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THE SUBLIME IN THE VISUAL CULTURE OF THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DUTCH REPUBLIC

STIJN BUSSELS
AND BRAM VAN OOSTVELDT

ROUTLEDGE

The Sublime in the Visual Culture of the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

Contrary to what Kant believed about the Dutch (and their visual culture) as "being of an orderly and diligent position" and thus having no feeling for the sublime, this book argues that the sublime played an important role in seventeenth-century Dutch visual and decorative art, architecture, and theater.

By looking at different visualizations of exceptional heights, divine presence, overwhelming natural phenomena, political grandeur, extreme violence, and extraordinary artifacts, the authors demonstrate how viewers were confronted with the sublime, which evoked in them a combination of contrasting feelings of awe and fear, attraction and repulsion. In studying seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture through the lens of notions of the sublime, we can move beyond the traditional and still widespread views on Dutch art as the ultimate representation of everyday life and the expression of a prosperous society in terms of calmness, neatness, and order.

The book will be of interest to scholars working in art history, visual culture, architectural history, and cultural history.

Stijn Bussels is a Professor of Art History and Head of the Department of Art History at Leiden University Centre of the Arts in Society.

Bram Van Oostveldt is an Associate Professor at the Department of Art, Music and Theatre Studies at Ghent University.

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The Sublime in the Visual Culture of the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt

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We dedicate this book to our son, Karel Van Oostveldt Bussels, who makes our lives a joy every day.

Introduction

Many people associate the sublime with Romantic landscape or marine paintings by Joseph Vernet, Caspar David Friedrich, and J.M.W. Turner, or with modern abstract paintings by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman. The sublime as a quality of speech, literature, art, or nature that goes beyond human measures and arouses conflicting emotions of awe and fear, of terror and fascination, is mostly related to modern thinking, from the mid-eighteenth century onward. For Edmund Burke the sublime often deals with human insignificance in face of the overpowering effects of nature. For Immanuel Kant, the sublime does not refer to art or an object in nature but to an inner state of mind. In his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), he describes how the sublime arouses strong emotions that transcend and destabilize human subjectivity at the same time as it enables us to overcome the fear this evokes.[1] Jean-François Lyotard in his reinterpretation of the Kantian sublime relates it to a decisively modern mode of sensibility, as the sublime signaled the limits of representation and shaped modernist avant-garde art in its move away from the beautiful toward a general sense of the unsettling.[2]

It may seem a bit odd to look at seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture from the perspective of the sublime as it is described above. Indeed, painting from the Republic is generally perceived as a eulogy of everyday life, its concrete material objects, and the proud burghers who collected them. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century art historians presented these paintings as products of a stable national identity rooted in Protestantism, austerity, and entrepreneurial spirit.[3] Svetlana Alpers emphasized the uniqueness of seventeenth-century Dutch art as "descriptive," as the product and agent of a visual culture that "maps" the outer world, as opposed to the narrative mode of Italian Renaissance art.[4] Likewise, Mariët Westermann characterized Dutch seventeenth-century painting as a distinctively worldly art with "an unprecedented concern for a reality effect."[5] From those different points of view, the perfected realism—or perhaps we should speak of hyperrealism or even "apparent realism," a term coined by Eddy de Jongh[6]—of Dutch seventeenth-century portraiture, still lifes, landscapes, and genre painting seems to have little in common with the disturbing nature of the experience that the sublime conveys. Dutch art's notorious lack of sensationalism, its prosaic character, its appeal to calmness, order, and neatness, and its moralizing emblematic messages would at first glance appear to be the exact opposite of the overwhelming and transporting capacities of the sublime.

Even Kant himself thought so. In his *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime* of 1764 he writes that "the Dutchman is of an orderly and diligent disposition and, as he looks solely to the useful, he has little feeling for what in the finer understanding is beautiful or sublime."[7] No doubt Kant was expressing here nothing more than the clichés

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of his own time describing the characteristics of different nations, but his harsh words would seem to preclude any discussion of seventeenth-century Dutch art in terms of the sublime. When the godfather of the sublime thinks it is absent from Dutch culture, why pursue the topic?

We believe that there are good reasons to discuss seventeenth-century Dutch visual art, as well as decorative art, architecture, and theater, from the perspective of the sublime. Although the sublime had not been strictly defined at that time, there were prominent theories, as well as many examples in visual culture that represented and aroused the conflicting emotions of awe and fear as a reaction to the incomprehensibility of heavenly realms, natural phenomena, benevolent or malicious forces, or extraordinary objects. They do not correspond with our general idea of Dutch art. The Delft painter Egbert van der Poel, for instance, experimented in much of his oeuvre with calling up enormous fires at night. Although Van der Poel became famous for several paintings of the gunpowder explosion in Delft in 1654, most of his work sprang from his imagination. The scenes both appalled and thrilled, thanks to spectacular effects of light and dark (Fig. 0.1). The way he depicted the eyewitnesses in a range of reactions—from mere resignation to awe to sheer panic— is remarkable as well.

Theatrical performances also elicited awe and fear from their audiences. In the most successful play of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, the revenge play *Aran and Titus*, Jan Vos overwhelmed his audience by staging the fierce struggle between the main characters as a whirlwind of the cruelest actions possible. The humanist Gaspar Barleaus

Figure 0.1 Egbert van der Poel, *Church on Fire,* 1658. Oil on panel, 46.3 × 62 cm. National Museum, Warsaw.

praised the play as being more than merely dreadful by stating: "I am stupefied. My mind is overwhelmed. The playhouse is transported, and our theater is raised to a higher level."[8] Despite the fact that Vondel's theater differed greatly from Vos's, we can use the same terms to praise his work as well. We will discuss Vondel's appropriation of Aristotelian catharsis in order to understand how his plays managed to overwhelm the audience to give them strength against the threats of fate.

Visitors to the tribunal of the Amsterdam town hall, built by the architect Jacob van Campen and inaugurated in 1655, expressed similar responses to the frightening mythological and historical scenes that the Antwerp sculptor Artus Quellinus carved in the purest Carrara marble (Fig. 0.2, cf. Fig. 6.1). The many poets who admired these sculptures, Vondel among them, emphasized the combination of attraction to the exceptional material and repulsion at the vivid nature of the extraordinary scenes. If we move one floor up in the Amsterdam town hall to the grand Citizens' Hall (*Burgerzaal*), we can see that the sublime was not only connected to feelings of terror evoked by visualizations of extremities in death, destruction, and cruelty, as in the tribunal, but could also lead to an overwhelming sensation of dwelling in divine heights.[9] In the Citizens' Hall, two enormous world maps, as well as a map of the firmament, have been integrated into the

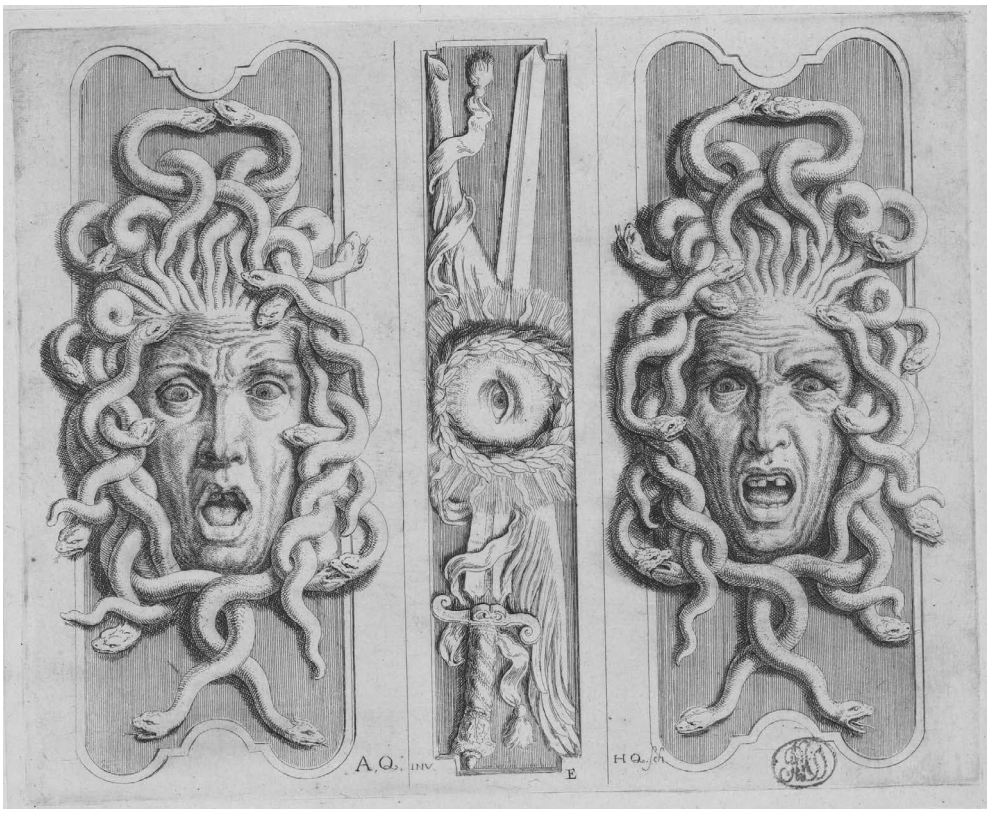

Figure 0.2 Hubert Quellinus, after Artus Quellinus, *Medusa and the Fury in the Tribunal of the Amsterdam Town Hall*. Illustration in Hubert Quellinus, *Het eerste deel. Van de voornaemste Statuen ende Ciraten, vant konstijck Stadhuys van Amstelredam*. Amsterdam: Frederik de Witt, 1665. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

marble floor of the hall, each one with a diameter of 624 cm (246 inches), the largest maps ever made (Fig. 5.1). In his poem praising the map of the firmament, the politician, poet, and art lover Constantijn Huygens encourages the visitors to believe that they are in heavenly regions.[10] In order to mentally reach sublime heights in the busy Citizens' Hall, the poet suggests that visitors should disregard their fellow visitors so they can start imagining themselves being elevated, getting a preview of heaven. He portrays this as a process in which the imagination—which, as we will see, plays an important role in the early modern conceptions of the sublime—serves as a central force.

Huygens's text presents his readers with an ideal way in which to experience and react to the magnificent building. This leads us to a central argument in our book: The sublime as it was theorized in the Dutch Republic and how it appeared in visual culture is always a matter of responses. Owing to its excessive and destabilizing nature, the sublime automatically takes into account how an image, a theatrical performance, a building, or an object will act on the viewer. As both Thijs Weststeijn and Caroline van Eck have written, the way the sublime was theorized and put into practice in the Dutch Republic always raised the question of the "beholder's share" in the experience of a work of art (Weststeijn) and of its agency (Van Eck).[11] In evoking strong and overwhelming reactions, the sublime invites us to think beyond the idea that an image or a theatrical performance is a mere representation that can be analyzed in terms of what it means, or that a building or object is more than the invention and appropriation of stylistic features that, in one way or another, symbolizes political and religious ideologies. The sublime, and how it was a part of Dutch visual culture, is performative in many ways: It links artist, representation, and viewer to each other, making the viewer an essential co-creator of a work of art. It is a strategy that makes the viewers forget they are dealing with a representation, but gives them the experience of being a witness to or even an agent in the representation; in its overwhelming effect it evokes existential questions concerning man's relation to the world, to nature, to God, and the self; and finally, its strong impact makes it an experience where political, social, and religious ideologies are negotiated and created. Thus, thinking about the sublime in seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture gives us a model of how people could or might have experienced a painting, a print, a theatrical performance, a building, or an object.

The sublime as the quality that goes beyond human measures and is expressed in works of art that elicit conflicting emotions of awe and fear, terror and fascination, speaks to an increasing interest in the role of emotions in seventeenth-century Dutch painting. At the start of the current millennium, a number of art and cultural historians, including Stephanie Dickey, Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Herman Roodenburg, Gary Schwartz, Eric Jan Sluijter, and Gregor Weber, related the painterly practices of expressing and stimulating emotions to early modern literature and theater and to ancient and early modern literary criticism, philosophy, and art theory.[12] Interest in the emotional impact of seventeenth-century Dutch theater started with Jan Konst's *Woedende wraakghierigheidt en vruchtelooze weeklachten* of 1993, an influential study of how emotions were staged in tragedies and how the staging affected the public.[13] For architecture, it is only recently that interest has been shown in the emotional impact of imposing buildings, as we, together with Caroline Van Eck, demonstrated in a book on the impact that the Amsterdam town hall had on its viewers and users.[14] This book expands on this recent scholarship by showing that, from the early seventeenth century on, the sublime was a productive means for addressing the unsettling, overwhelming, or transporting possibilities of Dutch art and how this has put the spotlight

on the viewer's position as a co-creator of or active participant in the effect art can have on the beholder.

The Sublime

Although the sublime as an experience definitely has universal aspects that, although named differently, can be ascribed to all cultures and throughout all periods, it also has a particular and lengthy conceptual history in Western thinking in which the Dutch Republic played a major role. In the West, the sublime began as a rhetorical and poetical concept based, at least in part, on an important original source, the treatise *On the Sublime* (*Peri hupsous*). There is not much contextual information on the treatise. We do not know who wrote it, or where or when it was written. The oldest manuscript can be found in a Byzantine codex from the tenth century. On its title page, the name "Dionysus Longinus" is mentioned, but in the index, this has been changed to "Dionysus or Longinus."[15] Humanists relied on these references to attribute the work to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Augustan literary critic, or to Cassius Longinus, a literary critic of the third century. Both attributions were eventually rejected, but the name Longinus stayed in use by default.[16]

The treatise gives the central attention to the sublime, the Greek *hupsos*, which was incorporated into European languages via the Latin adjective *sublimis*. Literally, *hupsos* and *sublimis* refer to extreme heights, and, figuratively they mean "grandeur" and "loftiness" as expressed in language.[17] *On the Sublime* concentrates on how the genius writer succeeds in transporting the audience completely out of themselves by creating a direct contact with *hupsos,* as if out of nothing. This has an overpowering and overwhelming effect on the audience but is gradually anticipated by the writer: By first mentally transporting himself and creating a direct experience with extreme heights, the writer can produce a text in which he has to combine his innate talent and his technical skill in order to eventually bring his audience to the sublime while erasing awareness of the medium itself. The text has thus an irresistible power over the audience because it brings the heavenly heights vividly before their mental eye, but in doing so it raises fear as well, since the highly elevated realms powerfully transcend the ordinary. The sublime escapes the grasp of human definitions and control. Longinus describes it as follows: "A well-timed flash of sublimity shatters everything like a bolt of lightning" (1.4).[18]

The importance of *On the Sublime*, therefore, resides in the fact that it deals with the strong persuasive and emotional impact of speech and literature that moves audiences into ecstasy. Longinus addresses the question of how language can move deeply, how it can transport, overwhelm, and astonish. "For the true sublime," he writes, "naturally elevates us: Uplifted with a sense of proud exaltation, we are filled with joy and pride, as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we heard" (7.2–3).[19] Speech or literature can create a close contact, or even a clash, with the object represented, while it also establishes a deep, indeed intimate, connection between an author and a reader or listener through a text. In Chapter 15 of Longinus's treatise, we find a famous reference to Euripides. In his play *Orestes*, he succeeded in overwhelming his audience by bringing the Furies directly before them because he had seen these goddesses of vengeance himself, thanks to his strong imagination. The sublime thus is an effect of presentification that succeeds in transcending the boundaries between representation and perceived reality.

Outside the field of early modern studies, it is still too often assumed that the sublime did not appear on the stage of modern criticism until 1674, when Nicolas Boileau translated Longinus's text as *Le traité de sublime, ou du merveilleux dans le discours*.[20] However, scholars in the 1950s, including Bernard Weinberg and Jules Brody, showed how *On the Sublime* was read in Italy and France from the mid-sixteenth century on.[21] Interest in the history and development of the concept of the sublime has increased rapidly since the 1980s. Marc Fumaroli in 1986 situated the early modern reception of Longinus within a larger humanist tradition of rhetoric and poetics.[22] He even considered *On the Sublime* a kind of "shadow text," which from the very beginning accompanied the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Republic of Letters.[23] The translation of Longinus by Boileau is, as Fumaroli and later scholars have argued, by no means a beginning that would be completed by Burke and Kant, but a culmination of earlier ideas relating to the sublime and the effect of literature.[24] As we will see, the Dutch Republic and its intellectual climate were crucial to understand these new perspectives regarding ideas about the sublime.

All of the studies mentioned above either respect the original rhetorical and poetical context in which Longinus's text first appeared or they subscribe to Boileau's statement that the sublime is the sovereign perfection of discourse. In the last few decades, however, the historiography of the early modern sublime has taken another turn, showing that manifestations as well as theories of the sublime were not limited to rhetoric and literature alone in the early modern period.[25] Painters, printmakers, draftsmen, and sculptors strongly imbued with the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis* used rhetorical and poetical concepts to theorize and describe the overwhelming and transporting effect of art.[26] Louis Marin and Clélia Nau connected the Longinian concept of the sublime to Nicolas Poussin's and Claude Lorrain's landscape paintings, which, they argue, reveal experiments in expressing a magnitude that goes far beyond everyday experiences.[27] *Translations of the Sublime,* a collection of essays published in 2012, related the sublime to the visual arts from a more historical and contextual perspective and also opened up the research to include architecture and the performing arts.[28] The task undertaken in that book was to look at how the sublime acts as a concept that is "translated" from rhetoric and poetics to all the arts. For the first time, the sublime evoked by language was systematically connected with its expressions in the visual arts, architecture, and theater and increasingly became a concept to consider the impact of art on the viewer.

Whereas *Translations of the Sublime* concentrates on early modern Italy, France, and Britain, this book is intended to broaden the research into the early sublime by giving a prominent place to the Dutch Republic. Thus, it expands on the special issue we edited in 2016, "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art" in the *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*.[29] In that special issue, tentative steps were taken to consider how the Dutch visual arts can be related to theories on the sublime. Our book *The Sublime in the Visual Culture of the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* will further explore these intersections, relying on new insights into the role of Leiden University in the early reception of Longinus's *On the Sublime* and especially its impact on art theory. Moreover, we take an important step beyond the special issue by not only concentrating on works of art, but also by relating them to architecture and theater, thus exploring the importance of the sublime in the broader visual culture. Two recent publications, Claire Charrier's book *Du sublime dans l'oeuvre gravé de Rembrandt* and Nafsika Litsardopoulou's essay *On the Expression of Emotions in Rembrandt's Art*, show that looking at art of the Dutch Republic through the lens of the sublime is timely, but restrict themselves to the oeuvre of the master.[30]

Longinus and Beyond

The first question that arises is to what extent the Longinian sublime was known in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. This question will be dealt with in the first chapter. Contrary to what is often assumed, the dissemination and reception of *On the Sublime* cannot be framed within a straight geographical itinerary from Italy across the Alps to France and then farther north. Its paths are much less direct, following detours and alternative routes. The Dutch Republic, and certainly the prospering Leiden University, proved to be fertile ground in the early dissemination, reception, and appropriation of Longinus.[31] Leiden professors were the first to debate and appropriate central issues of *On the Sublime* in handbooks of rhetoric and poetics, with Daniel Heinsius and Gerardus Vossius as instigators. Heinsius, for example, explicitly introduces Longinus as the writer "whose text on sublimity every tragic author must learn by heart."[32]

Given the early interest shown by these professors in *On the Sublime*, it may not come as a surprise that it was a scholar from Leiden University, Franciscus Junius, who used the ancient text for the first time in art theory in his magnum opus *De pictura veterum* of 1637.[33] Junius dedicates this work entirely to ancient thought that can be related to the visual arts, including theories that originally dealt with rhetoric or literature. Junius discusses *On the Sublime* to clarify how an artist can create powerful mental images that form the basis of works of art that overwhelm the beholder. Just as Longinus emphasized the writer's imagination, Junius presents the artist's imagination as the central driver in the artistic process. This appropriation of Longinus's theory led to new ideas about the role of the artist and influenced a wide range of art theoreticians throughout Europe, from Charles du Fresnoy and Roger de Piles in France to William Sanderson, Jonathan Richardson, and Joshua Reynolds in Britain.[34] Thijs Weststeijn has recently argued that the importance of *De pictura veterum* for the arts of the Low Countries was substantial, although often overlooked today.[35] We ask the question as to how far Junius's introduction of Longinus was picked up there.

Besides focusing on the introduction of Longinus in art theory, we also want to study the sublime from a kaleidoscopic perspective, so as not to overemphasize a Longinian-centered perspective.[36] Neither in antiquity nor in the early modern period did Longinus's *hupsos* monopolize all consideration of overwhelming speech, literature, visual and decorative arts, architecture, or theater.[37] In order to evaluate how the sublime played its role in the visual culture of the Dutch Republic, therefore, we will also look at a variety of manifestations and conceptualizations of the sublime. Thus, this book is innovative not only as it examines an underexplored aspect of Dutch visual culture in the seventeenth century, but also because it develops new ways to combine research into the initial reception of Longinus's treatise with neighboring concepts that come from other contexts—religion, politics, economics, the theater, or the world of collecting—that are closely related but can also emphasize other sides of the contact with highly elevated or extreme subjects.[38] More concretely put, beyond our discussion of *hupsos* in Chapter 1, we will concentrate in the rest of the book on related concepts that were prominent in the Dutch Republic: the Ovidian *sublimis, le merveilleux,* the fear of God, magnificence, terrifying sublimity, and wonder. All these concepts touch on conflicting emotions of awe and fear, but they have a different emphasis than that of the Longinian *hupsos*. These concepts have an ancient pedigree but were appropriated in the early modern period throughout the whole of Europe. The Dutch Republic is no different in this appropriation, but its particular political

and economic organizations and its religious and cultural climate had their specific influence on this appropriation.

In addition to researching these different concepts of the sublime and their impact in the Dutch Republic, we will also look at Dutch visual culture more broadly by analyzing paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, buildings, and performances, even if no theoretical text appears to be related to them. Thus, in this book we align ourselves with Eddy de Jongh, who argued that the Dutch eagerness for landscapes with high hills, rocks, and mountains must "certainly have had something to do with the attraction of the unusual, the peculiar and perhaps also, more paradoxically, with the lure of the terrifying."[39] Moreover, Jan Blanc, in exploring the impact of such overwhelming landscapes and seascapes, writes: "Everything seems to show that, during this era [the mid-seventeenth century], there existed a true sublime sensitivity, implemented by artists and experienced as such by the audience, even if it is unlikely that either could have been directly and explicitly aware of the categories they put into play."[40] This sublime sensitivity was fueled by the lived experience of facing the dangers of nature, crime, or war and resulted in artistic traditions capturing these experiences visually.

In the first two chapters of our book, we will compare three crucial aspects of the sublime with the help of the concepts *hupsos, sublimis,* and *le merveilleux*. With *hupsos* as used by Longinus and Junius, we look in the first chapter at the ways in which the writer and artist could convince and overwhelm their audiences. In this rhetorical, poetical, and art theoretical context we can already see that not only writers and artists, but also their audiences, are addressed, since the impact of texts or images is discussed as well. This will be developed further in Chapter 2, where the dangers the sublime involves are discussed. We depart from the *Metamorphoses*, where the adjective *sublimis* is used to name the most elevated heights, and link it with the necessary *humilis*, as Ovid marks the existential dangers that the magnitude of the sublime poses for human frailty and emphasizes the need to stay respectful. The story of Phaethon as told by Ovid was a popular subject in Dutch visual culture, not only because it pointed at life-threatening risks but also because staging and depicting the story evoked awe and surrender to the fantasy of floating high in the skies. The spectacular displays are discussed in terms of *le merveilleux,* as breathtaking and transporting experiences.

In the third and fourth chapter, we will look at the importance of religion for sublimity in Dutch visual culture. Throughout the ages, the sublime as a rhetorical, poetical, and art theoretical concept has closely interacted with the awe-inspiring, religious experience.[41] Longinus's reference to the *fiat lux* passage from the Book of Genesis is often taken as an example.[42] In the seventeenth century, the "Baroque sublime" of the Southern Netherlands with Rubens or of Italy with Bernini is brought to mind, with ecstasy as the center of attention evoked by direct contact with the holy or the divine. Although this kind of ecstasy was not overtly depicted in the Dutch Republic because of the dominance of Calvinism, the overwhelming powers of divine mystery were crucial to religious experience as well. In the third chapter, we will start from the concept of the fear of God (*vreese Godts*) with which theologians discussed the conflicting emotions of attraction and repulsion in experiencing contact with the divine. God inspired pure awe and had to be approached with the deepest respect. Among others, Calvin referred to divine awe to ban images of God the Father because it would disrespect his sublimity. We focus on the consequences of this ban in the arts and the theater, where the (in)visibility of God was at stake. The fourth chapter is closely linked to this and looks at artists who depicted awesome mountainous landscapes and threatening thunderstorms to deal with

Figure 0.3 Leonard Bramer, *Shipwreck on a Rocky Shore*, ca. 1645–50. Oil on canvas, 100 × 134.5 cm. BPK/Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

the incomprehensible grandness of God's power (Fig. 0.3).[43] However, landscape painting is not always about God's presence alone. It equally shows us how the enormous powers of nature have a strong impact that arouses fear and fascination or plays on the sensuous experience that reveals aesthetic pleasure.

In the fifth chapter, we concentrate on magnificence—first theorized by Aristotle as *megaloprepeia* and further explored as *magnificentia*—specifically the expression of political importance in large building projects. Relying on this concept, we study how the Amsterdam burgomasters and the stadholders alike expressed sublimity to strengthen their positions. In the sixth chapter, we look at terrifying aspects of sublimity. The increased use of terror in the arts and the theater led to escalating debates in the Republic because the fascination elicited by the representation of blunt cruelties had to be more than mere spectacular entertainment. The sublime lay in the fact that the terror initiated a process of attraction and repulsion that, ideally, should lead to catharsis. Finally, in the seventh and last chapter, the concept of wonder will be given central focus. This concept covered many areas, since it was used to name awe-inspiring miracles as well as astonishing sculpture and architecture from antiquity. The wonder that extraordinary objects in the cabinets of curiosities aroused was more than a departing point for the production of knowledge, but also elicited the ecstasy of being transported to astonishing worlds. Here, we will focus on how touch and haptic vision create confusing interactions that bring the distinction between object and subject out of balance and evoke feelings of wonder that can be understood in terms of the sublime.

In other words, this book argues that, contrary to what Kant believed about the Dutch as "being of an orderly and diligent position" and thus having no feeling for the sublime, the sublime played an important role in seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture. The interest of Dutch humanists in Longinus's *On the Sublime,* which from a European perspective was early and groundbreaking, turned the sublime into a fruitful historical category for studying the creation and impact of art, architecture, and theater in the Dutch Republic. But we also believe one must look beyond the Dutch reception of the Longinian sublime and study neighboring concepts, such as *sublimis*, *le merveilleux,* the fear of God, magnificence, terrifying sublimity, and wonder. It is a cluster of concepts and feelings that, despite their differences and their use in different contexts, overlap in many ways, as they all deal with overwhelming and astonishing effects that go far beyond the ordinary. By looking at different visualizations of exceptional heights, divine presence, political grandeur, extreme violence, and extraordinary artifacts, we see how viewers were confronted with the sublime, which evoked in them a combination of contrasting feelings of awe and fear, attraction and repulsion. In studying seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture through the lens of the sublime, we can move beyond the traditional and still widespread views on Dutch art as the ultimate representation of everyday life and the expression of a prosperous society in terms of calmness, neatness, and order. For far too long, this view has dominated our understanding of the visual culture in the Republic. As Gary Schwartz has stated, it is time to recognize the "thunder" in Dutch art and culture again.[44]

Notes

1 See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Beautiful and the Sublime,* ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 38; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 261–62; see also Baldine Saint-Girons, *Fiat Lux: Une philosophie du sublime* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1993); James Kirwan, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Timothy M. Costelloe, ed., *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

2 Jean-François Lyotard, "Le sublime et l'avant-garde," in *L'inhumain: Causeries sur le temps,* ed. Jean-François Lyotard (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 101–18.

3 Two famous examples are Conrad Busken Huet, *Het land van Rembrandt: Studiën over de Noordnederlandsche beschaving in de 17e eeuw,* 2 vols. (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1882–84), and Johan Huizinga, *Nederland's beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw, een schets* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1941). For a thorough discussion of art of the Dutch Golden Age and nationalism in the Netherlands, see Frans Grijzenhout and Henk van Veen, eds., *De Gouden Eeuw in perspectief* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1992).

4 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), i–xxvii, xxii.

5 Mariët Westermann, *A Worldly Art: The Dutch Republic, 1585–1718* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 7. Westermann's and Alpers's focus on "the reality effect" as the emphasis upon the figural instead of the discursive corresponds with Roland Barthes's famous essay "L'effet du réel" from 1968, on strategies in nineteenth-century French literature, in which he treats authors such as Michelet and Flaubert who manifest themselves in descriptions that resist meaning and discursive reading. Interestingly, in one of his first, but rarely mentioned, essays, "Le monde-objet" (1953), Barthes deals with seventeenth-century Dutch painting in a way that foreshadows this later fascination with the descriptive nature of Dutch art. See Roland Barthes, "Le monde-objet," in *Oeuvres Complètes,* ed. Eric Marty, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993), 1177–84, and Barthes "L'effet du reel," in *Oeuvres Complètes,* vol. 2 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), 483–97. See also Mieke Bal, *Verf en Verderf: Rembrandt lezen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1990), 105–15.

6 Eddy de Jongh, ed., *Tot lering en vermaak. Betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1976).
7 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,* trans. John T. Goldwaith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 105.
8 "Ik stae gelijk bedwelmt en overstolpt van geest./ De schouburg wort verzet, en schoeyt op hooger leest." The praise is published as Caspar Barlaeus, "Op het hooghdravend Treurspel van Jan de Vos, Glazemaker," in Jan Vos, *Alle de gedichten* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lescaille, 1662), folio A4v.
9 Stijn Bussels, Caroline van Eck, and Bram Van Oostveldt, eds., *The Amsterdam Town Hall in Words and Images. Constructing Wonders* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2021).
10 Constantijn Huygens, *Gedichten,* ed. J. A. Worp, vol. 6 (Groningen: Wolters, 1899), 82.
11 Caroline van Eck, "Living Statues: Alfred Gell's Art and Agency, Living Presence Response and the Sublime," *Art history* 33, no. 4 (2010): 642–59; Caroline van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, Ekplexis, and the Sublime," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, https://jhna.org/articles/petrifying-gaze-medusa-ambivalence-explexis-sublime/; Thijs Weststeijn, "The Sublime and the 'Beholder's Share,' Junius, Rubens, Rembrandt," in Bussels and Van Oostveldt, "The Sublime," accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.2.
12 A study in this context is Gregor Weber, *Der Lobtopos des 'lebenden' Bildes. Jan Vos and sein "Zeege der Schilderkunst" von 1654* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991). Later studies are Stephanie Dickey and Herman Roodenburg, eds., "The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands," annual issue of *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 60 (2010), see esp. the contributions of Herman Roodenburg and Eric Jan Sluijter; Daniele Hammer-Tugendhat, *The Visible and the Invisible: On Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Cologne: De Gruyter, 2009); Gary Schwartz, *How Vermeer and His Generation Stole the Thunder of the Golden Age* (Wassenaar: Nias, 2014); Gary Schwartz and Machiel Keestra, *Emotions: Pain and Pleasure in Dutch Painting of the Golden Age* (exhibition catalogue, Haarlem: Frans Hals Museum, 2014); Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World. Samuel van Hoogstraten's Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008). See also the chapters "Viewer," "Passions," and "Wonder" in Claudia Fritzsche, Karin Leonard, and Gregor Weber, eds., *Ad fontes! Niederländische Kunst des 17. Jahrhunderts in Quellen* (Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 2013).
13 Jan Konst, *Woedende wraakghierigheidt en vruchtelooze weeklachten. De hartstochten in de Nederlandse tragedie van de zeventiende eeuw* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993).
14 Bussels, van Eck, and van Oostveldt, *The Amsterdam Town Hall.*
15 C.M. Mazzucchi, "La tradizione manoscritta del Περὶ ὕψους," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 32 (1989): 206–26.
16 James Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–5.
17 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), lemma 'ὕψος' and Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), lemma 'sublimitas'.
18 All quotes from *On the Sublime* come from the Loeb Classical Library edition; translation by Hamilton Fyfe and revised by Donald Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
19 Emma Gilby, *Sublime Worlds: Early Modern French Literature* (London: Legenda, 2006), 1.
20 Even in the recent *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) editor Robert Doran ignores the reception of *On the Sublime* before Boileau.
21 The *editio princeps* of *On the Sublime* goes back to 1554 and was published by Francesco Robertello six years after his influential comments on Aristotle's *Poetics*. The first surviving Latin translations appeared in the 1560s, and vernacular translations were made in the first half of the seventeenth century. Despite its status as the first French translation, Boileau's version of *On the Sublime* was predated by an incomplete anonymous French translation made in the close circles of Cardinal Mazarin in the middle of the seventeenth century. All those different versions give us an idea of the importance of *On the Sublime* in the European Republic of Letters. See Jules Brody, *Boileau and Longinus* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1958); Bernard Weinberg, "Translations and Commentaries of Longinus, 'On the Sublime' to 1600," *Modern Philology* 47,

no. 3 (1950): 145–51; Bernard Weinberg, "Une traduction française du 'Sublime' de Longin vers 1645," *Modern Philology* 59, no. 3 (1962): 159–201; Emma Gilby, ed., *Pseudo-Longin: De la sublimité du discours; Traduction inédite du XVIIe siècle* (Chambéry: L'Act Mem, 2007), 12–28. Cf. Caroline van Eck, Stijn Bussels, and Maarten Delbeke, "Introduction," in Caroline van Eck, Stijn Bussels, Maarten Delbeke, and Jürgen Pieters, eds., *Translations of the Sublime: The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus's* Peri Hupsous *in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre,* Intersections 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 1–10.

22 Marc Fumaroli, "Rhétorique d'école et rhétorique adulte: Remarques sur la réception européenne du traité 'Du Sublime' au XVIe et au XVIIe siècle," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 86, no. 1 (1986): 33–51. This essay was also published in Marc Fumaroli, *Héros et Orateurs: Rhétorique et dramaturgie cornéliennes* (Geneva: Droz, 1996), 377–98. References are made here to this last edition.

23 Fumaroli, *Héros et Orateurs,* 389.

24 Sophie Hache, *La langue du ciel: Le sublime en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2000); Lawrence Kerslake, *Essays on the Sublime: Analyses of French Writings on the Sublime from Boileau to La Harpe* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000); Nicolas Cronk, *The Classical Sublime: French Neoclassicism and the Language of Literature* (Charlottesville, Va.: Rockwood Press, 2002); Gilby, *Sublime Worlds*; Dietmar Till, *Das doppelte Erhabene: Eine Argumentationsfigur von der Antike bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 2006); Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006); Patrick Cheney, *English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime. Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

25 Eva Madeleine Martin argues that we should look at the prehistories of the sublime from an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective. Seventeenth-century interests in the sublime and in Longinus "fit into an array of preoccupations broader than technical questions of writing, spanning unorthodox religiosity, politics, the visual arts, and the sciences," while it equally crosses national and linguistic boundaries. Martin, "The 'Prehistory' of the Sublime," 101. Cf. Roald Hoffmann and Iain Boyd White, eds., *Beyond the Finite. The Sublime in Art and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic. Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

26 Caroline van Eck, *Classical Rhetorics and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

27 Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1998); Clélia Nau, *Le temps du sublime: Longin et le paysage poussinien* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005); Clélia Nau, *Claude Lorrain, scaenographie solis* (Paris: Editions 1:1, 2009).

28 Van Eck, Bussels, Delbeke, and Pieters, eds., *Translations of the Sublime*.

29 Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, eds., "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.1.

30 Claire Charrier, *Du sublime dans l'oeuvre gravé de Rembrandt* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022), accessed April 30, 2023, https://books.openedition.org/pur/181101; Nafsika Litsardopoulou, "On the Expression of Emotions in Rembrandt's Art," *Philosophia* 46 (2018): 665–88; Nafsika Litsardopoulou, "The Animal as Agent of the Sublime in Rembrandt's Rape Narratives and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Philosophia* 50 (2022): 109–25.

31 Wieneke Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous*. Interpretations and Creative Adaptations of Longinus's Treatise *On the Sublime* in Early Modern Dutch Scholarship," University of Leiden, Ph.D. thesis, 2019, accessed April 30, 2023, https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/71553.

32 "cujus de sublimitate scriptum Tragico poetae ediscendum putem." (17.310, our translation)

33 We will be using Junius's own English translation of *The Painting of the Ancients* of 1638, available in a modern edition with introduction and annotations by Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). See Colette Nativel's latest publication on Junius with an extended bibliography: "Lecture du 'Traité du sublime' par Franciscus Junius F.F.," in Bussels, Van Oostveldt, and Jansen, "The Sublime in Early Modern Theories of Art and Architecture," 263–79. See also T.J.B. Spencer, "Longinus in English Criticism: Influences before Milton," *The Review of English Studies* 8, no. 30 (1957): 137–43, and Thijs Weststeijn, "The Sublime and the 'Beholder's Share,' Junius, Rubens, Rembrandt," in

Bussels and Van Oostveldt, "The Sublime," accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.2.

34 Colette Nativel has shown that his writings were discussed in France by such art theoreticians as Charles du Fresnoy and Roger de Piles. The English translation of Junius gave the text an important afterlife in Britain and influenced artistic discussions by other theoreticians, including William Sanderson in the seventeenth century, Jonathan Richardson in the early eighteenth century, and Joshua Reynolds in the late eighteenth century. See Colette Nativel, "Le traité 'Du sublime' et la pensée esthétique anglaise du Junius à Reynolds," in *Acta conventus neo-latini hafniensis: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Copenhagen, 12–17 August 1991*, ed. Rhoda Schnur (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), 721–30; Colette Nativel, "Quelques apports du *De pictura ueterum libri tres* de Franciscus Junius à la théorie de l'art en France," in *Revue d'esthétique* 31/32 (1997): 119–31; Colette Nativel, "A Plea for Franciscus Junius as an Art Theoretician," in *Franciscus Junius F.F. and His Circle,* ed. Rolf Hendrik Bremmer (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 19–33; Colette Nativel, "Ut pictura poesis: Junius et Roger de Piles," *XVIIe siècle* 61 (2009): 593–608; Colette Nativel, "Le *De pictura veterum* (1694) de Franciscus Junius et les académies," in *Comptes rendus. Académie des inscriptions & belles-lettres* 1 (2013): 253–74. See also Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl's introduction to Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients, according to the English translation (1638)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), lxiv.

35 Thijs Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity in the Netherlands and Britain: The Vernacular Arcadia of Franciscus Junius (1591–1677)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 1–9. Cf. his *The Visible World*.

36 See James Porter's double review of *Translations of the Sublime* and *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, in *Rhetorica* 32, no. 4 (2014): 419–23. Cf. James Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

37 Stephen Jager could study the role of the sublime in medieval art, architecture, literature, and music by stepping aside from *On the Sublime* as it was only seldom read in that period. Stephen Jager, ed., *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics. Art, Architecture, Literature, Music* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

38 Cf. Piet Gerbrandy who states that there are two ways to study the sublime: "One way is that in which one chooses a particular term, say hypsos, and meticulously examines in what contexts it is used, what it means, and how it is then translated.. . . The second method works the other way around. The researcher takes a particular aesthetic experience as a starting point, for example the sublime as defined by Burke, and then examines how and in what contexts that experience has been described throughout history, regardless of the terminology used for it." ("De ene weg is die waarbij men een bepaalde term kiest, bijvoorbeeld hypsos, en nauwgezet onderzoekt in welke contexten hij gebruikt wordt, wat hij betekent, en hoe hij vervolgens wordt vertaald.. . De tweede methode werkt andersom. De onderzoeker neemt een bepaalde esthetische ervaring als uitgangspunt, bijvoorbeeld het sublieme zoals het door Burke is gedefinieerd, en bekijkt vervolgens hoe en in welke contexten die ervaring in de loop der geschiedenis is beschreven, ongeacht de terminologie die ervoor gebruikt werd.") Piet Gerbrandy, *De jacht op het sublieme* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2014), 10 (our translation).

39 Eddy de Jongh, "Mountains in the Lowlands," in Eddy de Jongh, *Questions of Meaning. Theme and Motif in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Painting* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2000), 168.

40 Jan Blanc, "Sensible Natures: Allart Van Everdingen and the Tradition of Sublime Landscape in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, doi: 10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.4.

41 Robert Doran, "Introduction," in *The Theory of the Sublime*, 1.

42 Saint Girons, *Fiat Lux*.

43 Boudewijn Bakker, *Landscape and Religion: From Van Eyck to Rembrandt* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), esp. chap. 8.

44 Schwartz, *How Vermeer*, 4. Cf. the collection of essays on the early modern and modern history and art history of the Dutch seventeenth century: Grijzenhout and van Veen, *De Gouden Eeuw in perspectief,* and Schwartz and Keestra, *Emotions*.

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1 *Hupsos*

Franciscus Junius and the Reception of *On the Sublime*

The reception of the classic text *On the Sublime* started slowly. The treatise was not referred to in any texts that survive from Greco-Roman antiquity and rarely so in the Middle Ages. About 1450, a Byzantine codex containing a Greek manuscript of the treatise was brought to light by Cardinal Basilios Bessarion, who was an enthusiastic collector of ancient texts. Copies gradually spread throughout Italy, but it took more than a century to see the text broadly distributed.[1] The first print editions of *On the Sublime* were published by the Italian humanists Francesco Robortello (Basel, 1554), Paolo Manuzio (Venice, 1555), and Franciscus Portus (Geneva, 1569).[2] At first, the treatise was primarily used as a source for ancient literary passages and as a treatise on the use of style in literary texts, the so-called *genera decendi*, or the differences between the *genus humile*, the *genus medium*, and the *genus sublime*.[3] It was not until about 1600 that *On the Sublime* was studied as an important, independent text, and humanists connected to Leiden University played an important role in that development.

