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# HOUBRAKEN CELEBRATED

ARNOLD HOUBRAKEN AS INVENTOR AND FREETHINKER

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*Nijmegen, April 2023*



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## INTRODUCTION

For the past two centuries the most important source of information about the lives and creations of artists of the Dutch Golden Age has been *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche schilders en schilderessen* (The Great Theatre of Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses) by Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719) [1]. Published in three volumes in 1718, 1719 and (posthumously) 1721, it is enriched by forty-three plates with double or triple portraits of artists drawn by Houbraken and engraved by his gifted young son Jacob (1698-1780) [2] as well as by seven other plates of varied subject matter and provenance.<sup>1</sup> The great problem with *De groote schouburgh* has been that it is in Dutch, making it impenetrable for non-Dutch readers, including most Anglo-Saxon ones. A German translation by the Austrian art critic and collector Alfred von Wurzbach (1846-1915)<sup>2</sup> served German scholars well enough but was almost equally useless for many English-speaking readers, meaning in effect that they had to rely on the kindness of a Dutch colleague to deal with the original text. That obstacle was in part addressed by *The Golden Age Revisited: Arnold Houbraken's Great Theatre of Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses*, a massive two-volume book that was published by the inimitable Joop van Coevorden (1937-2019)

at the close of 2000.<sup>3</sup> However, *The Golden Age Revisited* offered only about a third of *De groote schouburgh* in English, so that there was still a pressing need for a more complete translation of Houbraken's masterpiece. That requirement has now been met by the recent and lavish online publication entitled *Houbraken Translated*, which was assembled by Hein Horn and Rieke van Leeuwen and presented as an RKD Study.<sup>4</sup>

*Houbraken Translated* offers numerous hyperlinks that provide immediate access to information about the artists, collectors, dealers, scholars, poets and the like mentioned by Houbraken in *De groote schouburgh* and is therefore sure to prove invaluable for scholars of Dutch art and culture. No doubt the presentation in English will also help make Houbraken's information more widely accessible. However, *Houbraken Translated* can't provide much in the way of information that does not lend itself to ready digital access. Obvious questions, such as why Houbraken barely mentions Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), who is now deemed to be one of the brightest stars of the Golden-Age firmament, are not easily cross-referenced.<sup>5</sup> Nor can scholars access vital information concerning Houbraken's social background, education, learning and earlier publications, leave alone

<sup>1</sup> The best overviews of the illustrations of *De groote shouburgh* are found at the very back of Swillens 1943, 1944 and 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Wurzbach 1880, now readily accessible as Google book.

<sup>3</sup> Horn and De Witt 2000, henceforth Horn 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Horn and Van Leeuwen, November 2021. Readers are warned that Gary Schwartz 2002, p. 230 claimed that my translations are altogether inept ('lijken nergens op').

<sup>5</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 236. This and other omissions are discussed in the appendix below.



1: Jacob Houbraken, *Portrait of Arnold Houbraken*. Engraving, 158 x 105 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, III, 1721, before page one.



2: Jacob Houbraken after Jan Maurits Quinkhard, *Portrait of Jacob Houbraken*, 1749. Engraving, 309 x 218 mm. Nijmegen, collection Hendrik J. Horn.

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about the courageous deistic and neo-stoic convictions that underlie his *Groote schouburgh* and that teach his readers how they may best thrive in life and cope with disaster and death. Hence *Houbraken Celebrated* could be seen as serving as an indispensable complement to *Houbraken Translated*.

*Houbraken Celebrated* owes much to the riches of *The Golden Age Revisited*. Even so many of the concerns of that book are not raised here while hundreds of endnotes have bitten the dust. It is not by accident that *Houbraken Celebrated* is only slightly concerned with the reliability of *De groote schouburgh*, a matter that is likely to be of concern to many people who consult the work.<sup>6</sup> What is left of *The Golden Age Revisited*, which is mainly based on its second chapter, has been reorganized, corrected and augmented, with much greater emphasis on Houbraken's work as inventor for the book trade and his evolution into a radical freethinker.<sup>7</sup> Overall, however, *Houbraken Celebrated* remains a severely reduced version of *The Golden Age Revisited*. That may well be a good thing with respect to its prolonged attack on the so-called New Art History.<sup>8</sup>

*Houbraken Celebrated* is at least as much about Arnold Houbraken himself as about his *Groote schouburgh*. It is important that it become widely understood that there is a great deal more to Houbraken than his work as a bio-

grapher and pioneering art historian. He was a successful and prolific painter, graphic artist and illustrator as well as an accomplished poet and author. His own publications and numerous drawings and etchings for the book trade show that he was an idiosyncratic theoretician as well as an important and courageous thinker who deserves much better than to be reduced to the status of mere biographer. May *Houbraken Celebrated* help rescue Arnold Houbraken from his isolation as an art-historical resource and grant him his rightful place as an indispensable figure for the study of Dutch art and society around the turn of the eighteenth century.

Much the same hope was expressed by Marten Jan Bok in a lecture entitled 'Arnold Houbraken as Inventor' that he presented at a colloquium on Dutch art between 1670 and 1750, convened in Cologne's Wallraf-Richartz Museum on 26 November 2005. Unfortunately the conference proceedings, which Ekkehard Mai published the next year,<sup>9</sup> did not include Bok's contribution. Bok has kindly sent me files containing an outline of his text and all his illustrations. The drift of his presentation was to highlight Houbraken as a prolific, accomplished, versatile and above all inventive painter and graphic artist who is mainly and unfairly remembered and appreciated as a biographer. It is difficult properly to acknowledge an unpublished paper,<sup>10</sup> but I have mentioned some of the

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of that topic, including a vital contribution by Marten Jan Bok, consult Horn 2000, pp. 103-123.

<sup>7</sup> A lesser difference is that *The Golden Age Revisited* specifies when a quotation is in translation. *Houbraken Celebrated* dispenses with this practice because virtually all quotations have been translated by the present writer.

<sup>8</sup> The very brief reaction from Mariët Westermann 2002, p. 370, note 74 is highly misleading. The book does not alternate its Houbraken translations with contemporary theory.

<sup>9</sup> Bok 2005 and Mai et al. 2006.

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contents awaiting the much-belated publication of Bok's work.

It was our intention to launch this study in November of 2021, in the wake of *Houbraken Translated*. But unlike the work of illustrating *De groote schouburgh* and linking the already translated text to the archives of the Dutch Bureau of Art History (RKD), *Houbraken Celebrated* required extensive external research, especially in connection with his graphic art. Covid virus meant that the Dutch Royal Library

(the KB) and the RKD, both in The Hague, were often closed until well into 2021. With every opportunity Patrick Larsen of the RKD looked up missing data. Without his skill and determination, *Houbraken Celebrated* would have been delayed even longer. Finally I need once more to mention Marten Jan Bok, the undisputed Houbraken authority, who has supported my work for more than two decades.

Nijmegen, 3 October 2022.

<sup>10</sup> *The pdf file forwarded by Bok has page references but these are useless without access to the file itself.*

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## THE MOST DEDICATED AND VERSATILE OF ARTISTS

### The Consummate Graphic Artist

Arnold Houbraken was first and foremost an artist. His overall production was dominated by his inventions for the book trade, whether in the form of autograph etchings or preparatory drawings for the engravings of others. In 1944 Piet Swillens (1890-1963) compiled the most recent and complete inventory of the numerous editions, which all date from 1678 or later. Swillens listed twenty-four books with one or more illustrations by Houbraken, but he omitted eight certain works and included one incorrect attribution,<sup>11</sup> making for a total of thirty-one items. They will all be discussed or at least mentioned in chronological order below.

With the exception of a few single prints, Swillens did not specify the number of illustrations per work, and even then he reduced an item consisting of twenty-six drawings to one item.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Swillens specified only one of Houbraken's etchings for *De groote schouburgh*,<sup>13</sup> no doubt because the many portraits were engraved by his son Jacob. But these forty plates, all with two or more portraits and

sundry accoutrements, including animated infants, attributes, curtains, books, small paintings and at least one fine bit of landscape,<sup>14</sup> must have been composed and drawn by the father and not by the son. In addition there are three elaborate antiquarian images<sup>15</sup> and a few miscellaneous smaller items.<sup>16</sup> By my count Houbraken's autograph illustrations and ones after his designs, including the illustrations of *De groote schouburgh*, add up to more than 425 for his entire career,<sup>17</sup> with about 150 of them dating from his Dordrecht years. Though I am able to illustrate only a fraction of these images, Google Books now make it possible and even convenient to examine almost all of them online.<sup>18</sup> Though my tallies will likely need to be revised for any future catalogue raisonné, it should already be apparent that we should stop writing about Houbraken as 'the biographer' except when referring specifically to *De groote schouburgh*. His biographical work dominated only the last few years of his life, whereas his roles as painter and inventor lasted for most of four decades. Nevertheless, Houbraken will

<sup>11</sup> The two volumes of Abraham Hellenbroek's *Het hooglied van Salomo* (not Salomon) date from 1718 and 1720, not 1717 as specified by Swillens, and lack substantial illustrations.

<sup>12</sup> I refer to the biblical edition commissioned by Adriaan Van der Marck (discussed below).

<sup>13</sup> Houbraken 1708, opp. p. 258.

<sup>14</sup> Houbraken 1719, opp. p. 126.

<sup>15</sup> Houbraken 1718, opp. p. 108 and 1719, opp. pp. 64 and 182.

<sup>16</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 143 and 1721, pp. 150 and 333.

<sup>17</sup> This figure also includes his London portrait drawings of 1713, of which ten were engraved and issued clandestinely by Pieter van Gunst, with a few more probably published posthumously.

<sup>18</sup> Note, however, that Google books often come in two or three copies which do not all include all of Houbraken's illustrations or may even have a mutilated or missing plate.

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likely continue to be seen as a major biographer and minor artist.

In 1968 Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich Hollstein (1888-1957) who relied heavily on Alfred von Wurzbach, compiled but did not illustrate a rich selection of etchings by Houbraken, including many from editions also listed by Cornelis Hofstede de Groot (1863-1930) and Swillens. Hollstein added such apparently independent biblical and mythological subjects as *The Return of the Prodigal Son* and *The Three Daughters of Cecrops Finding the Little Erichtonius in a Basket with a Serpent* [3]. The latter is a large undated print of great importance because Houbraken had relatively few opportunities to address such learned mythological subjects in his extensive work for the book trade.<sup>19</sup> The style of this etching is probably based on Italian models, and that is certainly the case with erotic prints that are directly inspired by engravings from the Lascivie series of about 1590 to 1595 by Annibale Carracci (1557-1602) [51-54].<sup>20</sup>

Hollstein also included three of Houbraken's mezzotints, which are an acquired taste. Their ability to approach the tonal values of a painting, as well as their peculiar unctuous and swarthy effect, is at once apparent in *A Nocturnal Landscape with a Shepherd, Nymph and Child* [4], since we have the corresponding painting for comparison [5]. Hollstein's catalogue knows its vagaries and omissions, however, and a great deal of work still remains to be done.

## The Learned and Prolific Painter

Houbraken's obvious energy and versatility look even more impressive when we consider the quantity and variety of his paintings. The catalogue compiled by Cornelis Hofstede de Groot in 1893 lists over 130 works, including ten Old Testament subjects, twenty-three New Testament ones, thirty-two mythologies and profane histories, five allegories, thirty-three genre paintings, twenty-two portraits, five landscapes and three unidentified subjects.<sup>21</sup> Though Hofstede de Groot did not identify all of Houbraken's pictures, this tally already points to a truly substantial and varied oeuvre, much of it produced during the Dordrecht years. The distribution of subjects is roughly what one might expect from reading *De groote schouburgh* except that Houbraken's love of landscape does not seem to be fully reflected. Inversely, he appears to have done more portraits than his dismissive view of that genre might lead one to expect. The substantial number of genre paintings could well be related to his tendency in *De groote schouburgh* to treat this category as a lesser kind of history painting.

As for the quality of Houbraken's work, it depends on one's point of view, but no modern scholar has ever argued that Houbraken was a great painter. On the other hand, no one has ever denied that he was a learned one. His beliefs and priorities were mostly part of a wider view of history painting called Dutch

<sup>19</sup> Several prints in his own *Toneel van sinnebeelden* of 1700, discussed below, form the distinguished exception.

<sup>20</sup> The connection was made by Marten Jan Bok in his Cologne lecture of 2005, where he acknowledged a debt to Eddie de Jongh.

<sup>21</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 18-32 and 461-466.

<sup>22</sup> As was first argued by Albert Blankert 1983, pp. 183-184. He further proposed that *Balthasar's Feast*, painted by Pieter de Grebber (c. 1600-1652/1653) in 1625, is a key work of early Dutch classicism.



3: Arnold Houbraken, *The Three Daughters of Cecrops Finding the Little Erichonius in a Basket with a Serpent*. Etching, 367 x 275 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



4: Arnold Houbraken, *Nocturnal Landscape with Shepherd, Nymph and Child*. Mezzotint, 165 x 206 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



5: Arnold Houbraken, *Nocturnal Landscape with Shepherd, Nymph and Child*. Oil on Panel, 25.1 x 31.5 cm. Present location unknown.

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classicism, an amorphous current which got started with late works by Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617)<sup>22</sup> and still played an important role around the time of Arnold Houbraken and his cynosure Adriaen van der Werff (1659-1722).<sup>23</sup> It emphasized the authority of ancient art, literature and philosophy and stressed the notion of decorum as adapted from classical rhetoric and poetic theory, meaning that everything, including style, costumes, settings, attributes, emotions and gestures had to be appropriate to the edifying or heroic subject portrayed. As with all such movements in the history of art, written theory generally codified or criticized existing art practice. Houbraken's most important progenitor as theoretician was Gerard de Lairesse (1640-1711), whose *Groot schilderboek* (Great Book of Painting) first came out in 1707, well after he had gone blind and stopped painting in 1690.<sup>24</sup> Ten years after the death of De Lairesse, Houbraken called him 'a flower of art as beautiful as probably stands to be seen again in no other century.'<sup>25</sup>

Classicists believed that painting is a sister art of poetry and should answer to much the same criteria, which explains why De Lairesse came to be closely associated with a literary society with the motto 'Nil Volentibus Arduum' (nothing is arduous for the willing) and with Andries Pels (1631-1681), a versatile but moral-

istic poet, playwright and theatre critic, to whose *Gebruik en misbruik des toneels* (Use and Abuse of the Theatre) and *Q. Horatius Flaccus dichtkunst* (The Poetry of Horace) Houbraken often deferred.<sup>26</sup> Pels' notorious attack of Rembrandt's costumes and nudes is discussed below.

From Goltzius on classicists stressed the importance of collectively drawing after the nude, a practice that eventually played a key role in the formation of art academies. Houbraken was clearly intrigued by this development, devoting one of his digressions to the historical background and eventual emergence of dedicated guilds of painters.<sup>27</sup> He discusses the founding of the artists' society of Dordrecht by four minor artists in 1641 and further dates the formation of the artists' society of The Hague to 1656, describing its premises on the *Korenmarkt*, including the third room, being the 'public drawing place or *Academie* erected in the year 1682.' As for Haarlem, of vital importance in connection with Goltzius, Houbraken elects not to discuss its 'flowering art school', which he says was there 'early on', but he has all the more information about Antwerp in 1664 and 1695, with mention of two '*Academien*' and festivities of 1693.

Well into his third volume Houbraken discusses a full-fledged academy along French lines in Berlin that was sponsored by Frederick

<sup>23</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 387-388. The most recent and thorough overview of classicism in Dutch painting of the Golden Age is by Albert Blankert 1999, pp. 12-33, who does not discuss the theory of Houbraken. It is important to remember, however, that Houbraken was hardly a seventeenth-century painter and not at all a seventeenth-century theoretician.

<sup>24</sup> D.P. Snoep 1983, pp. 237-239 discusses De Lairesse's theory in great detail.

<sup>25</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> For page references consult the online dbnl transcription of *De groote schouburgh* or, more indirectly, those of Swillens 1943-1953.

<sup>27</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 238-248.

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III, Elector of Brandenburg (ruled 1688-1713) and also King of Prussia (ruled 1701-1713) and erected under the guidance of Augustinus Terwesten (1649-1711) between 1690 and 1697. Houbraken describes the designation of its six rooms, including the second, 'for drawing after plaster', the fourth for the study of perspective, surveying and all kinds of architecture, and the fifth for instruction in human anatomy and 'the disposition of drapery'. The sixth room was 'a large oval space' lined with movable statues after 'the best antiques'.<sup>28</sup> Houbraken does not mention a single artist who was a product of this illustrious academy. From his point of view it was likely already a great success because it reflected the growing social prestige of Netherlandish artists, including Terwesten, working abroad. This concern is also illustrated by his extravagant appreciation of the lucrative successes of Adriaen van der Werff at the court of Düsseldorf, including the knighthood conferred on him in 1703.<sup>29</sup> When Houbraken announces his *Life of Van der Werff* as 'a graceful lock with which we can close off this third volume', it was probably at least as much in appreciation of the painter's stellar success as of his elegant portraits and sleek histories.

A fine example of Houbraken's classicism is the *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* in the Rijksmuseum [6],<sup>30</sup> which likely dates from his Dordrecht years. It takes its elevated subject from Ovid's

*Metamorphoses*, depicting the moment at which the priest Kalchas is set to sacrifice Iphigenia to appease Artemis so that the Athenian fleet might leave the harbour of Aulis, seen in the right background, and sail for Troy. To quote Edwin Buijsen:

Entirely in the spirit of classicism, he has emphasized the depiction of human emotions. Both the protagonists and some of the onlookers express definite feelings of grief, dismay and even resignation. This does not degenerate into violent drama; according to the rules of decorum the people concerned suffer the tragic event in a dignified and elevated manner. On the far left King Agamemnon has covered his face with the hem of his cloak. Following the classical model, the grief of the father was so great that it could not be depicted.<sup>31</sup>

One could add that Agamemnon strikes an august pose that at once identifies him as a king, that the clothing looks plausible, that the altar is decorated with authentic-looking motifs, that the composition is as animated as the subject allows, that the background architecture shows 'the tooth of time', and that the black slaves at the right suggest the exotic locale of a southern harbour. Finally, the handling of the painting is

<sup>28</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 270-271.

<sup>29</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 396-408.

<sup>30</sup> *The picture was auctioned (with provenance) by Sotheby's London on 3 July 1996, no. 177. Dealer Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder purchased it and illustrated it in colour in their Journal. It was acquired by the Rijksmuseum in 1998: inv./cat. no. SK-A-4942. The most recent discussion of the work is by Meredith Hale in Mai et al. (2006), cat. no. 26, pp. 156-157, with ill.*

<sup>31</sup> Buijsen 1997, p. 7, previously quoted by Horn 2000, p. 12. The translation is by Sam Herman.



6: Arnold Houbraken, *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, c. 1690 to 1700. Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 63.4 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

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refined and its tonality light. All these are points that Houbraken appreciated in his discussions of sundry pictures in his *Groote Schouburgh*.

Another instance is Houbraken's *Pallas Athena Visits Apollo and the Muses on Mount Parnassus*, now in the Dordrechts Museum, which has a complex but brilliantly, resolved composition with convincing movement and emotion as well as harmonious colour [7]. Signed and dated to 1703, this was one of thirty paintings by Houbraken and colleagues that his widow sold on 17 July 1720 to help fund the third volume of *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>32</sup> One could assume that Houbraken must have been particularly proud of this work, or else it would not have remained in the family all those years, but the substantial number of works sold suggests that Houbraken dealt in pictures on occasion.<sup>33</sup> The *Parnassus* was used by Alan Chong a few decades ago to illustrate his positive assessment of Houbraken as 'a history painter of considerable finesse and erudition, whose treatment of rarefied subjects is especially noteworthy.'<sup>34</sup> In short, if one appreciates learned history painting, there is much to like in Houbraken's work. In his predilection for 'rarefied

subjects' we again encounter his persona as inventor.

Back in 2005, in his still unpublished Cologne conference paper on Arnold Houbraken as inventor, Marten Jan Bok opened with the *Parnassus*, explaining that 'it is characteristic for Houbraken's mythological and religious paintings, which are mostly painted on medium-size canvasses.'

They contain elaborate and complicated compositions with large numbers of small figures. In the Northern Netherlands they fit in with a tradition starting with Cornelis van Poelenburch [1594/95-1667] and continued by masters such as Nicolaes Knüpfer [1603/1609-1655], Aert Jansz. Marienhof [1626-1654], Jan Steen [1626-1679] and onto Houbraken's contemporaries Willem van Mieris [1642-1747] and Nicolaas Verkolje [1673-1746].

In one instance adduced by Bok he is not sure whether a history painting should be attributed to Houbraken or Verkolje, showing that some attributions are not written in stone.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Hoet 1751, I, pp. 255-256 and specifically p. 255, no. 4: 'De Parnas-Berg met de Sang-godinnen, een kapitaal stuk', which sold for 255 florins.

<sup>33</sup> We know from the example of Jan Steen's *Wedding Contract of Tobias and Sarah* that he parted with works that he valued when, presumably, the price was right. Houbraken 1721, p. 16 and fig. 137 below.

<sup>34</sup> Chong 1994, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> The work in question is a *Dido and Aeneas* in the Getty Museum (oil on canvas 90.2 X 117.5 cm), where it is attributed to Nicolaas Verkolje. It seems to me that Verkolje used more splashes of saturated colour than Houbraken did. In addition Bok mentioned and illustrated a dubious *Artemis* (oil on canvas, 66 x 78.7 cm) which failed to sell at Sotheby's New York on 28 January 2005. It was sold by Christie's New York on 3 October 2007 and again failed to sell at the Dorotheum in Vienna on April 16, 2008. It then showed up in Paris with Millon & Associées on 27 March 2009, Cornette de Saint Cyr on 17 June 2009 and Tajan on 24 March 2010. It again failed in Stuttgart with Nagel Auktionen on 24 February 2011. The work was ever offered or sold at very low prices. I thank Otto Naumann for this and further information.



7: Arnold Houbraken, *Pallas Athena Visits Apollo and the Muses on Mount Parnassus*, signed and dated 1703. Oil on canvas, 71 x 96 cm. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum

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The *Parnassus* has a particularly important place in Houbraken's production as history painter because we have a gorgeous and highly detailed preliminary drawing in red chalk which is now in Cologne's Wallraf-Richartz-Museum [8].<sup>36</sup> However, the drawing is not identical to the painting. Most obviously the woman in the lower right of the picture is not found in the drawing. Inversely, Pegasus, the inspirational mount of poets, features at the right of the drawing but was left out of the picture.<sup>37</sup> Presuming that this sheet is typical of Houbraken's working methods at least some of the time, we learn that he edited his work when he began to paint.

A somewhat later and quite different history by Arnold Houbraken dates from very shortly after 16 May 1710, when he addressed a letter to Pieter de la Court van Voort (1664-1739) of Leiden, an important collector to whom Houbraken was to dedicate the third volume of *De groote schouburgh*. This letter [9], which is now in the Prentenkabinet of the Rijksmuseum, offers a welcome example of Houbraken's handwriting, which is remarkably legible. The artist tells De la Court, who was apparently not keen on biblical subjects, 'being too common', that he has 'sketched the orphans Romulus and Remus, where they are found by the upper shepherd, who recommends the same to his wife to be suckled.' The sketch enclosed with the missive was a pen and ink sheet now also in the Rijksprentenkabinet [10]. It is semi-final preparatory stage for the finished painting, *The Adoption of Romulus and Remus*, which is also in Amster-

dam [11]. Obviously the drawing differs substantially from the red chalk one in Cologne, but Houbraken's likely intention in this instance was to give De la Court an idea of what the finished picture would look like. We see that the shepherd Faustulus, who found the twins, is virtually identical in drawing and painting but that in the drawing his wife, Acca Larentia, is in the company of a young boy, possibly her son, who tries to draw her attention to the infants on the ground, whereas in the painting the lad has apparently gotten her to turn her head and look at the babes, clearly moved by their vulnerability and innocence.

There must have been a pictorial tradition for the subject, witness a handsome painting of 1654 by Nicolas Mignard (1606-1668) [12]. About all the two works have in common, however, is the right to left direction of their narration. Mignard's Faustulus carries the babes, who look quite robust, and is accompanied by an adoring but superfluous dog. His Acca Larentia sits next to a mysterious second woman who could be a wet nurse, given her fully exposed left breast. Houbraken more effectively renders Faustulus' supplication and the vulnerability of the twins, who had survived only thanks to a caring she-wolf. But it is Houbraken's young boy who constitutes his most puzzling but also most effective element, creating a touching little family drama which seems to unfold from drawing to painting.

Houbraken's close friend and biographer, the cattle and landscape painter Johan van Gool

<sup>36</sup> *The drawing was published by Hella Robels 1983, pp. 184-185. It formed the opening salvo of Marten Jan Bok's 2005 Cologne lecture.*

<sup>37</sup> *This fact was observed by Floor de Graaf in Paarlberg and Schoon 2001, pp. 232-233, cat. no. 38, fig. 38.1, who observed that Houbraken tightened his composition by omitting Pegasus.*



8: Arnold Houbraken, *Pallas Athena Visits Apollo and the Muses on Mount Parnassus*, c. 1703. Red chalk, 234 x 378 mm. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Graphische Sammlung. Photo Dieter Bongartz.

Mijn Heer. De La Court.

Terwijl ik mij volkomen rijkheid hebt believen te geven. Dog  
geene gerechtigheit voorende groot Bijbelstof; (te gemeen zijnde)  
Hebben wij de Yondelingen Romulus & Remus, daer zij van  
den Opsteker des gevonden waren, die de selve zijn vromen te  
zoo gen aanbeseelt; in schets gebracht. Denkende dit van ik  
gerechtigheit overom zal.

Terwijl wij het paneel daer toe vaardig makers, Enlam wij  
het selve in een water om. ja die een begin te maken  
bestende onder wij.

Mijn Heer ik gesezen bin aan  
Amst. den 16 mei 1710.

Arnoubraken

- 9: Arnold Houbraken, Letter of 16 May 1710 to Pieter de la Court of Leiden, 71x165 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



10: Arnold Houbraken, *The Adoption of Romulus and Remus*, 1710. Pen and ink drawing, 163 x 136 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



11: Arnold Houbraken, *The Adoption of Romulus and Remus*, signed, 1710. Oil on panel, 61 x 50 cm. The Hague, Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst.



12: Nicolas Mignard, *The Adoption of Romulus and Remus*, 1654. Oil on panel, 148.5 x 145.1 cm. Dallas Museum of Art.

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(1685-1763), informs us that Houbraken did many history paintings, 'both for around rooms and to be placed in cabinets.'<sup>38</sup> The catalogue of a 1708 sale held in Dordrecht shows that Houbraken's histories commanded higher prices than those by Gerard de Laresse and Godfried Schalcken (1643-1706),<sup>39</sup> colleagues whom he praised in his *Groote schouburgh*<sup>40</sup> We shall see that Houbraken's paintings still fetched high prices at a sale of 1717 in Amsterdam and one of 1718 in Dordrecht. In addition Johan van Gool wrote an appreciative description of several of Houbraken's late histories, ones that he produced after the death of his patron Jonas Witsen on 31 May 1715.

After this time he painted handsome cabinet pieces, both modern and historical, namely: one for Mister van Heemskerck in The Hague, an outstanding connoisseur of that time but who, to the great loss of all practitioners of art, was torn away by death in the prime of his life, depicting Orestes and Pilades, ready to be slaughtered before the eyes of the people but spared and saved thanks to the matchless loyalty and mutual friendship for each other; another, depicting the offering of Iphi-

genia in *Taurus*; a third work, in which Scipio returns the robbed bride to her groom; still another in which the guard in the prison comes forth in amazement; and a pendant in which he is baptized by Paul, along with his entire family. The latter two presently reside in the cabinet of the art-loving gentlemen Bisschop in *Rotterdam* and are not amongst his least. With Mister Pieter Leendert de Neufville in Amsterdam there is a Crucifixion of Christ which is rich in composition and well-painted.<sup>41</sup>

Houbraken discusses the *Orestes and Pylades* in some detail in his *Groote schouburgh*, complete with four lines of unidentified poetry, leading into his view of the limits that are best placed on blood and gore in history painting.<sup>42</sup>

As for *The Offering of Iphigenia* [13] mentioned by Van Gool, it was most likely too late to be the afore-mentioned painting in the Rijksmuseum [6].<sup>43</sup> A more complex version in Enschede, Rijksmuseum Twenthe [7] is a more likely candidate.<sup>44</sup>

Two more fine histories that could date from shortly before or after the death of Witsen depict *Christ before Pilate*. One of them was

<sup>38</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 133.

<sup>39</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 6-7 and Swillens 1944, p. V.

<sup>40</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 106-129 and 175-177.

<sup>41</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 263-264. *The present location of this work is unknown but the Städelsches Kunstinstitut Frankfurt has an unsigned drawing of the subject that could well be by Houbraken.*

<sup>43</sup> *The Rijksmuseum (inv. no. SK-A-4942) traces their picture no further back than 1764.*

<sup>44</sup> *Marten Jan Bok discussed and illustrated both versions in his 2005 Cologne lecture. I understand from Nelleke de Vries (email of 22 March 2022) that the museum has made the connection between their picture and Van Gool 1750, p. 137, but that the consensus is that there is room for doubt.*



13: Arnold Houbraken, *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, likely c. 1716. Oil on copper, 47.5 x 59.5 cm. Twenthe, Rijksmuseum Enschede.

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once in Berlin, but its present location is not known [14].<sup>45</sup> The other version is now in Copenhagen [15].<sup>46</sup> I mention Berlin first on the highly debatable assumption that Houbraken progressed to more complicated compositions. The two works are clearly related in the treatment of Christ but whatever the sequence of creation, Houbraken appears to have rethought the format and countless details, so that they are truly independent works of art. The drama of both works is restrained, which is inevitable given the subject, but the shared detail of Pontius Pilate consulting with an attendant effectively conveys the vacillation that preceded his fateful decision.

Van Gool further tells us that Houbraken did numerous portraits of the Dordrecht elite, 'including portraits of all the gentlemen who belonged to the Mint', who had earlier been portrayed by his master Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678).<sup>47</sup> The group portrait by Arnold has been lost but Samuel's earlier version has survived and demonstrates the excellence of the master. Houbraken's elite portraits are well-represented by signed pendants of about 1709 that portray Daniel Hooft (1675-1743) [16] and Sophia Maria Real Reael (1687-1724) [17]. Both sitters are handsome and stylish, explaining the demand for such works, but his right hand and her left one are virtually identical, creating an effete effect. It was the tendency of Anthony van

Dyck (1599-1641) to repeat the same elegant hands for several sitters that would later raise Houbraken's eyebrows.<sup>48</sup>

To close this brief survey with Houbraken's genre paintings, they show the influence of the Leiden 'painters of refinement' (*fijnschilders*) and can have considerable charm and originality. In the case of the pendants that I illustrate, the balustrade with a relief in *A Woman Receiving a Letter* [18] is reminiscent of similar features in works by Gerard Dou (1613-1675), whose technique Houbraken praised in *De groote schouburgh*,<sup>49</sup> but the pair of pictures also shows independence from the tradition in the conception of *Children Playing with a Dog* [19] as well as in the apparently arbitrary combination of subjects.

It is regrettable that the present study discusses relatively few of Houbraken's many paintings, giving this aspect of his creativity short thrift compared to a much more extensive treatment of his graphic art. That was a deliberate choice, however, because his work as inventor for the book trade yields a great deal more information about his personal and intellectual development over four decades than his paintings could possibly provide, making it especially important for an understanding of his creative genius and *Groote schouburgh*. But even within the category of Houbraken's graphic work there is an imbalance. Whereas his hun-

<sup>45</sup> *The file of the RKD informs us that the Staatlich Museen Berlin acquired the painting at auction in 1921, but that it was again put up for auction in 1937.*

<sup>46</sup> *Statens Museum for Kunst – KMSsp664. Marten Jan Bok discussed and illustrated both versions in his Cologne lecture of 2005.*

<sup>47</sup> *Van Gool 1750, p. 133, Horn 2000, fig. 183 and Weststeijn 2013, fig. 89.*

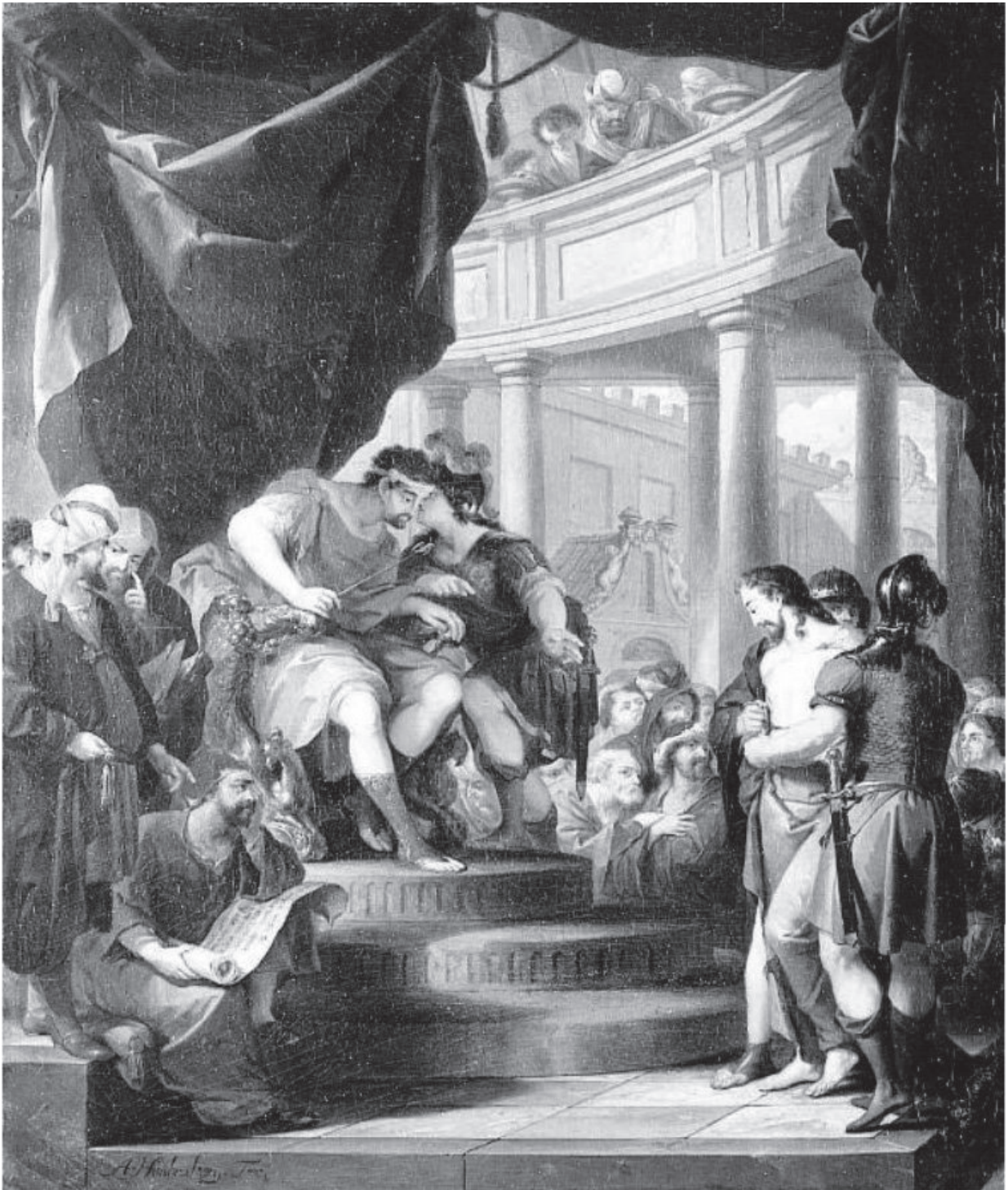
<sup>48</sup> *Houbraken 1718, p. 187.*

<sup>49</sup> *Houbraken 1719, pp. 1-7. Even so, we encounter some criticism on p. 3.*

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dreds of small emblematic book illustrations are presented selectively, his somewhat larger allegorical title prints are not. Today's readers may not be able to muster much sympathy for the conventions of the latter illustrations, which reflect Houbraken's laboriously acquired eclectic learning, even as the emblems often remain ac-

cessible and engaging after the passing of three centuries. As we shall see, it is a pity that none of these images, most of them little bigger than postage stamps, were blown up into paintings, as that would have greatly expanded the range and appeal of his work, with his classicism playing a relatively smaller role.



14: Arnold Houbraken, *Christ before Pilate*. Oil on canvas, 56.3 x 46.6 cm. Formerly Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. Present location unknown.



15: Arnold Houbraken, *Christ before Pilate*, signed. Oil on panel, 62 x 76 cm. Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst.



16: Arnold Houbraken, *Meester Daniel Hooft*, signed, c. 1709. Oil on canvas, 49.4 x 41 cm. Pendant of fig. 17. Present location unknown.



17: Arnold Houbraken, *Sophia Maria Reael*, signed, c. 1709. Oil on canvas, 49.4 x 41 cm. Pendant of fig. 16. Present location unknown.



18: Arnold Houbraken, *Children Playing with a Dog*, signed. Oil on panel, 44 x 34.2 cm. Pendant of fig. 19. Present location unknown.



19: Arnold Houbraken, *A Writing Woman Receiving a Letter*. Oil on panel, 44 x 34.2 cm. Pendant of fig. 18. Present location unknown.

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## THE ROAD TO *DE GROOTE SCHOUBURGH*: THE DORDRECHT YEARS

### Childhood and Training

Arnold Houbraken was born on 28 March 1660 to a Mennonite family in Dordrecht, the oldest city of the province of South Holland. This smallish town was a bastion of ecclesiastic conservatism and the location of the renowned *Synod of Dordrecht*, which convened there between November 1618 and May 1619 and pitted the Dutch Remonstrants or Arminians against the Counter-Remonstrants or Gomarists. The most important issue was the Remonstrant denial of the doctrine of predestination. The synod rejected their position, thereby securing the dominance of their opponents, who gained the support of Prince Maurits van Oranje Nassau (1567-1625), leading to the banishment of hundreds of Remonstrant preachers.<sup>50</sup> However, the community of Mennonites had to keep low profile as well because they also denied predestination. Moreover, they insisted on adult baptism, which put them on the wrong side of both Calvinist factions. The Mennonites were generally closer to the Remonstrants than to the Counter-Remonstrants. Not only did they reject predestination but they were not dogmatic about the literal truth of the Bible as God's word.

It should be noted that all stripes of Protestants, whether Remonstrant, Counter-Remonstrant, Mennonite, or Lutheran, were united in their aversion to Catholic rituals and doctrines. Of course Catholicism was also

identified with Spain, which had more or less terrorized the Netherlands during the Eighty Years War (1568-1648). Such contempt is embodied by Houbraken's wisely unsigned title print for the anonymously published *Laetsten Duyvels-Dreck ofte ongehoorde gruwelen van paepsche leeraers onser eeuw* (Last Devil's Filth or Unheard of Horrors of Papist Teachers of our Century) of 1687, in which a pope riding on the back of a pig feeds his own faeces to his mount while a gullible crowd in the background cheers him on [20]. A subtitle, following a sixty-four page preface, explains that the remainder of the text concerns *Nieuwe positien der Jesuyten, ende andere Roomsche Casuisten en Moralisten* (New Positions of the Jesuits and Other Roman Casuists and Moralists). By 1687 Houbraken was married and a nominal Calvinist and one might expect that he had moved on beyond this kind of rabid propaganda, but Houbraken never addressed the precise contents of the books he illustrated (other than his own), and the masterful rendering of the faces of the background spectators heralds his lasting concern with convincing physiognomy.

The Mennonite community of Dordrecht around the time of Houbraken's birth was small and closed, probably numbering fewer than a thousand individuals, or about one-fifth of the total population,<sup>51</sup> of which only about 250 were baptized members.<sup>52</sup> But their circle

<sup>50</sup> *There is a large amount of information about these events even at the Wikipedia level*

<sup>51</sup> *Israel 1995, p. 328 has Dordrecht's population at 20,000 in 1647, as opposed to 100,000 for Amsterdam.*

<sup>52</sup> *Thissen 1994, pp. 146-147.*



20: Arnold Houbraken, *The Most Recent Filth from the Devil*. Etching, 128 x 185 mm. In: Anonymous, *Laetsten Duyvels-Dreck*, 1687, title print.

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included a remarkable number of highly lettered individuals, all listed by Peter Thissen in his exhaustive study of Samuel van Hoogstraten,<sup>53</sup> which maintained close contacts with other scholars and authors. In this fecund environment connections often surmounted religious differences.<sup>54</sup> A prime example was the friendship of François van Hoogstraten (1632-1695), Samuel's brother, publisher and poet, who had strong Catholic leanings,<sup>55</sup> and Joachim Oudaan (1628-1692), a learned Dordrecht tile baker who was a poet, free thinker and member of the Rotterdam Collegiants.<sup>56</sup> We shall see that Oudaan was to become Houbraken's first great authority on archaeological matters. In short, despite any overall conservatism of Dordrecht, Houbraken was born into a potentially stimulating environment. His family, however, was probably not part of the city's intelligentsia.

Houbraken's father, Jan Jansz. Houbraken (died 1676), whom Houbraken renders in *De groote schouburgh* as a stern and principled man,<sup>57</sup> was a 'lakenstopper' or cloth darner, being a tailor. His mother, Geertruyt Aertsdr. (died 1679), is not once mentioned in Houbraken's extensive written oeuvre. His parents had both died by the time of his baptism as Aert, not Arnold, on 30 June 1680.<sup>58</sup> Aert was

twenty years old by then, meaning he spent his youth and early manhood in a community that stressed a return to a kind of ur-Christianity, stripped of the encrustations of both Catholic and Protestant dogma. Also, to repeat, the Mennonites rejected the sacrament of infant baptism. Houbraken must eventually have given up on that issue, since all his children were duly baptized as infants, but a determination to get down to basics characterizes all his mature thought.

Young Aert can have had almost no formal education beyond a modest amount of the three r's. Of course he attended Sunday school and more advanced religious instruction in the particulars of his faith, as is documented in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>59</sup> He must have learned early on that Mennonites had often been persecuted by Catholics and Protestants alike. In the year of Houbraken's birth a Mennonite mover and shaker named Tieleman Jansz. van Braght (1625-1664) published a popular two-volume compendium of martyrdom entitled *Het bloedigh tooneel der doops-gesinde, en weerloose christenen* (The Bloody Stage of Mennonites and Defenceless Christians).<sup>60</sup> Martyrs like the Renaissance painter Jan Wouterz. van Cuyck (1540-1572), whose death at the hands of evil monks is discussed early on in *De groote*

<sup>53</sup> Thissen 1994, following on Roscam Abbing and Thissen 1993.

<sup>54</sup> Thissen 1994, pp. 147-148.

<sup>55</sup> Van Hamel 1921, p. 52 and Thissen 1994, pp. 207-208.

<sup>56</sup> Thissen 1994, pp. 154, 170, 197, 226, etc.

<sup>57</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 149.

<sup>58</sup> We owe such information to the great Dordrecht archivist Jan Leendert van Dalen 1933, vol. 2, p. 2, columns 2 and 3 (photocopy kindly supplied by Marten Jan Bok).

<sup>59</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> The catalogue of the Dutch Royal Library lists thirteen copies, six of 1660 and seven of 1685.

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*schouburgh* by an outraged Houbraken,<sup>61</sup> must have been legendary in his circle, given that Van Braght mentions Van Cuyck eighteen times in his second volume.<sup>62</sup> Van Cuyck's demise is prefaced in *De groote schouburgh* by a fervent plea for tolerance and humanity in the face of religious fanaticism.<sup>63</sup>

When he was only nine years old Aert was apprenticed for two years to one Johannes de Haen (1650-1730), a merchant in twine and former student of Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693),<sup>64</sup> who encouraged his interest in drawing. Houbraken described the circumstances in detail in *De groote schouburgh* in his Life of Joris van Schoten (1587-1651), who had also been frustrated in his hopes to study art.<sup>65</sup> After short and relatively unfruitful training with Willem Van Drielenburg (1635->1677), a landscape painter from Utrecht and a great raconteur,<sup>66</sup> followed brief exposure to Jacob Levecq (1634-1675), a former Rembrandt student and portraitist.

Aert at last found a great teacher in the versatile, learned and cosmopolitan Samuel van Hoogstraten, who from 1674 to his death on 19

October 1678 nurtured the growth of the youth both as artist and theoretician. Houbraken's very first book illustration appeared in Hoogstraten's *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst anders de zichtbaere werelt* (Introduction to the Advanced School of Painting or the Visible World) of 1678. Entitled *The Shadows of the Sun with Their Striations*, it is an accomplished etching with closely observed light effects [21].<sup>68</sup> Had young Aert been given the opportunity to render all the *Inleyding* illustrations, as he had hoped,<sup>69</sup> that would have jump-started his career as inventor by four years. Three decades later, in his *Groote schouburgh*, Houbraken looked back upon his years with Van Hoogstraten as 'the foundation of everything I know about art,'<sup>70</sup> later including a fine portrait of his teacher in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>71</sup> He also became the intellectual heir of his master, who entrusted him with his second, unpublished theoretical treatise.<sup>72</sup>

Hostede de Groot assumed that Houbraken's theory was based on that of Samuel van Hoogstraten but the celebrated Utrecht scholar and poet Jan A. Emmens (1924-1971) rightly

<sup>61</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> Van Braght 1660, pp. 618, 619, 620 and 639. Note that Houbraken mentions Van Braght in his *Philaléthes brieven* 1712A, letter XXVI, p. 196.

<sup>63</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 50.

<sup>64</sup> A quick calculation establishes that De Haen would have been only nineteen at the time.

<sup>65</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 130.

<sup>66</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> For extensive information on Van Hoogstraten's versatility, consult Weststeijn ed. 2013.

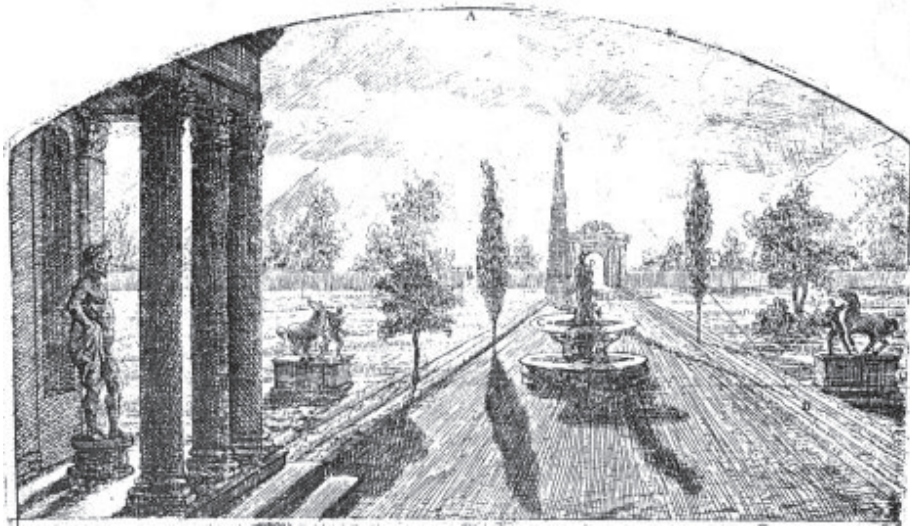
<sup>68</sup> Hoogstraten 1678, p. 269, as mentioned by Houbraken 1719, pp. 161-162.

<sup>69</sup> As mentioned by Houbraken 1719, pp. 161-162.

<sup>70</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 155.

<sup>71</sup> Houbraken 1719, plate G, p. 170, above Jan van Hoogstraten and Johan Lingelbach.

<sup>72</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 161, note \*.



21: Arnold Houbraken, *About the Shadows of the Sun, and Her Striations*. Etching, 70 x 121 mm. In: Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst*, 1678, p. 269.

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doubted this.<sup>73</sup> He argued that Houbraken was a more determined classicist than Van Hoogstraten and had even misunderstood his teacher's account of a competition between François van Knipbergen (1596-1674), Jan van Goyen (1596-1656) and Jan Porcellis (1584-1632), intended as an illustration of three basic approaches to painting, presenting it as a biographical anecdote instead.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand Emmens claimed that Houbraken must have been impressed by the knowledge of antique painting that Van Hoogstraten 'derived from Iunius', the reference being to *De Schilder-konst der Oude* (The Art of Painting of the Ancients) by Franciscus Iunius (1545-1602), which was published in Middelburg in 1641.

Arnold Houbraken's material about Samuel van Hoogstraten is amongst the most ambiguous of the entire *Groote schouburgh*.<sup>75</sup> In fact, one could fairly say that with a friend like his grateful student, Van Hoogstraten hardly needed enemies. Houbraken claims that his master was a better theoretician than artist.<sup>76</sup> Worse, he accuses his teacher of mindless and indiscriminate ambition.<sup>77</sup> It is easy to overlook that Houbraken offers no examples of his master's 'unusually envious spirit' as manifested by a fierce determination to surpass all others in 'buildings, landscapes, stormy seas, calm wa-

ters, animals, flowers, fruit and still lifes.' In truth, this unsubstantiated claim amounts to little more than character assassination. Even so, Houbraken may have accurately diagnosed an opportunistic side to his master's personality. Though he at once asserts that Van Hoogstraten was not ambitious in the sense of being a greedy and self-promoting careerist, he later observes 'that in the last years of his life, to court the ignorant to his advantage, he sometimes introduced things to his works that he had denounced in his book on the foundations of the art of painting.'<sup>78</sup> It may be to the point that we know of only one self-portrait by Houbraken [I] while we have at least seven of them by his teacher.<sup>79</sup>

Houbraken completes his discussion of Van Hoogstraten's ambition with a consideration of his master's *trompe-l'oeil* pictures, for which he had no respect other than for their technical achievement.<sup>80</sup> Note that Houbraken does not mention histories in connection with Van Hoogstraten's alleged ambition. What likely most bothered him about his master's splendid cosmopolitan career is that his undeniable international successes were often rooted in still-life, the least of the genres, and that he painted few histories. In fact, Houbraken barely discusses Van Hoogstraten's histories at all, and even then it only to criticize them or damn

<sup>73</sup> Emmens was virtually canonized in 1979 when almost his entire oeuvre was republished in four volumes. Unless I am mistaken this was an initiative of Peter Hecht of the University of Utrecht.

<sup>74</sup> Emmens 1968 (1964), p. 103.

<sup>75</sup> Horn 2013, pp. 209-239 and 241-257 cover all the ground.

<sup>76</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 139.

<sup>77</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 156-157.

<sup>78</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 159.

<sup>79</sup> Weststeijn 2013, cover and figs. 6, 8, 21, 24, 25 and 28, with fig. 29 being a repeat of fig. 8.

<sup>80</sup> At first Houbraken might appear to show admiration, but the negative verdict follows on Houbraken 1719, pp. 157-158.

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them with faint praise.<sup>81</sup> The one history that he identifies is a *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, which he only mentions in passing in the context of Van Hoogstraten's triumph at the court of Emperor Ferdinand II in Vienna, an event that Houbraken slights because it involved trivial and outdated illusionism.<sup>82</sup> He is also silent about his master's psychologically subtle genre paintings. Only Van Hoogstraten's perspectival work receives a nod of approval, it being preferable to the trompe-l'œil works for which he soon had 'too great a spirit'.<sup>83</sup> All in all it would be impossible to base a sound overview of Van Hoogstraten's life and art solely on the basis of Houbraken's testimony.

Even though Samuel van Hoogstraten mainly drew histories and painted relatively few of them, the key lesson that Houbraken learned from his master was one that he must have intended for future history painters: 'read the text', act it out, and seek to understand how someone in that situation would react and move.<sup>84</sup> On the next page Houbraken adds that Van Hoogstraten was wont to say: '*One must not invent things, but have a reason for everything one does, why one did it, or else not do it.*' The vital importance of convincing physiognomy and the faithful but reasoned rendering of texts were to become basic themes of Houbraken's later theoretical thought.

Houbraken also reports on an exchange with Van Hoogstraten related to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, the hottest theological issue of the times. The master read the topic to be discussed at Aert's next Sunday church gathering: 'Whether Adam's business was contingent business or whether God had foreknowledge of it?'<sup>85</sup> Of course Aert was expected to argue that God intended Adam to have free will so that his 'business' must have been unforeseen. Samuel's condescending comment speaks volumes: 'When I was young I did the same and thought it was time passed, but when I became wiser I realized it was time wasted.'<sup>86</sup> Houbraken does not mention that his teacher was a former Mennonite who had been expelled from the congregation in 1656 for marrying outside the fold,<sup>87</sup> so that the two men stood opposed on mutually familiar ground. Just how opposed is clear from Houbraken's observation that he would normally have hidden the piece of paper with the topic from the eyes of his master. Note, however, that Van Hoogstraten did not challenge Houbraken's aversion to the doctrine of predestination, which he likely still shared. It was futile theological speculation that the wise old man had come to see as a waste of time. Their divergent orientation had great consequences. Van Hoogstraten's one great publica-

<sup>81</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 159.

<sup>82</sup> Again Houbraken 1719, pp. 157-158.

<sup>83</sup> Again Houbraken 1719, p. 158.

<sup>84</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 162-163.

<sup>85</sup> 'Preordained', as in Horn 2000, p. 283 and Horn 2013, p. 250, is not quite the right word for 'voorwist', which means to know ahead of time or to foresee. Also, Houbraken says 'tydverdryf', which is passing or putting in time, clearly less positive than 'time well-spent'. Finally, 'confirmation classes', as in Horn 2000, p. 183, are not a Mennonite activity.

<sup>86</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 164.

<sup>87</sup> Roscam Abbing and Thissen 1993, p. 50, document no. 43.

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tion shuns religious controversy whereas almost all of Houbraken's published work is explicitly or implicitly rife with it.

### Assiduous Early Learning

If we may take Houbraken's own word for it, he was an autodidact with a natural aptitude for learning. In his *Philaléthes brieven* of 1712 the biographer commented on his precocious interest in literature and especially poetry. 'Poetry', he tells us, 'is best learned in the spring of youth [...]. In my early period, I did so, spending my spare hours with the art society, *Prodesse & delectare* [to improve and delight].'<sup>88</sup> 'Curiosity', he also wrote in the introduction to his emblem book of 1714, 'already spurred me on in my youth (without needing any coercing) to the reading of fine histories, proverbs, [and] sensible allusions concerning all sorts of matters.'<sup>89</sup> Young Aert learned that things could slip from his mind, so that he started taking the notes that later stood him in good stead while composing the exegesis of his emblems. In 'the long winter evenings', Houbraken tells us, he preferred not to bring out his books but instead to concentrate on annotating and amplifying his notes with historical accounts, fables or edifying sayings. With atypical lack of modesty Houbraken claims that his thought thus evolved to a perfection comparable to the best of creation. Time, so he assures us at the beginning and end of his 1714 preface, is our most valuable commodity. Hence, we may reasonably conclude

that Houbraken was an exceptionally assiduous youngster, who was ready to profit from intensive artistic and intellectual guidance.

As Piet Swillens surmised, the foundation for Houbraken's undeniable learning must have been laid during his four years, from 1674 to 1678, as student of Samuel van Hoogstraten.<sup>90</sup> That his teacher supervised and even censured his reading is documented in *De groote schouburgh*, where Van Hoogstraten is said to have vehemently disparaged the very recent translation of Ovid's *Amores* (The Loves) by Abraham Valentyn (died 1697) for being obscene.<sup>91</sup> This publication must have been the first volume of *Al de werken van P. Ovidius Naso* [...] as translated by Valentyn, which was published in 1678 and which opens with *The Loves* and continues with a few other books of Ovid's poetry, such as *The Heroines*. Houbraken's love of reading likely predated Valentyn's Ovid translation and he remained an avid reader all his life, no doubt amassing a substantial library as source for historical, archaeological, mythological, allegorical, emblematic, philosophical, theological, theoretical, literary, biographical, numismatic and topographic information,<sup>92</sup> much of which found its way into his *Groote schouburgh*.

Latin was still the lingua franca of educated Europe in the eighteenth century, so that no scholar of the arts or sciences could do without. It is tempting, therefore, to assume that a man of around 1700 who read no Latin can hardly

<sup>88</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXVI, p. 192.

<sup>89</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), n.p. (preface).

<sup>90</sup> Swillens 1944, pp. IX-XI, XVIII-XIX.

<sup>91</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 121-122. *The Amores* or *The Loves* were Ovid's first poems

<sup>92</sup> For a breakdown of Houbraken's sources by categories, Swillens 1944, pp. XXXIV-XXXVI.

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have been a Humanist in the sense of being a representative of Renaissance literary culture.<sup>93</sup> In addition, Latin was not Houbraken's only weak spot. To quote his plagiarist Jacob Campo Weyerman (1677-1747), our biographer 'possessed even fewer languages than eyes.'<sup>94</sup> But though Houbraken was an autodidact with very little formal education, he read and digested an astonishing amount in Dutch and Dutch translation. This hardly imposed any limitations on him, since the Dutch translated everything in sight, including items in sundry modern languages as well as all the classical texts that might otherwise have been accessible only to professional scholars. Naturally this greatly increased the number of people who could take part in scholarly discourse. Whenever he was out of his depth, Houbraken informs us in his introduction to his *Philaléthes brieven*, he would call on his better educated friends.<sup>95</sup>

Houbraken would eventually need biography and topography for the Lives of *De groote schouburgh*, and he mainly used poems to describe paintings instead of doing the work himself. Most of the other material was destined for his theoretical digressions. Along the way he must have assembled his material about the

history of humanistic art biography from Antiquity through the Quattrocento up to Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), Karel van Mander (1548-1606) and Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688)<sup>96</sup> and have taken notice of the common metaphors of the stage and the theatre<sup>97</sup> which presumably suggested the title for his great work. But his predominant concern was with what he believed to be reliable facts and images concerning archaeologically correct costumes and trappings as required for mainly hypothetical Graeco-Roman and Biblical history paintings. Some of Houbraken's authorities had already assembled large quantities of archaeological and other information that Houbraken absorbed.

