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The Interconnections of the Thematical
and Interpretational Questions of Flemish Baroque
Painting in the Mirror of Dutch Realist Painting



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Introduction

The *Katalog der Galerie alter Meister. Museum der Bildenden Künste* by Andor Pigler, the former General Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, published in 1967, is an indispensable, fundamental publication on the collection of the Old Masters' Gallery, used even today. The vast, nearly unfollowable growth of the literature and the enrichment of the gallery with new acquisitions since its publishing necessitated its updating. In the spirit of this endeavour, the so-called summary catalogues of the collection have been produced, which contain new attributions, research results and bibliographical data complemented with the reproductions of all the works of art. Parallel to this "fire-extinguishing work" and under the pressure of the international tendencies, the demand for *catalogues raisonnés*, fully working up the collection, has more and more often arisen since the 1990s. The volume treating the Gallery's Dutch and Flemish still lifes by Ildikó Ember as well as that discussing the Dutch and Flemish portraits by Rudi Ekkart, head of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, the Hague, are soon to be published. Six chapters of this present dissertation, giving an overview of the history of research and provenance history and containing the emphatic discussion of some more significant works as well as the scholarly treatment of the seventeenth to eighteenth century Flemish genre paintings of the Museum of Fine Arts, form a part of this large-scale professional enterprise.

Chapter 1: *The history of research of Dutch and Flemish genre painting in the past decades*

Chapter I of the dissertation contains the past decades' history of research of Dutch and Flemish genre painting along with its literature and is complemented, in a gap-filling way, with the scholarly results of Hungarian experts in this field.

The history of the research of Dutch genre painting begins with the presentation of Eddy de Jongh's method of emblematical interpretation, whereas the Flemish section with the founding in 1959 of the centre of Baroque research, the Rubenianum, and the publication in 1963 of Francine-Claire Legrand's fundamental *Les peintres flamands de genre au XVIIe siècle*. After the survey of the past decades' exhibitions exploring the history of certain genres and themes, of the monographs and other publications in this field, follows the comparison of

the research of Dutch and Flemish genre painting, pointing to the nearly total lack of constructive dialogues between the experts of the two nations and to the specialization of foreign, characteristically German and more recently American art historians in this topic.

In Hungary the research of Flemish Baroque formed around the Research Institute of History of Art of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the departments of history of art at the universities and – following from its collection profile – the Old Masters' Gallery and the Department of Prints and Drawings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. How many noted Hungarian experts, often enjoying an international fame, have been engaged during the past century or more in the research of this age and school, becomes obvious only if we go through the list of names. The names of Gábor Térey, Andor Pigler, Klára Garas, Ágnes Czobor, Marianna Haraszti-Takács, Teréz Gerszi, Zsuzsa Urbach, Miklós Mojzer, Ildikó Ember and István Németh from the Museum of Fine Arts, György Kelényi from the Department of History of Art at the Eötvös Loránd University, and Géza Galavics from the Research Institute of History of Art of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences hallmark the activity of Hungarian researchers, already requiring an outline from the aspect of the history of research. The limited size of the dissertation did not make it possible to give an overview of the research of all the categories of Flemish painting in Hungary in the last century, so it concentrates exclusively on genre painting.

Chapter 2. *The acquisition of Flemish Baroque genre paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest*

During the survey of the acquisitions of Flemish Baroque genre paintings, the grouping of the works around the collectors and the modes of acquisition seemed most exciting from among the possible approaches, and we succeeded in complementing it with some new data regarding provenance history. With reference to the purchase of Jan Siberechts' *The Ford* (Inv. 1226) e. g. Andor Pigler's catalogue (Pigler 1967, 640) only mentions enigmatically "Erworben vom Kunsthändler N. Steinmayer, Köln, 1896". However, recently surfaced, contemporaneous letters not only reveal the circumstances of the purchase in October, 1895, but also allow a glimpse into Pulszky's buying habits and are proofs of his legendary feeling for quality. Siberechts in the 1890s was a little-known painter even in the professional circles. Pulszky played a decisive role in his discovery and in the assessment of

his talent and credit goes to him alone for the acquisition of one of the most outstanding pieces of the master's oeuvre and of the Old Masters' Gallery.