From its very beginning, Leiden University, founded in 1575 by William of Orange, had an international reputation as one of the primary humanist centers of Europe.[4] The success of the university was largely the result of an extremely ambitious and richly financed policy regarding appointments. Leiden University attracted so-called *honorarii*, highly respected scholars, from all over Europe and paid them a significant salary. Justus Lipsius was one of the first in a series of renowned academics there. In 1579, a year after his arrival, he became the rector magnificus and paved the way for other intellectual celebrities, such as Carolus Clusius and Josephus Justus Scaliger, both of whom arrived in Leiden in 1593. Clusius founded the world-famous *Hortus Botanicus*, and Scaliger contributed greatly to the formation of an internationally renowned library and took care that ancient sources were given the attention they deserved.

On the Sublime was one of the ancient texts in the Leiden library, but as Wieneke Jansen has shown, the university library was not the only place where the treatise could be found.[5] Her interpretation of the significance of Longinus in early modern Dutch scholarship is based on her study of the book catalogs of 193 private collections and 53 inventories of booksellers and publishers from the first half of the seventeenth century, and she found that *On the Sublime* was present in 35.[6] In other words, one in every seven book collections that we know of in the Dutch Republic included a copy of the ancient treatise. In this regard, Leiden stood head and shoulders above the other cities of the Republic. Not only could copies be found in many Leiden collections, mostly those owned by professors, but also of the 41 printed copies that were sold in the Republic between 1599 and 1650, we know that 28 were purchased by Leiden bibliophiles.

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Jansen makes it clear that the early reception of *On the Sublime* was caused not only because so many copies were in Leiden collections but also because it was the result of the vibrant intellectual climate at the young university, where the latest trends in classical philology were quickly received and maintained. Before his arrival in Leiden, Scaliger had already relied on the treatise explicitly because it was the only preserved source of an extensive quote from a poem of Sappho, the so-called fragment 31.[7] In this, he followed, among others, the Italian humanist Fulvio Orsini, who owned a manuscript of *On the Sublime* and had previously discussed this fragment.[8] Scaliger brought this international knowledge along with him to Leiden and introduced it to his students Daniel Heinsius, Hugo Grotius, and Gerardus Vossius.[9]

Heinsius, Grotius, and Vossius

These three humanists, who were affiliated with Leiden University during crucial periods in their careers, would play an important role in the next step in the reception of *On the Sublime*. They helped to ensure that the treatise was used not only as a collection of quotes but also as an independent source with its own merits. More specifically, these humanists drew attention to *On the Sublime* as a means to discuss how excellent writers could overwhelm audiences and to explain why their texts could be characterized in terms of the sublime. Thus, the early reception of the ancient treatise at Leiden University focused on the powerful impact of words. In this respect, Heinsius, Grotius, and Vossius developed insights regarding Longinus's treatise that are generally attributed to literary critics from the end of the seventeenth century. Too often, modern scholars still consider Nicolas Boileau and his 1674 French translation *Traité du Sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours* as the starting point of modern Western thinking about the sublime. However, the groundbreaking ideas of the Leiden humanists regarding Longinus's treatise and the significant influence they had throughout Europe in the seventeenth century show us that Boileau's translation was not only a departing point but also a culmination of earlier ideas on the possibilities of *On the Sublime* that went beyond purely rhetorical questions.[10]

The interest in Longinus at Leiden raises three different points: First, the question whether stylistic imperfection is not a fault but a prerequisite for writing literature that has an overwhelming effect on the reader. Second, the focus on the use of the biblical *fiat lux* passage by Longinus, a heathen, as the ultimate example of sublime writing that has universal impact. Third, the idea that to create sublime literature, writers must possess an intense inspiration and an imagination that elevate them to a level of ecstasy.

The earliest example that Jansen gives of Longinus's reception at Leiden is Daniel Heinsius's *Prolegomena* to his 1603 edition of Hesiod's works.[11] Heinsius relies *On the Sublime* to defend the Greek poet against modern critics, who blamed him for an unrefined style. He uses Longinus's concept of genius to define the capacity of writers to rely on inspiration to create and express the profound thoughts that form the basis of sublime texts. For the humanist, Hesiod is a genius who trusts his natural impulses to mentally climb to heavenly heights and to describe his experiences in an overwhelming, though not faultless, style. In spite of, or actually because of, his stylistic failures, the words of Hesiod have for Heinsius the power to elevate readers. Longinus believes that we must forgive inspired authors for their mistakes, but Heinsius goes a decisive step further by stating that geniuses need to make mistakes in order to write sublime texts.[12]

In an international context, this notion was also under debate by several humanists who were in contact with Heinsius. Isaac Casaubon, for example, spoke up for Persius

in a similar way in his 1605 edition of the Roman poet's *Satires*. Casaubon, who corresponded actively with Heinsius,[13] relied on Longinus's justification of Plato's style, which for all its failures was nevertheless awe-inspiring, as it resulted from inspiration. In his *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste* of 1627–28, Jean Goulu in turn used Longinus's ideas about the inspired writer and the unrefined style to criticize a contemporary author, Guez de Balzac, whom he accuses of stylistic extravagance. Goulu made use of Longinus much as Heinsius did, by expressing the conviction that stylistic negligence must be forgiven, but he differed from Heinsius in emphasizing that this can only be done to a certain degree. In his view, Guez de Balzac went simply too far and furthermore was not a genius, as he could not rely on sublime inspiration.[14] Leone Allacci's *De erroribus magnorum virorum in dicendo* of 1635 and John Dryden's *Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence* of 1677, as well as Boileau's French translation of *On the Sublime*, also use the ancient treatise to explore the tensions between ingenuity, stylistic purism, and excess. Time and again, Longinus's treatise, as well as Heinsius's comments on the text, stimulated seventeenth-century literary critics, thanks to the fact that they could rely on it to avoid simplistic judgments and instead find arguments about how far an inspired author could go in his power to express grand thoughts. So, in his appropriation of *On the Sublime* to defend Hesiod, Heinsius was a forerunner.

Like Heinsius, Grotius and Vossius were also involved in the early reception of *On the Sublime*. Jansen has clarified how both were pioneers in using Longinus's praise of the *fiat lux* passage in the Book of Genesis to present the Bible as sublime.[15] Here, "sublime" is not merely a synonym of "highly elevated" or "heavenly inspired" but comes close to *hupsos* as a rhetorical and literary-critical concept that is not primarily a matter of viewing the Bible as the Word of God but rather considers it a text that can be discussed in the same way as those of Greco-Roman orators and poets for its overwhelming power. In *On the Sublime,* Longinus praises Moses as the author of the *fiat lux* passage. So, it is not God but a mortal that is central to the production of the text. Of course, our Leiden professors did not go so far as to deny that the Bible was the Word of God, but they did suggest that the Bible could be analyzed with parameters of the ancient rhetorical handbooks and literary criticism. Again, the assumption that Boileau was the first scholar to pay attention to the *fiat lux* passage and use it as a testimony to the majesty and simplicity of the Bible as a literary text must be revised.[16] In his influential *De veritate religionis Christianae* of 1627, Hugo Grotius predates Boileau by half a century in referring to Longinus's paraphrase of the same biblical passage. Taking a cue from *On the Sublime,* Grotius analyses the text in a literary-critical way primarily used for ancient texts by focusing on its style. The humanist clarifies how divine subjects can be overwhelming precisely because they are expressed in simple language.

Two decades earlier, in his *Commentarii rhetorici* of 1606, Gerardus Vossius, Grotius's friend and colleague, had already taken notice of Longinus's biblical reference. He started from the fact that the biblical passage was discussed by an ancient literary critic used to analyze texts of, among other authors, Plato, Euripides, and Homer. Vossius focused on the exceptional praise that the *fiat lux* passage receives in this particular context by noting that if even a heathen is overwhelmed by the Holy Scripture, it must exercise a universal power. So, by taking the Bible partly out of its theological context and bringing it explicitly into poetical and rhetorical thought from the Greco-Roman tradition, Vossius emphasized that the Bible could exercise a strong impact on all cultures. Vossius's opinion was soon followed by the handbooks of rhetoric

by Bartholomeus Keckermann and Nicolas Caussin and the theological works of Isaac Casaubon and Daniel Chamier.[17]

The question of inspiration will become one of the most important aspects in the humanist reception of Longinus by focusing on the irresistible elevation of the mind in the creative process. Longinus sees this upward movement as an exceptional quality of brilliant writers that brings them to produce sublime texts since it is only in being transported to heavenly heights that they can create overwhelming mental images that affect their audiences. In his *Poeticae institutiones,* published in 1647 but a work in progress for more than a decade, Vossius refers to Longinus to substantiate the fact that sublime texts result from intense inspiration since only inspiration can help writers go beyond what they can observe in the surrounding world and produce characters and events that are larger than life. Vossius asserts that the most excellent writers must be in a mental state of ecstasy; it is not direct observation but "*rage* or *ecstasy*, by which a man is enraptured outside himself and in forgetting himself becomes another man and presents to others that other man's thoughts and words" (11.3).[18] Thanks to ecstasy, writers are inspired to create overwhelming plays. They can show themselves as geniuses if they let strong mental images transport them into the characters they represent. Once back with their feet on the ground, they can use this sublime experience to give their characters such a presence that those in the audience believe themselves vividly confronted with lofty men instead of purely dramatic representations.

Vossius explains how the rapture with which writers produce drama can be transmitted to the audience. Here, we see how the Leiden humanist follows Longinus closely in the idea that the sublime functions as a mode of communication between an author, a text, and its audience. Sublime inspiration makes writers feel present with the events they describe and fuels their creativity to convey to their readers the impression of live events, thereby turning them into witnesses.[19] For Vossius, as well as originally for Longinus, the sublime was a means to blur the boundaries between representation and reality and can only occur when it results from the ecstatic mental state of the author during the process of creation. Heinsius, in his *Prolegomena*, expressed similar ideas, stating that a genius author must be able to climb to heavenly heights.[20] This focus on *hupsos* as the elevated state of mind will also be central for Franciscus Junius, who within the context of the visual arts reflects more in depth on the role of *hupsos* in his central concept of *phantasia* or imagination.

Franciscus Junius and *De Pictura Veterum*

Franciscus Junius the Younger was born in Heidelberg but was raised in Leiden, where his father was a professor of theology. After the death of his parents in 1602, he lived with Vossius, who was his mentor and later his brother-in-law. Junius studied theology and became a pastor in the village of Hillegersberg. After only one year, however, he resigned because he did not want to take a side in the theological discussion between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants, of which his uncle Franciscus Gomarus was the leader. After traveling to France, Junius moved to England, where he became the librarian of the politician and art collector Thomas Howard, earl of Arundel. There he wrote *De pictura veterum*, his theoretical discussion of classical art. The book first appeared in Latin in 1637, and his English and Dutch translations/adaptations were published in 1638 and 1641, respectively. Because he was a student in Leiden and had close connections to leading humanists, it may not surprise us that the interest Heinsius, Grotius, and Vossius gave to *On the Sublime* can be found in the work of Junius too,

especially in his *De pictura veterum*. We can say that the rich intellectual climate at Leiden is what introduced Longinus to early modern art theory, particularly in the overwhelming impact of images.

To better understand Junius's introduction of Longinus in art theory, however, we must start by asking what kind of treatise *De pictura veterum* actually is. The modern edition of the English-language version describes it as follows: "Junius' task, a primary task, obviously was the identification and the meaningful combination of all available references to art and works of art in all available texts [from Antiquity] so that each could be elucidated, within reason, in the light of all the others."[21] Junius combined explicit references to art with passages that he deemed useful to talk about but that originally dealt with rhetoric or literature. Thanks to the *ut pictura poesis* doctrine, Junius could treat the visual arts and literature in the same way and saw no problem in simply interchanging the words "writer" and "orator" from an ancient text with "artist" in his own art theory. The number of texts used by Junius in his work is exceptional. To this day, the treatise remains the most exhaustive collection of sources from classical antiquity directly dealing with or applicable to the arts. Junius combined famous and much-read texts with many obscure works never used before in the context of art theory.

So, in the end, Junius constructed a treatise that was unique. The clear structure of *De pictura veterum* is innovative, with three books that systematically discuss the material from classical antiquity. In the first book, Junius explains how an artist can rely on the imitation of nature and masterpieces, as well as on the independent creation of mental images, to start making works of art. The second book concentrates on the development of the arts, which can achieve excellence via the moral qualities of artists and their audiences. In book three, he defines excellence in art by focusing on the choice of subject, the use of proportion and perspective, the rendering of color, the representation of figures and actions, and the overall organization. The most important point Junius makes is that a work of art ideally should overwhelm the onlooker by evoking astonishment (*stupor*) as well as admiration (*admiratio*) (3.6.5). Thus, he comes close to accepting Longinus's definition of the goal of literature and rhetorical speech. However, in order to explain how an artist can make a work of art that achieves this goal, Junius relies on a rich diversity of ancient sources. He refers to Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime* about 30 times.[22] If we look at the number of references, Longinus does not really play the predominant role in *De pictura veterum*. In terms of quantity, the poetics of Aristotle and Horace, the encyclopedia of Pliny, the handbooks of rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian, and the art descriptions from the Second Sophistic with authors such as Callistratus and Philostratus the Elder and Younger all take the lead.

We will clarify, however, that Longinus gets full attention in crucial passages of *De pictura veterum*.[23] Unlike his Leiden fellows Vossius and Grotius, Junius does not refer in his book directly to the *fiat lux* passage in Longinus, but he must have known the discussion it provoked. What he does take from Longinus, in much the same way Heinsius did some decades earlier on the topic of stylistic imperfection in the *Prolegomena*, is the question: How far can an artist be free to evoke astonishment and admiration and how far is he still bound to certain rules? The artist, states Junius, must protect a golden means between freedom and rules, but he also relies on Longinus by making it clear that the genius painter can be allowed to depart from the rules more than the average painter (2.10–11). However, the most important element that Junius derived from Longinus is his ideas about artistic inspiration and its impact on the viewers of works of art. As we stated above, the question of inspiration had already been addressed by Heinsius and

Vossius, but Junius dealt with this question in a more elaborate and original way, by focusing on the notion of *phantasia* as the necessary impetus for the artist's elevated mind and, subsequently, as the means to overwhelm the audience.

Junius's *Phantasia*

For the expanded edition of Franciscus Junius's *De pictura veterum* of 1694, Adriaen van der Werff, the most prominent Rotterdam artist of his time, designed an intriguing frontispiece (Fig. 1.1).[24] In an ancient forum, diverse artists are working zealously, drawing, painting, and sculpting. The two sculptors and the draftsman do not look at their surroundings but are immersed in their work. The painter is working on the depiction of a female nude, evidently painting from the mind, as no model can be seen. By showing the artists' concentration, van der Werff pays tribute to their mental capacities. This accolade to the artistic mind is reinforced and made more explicit by the scene in the foreground, where a woman takes a boy by the hand. He points to his playmates, but the woman insists on leading him toward Pictura. Another boy helps the woman by offering the first boy a hand. He is the boy's Genius, his guardian spirit, holding the torch of artistic inspiration in his hands.

The woman who takes central stage is Phantasia, the goddess of imagination. By giving her a crown with wings and figurines, van der Werff follows a long visual tradition of depicting the concept of imagination as a female figure, exemplified by Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* of 1593 (Fig. 1.2). The wings emphasize the agility of the imagination that ascends toward highly elevated realms, and the figurines represent the mental images, or *phantasiai,* resulting from this elevation.[25] The idea of *phantasia* was not new in the time of Junius. At the end of the sixteenth century, Italian art theoreticians, especially Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, deviated from the Aristotelian theory that painting, like poetry, could only be successful with a thorough observation of nature or previous masterpieces.[26] Inspired by Neoplatonism, Lomazzo emphasized by contrast that perfection in the arts could be reached only if artists relied on their genius to be inspired by God rather than by nature. They could depict ideal beauty starting from a mental concept of perfection.

By relying on *On the Sublime*, however, Junius takes the artistic inspiration beyond an explicit religious context, as well as beyond a mere discussion of ideal beauty, since he focuses on how artists can bring their viewers to stupor and admiration by relying on their own imagination and anticipating the imagination of the viewers. Junius was inspired by Longinus's triangle between the author, the text, and the reader, which we saw already addressed in Vossius's poetics, but he was the first to introduce this thought in the context of the visual arts. In order to comprehend this innovation, we must first look at Junius's use of the long history of the concept of *phantasia,* thereby expanding on the research of, among others, Colette Nativel and Thijs Weststeijn, who have already brought attention to Junius's considerations of the importance of the viewer.[27]

Junius develops a synthesis of the ideas relating to *phantasia* by Aristotle and Quintilian, but Longinus's view on the subject is essential as well. For the Dutch humanist, artists and their audience rely on mental images that result from direct observations. Here, Junius starts from the Aristotelian definition of *phantasia* as an imprint of a natural object in the mind. This imprint can be used to remember the object when it is no longer there, or to use Aristotle's phrasing, bring it before the inner eye. However, Junius, like Lomazzo before him, goes beyond this definition by relating the concept of *phantasia* to a mental creativity that results in strong images in the mind of the artist that are needed to create a masterpiece.

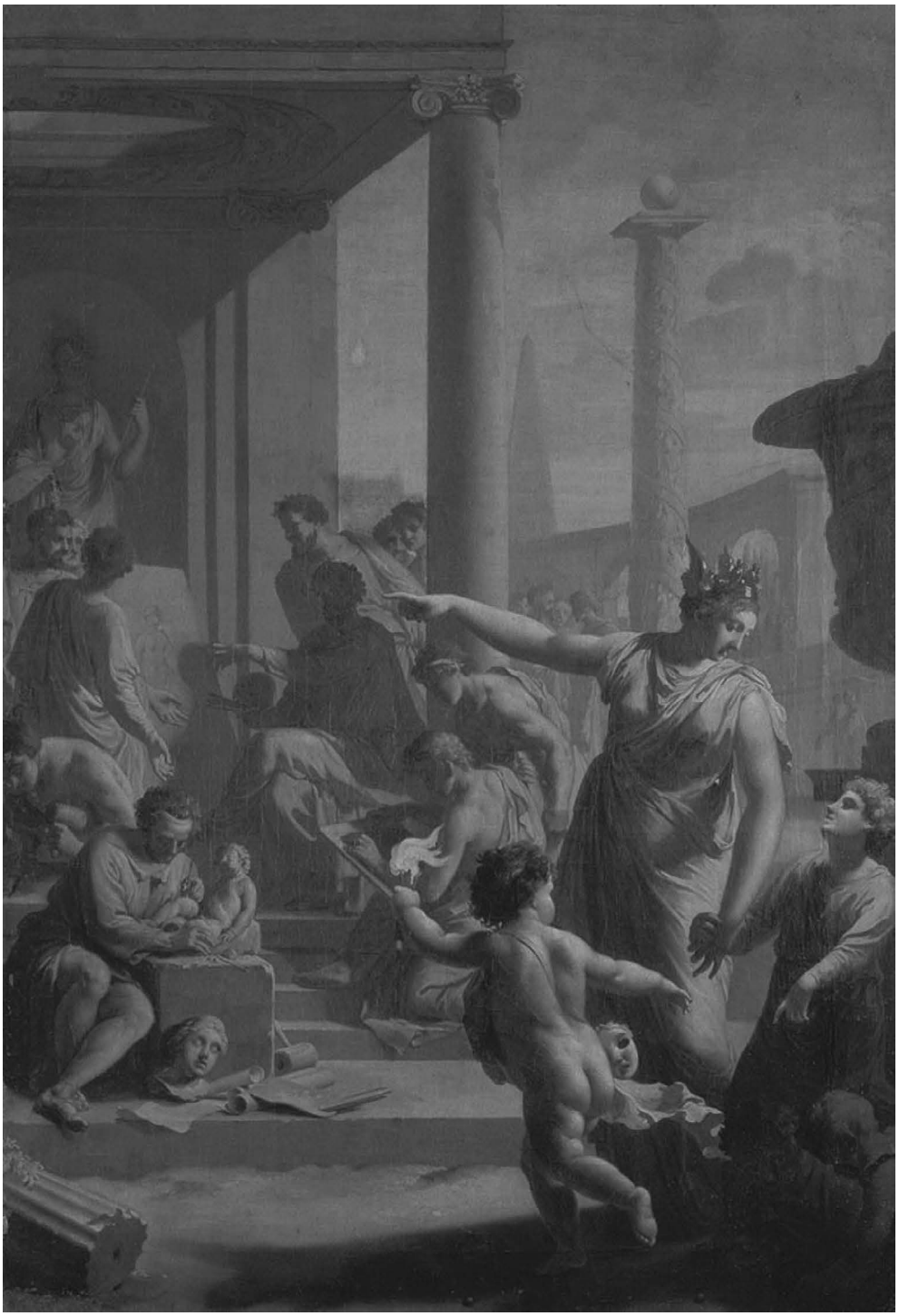

Figure 1.1 Adriaen van der Werff, Design for the frontispiece of the 1694 edition of *De pictura veterum*, before 1687. Oil on canvas, 34 × 23.5 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen—Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Figure 1.2 Cesare Ripa's "Imaginatio," as depicted in the Dutch edition of *Iconologia of Uytbeeldinghen des Verstants*. Amsterdam: Dirck Pietersz. Pers, 1644. University Library, Leiden.

To clarify that these mental images are more than the mere neutral imprints of Aristotle, Junius uses Quintilian's reference to daydreaming, where the mind takes the lead in imagining events that did not happen and persons that do not exist. Following Quintilian's emphasis on mental creativity that stands by itself, Junius translates *phantasia* as "lively and active Imagination" (1.3.5).[28] This is where *phantasia* comes close to our phantasy.

For Junius, a lively and active imagination is not something that can be switched on and off by the artist but is an irresistible force. Junius here follows Longinus, who states that genius poets—and by extension Junius's genius artists—do not produce these mental images entirely within their own control because the images result from an extraordinary inspiration. An irrepressible force drives artists to depict the subject in their mind, a force that Junius describes as "a secret instinct of Nature" (1.4.1). Even more importantly for the central focus of this book, Junius relates the *phantasia* of artists to that of the audience by relying on *the Sublime*, and he emphasizes that *phantasia* cannot be equaled with unbridled fantasy. Through *phantasia*, artists must create vivid and lifelike images, first mentally and then materially, which arouse the imagination of the viewer into thinking that the subject depicted is actually present:

> So may wee also gather from thence the true reason why *Dionysius Longinus* affirming that Perspicuitie [vividness] is the chiefest thing our Phantasie aimeth at, doth furthermore adde, that Art by the helpe of that same Perspicuity doth seeme to obtaine easily of a man what shee forceth him to, and though shee doth ravish the minds and hearts of them that view her works, yet doe they not feel themselves

> violently carried away, but think themselves gently led to the liking of what they see: neither can it bee otherwise: for as the Artificers that doe goe about their works filled with an imagination of the presence of things, leave in their works a certaine spirit drawne and derived out of the contemplation of things present; so is it not possible but that same spirit transfused into their works, should likewise prevaile with the spectatours, working in them the same impression of the presence of things that was in the Artificers themselves. And this is questionless that same Perspicuitie, that brood and only daughter of Phantasie, so highly commended by *Longinus*, for whosoever meeteth with an evident and clear sight of things present, must needs bee moved as with the presence of things.
>
> (1.4.6)

The introduction of Longinus into art theory takes into consideration the connection between *phantasia* and vividness (the Latin *perspicuitas* and the Greek *enargeia*) in defining the overwhelming effect of works of art. Hence, Junius connects the central principle of lifelikeness in early modern art to the sublime. Lifelikeness is here to be understood in the literal sense of the word, namely, the conviction that the subject depicted is actually present. Genius artists are able to bring directly before their mental eye the subject they want to depict. From this vivid image, they can create works of art that enable viewers to start believing that what they see is unmediated. Here, the sublime is an experience that effaces the distinction between representation and reality for the viewer in what becomes an overwhelming and sometimes disturbing experience.

Reception of Junius

Despite Junius's innovative use of *On the Sublime* to understand the working of inspired imagination, those who wrote letters of admiration for *De pictura veterum* did not pick up the reference to Longinus, not even the letters from the Leiden network. Grotius admires Junius for his "wide reading, discernment, composition, and what you have adduced from all arts to illustrate that art," but he does not go into detail about which new sources were used in the context of the theory of art.[29] Whereas Heinsius, Grotius, and Vossius used *On the Sublime* for rhetorical theory and literary criticism, they did not explore the possibilities that Longinus offered for art theory, as Junius did. The fields of expertise for both Heinsius and Grotius lay elsewhere. Vossius, who was closely involved in the Latin and Dutch editions of *De pictura veterum*, relied strongly on Junius's book for his far more modest *De graphice, sive de arte pingendi*, which was published in 1650, the year after his death.[30] He follows Junius's path by appropriating the ancient handbooks of rhetoric and poetics for art theory, but the small treatise did not play any role in the reception of Longinus's ideas.

Outside the Leiden network, however, international authors were aware of the emphasis *De pictura veterum* placed on the importance of the lively and active imagination in bringing a subject vividly to life. Junius's concept of *phantasia* played an important part internationally, as we see in William Sanderson's *Graphice*, *The Use of Pen and Pencil, or the most Excellent Art of Painting* (1658), Roland Fréart de Chambray's *Idée de la perfection* (1662), and Giovanni Pietro Bellori's *Le vite de'pittori* (1672), but there too it is hard to track down how far Longinus affected those theories directly, as *On the Sublime* is not explicitly mentioned.[31] Similarly, *De pictura veterum* succeeded in establishing its place in seventeenth-century Dutch art theories.[32] Cornelis de Bie's

The Golden Cabinet of the Noble Liberal Art of Painting (*Het Gulden Cabinet van de Edel Vry Schilderconst*) (1662), Willem Goeree's *Introduction to the General Art of Painting* (*Inleydinge tot de Al-ghemeene Teycken-konst*) (1670), and Samuel van Hoogstraten's *Introduction to the Academy of Painting* (*Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst*) (1678) were able to capture the essence of Junius's theory. In *Art and Antiquity*, Thijs Weststeijn writes that in these theories the most important influence of *De pictura veterum* "was related to a central concept of Junius's theory, one that joined his historical, artistic, and rhetorical interests. It involves the mind's eye rather than physical vision."[33]

So, Longinus's text enters early modern art theory more or less incognito. The disregard of the ancient text by Junius's followers can be viewed within a wider framework. Whereas modern scholars often focus on *De pictura veterum* as a collection of ancient texts, early modern art theoreticians used the treatise also for its own sake and regarded the whole as an important addition to existing art theories of their own time. A meticulous accounting of all the ancient sources that Junius used was seldom at stake. Although Junius was the first to appropriate the Longinian theory on inspired imagination of the writer in his art theory, his readers largely acknowledged the concept without referring to *On the Sublime*, let alone studying it closely. Retracing the sublime in the art theory can be traced back to Longinus but not directly.

Phantasia in Rubens and Vondel

The discussion of the role of a lively and active imagination was also picked up by Peter Paul Rubens but again without mentioning Longinus's name. Junius had sent the Antwerp master a copy of his book to which the latter responded—rather belatedly—with a short but interesting letter, written partly in Dutch and partly in Latin. Junius, for whom Rubens was the ultimate example of the modern master, was clearly proud of this letter, which he published in the preface of the Dutch version of *De pictura* in 1641 and later in the 1694 edition.[34] In his letter, Rubens first congratulates Junius for the tour de force he had performed and then goes to the core of Junius's argument, dealing with the question as to how far descriptions of ancient works of art can stir up the imagination of artists:

> But now that we can more or less respond to the *exempla* of the ancient painters in our imagination—as well as each of us is able—I, for my part, would like it if at some time it were possible to compose with the same diligence a like treatise on the paintings of the Italians. They provide examples, or prototypes, which to this day are before the public. One can point at them with one's finger and say: "Here they are!" For those things which touch our senses are more sharply imprinted on the mind; they remain with us and demand a more minute examination. In addition, they offer students a more fruitful scope for their improvement than does the study of a subject which reveals itself to us only through our imagination, in a dream, as it were, and to such an extent overlaid with words that, grasped three times in vain, they often elude us (as the image of Euridice eluded Orpheus), and frustrate a student in his hope. In this matter we artists speak from experience. When we attempt to render visible in its proper dignity a famous painting by Apelles or Timanthes that Pliny or other authors describe in detail, who among us will not produce a piece of work that is insipid or alien to the grandeur of the ancients?

> Each, indulging his own genius, makes a new wine instead of the bittersweet Opimian of the ancients and injures those great shades whom I honor with profound veneration. I adore their very footprints, as it were, rather than that I claim to come near them, even in my imagination. *I beg you, Sir, to receive in good part what I have in a friendly spirit felt free to say in the hope that after such a good entree you will not refuse us the main course itself for which we all eagerly long because so far none of the persons who have offered us such matter has satisfied our appetite: there is need to proceed to particular cases, as I said.*[35]

At first glance, Rubens seems to criticize the role of the imagination in the creative process, describing it as a delusive dream. But if that were the case, it would be rather strange that Junius published this critical letter in the preface of the Dutch edition. The letter is obviously more complex than it seems. What is at stake here is the impossibility of admiring the works of the ancient painters in a straightforward way. As we have seen above, images in the mind of the artist do not appear only by imagining them; they are also fueled by the works of earlier artists. For Rubens, the descriptions of ancient paintings are not sufficient to stir up this imagination since they appear to us only in our mind and are difficult to grasp. Ekphrastic writing only results in dreamlike images that are too elusive. Owing to the fact that they are mere descriptions of works of art, these images lack perspicuity; therefore, Rubens argues, they are less inclined to touch our senses and leave sharp imprints on our minds. Basically, therefore, Rubens questions not the need for the imagination in the creative process but the absence of the examples, as these come only in the form of descriptions. Modern (Italian) artworks cannot be examined thoroughly only by standing in front of them, but their impact on the senses and the mind will be much greater and hence will excite *phantasia*. At the end of his letter, Rubens—now in Dutch—repeats his hope that Junius will write a similar treatise on Italian art. For Rubens, the examples of the ancients are only hors d'oeuvres, while the "particular cases" of Italian art are the main course.

The role of *phantasia* in the creative process is also of importance for Rubens's theory on imitation, which he expressed in his short and never completed treatise *De imitatio statuarum*. Like Junius, Rubens clarified that the artist should not imitate the example slavishly but must select the best parts and bring them together creatively. Only by doing so can the artist overcome mere imitation and achieve genuine emulation.[36] To achieve this emulation, *phantasia* is brought to the foreground. As we have seen, Aristotle defined *phantasia* as the mental imprint of a perceived object, which can be remembered, but for Rubens, *phantasia* is not merely a mnemonic device; it also testifies to the artist's genius to rival with excellent predecessors. This process of creation is further elaborated on in later anecdotes about the master. Van Hoogstraten in his *Inleyding* writes how Rubens did not copy or draw a lot but "spent his precious time by wandering, looking, and sitting quietly." When another artist reproached him that he would become a great master only through careful drawing and copying, Rubens responded with his famous remark that precisely by contemplating concrete examples "he is most busy while he is idle" and that, in the end, he has better "retained what I have looked, than you have drawn it."[37]

However, during his own time and certainly shortly afterward, Rubens was also regarded as the artist who, by means of inspired imagination, created overwhelming art. In William Sanderson's *Graphice* (1658), in which *phantasia* has a central role and which was largely inspired by Junius, Rubens's method is described as follows: "[Rubens] would usually (with his arms across) sit musing upon his work for some time; and in an

instant in the liveliness of spirit, with a nimble hand would force out, his over-charged brain into description … by a violent driving on the passion."[38] So here, once again, we see the "lively spirit" as the driving force in the creation of mental images as well as in the actual execution of the artwork. In addition to Sanderson, Giovanni Pietro Bellori does not mention the importance of concrete examples either. For Bellori, Rubens's genius can be found in his so-called furious brush that is the swift and direct result of the "copiousness of his inventions."[39]

Rubens was not the only one who can be related to Junius's *De pictura veterum*. Vondel was involved as well. The 1641 Dutch version of *De pictura veterum*, in which Rubens's letter was published, was also accompanied by Wenceslaus Hollar's etching after Van Dyck's portrait of Junius (Fig. 1.3). Under the image Vondel wrote: "This is JUNIUS, the Right hand of Painters,/His blood is noble, but even nobler is his Mind."[40] Although this praise shows that the most important poet of that time had great appreciation for Junius, it does not say much about how Vondel shared ideas regarding inspired imagination with *De pictura veterum*. These ideas, however, are expressed in the preface to his tragedy *Brothers*, published in the same year, in 1641.

The play starts with a divine revelation ordering David to avenge the Gibeonites, many of whom were massacred by Saul, David's father-in-law.[41] David runs into a moral conflict having to choose between his family-in-law and divine justice, but eventually he delivers seven of Saul's descendants to the Gibeonites, who hang them. Because David's doubts are the central focus of the play, Vondel called it a tragedy (*treurspel*). Thus, he was one of the first European dramatists to use the ancient dramatic format to stage a

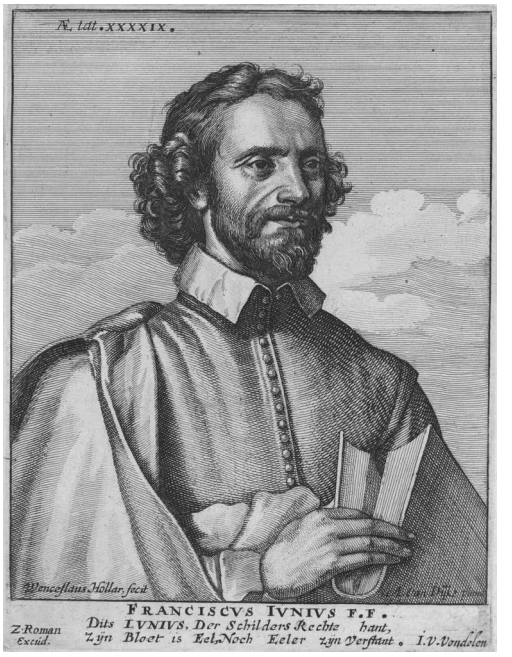

Figure 1.3 Wenceslaus Hollar, after Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Franciscus Junius*. Illustration in Franciscus Junius, *De schilder-konst der Oude, Begrepen in drie Boecken*. Middelburg: Zacharias Roman, 1641. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

biblical story.[42] In the preface to *Brothers*, Vondel not only clarifies his choice for the tragic genre as the best model to evoke strong emotional involvement in the reader or theatergoer but he also says that to achieve this, the writer must be inspired.

To explain his point of view, Vondel introduces Rubens in an extraordinary way by giving an elaborate ekphrasis of a painting by Rubens that depicts David in a state of doubt about avenging the Gibeonites. This painting does not exist, nor did it ever exist but is only the product of Vondel's imagination. Although the ekphrastic tradition relies on many Greco-Roman examples of art descriptions that may never have really existed, in the Dutch Republic, Vondel's description is an exception. It is so vivid and detailed that, even today, readers are urged to visualize the non-existent painting in their minds. So, Rubens's disbelief in the perspicuity of descriptions of artworks as expressed in his letter to Junius cannot be found in Vondel, who uses the fame of the Antwerp master to create his own work of art, albeit in words. Vondel begins as follows: "Now I am willing to furnish a glorious and royal scene into a tragedy by following Rubens, the triumph of the brushes of our age. Rubens starts drawing, ordering, and painting. His lively spirit does not rest until his piece of work is finished" (79–82).[43] Here, Vondel makes the mental process of imagination central to the creation of a painting. From scratch, Rubens creates in his mind a scene where David is in total despair. But just like Sanderson and Bellori some decades later, the dramaturg emphasizes that the painter cannot rest his energetic mind until he has transformed the imagined scene by drawing all elements of the story in a convincing order and then painting it. What is important here is that not only the creative force of *phantasia* is mentioned but that this elevated state of mind is equally essential in the process of creation. The "lively spirit" is thus the driving force behind the invention as well as the execution of the artwork.

Moreover, Vondel reveals that he is aware of the larger interest of the Leiden network in theories regarding overwhelming texts and images. The preface stands at the intersection of art theory and literary criticism exploring the *ut pictura poesis* dictum to the fullest, and in this exploration, imagination elicited by inspiration becomes the center of attention. Vondel's ideas not only correspond with the ideas of Junius but also with those of Vossius, to whom the preface is dedicated. At the start of this chapter, we saw how Vossius appropriated *On the Sublime* to discuss how a dramaturg must be in a state of rage to create vivid characters. Vondel, by using Rubens as a detour, implies that his mind too was in a state of rage while inventing and writing his tragedy. In his dedication, Vossius acknowledges Vondel's status as genius writer by praising him with "you write for eternity."[44]

Interestingly, by presenting himself as genius writer, Vondel comes across another fundamental aspect of the sublime, namely, the intricate relationship between ingenuity, stylistic purity, and excess. This is logical because a genius writer in a rage cannot and therefore will not bother much about poetic rules. As Vondel continues in his preface, overwhelming poetry, just like painting (and even music), is allowed to make mistakes against poetic rules: "On this occasion I must mention in passing, that people, of no small learning and science, who interfere with poetry only to a limited extent, are at times too narrow and strict judges of this art, and do not quite understand how it is too delicate and noble to stand such a hard test without losing much of its character and splendor. One must grant it a proper abuse, or rather a necessary freedom like that required in more arts, singularly in painting and music."[45] So, Vondel connects here, as Heinsius does in his *Prolegomena*, the concept of *phantasia* with the question of stylistic impurity. As we have seen, making mistakes against poetic rules and the debate about *phantasia* as inspired imagination were key points of interest that fueled the Dutch interest in Longinus's *On the Sublime*.

Conclusion

The reception and the dissemination of Longinus in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic were groundbreaking for several reasons. First, Leiden humanists Heinsius, Grotius, and Vossius were among the very first to study *On the Sublime* not only as a collection of quotes from ancient writers or purely as a rhetorical treatise but they also saw in the text possibilities for developing ideas on the impact of literature. This happened half a century before Nicolas Boileau's translation of Longinus in 1674, which is traditionally considered the moment when the career of the sublime as a key concept in literary theory took off. Second, in the study of Longinus, especially by Heinsius and Vossius, we can see how the idea developed that literary texts are not entirely subject to a rule-bound system, as the increasing dominance of a normative Aristotelian-inspired poetics would have it. Instead, great authors need not rely entirely on rules but should rely even more so on a mental state of rage in order to write texts that overwhelm and transport their readers.

A similar point of view can be found in *De pictura veterum*, where Junius recognizes that Longinus brought him to the understanding of the complex notion that *phantasia* creates a strong impact on the beholder, especially in the role of inspired imagination. Junius's introduction of *On the Sublime* to art theory would have a considerable influence on art theory throughout the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries. Although it was not picked up explicitly right away, the ancient treatise would in the end become a crucial text in the emergence of aesthetics. This brings us to our fourth point: The ideas about inspiration evoked by *On the Sublime* not only fueled theoretical discussions among humanists but were also followed—albeit in different ways and with divergent points of views—by artists and writers, notably by Rubens and Vondel. It shows us the evident but too often disregarded fact that humanist theory and artistic ideas and practices are not separate worlds. There were shared interests and sensitivities about the impact of art within a specific historical and cultural context.

Finally, the reception of and interest in Longinus is not a matter of pure citation. Although many humanists and artists did not refer directly to Longinus for their ideas about the status of artistic genius and the overwhelming impact of art, his indirect influence cannot be denied. On a more general level, this shows us how the influence of a concept or a text is never straightforward and is seldom about finding smoking guns. It follows multiple sideroads through which concepts travel from one context to another where they often lose the awareness of their pedigree, becoming infused and enriched by other ideas and concepts. This will be the subject of the rest of this book, where we shall see how the Longinian sublime was not the only framework for thinking about the effect of elevation. In our second chapter, we will see how Ovid's dialectical concepts of *sublimis* and *humilis* played an equally important part in the increasing interest in the overwhelming effect of the sublime, albeit shifting its perspective to the existential dangers the sublime can evoke.

Notes

1 K. Sier, "Robortello, Francesco," in *Brill's New Pauly*, eds. Peter Kuhlmann et al., supplements I, vol. 6 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008); Paul J. Angerhofer et al., *In Aedibus Aldi. The Legacy of Aldus Manutius and His Press* (Provo, UT: Friends of the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 1995), 89.

2 Especially this last version would become influential as the edition that was used by later scholars. Latin translations, by Domenico Pizzimenti (Naples, 1566) and Pietro Pagani (Venice, 1572), followed soon after these Greek editions, and the oldest Italian translation, by Giovanni Nicolo da Falgano, appeared about 1575. According to the literary historian Jules Brody, both

the sixteenth-century Latin and Italian translations had little influence on the early career of *On the Sublime*. Jules Brody, *Boileau and Longinus* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1958), 9–11. See also Bernard Weinberg, "Translations and Commentaries of Longinus, 'On the Sublime' to 1600," *Modern Philology* 47, no. 3 (1950): 145–51.

3 Wieneke Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous*. Interpretations and Creative Adaptations of Longinus's Treatise *On the Sublime* in Early Modern Dutch Scholarship," University of Leiden, Ph.D. thesis, 2019, 49–54, accessed April 30, 2023, https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/71553.

4 Willem Otterspeer, *Het bolwerk van de vrijheid. De Leidse universiteit in heden en verleden* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2008). Cf. G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, ed., *Leiden University in the Seventeenth Century. An Exchange of Learning* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1975), 161–75.

5 Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous*," 60–64.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 48–54.

8 Pierre de Nolhac, *La bibliothèque de Fulvio Orsini. Contributions à l'histoire des collections d'Italie et à l'étude de la Renaissance* (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1887), 348.

9 Baerbel Becker-Cantarino, *Daniel Heinsius* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978); Jan Bloemendal, *Gerardus Johannes Vossius, Poeticarum institutionum libri tres/Three Books on Poetics* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); Anne Duprat, "Daniel Heinsius (1583–1655)," in *Centuriae latinae: cent une figures humanistes de la Renaissance aux Lumières offertes à Jacques Chomarat*, ed. Colette Nativel (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1997), 417–25; Anne Duprat, *De constitutione tragoediae: La constitution de la tragédie, dite La poétique d'Heinsius* (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 2001); Jan Meter, *The Literary Theories of Daniel Heinsius: A Study of the Development and Background of His Views on Literary Theory and Criticism during the Period from 1602 to 1612* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984); Henk Nellen, *Hugo Grotius. A Lifelong Struggle for Peace in Church and State, 1583–1645* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015); Cornelis Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1577–1649)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981).