Although he became very learned, as even his persistent critic Jan Emmens had to admit,<sup>98</sup> Houbraken was not a true polymath because his interests were circumscribed. For instance, beyond the three fiddlers of *De groote schouburgh*,<sup>99</sup> music apparently scarcely interested him. Not a single composer is mentioned in its three volumes. Medical science is another example. The only medical treatment described in the *Schouburgh* involves Francesco Giuseppe Borri (1627-1695), a notorious international charlatan and swindler whom Houbraken

<sup>93</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 68, note\* cites only one Latin work, namely *Brabantia Illustrata* by Jacobus Le Roy (1633-1719), which first came out in 1676, but it is a picture book. The other exception occurs when he adduces the Latin edition of Von Sandrart's *Teutche Academie* (Houbraken 1718, p. 299), but he presumably sought help from a better educated friend when consulting it.

<sup>94</sup> Weyerman 1729, vol. 1, p. 12 or Broos 1990, p. 103.

<sup>95</sup> Houbraken 1712A, n.p.

<sup>96</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 3-6.

<sup>97</sup> Horn 2000, p. 138. Note 4-52 offers additional examples. Raup 2002 points out that the theatre metaphor originated with *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Abraham Ortelius (1517-1598).

<sup>98</sup> Emmens 1968 (1964), p. 102.

<sup>99</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 201-202..

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takes seriously.<sup>100</sup> Also, as I noted in *The Golden Age Revisited*, ‘the science of his time appears to have passed Houbraken by, witness his complete silence about the microscopic investigations of Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723), ‘whose great renown drew a steady stream of Europe’s ruling and intellectual elite to his home in Delft.’<sup>101</sup> Leeuwenhoek’s findings could have enriched Houbraken’s understanding of nature and hence his theology and art theory. But if the biographer must be faulted for anything, it is that he failed better to edit his accumulated data before sluicing much of it into his *Groote schouburgh*,<sup>102</sup> thereby creating some of its most unpalatable material.

Some works, such as the *Roomsche mogentheid* (Roman Hegemony) by Joachim Oudaan, first came out while Houbraken was still a young boy and were then republished at fairly regular intervals so that it is difficult to tell when they had their initial or greatest impact on the biographer. Other works, such as *Op de stilzwygentheyd van de Amsterdamse helicon* (On the Silence of the Amsterdam Helicon) by Willem van der Hoeven (1653-1719) and Arnoud van Halen (1673-1732), which accompanied the death of Gerard de Lairesse in 1711, provide a firm earliest possible date.<sup>103</sup>

There are also two key works that Houbraken almost certainly read the moment they were published, shortly before and after leaving the shop of Samuel van Hoogstraten. Both volumes were by the theatre critic Andries Pels. His *Q. Horatius Flaccus dichtkunst* came out in 1677, about a year before Van Hoogstraten’s death. *His Gebruik én misbruik des toneels*, which Pels intended as a continuation of the first, saw the light of day only four years later. Whereas Houbraken’s lasting infatuation with Pels was a mixed blessing, these two modest volumes must have introduced the young artist to the controversies surrounding the Amsterdam stage in the late seventeenth century. They must also have helped crystallize his notions concerning objective standards of criticism and may also have served as catalysts in the process of integrating his nascent deistic convictions with the ruling classicistic literary theory of the time.

Finally we need to consider the role of Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679). This most prominent playwright and poet of the Golden Age was a Mennonite who converted to Catholicism in 1641 or 1642. That fact alone could have made him persona non grata in all Protestant circles, but his genius was so great that he was not to be ignored. Because he had

<sup>100</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 287. This alchemist, occultist and inventive parasite, whom Houbraken calls Burry, arrived in Amsterdam in December of 1660 and left four years later. Houbraken was not alone in being conned by Borri. In April of 1662 the burgomasters of Amsterdam made him an honorary citizen. Clearly news of Borri’s extravagant larceny all over Europe and his final imprisonment and death in Rome did not reach Houbraken.

<sup>101</sup> Horn 2000, p. 165, with a comparison of their similar writing style on pp. 161-163.

<sup>102</sup> Not nearly all of it, however, as is demonstrated by Houbraken’s 1723 emblem book (which he had completed by 1714), as discussed below.

<sup>103</sup> Van der Hoeven and Van Halen 1711 and Houbraken 1721, pp. 130-131. See also Van der Hoeven 1703, which Houbraken used in connection with Melchior d’Hondecoeter and Jacob de Heusch (1721, pp. 70 and 366-367) but did not completely acknowledge.

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published almost all his work by the time Houbraken studied with Samuel van Hoogstraten, this literary giant could have influenced young Aert at any time. That Houbraken eventually got around to Vondel and developed great respect for him is clear from the fact that he quotes at length from his *Bespiegelingen van Godt en godtsdienst* (Reflections on God and Religion)<sup>104</sup> in his emblem book of 1714<sup>105</sup> and that he referred to him forty-three times in the course of writing his *Groote schouburgh*.<sup>106</sup>

### **Bachelor and Illustrator**

Once trained by Hoogstraten, Houbraken moved in with a married sister and launched his career in Dordrecht. Checking the Mennonite baptismal records published by Jan Leendert Van Dalen (1864-1936), we learn that the mar-

ried sibling can only have been Annetje. She was baptized in 1670, so that she was presumably born around 1650 and was roughly ten years Aert's senior. She married one Claes. Broeksmit on 6 April 1675.<sup>107</sup> Annetje and Claes had therefore been married about three and a half years when young Aert moved in with them.

One of the curiosities of Houbraken's life is that we have a closely contemporary biography in the form of an anonymous satirical poem entitled *Lyris*, which was published early in 1713.<sup>108</sup> The poem follows his footsteps from his birth until after his relocation to Amsterdam in 1710. Up to this point it is relatively anodyne, touching on his Mennonite origins<sup>109</sup> and his modest social background, including his parents' lack of ambition for him,<sup>110</sup> but after Van Hoogstraten's death it comes into its delicious own.

<sup>104</sup> Vondel 1662, pp. 3 and 92-93 (accessible online in a Google book).

<sup>105</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem I, discussed below.

<sup>106</sup> Following the indices of Swillens 1943, 1944 and 1953 (26, 12 and 5 mentions).

<sup>107</sup> Van Dalen 1933, columns 2 and 3, via Marten Jan Bok (4 December 1998).

<sup>108</sup> Early in 1713 because *Lyris* does not satirize or even allude to Houbraken's flight to England in the summer of 1713.

<sup>109</sup> Anonymous 1713, p. 5. Quoted in the original Dutch by Hofstede de Groot, 1893, p. 459 and Swillins 1944, p. XXI, note 3.

<sup>110</sup> Anonymous 1713, p. 6, Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 459 and Swillens 1944, p. X.

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See, there, my lofty Painter, like James and his shells  
Managing as best he can in a tiny room  
A square vault, unpleasant and dingy in appearance  
But with his easel provided with the necessary light.  
Is Envy to be put off by such a poor or humble dwelling?  
He who lodges Lyris graces his home as if [with] a King:  
For such a King, so renowned in art  
Almost transforms a cold fireplace into a warm hearth  
His sister might have expected as much from his brush.  
But he, transported by much more elevated thoughts  
Decided to escape the vault of his sister and brother-in-law.  
And do no less than offer his art to the courts of Kings.  
Envy could eat her heart out about this [but]  
My hero sallies forth. I hear Fame amply resound  
His departure. Farewell ungrateful fatherland!  
Thus went his song of departure; I see the chalk cliffs  
Tempt me to the Court of Britain, with its many ports.  
Here reigns Charles, Uncle of the Princes of Orange.  
This court, now Holland's friend, would surely soon reward  
Lyris, rich in art, with the King's money and favour.  
No[.] No one doubted that the Kolfstraat would soon speak,  
Of the great fortune placed in his lap there.  
His Brother-in-Law himself, a smallish man but great of beard  
Greater still of moustache and nose, but virtuous in nature  
Expected to recoup the losses of his inn keeping,  
And to compensate himself richly for these,  
Even though the debt incurred there by Lyris was substantial.  
But whatever he did, or did not do, his art was denounced  
As in Holland. Who would want to paint for barbarians  
Like the British, inexperienced in the arts  
And coarse, and clumsy, like the dogs bred there?  
Arrogant England, altogether deprived of discrimination!  
Thou art not worthy that Lyris lingers here:  
He leaves once more; and if this ever causes you regret,  
It should be honour enough for you that his renown  
Once dared expose itself to your ungrateful court.

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The likely truth behind this consummate send-up is that Houbraken travelled to England around 1680 and that he had plenty of energy and ambition right from the start.

By 1682 Houbraken had become fully active as illustrator. The young artist rendered thirty-five small etchings for *De Schoole der Wereld, Geopent in CXL. vliegende bedenkingen op veelerhande voorvallende gezichten en zaeken* (The School of the World, Opened in 140 Brief Considerations of a Variety of Occurring Views and Matters) by Joseph Hall (1574-1656), as translated from the Latin and published by François van Hoogstraten.<sup>111</sup> Hall was an English bishop, moralist and satirist of Puritan background who came to be known internationally as ‘the English Seneca’ and ‘the Christian Seneca’ for his Christianization of Stoicism. However, his status as neo-stoic is disputed, and he was likely primarily a Christian moralist.

The title print shows a youth who has climbed a tree to escape from a crazed unicorn but is in danger of crashing down because two mice are gnawing their way through the tree trunk even as he is menaced by a dragon and snakes down below. It is a marvellous image but certainly not by Houbraken. That is because the explanatory text, likely written by the translator, refers us to the twelfth chapter of the ‘*Historie van Barlaäm en Josephat door J. Damasceni*’ for

a more detailed explanation.<sup>112</sup> It is there that we encounter an earlier version of the 1682 title print along with a discussion of ‘how one must avoid the sensuous pleasures of the world’. The problem is that François van Hoogstraten’s translation of Johannes Damascenus (AD c. 650-740) came out in 1672, two years before Houbraken entered the studio of Samuel van Hoogstraten, when Aert was only twelve years old.

The remaining thirty-five illustrations of the book have a great variety of subject matter, ranging from a single bird, skull or candle to multi-figured interior scenes and ambitious landscapes, which must have challenged young Houbraken to the utmost. Note, however, that only a quarter of the topics is paired with one of Houbraken’s images, of which only eight are signed.<sup>113</sup> Who made the selection and on what grounds is not known. Certainly the publication is not remotely a picture book. It opens with prose and poetry and the extensive text is in verse throughout. In addition François van Hoogstraten appended a body of his *Mengeldichten*, being a selection of his own poetry. The pattern is repeated in all the books illustrated by Houbraken. The visual component is swamped by the written word and especially poetry, some of it written by Houbraken himself, making it difficult to argue with Svetlana Alpers that Dutch culture was primarily visual culture.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Readers should know that the KB has the book correctly catalogued under Joseph Hall, but the online Google Books are (as yet?) only to be found under François van Hoogstraten.

<sup>112</sup> *Damacenus* 1672, folio 138, described on p. 133, complete with mention of unicorn, dragon and snakes. Another large print, taken from folio 407 of the same source, follows p. 42 of François van Hoogstraten’s *Mengeldichten*. It depicts *Josephat Finally Finds Barlaäm* and has nothing to do with Joseph Hall’s text.

<sup>113</sup> A. Houbraken: *emblems* I, VIII, LV, LX, LXX, LXXVI, XCVIII and CXXIII.

<sup>114</sup> The reference is to Alpers’ *The Art of Describing* of 1984. Gary Schwartz 2002 claimed that Svetlana Alpers is my *bête noire* throughout *The Golden Age Revisited* but she shows up only once in the first eleven chapters.

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Houbraken's illustrations for the Hall-Van Hogenberg edition introduced him to the task of composing a veritable chain of varied images, thus forming a brilliant foundation for his lifelong role as indefatigable inventor for the book trade. It is difficult to suggest, however, how this eclectic work could have helped shape Houbraken's thought, since it primarily presents Hall as a conventional moralist. *On Contemplating a Picturesque Landscape* [22]<sup>115</sup> illustrates the notion that the beauties of nature can distract us from contemplating eternity. Similarly *On Seeing an Excessively Flowering Tree*<sup>116</sup> warns against the dangers of worldly ambition. *On Seeing an Old Insignificant Hut, Which Lacks its Thatched Roof, and is in Ruin* [23]<sup>117</sup> is totally different in appearance from the tree images but the oppressive message is much the same. The following lines ask: 'what paints for me a more perfect image of the weak old age of men?' The remainder of the poem is fully as depressing as it is moralizing, the message being that old age is ever decrepit and deficient. Only what we build as foundation for our eternal abode is of certain value. We shall see that such ideas were not remotely like Houbraken's own as he formulated those thirty years later, which did not allow for a personal God or any life after death. Nor were Hall's notions about the dangerous distractions of nature shared by Houbraken, whose *Groote schouburgh* lists her

beauties at length and identifies the *discerning* imitation of nature as the primary duty of the artist.<sup>118</sup> However, Hall's ideas must have had at least one immediate saving grace for Houbraken, being that they are incompatible with the doctrine of predestination.

It would be unfair to dismiss *De Schoole der Wereld* as no more than a compendium of heavy-handed Christian moralization, witness *On Getting Dressed* [24].<sup>119</sup> It shows a woman putting the final touches on her outfit for the day while sitting on an elaborate canopied bed fitted with Solomonic columns of a kind known from works by Raphael (1483-1520), Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). Both title and image have only a tenuous connection to the following text, which tells us we are lost without the support of our surroundings and the aid of our fellow human beings and other denizens of creation. We can only cheer when Hall concludes that much of mankind does not deserve the many wonderful animals that God created for our use and delectation; nay, that those animals would be better off without us. However, we need not reflect on whether or not Houbraken appreciated these specific sentiments or considered how he might give concrete form to abstract concepts such as interdependence and ingratitude. He simply opted for a literal and pedestrian rendering of the title.

<sup>115</sup> Hall 1682, emblem V, p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Hall 1682, emblem XI, p. 26.

<sup>117</sup> Hall 1682, emblem CX, p. 244.

<sup>118</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 261-278 *passim*, as summarized in Horn 2000, pp. 432 -443. Note that Houbraken rules out slavish imitation of nature. The purpose is ever to convey a sense of the excellence of God's remote creation and plan, and most certainly not to show Him at work in nature.

<sup>119</sup> Hall 1682, emblem LXX, p. 149.



22: Arnold Houbraken, *On Contemplating a Picturesque Landscape*. Etching, 68 x 79 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem V, p. 12..



23: Arnold Houbraken, *On Seeing an Old and Insignificant Hut*. Etching, 71 x 83 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem CX, p. 244..



24: Arnold Houbraken, *On Getting Dressed*. Etching, 65 x 77 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem LXX, p. 149.



25: Arnold Houbraken, *On Sighting a Night Owl*. Etching, 67 x 79 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem LXV, p. 136..

In fact, with most emblems the title virtually dictated the depiction even without reference to the text. Thus four playing infants could hardly convey the idea that a re-born soul must put the folly of its previous vanities behind it, but the title, *On Seeing a Children's Game*,<sup>120</sup> was all Houbraken needed. Similarly a single impressive owl could hardly suggest the safety of 'a quiet, sombre and solitary life' (hardly Houbraken's thing), but the title, *On Sighting a Night Owl* [25],<sup>121</sup> left little to his discretion or imagination. In short, even if Hall's moralistic ideas were foreign to Houbraken that can hardly have hindered his creative process. However, he may have dipped into the text now and then in pursuit of a secondary detail that might help explain an emblem, as with the unprepossessing *On Viewing Glasses* [26],<sup>122</sup> which shows a man holding a pair of glasses in each hand while another man with cane and dog walks further back. Hall's text helpfully informs us that 'glasses can't give sight to a blind man'.

*The Picturesque Landscape* would appear to be based on *The Avenue at Meerdervoort* of about 1650 by Houbraken's fellow Dordrecht painter Albert Cuyp (1620-1691) [29], but this clear lineage is a rare exception to the rule. It is well-nigh impossible to suggest such a source for other images. *On Seeing a Great and Price-*

*less Guest Meal*<sup>123</sup> could be related to the diagonal *Last Supper* of 1592 to 1594 by Tintoretto (1518-1594) in San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, but the connection, if any, must have been via an intermediary print. Most of the time we are looking for motifs and not for whole compositions, as with *On Seeing the Ruins of an Ancient Cloister*,<sup>124</sup> which could well have been adapted from one or more of the Italianate landscapes by Bartholomeus Breenberg (1508-1657) or Jan Both (1610-1652).<sup>125</sup> In many instances, however, Houbraken was likely on his own, as with *On a Certain Student Who Had Put Himself to Death* [27].<sup>126</sup> One can hardly imagine that he worked after a painting with this depressing subject. Another instance is *On the Reception of Tidings of the Lima Earthquake, Through Which a Forest was Sunk and Buried by the Fall of Two Mountains* [28], which must have introduced a brand new subject to Houbraken and his Dutch audience,<sup>127</sup> though the draconian moral ('that disasters teach us about what God can do, and what we have deserved') would have been accessible to one and all. Predictably Houbraken was not able to render two mountains swallowing up a forest, but he showed the aftermath of the horrific event with branches protruding from under great masses of stone. A youth in the left foreground wrings his hands while a central man

<sup>120</sup> Hall 1682, emblem XL, p. 88.

<sup>121</sup> Hall 1682, emblem LXV, p. 136.

<sup>122</sup> Hall 1682, emblem CIV, p. 233.

<sup>123</sup> Hall 1682, emblem LXXXXI, p. 178.

<sup>124</sup> Hall 1682, emblem LXXXVI, p. 165.

<sup>125</sup> For instance Blankert 1965, cat.no. 29, fig. 30 and cat.no. 48, fig. 53.

<sup>126</sup> Hall 1682, emblem CXVII, p. 252.

<sup>127</sup> Hall 1682, emblem LX, p. 124. Assuming I have translated 'Limenssche' correctly, the reference must be to the great Lima earthquake of 20 October 1609.

26: Arnold Houbraken, *On the Seeing of Glasses*. Etching, 65x79 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem CIV, p. 233.



27: Arnold Houbraken, *On Receiving Tidings of the Lima Earthquake, Through Which a Forest was Sunk and Buried by the Fall of Two Mountains*. Etching, 65 x 77 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem LX, p. 124.



28: Arnold Houbraken, *On a Certain Student Who Had Put Himself to Death*. Engraving, 65 x 77 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1725, emblem CXVII, p. 252.



29: Aelbert Cuyp, *The Avenue at Meerdervoort*, c. 1650 -1652. Oil on canvas, 72 x 100 cm. London, Wallace Collection.

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shows distress and disbelief. Between and behind them a third, man is fleeing.<sup>128</sup> Given such remarkable images, Marlies Enklaar was obviously wrong to claim that Houbraken's 'countless designs and etchings for book illustrations' were 'all strongly modelled on French examples.'<sup>129</sup> 'Countless' is not a helpful qualification and one would be hard-pressed to identify even one illustration of *De Schoole der Wereld* that is 'strongly' based on a French model. Certain is only that the young Aert Houbraken displayed great inventiveness on numerous occasions.

A curiosity of *De Schoole der Wereld* is that it came out twice within Houbraken's lifetime and twice more not long after his death. All four versions have the same text and long introduction by JOS: EXON, a pseudonym used by Hall, as well as an endorsement in verse by the historian Matthys Balen (1611-1691) vouching for their continuous authenticity. The second edition of 1687 has the same illustrations as the one of 1682. In fact, there is only one addition, which is more complex than the other images.<sup>131</sup> More importantly, we have a third edition, published by Hendrik Bosch (fl. 1717-1729) in Amsterdam in 1725,<sup>132</sup> in which everything was reworked, with approximately the same im-

ages presented in mirror image. The book has a new and anonymous title print and dedication to one Kornelia Schynvoet.<sup>133</sup> The print, which lacks any kind of explanation, likely shows Joseph Hall reclining on a couch and surrounded by visions or dreams of his sources, including an angel who probably represents his Divine inspiration. At the bottom of the print Bosch is identified as the publisher but we can only guess at the undistinguished engraver.

The difference between the illustrations of the two early editions and those of 1725 is clearly seen with *On Seeing a Spider Hanging in Her Web in a Window* [30].<sup>134</sup> The seemingly unrelated text describes the predatory behaviour of all animals and eventually proposes that the devil is like the spider and we are like the fly, caught in the trap of sin: 'Woe unto us? Who escapes that spider?' It is one of the technically weakest images of the books of 1682 and 1687. The corresponding illustration of the third edition is more firmly and closely modelled, with the Italianate temple facade in the foreground replaced by a Dutch Baroque edifice and the barely discernible structure in the background crystallized into what looks like the Colosseum [31].<sup>135</sup> Similarly in the case of the Lima Earthquake the

<sup>128</sup> *The etching is scribbly, so that it can take some time before one realizes that this is not some kind of monstrous insect but a bent-over man holding a cane and a large load on his back.*

<sup>129</sup> *Enklaar and Schuckman 2003.*

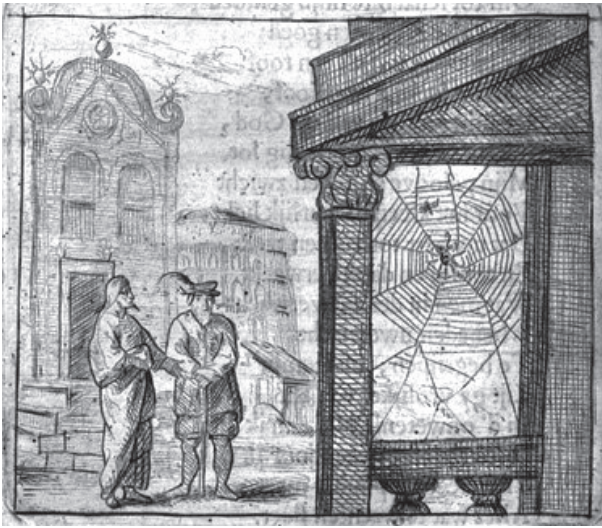
<sup>130</sup> *Not to be confused with another Matthys Balen, who was a student of Houbraken.*

<sup>131</sup> *It is an illustration to Emblem XIX ('Andermael op het zelve gezichte'), located on an inserted page between pages 42 and 43.*

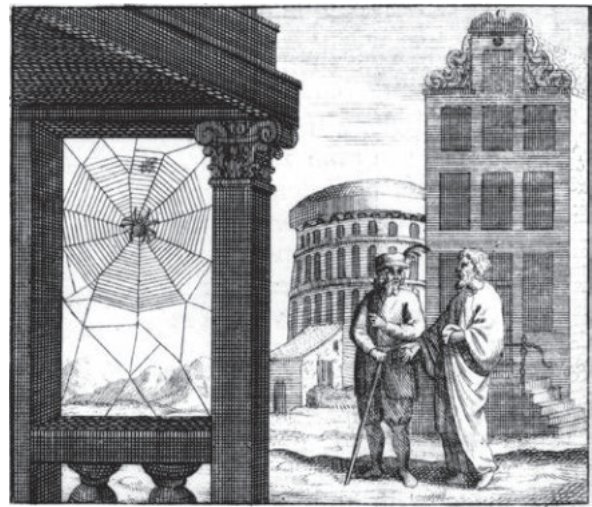
<sup>132</sup> *Hendrik Bosch published a few works by Jacob Campo Weyerman between 1722 and 1727, including his **Den Amsterdamschen Hermes** of 1721 to 1723. Gijsbert Tysens (1693-1732) was twice published by Bosch in 1722. But Bosch had also shown interest in Houbraken's kind of subject matter in that year by publishing a book about emblems written by Claas Bruin (1671-1721), as listed in the bibliography below.*

<sup>133</sup> *She is repeatedly mentioned but not identified online. She has no connection with Simon Schijnvoet (1653-1722).*

<sup>134</sup> *Hall 1682, emblem XV, p. 32.*



30: Arnold Houbraken, *On Seeing a Spider, Hanging in Her Web in a Window*. Etching, 67 x 79 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem XV, p. 32.



31: Anonymous engraver after Arnold Houbraken, *On Seeing a Spider, Hanging in Its Web in a Window*. Engraving, 65 x 77 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1725, emblem XV, p. 32.



32: Arnold Houbraken, *On a Certain Student Who Had Put Himself to Death*. Etching, 67 x 79 mm. In: Joseph Hall, *De Schoole der Wereld*, 1682, emblem CXVII, p. 252.

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hand-wringing youth was omitted and the fleeing figure made more recognizable. Whereas the above-mentioned tree images could be mistaken for etchings, everything else looks engraved. In fact, with the stripped and sterile version of the Student Suicide that could only be the case [32]. Curiously the single addition of the 1687 edition was not taken over in 1725, which virtually proves that this third version was directly based on the one of 1682. Of course the late date explains why none of the illustrations are signed by Houbraken who, needless to say, had died six years before. Unfortunately nothing identifies the engraver of the emblems, who must have worked after Houbraken's original etchings. This could have been one of several artists such as Jacob Folkema and Jan Goeree (1670-1731) who were active around this time. Not all are likely candidates, however.<sup>136</sup>

We may ask why Hendrik Bosch would have spent a lot of money to publish images that are so similar to the original ones. Possibly the death of François van Hoogstraten in 1696 is the key to the mystery. It could be that nobody envisaged another edition of *De Schoole*

*der Wereld* by then so that the type was used for other books and the etched plates were lost. That the book's text needed to be reset can hardly have mattered since typesetters of the time were highly adept at producing precise copies of existing works, witness the 1753 edition of *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>137</sup>

Still another edition of *De Schoole der Wereld* came out a little later. It has the same illustrations as the book of 1725. The aforementioned Marten Schagen, who published this fourth version, was still a young man in the twenties. Not one of his many autograph publications dates from before 1730, though he had already published work by others before that. Since the title page does not specify the time of publication, it is to 1730 that I would provisionally date the book, thereby following the example of the KB catalogue.<sup>138</sup> That would mean that Schagen published almost immediately after Bosch ceased to be active, presumably to meet continued demand for Hall's work. In fact, it seems overwhelmingly likely that Schagen simply took over everything, including dedication and title print, from Bosch<sup>139</sup> and merely

<sup>135</sup> This same later engraving is also illustrated, without date, in Horn 2000, fig. 51. In fact, Horn 2000, figs. 19, 50, 51 and 55 all came from the third edition but are discussed in the context of the first one.

<sup>136</sup> In addition there were, in alphabetical order, Pieter van Gunst, Jacobus Harrewijn, Jacob Houbraken, Joseph Mulder, Abraham Rademaker, Leonard Schenck, Jan Wandelaar and no doubt others. Gilliam van der Gouwen had died in 1520. Harrewijn was getting on and died only two years later. Rademaker (1676/77-1735) was exclusively a topographic specialist.

<sup>137</sup> The two editions of *De groote schouburgh* are compared in the appendix to *Houbraken Translated*. Note that the 1753 edition came out 'only' 32 years after the third volume of the *Schouburgh*, whereas 47 years passed between the second and third editions of *De Schoole der Wereld*.

<sup>138</sup> That date appears with no. 20 in the KB catalogue. A repeat entry under no. 25 specifies c. 1700, which is a blatant impossibility.

<sup>139</sup> Bosch's name was removed from below the title print whereas Schagen became identified as the publisher on the socle below the couch.

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added a new title page.<sup>140</sup> An eventual catalogue raisonné would need to establish precisely what happened and if this was an isolated instance of such an apparently baffling development.

François van Hoogstraten clearly did not intend *De Schoole der Wereld* for the militant majority of Dutch Calvinists, since he certainly did not believe in predestination any more than did Aert Houbraken or Samuel van Hoogstraten. François had embraced Catholicism around the time of Houbraken's birth.<sup>141</sup> Born in The Hague and mainly Rotterdam based, he lived in Dordrecht from 1640 to 1652 and again from 1678 to 1683. He published his brother's *Hooge schoole der schilderkonst* just before leaving Rotterdam. François must have developed Mennonite sympathies because the second work of his own, which had come out in 1664, was an elegy about Tielman van Braught,<sup>142</sup> the above-mentioned expert on Mennonite martyrdom. It appears that Houbraken bonded with the distinguished publisher, author, poet and translator and became a friend of his two distinguished sons, David (1658-1724) and Jan (1662-1736), who were both poets (among other accomplishments) and close contemporaries of his. Especially Jan was to play an important and eventually negative role in Houbraken's life.

One year later Houbraken supplied the title print and twenty other truly substantial etchings for *Het toneel der ongevallen, verhandelende in een schat van oude en hedendaegsche voorbeelden* (The Stage of Misfortunes, Treated in a Treasure of Old and Contemporary Examples) by the highly prolific Dordrecht author Lambert van den Bosch (1620-1698). The book consists of three volumes plus a subsidiary text entitled *Byspel van vorstelycke treur gevallen* (Supplementary Act with Instances of the Sorrow of Rulers) and is a very loosely organized compendium of a bewildering variety of natural, social and historical disasters discussed in several dozen 'histories.' How Houbraken made his rigorous selection of 'only' twenty-one plates is not clear. In fact the topics of his plates could have been dictated to him. The work is in any case a great achievement. It contains by far the greatest concentration of full-page illustrations of Houbraken's entire oeuvre. It demonstrates his astonishing fecundity and must in one blow have established his reputation as illustrator. A comprehensive examination of the *Toneel der ongevallen* would require a modest book or lengthy article and therefore falls outside the scope of the present study.<sup>143</sup>

The title print presents an *Allegory of Bad Government* [33].<sup>144</sup> It depicts the deplorable

<sup>140</sup> The 1725 title page the book is identified as the 'second edition, with printing errors removed [*van drukfouten verbeterd*]', whereas the c. 1730 version states that the work is 'now reprinted, and improved in printing matter [*printwerk*]':

<sup>141</sup> According to Thissen 1994, pp. 207-208 he did not formally convert.

<sup>142</sup> Van Hoogstraten 1664, there spelled Bracht.

<sup>143</sup> Of course readers can easily view all the illustrations via the online Google book, but a knowledge of Dutch would be needed to make sense of things.

<sup>144</sup> A famous earlier example, dated 1338-39, is by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Sala della Pace in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. It seems most unlikely that Houbraken was aware of it.



33: Arnold Houbraken, *Allegory of Bad Government*. Etching, 177 x 134 mm. In: Lambert van den Bosch, *Toneel der ongevallen*, 1683, title print.

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state of the world with a victorious ruler who has his enemies beheaded.<sup>145</sup> This evil ruler sits on a throne under a baldachin. To his right stand an attendant and a horn blower. To his left are mourning women and a man who holds up two severed heads. Two more heads lie on the ground before the throne. In the left foreground we see Envy holding a torch, with snakes on her head and in her hand. In front of her is a masked woman, perhaps Cupidity, who has a hand in a treasure chest. Her mask indicates that she is hiding her true identity. The man in armour on a column could be Mars. Like the combat in the left background, he is an inevitable concomitant of bad government.

The other twenty illustrations range from genuine disasters, such as an eruption of Mount Etna [34],<sup>146</sup> to what we might think of as bizarre events and practices. In fact *Het toneel der ongevallen* contains all sorts of supernatural material -- including considerations of sorcery, apparitions, werewolves, and the work of the devil -- which Houbraken no doubt disliked intensely even as he looked forward to his remuneration. To give only one example, Houbraken illustrated the *Curious Sacrificial Practices of the Pilappy or Laplanders* [35]. The improbable text tells us that these people, who 'inhabit the remotest parts of the half-Island Scandinavia on the Ice Sea,' select their sacrificial animals by a kind of pictorial roulette. As for the sad fate of

rulers, surely nothing could be more lamentable than the grisly murder of Willem II, Count of Holland (1227-1256) [36].<sup>147</sup>

Of greater importance for the intellectual growth of Aert Houbraken was his embarkation on his lifelong interest in antiquities. In 1683 the Dordrecht scholar Antonius Bynaeus (1654-1698) published the first edition of his *Gekruisde Christus, ofte verklaringe over de geschiedenis van het lijden, sterven ende begraven onses Heeren ende Salighmakers Jesu Christi, uyt Joodsche, Romeynsche, en andere outheden* (Crucified Christ, Or the Elucidation of the History of the Suffering, Death, and Burial of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, from Jewish, Roman, and Other Antiquities). Houbraken illustrated Bynaeus with a frontispiece and thirty-two other etchings of varying size, including thirteen depicting ancient coins (with two of them joined),<sup>148</sup> and in his *Groote schouburgh* he referred to both the text and the salient features of his own frontispiece [37],<sup>149</sup> which shows the Saviour tied to a smallish cross with His weight resting on a protruding support between his thighs and only his feet nailed in place. He is surrounded by spectators, including a soldier with the obligatory lance and three others at His feet who gamble for His cloak. A smaller version, though without attendants, is repeated in the seventeenth chapter.<sup>150</sup> Four more images concern the appearance or the carrying of crosses.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Patrick Larsen kindly read the entire book for me but could not find a specific connection.

<sup>146</sup> Van den Bosch 1683, folio 38.

<sup>147</sup> Van den Bosch 1683, folio 142 of *Treur gevallen*.

<sup>148</sup> I challenge the reader to consult the Google book online and arrive at another tally.

<sup>149</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 294-295.

<sup>150</sup> Bynaeus 1683, p. 476, with a small, schematic illustration based on a Greek coin on p. 459.

<sup>151</sup> Bynaeus 1683, pp. 451, 456, 461 and 462. All were discussed and illustrated by Marten Jan Bok (Cologne 2005), who further discussed a dead and swaddled infant featured by Bynaeus (1683, p. 559) and adapted by Houbraken (1718, p. 192).



34: Arnold Houbraken, *The Eruption of Mount Etna*. Etching, 168 x 122 mm. In: Lambert van den Bosch, *Toneel der ongevallen*, 1683, after p. 38.



35: Arnold Houbraken, *Sacrificial Practices of the Laplanders*. Etching, 168 x 131 mm. In: Lambert van den Bosch, *Toneel der ongevallen*, 1683, I, opp, p. 98.



36: Arnold Houbraken, *The Murder of Count Willem II by the West-Frisians*. Etching, 181 x 134 mm. In: Lambert van den Bosch, *Toneel der ongevallen*, 1683, II, opp. p. 142.



37: Arnold Houbraken, *The Crucified Christ*. Etching, 173 x 138 mm. In: Antonius Bynaeus, *Gekruiste Christus*, 1683, frontispiece.

The second of four full-page illustrations shows how the ancients reclined and dined on a *triclinium*, being a couch located around three sides of a table [38].<sup>152</sup> It is a practice that Houbraken discusses and partially illustrates below a triple portrait of his *Groote schouburgh*,<sup>153</sup> where he identifies the antiquarian ‘Fulvius Ursinus’ (being Fulvio Orsini: 1529-1600) as his source.<sup>154</sup> A third full-page illustration depicts the *The Last Supper* [39], with Christ in the foreground.<sup>155</sup> The text elaborates on the fact that the Romans would recline barefooted while dining, with their feet pointing away from the table. This made it possible for Mary Magdalene to anoint Christ’s feet, as is shown in the left foreground. In a subsidiary scene above the main image we see a slave removing the ‘soles’, no doubt the sandals, of a diner. The two-tier composition of this *Last Supper* and that of the preceding *Triclinium* were clearly conceived as a pair, which was not something dictated by the text. In the case of the *Last Supper* proper, the foreground placement of Christ and Mary Magdalene can be seen to answer to the text, but numerous other details have no such connection. Before we attribute it all to Houbraken we must remember that Bynaeus was still alive in 1683 and could have been involved as well.

The fourth and last full-page illustration is hilariously awkward but has the initials ‘AH’

below it [40].<sup>156</sup> The text reads: ‘The appearance of it [*a guttium*] may be seen in an illustration given by Guillaume Du Choul (1547-1581) in which stands a Roman who is being washed and salved next to a boy who holds a *strigilus*, that is a rubbing instrument, and a *guttium*, an oil flask from which the oil dripped in drops.’ Bynaeus must have been referring to a French edition of the great work on comparative religion by Du Choul.<sup>157</sup> It was no doubt owing to Bynaeus that Houbraken had access to such recondite material for his *Groote schouburgh*.

As mentioned, *Gekruisde Christus* has many other illustrations, with one featuring the same shrouded dead child that is illustrated in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>158</sup> The etchings lack the freedom of his work of the previous year, perhaps reflecting the greater importance of the subject matter from Houbraken’s point of view. Certainly his work for Bynaeus must have been of momentous importance for his intellectual metamorphosis into a full-fledged if idiosyncratic humanist. *Gekruisde Christus* features much the same kind of turgid and exhausting surfeit of scholarly authority that also marks Houbraken’s publications.

What Houbraken was like as a friend in these years is suggested by his own account of a meeting with Jan Soukens (active 1678-

<sup>152</sup> Bynaeus 1683, opp. p. 94.

<sup>153</sup> Bynaeus 1683, p. 557 and Houbraken 1718, opp. p. 294. Naturally it is also illustrated in *Houbraken Translated*.

<sup>154</sup> Orsini 1570.

<sup>155</sup> Bynaeus 1683, opp. p. 108.

<sup>156</sup> Bynaeus 1683, opp. p. 113.

<sup>157</sup> The Dutch translation by Mattheus Smallegange (Du Choul 1684), had yet to come out. It remains to be established to what degree the awkwardness of Houbraken’s image was due to Du Choul’s prototype.

<sup>158</sup> Bynaeus 1683, p. 559 and Houbraken 1718, p. 192. A fuller discussion of the importance of Bynaeus was part of Marten Jan Bok’s Cologne colloquium paper of 2005.



38: Arnold Houbraken, *Triclinium Patavinum*. Etching, 176 x 122 mm. In: Antonius Bynaeus, *Gekruiste Christus*, 1683, opp. p. 94.



39: Arnold Houbraken, *The Last Supper*. Etching, 176 x 121 mm. In: Antonius Bynaeus, *Gekruiste Christus*, 1683, opp, p. 108.



40: Arnold Houbraken, *The Roman Use of the Strigilus and Gutium*. Etching, 171 x 138 mm. In: Antonius Byaneus, *Gekruiste Christus*, 1683, opp. p.113.

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1725),<sup>159</sup> a slightly seedy colleague from Zaltbommel, a city located in the Betuwe, the fertile region between the great rivers. Soukens is so taken by Houbraken that he offers him the better of his two houses, the other being in ruin. The picture we get of Houbraken is of a man at ease with himself and the world, who, far from condescending to an impoverished country cousin such as Soukens, is able to draw comfort and amusement from his company. At the same time, we see that our biographer did not care to have time on his hands. Not surprisingly, he also disliked 'lazy sleep' and his idea of a soft life was 'to get up late in the morning and [...] not paint before nine o'clock.'<sup>160</sup> Remarkably, for a man who nearly evolved into a pantheist in his theory, he shows no reaction to the pastoral landscape around him. In fact, Houbraken mainly appreciated beautiful views indirectly, via landscape paintings.

Arnold Houbraken's success far outstripped that of Jan Soukens. The very fact that our man was summoned to Nijmegen vouches for his growing reputation as a portraitist. Houbraken's continued success allowed him to take his place among the successful artists of Dordrecht. Thus he mentions how he, Arnt de Gelder (1645-1727) and 'the excellent wood carver Hen[d]rik Noteman' (1656-1734) dropped in on Augustinus Terwesten, who was

at work on 'histories from Ovid' in the 'chamber' of Mister Barthout van Slingelandt,<sup>161</sup> to tempt the distinguished painter to join them for a drink.<sup>162</sup> We therefore learn in passing that Houbraken was not a man to shun taverns. Godfried Schalcken and Jakob Moelaert (1649-1727) were two more artists who moved in this same circle. Houbraken also had students in his Dordrecht years, namely Matthys Balen (1684-1766) and Adriaan van den Burg (1673-1733),<sup>163</sup> another indication of the professional esteem in which he was held in that city. To dispel any lingering notions that we might have about bohemian artists, we need only contemplate the assembly of periwigged gentlemen in Houbraken's *Showing at the Artists' Society Picture in Dordrecht* [41], a pen and brush drawing that also confirms his great skill as draftsman. By 1699, our biographer was able to buy a large house located on the Varkensmarkt for his growing family. Everything was going his way.

### **Marriage, Misbehaviour and Grief**

It was presumably Houbraken's lucrative success at doing portraits, history paintings, and book illustrations that facilitated his marriage in 1685 to Sara Sasbout Souburg (1662-1729), the only child of the city surgeon, Jacob Sasbout Souburg (1637-1694), whom Johan van Gool refers to as 'the renowned operating surgeon and stone cutter.'<sup>164</sup>

<sup>159</sup> *Houbraken 1721*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>160</sup> *Houbraken 1719*, p. 43.

<sup>161</sup> *I believe this must have been Meester Barthout Govertsz. (1654-1711).*

<sup>162</sup> *Houbraken 1721*, p. 269. *Not for a walk, as incorrectly translated in Horn 2000*, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> *Van Balen was a Mennonite. Van den Burg may have followed Houbraken to Amsterdam. See Van Gool 1751*, pp. 21, 57 and 277 and *Hofstede de Groot 1893*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>164</sup> *Van Gool 1750*, p. 133. *For the sundry documents, Veth 1889*, p. 5, note 1 and *Swillens 1944*, p. V, note 1, *with the literature in Veth 1889*, p. 300 or *Horn 2000*, note 2-12.



41: Arnold Houbraken, *Showing at the Artists' Society of Dordrecht*. Pen and brush in brown, 148 x 202 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

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The last two words should not be taken to allude to the quack practice of removing stones from the heads of gullible fools, but to the much more reputable business of relieving citizens from the agony caused by 'de graveel', being urinary stones.<sup>165</sup> Sasbout Souburg apparently collected paintings, as Houbraken mentions that his father-in-law owned two handsome landscapes on copper by Sebastiaen Vrancx (1573-1647) and that he had his portrait painted by Jan de Baen (1633-1702). Houbraken himself etched a copy of this undated and now lost portrait [42]. Given the apparent age of the sitter and the fact that he died in December of 1694 when fifty-seven years old, De Baen likely painted the portrait around 1690, with Houbraken's etching following on its heels. The print is most impressive, as is the Dutch poem by 'D[avid]. v[an]. Hoogstraten, M.D.' (1658-1724), here inadequately rendered in English:

Thus Souburg presents himself, full of  
skill, and spirited courage,  
As he pulls the stones from people's intes-  
tines;  
And gives the miserable their health, the  
highest good,  
And stems the hosts of death with alert  
hands.  
Such a man, the Maid of Dordrecht nour-  
ishes in her lap.  
A hero who has rescued hundreds from  
distress.<sup>166</sup>

That this distinguished healer took an interest in paintings could explain how Houbraken first met his daughter Sara.

Whatever the circumstances under which Aert and Sara became acquainted, we may safely assume that the couple must have been determined to marry. For surely their courtship can't have been untroubled. The Souburgs were not Mennonites, like Aert Houbraken; they belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>167</sup> Whether Houbraken's in-laws objected to the union, we don't know, but they were apparently able to insist on Sara marrying in her own faith. The banns of marriage were first published in Alblasserdam, a village located about half way between Rotterdam and Dordrecht, on 13 May 1685, and subsequently announced in Dordrecht itself on 20 May 1685. The couple married on 3 July 1685 in the Reformed church of Alblasserdam.<sup>168</sup> Normally, a wedding would take place after three Sundays. That seven weeks elapsed between banns and wedding indicates that someone raised some impediment, but in vain. Houbraken entered the records of the Dutch Reformed Church as Arnold, the name by which he is known to this day. That the Dordrecht Mennonites did not pursue Houbraken for marrying outside their congregation virtually proves that he had already left their ranks on his own accord.

That Arnold and Sara appear to have been a genuine love match is naturally of momentous interest in interpreting the biogra-

<sup>165</sup> *Troughout Horn 2000 I assumed incorrectly that references to stones concerned kidney stones. For reliable information, including mention of Sasbout Souburg, consult Quack 1874, pp. 9-11. I owe the reference to Rieke van Leeuwen.*

<sup>166</sup> *For a transcription of the original Dutch, Horn 2000, p. 30.*

<sup>167</sup> *Strictly speaking it was still the Low German Reformed Church or Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerk, which became the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk only in 1816.*

<sup>168</sup> *The sundry documents were kindly put at my disposal by Marten Jan Bok.*



42: Arnold Houbraken after Jan de Baen, *Portrait of Jakob Sasbout Souburg*, c. 1690. Etching, 359 x 256 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



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pher's comments about love and marriage in his *Groote schouburgh*. The fertility of the couple bordered on excess so that he could soon speak from experience about fatherhood. Sara bore a steady succession of ten children, all born in Dordrecht. The first child, Antonina, was baptized on 31 May 1686, a safe twelve months after the wedding. The last, Justinus, received the sacrament on 17 February 1706.<sup>169</sup> A simple calculation establishes that the couple had on average about one child every two years, so that Sara must have been almost continually pregnant or nursing during their Dordrecht years.

Worse, if any credence is to be given to *Lyris*, that anonymous attack of 1713 on Houbraken, the biographer was waylaid by Cupid, and got Sara's servant and young neighbour with child.

But as my spirited painter knew how to  
arrange everything  
To his end; the god of love did not sit still.  
That little rascal, in the habit of teasing  
people  
Decides to take a chance on Lyris' heart.  
And as he generally triumphs where he  
aims,  
He also quickly taught Lyris illicit love.  
A carriage, about to tip over on its own  
Does not need to bounce much before it  
falters and threatens  
To turn over, but topples very easily.<sup>170</sup>

The poem continues with feigned commiseration and inventive insinuation, the substance being that the biographer charged the young woman with mercenary motives. Sara is here painted as a degenerate version of Abraham's wife Sarah (who initially tolerated his concubine Hagar), presumably colluded in her husband's attempt to turn his fall into a windfall.

She who would lend her husband to her  
maid,  
Would be a strange Sara, and unusual.  
Nevertheless foul Sara, for the sake of  
profit,  
Let her husband make the Miss next door  
with child.<sup>171</sup>

Not surprisingly, Cornelis Hofstede de Groot managed to discuss *Lyris* without mentioning this material,<sup>172</sup> which he would no doubt have considered to be gratuitously salacious, whereas Piet Swillens thought it nasty and 'insignificant'.<sup>173</sup> Yet the poem is loaded with useful biographical information, provided one is alert to its bias.

The allegations in question are in any case not easy to dismiss. Whatever the precise truth behind the defamatory charges, it does seem likely that the Houbrakens had been talked about. Assuming that our man's anonymous tormenter did not fashion everything out of whole cloth, we may also assume a scenario that was likely not far out of the ordinary during

<sup>169</sup> Veth 1889, p. 300.

<sup>170</sup> Anonymous 1713, p. 10,

<sup>171</sup> Anonymous 1713, p. 11.

<sup>172</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 458-461.

<sup>173</sup> Swillens 1944, p. XX.

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the Golden Age and its twilight decades. The overburdened Sara needed help with her many children and Arnold could not keep his hands off the nubile newcomer to their domestic establishment. Then, to assume the very worst, Sara and Arnold made a desperate attempt to salvage family honour by launching a counter-accusation. It is only that last proposition that is truly shocking. The very possibility of such a sordid and sad incident in Houbraken's life adds an element of potential depth to our understanding of his person. The matter recalls Rembrandt's mistreatment of Geertje Dirck (1610-1656). In the case of Houbraken, however, we have only one nasty aspersion coming from a single enemy and part of sustained and suspect character assassination, whereas with Rembrandt we have a well-documented trail of disturbing events.<sup>174</sup>

*Lyris* is our only source of information about Houbraken's plans to travel to the Indies with Frans Valentijn (1666-1727), a Reformed Minister who was in Dordrecht between 1695 and 1705.<sup>175</sup> During the preceding decade, Valentijn had been preacher in the Dutch East Indies and he was to return there for another eight-year stint. Valentijn is not without interest even today, as he translated the Bible into Malaysian and compiled a Malaysian-Dutch dictionary. In his last years on earth, after Houbraken's death, he published his *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indien* (Old and New East Indies), an elaborate description of the Dutch colony there.<sup>176</sup> According to *Lyris*,

this truly distinguished man of the cloth asked the biographer to go to the Indies with him to escape scandal in Dordrecht and, one may venture to surmise, to record aspects of the colonial landscape and people.

My hero, withdrawn into his shell because  
of this escapade,  
Saw no more hope for deliverance in his  
fatherland,  
But let his far-ranging eye roam else-  
where.  
A pastor, used to teaching the Black In-  
dian  
On the Euphrates, moved by *Lyris'* disas-  
ter, invites  
The hero, his old friend and countryman,  
known to the eyes  
Of his family and worthy of his favour,  
To ship to Batavia with his art.  
There the Ganges would receive him on  
its banks  
Like a wonder transplanted from foreign  
climes.<sup>177</sup>

The anonymous author goes on to relate how Houbraken, hoping for fabulous wealth for himself and Sara as well as advantageous marriages for their daughters, applied to the seventeen governors of the East Indies Company to be allowed to ship with his devout friend, but that his request was rudely denied. Once again, the anonymous author is not satisfied with slan-

<sup>174</sup> *The unwelcome story was blown wide open by Vis 1965, passim, and widely disseminated in English by Schwartz 1985, pp. 242-248, who turned it into a cornerstone of his picture of Rembrandt as a reprehensible human being.*

<sup>175</sup> *Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 460, note 1.*

<sup>176</sup> *Molhuysen and Kossmann, V, 1921, cols. 989-990; Valentyn, 1724-1726 and Fennema 1998, pp. 9-19.*

<sup>177</sup> *Anonymous 1713, pp. 12-13.*

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dering Arnold; he paints Sara as a silly and pre-  
tentious woman.

His bedfellow did not sit still in these matters:  
She already considers in what dress to  
make her appearance,  
With dashing silks, and ample bows, and  
proud  
To outfit her daughters now that such  
treasure approaches.  
Each must dress according to his state,  
without false modesty  
It would look disgusting to come on board  
in some garb  
That had been worn here: such was be-  
neath her honour.

The poem goes on to make the point again and  
again. The author claims that Sara hoped to  
borrow about six or seven thousand guilders  
-- a fortune, in other words -- to properly outfit  
'such a family, / which would bestow such splen-  
dour on Batavia.' Even after exercising our more  
sceptic impulses, there is no good reason to dis-  
miss the possibility that Houbraken considered  
leaving Holland in the wake of a nasty scandal  
that probably made it hard for him to show his  
face in Dordrecht. Houbraken certainly knew  
Valentijn, whose portrait he drew. Engraved by  
Pieter van Gunst (1658/1659-1732) in 1704, it

shows the preacher framed by Faith, Wisdom  
and a few suitably exotic-looking figures [42].<sup>178</sup>

### **Antiquarian and Theological Pursuits**

Both before and after his marriage Arnold Hou-  
braken found a valuable intellectual contact in  
Salomon van Til (1643-1713), an important  
Dutch Reformed theologian. Van Til was a pupil  
of the great Johannes Cocceius (1603-1699),  
the nominal head of the more liberal Cocceian  
or Remonstrant faction of Dutch Calvinism of  
the time. Strictly speaking, however, Van Til  
was not a Cocceian but belonged to the dom-  
inant Counter-Remonstrant or Voetian faction  
(named after Gisbertus Voetius: 1589-1676)  
because he did not reject the doctrine of pre-  
destination like the competing Remonstrants,  
or like Arnold Houbraken.<sup>179</sup> Nevertheless, Van  
Til was like Cocceius in that he favoured the  
brilliant French thinker René Descartes (1596-  
1650) and his rational approach to the examina-  
tion of widely accepted doctrines. Even more  
than Cocceius, he helped lay the foundations of  
Enlightenment theology.

Van Til was preaching in Dordrecht by  
1683, moving on to become Professor at the Uni-  
versity of Leiden in 1702. In 1692 Houbraken  
supplied five substantial illustrations and about  
a dozen small ones for Van Til's *Digt- sang- en  
speel-konst, soo der Ouden, als bysonder der He-*

<sup>178</sup> Muller 1853, p. 264, no. 5563a. The tablet below the print says 'Aet[at]is] 38', so that it must date from 1704, when Valentijn was 38 years old.

<sup>179</sup> On Houbraken's view of predestination, Horn 2000, pp. 50 and 283-284. The doctrine crops up in his *Groote schouburgh* in connection with Samuel Van Hoogstraten -- again Houbraken 1719, p. 164 -- and, more explicitly, with the suicide of Jan Albertz. Roodsius (c.1615-1674) -- Houbraken 1719, pp. 11-12. That Van Til was not a Coccejan Calvinist, as carelessly stated in Horn 2000, p. 52 and 2006, p. 253, was kindly pointed out to me by Elly Groenenboom-Draai via Michiel Roscam Abbing. As I now understand it, Van Til combined Cartesian questioning with Calvinist orthodoxy so that his position is perhaps best described as enlightened orthodoxy.

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*breed* (Poetic, Vocal and Instrumental Art, both of the Ancients, and Especially of the Hebrews). The book is divided into three *verhandeligen* or ‘treatments’, which are best discussed in reverse. The third part describes the ‘song service of the Levites’, including the dress and placement of the singers and players in the temple or the courts leading up to it. It has only one substantial illustration, being *The Spoils of Jerusalem* [44],<sup>180</sup> which, as Van Til’s text informs us, is based on a relief on the Arch of Vespasian. He then speculates about whether or not it can be a reliable image of the actual musical instruments and other objects having come from Jerusalem’s temple.<sup>181</sup> The second part, which discusses the nature of the psalms, including a theological discussion of their divine authority,<sup>182</sup> has no illustrations whatsoever.

Of primary interest from our point of view is the first part, which discusses the musical instruments employed by the various cultures of Antiquity and features all but one of the numerous illustrations of the entire book. Almost all these images, which depict sundry instruments, are small, though they may be paired, as with the small flute or *Ginglarus* and the Greek double pipe,<sup>183</sup> or grouped, as with

thirteen tiny images of sundry gods with their harps.<sup>184</sup> Only five independent illustrations are larger than the others.<sup>185</sup> One of the most interesting of these items is the second, which shows a small procession of three laurelled priests, including two with an elaborate winding trumpet (*‘slingerbasuyn’*), accompanied by a swine representing ‘the grain goddess’ [45].<sup>186</sup> Of greatest interest in connection with Houbraken, however, is the first, being an intriguing emblem [46] which Van Til describes at the conclusion of a long discussion, rife with the authority of men such as Flavius Josephus (AD 37/38->93) and Publius Ovidius Naso (43 B.C.-A.D. 18) of ancient string instruments in general and of harps in particular. Both Josephus and Ovid are quoted in the original Greek and Latin, and we can imagine Arnold’s regret at knowing neither language. The emblem, so Van Til tells us, can serve to provide his readers with an understanding of a kind of harp called the *Nabla*, or *Nabel* in Dutch. Van Til then informs us that ‘it is Hieronymus Aleander [1574-1649], an Italian, who early in this century published an expansive discourse concerning a long-ago discovered piece of marble, along with a representation of the same.’<sup>187</sup> And indeed, Houbraken’s etching is an

<sup>180</sup> Van Til 1692, part 3, p. 481.

<sup>181</sup> Van Til 1692, part 3, pp. 480-482. Van Til argues that the temple of Jerusalem probably burned down before the Romans could abscond with any booty.

<sup>182</sup> Van Til 1692, part 2, *passim*.

<sup>183</sup> Van Til 1692, p. 74.

<sup>184</sup> Van Til 1692, p. 95.

<sup>185</sup> Van Til 1692, pp. 109, 115, 117, 156 and 158.

<sup>186</sup> Van Til 1692, p. 156.

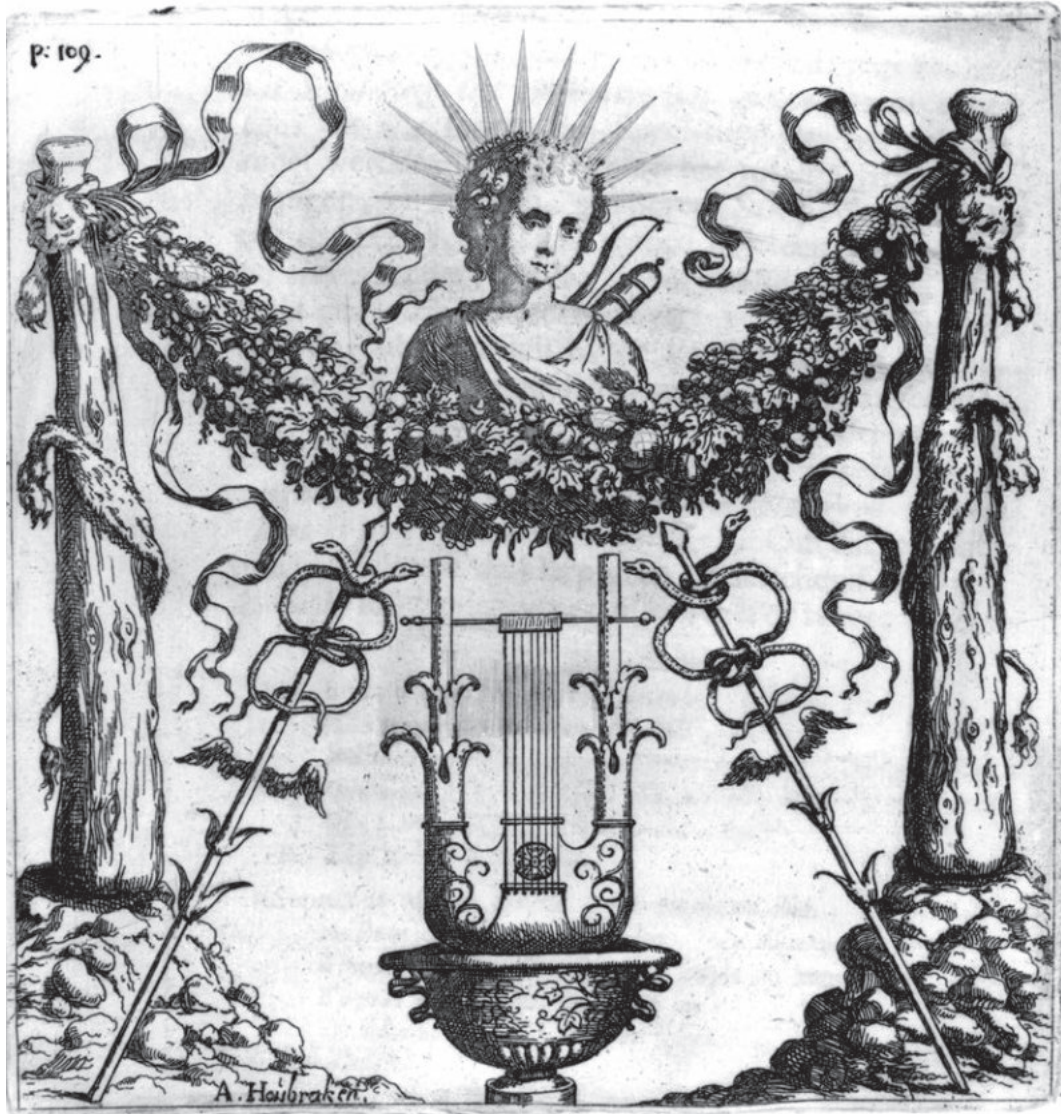
<sup>187</sup> Again Van Til 1692, p. 109. See Aleander 1617 (1616), p. 8 and on pp. 9-11. This Hieronymus was the grandnephew of the more famous Hieronymus Aleander (1480-1532), Italian cardinal and humanist. Aleander junior was a poet, scholar and antiquarian, as well as the founder of the Roman Academy of Humorists.