General Director Elek Petrovics' letters from 1820–21, which reveal that Móric Pick, Budapest art-dealer, bought the painting attributed to August Querfurt at the auction of the Ernst Museum with the intention that he would later present it to the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, also proved to be an interesting addition to provenance history. After the successful reading of the monogram, the painting, right after its handing over, was inventoried under the name of Pieter van Bloemen from Antwerp, so it enriched not the Austrian, but the Flemish collection.

The appendix concluding the chapter contains the list of Flemish Baroque genre paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, grouped according to collectors and complemented with data and references.

Chapter 3. *The iconographic analysis of the more important peasant genre scenes of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest*

With reference to the problems of interpretation of seventeenth-century Netherlandish painting, already Bob Haak – in our opinion justly – called the attention to the difficulties of recognizing the actual proportions of realism, symbolism and moralization. In accordance with Jan Baptist Bedaux's theory, we think that if a scene has a hidden meaning, it must be immediately obvious for the spectator. This content is characteristically conveyed by such symbols which are not closely linked to the given scene. This is well exemplified by the chained owl, or the glass globe placed above the patient's head in David Teniers the Younger's *At the Village Doctor's* (diss. cat. no. 17). However, such motifs, which seemingly organically belong to the composition, can also convey a didactic, moralizing content. An excellent example of it is the smokers appearing in various family and conversation scenes. Although contemporary literary pieces, emblems and inscriptions of engravings condemn this bad habit of humankind, nevertheless, we cannot pronounce *ex cathedra* that the painter of the picture held similar views of this question.

A further fundamental question is how the method of emblematical interpretation elaborated for Dutch realist painting can be applied to the iconographic interpretation of Flemish paintings? In practice the researchers of Flemish genre painting – especially when analyzing the so-called *Low Life* scenes – consistently employ the results of the Dutch

iconological school, and its applicability has never been queried. Because of the common roots in Dutch and Flemish genre painting, the *Nachleben* of linguistic, visual and literary traditions and the mutuality in artistic life also continuing after the political separation, this method can indeed be used without difficulties in the field of genre painting.

In this chapter of the dissertation follows the overall iconographic analysis of the more significant Flemish peasant genre scenes of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, by applying in practice Eddy de Jongh's method of emblematical interpretation, and also keeping in sight Jan Baptist Bedaux's above-mentioned view. Here we try to give a foretaste of the possibilities offered by the method through the analysis of a particular painting.

In Adriaen Brouwer's *Smokers* (on the cover) not a single motif refers to a hidden content, didactic or moralizing intention. It remains a question if it is enough only to take the visible things as a starting-point, or, when judging the work, shall we let ourselves be influenced by early biographers like Cornelis de Bie, Joachim Sandrart, Isaac Bullaert or Arnold Houbraken, who, in their writings, described Brouwer as a rather fickle, Bohemian soul, who found pleasure in the self-destroying passions of pubbing, revelling, drinking and smoking? Rudolf and Margot Wittkower called the attention to the conviction, already taken deep roots in antiquity, "that a man's character and the character of his works are interdependent". They continue "Doubtlessly, in history there are cases when the nature of the artist and his activity are evidently in harmony. The characters of Raphael, Rubens, Frans Hals, **Brouwer** and Caravaggio consistently and unmistakably manifest themselves in their works." Konrad Renger also rightly refers to De Bie's remark with regard to Brouwer "En soo hy was in't werck, soo droegh hy hem in't leven", or as Houbraken formulates it, "Potsig was zyn penceelkonst potsig zyn leven. Zoo de man was, was zyn werk."

So Brouwer's character, described in the sources, is one factor which can affect the interpretation of the painting, the other factor is the theme itself. Independently of the possible intention of the artist, several associations and parallels can be linked to tobacco in the mind of the spectator, depending on his profession, social rank, world view and education. While the doctors and scholars of the age polemized about the beneficial or deleterious effect of tobacco, on the basis of a witty folktale a great number of people thought that it had entered the possession of humankind as a gift of the devil.