10 Lawrence Kerslake, *Essays on the Sublime. Analyses of French Writings on the Sublime from Boileau to La Harpe* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 41–63.

11 Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous*," chap. 2. Cf. Wieneke Jansen, "Defending the Poet. The Reception of *On the Sublime* in Daniel Heinsius's *Prolegomena on Hesiod*," in "The Sublime in Early Modern Theories of Art and Architecture," eds. Stijn Bussels, Bram Van Oostveldt, and Wieneke Jansen, special issue of *Lias, Journal of Early Modern Intellectual Culture and Its Sources* 43, no. 2 (2016): 199–223; Korbinian Golla, "Daniel Heinsius' Epigramme auf Hesiod," in *Daniel Heinsius. Klassischer Philologe und Poet*, eds. E. Lefèvre and E. Schäfer (Tübingen: Narr, 2008), 31–55.

12 Colette Nativel, "La théorie de l'imitation au XVIIe siècle en rhétorique et en peinture," *XVIIe siècle* 175 (1992): 157–67.

13 Jan Hendrik Meter, *The Literary Theories of Daniel Heinsius: A Study of the Development and Background of his Views on Literary Theory and Criticism during the Period from 1602 to 1612* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984).

14 Emma Gilby, "Where to draw the line? Longinus, Goulu and Balzac's Lettres," in Bussels, Van Oostveldt, and Jansen, "The Sublime in Early Modern Theories," 225–40.

15 Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous*," chap. 3.

16 Kerslake, *Essays on the Sublime*, 41–63; James Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 107–16.

17 Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous*," 123–32.

18 "[…] *mania* sive *ekstasis*, qua fit ut homo extra se rapiatur suique immemor alium hominem induat eiusque cogitationes ac sermones aliis repraesentet," from Jan Bloemendal, "Introductory Essay," in *Gerardus Joannes Vossius, Poeticarum institutionum libri tres/Institutes of Poetics in Three Books*, ed. and trans. Jan Bloemendal (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 40–42. All translations from Vossius's poetical handbooks come from this edition.

19 Interestingly, within this contact, Vossius emphasizes the power of visuality and the actual performance as an essential feature for the impact of drama. The drama, he states, can reach far greater intensity and emotional force if it is presented on stage: "Nor do I deny that drama only inasmuch as it is written represents human actions, but I maintain that it does so in a

rather hidden and superficial way, whereas dramatic action does it in a more open and intense way, both efficient delivery and gestures and fashionable dress having a great emotional force." ("Neque inficior drama, utcunque solum scribatur, repraesentare actionem humanam, sed aio id facere occultius et levius, manifestius vero et vehementius id dramaticam praestare actionem, quae tum pronunciatione idonea tum gestibus et habitu morum magnam in movendo vim habet," 2.4.2). Unlike readers of texts, theatergoers see performances that persuade them to believe they have become eyewitnesses of the events being represented. Here, Vossius is one of the first to acknowledge the importance of the theatrical apparatus in creating overwhelming effects that arouse strong emotions in the viewer that heightens his or her imagination. Vossius clearly diverts here from the traditional Aristotelian idea that *opsis* or visuality is only secondary in creating the effect of the drama and has no impact on the imagination.

20 Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous,*" chap. 2.

21 Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl, "Introduction," in Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients, according to the English translation (1638)*, eds. Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xxxix.

22 Jansen, "Appropriating *Peri hypsous,*" app. 3.

23 The first modern scholar to mention references to Longinus in *De pictura veterum* was Allan Ellenius in his 1960 book on Latin art theory. The 1991 edition of the English version of Junius's book points at the references to Longinus in the introduction and annotations. A few years later, Colette Nativel dealt more in depth with Junius's reception of Longinus and looked at his influence in England and France. Recently, Judith Dundas further studied the influence of Junius's reception of *On the Sublime* with special attention to England, and Thijs Weststeijn looked at how Junius's view of the responsibility of the beholder relied on *On the Sublime*. Finally, Wieneke Jansen related his use of the ancient treatise to his network of Leiden humanists. Allan Ellenius, *De arte pingendi. Latin Art Literature in Seventeenth-Century Sweden and its International Background* (Uppsala and Stockholm: Lychnos-Bibliotek, 1960), 76–78; Colette Nativel, "Le Traité 'Du Sublime' et la pensée esthétique anglaise de Junius à Reynolds," in *Acta conventus neo-latini hafniensis. Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Neo-Latin studies*, ed. R. Schnur (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), 721–30, and most recently her "Lecture du "Traité du sublime" par Franciscus Junius F.F.," in Bussels, Van Oostveldt, and Jansen, "The Sublime in Early Modern Theories of Art and Architecture," 263–79; Judith Dundas, *Sidney and Junius on Poetry and Painting: From the Margins to the Center* (Cranbury: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 227–33; Thijs Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity in the Netherlands and Britain: The Vernacular Arcadia of Franciscus Junius (1591–1677)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), esp. chap. 5 and his "The Sublime and the "Beholder's Share," Junius, Rubens, Rembrandt," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.2; Wieneke Jansen, "Translations of Longinus' Sublime Terminology in Franciscus Junius' De pictura veterum," in *Des mots pour la théorie, des mots pour la pratique. Lexicographie artistique: formes, usages et enjeux dans l'Europe modern*, ed. Michèle-Caroline Heck (Montpellier: PULM, 2018), 387–400, and her "Appropriating *Peri hypsous,*" chap. 4.

24 Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl's introduction to Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients, according to the English translation (1638)*, eds. Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), lvii–lxiv; Barbara Gaehtgens, *Adriaen van der Werff, 1659–1722* (München: Deutscher Kunstverslag, 1987), cat. no. 38.

25 Aldrich, Fehl, and Fehl, "Introduction," lxiii.

26 Rensselaer Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis. The Humanist Theory of Painting* (New York: Norton, 1967), 207. For a broader view on the art theory of Lamozzo, see Barbara Tramelli, *Giovanni Paolo Lamozzo's* Trattato dell'arte della pittura: *color, perspective and anatomy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016).

27 Nativel, "Lecture du 'Traité du sublime'"; Weststeijn, "The Sublime."

28 We use the following edition: Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients,* eds. Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 34.

29 Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity,* 330.

30 For an English translation of important parts of Vossius's treatise with an introduction, see Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity,* app. 1.

31 Lydia Hamlett, "The Longinian Sublime, Effect and Affect in 'Baroque' British Visual Culture'," in *Translations of the Sublime. The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus'* Peri Hupsous *in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre,* eds. Caroline van Eck, Stijn Bussels, Maarten Delbeke, and Jürgen Pieters, Intersections 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 207–40; Colette Nativel, "Quelques apports du De pictura veterum libri tres de Franciscus Junius à la théorie de l'art en France," *Revue d'esthétique* 31/32 (1997): 119–31; Colette Nativel, "Le Triomphe de l'idée de la peinture. La phantasia chez Junius et Bellori," in *Théorie des arts et creation artistique dans l'Europe du Nord du XVIe au début du XVIII e siècle,* ed. Michele-Caroline Heck (Lille: Université Charles de Gaulle, 2002), 219–31.
32 Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity,* chaps. 4, 5, and app. 2.
33 Ibid., 247.
34 Aldrich, Fehl, and Fehl, "Introduction," xlv–vi. For a broader context of this letter regarding Rubens's thoughts on imitation, see Nils Büttner, "Peter Paul Rubens und Franciscus Junius. Aemulatio in Praxis und Theorie," in *Aemulatio: Kulturen des Wettstreits in Text und Bild, 1450–1620,* eds. Jan-Dirk Müller, Ulrich Pfisterer, and Anna Kathrin Bleuler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 319–67; Jeffrey M. Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art," *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 2 (1982): 229–47; Nativel, "Lectures," 561–79. For a discussion of how Rubens was used as the model artist in Junius, see Colette Nativel, "Rubens, Franciscus Junius, Roger de Piles," in *République des lettres, république des arts. Mélanges en l'honneur de Marc Fumaroli,* eds. Christian Mouchel and Colette Nativel (Geneva: Droz, 2008), 561–79.
35 For an English translation, see the modern English edition of Junius, *The painting of the Ancients,* app. II. The italics indicate the part that is originally written in Dutch.
36 For a view on the broader view of Rubens's theory of imitation, see Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice," 229–47.
37 Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst: anders de zichtbaere werelt* (Rotterdam: François van Hoogstraeten, 1678), 194 (our translation).
38 Quoted in Anne-Marie Logan, "Rubens as a Teacher," in *In his Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias,* eds. Amy Golahny et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 250. Cf. Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity,* 261.
39 Giovanni Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* ed. and trans. Hellmut Wohl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 251. Quoted in Donatella Sparti, "Bellori's biography of Rubens: An assessment of its reliability and sources," *Simiolus: Netherlandish Quarterly for the History of Art* 36, no. 1 (2012): 94.
40 "Dits IVNIUS, Der Schilders Rechte hant,/ Zijn Bloet is Eel, Noch Eeler zijn Verstant." Franciscus Junius, *De schilder-konst der Oude, Begrepen in drie Boecken* (Middelburg: Zacharias Roman, 1641), viii verso.
41 For an extensive bibliography on *Brothers*, see Jan Bloemendal, "Bibliography of Vondel's Dramas (1850–2010)," in *Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age*, eds. Jan Bloemendal and Frans-Willem Korsten (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 545–46.
42 Stijn Bussels, "Vondel's *Brothers* and the Power of Imagination," *Comparative Drama* 49, no. 1 (2015): 49–68.
43 "Hier word ik belust, om door Rubens, de glori der penseelen onzer eeuwe, een heerlijck en koningklijck tafereel, als een treurtooneel, te stoffeeren. Hy valt aen het teecken, ordineeren, en schilderen, nocht zijn wackere geest rust eer het werkstuck voltoit zy." Joost van de Vondel, *De werken,* eds. J.F.M. Sterck et al., vol. 3 (Amsterdam: De Maatschappij voor goede en goedkope lectuur, 1929), lines 81–84 (our translation), accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe03_01/vond001dewe03_01_0153.php.
44 "scribis aeternitate," Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones,* 1.4.33. See J.F.M. Sterck, "Het leven van Vondel," in *De werken van Vondel*, eds. J. F. M. Sterck et al., vol. 5 (Amsterdam: Maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur, 1931), 108.
45 "Ick moet by deze gelegenheid ter loop aenroeren, dat luiden, van geen geringe geleertheid, en wetenschap, zich luttel met poëzye bemoeiende, by wylen al te naeuwe en strenge keurmeesters zijn, over deze kunst, en niet wel begrijpen, hoe die te teer en te edel zy, om zulck een harde proef uit te staen, zonder een groot deel van haere aertigheid en luister te verliezen. Men moet haer inwilligen een voegelijck misbruick, of liever een noodige vryheid; gelyck die in meer kunsten, zonderling in Schilderije en Muzijcke, vereischt word." Vondel, *De werken,* vol. 3, lines 157–64.

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2 *Sublimis* and *Le Merveilleux*

Dramatizing, Performing, and Picturing Phaethon's Fall

He who rises high can fall deep. The ancient myth that demonstrates this and that was extremely popular in the early modern period is the story of Phaethon. Ovid's version at the beginning of the second book of the *Metamorphoses* was particularly influential. With Ovid, another facet of the sublime emerged: The impetuous youth who reaches to great heights with courage and bravado and then thunders violently downward is often described in sublime rhetoric, and so it was also in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Phaethon's fall, however, raised questions of a moral and existential nature, as well as questions about how his fall could bring about an overwhelming experience in the theater and the visual arts.

In 1663, Joost van den Vondel published the tragedy *Phaethon or Reckless Valor* (*Faëton, Oft roeckelose stoutheid*) based on Ovid's version of the myth from the *Metamorphoses* (2.1–400).[1] Vondel uses the story to focus on the conflicting emotions of attraction and repulsion evoked by the sublime and, as his title indicates, to discuss the existential dangers central to the myth. The Dutch poet warns emphatically against "reckless valor" in this cautionary play about how imagination leads to hubris. So, contrary to our previous chapter, where imagination was the beginning of the creative process to achieve the sublime in art and literature, the sublime is discussed here as a liminal experience that leads to reflections about man's rightful position in the world.[2]

Vondel begins his tragedy when Phaethon, his mother, Clymene, and his sisters have climbed up to the gates of the Palace of the Sun. The poet stresses that Clymene knows how to preserve an ideal relationship between her own human limitations and the elevated position in which she dwells, but he also stresses that it is not easy to preserve this relationship. Contrasting emotions of fear and attraction go hand in hand in her vivid description of the gates of the Sun Palace. Clymene is filled with fear that her children and especially Phaethon will lose their human frailty out of sight caused by heavenly grandness, and she admonishes them: "Lift not thy heart. Shun pride above all, avoid impudence that brought down many" (vv. 63–64).[3] But soon afterwards she cannot help but surrender to the awe of the divine craftsmanship and the dazzling and blinding splendor of gold and diamonds: "Riveting gold and amber glow here and sparkle like flames. The snow-white elven bone gives roof. On bright staples of diamonds, the trap door turns that it creaks" (vv. 104–7).[4]

For Clymene's description of the Palace of the Sun, Vondel freely translates the start of Ovid's story of Phaethon (2.1–20). The Latin poet starts his description of the gates as follows: "The Palace of the Sun stood highly elevated on sublime columns" (2.1).[5] Vondel changes these verses at the start of Clymene's description to: "The columns carried the court into heaven" (v. 104).[6] Thus he gives an active role to the columns, which propel

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the Palace of the Sun to heights that are unfamiliar to man. In doing this, Vondel pays special attention to the movement upward to lofty regions. Clymene and her children make a similar movement. They are far removed from earthly life, have followed the columns to their extreme height, and now reside in the most elevated place, which for them remains unreal and inscrutable. In his translation of Ovid's first verse, Vondel unites the elevated aspect (*altus*) of the Sun Palace with the sublime aspect (*sublimis*) of the columns that support the Palace, and he replaces both adjectives with the noun heaven (*hemel*). In that way Vondel combines Ovid's ideas on the sublime, which are inherent to the Phaethon story, with God's heaven.

It is necessary to expand on Ovid's use of *sublimis*, for the concept offers an important and influential addition to Longinus's concept of the sublime, or *hupsos*.[7] Both concepts refer to that which is far above man, but in contrast to *hupsos,* Ovid's *sublimis* does not focus on the inspiration of the writer and the overwhelming impact of literature on its readers. *Sublimis* indicates crucial limits between the everyday lives of men and that which is highly elevated, thereby evoking existential questions. In this Latin context, *sublimis* is contrasted with *humilis*, the humble, earthbound position of man. A lack of humility is linked closely with the concept of hubris or excessive pride, presumption, and arrogance. Ovid uses the adjective *sublimis* at the very beginning of the *Metamorphoses* as well, to indicate an essential difference between mankind and the animal world. Unlike animals who gaze at the earth, man is the only creature with "a sublime stature" (1.85).[8] Man's state of being aims at the sublime, as he is compelled to behold heaven. In the Phaethon story, Ovid uses *sublimis* to emphasize the elevated character of the columns supporting the Palace of the Sun, as noted above. The columns mark the superhuman aspect of the place but also function literally as a threshold, corresponding with the sublime as a liminal experience. As much as man aims at the sublime, and even if he climbs up to it, Ovid stresses the strict limits to human contact with the sublime. The sublime is that which is essentially different from the everyday world. Nevertheless, it is precisely for this reason that the sublime attracts man so powerfully.

Vondel paints this dangerous desire particularly well by appropriating the Ovidian figure of Phaethon for the title role in his tragedy. For the dramaturg, Phaethon is a boy filled with energy and lust for life, but he is thoughtless and adventurous and has not yet learned to restrain his impulses. He storms heaven without considering the consequences. Time and again his mother warns her son to be prudent, but Phaethon does not listen to his mother. When he arrives on the threshold of heaven, he is not remotely impressed and does not even notice the magnificent gates of the Sun Palace. Phaethon only begins to pay attention when his mother tells him that he is the son of the Sun God, Phoebus Apollo. In ecstasy he exclaims (vv. 47–51):

> Happy is the son who now knows his father.
> Now I live and float in my own element.
> Be brave, oh Phaethon, you rise to the roofs of heaven.
> The mountains sink from sight. My feet touch
> no ground.[9]

The extremely precarious balance between the preservation of respect and the urge for contact with the sublime that Vondel scrupulously assigns to the personage of Clymene is, in Phaethon's behavior, totally lost. In Latin terms, Phaethon cannot manage to

be *humilis* in the *sublimis* environment, and turns out to be full of hubris, which leads him to a certain death. Here we see how the sublime relies on the interplay between opposites—*sublimis* and *humilis*—that are unstable and can get out of balance. It is exactly this imbalance that gives the sublime its energetic character that is so overwhelming for man. As Frederik Knegtel has shown, architecture and its representation in texts and images are especially well suited to explore this energetic moment as a combination of spatial and emotional dynamism.[10] This combination is exactly what happens when Clymene and her children climb toward Apollo's palace. Although for Clymene this energetic movement makes her aware of her humble position and her own limits, this is not the case for Phaethon.

Vondel does not want to put the boy's death on the stage, but he lets the fourth act end with a choir song of the Hours that describes what went wrong with the sun ride, and they end their narrative just before Jupiter strokes Phaethon. The song emphasizes the contrasting feelings of longing to be relieved from the catastrophic destructions and fear for the boy's fateful end and his father's mourning. Vondel omits Phaethon's fall, which Fama vividly describes directly after the song at the start of act five in a turbulent dialogue with the Sun God. There, the playwright plays to the utmost on the rapid change of emotions. Indeed, Fama is delighted to tell Phoebus Apollo that the havoc that his son was wreaking has thankfully ceased. She begins her story with "I blow the clarion of joy" (v. 1371).[11] By this, the god learns that his son must have been brought down, and he is deeply saddened. Fama does not seem to notice his grief and takes pleasure in bringing the event before her eyes once again. She is completely absorbed in describing the spectacular display of power with which the father of the gods has averted the danger. She stresses that he is the bringer of salvation as follows: "People have to honor Jupiter in churches and in choirs" (v. 1377).[12]

Whereas at first sight *Phaethon* seems to be an exception in Vondel's oeuvre, since it is based on an ancient myth instead of on the Bible, the Ovidian dialectics between *humilis* and *sublimis* are in the end deeply religious, a point where God needs to be honored, as well as deeply feared. Vondel himself discusses his use of the *Metamorphoses* in the preface to the tragedy by explaining that the mythological story does not lead to the world of the ancient gods but to the eventual understanding of God's heaven (vv. 12–19). He asserts that stories about the ancient gods only make the holy message more appealing. As such, he connects with the centuries-old tradition of the *Ovide Moralisé* that read the *Metamorphoses* in profit of a Christian morality.[13] Following Vondel, the Olympians are "jewels" to adorn God's truth.[14] In using the ancient myth, therefore, Vondel essentially debates man's position toward God's sublimity.

Le Merveilleux in Bidloo's Performance

It was not until 1685, six years after Vondel's death, that *Phaethon* was put on the stage.[15] To present the Palace of the Sun in full splendor and to visualize Phaethon's fall in a convincing way, there was need for a so-called *scène à l'italienne* with ingenious lighting and spectacular theatrical machinery.[16] Despite the fact that such a *scène à l'italienne* had been built in the Amsterdam theater house in 1665, the audience had to wait for twenty more years to see *Phaethon* presented on the stage, managed by the competent hands of Govert Bidloo, a surgeon with a passion for the theater.[17]

Bidloo published a description of the performance, as well as of the adaptations he made to Vondel's text, by adding songs and dances.[18] We have seen that Vondel intended

to put a choir of Hours on stage, but Bidloo elaborated on this celestial performance, among others, by starting with the Hours, the Seasons, the Four Winds, the Seven Planets, and several other celestial bodies singing and dancing at the break of dawn. Bidloo describes the scene as follows: "The entire stage shows the clouds in the sky, where one can see the moon setting below the horizon, and the rising day breaking through the mist and the darkness of the clouds."[19] Hence, the heavenly heights are brought directly before the eyes of the theatergoers. Bidloo explains how later in the play some of the clouds disappear to reveal the "extremely rich" Palace of the Sun, which radiates a strong light. First the Palace's gates are closed, but eventually they open, so that the light becomes even brighter, almost blinding the viewer.

Unfortunately, there is no visual record of the first series of performances, but we do have a print of 1772 after a drawing by Willem Writs that shows the throne hall of the Sun Palace (Fig. 2.1). Since this print was made almost one hundred years after the première, the performance we see here must have been adapted from the original, but Bidloo's stage directions and descriptions remained a dominant point of reference.[20] As in most theaters in Europe, the stage machinery and the sets of the Amsterdam theater house, some of them painted by famous artists such as Gerard de Lairesse, were used over longer periods, even decades, and when they were renewed this was often announced in the press or via leaflets for publicity reasons. Bidloo's version of Vondel's play remained extremely successful until well into the eighteenth century.[21] There is no record that new machineries or scenery were used.[22] This print, therefore,

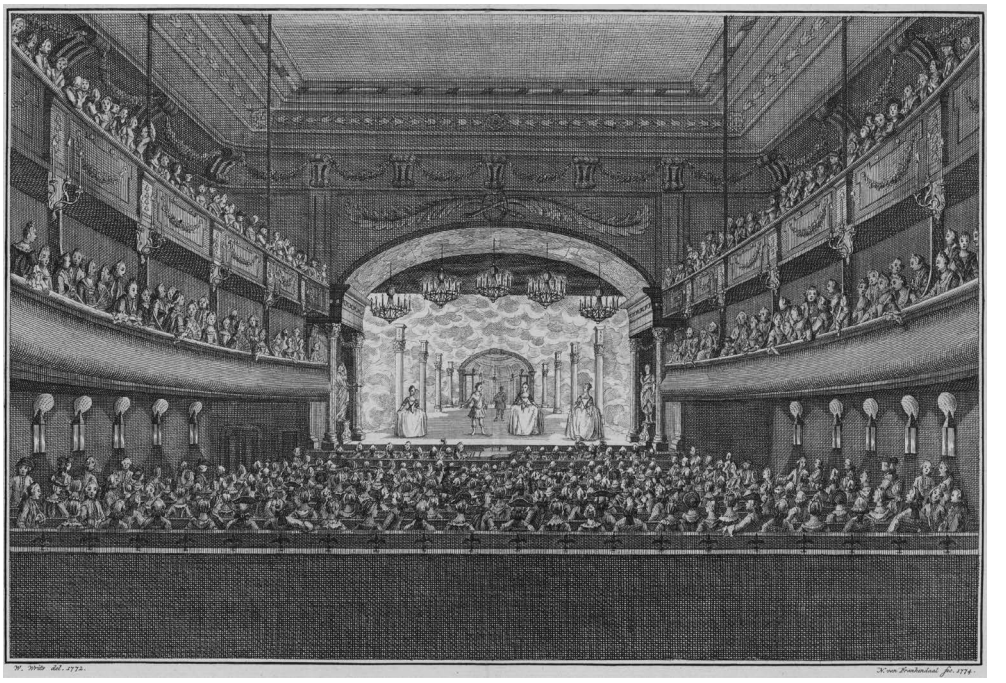

Figure 2.1 Nicolaas van Frankendaal, after Willem Writs, *Interior of the Amsterdam Theater with the Sun Court,* 1774. Etching, 225 × 307 mm. Collectie Atlas Dreesmann, Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

gives us an indication of what the première performances must have looked like, with the heavenly realms staged as a large background full of clouds; a set of high columns gave form to the hall and grand chandeliers with dozens of candles provided dramatic lighting.

Bidloo's spectacular performance of Vondel's *Phaethon* brings a third aspect of the sublime to the fore. Besides Longinus's *hupsos* that Junius used to discuss the powerful imagination of artists and their audience (see Chapter 1) and Ovid's *sublimis*, with which Vondel pointed his readers at the existential dangers of intermingling too closely with elevated regions, this performance focused on the spectacular effect of the sublime. The Amsterdam theatergoers were overwhelmed by having the celestial realms and later the divine throne hall brought right in front of them in the blink of an eye. We can place the delight and admiration that the staging of *Phaethon* elicited within a tradition in the early modern period that included the French *le merveilleux*, the Italian *meraviglia,* the German *Wunder*, and the English and Dutch *wonder*. These concepts are not restricted to the theater but also deal with the marvelous in other forms, such as literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, the decorative arts, printmaking and book illustrations, garden design, festival productions, and even science. According to Joy Kenseth, the "marvelous" referred to all "things or events that were unusual, unexpected, exotic, extraordinary, or rare … especially when it had the capacity to excite the particular emotional responses of wonder, surprise, astonishment, or admiration."[23] With its emphasis on ravishing excitement and breathtaking astonishment, the effect of the marvelous is related to the overwhelming and transporting effects of the sublime. In that sense, it is no surprise that Boileau gave his translation of Longinus the title *Traité du Sublime, ou du merveilleux dans le discours*, showing the clear connections both concepts have.[24]

In the theater, this effect of the marvelous depended largely on stage machinery, and at first appeared in theatrical genres that diverted from Aristotelian-inspired tragedy. Already in Bernardo Buontalenti's designs for the late sixteenth-century Florentine *intermedi,* Inigo Jones's scenographies for the English masks in the early seventeenth century, Giacomo Torelli's designs for Italian operas, or his designs for French *ballets de cour* and *tragédies lyrique*, the marvelous effects of theatrical machinery were considered the poetical cornerstone of these genres, creating a sudden and powerful effect.[25] For the spectator, writes the French chronicler of the arts André Félibien, "a Machine, by its movements, surprises … astonishes & ravishes … & surpasses the forces of nature & the ordinary reach of men."[26] The rapid and unexpected changes in the machinery, often supported by sound effects, created an astonishing and surprising impact for the spectators, leaving them in awe and wonder. In fact, in the overwhelming effect of the machinery we can recognize the notion of *ekplexis*, which for Longinus was also an essential aspect of the sublime and emphasized its captivating force.[27] *Ekplexis* is derived from *ekpletto*, "which means to strike, confound, paralyze, or render somebody besides themselves with fear, surprise, or amazement."[28] It holds the attention of the beholder as a kind of violent surprise that often evokes fear. For Longinus, *ekplexis* also "crushes" the demarcation line between fiction and reality, resulting in the fact that readers or listeners become direct witnesses so that they start to believe they are involved in the situation that is described. In the theatrical genres other than pure dramatic theater, this overwhelming effect depended much on the skillful use of spectacular machinery showing us that theater was not only a literary experience but a visual one as well.[29]

Stage Machinery for Tragedies

Thanks to the success of theatrical genres such as opera, *ballet de cour*, and *tragédie lyrique*, spectacular machines and the marvelous effects they created became increasingly integrated into regular tragedy. Pierre Corneille took the lead in this exploration of the dramatic and theatrical possibilities of machinery to create an overwhelming impact, especially in his tragedy *Andromède* of 1650, for which he closely collaborated with the Italian engineer Giacomo Torelli.[30] Bidloo deliberately connected with this tradition by announcing that he had used theatrical novelties of the time to the full, but he was careful not to go too deeply into the innovative side. He not only emphasized the marvels created by machinery, but he also pointed to the merits of Vondel's tragedy. At the very start of his description of the adaptations, he writes:

> In order to delight as strongly as we can your eyes and ears that long for innovations, we have found it well to bring on stage the grand tragedy of PHAETHON, written by the late Sir J. V. Vondel; but owing to the fact that the Poet has traditionally ordered his Plays in the Old Greek and Latin fashion, and therefore is no longer fitting to the taste of today, which depends on the appropriateness of the French or the scenery changes of the Italians, we have taken the liberty of adding some jewels to his beautiful play, which we will preserve in its entirety so that we will not decrease the worthiness of the great Man, whom we hold in great esteem.[31]

Bidloo adapted the spectacular performance with its quick scenery changes to the poetical rule of appropriateness. Determining the right balance between both caused constant controversy between theatrical practice and theory. How far could theater performances go in raising wonder, surprise, astonishment, and admiration? With his *De constitutione tragoediae* of 1611, Daniel Heinsius pioneered the discussion of the appropriateness of stage machinery.[32] The Leiden humanist opposed engineering feats that did not help the play. He followed Aristotle by stating that theatergoers had to undergo a catharsis (see Chapter 6). This emotional process driven by pity and fear could be obstructed by the mere marvel of stage machinery. However, Heinsius did not completely put aside *le merveilleux,* as even Aristotle had noted that the increase in amazement (*thaumaston*) was a powerful theatrical device. Heinsius's poetics influenced French theoreticians, such as Hyppolyte-Jules Pilet de La Menasdière, Abbé d'Aubignac, and Michel de Pure, who were concerned about the logically structured and uninterrupted development of the plot but who also saw the overwhelming possibilities in the use of machinery.[33] In his *Pratique du théâtre* (1657), Abbé d'Aubignac devoted a whole chapter to the use of machinery in tragedy. He writes that because of their astonishing and ravishing effect, machines not only accentuate the emotions of a character vis-à-vis certain events in the course of action but they can also help to transfer these emotions to the spectator in a most powerful way.[34]

The appropriateness of the marvels that stage machinery could elicit in the performance of tragedy was a controversial issue in Amsterdam's literary society *Nil Volentibus Arduum*, which adopted the arguments of Aristotle, Heinsius, and the French theoreticians and was frequently visited by Bidloo.[35] In the society's collection of essays *Accurate Education in Theater Poetry* (*Naauwkeurig Onderwys in de tooneel-poezy*), which was not published until 1765 but dates from the early 1670s, the physician and playwright Lodewijk Meyer contributed a chapter on stage machinery.[36] In line with Bidloo's

legitimization of his performance of *Phaethon*, Meyer states that the machinery's reason for existing is the delight it elicits by presenting the unexpected and the extraordinary; he warns, however, that these devices may never "deafen" the plot. Appropriateness needs to be guarded by staging only ancient myth: "Although everything in it about their gods and metamorphoses is inconceivable and improbable, it has nevertheless come to the knowledge of the viewers through common opinion and ancient tradition, which has used us to hear them speak of it in this way, so much so that it does not offend them, if they see it shown on stage."[37] Whether or not with these restrictions in mind, most theatergoers applauded the spectacular performance. One anonymous critic was annoyed by this and blamed Bidloo, as well as his ignorant audience, for disdaining poetry. According to the critic, the "excesses" (*uitspoorigheeden*) in performing *Phaethon* were appreciated only by fools.[38] In writing this, the critic followed another leading member of *Nil Volentibus Arduum,* Andries Pels, who, in 1681, had strongly opposed to the use of stage machinery in his *Use and Mis-Use of the Theater (Gebruik en misbruik des Tooneels*).[39] He did not follow Meyer and Bidloo, but claimed that machinery always obstructed the tragic plot.

Phaethon's Fall

Thanks to the critic we learn that most of *Phaethon's* audience eagerly watched as the spectacle was brought before their eyes, especially when it reached its peak in the grand finale; the theatergoers must have been astounded to witness Phaethon's fall. To make this the highlight of the play by sending shivers down everyone's spine, Bidloo replaced the vivid description that Vondel had planned as Fama's speech with a spectacular staging that involved flying devices and machinery that created waves in the water and adding a cry for help by Phaethon. Bidloo describes the scene as follows:

> *With the opening of the curtains, one sees at the start of the fifth act a Landscape and the streaming River of the Po; after the preliminary noise of Thunder and Lightning, one hears Phaethon screaming*:
>
> Help! Father Febus, help! Apollo, oh fear
> Most accelerates my ruin at any moment.
> I see the Thunderer descending full of wrath.
> Help Febus! Help! One is threatening the life of your own son.
>
> *After a dangerous violence of Thunder and Lightning Phaethon falls with chariot and horses out of the sky into the River Po.*[40]

Another print after Willem Writs gives some insight into what the staging of this scene must have looked like (Fig. 2.2). As in the previous image (Fig. 2.1), we must acknowledge that this print was made long after the first series of performances. However, since the scene shown in the print corresponds closely to Bidloo's description, it helps us to visualize Phaethon's fall in the original staging of 1685. So, in contrast to Vondel's intention, Bidloo explicitly presented Phaethon's fall. Furthermore, Iris and Mercury stood at the front of the stage and recited the lines that Vondel had originally given to the choir of Hours. From a theatrical point of view these two figures—like the choir in the

Figure 2.2 Simon Fokke, after Willem Writs, *Interior of the Amsterdam Theater with the Fall of Phaethon,* 1760. Etching, 220 × 307 mm. Collectie Atlas Dreesmann, Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

drama—function as commentators on the events that are presented in the visual experience of stage machinery. They were not really incorporated into the theatrical space but were standing on the stage apron, pointing to what could effectively be seen only in the background. In doing so, they were not only characters in the play but also spectators, and they stood at the outside boundary of the theatrical event to which they both did and did not belong. Bidloo gave them the role of communicating with the audience, which makes sense since both are gods of communication. They connected the world of theater and the world of the spectator. As spectators within a performance, they are part of the *theater within the theater* tradition, which, as the French theater and literary historian Georges Forestier points out, was a structural process that controlled the relationship between the spectator and the stage, but in doing so it also exposed the theatrical apparatus and gave the whole a metatheatrical dimension.[41] Indeed, Bidloo, or at least the etching of Writs, thematized the act of theatrical spectatorship: The two characters stood for two modes of spectatorship within an aesthetics of the theatrical *merveilleux* that resulted in heightened emotions, rapture, and astonishment that we can connect to the sublime.

Iris holds her handkerchief in front of her face because she can hardly look at the terrible event unfolding before her eyes, but she is drawn to it at the same time. This mixture of horror and delight is not restricted to her own emotions; it is also the emotional model that the ideal spectator should follow. For the audience, the tragic event, so spectacularly presented by the machinery, must evoke strong and overwhelming emotions that enforce the process of identification. The emotions aroused by the sight of Phaethon's fall were meant to be more than just momentary and spectacular but

also had to have a cathartic function connected with the religious and moral message of Vondel's play about man's *humilis* versus heavenly *sublimis*. Mercury, on the other hand, looks at the event in a totally different way. Rather than being emotionally involved, he points us with his outstretched arm to the stage machinery. This seems to go against the prevailing view of the use of stage machinery in tragedy, in which it is presented as a disturbing element that cannot in any way contribute to a sublime experience of the performance. From the point of view of the plot's unity, this is certainly accurate, but it is more complex than that. The use of stage machinery in that period cannot be thought of solely in terms of its function and place in the plot. It also provides a sensory experience that stands on its own, like a miracle of technology, capable of revealing the forces and laws of nature.

The two modes of spectatorship related to stage machinery were central to Abbé d'Aubignac's *Pratique du théâtre*, which, as we saw earlier, was inspired by Heinsius and in turn influenced the theatrical views of Andries Pels and *Nil Volentibus Arduum*. However, he does not see the complex experiential possibilities of theatrical machinery described above as a contradiction—emotional awe versus rational admiration—but explains it as the double consciousness that typifies the ideal spectator. Describing the effect of machinery, he uses two types of spectators. One is defined as the common spectator who takes the visual experience of machinery as genuine enchantment; the other is the spectator who can discern the artifice. The ideal spectator unites both types and depends on a double consciousness. For d'Aubignac, machinery is one of the most "touching sensibilities" of the "ingenious Magic" of the theater.[42] It ravishes us, since it brings heroes and an infinity of wonders right before our eyes. But at the same time, we are aware that it is only an illusion. It is a *magie théâtrale* of which one knows the secrets and magic spells and that, for d'Aubignac, is the essence of the theatrical *merveilleux*. Iris and Mercury each embody one type of spectatorship. These types are prototypically gendered: Iris embodies the naive and emotional one, while Mercury is the rational spectator who admires the artistry and technique of the machinery. But by putting them both on the stage at the same moment, Bidloo—or for that matter Writs—seem to have been aware of this double consciousness as the ideal type of spectatorship for plays that made use of extensive machinery.

Goltzius's Theatricality

The overwhelming impact of Phaethon's fall as a theatrical experience enthralled other artists throughout the seventeenth century as well. As early as the dawn of what can be called a golden age for the arts in the Dutch Republic, Hendrick Goltzius made a drawing of Phaethon's fall that expresses a similar theatricality, since, like Bidloo's staging, it shows a particular interest in spectatorship, as well as an explicit presentation of contrasting emotions (Fig. 2.3). Just as in the 1685 performance, the front of the stage is taken by eyewitnesses of the disaster and not the fall itself. Goltzius puts everything at stake to show how they are confronted with strong emotions, being horrified as well as fascinated by Jupiter's lethal strike. The witnessing gods look in total dismay at how the failed ride to the sun is ending in total destruction. The gods express their feelings of terror by following the popular instructions from the Latin handbooks of rhetoric regarding body language (*sermo corporis*), as they let their arms rise in pure devastation and their mouths fall open in a complete lack of understanding, and as they bring their hands to their faces to express complete surprise.[43] Among others, the Goddess of Earth

Figure 2.3 Hendrick Goltzius, *Phaethon*, ca. 1588. Pen and red-brown ink, 16.5 × 25.3 cm. Rogers Fund 1992.376, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

and the Goddesses of the Seasons stare mesmerized at the terrific scene. They cannot help but continue looking, too much attracted by the terror as they are. Even Atlas, who feels the heat of Jupiter on his back, moves his head to see what is happening but also tries to protect himself.[44]

Just as in the print after Writs, the choice has been made not to place the tragic event on the first plan. This can also be seen in influential artworks by Goltzius's predecessors, since in one of his drawings, Bruegel paid attention to Phaethon's fall as well. It is now lost, but we still have an engraving after this drawing, probably by Cornelis Bos (Fig. 2.4).[45] There we see three vessels whose crew is unaware of what is happening in the sky. In that way, the image is similar to Bruegel's famous paintings of the fall of Icarus, but in the drawing Bruegel does not entirely suggest that the dramatic event has passed by unnoticed. In the foreground, we can see a swan that shows us the awful effect that seeing Phaethon fall can have. It is King Cygnus of Liguria who, following Ovid's version of Phaethon, metamorphosed as a swan because of the shock of seeing his beloved friend fall out of the skies. Further comparison with Bruegel shows that Goltzius presents the rise and fall of Phaethon differently. The boy is not riding from one side to the other being chased after by Jupiter with the chariot shown in its full length, but he is riding away from the viewer in the direction of Jupiter. Like Bruegel, however, the Haarlem artist shows the direct confrontation between Phaethon and Jupiter, who takes the boy by surprise with his blinding light. In depicting this confrontation, both artists visualize what happens when the world of gods and humans collide.

In the same year, Goltzius used a drawing by his close colleague, Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, to make an engraving that explores the visual dynamics of the fall more

Figure 2.4 Cornelis Cort, after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Two Galleys following Armed Three-Masted Ship with Fall of Phaethon*, 1564–65. Engraving, 282 × 220 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

vividly (Fig. 2.5).[46] In this engraving, Goltzius does not express any interest in the eyewitnesses of the tragic event, as he does by contrast in his drawing (Fig. 2.4), nor in the violent intervention by Jupiter. Only the fall is left for the viewer and placed in a panoramic landscape in which we see the river Po in the center; on the left bank the land is on fire and on the right magnificent mountains appear. The chariot and horses are projected far ahead of the deplorable boy. By swinging with his arms and legs, he seems to try to control his wild tumbling, but the only thing he can achieve is raising his head to see that the chariot is already far away.

The inscription around the tondo frames the myth morally and anticipates the *Commentary on the Metamorphoses* of his fellow townsman Karel van Mander, which was influential in seeking lessons for a devout life in Ovid's poem.[47] The text reads: "A wise man does not approve ambition, but prizes expressions of praise; he prizes them if they go to good people. Therefore, the fall of Phaethon teaches us that impetuosity comes to a bad end."[48] But it is only to a certain degree that this moral framing plays a role in the impact the engraving has on the viewer, as the breathtaking sensation of the fall is most prominent. Goltzius lets a shadow fall on the muscular body and contrasts this with a sunlit background. Thanks to this light-and-dark effect, Phaethon seems to tumble even more toward the viewer who sees the boy from just underneath him. The Haarlem artist thus encourages the viewer to imagine being close to the boy and joining him in his

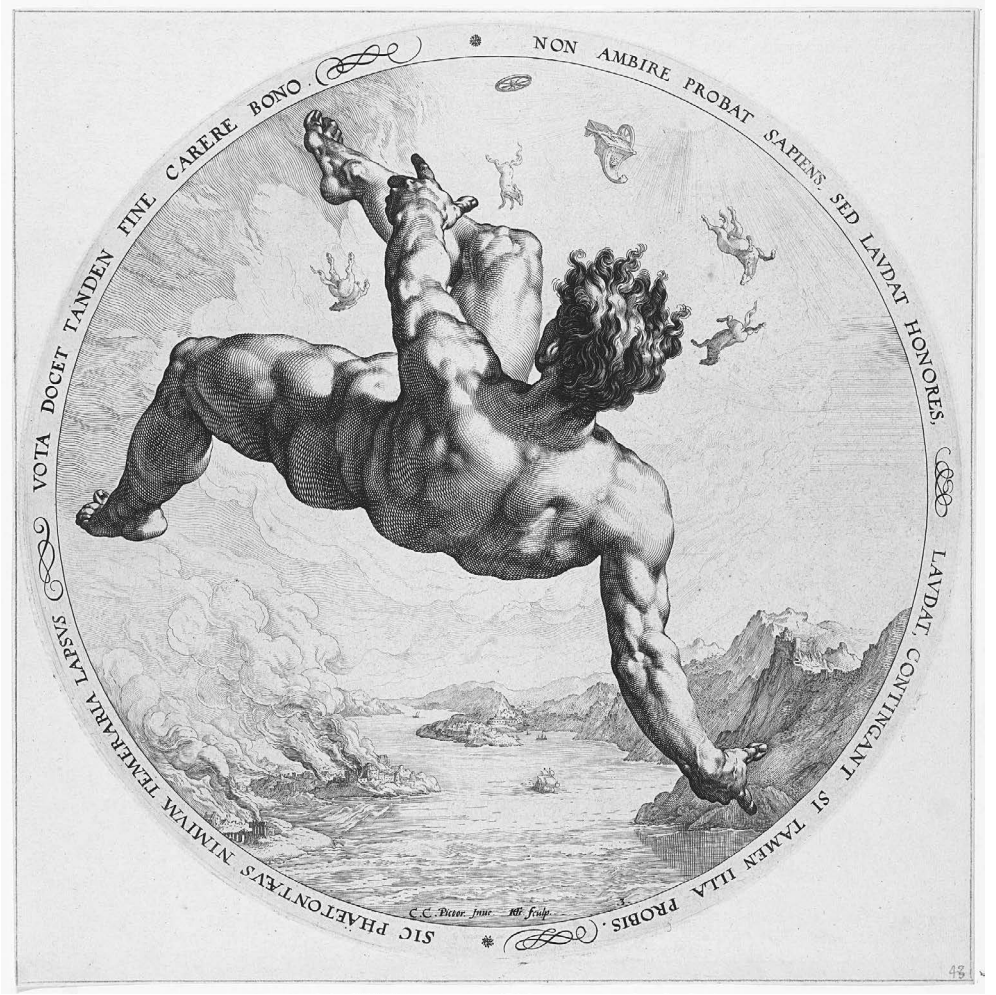

Figure 2.5 Hendrick Goltzius, after Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, *Phaethon,* 1588. Engraving, diam. 33 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

free fall. Because the boy's face is not visible, the viewer is not confronted with explicit emotions, but this does not make the fall any less overwhelming. As a concretization of emotions is avoided, only extasy and vertigo remain. Dismay and fear of the rapid fall go hand in hand with the thrilling sensation of tumbling high in the air.