44: Arnold Houbraken, *The Spoils of the Temple of Jerusalem* (after the arch of Vespasian). Etching, 85 x 139 mm. In: Salomon van Til, *Digt, sang - en speelkonst*, 1692, p. 481.



45: Arnold Houbraken, *Procession with Laurelled Trumpeters and a Swine*. Etching, 89 x 110mm. In: Salomon van Til, *Digt, sang - en speelkonst*, 1692, p. 156.



46: Anonymous Italian engraver, *Ancient Harp*. Engraving, 140 x 140 mm. In: Hieronymus Aleander, *Antiquae Tabulae Marmoreae*, 1616, p. 7 (1617, opp. p. 1).



47: Arnold Houbraken after an anonymous Italian engraver, *Ancient Harp*. Etching, 139 x 139 mm. In: Salomon van Til, *Digt, sang-en speelkonst*, 1692, after p. 109.

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endearing copy of Aleander's hard-looking engraved illustration [47].

Van Til describes the *Nabel* in great detail<sup>188</sup> before proceeding to an equally long description of the remainder of the emblem. He identifies it as depicting Apollo with his harp and with eleven rays emanating from his head and asks 'is there any reason why this emblem should not be taken for a Phoenician piece of work, since this instrument is surely to be considered as foreign to the Greeks and Romans?'<sup>189</sup> Even so, a depiction of Apollo with a harp surely suggests a Graeco-Roman context, and Houbraken must simply have assumed that this was the case. What is most of interest is the way in which he was able to engage such recon-dite material by way of a more formally educated mentor such as Van Til (who himself defers to 'the learned ones' on occasion). In addition, Van Til's comparative approach to Greek, Roman and other ancient cultures was to become a standard feature of Houbraken's own publications.

No doubt Arnold Houbraken had continued to read assiduously over the years, but the pace presumably picked up as he entered his thirties, with a shift in emphasis from archaeological to theological material. A substantial group of works that he mentions in *De groote schouburgh* or in his earlier publications of 1712 first appeared in Dutch translation between

1691 and 1705 and were important for the development of Dutch theology. Three theological works, one of these bipartite in nature, strongly influenced the continued intellectual growth of the mature artist. The most controversial book of them all, one that was reviled by many Protestants and Catholics alike, was by Balthasar Bekker (1636-1698). His *De Betoverde Weereld* (The Enchanted World) of 1691 constituted a reasoned Cartesian attack on what Bekker believed to be superstition of every kind, including belief in Satan, demons, and angels.<sup>190</sup> In 1691 also appeared *Het leven van Philopater* (*The Life of Philopater*).<sup>191</sup> This volume used the relatively low form of the early Dutch novel as well as aspects of autobiographical confession (*à la* Saint Augustine) to chart the fictive growth of a young hero from mainstream Voetian Calvinism to the dissident views of the more liberal Coccejans. The latter minority first heeded the great call to reason from René Descartes and with time they also embraced the more or less heretical notions of the Dutch philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-1677). Both thinkers were despised by the Voetian majority in the Church.

The anonymous author of *Het leven van Philopater*, who is identifiable as Johannes Duijkerius (1661/1662-1702), adopted some of the ideas of Spinoza. Nevertheless, Duijkerius' roman à clef became highly popular and escaped

<sup>188</sup> Van Til 1692, pp. 109-110.

<sup>189</sup> Van Til 1692, pp. 110-111.

<sup>190</sup> Bekker 1691.

<sup>191</sup> Maréchal 1991, pp. 45-124.

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serious censure because it appeared to poke fun at all factions within Dutch Calvinism.<sup>192</sup> Then, in 1697, Duijkerius published his *Vervolg van 't leven van Philopater* (Sequel to the Life of Philopater),<sup>193</sup> which was so blatantly Spinozist that the Church took action. Indeed, Duijkerius was more of a materialist than Spinoza in that the former's *Vervolg* denied the immortality of the soul more bluntly than the latter's *Ethica* had done. Hence even some of the more liberal Calvinists were offended. On 25 April 1698 the Amsterdam magistrates sentenced Duijkerius' publisher, Aart Wolsgrein (born 1657), to eight years in prison, twenty-five years of subsequent banishment from the provinces of Holland and Friesland, and a staggering four thousand guilders in fines for printing and selling *Vervolg*. Predictably these dire developments only heightened interest in the book,<sup>194</sup> which Houbraken likely devoured from cover to cover. It certainly provides a context for his Spinozist orientation, most notably his implicit assumption that we have no soul independent of our bodies and that neither has a life beyond the grave.

Even more important for Arnold Houbraken were the translations of 1696 and 1701 by the Zeeland jurist Mattheus Smallegange (1624-1710) of two seminal books by Baltasar Morales de Gracián (1601-1658),<sup>195</sup> a great Jesuit moralist and Deist. At first sight a Spanish Jesuit might seem an unlikely source for a lapsed

Mennonite and nominal Calvinist, but Gracián offered the great advantage of the bipartite thrust of his subject matter. The earlier work is a brilliant body of aphorisms entitled *De konst der wijsheit* (The Art of Wisdom), which embodies a shrewd assessment of human nature, whereas the later volume, being *De Mensch Buyten Bedrogh, Of den Nauwkeurigen Oordeelder* (The Man above Deceit or the Precise Judge), presents a courageous view of the Prime Mover or First Architect and the perfection of His remote creation, which may still be perceived in nature, as opposed to the current corruption of mankind. Houbraken took over this bipartite agenda, so that Gracián was to become the *éminence grise* behind *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>196</sup>

Arnold Houbraken did not follow Baltasar Gracián in everything. The Spaniard swore by Ecclesiastes, it being the only book of the Bible that arguably supports a deistic vision of God. Houbraken quotes Ecclesiastes only once in his *Groote schouburgh* and that is immediately after quoting Gracián.<sup>197</sup> He argues that 'those who refuse to follow tried guidance will never reach perfection: That is why Gracián (here to the point) has said *some would become wise if they did not believe they already are*. I therefore want to address youthful painters with the words of the Preacher, where he says: *if you listen you will learn, and if you take pleasure in listening you will become wise*.' The problem is that this

<sup>192</sup> Maréchal 1991, pp. 5-6 and 31-36.

<sup>193</sup> Bekker 1697 and Maréchal 1991, pp. 125-211.

<sup>194</sup> Maréchal 1991, pp. 16-18.

<sup>195</sup> Gracián 1700 and 1701, discussed below.

<sup>196</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 67, 166-168, 437, 438, 442 and 454, with sundry notes.

<sup>197</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 256. We shall see that he links Jezus Sirach and Jacob Cats in his *Stichtelyle zinnebeelden* of 1714. Houbraken 1723 (1714), p. 119.

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advice is not to be found in Ecclesiastes. The words do not come from the Preacher but from Jezus Sirach or the Book of Ecclesiasticus.<sup>198</sup> That means that Houbraken must have used a Catholic Bible, at least in this instance.

In 1703 Gracián's *De Mensch Buyten Bedrogh* was followed by *Den hemel of aarde* (Heaven on Earth) by the controversial Zwolle preacher Frederik van Leenhof (1647-1715), who anticipated what was to become Houbraken's basic theological position by arguing for an impersonal God to be understood through reason, the scriptures and nature, but where Van Leenhof was concerned with the order of nature, Houbraken mainly looked to it for its beauty. Nor can we afford to forget François de Kaarsgieter (1671-1706) and his Dutch translation of the renowned treatise on the passions by Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), which also appeared in 1703 under the title of *Afbeelding der hertstogten of middelen om dezelve volkomen te leeren afteekenen* (Depiction of the Passions or Means of Drawing Them Correctly). This work may seem out of place in a discussion of theological texts, but Houbraken would have disagreed. In 1712, he would use the passions as an indispensable first step in rebuilding a rational faith in God.

Aside from the books by Bekker, Duijkerius, Gracián, Van Leenhof and Le Brun, which greatly affected Arnold Houbraken's thinking about God and man, there were a few antiquar-

ian works that Houbraken probably bought and read around 1700.<sup>199</sup> Such books had a near-theological status for Houbraken because their contents helped confirm his belief in the scriptures, especially the Book of Genesis and the New Testament. The earliest of these works was *Roomsche mogentheid* (Roman Hegemony) of 1664, 1671 and 1706 by Joachim Oudaan. Three more of these works came from the pen of Willem Goeree (1635-1711), namely his *Joodse Oudheden* (*Jewish Antiquities*) of 1690, *Mosaïze historie der Hebreeuwse Kerke* (Mosaic History of the Hebrew Church) of 1700, and *De kerkelijke en wereldlijke Historïen* (The Sacred and Profane Histories) of 1705. Flanked by Goeree's prolific production was *Roomsche Monarchie* (Roman Monarchy) of 1697 by Abraham Bogaert (1663-1727), which was an illustrated authority on the coins and medals of the Roman Empire. Only one year later, one of its publishers, the Utrecht author and book dealer François Halma (1653-1722) published an incensed refutation of Duijkerius' *Vervolg van 't Leven van Philopater*, demonstrating that Houbraken's combination of interests and sympathies probably had an individual profile.

Of lesser importance for Houbraken but perhaps of even greater interest to us was a 1702 publication in Dutch of the antiquarian writings of Thomas Stanley (1625-1678) and Basilius Kennet (1674-1714) concerning, respectively, the Greek philosophers and poets.<sup>200</sup> Although

<sup>198</sup> *Ecclesiasticus 34: Indien gij liefde zult hebben om te horen, zo zult gij verstand krijgen, en indien gij uw oor zult neigen, zo zult gij wijs worden.* With thanks to Adri Mackor.

<sup>199</sup> Swillens 1944, p. XXV stressed the importance of *Geslachtsboom der Goden en Godinnen* (Genealogy of the Gods and Goddesses) of 1661 by Johannes Blasius, which was reworked by David van Hoogstraten in 1716, but I have found no evidence that Houbraken used the work in either guise.

<sup>200</sup> Houbraken probably knew about the two of them via Stanley 1702.

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these two authorities can't have been of much use to the biographer, they do demonstrate that he was always searching for new items in Dutch translation that might help him expand his understanding of the Graeco-Roman tradition as the cradle of a reasoned Christian faith. In this context he refers to one 'famous Spencer' and 'thoroughly learned Mister Spencer' in his *Philaléthes* 1712. This Spencer also turns up twice in the *Groote schouburgh*.<sup>201</sup> Houbraken probably intended Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), a prolific Strasbourg-based Lutheran theologian and preacher who was certainly very learned. Like Houbraken he swore by Saint Paul and believed in a simpler, more personal Christianity, with less reliance on dogma and public worship.<sup>202</sup>

Still another publication that needs to be mentioned is Ludolph Smids' three-volume edition of Abraham Valentyn's Dutch translation of the complete works of Ovid, which was published between 1700 and 1701. Houbraken had known about Valentyn's translation since it first appeared in 1678, but it was apparently the version annotated by Smids (1649-1720) that left a lasting impression on him. Predictably for a man who believed that the Greeks and Romans had great wisdom to offer, Houbraken used Ovid not just for his stories but also as a window on the religion of the ancients, with its plethora of gods that he believed had evolved out of an awareness of a single God.

Smids was still alive at the time Houbraken wrote his *Groote schouburgh*. This learned physician, antiquarian and poet had moved from Groningen to Amsterdam well before Houbraken settled there in 1710. However, Houbraken had already used Smids' work while still in Dordrecht. The biographer quotes *Smids gallerye, ofte proef van syne dichtoefeningnen* (Smids' Gallery, or Sampling of His Poetic Exercises) of 1685 as well other books, such as his *Schatkamer der Nederlandsche Oudheden* (Treasury of Netherlandish Antiquities) of 1711.<sup>203</sup> Smids is doubly important because he likely introduced Houbraken to other members of the Amsterdam intellectual elite.<sup>204</sup>

Houbraken's last two decades in Dordrecht, from about 1690 to 1709, were a period of intense reading and reflecting on the kind of books -- theological and antiquarian -- just discussed. All this reading had to be done in addition to his demanding professional activities as painter and etcher. Given our knowledge of *De groote schouburgh*, we can speculate about Houbraken's typical day. He likely rose at dawn and then painted, drew, or etched well into the afternoon. Though he must have made time for family and friends, the staple of his evenings must have been his favourite books. Piet Swilens painted an endearing picture of Houbraken 'in his dressing gown and armed with his Gouda pipe, sitting in his easy chair and chatting with his intimate friends. It is then that we

<sup>201</sup> Houbraken 1712a, letters XI, p. 69 and XXIV, p. 116, and 1718, pp. 104 and 202-203\*.

<sup>202</sup> The KB owns nothing after Spener in Dutch that is early enough to have been read by Houbraken. However, we know that he could manage in German. Awaiting further research, Spener 1706 looks promising.

<sup>203</sup> Houbraken's reference to Smids' *Graafelyke Sinnebeelden* (1719, p.63) refers to his *Emblemata Heroica* of 1712. See the bibliography for the full title.

<sup>204</sup> On Smids and Houbraken, Horn 2000, p. 124 and note 4-3.

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listen to his good-natured jocularly and for a moment enjoy his cosy storytelling.<sup>205</sup> But where Swillens retrieved a ‘comical old fashioned note’, a driven personality must surely have predominated.

### A First Step as Author

In 1700 produced a highly original emblem book, the first publication of a work of his own. Entitled *Toneel van sinnebeelden, geopent tot dienst van schilders, beeldhouders etc.* (Stage of Emblems Opened in the Service of Painters, Sculptors Etc.), the work occupies a pivotal place in Houbraken’s art and thought. It is divided into three volumes, featuring twenty-three, seventeen, and twenty plates respectively.<sup>206</sup> Simple math tells us that the book contains sixty etchings, of which we depict only a small fraction. Fortunately we now have a Google Book online, so that keen readers can examine all the illustrations.<sup>207</sup> Houbraken apparently published all three parts separately in the late 1690’s and then combined them, using title prints, for the 1700 edition. At the beginning of the resultant book Houbraken then included short explanations for all the images depicted in all three parts. It is these passages that first moved him beyond artistic practice into writing, and this first important publication

always remained on his mind. Beyond that the jumbled organization of the images is prophetic of Houbraken’s chaotic publications of 1712 (as discussed below).

The first part is an emblem book that is more or less in the tradition of Cesare Ripa. Indeed, in his *Groote schouburgh* Houbraken mentions Ripa’s work and his own emblem book in one sentence.<sup>209</sup> In his 1700 dedication to ‘Mister ANTHONY de VOS. [...] My Friend’ Houbraken points out that ‘Cesare Ripa does present a large number of emblems in rough outlines, but to match these to and with a well-formed figure or body, could only be achieved by [the] experienced.’ Houbraken’s work consists mainly of allegorical figures. Comparing them to the corresponding personifications in the Ripa edition by Dirck Pietersz. Pers (1581-1659)<sup>210</sup> demonstrates a general communality in the sex and age of the figures and their attributes, but no close dependence.

The title print [48] depicts TIME, who is easily identified by his scythe. Houbraken’s explanatory text tells us that the putti represent ‘youthful painters who, equipped with their tools, look forward to the opening of the stage’. Then come Eternity, Time (again), Perfection, Beauty, Happiness, Contentment, Innocence,

<sup>205</sup> Swillens 1944, p. XXVIII.

<sup>206</sup> See Horn 2000, note 2-230, for mention of the four surviving copies of *Toneel van sinnebeelden* and the unpublished essay (dated 20 February 1998) by Marten Jan Bok that accompanies the copy at the RKD.

<sup>207</sup> The SKD / Online Collection illustrates the entire book, complete with measurements, but Part I, no. 23 (here fig. 54) is missing. The print in question is illustrated in RKDimages as well as by the British Museum. Possibly someone in Dresden censured the print, thinking obscene.

<sup>208</sup> Houbraken 1700, pp. 1-10.

<sup>209</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 208.

<sup>210</sup> Pers 1544.



48: Arnold Houbraken , *Time Reveals the Stage of Emblems*. Etching, 237 x 153 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part I, title print.

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Steadfastness, Fortune, the Married State, Modesty, Nature, Friendship, and Sin (nos. 1-14 & 16), as well as Piety, Charity, Instrumental Music [Speelkunst], Courtesy, and Wisdom (nos. 18-22). Some of these figures have accessible attributes, as with INNOCENCE [49], who washes her hands using a basin on an elaborate pedestal. We may think of ‘washing the hands in innocence’, as did Houbraken, but he also thought of King David approaching the altar. We further learn that the white robe of Innocence represents ‘purity of soul’ and that ‘those who assisted at religious services wore white robes.’

Other emblems are more challenging. It is therefore a good thing that Houbraken provided us with detailed explanations, as with PERFECTION [50].

We have shown PERFECTION tracing a sphere or circle with a compass because of all geometric figures these are judged to be the most perfect. The robe embroidered with stars shows her heavenly origins. We have decorated her head with roses because all perfection, even like these flowers, may not strike us as other than pleasant. We have shown her here as partially nude because perfection on the whole consists of a flawless and purely beautiful circumference ...<sup>211</sup>

Houbraken then continues seamlessly into his next emblem.

Which is why we have depicted BEAUTY

[51] entirely nude, without any embellishment because we can only call something beautiful which is also natural. The bouquet of white lilies in her hand is intended to say that just as lilies surpass all other flowering plants with their pleasant whiteness and attractive odour, so will a beautiful female figure move the soul and senses to love above all what is beautiful in the entire world. Just as when Paris had to pronounce his verdict, Venus put away her golden girdle and Minerva her plumed helmet.

In the right hand (leaning on a round ball, a sign of perfection) we provide a link, chain and compass, intending to have understood by this that Beauty (if it is to be perfectly beautiful) consists of a certain number of linked beautiful parts.<sup>212</sup>

Any danger of promoting Houbraken as a timeless thinker, at least at that stage of his career, is allayed by his MARRIED STATE [52], which combines male condescension with truisms.

She is shown with crown and sceptre and with an iron chain cuff on her leg to say that she may have free reign and authority in her home, but below her husband as overlord, to whom she is chained by marriage. The chain is clamped to a block because it is appropriate for a woman to concentrate on domestic affairs. [This] as a consequence of the proverb: *The married ones have a block on the leg.*<sup>213</sup> We also gave her sandals on her feet to show that marriage may sometimes be beset by reversals

<sup>211</sup> Houbraken 1700, p. 1, no. 4.

<sup>212</sup> Houbraken 1700, pp. 1-2, no. 5.

<sup>213</sup> Meaning a millstone around the neck.



49: Arnold Houbraken, *Innocence*. Etching, 180 x 96 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part I, no. 8.



50: Arnold Houbraken, *Married State*. Etching, 178 x 87 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700. Part I, no. 11.



51: Arnold Houbraken, *Perfection*. Etching, 188 x 90 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part I, no. 4.



52: Arnold Houbraken, *Beauty*. Etching, 198 x 94 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700. Part I, no. 5.

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and thorns of disaster: *The married ones do not always walk on roses*. In her hand she has a branch of wormwood, which attracts bees, to depict the bitter and the sweet that we must together taste in a marriage.

Before we succumb to feminist outrage we must remember that it was not until 1956 that the Dutch law of *'handelingsonbekwaamheid'* (incompetence to act) was at last revoked and women were legally able to work, open a bank account, purchase insurance, or travel without permission from their husbands, and even then it took another few decades for women to achieve a serious measure of equality.<sup>214</sup> Houbraken's expressed point of view was therefore likely taken for granted by his readers. It should be stressed, however, that such sentiments did not make their way into his *Groote schouburgh*.

To return to the *Toneel van Sinnebeelden*, its first part also includes two scenes from Graeco-Roman mythology (nos. 15 & 17) that are quite distinct in subject and format from the emblems proper. They depict *Apollo in the Forge of Vulcan and Jupiter and Semele*. Hofstede de Groot observed that 'in several parts of the antique, moralizing or aesthetic digressions that he interspersed throughout his *Groote schouburgh*, Houbraken alludes to this work, and once (1719, p.176) he even presents an illustration from the latter, which is altogether representative of the remaining sheets.'<sup>215</sup> The print adduced by Hofstede de Groot is the *Jupiter and Semele* [53]. Given that it is one of the two divergent mythological

subjects of Houbraken's first part it is not clear how this print can be 'altogether representative'. Leaving that aside, Houbraken chose *Jupiter and Semele* as one of only a handful of engravings (in addition to portraits and archaeological paraphernalia) to include in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>216</sup> His commentary on this image is quite distinct from that of his 1700 emblem book, where he warns that desire fixed on prohibited things will be punished. Hofstede de Groot elucidated neither that moral nor Houbraken's later interpretation, which instead centres on the intelligent latitude that should be allowed a painter in the use of attributes in history painting because they are at times indispensable for clarifying the subject or enhancing the appeal of a work. Houbraken's dubious example is that the Moorish Andromeda is better rendered as having white skin because 'a lily-white nude has much to recommend it over a mole-black hide.'<sup>217</sup>

Houbraken's discussion of the subject, for which he relied on Ludolph Smids as his authority, does not do justice to his own rendering of it. Jupiter strides decisively, if regretfully, away from the tragically ill-fated Semele, who in obvious agony is convincingly being consumed by flames. The infant Bacchus already appears to be reaching for the soft nymphs who are about to cradle his sybaritic inclinations. Meanwhile a youth, perhaps a young painter looks down from the upper left, presumably edified by the event that takes place before his eyes.

The second part again has a fine title print [54]. Houbraken's text informs us that we

<sup>214</sup> *The process is succinctly described by Geert Mak 1999, pp. 454-456.*

<sup>215</sup> *Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 15.*

<sup>216</sup> *Houbraken 1719, opp. p. 176.*

<sup>217</sup> *Houbraken 1719, p. 176.*



53: Arnold Houbraken, *Jupiter and Simele*. Etching, 166 x 103 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part I, no. 17 and *De groote schouburgh*, 1719, opp. p. 176.



54: Arnold Houbraken, *The Art of Painting with Pallas Athena and Creative Putti*. Etching, 236 x 160 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part II, title page.

see the Art of Painting, who holds out a palette and brushes. She is nude, having taken on the appearance of Truth, since ‘the very most important part of her work consists of the following and showing of truths.’ The cloth before her mouth indicates that ‘the tongue should not plead for the brush but that the work of art must speak for itself.’ Behind the Art of Painting is Ignorance with ‘nasty head’ and ‘donkey’s ears’, who ‘blindly denigrates her and her work’ while pointing at her with his disrespectful tongue and the fingers of his left hand. He is followed by *Envy* and by *Slander*, who is ‘crowned by a serpent’ (*beckel*). Reaching behind Ignorance with his right arm, he holds some kind of trumpet (*een Schaelmy*) ‘with which he rallies the backbiters of the Art of Painting’. She is not distracted by this but turns away and directs her art work towards *ReasF[56]on*, who studies it attentively. Why she has a pet lion is not explained, but the animal, like her armour, could allude to her determination. The four animated putti presumably evoke the abundance and youthful pursuit of art. It is not possible to make out Envy’s cloak, ‘embroidered with finely rendered flames’, unless it is in fact draped over the left arm of Ignorance.

Part II then proceeds with more mythological depictions. Five of them (nos. 2, 3, 4, 5 & 11) -- along with the last of the first volume (no. 23) [55] -- appear to form a set that all feature satyrs spying on sleeping nude nymphs. The first etching of the group of Part II [56] also constitutes a kind of subsidiary title page which an-

nounces: ‘Arrangements of pictures to put above chimney pieces Invented by A. Houbraken’. Frederik Muller (1817-1881) already observed that such voyeuristic scenes ‘give a highly peculiar notion of an age when an artist such as Houbraken deemed such subjects suitable for installation above the mantles of distinguished homes.’<sup>218</sup> The etchings were inspired by the *Lascivie* (1590-1595), a series of erotic engravings by Agostino Carracci (1557-1602) [57]. In his unpublished Cologne lecture of 2005, Marten Jan Bok showed that Houbraken did not shun the more explicitly sexual images of the *Lascivie* elsewhere in his oeuvre.<sup>219</sup> Even with this emblem book, however, the artist must have known that he could at times be challenging the sense of decorum of some potential readers. This is apparent from his cunning and ludicrous comment on the most explicit of his images, which shows the fully nude nymph frontally and assigns us the role of voyeur [55]: ‘This could serve as a chimney piece. *Quam Meminisse Juvat*. [How I like to remember] adequately conveys its meaning.’ One could hardly imagine any respectable home prominently displaying an enlarged version of this image. The second of this group of five voyeuristic etchings has the spying done by the light of an oil lamp, with the woman seen more politely from behind [58] and looks like a counterpart to the more lewd version in Part I.<sup>220</sup> Here, as so often in his oeuvre, Houbraken seems to have given little thought to structured organization, a flaw that is also revealed by images that are repeated twice or even thrice.

<sup>218</sup> Muller, IV, 1882, no. 3015A.).

<sup>219</sup> Bok 2005 showed that Houbraken included a more explicit detail in a design for a mezzotint by Nicolaas Verkolje (1673-1746).

<sup>220</sup> That must be why I illustrated them side by side in Horn 2000, figs. 35 and 36,



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55: Arnold Houbraken, *Satyr Spying on a Woman, with Dog*. Etching, 116 x 151 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part I, no. 23.



56: Arnold Houbraken, *Satyr with Cupid Spying on a Nymph*. Etching, 124 x 155 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part II, no. 2.



57: Agostino Carracci, *Satyr Spying on a Sleeping Nymph*. Lascivie series, c. 1590-1595. Engraving, 153 x 117 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



58: Arnold Houbraken, *Satyr Spying on a Woman by the Light of an Oil Lamp*. Etching, 122-152 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part II, no. 4.

Other, more ambitious subjects include *Dido Mourning the Departure of Aeneas* (no. 3), *Narcissus* (no. 7) [59], *Mars and Venus* (no. 8), *Vertumnus and Pomona* (no. 9), *Ariadne on Naxos* (no. 10), and *Apollo Conversing with One of the Muses* (no. 12) [60].<sup>221</sup> Such works could have provided readymade compositions for handsome history paintings that would have provided a welcome alternative to Houbraken's multi-figured histories. Especially the way Houbraken suggested the relaxed familiarity of Apollo, who is comfortable in his nudity, and the attentive and appreciative muse, is both brilliant and timeless. Then follows a curious emblematic trio of Purity, Caution, and Mediocrity (nos. 13-15). Part II closes with a herm (no. 16) and *Priapus* (no. 17) [61]. Houbraken discusses but does not illustrate this last etching in his *Groote schouburgh* because the impressive bulge under his robe demonstrates how one can indicate potency without resorting to obscenity.<sup>222</sup> He may have been alluding to the Roman renderings of the god, which generally feature a huge and exposed phallus.

The third part has as subtitle *Nieuwe ordonantien van sinebeelde, geschikt tot het schildere van deure, haartstee-stucke, etc.* (New Ordinances of Emblems Suited to the Painting of Doors, Chimney Pieces, etc.). Like the first two parts, this one has an elaborate title page [62]. Houbraken tells us that the main figure is again the *Art of Painting*, this time with two small wings on her temples to indicate her 'alertness and elevated spirit and thoughts.' She points at a

depiction of a great formal garden with an elaborate gate in the background. The chained monkey at her feet embodies imitation, whereas the fallen torch somehow alludes to 'life and death' and 'the manifold changes of concern in the treatment of art.' The mask just to the left of the torch, which is easy to overlook, indicates that the artist must have 'affection for persons and business to display things naturally and well.' It is a challenge to locate 'the stage screen behind her with a view into a room in which are depicted all sorts of home furnishings [*huys-cieraden*] as we have arranged them in our work.' Is the painting on the screen in fact the stage screen, so that a sculpted bust, a figure in apparent distress, a large and prominent vase and two scarcely visible paintings on the wall represent the *huys-cieraden*? If so, then why the Vulcan, cupid and bust of a hero on the left? Everything suggests that Houbraken pulled this image and its brief description out of his learned hat.

The splendid second image of the third part looks like an ambitious subsidiary title page [63]. The emblem celebrates Truth, and Houbraken tells us that it served as a design for an elaborate painting above the door of one Pieter Blokland.<sup>223</sup> The longer period of gestation likely explains its superiority to the preceding title page. Clearly Houbraken himself was infatuated with his own inventiveness in this instance, since he devoted twenty-seven lines to elucidating all its elements. In the foreground we see 'how Time reveals Truth to the world.' Behind winged Time stands Falsehood (Leugen), who 'rages

<sup>221</sup> *The title is my invention. Houbraken skipped over numbers eleven and twelve of his description of the emblems.*

<sup>222</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 261.

<sup>223</sup> *Most likely this was Pieter Beelaerts van Blokland (1639-1691). His wife Christina Pompe (1647-1722) had eleven children who were baptized in Dordrecht between 1666 and 1690.*



59: Arnold Houbraken, *Narcissus*. Etching, 120 x 155 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part II, no. 7.



60: Arnold Houbraken, *Apollo Conversing with One of the Muses*. Etching, 183 x 165 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part II, no. 12.



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61: Arnold Houbraken, *Priapus*. Etching, 148 x 81 mm. in: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part II, page 17.



62: Arnold Houbraken, *The Art of Painting with Attributes*. Etching, 182 x 147 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, title page.



63: Arnold Houbraken, *Time Discovers Truth and Falsehood in the World*. Etching, 146 x 129 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 2.

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against Truth.’ His reflecting robe is stitched with all sorts of masks and flames. Houbraken then embarks on a whole paragraph devoted to this barely visible robe, ‘which nicely depicts the instability and unevenness of Falsehood for ‘just as the colours of a reflection become totally different with the slightest movement, so the liar changes his stories at a wink.’

Then, after elaborating on the deceit of the liar, Houbraken turns to *Truth* on the left, who is almost completely nude because she needs no embellishment. Her headdress is graced by the sun because Truth is the girlfriend (*vriendinne*) of light. She has an open book in her hand because it is in books that truth may be found. The palm branch in the other hand relates to the fact that the shoots of the palm tree are not to be bent. It is not at once clear what Houbraken intended with the pyramid with a bust of a laureate hero and with the eye in the left background, to which Time points. In the end, however, we learn that ‘the eye of Godly Providence wakes so well against the violence of Falsehood that remembrance of Truth always remains.’ Exhaustive as Houbraken might seem to have been, he still missed details, such as the burning twigs in the left hand of Falsehood or the relief below the world, which would seem to depict an Adoration of some kind. It may all seem like a lost language to us, but it must have been more accessible to Houbraken’s educated contemporaries.

The remainder of this third part is even more mixed than the other two, including a fair

number of other emblems (numbers 7 to 10, 13 to 16), four allegorical subjects with *putti* (3 to 6), depictions of *Democritus and Heraclitus* (11 & 12) and a few totally unrelated subjects (18-20). Striking is his rendering of *putti* with dynamic movement and steep foreshortening, as with *Sloth and Diligence*, which shows the virtue beating up on the vice [64]. Thanks to their foreshortening these images would have worked brilliantly above doorways. The sarcastic grin of *Democritus* [65]<sup>224</sup> and introspective sorrow of *Heraclites* [66] show the kind of thorough grasp of physiognomy that we shall see Houbraken promote in his *Gemeene leidingen tot de godsdienst* and *Groote schouburgh* as essential for history painters.

In a footnote to one of the theoretical digressions of his *Groote schouburgh*, Houbraken reflects in detail on his 1700 depiction of Reason in the third part of his *Toneel van sinnebeelden* [67].<sup>225</sup> On dozens of occasions in *De groote schouburgh* Houbraken drew on images or motifs from his own publications. In the case of Reason, the practice is doubly important because Houbraken is describing a lost title print for this 1700 book of emblems, one that is also celebrated in a poem by his young friend and soul mate Jacob Zeeus (1686-1718) that was published two years after Houbraken’s death.<sup>226</sup> The image garners forty-nine lines of commentary which we pass over here except to note that ‘just as the head of Medusa petrified all enemies, so must all contradiction of Reason be silenced or, after a brief skirmish, clear the field,

<sup>224</sup> The RKD shows the image in the form of a much larger copy by Hendrik van Velthoven (1728-1770) after Houbraken.

<sup>225</sup> Houbraken 1700, III, p. 7, no. 8 and Houbraken 1719, p. 184.

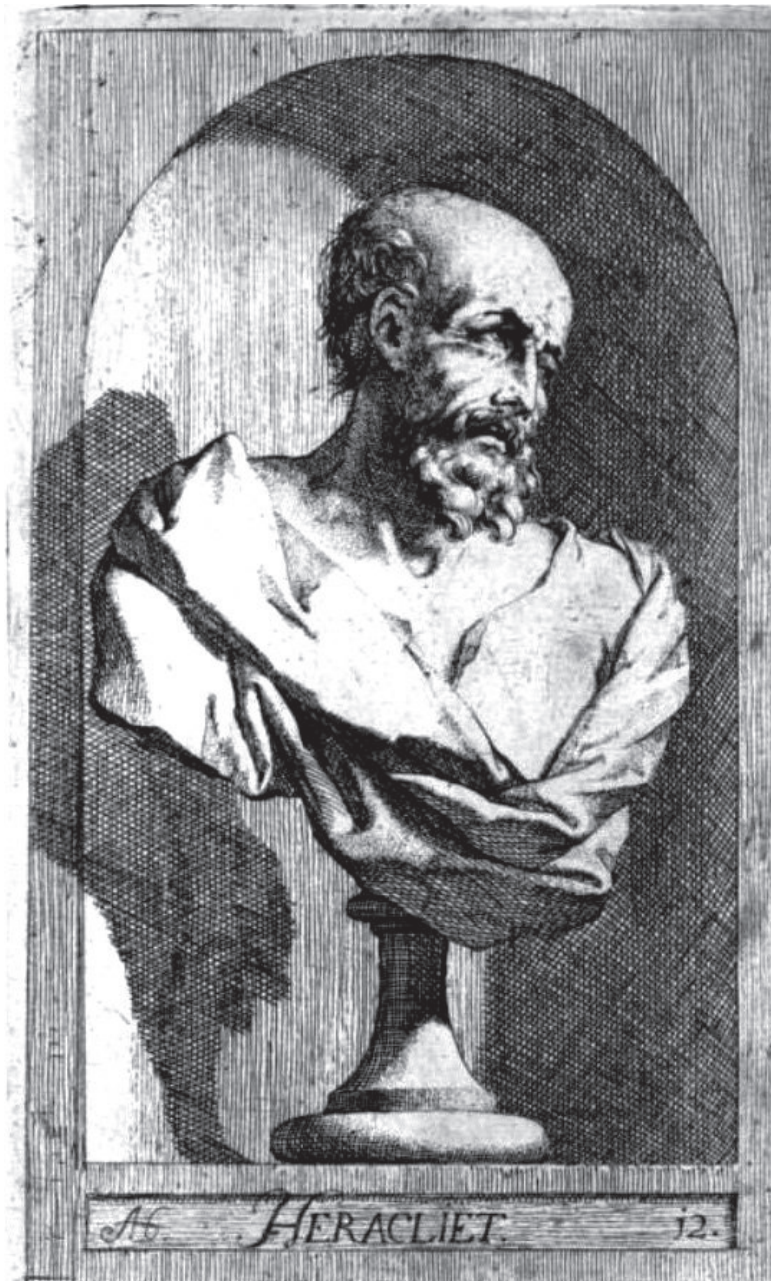
<sup>226</sup> Zeeus 1721, pp. 336-337, cited by Marten Jan Bok in his unpublished textual study of 20 February 1998, located with the RKD copy of Houbraken’s *Toneel van sinnebeelden*.



64: Arnold Houbraken, *Diligence Conquers Sloth*, 105 x 129 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 3.



65: Arnold Houbraken, *Democritus*. Etching, 200 x 160 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 11.



66: Arnold Houbraken, *Heraclitus*. Etching, 165 x 103 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van Sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 12.



67: Arnold Houbraken, *Minerva as Personification of Reason*. Etching, 184 x 88 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 8.



68: Arnold Houbraken, *Vocal Music*. Etching, 184 x 90 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 10

leaving the victory to her.' The rest of the text is a fervent plea for the importance of reason in human conduct. True, much of Houbraken's life developed in the pursuit of reason, but it is a lot of compulsive verbiage to attach to this unprepossessing image, with its truculent face and bulging breastplate. The following rendering of *Vocal Music* [68], which received 'only' eleven lines of explanation, has greater grace and charm. She represents 'a heavenly and esteemed art which can be so useful that even Jehovah wanted to be honoured by it.' The harp, which we encountered with Van Til back in 1692 [46 & 47], indicates that song must be subservient to music. The monstrous creature wrapped around the pedestal is one of the Sirens whose singing was so enticing that Ulysses had himself tied to the mast of his ship 'out of fear that his senses might be ravished and tempted by that seductive voice.' The elegant pose, small head and tiny extremities of *Vocal Music* are reminiscent of Italian Mannerism, as with the renowned caryatids (1541-1545) by Francesco Primaticcio (1503-1570) at Fontainebleau, though Houbraken was much more likely inspired by images in *Segmenta nobilium signorum statuarum*, an influential compilation of etchings by the French academician François Perrier (1594-1649) [69]<sup>227</sup> which was published in Rome and Paris in 1638.<sup>228</sup> Houbraken repeated much the same figure canon for several other female personifications, but it works at its most engaging with *Poetry* [70] and *Self-Praise*, who happen to be male.

Parts of the riches of this emblem book are two depictions of vases filled with flowers with accompanying cherubs. The inscription in French below the second of these images [71] makes their point: 'La vie de l'homme et Semblable aux Fleurs.' Though this message may be an addition of 1723, we hardly need to be told that we germinate, bloom and perish just as flowers do. Houbraken explains that the cherub on the right bends over a 'severely wilted' fallen flower and is 'upset' by the sight'. The other cherub points at the pot, 'with its image of dancing bacchantes (who are untimely torn away by death), perfectly showing a mirror of the transience of human existence'.

The second to last image of the compilation depicts *Apollo as God of Music and Fire* [72]. Houbraken informs us that it 'shows the image of Apollo as we encountered the same from an old marble piece shown by Mister S. V. Til in his learned *Voorlooper van de Psalmen* (Forerunner of the Psalms)'. This title is baffling until we spot the separated words 'voorlooper', 'der' and 'psalmen' in the middle of the long title of Van Til's *Digt-sang-en speelkonst* of 1492.<sup>229</sup> In other words, Houbraken derived Apollo and his harp from the already familiar image that he based on a prototype by Heronymus Aleander [47] as discussed by Van Til and illustrated by Houbraken in 1492 [46]. Of the three cherubs one looks on while another, sitting on a step below, fingers a harp, which show the god as 'patron of soul-stirring music'. The third cherub helps

<sup>227</sup> Perrier taught Charles le Brun and was one of the founders of the French academy in 1648.

<sup>228</sup> For the full title consult Perrier 1538 in the bibliography. Numerous other prints are illustrated under <https://panteek.com> under François Perrier and the work as a whole is available under Internet Archive.

<sup>229</sup> Check the bibliography below. The relevant words are 'Diendende, om, by wege van een VOORLOPER. Den leser tot een beter verstand der Goddelijke PSALMEN [...] te leyden'. The image is on Van Til's p. 109.



69: François Perrier, *Muse in the Borghese Gardens*. Etching, 245 x 155 mm. In: François Perrier, *Segmenta nobilium signorum et statuarum*, 1638, no. 78.



70: Arnold Houbraken, *Poetry*. Etching, 181 x 101 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 7.



71: Arnold Houbraken, *Pot with Flowers and Dancing Bacchantes*. Etching, 182 x 98 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 18.



72: Arnold Houbraken, *Apollo as God of Music and Fire*. Etching, 180 x 99 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, 1700, Part III, no. 19.

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steady the harp. The lit fire of his torch, like the crown with eleven rays of the sun around Apollo's head, 'shows how the god's image is honoured in the guise of fire.' Predictably *Fire* is the subject of the final emblem.

At least two decades later a new and epitomized edition of the *Toneel van sinnebeelden* came out with a somewhat longer title: *Een-en-veertigh stuks verscheydene sinnebeelden geinventeerd en in koper gebragt door A. Houbraken* (Forty-one Varied Emblems Invented and Rendered in Copper by A. Houbraken). The title print, which is a reworking of that of the second princeps volume, has the *Art of Painting* pointing to a portrait of Houbraken instead of to a picture of a formal garden [73]. Assuming the facial features are at all reliable, it could be our only portrait of the artist as a young man. The cartouche below the portrait gives the full title, adding 'Leonardus Schenk excudit' (executed by Leonard Schenk). This means, of course, that Jacob Folkema (1692-1767) was not the engraver. Since Schenk was born in 1696 (and also died in 1767) both the book and the print must surely be much later than 1710 and likely post-date the death of Houbraken in 1719.<sup>230</sup>

It appears that Houbraken was particularly active as a painter during the nine years following his emblem book of 1700. In 1708, however, he again worked for the book trade by supplying title prints for *Minnezangen kusjes drinkliederen* (Love Songs Kisses Drinking Songs)<sup>231</sup>

and *Zedezangen en stigtelyke liederen* (Moral Songs and Edifying Ballads),<sup>232</sup> both written by Jan van Hoogstraten.<sup>233</sup> This particular Van Hoogstraten was a gifted poet and good friend of Houbraken who was to turn into his implacable enemy only four years later. Both prints are relatively self-explanatory. The first [74], which was published in Gouda by Lukas Kloppenburg (fl. 1695-1712), says below that it was drawn and etched by Houbraken himself and is explained by him in the preceding poem. A seated woman, being Venus (*Minvoogdes*), plays on a lute and is about to be crowned with laurels by Youth personified, 'who has decorated his hair with living green.' Note that Houbraken does not identify the figure of Youth as Bacchus, whose association with riotous inebriation would be inappropriate to the subject matter at hand.<sup>234</sup> At the feet of Venus her 'winged son' Cupid is already 'diligently sharpening his arrows', with pertinent music books and a flute piled up to the right. Venus sits on an ivory throne befitting her power since, aided by her devious son, she can compel gods and men to love making. Flanking her throne are 'tempting sirens' which 'prove the power of the art of song'. Her legs are enclosed in a 'pavilion' embroidered with roses, which are 'threatened and spied on in vain by Envy', who is barely discernible in the deep shadows behind Venus' right knee. Some details are puzzling. Cupid has only one arrow, only one of the sirens is in evidence and the only embroi-

<sup>230</sup> *The incorrect identification of Folkema as engraver and the date of c.1710 likely follow Landwehr 1988, no.100c.*

<sup>231</sup> *Horn 2000, fig. 20 has an over-punctuated title and 1710 as incorrect date. 1710 was the date of the third printing, which is also accessible online as a Google book.*

<sup>232</sup> *Overlooked in Horn 2000.*

<sup>233</sup> *Swillens was aware of the second of these books but overlooked the first.*

<sup>234</sup> *I mention this because the mistaken identification is frequently encountered online.*



73: Leonard Schenk after Arnold Houbraken, *The Art of Painting with Portrait of a Youthful Houbraken*. Engraving, 180 x 135 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Een-en-veertigh stuks verscheydene sinnebeelden*. Amsterdam, after 1719, title print.



74: Arnold Houbraken, *Venus Crowned by Youth*. Etching, 142 x 84 mm. In: Jan van Hoogstraten, *Minnezangen, kusjes, drink liederen*, 1708 (1701), title print.

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dered roses would appear to be located on the baldachin at the upper right. Clearly Houbraken did not consult his print methodically while composing his poem. Such lack of method, which we already encountered in the title print to Part II of his *Toneel van sinnebeelden*, reflects a pervasive weakness of his that is also encountered in his theological writings of 1712 and in his *Groote schouburgh*.

The title print of *Zedezangen en stigtelyke liederen* [75], another Cloppenburg publication, states below that it was engraved by Gilliam van der Gouwen (1699/70-1720) after Arnold Houbraken. As we read in the preceding poem, Piety (*Godvrugtigheyt*) plays on a harp and raises her song to the heavens while at the very right the ‘cloven footed one’, being Pan, ‘flees from the divine countenance, red with shame’. He is truly a personification of vice, who ‘shuns virtue and is keen on evil’. His ‘playful lyre, tuned to lascivious love songs, provides the youth with nothing but bitter fruit’ and ‘he binds the world with his magic music, founded on vices’, which has ‘already devoured the best of its youth’. The World personified is seated at Piety’s feet, identified by the orb under her left elbow. She covers her ears to shut out Piety’s virtuous music. Clearly Houbraken could not depict much of the poem, its contents being altogether too abstract. Obviously, too, he could not render every concrete bit of the poem, such as Pan’s red cheeks. On the other hand he also invented details, such as the book held by Pan, which presumably contains

his nefarious music. All in all the engraving is a major feat. One wonders how long it took Houbraken to compose such images, which once more confirm his brilliance as inventor.

Still another handsome title print of 1708 opens an anonymous compilation of pharmaceutical data entitled *Pharmacopoea Dordracena*, which was published in Dordrecht by Johannes van Braam (1677-1751).<sup>235</sup> Curiously the image, which was also engraved by Gilliam van der Gouwen [76], received the divergent title of *Pharmacopoea Dordracensis*. At its left stands the laurelled Apollo, who is identified by the harp half hidden behind him, which he supports with his left hand. The caduceus of Mercury, the god of medicine, lies at his feet. He pulls back a curtain with his right hand, revealing a kneeling woman, likely a personification of Pharmacy, who is armed with notebook and pen and taking down his every word while an old man offers her herbs of some kind. Behind her are racks with apothecary pots as well as two men, one of them bent over a pot with medicinal plants and the other inspecting the contents of a flask. The introductory poem entitled ‘On the New Dordrecht Apothecary’ and written by the still young *Meester* [Master of Jurisprudence] Pieter de Bye (1687-1749),<sup>236</sup> sketches the hazardous pursuit of pharmaceutical herbs and the slow growth in understanding of the past but closes with Dordrecht of the present, where the art of healing as ‘polished’ by physicians ‘leans on firmer ground’ so that ‘death spends many

<sup>235</sup> Piet Swillens did list this book but entered it without author and as undated at the end of his inventory.

<sup>236</sup> The KB catalogue tells us that De Bye was a precocious and prolific occasional poet who only published between 1702 and 1714. For a little information see ‘David van Hoogstraten’ in Ter Laan 1952, p. 231. Like David Bogaert, Johan de Haes, Jan van Hoogstraten, Pieter Antonie de Huybert, Arnold Nachtegaal Klemens and Jacob Zeeus (in arbitrary alphabetical order) he was involved in a *Poëtenstrijt* or Battle of the Poets, which lasted from 1711 to 1716.



75: Gilliam van der Gouwen after Arnold Houbraken. *Piety Playing Her Harp*. Etching, 135 x 79 mm. In: Jan van Hoogstraten, *Zedezangen en stigtelyke liederen*, 1708, title print.



76: Gilliam van der Gouwen after Arnold Houbraken, *Apollo Dictating to a Personification of Pharmacy*. Etching, c. 135 x 79 mm. In: *Pharmacopoea Dordracena Galenico-Chymica*, 1708, title print.

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arrows in vain.' De Bye closes on a truly inspiring note.

Oh noble and useful science  
Long may you flower within Dordrecht's  
walls,  
Its citizens grow up in health,  
And climb to the highest level,  
Then your end will witness the ends of the  
earth.  
What more closely sings your praise at its  
worth?

In short, Houbraken joined in concocting lame propaganda for his beloved native city. But where De Bye explicitly dismissed Greek pharmacological achievements in terms of 'Medea's magical juices' and therefore irrelevant to the long march of progress that ended up in triumphant Dordrecht, Houbraken could not dispense with Apollo. Linking almost anything to Graeco-Roman culture had apparently become a mental habit with him.

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## THE ROAD TO *DE GROOTE SCHOUBURGH*: THE AMSTERDAM YEARS

### Slave to the Book Publishers

Sometime late in 1709 or early in 1710 Arnold Houbraken moved to Amsterdam.<sup>237</sup> The Houbrakens settled 'on the Prinsengracht between the Vijzelgracht and the Leidse Kruisstraat. According to Johan van Gool, Houbraken undertook this risky relocation to relatively unfamiliar territory for the best of motives, namely 'as his children were growing up, and there was more opportunity in *Amsterdam* than in *Dordrecht* to raise and establish the same, according to individual inclination, be it in scholarship, art, trade or any other profession.<sup>238</sup> Near the end of his Houbraken biography, Van Gool repeats his high opinion of his friend as nurturing father of his children, 'both male and female', whom he all encouraged to learn according to their inclination and gifts.<sup>239</sup> However, Van Gool could only come up with the oldest boy, Jacob, as example. He apparently did not know about Antonyna (1686-1736), who became an accomplished topographic draughtsman like her husband Jacob Stellingwerf (died c. 1736),<sup>240</sup> or about Christina who in 1624 married the painter Antoni Elliger (1791-1781), a specialist

in portraits, histories and decorative painting.<sup>241</sup> As for opportunities for Houbraken's children, one expects that these had also been in decent supply in Dordrecht.

Johan van Gool claims that Houbraken had the financial protection of an art-loving Amsterdam regent named Jonas Witsen (1676-1715),<sup>242</sup> who owned two paintings by our man. In *De groote schouburgh* Houbraken speaks highly of Witsen as the generous protector of Michiel van Musscher (1645-1705).<sup>243</sup> Houbraken also reports having been greatly delighted on several occasions by a batch of coloured drawings by Adriaen van Ostade (1610-1685) that Witsen had bought from the silk painter and collector Constantijn Sennepart (1625-1703), and he describes a wonderfully detailed painting of 'the embarkation of Charles II on the Dutch shore' that 'often caught my eye' in Witsen's residence.<sup>245</sup> The word 'often' indicates that Houbraken must have been a regular visitor of the Witsen residence.

Van Gool's version of Arnold Houbraken's relocation seems to have been taken at face value, but it could well be true only in part, if at all.

<sup>237</sup> *For documents and literature, including Veth 1889, pp. 300-301, see Horn 2000, note 2-158.*

<sup>238</sup> *Van Gool 1750, p. 133.*

<sup>239</sup> *Van Gool 1750, p. 146.*

<sup>240</sup> *Horn 2000, pp. 76-77 and note 2-358, and Lots 2010, pp. 499-507.*

<sup>241</sup> *Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 17.*

<sup>242</sup> *Van Gool 1750, p. 133. Also Horn 2000, p. 41.*

<sup>243</sup> *Houbraken 1721, p. 211.*

<sup>244</sup> *Houbraken 1719, p. 347.*

<sup>245</sup> *Houbraken 1719, p. 273. Houbraken also describes a group portrait by Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613-1670) which features Witsen's grandfather, Cornelis Jansz. Witsen, as commander. For the Witsen genealogy, Horn 2000, note 11-156.*

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Witsen was presumably neither incredibly rich nor very foolish. Predictably, there is no proof that the regent took on full financial responsibility for Houbraken's large family. It is much more likely that our hero found the intellectual climate in his native city too stifling in view of his increasingly freethinking intellectual orientation. After all, Dordrecht had been the site of the Synod of Dordt, which had crushed the hopes of the more moderate Remonstrant faction of Calvinism early in the century. Amsterdam was quite a different story. Not surprisingly Houbraken himself informs us that he was encouraged in his intellectual pursuits 'by brother Collegiants [...] in Amsterdam and Rotterdam [...] where I attended many heated disputes.'<sup>246</sup> The Collegiants were a free thinking association that joined the Remonstrants and Mennonites of the Netherlands in 1619, after the Synod of Dordt. They first met in Warmond and then in Rijnsburg, but other cities, including Amsterdam, soon had large communities of Collegiants. Membership ranged from Spinoza, who was Jewish, to individuals such as Houbraken who never entirely severed their connection with orthodox Christianity.

Houbraken had certainly settled in Amsterdam by 16 May 1710, when he addressed the above-mentioned letter and drawing to Pieter de la Court van Voort of Leiden. Though Houbraken continued to render lucrative pictures over the next several years, his artistic activity consisted mainly of drawing and etching for the busy book publishing trade. Piet Swillens listed ten publications of 1711 to 1713 for which

Houbraken supplied illustrations. The authors and dates of publication provided by Swillens are Jacob Zeeus and Johan van Broekhuizen (1649-1707) plus an edition of Biblical prints compiled for Hendrik Adriaan van der Marck (1667-1726) in 1711; E. Verryke (fl. 1701-1717), Daniël Willink (1676-1722), Jan Luyken or Luyken (1649-1712) and two by Houbraken himself in 1712; with Phillippus van Limborgh (1633-1712) and Samuel Pitiscus (1637-1727) in 1713. In addition, 1712 should include a second book by Van Broekhuizen and one by Joachim Oudaan. Swillens listed the single bipartite book by Willink twice and did not distinguish between Houbraken's three separate theological publications of 1712 and 1713, mentioning only *Philaléthes brieven* of 1712.

Of this group of works, the ones by Willink, Verryke, Zeeus, Luyken and Houbraken, plus the Van der Marck edition, are discussed below. The others offer relatively slim pickings. Samuel Pitiscus' *Lexicon antiquitatum romanorum* (Lexicon on Roman Antiquities) has a few illustrations, but they are either anonymous or by other artists. A portrait of Pitiscus, for instance, is by Pieter van Gunst after Gerard Hoet II (1698-1760). Joachim Oudaan's *Poëzy* (Poetry) has three substantial tomes but only the first volume features a title print by Houbraken, which was engraved by Pieter Sluyter (1675->1713). It depicts *Pure Poetry Evokes Aspects of the Work of Joachim Oudaan* [77].<sup>247</sup> The feet of Pure Poetry are flanked by a laurel wreath and a book to the left with more books, a music book and a lute to the right. She holds a trumpet in

<sup>246</sup> Houbraken 1712B, n.p. (p. 15).

<sup>247</sup> In addition there is a lacklustre portrait of Oudaan for which Houbraken provided a drawing. I can't quite make out the name of the engraver.



77: Arnold Houbraken, *Pure Poetry Evokes Aspects of the Work of Joachim Oudaan*. Etching, 135 x 85 mm. In: Joachim Oudaan, *Poëzy, verdeeld in drie delen*, 1712, volume one, title page.

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her left hand. With her right hand she points at images that apparently embody the wide-ranging aspects of Oudaan's poetry. Several topics are listed in Houbraken's poem.

He strokes his reader with the power and  
force of language,  
Whether it deals with religion, matters of  
state,  
Or praise of books, or that concern mar-  
riage;  
Unless he tunes his strings to Golden an-  
niversary splendour;  
Birthday-, or Funerary song, or whether  
he paints  
Portraits of esteemed men,  
His rapid pen always garners laurels.

Unfortunately Houbraken does not relate these concerns to the several images. However, he does go on to identify a bipartite purpose, namely that the combination of Oudaan's Drawing and Poetry might 'make something that lives which might otherwise through neglect be buried in darkness'. With the drawings Oudaan is to have 'pursued the pictorial language of the Ancients' in a way that complements his verse. The likely source for at least a few of the images is therefore to be found in Oudaan's *Roomsche mogentheid*.<sup>248</sup> In passing Houbraken identifies the two figures behind Pure Poetry as 'Religion in his choir robe' and 'State Management'. The latter holds the scales that are usually associated

with Justice, who is of course indispensable to proper governance. Oudaan is therefore portrayed as an exemplar man with deep concern for everything that matters.

There are two books by Johan van Broekhuizen. The first is *Jani Broukhusii Poematum libri sedecim* (The Seventeen Books of Johan van Broekhuizen's Poetry), which was edited by David van Hoogstraten (1658-1724). It has a splendid title print which identifies François and Amsterdam as publisher and city, but not the engraver. Beyond that there is an illustration found just before a long and unpaginated dedication to Johan de Witt (1625-1672), a 'most noble man', which identifies Arnold Houbraken as inventor and Joseph Mulder (1658-1742) as engraver. The image shows a personification of Poetry seated under a canopy to the right of a coat of arms which features a bird with a twig in its beak and three fleurs-de-lis [78].<sup>249</sup> A few attributes of the sister arts of painting and music are located down below. To the left are two cupids before a landscape with Pegasus, the mount of poets, flying in the very background. Note, however, that the fine small engraving that follows this dedication is said to be by Jan Goeree. In addition dozens of middle-sized, small and even tiny illustrations, all highly accomplished, punctuate the long text. Most remarkable are the elaborate architectural frameworks around many of the illustrations. Unfortunately no inventor or engraver is ever specified and the images are not closely related to work by Houbraken.

<sup>248</sup> Check out Oudaan 1664 (1671, 1706), page 8, no. 7 for the two-headed king. Very similar heads of Roman emperors are encountered on p. 39, no. 10 and between pp. 326 and 327, no. 8. Isolated clasped hands are found between pp. 346 and 347, no. 9. Between pp. 346 and 347, no. 9 we see a similar couple flanking an altar. Clearly the matter still needs to be investigated more systematically.

<sup>249</sup> This is not the coat of arms of the Van Broekhuizen or the De Witt family.



78: Joseph Mulder after Arnold Houbraken, *Poetry with Attributes, Coat of Arms, Two Cupids and Pegasus*. Engraving, 70 x 134 mm. In: Johan van Broekhuizen, *Jani Broukhusii Poematum libri sedecim*, 1711, n.p.



79: Gilliam van der Gouwen after Arnold Houbraken, *Wisdom Finds Rest Under a Linden Tree*. Engraving, 78.7 x 64.2 mm. In: Johan van Broekhuizen, *J.V. Broekhuizens gedichte*, 1712, image on titlepage.