Following a passage of the Bible – *Fumus gloria mundi* (Psalms 102, 4) – smoke was already a well-known Vanitas-symbol at the time of Brouwer. This meaning became also associated with the smoke of tobacco, as proved by contemporary emblems, literary works, inscriptions of engravings and texts incised on the various accessories of smoking (e. g. "*Vita*

est fumus”). An informative example of it is the inscription on the Dutch Hendrick Bary’s (1632–1707) engraving: “*Terwijl ik ijvrig rook Verinis, kleijn gesneen, / Denk ik vast bij mij self; Soo vliegt de Weerelt heen.*” (“While I diligently smoke my chopped tobacco, I think: So flies the world away.”) Or Scriverius’ work from 1628 entitled *Saturnalia*, which was translated from Latin into Dutch and published in Haarlem, 1630, by Samuel Ampzing. On its frontispiece a skull is shown with a winged hourglass on its top and a pipe in its mouth, accompanied with the following text: “*Haec vitae imago. Fumus, atque herbae vapos / Humana cuncta: et, verbo ut absolvam, nihil*” (“The symbol of life is smoke and all human things are but the breath of an herb. In a word, nothing.”).

This mode of interpretation of smoking can be detected on those engravings, too, which were produced after Brouwer’s partly lost works. In one of the works of Jonas Snyderhoef (c. 1613 – 1686) e. g. the traditional motifs of the owl and the extinguished candle next to the smokers leave no doubt in the viewer with regard to the content, similarly to Jan de Visscher’s work (c. 1636 – after 1692) interpreted on the basis of its inscription: “*Idem omnes simul ardor agit*” (“All are impelled by the same desire at the same time”). Nevertheless, the subsequent additions to the texts do not serve as points of reference for the iconographic analysis of Brouwer’s works, so today it is already practically impossible to answer whether the artist intended to convey the thought of Vanitas with these paintings. The Budapest picture may not give an answer for it, yet, it is probable that Brouwer consciously strived to suggestively document the different phases of the bodily reactions incident to the enjoyment of tobacco. Here one of the men is just lighting his long-stemmed, clay pipe with a piece of burning wood in order “to drink a pipe of smoke” – to use the term then in use. His companion on the other hand, in the state of the so-called “dry drunkenness”, leans back on his chair enervatedly, in stupor.

More series, or fragments of series, have survived by Brouwer, in which the smokers are shown as embodiments of *Smell* or *Taste*. In this case it cannot be ruled out either, that smoke refers to *Smell*, the drinking jug stands for *Taste* and the burning piece of wood for *Touch*, while supposedly, its possible pendant may have represented *Sight* and *Hearing* side by side.

As a member of various Flemish and Dutch literary societies (of the amateur literary society called *De Wijngaertranken* [The Vine Tendrils] in Haarlem from 1626, and of the rhetoricians’ chamber called *De Violieren* in Antwerp from 1634), Brouwer must have known those popular publications of the age, like Roemer Visscher’s (1547 – 1620) emblem-book entitled *Sinnepoppen*, issued in Amsterdam, 1614, or Jacob Cats’ (1577 – 1660) moralizing

poem entitled *Proteus*, published in 1627, in which the authors condemn smoking. He must have been acquainted with Gerbrand Adriaensoon Bredero's (1585 – 1618) sharply realistic folk comedy entitled *Klucht van de Molenaer* (Comedy of the Miller), published in 1613, which called the attention of contemporaries, who were responsive to it, to the destructive, family-destroying effect of tobacco. In this context the boy in Brouwer's Budapest picture joining the company may warn of the dangers of harmful pleasures and of the lack of the exemplary behaviour of adults.

