



Bart Ramakers (ed.), ***Understanding Art in Antwerp: Classicising the Popular, Popularising the Classic (1540-1580)*** (Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 45; Leuven: Peeters, 2011, xxv + 342 pp. + 68 illus., ISBN 978 90 429 2613 4).

This volume publishes the thirteen papers, and the seven responses to them, presented at the symposium of the same name held at the University of Groningen in January 2008. The great virtue of the symposium and book is that they bring together studies from multiple disciplines: art history, music history, and literary history (mainly the works of the rhetoricians). The art historical papers represent roughly half of the collection.

The decision to focus upon this period in Antwerp – 1540 to 1580 – is particularly apt for several reasons. First, as the authors emphasize, it represents the initial maturation and consolidation of the city's international preeminence upon the European stage, in the arts but equally in global trade and the ethnic and linguistic cosmopolitanism which resulted from it. Second, at least in art history, this period of sixteenth-century Antwerp art has, until relatively recently, been rather neglected. The traditional preference of art historians leaned toward either the rise of the city's artistic hegemony, in the first decades of the sixteenth century, or toward the generation of Frans Floris and Pieter Bruegel, near its end. Happily, this neglect began to change in publications of the 1990s, when artists of the middle generation became the object of serious scholarly attention. This period of art gained an especially sophisticated model of intellectual engagement and novel interpretation in 1998 with the appearance of Elizabeth Honig's *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp*. The present volume eloquently demonstrates the maturation of scholarly sophistication since those initial efforts.

The term 'classic' in the title is, appropriately, understood in broad and nuanced terms. It signifies, variously, material from the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome; its adaptations in contemporary, foreign cultures (Italian and French); and even the Bible as an ancient, authoritative text. In general, the classic mode evokes elite, non-native, and often humanistic sources. 'Popular', on the other hand, signifies currents and traditions that are local (Antwerp, Brabant) or indigenously Netherlandish, thereby constituting a vernacular: in style or practice (art and music) or in spoken and written language (Dutch literature).

In her keynote address, Joanna Woodall contextualizes the relevance of these issues. Taking Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* paintings as her departure point, she likens the polyglot linguistic, artistic, and economic culture of Antwerp at mid century to ancient Babel itself, citing, for instance, the publication of Plantin's five-language *Biblia Regia* and the centrality of the Antwerp book-publishing industry in generating vernacular translations in six or more languages. In this Babel-like aspect, as Bart Ramakers stresses in his Introduction, the intermingling and translations of classical and vernacular should be understood in terms of 'exchange, conversation, negotiation and dialogue – in short, as reciprocating movement' (xiv).

David Rijser deconstructs the older, simple-minded opposition of the classical vs. popular by demonstrating that both contemporary Antwerp painting (Floris) and modern Roman painting (Raphael) mixed antique elements with vernacular ones. He advances the provocative thesis that, for Northerners, the invocation of antique and contemporary Italianate elements in their art might be more than simple rivalry with the Italians. Like Guicciardini's 1567 canon of Netherlandish painters, it could be a claim for equivalent Northern legitimacy, even superiority, in relation to Italy. In this connection, Caecilie Weissert discusses Van Mander's praise of Frans Floris's ability at deceptive realism, which the Dutch author likened to the ancient competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Weissert shows that Northerners universally praised this kind of illusionism, so that the 'living pictures' of Floris, Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer surpassed the Italians and matched the ancients of Pliny's account.

In the first paper to examine the role of Netherlandish rhetoricians, Todd M. Richardson argues that Bruegel's use of Italian *historia* as a design strategy in his vernacular peasant paintings is analogous to the way in which contemporary Brabantine rhetoricians were integrating antique and humanist motifs, plus classical rhetorical arguments, into plays derived from Netherlandish folk culture. At mid century, the Antwerp rhetorician Cornelis van Ghistele produced vernacular translations of ancient texts, using language and style faithful to *rederijker* conventions, as Femke Hemelaar demonstrates.

The central figure in this book is the prominent rhetorician and publisher, and organizer of the famous 1561 Antwerp *Landjuweel*, Willem van Haecht (not to be confused with Willem van Haecht II, the seventeenth-century Antwerp picture-gallery painter). He is the subject of four papers plus additional responses. Yvonne Bleyerveld's study of eight prints published by Van Haecht stresses their Lutheran moral themes, both in the allegories and the religious works, and their likely allusions to actual events of the time. Anke van Herk interprets Van Haecht's play, *Cephalus and Procris*, as an exemplum of ideal Erasmian marriage, thereby fulfilling Erasmus's call to use classical stories for didactic purposes. Like other Flemish humanists, Van Haecht believed that knowledge and use of antique culture would improve the new vernacular literature of the time. In the 1560s, Van Haecht wrote three Apostle plays dramatizing the Acts of the Apostles, in which, according to Bart Ramakers, he presented Paul as the ideal rhetorician – 'an example of

how the art of rhetoric in its contemporary manifestation [...] should be practiced and to what end' (230).

Van Haecht's publishing foray into the field of music is addressed by Jan R. Luth, focusing on the metrical psalter he produced for the Antwerp Lutheran church in order to correct versification problems in the older editions. Herbert Meeus emphasizes the international esteem in which psalters were held by Protestant congregations, leading to the suggestion that Van Haecht was deliberately asserting his literary stature. Meeus makes a similar claim for the vernacular songs of the Antwerp composer, Tielman Susato, studied here by Louis Peter Grijp. In Susato's eleven music books, published over the course of as many years, Grijp shows that he sought to establish Dutch songs as the equal of Latin, Italian and French songs. In addition to writing in the vernacular, Susato incorporated elements of rhetoricians' poetry and composed the music in four-part polyphonic form, the standard mode then in use for elite, foreign songs.

This book assembles a superb collection of individual studies, distinguished by their insight, multivalence, and originality. From this standpoint, as well as from the several disciplines embraced by it, this volume has much to offer a broad scholarly audience. Bart Ramakers is to be congratulated for his exceptional work in organizing the symposium and editing this volume. This gathering of sophisticated scholarly studies provides every reason to believe that these high standards will continue to evolve, and that future contributions will add even greater definition to our understanding of the sister arts in Antwerp at mid century.

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