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The second Broekhuizen book is *J.V. Broekhuizens gedichten: Op nieu by een vergadert* (J. Van Broekhuizen's Poems: Newly Assembled), which was not listed by Swillens. Its impressive title print is by Jan Goeree, but is also has a title page with a tiny but irresistible print drawn by Houbraken and engraved by Gilliam van der Gouwen [79]. It depicts a pensive old man in a landscape, sitting under a tree and flanked by objects of learning and cultivation, such as a book, lyre and a trumpet. An owl no doubt indicates his wisdom. A banner reads 'TILIAE SUB TERMINE TUTUS', which tells us that it is under a linden tree that he has found his end.

Finally, for Philippus Van Limborgh's *Uitleggingen over de Handelingen der Apostelen* (*Explanations of the Acts of the Apostles*) Houbraken provided only the title print, which states that it was both drawn and executed by him [80]. It depicts *Saint Paul Supervises the Rendering of a Map of His Travels on the Mediterranean Sea*. Saint Paul is identified by his sword and scrolls which presumably record his incessant journeys. A relief above and behind his head likely shows his blinding on the road to Damascus. Saint Peter holds up the map with his right hand and his cross with his left. Saint Luke's bull looks out at us from below the map. Of course both Peter and Luke also feature in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

More richly illustrated is Daniël Willink's *Amsterdamsche Tempe* (Amsterdam Climes). Both the large and small title prints for the work as a whole are again by Jan Goeree. Following a plethora of poetry by numerous worthies is a handsome title print by Houbraken for the first volume proper [81]. As we learn from Houbraken's poem, it displays and praises *The City Maiden of Amsterdam*. Because Houbraken in effect wrote prospectuses for Willink's tripartite text, which makes lavish propaganda for Am-

sterdam, it may be appropriate to translate his entire poems.

The City Maiden of Amsterdam,  
Thus grandly cloaked and bedecked with  
pearls,  
Although she grew from obscurity,  
Now attracts the eye of the entire world.  
The lance depicts her bravery  
Once defended on her fortifications.  
Thus grows, through care and wisdom,  
At last the slight to greatness.  
A ship's crown, artfully embroidered  
Decorates her head and blonde hair:  
A sign that her naval power seeks  
To sail throughout the wide world.  
Mercury depicts the commerce,  
The full horn of plenty the profit, below  
Stand the old fishermen looking at  
The crowned statue with great amazement.  
See standing in the distance, a green lane,  
A depiction of the plantation.

The second volume has another fine title print by Houbraken [82], which shows *Poetry Observing the Beauties of Nature*. As we read in Houbraken's poem,

Poetry, full of pure pride,  
Dressed in gold and laurels,  
Sits attentively observing  
All that nature created, in foliage, in herbs  
And flowers, and tasty fruit,  
To unfold in edifying poetry.  
The four cupids here depict the time  
Of the four seasons after life,  
Which in the tapestry of poetry  
Is so naturally and edifyingly woven.  
The statue of noble Nature,  
Ready mildly to refresh everything,



80: Arnold Houbraken, *Saint Paul Supervises the Rendering of a Map of His Travels*. Etching, 170 x 125 mm. In: *Philipus Van Limborch's Uitleggingen over de Handelingen der Apostelen*, 1713, title page.



81: Arnold Houbraken, *The City Maiden of Amsterdam*. Etching, 129 x 80 mm. In: Daniel Willink, *Amsterdamsche tempe*, 1712, volume 1, title print.



82: Arnold Houbraken, *Poetry Observing the Beauties of Nature*. Etching, 130 x 80 mm. In: Daniel Willink, *Amsterdamsche tempe*, 1712, volume two, title print.

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Stands in the niche of the back wall:  
He who is wise never abuses her gifts.

Still another fine illustration introduces the third volume, made up of Willink's *De Amstelstroom*, and shows *The God of the Amstelstroom* [83].<sup>250</sup> It is again most efficient to quote Houbraken's entire introductory poem.

See the Amstelstroom God sitting on the land  
Resting at the flowing water vat  
Where noble Poetry, with good sense  
Spreads his praise to all foreign coasts.  
She crowns his grey head with light  
And smiles at him with sweet beckoning  
Her praise of the stream, not choked by  
Envy,  
Seems to ignite even the altar fire,  
Dedicated to endless Eternity;  
While yonder a farmer, to the splashing  
Of the stream's turbulence, spreads his praise  
With sweet echoes along the water.  
The milestone is depicted here  
Which shows off with a trio of crosses.

Everything is clear enough except perhaps for the *mijlpaal*, which is the huge monument decorated with a coat of arms of Amsterdam.

The picture changes substantially with E. Verryke's *Zederyke zinnebeelden* (Virtuous Emblems) of 1712, which is Houbraken's most lavishly illustrated book. We know almost nothing about Verryke, but he was most likely a theologian or clergyman, or both, for his text reads like an endless and repetitive sermon. In compensation, he was not a name-dropper. Nowhere in his 274

pages does he call on supporting testimony from a pundit or poet of the past or present. The Bible was all he needed. From a modern and secular perspective his work only deserves to be remembered thanks to the illustrations by Houbraken.

First comes a title print engraved by Jacobus Harrewijn (1660-1727) [84] accompanied by an eighteen-line poem by Houbraken which likely explains its contents more clearly than the following translation does.

PIETY, who here stands in the foreground,  
Recognized by all by her pure white robe,  
Draws back from the world  
The curtain, which is stitched with Prejudice,  
By which her eye sees everything enlivened,  
Embellished by deception.  
The polished glass, which neither deceives nor flatters.  
Depicts things correctly and truthfully,  
By reflections,  
She holds her raised hand up high, and has  
The world see in undisguised garb,  
The nature of things;  
While the Work of Falsehood disappears in the blue distance,  
Now the bright light of Truth shines through the glass,  
With golden rays.  
VIRTUE, depicted by the Easter palm tree, shoots up,  
And can, though tormented by pressure and truncated,  
Still triumph.

<sup>250</sup> Literally *Amstelstroom* means the stream of the Amstel River, but the term does not lend itself to translation.



83. Arnold Houbraken, *The God of the Amstel Stream*. Etching, 130 x 79 mm. In: Daniel Willink, *Amsterdamsche tempe*, 1712, volume 3, title print.



84. Jacobus Harrewijn after Arnold Houbraken, *Piety with Attributes*. Engraving, 140 x 80 mm. In: E. Verryke, *Zederyke zinnebeelden vertoont in konstplaten*, 1712, title print.

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Then, following lots more poetry by Houbraken and others, there are a hundred emblems drawn by him and again engraved by Harrewijn. The first image already strikes an exalted Christian note [85]. It shows a kind of *Flamme Éternelle* in the crossing of a Bramante-like church interior. The surrounding text reads ILLE HABEAT SERVETORE and the opening explains ‘One must have and preserve this alone.’ The explanatory poem reads:

No earthly fire once dedicated,  
To eternity or Vesta,  
Could reach heaven with its flame;  
But the heart sparked by holy devotion,  
Penetrates heaven with its flame,  
And only it can approach God.

The second emblem offers more of the same. The surrounding text reads ‘SECURA SUIS RADICIBUS’, which is translated below the image as ‘Its Roots Keep it Safe’ [86].<sup>251</sup> The following poem reads:

A tree which is firmly rooted,  
Though struck by wind and lightning,  
Holds firm, though its branches tremble.  
A soul, nurtured by blessed hope,  
Is by the reversals of the world,  
Raised still higher to its God.

Houbraken, we shall soon learn, almost certainly did not believe in a soul independent of the body. Nor did he subscribe to our resurrection and life eternal, which are both more explicitly celebrated below the next emblem, ‘I Leave All Else Behind’ [87].

What good a crown, and worldly treasures?  
They do not still desire,  
And keep us from embracing the crown,  
In permanence, such as eternity.  
Who would not prefer that treasure of the soul  
Over that which death has us lose?

In fact, the hundred emblems repeatedly allude to an intervenient God who continually approves or disapproves of our actions in a way totally foreign to Houbraken’s Deism. This God is continually at work both in nature and within us, as with ‘From There it Draws its Life and Virtue’, in which we see a grape vine basking in the rays of the sun [88].<sup>252</sup>

The vineyard lit by the rays of the sun  
Furnishes us with fine wine;  
But as soon as this light loses its rays,  
All labour will be fruitless.  
Man! Do not boast of your accomplishments,  
All that you have comes from above.

The theme of the following repetitive elaboration is the lost strength of character and bravery of ‘our ancestors’.

It appears that we cannot be filled with this true strength if we do not receive the same from a higher power: just as the vineyard can’t produce its fruits to the amusement of man if the heat of the sun does not warm and feed them. It is also thus with strength and all the other vir-

<sup>251</sup> Verryke 1712, p. 4, emblem II.

<sup>252</sup> Verryke 1712, p. 11, emblem IV.



85. Jacobus Harrewijn after Arnold Houbraken, *Cling To and Preserve This Alone*. Engraving, 60 x 60 mm. In: E. Verryke, *Zederyke zinnebeelden vertoont in konstplaten*, 1712, emblem I, p. 1.



86. Jacobus Harrewijn after Arnold Houbraken, *Its Roots Keep it Safe*. Engraving, 60 x 60 mm. In: E. Verryke, *Zederyke zinnebeelden vertoont in konstplaten*, 1712, emblem II, p. 4.



87. Jacobus Harrewijn after Arnold Houbraken, *I Leave All Else Behind*. Engraving, 60 x 60 mm. In: E. Verryke, *Zederyke zinnebeelden vertoont in konstplaten*, 1712, emblem III, p. 7.



88.. Jacobus Harrewijn after Arnold Houbraken, *From There it Draws its Life and Virtue*. Engraving, 60 x 60 mm. In: E. Verryke, *Zederyke zinnebeelden vertoont in konstplaten*, 1712, emblem IV, p. 11.



89: Arnold Houbraken, *The Expulsion of Deceit in the Guise of a Wolf*. Etching, 155 x 97 mm. In: *De Wolf in 't Schaapsvel ontdekt door Jacob Zezus*, 1711, title print.

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tues, which receive all their power from Divine favour, to which they owe their origins and without which they could not exist [...].<sup>253</sup>

We may be sure that Verryke was the author of such platitudinous Christian sentiments. But Houbraken probably did not read most of Verryke's deliberations, just as he probably did not bother with Joseph Hall's text. Much as with Hall, where Houbraken illustrated only the headings of the emblems, all the illustrations of Verryke's emblem book can be fully understood in terms of the introductory poems. When given leeway Houbraken implemented a relatively neutral solution. After all a grapevine basking in the sun is not necessarily a Christian image. However, many of the poems left Houbraken no room for evasion, as with *I Leave All Else behind* [87], with its attributes of worldly rank and power down below and an angel's arm holding a laurel crown reaching for the heavens above. Such images demonstrate Houbraken's consummate ability to adapt to the requirements of a patron.

Houbraken's title print for Jakob Zeeus' fiercely polemic *De Wolf in 't schaepsvel* (The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing), which was engraved by Joseph Mulder [89], is of obvious interest because of a poem in defence of the author that Houbraken also contributed to the volume. The painter, surveyor, notary public and satirist Zeeus belonged to the Reformed Community of Zevenbergen, which was part of the Classis of Dordrecht. By 1710, when Arnold Houbraken quit that city for Amsterdam, Zeeus was embroiled in a serious conflict with his Church

Council and especially its pastor. Cornelis Wilhelmus van de Watering (born 1935) explained the controversy thus: 'To a certain extent this must have been a consequence of previously developed freethinking notions concerning God and religion, but to a much more important degree this conflict was the outcome of a very radical religious turnabout in his life.' It was this conflict that led to Zeeus' best-known satire, *De Wolf in 't schaepsvel* of 1711, in which he sought to rake his enemy over the coals. In his dedicatory poem to *De Wolf*, Houbraken warns his former pupil of the dangers of taking on a powerful representative of the Church:

Turn, dear Jakob, turn back: you face your death  
Too frivolously. Are your tender hands intended  
To attack the determined Choir-dragon in his den?  
Your fists are too small, its claws much too big.  
Will that cursed monster gnaw on your noble bones?  
Feed his entrails with your marrow and muscles?  
And will my Muse have to rush to your graveside  
To lament your fate in the shade of cypress trees?  
Am I to see you fallen victim to seething vermin,  
As you lie in the arena, so pitifully vanquished?  
Am I to see the laurels, braided about your worthy head

<sup>253</sup> Verryke 1712, p. 12.

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Reek of blood, as your enemy exults?  
Are those the fruits that your youth came  
to promise me  
When it suckled at my breast so eagerly,  
Disguised its youth so boldly, and held its  
head high  
So courageously in the ring of its games?

The poem, with its literal take on the notion of a bosom friend, may be melodramatic, but it is mild compared to the title print in which Zeeus is celebrated as a youthful poet with mature courage, and with Truth welling up in his breast. He has chained the wolf, which has defiled church and choir, to a marble column and tears off its white sheep's skin of Deceit. Nearby, Envy turns her pale head, unable to bear the light of Truth that emanates from young Zeeus' breast. An altar bathed in swine's blood alludes to the abominable sacrificial practices of the heathens, as do the bloody axe and the decapitated head of a sacrificed child on the ground. The Papal attributes in the lower right refer to the 'Roman whore'. In short, Zeeus is seen to be triumphing over every possible and impossible abuse of the priesthood. Most of the imagery had no direct relevance to the young poet's actual opponents. Instead, readers were expected to consider that this was an allegory, not to be taken literally. Houbraken's second version, of 1715, is somewhat less strident, with Calliope reflecting on the Church in the left foreground and much of the rest of the imagery repeated farther back in mirror image [90]. The 1715 edition, again engraved by Mulder, added a fine

portrait of Zeeus which was engraved by Pieter van Gunst [91] after a prototype by Houbraken [92]. The accompanying anodyne poem by David van Hoogstraten reads in translation:

Houbraken has thus captured ZEEUS after life,  
To whom Apollo himself gave his cittern,  
To sing with to the amusement of the Netherlands, -  
Which cries with joy as he plucks his golden strings.

Not to be outdone, one K. Boon van Engelandt<sup>254</sup> contributed additional praise to the version by Van Gunst and at least managed to allude to Zeeus' controversial tome:

This is Zeeus, whose great spirit amazes  
all of the Netherlands  
Which now boldly calls out let the Greeks  
cease boasting  
About Orpheus, that he tamed forest  
monsters with his strings.  
Thus [Zeeus] restrains the temple wolf  
with his lyre.

Of course it is blatant hyperbole. All of the Netherlands can only rarely have been united by amazement about anything and the likely supporters of Zeeus were a minority of people, including Houbraken, who were critical of the dogma and intolerance of the Church.

Houbraken's contribution to *De Schriftoorlyke Geschiedenissen en gelykenissen* (The Scrip-

<sup>254</sup> This worthy was likely *Meester* Kornelis Boon van Engeland, who is documented in the *Streekarchieff* [regional archive] Voorne Putten (no. 672) on 3 May 1726 as generous *armmeester* (warden of the poor) of the small town of Heenvliet, just south of Maassluis.



90: Arnold Houbraken, *The Expulsion of Deceit in the Guise of a Wolf*. Engraving, 159 x 100 mm. In: *De Wolf in 't Schaepsvel ontdekt door Jacob Zeeus*, 1715, title print.



91: Arnold Houbraken, *Portrait of Jakob Zeeus*. Mezzotint, 275 x 190 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



92: Pieter Stevens van Gunst after Arnold Houbraken, *Portrait of Jacob Zeeus*. Engraving, 158 x 99 mm. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek.

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tural Histories and Parables) of 1712 by the mystic, moralist and engraver Jan Luyken is of equal interest. It is an elaborate decorative frame around a portrait of Luyken which had been engraved by Pieter Sluyter after Arnold Boonen (1669-1729) and which, along with an extensive poem by Houbraken, is located near the front of the first volume [93].<sup>255</sup> Though Luyken plays a major role in *De groote schouburgh*, he is one of only a few individuals in its eleven hundred pages to whom Houbraken shows outright antipathy. That view is not reflected in his poem, however, which praises the pietist to the skies, making him look like an example to us all.

His way of life was simple, modest,  
He [was] virtuous, upright and full of  
compassion,  
And charity, oft shown to the poor;  
Hence his image deserves to be crowned  
with eternal praise.

Houbraken then proceeds to explain his flattering invention, which also centres on Luyken's virtue and especially on the great contribution that his many Biblical plates stand to make to the spiritual welfare of young people.<sup>256</sup> One can barely relate this paragon of virtue to the excessively devout and thoroughly impractical Jan Luyken of the third volume of *De groote*

*schouburgh*,<sup>257</sup> where he is painted as a fool who wrote silly love poetry and then compromised his art by pursuing religious delusions, and who never even grasped the basic wisdom that charity begins at home.<sup>258</sup> It can't be that Houbraken felt much different about Luyken and his zealotry in 1712 than in 1719. Nor, as we have seen, can Houbraken have been much taken by the scholarship of Luyken's Biblical prints.

Much of the fundamental difference in character between the 1712 Luyken allegory and the 1719 Luyken biography can be explained by the simple fact that allegory and biography were distinct modes of expression, with largely separate conventions. The allegory sought to rise to higher truth through abstractions, whereas history writing pursued truth of a more literal and down-to-earth kind. Hence Houbraken's allegories are foreign to our twentieth-century sensibilities, whereas his biographies have retained much of their appeal to this day. Obviously Houbraken and his contemporaries would not have tolerated the elevated abstractions of an allegory in the middle of a passage of history writing. On the other hand, they did not expect literal truth from an allegory. The latter reality helped Houbraken with a particularly difficult task, which was to write high praise for a man whom he held in low esteem. In addition, Houbraken probably appre-

<sup>255</sup> Note that this material is missing from the Google version based on a copy from the library of the University of Utrecht. However, Google offers other copies.

<sup>256</sup> For a translation of the poem, Horn 2000, p. 62. The figure of Alertness on the left is said to be standing but in fact seems to be crouching.

<sup>257</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 253-255.

<sup>258</sup> Note that Houbraken paints Jan Luyken mainly as a lovesick twit and zealous fool, whereas Schama 1987, pp. 159, 380-382, 388 etc. presents him as iconic for the Dutch Golden Age. By contrast, Schama adduces 'Arnoud van Houbraken' only once, in a caption to a print.



93: Pieter Sluyter after Arnold Boonen and Arnold Houbraken, *Portrait of Jan Luiken*. Engraving, 222 x 160 mm. In: Jan Luyken, *De schriftuurlyke geschiedenissen en gelykenissen*, 1712, n.p.

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ciated an opportunity to create an allegory for a book by a best-selling author, so that he had no incentive to harp on Luyken's excessive ardour and deficient common sense. Houbraken probably saw the Luyken allegory mainly as an intellectual challenge and as a source of money to help feed his large family.

Even so, one can't help being struck by how much of the imagery of the Luyken allegory, with its incense, heaven and cherubs, smacks of the Counter Reformation and seems altogether out of place in the oeuvre of Houbraken, who was intellectually situated in the early Enlightenment. Indeed, we know that Houbraken did not even believe in our ascension to heaven or in any subsequent 'celestial fire of love'. It seems unlikely that he was unaware of the theological implications of his allegorical approach to his pious contemporary. Clearly he was familiar with his own and Luyken's convictions in matters of religion. We may even surmise that he actually enjoyed laying on his exalted imagery with a trowel, relishing the irony of celebrating the life of a Protestant mystic in this elevated and near-papist fashion. It is likely, in other words, that Houbraken was already sending up Luyken by 1712.

By this time Houbraken may well have started work on a major project, being a collection of engraved Old and New Testament scenes which was commissioned by Hendrik Adriaan van der Marck.<sup>259</sup> In the first volume of *De groote schouburgh* Houbraken explains that Simon car-

ried Christ's cross, adding: 'Wherefore we have depicted it thus in the Biblical Scenes that are about to come to light, by Mister Hend. vander Mark, Lord of the Leur.'<sup>260</sup> The father of this Meester Hendrik Adriaan van der Marck, heer van De Leur, was Thomas van der Marck, canon of the chapter of Saint John in Utrecht and, subsequently, burgomaster of Schoonhoven, who bought the estate De Leur (near Nijmegen) in 1650 from descendents of Boudewijn of Luxemburg (1285-1354). On 10 March 1687 young Hendrik Adriaan matriculated in jurisprudence at the University of Leiden. In 1713 he inherited De Leur from his older brother Nicolaas Thomas, who had succeeded his father as burgomaster of Schoonhoven. Hendrik eventually became canon of Saint Mary in Utrecht. His splendid library and numismatic collection were auctioned in The Hague the year after his death.<sup>261</sup> Houbraken's cryptic information suggests that Van der Marck intended to publish a Bible commentary that would have been illustrated by Arnold himself.

Van der Marck had committed himself to this publication by 24 October 1710, when he signed an elaborate contract with the recently arrived Amsterdam publisher Albert Picart (died 1760). The work came out in three volumes in 1728, well after Houbraken's death.<sup>262</sup> The artists were Gerard Hoet II, Arnold Houbraken and Bernard Picart (1673-1733), and the substantial title, translated into English, reads: *Scenes of the most important stories of*

<sup>259</sup> Marten Jan Bok kindly drew our attention to this major project in his comments on the final manuscript for *The Golden Age Revisited*.

<sup>260</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 197 and Van Eeghen 1960, pp. 104-105.

<sup>261</sup> For detailed information unearthed by Willem van den Watering, Horn 2000, note 2-172.

<sup>262</sup> Horn 2000, p. 43 has 1720, which is inexplicably incorrect.

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*the Old and New Testaments and other books added to the Holy Scripture, drawn by the renowned masters Hoet, Houbraken and Picart, and engraved in copper by the best masters, and amplified by descriptions.* Gerard Hoet illustrated most of the Old Testament volume and may well have taken charge of the whole project. Houbraken's twenty-six New Testament drawings, all in the third volume, with slightly adapted title, were engraved by Gilliam van der Gouwen, Abraham de Blois (died >1720), Joseph Mulder, Andries Casparus van Buijsen (1708-1755), Gerrit de Broen (1692-1760), Matthys Pool (1670-1732), Pieter Sluiter (1675->1713), François Bleyswyk (active 1671-1746), Wouter Jongman (active 1712-1744), and Jacob Folkema.

The specific illustration mentioned in *De groote schouburgh*, namely *Simon Bears Christ's Cross*, was engraved by Gilliam van der Gouwen [94].<sup>263</sup> It is one of two double illustrations and is highly ambitious, incorporating several truly expressive gestures. Even on his way to his execution, Christ shows concern for women and children. Simon, who is being beaten as he strains under the cross, is at the very right of the composition. In the left background is the city of Jerusalem. A procession that includes the two thieves winds from a city gate into a trench-like gulley in the middle-ground and re-emerges just behind Simon to the right of the cross. Such a wonderful, ample composition shows that Houbraken had continued to grow substantially as an artist.

Houbraken probably started his drawings in 1709, the year that Albert Picart settled in Amsterdam. Possibly his involvement in the project helped bring Houbraken to the city. There is no way of knowing just how long he continued to work on his drawings between then and 1718, when he writes in the past tense ('wherefore we have depicted it thus') in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>264</sup> Supervising the engravings after his many drawings must have encouraged Houbraken to concentrate on the requirements of engraved reproduction, so that there may well have been a connection between his contribution to the Van der Marck edition and his successful undertaking to teach his son Jacob to become an engraver. A quick calculation shows that Jacob was twelve years old in 1510, when Albert Picart signed his contract with Van der Marck. The youth must have been an experienced engraver by 1718, when the first volume of *De groote schouburgh* came out with seventeen of his multi-portrait illustrations.

### **A Surfeit of Dangerous Ideas**

Houbraken fully declared himself as a Deist when he published his *Philaléthes brieven* at the start of 1712.<sup>265</sup> The impossibly long title reads *Philaléthes brieven, Verhandelende verscheide Schriftuurlyke, Natuur- en Oudheidkundige nutte aanmerkingen: Beneffens een ahangzel van eenige opgehelderde plaatzen der H. Schrift.* (Philaléthes' Letters, Treating Various Scriptural, Scientific and Antiquarian Comments. As Well as an Appendix of Some Clar-

<sup>263</sup> As is clear from the 'in koper gesneden' of the title, the print is an engraving and not an etching as specified in Horn 2000, fig. 37.

<sup>264</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 197.

<sup>265</sup> Boeteman advertised the book in the *Amsterdamsche Courant* of 2 January 1712.



94: Gilliam van der Gouwen after Arnold Houbraken, *Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross of Jesus Christ*. Engraving, 358 x 511 mm. In: Gerard Hoet et al., *Taferelen der voornaamste geschiedenissen van het Oude en Nieuwe Testament*, 1728, volume 3, between pp. 111 & 112.

ified Places in the Holy Scriptures). This work and its immediate sequel, *De gemeene leidingen tot den godsdienst* (The General Guidelines to Religion), turned Houbraken into arguably the most radical representative of the now so-called Radical Enlightenment of his times. Swillens listed *Philaléthes* but overlooked *De gemeene leidingen*, possibly because he thought of the two books as one work. If so, this is odd given that *De gemeene leidingen* was not published by Pieter Boeteman (1685-1719) but by Gerard onder de Linden (1682-1727).<sup>266</sup>

We still have what could well have been Houbraken's modello for the intended title print for *Philaléthes* [95], which was engraved by Jacob Folkema [96]. The inscription below the beautiful drawing reads:

*Time reveals the nature of Things in Mirror-clarity  
Stripped of appearances and folly, by Love of Truth.  
Thus will Judgement  
(Deprived of blind faith and tradition) easily discern  
How the human mind, too readily, curbs the scope of the Spirit  
To Profit, and Advantage,  
Philaléthes*

Philaléthes means 'lover of truth', and the religious component of the book made it a dan-

gerous undertaking, one that Houbraken wisely intended to be anonymous. Perhaps the biographer gave up on using a title print inscribed 'AHoubraken Del.' when he realized that it would immediately compromise the anonymity of his publication. The Folkema engraving, which does not reproduce Houbraken's inscription, was eventually adapted for use in an altogether unrelated book.<sup>267</sup> *Philaléthes* received a quite different and somewhat inferior title print depicting *The Personification of Reason Guiding Curiosity Toward the Light of Truth* [97]. A lion suggests Reason's determination while Curiosity is sanctified by the flame and wings emanating from her head. Clearly she is on a holy mission. The books, owl and antique bust indicate that she will need learning on her way up the background steps. Below the image we read 'Amsterdam, by P. Boeteman. 1712,' with 'A. Houbraken' and 'J. Folkema' identified as creator and engraver. A small illustration on the title page, which likely shows *The Triumph of Truth*, also names these two artists [98].<sup>268</sup>

Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* of 2001 focussed on Houbraken's *Philaléthes* but proposed that the book is 'typical' of Willem Goeree. Yet very little of Goeree's massive production has significant theological content. Houbraken adduces Goeree's books in connection with archaeological matters and, much less often, biographical details, but never in direct connection with theological issues. Though Is-

<sup>266</sup> Like Houbraken, *Onder de Linden* began in Dordrecht and relocated to Amsterdam.

<sup>267</sup> It was incorporated in the titleprint of an anonymous bestseller, *Het groote tafereel der dwaasheid*, of 1720. The RKD mistakenly presents the original print in the context of that book.

<sup>268</sup> The motto on the banderole continues to foil me. The distortion of this image was unavoidable because the exceedingly rare volume (Radboud University library OD 1000 c 63 nr.1) is very tightly bound. Fig. 107 is less distorted because it is located at the very front of the book.



95: Arnold Houbraken, *Time Reveals the Meaning of Things*. Modello for a title print, likely intended for Houbraken's *Philalèthes Brieven* of 1712. Pen and wash drawing, 161 x 100 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



96: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Time Reveals the Meaning of Things*. Title print, likely intended for Houbraken's *Philaléthes brieven* of 1712. Engraving, 140 x 85 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



97: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Reason Guides Curiosity Toward the Light of Truth*. Engraving, 80 x 144 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Philaléthes brieven*, 1712, title print.



98: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Triumph of Reason*. Engraving, 43 x 60mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Philaléthes Brieven*, 1712, on title page.



99: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Fall of Man*. Engraving, 87 mm. circumference. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Verzameling van uitgelezen keurstoffen*, 1713, opp. p. 2 of the reprint of *Philaléthes Brieven*.

rael's book came out too close to *The Golden Age Revisited* for him to learn in time that Houbraken's authorship is firmly established by eleven documents (discussed below) in the Amsterdam archives, he might have asked how Goeree could have published in 1712 when he had died on 3 May of the preceding year. Moreover, *De gemeene leidingen*, being the immediate sequel of *Philaléthes*, states that it was 'printed by the author and to be obtained from Gerard onder de Linden.' It seems unlikely that Onder de Linden had the book gathering dust for much of a year and then took the risk of distributing it on his own accord.<sup>269</sup> Clearly 'the author' of *De gemeene leidingen* was also Arnold Houbraken, not Willem Goeree.

Israel could also have consulted the art-historical literature. Back in 1750 Houbraken's biographer Johan van Gool reported that his friend's theology 'got the preachers after him because he did not bind himself all that closely in these letters to the Formulations of the Church.'<sup>270</sup> The attribution lived on from Cornelis Hofstede de Groot to Jan Emmens and be-

yond because of Van Gool, but also because of two instances in *De Grootte schouburgh* in which Houbraken identifies himself as the author of *Philaléthes*. Much more recently, the Houbraken attribution was vindicated by Inger Leemans in a study of Goeree's writings and ideas.<sup>272</sup> She spotted the documentation in *The Golden Age Revisited* but not the places that establish the connection between Houbraken's *Philaléthes* and his *Grootte schouburgh*. Fortunately, as she reports, Bert van den Roemer and Marten Jan Bok drew her attention to these links.<sup>273</sup> Leemans points out that 'in the anonymous *Philaléthes brieven* virtually all the key points of Goeree are presented in a much more radical way.'<sup>274</sup> Given that decisive verdict, it only remains to stress the vital fact that Goeree hid his less radical ideas in a few books with anodyne titles whereas Houbraken concentrated much the same ideas in two dedicated volumes.<sup>275</sup>

What we can learn from Israel back in 2001 is that Houbraken's *Philaléthes* was rightly seen by the Dutch Synods as supportive of the writings Frederik van Leenhof, whose *Den*

<sup>269</sup> *On the widespread persecution of authors and publishers during the seventeenth century, beginning with Adriaen Kobergh (1632-1669)*, Marion 2012, pp. 31-43.

<sup>270</sup> *Van Gool 1750*, p.145.

<sup>271</sup> *Houbraken 1718*, pp. 104 and 265. Only the former connection is cited by Leemans 2004, note 38.

<sup>272</sup> Leemans 2004, pp. 255-272. Note, however, that Leemans 2004, p. 269, note 37 claims that Goeree and Houbraken 'certainly' knew each other because of an appreciative reference in the combined edition of 1713 of *Philaléthes* and *De gemeene leidingen*. However, Houbraken only writes that he holds the writings of Goeree in 'high esteem'. On this point Israel 2019, p. 271 is much more cautious: 'Conceivably Goeree and Houbraken barely know each other ...'

<sup>273</sup> Leemans 2004, p. 269. Perhaps 'link' would be a better word, since Leemans quotes only the first of the two connections.

<sup>274</sup> Leemans 2004, p. 269, in translation.

<sup>275</sup> Israel 2013, *passim* and 2019, *passim* eventually conceded that Arnold Houbraken wrote *Philaléthes brieven*, but he never mentions his own earlier attribution. Nor does he review the subsequent literature, including the documents discovered by David de Witt. His tidbits about Houbraken and his *Grootte schouburgh* appear to have come out of nowhere and not from Horn 2000.

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*hemel op aarden* had emerged as the most accessible Spinozistic text of the times. Israel's several pages concerning the fierce Leenhof controversy finally focus on our biographer. I quote two passages because they provide important supplemental insights to *The Golden Age Revisited*.

The book which undoubtedly caused the greatest offence to the Synods in the closing stages of the Leenhof affair, however, was the anonymously and clandestinely published *Philaléthes brieven* (Philalethes' Letters) which appeared in Amsterdam in 1712. Extracts from *Philaléthes* were circulated at the meeting of the South Holland Synod in July 1712 [...].

*Philaléthes brieven* are perhaps especially symptomatic of the underground Radical Enlightenment of the early eighteenth century in their fervent belief in the progression of human reason and confidence that, in recent years, philosophy had achieved a crucial breakthrough, building on and completing the humanist philosophy of what we would now call the Renaissance, as well as (as he puts it), 'the Reformation',<sup>276</sup> and utterly demolished the metaphysical foundation of all prejudice and superstitious credulity. Inevitably, for such a writer, the Leenhof episode was emotionally highly charged. When *Philaléthes* was condemned at the Synod of Gelderland in August 1713, its defiant defence of Leenhof was singled out as one of its most offensive features.<sup>277</sup> Indeed, such was the uproar over *Philaléthes*

*brieven* that the Reformed synods felt able to resume their campaign in the States of Holland for tougher and wider intellectual censorship, adamant that 'freedom of the printing press goes too far'.

Arnold Houbraken must have known that his ideas would be poorly received by the Reformed Synods. In his unpaginated preface to *Philaléthes* he claims that he did not opt for anonymity as protection from hostile critics, 'so that our work might be judged more freely and with less prejudice, and we [...] might hear everyone's opinion all the more frankly'.

The letters vary widely in their topics, coherence and length. Occasionally one missive virtually continues into the next. They rarely have the aspects of a sustained and tiresome exposition. Instead, they read like believable letters, complete with the odd lament about lacking time to bring an argument to a satisfactory conclusion. Houbraken even includes dates for some of the correspondence: 'I have received your Honour's polite Letter, *Euzebius*, dated the 3. of Twig month [February], 1705 [...]'. I believe that the letters vouch for Houbraken's partiality to variety in presentation, which was to find its final expression in his *Groote schouburgh*. Had he wanted more structured text, he would surely not have opted for the format of a collection of letters. On the other hand this format does not explain the truly chaotic and utterly exasperating nature of some of his material. It is only in his lengthy antiquarian expositions that he achieves a measure of focus. One unfortunate consequence of Houbraken's unstructured

<sup>276</sup> Houbraken (letter XVIII, p. 124).

<sup>277</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XVIII, p. 126 and letter XXIV, pp. 175-176.

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presentation was that he was probably not taken seriously by professional theologians.

The letters were real and not invented for the book, but he presumably edited them for the occasion. They are addressed to various people identified by initials or pseudonyms -- GL, Lealto, Mevrouw NN, NN Pictor, MvL, MNR, Fronesimus, and D.v.S. -- but most are replies to one correspondent, one Eusebius or Eusebius. Houbraken addresses him in the role of a mentor who is helping a younger friend clarify his thinking. I believe Eusebius must have Jacob Zeeus, whom Houbraken called his 'bosom friend' on at least two occasions. All the information fits the assumption that Zeeus was Eusebius: the generation (twenty-six years) that separated the two men in age, their early- and long-established father-son and teacher-student relationship in art, poetry, and theology, their shared years of questioning and growing doubt in and near Dordrecht; and the crisis year, 1710, which marked Arnold's departure for Amsterdam and Jakob's rupture with the Church. In short, *Philaléthes brieven* is in part a record of an intellectual pilgrimage shared by two dear friends.

Arnold Houbraken, Jakob Zeeus and the other correspondents of *Philaléthes* apparently formed a smallish group of like-minded thinkers within the larger body of Collegiants.<sup>278</sup> In a 1700 expose of the 'pestiferous behaviour and feelings of today's Spinozists, written by one J.

Roodenpoort (Jan Rodenpoort?), we encounter Eusebius and Fronesimus, joined by a fictive and troubled anti-hero named Kakotegnus (Latinized Greek for 'bad child'),<sup>279</sup> in a weekly meeting at Eusebius' home, where they discuss the nature of the soul.<sup>280</sup> Collegiants prided themselves on their freedom of opinion, hence the need for disputation, so that the position of the individual members of Houbraken's subgroup on such matters of dogma would need to be compared to place him in this milieu with precision. We shall soon see, however, that Houbraken allows the soul no existence independent of the body, and that is all that matters in the present context.

*Philaléthes* is divided into three parts without clear demarcations, followed by a variety of odds and ends. The first part concerns what we might call the iconography of the Book of Genesis and specifically of the Fall of Man, which he maintains must answer to reason and not only to the letter of the text.<sup>281</sup> A second section is devoted to the history of religion and specifically to the continuity of ancient Hebrew and heathen cultures with respect to burial customs, horns on altars, beards and the like.<sup>282</sup> It is much the same kind of material that is found in a few of the theoretical digressions of *De groote schouburgh*, and we also encounter Antonius Bynaeus and Willem Goeree as authorities.<sup>283</sup> However, no direct connection is here made to

<sup>278</sup> Meyer 1899, pp. 181-182 identified it as 'Duikers club', Duiker being Johannes Duijkerius.

<sup>279</sup> Maréchal 1991, pp. 34-35, and p. 35 note 4.

<sup>280</sup> Roodenpoort 1700, pp. 53-67, esp. p. 57. Apparently this was one of two pamphlets by him. The one mentioned here is accessible as Google book.

<sup>281</sup> Houbraken 1712A, pp. 1-53.

<sup>282</sup> Houbraken 1712A, pp. 54-89.

<sup>283</sup> Houbraken 1712A, pp. 55 and 79.

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the requirements of history painting. The underlying assumption would appear to be that the cultural continuity confirms the reliability of what we know about such matters. We get the distinct impression that Houbraken was mainly airing a near-hobbyist interest of his, whether here or in his *Groote schouburgh*, and both here and in the *Schouburgh* the material is tedious in the extreme for many of today's readers. Curiously this part ends with Thomas Goodwin (1517-1590) and Hebrew law about what constitutes legitimate cause to dump one's wife,<sup>284</sup> a topic that thankfully does not arise in *De Groote schouburgh*, before turning to the altogether unrelated topic of Mary, mother of Christ, and her mortal capacity for sin and need of redemption.<sup>285</sup>

The third section of *Philaléthes* concerns a bewildering variety of theological issues. The fundamental idea is that reason must be applied to the scriptures. A brief bout of self-quotation may well be the most efficient approach here.

At all junctures Houbraken confronts superstition with reason. He dismisses the dubious notion that Adam may have been

transparent or that he put on weight after the Fall.<sup>286</sup> He also challenges Biblical references to ghosts, angels and the devil. Angels are simply a metaphor by which God carries out His commands.<sup>287</sup> Houbraken also notes that Moses nowhere mentions angels in the story of creation.<sup>288</sup> The Evangelists were simple men, whose language had its inevitable limitations. This led to superstition, so that some of what they wrote must be interpreted in that light.<sup>289</sup> Christ referred to Satan metaphorically, claims Houbraken.<sup>290</sup> No good Christian believes in devils. Nor did Christ,<sup>291</sup> though He did not bother to correct His disciples. This was because He and the Apostles were more concerned with improving corrupt morals than with correcting 'minor errors in understanding.'<sup>292</sup>

Such propositions were bound to offend all conventional Christians. But what Houbraken chose *not* say must have been even more offensive. Though he argues that the scriptural and archaeological evidence for the Resurrection of

<sup>284</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XIII, p. 89. Since he gives a page reference, we can tell that he used the expanded 1694 edition and not that of 1686. Goodwin recurs in letter XXIV, p. 162. Other such items include a linguist named J. Kramer (letter XV, p. 94), Balthasar Bekker's 1683 book about comets (letter XVI, p. 109) and a Lutheran preacher named Johann Balthasar Schupp or Schuppius (1610-1661) (letter XXV, p. 180).

<sup>285</sup> Houbraken 1712a, letter XIV, pp. 90-91.

<sup>286</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter III, p. 24 and letter V, p. 27.

<sup>287</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXII, pp. 247 and 250.

<sup>288</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXIII, p. 151. Houbraken believed that Moses wrote Genesis.

<sup>289</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XVII, p. 116 (twice) and p. 117 for their inadequate language.

<sup>290</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXIV, pp. 168 and 169.

<sup>291</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XVIII, p. 125.

<sup>292</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XVII, p. 118, letter XVIII, p. 123 and letter XIX, p. 128

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Christ is overwhelming and must be believed,<sup>293</sup> not a single word indicates that Christ died on the cross so that we might have everlasting life. Not a word refers to the resurrection of the body or even to a soul independent of our bodies. Not a word alludes to the role of a provident or intervenient God, so that the reader is obliged to conclude, remembering Gracián, that God has chosen to remain outside His creation. These ideas, though only implied, must have outraged all orthodox Christians, Protestant and Catholic alike.

Obviously Houbraken's most determined antagonists were bound to be the Contra-Remonstrants. The Remonstrants are not atheists, he says. If they do not go to church to profess their own faith it is because the Church will not accommodate them.<sup>294</sup> He therefore contends against the Voetian majority by professing to dislike some of the deliberations of the Synod of Dordt, including the affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity, because it is altogether beyond human comprehension.<sup>295</sup> His opposition to the doctrine of predestination, whether for Christ or sinner, is ever on his mind.<sup>296</sup> He lambastes Antoinette de Bourignon (1616-1680), a Flemish mystic, because 'she clearly denies the atonement of Christ' by denying Him free will.<sup>297</sup> 'And thus I conclude, if man does not have complete free will, how is it conceivable that he can sin.'<sup>298</sup>

Houbraken's firm rejection of predestination, whether for us or Christ, takes us back to the studio of Samuel van Hoogstraten. Now, more than three decades later, we learn that God will not have had foreknowledge of 'the business of Adam' and that the topic of Aert's youth was of great importance and not at all a waste of time. The continuity in Houbraken's thought should not be interpreted as a sign of his lingering Mennonite identity. Opposition to predestination was a generic conviction that also stood at the heart of the Remonstrant faith. The crucial and perennial theological problem is that claims for pervasive free will are incompatible with God's presumed omniscience and omnipotence. Houbraken explains that such problematic questions stem from confusing the nature of God with that of man. God's justice and love meant that He could not give up on mankind, so that the horrible death of Jesus was not frivolous.<sup>299</sup> In other words, Christ's sacrifice was a necessary one-time sign from God that despite His adopted distance from his creation, He had not altogether forsaken mankind. As for Christ, being 'God made manifest in the flesh', he did what he could do, what he had to do, and what he wanted to do.<sup>300</sup> Further on Houbraken claims that 'sin has no other characteristic than that we do not want what God wants.'<sup>301</sup> It

<sup>293</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXI, p. 144.

<sup>294</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter V, p. 29.

<sup>295</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XIX, pp. 129-130 and 132.

<sup>296</sup> See especially Houbraken 1712A, letter XX, p. 134.

<sup>297</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter V, p. 28.

<sup>298</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter II, pp. 16-20, esp. pp. 19-20.

<sup>299</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter VIII, p. 47.

<sup>300</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XX, pp. 133-142.

<sup>301</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXIV, p. 177.

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follows that God and Christ were agreed in the all-important matter of His passion.

### **The Birth of Deistic Classicism**

Houbraken's art theory as first articulated in his *Philaléthes* and its sequel was more or less standard for a Classicist of around 1700 in its emphasis on history painting and convincing emotions, but it stands out by his extension, via Andries Pels, of the pervasive notion of *Ut Pictura Poesis* (as is poetry so is painting)<sup>302</sup> to embrace the theatre<sup>303</sup> but even more importantly by its religious component. There is a link between Houbraken's theoretical and religious thought in that all criteria hark back to antediluvian creation. Lots of people around 1700 believed that the dictates of good taste were objectively valid, hence '*de gustibus non est disputandum*'. With Houbraken's deistic classicism, however, the values of classicism were truly immutable, given that they were in part rooted in his theological convictions. The importance of the connection for him is apparent from the fact that he opened *Philaléthes* with related matters.

Houbraken illustrates an engraving by Jacob Folkema, based on one of his own drawings, which shows paradise before the Fall [99].<sup>304</sup> An elegantly reclining Eve tempts an equally comfortable Adam in the foreground, and several animals are portrayed in

the background. Conspicuous by its absence is the snake. As Houbraken explains, he disliked the serpent because reason tells us that a snake could not have spoken. Houbraken proposes that reason should rule in our interpretation of the Scriptures and that desire, and not a serpent, must have tempted Eve, so that the snake is therefore best omitted. In fact, he interprets the Fall of Man an allegory of sexual desire.<sup>305</sup> Artists such as Rembrandt van Rijn and Gerard de Lairese, claims Houbraken, simply included the snake because of tradition, without giving it any thought. Worse, these two painters did not even have the good sense to follow the letter of the Biblical text.

In a print depicting Adam and Eve, the first [by Rembrandt] shows (instead of a snake after the letter) a monstrous apparition, like the ornamental dragons in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid [100]; the second [by De Lairese] a monster with a woman's face [101]. Whatever reason he (Lares) may have had for this does not excuse it; yet it surprises me that a great light of art would have deliberately broken with the letter, much more than of Rembrant, of whom it is known that he would not be bound by any rules of art (no matter how widely approved), but took idiosyncrasy for his rule.<sup>306</sup>

<sup>302</sup> Ever indispensable on this topic is Rensselaer Lee 1940, pp. 197-269, reprinted as a paperback, complete with updated bibliography, by Norton Library in 1964.

<sup>303</sup> Horn 2000, p. 139. The complexities of the theory of *De groote schouburgh* are discussed in detail in Horn 2000, pp. 407-419. On Pels and his connection to Samuel van Hoogstraten and Gerard de Lairese, see especially pp. 419-421.

<sup>304</sup> Houbraken 1712A, opposite p. 2.

<sup>305</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter I, pp. 5-8.

<sup>306</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter I, p. 3.



100: Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Fall of Man*, signed and dated 1638. Etching, 162 x 116 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.



102: Albrecht Dürer, *The Fall of Man*, signed and dated 1504. Engraving on ivory laid paper, 250 x 193 mm. The Art Institute of Chicago.



101: Gerard de Lairese, *The Fall of Man*, c. 1680. Etching, 223x 252 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.

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Houbraken quotes Andries Pels with a now iconic passage from his *Gebruik én misbruik des toneels* (as quoted in full in *De groote schouburgh*),<sup>307</sup> which attributes to Rembrandt a perverse preference for ‘*Flaccid breasts, / Distorted hands, yes the pinches of the laces, / Of the corset on the belly, of the garters on the leg*’. He then adduces the afore-mentioned strictures of Samuel van Hoogstraten (also found in *De groote schouburgh*)<sup>308</sup> that an artist should study a text with care, seek to understand the situation, and not invent things. Houbraken, however, has moved beyond his master in that he is still telling us that the text must be followed without elaboration but that one can also leave something out if reason requires it.

Houbraken then returns to the issue of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and his preference for leaving out the snake altogether. One should not take the account of Genesis too literally, he explains. He dismisses the compromise notion of his early mentor Salomon van Til that the snake was a personification of the evil of Satan, and must therefore be depicted. Houbraken proposes to be still more radical in applying reason to the Bible:

But I have perhaps censured the above-mentioned painters unfairly: perhaps they intended to show this evil intellect, which Mister van Til would have

hidden in a snake skin, in its unwrapped state; but no: it is said to be a ghost, and to turn that into a figure runs counter to the laws of nature and the constitution of ghosts; as things that one represents require a measure of elaboration. As it is therefore not plausible that an evil intellect (Satan) carried out that work by way of a snake, and as the Holy Scriptures do not compel me to believe it against reason, that device (the snake) has no place in an historical depiction either.<sup>309</sup>

Deliberations about the folly of the snake fill a few more pages. How, Houbraken asks, could Adam have named the animals according to their nature, and yet have failed to have recognized the deceitfulness of the snake?<sup>310</sup> Eventually, however, he returns to the beauty of Eve in a discussion in which he draws on the authority of Joost van den Vondel.<sup>311</sup> He then reconsiders Rembrandt’s *Fall of Man* with its realistic Eve, who Houbraken insists can’t possibly reflect what God intended when He created her for, so he argues, ‘the distributed perfection of the bodily members of the female ‘can only have us amazed and decide that the first created female figure, when it came fresh from the hand of the Creator, must have been perfectly beautiful’.<sup>312</sup> Houbraken in effect proposes that artists should emulate God and assemble perfect limbs

<sup>307</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 268.

<sup>308</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter I, p. 4.

<sup>309</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter I, p. 6.

<sup>310</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter I, p. 11 and again in letter XVII, p. 116.

<sup>311</sup> Vondel 1654.

<sup>312</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter I, pp. 12-15, with the quotation from Houbraken 1721, p. 273. He refutes the objection that beauty is relative

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into a beautiful whole. He dismisses the notion that beauty is relative, since it is anchored in God's creation. In this way Houbraken ends up sounding like a neoplatonist, with God's remote creation taking the place of Plato's nebulolus Realm of Forms. His debatable example of an exemplar Eve is the figure in Albrecht Dürer's 1504 *Fall of Man* [102].<sup>313</sup>

We also encounter in *Philaléthes brieven* another direct prelude to the Rembrandt criticism of *De groote schouburgh*. Houbraken quotes a second short passage from Andries Pels' *Gebruik én misbruik des toneels* to allude to the general lack of discrimination of a certain artist (being Rembrandt):

Who through the entire city, and its corners,  
On the New, and North market, searched  
assiduously  
For harnesses, helmets, Japanese daggers,  
fur,  
And ravelled collars, which he thought  
picturesque,  
And often clad the Roman body of a Scipio,  
Or overburdened the noble limbs of a  
Cyrus.<sup>314</sup>

Houbraken concludes that such use of scavenged costumes for grand personages will not do because 'Idiosyncrasy is not appropriate to a universal practice; there one ought to follow the steps and the rules of those who make laudable

use of them.'<sup>315</sup> In other words, Rembrandt is being accused of failing to heed decorum and the tradition. This point is also raised in *De groote schouburgh*, complete with Pels' verse, but in a theoretical digression and not in the Life of Rembrandt.<sup>316</sup>

Houbraken's desiderata are summed up by a plate from the compilation of biblical depictions commissioned by Hendrik Adriaen van der Marck around 1709, namely an etching by Andries van Buijsen (dates unknown) after a drawing by Gerard Hoet depicting *Eve Giving the Fruit to Adam to Eat* [102]. The depiction likely reflects the ideas of Houbraken who, along with Hoet, rendered the preparatory drawings for the compilation, which was not published until 1728.<sup>317</sup> Adam and Eve are gorgeous, with convincing gestures and emotions. The Tree of Knowledge bears abundant fruit and the lush landscape, replete with animals and birds, looks like the work of a brilliant creator. The speaking snake is nowhere in sight. To see what Houbraken must have acutely disliked we have Jan Luyken's lacklustre treatment of the event, complete with a prominent and garrulous snake [103].

Houbraken eventually returns to his beloved antiquarian concerns, including the phenomenon of superstition. As an unexpected curiosity, he claims to have been encouraged by an anonymous reader to dig up a substantial segment of his preliminary design for *De Kruisheld*

<sup>313</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter I, p. 13.

<sup>314</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter II, pp. 17-18 and Pels 1678, lines 1117-1123.

<sup>315</sup> Houbraken 1712, letter X, p. 53.

<sup>316</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 103.

<sup>317</sup> The compilation was published as *Taferelen der voornaamste geschiedenissen van het Oude en Nieuwe Testaments*. This particular plate is in the first volume, opp. p. 4.



103: Pieter Sluyter after Jan Luyken, *The Fall of Man*. Engraving, 114 x 153 mm. In: *De Schriftuurlyke geschiedenissen en gelykenissen*, 1712, p. 9.



104: Andries van Buijsen after Gerard Hoet, *Eve Gives the Fruit to Adam to Eat*. Etching, 357 x 219 mm. In: *Taferelen der voornaamste geschiedenissen van het Oude en Nieuwe Testament*, 1728, part 1, opp, p. 4.

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by Jan van Hoogstraten (soon to be discussed) which he says is about to be published, the chore having been completed by ‘stronger shoulders’ than his own.<sup>318</sup> Indeed, the work does appear to show the hand of two poets, one more sophisticated than the other. Jan van Hoogstraten is not mentioned by name, however. Presumably the two men were already embroiled in their literary quarrel. As Houbraken’s resurrected fragment runs for ten pages, it should be more than enough to allow specialists in Dutch literature to assess Houbraken’s overall contribution to the work. Something of the kind was probably on the biographer’s mind as well. Given the acrimony surrounding the publication, it is not surprising that Houbraken regretted his generosity in letting Jan van Hoogstraten claim all the credit for the poetry and wanted to draw attention to his own rightful status as co-author of the work.

The last of topic of *Philaléthes* concerns matters of literary style. Predictably, Houbraken argues for a reasoned approach to punctuation.<sup>319</sup> He concludes his final letter with some of his own translation of Odes by Horace and several pages of his own ‘Den Lof der Merwestroom,’ along with its preface.<sup>320</sup> *Philaléthes brieven* also has an index, a glossary<sup>321</sup> and a series of short poems by Antonides van der Goes celebrating the animals, ranging from ele-

phants to bees, and birds from swans to hawks, as well as the planets.<sup>322</sup> Finally there is a long addendum, ‘Comprising a moral conversation between Philaléthes, Euzebius, Diagnostes, Fronesimus, and Lealte about most of the issues treated in the preceding letters.’<sup>323</sup> Amongst a bewildering variety and alternation of topics, Houbraken again argues against the existence of the devil who, as some reflection should tell us, could not have shown Christ all the kingdoms of the world at once. He even proceeds to argue that the wisdom of David and Solomon is unreliable when exposed to the light of reason. The material is almost impenetrable from the point of view of most readers, demonstrating once again that Houbraken was truly the least structured of thinkers.

### **Physiognomy as Key to a Reasoned Faith**

Few of us are likely to be sitting on the edge of our chairs, eager to see the issue of the talking snake resolved.<sup>324</sup> In addition Rembrandt’s Eve is not remotely comely, so that anyone who believes in a competent Creator has reason to grant Houbraken his point, which is in any case as much theological as theoretical.<sup>325</sup> It is unlikely however that the biographer would find much support for his conviction that an understanding of human emotions is a vehicle to understanding the nature of the Creator. He expressed

<sup>318</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXV, pp. 181-191.

<sup>319</sup> Houbraken 1712A, pp. 194-195.

<sup>320</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXVI, pp. 198-204.

<sup>321</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXVI, pp. 205-207 and 207-210.

<sup>322</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter XXVI, pp. 312-217, with the odd item by Heiman Dullaert.

<sup>323</sup> Houbraken 1712A, pp. 221-261.

<sup>324</sup> The issue was still not resolved as late as 12 March 1925, when a Reformed clergyman named Johannes Geelkerken (1879-1960) was removed from office for refusing to affirm the literal truth of the talking snake.

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this remarkable idea on the title page of his (unpaginated) *De gemeene leidingen tot den godsdienst*, his sequel to *Philaléthes brieven*, where he announces a supplementary disposition:<sup>326</sup>

*The general guide to religion broken down and reassembled on a firm foundation with an address about the emotions and their fixed manifestations in human features and how to deduce from them a pure understanding of an Upper Creature, the only true foundation for religion serving as a sequel to Philalethes' Letters.*

We see here a conflation of Houbraken's conviction that some artists are privileged to catch glimpses of God's hidden plan and his classicistic concern, in the tradition of Charles le Brun, with the convincing rendering of physiognomy in history painting. Houbraken proceeds to cover many of the same controversial points raised in *Philaléthes*, the overall proposition being that 'man must use his intellect to understand the wonder of God, or the upper being'.<sup>327</sup>

Should anyone doubt that God has endowed the reasonable soul of man with sufficient capacity and competence to view the Creator in his work, to discover all the miracles through reflection, and fi-

nally to come to know God through this, he will become convinced by the clear proofs that we present for it.

Houbraken believed that Moses had written the book of Genesis. Moses did not understand everything equally well, Houbraken argues, but the overall miraculous splendour is irrefutable. What we can see of God's creation around us, such as the wonderful intricacies of human anatomy, will also compel us to recognize His profound but ultimately unfathomable intellect.

Houbraken also returns to the substance of his title. To the opening section of this theological treatise he added a sub-treatise (as announced on the title page) concerning the human emotions or passions, written in emulation of the much better known version by Le Brun. Houbraken argues that the self-knowledge gained by the study of the passions makes them an important first key to rebuilding our reasoned understanding of God. After discussing the folly of envy and contempt in our dealings with others, he reviews in great detail a variety of emotions both with respect to their outer appearance and 'inner movement'. Typically of Houbraken the latter concern receives ample confirmation from several ancient authorities, most notably Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BC-AD 65). The exterior manifestations are illustrated

<sup>325</sup> However, Michiel Roscam Abbing 1994, *passim*, did not understand where Houbraken was from coming from and labelled his criticism of Rembrandt's *Fall* inept. A few years later Roscam Abbing 1999, pp. 129-150, softened his criticism but as I argued in great detail (Horn 2000, pp. 52-55) still showed little understanding of Houbraken's bipartite theory in his *Philaléthes* and *Groote schouburgh*.

<sup>326</sup> Houbraken 1712A, letter IX, p. 48 comments on his *Gemeene Leidingen*, proving he worked on it and *Philaléthes* simultaneously. The *Leidingen* were therefore more a pendant than a sequel. In 1713 the two books were re-published in combination, though with additions.

<sup>327</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 56-57 and Houbraken 1712b, pp. 10-33.

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by a representation of sixteen heads (one as part of an eloquent bust), with eight of them beautifully finished and the others only in outline. Labelled from A to P (with J missing) they illustrate the facial expressions discussed in the text.<sup>328</sup> In the case of Physical Distress [105a] Houbraken says he will follow Le Brun closely. The most interesting passage, however, concerns an achievement of Jan Steen.