Brouwer's personality, both with regard to his supposed erudition and to his career, perfectly exemplifies the connection and mutual effects of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish genre painting. He studied and lived in Holland, first of all in Haarlem and Amsterdam, for about ten years. In 1627 the poet Pieter Nootmans, director of the *De Wijngaertranken* dedicated one of his tragedies to him, "the world-famous painter of Haarlem", and more of his contemporaries mentioned him as the "Haarlemensis", i. e. the Haarlem-born. He had contacts with the noted portraitist of the age, Frans Hals, who was of Flemish origin, but also worked in Haarlem. They were members of the *De Wijngaertranken* society in the same period. Jan Cossiers (1600–1671), the painter skilled in more genres, and Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606 – 1683/84), the still life specialist living in Leiden and later in Antwerp, also belonged to his friends. Paintings, which are proofs of not only their close friendship but also of their passion for smoking, can be found in the oeuvres of all the three painters. Dutch painter and art historian Jacob Campo Weyermann's writing from 1729 verifies that Brouwer's signed work, *The Smokers* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, shows Brouwer together with Jan Davidsz. de Heem and Jan Cossiers as they uproariously abandon themselves to the passion of smoking.

Brouwer's works unmistakably mirror the double nature of his personality: he was both an erudite citizen of his age, highly esteemed by Rubens and Rembrandt, and a *debauchée* revelling with his friends. With Wilhelm Bode's apt words: "...*ein Philosoph in der Narrenkappe...*"

Chapter 4. *Contributions to the history of the Antwerp and Rotterdam schools of painting*

Already Houbraken in his *De Grootte Schouburgh* referred to the fact that Herman Saftleven (Rotterdam 1609 – 1685 Utrecht) and his brother, Cornelis Saftleven (Gorkum 1607

– 1681 Rotterdam), were acquainted with David Teniers the Younger. The Antwerp sojourn of the two Rotterdam masters between 1632 and 1634 and the atmosphere of their works exerted a long-lasting influence on Teniers, who was hardly younger of them. It was under their inspiration that the Flemish master developed his manner of painting still life motifs, which he employed for decades. It has been known since Klinge-Gross' research (1976) that their acquaintance resulted in collaborative works as well.

In our opinion one of the pieces of the Flemish Baroque collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, the *Peasant Courtyard with an Old Woman and a Cat*, formerly attributed to Mattheus Helmont, is a further proof of the links between the Rotterdam and Antwerp schools of painting (diss. cat. no. 8.). The setting, some motifs and the manner of painting preserve some reminiscences of Teniers' art, yet the still life, its emphatic role, its composition, arrangement and coupling with a genre scene betray the influence of masters active in the first half of the 1630s in Rotterdam, first of all Herman and Cornelis Saftleven. The authorship of David Teniers the Younger can be ruled out, nevertheless, it can be established that the author of the work must have lived in the milieu of Teniers, whose work reflects the direct influence of the great Flemish artist and the indirect impact of the Rotterdam school. Its specialty lies in the fact that this "second line" illustrating the mutual effects of the two schools of painting has been unrepresented so far in the Flemish material. Its theme is also a rarity: a woman or a child fingering her pet, or a mother combing her child's hair – as a symbol of *Care* and *Cleanness* – was widespread especially in Holland in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, however, it was not popular in the Flemish territories. Also in this aspect the painting informatively complements the former results of research.

Chapters 5–6. *The seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Flemish genre paintings of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest*

Chapter 5 gives a frame to the scholarly discussion of thirty-seven seventeenth-century Flemish genre paintings, dividing them into six thematical groups (peasant and bourgeois genre scenes, labour and cavalry scenes, genre portraits and genre scenes set in landscapes or cityscapes), while Chapter 6 contains eight paintings of the eighteenth-century material in alphabetical order. Compared to the former results of research, nearly all the entries contain

novelties, iconographic, attributional or other additions (dating, identification of the sitters, additions to the list of replicas, copies and analogies, defining of the year of the artist's birth).

