learned that the intermingling of ideology and the interpretation of art is a recurring pitfall which they want to avoid. Present-day political correctness unfortunately menaces the recognition of a long and proved consensus, I mean 'the agreement that the Dutch produced a portrait of themselves and their countrymen.'[74]

Because my attention is primarily with the reception of classicist aesthetics by late eighteenth-century authors, not that of Dutch art, today, I did not intend to mingle in the still ongoing methodological debate. Neither did I propose to summarise an exhaustive overview of late eighteenth-century critics of Netherlandish art. My methodological concern is with the correct and adequate use of terminology and so I aimed to counter that present day tendency of implicitly abusing classicist idioms. By exemplifying the most representative spokesmen of late eighteenth-century classicism, I hope to have approved that neither the iconologic interpretation, nor the aestheticist appreciation of illusionist style in Netherlandish art, allow for the use of the notion 'classicism'.

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Because these theoreticians profiled themselves as the keepers of classicist ideals and idealist aesthetics, I hold their sayings as authoritative with regard to the use of terminology exclusively reserved for classicist art. In as far as they denied Netherlandish art their 'classy' epithets, serious use of art historical and stylistic terminology should do so as well. Art historical research should not depend up matters of personal taste and thereby obscure its own comprehension of stylistic notions. By careful use of art historical terminology one could escape, I believe, from the luring danger of exploiting historical facts for improper purposes. The work of Svetlana Alpers has shown at least an awareness of this threat. She taught us not to seek too many qualities in Dutch art which are not to be found there, qualities that are in fact the proprium of Italian art and art inspired by antique aesthetics, that is to say, classicist art. But in turn we must be careful that the aestheticist 'l'art pour l'art' penchants of our post-modern age do not get on top. We may still appreciate Netherlandish art. But in order to do so, we do not need the leave of classicist nomenclature, neither the self-indulging leniency of taste.

NOTES

1 A complete survey of the debate is to be found in the still valid study of H. Rigault, *Histoire de la querelle des anciens et des modernes*, Paris 1895. Interesting is also W. Krauss, 'Der Streit der Altertumsfreunde mit den Anhängern der Moderne und die Entstehung des geschichtlichen Weltbildes', in: *Essays zur französischen Literatur*, Berlin/Weimar 1968, 130–194.

2 R. Bray, *La formation de la doctrine classique en France*, Paris 1961.

3 On the rise of historicism the reader is referred to the excellent study of F. Meinecke: *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, 2nd ed., München 1946. A more recent publication is P.H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the rise of historicism*, Berkeley 1975.

4 The upcoming nationalist tendencies in German eighteenth-century aesthetics are discussed in B. Vick, 'Greek origins and organic metaphors. Ideals of cultural autonomy in neohumanist Germany from Winckelmann to Curtius', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002), nr. 3, 483–501.

5 Quoted from J.W.F. Goethe's article on the Boisserée collection of early German and Netherlandish painting in the first issue of *Über Kunst und Alterthum*. We quote the translation from *Goethe on art*, selected, edited and translated by J. Gage, London 1980, 130–149.

6 Goethe, *op. cit.*, 146–147.

7 *Ibid.*, 146.

8 *Ibid.*, 19. (Aus Goethes Brieftasche. Commentary on Falconet)

9 J.J. Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst*, Dresden/Leipzig 1756, i.c. 124–125. (Our translation.)

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10 In her 1980 doctoral thesis Eveline Koolhaas studied intensely the writings of the representative spokesmen of both nationalist art theory and conservative classicism in the Netherlands at the turn of the century. Specifically the respective positions to the changing political circumstances of the period were discussed at length. The results of her research were summarised in: E.A. Koolhaas-Grosfeld, 'Nationale smaak versus goede smaak. Bevordering van nationale kunst in Nederland: 1780–1840', *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 95 (1982), 605–636. —, 'De negentiende eeuw en de zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst als een vraagstuk van Ouden en Modernen', *De negentiende eeuw* 9 (1985), 145–170.