[...] in Crying (fig. F) [105b] one discerns opposing and unbalanced movements of the parts, muscles, and expressions: for the ends of the eyebrows lower on the side of the nose, opposite to which the mouth rises, and where the eyebrows rise on the side of the ears, countering to this (looking further down) the mouth lowers in both its corners. In addition there occurs, among the traits of the emotion, an unusual, and, differentiated from others, frowning of the forehead, and an outwardly curled lower lip; which I have once seen depicted very naturally by the inventive painter Jan Steen, showing a young, gangling wretch [*Julfus*], who stands bawling because he found a rod or switch in his shoe, instead of something tasty.<sup>329</sup>

Most Dutch readers and all specialists in Dutch art will at once recall having seen such a figure

in the renowned *Eve of Saint Nicholas* in Amsterdam [106]. Houbraken was to return to Steen's *Julfus* in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>330</sup>

For Houbraken's notions about what constitutes self-knowledge, presented in an itemized overview, we have to leaf back in the treatise.<sup>331</sup> Items one to ten deal with the recognition and mastering of the passions. Number eleven proceeds to the nature of the 'upper being' or God. Number twelve establishes the necessity of the Holy Scriptures as a guiding light. Houbraken also proposes to free Moses from the base attacks of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and to defend the author of the *Life of Philopater* from calumny. Number thirteen confirms the facts of the Passion of Christ. Number fourteen argues that the death and resurrection of Christ must be believed, given the overwhelming evidence. Then, with number fifteen, Houbraken asserts that 'the essence of true Christianity consists of a steady consecration of our debt of gratitude (*Dank-plicht-wytingen*) for that great gift, to love God and treat our fellow men in such a way as we wish to happen to us.'<sup>332</sup> Thus, in typical Houbraken fashion, he locates his fundamental confession of faith in the middle of all sorts of secondary considerations.

Houbraken proceeds to argue that the sincerity, consistency and archaeological correctness of the Gospels confirm their veracity, despite the numerous mistakes made by the

<sup>328</sup> This illustration is missing in the Google book of 1712 but survived in the 1729 edition, which is mistakenly presented under the heading of *Verzameling van uitgelezene keurstoffen* of 1713..

<sup>329</sup> Houbraken 1712b, p. 13.

<sup>330</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 16-17 and Horn 2000, p. 526. The Rijksmuseum picture is a much smaller version of the lost work mentioned by Houbraken.

<sup>331</sup> Houbraken 1712b, pp. 4-7.

<sup>332</sup> Houbraken 1712b, p. 7.



105a & 105b:

Arnold Houbraken, *Physical Distress and Crying*, details of *Fifteen Heads Representing Varied Passions*. Etchings.  
In: Arnold Houbraken, *De gemeene leidingen tot den godsdienst*, 1712, following p. 10.



106: Jan Steen, *The Eve of Saint Nicholas*, signed, c. 1665. Oil on canvas, 82 x 70.5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

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Evangelists as well as by subsequent translators and interpreters. He wisely restrains from flagging the mistakes or what he deemed to be unreasonable information. What mattered for Houbraken was that Christ was much more than an exemplary man. Christ died for our sins, and (as we already know) that must be believed. Thus, he formally distances himself from the anti-Trinitarian heresy or Socinianism of his times, which denied the divinity of Christ. Houbraken rarely thinks as linearly as we might like, but we learn that archaeological correctness confirms the reliability of the scriptures and that the events of the New Testament are extra important because they deal with Christ's great sacrifice. It follows that when a history painter botches his setting, dress, or attributes, he undermines the credibility of the scriptures.

About a third of the way through this treatise, the biographer proceeds from the passions to other aspects of God's creation, notably the marvels of human anatomy and the beauty of nature, with its mist on the water and similar visual delicacies. Here we sense the influence of Baltasar Gracián's *El Criticón* or *De Mensch Buyten Bedroch*, with its emphasis on the beauties of nature as a path to appreciation of the wisdom and beauty of creation. However, the importance of the Jesuit is still only implied and his name not yet mentioned. It is not until Houbraken's *Groote schouburgh* that Gracián's deistic pantheism first plays an explicit role, along with mention of those artists who did full justice to various manifestations of nature.<sup>333</sup>

Houbraken then returns to the subject of Moses as the fundamentally inspired but not always equally insightful author of Genesis, followed by the internal textual evidence that establishes the fundamental reliability of the synoptic New Testament accounts of Christ's Passion. This wisdom concludes with a great paean for 'the Architect of the world.' As with almost everything that Houbraken wrote in 1712, just about all this material eventually found its way into *De groote schouburgh*. In fact, one aspect of his deistic classicism only blossoms, though virtually encoded, in his *Schouburgh*, where he places history at the top and still-life at the bottom of his hierarchy of genres, as do other classicists, but reverses the traditional positions of portraiture and landscape.<sup>334</sup> Houbraken argues that it is in their deep understanding of nature that some artists demonstrate their unique intuition of the remote plan of the Creator. He ranked Herman Saftleven (1609-1685), whom he exposes as a gullible simpleton in quotidian matters, higher than his own intellectual teacher Samuel van Hoogstraten because he thought of the landscapist as blessed by intimations of the design of the first architect and of Van Hoogstraten as having pursued acclaim at the Viennese court with outdated trivialities.<sup>335</sup> Van Hoogstraten's Vienna trompe-l'oeil has not survived but we can share Houbraken's appreciation of the finely observed light and recession of Saftleven's early landscapes [107].

Houbraken's *Gemeene leidingen* was soon followed by his *Verzameling van uitgelezene keurstoffen* (Collection of Choice Materials) of 1713,

<sup>333</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 274-278.

<sup>334</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 443-454.

<sup>335</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 341, 1719, pp. 156-158, 1721, pp. 137-139 and Horn 2013, pp. 222-225.



107: Herman Saftleven, *Landscape with Sunset*, 1645. Oil on canvas, 129 x 183 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

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which repeats all of *Philaléthes* and was again overlooked by Swillens. The book, which was published by Johannes Oosterwyk (active 1700-1737) and Hendrik van der Gaete (active c. 1710), is preceded by by Houbraken [108]. He explains the image in a turgid twenty-four line poem.

The craving for Truth, here shown,  
(Often derided through misunderstanding)  
Ready to write and with eyes turned upward,  
Where hangs the opened curtain:  
Looks at the scene of paradise,  
And the freshly painted picture,  
Of Bethlehem's stable, and the world's miracle.  
The diligent Art of Painting down below  
Shows how the passions of the spirit,  
Through stimulation of the blood,  
Ignite in the facial features.  
On the other side stands  
A whole group of wise ones (to study  
The miraculously wrought universe,  
And whether changeable chance  
Can also be the origin of those things)  
The clouded idolatrous kingdom of the gods.  
Which everywhere under the starry sky,  
Is subject to undeniable retreat,  
Must give way to the glow of truth.  
In the blue distance the host of *Parnassus*  
Apollo wrapped in the glow of the sun;  
And Pegasus on light wings,  
Points to the content of this work.

The poem is difficult to translate but its gist is clear. We encounter a kind of synopsis of *Philaléthes brieven* and *De gemeene leidingen*, with their emphasis on the Fall of Adam and Eve, our redemption from sin through the birth of Christ ('the world's miracle') and the manifestation of God's hidden plan, which is certainly not a matter of chance, through the laws of nature and human physiognomy. I can offer no good explanation for the dominating foreground figure in armour.

In addition the book has an illustration to a new introductory text entitled *Korte schets van de heidense goden* (Brief Sketch of the Heathen Gods).<sup>336</sup> It depicts Hercules with an axe on the left, Jupiter on the right, with two priests carrying an elaborate altar in the middle [109]. It is an illustration to Houbraken's text concerning the king of the ancient Roman gods, Jupiter or Jove.<sup>337</sup> The question might arise, why did Houbraken want to preface his theological material with a disposition about the pagan gods who, according to his own title print, are in retreat everywhere? We know, however, that he believed that the accuracy of the ample surviving archaeological information about these gods confirms the reliability of the Scriptures.

It is tempting to identify Arnold Houbraken as a modern thinker much like Albert Einstein (1879-1955), who endorsed the theology of Baruch Spinoza, questioned the notions of a personal God and life after death, and looked to nature for 'the mysterious force that sways the constellations.' Though Houbraken's ideas about God's hidden plan were primitive compared to

<sup>336</sup> Houbraken 1713, opp. p. 14. The 'short' sketch is twenty-eight pages long!

<sup>337</sup> As described by Houbraken 1713, pp. 14-15. The print is located opposite page 14 or p. 74, depending on the online Google version that one consults.



108: Arnold Houbraken, *The Ascendance of Truth*. Etching. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Verzameling van uitgelezene keurstoffen*, 1713, title print.



109: Arnold Houbraken, *Jupiter and Hercules Flanking Two Priests With an Altar*. Etching, large fold out, here much reduced. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Korte schets van de heidense gode / Verzameling van uitgelezene keurstoffen*, 1713, opp. p. 14.

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Einstein's understanding of the universe, both men professed to be looking through a glass darkly. Einstein, however, was an agnostic whereas Houbraken was a dedicated Christian.<sup>338</sup> In addition, Einstein thought of the Bible as 'a collection of honourable, but still primitive legends' whereas Houbraken took the Scriptures much more seriously. More to the point is that Houbraken was not nearly as systematic as we might like. For instance, his three theological publications of 1712 to 1713 barely discuss the contents of the Old and New Testaments. He was so fixated on the details of the Fall of Man at the beginning and the suffering of Christ at the end that he did not offer a selection of further examples of the alleged unreliability of the Old Testament prophets or of the misconceptions of the Evangelists and later translators. In the latter category he mentions only Satan's temptation of Christ on the mountain. Surely, while perusing the Scriptures, he could have found other stories that could not stand-up to the light of reason. Did Houbraken really believe that Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea or that Christ walked on water?<sup>339</sup> He wisely left such questions to the discretion of his readers.

### **The Apostle Paul as Bone of Contention**

Also in 1712 Houbraken supplied seven full-page illustrations and numerous learned notes to a major poem entitled *De Kruisheld, of het leven van den grooten Apostel Paulus, leraar der heidenen* (Hero of the Cross, or the Life of the

Great Apostle Paul, Teacher of the Heathens), written by Jan van Hoogstraten, which came out in 1713. It is a truism that most people tend to be perfectly affable until there is something at stake, and here we see Houbraken involved in a major dispute. We already know that this Van Hoogstraten was a long-standing friend of Houbraken, for whom he rendered the title prints for his *Minnezangen* and *Zedezangen* back in 1708. Whereas Van Hoogstraten's poem tells us about the wonderful things that Paul did for the heathens, Houbraken's notes convey the assumption that these same heathens must be studied if we are to understand Saint Paul. Although the convictions of our amateur theologian and antiquarian were bound to irritate many people, especially the professional hair splitters of his day, the project caused Houbraken considerable grief for quite different reasons.

It was Houbraken himself, not Van Hoogstraten, who embarked on the epic poem. Elly Groenenboom-Draai has proposed that Houbraken was primarily looking for a vehicle to publish a series of illustrations depicting the life of Saint Paul, and that he based his work on a poem of 1681 by Pieter Rabus (1640-1702).<sup>340</sup> Houbraken, however, claims in his introduction that he was primarily moved by an impulse to develop his poetic talent beyond his occasional poetry that culminated in his contribution to 'the description of the life of

<sup>338</sup> For documented quotations consult Wikipedia under 'Einstein's Religious and Philosophical Views'. Einstein believed in the historical Jesus but not in his role as Christian Redeemer.

<sup>339</sup> The inimitable Frank Fabian (2011, pp. 143-174) shrewdly related sundry New Testament events to earlier, mainly Hindu tales, concluding that 'we are on the trail of the biggest literary fraud of world history.' Houbraken, however, believed in the divinity of Christ and probably knew nothing about Hinduism.

<sup>340</sup> Groenenboom-Draai 1994, pp. 212-214.

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the great Apostle Paul in verse, which is something that no one to our knowledge had yet commenced and therefore something new, for which demand is usually greatest.' The biographer nowhere mentions Pieter Rabus. Far from it; Houbraken explicitly claims that his was the first version of the life of Paul treated in rhyme and he expresses regret that the great Antonides van der Goes (1647-1684) had died before he could have taken on the work instead. He further identifies a bundle of sermons delivered in The Hague around 1690 by Joannes Brandt (1660-1708), a Reformed preacher, as his source.<sup>341</sup>

From this point on things become complicated.<sup>342</sup> By 1709, Houbraken had discovered that his poetic gifts were not nearly up to the task of organizing his material. For this reason our hero asked Jacob Zeeus, his former pupil, for help. During the Dordrecht years, Zeeus had been a student of Houbraken and had dedicated some verses to him, and Houbraken had done a portrait of him in return. Zeeus passed the task on to a friend of his, an obscure poet named Joan Vermeulen (died c.1750), but the latter gave up on the work in 1711, when he left for Africa. Houbraken, who was by then living in Amsterdam, turned to Jan van Hoogstraten. It was around this time that Houbraken rendered his mezzotint portrait of the poet [110]. Apparently Houbraken had blocked out most of the poem before he handed his work over to Van Hoogstraten, so that much of the latter's task

was to turn Houbraken's chronicle-like fragments into a great epic, modelled after *Joannes de Boetgezant* (John the Preacher of Penitence) of 1662 by Joost van den Vondel. As Wisse Alfred Pierre Smit (1903-1986) observed, this was an impossible challenge.<sup>343</sup>

With his chronicle-like Biblical rendering of his fragments, Houbraken had excluded an epic treatment from the very start. Nor had he intended an epic. When we make a connection between the manner in which he worked and his exposition in the preface, there can be no doubt that he rejected this *merveilleux chrétien* as 'deceptive inventions'.<sup>344</sup>

In short, Houbraken's intellectual orientation underlies the style of *De Kruisheld*, and not merely its annotation and plates.

Then things began to sour. The two collaborators agreed that *De Kruisheld* would be published by Lukas Kloppenburg of Gouda, with Van Hoogstraten as the main and only author of the poetry and with the margin notations and plates credited to Houbraken. Van Hoogstraten and Kloppenburg soon published an aggressive pamphlet in which they claim that 'faithless' Houbraken had spotted an unnamed Amsterdam bookseller-publisher, being Pieter Boeteman (died 1676), who had published *Philaléthes Brieven* and was prepared to pay particularly well for the illustrations. Van Hoog-

<sup>341</sup> W.A.P. Smit 1983, pp. 50-51 has demonstrated that Brandt was indeed the inspiration behind *De Kruisheld*. Predictably Houbraken, Rabus and Brandt were too deferential to have spotted Saint Paul's intolerance, anti-semitism and misogyny.

<sup>342</sup> I follow the summary in *The Golden Age Revisited* (Horn 2000, pp. 44-46), though without most of the footnotes.

<sup>343</sup> The inscription below the print mentions *De Kruisheld* but must precede the feud of the two men.

<sup>344</sup> Smit 1983, pp. 58-59.



110: Arnold Houbraken, *Portrait of Jan van Hoogstraten*. Mezzotint, 178 x 134 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.

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straten professed not to be swayed by money and wished to honour his commitment to his regular publisher Kloppenburg.<sup>345</sup>

Although the poem itself was already in print, Houbraken asked Kloppenburg for an honorarium for the plates that the publisher deemed too high and refused to pay, thus putting the entire project on hold. Van Hoogstraten wanted his manuscript back; Houbraken declined. After some haggling and a promise of fifty guilders, Van Hoogstraten gave in. In return, he demanded considerable control over the production of the work, including paper, letter type, and layout. His brother David was to act as copy editor. Foolishly, Houbraken had sold the only copy of the annotated poem to Pieter Boeteman. The latter frustrated Houbraken by taking his time, so that our man had to wait on his money which, according to the contract, was to be paid out no earlier than two months after publication of the poem. It was presumably his frustration with this delay that led Houbraken to give up on Boeteman and turn to Gerard onder de Linden for his *Gemeene Leidingen*, the sequel to *Philaléthes*. Van Hoogstraten, on the other hand, was truly distraught because Boeteman paid little heed to his spelling and because the poet's brother David was never allowed to see any proofs. Van Hoogstraten therefore stepped back from the project. He and Kloppenburg then accused Houbraken of fraud and greed. Both sides soon gained supporters and literary Holland became divided into two factions. In a poem entitled *Fabel van den jagthont en leeurik* (Fable of the Hunting Hound and Nightingale), again of

1712, Jacob Zeeus took the side of Houbraken. It is in this poem that Houbraken is first referred to as 'Lyris'.

The question still remains as to Arnold Houbraken's culpability in the affair. The accusation that he proceeded to publish with Boeteman without consulting Van Hoogstraten was not true. Nor did Van Hoogstraten have any genuine reason for complaint with respect to the letter type and layout of the book, which is a handsome edition. Only in the matter of orthography did Boeteman fail Jan van Hoogstraten, although it was probably a more momentous issue for the latter than we can appreciate. One suspects, however, that Arnold might have been more flexible had he not needed money.

In an art-historical context, of course, the plates are of primary importance. Houbraken's seven large illustrations are indeed characterized by a lack of any indication of the supernatural.<sup>346</sup> The highly original *Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus* (which could well be an apocryphal event) was engraved by Jacobus Harrewijn [111]. There is no blinding bolt of heavenly light. Only a small figure in the left background is seen to protect his eyes with his shield while another participant at the far left seems to be getting up off the ground after having been struck down. The horse in the right foreground is still frightened and has to be restrained. Paul is already touchingly blind, needing support from one of his companions while another looks at him questioningly. Expressions, gestures and body language are all eloquent and convincing. Here we see Houbraken at the height of his powers.

<sup>345</sup> Hoogstraten and Kloppenburg 1712.

<sup>346</sup> For information and literature concerning the other six illustrations, Horn 2000, note 2-188.



111: Jacobus Harrewijn after Arnold Houbraken, *Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus*. Engraving, 160 x 124 mm. In: Jan van Hoogstraten and Arnold Houbraken, *De Kruisheld*, 1712, before p. 1.

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### The Hurtful Outrages of Lyris

Unfortunately the acrimonious and protracted circumstances of the publication of *De Kruisheld* turned a good friend into a relentless enemy, leading a year later to *Lyris*, the above-mentioned anonymous satirical attack on Arnold and his family. The long poem was almost certainly written by Jan van Hoogstraten, though possibly penned for him by Joan de Haes (1685-1723).<sup>347</sup> However, the immediate impetus for *Lyris* was likely Houbraken's *Philaléthes brieven*. Jan later documented his aversion to *Philaléthes* in a nasty poem in his *Mengelpoëzy of verscheyde gedigten* (Mixed Poetry or Varied Poems) of 1716,<sup>348</sup> which exudes the same compulsive hatred of our biographer.

On the DEPICTION of the exalted  
PHILALETHES.  
Who with his godless writing tries to be-  
smirch the church  
And when danger threatens him, tries to  
erase the dirty work  
From *Philalethes'* name, as if his delusion  
and intent  
Could not be discovered from his scurri-  
lous text.  
The master of lies and fraudulent corre-  
spondence writer  
As heretical in his actions as deceptively  
admirable in his diligence  
Is here depicted, disguised by appearance  
of honour and shame.  
Who does not laugh when such a one calls  
himself Philalethes.

Three years before, Van Hoogstraten had used *Lyris* to react to *Philaléthes* with elaborately feigned praise.

This work gave the first proof of his reflective intellect.  
Never mind that most of it was stolen from others.  
My great master teaches poetry there.  
They overflow with the essence of prophesy  
And Theology shines forth with new rays  
Only to be obtained through the fine understanding of *Lyris*.  
It would trample on the hellish snake of paradise,  
Could he find any? But my hero finds none there.  
It is too dangerous to go collecting snakes.  
Fear of them causes the traveller to proceed quickly,  
Where he takes to the field, and hastens slowly, or rapidly.  
For serpents are usually encountered in tall grass:  
In which, intent on prey, they remain quietly hidden.  
People say that they also hide in the hearts of deceivers,  
And hypocrites of false nature,  
To bite friend and foe in the ankle.  
Too foolishly, ignorance calls him a heretic.  
Every word hides gold, and every letter, salt.  
Historic wisdom and ancient science  
Achieve the highest step in these letters

<sup>347</sup> Aside from the circumstantial evidence, Jacob Campo Weyerman attributed *Lyris* to Jan van Hoogstraten, as documented by Groenenboom-Draai 1994, p. 213, note 242.

<sup>348</sup> The poem is quoted in Dutch in Horn 2000, note 2-48.

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He who has this wisdom, needs no other books,  
And does my writer need to search for a Publisher  
For such a holy work? in the way that he trots  
In and out of every shop along the Rokin  
with these letters,  
Where everyone turns down his earnest  
and wise request?  
Shame booksellers! Shame! Apollo ought  
to hear of this,  
That such a writer has to take satisfaction  
with bringing  
His poem into the light at his own expense!<sup>349</sup>

Clearly the admirable versatility of an author who is able to move back and forth between theology, poetry and antiquarian studies, was precisely what irritated Jan van Hoogstraten. He took particular aim at Houbraken's anti-snake campaign, no doubt operating on the safe assumption that it was bound to make his enemy look thoroughly ridiculous to many of his contemporaries. Predictably, the poem does not attempt to refute Houbraken's argument, its intention being to label him an inveterate snake in the grass.

The guarded charge of heresy ('ignorance calls him a heretic') is of particular interest. In an epilogue to his *Gemeene Leidingen*, Houbraken himself itemizes what he perceived to have been thin ice for him, listing a few of the people whose ideas he reviewed but did not in the end endorse. Examples are Professor H.A. Roël's notions about the birth of Christ and W.

Densdorf's opinions about Adam and Eve. Finally, one D.S.J., to whom Houbraken had addressed two of his letters (numbers fifteen and sixteen), is adduced in connection with 'incarnation from seeds.' His meddling critics, Houbraken claims, have not followed his arguments to their logical conclusion, but have launched ad hominem attacks against him. Most importantly, Houbraken informs his critics that he understands the Gospels, tries to live a blameless life, and believes in freedom of conscience.<sup>350</sup>

Jan van Hoogstraten clearly knew that he could get at Arnold via Sara. She is to have hired a 'nymph from the Vegt [River]' to look after her children and this creature is so vulgar 'that even the brothel next door pales in comparison.' Sara also wastes money entertaining the riffraff of the neighbourhood while her daughters spend altogether too much time singing. Worst of all, she has lost all taste for her domestic responsibilities.

What could she do? Her work could only mock *Lyris'* art,  
As he earns more in fifteen minutes with his paints,  
Than she could manage with a whole day of knitting.  
Except that it pleases her to dandle the little ones,  
When young, she says, I had to share in the cares of the household.  
Then I had child after child. Now our eldest are grown up,  
Which is why I give them the little ones on their laps.

<sup>349</sup> *Anonymous 1713, p. 24.*

<sup>350</sup> *Houbraken 1712B, n.p.*

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So that they now work, as I once did for them.

Thus they see how I was burdened by them,

When I was beshat by the one, and pissed on by the other.

Thus the joy [of life] now comes that I missed back then.

My husband makes enough money. We can afford it now

Even if something is broken now and then.<sup>351</sup>

Underneath all the nastiness, there is a core of real experience with the Houbraken household which demonstrates that Jan van Hoogstraten had been dangerously close to their hearth. Reading between the lines and ignoring all the contempt, we are relieved to see that Arnold supported a lively and gregarious domestic establishment that would not have come close to meeting the impeccable standards of many of his Calvinist contemporaries. Sara felt understandably relieved not to be pregnant or nursing

any longer and at long last having some money to spare.

*Lyris* further tells us that Sara liked to think back on the dalliances of her youth in Dordrecht, about which the anonymous poet seems to have been alarmingly well informed. She goes on at length about two brothers who courted her, one 'a Doctor, and a very learned poet,' who was an introverted and dull man who liked kissing but feared marriage, the other a decidedly gregarious type who loved life, singing and chatting, and who could whip off a poem at the drop of a hat.<sup>352</sup> Ernst Ferdinand Kossmann (1881-1945) was able to identify the duo as David and Jan van Hoogstraten, brothers so different in personality that they quarrelled much of the time. Ultimately, however, nothing nasty is said about the amorous Jan. Only Sara is truly compromised by her alleged claim that 'I spent at least fifty nights in his company/ And that in honour, and virtue.'<sup>353</sup> All this material could be a diversionary manoeuvre. None of it undermines the proposition that Jan van Hoogstraten (or his agent Joan de Haes) wrote *Lyris*.

<sup>351</sup> *Anonymous 1713, pp. 18-19,*

<sup>352</sup> *Anonymous 1713, pp. 19-21, cited by Kossman 1915, pp. 46-47.*

<sup>353</sup> *Again Kossman 1915, pp. 46-47.*

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## THE ROAD TO *DE GROOTE SCHOUBURGH*, LONDON AND AFTER

### Crisis and Precipitate Flight

In 1813 Houbraken had other things on his mind than the aspersions of *Lyris*. By the summer his conflict with the Dutch Reformed Church had literally come home to roost. The minutes of a meeting of 22 June 1713 inform us that the Synod of the province of South Holland had asked the Synod of North Holland to have the Church Council of Amsterdam look into the contents of 'the book of Philalèthes.' The document in question is the first of eleven located for me by David de Witt in the Amsterdam archives, which prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Houbraken wrote *Philalèthes brieven*.<sup>354</sup> That the process was initiated in Houbraken's old haunts in the south, proves what has yet to be documented, that he (or, at least, his wife and children), must have formally joined the Church before leaving Dordrecht (which is not the same thing as marrying in it), otherwise he would not have been immediately subject to its doctrinal authority. Clearly, too, the Dordrecht authorities must have had their doubts about Houbraken and kept an eye on him after he quit his native city for the more tolerant climes of Amsterdam.

Having been forced to take notice, however, the assembly of the Amsterdam Church Council condemned *Philalèthes brieven* for being 'abhorrent' and 'filled with godless propositions.' Even so, the assembly decided not to ban the work because it would have penalized the printer, who is said to have lots of stock on his hands. Instead, the author was to be required

to explain himself. By 20 July 1713, a delegation had been to see Houbraken, who is said to have shown 'great regret' at his errors, as well as a commensurate eagerness to make amends. The situation apparently required some deliberation, as the Houbraken case was tabled. Nowhere do we learn precisely what offended the Church Council, but it is doubtful that the objections came as a surprise to Houbraken. His alleged 'great regret' should therefore be taken with a grain of salt and with an eye to the imminent danger in which he found himself.

Clearly Houbraken was accused of heresy, though only of a relatively minor kind. Had *Philalèthes brieven* been deemed to be a major doctrinal threat, the Church Council would have tried to goad the civil authorities of the city of Amsterdam and the province of Holland into taking action, and the stock might have been seized without any consideration for the printer. Indeed, the latter might well have gone to jail along with the author. There is no evidence that there was any immediate danger of such a dire scenario, however. Possibly Houbraken's unstructured presentation, with its avalanche of heterogeneous topics and ideas, made him look like a bungling amateur theologian, so that he was merely required to clarify several points of irritation. Most likely, he faced the mortifying indignity of having to issue a public retraction of some kind.

In short, Houbraken was caught between a rock and a hard place, able to safeguard his

<sup>354</sup> The documents are described in Horn 2000, pp. 59-60, with extensive documentation in note 2-271.

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integrity only by risking a large fine or imprisonment. His response to this ‘avoidance-avoidance conflict’ was the classical one; he quit the field. At a Council meeting of 10 August, it is reported that Houbraken has left for England, so that his case has to be tabled once more. He is again discussed more than a month later, on 21 September 1713. From then on, with Houbraken’s continued absence abroad, the anxiety of the Council appears to have dissipated.

Houbraken hoped for more positive benefit from his English venture. He had been commissioned to render drawings after portraits by Van Dyck for a series of engravings commissioned by an Irish impresario named Owen McSwiney (1676-1754).<sup>355</sup> McSwiney ran London’s Queen’s Theatre in the Haymarket from 1707 to 10 January 1713, when it went bankrupt, forcing the entrepreneur to relocate to the continent for two decades to avoid debtors’ prison.<sup>356</sup> Not surprisingly, McSwiney never paid for the drawings. According to Johan van Gool, Houbraken travelled to Leiden upon his return from England to collect, but McSwiney had flown the coop.<sup>357</sup> In view of this background, Houbraken’s experience becomes less surprising and more poignant. Even if he had sensed that he was not dealing with an upright individual, he

was in no position to be fastidious, given that he had the Church breathing down his neck. That Pieter van Gunst issued ten completed portraits after Houbraken without mentioning him, must have rubbed salt in his wounds. Unfortunately Houbraken’s English drawings appear to have been lost. Possibly a few of them were later used by Jacob Houbraken and George Vertue (1684-1756) for *The Heads and Characters of Illustrious Persons of Great Britain*.<sup>358</sup>

The engravings were to have been of prominent figures from the time of King Charles I, whose principal portraitist had been Anthony van Dyck. Houbraken visited a number of collections in London and elsewhere, and in his *Groote schouburgh* he reported on seeing portraits by the great Flemish master and admiring his facility. The most important group of Van Dyck’s paintings were the thirty-two portraits at Wickendon, the country home of Lord Wharton.<sup>359</sup> Elsewhere, in passing, Houbraken mentions that he viewed the London collection of the Duke of Grafton,<sup>360</sup> which included a brilliant *Proteus* by Jusepe de Ribera (c.1590-1652).<sup>361</sup> Houbraken further tells us that he admired the famous ceiling decorations glorifying the reign of King James I, done by Peter Paul Rubens for Inigo Jones’ Banqueting

<sup>355</sup> Van Gool 1750, pp. 135-136, who did not know McSwiney’s name and thought he was an Englishman.

<sup>356</sup> McSwiney went bankrupt after the first performance of Handel’s *Teseo*. The performers were not paid. I am indebted to Marten Jan Bok and to Elizabeth Gibson’s 1992 contribution to *The Grove Dictionary of Music*, which was published online in 2002.

<sup>357</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 136.

<sup>358</sup> Birch 1743 and 1752. There is extensive documentation for this and the preceding information, most of it owing to Marten Jan Bok, in Horn 2000, notes 2-282 to 2-285.

<sup>359</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 187. This must have been Thomas Wharton, 1st Marquess of Wharton (1648-1715).

<sup>360</sup> This must have been Charles FitzRoy, 2nd Duke of Grafton (1683-1757).

<sup>361</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 268. I return to this picture below.

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House,<sup>362</sup> though he says nothing about the paintings themselves. Beyond that, Houbraken did a fair amount of sightseeing.<sup>363</sup> Given his strong literary bent, one might expect him to have kept a detailed record of such experiences, or else have filled his letters to Sara with his observations. If so, the material has been lost.

One by-product of the English journey was a lasting friendship with engraver, antiquarian and diarist George Vertue [112].<sup>364</sup> Vertue's famous notebook diary supplies us with several facts that confirm and amplify Van Gool's information.

Mr. J. Houbraken painter came from Amsterdam to make coppys < siz'd a large a half sheet each. in two colours > (after Vandykes pictures at several Noblemen Houses) to the number of thirty [twenty=six]. he staid here about seaven months. these coppys are to be engrav'd. I have seen most of them amongst them two I like very well one a half length of the old Duke of Devonshire. an other <of> two brothers at whole length who dyed in the Civil wars. April 2d. 1714. Mr. Houbrake return'd to Holland he had a hunderd Guilders for each copy. thats above 4ll. 10 shil. the Persons that Employd him Were. Mr. Cock. Commyns & Mr Swiney. the two first died before any was grav'd. the other went to france. & carry'd with him 20 of

these pictures the other ten were grav'd by V. Garost [Van Gunst].<sup>365</sup>

We learn several things from these reports. First, Houbraken's drawings were in colour. Secondly, the biographer had left for Holland by early April of 1714. Thirdly, McSwiney had two business partners. Whether Houbraken actually received some money before he left England for home, is not certain. Vertue could have been talking about promises that were never kept.

Arnold Houbraken's gift for making friends is suggested by the way that he kept in touch with George Vertue after leaving England. The biographer and his heirs apparently supplied Vertue with copies of the three volumes of *De groote schouburgh* as they were published and, judging from several comments in his notebooks,<sup>366</sup> Vertue read these with care. One might well ask in what language the two men discoursed, given that the Houbraken's English was demonstrably wretched. It would appear that they conversed in Dutch, which was still a world language at the time (as well as the diplomatic language of Scandinavia). In fact, Dutch must have served Houbraken well on numerous occasions during his English journey.

The close connection between Houbraken and Vertue helps explain a vexing little mystery in the literature, one that was discussed several

<sup>362</sup> *Houbraken 1718*, p. 68.

<sup>363</sup> *Again, Houbraken 1718*, p. 68 and also 1721, p. 82: *London exchange 'with the Monument'*.

<sup>364</sup> *On the close and fertile relationship of Houbraken (and his son Jacob) and Vertue*, Horn 2000, pp. 63, 65, 66, 195, 322, 337 and 338, and notes 2-289 to 2-291. The portrait of Vertue in Horn 2000, fig. 49 mistakenly states 'location unknown'. The online site of the National Portrait Gallery offers fascinating contextual information.

<sup>365</sup> *Vertue n.d. (1932)*, vol 2, p. 30.

<sup>366</sup> *Vertue n.d. (1930)*, vol. 1, p. 107, quoted in Horn 2000, note 2-290.



112: George Vertue, *Self-Portrait*, signed and dated 1741. Black and red chalk, 234 x 145 mm. London, National Portrait Gallery.

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years ago by J. Douglas Stewart. Josua Bruyn and Jan Emmens had proposed to explain Anthony van Dyck's *Self-Portrait with a Sunflower* in the collection of the Duke of Westminster in Eton Hall, Cheshire [113] with reference to a 1654 poem (in Dutch) by Joost van den Vondel<sup>367</sup>:

Just as the sunflower, out of love  
Turns her eyes towards the heavenly canopy  
And follows with her face  
The all-quickenning light,  
The sun, which gives the universe its colour,  
And trees and plants their life;  
Thus the Art of Painting  
From innate inclination  
Kindled by a sacred fire  
[follows] The beauty of Nature ... .

When in 1725 George Vertue listed the self-portraits by Van Dyck, Stewart reports, his 'interpretation of the Van Dyck *Self-Portrait with a Sunflower* is almost a quotation of the 1654 Vondel poem. Yet it is unlikely that Vertue knew the Vondel passage and both authors must have drawn their interpretation from a shared tradition.<sup>368</sup> However, Arnold Houbraken was closely acquainted with Vondel's poems on pictures, and this particular verse would have been close to his heart. With Van Dyck's portraits at the heart of Houbraken's English journey, our biographer presumably discussed the great Flemish

master with Vertue. Vondel's imagery travelled to Vertue by way of Houbraken.

### Emblems, Title Prints and Title Pages

In the meantime Houbraken must have missed his family terribly and been delighted to rejoin them upon his return to Amsterdam in April of 1714. We already know that he again painted histories until after the death of Jonas Witsen in 1715, but his work as inventor for the book trade dominated the post-London years, with an astonishing production of title pages and emblems. In 1714 he likely contributed a charming emblematic image on the title page of *Pyrrhus koning van Epieren* (Pyrrhus King of Epirus) by the French playwright Thomas Corneille (1625-1709), as translated by Willem den Elger (1679-1703). The print shows *Time Leading Truth by the Hand* or, following the caption, 'VERITAS FILIA TEMPORIS' [114].<sup>369</sup> It was repeated at the end of *De dood van Cyrus* (The Death of Cyrus) of 1716 by Philippe Quinault (1635-1688), again as translated by Den Elger. Piet Swillens, who listed Quinault, calling it *De zelfmoord* (suicide) *van Cyrus*,<sup>370</sup> was unaware of the earlier work.

In 1714 Arnold Houbraken's also created his very own emblem book, the *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden: Gepast op deugden en ondeugden*. It is in this little known work, with its fifty-seven emblems drawn by Houbraken and engraved by Jacob Folkema,<sup>371</sup> that we find the first flower-

<sup>367</sup> Bruyn and Emmens 1955, pp. 3-9.

<sup>368</sup> Stewart 1990-1991, p. 70.

<sup>369</sup> *Truth is the daughter of Time. The print is neither signed nor initialled, but I believe Swillens was correct in this instance.*

<sup>370</sup> Swillens 1944, p. XXXI.

<sup>371</sup> John Landwehr 1988, no. 338, no. 138 identified Jacob Folkema as the engraver but provided no evidence. However, five of the emblems are signed by Folkema, namely IV, p. 13 (barely legible), XXVII, p. 155, XXXVIII, p. 159, L, p. 209 and LIII, p. 225. The KB repeatedly has Houbraken working after Folkema.



113: Anthony van Dyck, *Self-Portrait with a Sunflower*, 1632-1633. Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm. Eton Hall, Cheshire.



114: Arnold Houbraken, *Time Leading Truth by the Hand*. Etching, 55 x 41 mm. In: Thomas Corneille, *Pyrrhus koning van Epiëren*, 1714, image on title page.

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ing of the stoicism that Houbraken was to advocate in the introductory poem of his *Groote schouburgh*. When we look at Houbraken's evolving thought, the emergence of stoicism seems almost inevitable. His theological treatises of 1712 repeatedly challenged the presence of a personal God. The question must then have presented itself, how are we to prosper without a caring God when, despite our gifts and application, almost everything is a matter of chance? At that point Houbraken could have retreated to orthodox Christianity, but that would have meant a betrayal of everything he had come to believe in. Hence stoicism became his only option. It could not offer a permanent solution like Christianity, with its promise of eternal life, but it was the best philosophical alternative on offer. It can therefore be no accident that the next publication from Houbraken's hand was this emblem book, with its detailed celebration of this venerable intellectual tradition.

In his long preface Houbraken announces that the work on the plates (*'het plaatwerk'*) had been completed fully four years before the death of Jacob Zeeus.<sup>372</sup> As Zeeus died on 27 November 1718, it follows that Folkema must have completed his engravings well before the close of 1714. But Houbraken also reports that his work 'might well have remained in writing and drawing for myself alone' had he not been encouraged by his 'virtuous bosom friend' Jacob Zeeus, who approved of the text, 'designed' the ten-line poems below the emblems, and urged him to have the work published.<sup>373</sup> 'From then on' Houbraken tells us, 'I made the draw-

ings to have them turned into plates by myself or someone else.' Since we know Jacob Folkema completed his engravings in 1714, the book must have been almost ready for publication by then.

The fly in the ointment was that Zeeus was otherwise occupied for years on end and never got around to finishing the poems. Only after his death did Houbraken get in touch with 'the astute poetess Gezina Brit' (c. 1699-1747) and asked her to finish what Zeeus had started. She completed the poems 'in little time', by which she gave Houbraken 'great pleasure, seeing that my loss was amply compensated'. By that time, likely early in 1719, work on *De groote schouburgh* was going full blast, with Houbraken ailing and within a year of his death on 14 October. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Houbraken got no further than writing his preface and that the book was not published in 1719. Even so, we should not attach too much importance to the several years of delay with the poems. *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* was intellectually and physically largely a production of 1714.

Obviously a book produced in 1714 but never published during Houbraken's lifetime had serious financial consequences. He must have paid Jacob Folkema for his fifty-seven engravings, and that at a bad moment, shortly after the London venture had likely left a dent in the family finances. It is characteristic of Houbraken that he never showed anything but respect and affection for Zeeus. He could have appended an aside to the effect that thanks to

<sup>372</sup> Swillens mistakenly had Houbraken report that he had completed the book in 1714.

<sup>373</sup> Houbraken used the word 'ontwerpen' and gives one example of such a design. Curiously it has no counterpart in the book.

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his ‘bosom friend’ he had invested effort and money in a work that remained unpublishable and therefore could not generate any income. Personal reproach, however, was not part of Houbraken’s range. Though he alluded to unidentified ‘backbiters and nitpickers’ as well as unforthcoming correspondents in *De groote schouburgh*, he never resorted to more targeted attacks. In fact, he never published as much as a word of response to *Lyris*, which must have been a thorn in his flesh.

The book showcases Houbraken’s great but at times oppressive learning, with hundreds of references to famous and obscure ancient poets and thinkers through to contemporary figures such as Jacob Zeeus, David van Hoogstraten and Joannes Vollenhove (1631-1708).<sup>374</sup> Baltasar Gracián plays a key role, as he does in the *De groote schouburgh*, though primarily in his persona as social critic, but there are all sorts of authorities not mentioned in the *Schouburgh*, such as George Buchanan (1506-1582), ‘the best of Latin poets in Great Britain.’<sup>375</sup> We even encounter Emperor Charles V (1500-1558), who is to have said that ‘even if Loyalty departs from the entire world, it must still continue to live in the courts of Kings.’<sup>376</sup> Typically Houbraken continues with Plato, who is to have said that ‘Loyalty is the basic support and foundation of bourgeois life.’

It is worth mentioning in this context that Houbraken nowhere questions the basic fabric of society or the privileges of kings and princes but that he is nevertheless dismissive of those

who ‘believe themselves to be great and others slight’. In both his *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* and *Groote schouburgh* we find a substantial anecdote concerning an arrogant German officer who takes pride in his ancestry and treats a courageous French colleague with disdain because he is the mere son of a baker. The baker’s son retaliates shrewdly and makes his opponent look thoroughly ridiculous.<sup>377</sup> One hopes that someone will eventually correlate the learning of the two works to ascertain to what degree Houbraken anticipated or surpassed his more famous work. We can safely predict, however, that the differences will turn out to be primarily due to the differing focus of the two works, with the *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* concentrating on behavioral matters whereas *De groote Schouburgh* also embraces theology and archaeology. Certainly the learned bounty of the *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* comes without the frequent alternation of biography and theory that characterizes but also mars *De groote schouburgh* and it is served up in combination with images that are always accomplished and sometimes breathtaking.

Houbraken introduced his body of emblems with a long preface, as already mentioned. Addressed ‘aan den bescheiden lezer’ or ‘to the modest reader’, its thirteen pages are regrettably unpaginated. It is there, we recall, that he described his assiduous experimentation during the long winter evenings of his youth. He further informs us that he was not able to rely on earlier emblems.

<sup>374</sup> For instance on pp. 4, 23 and 238.

<sup>375</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), p. 237. Buchanan is better known as historian and scholar.

<sup>376</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), p. 200.

<sup>377</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), p. 162 and Houbraken 1721, pp. 325-325.

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The manifold number of emblems, from long ago up to today ... could not be of service to me, but on the contrary, lack of service, seeing that it was my considered intention (while I wanted to produce something new) to avoid the same. Yes, it would have been better for me if I had not read or seen any of them because I often had to put down my writing and drawing pen when I noticed that I was following in the footsteps of others, no matter how I had tried deliberately to avoid this. Even so I discovered in the end that though some print images still had an inkling of others, not one of them followed the other entirely or in part.

The unprepossessing title print of the book shows a woman with wings at her temples who looks out at us while she points to a mirror that she holds in front of herself [115]. At its centre is a heart from which radiate ten beams of light. It is unmistakably an engraving and must date from close to 1723, the publication date of the book given on the immediately following title page, which is also specified on the tablet below the image. Though it could have been executed after a design by Houbraken that he had created several years earlier, that seems most unlikely.<sup>378</sup> Despite the lute, palette and scroll at the left, the frosty image lacks the rich multiplicity of Houbraken's other title prints.<sup>379</sup> The high-minded

explanation for this engraving was both written and signed by Gezine Brit. To quote only the first six of sixteen lines:

Virtuous love of learning, driven by a noble fire  
Shows not unclearly in the face of this Woman,  
Who points her finger at the duties of life,  
And steady labour, to place the splendid edifice  
Of useful learning in a clear day,  
So that the light shines strongly from the reflective heart.

The preachy poem, with its references to duty and virtue, does not read like the product of a partnership, which best describes the relationship of Brit and Houbraken, but instead adopts the vantage point of a congratulatory outsider. In this one instance Brit likely wrote at about the same time that the title print was rendered, being close to 1723 and well after the death of Houbraken.

With the emblems we are more securely in the company of Houbraken. Though the subsidiary poems or 'bygedichten' were again penned by Brit, we know that they had been 'designed' by Jacob Zeeus, who was Houbraken's intellectual soulmate. The poems are always ten lines long, like Zeeus' lost prototypes, whereas Houbraken's following commentary varies greatly in

<sup>378</sup> *The tablet below the image specifies the city and publisher but neither the inventor nor the engraver. The print was illustrated by Bok 2005, though without specification of author and technique.*

<sup>379</sup> *In addition the title page of the book has a beautiful small image showing a central beehive with a landscape with a dead tree to the left and the bees swarming to a flourishing specimen to the right. The whole is surrounded by an elaborate architectural framework that is very much like those of numerous small illustrations of *Jani Broukhusii Poematum libre sedecim* of 1712.*



115: Jacob Folkema after an anonymous artist, *Virtuous Love of Learning*. Engraving, 137 x 83 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), title print.

length. On two occasions Brit inserted a longer poem elsewhere in his commentary.<sup>380</sup> Willem Barents, the Amsterdam publisher of *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*,<sup>381</sup> states in his introduction that Brit wrote ‘at the request of the [since] deceased author and with insight into the treated material’<sup>382</sup> and he made much same claim in his dedicatory letter to one Karel Wittebol.<sup>383</sup> We know, however, that Brit wrote while Houbraken was still alive and that he was grateful to her. No doubt she tried to work in harmony with his insights, even though she was not a deist.<sup>384</sup> Certainly he had great respect for the learned poet and quoted her *Koridon* of 1699 integrally in *De groote schouburgh* in connection with the scissor art of Johanna Koerten (1650-1715).<sup>385</sup>

Because the book is full of Houbraken’s own ideas he could dispense with his previous practice of ignoring the main body of the text in favour of short introductory material. Contrary to the emblem book by E. Verryke this one is still well worth reading, with truly thought-provoking illustrations. The first emblem illustrates the ‘Hemelkringen’ (circles of the heavenly spheres) which ‘surpass human understanding’ [116]. It is most efficient to let Brit speak for Houbraken

See how this small paper plane  
Raises, clear for the eyes

Our great universe from the dark precipice  
In all its parts rich in lustre.  
While in the high heavens, ever so high  
Revolving in its firmament,  
Countless stars set out to dance,  
And float by their own gravity.  
A work full of Majesty,  
And inadequately praised Godliness.

Houbraken would presumably have known that the schematic emblem depicts the solar system, with the sun at its centre, and not the universe. That, of course, explains why Brit’s ‘countless stars’ are not in evidence.

With the opening of his explanatory text Houbraken argues that ‘It is a certain and irrefutable truth, *that all things must have their essential first beginning, and in that respect are indebted to their first cause.*’ This seemingly tautological proposition means that ‘nothing in the world has at once reached its perfection, but everything rises to that by steps.’ Therefore everything, such as plants and even our thoughts, especially Houbraken’s own, evolved to their present perfection and that all beauty around us is ultimately owing to the creation of the world and, to return to his thinking of 1712, serves as evidence for God’s wonderful though hidden remote plan. Houbraken then turns to

<sup>380</sup> Check pp. 22 and 187-188.

<sup>381</sup> Barents is an enigmatic figure. It has proved impossible to establish his dates.

<sup>382</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), between pp. 4 and 5.

<sup>383</sup> Barents dated the letter to 28 November 1722. Nothing there or online identifies Wittebol.

<sup>384</sup> According to the online Resources Huygens entry concerning Brit, she was ever a fervent believer in the efficacy of a Christian education in preventing later corruption of morals.

<sup>385</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 297-305. He also contributed a complex allegorical drawing depicting *Loyalty*, along with a message of admiration to her *Album Amicorum* or *Stamboek*. The sheet, which can be dated to the few years between her death and his, may be admired online as part of the album or via RKDimages.

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Anaxagoras (c.500-c.420 BC) and Plato (c. 427-c. 347 BC), who are to have groped towards his own great truth. He closes with a long quotation from Vondel's *Bespiegelingen van Godt en den Godtsdienst* (mentioned above) to hammer home his theological point.

The second emblem, which depicts the 'wereldkloot' [117], is again explained by Gezine Brit:

The sphere of the earth, by air and clouds  
Beshadowed, turning on its axis,  
With forests, mountains, waterfalls,  
And fertile meadows, only recently  
Formed, suitable in every respect,  
Which in variety of nature and design,  
Together grace the state of the world,  
So wise, so wonderfully wrought,  
Shame the Godless in their violation  
To frivolously deny its creation.

In other words, Brit could again be seen to evoke the main lines of Houbraken's theological publications of 1712, being that neither the wisdom of God's remote plan nor the authority of the Bible are to be comprehended or challenged. At the same time Houbraken proceeds explicitly to dismiss any attempt of human intellect to challenge the wisdom of the Scriptures, thereby slighting his earlier emphasis on the role of reason. Ever prone to wearing his learning on his sleeve he closes with a long quotation that Lactantius (AD c. 250 - c. 325), 'the most elo-

quent of all the Christian writers, has left us in writing in the first chapter of the second book of the origin of error',<sup>386</sup> which gives the example of a clueless man who sees a completed house without having an inkling of all the many steps that were needed for its construction.<sup>387</sup>

Houbraken's emblem book also forms a treasure grove of less recondite biblically inspired wisdom. Arguably the most appealing and least controversial engraving of all, it is the fourth of the compilation, *Adam and Eve under the Yoke. It Keeps the World Going* [118]. It shows that though the Fall of Man, the subject of *Luxury Spoils* [119], the preceding emblem (which has the offending snake suitably hidden in the vegetation), may have been quite literally a matter of life or death, it was by no means the end of the world. The best compact explanation is again the poem by Gezina Brit.

Thus has art, at our pleasure,  
Depicted the unity of marriage,  
By the yoke that the spouses carry,  
On both sides of which a babe plays,  
Beloved by them with heart and soul,  
While the spade tells the man,  
To be the breadwinner of the family.  
The spindle teaches the wife her duty.  
Thus, on well-arranged marriage  
The State and Church can build their welfare.

Houbraken then explains parts of the image that we may not have spotted. The yoke that the first

<sup>386</sup> *The book in question is the second volume of L. Caelius Firminius Lactantius' Divinarum institutionum. The work is readily accessible in English translation (Lactantius 2004). The original Latin was published in the form of collected works before Houbraken's time but I can find no Dutch translation that he could have used.*

<sup>387</sup> *The reference seems precise there is nothing of the kind to be found in the first chapter. Houbraken would in any case have endorsed little else in the book.*



116: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Circles of the Heavens. It Goes Beyond Human Comprehension*. Engraving, 90 x 85 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. I, p. 1.



117: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Globe of the World. Not Without Cause*. Engraving, 85 x 85 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. II, p. 5.



118: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Luxury Spoils*. Engraving, 75 x 75 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. III, p. 9.



119: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Adam and Eve Under the Yoke. It keeps the World Going*. Engraving, 77 x 77 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. IV, p. 13.

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married couple bear shows that they are equally responsible for bearing the load of their union. Their feet touch, showing their closeness (which is also captured by their exchanged glances). Eve's spinning gear shows her domesticity, just as the turtle at her feet is attached to its dwelling. She has soles under her feet 'because the path of marriage (with respect to which Eve here serves as emblem of the first housewife) is both uneven and paved with the thorns of annoyances [...]'. Houbraken continues with the pros and cons of marriage before quoting a long poem by François van Hoogstraten. Death, he concludes, will be the subject of the next emblem. Whereas the Neo-Stoic element can easily be overlooked in this instance, we do see that Adam and Eve have understood that their great mistake could not be undone and that they might as well get on with things. They wisely ignore inevitable Death, who is already lurking behind them.

As mentioned, this book of emblems is altogether different from his first effort of 1700. Where *Upon Seeing an Excessively Flowering Tree* by Joseph Hall had warned that our pursuit of accomplishments can distract us from God and eternity, Houbraken's *A Beautiful Tree. Virtue and Beauty not Always Combined* [120]<sup>388</sup> argues that beauty is worth little unless one has brains to match. *The Pillar. Undefeatable* [121]<sup>389</sup> shows a column, a favourite motif of Christian stoics for representing steadfastness in the face of fickle fortune. We again encounter ample wisdom from the likes of Seneca and

Plutarch (AD c.46- >119 AD) on how to expect the worst, as well as the inspiring words of Anaxagoras, who upon losing his only son is to have said: 'I have always known that I had conceived him as a mortal.' Similarly the emblem called *Death and Consolation. What Does not Bend Breaks* [122]<sup>390</sup> counsels us not to grieve excessively as it will not bring back the dead.

Houbraken's reflections on the raising of children are probably more idiosyncratic. The relevant emblem, entitled *The Grafted Tree. Fruitful Trough Suffering* [123], shows a dead trunk with a life branch grafted onto it.<sup>391</sup> He likens children to plants, which have to be prevented from growing wild and must therefore be grafted at an early age with God's wisdom. Atypically for Houbraken he cites Jacob Cats (1577-1660), quoting from the first emblem of Cats' 1632 *Spiegel van den Ouden en Nieuwen Tijd* (Mirror of Past and Present Times), but with the most unpredictable of tastes, he sandwiches the Dutch moralist between an unspecified Fabias and Jesus Sirach (XXX, 12), the author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus. The message as quoted by Cats has become politically incorrect: 'Wring your child's neck while it is still young, so that it may not become hardened.'<sup>392</sup> In other words, 'spare the rod and spoil the child.' Houbraken mentions that Cats is an insightful and entertaining authority of the subject of child rearing. One expects that with nine surviving children, Houbraken did not spare the rod on occasion.

<sup>388</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XXV, p. 111.

<sup>389</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XV, p. 59.

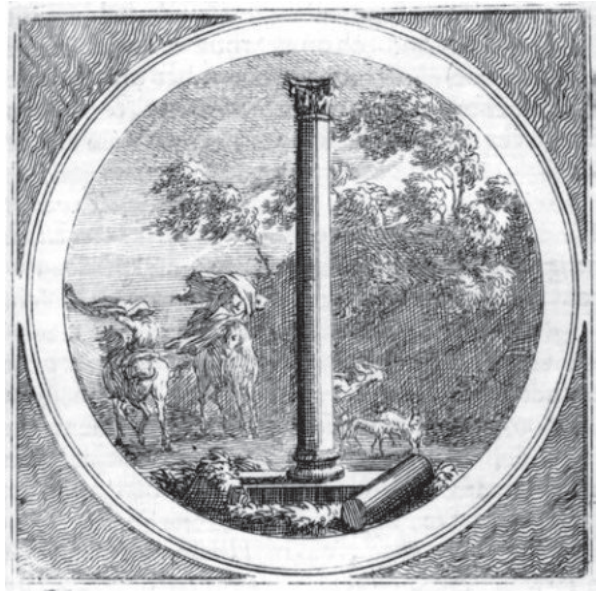
<sup>390</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XIX, p. 79.

<sup>391</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XXVII, p. 119.

<sup>392</sup> The punnig word for 'hardened' is 'hartnekkig', literally tough necked.



120: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Beautiful Tree. Virtue and Beauty Do Not Always Come Paired*. Engraving, 75 x 80 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XXV, p. 111.



121: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Pillar. Invincible*. Engraving, 76 x 78 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XV, p. 59.



122: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Death and Consolation. What Does Not Bend, Breaks*. Engraving, 76 x 76 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XIX, p. 79.



123: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Grafted Tree. Fecund Through Suffering*. Engraving, 77 x 78 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XXVII, p. 119.

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Of course each emblem was preceded by a drawing, of which at least six have survived, now mounted on one sheet kept in the Rijksmuseum. In the centre left is the drawing for *The Camel. Neither More Nor Less* [124], which is closely copied in the engraving [125].<sup>393</sup> Brit's poem and Houbraken's text tell us that just as the camel bears with resignation whatever is placed on its back we must learn that we are not special and to accept gracefully what we have been assigned to carry 'by heaven's hand', meaning fate with Houbraken. It is still another hammer blow of Houbraken's ever present neo-stoicism.

In this posthumous production we once again encounter Houbraken's recognizable literary personality. First and foremost he is highly opinionated, offering his viewpoint on a bewildering variety of issues, almost all of which touch on matters of conduct. Proof that Houbraken was highly sensitive about his recent experiences is supplied by his commentary on the emblem called *The Spider. One Encounters them Everywhere* [126],<sup>394</sup> which likens the lowly arachnids to those nasty little creatures - 'chiders, meddlers, word carpers, nitpickers' - who attack fellow writers, dispense venom and then scurry back into the shadows.<sup>395</sup> This concern is totally unlike what we encountered in Joseph Hall's emblem book, where the spider is interpreted as representa-

tive of the menacing trap of sin. Houbraken now includes a stoic message based on Xenophon (c. 430-355 B.C.): 'You have learned to speak evil; and I have learned to tolerate the same,'<sup>396</sup> even though he does not appear to have truly taken it to heart himself. In addition, the slightly earlier conflict surrounding Jacob Zeeus was still on his mind. In his discussion of '*Truth and Falsehood. Be on Your Guard*'<sup>397</sup> Houbraken actually quotes at length from Zeeus' *De Wolf in 't schaepsvel*.<sup>398</sup> Cesare Ripa is decisively left behind.

At the same time, only one of Houbraken's emblems, called *Het Verkeerbort. Dangerous Household Effects* [127] -- literally 'the backgammon board' as illustrated, but figuratively 'the way of the world'<sup>399</sup> -- seems to have had immediate relevance to the mainstream Calvinistic moralising tradition represented by such Golden-Age moralists and emblematisers as Roemer Visscher (1547-1620), Jacob Cats and Joan de Brune (1588-1658). The accompanying poem by Gezina Brit also represents this moralizing tendency, as it discusses the evils of drinking and gambling, and the concomitant neglect of family and God. At first Houbraken's text follows suit, but he soon turns to the wisdom of Plutarch and the playwright Terence (c. 195?-c. 159? BC). His interests turn out to be universalizing and related to his neo-stoicism.

<sup>393</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XX, p. 83.

<sup>394</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XLVIII, p. 197.

<sup>395</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), p. 198.

<sup>396</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), p. 199.

<sup>397</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem LII, p. 219.

<sup>398</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), pp. 223-224.

<sup>399</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XIV, p. 55.



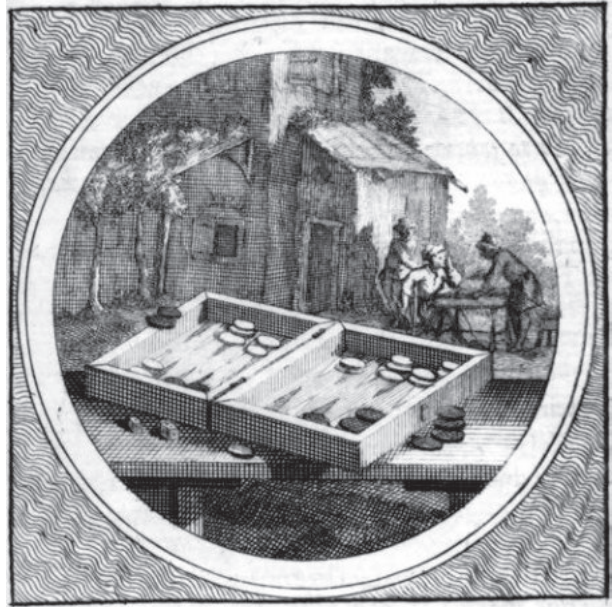
124: Arnold Houbraken, *The Camel*. Pen in brown and reddish-brown ink, brush in greyish brown, 77 x 77 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



125: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Camel. Neither More Nor Less*. Engraving, 76 x 76 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XX, p. 83.