From an iconographic aspect only two paintings by David Teniers the Younger (diss. cat. nos. 7. and 17.) and Vrancx' *Party in the Court of an Italian Palace* (diss. cat. no. 30) have been properly discussed by scholars so far. The former analyses of Teniers' *At the Village Doctor's* have been complemented with the examination of such a motif of the painting, which hitherto escaped the scholars' attention (diss. cat. no. 17). The viewer may not even notice it, or if he notices it, he may not attach importance to it, that the quack doctor wears a fur-trimmed cap. Without falling into the the trap of over-interpretation, after the survey of the complete oeuvre of the master, we can surely establish that this motif has a meaning in his case. Teniers took pleasure in rendering all types of caps and hats, so in the nineteenth century some of his works were entitled after them (*The Red Cap, The White Cap, The Green Cap*). Looking over the master's paintings, it strikes the eye that fur-trimmed caps are almost always headwears of silly blockheads, drunkards, quack doctors, pseudo-scholars, like astrologers and alchemists. We can rightly suppose that this piece of clothes had a meaning of pejorative discrimination with Teniers. From this aspect it is quite informative to compare the painting to Brouwer's *The Operation* in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, which is proved to have exerted an influence on Teniers' early works including this one. Here the quack doctor tries to hide his shifty gaze and dishonest intention with his cap deeply pulled into his head, but, thanks to the artist's virtuosic portrayal of character, unsuccessfully. In our opinion Brouwer, with this everyday headgear, modernized those cockscombs decorated with jingle bells, well-known from art, literature and theatre plays (see e. g. Sebastiaen Brant's *Narrenschiff* published in 1494), whose wearer confronted the viewer or the reader with the various human frailties. In Teniers' case, this cap "tamed" into a simple decorative element, so its hidden meaning can only be supposed on the basis of the foregoing. Kongard Renger rightly notes that Brouwer's simple visual motifs filled with a didactic content lose from their strength even in the works of such outstanding followers as Teniers: "sie bereits von seinen unmittelbaren Nachfolgern missverstanden und verwässert wird."

Literature has not yet linked this painting by Teniers to that signed, less known work by Brouwer in the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum of Aachen which may have served as a direct model for the Budapest painting: the kneeling quack doctor, the positioning of the patient, the assistant busying himself in the background, the glass globe hanging from the ceiling, the huge, worn-out shoes and the neglectfully hung cap, are represented in quite a similar way.

We succeeded in adding some new data to the oeuvre of David III Ryckaert, the third leading figure of Flemish genre painting besides Brouwer and Teniers, which is otherwise outlined by Bernadette Van Haute's thorough monograph, nevertheless, in the case of the Budapest paintings, containing several wrong attributions, datings and data. The subject matter of one of the master's works, *The Bean-King* (diss. cat. no. 6), was newly defined. With the iconographic analysis of Ryckaert's alchemist-pictures produced in the 1640s, we could hopefully prove that his view underwent the same change as that of Brouwer or Teniers: he turned away from the critical approach expressed with symbols and became more loyal to the activities formerly condemned by him (diss. cat. nos. 15. and 16.)

In our opinion the outstanding quality, exceptional dimensions and unique iconography raises Robert van den Hoecke's *Cavalry Scene* among the masterpieces of the genre in Flanders (diss. cat. no. 32). The discord caused by card-playing and gambling was a classical theme already from the fifteenth century, but the way Hoecke rendered it – with the objects and foods consciously composed into a still life and the huge wooden cross towering over the soldiers and seemingly only supporting the tent and the ramparts in the background – was highly novel. On the basis of the diagonal composition it can be supposed that the painting originally also had a companion piece, or possibly, belonged to a series representing the temperaments, in which the soldiers – because of their irascible nature – may have been the personifications of choleric temperament.

The *Woman with a Glass*, newly attributed to Pieter Borselaert, is a real iconographic curiosity. The plumed hat, the raised glass and the accessories of smoking all refer to the fact that the lady, in spite of her age and consolidated appearance, is *Luxuria*, i. e. the allegorical figure of Lechery (diss. cat. no. 34). On the basis of the positioning of the figure and the structure of the composition it can be supposed that this painting also had a companion piece, possibly with the representation of the housewife's virtues or the example of the humble way of life. The possibility, that its pendant may have represented an aristocratic lady encircled with objects conveying a more dignified content, can be also raised.