11 E. Koolhaas, 'Op zoek naar de Gouden Eeuw. De herontdekking van de 17de-eeuwse schilderkunst', in: L. van Tilborgh – G. Jansen (eds.), *Op zoek naar de Gouden Eeuw. Nederlandse schilderkunst 1800–1850*, cat. exh. Haarlem (Frans Halsmuseum), Zwolle 1986, 28–49, esp. 42.

12 Koolhaas, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 612.

13 *Ibid.*, esp. 610–616.

14 Dedalo Carasso offers another survey. D. Carasso, 'Een nieuw beeld. Duitse en Franse denkers over de zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse schilderkunst, 1775–1860', in: F. Grijzenhout en H. van Veen (eds.), *De Gouden Eeuw in perspectief. Het beeld van de Nederlandse zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst in later tijd*, Nijmegen 1993, 161–192.

15 Goethe, *op. cit.*, 20.

16 P.P. Rubens, *De imitatione statuarum*. We quote from the translation in J.R. Martin, *Baroque*, 3rd ed., London/ New York 1991, 271–273.

17 Winckelmann, *op. cit.*, 4. Partially translated in *Winckelmann. Writings on art*, selected and edited by David Irwin, London 1972, 61–85.

18 Rubens, *op. cit.*, 271.

19 Winckelmann, *op. cit.*, 3.

20 *Ibid.*, 107–108.

21 *Ibid.*, 1.

22 *Ibid.*, 2.

23 *Ibid.*, 117.

24 Rubens, *op. cit.*, 271–272.

25 Winckelmann, *op. cit.*, 27. (Our translation.)

26 *Ibid.*, 131. (Our translation.)

27 *Ibid.*, 74. (Our translation.) Furthermore, Winckelmann quotes the notorious verse of Propertius: 'Turpis Romano Belgicus ore color' (l.11 *Eleg.* 8).

28 *Ibid.*, 27.

29 *Ibid.*, 124. (Our translation.)

30 *Ibid.*, 16. (Our translation.)

31 The anachronistic notions of 'poussinism' versus 'rubenism' were introduced by Walter Friedlaender in his study *Hauptströmungen der französischen Malerei von David bis Delacroix* (1930).

32 D. and G. Wildenstein, *Documents complémentaires au catalogue de l'œuvre de Louis David*, Paris, s.d. [1973], 133 [Catalogue entry number 1204].

33 *Ibid.*, 180 [#1547].

34 To the Society's secretary David wrote: 'Un peintre doit se faire gloire de faire partie d'une Société qui habite la patrie de Rubens, Van Dyck, Téniers, etc.' *Ibid.*, 195 [#1695].

35 'Je vois avec plaisir et je souffre en

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même temps de voir les dispositions que les flamands apportent en naissant pour l'art de la peinture, quand je considère que toutes ces dispositions naturelles s'évanouissent par la mauvaise éducation qu'on leur donne. Il n'y a rien dans ce pays qui puisse porter au grand genre de l'histoire […] et cependant, je le répète, ils sont nés comme tous les autres pour arriver au grand genre de l'histoire. Le "sublime" Rubens leur a fait beaucoup de tort. Avant lui ils sentaient la peinture comme les Italiens du XVIe siècle. J'admire tous les jours ces ouvrages antérieurs à cet homme de génie et je remarque que leurs anciens maîtres ajoutaient encore le coloris à leur beau dessin.' *Ibid.*, 212 [#1839].

36 Je ne connais pas ses ouvrages, mais comme Flamand, je suis sûr qu'il sentira la couleur.' *Ibid.*, 212 [#1839].

37 Winckelmann, *op. cit.*, 75–76. (Our translation.)

38 *Ibid.*, 39.

39 *Ibid.*, 76.

40 *Ibid.*, 124–125.