From All Points of View

A grand painting by Peter Paul Rubens (Fig. 2.6) combines the illusion of joining Phaethon in his fall as evoked in Goltzius's engraving (Fig. 2.5) and a focus on the overwhelmed witnesses of this disaster, as in his drawing (Fig. 2.4). As we have seen, the Antwerp master was influential in the Dutch Republic, but he was also influenced by Dutch artists and not in the least by Goltzius. At the start of his career, during the 1590s, he turned his gaze to the Haarlem master and even paid him a visit two decades later in 1612.[49] It is in this

Figure 2.6 Peter Paul Rubens, *The Fall of Phaethon,* completed ca. 1612. Oil on canvas, 98.4 × 131.2 cm. Patrons' Permanent Fund, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

period that Rubens finished a masterpiece depicting Phaethon's fall.[50] With his interpretation of the tragic end of the boy, he avoids showing terror bluntly but nevertheless tried to make a penetrating impact on the viewer. He does not draw the viewer's full attention to the lethal bolt of lightning, thereby representing Jupiter's anger only indirectly. Instead, he emphasizes the astonishment and terror of the heavenly witnesses watching the chariot come their way at a speed that endangers them, even running over their relatives.

As in the case of Goltzius, the Phaethon myth motivated Rubens to experiment with the impact of overwhelming scenes. In making this brief comparison, we do not want to claim a straightforward influence, but simply shared interests in dealing with the attraction and terror of the highest spheres. Rubens lets the viewer imagine he is near Phaethon, just behind him and following closely his fatal ride, much as Goltzius did in his engraving (Fig. 2.5). Although the heavenly creatures are placed further away from the viewer of the painting as in Goltzius's drawing (Fig. 2.3), the focus on their emotional involvement has not diminished in Rubens's painting. Because the chariot is threatening them, their astonishment and terror are extreme. Thus, the Antwerp master brings attention to Phaethon falling, as well as to the overwhelmed onlookers.

Artists in Goltzius's network experimented with the visualization of Phaethon's fall from celestial realms as well. This can be seen in an illustration of Crispijn de Passe after Maerten de Vos for *Metamorphoseon Ovidianarum* (Fig. 2.7).[51] With this engraving, de Passe continued to work on an unfinished cycle by Goltzius for which the 1588 drawing was made.[52] The text—taken from Johannes Postius's *Metamorphoses* edition

Figure 2.7 Crispijn de Passe (I), after Maerten de Vos, *The Fall of Phaethon*. Illustration in Ovid, *Metamorphoseon Ovidiarum*. Cologne: Crispijn de Passe, 1602. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

of 1563—follows the moral lesson that Vondel brought by stating that "this example teaches young and old alike not to strive for what lies beyond their powers."[53] In the image, the focus is put on Phaethon being pursued by Jupiter. The tragic event here gobbles up all the space, thus coming across as overwhelming. The boy tumbles down quickly and falls, together with the chariot and horses, in the direction of the viewer. Half a century later, this illusion is further explored by Jacob van Campen (Fig. 2.8). In his design for the ceiling of the Citizens' Hall of the Amsterdam town hall, the architect and painter

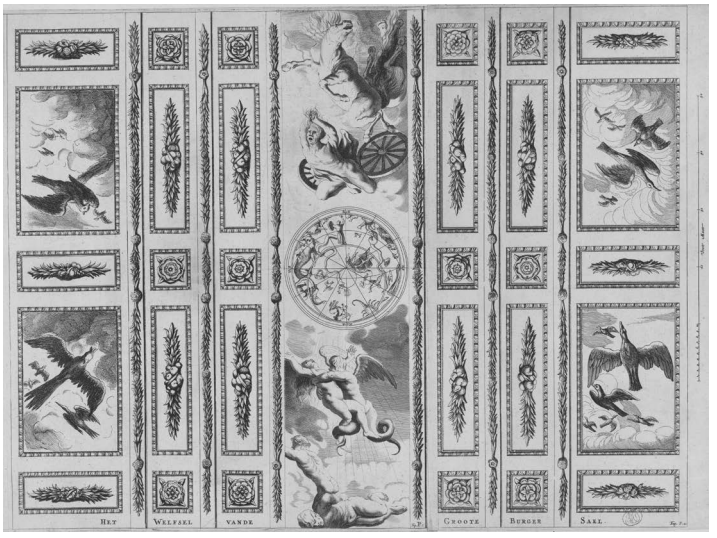

Figure 2.8 Dancker Danckerts (engraving), Jacob Vennekool (drawing), and Jacob van Campen (design), *The Vault of the Grand Citizens' Hall*. Illustration in Dancker Danckerts, *Afbeelding van 't stadt huys van Amsterdam*. Amsterdam: Dancker Danckerts, 1661. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

wanted to create the illusion that the boy tumbles down with the chariot and the horses toward us from high in the skies.

To conclude, we can say that as we have seen in Vondel's tragedy, many images of Phaethon's fall dealt with moral and religious issues, existentially questioning the place of man vis-à-vis the heavenly realms along with the dialects between *sublimis, humilis* and hubris, as expressed by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. This chapter has also focused on how the representation of Phaethon's fall, whether in theater, painting, prints, or drawings, evoked the spectacular excitement of being in highly elevated regions or seeing the consequences of this hubris in the fall. This sensation was discussed using *le merveilleux* and hence linked to a rich variety of contexts, but we have focused on the emerging importance of stage machinery to create the illusion of being lifted far above the earthly goings-on. Moreover, representing Phaethon's fall was a matter of representing the act of viewing and, in so doing, of guiding the viewing experience. In Bidloo's "theater in the theater," we saw how Iris and Mercury presented two possible forms of spectatorship where the astonishment over the technical wonders of machinery did not necessarily diminish its effects as a kind of spectacular *ekplexis* that increase the strong emotions elicited by the plot. In visual representations of Phaethon's fall, the effect on the viewer gained a more physical if not visceral character. Whether in Goltzius's engraving, Rubens's painting, or Van Campen's decorative scheme for the Amsterdam town hall, there was a suggestion that the viewers themselves might be crushed by Phaethon, the horses, or the chariot. This suggestion destabilizes the relation between the beholders and the visual representation and thrives on the conflicting emotions of awe and wonder, emotions that defined the sublime experience long before Edmund Burke conceptualized this opposition in terms of horror and delight.

Notes

1 We are using the most recent scholarly edition of the play: Joost van den Vondel, *Jeptha, of offerbelofte; Koning David hersteld; Faëton, of roekeloze stoutheid,* ed. Jan Konst (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004). All translations of Vondel's tragedy are ours.

2 By praising Ovid as author of the breathtaking fall of Phaethon, Franciscus Junius refers to the myth of Phaethon as well. Unlike Vondel, he does not focus on the death of the boy but on the Roman poet who excels in his imagination, thus being able to vividly describe the heavenly realms. In doing so, Junius rephrases Longinus, who on his turn had praised Euripides for the vivid description in his tragedy *Phaethon*, which is now preserved only in fragments. Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients,* eds. Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1.4.6; Longinus, *On the Sublime,* ed. D. Russell, trans. W. H. Fyfe, Loeb Classical Library 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), paragraph 15. See Colette Nativel, "La chute de Phaéton," *Hemantica* 50 (1999): 553–68.

3 "Verheft uw hart niet. Schuwt de hovaardij vooral./ Vermijdt vermetenheid die menig' bracht ten val."

4 "Klinkklaar goud/ en barnsteen gloeien hier en schitteren als vlammen./ Het sneeuwwit elphenbeen geeft dak. Op held're krammen/ van diamanten draait de valdeur dat het kraakt."

5 "Regia Solis erat sublimibus alta columnis" (our translation). Philip Hardie writes about this opening line: "The columns are literally 'lofty,' and that spatial sense of sublimis is duplicated in the juxtaposed alta. But the Palace of the Sun is also a frontispiece or facade, in Pindaric manner, to the sublime episode of Phaethon. There is a dual sublimity in the episode: first, the sublimity of the Sun, whose dazzle is more than Phaethon's mortal eyes can bear (22–23), framed in the sublime architecture of his palace; and, secondly, the vertiginous sublimity of Phaethon's fall from the sky and the near return of Chaos as a result of his disastrous ride." Philip Hardie, "The Ovidian Sublime. Antiquity and After," *Dictynna* 19 (2022), paragraph 10, accessed April 30, 2023, doi: 10.4000/dictynna.2793.

6 "De pijlers dragen 't hof ten hemel."

7 This notion of *sublimis* can be found not only in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* but also in diverse other Roman poetic and rhetoric discourses. For example, Vergil uses the adjective to name the exceptional gates of the city of the Latini (*Aeneid* 12.133) or the high flight of Jove's eagle (*Aeneid* 5.255). In the context of rhetoric, Quintilian uses *sublimis* in a figurative sense to name the elevated style, which may only be used on extraordinary occasions (*Institutio oratoria* 11.1.3).
8 "And, though all other animals are prone, and fix their gaze upon the earth, he gave to man an uplifted face and bade him stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven" ("pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram, os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre" 1.84–85). Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* trans. Justus Miller, rev. G.P. Gould, Loeb Classical Library 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).
9 "Gelukkig is de zoon die nu zijn vader kent./ Nu leef en zweef ik in mijn eigen element./ Schep moed, o Faëton, gij stijgt in 's hemels daken./ De bergen zinken in 't verschiet. Mijn voeten raken/ geen aard."
10 Frederik Knegtel, "Constructing the Sublime. The Discourse on Architecture and Louis XIV's Sublimity in Seventeenth-Century Paris," University of Leiden, Ph.D. thesis, 2019, 13–14 and 24–25, accessed April 30, 2023, https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/82074.
11 "Ik blaas klaroen van vreugd."
12 "Men ere Jupiter in kerken en in koren."
13 Catherine Croizy-Naquet, "L'*Ovide moralisé* ou Ovide revisité: de metamorphose en anamorphose," *Cahiers de Recherces Médiévales et Humanistes* 9 (2002): 39–52, accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.4000/crm.49 In the Dutch Republic, there was the influential *Commentary on the Metamorphoses (Wtlegginghe van den Metamorphosis)* of Karel van Mander in his *The Book on Painting (Het Schilder-boeck)* of 1604. This commentary was successful enough to be published as a separate book, e.g., in Amsterdam by Pieter Robijn in 1643, accessed April 30, 2023, https://books.google.be/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=2vE9AAAAcAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=ovid+mander&ots=vgUS1MLtAY&sig=ZcrT-ipoPoiSMLdn-Ajv0_M2UWw#v=onepage&q=ovid%20mander&f=false.
14 Marijke Spies, "Helicon and Hills of Sand: Pagan Gods in Early Modern Dutch and European Poetry," in Marijke Spies, *Rhetoric, Rhetoricians and Poets. Studies in Renaissance Poetry and Poetics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 58–78.
15 R.A. Rasch, "19 februari 1685: Onder regie van Govard Bidloo wordt Vondels *Faëton* opgevoerd als een muziekdramatische show. Toneel en muziek aan het eind van de zeventiende eeuw," in *Een theatergeschiedenis der Nederlanden. Tien eeuwen drama en theater in Nederland en Vlaanderen,* ed. Robert Erenstein (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 272–77.
16 H.H.J. de Leeuwe, "Vondel, Bidloo, Faëton en de Amsterdamse decorprenten," *De nieuwe taalgids* 82, no. 5 (1989): 441–50.
17 T. Amir, "De opening van de verbouwde Schouwburg te Amsterdam. Van suggestie naar illusie; kunst- en vliegwerken in de Amsterdamse schouwburg," in *Een theatergeschiedenis*, 258–65.
18 Govert Bidloo, *Beschrijving der spreekende Perzoonen, Zangen, Danssen, Konstwerken en Vertoogen, gevoegd bij J. V. Vondels Faëton* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lescailje, 1685).
19 "Het geheele Tooneel verbeeld een Wolkhemel, alwaar men een ondergaande Maan aan de kim, en den opkomstigen dag door de nevelen, en duisterheid der Wolke ziet breeken." Bidloo, *Beschrijving*, 7.
20 Amir, "De opening," 258–65.
21 J.A. Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg 1496–1872,* ed. J.F.M. Sterck (Amsterdam: S.L. van Looy, 1920), 144, 175, 194.
22 De Leeuwe, "Vondel," 441–50.
23 Joy Kenseth, "Introduction," in *The Age of the Marvelous,* ed. Joy Kenseth (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art-Dartmouth College, 1991), 25.
24 Nicolas Despreaux Boileau, *Oeuvres diverses du Sieur D***, avec le Traité du Sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours, traduit du grec de Longin* (Paris: Denis Thierry, 1674).
25 Bram Van Oostveldt and Stijn Bussels, "One never sees monsters without experiencing emotion: *Le merveilleux* and the sublime in theories on French performing arts (1650–1750)," in *Translations of the Sublime. The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus' Peri Hupsous in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre,* eds. Caroline van Eck, Maarten Delbeke, Stijn Bussels, and Jürgen Pieters, Intersections 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 139–62.

26 Quoted in Marianne Grivel, "Genèse d'un manuscript," in *Devises pour les tapisseries du roi,* eds. Marianne Grievel and Marc Fumaroli (Paris: BNF-Herscher, 1989), 105 (our translation).
27 On *ekplexis* in ancient rhetoric and poetics, see Eugenio Refini, "Longinus and Poetic Imagination in Late Renaissance Literary Theory," in *Translations of the Sublime*, 45–46.
28 Caroline van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, *Explexis,* and the Sublime," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, doi: 10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.3
29 See Bram Van Oostveldt and Stijn Bussels, "The Sublime and French Seventeenth-Century Theories of the Spectacle: Toward an Aesthetic Approach to Performance," *Theatre Survey* 58, no. 2 (2017): 209–32.
30 Stefan Bayer, "Les scénographies de Torelli pour l'*Andromède* de Corneille," *Littératures classiques* 105, no. 2 (2021): 107–21.
31 "OM uwe nieuwbegeerige oogen, en ooren, zoo veel wy vermoogen, te vergenoegen, hebben wy goed gevonden, het groote Treurspel van FAËTON, door wijlen de Heer J.V. VONDEL gemaakt, ten Tooneele te brengen; maar alzoo de Dichter gewoonlijk zijne Speelen, op de Oude Grieksche, en Latijnsche wijze geschikt heeft, en derhalven aan de hedendaagsche smaak, die op der Franschen geschiktheid, of der Itaaliaanen veranderingen van vertoogen gestelt is, niet allom voldoed, neemen wy de vryheid, onvermindert des grooten Mans waardye, wien wy zoo veel achting als iemand, toedragen, om zijn schoone stuk, 't welk wy in 't geheel laaten, noch eenig sieraaden by te voegen." Bidloo, *Beschrijving*, 4 (our translation).
32 Anne Duprat, "Introduction," in Daniel Heinsius, *De Constitutione Tragoediae, La Constitution de la Tragédie, dite La Poétique d'Heinsius,* ed. and trans. Anne Duprat (Geneva: Droz, 2001), 63–75.
33 Edith Kern, *The Influence of Heinsius and Vossius upon French Dramatic Theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949).
34 Abbé d'Aubignac, *Pratique du théâtre,* ed. Pierre Martino (Geneva: Slatkin Reprints, 1996), 483–93.
35 Amir, "De opening," 258–65.
36 Lodewijk Meyer, "Van het Tooneelspel met Kunstwerken," in *Naauwkeurig Onderwys in de tooneel-poezy,* eds. Andries Pels and Lodewijk Meyer (Leiden: Cornelis van Hoogeveen, 1765), 305–28, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/pels001naau01_01/pels001naau01_01_0041.php.
37 "(…) schoon al, wat daar in is van hunne Goden en Gestaltveranderingen, onmoogelyk en onwaarschynlyk is, het evenwel door het gemeen gevoelen en die oude overlevering, die ons gewend heeft, om op die wyze daar van te hooren spreeken, het zo tot de kennis der Aanschouweren gekoomen is, dat het hen niet tegen den borst is, als zy dat op het Tooneel veel zien vertoonen." Meyer, "Van het Tooneelspel," 313.
38 Anonymous, "De triomfeerende schouburg, aan Apollo," in *Nederduitse en Latynse keurdigten,* ed. Pieter van der Goes (Rotterdam: Pieter van der Goes, 1710), 573.
39 Andries Pels, *Gebruik én misbruik des tooneels*, ed. M.A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink, 1978), accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/pels001gebr01_01/index.php.
40 "*Met het openen van de gordijnen ziet men in 't begin van 't Vijfde Bedrijf, een Landschap, en den stromende Rivier de Padus na een voorgaande geruis van Donder en Blixem, hoort men FAËTON in de Wolken roepende.* Help! Vader Febus, help! Apollo, ach de schrik/ Verhaast mijn ondergang vast ieder oogenblik./ Ik zie den Donderaar vol gramschap nederstreeven,/ Help Febus! help! men dingt uw eyge zoon naar 't leeven. *Na een vervaarlijk geweld van Donder en Blixem valt FAËTON met wagen en paarden uit de lucht, in den Padus.*" Bidloo, *Beschrijving,* 14.
41 Georges Forestier, *Le théâtre dans le théâtre sur la scène française du XVIIe siècle* (Genève: Droz, 1981), 10–15.
42 D'Aubignac, *Pratique,* 483–84. Cf. Van Oostveldt and Bussels, "One never sees monsters," 139–62.
43 Volker Kapp, "Die Lehre von der actio als Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Kultur der frühen Neuzeit," in *Die Sprache der Zeichen und Bilder: Rhetorik und nonverbale Kommunikation in der frühen Neuzeit,* ed. Volker Kapp (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1990), 40–64.

44 The Latin text in the margin of the engraving that an anonymous engraver made after this drawing explicitly mentions Atlas's repellent attitude: "Even Altas, with his true burden on his back, is scalding hot." ("Astuant ipse sua meli gravitus Atlas.") Huigen Leeflang and Ger Luijten, eds., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617). Drawings, Prints and Painting* (exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2003), 111.
45 Arthur Klein, *Graphic Worlds of Peter Bruegel the Elder* (London: Dover Publications, 1963), cat. no. 16, 81–83; Manfred Sellink, *Bruegel: L'oeuvre complet. Peintures, dessins, gravures* (Brussels: Ludion, 2007), cat. no. 112; Joris van Grieken, Ger Luijten and Jan van der Stock, eds, *Hieronymus Cock. De renaissance in prent* (Leuven: Mercatorfonds, 2013), cat. no. 101.
46 The engraving is part of a series with three other mythological figures that tragically fall, Tantalus, Icarus and Ixion. Leeflang and Luijten, *Hendrick Goltzius*, cat. no. 33.3, 98–99.
47 Cf. note 12 in this chapter.
48 "Non ambire probat sapiens sed laudat honores, laudat, contingant si tamen illa probis. Sic Phäetontaeus nimium temeraria lapsus vota docet tanden fine carere bono." Translation from Leeflang and Luijten, *Hendrick Goltzius*, 98.
49 Filip Vermeylen and Karolien De Clippel, "Rubens and Goltzius in dialogue. Artistic exchanges between Antwerp and Haarlem during the Revolt," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 28, no. 2 (2012): 148.
50 Thanks to a range of technical evidence and a formal analysis, Melanie Gifford could document Rubens's experimentation spread over eight years, from approximately 1604 to the year of his visit to Goltzius. E. Melanie Gifford, "Rubens's Invention and Evolution: Material Evidence in The Fall of the Phaeton," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 11, no. 2 (2019), 8, accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/ 10.5092/jhna.2019.11.2.1.
51 Ovid, *Metamorphoseon Ovidiarum* (Cologne: Crispijn de Passe, 1602), folio 21r, accessed April 30, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k15218623.
52 Ilja M. Veldman, *Profit and Pleasure. Print Books by Crispijn de Passe* (Rotterdam: Sound and Vision, 2001), 73–84, 197 (cat. no. VII.19), and 327 (fig. 134).
53 "Hoc docet exemplu[m] partier juvenesq[ue] senesque,/ Viribus affectent ne graviora suis." Translation in Veldman, *Profit and Pleasure,* 197.

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3 *Vreese Godts*

Divine Sublimity and the Invisibility of God

The first edition of Joost van den Vondel's tragedy *Lucifer* of 1654 contains an illustration of the protagonist's fall that is attributed to the Amsterdam engraver Salomon Savery (Fig. 3.1). At the bottom of the image we see God's loyal angels shown as swarms of insects in battle formation fighting the rebel angels, who are defeated and fall from heaven. At the lower left, an angel expels Adam and Eve from Eden. The leader of the heavenly revolt, Lucifer, the Light-Bringer, had poisoned the first man and woman against their creator and succeeded in dragging them along in his downfall. The illustration prominently represents Lucifer in a decorated chariot pulled by a dragon and a winged lion high in the clouds. The archangel Michael is about to strike Lucifer with a bolt of lightning, flying directly in front of a brightly shining sun, whose beams push aside the clouds on which Lucifer is driving. Because of Michael's attack, the dragon and the lion panic and make a U-turn, which results in the fall of the Light-Bringer. As in the depictions of Phaethon's fall (see Chapter 2), we see that the chariot has become entirely unmanageable and that its driver is tumbling out.

Many early modern Netherlandish artists depicted the fall of Lucifer and his rebel angels. Rubens was especially attracted to the subject, which he painted several times, and described it as one of the most appealing but also one of the most difficult subjects to represent.[1] The Antwerp master expressed this idea in a letter to Wolfgang Wilhelm, Count Palatine of Neuburg, for whom he painted an altarpiece with Michael defeating Lucifer (Fig. 3.2).[2] The painting shows how the Light-Bringer is being transformed into a monstrous creature whose face already had composite animalistic traits.[3] The most striking difference from the illustration of Vondel's *Lucifer* is the presence of God the Father. Where the illustrator shows Michael flying in front of a radiant sun, the painter depicts God in humanized form backing the commander of his army. Moreover, Rubens depicts both figures in a similar pose. In his left arm God holds the globe and Michael holds a round shield; God raises his right arm in a gesture to support and encourage his commander, and Michael has his right arm in a similar position, on the verge of striking the enemy with a sword that looks like a bolt of lightning. An angel at the commander's right side echoes this posture. We see the Lord as the ultimate initiator in expelling malice.

Whereas Rubens could build on a centuries-old tradition in which God the Father was depicted in full splendor, a bearded old man highly elevated in his heavenly realms, the Dutch in the same period usually represented their Lord without anthropomorphic features, often suggesting God's presence by showing a radiance as bright as the sun. The absence of a corporeal representation of God in Dutch visual culture will run like a thread through this chapter, as we focus on how profound it was to part with the idea

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Figure 3.1 Salomon Savery (attr.), *Lucifer's Removal from Heaven by Michael.* Illustration from the first edition of Joost van den Vondel's *Lucifer.* Amsterdam: Abraham de Wees, 1654. University Library, Leiden.

Figure 3.2 Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Michael Expelling Lucifer*, 1621–22. Oil on canvas, 438 × 291 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

of a visible God. In this way, we get to the heart of the tension that religious imaging endured in a changing religious world. In the previous chapter, we saw how contact with the divine could be addressed in the Dutch Republic through ancient myths. However, in visual culture, as well as in discourses about images, it was also possible to address directly the challenges and problems of depicting the divine. By focusing on these issues in this chapter, we can further explore how in the early modern period the sublime played an important role in thinking, evoking, and imagining religious experiences, in addition to its appearance in rhetorical, poetical, and art-theoretical discussions.[4]

Vreese Godts

In his *Oeconomia Christiana*—first published in 1655, although we use the expanded version of 1661—the radical Amsterdam minister Petrus Wittewrongel addresses the Christian family and prescribes how one must behave in a devout manner.[5] He gives much

attention to defining good parents and how they must teach their offspring to approach God correctly. It is important that a pious family always keeps heaven in mind: "Our aim is nothing other than that we must elevate our mind to Heaven, all our thoughts and movements of the soul, and of the earth and everything that is so transient, and turn our attention to that which is eternal and immutable."[6] However, this goal must not lead to the storming of the highest regions. The minister points out that in his contact with God man must maintain a humble attitude. We have already seen this message expressed indirectly via Phaethon, but Wittewrongel takes Lucifer as a prominent counterexample: "Lucifer: He wanted to climb higher, and float above the stars; and he crashed down into hell."[7] Godly men should always stimulate their impetus toward the heavenly realms, but at the same time they must constantly show themselves to be respectful and modest. If believers maintain the necessary respect, they may, even must, cultivate their desire to be close to God, since it is only by taking this approach that we can feel his love in its purest form. Wittewrongel points out that believers need only stimulate their longing for God with an "orientation toward heaven" (*Hemelsch-gesintheydt*). Thus, they can transport themselves away from everyday life and their earthly belongings and move up to the most divine spheres. The so-called "movements" of the soul play an important part in this mental exercise of elevation. He writes that "the movements are the wings of the soul, whereby we have to fly upward to Heaven and whereby we are drawn up to everyone and everything there."[8]

Wittewrongel brings in the "fear of God" (*vreese Godts*) to further define the correct orientation toward heaven, which, we argue, can also be seen in terms of the sublime. For this, we should turn to the German theologian Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* of 1917 in which he analyzes how in many religions the fear of God is described in terms of "sacred horror" (*sacer horror*) and the "mystery that makes one shiver" (*mysterium tremendum*).[9] Both point at a combination of deep contemplation for the unexplainable divine experience and a fearful respect that is the result of the divine's "absolute unapproachability."[10] One should also add here God's "awful majesty" (*tremenda majestas*), which is an energetic and dynamic experience (*mobilitas dei*) of "vitality, passion, … force, movement, excitement, … and violence."[11] But the overwhelming characteristics of the divine experience arouse not only fear, but fascination as well. Holiness is always an experience of terror and attraction that makes man tremble and most humble, but—as in Wittevrongel's *Hemelsch-gesindtheyd*—it also inspires him in an irresistible upward movement "that captivates and transports him in a strange ravishment."[12] In Otto's description of the divine experience, it is not difficult to recognize the characteristics we have ascribed to the sublime: Inexplicable, but overwhelming; transporting and elevating; powerful and majestic; fearful and unapproachable, yet inspirational and an object of absolute fascination and desire. The theologian makes this connection as well, stating that "there is more … in the combination of 'the holy' with 'the sublime' than a mere association of feelings," but that "the sublime too is an authentic scheme of the holy."[13]

This contrasting experience of awe and fear, of terror and fascination, is fundamental for the understanding of the holy in Christianity in terms of a *divine sublimity*. Many Christian authors relied on Matthew, among other biblical texts, to "fear him which is able to destroy" (10:28, King James Version) but also see in this fear the motive for admiration and attraction. In his turn, Wittewrongel makes the fear of God evident by focusing on the difference between the negative "fear felt by servants" (*knechtelijke vrees*) and the positive "fear felt by children" (*kinderlijke vrees*). In both, it is the contact with

God that elicits fear. However, the fear felt by servants only leads to a superficial contact with God, one that is focused on a longing for direct rewards and the avoidance of punishment. By contrast, love functions as the motivator in the fear that children feel for their parents and that true believers should feel for God. Here, fear comes close to reverence. The fear felt by children leads to the fact that true believers have blind trust in him. They are completely overwhelmed by any contact with God, but they always maintain a respectful distance.

Calvin's Ban

A long tradition of defining contact with divine sublimity entered the Dutch Republic, but the ban on representing God the Father remained a real challenge. It was John Calvin who vehemently objected to depictions of God as a human and whose teachings were adopted by the Dutch Reformed Church, which dominated religious culture.[14] The Genevan reformer pointed to the fact that after expelling Adam and Eve from Eden, God had made himself invisible to mankind, which meant that any attempt to depict him in humanized form would end in failure. In his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* of 1536, Calvin writes: "God himself being the only fit witness to himself. Meanwhile, seeing that this brutish stupidity has overspread the globe, men longing after visible forms of God, and so forming deities of wood and stone, silver and gold, or of any other dead and corruptible matter, we must hold it as a first principle, that as often as any form is assigned to God, his glory is corrupted by an impious lie."[15] Depicting God in humanized form, moreover, would hinder the sense of fear, as it made him too familiar. Showing God as an old, bearded man confused the balance between one's attraction to him and one's fear of him. So Calvin introduced the fear of God in order to strengthen the conviction that man may not create images of God, because these bring dishonor to his splendor and make him falsely approachable and understandable. As Calvin put it: "Corporeal images are unworthy of the majesty of God, and that because they diminish reverential fear and encourage error."[16]

To begin a discussion of the influence of Calvin's ban on Dutch visual culture, let us look at illustrated Bibles, where images merge with God's Word.[17] Calvin had left an opening for the visualization of biblical stories by writing: "I am not, however, so superstitious as to think that all visible representations of every kind are unlawful. But as sculpture and painting are gifts of God, what I insist on is that both shall be used purely and lawfully."[18] The Dutch publishers of illustrated Bibles followed the reformer in the belief that images could be used to show historical events, since these "are of some use for instruction and admonition."[19] Moreover, the publishers met market demand closely, as the illustrated Bibles were readily sold in the Dutch Republic.

However, compared to a century earlier, illustrated Bibles were subject to stronger restrictions. For his *Theatrum Biblicum* of 1643, Claes Jansz. Visscher compiled 450 prints to present the Holy Scripture in pictorial form. Drawing on several sources, Visscher chose to adapt the copperplates of Johan Sadeler (I) after designs of Crispijn van den Broeck that were originally used for Gerard de Jode's *Thesaurus Sacrarum Historiarum* of 1585. Thus, the renowned Amsterdam printmaker and print publisher "corrected" pictorial models from late sixteenth-century Antwerp to become suitable for the mid-seventeenth-century Dutch market. Striking examples of these adaptations can be found

Figure 3.3 Johan Sadeler (I), after Crispijn van den Broeck, *Adam and Eve Hide from God*. Illustration in Gerard de Jode, *Thesaurus Sacrarum Historiarum*. Antwerp: Gerard de Jode, 1585. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

at the start of the *Theatrum Biblicum* in the depictions of the story of Adam and Eve (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4).[20] In the image of the couple hiding from God, ashamed of their nudity, Visscher replaced God's corporeal representation in the front as well as the back. Originally, God was depicted in humanized form and found the couple embarrassed because they were aware of their nudity and mercifully provided them with clothes. Half a century later, God was no longer shown in the human body of a caring father but with a tetragram framed by a halo of light. God's Word is accentuated by adding "Adam, where are you?" ("Adam ubi es?") around his name in the front. At the back, a vertical text states that he made for them garments of skins (Genesis 3:21). Whereas God has disappeared, his gift remains, although strangely suspended in mid-air. Thus, a respectful distance between God and the beholder is preserved, and his Word gets the full attention.

It is too restrictive to assert that visual culture in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic was defined entirely by Calvin. Other religious communities than the Reformed Church, usually the Catholics, represented God with corporeal images in full splendor, highly elevated in heavenly realms. In his book *Clandestine Splendor* Xander van Eck clarified how a considerable number of Dutchmen remaining in the old faith came together in clandestine churches, often richly decorated with monumental paintings.[21] A striking example is *God Showing Christ His Seat at His Right Hand*, painted by Pieter

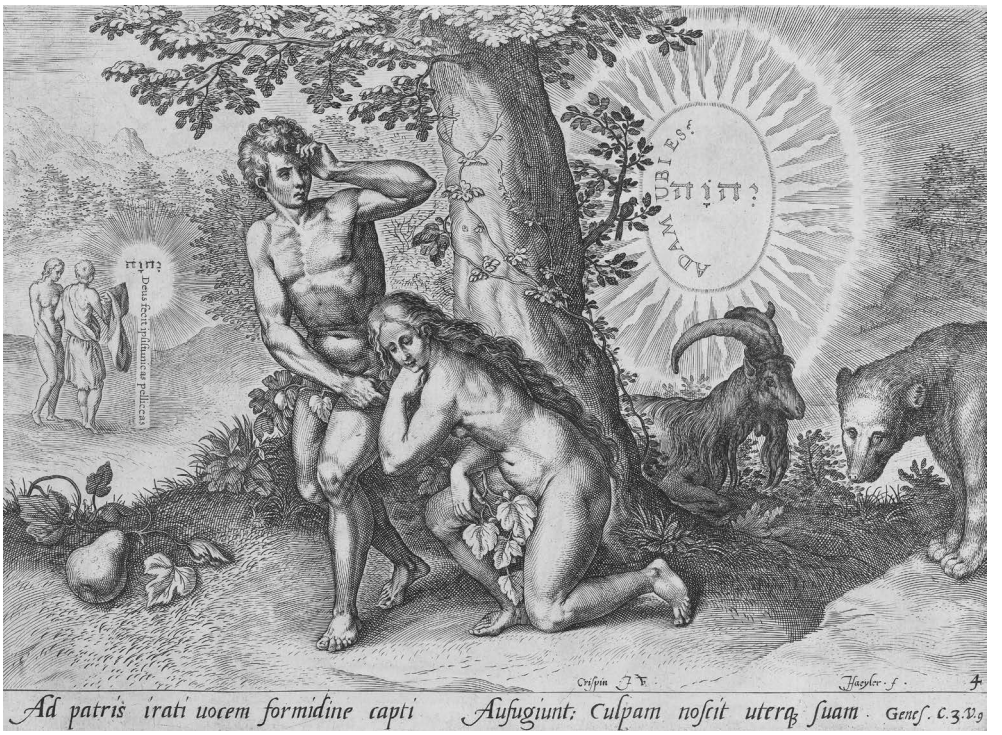

Figure 3.4 Anonymous reworking of Johan Sadeler (I), after Crispijn van den Broeck, *Adam and Eve Hide for God*. Illustration in Claes Jansz. Visscher, *Theatrum Biblicum*. Amsterdam: Claes Jansz. Visscher, 1643. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

de Grebber about 1645 for the Catholic mission station in Roelofarendsveen near Leiden (Fig. 3.5).[22]

With this painting de Grebber follows a long tradition that started with late fifteenth-century woodcuts, but it was a rare image in the seventeenth century, because it differed from the belief in the equality of the Holy Trinity.[23] We can see Christ kneeling on top of his cross, surrounded by instruments of the Passion with Judas's silver coins prominently shining in the front, while the other objects are shrouded in shadows. High in the sky the Holy Spirit is shown as a dove, but most of the attention goes to God the Father sitting enthroned in full majesty. Christ shows his wounds to him as evidence of his sacrifice for mankind. The Father accepts this sacrifice and offers his son a seat at his right hand. De Grebber contrasts the heavenly realms with the earthly world by focusing on the materiality of the cross, which looks more like a heavy block of stone than a wooden structure, as well as by gradually changing the color of the clouds. God's alb merges with the upper clouds but is even more radiant. The dark brown base of the clouds emphasizes the barrier between heaven and earth that angels protect. Thanks to his explicit invitation, Christ can go to the light, where he will soon be elevated to the highest regions, close to the divine splendor and far removed from the dark earthly shadows. More than ever before, it was open to debate in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic how far such explicit representations of God's sublimity went in preserving divine awe. Even if God

Figure 3.5 Pieter de Grebber, *God Showing Christ His Seat at His Right Hand,* ca. 1645. Oil on canvas, 115 × 133 cm. Museum Catherijneconvent, Utrecht.

is shown highly elevated on his throne in full glory, Calvin and the Dutch Reformed Church objected on the grounds that we merely see an old man who looks too familiar to evoke divine majesty.

Rembrandt's God

Although explicit representations of God the Father in humanized form are rarely found in Dutch visual culture, there are some intriguing examples in Rembrandt's oeuvre, particularly in his drawings and etchings. In contrast to Catholic commissions, such as de Grebber's monumental painting, which proclaims God's majesty unequivocally by showing him in the form of a human, Rembrandt uses his mastership to indicate the impossibility of seeing God as a corporeal figure, paradoxically by explicitly depicting him as a man. The master explores how divine sublimity can be preserved by two possible responses to God's corporeal appearance: Man's immersion in everyday activities may be making him blind to God's presence; or he could be so devout that he was fully aware of the divine presence but averted his gaze to avoid showing disrespect.

Figure 3.6 Rembrandt, *God Speaks to Abraham*, ca. 1657. Pen and ink on paper, 132 × 177 mm. Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. Photograph: Herbert Boswank.

In an intriguing drawing of about 1657, Rembrandt shows God appearing before Abraham (Fig. 3.6). Larry Silver accurately defines the drawing as "Rembrandt's most emphatic assertion of the divine."[24] God is supported by two angels and accompanied by the Holy Ghost, which appears as a dove flying directly above him. Since Rembrandt has sketched God's face in few lines, we cannot fully grasp exactly what he looks like. He explores the medium of drawing to the full by humanizing God, but only to a certain degree of distinctness. Standing on clouds, God looks down at Abraham, who is affected by all divine splendor as he drops his walking stick to lie flat on the ground and bury his face in his hands, thus obeying the divine interdiction to behold God. Although God appears in humanized form, Abraham does not interact with his image but expresses reverential fear.

It is difficult to tell exactly which of God's manifestations to Abraham is presented in this drawing, as several manifestations are mentioned in the Bible. Most likely this depicts him promising the patriarch that he will soon be blessed with a son (Genesis 18).[25] In the center background a figure stands behind a half door, probably Sarah, who was present at the divine blessing of her family. Rembrandt gives her no facial characteristics, but even so he succeeds in showing her as being unaware of God's presence, undertaking no action. By placing Abraham overwhelmed by God's presence near his wife, who does not respond to his appearance, Rembrandt follows the Bible and emphasizes the contrast between the patriarch's belief and his wife's disbelief in the divine promise of begetting a

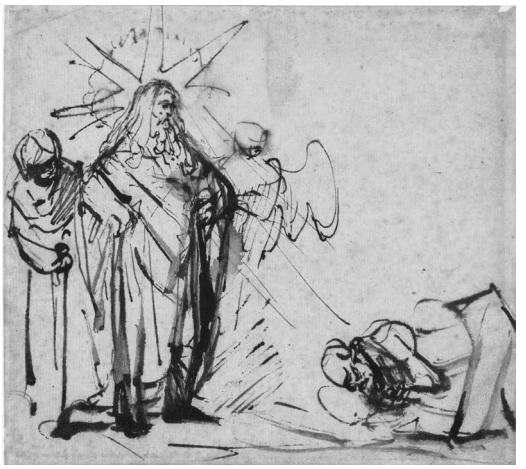

Figure 3.7 Ferdinand Bol, *God Speaks to Abraham*, after 1646. Pen and ink on paper, 145 × 159 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

child. The person who can actually witness a corporeal God has covered his eyes. Paradoxically, in depicting God the Father, Rembrandt has shown that it is impossible for man to behold him. Even if a truly devout man is fully aware of his presence, he is not meant to see God. The divine manifestations to Abraham were popular subjects throughout the seventeenth century. In spite of the Calvinist ban, the drawing corresponds with the work of Rembrandt's pupils and followers, such as Ferdinand Bol (Fig. 3.7).[26] However, there the nuance of showing God in faint outlines is often lost.

Another way in which Rembrandt deals with the (in)visibility of God the Father is his blinding radiance. Hans-Martin Rotermund was one of the first art historians to point out the fact that the master plays with the motif of the halo of light, thus finding a connection to the prevailing way in which God was represented in Dutch visual culture.[27] In an etching illustrating a vision of Daniel, Rembrandt shows a corporeal God the Father, who is only dimly visible because he radiates a strong light (Fig. 3.8). As vague as the light makes him appear, we can fully assess his solemn demeanor, which eliminates any opportunity to familiarize oneself with him. Even in this humanized form, God instills reverential fear. This image is one of four small etchings illustrating the messianic treatise *The Glorious Stone* (*Piedra Gloriosa*) of Menasseh ben Israel, the rabbi of the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish congregation, published in 1655.[28] *Piedra Gloriosa* pays close attention to the Book of Daniel, because Jews such as Menasseh, who had to flee the Inquisition in the Iberian Peninsula, could find consolation in the stories of divine manifestations. The Book of Daniel focuses on God's interaction with the world to support his people during the Babylonian exile and promise them a bright future under a new king like David.

In his illustration of Daniel's vision, Rembrandt depicts only one light source, which is at the top of the image, where God sits elevated on his throne encircled by angelic hosts. The master, perhaps following Menasseh's instructions,[29] emphasizes how God sheds a bright light on the rest of the scene by explicitly rendering the rays that emerge from him and descend to the bottom of the image. There, we see the four creatures that have a central place in Daniel's vision and symbolize the four doomed world empires.