Two paintings of the collection were deprived of their former Mattheus van Helmont-attribution. One of them is the afore-mentioned *Peasant Courtyard with an Old Woman and a Cat* (diss. cat. no. 8) and the other is a composition representing a market scene which remotely reflects reminiscences of the Italian traditions, evolved especially in the wake of Bartolomeo Passerotti, yet – in spite of its signature – it cannot be unanimously assigned to the master's oeuvre (diss. cat. no. 14).

We also succeeded in defining Joos van Craesbeeck's birthdate. Literature formerly placed this date between 1605 and 1608, while the master's monographer, Karolien de Clippel, to 1605–06. However, we have succeeded in finding a datum, which surely defines this date as 1608: among the war losses of the Kunsthalle, Bremen, a *Self-Portrait* by Craesbeeck is recorded which bears the following inscription on its back: "Aet. 39 Jos. van Craesbeeck se ipse pinxit 1647" (Catalogue Bremen 1998, 30). Craesbeeck's oeuvre, who advanced from a baker to a painter under the influence of Adriaen Brouwer, is quite uneven. His work showing a *Fight in a Tavern*, which enriched the Ráth collection, Budapest, till the 1880s and is now preserved in the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunste, Antwerp, belongs to his most outstanding and iconographically most complex works. The Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, preserves two paintings of poorer quality by him. The *Lady with a Wine Glass in the Company of Men* is a typical piece of his oeuvre (diss. cat. no. 19), and, in contrast to the title as *Merry Company* given by Pigler, the mood of the participants is quite melancholic, and the real theme of the painting is the love of soldiers or mercenaries.

Craesbeeck's other painting in Budapest, the *Company Smoking and Drinking in the Open Air*, was included in the Summary Catalogue of the museum as a work by an imitator of Craesbeeck, but according to the testimony of the signature appearing during the restoration, this work, executed somewhat clumsily but with virtuoso painterliness, can also be assigned to the master's oeuvre (diss. cat. no. 3).

The painting representing an *Old Man Singing* attributed to David III. Ryckaert, which formerly elicited a series of opinions and counter-opinions with regard to its authorship, also underwent a restorational examination (diss. cat. no. 37). In the centre of the back of the panel also appeared a burnt form showing a lily or an iris, hardly visible to the naked eye because of the marked veining of the panel, which – according to the seventeenth-century studio practice – is the device of the panel-maker. It hasn't been identified yet, nevertheless, the panel surely dates from the seventeenth century, and the execution of certain parts of the panel supposes Ryckaert's authorship. It is interesting to mention that at the beginning of the nineteenth century this painting still figured in the Viennese collection of J. M. von Birckenstock, together with the above-mentioned Craesbeeck-work originating from the Ráth collection.

A recently traced, misunderstood variant of the *Changing of the Diaper (The Smell)* supposedly painted by Anthoni Victoryns, is a perfect example of Lyckle de Vries' theory of the so-called "iconographic erosion" (diss. cat. no. 13). In the composition the child whose diaper is changed is replaced by a loaf of bread, about to be sliced by the mother. Yet, the participants of the scene – as a devaluation of the former iconographic links – do not change

their behaviour: they unalteredly hold their noses, because of the unpleasant smell. The compilation of disconnected actions resulted in an iconographically senseless and uninterpretable work.

The *Music-Making Company with the Statue of Hercules*, which is newly attributed to Victor Honoré Janssens (Brussels 1658 – 1736), already belongs to the eighteenth-century material (diss. cat. no. 43.). The painting was inventoried in 1956 as the work of a *Netherlandish master of around 1700*, and Andor Pigler retained this attribution in the catalogue of the Old Masters' Gallery. The grouping of the figures, the frieze-like arrangement of the three protagonists, the graceful pose, the affected movements and demure faces undoubtedly assign the work to Victor Honoré Janssens, a less-known master from Brussels. Its closest analogy, *The Landscape with the Wedding of Messalina*, can be found in the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

The dissertation also touches upon the Dutch parallels of the particular works, and in the given case, upon the influence of contemporary Dutch literature on Flemish artists.

The dissertation is complemented with a bibliography and one hundred and twenty black and white reproductions as well as appendices after Chapter II and some catalogue entries (diss. cat. nos. 13, 17, 28, 29).

Translated by Zsuzsa Dobos