41 In 1766 Winckelmann published his treatise *Versuch einer Allegorie, besonders für die Kunst*, that he himself considered as one of his most important contributions in service of art.

42 J. Reynolds, *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds to which are added his letters to 'The Idler'*, edited by Austin Dobson, London 1907, 48–49. (Fourth Discourse.)

43 *Ibid.*, 49.

44 Goethe, *op. cit.*, 20.

45 *Ibid.*, 20.

46 Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 85–86. (Sixth Discourse.)

47 E. Panofsky, 'Der gefesselte Eros. Zur Genealogie von Rembrandts Danae', *Oud-Holland* 50 (1933), 193–217.

48 E. de Jongh e.a., *Tot lering en vermaak. Betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, cat. exh. Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1976.

49 E. de Jongh summarises the debate at length: E. de Jongh in: 'De iconologische benadering van de zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse schilderkunst', in: F. Grijzenhout en H. van Veen (eds.), *op. cit.*, 299–329.

50 S. Alpers, *The art of describing. Dutch art in the seventeenth century*, London/Chicago, 1983.

51 *Ibid.*, xxiv.

52 *Ibid.*, xxii.

53 E. de Jongh, 'The art of describing', *Simiolus* 14 (1984), 51–59; J. Bruyn, 'The art of describing. Dutch art in the seventeenth century', *Oud-Holland* 99 (1985), 155–160.

54 P. Hecht, 'The debate on symbol and meaning in Dutch seventeenth-century art: an appeal to common sense, *Simiolus* 16 (1986), 173–187.

55 A. Blankert e.a., *Dutch classicism in seventeenth-century painting*, cat. exh. Rotterdam (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen)/Frankfurt am Main (Städelsches Kunstinstitut), 1999.

56 *Ibid.*, 13.

57 Koen Ottenheym's article in the same catalogue tries to prove this, but his conclusion seems to imply that in architecture as well, 'classicness' is more of a matter of ornamentation and of the application of the Vitruvian orders. K. Ottenheym, 'The painters cum architects of Dutch classicism', in: *Ibid.*, 34–53.

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58 A. Blankert, 'Classicism in Dutch history painting', in: *Ibid.*, 12–33, 28.

59 Much of the work integrated into the exhibition was prepared by Blankert twenty years earlier when he devised an exhibition on Dutch seventeenth-century history painting: A. Blankert e.a., *Gods, saints and heroes*, cat. exh. Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum)/ Washington (National Gallery of Art)/Detroit (Institute of Arts), Washington 1980.

60 Blankert, *op. cit.*, 24.

61 M. Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Berkeley 1980.

62 For example: 'Neither Berchem's nimble lines nor Dujardin's preference for agitated scenes go well with the concept of classicism. Even so, the two artists will not be out of place at this exhibition.' Blankert, *op. cit.*, 29.

63 *Ibid.*, note 19.

64 A. Blankert, 'Een coryfeocentrische visie', *Simiolus* 1 (1966/67), 116–120.

65 Alpers, *op. cit.*, xxiii.

66 R. Rosenblum, *Transformations in late eighteenth-century art*, Princeton 1967.

67 J. Knowles, *The Life and the Writings of Henry Fuseli, Esq.*, 3 Vol., Londen 1831, Vol.2, 73–131, i.c. 122.

68 J.W. Goethe, 'Ruysdael als Dichter', in: *Goethes Kunstschriften*. Grossherzog Wilhelm Ernst Ausgabe, Vol. 2, Leipzig 1912, 404–408; —, 'Rembrandt der Denker', in: *Ibid.*, 754–755.

69 'Plattheit des Sinns, dem Streben nach täuschender Natürlichkeit, der manierierten Behandlung der Farben auf den blossen Effekt.' F. Schlegel, *Ansichten und Ideen von der christlichen Kunst*. Kritische Friedrich Schlegel-Ausgabe, Vol. 4, edited by H. Eichner, Munich/Paderborn/Vienna/ Zurich 1959, 124. Also quoted by Carasso, *op. cit.*, 161–192, i.c. 170.