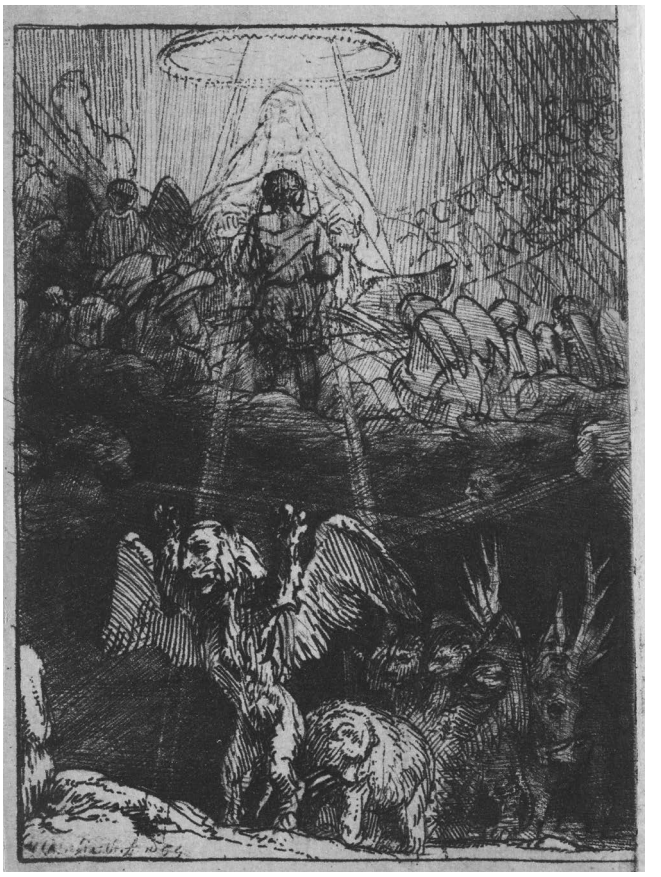

Figure 3.8 Rembrandt, *Daniel's Vision*. Illustration in Menasseh ben Israel, *Piedra Gloriosa*. Amsterdam: n.p., 1655. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

The man standing in front of God receives his blessing to lead a new kingdom, "an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (7:27, King James Version). In this etching, God's appearance enables Daniel to find comfort in being assured a bright future for his people. However, here too Rembrandt experiments in contrasting the visibility and invisibility of God. God sits directly in front of the new king, who is so close that God has a blinding effect on him. Once again, the representation of God as a bearded old man in the most powerful light is linked with the divine awe he elicits. Rembrandt shows the Lord but points directly at the fact that he must remain invisible, because his sublimity goes far beyond human reach. The devout man can show his humility in the presence of all this majesty by bowing his head deeply, thus acknowledging that God's almighty power extends far beyond human understanding.

Calvin and the Dutch Reformed Church were not the only ones to express their difficulty with the corporeal representation of God the Father. The Jewish community in the Dutch Republic also avoided directly representing God in humanized form, following such traditions as the depiction of God as a hand appearing from heaven.[30] This reluctance to visualize God as a human had a direct impact on Menasseh's *Piedra Gloriosa*. Recently, Steven Nadler has clarified that we cannot find Rembrandt's etching in

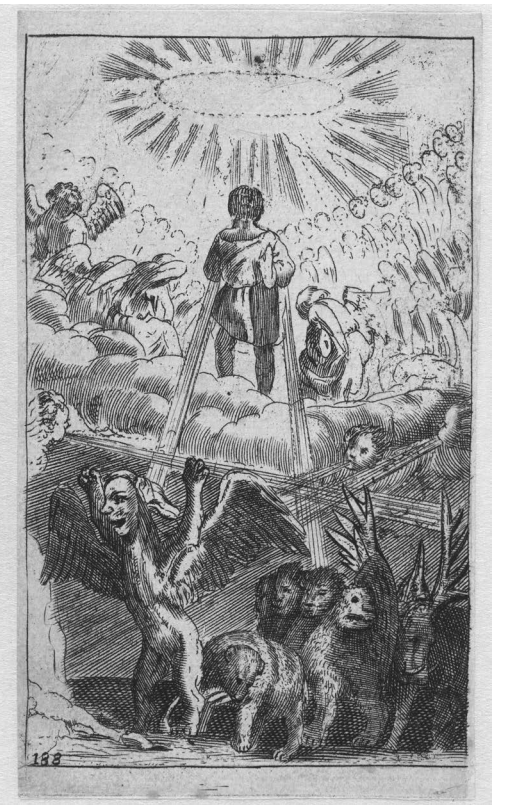

Figure 3.9 After Rembrandt, *Daniel's Vision*. Illustration in Menasseh ben Israel, *Piedra Gloriosa*. Amsterdam: n.p., 1655. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

all the copies, as some do not have any illustrations and others have only an engraving that resembles Rembrandt's etching but is attributed to the Jewish engraver Salom Italia (Fig. 3.9).[31] In that engraving God's rays have materialized into harsh lines. They no longer originate directly from him, and they miss the subtlety and gentleness with which Rembrandt rendered them. However, the most striking difference is the disappearance of a corporeal God. A "correction" like the one we saw in Visscher's *Theatrum Biblicum* is apparent, since the faint but bright outline of God has disappeared and been replaced by a halo of light.

Rembrandt's treatment of light has only recently been discussed in terms of the sublime. Both Claire Charrier and Nafsika Litsardopoulou have studied the master's clair-obscur in these terms.[32] They focused on the darkness as a source of terror and hence come close to Otto's view. The German theologian states that sublime art is built on the importance of darkness that must be represented or used so that it seems to extinguish the last moments of brightness: "The 'mystical' effect begins with semi-darkness. Its impression is rendered complete, if the factor of the 'sublime' comes to unite with and supplement it."[33] Charrier's, Litsardopoulou's, and Otto's emphasis on darkness as the expression of sublimity is inspired by Burke's iconography of the sublime as darkness "which has a greater effect on the passions than light."[34] However, within the Longinian tradition, light, more than darkness, is an essential characteristic of the sublime. The importance

of *enargeia*—literally the infusion (*en-*) of a bright light (*argos*)[35]—as a stylistic figure in rhetoric is evident here. *Enargeia*, Longinus states, is most apt to write sublime texts, because through its brilliancy it conceals itself as a rhetorical figure: "Much in the same way that dimmer lights vanish in the surrounding radiance of the sun, so an all-embracing atmosphere of grandeur obscures the rhetorical devices (17:2)."

What is of interest for us here is not the specific context of rhetoric in which Longinus refers to light in the creation of sublime texts, but the fact that he uses a radiant sun that outshines everything as a supreme example of the sublime itself. Importantly, light here also has a terrifying force; its sublimity not only resides in its brilliancy, but it is also inherently violent, crushing dimmer lights and making them vanish, creating an effect of sudden surprise if not shock. Within a Christian context, light becomes a manifestation of God's overwhelming power, which first appeared in the sudden and violent moment when he created the world itself (*fiat lux*). Thus, in terms of divine sublimity, radiant light—like darkness—is so overpowering that it is essential to install the fear of God and making man tremble before the divine mystery (*mysterium tremendum*).

The Supper at Emmaus

The tension between the visibility and invisibility with which Rembrandt struggles in his Old Testament depictions of God's manifestations can also be found in his images of Christ that reveal his divinity, as described in several passages in the New Testament. Larry Silver and Shelley Perlove made clear that throughout his career Rembrandt paid special attention to the Supper at Emmaus.[36] In paintings, prints, and drawings, he played with the rendering of light to evoke how Christ after his resurrection reveals himself as divine to two of his disciples. First, Christ is disguised as a stranger who joins both men on their way to Emmaus and manages to remain unrecognizable. After arriving in the village, they invite the stranger to join them for dinner. When he breaks the bread, "their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31, King James Version).

Many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artists, among them Albrecht Dürer, followed the Bible in showing how the breaking of the bread arouses a sudden insight and utter surprise to Christ's fellow diners.[37] But they also emphasized the strong impact of the divine appearance by showing how a radiant halo accompanies his revealing gesture. More than any artist before him, Rembrandt explored this visual tradition by using the halo to express the shock that Christ's revelation evoked. He focused on the responses of the men around the dinner table to the sudden radiance of divine light. They express their utmost surprise, as suddenly they can no longer regard their table companion as a fellow man but must drastically alter their mode of encounter. Now the feeling of divine awe predominates. In Rembrandt's work, the light that reveals Christ's divinity is so extraordinarily strong that the solid ground seems to be whisked away from under them. The harsh flash of light pushes conviviality aside to make place for divine sublimity.

Even at the beginning of his career, Rembrandt must have seen it as a true challenge to depict how Christ immediately disappears in the very act of revealing himself in full divinity.[38] In 1629 he painted his first version of the Supper at Emmaus with an extraordinary use of light that does not emanate from Christ but comes from directly behind him (Fig. 3.10). It changes Christ's face into a black silhouette that anticipates his imminent disappearance, which, as we have seen with Longinus, shows us how a strong shining light can exalt a sublime reaction. Only the man who is sitting across from him at the

Figure 3.10 Rembrandt, *The Supper at Emmaus,* ca. 1628. Oil on wood, 39 × 42 cm. Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris.

table can fully see Christ revealing his divinity. Rembrandt puts the disciple in a position that contrasts with that of the viewer of the painting, who cannot easily see Christ's countenance because of the blinding backlight. Rembrandt also includes a figure in the painting who is unaware of Christ's transformation. The woman in the background does not see him at all, immersed as she is in her everyday activities, revealed by a soft kitchen light, which counterbalances the divine flash that exposes the stranger's divine identity. The sudden transformation from fellow man to an extraordinary flash is so overwhelming for the second disciple that he has fallen from his chair at Christ's feet as fear overtakes him. Or perhaps we can say that he has recognized Christ's divinity in the harsh light and has quickly dropped down on his knees and averted his gaze in order to fully express his reverence. The face of the disciple sitting at the table shows his utmost surprise, for only he is witnessing how Christ reveals his divinity with the brightest of lights. The sudden revelation both attracts and stupefies him. He cannot help but stare at the powerful flash, but he also tries to maintain as much distance as possible. It looks as if he wants to follow his companion and hide under the table, but his eagerness to witness the divine manifestation has had a strong impact on him. The confusion caused by these contrasting

emotions is further expressed by his hands. He simply does not know what to do with them: Shall he hide his face or start a prayer? Here we clearly recognize the breathtaking force of the sudden appearance of light and the way how it installs *sacer horror*.

In a drawing made about 1640, Rembrandt tells the biblical story once again, but this time he illustrates a moment that takes place a fraction of a second after the moment that the first image depicts (Fig. 3.11). Although both disciples are now watching carefully, one seated and the other having risen from his chair, they can no longer see Christ, who has disappeared into thin air. A strong light bursts forth at the spot where just a moment ago they could see the stranger's head. As an unknown companion, Christ had given them the courage to keep on believing in his divine message, but now they are on their own again, looking at an empty chair. Thus, Rembrandt and many other artists of his time used the biblical story of the Supper at Emmaus to underline the fact that contact with the divine is not in our own hands. It is not given to us to approach God the Father or the divine Christ at our own initiative, even as much as we wish to make this contact. This thought is prominent in Dutch culture, where it was related to the fact that depictions of God or the divine Christ were rare. These images were restricted to clandestine Catholic churches, as we saw with the painting of Pieter de Grebber (Fig. 3.5), as well as to novel interpretations by influential masters like Rembrandt. Unlike de Grebber,

Figure 3.11 Rembrandt, *The Supper at Emmaus*, ca. 1640. Pen and ink on paper, 198 × 183 mm. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Rembrandt did not shy away from the problem of unapproachability. In showing divine revelations, he emphasized that it was impossible to behold God or the divine Christ, but exactly in doing so he destabilizes the subject, who is left in doubt and fear in front of this radiant light that, as a divine mystery, is incomprehensible for him.

Sympathy for the Devil

The tense struggle between the visibility and invisibility of God the Father and the divine Christ, as expressed by Rembrandt, was not isolated in Dutch seventeenth-century visual culture. Another famous expression of this struggle can be found in Vondel's *Lucifer* of 1654.[39] In this tragedy, the problems start when God's messenger Gabriel proclaims that all angels must serve God's latest creation, Adam. Archangel Lucifer cannot understand the divine wish, because he is convinced that the heavenly state of the angels is elevated far above the terrestrial state of men. The play focuses on Lucifer's quest for further explanations concerning God's will. Eventually this quest proves to be fruitless, because Lucifer fails to reach God directly. Lucifer is not satisfied with God's spokesmen, nor with the splendor of his name. In the end, he has to accept the harsh consequences of his solid belief in the superiority of the angels and lead a revolt against God. As a result, the archangel tumbles far down, as depicted in the illustration attributed to Salomon Savery with which we started this chapter (Fig. 3.1).

Many twentieth-century scholars saw Vondel's *Lucifer* as a theological doctrine rather than as a theatrical drama,[40] but the literary historians Wisse Smit and Kåre Langvik-Johannessen reacted against this specific frame of interpretation.[41] They introduced the idea that Vondel gave the character of Lucifer universal appeal by providing a thorough analysis of the character's crucial features, which, in Vondel's own words, were arrogance and envy. These analyses of Vondel's *Lucifer* are only sufficient to a certain extent, however, since they did not put enough consideration into the fact that Vondel used the word tragedy *(treurspel)* in the subtitle of *Lucifer*.[42] We will clarify that Lucifer is primarily a dramatic character who, as Vondel explicitly states in his foreword to the tragedy, must arouse both fear and pity: "The goal and intention of legitimate Tragedies is to placate people by fear and pity" (179–80).[43] Following Aristotle's ideas on catharsis, Vondel believes that the problems confronting an audience in a tragedy enable viewers to build up an emotional resistance so that they will learn how to deal with problems like those being performed on stage (cf. Chapter 6). In *Lucifer* these problems do not concentrate so much on the Devil's pride as on his eagerness to make contact with his father. Vondel presents Lucifer as a tragic character who searches fruitlessly for his preeminent antagonist, God. The playwright sees the genesis of the Devil as ideal subject matter for a tragedy that aims to reinforce the audience's faith. By observing the Devil's problems and the incorrect way in which he responds to them, the audience will be armed against making similarly bad choices when faced with serious doubts concerning God.

Whereas earlier playwrights use the Devil's pride and spitefulness to show why he tries to ruin mankind with villainy, Vondel's tragedy presents these traits to show how the archangel is responsible for his own ruin by restricting himself to his own opinion.[44] He sticks with his own ideas and is not open to other suggestions, because these have not come directly from God himself, but via messengers. Lucifer is unable to get close to God because he focuses only on his lack of direct contact. Aside from the angels who spread the Word of God, the representations of his name are not direct enough for Lucifer. He even openly denies the power of the tetragrammaton. Full of wrath, the archangel asks

his accomplices: "What does avail a name written in light?" (v. 648).[45] Lucifer considers God's name to be an empty title, a sign of vain grace. This conviction eventually leads to a brazen attack on his name. In the final act, Uriel, shield-bearer of God's supreme commander Michael, gives a comprehensive eyewitness report that starts as follows: "He firmly sways the axe to fell God's banner, that descends and where from God's name, a more beautiful light and more beautiful rays radiate in his glowing face" (vv. 1895–97).[46] With this description, Vondel encourages the theatergoer to form an image of how the tetragrammaton on Michael's banner shines a brilliant light on Lucifer's face. This appears to be God's final attempt to change the archangel's mind. Unfortunately, Lucifer does not notice it, because immediately afterward he tries to furiously attack another representation of God's name, Michael's shield, on which God's name shines in diamonds, after which Michael sends Lucifer to damnation. Now everything is lost for him. The Light-Bringer falls forever into deep darkness.

Lucifer encounters a problem that is generally shared among the angels. Vondel emphasizes this by making it clear that the archangel is not the only one who craves to see God. Before the protagonist enters the stage, the poet addresses this issue in a famous song that expresses divine awe (vv. 281–347). The choir of angels wonders who holds such a high seat in a bright, unfathomable light. The light of his majesty is so strong that the angels have to cover their eyes with their wings. They are unable to see him through the brightness. In the countermelody, the angels formulate an answer by giving him a name: That is God. The angels recognize the fact that giving him a name is inadequate, but unlike Lucifer, they recognize that this inadequacy is their own. The angels beg God for mercy for their shortage (vv. 314–19):

> Forgive us, and excuse us
> That no imagination, tongue nor sign
> can name You. You were, You are,
> You remain the same. All the Angels' knowledge
> And words, weak and incompetent,
> Are nothing but desecration and sacrilege.[47]

The angels address serious shortcomings in their own imagination, language, and understanding of the meaning that is required to be able to mention him satisfactorily. Thus, Vondel does not avoid Lucifer's pressing problem with the unapproachability and invisibility of God's sublimity at all. By generalizing the issue and then focusing on how one of the main angels—archangel Lucifer—handles this problem, Vondel encourages his audience to empathize with an exalted character in order to avoid making the same mistakes as he made.

Not all of Vondel's contemporaries could appreciate his faith in tragedy and his desire for its deep and healing effect. The Calvinist ministers especially had it in for the theater and especially putting the Devil on stage was a true thorn in their flesh.[48] Their attacks resulted in the city council's banning the production of *Lucifer* after only two days of performances. In his *Oeconomia Christiana*, Wittewrongel ferociously attacks what he calls the "wholly atrocious Tragedy of Lucifer."[49] It is telling in terms of the gravity and importance of the topic that the minister turned his final guidelines into heavy criticism of the theater. As early as 1661, Vondel stood up for himself in *Stage Shield* (*Toneelschilt*), a fierce reaction to Wittewrongel's criticism.[50] The gap between the two turned out to be too great, despite the fact that the minister and the poet actually wanted to achieve

a similar goal. Both tried to persuade their fellow citizens to treat God with awe and to preserve blind faith in him despite the lack of direct contact.

With this chapter we have lifted the sublime beyond the well-worn paths of textbooks of rhetoric, poetics, and art theory and further linked it to the overwhelming contact with the divine. In the previous chapter, we saw how Dutch writers and artists appropriated the Ovidian *sublimis* and the myth of Phaethon to explore the relationship between humility and hubris and link it to divine sublimity, but with the age-old concept of the *vreese Godts*, this exploration could be placed directly within Christianity. From the perspective of Calvinism, the fear of God reinforced the prohibition against depicting God, but ministers all too easily assumed that his Word and symbols could fill in for the lack of a visible father. In contrast, prominent writers and artists realized that the disappearance of the concrete visibility of his majesty could not simply be dismissed. Both Rembrandt and Vondel hypothesized and complicated divine sublimity by counterbalancing visibility and invisibility, as well as the symbol and God's presence behind it.

Notes

1 Eveliina Juntunen and Anna Pawlak, "'Bellissimo e difficillimo.' Zur Ikonographie von Rubens' *Engelsturz* in der Alten Pinakothek in München," in *Rubens im Blick: Ausgewählte Werke unter Re-vision,* eds. Eveliina Juntunen and Zita Ágota Pataki (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2007), 15. For example, in addition to the Munich painting (Fig. 3.3), Rubens or his workshop also depicted the story in a painting now in Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/rubens-peter-paul-workshop/st-michael-expelling-lucifer-and-rebel-angels.

2 Willibald Sauerländer, *The Catholic Rubens: Saints and Martyrs* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2014), 41–47.

3 His chariot is not shown. Instead, we see the infamous Beast with its seven heads from the Book of Revelation. Thus, Rubens captures in one image the story from the Book of Isaiah in which Lucifer is punished for his pride with the fall of the apocalyptic Beast from the New Testament. Juntunen and Pawlak, "Bellissimo e difficillimo," 15–47.

4 Cf. "… it is the tension between a literary-aesthetic concept and an experience with mystical-religious resonances that motivates the critical concept of sublimity, creating multilayered nexuses between religion, art, nature, and society." Robert Doran, "Introduction," in *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant,* ed. Robert Doran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

5 Petrus Wittewrongel, *Het tweede boeck van de Oeconomia Christiana ofte Christelijke huyshoudinge* (Amsterdam: Weduwe van Marten Jansz. Brant en Abraham van den Burgh, 1661), 1186 (our translation), accessed April 30, 2023, https://books.google.be/books?id=FvVjAAAcAAJ&pg=PA564&dq=oeconomia+christiana+1661&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjJo7D3y4b1AhVt57sIHc5yBNgQ6AF6BAgIEAI#v=onepage&q=oeconomia%20christiana%201661&f=false. See Leendert Frans Groenendijk, *De nadere reformatie van het gezin. De visie van Petrus Wittewrongel op de christlijke huishouding* (Dordrecht: Van den Tol, 1984).

6 "Ons ooghmerck niet anders daer in zijnde, als dat wij het gemoet, alle de gedachten ende bewegingen van de ziele, van de aerde, ende al het gehene, soo verganckelijck is, tot den Hemel souden optrecken, ende vesten op het ghene dat Eeuwigh ende onveranderlijk is." Wittewrongel, *Oeconomia Christiana*, 320.

7 "Lucifer: hy wilde hooger klimmen, ende boven de sterren sweven; ende hy wierdt tot der Hellen neder-gestort." Ibid., 336.

8 "[…] de bewegingen zijn de vleugelen van de ziele, waer door wij na boven moeten vliegen, ende tot den Hemel, ende die Persoonen ende saecken die daer zijn, opgetrocken worden." Ibid., 324.

9 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational,* trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924). For the feeling of *sacer horror* in Jesuit festivities, see Annick Delfosse and Ralph

Dekoninck, "'Sacer horror': The Construction and Experience of the Sublime in the Jesuit Festivities of the Early Seventeenth-Century Southern Netherlands," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.9. For a more general discussion that focuses on Otto to relate religion to the sublime, see Andrew Chignell and Matthew C. Halteman, "Religion and the Sublime," in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present,* ed. Timothy M. Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 183–202.

10 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* 12–13.
11 Ibid, 23.
12 Ibid, 32.
13 Ibid, 47.
14 On the influence of Calvinism on the visual arts, see Daniel W. Hardy, "Calvinism and the Visual Arts: A Theological Introduction," in *Seeing beyond the Word. Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition,* ed. Paul Corby Finney (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1–16. On the role of Calvinism on Dutch visual culture, see the contributions of Reindert Falkenburg, James Tanis, and Ilja Veldman in *Seeing beyond the Word*. On the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Republic, see Charles H. Parker, "Reformed Protestantism," and Angela Vanhaelen, "Spiritual Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age*, eds. Helmer Helmers and Geert Janssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 189–207, 225–45.
15 John Calvin, "Impiety of Attributing a Visible Form to God—The Setting Up of Idols a Defection from the True God," in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 1.11.1, 120, accessed April 30, 2023, https://books.google.be/books?id=us5MAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA39&dq=calvin+Impiety+of+Attributing+a+Visible+Form+to+God&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiEpsal7OD0AhWMu6QKHTdPBTQQ6AF6BAgKEAI#v=onepage&q&f=false. Cf. Larry Silver, *Rembrandt and the Divine* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), x.
16 Calvin, "Impiety," 1.11.6, 126.
17 For a more general discussion, see Mia M. Mochizuki, *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566–1672* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2008).
18 Calvin, "Impiety," 1.11.12, 134.
19 Ibid. Cf. Christopher Richard Joby, *Calvinism and the Arts. A Re-Assessment* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 19–20.
20 Amanda K. Herrin, "Recycling and Reforming Origins: The Double Creation in Claes Jansz. Visscher's *Theatrum Biblicum* (1643)," in *Illustrated Religious Texts in the North of Europe, 1500–1800,* eds. Feike Dietz et al. (London: Routledge, 2014), 183–204. Cf. Ilja Veldman, "Protestantism and the Arts: Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Netherlands," in *Seeing beyond the Word,* 417–21.
21 Xander van Eck, *Clandestine Splendor. Paintings for the Catholic Church in the Protestant Republic* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2008).
22 Xander van Eck, "The artist's religion: paintings commissioned for clandestine Catholic churches in the northern Netherlands, 1600–1800," *Simiolus* 27 (1999): 74; Xander van Eck, "Resuscitating a languishing bishopric: Pieter de Grebber and the Haarlem Chapter," *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 52 (2004): 375.
23 Xander van Eck, "Een kwijnend bisdom nieuw leven ingeblazen. Pieter de Grebber en het Haarlems kapittel," *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 52 (2004): 261–62; Xander van Eck, "Pieter Fransz de Grebber. God de Vader wijst Christus in de hemel de zetel aan zijn rechterhand," in *Goddelijk geschilderd. Honderd meesterwerken van Museum Catherijneconvent,* eds. C.J.F. van Schooten and W.C.M. Wüstefeld (Zwolle: Waanders, 2003), cat. no. 57, 180–82.
24 Silver, *Rembrandt and the Divine,* 12. Cf. Joanna Sheers Seidenstein, *Divine Encounter. Rembrandt's Abraham and the Angels* (New York: The Frick Collection, 2017), 51–54.
25 Cf. a drawing by Ferdinand Bol as discussed in Jan L. Leja, "Abraham Meeting the Lord and Two Angels: Making the Case for Ferdinand Bol and Workshop," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 5, no. 2 (2013), accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2013.5.2.13.
26 Sheers Seidenstein, *Divine Encounter,* 59.

27 Hans-Martin Rotermund, "The Motif of Radiance in Rembrandt's Biblical Drawings," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15 (1952): 101–21.
28 Steven Nadler, "Rembrandt and the Illustrations for Menasseh ben Istrael's *Piedra Gloriosa* (1655): A Reckoning," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 47 (2021): 27–47, accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5117/SR2021.1.002.NADL. Cf. Silver, *Rembrandt and the Divine,* 25–27.
29 Steven Nadler and Victor Tribas, "Rembrandt's Etchings for Menasseh ben Israel's Piedra Gloriosa: A Mystery Solved?," *De Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* (2021): 1–17, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.rembrandthuis.nl/nl/kronieken/rembrandts-etchings-for-menasseh-ben-israels-piedra-gloriosa-a-mystery-solved/.
30 Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 3–4.
31 This attribution is under discussion; see Steven Nadler, *Menasseh ben Israel. Rabbi of Amsterdam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), app.
32 Claire Charrier, *Du sublime dans l'oeuvre gravé de Rembrandt* (Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022), 49–50, accessed April 30, 2023, https://books.openedition.org/pur/181101; Nafsika Litsardopoulou, "On the Expression of Emotions in Rembrandt's Art," *Philosophia* 46 (2018): 665-88.
33 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* 70.
34 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Beautiful and the Sublime,* ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 147.
35 The word *enargeia* is etymologically defined in Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue Grecque. Histoire des mots* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1968), 104–5.
36 Larry Silver and Shelley Perlove, "Rembrandt's Jesus," in *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus,* ed. Lloyd Dewitt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 75–95. Cf. Wolfgang Stechow, "Rembrandts Darstellungen des Emmausmahles," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 3, no. 6 (1934): 329–41; Johan Quirijn van Regteren Altena, "Rembrandt's Way to Emmaus," *Kunstmuseets Aarsskrift* 35, no. 6 (1948/9): 1–26; W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (New York: Meridian Books Inc., 1960), 17.
37 Albrecht Dürer, *The Supper at Emmaus*, from *The Small Passion*, ca. 1510. Woodcut, 125 x 95 mm. Gift of Junius Spencer Morgan, 1919. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/387432.
38 Rotermund, "The Motif of Radiance," 103–4.
39 For an overview on the secondary literature on Vondel's *Lucifer*, see Jan Bloemendal, "Bibliography of Vondel's Dramas (1850–2010)," in *Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age,* eds. Frans-Willem Korsten and Jan Bloemendal (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 564–67.
40 Peter K. King, "Vondel's Lucifer: Een mislukt theologisch toneelstuk," in *Visies op Vondel*, eds. Sonja Witstein and Eddy Grootes (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff and Tjeenk Willink-Noorduijn, 1979), 218–35.
41 Wisse A.P. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noach. Deel 2: Salomon—Koning Edipus* (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1970), 54–180 and Kåre Langvik-Johannessen, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde. Eine Studie über Joost van den Vondel's biblische Tragödie in gattungsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Oslo: Universitetsvorlaget, 1963), 249–88.
42 In his recent study on Vondel's *Lucifer* Frans-Willem Korsten concentrates on God as a tyrant who "has not acted effectively in the general interest" (180). He adds that thus Lucifer can be seen as a tragic character who arouses empathy. This corresponds with our reading, but only to a certain degree, since the question arises as to what extent Vondel and his audience could think of God as a tyrant. We choose to look at how Lucifer sees God as unapproachable, which eventually causes deep problems. Frans-Willem Korsten, *Sovereignty as inviolability. Vondel's theatrical explorations in the Dutch Republic* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), 175–80.
43 "Het wit en ooghmerck der wettige Treurspelen is de menschen te vermorwen door schrick, en medoogen." We used the following edition: *De werken van Vondel,* ed. Bernard Molkenboer (Amsterdam: De Maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur, 1931), 601–96 (our translation). *Lucifer* is also available at Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (DBNL), accessed April 30, 2023, http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001luci01_01. See Bloemendal, "Bibliography of Vondel's Dramas," 564–67.
44 Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, "Lucifer's Tragedy: How to Find God in the Dutch Golden Age," *Dutch Crossing* 41, no. 3 (2017): 195–209.

45 "Wat baet een naem met licht geschreven?"
46 "Hy [Lucifer] zwaeit de heirbyl vast, om Godts banier te vellen,/ Die neêrstyght, en waer uit Godts naem een schooner licht/ En schooner stralen schiet in 't gloên van zyn gezicht."
47 "Vergeef het ons, en schelt ons quyt/ Dat geen verbeelding, tong, noch teken/ U melden kan. ghy waert, ghy zyt,/ Ghy blyft de zelve. alle Englekennis/ En uitspraeck, zwack, en onbequaem,/ Is maer ontheiliging, en schennis."
48 See Leendert Frans Groenendijk, "De Nadere Reformatie en het toneel," *De zeventiende eeuw* 5 (1989): 141–53.
49 "gantsch aenstootelicke Treur-spel van Lucifer." Wittewrongel, *Het tweede boeck*, 1186 (our translation).
50 Joost van den Vondel, *Tooneelschilt of Pleitrede voor het tooneelrecht* (Amsterdam: weduwe van Abraham de Wees, 1661).

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4 Sublime Landscapes and Seascapes

Of Aelbert Cuyp's many paintings of Dordrecht, the one in the Bührle collection stands out (Fig. 4.1). We see the painter's famous cows ruminating as they rest on a gently sloping meadow in soft sunlight. The landscape does not correspond to reality because, as usual in his work, Cuyp made the surroundings of Dordrecht more attractive by creating slopes.[1] However, he deviates from the rest of his paintings by showing dark clouds and impressive flashes of lightning that threaten his hometown. When John Constable saw *Thunderstorm over Dordrecht* at Ham House near London in 1834, he wrote:

> A truly sublime Cuyp, a tempest, still mild, & transquil. The village of Dort is seen with its solemn tower and windmills under an insidious gleam of a faint watery sun, the cattle lying and ruminating in the foreground, while a horrid rent in the sky, almost frightens one, & the lightning descends to the earth some poor cottage with a glide that is so much like nature, that I wish I had seen it before I sent my Salisbury [his famous painting *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* of 1831] away.[2]

Constable's response echoes Edmund Burke's attention to the sublimity of the threatening forces of nature that are far beyond human control (cf. Chapter 6). In what follows, we will contextualize Cuyp's lightning in its own time and place. To do so, we must look at how Dutch visual culture dealt with overwhelming natural phenomena.

We can start by drawing on considerations that early modern Dutch art theorists devoted to lightning. For one, they associated the depiction of lightning with technical skill. Karel van Mander and Franciscus Junius among others refer to Pliny to point out the exceptional way in which Apelles was able to show lightning convincingly.[3] For both the ancient and early modern writers, the depiction of lightning was a significant painterly challenge. By meticulously rendering these erratic flashes, Cuyp, like many other early modern and modern artists in Europe, may have felt the urge to emulate the legendary painter of antiquity. But wasn't there more to it than mere artistic daring? Can we relate *Thunderstorm over Dordrecht* to seventeenth-century notions of the sublime?[4]

Many viewers must have been fascinated by the contrast between the storm over Dordrecht and the peace and quiet of the area below. Cuyp contrasts Arcadian timelessness with the moment when powerful flashes suddenly strike a building at the edge of the city. Many viewers have also noticed that the cattle seem unaware of the thunderstorm. As we saw in Chapter 2, Ovid's concept of *sublimis* stated that only man is created upright to behold the heavens, so where cows see no danger, man has the ability to foresee

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Figure 4.1 Aelbert Cuyp, *Thunderstorm over Dordrecht*, ca. 1645. Oil on canvas, 77.5 × 107 cm. Emil Bührle Collection, on permanent loan at the Kunsthaus, Zürich.

celestial threats. Even more prominently than *sublimis*, we can refer to the theological concept of the fear of God, as discussed in Chapter 3. Karel van Mander not only presents artistic excellence, but he also explains that lightning can make its spectators pale because the extraordinary phenomenon evokes the fear of God, even though he attributes that fear to Jupiter and only indirectly to the Christian God:

> Then occasionally let raging waves wetly be portrayed,
> Stirred by the messengers of Eolus,
> The work of black thunderclouds, ill-favored and spectral,
> And crooked lightning bolts, which come flying
> Through the dark air of thunderstorms,
> From out of the hand of the highest of the Gods,
> Whose rule every mortal creature endowed with a Soul
> Appears to fear.[5]

In this chapter, we will demonstrate that an impact comparable to contact with God could be elicited by the observation of nature and its images, since powerful natural phenomena such as lightning were associated with divine sublimity.[6] In doing this, we study how landscape and seascape paintings and prints offered an alternative to the centuries-old image of God the Father sitting enthroned in heaven. However, we also look at how artists depicted the extraordinary forces of nature without explicit references to the divine. Eric Jorink has explained that throughout the seventeenth century Dutch scientists wondered to what extent one could see the hand of God in nature; among other things, they questioned how lightning should be interpreted.[7] Was the question of God's involvement in nature asked in Dutch visual culture? Or might we see the landscapes and seascapes from the Dutch Republic as the starting point of an artistic tradition that presents the powers of nature as part of the sublime as an aesthetic category?

Divine Book and Theater

Before delving deeper into the divine and/or natural presence of lightning in Dutch visual culture, we must look at the widely accepted belief that God expresses himself in the visible world. Studying our world may bring us closer to him because he created it, but also because he is still actively engaged in it. This belief was largely shared in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, but it was anything but new.[8] It had already been expressed in biblical passages, such as Paul's letter to the Romans: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (1:20, King James Version). Medieval and early modern writers used these passages in their so-called natural theologies that found evidence for divine providence in nature. They saw nature as the first Book of God, which could be read in a way that was more or less similar to the second Book, the Bible, in order to come to a greater understanding of him.[9] The importance of this metaphor in the Dutch Republic is illustrated by the second article of the 1619 *Confession of Faith* of the Reformed Church. The article stipulates that in addition to the Bible, God is known "by the Creation, and maintaining, and governing of the whole World; seing [*sic*] it is before our eyes as a fair book, in which all the Creatures, both great and small, are as characters showing unto us the invisible things of God, *viz*. his *eternal power and Godhead*, as St. Paul saith."[10]

In addition to seeing nature as God's first Book, theater functioned as a prominent metaphor to indicate divine involvement in nature. Close visual observation is emphasized by the latter metaphor according to the etymology of the word *theater* based on the verb *theáomai*, which combines the act of looking with contemplation. The metaphor of theater also points to the fact that God wrote a "scenario" for his creation that, like a play, develops over time. Boudewijn Bakker has clarified in his *Landscape and Religion* that the idea of nature as a theater displaying God's glory can be related to the success in the Dutch Republic of the so-called world landscapes that focus on the main features of the visible world, namely the four elements and seasons, hills, mountains and valleys, light and dark, and nature and culture.[11] For example, Philips Koninck's oeuvre contains broadly painted panoramas that emphasize the grandeur and diversity of nature and invite close observation (Fig. 4.2).

The metaphor of the divine theater can be found in Junius's *De pictura veterum*. He uses it at the beginning of the book where he asks his readers to observe the wonders in the world around them to get closer to God. He even wants them to go beyond mere observation by encouraging them to actively investigate and study the divine majesty in nature and the heavens:

> The one by a praiseworthy boldness undertaketh to compass with his understanding the unmeasurable measures of heaven… Another doth not stick to prie into the most profound mysteries of Nature; neither will he give his mind any rest till he hath in some measure conceived the nature of floting clouds, the cause of thunder, lightning, and of all those things that above or about the earth doe terrifie the heart of man. He goeth about the search of those things with a very great confidence, as knowing himselfe to be placed in this stately theatre, to view and to consider all such wonders of God.
>
> (1.1.1)

Figure 4.2 Philips Koninck, *River Landscape,* 1676. Oil on canvas, 92.5 × 112 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

This quote brings us back to the divine sublimity of lightning. Among other impressive natural phenomena, Junius puts lightning forward as a phenomenon to be studied, even though it instills fear because it comes from God. It should be remembered that Junius was a theologian before he became an art theorist, so it comes as no surprise that his view of the arts was inspired by theological concepts. Junius, who introduced the Greek concept of *hupsos* into art theory, also used natural theology to legitimize the overwhelming impact of art in a deeply religious society. He placed the study by natural scientists on the same level as the observations of artists and sees both as legitimate, even necessary, means for getting closer to God.

In a 1643 etching, Rembrandt introduces a tension between nature as an expression of divine goodness versus the life-threatening forces that God can generate in nature (Fig. 4.3). On the one hand, Rembrandt ties in with the tradition of the world landscape by showing the rich diversity that God has bestowed on his creation, revealing his benevolence.[12] The landscape alternates hills with plains, trees and shrubs with fields, water with land, and dark with light. Moreover, he contrasts the small people engaged in their daily activities—fishing, driving a wagon, and guarding livestock—with the sky whose hard lines evoke severe weather. A small figure seated at the far right brings to mind Junius's ideal artist with a pencil in one hand and paper and a board on his knees. This figure attentively observes the theater of God's glory, but he has turned away from the most threatening part of the sky, the thunderstorm. By placing him in front of the brightest

Figure 4.3 Rembrandt, *The Three Trees*, 1643. Etching, dry needle and burin, 213 × 279 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

part of the sky, Rembrandt creates the idea that God gives his blessing to an artistic observation far removed from the terrifying aspects of divine revelation. In Rembrandt's etching, however, we are faced with the challenge of bringing the depiction of nature close to God. The master leaves it up to the viewers how far they want to go in relating the landscape to divine providence. Other depictions, such as those for pamphlets and chronicles, are less open to interpretation.

God's Wrath

Willem Frijhoff, Lotte Jensen, and Eric Jorink studied how throughout the seventeenth century Dutch pamphleteers time and again pointed out that an orientation toward God in our observation of nature is necessary because that is the way his will is revealed, but also that there was little good to be read in it.[13] In a 1668 pamphlet, for example, an anonymous doomsayer warned his readers that Judgment Day was approaching. The illustration accompanying this harsh warning leaves nothing to the imagination (Fig. 4.4). The angelic messenger of death blows an ominous trumpet in the darkest sky full of flaming comets

Figure 4.4 Anonymous, *Warning for the Upcoming Punishment of God*, 1668. Etching, 385 × 283 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

and flashes of lightning that destroy cities, collapse mountains, make whales emerge from the deepest waters, cause shipwrecks, and encourage demons to threaten people.

Unlike pamphlets, chronicles rarely point explicitly to the End of Days as they report on specific disasters. They associate the disasters with God, though not exclusively with his wrath, but also with his mercy, as he provides relief to the God-fearing. For instance, in his chronicle of 1698 the Utrecht compiler Simon de Vries tells the story of a cloudburst over a village in Franconia where a boy was miraculously saved from drowning.[14] When the boy was seized by the turbulent waters, he cried out to God. Immediately after his plea, a large piece of wood appeared to rescue him. In his illustration for the chronicle, the engraver Jan Luyken depicts this divine wonder (Fig. 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Jan Luyken's *Cloudburst over a Village in Franconia*. Illustration in Simon de Vries, *Omstandigh Vervolgh op Joh. Lodew. Gottfrieds Historische Kronyck*, Part 1, 1427–28. Leiden: Pieter vander Aa, 1698. University Library, Ghent.

Figure 4.6 Jan Luyken, *Cloudburst over a Village in Franconia (1627), Famine in Germany Due to War (1637), Earthquake in San Severo (1627), and Battle of the Starlings in Cork (1621)*. Etching, 222 × 308 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

This image also led a life independent of the chronicle.[15] The Rijksmuseum collection contains a sheet on which this image is combined with three more illustrations for De Vries's book (Fig. 4.6) depicting other wonders, such as a church bell that miraculously fell on a child, protecting it from debris caused by an earthquake. Together these four images evoke diverse ways in which God intervenes in his world; he punishes with natural disasters, such as thunderstorms, or with human catastrophes, more specifically with the clashes of war, but he also gives warnings with earthquakes and, uniquely, with the disturbing struggles of a large number of starlings, as can be seen in the image in the right corner.