126: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Spider. One Encounters Them Everywhere*. Engraving, 74 x 75 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XLII, p. 197.



127: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Backgammon Board. Harmful Household Goods*. Engraving, 79 x 80 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke Zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XIV, p. 55.

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Those who look at the writings of the ancients with care will often find sayings there that deserve proper attention, even though they owed all the enlightenment that they had to nature. Horace, a distinguished poet amongst them, delivers to us the following:

A heart that has properly prepared itself,  
Is full of apprehension when flattered by  
chance,  
And hopes when it goes bent under blows.  
Thus it learns to tolerate good and bad  
fortune.

These lines, coming from one of the most admired voices of Antiquity, could serve as a synopsis of Houbraken's neo-stoic convictions.

Especially the landscapes of this emblem book are impressive and can be seen to herald one of the predilections of *De groote schouburgh*, in which Houbraken dotes on the convincing rendering of atmospheric light and subtle recession as capturing intimations of God's remote but miraculous plan.<sup>400</sup> *The Dawn. Life out of Death* [128]<sup>401</sup> reflects his great appreciation of the early works of Herman Saftleven [108]. As for *The Waterbrook* [129],<sup>402</sup> it is simply one of the great landscapes of the Golden Age. However, the meaning that Houbraken attached to these images in 1714 has nothing to do with his later concerns. *The Dawn* shows that we may

profitably reflect on the carefree years of our early youth, whereas *The Waterbrook* argues that just as a stream may flood its banks, so Greed is likely to know no bounds.

Because Houbraken's emblem book addresses numerous subjects that were rarely if ever treated in the paintings of the Golden Age, some of his emblems presented him with unique challenges, as with *The Money Bags. Who Makes Good Use of Them?* [130].<sup>403</sup> The work surprises by its steep recession to the only figure in the background. The text at once informs us that he is 'the subterranean demigod Pluto, who with his three-headed hellhound Cerberus stands preening on an elevated base before the entrance to his dark cave, with its money treasures'. 'Treasure' is the wrong word we are informed, as those in assiduous pursuit of money will find only unrest. Equally effective but still more impressive is *The Ants, A Productive Life Is Truly Human* [131].<sup>404</sup> Every aspect of the image, such as the coordination of the tree with the round format, the balanced recession of the two landscapes, the placement, gestures and emotions (or lack of same) of the two principal figures and the sinuous negative space between the main figure and the tree, is brilliant. *The Stichte-lyke zinnebeelden* is a major achievement by an important artist at the height of his powers.

On 31 May 1715, Arnold Houbraken was faced with what may have been a serious setback. His patron Jonas Witsen died, and this

<sup>400</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 158 (*Lucas van Uden*) and 339-341 (*Herman Saftleven*); 1719, p. 115 (*Jan Both*). For the diffuse nexus between God's plan, landscape painting and Baltsar Gracián, Horn 2000, pp. 436-442 *passim*.

<sup>401</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem IV, p. 235.

<sup>402</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714), emblem XLII, p. 175.

<sup>403</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714-1718), emblem XLIV, p. 183.

<sup>404</sup> Houbraken 1723 (1714-1718), emblem XXX, p. 129.



128: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Dawn. Life Out of Death*. Engraving, 74 x 73 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. LV, p. 235.



129: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Water Brook*. Engraving, 80 x 70 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XLII, p. 175.



130: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Money Bags. Who Makes Good Use of Them?* Engraving, 75 x 75 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XLIV, p. 183.



131: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *The Ants. The Productive Life is Truly Human.* Engraving, 74 x 73 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, 1723 (1714), no. XXX, p. 129.

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happened only shortly before Owen McSwiney disappeared without paying. The reversal of fortune was dramatized by Johan Van Gool as Houbraken's life crisis.<sup>405</sup> He proposed that Witsen's mortuary sale (which took place on 23 March 1717) was the last occasion on which Houbraken's work still commanded good prices, and that the event initiated his descent into poverty. In truth, only two works at this large Witsen sale were by Houbraken, but they did fetch high prices. An *Ecce Homo* brought 1,720 guilders, the highest amount paid for any work there.<sup>406</sup> Similarly at the Van Hairen sale in Dordrecht on 13 October 1718, four of Houbraken's histories were sold for 93 to 152 guilders each.

As Cornelis Hofstede de Groot argued, the Witsen sale was less pivotal than Johan van Gool made it out to be. We know of a fair number of pictures that date to the years after Witsen's death, pointing to continued success. Some of them were actually discussed by Van Gool himself.<sup>407</sup> Aside from reflecting a modest level of production and prosperity, this list suggests that whenever Houbraken painted around 1715 to 1716, he concentrated on histories. In the latter year Houbraken also rendered forty-one drawings for *Zederyke zinnebeelden der tonge* (Virtuous Emblems of the Tongue) by the jurist,

bailiff and dike reef Matthaëus Brouërius van Nidek (1677-1743), which were again engraved by Jacob Folkema.<sup>408</sup> Though Jacobus Schijnvoet (1685-1733) signed the small decorative image on the title page, it is probably the only print in the book by that artist.<sup>409</sup>

Brouerius, van Nidek was a learned and versatile author who deserves more attention than we can give him here. We can only be impressed by his incessant productivity between 1702, when he defended his inaugural dissertation,<sup>410</sup> and his death four decades later. In addition to publishing ambitious multi-volumed works on topographical matters (sometimes in tandem with François Halma or David van Hoogstraten),<sup>411</sup> he contributed a volume on neglected and forgotten historical works and also edited an ample collection of poetry by Jeremias de Decker (1610-1666).<sup>412</sup> Two years before, he had done the same for the lesser-known Thomas Arents (1652-1701).<sup>413</sup> Curiously, given his doctorate in jurisprudence, he never again published on legal matters even as he always advanced himself as 'R.G.' or 'Rechtsgeleerden' (jurist).

Like Arnold Houbraken, Matthaëus Brouërius van Nidek did not wear his learning lightly. His whole book reads like an exercise in name-dropping. Given his focussed interest in

<sup>405</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 134.

<sup>406</sup> Hoet 1752, vol. 1, p. 206, no. 18. *The other history, a Bath of Calisto* (p. 205, no. 8) fetched 465 guilders.

<sup>407</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 137.

<sup>408</sup> *The title print states 'A. Houbraken del[ineavit]' and 'J. Folkema sculpsit'.*

<sup>409</sup> RKD Images mistakenly attributes *Dubbele Tonge* and *Gramschap* to Schijnvoet.

<sup>410</sup> Thanks to Google books, the Latinists amongst us can read the dissertation online.

<sup>411</sup> For the long titles of these works, which were all published between 1723 and 1733, consult the KB catalogue, being sure to enter the author's Christian name as *Matthaëus*, not *Mattheus*.

<sup>412</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1726.

<sup>413</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1724.

human failings of the past and present, his body of authorities is generally quite different from that of Houbraken. The jurist excels at exhuming obscure figures such as Gaius Asinius Pollo (75 BC – AD 4) or Thrasillius of Mendes (died AD 36)<sup>414</sup> overlooked by Houbraken and mentions numerous equally forgotten rulers of the past. An important difference between the two authors is that whereas Houbraken concentrates on the polarities of the Book of Genesis and the New Testament, the Brouërius van Nidek often calls on the Old Testament as a whole, with King David's Psalms showing up repeatedly. The Book of Leviticus and Book of Chronicles also find their place. Nor does Brouërius van Nidek discuss the importance of reason in dealing with the Scriptures so that he does not stop to question the notion of a talking snake.<sup>415</sup>

With respect to more recent figures, both men adduce the poetry of Jeremias de Decker, Lucas Rotgans (1653-1710) and Dirk Schelte (1639-1715), though in quite different contexts. Houbraken draws on poems as commentaries on paintings whereas Brouërius van Nidek uses them to help illuminate the historical persistence of character flaws. In connection with Blasphemy (*Godslastering*), for instance, we read 'Thus the heathen poets also tell about the horrible death of the thunder-imitating Salmo-

neus, king of Ellis, as is powerfully described by Lucas Rotgans in his *Zedelessen* [...]'. The reference is to a large sub-section of *Lukas Rotgans Poëzy* of 1715, which was in effect a slightly earlier emblem book.<sup>416</sup> Curiously Rotgans' vice is Arrogance, not Blasphemy. However, the mythical King Salmoneus expected to be worshipped as the god Zeus,<sup>417</sup> so that the shift is understandable. It may be surprising to us that both Rotgans and Brouërius van Nidek apparently assumed that their readers would know who Salmoneus was. Their common resort to poetry in combination with mythology and history is characteristic for a time when a broadly educated public expected these elements almost regardless of context. It pays to remember this when reading *De groote schouburgh*.

Obviously Arnold Houbraken was not the main author of this emblem book, but he did contribute a thirty-line poem entitled 'Content of the title print', which explains the image in detail [132].

.  
The urge to write opens the stage.  
On which Truth comes to appear,  
Painted by pen and art brush,  
And rips off the mask of Falsehood,  
Which will soon have Deceit disappear,  
Though it, cloaked and bejewelled,

<sup>414</sup> Of course obscurity is relative to a given audience. For instance, Diodorus Seculus (c. 90-29 B.C.), who is also adduced by Brouërius van Nidek (p. 18), may seem obscure to many but his forty volume *Bibliotheca historica* is still renowned in some circles.

<sup>415</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1716, p. 25,

<sup>416</sup> Rotgans 1715, pp. 3-132. Rotgans' verse concerning 'Salmoneus buitensporige hoogmoet' is on pp. 112-115 with the twelve lines of poetry on p. 114. François Halma may have published the *Zedelessen* independently a year or two before or after. However, I can't find a title page.

<sup>417</sup> Salmoneus tied kettles to his chariot, hence 'thunder-imitating'. Zeus smites him and consigns him to eternal torment in Tartarus, hence the 'horrible death'.



132: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Truth Removing the Crown of Falsehood*. Engraving, 140 x 89 mm. In: Matthaëus Brouërius van Nidek, *Zederyke zinnebeelden der tonge*, 1716, title print.

Wears a crown of state, and golden staff,  
 And has the whole world in his train,  
 One sees the prospect of the stage in full,  
 Resplendent with choice emblematic im-  
 ages,  
 How self-loving Vanity  
 Lies sadly drowned in its delusion,  
 How the gossipy tongue which, without  
 Restraint and limits, grows altogether  
 wild,  
 Ever indifferent to her shame and that of  
 others,  
 Stands depicted by a magpie,  
 Just as foolish Arrogance  
 Is compared to the preening of a peacock,  
 As with the chameleon's flattery,  
 Knows how to tell what we want to hear,  
 Slander comes behind Devotion,  
 On the heels, like a shadow;  
 Envy comes up right behind,  
 Whose scalp swarms full of snakes.  
 Curiosity proceeds ahead of Youth,  
     And leads her step-wise by the  
 hand,  
 On the praiseworthy educative path of  
 virtue,  
 The most useful of all sciences.  
 Thus Godliness is gladdened,  
 And praises the writer for his diligence.

The engraving in fact shows Truth removing the crown of Falsehood, not his mask. Falsehood sits immediately next to the world ruled by him, which is represented by a globe with cross. The

image is cluttered and uninviting, so that it is hard to locate such elements as the magpie, representing Gossip, but the bird is in fact depicted in a medallion at the lower left of 'the prospects of the stage'. Puzzling is that Envy, with its snake-laden head, would seem to be following Youth. The fleeing figure with torch to the right of Falsehood, who must be an acolyte of his, is not even identified.

With his preface, which runs for seven pages brimful of learned authorities who help argue for the vital importance of sundry ancient and modern languages, Brouërius van Nidek announces that he intends his book for 'the language-loving and impartial reader'. Then follow seventeen pages of warm endorsements from seven worthies<sup>418</sup> before we arrive at the first emblem and the pagination of the text. Each image is prefaced by a poem in Dutch followed by brief related text in Latin verse by Seneca, Terence and Juvenal (born AD 55) and a whole flock of Neo-Latin poets, opening with Bernardus Bauhusius (or Bernhard Bauhuis: 1575-1619), a Flemish Jesuit who wrote exclusively in Latin. Other now thoroughly obscure figures are Jonannes Sambucus (or János Zsámboky: 1531-1584), Dominicus Baudius (Dominique Baudier: 1561-1613), Florentius Schoonhovius (or Florens Schoonhoven: 1594-1648), Balduinus Cabillavius (or Baudoin Cabilliau: 1568-1652) and Sindronius Hosschius (or Syderoen de Hosch: 1596-1653).<sup>419</sup> Only the Scottish Buchananus or George Buchanan was never truly obscure.<sup>420</sup> The Dutch poems may vary from

<sup>418</sup> One of them is Pieter Langendijk (1683-1756), an important poet and playwright.

<sup>419</sup> These worthies are not included in the bibliography below. Interested readers will need to check them out online or via the KB catalogue.

<sup>420</sup> That explains why Houbraken praised him in his 1714 emblem book, as mentioned above.

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ten to thirty lines in length, with the generally shorter free-verse commentary in Latin consisting of four to fourteen lines. Then follow several pages of detailed explication by the author.

The emblems illustrate a catalogue of universal human foibles and failings. Possibly only money induced Houbraken to invent these images but being a true professional he acquit himself brilliantly, with an astonishing variety of settings, including domestic interiors, town squares, village prospects, forest views, country lanes, harbour views and seascapes, with numerous links to sundry pictorial traditions of the Golden Age. *Slander* [133]<sup>421</sup> for instance seems to combine features of forest prospects by Jacob van Ruisdael (1628-1682) and others, whereas with *Dominating the Conversation* [136],<sup>422</sup> Gerrit Berckheyde (1638-1698) comes to mind [135]. *Anger*, on the other hand, with its violent explosion,<sup>423</sup> is like no painting known to me. When we compare these images to those in Houbraken's *Schoole der Wereld* etchings of 1682, where only one of the etchings is clearly based on a whole picture and that by a local Dordrecht painter [24], we learn that he had been assiduously studying works of art over the last thirty-four years. In addition Houbraken was recycling his own inventions, as with *Self Glorification* [136],<sup>424</sup> which closely resembles the picture pointed at by the personification of The Art of Painting in his title print for the second part of his *Toneel van sinnebeelden* of 1700 [50].

Houbraken returned to his practice of

largely ignoring the main body of the text that follows the emblems and concentrating on the opening lines, as with the poem for *Double Tongue* [137]:

Holly may charm our eye with shining green;  
But whoever dares approach it to pick a leaf,  
At once feels his hand pressed on sharp spikes,  
And with pain and shame sees his bold fingers bleed.  
Thus a double tongue knows how sweetly to caress us,  
(Just as the hollow flute tempts the bird to the net),  
Until it has caught us in the snare and confined us,  
And forces us to live in her way, to torment us.<sup>425</sup>

Note, however, that the connection between the vice of deceit and a youth standing next to a hedge will not occur to any casual spectator even though it can be extracted from the poem. The viewer needs to be in the know, so to speak.

With *Slander* [133] the detail of the dark cloud covering the sun at the upper right of the image is intended to evoke the idea that just as clouds may obscure the beneficent sun, so slander concentrates on suppressing virtue. This

<sup>421</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1716, p. 107.

<sup>422</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1716, p. 235.

<sup>423</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1716, p. 69.

<sup>424</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1716, p. 171.

<sup>425</sup> Brouërius van Nidek 1716, p. 16.



133: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Slander*. Engraving, 73 x 75 mm. In: Matthaëus Brouërius van Nidek, *Zederyke zinnebeelden der tonge*, 1716, p. 107.



134: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Self-Glorification*. Engraving, 73 x 75 mm. In: Matthaëus Brouërius van Nidek, *Zederyke zinnebeelden der tonge*, 1716, p. 171.



135: Gerrit Berckheyde, *The Market Place and Church of St. Bavo at Haarlem*, 1674. Oil on Canvas, 51.8 x 67 cm. London, National Gallery.



136: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Dominating the Conversation*. Engraving, 73 x 75 mm. In: Matthaëus Brouërius van Nidek, *Zederyke zinnebeelden der tonge*, 1716, p. 235.



137: Jacob Folkema after Arnold Houbraken, *Double Tongue*. Engraving, 73 x 75 mm. In: Matthaëus Brouërius van Nidek, *Zederyke zinnebeelden der tonge*, 1716, p. 17.

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connection can't be extracted from the short title, which happens to be in Latin, nor from the long text that follows. Houbraken would have been lost without the poem that precedes the emblem and, once again, the connection the connection will remain concealed for anyone who does not take the trouble to extract it from the verse. Certainly our quest for meaning should not distract us from appreciating the achievement of the fine landscape, of which there are many others in the *Zederyke zinnebeelden der tonge*. Time and again the perspicacious spectator will be intrigued and delighted by the unique journey of bipartite discovery offered by this emblem book

In the case of *Dominating the Conversation* [136] the poem tells us that a bale of hop (a

fruit used for beer brewing) may be bigger and more impressive than a bale of wool but that when the two are weighed, the bale of wool will be found to be more substantial. Those who take pride in the superiority of their achievements or ideas are like the bale of hop. The seemingly tenuous connection to the engraving is established in the lower right corner, where we see a 'waag', or public weigh house, which has a set of scales in front of it. Since Houbraken created these images, he must also have been responsible for their idiosyncratic relationship to the poems. On the other hand Brouërius van Nidek must have concurred in Houbraken's approach, one that helps make this particular emblem book the most fascinating and appealing of them all.

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## THE PRODUCTION AND VICISSITUDES OF *DE GROOTE SCHOURBURGH*

### The Making of a Biographer

A number of considerations may have encouraged Houbraken to embark on his *Groote schouburgh*. It may have occurred to him that such a work would allow him to return to his radical ideas of 1712 in camouflaged form, without risking imprisonment and subjecting Sara and their children to ruin. But the London disaster was not the only trauma of Houbraken's life. The first was the domestic scandal in Dordrecht, which likely encouraged him to move to Amsterdam. Hardly had he fully settled there and he became embroiled in a bitter dispute with his good friend Jan van Hoogstraten over the production of *De Kruisheld*. This altercation led to *Lyris*, the poem that made him and his wife look ridiculous in connection with the conduct of their lives and the alleged hubris of his *Philalèthes brieven*. On the heels of *Lyris* came the spectre of a charge of heresy and the resultant precipitate flight to London. Returned to Amsterdam his closest friend Jacob Zeeus encouraged him to publish his neo-Stoic emblem book but then let him down by not completing the poems. Then his patron Jonas Witsen died. Even if that death was not a catastrophic as Johan van Gool claimed, it was still another blow. In fact, if we believe Van Gool, even Houbraken's highly productive career as artist brought him numerous disappointments: 'His art fortune offered him a pleasing and friendly face now and then, but when he expected to embrace her, she slipped like water through his fingers.'<sup>426</sup>

By about 1715 Houbraken had been buffeted by disasters and disappointments and his incessant work had yielded neither the recognition as a thinker nor the prosperity as an artist that he had likely hoped for. In addition, Houbraken may not yet have become ill but he was getting on, at least by the standard of his times, and he may have been taking stock of what his life had amounted to and whether that would suffice to secure him his place in posterity. He may have started to think of a project that might allow him to address his theological and philosophical convictions and also make use of the insights that he had gained as a professional artist. Though he no doubt admired the theoretical works by Samuel van Hoogstraten and Gerard de Lairese, they were too much focussed on art theory and practice. His extensive experience with the publishing trade likely made him aware of a demand for a work similar to Karel van Mander's celebrated *Het Schilder-Boeck* (The Book about Painting) but applying to the following century. Apparently Houbraken craved immortality enough to be willing to devote years of his life to a task of similar magnitude.

An important difference between the two biographers is that Houbraken combined his biographies and theory in one volume, whereas Van Mander had relegated his theory to a separate book. Jan Emmens proposed that the combination of biography and theory was 'typical of the pretensions of the *Groote schouburgh*,' but

<sup>426</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 146.

pretensions may have had nothing to do with it. Houbraken may well have considered that a work containing nothing but his theoretical digressions might sell poorly and therefore be a financial liability.<sup>427</sup> In addition he may have realized that his biographies would be more sought after than his theory, so that he spaced his digressions for minimum disruption and least detriment. As Emmens noted, a digression of the sacrificial practices of the ancients is inconspicuously included in the Life of Pieter Lastman (1583-1633) while a substantial discussion of the need to choose what is beautiful is introduced as part of the Life of Rembrandt. As another example, a disposition on the vice of Envy, the blight of the profession, is illustrated by a dastardly attack on Jan de Baen.

That Arnold Houbraken did indeed want lasting fame is seen in his wonderful title print for the first volume of his *Groote schouburgh* [138], which was executed by his son Jacob. It shows the personification of Art restraining Time by holding one of his wings with her left hand while she breaks his scythe with her right. Around her waist hangs the mask of *imitatio* (imitation) or *pittura* (painting), derived from the *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa. The title of *The Great Theatre* is engraved on a huge cenotaph behind the figure of Time, with its author's name and the date on the base on which Time kneels. To the left two cupids admire a portrait about to be snatched away from Time, while a third carries a schematic likeness aloft in the upper left corner, where we also see a snake biting its own tail, a symbol for eternity. The accompanying poem (which is included in *Houbraken Translated*) gives a highfalutin syllabus

of what Houbraken undertook in order that he too might blunt the tooth of time.

The goddess of art transported by diligence  
 Represents the passion for art of the writer  
 Who spared himself neither effort nor application  
 To bring to light anew the name and fame of artists  
 Who had been obscured by time:  
 Nor could he deny this to the youthful learners  
 Who climb the mountain of art in their footsteps.  
 One sees the fire of her passion

Break the handle of the scythe with TIME  
 And hinder its movement,  
 And restrain its rapic progress  
 By the trimming of its fleet wings.  
 The portraits piched upside down  
 Quietlysecuredfromthegnawingofworms  
 So that youthful artists may decorate them,  
 With palm and greening bay leaves,

Or carry them to eternity.  
 Then Envy might vomit its bile.  
 Blind ignorance try to avenge this,  
 A fixed radiance is prepared for her,  
 So that previously descended into darkness,  
 She will always shine with renewed lustre.

Houbraken's intention was summarized by the author of an anonymous review of April 1718 of the first volume of *De groote schouburgh*, who recast it as a kind of mission accomplished.

<sup>427</sup> Marten Jan Bok has unpublished evidence that *Philaléthes* sold poorly.



138: Jacob Houbraken after Arnold Houbraken, *Art Restraining Time*. Engraving, 157 x 97 mm. In: Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, I, 1718, title print.

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Had a few more years passed, one would hardly have been able to unearth anything about many of these artists who now, because of the author's tireless diligence and restless enquiries, have been saved from oblivion and will therefore live forever.

Bart Cornelis, who first published the document,<sup>428</sup> proposed that 'in this remark the author captured in a nutshell what is indeed the essence of the value of Houbraken's book'. For us, of course, the *Schouburgh* has value beyond the commemoration of artists, witness its rich information about patrons, collectors, collections, art schools and the like. But ultimately Cornelis was not far off the mark. As confirmed deist Houbraken believed that our lives end with what he called 'the dark night of death'. The only thing he could do to save his subjects from eternal darkness was to record their names and works for posterity.

Jan Emmens postulated a second purpose of *De groote schouburgh*, one that he believed to be even more important than the commemoration of artists. He argued that Houbraken attached great importance to his theory, thinking of it as 'the crown on the work'.<sup>429</sup> According to Emmens Houbraken was 'filled with indestructible optimism about the result that his lessons could produce in the future', being that they 'could open a possibility for progress with a sketch of the classicistic principles'. Giv-

en that Emmens also claimed that Houbraken's classicism is a 'compilatory, thoughtless and narrow-minded' version of the ideas of Gerard de Lairesse' and no more than an 'extremely provincial and schoolmasterish version of the French',<sup>430</sup> it would follow that our biographer must have been seriously deluded. Emmens buttressed his tendentious argument with the claim that in his biographies 'Houbraken could only vent what fit in with his so clearly biased art theoretical mind'.<sup>431</sup> In fact, Emmens had a dismal view of Houbraken's intellect in general, claiming that his *Philalèthes brieven* 'had already clearly demonstrated that his talent for theoretizing was about as small as his need for it was great'.<sup>432</sup> No wonder Emmens completely overlooked the critical religious component of Houbraken's thought.

The years that Houbraken worked on *De groote schouburgh* comprised the last and likely most hectic phase of his life, one that we need to examine in even greater detail than the preceding decades. The great pressure on our biographer shows in his choice of sources. Cornelis Hofstede de Groot already pointed out that Houbraken gave little thought to evaluating his authorities. He simply used the most recent source even if it was obviously copied after an earlier one. In some cases, as Hofstede de Groot demonstrated, the biographer opted for a later but inferior source, as when he turned to Louis Moréri (1643-1689) in connection with Anthony van Dyck.<sup>433</sup> Hofstede

<sup>428</sup> Anonymous 1718, pp. 474-486 and Cornelis 1998, p. 152. The article is discussed below.

<sup>429</sup> Emmens 1968 (1964), p. 103.

<sup>430</sup> Emmens 1968 (1964), pp. 102 and 103.

<sup>431</sup> Emmens 1968 (1964), p. 103.

<sup>432</sup> Again Emmens 1968 (1964), p. 102.

<sup>433</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 212-213 and Moréri 1702.

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de Groot pointed to numerous errors of judgment and included most of three detailed pages of examples of 'Flüchtigkeitsfehler', being errors brought on by haste.<sup>434</sup> Haste makes waste, we all know, as is abundantly clear from the appendix to Houbraken Translated. Some of Houbraken's errors were no doubt inevitable given that he lacked the time needed to digest his sources and was often forced to fly by the seat of his pants.

A close reading of the biographical component of *De groote schouburgh* yields all sorts of other indications of Houbraken's stressful circumstances. He repeatedly laments that potential witnesses have died or that the living have not been forthcoming with biographical data or a portrait.<sup>435</sup> He begs his readers for supplemental information, as with Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1598-1657), Gabriël Metsu (1629-1667), Gerard ter Borch (1617-1681) and Gerard Pietersz. van Zijl (1607-1665), 'all painters worthy of a major role in our theatre [...]'.<sup>436</sup> In fact, Houbraken devotes a whole digression to the problem of pretentious people who do not wish to own up to having a painter in the family.<sup>437</sup>

Once, in the life of Caesar van Everdingen (1616-1678), Houbraken points out that information reached him too late to present it

in its chronological order because material of a later date was already with the printers.<sup>438</sup> It is firm evidence that he did not wait until a given volume was complete before he gave it out of his hands. When he discovered that he had been seriously misinformed, he corrected his material, even if it meant returning to an earlier volume. The circumstances of the later years and death of Pieter van Laer, alias il Bamboccio (1500-1642)<sup>439</sup> and Johannes van der Beeck, better known as Johannes Torrentius (1589-1644),<sup>440</sup> are the most striking examples. He also admits that he was half way through his 'work with the pen' before he discovered that Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) was active as artist.<sup>441</sup> Note also that Houbraken was sometimes forced to revise an attribution, as with a portrait by Juriaen van Streek (1659-1713) of the wife of Emanuel de Witte (1617-1692) which 'for lack of recollections' he had previously given to De Witte himself.<sup>442</sup> In short, Houbraken was continually forced to make decisions about whether to backtrack or not. Though he likely had some sort of overall design for his great work, it takes little imagination to understand why *De groote schouburgh* is so often a disorganized book.

A study of Houbraken's three turgid volumes, with their continuous alternation of facts,

<sup>434</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 214-220. He spotted the haste but did not relate it to the very nature of *De groote schouburgh* as a venture.

<sup>435</sup> See Houbraken 1718, p. 36. In Houbraken 1719, p. 208.

<sup>436</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 370.

<sup>437</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 227-233.

<sup>438</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 94.

<sup>439</sup> Compare Houbraken 1718, p. 362 to 1719, pp. 73-75.

<sup>440</sup> Compare Houbraken 1718, pp. 137-138, to 1719, pp. 117-118.

<sup>441</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 17.

<sup>442</sup> Compare Houbraken 1718, p. 283 and 1719, p. 290.

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anecdotes, worldly wisdom, antiquarian data and theory, can only reinforce a sense of pervasive haste. Though Houbraken mentions in passing that he had realized more than twenty years before that someone ought to ‘cut his pen’ to preserve the reputation of artists,<sup>443</sup> he probably only started seriously collecting biographical information in 1715, the year after his return from England. Houbraken himself supports this surmise. He mentions that his bedridden friend Jan van Neck (1634/1635-1714) could have been of great use to him ‘had the present undertaking entered my head.’<sup>444</sup> As Van Neck died on 6 June 1714, that points to later in 1714 at the earliest. In addition Houbraken reports in his biography of Arent de Gelder that he is writing ‘in this year 1715’. Similarly Houbraken says about Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723) that ‘since the time in which one writes, 1715,<sup>445</sup> he has painted an innumerable number of portraits.’<sup>446</sup> The repeated date is surprising given that the Lives of both De Gelder and Kneller are located well into Houbraken’s third volume. We must consider, however, that Houbraken likely visited his former townsman De Gelder in 1715 and therefore had no need to write letters of enquiry. As for Kneller, Houbraken had presumably already picked up his information

from his friend George Vertue in London by 1714. We know from Houbraken that he received letters with biographical information in November and December of 1716,<sup>447</sup> but they likely came in response to enquiries that he had sent out well before then. The city chronicles on which he often relied for biographical data had all come out by 1714,<sup>448</sup> so that they do not rule out a 1715 commencement date. He had probably collected and digested his numerous sources pertaining to non-biographical matters well before his flight to England.

### Faithful unto Death

Johan van Gool proposed that Houbraken commenced his *Groote schouburgh* in 1717.<sup>449</sup> Hofstede de Groot considered evidence for an earlier date but concluded that ‘we have only Van Gool to go by.’<sup>450</sup> We may now safely assume that Houbraken was already collecting material, taking notes and drawing portrait illustrations in 1715 and 1716, but that he only started composing and writing the actual book in 1717. That means that he wrote his three substantial volumes within three years, and that using a quill pen and without the aid of typewriters or Xerox machines, leave alone computers or printers. Of course Houbraken’s

<sup>443</sup> *Houbraken 1718*, p. 223.

<sup>444</sup> *Houbraken 1721*, p. 75.

<sup>445</sup> *Houbraken 1721*, p. 208.

<sup>446</sup> *Houbraken 1721*, p. 236.

<sup>447</sup> *Houbraken 1719*, p. 129 and *1721*, p. 204.

<sup>448</sup> *Swillens 1944*, p. XXXIV lists ten of these works, plus two more uncertain ones. In order of publication they are *Orlers 1614 and 1641 (Leiden)*, *Ampzing 1628 (Haarlem)*, *Schrevelius 1648 (Haarlem)*, *Van Bleywijck 1667 and 1674/5 (Delft)*, *Van Leeuwen 1672 (Leiden)*, *Balen 1677 (Dordrecht)*, *Ten Hoorn 1713 (Amsterdam)* and *Walvis 1714 (Gouda)*.

<sup>449</sup> *Van Gool 1750*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>450</sup> *Hofstede de Groot 1893*, p. 16

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household had neither gas nor electricity. The stove had to be fired up and stoked throughout the winter months and the candlelight must at times have been badly inadequate. No doubt the Houbrakens had domestic help to empty the bedpans and the like, but his large family must have been a frequent distraction. In fact, his friend Johan van Gool refers in passing to Houbraken's 'numerous and heavy family'.<sup>451</sup> In addition *De groote schouburgh* was not a fun project or leisurely undertaking. The books had to be produced as quickly as possible to secure sales and family income. That means that Houbraken simply did not have time to be a fastidious editor. Though it is unfair to dismiss *De groote schouburgh* as 'Houbraken's famous collection of primarily confused gossip', to quote Jan Emmens,<sup>452</sup> it is certain that just about everything that reached his eyes or ears must have been grist to his mill.

Of course, Emmens was mainly referring to Houbraken's biographical content, especially where it concerns Rembrandt. But I believe that there is now a broad consensus that Houbraken was an entertaining and generally reliable story teller who was only rarely seriously misinformed, judgmental or gullible. It is mainly when he moved beyond biography to the exegesis of a painting or to one of his theoretical digressions that his information can be remarkably uneven. However, it is only a very rare reader, one who is determined to peruse

*De groote schouburgh* from beginning to end, who is likely to spot most of the many errors. A long appendix in *Houbraken Translated* documents in great detail his persistent combination of ambitious learning and erratic editing. We encounter typos, spelling errors, unidentified poems, incomplete, incorrect, or missing references and the like. We may safely assume that if Houbraken had not needed to work under great pressure within very limited time, he would have avoided some of the lapses of his great work. We know, however, that he was not by nature a systematic thinker, so that no amount of leisure would likely have eliminated all of his errors and omissions.

We should also consider that Houbraken died from what Johan van Gool called 'a wasting illness'.<sup>453</sup> What's more, Van Gool blamed the major shortcomings of the third volume on the biographer's failing health.<sup>454</sup> It is not clear, however, just when this debilitating illness set in. In his biography of Samuel van Hoogstraten,<sup>455</sup> Houbraken mentions that he expects to edit and publish his master's *Onzichtbare Waereld* (Invisible World) after he has completed his current project, but we can't date that flash of optimism with any precision, if only because he could have been composing his Life of Van Hoogstraten as early as 1715. Houbraken's plans to write an Ovid commentary and to compile a numismatic reference work, as announced in his first and second volumes,<sup>456</sup> were proba-

<sup>451</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 146: 'talryk en zwaar huisgezin'.

<sup>452</sup> Emmens 1968 (1964), p. 98.

<sup>453</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 146.

<sup>454</sup> Van Gool 1750, pp. 5-6

<sup>455</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 161.

<sup>456</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 50 and 1719, p. 182\*.

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bly no more than wishful thinking.<sup>457</sup> Houbraken's still unpublished *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, which he had written in 1714, must also have prayed on his mind and been part of his optimistic plans for the future.

Certain is only that Houbraken was living in a temporal pressure cooker while he planned and wrote much of his *Groote schouburgh*. At all times during his last few years on earth he was engaged in a complex balancing act, firming up his theoretical digressions while sorting and digesting his correspondence and churning out his biographies. He was also viewing art sales at least as late as 1715,<sup>458</sup> and we know that he was still rendering histories and inventing emblems in 1716. In addition, he found time to consult recent publications. Gerard van Loon's *Inleyding tot de hedendaagsche penningkunde* (Introduction to Contemporary Numismatics) only came out in 1717,<sup>459</sup> whereas the Ovid translation by Arnold van Hoogvliet (1687-1763) and the *Mengelpoëzy* (Mixed Poetry) by Hermanus van den Burg (1682-1752)<sup>460</sup> appeared a year later, proving he kept right on reading even as he wrote. As for Heymen Dullaert's *Gedichten* of 1719, which Piet Swillens listed as a work illustrated by Houbraken, it does have one small illustration by our biographer on the title page,

but it is a recycled item from *J. V. Broekhuizens gedichten* of 1711 [79].<sup>461</sup>

A year and a half before his death, Arnold Houbraken received some public recognition for his enterprise. In April of 1718 an anonymous author published a thoroughly positive review of the first volume of *De groote schouburgh*, which appeared in an Amsterdam trade periodical called *Maendelyke uittreksels, of boekzael der geleerde waerelt* (Monthly Abstracts, or Book Room of the Learned World).<sup>462</sup> This was no fly-by-night venture, as it saw 96 issues between 1716 and 1811. There is no way of telling how close the author was to Houbraken, and the purpose of such a review was clearly to encourage readers to buy *De groote schouburgh* and not to alert them to its possible weaknesses. The piece consists of a balanced but uncritical selection of contents, both biographical and theoretical, in Houbraken's order of presentation. Significantly, the unknown author also quotes a few examples of the poetry of *De groote schouburgh*, including a verse by Houbraken himself, which suggests that this aspect of his work was deemed to be more of an attraction for his contemporaries than it is for us today. Two instances of the aphorismic wisdom that Houbraken drew from Baltasar Gracián are excerpted as well, as are two of the insights drawn

<sup>457</sup> Well into his third volume, while describing an allegorical ensemble by Gerard de Lairese, Houbraken refers to 'our *Emblemata*, a small work that also stands to come out one of these days', but he does not tell us that he had completed the work in 1714. Nor could he have known that it would not be published until well after his death.

<sup>458</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 154.

<sup>459</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 365, note\* and 1719, p. 155. I have included about half of the endless title in the bibliography below.

<sup>460</sup> Consult Houbraken 1721, p. 370, note + and the bibliography below.

<sup>461</sup> The two title prints (the second being part of an appended work by Tielman van Braght) are by other artists, one of whom was Frans van Bleyswyck (1671-1746).

<sup>462</sup> Again Anonymous 1718, pp. 474-486, first published by Cornelis 1998, p. 152.

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from Andries Pels. The writer also approves of Houbraken's sense of humour. Most notably, a tale of Rembrandt throwing a libidinous young couple out into the street after catching them acting out the parts of Adam and Eve, is quoted with relish. Finally, the review takes up the cause of Houbraken against the meddlers whom he professes to fear in his introduction to *De groote schouburgh*. The conclusion commends Houbraken for undertaking his work and rescuing any number of artists from oblivion. Houbraken could have concluded nothing else from this publication but that he had the right mix of material and should therefore carry on as planned.

Even so Arnold Houbraken was not adequately compensated for his labour, at least, not financially. Although there was a ready market for *De groote schouburgh*, it yielded little profit. The problem, Van Gool tells us, was that the subscription rate for the project (six guilders, three to be paid at once and three more upon delivery) had been set too low to meet the production costs for such a fine work, so that 'our honest artist always fished behind the net, ploughed the parched beach and hunted where there was naught to be caught.'<sup>463</sup> Van Gool adds that the money Houbraken saved by having his son Jacob engrave the many portraits could not make enough of a difference.

Van Gool wrote a detailed account of related disappointments, saying that after François Fagel (1659-1740) had declined a dedication of the first volume to his person, Houbraken turned Johan van Schuylenburch (1675-1735), who accepted the handsomely bound copy that was

dedicated to him without offering compensation. Worse, Houbraken had taken along a picture as a gift, but Schuylenburg did not want it. 'This unheard-of treatment made him virtually sick with regret; he came to me to express his anguish; I comforted him with the hope that this gentleman might possibly demonstrate a token of thanks with the second volume; but it, too, was received with a slight smile and scant thanks.'<sup>464</sup>

Unlike his beloved teacher Samuel van Hoogstraten, Houbraken had no opportunity to sit back and reflect on his coming departure for eternity.<sup>465</sup> That he did not even manage to complete his third volume is explicitly stated in the opening 'message for the reader', which offers a corrected index to the location of the plates. It is further suggested by the closing summaries of the contents of his volumes. The first two state: 'LIST of the most important matters or curiosities of this first part [or 'second part'] of the *Theatre of Painters*; to be able to locate everything in its place.' The page references for both run from beginning to end in several loosely thematic sequences. For the third volume we are no longer told that the summary is intended to locate things, the overall list is shorter, and its numeration simply runs from beginning to end in one sequence. Most likely Sara Houbraken (or an anonymous helper) lacked the insight needed to imitate Houbraken's more comprehensive thematic approach when she completed his work after his death.

In defending Houbraken with respect to the errors and omissions of *De groote schouburgh* and especially its third volume, Van Gool, who

<sup>463</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 138.

<sup>464</sup> Van Gool 1750, pp. 139-141.

<sup>465</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 167.

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was writing three decades after the events, pointed to his early death and the uneven posthumous editing of the still-chaotic material.

From the manifold disarrays of the third or last volume, which was published by the same's widow in the year 1721, it can easily be deduced what detriment was brought to the completion of the same by the man's untimely death, and what damage the immortal memory of a considerable number of artists suffered from this. For if one leafs through it with insight and attention, one easily spots the many outstanding masters who then still lived or were already deceased and as a consequence could and should have been included, who were omitted through lack of thorough research or, with some deliberately withheld, are not even to be found in the same

Inexcusable errors, which unpleasant performances would never have defaced Houbraken's distinguished Painter's Theatre had not death prevented him from completing the leading role of his work and granted him the time (as there was still ample material at hand) to supplement his book with a sequel, beginning where Karel van Mander ended, and ending there, after time had passed, where another could in turn have continued in a convenient fashion. This would have laid the foundation for a handsome and neatly linked *Painter's History of all the Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses*

who flourished after Karel van Mander up to the present.<sup>466</sup>

Van Gool's reference to artists 'deliberate withheld' might seem to contradict my insistence, expressed above, that Houbraken was the least selective of biographers. Note, however, that Van Gool does not claim that Houbraken had omitted some artists right from the start. He is writing only about the third volume. What we learn is that with the water reaching up to his neck, the biographer may have given up on a few figures or have decided to leave them for later. What Van Gool is telling us in so many awkward words is that Houbraken did not fully realize his ambition.

Note also that Johan van Gool alludes to a fourth volume of *De groote schouburgh*. Its absence is probably felt less acutely by posterity than by Van Gool, since we are generally less interested than he in the missing material. Van Gool, of course, duly compensated for Houbraken's near silence concerning important artists such as Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750) by their inclusion in his *Nieuwe Schouburg*. Hofstede de Groot found three indications in the text of *De groote schouburgh* that a fourth tome was planned.<sup>467</sup> First Houbraken says he will mention Jacobus de Baen (1673-1700) when he gets around to his year of birth. Secondly, he makes the same promise for Nicolaes Verkolje. Thirdly, he makes a pledge to deal with Willem Verschuring (1660-1726), but that promise remains unfulfilled as well. To this list we can add the example of the painter Isaac de Moucheron (1667-1744), the son of Frederik de Moucheron

<sup>466</sup> Van Gool 1750, pp. 5-6.

<sup>467</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 43.

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(1633-1686), ‘far more advanced than the father in art, of whom we shall make mention later.’ Presumably Ruysch, whom Houbraken greatly admired,<sup>468</sup> was also intended to have her life detailed in the fourth volume. Moreover, Houbraken is quite explicit in the last line of his third volume,<sup>469</sup> where he promises that there is more to come. Complete with a fourth volume much like the others *De groote schouburgh* would have counted well over fifteen hundred pages. It was a hugely ambitious undertaking and well-nigh impossible dream.

We will probably never know the precise circumstances surrounding the delayed launching of the third volume of *De groote schouburgh*. Given the publication dates of 1718 and 1719 for the first two volumes, 1720 was presumably the target date for the third tome. In other words, we need to account for a delay of about one year. Most likely the time was not only needed for editing but also for resolving a problem with family cash flow in the wake of Arnold’s death. On 17 July 1720 Sara auctioned off thirty works from Arnold’s estate for well over two thousand guilders,<sup>470</sup> a small fortune back then, allowing her to publish the third volume the next year.

It is at this juncture that the miserly Van Schuylenburch resurfaces. Although twice bitten, the Houbrakens had not yet learned to shy away from the man. Quite to the contrary, their expectations had only grown with the years. Van Gool tells a long story about how Van Schuylenburg drove poor Sara to tears with his

ingratitude, but how ‘Mister Secretary Fagel’ (Van Gool’s upstairs neighbour for thirty-six years) saved the day with a generous gift, even though he had already rewarded Houbraken with a tribute of ten ducats for the first volume. As Van Gool further informs us:

Houbraken had dedicated the second volume to Mister Meester Pieter de la Court van der Voort, and received a handsome silver gift in return. The wife later brought the third volume to the same gentleman, who, according to his noble nature, had wanted to do her another favour, but she declined so as not to sin against the command of her husband on his deathbed. From all this one gathers the grateful nature of the deceased and the simplicity of his widow.<sup>471</sup>

Such passages remind us of Arnold Houbraken’s sense of propriety and of his wife’s equal sense of loyalty. That Sara sold off her husband’s collection of paintings to be able to complete his great project, was an act of conjugal piety that demonstrates how fully she appreciated the importance that he had attached to his great work.

In addition the text and illustrations of Houbraken’s *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* were still gathering dust as part of his estate. It was no doubt Sara who contacted the publisher, Willem Barents of Amsterdam, and saw to it that the important work was at last published in

<sup>468</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 83, 278 and 353.

<sup>469</sup> Simon Schama 1995, p. 1052, who dates the third volume of *De groote schouburgh* to 1720, has Houbraken seeking out Ruysch and writing her life.

<sup>470</sup> Again Hoet 1751, vol. 1, pp. 255-256.

<sup>471</sup> Van Gool 1750, pp. 142-143.

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1723. David van Hoogstraten also contributed an introductory poem entitled ‘Op de Stichtelyke ZINNEBEELDEN Van den Heere ARNOLD HOUBRAKEN’:

Thus Houbraken still paints scenes after  
his death,  
That delight both our sight and our senses.  
Thus he provides food to the attentive  
mind,  
Which feeds on delicacies of divine nour-  
ishment.  
Thus his art and diligence, elevated to  
such heights,  
Will continue to live in the hearts of pos-  
terity.<sup>472</sup>

A second edition of *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* followed in 1729. That same year also saw another publication of Houbraken’s theological writings of 1712 and 1713.<sup>473</sup> Ten years after his death the biographer was still being read and appreciated. Sara died on 25 October 1729, presumably surrounded by some of her nine surviving children.

It must have been of comfort to Sara Houbraken when *De groote schouburgh* proved to be a success, although (again according to Johan Van Gool) it was the book sellers and not Sara and her children who did well financial-

ly.<sup>474</sup> The dealers were soon selling *De groote schouburgh* at well above its subscription price, so that it is hardly surprising that at least three of Arnold’s younger colleagues were inspired to follow in his footsteps. The least important example of this wave of Houbraken emulation is Matthaeus Brouërius van Nidek (whom we already know from his emblem book of 1716). Only six years after our biographer’s death, he informed posterity that he was planning to publish a *Schouburgh der Nederlandsche Dichters en Dichteressen* (Theatre of Dutch Poets and Poetesses). This title, if not the whole project, was surely inspired by the considerable success of Houbraken’s great opus, since Brouërius van Nidek mentions *De groote schouburgh* in his foreword to his 1726 compilation of the collected poetry of Jeremias de Decker.<sup>475</sup> There is no evidence that Van Nidek’s biographical work ever came out.

### Dispute and Emulation

In 1729, the year of Sara Houbraken’s death, Jacob Campo Weyerman published the first three of four volumes of his *De levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche Konst-schilders en Konst-schilderessen* (The Descriptions of the Lives of the Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses).<sup>476</sup> It is widely acknowledged that Weyerman had his own considerable strengths,

<sup>472</sup> For the Dutch original, see Horn 2000, note 2-363.

<sup>473</sup> Ever incorrigible, the KB still catalogues both the 1713 and 1729 versions of Houbraken’s *Verzameling van uitgelezene keurstoffen* under the name of Willem Goeree.

<sup>474</sup> Van Gool 1750, pp. 138-139.

<sup>475</sup> *Alle de Rym-Oefeningen van Jeremias de Decker*, 1726; discussed by Karsemijer 1934, pp. 339-340. For tons of information about De Decker, Horn 2000, note 7-17. Brouërius van Nidek also repeatedly adduces De Decker in his 1716 emblem book.

<sup>476</sup> Weyerman 1729 and 1769.

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manifested especially in his third and posthumous fourth volumes. Aside from his fresh information and additional biographies, he was unencumbered by theory, and his style was remarkably lively. He disliked the Leiden fijnschilders, whom Houbraken generally admired, and had a keen interest in lesser, marginal figures whom Houbraken tended to slight.<sup>477</sup> Above all he concentrated on Houbraken's anecdotes and used dubious sources to make them more salacious and readable. The fact remains, however, that Weyerman's first three volumes are substantially plagiarized from *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>478</sup> Ever an opportunist, Weyerman probably intended his work to undercut the still available copies of Houbraken's original which, as Van Gool informs us, were selling for three times the original subscription price on the second-hand market.<sup>479</sup> Being able somehow to gain access to Houbraken's copper plates for the many portraits of *De groote schouburgh*, must have made the project additionally attractive for Weyerman.<sup>480</sup> The plates must still have been in

the possession of Jacob Houbraken at the time since Johan Gool used them in 1753 for his edition of *De groote schouburgh*. Did Jacob not realize that Weyerman was no friend of his father? Or was he offered enough money for use of the plates to have him overlook the problem?

Houbraken had treated Weyerman harshly in *De groote schouburgh*,<sup>481</sup> which must explain the latter's obsessive hatred of his predecessor.<sup>482</sup> Incredibly, he let his great dependence on Houbraken go almost entirely unacknowledged, and he had the bad taste to make fun of his victim even as he purloined his information. Never a man to be gracious, Weyerman wrote an unpaginated 'Necessary preface for the reader' in which he criticizes Houbraken for his confusing placement of the plates. Not only did he mock Arnold's lack of languages,<sup>483</sup> but he compared his theoretical digressions to disruptive 'spider webs'<sup>484</sup> and showed aggressive disdain for his style: 'Arnold employs a complicated, common, vulgar and enervating style; he does not stick to his topic; he begins but does not persevere; he is

<sup>477</sup> Horn 2000, note 2-370. For a more detailed comparison of their taste in art and especially their different views of Adriaen van der Werff and Rembrandt, Boom 2001, pp. 130-139. However, Boom touches on Houbraken's classicism but not on the theological element underlying his personal views of history painting, landscape and vanitas still life.

<sup>478</sup> As Van Gool 1750, pp. 6-7 explained in detail.

<sup>479</sup> Van Gool 1750, p. 139

<sup>480</sup> As suggested by De Vries 1989, p. 1. Bruggeman 1969, p. 20, points out that *De groote schouburgh* is in octavo format, whereas *De Levens-beschryvinge* are in quarto, hence the need for the decorative framework that surrounds the borrowed illustrations in the latter work. Bruggeman 1969, p. 21 also discusses the eight small scenes depicted in the frame around the title print in Weyerman's first volume.

<sup>481</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 52.

<sup>482</sup> Broos 1990, pp. 77-78 and 97-112, esp. p. 101.

<sup>483</sup> Again Weyerman 1729, vol. 1, p. 12 or Broos 1990, p. 103.

<sup>484</sup> Weyerman 1729, vol. 1, p. 11 or Cornelis 1995, p. 11. Weyerman's following 'der historien' means 'of histories' with 'histories' meaning matter pertaining to history painting, not 'stories'. Weyerman's own 128 page 'elaboration on the art of painting of the Ancients' may not interrupt anything but it is still a huge and arguably boring irrelevancy.

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like a man playing hide-and-seek.<sup>485</sup> This astute assessment certainly captures the unstructured nature of much of Houbraken's prose, though it is much truer of his *Philaléthes* than his *Groote schouburgh*. Ton Broos, a Weyerman expert, briefly compared the work of the two men and concluded that though Weyerman can be more flowery on occasion, he was the more accomplished writer.<sup>486</sup> It appears that Weyerman, who was a well-educated linguist, may well have been right in this instance.

In part to defend his friend against Weyerman's outrages, Johan van Gool published his two-volume amplification, complete with corrections and a continuation of *De groote schouburgh*, in 1750 and 1751. This work (which we have already repeatedly cited and quoted) bears the revised title of *De Nieuwe Schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen* (*The New Theatre of the Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses*), reflecting both his debt to Houbraken and his updated material. Van Gool also completed the unfinished lives of *De groote schouburgh*, just as Houbraken had done with *Het Schilder-Boeck* by Karel van Mander. Van Gool's book further included the first complete biography of Houbraken, giving us, along with *Lyris*, the largest part of what we now know about his life. Immediately following his own *Nieuwe Schouburg*, Van Gool attended to a second edition of *De groote schouburgh* itself, which was published in The Hague in 1753.<sup>487</sup> We may safely regard it as homage to his colleague and

friend, but Van Gool may also have intended the reissue to undermine Weyerman's sales and ruin the prospects of his fourth volume, which was posthumously published in 1769.

In 1751 the artist and dealer Gerard Hoet published a pamphlet entitled *Brief aan een vrient. Behelzende eenige aanmerkingen op het eerste deel van den Nieuwen Schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen, door Johan van Gool* (Letter to a Friend. Comprising Some Comments on the First Volume of the New Theatre of the Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses by Johan van Gool). One of Hoet's many complaints, most of which centred on Van Gool's baiting of art dealers, concerned Arnold Houbraken.

Page 134. It is said, that Houbraken was necessitated to draw for the booksellers, being, according to the belief of the writer, not much better than if one were painting on the galleys, as they are wont to call painting for cut throats [dealers] in Rome. How can one so thoughtlessly despise an activity which deserves praise in every way! Does the writer consider drawing to be so inferior that one should not be permitted to follow it to one's profit? Is she not the soul of the art of painting? Surely yes. What reason is there then, when one finds more profit there than with painting, that one should not be able to dedicate oneself to it?<sup>488</sup>

<sup>485</sup> Weyerman 1729, pp. 10-11 or Broos 1990, pp. 78-79.

<sup>486</sup> Broos 1990, p. 112.

<sup>487</sup> As mentioned in the appendix below, Van Gool was not the publisher, these being J. Swart, C. Bouquet and M. Gaillard of The Hague.

<sup>488</sup> Hoet 1751, pp. 7-8. The pamphlet is accessible in facsimile in De Vries 1993, pp. 219-226.

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Houbraken may not have shared Hoet's view of the central place of drawing in the creative process, given that he gave it and print making short thrift compared to painting in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>489</sup> Though Houbraken certainly etched and drew far more than he painted, this was probably, as Hoet surmised, mainly for the money.

Two years later, after Johan van Gool had published a rebuttal along the lines of 'with friends like that, who needs enemies,' Hoet published a second pamphlet, which took to task both volumes of Van Gool's *Nieuwe Schouburg* in great detail.<sup>490</sup> This time Hoet touched on the financial situation of the aging Houbraken as sketched by Van Gool: 'He speaks of Houbraken as if fortune had resolutely turned against him. I have never heard speak of this misfortune. Truly the widow and the son can be little obliged to him for this decided and inappropriate exposition.'<sup>491</sup> Hoet's objection may have been well-founded, as Hofstede de Groot concluded,<sup>492</sup> but without Van Gool's slightly distorted version of events, we would know almost nothing about the circumstances surrounding the publication of Houbraken's masterpiece.

## Success and Decline

*De groote schouburgh* soon became an international success. By 1753, when its second edition was published, Antoine Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville (1680-1765) had just published the last tome of his three volume adaptation in Paris.<sup>493</sup> With his much more rigorous selection he approached our priorities more closely than Houbraken did.<sup>494</sup> At about the same time the first of four volumes by Jean-Baptiste Descamps (1714-1791) came out, again in Paris.<sup>495</sup> He was soon followed by other foreign imitators, notably Matthew Pilkington (1700?-1784) in London in 1770, Johann Dominicus Fiorillo (1748-1821) in Göttingen in 1815 to 1820,<sup>496</sup> and Cornelis Harkes Balkema (1792-1857) in Ghent in 1844,<sup>497</sup> thus ensuring that a great deal of Houbraken's material received much wider circulation. If imitation be the sincerest form of flattery, *De groote schouburgh* was a resounding success indeed.

Even before Balkema emulated *De groote schouburgh*, its reputation had begun to plummet. The attack on Houbraken was multifarious and complex, part of the problem being that his work had become almost inseparable from the

<sup>489</sup> As is abundantly clear from Horn 2000, pp. 498-559.

<sup>490</sup> Hoet n.d. (1753). De Vries 1993, pp. 242-265.

<sup>491</sup> Hoet 1753, p. 32, adduced by John Loughman, 1992, p. 210, note 2.

<sup>492</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 9.

<sup>493</sup> Dezallier (also Dézallier) d'Argenville, 3 vols. 1745-1752, with a revised four-volume edition of 1762. As mentioned by Hecht 1996, pp. 266-267, Dezallier was soon adapted in English and translated into German.

<sup>494</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 589-590.

<sup>495</sup> Descamps, 4 vols, 1753-1752. He generally condensed Houbraken's biographical data and added a great deal of useful information concerning the whereabouts of pictures in French and Dutch collections of the mid-eighteenth century.

<sup>496</sup> As mentioned by Erwin Panofsky 1955, p. 323, Fiorillo was not an Italian, as his name might suggest, but a native of Hamburg. In 1813 he became the first professor of art history, in Göttingen.

<sup>497</sup> Balkema 1844, p. 146 actually appreciated aspects of Houbraken's history paintings. See the quotation in Horn 2000, p. 12.

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plagiarisms of the by then more popular Weyerman and the adaptations of foreign Houbraken imitators. The attack focused on the two most renowned artists of the Golden Age, Jan Steen and Rembrandt van Rijn. The reaction to Houbraken's *Life of Steen* got under way with Roland van den Eijnden (1747-1819) in 1816<sup>498</sup> almost a generation before the reaction to the Rembrandt biography. The big difference is that Rembrandt was widely seen as a great man whose reputation had been sullied by tales of wrong-headedness, greed and asocial withdrawal. By contrast, the biographer had never placed Steen on a pedestal only to rudely tear him down. Houbraken presented Steen, whom he admired, as a great artist who behaved with remarkable consistency. Unfortunately it was also disreputable consistency. Not to put too fine point on it, Jan Steen is painted as an incorrigible lush from beginning to end, and the most remarkable thing about him is that his alcoholism is never seen to get in the way of his productivity. Of course a boozier could not serve as a worthy representative of Dutch domestic virtue, so that the daunting task of Houbraken's critics was to clean up Steen's image. That is why Van den Eijnden balked at the ostensible improbability of some of Houbraken's information. He challenged Houbraken's proposition of the unity of Steen's art and life, claiming it was exaggerated, and argued that no alcoholic could have been so highly productive.

Remarkably, Van den Eijnden also claimed that Steen's many paintings are as uneven in quality as they are varied in subject matter, with an ever-present well-drawn but 'naive' representation of physiognomy. Note, however, that Van den Eijnden probably did not intend to contradict Houbraken's high praise of Steen's grasp of physiognomy. It was the choice of low subjects that he, much like Houbraken, regretted, citing Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) to the effect that Steen would have profited from greater exposure to Italian art and the pursuit of more elevated subject matter.