70 D. Carasso, *op. cit.*, esp. 177.

71 W.E. Krul, 'Realisme, Renaissance en nationalisme: cultuurhistorische opvattingen over de Oudnederlandse schilderkunst tussen 1860 en 1920', in: Bernard Ridderbos – Henk van Veen (eds.), *'Om iets te weten van de oude meesters'. De Vlaamse Primitieven – herontdekking, waardering en onderzoek*, Nijmegen/Heerlen 1995, 236–284, esp. 259–263.

72 Their idea of Dutch culture forming a continuum, implies that these authors bear on the determinist concept of nationality. Much alike Winckelmann, they state explicitly or covertly that the cultures of North and South are unbridgeable

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by force of nature. This conservative viewpoint contradicts evidently that of progressist authors as Théophile Thoré: human culture (in the North) is essentially unreceptive to change. Nationalism, conservatism and aesthetic realism appear to be kindred ideological mindsets. As regards the interpretation of Netherlandish art, these conservative authors generally strive to explain that the cultural unity of the Netherlands does not allow for important differences between Dutch and Flemish art, neither between the art of the fifteenth and that of the seventeenth century.

73 Alpers is aware of this charge and so she ripostes in advance: 'I do not want either to multiply chauvinisms or erect and maintain new boundaries, but rather to bring into focus the heterogeneous nature of art.' (Alpers, *op. cit.*, xxvii.) That heterogeneity does of course not apply to her concept of the 'continuity' of the Dutch 'visual culture', but to European art, which has at least two competing homogeneous cultures: that of the South versus that of the North.

74 *Ibid.*, xvii. Alpers. Cfr note 42.