Returning to *Thunderstorm over Dordrecht*, we may add an additional layer of meaning (Fig. 4.1). Besides offering a painterly challenge, as well as the expression of the city's pride and an Arcadian dream made more exciting with the thunderstorm, nature can be seen as divine revelation. Cuyp sublimates the beauty of God's creation, but the thunderstorm shows the other side of the coin or that which Junius calls "those things that above or about the earth doe terrifie the heart." The painting could have prompted seventeenth-century viewers to think about nature as overwhelming evidence of God's goodness, but it could simultaneously have brought to mind his immeasurable powers as life-threatening. Human study of the visible world had to be imbued with a deep confidence in his benevolence, but also with an awareness that seeing divine providence

in nature had to be accompanied by the utmost reverence and humility. Among other theologians, Calvin refers to the storm in pointing out that we must never forget that God is behind everything we see:

> In regard to his power, how glorious the manifestations by which he urges us to the contemplation of himself; unless, indeed, we pretend not to know whose energy it is that by a word sustains the boundless fabric of the universe–at one time making heaven reverberate with thunder, sending forth the scorching lightning, and setting the whole atmosphere in a blaze; at another, causing the raging tempests to blow, and forthwith, in one moment, when it so pleases him, making a perfect calm.[16]

God's Storm

Numerous Dutch artists thematize the feeling of being pulled back and forth between fear and hope, especially in depicting sea storms. Many portrayals of tempests contrast sunny skies with impending thunderstorms, as in *The Shipwreck of the Amsterdam*, attributed to Hans Savery the Elder, with dark orange flashes, pitch-black clouds, and oily seawater at the right contrasting with the intensely radiant sun breaking through the clouds at the left (Fig. 4.7). Various marine images warn that we can never feel at ease when we are at sea but remain small in the face of the sudden, violent forces that water and wind can generate. However, the contrast can also be interpreted the other way around, because at the worst moments, things can unexpectedly turn for the better. Theologians have pointed to the fact that these sudden changes cannot be seen as a pure twist of fate. They must be related to God, for the forces of nature are not driven by blind luck but follow a divine plan. Again, Calvin was one of the most influential but certainly not the only theologian to make this explicit:

> If a sudden gust of wind at sea causes shipwreck …; or, after being tossed by the waves, arrives in port; and makes some wondrous hair-breath escape from death—all these occurrences, prosperous as well as adverse, carnal sense will attribute to fortune. But whoso has learned from the mother of Christ that all the hairs to his head are numbered (Matth x. 30) will look farther for the cause, and hold that all events whatsoever are governed by the secret counsel of God.[17]

Art historians have rarely associated divine providence with Dutch marine paintings, but they definitely saw political references. The catalogue of the National Maritime Museum's exhibition *Turmoil and Tranquillity* interprets *The Shipwreck of the Amsterdam* by comparing the ship with the Amsterdam coat of arms on the stern to the ship adorned with the image of the Virgin Mary.[18] Without reference to a specific time and place, this painting could allude to the Eighty Years' War, in which the latter ship was shipwrecked as a sign of Spanish defeat. The first ship must represent the city of Amsterdam, one of the last cities in the northern Netherlands to join the Protestant revolt against Spain. This ship is in grave danger but can still be saved. If the sailors make the right decisions, the ship can resist the grip of the waves. While this political analysis certainly makes sense, it is difficult to prove, in the absence of primary sources.

Figure 4.7 Hans Savery the Elder (attr.), *The Wreck of the Amsterdam*, ca. 1630. Oil on canvas, 125.7 × 177.8 cm. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Figure 4.8 Detail of Fig. 4.7.

However, we can add an additional layer of meaning related to divine sublimity if we focus on the sunlit figures on the rocky coasts (Fig. 4.8). A man climbs up the cliffs to flee the violent waves, and two others follow him. A little lower, we see a fourth man who seems to have managed to climb the high rocks to escape the violent waters. Beside this foursome, two figures clasp their hands, intensely praying for their salvation. The sunbeams falling on their faces could be interpreted as a sign that God hears them. Behind a high rock on which a chamois clambers, another man prays. He kneels down with his head raised. In this figure the painter connects with the centuries-old tradition in the Low Countries of depicting hermits in mountain landscapes.[19] Because he is farthest away from the storm, he does not need to ask the Lord for salvation and can concentrate fully on the heavenly realms. Hence, we see three layers of reaction to the sea storm—from panic to prayers for immediate help from the Lord to a focus on heaven. Preachers like Petrus Wittewrongel proclaimed that this last reaction is an example of true piety (cf. Chapter 3).[20] The hermit is free of momentary emotions and focused on eternity. In the midst of all turmoil, he expresses the ideal handling of divine sublimity.

In Simon de Vlieger's painting of a sea storm, we see different reactions to the disaster as well (Figs. 4.9 and 4.10). Sailors find solid ground while others come to their aid. Two friars are calmer than the rest. One stands serenely, withdrawn from all the drama; the other is kneeling and praying intensely with his head held high. Trust in God therefore stands against the chaotic rescue attempts like a proverbial rock. It may be surprising, however, to see that representatives of the Roman Catholic faith are depicted so pontifically. This image may have been commissioned by Catholic patrons, but the friars also remind us of the layered meaning that Dutch art contained. Beyond a religious response to the sea storm, these figures could have further illustrated the remoteness of the rocky coasts, since these brothers may have enhanced the Mediterranean character of the scene.[21]

Figure 4.9 Simon de Vlieger, *Ship in Distress off a Rocky Coast*, ca. 1656. Oil on wood, 55 × 79 cm. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. Gift in memory of Estelle Burpee Chambers and David L. Chambers, Jr. from their family and friends, 1997.85.

Figure 4.10 Detail of Fig. 4.9.

Shipwreck with Spectator

The friars show an ambivalence that we want to examine more closely. The *Shipwreck of the Amsterdam* leaves little doubt that the figures on the rocky shore link the threats of nature to God's overwhelming power. Other depictions of sea storms, however, are more ambivalent. In a painting from 1655, for example, the Haarlem painter Hendrick Staets depicts two witnesses ashore in the lower right corner (Figs. 4.11 and 4.12). One of them is clinging to a rock, fascinated by what is happening, his eyes focused on the disaster, especially on the sailors holding on to a severed mast. The other witness has dropped to his knees and turned his back to the storm. Unable to look at the terrible event, he seems to be praying for a happy ending, but it is left to the imagination of the viewer if he really directs his pleas to God. To understand this ambivalence, another dominant tradition must be taken into consideration, as we can relate the spectators watching the disasters of the tempests to the use of the dangers of water as a metaphor for the dangers in life. In the seventeenth century, this metaphor becomes subject to a shift in meaning in which the responsibility of God is still engaged, but man himself is left to choose whether he dares to venture into adventures as well.

The German philosopher Hans Blumenberg clarifies in his famous essay "Shipwreck with Spectator" how man has always sought a logical explanation of death and destruction, and the storm at sea has functioned as a popular metaphor in this never-ending search.[22] Over many centuries, a rich variety of texts have represented the tempest as an example of the vicissitudes of existence, often associated with religion. Ancient poets such as Homer and Virgil, travel accounts, and the Bible are prominent examples. Blumenberg pays special attention to two metaphors from Lucretius's *De rerum natura*:

> Tis sweet, when, down the mighty main, the winds
> Roll up its waste of waters, from the land
> To watch another's laboring anguish far,
> Not that we joyously delight that man
> Should thus be smitten, but because 'tis sweet
> To mark what evils we ourselves be spared.
> (2.1–6)[23]

Figure 4.11 Hendrick Staets, *Ships Wrecked on a Rocky Shore*, 1655. Oil on panel, 50.8 × 68.6 cm. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Figure 4.12 Detail of Fig. 4.11.

Further on in *De rerum natura*, more specifically in his paean to Epicurus, Lucretius returns to the contrast between the dangers of the seas and the safety of the land. He uses this safety as a metaphor for the comfort that can be found in philosophy and felt in escaping the whirlwind of actions around us. He defines Epicurus as the one,

> Who first and chief found out that plan of life
> Which now is called philosophy, and who
> By cunning craft, out of such mighty waves,
> Out of such mighty darkness, moored life
> In havens so serene, in light so clear.
> (5.12–16)

Blumenberg points out that Lucretius's contrast between the safe land and the savage sea was used regularly, often by explicitly referring to the philosopher or using his words. In early modern Europe we find an appropriation of this contrast, but there the spectator ashore is connected to the seamen in the turbulent water. Blumenberg sees Blaise Pascal's statement that everyone is embarked—*vous êtes embarqué*—as an example of an epochal shift: "… remaining in the harbor is in Pascal's view not an option. The metaphorics of embarkation includes the suggestion that living means already being on the high seas, where there is no outcome other than being saved or going down, and no possibility of abstention."[24] Unlike Lucretius's belief in the possibility of the protective distance between man and nature which causes delight, for Pascal there is no safe shore or harbor. Everyone is in the same boat on a perilous journey. The sea voyage as a metaphor for the movement of human existence is thought through to the extreme. Ultimately this leads to

the realization that we have no choice but to take risks and go on adventures.[25] Faith in God continued unabated, but his direct intervention in our world, and certainly the idea that we could evoke it with a quick prayer, was subject to debate. The delight previously provided by the idea of being permanently in a secure position had become relative, as it was temporarily determined by being at a safe place, but enhanced by the pleasure of being on an adventure.

While Lucretius was controversial in the Dutch Republic, as he was elsewhere in Europe, because of his views regarding the mortality of the soul and the world, his metaphors of the violent sea were often used.[26] In doing so, Dutch appropriations can be related to Blumenberg's epochal shift, albeit that the risks of life are still often directly related to God. We have already seen Calvin referring to the arrival of sailors in safe harbor as a metaphor of life that he uses to reject belief in blind fortune and to present the overall significance of divine providence. Many Dutch authors, not necessarily Calvinists, held a similar view. Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft, for example, refers more than once to Lucretius's metaphor of the shipwreck with the spectator. Sometimes he quotes it literally, but in a 1632 letter to his brother-in-law Joost Baek, he links the steady ground of the spectator of a shipwreck to divine goodness without suggesting in any way that we would be able to manipulate it: "Thanks to God's mercy we can watch the sea storm from the harbor."[27] Vondel also takes the idea of being safe on solid ground almost literally from Lucretius, but he links this safety to God. He ends his *Reflections on God and Religion* (Bespiegelingen van Godt en Godtsdienst) by writing:

> Happy is the man, who, out of the wild sea,
> After so many delusions and lamentation,
> Over the cliffs, regularly buried in sea foam,
> Submerged by breakers, finds in the end
> Safely the quiet haven of religion.[28]

In Dutch prints, however, the appropriation of Lucretius's metaphors was less explicitly connected to God than it was to concentrate on the human challenges. An engraving by Pieter Nolpe after a painting by Jan Beerstraten can give us more insight into what these figures evoke because it is part of a series in which the months and elements are depicted (Fig. 4.13). The caption mentions the month of March and the element of water. As noted above, the months and the elements were seen as prominent examples of the order that God created out of chaos. Thus, we could say that the chaotic storm at sea is connected to divine providence. However, the caption does not explicitly designate God but, on the contrary, points to the challenges of the sea that can make someone a true hero:

> It is easy to brag with art and courage,
> Nearby a fire with a glass in the hand, far from the perils and the water.
> Art and bravery are visible on top of a vessel,
> In the middle of chaos, close to a shipwreck.[29]

The text is strengthened by Nolpe's engraving that encourages his audience to go on an adventure by showing an extraordinary number of sailors on their way to safety and no one in actual danger (Fig. 4.14). Even the sailors on board the ship near the rocky shore seem to have everything under control. Ashore no one panics, no one prays.[30]

Figure 4.13 Pieter Nolpe after Jan Beerstraten, *Shipwreck, with the Month March and the Element Water.* Etching and engraving, 405 × 519 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Figure 4.14 Detail of Fig. 4.13.

In his book, *Tempest with Shipwreck*, Lawrence Goedde examines the conventions, rhetoric, and possible interpretations of sea storms in early modern Netherlandish painting. He points out a crucial difference in another period when depictions of stormy waters were popular, namely the late nineteenth century. Unlike the romantic paintings of Joseph Vernet, J.M.W. Turner, Gustave Courbet, and Winslow Homer, Goedde declares that Dutch seventeenth-century painters were not concerned with the sublime. In doing so, he limits himself to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinking by defining the sublime as a "transcendence of human limitations in the face of the awesome and perilous otherness of the world." According to Goedde, this is not how Dutch artists or their clients saw storms. For them it was "a ruthless enemy of individual and group, a token of all lawlessness and of all destructive forces in nature, in society, and in every man."[31]

We disagree with Goedde's thesis on two points. First, we disagree with his assertion that storms were uniquely seen as lawless, because preachers of various faiths referred to the storm as a concrete example of God's wrath and painters depicted spectators ashore praying for his mercy. Second, thanks to Blumenberg's epochal shift, we learn that in the seventeenth century writers and artists were already developing a vision of nature that challenges man to transcend his limitations by confronting that which is experienced as awesome and dangerous. This is not to say, however, that we would entirely reject Goedde's focus on extreme forces in nature as a token of lawlessness and destruction. Besides being an expression of God's sublime power, as well as a challenge to men to go on adventure, we can also include this view of nature in our further analyses to determine if this layered view of nature can be found in landscape painting, especially the mountainous views and the depictions of natural disasters on land.

Sublime Sensitivity

In his essay "Mountains in the Lowlands," Eddy de Jongh focuses on the work of Jan Both (Fig. 4.15), among other artists, and asks: "What emotional charge did mountains have for those who were used to a horizon at eye level, to lush pastures and woods in flat countryside?"[32] He connects these representations of mountains to Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime a century later—natural extremities that terrify, but when viewed from a safe distance also evoke rapture—and recognizes that "aesthetic

Figure 4.15 Jan Both, *Italian Landscape with a Draughtsman,* ca. 1650. Oil on panel, 187 × 240 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

categories rarely arise ex nihilo just because a label is put on them."[33] Jan Blanc also focuses on mountain landscapes but relates them to a "sublime sensitivity" shared by early modern Dutch artists and their patrons, the work of Allart van Everdingen being a prominent example (Fig. 4.16). Blanc emphasizes that these landscapes "are personal and general experiences translated into images, which were all the more powerful because they reflected categories and emotions largely shared by their spectators."[34] Like de Jongh, Blanc cannot find a specific concept to explain the Dutch interest in visual representations of nature's extremes. He investigates ancient texts, notably Longinus's *On the Sublime*, but this turns out to be a dead end because, as he rightly claims, the treatise would not have been on the bookshelves of many Dutch landscape painters. The solution he proposes is to focus on a sublime culture that "was built on images more than on texts."[35]

Explicit references to God are rare in the numerous mountain landscapes of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Viewers are seldom compelled to fear God but may have done so as a result of their various religious backgrounds, whereas other spectators will have looked in awe at the power of nature without linking it exclusively to God. The popularity of mountainous views in the Dutch Republic was for a large part caused by the fact that the paintings could encourage the viewer to enter the wide world without

Figure 4.16 Allart van Everdingen, *Scandinavian Landscape,* ca. 1655. Oil on canvas, 137.5 × 181 cm. Donation: J.F. Hoffmann 1850. Collection Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

shying away from the dangers that nature could hold, even if that travel was often only in the form of daydreaming. The epochal shift that Blumenberg described can also help us gain a better understanding of the impact of mountain landscapes. The fear and hope evoked by the thought of God's providence transforms into the fear, but also the hope and delight of setting out on an adventure.

We have seen that pamphlets and chronicles explicitly linked God to natural disasters. In painting, however, that connection is much less obvious. For this, let us look at another, dominant expression of sublime sensitivity that we find in Dutch visual culture, the flood. During the night of 4–5 March 1651, Saint Anthony's Dike was breached near Amsterdam, and Willem Schellinks and Jan Asselijn, among others, went to look. In his depiction of the scene, Schellinks draws attention to the virulent waters breaking through the breach (Fig. 4.17). He demonstrates that the disaster is taking place near Amsterdam by showing the silhouette of towers and ships in the background. However, it seems as if the surroundings of Amsterdam have changed into a mountainous landscape. This change is emphasized by the men climbing on the remnants of the dike, and even more so by metamorphosing the breach into an impressive waterfall, similar to those painted by Allart van Everdingen (Fig. 4.16). Hence, Schellinks uses the breach to bring the sublime sensibility of the Alps and Scandinavian fjords to the flat land of Holland.

Figure 4.17 Willem Schellinks, *The Breach of the Saint Anthony's Dike*, 1651. Oil on canvas, 47 × 68 cm. On loan from Stichting Genootschap Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam.

Jan Asselijn, in turn, made no fewer than five paintings of the breach. The painting in the Rijksmuseum is monumental and three times the size of Schellink's work (Fig. 4.18).[36] There Asselijn captures the breach at a later moment, when the water had become less violent, but he still manages to emphasize the sublimity of nature by creating sharp contrasts. The red cape of the figure in front immediately catches the eye. The man is elegantly dressed with dark ribbons on his hat and boots. He and his companion are fighting the heavy wind. They risk everything to be able to stand on the remainders of the dike so as not to fall deep into what looks like an alpine canyon. They try but fail to communicate with the small figure on the other side of the breach who gestures fiercely but at the same time also fights against the fierce wind. Sailors on the Zuiderzee must use all their strength to steer their boat in the right direction, further underscoring the stormy weather. The blue sky in the middle of the scene is a surprise. Without showing the sun directly, Asselijn suggests its presence through the clearing and by making the water that runs through the breach shine intensely. In contrast, the far side of the breach is covered with dim clouds, where daylight seems to merge into night. This painting confronts day with night, calm with turmoil, peace with storm. Nature is disturbed. The order and diversity of the world's landscapes find their opposite here, as nature's harmony stands in opposition to contradictory natural phenomena. We are removed from explicit expressions of divine wrath and might think we are witnessing an evocation of the natural sublime such as Burke would discuss it a century later.

Calm Seas

Stormy seascapes and depictions of other natural disasters can be interpreted in terms of the sublime. They evoke a mixture of fascination and fear in the theories of Lucretius and Burke, and in Dutch visual culture they could be linked to God, explicitly or not. The paintings by Hans Savery the Elder, Hendrick Staets, and Simon de Vlieger, as well as Willem Schellinks and Jan Asselijn, are examples of this, but we might also have referred to the storm scenes of Willem van de Velde the Younger and Rudolf Bakhuyzen that had a decisive influence on later painters, such as J.M.W. Turner. But what about calm seascapes and landscapes? Can these be thought of in terms of the sublime?

In his *Entretiens d'Ariste et Eugène* of 1671, the French Jesuit Dominique Bouhours states that it can. In a dialogue that takes place on a beautiful summer day at a beach somewhere on the Flemish coast, Ariste and Eugène look at the calm sea and at the "dunes of a very strange shape … which represents in perspective something similar to old palaces fallen in ruin."[37] Immersed in this "admirable spectacle," they walk on silently until Eugène asks Ariste if a calm sea impresses him as much as a stormy one. Although for Ariste a ship that threatens to go down in the raging water is most certainly "as terrible as it is admirable" and evokes an "I don't know what horror [*je-ne-sçais quelle horreur*] accompanied by pleasure," a calm sea constitutes an equally impressive spectacle.[38] "This huge expanse of water, this ebb and flow; the noise, the color, the different shapes of these waves which regularly pass one another, I don't know what [*je ne sçais quoi*] is so surprising and so strange that I don't know anything about it."[39] For Bouhours, the concept of *je-ne-sais-quoi* indicates that which leaves an overwhelming impression and transcends all understanding and is a central component of the sublime—Boileau also refers to *je-ne-sais-quoi* in the preface to his translation of Longinus—from which follows that even a calm sea can produce a sublime experience.[40]

Figure 4.18 Jan Asselijn, *The Breach of the Saint Anthony's Dike*, 1651. Oil on canvas, 85 × 108 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

According to Louis Marin, the *je-ne-sais-quoi* cannot be separated from divine sublimity.[41] The sea as it is discussed with Bouhours, wild or calm, is a perfect example of this because it shows that "God is admirable & incomprehensible."[42] There is also no point, according to the Jesuit, in trying to understand this mystery. Philosophers and scientists might try to come to an understanding of the sea's movements and its play with colors, but in the end this magnificent spectacle only reveals itself in its effects. But Bouhours gives the *je-ne-sais-quoi* not only a religious but also an aesthetic dimension. The sea allows itself to be experienced only as "a natural painting, that art cannot imitate."[43] Seascapes that keep far away from the violent spectacle of nature, but emphasize the softly shaded atmospheric light of a setting or rising sun, give the sea its vast infinity so that they make everything else fade and disappear into thin air. Just as in raging sea storms, according to Bouhours, this evokes the overwhelming and inexplicable sense of the sublime.[44]

The *je-ne-sais-quoi* was also present in Dutch thinking about art. In his Dutch version of *De pictura veterum*, Junius uses the expression to name the artist's inspiration.[45] But Samuel van Hoogstraten relates it to the impact of art on the viewer and focuses on landscape painting. In his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* of 1678, he describes the effect of light and shadow on the colors in a landscape. Up close, light and shadow can create sharpness but in the distance vagueness, as if things dissolve into nothingness.[46] Because of this, "the shadows from very far … finally reach the Sky Blue."[47] Here, he comes close to Longinus's reference to painting, presenting the interaction of light and shadow as an important means of evoking the sublime. This reference was quoted in Junius's *De pictura veterum* as follows:

> Artificers therefore use always to adde unto their works some shadowes and deepnings, that those things which are inlightned in their pictures might seem to sticke out the more, and to meet the eyes of the beholder. "Let upon the same superficiall bredth of any flat boord two parellell lines be drawn," saith *Dionysius Longinus,* "with the colours of shadow and Light, yet shall the ardent flagrancie of light soonest of all meet with our eyes, and seeme a great deale nearer."
>
> (3.3.5)

The process is clear and simple; its effect is breathtaking, as evidenced when van Hoogstraten describes it from his own experience. During a trip across the Apennines, he saw the rising light that placed the mountains in a blue glow and made them disappear into the distance which overwhelmed him. He had to wait for the sun climbing higher to see them emerging in full glory, in order to fully acknowledge the vastness of the landscape. This play of disappearing and reappearing through light and color evokes in him a sense of *je-ne-sais-quoi*—van Hoogstraten speaks of *ik wist en niet wat*—and that is what the landscape painter should also be able to achieve.[48]

This effect of appearing and disappearing in light that evokes a sense of *je-ne-sais-quoi* is found in numerous Dutch riverscapes and seascapes. In *The Maas at Dordrecht*, Cuyp paints the gathering of the Dutch fleet in the spring of 1646, ready to set sail against the Spanish Armada (Fig. 4.19).[49] But the painting attracts attention not so much for the sake of depicting that historical event but for the way Cuyp shows how the light on the calm water generates a sense of infinity. Here, we see the rising sun activating, as it were, the bustle of Dordrecht harbor. The ship in the foreground is clearly visible in the sharp light, contrasting with the endless rows of ships whose dirty white sails disappear in the

Figure 4.19 Aelbert Cuyp, *The Maas at Dordrecht*, ca. 1650. Oil on canvas, 114.9 × 170.2 cm. Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

soft golden morning light; Cuyp creates an effect just as van Hoogstraten described.[50] Willem van de Velde the Younger, famous for his sublime storm scenes, also achieves the feeling of *je-ne-sais-quoi* in his calm seascapes. In his *Ships in a Calm Sea*, we again see in the foreground a sharply delineated ship and a sloop sailing toward it, while in the background the light becomes increasingly diffuse and allows the many ships to dissolve into the horizon (Fig. 4.20).

Although Van Hoogstraten, in his *Inleyding*, does only talk about the mountains and not about how calm seas and the fanning light can achieve this *je-ne-sais-quoi* effect, he implicitly refers to riverscapes and seascapes by quoting a few lines of a poem by Joannes Antonides van der Goes: "What comes to the fore in the light, shines out and triumphs. The images in the distance with shadows disappear more and more and slip from our eyes."[51] The quote comes from a long and then-famous poem, *The River IJ (De Ystroom)*, of 1671 in which the Amsterdam writer praises the city, its admiralty, and its shipbuilding yards, but more important for us is that the focus is shifted from the foreground to the background. The Amsterdam fleet anchored in the estuary of the IJ, van der Goes writes, sits as if on an "elevated throne." This "makes one stand still … and amaze" the mass of interested people along the quays.[52] The overwhelming effect that he describes here has a double origin: The magnificence of the Amsterdam fleet and the incomprehensible experience of the endless and calm water in which everything disappears and makes things slip from the eyes into nothingness. This is exactly what happens in the painting by Van de Velde. The void itself here becomes its subject. "Isn't the sublime," Baldine Saint Girons writes, "rather the emptiness that has become presence, the absence of an object transformed into the very reason for reflection?"[53]

Figure 4.20 Willem van de Velde the Younger, *Ships in a Calm Sea,* ca. 1665. Oil on canvas, 86.8 × 120 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In Dutch visual culture, as well as in discussions about images, the relationship between nature and divine sublimity is complex. Pamphlets and chronicles combine word and image to make it clear how God overwhelmingly intervenes in his creation. Some painters of sea storms in turn depict spectators in prayer ashore to underscore that the forces of nature can be connected to divine providence. Dutch artists, however, also presented this connection as a question: Is God's anger to be found in the extraordinary forces of nature? The lightning in the Arcadia that Cuyp creates around Dordrecht can therefore incorporate multiple charges, from a proof of outstanding artistic skill and an aesthetic delight to a divine punishment descending on the city from heavenly spheres. Looking ahead, we can connect these explorations in the Republic to Edmund Burke, who places the sublimity of nature in the terror of its enormous power that challenges man. But where Burke leaves out the divine in his discussion of the sublimity of nature, in Dutch visual culture they can rarely be disconnected.

Notes

1 This kind of *varietas* functioned as an important aesthetic virtue in Dutch landscape painting. Boudewijn Bakker, "Order or Variety? Pieter Bruegel and the Aesthetics of Landscape," in *Landscape and the Visual Hermeneutics of Place, 1500–1700,* eds. Karl Enenkel and Walter Melion, Intersections 75 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 158–94.

2 Alan David Chong, "Aelbert Cuyp and the Meanings of Landscape," New York University, Ph.D. thesis, 1992, 309; Mark Evans, "'De kracht die ruimte schept': Constable en Cuyp," in *In het licht van Cuyp. Aelbert Cuyp & Gainsborough, Constable, Turner,* ed. Sander Paarlberg (exhibition catalogue, Dordrecht: Dordrecths Museum, 2021), 135.

3 Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem: Paschier van Wesbusch, 1602), 1.8.12; Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients*, eds. Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1.1.2. Cf. Walter Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's* Schilder-Boeck (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 35; Peter C. Sutton and John Loughman, *The Golden Age of Dutch Landscape Painting* (exhibition catalogue, Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemizza, 1994), 246.

4 For a discussion of Italian landscape painting as sublime, see Helen Langdon, "The Baroque Sublime: The Affective Power of Landscape," in *Emotion and the Seduction of the Senses, Baroque to Neo-Baroque,* eds. Lisa Beaven and Angela Ndalianis (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2018), 43–62. Langdon suggests an influence of Longinus, but sees merely shared subjects in *On the Sublime* and Italian art.

5 "Laet somtijts dan rasende golven vochtich/ Naebootsen beroert door Eolus boden/ Zwarte donders wercken leelijck ghedrochtich/ En cromme blixems, door een doncker-lochtich/ Stormich onweder, comende ghevloden/ Wt de handt van den oppersten der Goden,/ Dat de sterflijcke Siel-draghende dieren/ Al schijnen te vreesen door sulck bestieren," Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck,* 1.8.13. Quoted in Jan Blanc, "Sensible Natures: Allart Van Everdingen and the Tradition of Sublime Landscape in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, doi: 10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.4. Translation in Karel van Mander, *Foundation of the Noble, Free Art of Painting,* trans. and intro. Walter Melion (Leiden and New York: Brill, 2022), 293.

6 Cf. Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), chapters 6 and 7; Shelley Perlove, "Jacob van Ruisdael's *The Jewish Cemetery,* c. 1654–55. Religious Toleration, Dutch Identity, and Divine Time," in *Landscape and the Visual Hermeneutics*, 234–60.

7 Eric Jorink, *The Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575–1715* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 36, 380–81.

8 Two standard references are Heribert Maria Nobis, *Buch der Natur* (Basel: Schwabe, 1971) and Erich Rothacker, *Das "Buch der Natur." Materialien und Grundsätzliches zur Metaphorngeschichte* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979). For the Dutch Republic, see Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature*.

9 Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
10 English translation: Cornelis Coorne, *A Catechism of the Christian Religion. With the Confession of Faith, Revised in the Nationall [sic] Synod Last Held at Dordrecht* (Middelburg: Simon Clement, 1721), 31, italics by Coorne, accessed April 30, 2023, https://books.google.be/books?id=4D1WAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Confession+of+Faith+1619&hl=nl&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Confession%20of%20Faith%201619&f=false. Cf. David C. Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God," in *Via Augustini. Augustine in the later Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation,* eds. H.A. Oberman and Frank A. James (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1991), 142–56.; Léon Wencelius, *L'Esthétique de Calvin* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1937), 36–49.
11 Boudewijn Bakker, *Landscape and Religion from Van Eyck to Rembrandt* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 265. Cf. Michel Weemans, "World Landscapes as Visual Exegesis. Herri met de Bles's *Penitent Saint Jerome*," in *Landscape and the Visual Hermeneutics*, 507–46.
12 Boudewijn Bakker brought this etching to our attention.
13 Willem Frijhoff, "The meaning of the marvelous. On religious experience in the early seventeenth century Netherlands. Questioning the extraordinary," in *Experience and explanations. Historical and sociological essays on religion in everyday life,* eds. L. Laeyendecker et al. (Leeuwarden: Ljouwert, 1990), 79-102; Lotte Jensen et al., "Omgaan met rampen in Nederland door de eeuwen heen. De rol van culturele media bij gemeenschapsvorming," *Neerlandica Wratislaviensia* 30 (2020): 44–59; Lotte Jensen, "Floods as shapers of Dutch cultural identity: media, theories and practices," *Water History* 13 (2021): 217–33; Eric Jorink, "Tekenen van Gods gramschap. Wonderbaarlijke natuurverschijnselen in de Republiek in de 16e and 17e eeuw," *Groniek. Historisch Tijdschrift* 127 (1995): 177–88.
14 "In the River *Jagst*, he grasped a bundle of Straw, on which he floated for some time. In the meanwhile, a terrible Thunder stroke down; which terrified him so much, that he let the bundle of straw go. He, however, begged God for help with passionate Prayers. Immediately afterwards a large piece of Wood touched his back, and made a deep hole in his head. He clung to this Wood, and bumped into a Mill with it. Due to his shouting the people from inside came out." "In de Rivier *Jahst* greep hy een bos Stroo/ waer op hy een tijd langh voortdreef. Ondertusschen viel een vreeslijken Donderslag neer; ware van hy soodanigh verschrickte/ dat hy de Stroo-bosch losliet. Echter riep hy God met herlijcke Gebeeden om hulp aen. Stracks daer na quam een groot stuck Houts hem over den rugg' heenen schieten/ en maeckte hem een diep gat in't hoofd. Aen dit Hout hield hij hem vast/ en stiet'er mee tegens een Molen aen. Op sijn geroep quamen de daer in sijnde persoonen uyt." Simon de Vries, *Vervolgh op J.L. Gottfrieds Historische Kronyck. Van 't Jaer 1576 tot 1637* (Leiden: Pieter vander Aa, 1698), 1427–28 (our translation).
15 We are indebted to Yvonne Bleyerveld for her help in analyzing these prints.
16 Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 1.5.6, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.google.be/books/edition/Institutes_of_the_Christian_Religion/7gkOAQAAMAAJ?hl=nl&gbpv=0.
17 Calvin, *Institutes,* 1.16.2.
18 Jenny Gaschke, ed., *Turmoil and Tranquillity. The Sea Through the Eyes of Dutch and Flemish Masters, 1550-1700* (exhibition catalogue, London: National Maritime Museum, 2008), cat. no. 2.
19 Reindert Falkenbrug, *Joachim Patinir. Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988); Weemans, "World Landscape," 507–46.
20 Petrus Wittewrongel, *Het tweede boeck van de Oeconomia Christiana ofte Christelijke huyshoudinge* (Amsterdam: Weduwe van Marten Jansz. Brant en Abraham van den Burgh, 1661), 163, accessed April 30, 2023, https://books.google.be/books?id=FvVjAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA564&dq=oeconomia+christiana+1661&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjJo7D3y4b1AhVt57sIHc5yBNgQ6AF6BAgIEAI#v=onepage&q=oeconomia%20christiana%201661&f=false.
21 Lawrence Otto Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art. Convention, Rhetoric, and Interpretation* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 104–5.
22 Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator. Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence,* trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1997). Cf. Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck*, chap. 2.

23 Lucretius, *De rerum natura,* trans. William Leonard (New York: Dutton & Co, 1916).
24 Blumenberg, *Shipwreck,* 19.
25 See Steven Rendall, "Translator's Introduction," in Blumenberg, *Shipwreck,* 1–5.
26 Piet Schrijvers, "Schildknaap en tolk van Epicurus. Lucretius in Nederland," in Lucretius, *De natuur van de dingen,* trans. and ed. Piet Schrijvers (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2008), 536–77.
27 "Dat wij al dit onweder ujt de haven moghen staen aenschouwen, is wel een genaede van Godt." Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft, *De briefwisseling,* ed. H.W. van Tricht, vol. 3 (Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink, 1977), 325, letter 525 (our translation). Schrijvers, "Schildknaap en tolk," 544.
28 "Geluckigh is de man, die, uit de wilde zee/ Zoo veeler dwaelingen en jammeren en wee/ Door alle klippen heen, by wijle in schuim begraven/ Van barningen bestulpt, in 't eindt de stille haven/ Des godtsdiensts innezeilt." Vondel, *Reflections,* vv. 1983-7 (our translation). Schrijvers, "Schildknaap en tolk," 554–55.
29 "A l'aise on peut venter son art & son courage,/ Dos au feu, verre en main, loin des coups & de l'eau,/ L'Art & le coeur se voit sur le haut du vaisseau,/ Au fort de la meslée, & deux doits du naufrage" (our translation).
30 However, we are still in full negotiation between the old ideal of staying safely ashore to watch the fate of others with sublime feelings of attraction and repulsion, hope and fear, and the new observation that we might as well go on an adventure ourselves since we have no idea what God has in store for us anyway. This is proven by the Dutch version to be read alongside the French poem. That poem does not emphasize adventure, but rather the fact that "everything perishes in the water." "Daer t al vergaet int Water" (our translation).
31 Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck*, 4.
32 Eddy de Jongh, "Mountains in the Lowlands," in Eddy de Jongh, *Questions of Meaning. Theme and Motif in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Painting* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2000), 168.
33 De Jongh, "Mountains in the Lowlands," 177.
34 Blanc, "Sensible Natures," 48.
35 Blanc, "Sensible Natures," 48.
36 Dirk Jan Biemond, Pieter Roelofs, Eveline Sint Nicolaas, and Ludo van Halem, "Recent Acquisitions," *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (2016): 88–89.
37 "… dunes d'une figure fort bizarre … qui représente dans la perspective quelque chose de semblable à des vieux palais tombez en ruine". Dominique Bouhours, *Entretiens d'Ariste et Eugène* (Paris: Sébastien Marbre-Cramoisy 1671), 3.
38 "je-ne-sçais quelle horreur accompagnée de plaisir." Ibid.
39 "Cette imense étendue d 'eaux, ce flux & reflux; le bruit, la couleur, les figures differentes de ces flots qui se passent regulierement les un les autres on je ne sçai quoi de surprenant & de si étrange, que je ne sçache rien qu'en approche." Ibid.
40 Richard Solar, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi. Enquête sur une énigme* (Paris: PUF, 2010), chap. 4.
41 Louis Marin, "1674—Le sublime, l'infini, et le 'je ne sais quoi,'" in *De la littérature française,* ed. Denis Hollier (Paris: Bordas 1993), 327–32.
42 "Dieu est admirable & incomprehensible." Bouhours, *Entretiens,* 29.
43 "… une peinture naturelle, que l'art ne peut imiter." Bouhours, *Entretiens,* 3. Cf. Marin, *1674,* 331; Louis Marin, "Le sublime dans les années 1670: un je-ne-sais-quoi?" in Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Paris: Le Seuil 1995), 218.
44 In her brilliant essay on Claude Lorrain, Clélia Nau elaborates on how the painter tries to unite the sea as a religious and aesthetic experience in his calm and gentle seascapes that keep far away from nature's violence. The *je-ne-sais-quoi* of Lorrain, according to Nau, lies precisely in the way he knows how to depict the softly changing light of the sun. Clelia Nau, *Claude Lorrain: Scaenographiae Solis* (Paris: Editions 1:1 2009), 95–101, 130–37.
45 Franciscus Junius, *De schilder-konst der Oude, Begrepen in drie Boecken* (Middelburg: Zacharias Roman, 1641), 49.
46 "The restriction caused by the thickness of the air, or any fog, mist, or smoke, can also be rendered in paint. It is seen that the colors of things are also diminished by being far away, mainly in the open air, as well as by the thickness of the air, which, however clear the weather is, prevents and diminishes the things that are far away." "De verhindering, die de gemeene dikte der lucht, of eenig mist, nevel of rook geeft, bezwalpt ook de verwen. Men ziet dat de koleuren der dingen ook vermindert worden door het verre af zijn, voornamentlijk in de opelucht als door de dikte der locht, die, hoe klaer het weder is, echter de dingen, die veraf zijn belet en

vermindert." Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst: anders de zichtbaere werelt* (Rotterdam: François van Hoogstraeten 1678), 264 (our translation).

47 "de schaduwen van zeer verre. . . eyndelijk het Hemelblauw bereyken." Hoogstraten, *Inleyding,* 265.

48 Hoogstraten, *Inleyding,* 265.

49 Margarita Russell, "Aelbert Cuyp. The Maas at Dordrecht: The Great Assembly of the Dutch Armed Forces, June–July 1646," *Dutch Crossing* 40 (1990): 31–82.

50 The effect of infinity that Cuyp evokes here through the soft and diffuse light that makes everything disappear in thin air, influenced Turner for his *Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam* of 1817 which seems almost like a copy and was considered by among other magazines, the *Morning Chronicle,* to be "one of the most magnificent paintings ever exhibited." Frédéric Ogée, "Turner, English Landscape, and the Anthropocene," in *British Art and the Environment,* eds. Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (New York: Routledge 2021), 166–81.

51 "Wat voortkomt in het licht, blinkt uit en triomfeert./ De beelden in 't verschiet met schaduwen betoogen,/ Verdwijnen meer en meer en glippen uit onze oogen." Joannes Antonides van der Goes, *De Ystroom, begreepen in vier boeken* (Amsterdam: Nicolaas ten Hoorn, 1705), 22.

52 "verheven troon" and "doet stilstaen (…) en verbaezen". Van der Goes, *Ystroom,* 6–7.

53 "Le sublime n'est-il pas plutôt le vide devenu présence, l'absence d'objet transformé en motif même de la réflexion?" Baldine Saint Girons, *Fiat Lux. Une philosophie du sublime* (Paris: Quai Voltaire 1993), 71 (our translation).

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5 Magnificence and the Politics of Architecture

In 1656, the poet, art connoisseur, and politician Constantijn Huygens devoted two related poems to the Amsterdam town hall, which had been designed by the architect Jacob van Campen and inaugurated only a year earlier.[1] In the poems, Huygens concentrates on its top attraction, the Citizens' Hall (*Burgerzaal*), at the time the largest interior secular space open to the public in Europe (Fig. 5.1). One of the poems praises the two maps of the world, the other poem the map of the heavens. These three maps, made of marble and embedded in the floor, were designed by the celebrated cartographer Willem Blaeu. The maps, each with a diameter of 624 cm, are the largest of their kind ever made.

On the terrestrial map in the floor of the town hall of Amsterdam

Who pays attention to this flooring,
And to the delightful curving,
Has to say to himself,
Undoubtfully this Government
Consists in all her parts
Of highly intelligent men;
They teach us with reason
To walk on the world
And to gaze upwards.

On the celestial globe over there

Learn among the jostle
Of the crowded Town Hall
To bear in mind Heaven
And enter freely into its bustle,
As if risen from the earth
Stepping on its Stars and Sun and Moon;
Here it is proven to you
How it once after this [life]
Will turn out for the blessed.[2]

By mentioning the burgomasters as "highly intelligent men," Huygens compliments them for the ingenious way in which they invite the visitors in their building to look at their surrounding world, as well as to orient themselves to heaven. Huygens's second poem goes a step further by giving preference to the orientation toward heaven over the

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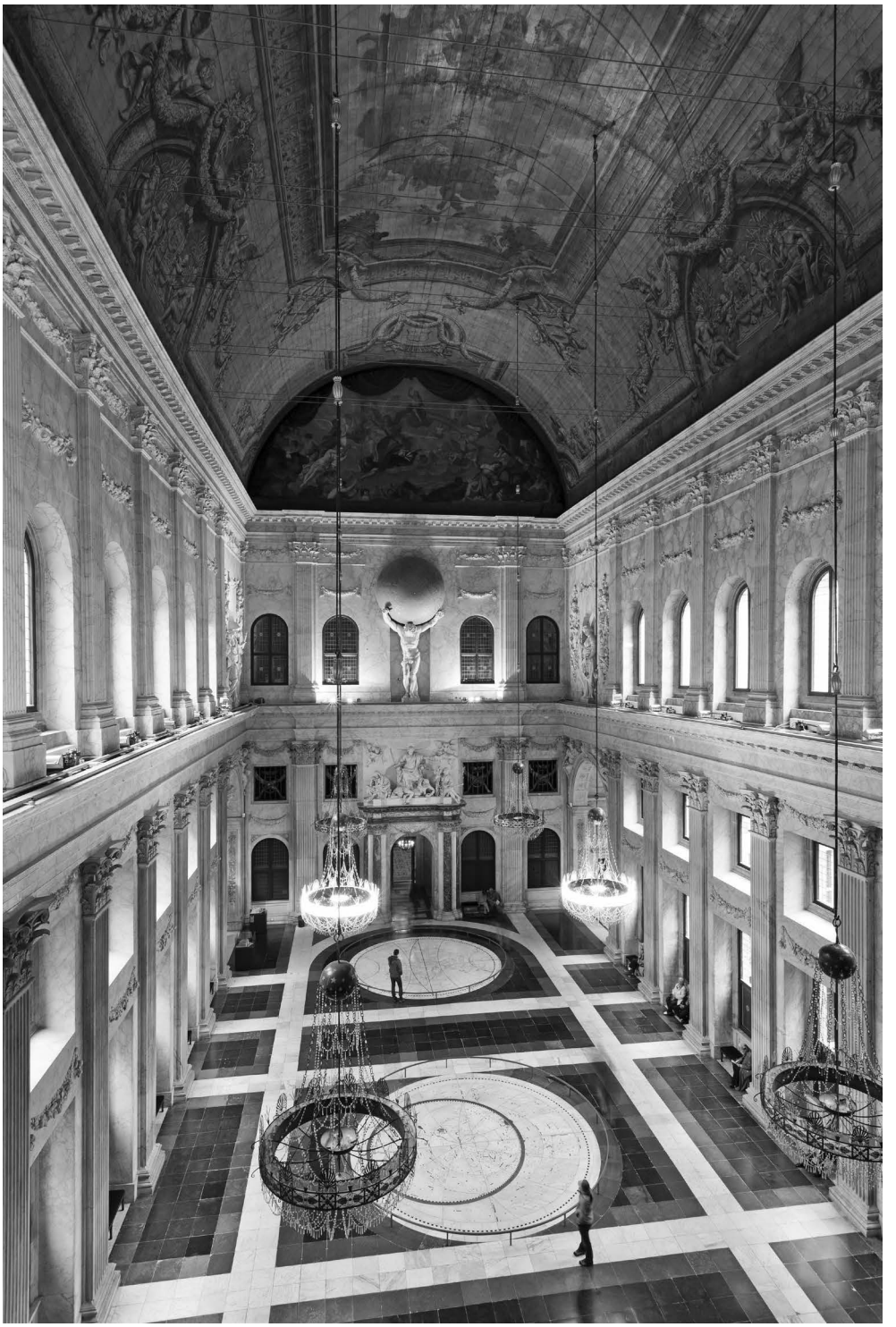

Figure 5.1 The Citizens' Hall of the Amsterdam Town Hall. Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, Amersfoort/557218. Photograph: Chris Booms.

observation of what is happening in the hall. According to Huygens, the Amsterdam burgomasters created a place that was meant for civic affairs but was primarily intended to bring people closer to divine sublimity. This was not considered blasphemous, nor was it in competition with the churches, since even the strictest Calvinists made references to the divine sublime when honoring the Amsterdam burgomasters. Sometimes they even went a step further than Huygens by relating God's sublimity directly to the civic rulers. For example, in his dedication of the influential *Hora novissima* (1663), Otto Belcampius defines the city government as a radiant sun, which, as we have seen, was a prominent way of depicting God in Dutch visual culture.[3]

Huygens not only honored the Amsterdam burgomasters, but he also wrote laudatory poems about the architecture of the stadholders for whom he worked as secretary. In a couplet written in 1631 he focuses on Prince Maurits's garden at the Binnenhof, which was designed by Jacques de Gheyn II and dominated by two large globes (Fig. 5.2):

> On Maurits's garden with the two circles
> Why would Maurits have trodden both worlds?
> Because one world did not satisfy [this] Alexander.[4]

Whereas Huygens uses the globes in the Amsterdam town hall as evidence of the ability of the burgomasters to lead the visitors toward divine sublimity, Maurits's excellence in governance is connected to the past, as his projects are exalted above those of Alexander the Great. As different as the two discourses might be, both describe the rulers as extraordinary by relying on their (garden) architecture. The architectural projects are referenced in order to make it clear that the rulers were perfectly capable of thinking big but eventually also managed to complete the execution of their outstanding plans.