In his brief and posthumous treatment of 1843 Johannes Immerzeel Jr. (1776-1841) charged Houbraken as well as Weyerman, Pilkington and Fiorillo with transparent lies and slander, claiming they had defamed not only a great artist but Dutch art and society in general.<sup>499</sup> But Immerzeel had no new archival material with which to challenge Houbraken, as was demonstrated in 1856 by Tobias van Westhrene Wz. (1825-1871), who merely sanitized the *Life of Steen*. In fact, he generally praised Houbraken and criticized Weyerman and the others.<sup>500</sup> In 1863 Christiaan Kramm (1797-1875) basically deferred to Van Westhrene's more detailed and balanced analysis.<sup>501</sup> Finally Wilhelm Martin (1870-1954) continued this tendency well into the twentieth century, even lapsing into a hilarious reinterpretation of Houbraken's picture of Steen's home life.<sup>502</sup>

<sup>498</sup> *Van der Eijnden*, vol. 1, 1816, pp. 419-420.

<sup>499</sup> *Immerzeel 1843*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>500</sup> *Westhrene 1856*, pp. 35-52, esp. pp. 39, 43 and 47.

<sup>501</sup> *Kramm 1863*, pp. 1562-1565.

<sup>502</sup> *Martin 1936*, p. 253. *On a totally different tack, an English art dealer named John Smith (1781-1855) had moved in the opposite direction in 1833 (pp. xv-xviii) by emphasizing Steen's dissolution and resulting premature aging.*

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Thus that marriage commenced, which in unremitting labour leavened with jollity and blessed with five sturdy children, lasted twenty years. It was a typical burgher's marriage, without much intellectual culture but founded on what both had wrought with their work and supported by a firm, simple faith [...]. All that is witty and sincere is welcome to Jan Steen and his wife. And thus they shared – at least so it seems to me – the good and the bad times in that old-fashioned Dutch way that is most dear to us.

Here at last we have Houbraken's Jan Steen fully groomed for membership in the superior Dutch middle classes.

The concerted assault on Houbraken's Rembrandt biography only got started most of a generation after the attack on his *Life of Steen*. The main thrust, pioneered in 1834 by Christianus Johannes Nieuwenhuis (1799-1883), came from nationalistic Dutch scholars who thought that Houbraken's Rembrandt biography was a near-treasonous attack on a national hero. That attitude survived into the late nineteenth century with Conrad Busken-Huet (1826-1886), who called *De groote schouburgh* 'a sustained scandal chronicle'.<sup>503</sup> Still other scholars, led by

Eduard Kolloff (1811-1878) in 1853, maintained that anecdotes are largely irrelevant to the serious study of artists. It all came together in 1860 with Joseph Théophile Thoré (or William Bürger: 1807-1869), who professed to loathe Houbraken and his work but who knew little about them.<sup>504</sup> His hatred was unmeasured and personal: 'Oh that villainous man, with his long wig, his pinched nose, his pretentious and cunning air!' He accused Houbraken of hypocrisy for condemning the obscene art of Torrentius and yet painting dubious pictures such as a *Woman Taken in Adultery*. Eventually Thoré-Bürger joined the anti-anecotal current, preceded by his countryman Charles Blanc (1813-1882), who managed to discuss Rembrandt's art and life at some length while barely mentioning Houbraken.<sup>505</sup> Another formalist who had little use for Houbraken and Weyerman was Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794-1868), who claimed that their notices are 'as scanty as incorrect, though all the more abundant in idle gossip and false anecdotes'.<sup>506</sup> On the heels of these developments followed the romanticization and even the Christologizing of Rembrandt along with the indestructible concept of a bipartite early and late Rembrandt<sup>507</sup> which, though rightly challenged by Jan Emmens, survived right up to H. Perry Chapman's *Rembrandt's Self Portraits* of 1990.<sup>508</sup>

<sup>503</sup> *Busken Huet 1912 (1882-1884)*, p. 378.

<sup>504</sup> *Thoré-Bürger 1860*, pp. 54-56. *Hofstede de Groot 1893* tends not to specify page references for Thoré but see *Horn 2000*, pp. 626-630.

<sup>505</sup> *Blanc 1859*, pp. 11-38, esp. p. 36, where he accepts Houbraken's mistaken identification of Hendrikje Stoffels (1626-1663), Rembrandt's common-law wife, as 'paysanne de Rarep'.

<sup>506</sup> *Waagen 1863-1864*, vol. 1, p. x and vol. 2, p. 370, n. 2.

<sup>507</sup> The key names are Eugène Fromentin (1820-1876), Émile Michel (1828-1909), Carl Neumann (1860-1934) and especially Frederic Schmidt-Degener (1881-1934), all discussed in detail by Jan Emmens 1968 (1964), pp. 12-37 and very briefly by *Horn 2000*, p. 625.

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## Comeback and Vindication

An important start in the modern rehabilitation of *De groote schouburgh* was at last made in 1880 by Alfred von Wurzbach with his German translation of Houbraken's text. This exemplar scholar tried to clear Houbraken's reputation of the charge of mendacious gossip and slander.<sup>509</sup> Though his book omits the theoretical digressions and some anecdotes of the original, it has nevertheless been used by German scholars almost to this day.<sup>510</sup> Von Wurzbach's omission of Houbraken's theory is understandable. The latter's digressions can be disruptive and tedious, as Jacob Campo Weyerman rightly observed, but they are nevertheless needed to appreciate Houbraken's professed bipartite purpose in writing his *Groote schouburgh*, which was to safeguard the memory of past art and artists but also to educate his young colleagues in the demanding requirements of history painting. In addition, we skip Houbraken's theoretical digressions at our peril, as they may include snippets of biographical interest. The ostensible gullibility of Herman Saftleven comes to mind.<sup>511</sup> Most remarkably, as mentioned, a long digression on the subject of Envy closes with a treacherous attempt on the life of Jan de Baen.<sup>512</sup>

The still unsurpassed foundation for Houbraken studies was laid in 1893 by Cornelis Hofstede de Groot in his study of Houbraken's

life and art and especially of his sources for the *De groote schouburgh*. However, Hofstede de Groot did not undertake to translate Houbraken's work and yet had nothing positive to say about Von Wurzbach's effort, claiming that the German scholar was not up to the task, so that almost every page contains an error.<sup>513</sup> Hofstede de Groot did not give examples of Von Wurzbach's mistakes, and we believe that his translation is better than his Dutch colleague was prepared to grant. Also, Von Wurzbach did in fact translate much of *De groote schouburgh* into what was back then the dominant language of scholarship, so that his translation and indexes made much of Houbraken accessible to an international audience. Until *Houbraken Translated*, English speaking scholars had no alternative but to master early eighteenth-century Dutch or to impose on a Dutch colleague.

Short of producing a translation of his own, Hofstede de Groot was thorough in the extreme, so that no one is likely to render him obsolete. For instance, he reviewed all the instances in which Houbraken deviated from his chronology, including how or why this might have come about.<sup>514</sup> In addition, Hofstede de Groot considered all of Houbraken's sources, including unpublished ones and a few that Houbraken did not identify. Even Houbraken's numerous references to correspondence, con-

<sup>508</sup> Horn 2000, p. 845, note 13-28.

<sup>509</sup> Von Wurzbach 1880, pp. X-XII.

<sup>510</sup> For instance, Schumacher 2006, esp. p. 28, note 136, p. 30, notes 144 and 150, as well as page 35, note 180 and p. 36, note 183.

<sup>511</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 138. That must explain why Schulz 1982, *passim* overlooked the passage.

<sup>512</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 321-323. However, I am at a loss to give further examples.

<sup>513</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 35-36.

<sup>514</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 37-43.

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versations, works of art and poems were scrutinized by this exemplar scholar. But though Hofstede had respect for the overall achievement of *De groote schouburgh*, he noted that we must verify the reliability of its information and that ‘there is only one characteristic of Houbraken that we must always consider in the process, and that is his *penchant for gossip*, his *anecdote mongering*.’<sup>515</sup> In this respect Hofstede de Groot was the heir of the earlier critics of Houbraken’s Steen and Rembrandt biographies.

No one is perfect and even Hofstede de Groot dropped a few stitches here and there. His Netherlandish artists include a stellar French academician named Charles Errard (1606-1689), whom Houbraken calls Karel Erpard on the authority of Cornelis de Bie (1627-1711), who calls him Charles Erpard.<sup>516</sup> Errard’s only Netherlandish connection was a trip to Flanders in the mid-sixties to buy art for Louis XIV, but he has appeared in indexes of Houbraken’s Netherlandish subjects to this day.<sup>517</sup> With respect to his biographical data, we learn from the example of Abraham Janssens (1567-1632), a gifted and productive Flemish artist, that his interpretation of Joachim von Sandrart could be questionable. After adducing a poem by Cornelis de Bie to the effect that love can be dangerous, Sandrart observes:

All this is confirmed by the unhappy example of our artist Janson, who stubbed all his prosperity to pieces against the

stone of an untimely love, for when he had thoughtlessly married a beautiful young woman he turned to taking walks and thereupon filled his home, without planning supplies, with children, whereupon, overcome with melancholic thoughts, he could only find little place for poetic thoughts or intelligent reflections, so that with all his resolve weakened and become deranged in every way, he rapidly left his good work and ran about town bewildered looking for whether there was anything new or good, from exotic Dutch fish to Italian food, which he himself prepared in good fashion and washed down with ample drink with other colleagues, so that with valuable time wasted and nothing done for his household, his good happiness vanished and was driven underground even though he had the good example of Peter Paul Rubens before his eyes.<sup>518</sup>

Houbraken instead opens with the good example of Rubens, from which Janssens fails to profit because he is envious of his colleague’s success.<sup>519</sup> Envy, ever Houbraken’s *bête noire*, is said to have served as catalyst for Janssens’ self-destructive impulses. A number of pressing questions arise here. Why did Houbraken edit Sandrart’s account so severely, omitting the concrete clues that the young woman in question was beautiful and that she bore the artist

<sup>515</sup> Hofstede de Groot, p. .

<sup>516</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 255, Houbraken 1718, p. 296 and De Bie 1661, p. 520.

<sup>517</sup> Including the index of the online dbnl transcription of *De groote schouburgh*.

<sup>518</sup> Translated from Sandrart as quoted by Hofstede de Groot 1893, p. 271.

<sup>519</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 79-80.

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disruptive children, thereby turning an understandable crisis into a baffling one? For what could have been the connection between Janssens' envy and his other problems. Why should his love for a new wife or his daily walks with her have led to 'consuming emptiness'? And why should the painter have cherished that state of mind? And just what is the heaviness that drove him to drink? Nothing much seems to make sense. We must remember, however, that Houbraken had ten children, so that his own household may well have been chaotic on occasion. Certainly that is suggested by passages of *Lyris*. Yet children are never seen to be anything less than a blessing in *De groote schouburgh*, and our biographer was probably unable to believe that a beautiful wife and a raft of kids could cause a man to fall apart, so that he was necessitated to fabricate an alternative and even less plausible scenario. But though Houbraken is out of his depth here, he is surely also at his intriguing best, depending mainly on his imagination instead of derivative scholarship.

This is not the place to compare all or even some of Houbraken's biographies to his sources, of which Von Sandrart was the most important. Hofstede de Groot undertook the work, adding up to forty-three pages of material for Von Sandrart alone, with the two biographers frequently quoted side by side. With respect to Abraham Janssens, however, Hofstede de Groot saw no reason to compare the two because he believed that Houbraken's version 'comes almost word for word from Sandrart.' Hofstede de Groot's inability to perceive the important differences be-

tween the two accounts suggests that someone may have to review his findings from a more modern and psychologically more penetrating perspective.

As for the poems used by Houbraken, Hofstede de Groot omitted Lukas Rotgans' *Boerekermis* of 1708, which our biographer quotes at length in connection with the subject matter of a painting by Adriaen van Ostade.<sup>520</sup> Another example is Houbraken's quotation of a long poem by Vondel celebrating *Saints Paul and Barnabas at Lystra* by Pieter Lastman [139].<sup>521</sup> Much of the time our biographer follows Vondel closely, but he excises several lines near the end. They elaborate on a prophetic leap into the future based on the *Acts of the Apostles*. Houbraken, who was primarily interested in Vondel's inventory of the archaeological details of the history painting and not in the poet's theological tangent, simply left out what did not suit his ends. Houbraken's introductory claim that he will quote only the beginning of the poem is even more misleading. Such details escaped the eagle eyes of Hofstede de Groot.

Even so, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. The real problems with Hofstede de Groot's work have little to do with his brilliant assemblage of facts. First, he made no attempt to move beyond a succinct biography of Houbraken to arrive at some kind of synthesis of the nature of the man and his ideas. The second problem is that Hofstede de Groot was like Von Wurzbach in that he was not truly interested in Houbraken's theoretical digressions. Hofstede de Groot's several categories of sources do not

<sup>520</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 348.

<sup>521</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 98-102. *Houbraken Translated* illustrates two versions but Vondel definitely described the work of 1714 in Poland and not the one of 1716 in Amsterdam.



139: Pieter Lastman, *Saints Paul and Barnabas at Lystra*, 1714. Oil on panel, 74 x 111 cm. Sucha (Poland), Julius Tarnowski..

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include even one for antiquarian or theoretical studies. A key source such as Joachim Oudaan appears only in connection with his poetry and a portrait, and lesser figures like the mentioned Basil Kennett don't even show up in Hofstede de Groot's index of names. In this respect, Piet Swillens cast his net more widely. For instance, he indexed Ovid fourteen times as opposed to zero for Hofstede de Groot. But Swillens also failed to extract a reliable synthesis of Houbraken as man and scholar. Nevertheless Swillens' conviction that a committed classicist, fine painter, virtuous family man and noble soul like Houbraken was 'not in the least a man for the writing of a scandal chronicle'<sup>522</sup> may be a little naively stated but is essentially correct and rightly challenged Busken Huet and much of the carping of the earlier nineteenth century.

Arnold Houbraken was largely rehabilitated in the wake of Piet Swillens. *The Golden Age Revisited* reviews a selection of fifteen scholars who made grateful and effective use of the biographical material of his *Schouburgh*, with particular praise of Otto Naumann's *Frans*

*van Mieris the Elder* of 1981. In addition to Naumann there were Horst Gerson in 1935 on Philips Koninck, Sturla Gudlaughsson in 1959 on Gerard Ter Borch, Helga Wagner in 1971 on Jan van der Heyden, Joaquim de Sousa-Leao in 1973 on Frans Post, Stephan Reiss in 1975 on Aelbert Cuyp, George Keys in 1984 on Esaias van de Velde, Konrad Renger in 1986 on Adriaen Brouwer, Roland Fleischer in 1989 on Ludolf de Jongh, Seymour Slive in 1989 to 1990 on Frans Hals, Alice Davies in 1992 on Jan van Kessel, Frits du Parc in 1993 on Phillips Wouwerman, Ben Broos in 1995 to 1996 on Johannes Vermeer, Marten Jan Bok in 1996 on Jan Steen, Mariët Westermann in 1997 on Jan Steen, and Paul Jan Huys in 1998 on Jan van Bijlert, all listed in the bibliography of *The Golden Age Revisited*. We can now add Roelof van Straten's in 2005 on the early Rembrandt and Frits Duparc and others in 2009 on Philips Wouwerman.<sup>523</sup> No doubt this list is incomplete. No doubt, too, *De groote schouburgh* will continue to be of great value for future generations of art historians.

<sup>522</sup> Swillens 1944, p. XXIX.

<sup>523</sup> Van Straten 2005, pp. 32, 36 and 74-75.

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## CONTINUED CRITICAL RESPONSE TO *DE GROOTE SCHOURBURGH*

While numerous scholars made grateful use of *De groote schouburgh*, about an equal number, including (in alphabetical order) Svetlana Alpers, Jonathan Bicker, Celeste Brusati, Dedalo Carasso, H. Perry Chapman, Bart Cornelis, Jan Emmens, Peter Hecht, Hendrik Horn, Oscar Mandel, Hans-Joachim Raupp, Robert Scheller, Nanette Solomon, Gary Schwartz, Lyckle de Vries and John Walford, scoured its pages for information concerning Houbraken's priorities and taste, and they too often did so to advance their own conceptions as opposed to those of Arnold Houbraken.<sup>524</sup> The *Golden Age Revisited* devotes most of a hundred pages (excluding notes) to the often unpalatable material. It would be inappropriate to present more than a stringent selection here. Truth be told, very little of the material is important for an understanding of *De groote schouburgh* and its author. On the other hand this aspect of Houbraken studies certainly gave the *Schouburgh* much higher profile than it had enjoyed before.

### **The Trying Riddles of Rembrandt**

It was only with respect to Rembrandt that Arnold Houbraken remained truly controversial after the mid-twentieth century. With respect to Jan Steen the more straightforward discussion centred on his biographical information, which has been shown to be largely reliable,<sup>525</sup> but

with Rembrandt the controversy continued unabated. In that respect Jan Emmens stands out, with his persistent denigration of *Philaléthes brieven* and *De groote schouburgh*, as does Gary Schwartz with his reliance on the biographer to support his contention that 'Rembrandt had a nasty disposition and an untrustworthy character.'<sup>526</sup>

The hunting ground for Houbraken's alleged failings was a handful of anecdotes in Houbraken's lengthy *Life of Rembrandt*.<sup>527</sup> Many of us can reel them off by heart: there is the artist's journey from The Hague to Leiden, with bolting horses that carry him home free of charge, his expulsion of a nude pair from his studio, the monkey that he refused to paint over, the painting that could be picked up by the nose, his rude treatment of his customers by telling them to step back, his stooping for painted coins, and his final hanging out with non-entities. Throughout this material it is worrying that Houbraken, who normally wears his learning on his sleeve and shows no tendency to buried literary allusions or hidden meaning in his *Philaléthes brieven* or *Groote schouburgh*, is now seen to specialize in them. Also remarkable is that the deeper meaning that modern scholars have extracted from the anecdotes yields no insight beyond what Houbraken himself states clearly. Thus H. Perry Chapman linked the bolting horses to Hou-

<sup>524</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 570-616 and 628-677.

<sup>525</sup> Bok 1996, pp. 25-33. As mentioned, I ignore the discussion of Steen's alleged self-fashioning.

<sup>526</sup> Schwartz 1985, pp. 362-365, with the quotation on p. 363.

<sup>527</sup> The instances are interspersed throughout the *Rembrandt biography*: Horn 2000, pp. 458-480, esp. pp. 460-462, 464-465 and 471-474, with analysis.

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braken's classicistic view of Rembrandt as an artist out of control,<sup>528</sup> but Houbraken makes that point in spades in tandem with Andries Pels. In addition, the accurate topographic details of the tale give pause for thought.<sup>530</sup> Also, as Roelof van Straten recognized, the tale is both a wonderful story and subservient to the young Rembrandt's heady success in The Hague. It is futile to ask if this event actually happened or could have happened, or how Houbraken came by the story. It seems highly unlikely, however, that he manufactured it out of whole cloth purely to underscore his theoretical convictions in disguised form.

Jan Emmens proposed a connection between Houbraken's nude couple and a single sentence in Georgio Vasari's *Lives*, one that was versified by Karel van Mander and then adopted by Samuel van Hoogstraten.<sup>531</sup> Vasari adduces an anonymous critical objection in verse to nude figures by Baccio Bandinelli (1488-1560) which is to have stated that 'just as Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise for their disobedience, so these figures disgraced the earth and ought to be expelled from the church.'<sup>532</sup> But Houbraken, who had dedicated much of his *Philaléthes* to the nature of the Fall

of Man, surely did not need such an elaborate lineage to allude to the Expulsion, which he in any case mentions at the end of the tale, and Emmens makes things worse by claiming that dunderhead Houbraken inverted an allusion to decorum.<sup>533</sup> Consider also that the anonymous reviewer of *De groote schouburgh*, writing in 1718, loved the tale and took it at face value.<sup>534</sup> That Rembrandt is to have told his patrons to step back surely requires no explanation, given that we know that Houbraken believed that rough pictures are often better viewed from a distance.<sup>535</sup> As for Rembrandt's monkey, there appears to be no consensus about what Houbraken intended with the wretched animal.<sup>536</sup> Rembrandt's 'famous last words' originated with Roger de Piles (1635-1709) and not with the artist himself,<sup>537</sup> but Houbraken had already made much the same point independently.

Only one Rembrandt anecdote stands out by being outright nasty and condescending while ostensibly having a specific literary origin, this being the picture of a wealthy artist who is so greedy that his students know he can be counted on to stoop for coins that they paint on his studio floor.<sup>538</sup> It was this one story that Conrad Busken-Huet (1826-1886) singled out

<sup>528</sup> Chapman 1993, p. 141 and Horn 2000, pp. 106-107, 461 and 477

<sup>529</sup> Horn 2000, p. 461, where I treat Chapman more deferentially.

<sup>530</sup> Van Straaten 2006, pp. 74-75..

<sup>531</sup> Emmens 1979 (1964), pp. 104-106.

<sup>532</sup> I quote from the English Vasari edition edited by William Gaunt 1963, vol. 3, p. 208.

<sup>533</sup> Unlike Vasari, Van Mander and Van Hoogstraten, Emmens explicitly links the passage to the concept of decorum.

<sup>534</sup> Anonymous 1718, pp. 483-484.

<sup>535</sup> For evidence that Houbraken was not alone in this belief, Emmens 1979 (1964), p. 109.

<sup>536</sup> Slive 1953, p. 182, Emmens 1979 (1964), p. 107, Chapman 1990, pp. 133-134, and Horn 2000, p. 465.

<sup>537</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 272-273, Chapman 1990, p. 137 and Horn 2000, p. 477.

<sup>538</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 272.

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to illustrate Houbraken's ostensibly scurrilous treatment of Holland's national treasure.<sup>539</sup> Emmens questioned the tale, arguing that it must have come from a letter by Horace which has Athenian youths nail coins to the ground to fool gullible passersbys.<sup>540</sup> Significantly Emmens made no attempt to show how Houbraken came by this letter or its contents. There was no Dutch translation of Horace's epistles available to our biographer, and Emmens himself used a 1932 edition with English translation.

More recently Gary Schwartz argued that Rembrandt may well have stooped for painted coins given that there is ample documentary evidence that Rembrandt was altogether too fond of money.<sup>541</sup> Schwartz's *modus operandi* is clear enough; Houbraken must be reliable because the biographer's anecdote confirms his own unbalanced picture of the artist as a reprehensible human being.<sup>542</sup> However, Schwartz forgot to mention that Houbraken explicitly celebrates Rembrandt's ethics and generosity in the life of Jan Griffier (1645/1652-1718), who wanted to exchange Roelant Roghman (1627-1692) for

Rembrandt as teacher, 'but Rembrandt refused this, saying that Roghman was too good a friend to lure his students away from him.'<sup>543</sup> We also know that Rembrandt would not accept money for board from the grandmother of Jan Jansz. de Stomme (1615-1657/8) because he had been his best student.<sup>544</sup> Rembrandt's life revolved around his colleagues and art, including his large art collection. His solicitude for the financial welfare of his son Titus was also an important element. That his financial dealings were at times opportunistic need not be over-emphasized.<sup>545</sup> Nor was the artist interested in hobnobbing with the upper crust of Amsterdam society, as was perceived, if not fully understood by Houbraken. Rembrandt's financial undoing was mainly due to extravagance and imprudence, dangerous character traits that are not to be confused with greed.

With the painted coins, obviously, we have an incident that could have happened and may have happened but as with the bolting horses it is most unlikely that Houbraken invented the tale or even adapted it from Horace

<sup>539</sup> *Busken Huet 1912 (1882-1884), p. 378. For the early criticism of Houbraken's Life of Rembrandt, starting in 1834, Scheller 1961, pp. 84, 89-91, 95, 111-112, 118 and 128, and Horn 2000, pp. 624-625 and notes 13-21 to 13-24.*

<sup>540</sup> *Emmens 1979 (1964), p. 110.*

<sup>541</sup> *Schwartz 1984 and 1985, p. 365.*

<sup>542</sup> *Here I follow the review by Sluijter 1987, pp. 287-300. Despite his bias, however, Schwartz made a major documentary contribution to the Rembrandt literature.*

<sup>543</sup> *Houbraken, 1721, p. 358.*

<sup>544</sup> *Broos 2015, pp. 125-138, esp. p. 128, based on an unacknowledged essay by Roelof van Straten which was passed on to Ben by Michiel Roscam Abbing.*

<sup>545</sup> *It is part of a relatively recent and common tendency to rap the knuckles of the past, as with Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) and his spreading of syphilis amongst his Tahitian subjects or Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and his exploitation of underage dancers. I recently demonstrated that Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) hoped to marry a much younger woman even though he must have known he had syphilis. It is all too true, but Rembrandt, Gauguin, Degas and Mondrian remain great artists in an ocean of non-entities with similar failings.*

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just to buttress his view of Rembrandt as a man whose social success was impeded by his greed. Neither Rembrandt nor Houbraken studies stand to profit from Gary Schwartz's kind of indignant analysis. Perhaps a moratorium should be declared on Houbraken's *Life of Rembrandt* because it is atypically controversial and distracts us from an understanding of the nature and achievement of *De groote schouburgh* as a whole.

### The Fashion for Self-Fashioning

Whereas Gary Schwartz advanced a greedy and asocial Rembrandt, H. Perry Chapman took on the overall development of the artist. Basically she proposed to interpret his self-portraits as conscious statements of his evolving identity. She integrated this concept with the indestructible notion of a bipartite artist, with its pre- and post-*Nightwatch* personas,<sup>546</sup> which was ultimately based on the least satisfactory part of Houbraken's long Rembrandt biography.

Chapman's approach added little to an understanding of Rembrandt and Houbraken, but it proved more interesting when applied to Jan Steen, whose *Life* opens with the claim that 'his paintings are like his way of life and his way of life like his paintings.'<sup>547</sup> She assumed that the self-portraits that Steen included in some of his

works present a consciously constructed persona intended to attract patrons and financial gain, with Arnold Houbraken charting and heightening Steen's efforts. Her premise stands or falls with reference to Steen's *Dissolute Household* of about 1665 in the New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art<sup>548</sup> (or a lost painting much like it) which is described by Houbraken as being 'an emblem of his corrupt household' and which entered the collective memory of Dutch culture as 'a household of Jan Steen'.

We hardly need *De groote schouburgh* to tell us that an artist could switch genres to cope with changing fashion. It has also been argued that a self-portrait in combination with the astonishing technique of Gerard Dou and Frans van Mieris was the very '*raison d'être*' of their pictures,<sup>549</sup> but nothing else supports Chapman's anachronistic premise, which projects the very conscious career anxieties and strategies of the twentieth century into the seventeenth century. In addition, it raises a problematic question. Was *The Dissolute Household* a commissioned work or was it intended for the open market? Even if we assume the former, we can only guess at why the unknown patron bought the work or whether he recognized Jan Steen's presence as principal actor, leave alone valued his persona as dissolute artist enough to buy the work.

<sup>546</sup> Horn 2000, p. 625 and especially p. 845, note 13-28.

<sup>547</sup> Note that the unity of art and life is a pervasive underlying assumption of *De groote schouburgh* (Horn 2000, pp. 184-192), as with Adriaen Brouwer (Houbraken 1718, p. 318), Jan Teunisz. Blankerhoff (Houbraken 1721, p. 13) and Adroaem Cornelis van Linschoten (Houbraken 1718, pp. 145-146), but also with marked exceptions to the rule, as with Emanuel de Witte (Houbraken 1718, pp. 281-283) and Ernst Stuven (1721, pp. 372-378).

<sup>548</sup> Also particularly important are his *In Luxury Beware* of 1663 in the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna, *As the Old Sing, So pipe the Young*, of c. 1663 to 1665, in *The Mauritshuis in The Hague and his Self-Portrait as a Lutenist* of c. 1663-1665 in the *Fondación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid*.

<sup>549</sup> Van de Wetering 1993, pp. 28-37.

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Such questions need not detain us here, however, since this study is not about Jan Steen and his patrons but about Arnold Houbraken. We can more profitably speculate about his obvious and non-judgmental appreciation of this picture. First of all, though he presents Steen as a buffoon in both his life and art, he does not enunciate ideas that support Chapman's more ambitious construction of a man pushing a persona as market strategy. It is therefore incorrect to propose that he 'joined in Steen's game' (so to speak). In addition Houbraken was a Deist and not remotely an orthodox Calvinist. That means that regardless of Steen's intentions, Houbraken was almost certainly *not* explicitly sermonizing about the dangers of loose behaviour.

As a peripheral consideration, we have reason to believe that Houbraken's household did not live up to our expectations of a society that is to have been obsessed with order and cleanliness. With so many children, the Houbraken home must at times have been chaotic. At one point *Lyris* accuses his wife Sara of having lost all appetite for housework, which implies that she had little taste for it at any time. Also telling is Houbraken's tale about the filthy house of Isaack Dusart (1628-1699), in which 'cat and dog found ample garbage to fertilize with their droppings'. When a patron observes that things have gotten even worse over the past eight days, Dusart assures him that 'they are trifles that one can easily avoid.'<sup>550</sup> Houbraken offers no censure and observes with detached understatement: 'The wife was not the most meticulous (besides, all too much punctiliousness is not saintliness) and the hus-

band was indifferent to such things.' Though it would be folly to propose that Houbraken tolerated animal droppings around the house, he was surely not a man to treasure an immaculate household, leave alone one to argue that 'cleanliness is next to godliness.'

Most likely Houbraken deliberately left things open-ended, as he did elsewhere with matters touching on religion in *De groote schouburgh* (as discussed below) so as not to alienate potential readers. Most of them could extract a cautionary message from *The Dissolute Household*, one attuned to the values of the majority of Dutch people of the time, who were Calvinists and swore by moral rectitude and a well run and clean household. Like-minded readers, such as Houbraken's fellow Collegians, could be amused by Steen as dissolute clown, as indeed we are today.

### **The Canon of Golden Age Painting**

Much of the critical examination of *De groote schouburgh* in the late twentieth century involved its ostensible role as the cradle of our canon for Golden Age painting, a topic to which *The Golden Age Revisited* devotes numerous pages.<sup>551</sup> I propose to take Ockham's razor to this pile of material and review a few indisputable facts. First and foremost a canon involves serious selection according to quality or some other criterium. A comprehensive or inclusive canon is a contradiction in terms. A fairly recent and admirable paradigm is *The Western Canon* by Harold Bloom (1930-2019), in which the author presents twenty-six essential figures from the entire Western literary tradition whom he

<sup>550</sup> *Houbraken 1721*, p. 84.

<sup>551</sup> *Horn 2000*, pp. 570-591.

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‘selected for both their sublimity and their representative nature.’<sup>552</sup>

In stark contrast, Houbraken was not remotely a selective biographer and had a decidedly encyclopaedic disposition. Given the appearance of things we may ask what there is to be said for *De groote schouburgh* as the foundation of our canon. The only reasoned argument, I believe, has come from Lyckle de Vries.

However complete he wished to be, Houbraken had no choice but to make a selection. In the end he included those artists who were known to the collectors and connoisseurs of his day or, to his way of thinking, should have been. Thus his *Schouburgh* summarized the development of taste during the previous half century and also decisively influence the choice of subsequent generations. Exclusion from the *Schouburgh* condemned an artist to obscurity, often banishing his works to lesser-known collections and, eventually, the attic. Reconstructing the oeuvre of such painters is well nigh impossible. Conversely, at least some works by almost every artist Houbraken mentioned is still known.<sup>553</sup>

De Vries continues in this vein but does not offer a single instance of a work that was rejected by Houbraken and ended up in the attic.

And though we know that Houbraken wrote numerous letters of enquiry to collectors and family members, this was in pursuit of information about artists of whom he was already aware.<sup>554</sup> It is surely highly improbable that the harried biographer should have invested precious time in the compilation of some kind of pecking order based on auction catalogues and consultation with collectors and connoisseurs. The sales of Houbraken’s time shed some light on the matter. For instance a work by Willem Claesz. (1594-1680) hung in an important sale in Dordrecht, one that also featured pictures by Houbraken.<sup>555</sup> As Heda’s work brought 150 guilders (twice the price commanded by a Gerard de Lairese) market realities could hardly have prejudiced Houbraken against that artist. Most likely he encountered no information about Heda beyond a mention by Theodorus Schrevelius (1572-1649).<sup>556</sup> Certainly no hypothetical consensus based in part on the *Schouburgh* could have survived intact over the centuries given repeated changes in taste and priorities.

Note, however, that Houbraken did in fact mention Heda. Counter to the claims of De Vries, Houbraken never demonstrably dismissed an artist based on his taste or on any other consideration. With 1,207 names, he simply included everyone he ran across. Comparing the number of pages of individual biographies, as undertaken by Dedalo Carasso, does not help because length can have been deter-

<sup>552</sup> Bloom 1994, *passim*.

<sup>553</sup> De Vries 1992, p. 31. See also Horn 2000, pp. 574-578, *passim*.

<sup>554</sup> Much more on this in Horn 2000, pp. 87-88.

<sup>555</sup> Hofstede de Groot 1893, pp. 6-7 and Swillens 1944, p. V.

<sup>556</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 124

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mined by chance or padded by anecdotes.<sup>557</sup> The only time that Houbraken achieved a measure of selection was with his list of sixty-one superior Flemish and Dutch artists who flourished from about 1605 to 1675,<sup>558</sup> but even then the entire tonal phase of Dutch painting is missing, as are some of our current favourites, notably Johannes Vermeer, Meindert Hobbema (1638-1709) and Judith Leyster (1609-1660). Houbraken goes on to pare this list down to sixteen excellent Dutch painters who ‘stand out like the full moon from the stars’ and especially deserve to be emulated by young artists.<sup>559</sup> But the group does not include a single history, landscape, still life or flower painter. Domestic genre painting is also omitted, so that Jan Steen, one of Houbraken’s favourites, goes missing. Other artists, such as Van Lint (in fact Herman van Lin: 1634-1681), are hardly ones to conjure with today.<sup>560</sup> It seems wildly improbable that this shortlist remained influential over most of three centuries. We know by now that Houbraken was so erratic that his selection could have been only the most imprecise of tools for dealers and collectors in the decades following the publication of *De groote schouburgh*.

Whereas Lyckle de Vries argued that Houbraken’s near-omission of Johannes Vermeer and total omission of Meindert Hobbema

are rare exceptions that confirm his rule of a consensus passed down over the centuries, what are we to make of Houbraken’s omission of virtually the entire Dutch production from about 1615 to 1659? By what process did the paintings of Balthasar van der Ast (1593/94-1657), Hendrick Averkamp (1585-1634), Pieter Claesz, Jan van de Cappelle (1626-1697), Quiringh van Brekelenkam (1622->1669), Jacob Duck (c. 1600-1667) and Jan Victors (1620-1676/?), who were all ignored or virtually overlooked by Houbraken, become standard collector’s items by our time? The facts can only confirm our assessment of Houbraken’s *Groote Schouburgh* as a work produced by an unsystematic biographer working under great pressure.

The scholarly dialogue of the last decade of the twentieth century also did not yield a genuine canon of Golden Age painting. Bob Haaks’s massive *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century* has been nominated for the honour,<sup>561</sup> but with well over a thousand illustrations and numerous very minor figures, it is not nearly selective enough. Much more often, however, scholars addressed a hypothetical universal canon embracing a huge number of artists celebrated in sundry college courses, text books, monographs, exhibition catalogues, museum acquisitions and attendance, and the like. This

<sup>557</sup> Carasso 1996 (1993), pp. 336-337 and 343-344 and Horn 2000, pp. 583-584. He eliminated a number of problematic categories of subject matter to facilitate his argument. Gary Schwartz 2002 dismissed my objections with reference to an alleged indifference to numbers at the University of Guelph.

<sup>558</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 130-131 or Horn 2000, pp. 94-96.

<sup>559</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 132 and Horn 2000, pp. 97-98.

<sup>560</sup> Houbraken presents Van Lint and Philips Wouwerman as horse specialists. But Peter van Lint did not paint horses. Houbraken must have intended Herman van Lin, who painted a great many of them.

<sup>561</sup> Carasso 1996 (1993), pp. 343-344, who wrote in terms of a ‘Haak-Martin frame of reference’. Wilhelm Martin’s work of 1936 was and is probably little known outside The Netherlands.

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situation facilitated the construction of a kind of ubiquitous and nefarious superplot intended to exclude personal interests and deviating pursuits. Perhaps the most extreme exponent of such ideas was Christopher Steiner, whose 'Can the Canon Burst' of 1996 tells us that 'the canon of art history, like the caste system in India, is a rigid hierarchical system which excludes "impure" categories of art and reduces certain classes of objects to the status of untouchable.' Occasionally, Steiner adds, marginalia is admitted as a diversionary gesture but the canon does not truly change; it only grows.<sup>562</sup> When we learn that Steiner is concerned about the exclusion of African slingshots, we appreciate that we are no longer on the same planet as our mundane Houbraken scholars. Yet they were also on a wild goose chase because they were not comparing true canons but large and amorphous bodies of artists that were assembled on the basis of numerous ad hoc decisions. Of course there is significant overlap between the artists discussed by Houbraken and the ones we still appreciate today, but it is almost certain that our canon or canons of Golden Age painting would be little different if Houbraken had died in 1716 before commencing his great masterpiece.

### **The Debatable Role of Women**

*The Golden Age Revisited* devotes most of ten exhaustive and exhausting pages to 'The Protofeminism of *The Great Theatre*'. In fact, the heading should have read 'the ostensible protofeminism.' In this instance the catalyst was a 1991 study by Nanette Salomon which managed to weld four

hot issues of the time, namely feminism, the body, the canon, and the north-south opposition and uncovered a nefarious plot reaching from Giorgio Vasari, who omitted women, all the way to H.W. Janson (1913-1982), who presented women artists in unflattering comparison to their male colleagues. Solomon identifies a 'strategy' on the part of Vasari and Janson to establish the imposition of a standard or norm which promoted classical art, Michelangelo and the young male body and which denigrated northern art. With Svetlana Alpers skulking in the wings, Arnold Houbraken is soon identified as a kind of antidote to the systematic devaluation of northern art and as a representative of a less sexist Northern culture.<sup>563</sup>

It is not that Solomon's diagnosis of the relative neglect of women in the history of art since Vasari is incorrect. It is in her assumption of a deliberate strategy on the part of Vasari and Janson that she erred. It is as if the two men were somehow able to connect over four centuries and unite in a deliberate design to shaft women artists. And though Solomon stands out by presenting Houbraken in a pervasively positive light, she ignored the contribution of Joachim von Sandrart, whose *Teutsche Academie* set Houbraken a good example by supplying all sorts of information about six gifted women artists of antiquity. Houbraken also recognizes Karel van Mander as instigator of his practice of including more recent women artists, with Samuel van Hoogstraten providing additional impetus in this direction.<sup>564</sup> On the other hand Van Mander treated women in separate lists, whereas

<sup>562</sup> Steiner 1996, p. 123.

<sup>563</sup> Solomon 1991 and 1998.

<sup>564</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 15.

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Houbraken was the first to integrate them with his biographies. This move, of course, is closely related to his integration of Van Mander's separate treatment of biography and theory.

I overlooked M. Russell (1981), pp. 7-11. See also Elsa Honig-Fine (2001-2002), pp. 31-39. Though Salomon's historiographic construction should have been quickly defused or simply ignored, *The Golden Age Revisited* took it all too seriously. Still, the resulting pages remain a thorough examination of the careers of the Netherlandish women artists of the Golden Age as discussed by Houbraken, being Margareta Godewijk (1627-1677), Katherina Rozee (1632-1682), Maria van Oosterwijck (1630-1693), Adriana Silberg (1656-1697), Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717), Maria Cuyper (died 1607) and Johanna Koerten.<sup>565</sup> To review some indisputable facts, not one of these women made Houbraken's list of sixty-one artist who flourished 'in splendour [...] between the years 1560 to 1660,' nor does the numerical part played by women artists in *De Grootte Schouburgh* reflect their equal billing in its title.

We may never know just why Houbraken chose to pay as much attention to women artists as he did, but it seems highly unlikely that he consciously aimed to redress any historical neglect. Once he had decided to follow the example of his paragon Van Mander to include

women, his innate lack of selectivity kicked in so that he simply included all the information that he could recover. In addition Houbraken consistently stressed financial success and social recognition on the part of male artists, so that the ability of a woman to command stellar prices and the patronage of princes was sure to catch his full attention.

The question is whether Houbraken fully subscribed to his presentation of women artists. The practitioners of the *De Grootte Schouburgh* are mainly admirable curiosities who could be expected to interest his readers as such. In addition, though a few of them painted flowers, a speciality that he admired, others neither painted nor drew but worked in media that one might normally associate with traditional female handicrafts. At one point Houbraken quotes four lines of anonymous and patently hyperbolic poetry which praise the superior judgment and perseverance of women,<sup>567</sup> but the artist whom he at once advances as illustrative of such strengths is the now obscure but once successful Katherina Rozee.

This Juffrouw ... Rozee managed (I don't know how she did it, or what equipment she used) to depict landscapes, flowers, animals, portraits, etc. made of all sorts of colours of combed silk on panel in such a

<sup>565</sup> *My charge of partial imbalance on the part of Houbraken because he overlooked Clara Peeters (c. 1589-1636), Judith Leyster (1609-1660) and Rachel Ruysch is feeble, since he also overlooked Johannes Vermeer and planned to get around to Ruysch. In the case of Cuyper, Houbraken could not remember her name but admired her embroideries because she was the mother of Anthony van Dyck.*

<sup>566</sup> *On the other hand my quotation of Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) on the subject of women preaching ('It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.') is altogether too negative to be applicable.*

<sup>567</sup> *The poem is appended to a treatise of 1678 by one Petrus de Vernoege which celebrates *De tien delicatessen des huwelijks* (The Ten Delicacies of Marriage), which does little or nothing to advance the intellectual qualities of women.*

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way that from a little distance one could not see that these things had not been rendered in paint by a well-guided brush.<sup>568</sup>

It seems unlikely that Houbraken would have praised such a peculiar technique if it had been pursued by a male artist, no matter how successful, but that he would instead have firmly dismissed it as a waste of time along with all other so-called 'beuzelingen', being futilities. Nor would Houbraken likely have thought of the acquisition of several languages or other great learning as particularly relevant to the practice of art. As for the piety that he praises in some of his women artists, it is a quality that he disdains in his biographies of male colleagues. The only female artist whom he no doubt took really seriously was Maria Sibylla Merian, who kept her maiden name despite a distinguished marriage and 'whose love for Art continued to grow even during her child-bearing and domestic cares.' She published her first important study in 1679 and, after travel to the West Indies, produced two more works in 1693 and 1705. Her close examination and rendering of insects, arachnids, amphibians and reptiles, including their growth and behaviour, clearly struck a chord with Houbraken, who deemed the study of nature to be a central duty of artists in their search for understanding of the remote plan of the Creator.

Not much else about Houbraken's women artists was able to win his approval to this degree, though his praise of the flower paintings by Maria van Oosterwijck comes close. As I concluded in *The Golden Age Revisited* after my long dis-

cussion of Houbraken's long and comprehensive treatment of Johanna Koerten, 'this extensive biography, complete with laudatory poems, looks like so much hollow praise for idiosyncratic technique and dubious subject matter. With Koerten, it is at last truly evident that Houbraken did maintain a double standard for men and women.'<sup>569</sup> However, he was presumably unaware of this fact and probably did not give such matters any thought. Houbraken was neither a feminist nor a sexist. He was simply doing what came naturally to him, which was to leave no stone unturned within the severely limited time at his disposal. Clearly he made a major contribution to scholarship with his detailed information about women practitioners of the Golden Age.

The truth of the matter, however, is that Solomon shows little interest in Houbraken's actual information about women artists. Everything focuses on her indignant pursuit of her agenda. Not all women are artists, moreover, and Solomon might also have mentioned a couple of the other interesting women mentioned by Houbraken. They are not paragons of domestic virtue. Nowhere in the *De groote schouburgh* do we encounter a diligent housekeeper. Though the ups and downs of married life show up in the biographies of *De groote schouburgh*, one never encounters the kind of platitudinous focus on the domestic duties and subservience of the housewife that Houbraken voiced in his 1700 *Toneel van sinnebeelden*. Significantly he does not once adduce Jan Luyken's *Het leerzaam huisraad* (The Tutelary Household) of 1711.<sup>570</sup> We find one woman, married to Jan van Pee (< 1640-1710),

<sup>568</sup> *Houbraken 1719*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>569</sup> *Horn 2000*, p. 606.

<sup>570</sup> *My loose translation of the title comes from Schama 1987*, p.159.

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who has more business acumen and common sense than her husband. Houbraken relishes in the clownish antics of the irresponsible Van Pee much more than in his work, which stood out by his copies of Italian paintings.<sup>571</sup> Jan Steen's second wife, Marritje Herculens, is another capable woman, who helps save the widower from himself.<sup>572</sup> On three occasions we run into a reprehensible wife who bullies her mate. Jan Baptist Weenix ((1621-1659) is driven to tavern and drink by his meddling wife<sup>573</sup> and the spouse of Nicolaes Berchem (1661/2-1683) is a terror who begrudges him respite in his studio and money in his pockets.<sup>574</sup> Most dramatically the third wife of Adriaen van der Spelt (1630-1673) is 'a vicious woman from Groningen who extinguished not only his love of painting but also the lamp of his life in the year 1673, before he had reached the middle stage of his old age.'<sup>575</sup> No doubt Houbraken counted on the tacit disapproval of his readers in such instances but he must also have understood that such exceptions made for much better reading than the rule. Dutiful housewives are admirable, but they are also boring.

Despite his impressive celebration of women artists and of women in general there is no cause to champion Arnold Houbraken, who was an early-eighteenth-century Dutch bur-

gher, at the expense of Giorgio Vasari, who was a sixteenth-century Italian courtier. Vasari dealt with totally different circumstances and was a brilliant biographer in his own right.<sup>576</sup> The well-deserved and indestructable reputation of Arnold Houbraken does not need buttressing by such such apple and orange exercises.

### **Disputed Theory and Preferences**

The topic of Arnold Houbraken's art theory and preferences differs from the preceding ones in that it concerns the essence of *De groote schouburgh* and not some attempt to turn him into a spokesman for a post-Modern issue or non-issue. The two main scholars who have pursued the topic of Houbraken's art theory, being Bart Cornelis and Peter Hecht, are to be congratulated for being primarily interested in the ideas of the biographer and not ones of their own. Perhaps most importantly Cornelis argued that Houbraken 'had to arrive at a compromise between his ideals as a classicist history painter and his admiration of the great masters of the seventeenth century. Such a compromise was in fact impossible, the result being that Houbraken's praise of his seventeenth-century predecessors seems to conflict with his "official" stance on more than one occasion.'<sup>577</sup>

<sup>571</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 85-88.

<sup>572</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 21-25. Scholars have been able to identify Van Pee's wife as Marieke Matthysdr., but no one has had any success with Marritje Herculens.

<sup>573</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 73.

<sup>574</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 111-112.

<sup>575</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 34.

<sup>576</sup> As explained by Gaunt 1963, *passim*, esp. p. xii and Horn 2000, pp. 611-613.

<sup>577</sup> Cornelis 1995, p. 180. See Cornelis 1998, pp. 45-161 and Horn 2000, pp. 404, 578 and 670-671 for closely related misconceptions on his part. Well before Cornelis, Lyckle de Vries (1973, p. 229) had proposed that Houbraken was in a 'moral dilemma' with respect to his great appreciation of Jan Steen.

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However, any serious conflict was manufactured by Cornelis. Houbraken was a relatively flexible critic and praised a great variety of art works. Though most of his theoretical material concerns history painting, he at most presents it as a superior option, being an elevated genre to which only those who are suited by intellect and natural inclination need aspire. He repeatedly applies his appreciation of concomitant factors, such as the convincing rendering of human emotions or the fine imitation of nature, to other genres when applicable.

Even in his long *Life of Rembrandt*, with its near pendulous alternation between approval and disapproval of the artist, Houbraken does not so much contradict himself as ask quite rationally, at least from his point of view, why such a sublimely gifted painter and etcher of historical material would have flaunted all reasonable rules? In the end Houbraken actually argues that Rembrandt can't be held to classicistic notions of beauty, since the great painter had set himself a course quite independent of such criteria in order to become truly incomparable. Here as elsewhere the only 'official stance' of *De groote schouburgh* is that artists should attempt no more than what comes naturally, and what came naturally to Rembrandt, if we may believe Houbraken, was far-reaching self-confidence and professional ambition.

It is apparent that Houbraken's theory was generally related to his theology and

taste. We know, for instance, that he believed landscape painting to be generally superior to portraiture because landscapes can convey intimations of God's hidden design whereas portraits are relatively mindless, but it could also be in part that Houbraken liked landscapes better than portraits. Certainly he himself contributed gorgeous tiny landscapes to emblem books [86, 88, 133], especially his own *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* [123, 126, 128, 129, 131]. Similarly, Houbraken loved expressive genre pictures and therefore treated them like a lesser category of history painting. Though he was no doubt aware of the venerable theory justifying the comic genre,<sup>580</sup> he probably only needed such theory, if at all, to rationalize his love of the more ribald pictures of Jan Steen. In fact, he touches on it only briefly and superficially in the closing digression of his first volume.<sup>581</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, Houbraken loathed *vanitas* paintings, with their gloomy allusions to life after death, meaning that he disliked them for theological as well as aesthetic reasons. Almost anything roughly painted or muddy was also certain to meet with Houbraken's displeasure. That had little to do with theory and much more with taste, though even here he likely projected his preference onto the Creator, who is best appreciated in the clear and warm light of dawn. Finally, he slighted much of what we now call the tonal phase of Dutch seventeenth-century painting, regardless

<sup>578</sup> *Again Houbraken 1718*, pp. 254-272 and *Horn 2000*, pp. 458-480.

<sup>579</sup> *Houbraken 1718*, p. 273 and *Horn 2000*, p. 477.

<sup>580</sup> *Chapman 1993*, p. 149.

<sup>581</sup> *Houbraken 1718*, pp. 373-374. More plausibly, Mariët Westermann 1996, pp. 53-57 looked to the popular seventeenth-century *jest book* for Houbraken's source of inspiration.

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of genre.<sup>582</sup> In the case of Willem Claesz Heda and Pieter Claesz, whom Houbraken barely mentions, this could have been in part because of their relatively inferior genre or because he thought that their pictures were too drab for words, but Houbraken was compulsively inclusive and the omissions were more likely due to accident. He could not overlook the prolific Jan van Goyen, however, if only because he was the father-in-law of Jan Steen. However, he rationalized incorrectly that Van Goyen's works were not originally 'monochromatic or drab but had become that way because of an unstable pigment called Haarlem blue.'<sup>583</sup> Only the stormy seas of Jan Porcellis truly impressed Houbraken.<sup>584</sup>

We should never draw conclusions concerning Arnold Houbraken's predilections on the basis of his omissions. With every omitted or barely mentioned artist we can ask if there were mitigating circumstances that explain his lapse, or whether he simply did not run across a name during the couple of years that he was assembling his material. An invaluable test case is the most surprising near-omission of the entire *Groote schouburgh*, namely Johannes Vermeer, who is now deemed to be one of the brightest stars of the Golden Age firmament. Houbraken mentions Vermeer's name only in passing as he encountered it in the *Beschryvinge der stad*

*Delft* (Description of the City of Delft) by Dirck Evertsz. van Bleyswijck (1639-1692).<sup>585</sup> Part of the answer could be that many of Vermeer's paintings went to one collector, Pieter Claesz. Van Ruijven (1624-1675).<sup>586</sup> The collection of Jacob Dissius (1653-1695), Van Ruijven's son-in-law, contained twenty-one paintings by Vermeer. Houbraken apparently missed the auction of Dissius' estate on 11 May 1696. Ben Broos discussed and illustrated advertisements of 19 April 1696 and 24 February 1699 in the *Amsterdamsche Courant* which could have alerted Houbraken to key works by Vermeer, including *The Milkmaid*.<sup>587</sup> Clearly Houbraken was not yet attuned to the Amsterdam scene by the late nineties. It is equally clear that he was not yet engaged in focussed research by that time.

Another artist whom Houbraken barely mentions is Jan Miense Molenaar (1638-1709). Yet Houbraken likely attended the Witsen mortuary sale of 23 March 1717, which included two of his own paintings. Two of the other works sold were '50 A Farmers' Company by Jan Miense Molenaar' and '94 A Farmer with a Girl by Molenaar'.<sup>588</sup> These pictures sold for only twelve and just under seven guilders. Such low prices could explain why Houbraken barely mentions Molenaar but we may be sure that he would gladly have granted the artist a substantial Life had he run into some juicy material. It

<sup>582</sup> This, of course, has implications for the ostensible connection between Houbraken's selection and our canon of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. See Horn 2000, pp. 570-581.

<sup>583</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 171.

<sup>584</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 213.

<sup>585</sup> Van Bleyswijck, 1667-1680, p. 859.

<sup>586</sup> Montias 1992 (1987), pp. 41 and 66.

<sup>587</sup> Broos 1995-1996, pp. 53-55 and figs. 7 and 10.

<sup>588</sup> Hoet 1728, pp. 207 and 209.

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is perhaps not surprising that the now celebrated wife of Molenaer, namely Judith Leyster, also found no place in *De groote schouburgh*. Given that Houbraken was generally most accommodating to women artists, this was clearly an inadvertent omission.

Ever in Amsterdam, at least one group of collectors, namely the Lutherans of Amsterdam, appears to have been unfamiliar to Houbraken. That would explain why he does not mention Simon and Isaack Luttichuys (1610-1661 and 1616-1673), who in 1646 had moved from London to Amsterdam, where they were avidly collected.<sup>589</sup> The reason for the omission is not clear. Was it purely by accident or did his reputation as freethinker make him unwelcome? Of course Simon was specialized in still-life, which occupied the lowest position on Houbraken's hierarchy of genres, but that artist's technical mastery would surely have impressed him. Isaack did mainly portraits, which was Houbraken's second-most-slighted pursuit, but he would not have overlooked their style and competence. We can therefore safely say that he did not leave out the brothers, or any other artist, on principle.

Houbraken's clearest summary of his preferences comes at the end of the last theoretical digression of his Part I, which concerns the many elevated subjects that an artist has at his

disposal. Houbraken forwards three criteria for a perfect picture: a worthy subject elegantly rendered, 'expressive and recognizable emotions' as achieved by Jan Steen, and the perfect 'detail and power' of Gerard Dou.<sup>590</sup> But Houbraken soon goes on to argue that a perfect picture is an impossibility because no one artist can have all the requisite strengths.<sup>591</sup> Ever a man to ramble, Houbraken explains that artists must do what comes naturally or else court disaster, and then proceeds to a learned mini-digression comparing ancient orators and authors before once more addressing the problem and agreeing with Franciscus Iunius that artists have in fact generally done what came naturally, 'the proof of which we do not have to go far to seek but see readily and conveniently affirmed by Jan Steen.'<sup>592</sup>

Of course Houbraken assumed that those select artists who are led by their nature to worthy subjects would render them with close attention to correct costumes, trappings and settings, this being a recurring theme of the theoretical digressions of his *Groote schouburgh*. In that respect Gerard de Lairese was his exemplar. De Lairese also had a closely descriptive style but fell short of Steen's masterful understanding of physiognomy. *Saints Paul and Barnabas at Lystra* by Pieter Lastman, which Houbraken describes in great detail using Vondel,<sup>593</sup> was

<sup>589</sup> *The authority is* Bernt Ebert 2009, pp. 46-54 (Simon) and pp. 54-58 (Isaack). Ebert omits Houbraken without asking why the biographer left out the Luttichuys brothers.

<sup>590</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 377-378. Note that Houbraken 1718, pp. 135 and 380 adds two other dream combinations, namely an historical event set inside a church or temple and a biblical history set in a landscape. A Tokyo lecture by David de Witt (2004) wanders from Houbraken's perfect picture of his title to Van Gelder's perfect picture of his conclusion.

<sup>591</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 178.

<sup>592</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 378.

<sup>593</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 98-102.

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truly a paradigm of learning and almost worthy of Dou in its refinement and detail, but only a few of the figures show emotion and that of a restrained kind. As for Rembrandt, Arent de Gelder and Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621-1674), they were disqualified by their technique.

Ironically the artist who came closest to rendering Houbraken's perfect picture was Jan Steen, for not only did he have the requisite expressive emotions but he also rendered historical subjects, and the refinement of his technique approached that of Dou. But Steen's failure to respect historical decorum got in the way of Houbraken's perception. In one of his more pedantic moments he balked at 'the pickled herring in a work by Steen in which he depicts the fable of Mitra from Ovid, since the practice of salting herring and other fish was discovered only 300 years ago by one Willem Beukelszoon of Bivervliet [...]'.<sup>594</sup> It would appear that Houbraken deemed this work to be a badly flawed history painting, one lacking 'a worthy subject elegantly rendered'. The biographer was so distracted by Steen's anachronisms that he failed to see that the *Marriage Contract of Sarah and Tobias* [140], which he knew intimately (having once owned the picture), depicts a biblical event. To be fair to Houbraken, given his reasonable expectations of serious history painting, we may ask what aspects of the clothing and setting of the picture should have alerted him to its Old

Testament subject?<sup>595</sup> Hans-Joachim Raupp has suggested that Houbraken deliberately failed to address the work as a history painting so as to be able to use it as an illustration of the comic genre,<sup>596</sup> but though Houbraken could resort to irony or strategic omission on occasion, he was not a man to write the opposite of what he knew to be true.

### **Real and Alleged Contradictions,**

It must be recognized that Houbraken was not nearly systematic enough to satisfy our craving for clarity and consistency, so that we are constantly distracted from his impressive overall design. One aspect of the messiness of *De groote schouburgh* is that it contains both real and apparent contradictions. This fact is of importance in the present context because a man who routinely contradicts himself is unlikely to have a coherent vision. Certainly contradictions are not far to seek. Almost at once Houbraken announces that he has decided 'not to commemorate the diligence of those who yielded the brush solely out of an isolated passion for art (without intending to reap profit from this)', only to proceed with a discussion of the art of Erasmus, who is to have 'handled the brush out of love of art'. Similarly Aart Jansz. Druyvesteyn (1577-1627) 'practiced art purely for the love of it and not out of necessity', and yet he receives a short biography.<sup>597</sup>

<sup>594</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 245-246. The painting, which is now in the Rijksmuseum, depicts *Erysichton Selling his Daughter Mestra*. Westermann 1997, fig. 4 and pp. 20-21 provides an illustration and information.