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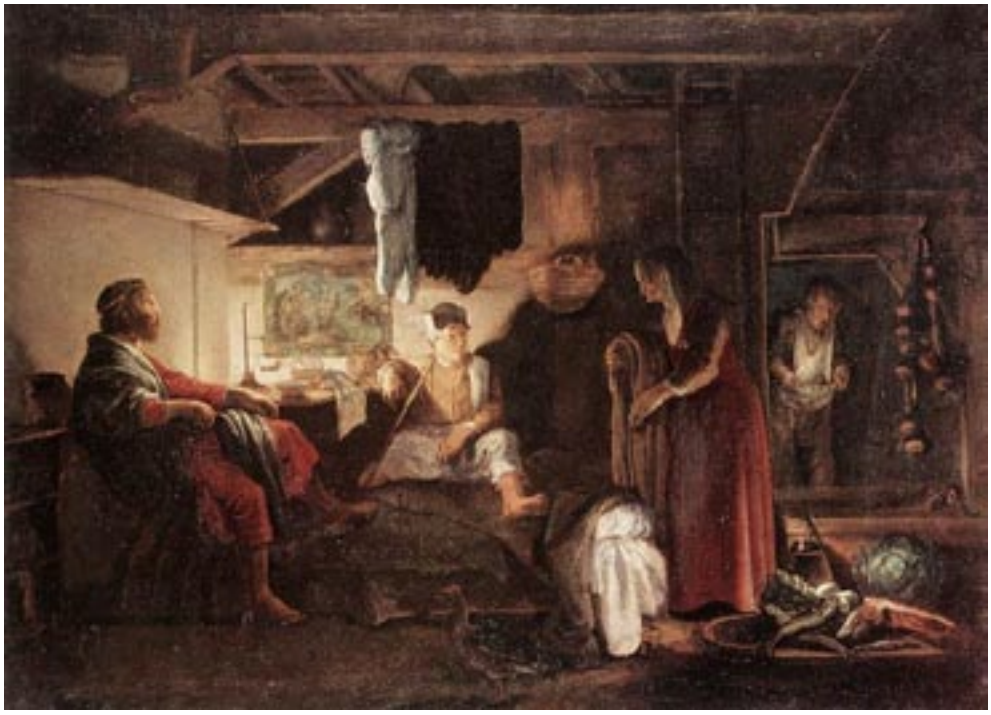
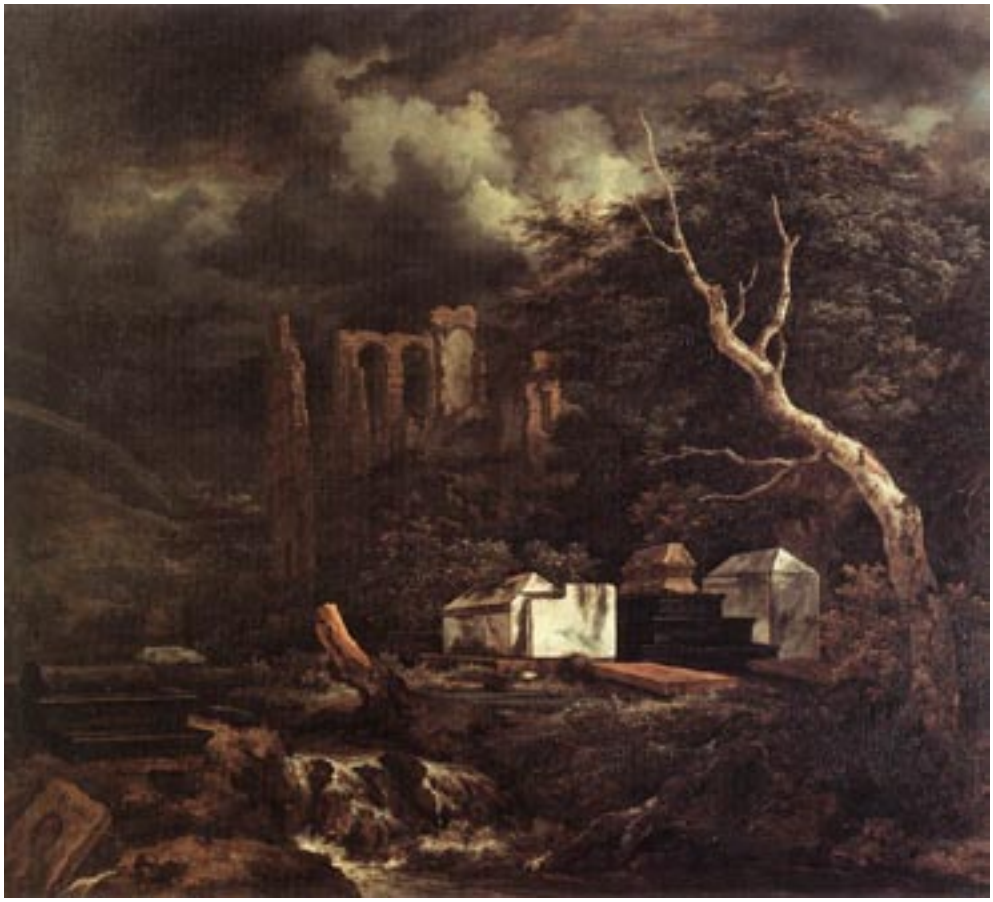


ADAM ELSHEIMER, JUPITER AND MERCURY AT PHILEMON AND BAUCIS
1609-10, OIL ON COPPERPLATE, 16,5 × 22,5 cm
GEMÄLDEGALERIE, DRESDEN

(photo: Web Gallery of Art)



JACOB ISAACKZ. VAN RUYSDAEL, THE JEWISH CEMETERY
1655-60, OIL ON CANVAS, GEMÄLDEGALERIE, DRESDEN

(photo: Web Gallery of Art)

GERARD TERBORCH, THE PATERNAL ADMONITION
c. 1655, OIL ON CANVAS, RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

(photo: Web Gallery of Art)