In order to study the political sublime in Dutch architecture, we cannot restrict ourselves to Amsterdam alone. In addition to the rulers of the most important Dutch city, we will also look at the princes of Orange. They were not sovereign rulers, but they officially worked as stadholders at the service of the States General and were chiefly responsible for foreign policy and military affairs.[5] Nevertheless, one of the ways in which the Oranges

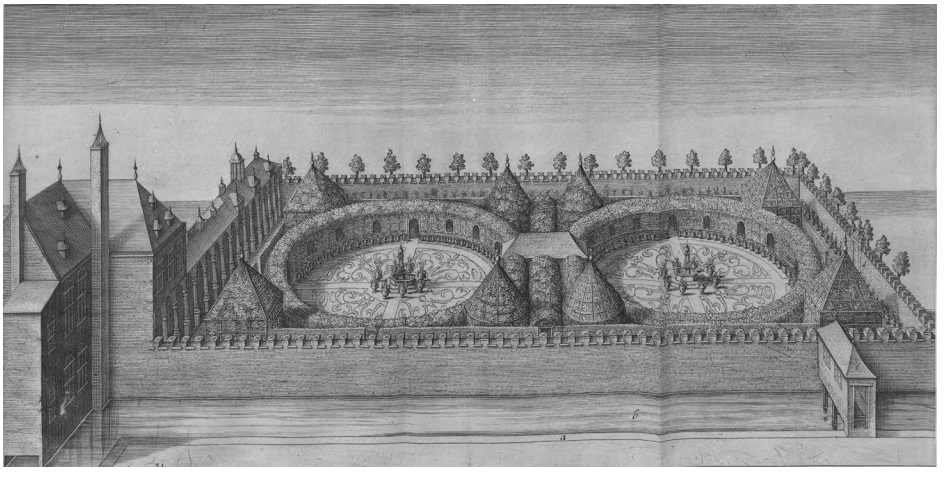

Figure 5.2 Hendrick Hondius, *The Garden of Prince Maurits at the Binnenhof in The Hague*. Illustration in Hendrick Hondius, *Onderwijsinge in the perspective conste*. The Hague: Hendrick Hondius, 1623. University Library, Leiden.

expressed their power and wealth was prestigious architecture in an allusion to sovereignty and dynastic succession. To clarify this, we will focus on texts and images dealing with the manor Huis ten Bosch near The Hague commissioned by Amalia van Solms, the wife of stadholder Frederik Hendrik, and designed by Jacob van Campen and Pieter Post. The construction started in 1645, but when Frederik Hendrik died two years later, his widow dedicated the building to his memory by placing in the central Orange Hall (*Oranjezaal*) monumental paintings by Salomon de Bray, Jacob van Campen, Pieter de Grebber, Gerard van Honthorst, and Jacob Jordaens, among others, glorifying the stadholder as equal to the most illustrious Roman generals (Fig. 5.3).[6] Moreover, at the end of this chapter we will look at the Vrijburg Palace, probably designed by Pieter Post, that Count Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, the governor-general of Dutch Brazil on behalf of the Dutch

Figure 5.3 The Orange Hall in Huis ten Bosch with monumental paintings in remembrance of Frederik Hendrik. In the center we see the painting of Jacob Jordaens with the stadholder in ancient triumph. Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, Amersfoort/539056. Photograph: Gerard Dukker.

West India Company, erected in the village of Recife, the center of sugar production for the Dutch, between 1638 and 1642.[7] Vrijburg offers us the opportunity to compare Dutch discourses on architectural splendor within both the Republic and its colonies.

We will not concentrate primarily on architecture itself, but on textual and visual discourses on the buildings and their immediate surroundings.[8] These texts and images give further meaning to the architecture by accentuating its sublimity and explicitly linking it to the elevated minds of its founders.[9] The texts and images had a broad audience, from citizens to international visitors. Whereas paintings of political buildings were collected by both the local and international elite, prints of varying quality and price were distributed widely. The texts were mostly written in Dutch, but they also appeared in Latin and French to serve local and international distribution. They varied from poetic couplets and short texts on the actual prints to poems of more than a thousand verses that were distributed as pamphlets but also published in lavish books or written in calligraphic masterpieces (Fig. 5.4). Because the artists and writers strengthened the political impact of the buildings, their work was often commissioned or at least supported by the founders.

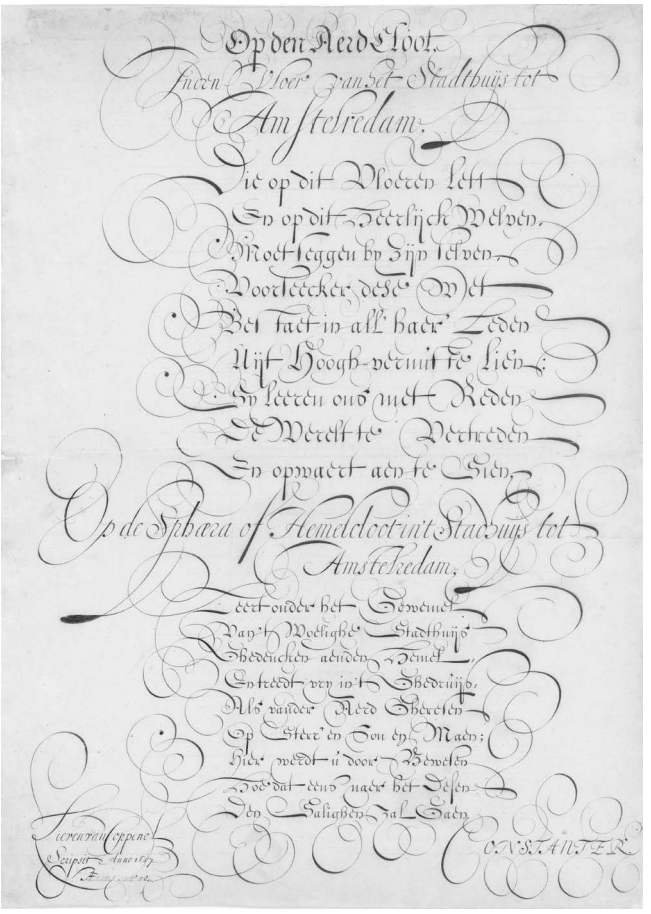

Figure 5.4 Lieven Willemsz. Coppenol, *Calligraphic Text of the Poems of Huygens on the Maps in the Floor of the Citizen's Hall*, 1657. Pencil on paper, 710 × 505 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Magnificence

In order to understand the politically overwhelming impact of these buildings in terms of the sublime, we must rely on the concept of magnificence, which reflects the benefits of spending enormous sums. In our context, the huge costs for the constructions were presented as necessary in order to demonstrate the eminent position of the Dutch cities and the Republic. Moreover, the fact that the founders successfully undertook such constructions was used to emphasize their excellent leadership. Texts and images time and time again highlighted the overwhelming impact of the architecture and linked it to the high-mindedness of the founders. The poem that Joost van den Vondel wrote in honor of the inauguration of the Amsterdam town hall is a famous example.[10] In a total of 1378 verses he legitimizes the huge costs to construct the building, not only by pointing at its practical use but also by presenting it as an awe-inspiring expression of the elevated state of the city and its rulers. Vondel starts his discourse by pointing directly at the sublimity of the building. The four elements applaud it, and the stars and planets dance around it. He ends his long poem by bringing the seven United Provinces to life to let them acknowledge that this extraordinary building guarantees a bright future for Amsterdam and the Republic, because it was founded by rulers who were blessed with divine wisdom. But in Vondel's poem, as in many other political discourses in the Republic, architectural magnificence does not supersede the heavenly sublime. Whereas we saw that God's almightiness had to instill both attraction and horror, the latter aspect was not as present in the political context. Magnificence could instill fear, but for the most part it was meant to arouse breathtaking admiration and awe.[11]

The economy of spending enormous sums was debated for centuries, involving among other disciplines, ethics, theology, politics, and even art theory.[12] We find an early and important contribution to the debate in *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle defines magnificence (*megaloprepeia*) as a virtue concerned with great wealth, more particularly: "it consists in suitable expenditure on a great scale… The suitability of the expenditure is relative to the spender himself, and to the occasion or object" (4.2.1–2).[13] For Aristotle magnificence is a personal quality, as it is closely related to rich individuals who interact with their communities by spending exceptional sums. Magnificent men can offer favors to their communities by organizing expensive festivities and receiving foreign guests. Even if they furnish their own houses in full splendor, they are serving their community, for as Aristotle writes, "a house is a sort of distinction; and to prefer spending on permanent objects, because these are the most noble" (4.2.16).

Every subsequent period in European history appropriated magnificence in such a way that Aristotle's virtue figured, in the words of the economic historian Guido Guerzoni, as "the intellectual bases of twenty-five centuries of consumption patterns that were not conspicuous nor flaunted, but burdened by the weight of inevitable social obligation."[14] In the Roman period, *magnificentia* got related to the counter-concept of *luxuria*, and private and public expenditure were theoretically separated from each other. Cicero writes in his *Pro Murena*: "Roman people hate private luxury but like public magnificence" (36.76).[15] Public buildings were put at the center of *magnum facere,* "to perform magnificence" or, more literally, "to make something great." In the Middle Ages, the divine sublime becomes related to magnificence, as the debate about great expenditure was discussed on a theological level. In his guidebook for princes, *De regimine principum* (1280), the archbishop Giles of Rome argued that princes were naturally inclined toward magnificence.[16] By spending enormous sums to serve their communities, they

could overwhelm their subjects with benevolence in accordance with God. Giles states that their expenditure could be impossibly prodigal and that they were appropriately liberal. By giving princes an almost divine infallibility, *De regimine principum* was readily referred to in its own time, but it also became an influential source to pave the way for the rise of the splendor at Renaissance papal and princely courts, as well as for helping newcomers become powerful.[17] Cosimo de' Medici, for example, spent a great deal of money to express magnificence and relied especially on architecture to reinforce his own position, as a banker appropriating noble allure.[18] These splendid constructions were quickly emulated—by the Gonzagas and Sforzas, for example, as well as by his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent—so that it became increasingly common to express one's superior position by patronizing architecture. A defense of this kind of patronage, among others expressed in Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* (1452), was found in the virtue of magnificence.

By the seventeenth century, the concept of magnificence had evolved from a personal quality of the extremely rich, a group that Aristotle had not clearly defined, into a far more socially restricted concept, a restriction under constant pressure. Moreover, throughout the Middle Ages, magnificence had become linked with divine sublimity by attributing exceptional powers and talents to rulers. Hence, in the seventeenth century the concept could be used to consider the rulers as a liaison bringing their subjects closer to God, or else to ascribe sublime qualities to the rulers themselves, much like God. Magnificence, therefore, could be a welcome concept for absolutist aspirations, exemplified by the grand projects of Louis XIV in Paris and Versailles.[19] But how far could a Calvinist republic, where richness was so often a topic of embarrassment, use the concept to perform overwhelming splendor with expressions of their power? According to the well-known, and disputed, theory of Quentin Skinner, the classical republican virtues had an anti-aristocratic character, and virtue was not rooted in lineage or richness but acquired through political participation and sacrifice for the common good.[20] From this perspective, the manifestations of magnificence could become easily identified with corruption. However, as we just saw in the poems of Huygens, the great expenditure in architectural projects was also explicitly praised. We can broaden this concept by clarifying throughout this chapter how magnificence played a prominent role in the politics of the Dutch Republic, more particularly in discourses on great architecture.[21]

A Royal Ball and a Civic Parade

Magnificence figured as a central concept in the praise of the Amsterdam town hall, Huis ten Bosch, and the Vrijburg Palace, but owing to the different political contexts, discourses on these three buildings put the emphasis elsewhere. Texts and images dealing with the architecture of the Princes of Orange and Nassau primarily express their nobility; they even allude to royalty and disregard the fact that as stadholder or colonial governor these princes were serving, respectively, the States General and the Dutch West India Company. In their turn, textual and visual discourses on civic architecture did not emphasize specific persons, but rather the magnificence of the civic government. The Dutch cities headed by Amsterdam were oligarchic city states in which the burgomasters exercised power. Throughout the seventeenth century, these rulers became increasingly related to a small number of interconnected families—such as Backer, Bicker, de Graeff, Huydecoper, and Valckenier—dividing the political responsibilities among themselves on the basis of frequent alteration.[22] In the civic discourses, the magnificence of the office was given central stage, but we also find references to the families in their coats of arms,

for example. If the burgomasters or other civic rulers are mentioned individually, they are often presented as members of their respectable families and because they occupy their office at the time of the *magnum facere,* for example, the founding of the Amsterdam town hall in 1648.

In order to start defining the magnificence of the Amsterdam government and the Oranges and Nassaus, let us compare two engravings by Daniel Marot (Figs. 5.5 and 5.6). Both were made in 1686, a year after Marot had fled France as a Huguenot because of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In that year, princess Mary Stuart (later queen Mary II of England) lavishly celebrated the anniversary of her husband, stadholder William III (later king of England), in Huis ten Bosch. Marot revealed himself as an excellent artist by making an impressive commemorative engraving of this ball.[23] In the upper corners of the engraving, we see an image of the guests arriving in front of the building, as well as the birthday dinner, and at the top the portrait of the princess, but the main focus is on the grand ball in the Orange Hall. Marot emphasizes how the hall has been transformed into a theater with an impressive set of curtains and with musicians seen at the

Figure 5.5 Daniel Marot (I), *Ball in Huis ten Bosch in Honor of the Birthday of the Prince of Orange*, 1686. Etching with engraving, 810 × 560 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

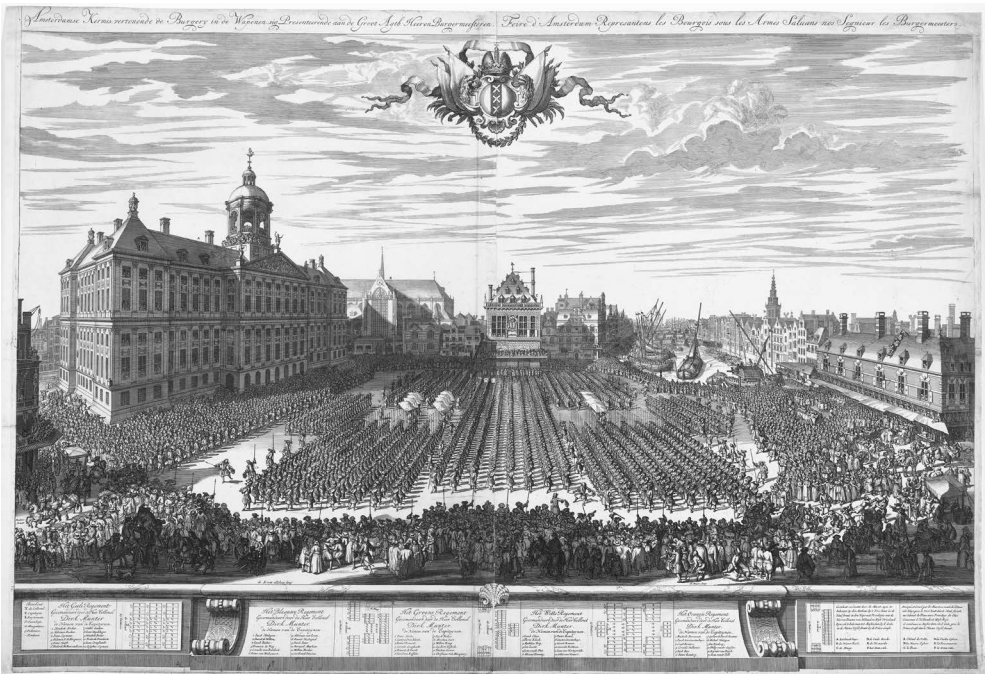

Figure 5.6 Daniel Marot (I), *Citizen Forces Presented in Front of the Town Hall,* 1686. Etching with engraving, 640 × 940 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

back. The princess sits at central stage, her place indicated with the number one. Other numbers indicate the presence of the Moroccan ambassador and Friedrich Wilhelm, elector of Brandenburg and son-in-law of Frederik Hendrik. By accentuating the presence of these VIPs, the stadholder's responsibility in foreign policy and military affairs assigned by the States General is emphasized, but the entire scene gives the Oranges royal appeal three years before they became king and queen by emulating depictions of the marvelous festivities at Versailles.[24] Thus, Marot appropriated the magnificence of Louis XIV for use in Dutch politics.[25] This appropriation is further acknowledged by a dedication, prominently presented as if carved in an impressive pedestal, in which the artist praises the majesty of the princess.

Because of the theatrical quality of the image, the Orange Hall has much in common with the wondrous devices of the *théâtre à l'italienne*, including the stage sets of the Amsterdam performance of *Phaethon* in 1685, as discussed in our second chapter. However, the crucial difference in these marvelous stage sets, which suddenly appeared to be visible but were merely mind-blowing illusions, was that the hall was a work of real architecture, not made of ephemera but decorated with monumental canvases of the most prominent Netherlandish artists of the time, works explicitly referred to in the etching with the number eleven. The image itself conspicuously brings Jordaens's *Triumph of Frederik Hendrik* of 1652 to our attention, thus connecting the late stadholder's illustrious victories in the war with Spain with the royal allure that Mary Stuart was performing in the sense of *magnum facere*.

Also in 1686 Marot created an image of the citizen forces of Amsterdam that is similarly monumental in scale and appeal as the depiction of the ball (Fig. 5.6). We see

the four regiments of Amsterdam orderly positioned on Dam Square. A mass of people has turned up to admire and cheer them. The title at the top, "Amsterdam Fair Showing the Citizens in Arms Presenting Themselves to the Highly Respectable Lords Burgomasters,"[26] contrasts with the image itself, where we cannot see the burgomasters. The building is crowded with people inside, on top, and in front of it, as with the neighboring buildings, but the town hall dominates the other buildings. Marot emphasizes its grandness by letting it rise above the New Church, weigh house, and fish market. Just as in the engraving of Mary Stuart's ball, this image of the town hall in its strong perspectival view brings to mind the arrangement of a theater set, with a front, central, and backstage and its wings transforming the building into an extraordinary structure. But unlike the ball of Mary Stuart as an expression of princely magnificence, the agents of *magnum facere*—the burgomasters—are not present here; magnificence is expressed by the building itself in close alliance with the citizen forces. After its long history of elitism, magnificence has come into the hands of a larger group of people; it has become a *res publica* expressed by the awesome and overwhelming appearance of the seat of government.

The attention paid to the magnificence of the Amsterdam town hall in the visual arts was not new. Even before the building was inaugurated, artists such as Jacob van der Ulft had already emphasized its overwhelming impact.[27] In the 1660s, this resulted in the internationally renowned masterpieces of Gerrit Berckheyde and Jan van der Heyden, who were groundbreaking in using a diversity of painterly methods—such as linear perspective, color, and juxtaposing the grand building with the other buildings and the people on Dam Square—to capture and strengthen the magnificence of the architecture. They would influence later artists, including the Italian *vedute* painter Canaletto. Van der Heyden's painting of 1667, bought by Cosimo III de'Medici two years later, is a striking example (Fig. 5.7).[28] It expresses the building in full grandeur, but if we look at the figures admiring the building, the unsettling aspect of the sublime has disappeared. The painter, however, manages to evoke the sensation of being suddenly confronted with the magnificent building as one comes from the Kalverstraat. The actual situation is delicately altered by reducing the size of the house at the left, The Golden Plow. Moreover, the artist places it, together with the New Church, in shadows and contrasts this darkness with the morning sun that shines on the town hall. The most striking feature is the explicit rendering of the single-point perspective. Soon after the painting arrived in Florence, Van der Heyden sent the grand duke a viewing device so that he could observe the painting from the perfect vantage point that would not distort the cupola while accentuating the building's grandness.

Van der Heyden depicted Huis ten Bosch several times as well. There he mostly focuses on the pleasure and splendor of its gardens, which may not surprise us given the fact that princes throughout Europe emulated each other in landscape design, the most celebrated example being Louis XIV and his gardens at Versailles.[29] Along with showing the prominence of the town hall in its urban setting, the artist emphasizes the outstanding surroundings of the palace in order to enhance the ambiance of royalty. Magnificence is emphasized, but there is no sense of sublime fear in the elegant figures in the garden. In a Van der Heyden painting sold at Sotheby's in 2020, we can see only the cupola of Huis ten Bosch, as the emphasis is placed on the *capriccio* in the foreground (Fig. 5.8).[30] A triumphal arch is rendered in sunlight and in a strong perspective similar to that of the town hall in his 1667 painting, but because the building is in the shade, the viewer's attention is drawn instead to the graceful woman coming out of the arch. The atmosphere

Figure 5.7 Jan van der Heyden, *Dam Square with the Town Hall and the New Church*, 1667. Oil on canvas, 85 × 92 cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

is defined by courteousness (or that what the French call *galanterie*), as Van der Heyden presents richly dressed women and men who enjoy their surroundings as they blend in with the monument and enjoy a refined courtly life by living in grandeur. Moreover, the triumphal arch seems to be formed by an ancient wall that has niches with statues and a Doric gate crowned by caryatids. These details give the setting of Huis ten Bosch an Italianate character as if it was situated close to the remains of Roman antiquity and its Baroque revival.

Jan Zoet

The princely and civic magnificence of these buildings was presented in comparable texts and images, albeit with a different emphasis, that focused on either the quasi-royalty of the Orange family or the *res publica*. The relationship between princely and civic magnificence could even be found within the same texts. In 1675, the poet Jan Zoet wrote an extensive laudatory poem entitled *The Orange Hall* in which much attention is paid

Figure 5.8 Jan van der Heyden, *A Palatial Garden with the Roof of Huis Ten Bosch in the Distance,* ca. 1670. Oil on panel, 39 × 45 cm. Photograph: Courtesy of Sotheby's, 2023.

to the Amsterdam town hall as well as Huis ten Bosch.[31] Thus, he was able to combine his Orangist sympathies with his love for his hometown, Amsterdam.[32] Zoet pays much attention to the military accomplishments of Frederik Hendrik and implicitly references the paintings in the Orange Hall that depict his victorious life, as well as referencing Jordaens's monumental painting showing the stadholder in an antique triumph (Fig. 5.3). Additionally, he focuses on Amalia van Solms, because a crucial part of the poem is devoted to a medial reflection in which the building and its decorations are compared to the poem. Zoet proposes unlike himself, Amalia as the founder of the mausoleum has succeeded in making her husband famous for eternity. She has created a true wonder that will stand the ravages of time and will ensure peace. To clarify how this concept relates to his own literary effort, Zoet uses the metaphor of the sun, which was common to praise nobility and royalty, but he gives it an extraordinary twist, stating that with his poem he "can do nothing more than lighten the Sun with a weak torch."[33] Amalia is praised for her *magnum facere* in architecture, which is a continuation of her husband's magnificence in battle. The prince's warfare and the princess's building project are awe-inspiring and strengthen the position of the Orange dynasty. The poem merely echoes these magnificent accomplishments.

As noted above, Zoet merely alludes to the paintings in the Orange Hall and doesn't describe any specific elements, in contrast to the elaborate ekphrasis that he gives in the same poem of the Amsterdam town hall. He describes the civic building as being so impressive that it can rightfully be called the eighth wonder of the world, surpassing the seven wonders of antiquity.[34] A few pages later, Zoet even speaks of a "royal building" in reference to the town hall.[35] But the royal allure given to the Oranges is not applied to the civic governors. The architecture and its decorations are given full consideration, but not the individual rulers. First, Zoet praises the tribunal, especially its marble reliefs depicting exemplary Greco-Roman and biblical stories in which justice is served. The reliefs are so lifelike that, according to the poet, they could have been sculpted by Pygmalion. With the same parameter of lifelikeness, the poet lauds the Citizens' Hall in detail, by echoing Huygens's poem of 1656 in praising the marble floor:

> In the *Citizens' Hall*, with dry feet, you can wade through the water.
> Traverse the whole wide world in a glimpse.
> Then fly, with your gaze, till the highest Vault.
> There you will find the Sun, and Moon, and all the Stars.
> Then remember in your mind that every human being
> Has to leave earthly vanity and connect with Heaven.[36]

This comprehensive description continues by noting many other decorations in the hall and its adjacent galleries, but no mention of the founders. Whereas the Oranges are given the central role in founding the Orange Hall and in giving the building its strength, thanks to the close interaction with their *magnum facere*, the role of the Amsterdam burgomasters is neglected in order to put the full focus on their town hall. We have seen in the engravings of Marot that princely magnificence is personal and civic magnificence is a *res publica*; this can be found in Zoet's poem as well. Nevertheless, both discourses praise the two monuments for eliciting admiration and awe.

Mythological Grandness

Discussions that rely on the concept of magnificence to praise the town hall could be viewed as going a step further and coming closer to the unsettling domain of the sublime. The building could be viewed as an awe-inspiring living being since the individual burgomasters themselves were placed in the background so that full attention could be focused on their office. The Haarlem poet Pieter Rixtel explores this idea in a poem of 1669 where he does not take the town hall into primary consideration but focuses on a painting that his fellow townsman Gerrit Berckheyde made of the building only one year earlier (Fig. 5.9). Rixtel brings the building to life so that it can praise its own portrait, but also reflect on its own sublimity. The extraordinary being that addresses the reader in such a straightforward manner is not easy to define. It compares itself to a phoenix, since the medieval town hall had burned down in 1652 and was replaced by a grand building. In other words, the living being cannot be fixed to one specific embodiment, just as the role of burgomaster cannot be identified with specific individuals. The poem continues by pointing out that even if this architectural wonder were to be destroyed by fire, an even grander wonder would be erected, because architecture is an expression of the strength of the city of Amsterdam and its rulers. Here, magnificence can be closely related to the action of *magnum facere,* in which the agent exerting magnificence converges in an extraordinary way with the magnificent object.

Figure 5.9 Gerrit Adriaensz. Berckheyde, *The Dam in Amsterdam*, 1668. Oil on canvas, 70 × 110 cm. Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.

The burgomasters' creation of magnificence by founding the town hall could also be visualized as the appropriation of heroes from the past. A popular topos to show their *magnum facere* without having to focus on the building itself, but on a specific figure performing the action of building, can be found in Greco-Roman mythology. In the decorations in the town hall, as well as in visual and textual discourses praising it, Amphion was referenced in order to underline the extraordinary power that was required to construct the Amsterdam building. This son of Zeus had magically built the fortifications of Thebes by using his golden lyre to let stones move and form the walls. Vondel refers to the mythological hero and adds that the Amsterdam burgomasters surpassed him because they did not have to rely on supernatural forces but had enough worldly powers at their disposal to carry out the extraordinary work.[37]

The closest we come to seeing individual burgomasters performing magnificence is in a large drawing attributed to the German-Dutch artist Jurriaen Ovens (Fig. 5.10). This image is an isolated case, as it shows the four men who at the time of the building's construction held the office of burgomaster. With funding in hand, they discuss which of the begging men and women need to be given support. Their expression of liberality is accompanied by the *magnum facere* of founding the town hall, since the building is shown under construction. As early as Aristotle, liberality was closely related to magnificence. The burgomasters' performance is set in an environment that corresponds

Figure 5.10 Jurriaen Ovens (?), *Entry of the Amsterdam Burgomasters,* ca. 1662. Black crayon, pencil in black and brown, 41 × 63.2 cm. © Hamburger Kunsthalle/bpk. Hamburg: Kunsthalle. Photograph: Christoph Irrgang.

to Van der Heyden's *capriccio* (Fig. 5.8). The Dam Square is given a Roman alure thanks to classicist monuments. It is even populated by mythological beings that would eventually adorn the pediments of the town hall in sculptures by the Antwerp master Artus Quellinus. The crucial difference between this and the magnificence of Frederik Hendrik, however, is that the burgomasters are not shown in triumph, as Jordaens does in his central piece for the Orange Hall (Fig. 5.3). Here, the city maiden of Amsterdam is triumphant as Cybele, the ancient goddess of fertility, in her wagon drawn by lions.

Magnum Facere by Architects and Artists

Another person who could claim he performed magnificence by constructing grand buildings was the architect. In the context of the Amsterdam town hall, as well as Huis ten Bosch, Jacob van Campen played a crucial role. He was one of the most renowned architects in the seventeenth-century Republic and his influence spread as far as Scandinavia.[38] Nevertheless, poets praising the buildings seldom pay attention to him. Although Zoet brings together two of his greatest achievements, he does not mention van Campen. Moreover, in his extensive laudatory poem Vondel mentions him only once and Van Campen has to share the attention with Daniel Stalpaert, supervisor of the construction. Vondel mentions the two in the same breath, although it was generally acknowledged that they did not get along. A dispute between them had even led to van Campen's leaving the project before the building was inaugurated.[39]

However, to conclude that all poets excluded van Campen from performing magnificence is presumptuous. In 1655, the year of the town hall was inaugurated, the architect's

friend and neighbor Everard Meyster wrote a laudation in the format of a theatrical play, the *Celestial Land Play* (*Hemelsch Land-Spel*), which was devoted to the architect.[40] The play starts with Jupiter summoning the greatest architects and artists of the past—from Vitruvius to Michelangelo and Raphael to Heemskerck and Holbein—to help the gods come to an understanding of the marvelous building. Before they start their praises, nymphs sing a song devoted to van Campen that sets the tone. The song uses the metaphor of the sun to point at the *magnum facere* of van Campen and thus is similar to Zoet's praise of Amalia van Solms and, more generally, the praise of many early modern rulers. The architect is described as "a Sun in the dark, who always seeks to increase public splendor as well as profit for his City and country."[41] Meyster even attributes divine sublimity to his friend, as he appropriates the fear of God to laud him. The nymphs sing that Van Campen's architecture "just as Jupiter with his Thunder, not merely elicits fear, but wonder."[42] He has designed his architecture in such an excellent way that this feeling of wonder is not restricted to the Dutch, but to the visitors from far beyond. Moreover, his architecture is destined for eternity; Van Campen's work is "honored by all Nations" and "will shine forever."[43] Later in the play, the souls of the Elysian Fields explain in their song that the architect's excellence can be directly related to his bright spirit. No master before him, they sing, has ever shown such inventiveness. His ingenuity is comparable only to the goddess of wisdom, Athena.[44] Meyster does not want to leave his audience in any doubt; with his building projects and especially with the Amsterdam town hall van Campen performs magnificence.

As isolated as Meyster may have been in the strict context of the poems praising the Amsterdam town hall, seen in a broader context he was not unique in the Dutch Republic in his reliance on using the concept of magnificence to honor the creator of architecture or art. In his *De pictura veterum*, Junius had already made the link between artistic excellence and the performance of magnificence. Just like Meyster's architect, Junius's artist had to depend primarily on his ingenuity and inventiveness. To clarify this, Junius relied on *On the Sublime* and pointed out that the primary source of magnificence are grand thoughts. Like Longinus's poet and orator, Junius's artist needs to begin with elevated subjects. Longinus further follows the ancient treatise by stating that the artist performing magnificence during the *inventio*—the moment when the artist gives form to his ideas that will be central to the work of art—can create a work of art that will meet universal understanding and approval. Moreover, it will stay in the thoughts of its viewers forever. So Meyster's discussion of universal and eternal acclaim is not unique in the context of Dutch art theory, since Junius two decades earlier had already used the same parameters to define the *magnum facere* of an artist:

> … it is worth our labor to observe out of *Longinus* an infallible marke of true magnificence. "This is great indeed," sayth he, "which doth still returne into our thoughts, which we can hardly or rather not at all put out of our minde, but the memorie of it sticketh close in us and will not be rubbed out: esteeme that also to be a most excellent and true magnificence, which is liked alwayes and by all men."
>
> (3.1.15 quoting *On the sublime* 7)

Junius's introduction of *On the Sublime* into art theory corresponds with the moment when the centuries-old thinking on magnificence was no longer restricted to the patron but expanded to the artist. The richness presented by the artist is not financial but uniquely intellectual. He performs magnificence by creating great thoughts that result in overwhelming works that have a limitless and timeless impact. This idea will be picked

up internationally by, among other art theoreticians, Roger de Piles and Giovanni Pietro Bellori in their definitions of the genius artist, but we see similarities in Dutch writings as well.[45] Without suggesting any direct link to Meyster, we note how striking it is to see how in the Dutch Republic innovative thinking about the impact of art, as well as architecture, is not restricted to theorical treatises *stricto sensu*. Meyster praises van Campen by stating that in the radiance of the town hall everyone can see the brightness of the architect: "His art has to shine eternally, where his Palaces radiate."[46] Thus Meyster comes close to Junius's appropriation of Longinus's *On the Sublime*.

As to images of the town hall, it is impossible to determine how far the magnificence of the architect instead of the magnificence of the city and its rulers could have been emphasized. However, several artists put everything at stake to highlight the universal and eternal acclaim of the building. Many images—for example, the paintings of Gerrit Berckheyde—show a rich diversity of viewers on Dam Square standing in admiration for the town hall. Their costumes indicate that not only local regents and burghers are present, but foreigners as well, richly dressed in exotic costumes, emphasizing that in Amsterdam all nations assemble to engage in trade.[47] Since they are directly in front of the town hall, we could add that not only international commerce is highlighted, but also the universal power of extraordinary architecture. The people on Dam Square find each other in their admiration for the building. Next to its international allure, artists also tried to emphasize the building's eternal character. Among others, the Amsterdam painter Hendrick Mommers presents the town hall as a supernatural manifestation in the middle of human hustle and bustle (Fig. 5.11). Thanks to its remarkable white surface, the building gets the character of a divine apparition.

Figure 5.11 Hendrick Mommers, *Market Scene before the Dam*, 1660s. Oil on canvas, 84.5 × 120.7 cm. Dyrham Park, Bath. Photograph: © National Trust UK.

Magnificence in Dutch Brazil

In addition to introducing the entire world to Dutch magnificence in the center of Amsterdam, the Republic also conveyed her magnificence to all the corners of the world, or perhaps, putting it more accurately, the Dutch used the idea of magnificence to conquer the world. A prominent discourse on this influence overseas suggested that the people of the other continents should consider themselves fortunate that magnificent rulers had come from the Republic to take care of them. A striking example can be found in the discourse that Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen developed during his eight-year as governor in Brazil. Before his governorship, he had experienced limits to expressing his power. His house under construction in The Hague, now called the Mauritshuis, gave him prestige, but it did not make him magnificent; there magnificence was reserved for his uncle, Frederik Hendrik, and his aunt, Amalia van Solms. In 1636, Johan Maurits seized the opportunity to become governor-general of Brazil and thus entered into the service of the Dutch West India Company (WIC).[48] To the increasing chagrin of the board of the WIC, he behaved like a sovereign, serving as patron in the arts and sciences that had royal appeal thanks to such painters as Frans Post and Albert Eckhout, the doctor Willem Piso, and the astronomer Georg Markgraf. Moreover, Johan Maurits went much further than previous governors by founding a new city near Recife that bore his name, Mauritiopolis, which was crowned with Vrijburg, a grand palace probably designed by Pieter Post featuring a famous garden and a zoo.[49]

The enormous cost of these projects were covered by the trade in sugar produced by enslaved Africans in the sugar mills around Recife, but this downside did not get much attention in the descriptions of Johan Maurits's *magnum facere*.[50] A prominent example is the illustrated *History of Brazil Under the Governorship of Count Johan Maurits of Naussau,* an exhaustive and flattering account written by the famous Amsterdam humanist Caspar Barlaeus on behalf of Johan Maurits that was published in 1647 (Fig. 5.12).[51] His praise of Vrijburg is a prime example of how in the seventeenth century the concept of magnificence was appropriated to strengthen social and political positions. Every sentence in Barlaeus's description of the palace points to the elevated mind of Johan Maurits, who succeeded in combining usefulness, beauty, splendor, and wonder in one and the same building. The humanist introduces Vrijburg as follows:

> Now Vrijburg in all its splendor dominates Antonio Vaz Island, a pleasure and delight to the citizens and an everlasting monument to the magnanimity of the count of Nassau in the New World. It is remarkable how these building activities shook the confidence of the Portuguese, while increasing that of our people. In their opinion it reflected the positive status of our government, which the count had strengthened by spending his own money. People despair when they believe that their government is indifferent to public needs, neglects its responsibilities, and is irresolute. Under such circumstances they endure the loss and ruin of the state without attempting to save it. But here the citizens put aside the trepidation they had felt at the approach of a Spanish armada when they saw Johan Maurits busy at building, because it was of the utmost importance to him that Brazil should suffer no harm. They went to work in the sugar mills and planting the cane and manioc with more enthusiasm because their commander had raised the hopes of all and had never despaired of the state. The state owes him gratitude for that, as the Romans once owed it to Varro.[52]

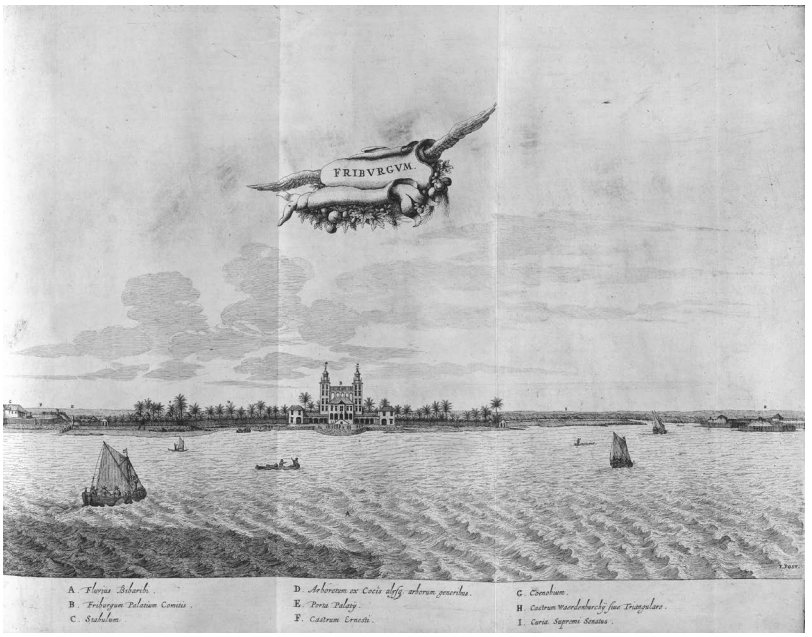

Figure 5.12 Jan van Brosterhuysen, after Frans Post, *View on Vrijburg*. Illustration in Caspar Barlaeus, *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia*. Amsterdam: Joannes Blaeu, 1647. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In first instance, Barlaeus's account was meant to convince the court at The Hague and the States General to keep on believing in the governmental and military virtues of Johan Maurits and to respond to the rumors of problems in Brazil under his governorship. The humanist excludes the fact that the count would have wasted money, by pointing out that he repeatedly invested his own money in projects that the WIC did not have enough trust in at first, but that in the end brought the company much profit. In turn, the large expenditure that Johan Maurits made for his palace is legitimized by references to illustrious Roman generals who similarly engaged in grand building projects to scare their enemies away without directly confronting them but by impressing them with magnificence. In the same way, the count managed to reduce conflict and increasingly convince the Brazilians, Portuguese, and even enslaved Africans of his leadership qualities. Barlaeus clarifies this directly at the start of his account by relying on the metaphor that has already turned up in this chapter: just like Amalia van Solms and Jacob van Campen, the governor is described as "a light in a world of darkness," and more particularly "a compatriot among a foreign and wandering tribe, a guide in the wilderness, and a ruler to the most widely differing and exotic peoples," since when "the cannibals saw the building of Vrijburg and Boa Vista [the Count's mansion], they would recognize these as emblems of the might and splendor of the House of Nassau."[53]

Thanks to the strategy of employing magnificence, Barlaeus can rise above the fact that Johan Maurits worked at the service of the WIC. Barlaeus's logic is defined by his belief that the count was a leader by nature, thanks to his pedigree. He is superior to the members of the board of the WIC, since they are "thrifty merchants" and therefore not capable of thinking or acting in a similarly grand way as the governor.[54] The awareness

of magnificence as a *res publica* as it will be developed in the second half of the century, thanks to the Amsterdam town hall, was overlooked by Barlaeus, who focused on the centuries-old tradition in which magnificence is reserved for the highest nobility and restricted to birthright. It remains a question how far Barlaeus's account convinced its target audience, more especially the members of the States General, especially since he was the author of *Mercator sapiens* as well. In this inaugural speech to become professor at the Athenaeum Illustre in 1632, the humanist seems to contradict what he writes in *History of Brazil* by pointing at the wisdom and nobleness of being a merchant.[55]

Barlaeus does fall back on the long tradition of defining magnificence, but he cannot take that tradition entirely for granted, since he must make a translation to apply it to the overseas territories. Since Johan Maurits had developed his magnificence in Brazil, Barleaus must acknowledge the diversity of people who were involved in his *magnum facere*. As to the enslaved Africans, he could not deny the problem of slavery. He agreed with Seneca who pointed out "that calling anyone a 'slave' sprang from an injustice,"[56] but he had to acknowledge that slavery brings about profits that are crucial for the Dutch presence in Brazil.[57] In his introduction to Vrijburg, which we quoted above, Barlaeus tries to solve the problem by pointing out that the magnificence of Johan Maurits made the people "enthusiastic" about working in the sugar mills and plantations.[58] The imagined response of the native Brazilians and the Portuguese to the *magnum facere* is defined along similar lines. They too willingly subject themselves to the governor to work with and for him. Johan Maurits's projects are given universal acclaim, exciting everyone involved. Despite the fact that Barlaeus takes into account that the audience of the count's *magnum facere* is diverse, he does not differentiate between the responses. Everyone is overwhelmed by the elevated status of the governor, as expressed in his patronage, his building projects, and, if necessary, his warfare. Because Barlaeus ignores the reality of harsh suppression, we see here how sublimity can be a fabrication that does not correspond with actual reactions but relies on concepts that strengthen the powerful.