<sup>595</sup> H. Perry Chapman 1996, p. 247 notes that in comparison to a later version in San Francisco, 'Tobias is now clothed a l'antique in a tunic and flowing robe that would have been recognized as more appropriately biblical'. 'Would have been recognized' by whom? Surely not by Houbraken.

<sup>596</sup> Raupp 1983, pp. 405-406.

<sup>597</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 60-61.



140: Jan Steen, *The Marriage Contract of Tobias and Sarah*, 1667-1668. Oil on canvas, 131-172 cm. Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum.

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Anna Maria van Schurman ‘painted all sorts of flowers very naturally, as well as all sorts of animals, such as snakes, lizards, caterpillars and butterflies, which, however, she did only as relaxation, whenever he spirit needed a rest from studying foreign languages.’<sup>598</sup> As still another margin-line case, Leendert van der Cooghen (1632-1681) was relatively unproductive because he ‘did not paint for bread’ and yet merited both a brief biography and a sustained comical interlude. This comedy, which is apropos of nothing, demonstrates that Houbraken was truly an unsystematic biographer.

In his *Life of Arent de Gelder* Houbraken complains about the widespread fashion for Rembrandtesque handling which attracted artists such as Govert Flinck (1650-1660) even though they ‘themselves had a more praiseworthy treatment’, but adds that De Gelder was so successful in adopting Rembrandt’s manner ‘that I must say to his credit that not one of the others so closely approached that way of painting. And in addition it is remarkable that he alone amongst such a large number who later abandoned that way of painting stayed with it.’<sup>600</sup> And yet Houbraken also tells us that Franz Wulfhagen (1624-1670) ‘was able to imitate the handing of his master with much fame and to cling to it to the end of his life.’<sup>601</sup> Simi-

larly Gerbrand van den Eeckhout ‘was a pupil of Rembrandt van Rijn and stayed to the end of his life with the same way of painting that he had learned from his master.’<sup>602</sup> These three instances are separated by hundreds of pages, so that Houbraken may have simply lost sight of what he had written before. On the other hand, why should Houbraken have repeatedly praised sustained adherence to Rembrandt’s style when a ‘more praiseworthy treatment’ was an option?

Houbraken’s disdain for still-life painting and admiration for fine description is a more subtle and important case in point which has tripped up users of *De groote schouburgh*. Some scholarship has mistakenly extrapolated from Houbraken’s admiration of what we might now call ‘the art of describing’ to an appreciation of still life.<sup>603</sup> But Houbraken held the genre in near-contempt.<sup>604</sup> At one point, he even attributes his own ambivalence to the art-loving public of his time. This happens with Willem Kalf (1619-1693), ‘who was able to paint still life, and primarily gold and silverwork, mother-of-pearl, horn, and agate knife handles so wonderfully well and naturally that (though paintings of such preferences are now little valued, having had to surrender space for more worthy subjects) his works remain highly esteemed by

<sup>598</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 314-316.

<sup>599</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 350-354.

<sup>600</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 269.

<sup>601</sup> Compare Houbraken 1721, pp. 206-207 to 1718, p. 273.

<sup>602</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 207-208.

<sup>603</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 450-452 presents the extensive evidence.

<sup>604</sup> For instance Houbraken 1718, p. 174. Exceptions are the still lifes of Pieter van der Willigen (1635-1994) (Houbraken 1718, p. 288), which depict ‘the vanity of earthly treasures’ but are not at all gloomy. The moral is not so much ‘beware of death’ as ‘you can’t take it with you’.

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all connoisseurs'.<sup>605</sup> How, to belabour a point, can Kalf's work have been little valued and yet a must for collectors? In closing, Houbraken's love of flower painting could seem to be inconsistent with his disdain for nature morte, but he apparently thought of flowers as still living instead of as fully dead, like books or broomsticks.<sup>606</sup>

Another contradiction of *De groote schouburgh* is between his abhorrence of obscene pictures, with respect to which he defers to Andries Pels as expert on the straight road from the theatre to the whorehouse,<sup>607</sup> and his particular success at describing a 'whore's hov-el'.<sup>608</sup> In this respect he could reflect a widespread ambivalence of Dutch society in general, as discussed at length by Simon Shama.<sup>609</sup> And then there is the contrast between his low opinion of portraiture, with its lack of significant content and its uninformed but critical sitters, including damsels who crave fashionable white pigment,<sup>610</sup> and his detailed treatment and apparent appreciation of the stellar success of portraitists such as Jan de Baen and Jan Frans van Douven. Houbraken also announces in his introduction that painting is greatly superior to other art forms but eventually goes on to pay lavish homage to Johanna Koerten's scissor art.<sup>611</sup> Here again the

key is the high patronage of this now virtually forgotten artist. With Houbraken, nothing succeeds like success.

One possible and possibly insignificant instance of contradiction is easily overlooked. It occurs while Houbraken describes the sight-seeing of Willem Schellinks (1627-1678) in Naples in connection with works by 'Spanjolet'. This artist was presumably Jusepe de Ribera or Lo Spagnoletto, who had emigrated from Spain (Spanje in Dutch) to Italy, moving via Parma and Rome to Naples. 'I must certainly say of him that he may be considered one of the greatest masters of the art of painting, for I saw a naked Proteus by him in London in the art room of the Duke of Grafton, so beautifully and firmly drawn and so naturally and powerfully painted that no brushworks could touch it.'<sup>612</sup> Further on Houbraken recalls this 'marvellously painted Proteus' in passing.<sup>613</sup> Rarely does Houbraken gush in this way. But Ribera generally employed a more pronounced or spot lit version of Caravaggesque chiaroscuro, which is called tenebrism from the Italian tenebroso, meaning dark, murky or gloomy, whereas Houbraken generally professed to prefer a light tonality. Possibly the work, which has proved impossi-

<sup>605</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 218.

<sup>606</sup> The distinction was explicitly overlooked by E. John Walford 1992, p. 30. For more on this matter, Horn 2000, pp. 632-634.

<sup>607</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 119-120.

<sup>608</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 17.

<sup>609</sup> Shama 1987, pp. 375-480: 'Housewives and Hussies: Homeliness and Worldliness'.

<sup>610</sup> Particularly telling is the *Life of Nicolaes Maes* in Houbraken 1719, pp. 276-277.

<sup>611</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 293-307.

<sup>612</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 268. This picture is mentioned above in connection with Houbraken's sightseeing during his English journey of 1713 to 1714.

<sup>613</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 264.

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ble to identify,<sup>614</sup> was a later and softer one and therefore atypical for Ribera or else Houbraken simply capitulated when faced with a picture that was triumphantly the best of its kind. It is even possible that his attribution was incorrect and the fact that Luca Giordano (1634-1705) was known as Proteus introduces additional room for doubt.

Joanthen Bikker recently spotted a more serious contradiction in *De groote schouburgh*. He notes that the biographer criticizes Rembrandt's late chiaroscuro and impasto but follows 'volte face' with praise for the long-distance impact of some of the works.<sup>615</sup> We can add that one encounters the same dichotomy in the biography of Arent de Gelder. After disparaging his chiaroscuro and impasto Houbraken concludes: 'and it is amazing how naturally and powerfully this approach sometimes shows from a distance.'<sup>616</sup> Bikker notes that the desirability of a bold style for paintings meant to be seen from a distance can be traced back to Horace. He directs his readers to *Art and Illusion* by Sir Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001), where we find Francis Iunius quoting Horace in English translation. But Houbraken himself quotes the same passage in Dutch translation.<sup>618</sup> In addition our biographer fully understood that Iunius discussed sculptures, not paintings. Houbraken draws no direct connection between Phidias'

superior statue and Rembrandt's bold paintings. Instead he raises the passage in connection with an allegorical ceiling painting by Jan Hoogsaat (1654->1730), located in Amsterdam's city hall, with figures too small to be individually identified because of the great height of the work. We see that Houbraken simply proposed a corollary to his personal preference for finely finished pictures that invite close inspection. If a work is intended to be seen from a distance, a rougher manner may well be preferable. Efficacy on canvas is shown to be more important than consistency on paper.<sup>619</sup>

Bikker apparently has contradiction on the brain. He asks whether Houbraken was 'conscious of the fact that his emphasis on late life creativity seems to contradict his "official" stance that the third and last phase of every artist's career is one of decline?'<sup>620</sup> But Houbraken does not formulate any such 'official' position. It is Bikker who first constructs a firm rule by taking two of Houbraken's many nature metaphors altogether too seriously and then struggling with the consequences. The metaphors in question compare the phases of artistic creativity to the times of the day and the seasons of the year in terms of birth, flowering and decay. Yet Bikker himself notes that when Houbraken first proposes that the production of aging artists will decline in quality, the biographer at once follows

<sup>614</sup> *Proteus, the prophetic old man of the sea, does not appear to have captured the imagination of Baroque painters.*

<sup>615</sup> Bikker 2018, p. 187 and Houbraken 1718, p. 269.

<sup>616</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 207-208.

<sup>617</sup> Gombrich 1960, p. 162.

<sup>618</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 335-336 or Swillens 1953, pp. 267-268, as indexed on p. 394. We see that the Houbraken literature has its uses.

<sup>619</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 206 also explains that preferences are subservient to changing fashion.

<sup>620</sup> Bikker 2018, p. 194.

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with an exception to that rule, namely the stellar fruit and flower painter Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1684).<sup>621</sup> The second formulation of Houbraken's 'official' position occurs just before the Life of Herman Saffleven, and yet that artist is seen to decline only in that that Houbraken finds that the brighter colours of his later landscapes are less pleasing than those of his mature work. Bikker also observes that 'in Houbraken's adaptation of de Bie's life of David Ryckaert III (1612-1661), all celebration of the painter's inventiveness in old age despite his physical condition is omitted, leaving only the fact that he changed styles at the age of 50'.<sup>623</sup> Bikker adds that 'Houbraken never praises a change in style by an artist in his later years'. And yet our biographer does in fact devote the bulk of his brief but appreciative Ryckaert biography to the great inventiveness and success of that artist's late-career work.<sup>624</sup> Finally Bikker notes that Joachim von Sandrart and Eglon van der Neer (1635-1703) carried the quality of their early work into their later years.<sup>625</sup> No wonder Bikker needed a heading announcing 'Houbraken's contradictory views of old age creativity'.<sup>626</sup>

In conclusion we must consider that serious lapses on the part of Houbraken play a

very minor role in his *Groote schouburgh* as a whole and that not one of them challenges or undermines his overall theory of genres or his deistic and stoic convictions. We must also remember that Houbraken was working on a huge project under great pressure and that he was not by nature a structured thinker. Though he acknowledged patterns, conformity and consistency were not important concerns of his. He expected diversity and contradictions as facts of life in a creation in which God is not at work. That is why he repeatedly announces that 'there is no certainty in human affairs; everything is subject to constant change'.<sup>627</sup> In fact, Houbraken stresses the importance of change on at least ten occasions.<sup>628</sup> We also learn from Houbraken that 'there is a common saying, and experience confirms its truth, that there is no rule without an exception'.<sup>629</sup>

### **Old-Age Creativity as Alleged Obsession**

Arnold Houbraken was fascinated by artists who aged or died in interesting ways. In this matter we should ignore a recent study by Jonathan Bikker,<sup>630</sup> who routinely strips old-age biographies down to art practice, ignoring almost all else. This tunnel vision allowed him to postu-

<sup>621</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 209 and Bikker 2018, p. 188.

<sup>622</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 340.

<sup>623</sup> Bikker 2018, p. 195.

<sup>624</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 14; Houbraken 1718, pp. 281-282 and 1721, pp. 274-275. Van der Neer is not said to have changed his style, but he did adopt a new genre.

<sup>625</sup> Bikker 2018, p. 194.

<sup>626</sup> Bikker 2018, p. 192.

<sup>627</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 308.

<sup>628</sup> For page references, consult note 333 above.

<sup>629</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 137, where he repeats Houbraken 1712A, letter VIII, p. 46.

<sup>630</sup> Bikker 2018, pp. 186-194.

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late that Houbraken was ‘obsessed’ with old-age creativity.<sup>631</sup> In fact, Bikker uses the word ‘obsession’ on three occasions. Obviously, to propose that Houbraken was haunted by late career art and that the idea dominated his mind (which is, after all, what the word ‘obsessed’ means) is altogether too melodramatic and improbable in connection with our biographer, who had a great deal on his mind, such as his dread of the barbs of hostile critics, the promotion of artists and the art of painting, the instruction of young colleagues in the importance of decorum in history painting, and the subtle dissemination of his deistic and pessimistic view of the plight of art and mankind. But had Bikker claimed that Houbraken was interested in or even fascinated by late-life creativity that would have robbed him of a catchy theme for his study.

Bikker suggests that Houbraken ‘probably got the idea for his obsessive documentation of artists who practiced their craft until their dying days from Cornelis de Bie’s *Het gulden cabinet*’, since De Bie also traces some lives to their end.<sup>632</sup> In other words, if I understand correctly, Houbraken needed De Bie’s idea to trigger his own obsession. But whether influenced by De Bie or not, Houbraken commemorated the lives of hundreds of artists from cradle to grave. He also discusses frustrated but ultimately triumphant youngsters, mature artists who struggle to find their niche in a competitive and changing market, or adventurous colleagues who are lured away from hearth and home by wander-

lust. Not surprisingly, Bikker does not present a shred of evidence for significant over-representation of old-age information.

But even if our biographer was fascinated by old age that would hardly be surprising given that he was himself aging and lost his health and life *in medias res*. His plight was especially poignant because he did not believe in any kind of afterlife for himself or his subjects other than through their works and reputation. He intended *De groote schouburgh* mainly to insure that as many of his deserving colleagues as possible would be rescued from obscurity and remembered for centuries, this being the only immortality vouchsafed for them. No wonder Houbraken was comforted by the old-age productivity or success of some of his older subjects and disheartened by individuals who came to a dismal end. No wonder he was fascinated by artists who were able to rise above the trying circumstances of their last years or days on earth.

We should also consider that Houbraken believed that a talent for art is the greatest blessing of all. It may or may not be inherited and it can hardly be frustrated by wrong-headed parents or guardians. Though it is not directly bestowed by God, it is nevertheless miraculous.<sup>633</sup> What therefore most concerned him about creativity was not so much its timing or its relative quantity or quality, but that artists must not betray their talent in any way, including by pursuit of money or of a genre to which they are not by nature suited.<sup>634</sup> Most important, however, is

<sup>631</sup> Bikker 2018, p. 189.

<sup>632</sup> Bikker 2018, p. 188.

<sup>633</sup> Houbraken does not say this concisely and unambiguously. The cumulative evidence is reviewed in Horn 2000, pp. 348-373.

<sup>634</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 336-337.

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that they continue to use their talent up to the very end unless illness renders that impossible. Thus Houbraken notes with pride: 'We could also summarize a multitude of our best Dutch painters who did not cease to practice art until the end of their lives, even though it is manifestly clear from their estate that they did not do this out of necessity but purely out of love of art.'<sup>635</sup> All Houbraken's mentions of old-age creativity must be interpreted in that light.

One exemplar figure was Nicolaes Maes, who continued his thriving practice 'to the end of his life, which is why he left behind a large number of incomplete portraits.'<sup>636</sup> Plugging away at portraits was not Houbraken's idea of a particularly worthwhile pursuit; he would no doubt have been happier had Maes painted more ambitious pictures.<sup>637</sup> But at least he kept the faith. Arent de Gelder offers a quite different picture. Houbraken reports that he expects the Passion pictures will be painter's last,<sup>638</sup> 'because he already spends ample time going to church and visiting his friends. He is now, as I write this in the year 1715, still in good health and single.'<sup>639</sup> The church attendance will not have impressed Houbraken, who had come to believe that worship should preferably be a private pursuit<sup>640</sup> and who sympathized with the

minority Remonstrants, who he claimed were not wanted at main-stream church services.<sup>641</sup> Most importantly De Gelder clearly ran counter to Houbraken's conviction that only a bungler would stop working until forced to do so. Worse, 'being in good health,' De Gelder had no excuse and his inherited money was not to the point,<sup>642</sup> at least from Houbraken's point of view. Little could the biographer have known that the artist would outlive him by eight years, all presumably invested in social and church visits. Compare that to Houbraken himself, who remained a near-workaholic to his last breath. One could argue that Houbraken's disapproval of De Gelder is not explicit, but the biographer believed that it is poor practice to criticize the art of living colleagues,<sup>643</sup> and he may well have extended that principle to the unproductive final behaviour of his townsman.

One of the interesting oldsters of *De groote schouburgh* was the brilliant seascape painter Ludolf Bakhuizen (1630-1798), to whom Houbraken devoted a long biography which includes a passage that reads like a secular *ars moriendi* and a fine illustration of the kind of stoic detachment that he had advocated in his 1714 emblem book. The artist 'prepared himself so well for that great journey' that 'when the hour

<sup>635</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 337-338. The passage is quoted by Bikker 2018, p. 192, who draws no conclusions beyond Houbraken's ostensible obsession.

<sup>636</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 275.

<sup>637</sup> The extensive evidence (esp. Houbraken 1721, p. 168) is found in Horn 2000, pp. 367-370.

<sup>638</sup> Schoon et al., 1998-1999, pp. 71-81 and figs. 49-53 (in colour).

<sup>639</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 208.

<sup>640</sup> Houbraken 1712a, letter IX, p. 49.

<sup>641</sup> Again Houbraken 1712A, letter V, p. 29.

<sup>642</sup> Schoon and Mai et al., 1998, pp. 11-17, esp. p. 14.

<sup>643</sup> Again, Houbraken 1718, pp. 13 and 103.

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approached that he had to depart from here (as it is said) not the least fright or change could be discerned.' The considerate Bakhuizen left his friends money and wine so that they could carry him to his grave and celebrate his departure in style.<sup>644</sup> Bakhuizen's 'passion for art stayed with him to the evening of his life' while he also 'maintained friendships with the most esteemed poets of his time, especially with Misters Petrus Francius, J. van Broekhuijsen, Antonides van der Goes and David van Hoogstraten.'<sup>645</sup>

A related individual who 'plied pencil and pen with great pleasure and diligence to the end of his life' was Christoffel Pierson (1631-1714), 'who died on the 11th of August 1714, being 83 years and three months minus eight days old.'<sup>646</sup> In 1691 Pierson moved from Gouda to Schiedam 'at the request of his second wife, who lived and had her friends there.' We learn that Pierson was an accomplished poet, 'famous for the making and publishing of many spirited poems, as well as for his art of painting.'<sup>647</sup> As an amusing touch, Houbraken tells us that Pieter Mulier the Younger (1637-1701) had a craving for art that 'stayed with him to the end of his life, and when his sight began to fail him and he could no longer see through glasses, he placed two on his nose when he painted.' Houbraken says his informants have told him that De Mulier 'was a great lover of art, and equally of Venus.'<sup>648</sup> Clearly Houbraken viewed Bakhuizen, Pierson

and De Mulier as individuals with particular strengths and interests that complemented their love of art.

In the case of Barent Graat (1628-1709) Houbraken tells us that the artist was 81 years, one month and thirteen days old and had recently painted his last few pictures when the thread of his life was cut after being bed-ridden for six weeks.<sup>649</sup> In Graat's long Life, however, Houbraken tells us all the more about his early determination to master drawing and then painting, his drawing of 'horses, oxen, cows, sheep or goats' after life the moment the city gates were opened, his accomplished artworks, including histories, then portraits, and finally a large allegory for Amsterdam's town hall, his plans for a journey to Rome which were undone by his friends and his wife Maria Boom, his teaching of Johan Heinrich Roos (1631-1685) and his twice-weekly performances as teacher in a kind of art school which introduced others to drawing after the nude. Remarkably Graat performed this function for fifteen years. With this wealth of balanced information, we hardly miss more details about his few final paintings and days. This, surely, is not a biography written by a man obsessed with old-age creativity.

About the worst thing that can happen to an artist is that he ends up both old and destitute, as Houbraken tells us with the last line of a poem by Jan Vos (1610-1667) which comments

<sup>644</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 241-241.

<sup>645</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 243.

<sup>646</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 261.

<sup>647</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 262.

<sup>648</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 184. Houbraken has Pieter de Molijn. Bikker 2018, pp. 91-92 rightly applies the information to Pieter Mulier the Younger.

<sup>649</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 205-208.

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on a still-life by Anthonie de Grebber (1622-1691) and Cornelis Brisé (1622-1670) in the old men's home of Amsterdam. It tells us that 'who ends up poor when old has lost all hope'.<sup>650</sup> Only Stoic resignation, like that of Gerard de Lairesse, can be of comfort then.<sup>651</sup> Houbraken's sustained homage to De Lairesse's perseverance in the face of blindness and poverty becomes all the more remarkable once we know that he probably had little overall respect for the artist, given that he is to have told his friend George Vertue that Lairesse was 'very proud, self-conceited, debauched and extravagant'.<sup>652</sup> In both Houbraken's *Life of De Lairesse* and Vertue's more compact account it is extravagance, not blindness that explains the poverty of the painter.

Altogether undeserved was the remarkable death of the rich Frankfurt artist Johann Heinrich Roos, who we recall was a student of Barent Graat.<sup>653</sup> Roos was a highly successful painter and etcher and an exceptionally virtuous man and parent who would presumably have continued to work well into his old age had not careless neighbours set his house on fire. When he collapses from smoke inhalation, he is dragged head first down his front stairs by well-meaning spectators. Houbraken concludes that 'he died that same morning, leaving behind four sons and a daughter'.<sup>654</sup> Houbraken does

not offer a word of consolation or interpretation other than a rhetorical question: 'who can avoid his fate?' Even so, he creates the distinct impression that Roos would not have collapsed at all had he not been overly attached to precious things, so that he recklessly entered his burning home and then stooped to pick up a bauble he had dropped.

On a different but related topic, one might ask why not one of Houbraken's aging subjects is said to have stopped creating because of mental decline. Possibly dementia was not as widespread in the seventeenth century as it is now, but it is surprising that the topic is not broached in *De groote schouburgh* except, possibly, in connection with Hendrick Goudt (1583-1648) who by 1624 'no longer understood anything unless one mentioned art to him, about which he was able to judge until his death'.<sup>655</sup> Houbraken blames 'a young lady who badly wanting to marry him gave him something which instead of making him fall in love had him lose his mind'. But selective memory loss is not a symptom of venereal disease, and it often occurs as part of dementia. Could mental decline also help explain Arent de Gelder's final decade of inactivity? The artist need not have become seriously disoriented to have lost motivation and focus. That would also explain why De Gelder conveyed so little information to Houbraken

<sup>650</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 342. We encounter the same sentiments in Houbraken 1721, p. 126.

<sup>651</sup> *Again* 1721, pp. 128-129.

<sup>652</sup> This statement is only the beginning of a substantial passage devoted to De Lairesse, as quoted in Horn 2000, pp. 337-338.

<sup>653</sup> Houbraken calls him Johan Henrik Roos and treats him as a Dutch export because he was trained by Barent Graat in Amsterdam before he moved back to Germany.

<sup>654</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 278-279.

<sup>655</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 56.

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about Rembrandt's situation in the early sixties, when he was the great master's student. It is only a suggestion and as Houbraken would say, 'he who refuses to believe it will not be burned for it'.

### The Minor Distractions of Topoi

One consequence of the biographer's deviating theology and its concomitant pessimism is that the biographies of *De groote schouburgh* escaped from the straightjacket of Christian authority, with its suffocating emphasis on sin, death and resurrection. Just try to imagine the crushing predictability of a Schouburgh written by a Calvinist theologian! It was Houbraken's intellectual freedom that opened the way to a challenging view of the unpredictability of much of life. Though the arguable down side of Houbraken's text is that it lacks structure, like his earlier work, his biographies are multi-levelled, varied and original. Yet Hans Joachim Raupp has sharply condemned my dismissal of a search for topoi in *De groote schouburgh*.<sup>656</sup>

A topos is the antithesis of an original or idiosyncratic perception of the kind that I have often attributed to Houbraken. As I argue in *The Golden Age Revisited*, topoi are correctly defined as 'stock themes in literature'. They surely do not move underground, along the lines of Jung's collective subconscious, only to pop up when it suits us. If we are to argue for something being a topos we need to establish

some kind of trail of recurrence of truly related instances of something that is out of the ordinary enough to invite explanation. Raupp did not address my argument but focused instead on an episode in the Life of Adriaen Brouwer that I had dismissed as 'silly'.<sup>657</sup> The artist arrives in Amsterdam after being robbed and stripped by pirates and appears onstage wearing a splendid robe that he himself has decorated using water colours and then washes off his handiwork to demonstrate the treachery of appearances. But while Houbraken's anecdotes are generally plausible or else at once questioned or lampooned by him, this one descends to a rare level of unchallenged inanity. Houbraken simply attributes the story to Cornelis de Bie, and when we check *Het gulden cabinet der edel vry schilderconst* (The Golden Cabinet of the Noble Liberal Art of Painting), we see that Houbraken did indeed take over both the tale and its moral from de Bie.<sup>658</sup> For Raupp, however, 'the topos of the washable picture harks back to the role of the painter as satirical mocker found in the art of the *Trecento* novella down to Bernini's anti-Spanish jokes at the court of Versailles'. But where is the trail of incidents leading from *Trecento* Italy to 1665, when Bernini was in Versailles? And where could De Bie possibly fit in, given that he published his *Gulden Cabinet* in 1661?<sup>659</sup> Nor does Houbraken adduce any pre-De Bie pedigree. The surprising thing about this case is that Houbraken showed no scepti-

<sup>656</sup> Raupp 2002, n.p., referring to Horn 2000, pp. 157-160, where I review the claims of Derk Snoep, Konrad Renger, H. Perry Chapman and Lyckle de Vries.

<sup>657</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 326-327.

<sup>658</sup> De Bie 1661, pp. 91-92.

<sup>659</sup> De Bie's *Gulden cabinet* was reissued in 1662, but that is still three years too early. That version was digitized by dbnl, whereas the *princeps* text is accessible as a Google book.

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cism, as with the ‘non credo’ that he attached to another, altogether more plausible De Bie tale about Brouwer.<sup>660</sup>

That does not mean that there are no topoi to be identified in *De groote schouburgh*. In fact, I identified a ‘likely topos’ in the biography of Jan Lievens, in which that artist draws undisturbed in the midst of a riot.<sup>661</sup> Another instance, one that I did not spot back in 2000, is of a major artist paying an unannounced visit to the studio of an important colleague, eventually leading to a moment of recognition of some kind. Houbraken has at least four examples, ones involving Apelles and Protogenes, Anthony Van Dyck and Frans Hals, Nicolaes Maes and Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678), and Michelangelo and Raphael.<sup>662</sup>

Still another overlooked example is that of painted animals that are so realistically rendered that they fool living congeners. The most important example concerns Dirck or Theodor van Hoogstraten (1627-1678), the father of Samuel and François, which Houbraken

seems to accept as factual even as he flags a literary tradition reaching back to antiquity.<sup>663</sup> Note how Houbraken’s respect for his teacher threatens to validate the account. He is more circumspect with Morten van Steenwinckel (1595-1646), who is to have been a great success at the Danish court primarily ‘because he painted a horse so naturally and artfully that a live horse brought to it whinnied and charged it’.<sup>664</sup> One wonders what might be left of a painting after it has been attacked by a horse. Not surprisingly, therefore, Houbraken identifies a literary tradition of scepticism with respect to such tales.<sup>665</sup> He claims not to know Steenwinckel’s first name and, as a rare exception, did not capitalize his last name. Nor does the biographer say how he came by his dubious information. Be that as it may, the overall harvest of topoi is far from impressive.<sup>666</sup> Two decades after *The Golden Age Revisited*, I still conclude, pace Raupp, that ‘*De groote schouburgh* is the opposite of a topos-rid-den book.’ It is in fact a highly original and brilliant achievement.

<sup>660</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 327 and *De Bie* 1661, p. 93.

<sup>661</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 159-160.

<sup>662</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 89-90; 1718, pp. 90-91; 1719, pp. 275-276; 1719, pp. 316-317.

<sup>663</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 44 note \*. Thissen 1994, p. 48 mentions the wrong source for this topos. Houbraken relates it to *Elianus and Valerius Maximus*, whereas Thissen mentions *Pliny*. That is the source Houbraken p. 45, note\* relates to tales of *trompe-l’oeil* grapes.

<sup>664</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 182.

<sup>665</sup> Again, Houbraken 1721, p. 182. *Birds fooled by painted grapes* arguably constitute another topos. Compare Houbraken 1718, p. 45, note\* and 1719, p. 124.

<sup>666</sup> For more debatable examples of topoi proposed by Derk Snoep, Konrad Renger, Walter Liedtke, H. Perry Chapman and Lyckle de Vries, see Horn 2000. p. 157.

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## DEISM, STOICISM AND PESSIMISM IN *DE GROOTE SCHOURBURGH*

### **The One and Only Deistic Biographer**

Just about everything that Houbraken had read or thought up to about 1717 found its way into his *De groote schouburgh*. Clearly theology and biography are different genres, but Houbraken's accumulated wisdom resurfaces everywhere in and around his Lives of artists. As a first step toward a realistic assessment of the predominant thought underlying the entire *Groote schouburgh* one must consult the long opening poem with which Arnold Houbraken prefaced his first volume, which contains an elaborate statement of purpose. As we might by now expect, almost everything pertains to the assiduous pursuit of fame through art and for art's sake, following the example of Karel van Mander. The need for learning is a subordinate theme, though surprisingly not with explicit reference to the mastery of historically correct history painting. However, this is the only place in his entire *Groote schouburgh* where Houbraken explicitly announces that he intends to use the vehicle of biography to foster philosophical detachment.

Are you inexperienced  
In the world's changes  
In the theatre you will learn,  
How on the world's tides  
You must undergo adversity:  
And control your passions.  
So that if fortune rolls your way like a ball  
You will know it is an isolated instance.

It is surely permissible to extrapolate from Houbraken's words and add that if fortune rolls *away* from us instead, we should understand that as an isolated instance as well. We see, in effect, an advocacy of stoicism as a path to acceptance of the absence of divine intervention in the course of our lives. We therefore have a thinly disguised pronouncement of Houbraken's Deism, a theological conviction that must otherwise be extracted from his *Philaléthes brieven*, *De gemeene leidingen* and *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* or else deduced from his *Groote schouburgh*. Deism is of central importance for an understanding of *De groote schouburgh* because it underlies both its biographical and theoretical components. Stoicism is merely the important lesson to be learned from the Lives of artists that may be of use to us in the conduct of our own lives. In other words, deism is a near-religion and all-embracing belief system. Anyone who embraces that system had better master a measure of stoic detachment as a coping strategy.

David de Witt has proposed that Arnold Houbraken 'leaned toward Deism',<sup>667</sup> which is roughly like saying that Benito Mussolini leaned towards Fascism. Once one is alerted to Houbraken's theological orientation, it becomes baffling that Piet Swillens could have devoted a decade of his life to *De groote schouburgh* and have yet have observed that Houbraken did not believe in predestination but otherwise 'hardly expressed his religious convictions in the

<sup>667</sup> De Witt 2004, p. 85.

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*Schouburgh*.<sup>668</sup> Similarly Jan Emmens showed no comprehension of Houbraken's theology, be it in his *Philaléthes* or *Groote schouburgh*.<sup>669</sup> Here two Utrecht scholars apparently led two others astray, because in their valiant attempts to resolve the complexities of Houbraken's taste and theory, Bart Cornelis and Peter Hecht overlooked the biographer's fundamental theological orientation, which is an indispensable key to his view of the world, man and art.<sup>670</sup>

As might be expected, Houbraken's Deism permeates his biographies in general, which are pervasively secular in orientation. Not once does he support a point by quoting the Bible. Though the biographer constantly harps on obvious facts of life, such as that it pays to be diligent, prudent, polite, or amiable, and that wealth is a good thing for any artist, we almost never encounter God in any guise. Talent is often inherited, but it is never directly bestowed by God. Houbraken pursues all reversals of fortune, including ones that can be truly heart-breaking, with apparent detachment. When artists die, the thread of their life ends, cut by Fate or terminated in a variety of ways by personified Death. They then move on to undefined 'eternity' or even 'the dark night of death',<sup>671</sup> and not to heaven or hell. Angels or devils receive no quarter

from Houbraken. Heaven is wished for only by a drunken and befuddled Frans Hals (1582/3-1666).<sup>672</sup> The name of God is also evoked only once, and that is by the gifted flower painter Ernst Stuken (1657-1712), who is on a criminal rampage at the time.<sup>673</sup>

Only rarely does Houbraken hint at the role of a provident God in daily life, but the examples are far from convincing. The first in Houbraken's order occurs in the biography of Caspar Netscher (1635/1636-1684), whose widowed mother 'depends on the protection of the Almighty [...], who always extends aid to widows and orphans',<sup>674</sup> but when we consider that this courageous woman had just lost two young sons to famine, we are left with a highly debatable exception to the rule. That 'it pleased the Almighty' to foil the promising old-age plans of Govert Flinck by having him vomit to death,<sup>675</sup> is no more likely to sell us on divine intervention. Sometimes Houbraken is more circumspect, as in his introduction to the Life of Jean Baptiste de Champaigne (1631-1681), where he observes that 'Experience has shown us that whole dynasties from father to child are blessed and know prosperity and other whole dynasties sigh under lack of luck and anxiety without people giving other reason for this than that the

<sup>668</sup> Swillens 1944, p. XXI.

<sup>669</sup> Emmens 1979 (1964), pp. 101-114.

<sup>670</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 668-675: 'The *Great Theatre* and the shade of Jan Ameling Emmens'. Hecht 1996, pp. 257 and 274 even managed to overlook the seminal contribution of Swillens (1943, 1944 and 1953) while proposing to rescue Houbraken from 'a century of systematic neglect'.

<sup>671</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 340.

<sup>672</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 93.

<sup>673</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 375.

<sup>674</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 93.

<sup>675</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 25.

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Almighty wants it that way,<sup>676</sup> but even without knowing that Houbraken was a Deist, we can tell that he was not convinced by this common Christian notion.

Then there is Mathijs Wulfraet (1648-1726), who ‘has learned by the right use of reason to undergo all disasters [...] with a tranquil heart, as coming from the hand of the Lord, whose arbitrariness one must undergo without complaint.’<sup>677</sup> Houbraken is at his most devious here, but I think he is telling us that that even if we wish to believe that God rules over our lives, we might as well accept that there is no rhyme or reason to His decisions. Finally, Houbraken proposes that Jan Frans van Douven (1656-1727) would have transformed Düsseldorf into a second Rome, ‘if the omnipotent one had not begrudged him a longer life.’<sup>678</sup> Readers wanting to take this bit of divine pettiness as evidence for an intervenient God are welcome to their peace of mind.

Only rarely does Houbraken hint at a fairly conventional understanding of Christianity. The first is when he condemns suicide because ‘reason teaches us all that we come into the world without our will or assistance, and no one is given the choice or power to end this life, because that depends on the pleasure of the Creator.’ This could create the impression that an intervenient God decides when we should die, but I believe on the basis of overwhelming evidence that this was not what Houbraken intended. He did see God as our creator, but only

at arm’s length so to speak. On another occasion Houbraken argues that intolerance goes ‘counter to the law of nature’ and that ‘no one is qualified to rule over another’s conscience and to make his convictions conform to those of his own. For in this respect every man stands by himself and depends on no one but his Creator, to whom he will have to give account in his last days.’<sup>679</sup> He might seem to be referring to the Last Judgment, but he much more likely intended those ‘last days’ as the ones we spend on our deathbed. As proof of this proposition Houbraken offers the example of Jan Woutersz. van Cuyk (died 1572), whose end must have been most uncomfortable. He is burned alive, leaving ‘a sorrowful wife, a daughter of seven years, and a good reputation’, and that is the last we hear of him.<sup>680</sup> Nothing suggests that this exemplar man and martyr deserved a heavenly award to compensate him for his final agony.

Nowhere does Houbraken as much as imply that a better life may be awaiting a good man who ends up deprived or disappointed, or that deplorable people will one day get their comeuppance. It can’t be said often enough that Houbraken was a free thinker with none of the concern for death, redemption and afterlife of all remotely orthodox Christians. At times Houbraken might even seem to drift into chilling and gratuitous heartlessness, as with Willem van Aelst (1627-1683), whose widow, being from Germany, marries a German brewer who is after her money. ‘But it did not take long be-

<sup>676</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 209.

<sup>677</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 250.

<sup>678</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 352-353.

<sup>679</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 50.

<sup>680</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 51.

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fore a sad accident befell the oldest of the children, being a well-shaped boy, for he fell into the brewing kettle and was burned alive.<sup>681</sup> The closing event is irrelevant to an understanding of Van Aelst or his art, and the only message would appear to be that in a god-forsaken world shit happens.<sup>682</sup>

Without God guiding events, the biographies of *De groote schouburgh* are as unpredictable and chaotic as life itself. In fact, Fortune is the principal actor. As in life there are patterns, which Houbraken mentions, but it continuously rains individual deviations. Artists may be encouraged or frustrated by their parents. They may find a suitable teacher at once or with difficulty. Most of them marry sooner or later, but their eye may fall on a satisfactory or even superior mate, or on one who is altogether disastrous. Some artists are good providers; others are perilously insouciant. Some artists may find a great patron; others have no such luck. Some artists are fortunate in that they grow rich and old. Others die young or in poverty. The effects of changing fashion, which are unpredictable by their very nature, also form a recurring theme of *De groote schouburgh*, with some artists struggling to adapt and others (including Rembrandt) not willing to submit to new market realities. Some artists are afflicted by gout or arthritis, making it difficult or impossible for them to work for months on end. Most artists decline with old age, but a very few surpass all reasonable expectations. Many never reach old age, falling victim to things out of their control, including marauding soldiers, poor

health, fatal accidents, severe depression, or inherited character flaws. When someone commits suicide, Houbraken disapproves but also tries to understand the precise circumstances that led to the counter-productive act. It is not death but the aging that usually leads up to it that rightly interested him.

Houbraken can be devious on occasion. If we look below the surface it turns out that even an apocryphal anecdote such as the levitation of Frans Hals, brought about by ropes pulled by Adriaen Brouwer (1603/1605-1638) and Dirck van Delen (1605-1671),<sup>683</sup> can contain a deistic subtext. We read that Hals concluded his evening prayers with the wish: 'Dear Lord, take me soon to your high heaven.' When he perceives that he is in fact ascending, he cries out much louder than usual; 'not so hasty dear Lord, not so hasty, not so hasty.' From a Calvinist point of view it is Hals' heavy drinking that is the problem, with his behaviour merely an arguably amusing and understandable quirk on his part. With Houbraken we learn that Hals was not only a drunk but also a drunken fool who was naive enough to believe that he would eventually rise to join his maker in heaven.

To conclude with another speculative consideration, one of Houbraken's stylistic quirks is that he favoured needlessly passive, complicated or indirect ways of couching simple propositions. His actors rarely simply do anything, such as marry or set out on a journey, they have occasion or find occasion to do so. It is possible that such passive formulations may have im-

<sup>681</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 230. Note that van Aelst lived until 1683, not 1680.

<sup>682</sup> 'Shit Happens' has become the name of a popular Dutch parlour game, presumably making the term *salonfähig*.

<sup>683</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 93-94. He misread Cornelis de Bie 1661, p. 281. It was Philips Wouwerman (1619-1668) and not Dirck van Delen who was a student of Frans Hals.

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plications of which Houbraken need not have been aware. For if we decide to marry, we make a conscious decision and are arguably, to resort to a cliché, captains of our fate. But in *De groote schouburgh*, fate is often out of control. In other words, if we ‘come to marry’, we could well be to some degree victims of circumstances for which fate, meaning chance, accident, or the luck of the draw, is in part responsible. The workings of fate must not be understood as some kind of predestination. Countless decisions in *De groote schouburgh* are made on a rational basis in response to a variety of personal or societal factors. But whatever artists may plan, fate may undo their prospects or resolve.

My argument might seem to outreach the scant evidence, but it is well-supported by Houbraken’s treatment of the phenomenon of wanderlust. Artists do not normally decide to travel to Italy because they think their artistic development requires that they copy venerable models. No! The urge generally comes first and the purpose follows. Only David Teniers I (1582-1649), Jan Linsen (1602/3-1635) and Willem van Bemmel (1630-1708) are said to have left for Rome to practice after outstanding models.<sup>684</sup> In the case of Johannes Glauber (1646-1726), continued practice after beautiful models ‘also awakens a desire in him to go see Italy’.<sup>685</sup> But such artists are exceptions to the rule. With all the others the urge to travel would appear to be an undefined corollary of the fact, often repeated

by Houbraken, that ‘mankind lives by change’.<sup>686</sup> It goes without saying that artists can’t always be in full control of a kind of innate and universal impulse that must somehow be related to God’s hidden design.

### **The Slight Role of Organized Religion**

Any discussion of the role of organized religion in *De groote schouburgh* must proceed from the recognition that his purpose in writing this work was totally different from that of his theological publications of 1712 and 1713. The Houbraken of *Philaléthes brieven*, *De gemeene leidingen* and *Uitgelezene keurstoffen* must have known full well that his ideas were going to be poorly received by orthodox members of the Reformed Church and that they would be acceptable only for a small like-minded minority. In fact, it was not until the late twentieth century that about half of ‘reformed’ believers would have been receptive to some of his ideas.<sup>687</sup> With *De groote schouburgh* Houbraken set out to produce a book for a broad audience that could be expected to sell well. Clearly, therefore, his opinions touching on doctrinal matters would have been counter-productive. His tactic was to exclude anything other than anodyne mention of organized religion, with only the vicious excesses of sixteenth-century monks being an exception to the rule. Nowhere in *De groote schouburgh* does Houbraken relate a biographical instance in which conversion or adherence to a religion is shown to play a

<sup>684</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 115 and 343; 1721, p. 30.

<sup>685</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 217.

<sup>686</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 85. See also Houbraken 1718, p. 119; 1719, pp. 130, 159, 308 and 344; 1721, pp. 84, 174 and 272.

<sup>687</sup> I am following Geert Mak 1999, p. 466. He writes in terms of ‘de gereformeerden’, not ‘de Gereformeerden’, because he includes a whole spectrum of orientation.

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decisive role. Only when an artist descends into what he deemed to be zealotry, as with the disastrous relocation of Anna Maria van Schurmans from Utrecht to Altona and the Labadist community there,<sup>688</sup> does religious association play a decisive role. The Deism of *De groote schouburgh* is only implied and nowhere crystallizes into clear doctrinal challenges. Possibly Houbraken's almost incessant emphasis on the trio of talent, application and luck was uncomfortable for his more conservative readers but his rare references to the Almighty likely reassured them. For not even an uncaring Allmighty was likely to offend, since most if not all believers accepted that it was within God's purview to be unfathomably heartless on occasion. What mattered to them was that He be seen to hold sway.

The Arnold Houbraken of *De groote schouburgh* was a nominal Calvinist and committed Free Thinker with a Mennonite upbringing who deemed Catholic doctrine to be seriously deficient.<sup>689</sup> However, he was not at all a dogmatic anti-Catholic. He had at least one good Catholic friend, namely Jan van Neck, and we have seen that his work was published by François van Hoogstraten, who had strong Catholic leanings and was not at all dogmatic, being a good friend of Joachim Oudaan, Hou-

braken's seminal archaeological source and the key poet of the Rotterdam Collegiants.<sup>690</sup> In addition Houbraken was remarkably well informed about art work located in the Catholic *schuulkerken* or underground churches of Rotterdam, Gouda and Amsterdam.<sup>691</sup> In short, he does not seem to have thought much in terms of a Protestant versus Catholic polarity. He frequently cites Joost van den Vondel, a prominent convert to Catholicism. In addition, though Houbraken sympathized with the Remonstrants of his time, who shared his aversion to the doctrine of predestination, his prime source for his moralizing ideas about marriage and family was Jacob Cats, who was a mainstream Calvinist. Finally, Houbraken generally does not specify the religion of his subjects unless it plays an important role in a biography.

As a test case, we find that Houbraken tended to pass over the religious orientation of Mennonite artists such as Vincent Laurensz. van der Vinne (1628-1702),<sup>692</sup> Jan van der Heyden (1637-1712)<sup>693</sup> and Jan Luyken except when important, as with Jan Woutersz. van Cuyck, David Jorisz. (1501-1556),<sup>694</sup> Dirk Rafaelsz. Camphuysen (1586-1627)<sup>695</sup> and Govert Flinck.<sup>696</sup> But there is no rule without an exception, as Houbraken himself informs us.<sup>697</sup> That Dirk van

<sup>688</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 315.

<sup>689</sup> On religion in *De groote schouburgh*, Horn 2000, pp. 283-291 and 403.

<sup>690</sup> Again Thissen 1994, pp. 154, 170, 197, 226, etc.

<sup>691</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 178 and 1721, pp. 75 and 91.

<sup>692</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 210-214.

<sup>693</sup> Houbraken 1721, pp. 80-82.

<sup>694</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 21-22.

<sup>695</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 123-128.

<sup>696</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 20.

<sup>697</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 137.

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Hoogstraten (1595/96-1640) was a Mennonite is arguably essential to his biography and yet he is not identified as such,<sup>698</sup> whereas in the case of Jan van Nickelen (1655/56-1721) a relatively incidental connection is mentioned in passing.<sup>699</sup> Jan Luyken is special because his conversion to the Mennonite faith in 1675 was pivotal for his change from the frivolous persona of his youth to the religious one of his maturity and old age.<sup>700</sup> Given that Houbraken ridiculed both phases of Luyken's life, it is scarcely surprising that he left out his religious conversion. Finally, as a neutral incident, the wife of Jan Baptist Weenix is misled by friends 'who were all Reformed or Mennonite.'<sup>701</sup>

Houbraken's far-reaching neutrality in matters religious is perhaps best demonstrated by the phenomenon of the almost obligatory visits to Rome. One might expect Catholic painters to have been especially keen on a southern journey, but Houbraken does not argue this. Protestant Dutch artists normally travelled to the Protestant courts of the German territories, whereas Catholic Flemings favoured France on their way to Italy, but Houbraken's readers have to extract the pattern.<sup>702</sup> Of course Papist Italy was a near den of iniquity from a

Calvinist point of view, but the deistic Houbraken is not judgmental. For him the advantages of study after the best possible models outweighed any religious impediments. Only three artists get into trouble with the Catholic authorities. Pieter Mulier the Younger (1637-1701), called 'il Cavalier Tempesta' (whom Houbraken confuses with Pieter de Molijn the Younger), goes to prison in Genoa, but then he was believed to have murdered his wife or mistress.<sup>703</sup> David de Coninck (1644-1701/1705) and his fellow Bent members are arrested on suspicion of being subversive, but that was only because a couple of nefarious German artists had misinformed the authorities.<sup>704</sup> He and his friends are at once released once the truth is revealed. Philip Peter Roos (1657-1706) cynically converts to Catholicism to be able to marry the comely daughter of Giacinto Brandi (1621-1691), a prosperous history painter, but his is an isolated case, and it is much more the artist than the Catholic authorities and his reluctant stepfather who are shown to be unethical.<sup>705</sup> Similarly, in the case of Jan Baptist Weenix, Cardinal Pamphili and Pope Innocent X do their best to reunite the artist with his wife,<sup>706</sup> but (as mentioned) she is misled by meddling friends. Most importantly,

<sup>698</sup> Houbraken 1718, pp. 160-161.

<sup>699</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 266.

<sup>700</sup> Luyken was twenty-six years old at the time.

<sup>701</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 80.

<sup>702</sup> This and related matters are being examined by Rieke van Leeuwen in her online English edition, sponsored by the RKD, of Gerson 1942.

<sup>703</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 183.

<sup>704</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 316.

<sup>705</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 282-283.

<sup>706</sup> Houbraken confused Prince Camillo Pamphili, who was Weenix first Roman patron, with Cardinal Giovanni Battista Pamphili, who became Pope Innocent X in 1644.

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Providence has nothing to do with such events. In Houbraken's universe, God is too detached to take an interest in them.

### A Gloomy View of the Future

A final question is, with God keeping His distance and human beings left to their own devices and denied any future beyond death, what faith did Houbraken have in a collective future. The answer would appear to be that he believed things were heading downhill and had been for some time. Though admirable individuals sporadically take their bow in the *De groote schouburgh*, Envy and her handmaiden Slander too often rule the roost and opportunists abound. Almost at once the biographer tells us that 'we live in a century in which everyone is out for his own benefit and almost no one for that of others.'<sup>707</sup> What's more, Houbraken claims the situation is getting worse. Well into his second volume, he tells us that 'the world is corrupt, and its inhabitants for the most part degenerate. The spiders increase greatly and the bees decrease.'<sup>708</sup> Finally, in his third tome Houbraken is more explicit with respect to art: 'For the world has degenerated so far from the old simplicity that people make mock of piety and call trickery wisdom. Sincere claims merit no credence. Deception has to sell the wares,

and those who have honed those skills, walk off with the profits.'<sup>709</sup> Houbraken does not tell us when 'the old simplicity' still prevailed and he expresses no hope of it making a comeback. Nor does the biographer tell us on what authority virtues such as honesty and sincerity are based. They are simply self-evident: 'Reason teaches me that to be helpful for another's benefit (in any form whatsoever) as well as for one's own, is the chain that links human society.'<sup>710</sup> Houbraken also believed that intolerance 'goes counter to the law of nature', so that we may assume that charity and tolerance are part of God's hidden plan, which is being subverted by mankind.

Arnold Houbraken had a defined concept and high opinion of the Northern Netherlands (excluding Friesland and Overijssel), which he thought of as his 'Fatherland'. He clearly took pride in its relative tolerance, which he does not identify as having waned in his time.<sup>711</sup> Given the recent populist emphasis on poverty in the Golden Age, with the adjective 'golden' becoming politically incorrect,<sup>712</sup> it is also important to understand that Houbraken frequently mentions the charitable institutions such as the poorhouses and orphanages, of his nation without mentioning that Holland was superior there as well. His diagnosis of decline was certainly correct with respect to commerce.

<sup>707</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 8. It is not altogether clear whether Houbraken intended the 18th century or the century leading up to and following his time of writing.

<sup>708</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 320.

<sup>709</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 327.

<sup>710</sup> Houbraken 1718, p. 9.

<sup>711</sup> Horn 2000, pp. 89-93.

<sup>712</sup> That there were poor people in the Dutch seventeenth century, as in any other century, was common knowledge, witness a major exhibition on the theme (Levie 1965). 'Golden' was never intended to indicate universal wealth. It captured the reality of a cultural highpoint.

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As for his lamentation about the widespread waning of moral standards, it is of course impossible to verify.

Houbraken also devotes a substantial digression to his perception that art has been in decline since about 1660, with many genres neglected or no longer represented by top-notch practitioners<sup>713</sup> and with only flower painting and some history painting exceptions to the rule.<sup>714</sup> Worse, a regrettable fashion for wall hangings ('the plague of art') has been undermining the status of traditional pictures.<sup>715</sup> He further argues that greed and the commercialization of education help explain the decay of art.<sup>716</sup> This basic art-historical premise likely survived him to somehow become received wisdom by the twentieth century. It is sobering, for instance, to peruse *Dutch Art and Architecture 1600-1800* of 1966 by Jakob Rosenberg (1893-1980) and Seymour Slive (1920-2014), senior scholars whose work can serve as representative of a widespread consensus. The authors devote only eleven pages and even fewer illustrations to Dutch painting from 1675 to 1800,<sup>717</sup> and the picture they paint, which fills only a page, is pervasively negative and presented as manifest truth. I quote only two snippets:

The number of artists who continued to practise the well-established categories of painting did not diminish. The significant

change is in the quality of their production. Over-refinement set in, and work became more homogeneous. Attempts to come to grips with the new French style served as a leveller, not a catalyst. The strong individuality which marked the minor as well as the greater masters of the earlier period virtually disappeared. [...] Artists seemed to acquire something of the spirit of the Dutch patricians of the period, who were mainly *rentiers*, not *entrepreneurs*. They preferred to live on the dividends of their substantial capital rather than risk new ventures.<sup>718</sup>

Though this account deals with a time span extending beyond *De groote schouburgh* and also has the advantage of greater historical perspective, as with its mention of French influence, it clearly resembles Arnold Houbraken's version. There is no depressing talk of social corruption à la Houbraken, but the authors do follow his lead in relating decline in art to decline in commerce. But though they celebrate his important contribution to art biography, they do not acknowledge his pioneering diagnosis of post 1660 decline.

The diagnosis was challenged, though not systematically, by a major international exposition entitled *Vom Adel der Malerei: Holland um 1700*. Organized by Ekkehard Mai and others

<sup>713</sup> Houbraken 1719, pp. 130-134

<sup>714</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 83.

<sup>715</sup> Houbraken 1719, p. 96.

<sup>716</sup> Note, however, that Houbraken was not an economic determinist. Read 'The historical perspective of *De groote schouburgh*' in Horn 2000, pp. 93-103.

<sup>717</sup> Rosenberg, Slive and Terkuile 1966, pp. 207-218.

<sup>718</sup> Rosenberg, Slive & Terkuile 1966, p. 207.

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and hosted by museums in Cologne, Dordrecht and Kassel, it ran from late 2006 to late 2007. The message of the show is encapsulated by the Dordrecht title, *De kroon op het werk*, meaning ‘the splendid consummation of the work’, the work in question being that of the Golden Age. Note that Houbraken showed appreciation for several key artists featured in the exhibition, including Gerard de Lairesse, Adriaen van der Werff, Godfried Schalcken, Johannes Verkolje and Jan van

Huysum (1682-1749). In fact, Houbraken states explicitly that Rachel Ruysch and Van Huysum surpassed all their predecessors as flower painters.<sup>719</sup> Houbraken knew full well that there were good artists at work around 1700, but he judged, quite rightly, that many of their colleagues of around 1650 had been even better. Here, as so often in *De groote schouburgh*, Arnold Houbraken emerges as a man endowed with impressive historical insight and critical discrimination.

<sup>719</sup> Houbraken 1721, p. 278.

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## SYNOPSIS

The preceding study discusses too many events, works of art and ideas to allow for a concise summary. On the other hand most of us are overworked and do not have the time needed to read entire books from cover to cover and therefore tend to survey them in an attempt to get to the heart of things. This can also be true of scholars who undertake to review scholarly works. Fortunately this study is neither very long nor highly complex and its table of contents should suffice to help readers find their way. Still, to avoid grievous misunderstanding and even misrepresentation, a list of crucial points may be no luxury.<sup>720</sup>

1 – Trained primarily by the cosmopolitan and intellectual Samuel van Hoogstraten from 1674 to 1678, Arnold Houbraken was an astonishingly versatile and productive painter of histories and illustrator of books. Most of his pictures are fine and learned examples of the classicism of his time, with convincing emotions and gestures. His graphic production consists mainly of hundreds of small and evocative emblems but he also produced some larger illustrations and many learned allegorical title pages and title prints. Except in the case of his own publications, in which he naturally advanced his own stimulating ideas, he was able brilliantly to adapt to the more conservative convictions of his patrons.

2 – The Arnold Houbraken of *De groote schouburgh* was not a Mennonite. He was raised

in that faith in Dordrecht but married as a Calvinist in 1685. Though he remained a nominal Calvinist, he had become a deistic freethinker by the time he relocated to Amsterdam in 1710, where he published his *Philaléthes brieven* in 1712. Houbraken did not believe in a personal god, life after death, the immortality of the soul, heaven, hell, devil, or angels. His theological deliberations most often concentrated on the Fall of Man and the Passion of Christ as the birth of sin and its atonement. He was a Christian humanist because he maintained that Christ's death must be believed as a one-time sign from God that He had not altogether forsaken mankind.

3 – Arnold Houbraken was an autodidact who read incessantly both in Dutch and in Dutch translations from ancient and modern authors and became very well read. His view of man and the word was particularly shaped by two books by Baltasar Gracián. He scoured authorities on ancient cultures as sources for accurate history paintings and sluiced this information into *De groote schouburgh*. Its oft-ignored theoretical digressions are in part the outcome of his generous pedagogic conviction that young artists with appropriate talent need to have access to such material so that they may blossom into accomplished history painters whose work will confirm the wisdom of the ancients and the reliability of the Old and New Testaments. Artist who botch the trappings of their histories are reprehensible

<sup>720</sup> Note how Eva Boom 2001/2002, p. 236 was somehow able to assume that Houbraken remained a Mennonite to the end and should therefore be compared to contemporary Mennonite texts.

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bunglers who undermine the authority of the Scriptures. However, Houbraken also believed that reason must be brought to bear on the Bible when necessary. His most important *bête noire* was the talking snake of Genesis.

4 – Houbraken's Deism was dangerous. He had to flee from Amsterdam to London in 1713 because his *Philalèthes* was deemed to be doctrinally abhorrent by the Church Council of Amsterdam. Given that Houbraken wrote his *Schouburgh* to reach a wide audience, his deism is not explicit in it but it is nevertheless of great importance to an understanding of some of his theory and especially of what he says and does not say about life and death in his biographies. In 1714 Houbraken dedicated an emblem book (published posthumously) to the stoical tradition, and stoic detachment is assumed to be a last resort in the numerous instances of the arbitrariness and cruelty of the god-forsaken world presented by his *Schouburgh*.

5 – Houbraken believed that proof for God's wonderful and remote plan for His Creation must be looked for in nature. Close though not slavish study of nature is part of the mandate

of the artist. Artists are blessed beyond measure because they can receive intimations of the Creator's remote plan. That explains why he ranked a landscape painter, Herman Saffleven, whom he paints as a simpleton, above his own intellectual teacher Van Hoogstraten and why he ranked landscape above portraiture in his otherwise classicistic hierarchy of genres. Houbraken particularly dislike *vanitas* still-lives, with their message of the wages of sin. Houbraken is not to be understood as a man torn between his classicistic convictions and his love of a great variety of paintings. He presents history painting as no more than a superior option to be pursued by those who have it natural aptitude for it and he appreciated fine detail and convincing emotions in every context.

6 – Ever distracted by a large family, Houbraken wrote his *Groote schouburgh* in only three years. He worked under great pressure and finally in the face of death. Nor was he by nature a systematic thinker. The combination of haste and lack of structural rigour must constantly be kept in mind if we are not to misinterpret his great work. It is also pays to remember his adage: 'There is no rule without an exception.'



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