Dutch Classicism

Thus far, we have focused on texts and images as "constructions beyond the actual construction." To end this chapter, however, we will focus on the historiography of the buildings. Today, architectural historians group the designs of Jacob van Campen and Pieter Post under the heading of Dutch classicism, which the post-war generation referred to as baroque, Katherine Fremantle's *The Baroque Town Hall* of 1959 serving as a famous example.[59] Whereas classicism is used to discuss a building that expresses order and harmony with formal characteristics borrowed from ancient buildings and early modern architects such as Andrea Palladio and Inigo Jones, baroque in architectural history points to a free handling of ancient examples through the use of grand, dramatic structures and abundant ornamentation. Baroque describes architecture that is extravagant and bombastic.[60] Viewed from this perspective, the two terms are associated with different architectural styles and are virtually incompatible. However, when both terms are used to discuss the same buildings, architectural historians seem to have lost themselves in their own terminology. A similar confusion occurs in painting. One of the most important representatives of the so-called Flemish baroque, Jacob Jordaens, could not be more different in our modern art-historical thinking from painters belonging to Dutch classicism, such as Salomon de Bray, Jacob van Campen, Govert Flinck, Pieter de Grebber, and Gerard van Honthorst.[61] However, both in the Amsterdam town hall and in Huis ten Bosch,

Jordaens's works were presented side by side with those of the Dutch classicists. In the Orange Hall, the works of all these masters were even supposed to create one immersive whole, making the spectator an eyewitness to Frederik Hendrik's triumphal parade.[62]

In terms of the sublime, we seem to run into even more problems. Baroque is often associated with the overwhelming effect that the sublime entails. It is, therefore, synonymous with extreme feelings that are presented with a sense of great drama and theatricality.[63] Classicism, on the other hand, is equated by modern art and architecture historians with emotional control and mental balance. Franciscus Junius is referred to as the theoretician of classicism, but here we again encounter confusion, where classicism is too easily equated with the use of ancient sources.[64] Moreover, one must not forget that the ultimate example of the ideal artist for Junius is that even more famous representative of the Flemish baroque, Peter Paul Rubens.[65] Junius's introduction of Longinus into art theory cannot, therefore, be simply linked to his alleged classicism.

Thus, from this perspective, it seems best to eliminate this modern use of styles because they can lead to anachronistic ideas about the concept of classicism and result in the opposite of the overwhelming effect implied by the sublime. However, the idea of classicism can also be thought in the context of the seventeenth century. Stripped of its modern interpretations based on style, classicism provides us with insights with which we can conclude this chapter. Classicism in the early modern period consisted of elevating well-defined examples from antiquity to classical values for the present.[66] However, this reference to antiquity did not imply stagnation but rather a stimulus to innovate and face the future with confidence. Classicism was constantly up for debate in the seventeenth century.

The idea of repeatedly defining one's own position in light of models from the past was put on the map in the Low Countries and beyond, thanks to Desiderius Erasmus. In his *Ciceronianus* of 1528, he came down hard on conservative Italian humanists who felt that Cicero's language should be preserved at all costs.[67] Erasmus answered them by saying that Latin had to adapt to the new times in order to avoid becoming a dead language. The ancient model might still be strong, but new times needed to express their own ideas to be able to move the model toward the future. This belief was constantly repeated in the seventeenth-century Republic, where looking back served to move forward.[68] But how can this historical contextualization of classicism now lead us to concluding insights into the seventeenth-century use of magnificence and the political sublime? In her "The Amsterdam Town Hall: The Triumphant Statement of a Successor State," Caroline van Eck has argued that the architecture of Jacob van Campen aimed to identify the Republic as the rightful successor to great rulers of the past, such as Alexander the Great or certain Roman emperors. If van Campen and Post distanced themselves from their predecessors, such as the architect Hendrick de Keyser, with their abundantly decorative style and revert to the architectural style of the Romans, they produced something essentially new. Van Eck therefore sees their architecture, "as the stone embodiment of the trajectory of classical architecture towards a new phase of transformation and appropriation, rather than as the result of an attempt to imitate oriented towards Greece and Rome."[69]

In this chapter, we have seen that the way in which Ovens locates the Amsterdam town hall and Van der Heyden's Huis ten Bosch in a Roman context can be interpreted as more than a mere embellishment of their surroundings. It is the emphasis on the buildings as tangible but awe-inspiring bridges between a classicized past and a bright future. More generally speaking, the magnificence and sublimity of buildings for which primarily the founder, and also the architect, were held responsible, lay precisely in the paradoxical

movement of stepping forward by looking backward and bringing forth unseen things from the past. The aura of wonder that texts and images reinforce with these buildings often play on the complex relationship between past, present, and future, with Rixtel's description of the town hall as a phoenix and Vondel's as a companion of the four elements, and the stars and planets as pregnant examples. But Zoet's insistence on the eternity of Huis ten Bosch should also be understood in this context. The past and the future are impossible to experience directly, but grand architecture and certainly the textual and visual constructions around it form an overwhelming connection between the two. With Marot, we saw how the ephemerality of the ball, as well as the parade of the Amsterdam regiments, is confronted with the constancy of architecture strongly tied to strong rulership. Barlaeus made it clear that the complex of past-present-future is not subject to a particular place, as a building can even make the past of another continent present almost effortlessly to show that great days lie ahead. From Huygens and Mommers, finally, we learn that the future presented by grand architecture does not always need to be earthly but can also be heavenly.

Notes

1 Although much has been written on the town hall, the basic reference book in English is still Katherine Fremantle, *The Baroque Town Hall of Amsterdam* (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker and Gumbert, 1959). The latest book devoted to the building with an extensive bibliography is Stijn Bussels, Caroline van Eck, and Bram Van Oostveldt, eds., *The Amsterdam Town Hall in Words and Images. Constructing Wonders* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021).

2 "Op de aerdtcloot inden vloer van 'tstadhuijs tot Amsterdam./ Die op dit vloeren lett,/ En op dit heerlijck welven,/ Moet seggen by syn selven,/ Voorseker dese Wet/ Bestaet in all'haer leden/ Uijt hoogh vernufte lien;/ Sij leeren ons met reden/ De werelt te vertreden/ En opwaert aen te sien." and "Op den hemelcloot aldaer./ Leert onder het gewemel/ Van 'twoelighe Stadthuijs/ Gedencken aen den Hemel,/ En treedt vrij in 'tgedruijs,/ Als vander aerd' geresen/ Op Sterr en Son en Maen;/ Hier werdt u in bewesen/ Hoe dat het eens naer desen/ Den saligen sal gaen." Constantijn Huygens, *Gedichten*, ed. J.A. Worp, vol. 6 (Groningen: Wolters, 1899), 82–83 (our translation).

3 Otto Belcampius, *Hora novissima, dat is Laetste Uyre ofte een klare verhandeling van de Scheppinge ende ondergang des Werelds* (Amsterdam: Johannes van Ravesteyn, 1663), *3 recto-verso.

4 "In hortulum P. Mauritij δίκυκλον./ Quidni Mauritius geminos calcaverit orbes?/Orbis Alexandro non satis unus erat." Huygens, *Gedichten*, vol. 2, 229. English translation in Boudewijn Bakker, "Rembrandt and the Humanist Ideal of the Universal Painter," in *Rembrandt and his Circle. Insights and Discoveries,* ed. Stephanie Dickie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), n. 119.

5 David Onnekink, "The Body Politic," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age*, eds. Helmer Helmers and Geert Janssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 107–23.

6 Margriet van Eikema Hommes and Elmer Kolfin, *De Oranjezaal in Huis ten Bosch: Een zaal uit loutere liefde* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2013).

7 Jacobus Johannes Terwen and Koen Ottenheym, *Pieter Post (1608–1669): architect* (Zutphen: Walbrug Pers, 1993), 28–29.

8 For a broad discussion on the relation between buildings and the sublime, see Richard A. Etlin, "Architecture and the Sublime," in *The Sublime. From Antiquity to the Present,* ed. Timothy Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 230–73.

9 Stijn Bussels, Caroline van Eck, and Bram Van Oostveldt, "Introduction," in *The Amsterdam Town Hall*, 7–9.

10 Joost van den Vondel, *Inwydinge van 't Stadthuis t' Amsterdam,* eds. Saskia Albrecht, Otto De Ruyter, and Marijke Spies (Coutinho: Muiderberg, 1982).

11 That does not mean that horror was completely out of the picture, the public rituals of executions heavily relied on architecture, such as the magnificent tribunal (*vierschaar*) in the Amsterdam Town Hall that was often praised for expressing magnificence, to fill the audience with fear for the burgomasters's wrath. See Chapter 6 in this book, as well as Stijn Bussels, "Medusa's Terror in the Amsterdam Town Hall. How to Look at Sculptures in the Dutch Golden Age," in *Idols to Museum Pieces. The Nature of Sculpture, its Historiography and Exhibition History, 1640–1880,* ed. Caroline van Eck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 85–102.
12 Cf. Gijs Versteegen and Stijn Bussels, "Introduction," in *Magnificence in the Seventeenth Century. Performing Splendour in Catholic and Protestant Contexts,* eds. Gijs Versteegen, Stijn Bussels, and Walter Melion, Intersections 72 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 1–18.
13 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). See Nafsika Athanassoulis, "A Defence of the Aristotelian Virtue of Magnificence," *Value Inquiry* 50 (2016): 781–95.
14 Guido Guerzoni, "Liberalitas, Magnificentia, Splendor: The Classic Origins of Italian Renaissance Lifestyles," *History of Political Economy* 31 (1999): 345.
15 Cicero, *Pro Murena,* trans. C. Macdonald, Loeb Classical Library 324 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976). See Rhiannon Evans, "Learning to be decadent: Roman identity and the luxuries of others," *Proceedings of the Australasian Society for Classical Studies* 32 (2011): 1–7, accessed April 30, 2023, http://ascs.org.au/news/ascs32/index.html.
16 Tobias Hoffmann, "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Magnanimity," in *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages. Commentaries on Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics*, 1200–1500,* ed. Istvan P. Bejczy (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 101–20; Stephen Jaeger, ed., *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics. Art, Architecture, Literature, Music,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
17 Guerzoni, "Liberalitas, Magnificentia, Splendor," 345.
18 A.D. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's patronage of architecture and the theory of magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 162–70; Peter Howard, *Creating Magnificence in Renaissance Florence* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012); F.W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); James Londow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence. Magnificence and Splendour in 15th-century Italy* (London: Routledge, 2007).
19 E.g., Frederik Knegtel, "Constructing the Sublime. The Discourse on Architecture and Louis XIV's Sublimity in Seventeenth-Century Paris," University of Leiden, Ph.D. thesis, 2019, accessed April 30, 2023, https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/82074; Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn, eds., *Baroque 1620–1800. Style in the Age of Magnificence* (exhibition catalogue, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009).
20 See esp. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For discussions of Skinner's work, see Kari Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); Annabel Brett and James Tully, eds., *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
21 See the chapters of Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt and of Elizabeth den Hartog, in *Magnificence in the Seventeenth Century*.
22 Onnekink, "The Body Politic," 113; and Henk van Nierop, *The nobility of Holland. From knights to regents, 1500–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
23 Adam Bowett, "The Engravings of Daniel Marot," *Furniture History* 43 (2007): 85–86.
24 Rebecca Harris-Warrick, "Ballroom dancing at the court of Louis XIV," *Early Music* 14, no. 1 (1986): 41–50.
25 Murk Daniël Ozinga, *Daniel Marot. De schepper van den Hollandschen Lodewijk XIV-stijl* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1938).
26 *Amsterdamse Kermis vertonende de Burgery in de Wapenen sig Presenteerende aan de Groot. Agtb. Heeren Burgermeesteren./ Foire d'Amsterdam Representens les Bourgois sous les Armes Saulans nos Segnieur les Burgermeesters* (our translation).
27 *The Amsterdam Town Hall*, 124–27.
28 Peter C. Sutton, ed., *Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712)* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2006), 43–45 and cat. no. 9.

29 Michel Jeanneret, *Versailles, ordre et chaos* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).
30 Accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2019/master-paintings-evening-sale/jan-van-der-heyden-a-palatial-garden-with-figures.
31 Jan Zoet, "De Zaale van Oranje. Gebouwt by haare Hooghaid, Amelie van Solms, Princesse Douarire [sic] van Oranje," in Jan Zoet, *d'Uitsteekenste digt-kunstige werken* (Amsterdam: Jan Klaasz. ten Hoorn, 1675), 177-90.
32 Rudolf Cordes, *Jan Zoet, Amsterdammer 1609–1674. Leven en werk van een kleurrijk schrijver* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008), 318, 528.
33 "wy, in dezen niet anders poogen te doen dan de Zon, met onze duistere toortze te lighten." Zoet, "De Zaale van Oranje," 180 (our translation).
34 Zoet, "De Zaale van Oranje," 187.
35 "dit Koningklik Gebouw." Zoet, "De Zaale van Oranje," 188.
36 "En, in de *Burgerzaal,* droogsvoets, door 't waater, gaan./ De gantze weereld, in een ogenblik, door ploegen./ Vlieg dan, met uw gezigt, tot aan het hoog Gewelf,/ Daar zult gy Zon, en Maan, en al de Starren vinden./ Denk dan, in uw gemoed, dat ieder mensch hem zelf,/ Van d'aardtze ydelhaid, aan 't Heemels moet verbinden." Zoet, "De Zaale van Oranje," 183.
37 Vondel, *Inwydinge*, vv. 555–58.
38 Jacobine Huisken, Koen Ottenheym, and Gary Schwartz, eds., *Jacob van Campen. Het klassieke ideaal in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Pers, 1995).
39 Vondel, *Inwydinge*, vv. 561–64.
40 Everard Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel of Goden Kout, Der Amersfoortsche Landdouwen. Bevattende den buytensten Opstal van't Nieuwe Stad-Huys* (Amsterdam: s.n., 1655). For life and work of Meyster, see Dianne Hamer and Wim Meulenkamp, *De dolle jonker: Leven en werk van Everard Meyster (c. 1617–1679)* (Amsterdam: Bekking, 1987).
41 "Een Zon in het duyster,/ Die tot gemeene Luyster/ Steedts voor sijn Stad en staet/ Zoo winst soekct." Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel,* 15 (our translation).
42 "G'lijck Jupijn met sijn Donder,/ Tot schrick niet, maar tot wonder." Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel,* 15.
43 "Geëert by alle Volcken" and "Sijn kunst moet eeuwig flick'ren." Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel,* 15–16.
44 Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel,* 27–29.
45 Colette Nativel, "Quelques apports du *De pictura veterum libri tres* de Franciscus Junius à la théorie de l'art en France," *Revue d'esthétique* 31/32 (1997): 119–31; Colette Nativel, "Le Triomphe de l'idée de la peinture. La *phantasia* chez Junius et Bellori," in *Théorie des arts et creation artistique dans l'Europe du Nord du XVIe au début du XVIII e siècle,* ed. Michele-Caroline Heck (Lille: Université Charles de Gaulle, 2002), 219–31; Colette Nativel, "Rubens, Franciscus Junius, Roger de Piles," in *République des lettres, république des Art. Mélanges en l'honneur de Marc Fumaroli,* eds. Christian Mouchel and Colette Nativel (Genève: Droz, 2008), 561–79; Colette Nativel, "Le *De pictura veterum* (1694) de Franciscus Junius et les académies," *Académie des inscriptions & belles-lettres, Comptes rendus* 1 (2013): 253–74.
46 "Sijn kunst moet eeuwig flick'ren,/ Waer sijnn' Palleysen blick'ren." Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel,* 16.
47 Leonore Stapel, *Perspectieven van de stad. Over bronnen, populariteit en functie van het zeventiende-eeuwse stadsgezicht* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2000), 58–59.
48 Erik Odegard, *Patronage, Patrimonialism, and Governors' Careers in the Dutch Chartered Companies, 1630–1681* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022), esp. chaps. 2, 3, 4.
49 J.J. Terwen, "The Buildings of Johan Maurits van Nassau," in *Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen 1604–1679. A Humanist Prince in Europe and Brazil: Essays on the Occasion of the Tercentenary of his Death,* eds. Ernst van den Boogaart, Hans R. Hoetink, and Peter James Palmer Whitehead (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1979), 54–141; Maria Angélica da Silva and Melissa Mota Alcides, "Collecting and Framing the Wilderness: The Garden of Johan Maurits (1604–79) in North-East Brasil," *Garden History* 30, no. 2 (2002): 153–76.
50 In their "Reexamining Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen and his Role in Slavery, Slave Trade and Slave-smuggling in Dutch Brazil," *Journal of Early American History* 10 (2020): 3–32, Carolina Monteiro and Erik Odegard have clarified that Johan Maurits was deeply involved in the slave trade and slave-smuggling. For the broader context of the Dutch involvement in the sugar industry within the Atlantic World, see Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade,*

and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Michiel van Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic: Print Culture and the Making of Dutch Brazil* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

51 Caspar Barlaeus, *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia et alibi gestarum, sub praefectura illustrissimi comitis J. Mauritii, Nassoviae &c comitis* (Amsterdam: Joannis Blaeu, 1647). For an English translation: *The History of Brazil Under the Governorship of Count Johan Maurits of Nassau,* trans. Blanch T. van Berckel-Ebeling Koning (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011). See also Arthur Weststeijn, "Machiavelli in Dutch Colonial Ideology: Caspar Barlaeus, Johan Maurits of Nassau and the Imperial Prince," *Storia del Pensiero Politico* 2 (2017): 1-20.

52 Barlaeus, *The History of Brazil,* 143.

53 Ibid., 2–3.

54 Ibid., 141.

55 Gaspar Barleaus, *Mercator Sapiens. Oratie gehouden by de inwijding van de Illustere School te Amsterdam op 9 januari 1932,* ed. Sape van der Woude (Amsterdam: Universiteitsbibliotheek, 1967), accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/barl001merc01_01/. For an English translation: *The Wise Merchant,* ed. Anna-Luna Post, trans. Corinna Vermeulen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvhrcz1b.

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57 Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger, "Myths of Early Modernity: Historical and Contemporary Narratives on Brazil and Angola," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 3 (2007): 103–29.

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59 See first note of this chapter. Koen Ottenheym already redefined "classicism" to avoid the strict logic of imitation, among other publications in "Dutch Contributions to the Classicist Tradition in Northern Europe in the Seventeenth Century: Patrons, Architects and Books," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 28, no. 3/4 (2010): 227–42.

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61 Albert Blankert, "Classicisme in de Hollandse historieschilderkunst," in *Hollands classicisme in de zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst,* ed. Albert Blankert (exhibition catalogue, Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1999), 12–33.

62 Van Eikema Hommes and Kolfin, *De Oranjezaal*, 123.

63 John Rupert Martin, *Baroque* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977).

64 Blankert, "Classicisme," 15–16.

65 Colette Nativel, "Rubens, Franciscus Junius, Roger de Piles," in *République des lettres, république des arts. Mélanges en l'honneur de Marc Fumaroli,* eds. Christian Mouchel and Colette Nativel (Geneva: Droz, 2008), 561–79.

66 Stijn Bussels, "Dutch Classicism in Europe," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age,* ed. Helmer Helmers and Geert Janssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 308–30.

67 Betty I. Knott, "Introductory Note," in Desiderius Erasmus, *Dialogus Ciceronianus* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1986), 324; George W. Pigman, "Imitation and the Renaissance Sense of the Past: The Reception of Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9 (1979): 155–77.

68 Bussels, "Dutch Classicism," 308–30.

69 Caroline van Eck, "The Amsterdam Town Hall: The Triumphant Statement of a Successor State," in *The Amsterdam Town Hall,* 64.

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6 The Medusean Gaze
Terror and the Sublime

In the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, the exploration of limits and possibilities in images and plays evoking terror was widespread and innovative. Not only were Dutch humanists frontrunners in interpreting Greco-Roman texts on the subject, but other writers also made themselves heard, sometimes with surprisingly new ideas. Art and theater historians have usually limited themselves to poetics and art theory *stricto sensu* in examining early modern regulation, focusing mainly on the creative process and responsibility of the artist or playwright, but if we look outside this strict context, we see that there was also attention paid to the role of the spectator. Moreover, these texts can often be linked to artistic networks because they were written by artists and playwrights or by writers within their immediate environment. Thus, it is possible to relate images to reflective texts. This chapter deals with the combined emotions of repulsion and attraction, just as we did in Chapter 3 with the fear of God. Here, however, we will look at expressions of dread, not the divine.

To what extent can we connect the seventeenth-century Dutch authors with the well-known definition of terror as the source of the sublime by Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* of 1757? In his famous treatise, Burke differentiates between the beautiful and the sublime.[1] Whereas beauty can give the viewer pleasure, the sublime is driven by terror: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*." In order to have a sublime effect, one has to consider survival but must also be assured that one's life is not really at risk: "… if the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person."[2] In the Dutch discourses, we will also see that a feeling of safety is necessary to experience the sublime. Burke, however, focuses primarily on extreme natural or human forces, such as stormy seas and earthquakes or regicide and revolt, that arouse feelings of sublimity. Moreover, he gives preference to the power of words: "In painting we may represent any fine figure we please; but we never can give it those enlivening touches which it may receive from words."[3] The Dutch, by contrast, took the event represented in the image carefully into consideration in order to explore the possibilities of eliciting terrifying sublimity.[4] Because terror was deliberately evoked, artists and playwrights had to take certain limits into consideration.

During their struggle for independence the Dutch faced extreme violence in confrontations with the Spanish troops. Among other historians, Judith Pollmann has studied how this violence haunted the collective memory throughout the entire seventeenth century

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and afterward.[5] When the Republic was finally consolidated in 1648, new enemies emerged, notably the French and English, neither of whom shied away from bloodshed, which was swiftly publicized in the media.[6] In addition, there were waves of internal struggles caused by harsh confrontations between the Republicans (*staatsgezinden*) and the Orangists. All this upheaval influenced the artistic and intellectual focus on terror, but the connection cannot always be drawn directly. In what follows, therefore, we will focus only partially on visualizations of actual manifestations of violence; even in these historic contexts we can see that arousing terror led to general questions regarding the position of the spectator. By focusing on the experience of watching physical violence, we will build on recent research, including that presented in the book volume *The Hurt(ful) Body*.[7] To complement this existing research, we will look at ways in which atrocities were visualized in the Republic in artistic and theatrical practices. These were intended to shock but must also have had a long-lasting impact.

The overwhelming impact of arousing a sense of terror was addressed in several ancient texts, including *On the Sublime*. Longinus refers often to texts that arouse terror in order to illustrate the mechanisms of the sublime, but he subjects the arousal to certain limits in order to avoid stupefying the reader or listener. To be sublime, terror first has to overwhelm, like lightning, but in the end, it must have a profound and lasting effect. It must trigger the imagination, not deafen it. The same requirement is expressed in diverse seventeenth-century Dutch texts. After being terrified by the visual arts or in the theater, viewers had to learn how to elevate themselves above mere abhorrence. To avoid stupefaction, one had to take into consideration the beauty and grace, the rich material, or the technical sophistication of an artwork or play. Because the audience was aware that this was a representation, not the real thing, it could accept the excitement of feeling shivers down the spine. However, the terrifying image or play was also intended to help the audience to become stronger for later confrontations with real or represented atrocities.

Terror in the Tribunal

In great detail, the Antwerp sculptor Artus Quellinus sculpted the heads of Medusa and one of the Furies, as mirror images for the tribunal (*vierschaar*) in the Amsterdam town hall in 1651–52 (Fig. 6.1, cf. Fig. 0.2). The snakes swarming in their hair have their mouths wide open, ready to attack once they escape the architectural frame. In absence of other victims, they bite each other, thus expressing both aggression and violence. The mouths of both Medusa and the Fury are also wide open, as are their eyes. Their facial expressions accentuate the terrifying appearance of the monstrous heads, as well as the fact that the mythological figures themselves are terrified of what they see. The Furies had a reputation for being so outraged by certain crimes—Orestes's matricide being a famous example—that they caused equally strong fear in criminals by hunting them down. Thus, the screams of the monstrous heads in the tribunal combine the dismay at the terrible crimes of these criminals and the threat they pose to them. It is hard to prove a direct influence, but the correspondence to Caravaggio's renowned shield is striking, showing a similar complexity of causing terror and being terrified (Fig. 6.2). In the case of Medusa, this two-fold expression can be related to her story as well. Athena gave her a frightening, lethal appearance out of jealousy for her original beauty, but Perseus's unexpected attack caused her to become mortally terrified herself.

This dual circumstance of being terrified and causing terror served a specific purpose in the tribunal. The heads of Medusa and the Fury hung directly above the aldermen

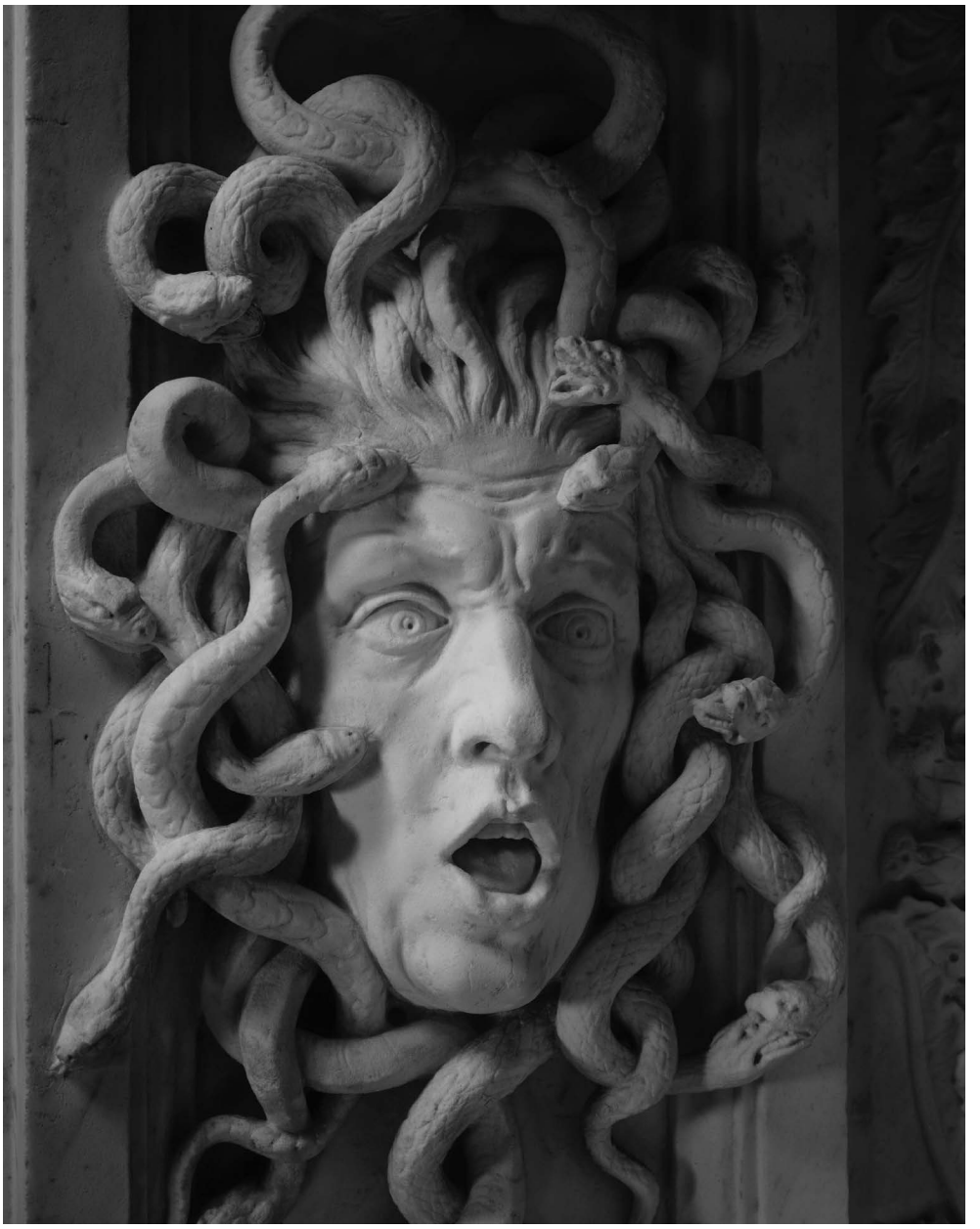

Figure 6.1 Artus Quellinus and workshop, Medusa's Head in the Tribunal of the Town Hall, 1651–52. Marble. © The Royal Palace of Amsterdam. Photograph: E&P Hesmerg.

who acted as judges, but the heads were hardly visible to the general public. Hence, they addressed the judges as if urging them to be shocked by the crimes of the persons brought before them but to combine this dread with determination to do their job as fairly as possible. Even though the Amsterdam tribunal was only used for the ceremonial proclamation of the death penalty—the trial and execution took place elsewhere—it

Figure 6.2 Caravaggio, *The Head of Medusa,* ca. 1597. Oil on convex shield, 55 × 48 cm. Uffizi, Florence.

received special attention from the burgomasters. The room was, after all, the place where these civic rulers could express their ultimate power, the disposition of life and death.[8] From the first plans in the early 1640s onward, every effort was made to place the tribunal in the center of the building, in spite of the expense of constructing a monumental entrance hall. The two monstrous heads formed a relatively small part of the highly decorated room and demanded the special attention of Quellinus, who provided it with impressive reliefs in Carrara marble. The reliefs emphasized the importance of Amsterdam's jurisprudence to reinforce order in society; in other words, visitors saw exemplary justice, such as Solomon's judgment, grandly presented. Many laudatory poems legitimize the huge costs involved in decorating the tribunal by accentuating how the room protects society.[9]

Despite the fact that the heads of Medusa and the Fury do not occupy a prominent place in the tribunal, they receive a great deal of attention in one of the works praising the town hall, namely Everard Meyster's *Celestial Land Play* (*Hemelsch Land-Spel*) of 1655. In Chapter 5, we focused on how Meyster praised the *magnum facere* of Jacob van Campen. Here, we look at the end of the play, which is reserved for the two heads, in order to gain more insight into their intended impact. By being closely related to van Campen, Meyster can give us a privileged view. He does not, however, describe the location of Medusa and the Fury in the tribunal or how they were represented. He explores the impact of the lifelike quality of the heads, starting with the belief that the mythological creatures were actually alive. He therefore weighs two possible reactions to the lifelikeness. On the one hand, he describes a viewer who still manages to control his imagination, and on the other, a second viewer who completely surrenders to the idea that Medusa and the Fury are present.

Meyster has Michelangelo appear before Jupiter and his retinue and reports to the father of the gods everything that he saw in the tribunal. In this conversation, Meyster contrasts the exemplary reaction of Michelangelo, who expresses himself as a

connoisseur, with the erroneous reaction of Jupiter, who panics at the artist's description of the heads of Medusa and the Fury. Michelangelo describes the monstrous nature of the heads to emphasize their terrifying effect, but he also admits to feeling the awe evoked by the masterful sculptures. Michelangelo describes the heads as follows:

> They were sculpted wrought in such an excellent way
> That they looked at us straightforwardly, as if the hellish monsters
> The Fury, and Medusa, wanted to tear us up
> And trample us; we are still shaking,
> When we remember them. I would think they still follow us.[10]

After having heard Michelangelo's description, Jupiter reacts in an extreme way. He loses his self-control and is so frightened that he can no longer think. The god makes himself appear ludicrous by believing that Medusa and the Fury are close by. On top of that, he also begins to believe he hears the giants approaching and is convinced that they have rebelled against him again, leading a host of other monstrous creatures who would violently attempt to overthrow the rule of the Olympians. In this chaos of frantic misunderstandings and sheer panic, Meyser's play ends abruptly. Although another act is announced, the story is not developed any further.

With the character Michelangelo, Meyster introduces a connoisseur who allows himself to believe that he is actually seeing the monsters but also repeatedly notes that the heads are well sculpted. Moreover, Meyster juxtaposes Michelangelo's eyewitness report with Jupiter's reaction to this account. Thus, the sculptures seem to create a chain reaction in which powerful emotions are generated. It does not matter whether the terror is determined by straightforwardly witnessing a work of art, by bringing it back into memory, or by hearing a description. What matters is that the representational nature of the monstrous appearances must not be lost sight of completely in order to put the sculptures to use. These works must instill abhorrence for crimes, but that abhorrence must not lapse into mere panic thanks to the acknowledgment of the artfulness. Hence, terror and awe are complementary.

Furies and Medusa

Let us place Meyster's ideas regarding terror and the sublime in a historical context, not to suggest any direct connections but to study how his ideas were neither eccentric nor isolated. This will clarify the idea that the Furies, as well as Medusa, served as loci for the terrifying impact of images. In her essay "The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa," Caroline van Eck linked the representation of Medusa with the sublime in the Dutch visual arts.[11] We will pursue this notion by looking into different texts and images and by making a connection with theatrical practice and theory, as well as with the depiction of actual historic atrocities.

In *De pictura veterum*, Junius pays special attention to terror as well. In contrast to Meyster's focus on reactions to terror, however, Junius looks at the role played by artists and at the restrictions on them, taking a close look at how Euripides's *Orestes* is used in *On the Sublime* (15.2). Just as Longinus describes how Euripides had to use his imagination to witness Orestes being tormented by the Furies, Junius's ideal artists must be mentally transported: "they doe very often espie the snaky-headed Furies tear their own heads and thrusting a hand-full of hissing serpents into the faces of ill-minded

bloud-thirstie men" (1.4.6). Nevertheless, the artist should not use too much fantasy, or else his audience will become dumbfounded. Junius often uses terrifying subjects as examples of the sublime, but only with its long-lasting effect can art be rightfully defined as sublime: "'That is great indeed,' sayth he [Longinus], 'which doth still returne into our thoughts, which we can hardly or rather not at all put out of our minde, but the memorie of it sticketh close in us and will not be rubbed out'" (3.1.5).[12] But why must the viewer have a long and vivid memory of terrifying subjects? At the start of *De pictura veterum,* Junius states that man is born to imitate because it gives him insights into the world. Man won't "give his mind any rest till he hath in some measure conceived the nature of the floting clouds, the cause of thunder, lightning, and of all those things that above and about the earth doe terrifie the heart" (1.1.1). Terrifying subjects are primary illustrations that art can bring us to a deeper understanding of our surrounding world. Since many frightening events can only briefly be observed, art can give us an enduring view and thus a deeper understanding of these events.

Let us also take a look beyond the Dutch Republic and go back in time to see in how far Meyster's ideas can be related to earlier discourses on terrifying images. Of all the ancient, Italian, and Dutch artists and architects whom Meyster uses as characters in his play, he chooses Michelangelo to deal with the terror that Medusa and the Fury arouse. Can we relate his choice to the emphasis Vasari puts on Michelangelo's *terribilità* in his *Le vite* of 1550–68? First of all, we need to keep in mind that *terribilità* is not a synonym for terrifying art, as in *Le vite* the word did not primarily refer to the creations, but to the character of Michelangelo.[13] The artist could create exceptional works of art, because during the process of creation he shows himself as terrifying, in the sense of the intensity he demonstrates during the act of creation. Unfortunately, we cannot relate Vasari's ideas on *terribilità* to the Dutch Republic in a straightforward manner. Although Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* of 1604 relies strongly on *Le Vite* and certainly in Vasari's biography of Michelangelo, the Haarlem art historian omits the passages in which Vasari deals with *terribilità*. Nevertheless, half a century after van Mander, Vasari's *terribilità* seems to echo in the *Celestial Land Play*; perhaps his friend van Campen had a role in this? At the start of his description of the tribunal, Meyster lets the character of Michelangelo honor the creativity on view in the room by using the expression "sneege geestighêen," which can be literally translated as "sharp ingenuities."[14] By using the adjective "sneeg," Quellinus's creativity is honored for being intense and deeply penetrating, as well as sagacious, enabling us to see parallels with Vasari's praise for Michelangelo.[15]

Meyster's focus on the belief that one can be directly confronted by monstrous creatures in the tribunal can be linked to Vasari's *Le Vite* as well. In his biography of Leonardo, Vasari presents the head of Medusa as a locus of terror. He discusses at length an early work of Leonardo that was intended to terrify, "as once did the head of Medusa."[16] Leonardo did not create a representation of Medusa but tried to evoke similar alarm by closely observing lizards, crickets, serpents, butterflies, grasshoppers, bats, and other creepy animals to combine in the painting of one horrible creature. The young master presented the painting in the dark so that the deception of lifelikeness was optimal, thus even fooling his father. And so Vasari points to the essential role of the artist's observation, as well as that of the viewer, to achieve a straightforward deception by using an optical illusion. Here, we are confronted with pure horror, but not with terrifying sublimity. The Italian art theoretician does not deal with the role of the imagination, which has a central role in Meyster's play, as well as in Junius's theory. For Vasari, the painting of Leonardo is only about an instant shock; what follows is not taken into account.

Rubens and Huygens

If we compare Vasari's discourse on terror with the discourses in Meyster and Junius, we can observe a shift toward terrifying sublimity. Vasari is still closely related to the Greco-Roman anecdotes of deception like, for example, Pliny's story of Parrhasius deceiving his colleague Apelles with the painted illusion of a curtain. In the mid-seventeenth century Dutch Republic, we find these stories still recounted, but we also see that an alternative is under development, an interest in the imagination of terror triggered by images and the accompanying risks. Therefore, let us look at another reaction to an image of Medusa, namely Rubens's depiction of her severed head (Fig. 6.3).[17] Thanks to Huygens's famous description of this painting, we gain more insight into the tensions between the role given to the artist and to the viewer, and between sudden shock, deception, imagination, and memory.

In a dark, rocky foreground that opens out onto a green hilly landscape under gray clouds lies the head of Medusa. Although her death is indicated by a pale complexion and gray lips, the horror of her murder can still be read in her terrified gaze. The blood gushing from her neck shows that the decapitation was a recent event. Her eyes are downcast and yet seem to try capturing the act of beheading. So, once again, the states of being terrifying and terrified alternate. The snakes in her hair powerfully emphasize the moment of death; they are as aggressive as they appear in Quellinus's sculpted head, but in the tribunal they help to strengthen the threatening effect of severe punishment, whereas in Rubens's painting they flee their hostess to find shelter in the darkness in order to continue their despicable terror. By putting the focus on the "crawly creatures," the Antwerp master found connection with the genre of the *sottobosco*, which was being developed by such artists as Roelant Savery, but would not come to full growth until some decades later with Otto Marseus van Schrieck.[18]

Figure 6.3 Peter Paul Rubens and possible Frans Snijders (animals), *Head of Medusa,* ca. 1617–8. Oil on canvas, 68.5 × 118 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

In Huygens's description of Rubens's painting in his autobiography, most of which he wrote in 1631, he focuses not so much on Medusa feeling the terror of being murdered but on the terrifying impact she has on the viewer, along with that of the snakes:

> Of the many [paintings of Rubens], I seem to have one constantly before my eyes (*ob oculos habere*), the one which, among the magnificent furniture (*inter magnificam supellectilem*), my friend Nicolas Sohier once exhibited to viewers in his house in Amsterdam. The head of Medusa is painted entwined with snakes that are born out of her hair. In it is still the grace of a most beautiful woman, and yet repelled by death, and covered with hideous reptiles, combined with such faultless effort that the spectator is suddenly struck by terror (the painting is normally covered) and delighted thanks to the vivid and beautiful abhorrence of the things shown.
>
> As I am expressing such praise for something I would rather see hanging in friends' homes than in my own, I am reminded of the amusing answer given by a Teutonic envoy to Rome [as described in Pliny's *Naturalis historia*]. At a precious painting exhibited in the Roman Forum, a depiction of an elderly shepherd with his staff, someone asked him if he had any idea of its value. With the open-mindedness peculiar to those people, he replied that he did not want such a man in real life even without paying. Away with those art critics who estimate the beauty of things despite their horror. If someone wants to sing to me of death and blood in the same elegant voice as he sings to celebrate, to joke, and to raise laughter, should I not ask him to delight me with the subject he sings about as well? Beautiful things could be rendered in a less elegant way, but that what is horrid never can be rendered in a pleasing way.[19]

Once again memory and imagination are central to the reception of a terrifying image, since with *ob oculos habere* Huygens refers to the Aristotelian mnemonic concept of *phantasia*, as discussed in Chapter 1. Starting with this focus, he explains that the painting had produced a shock when it was suddenly revealed from behind a curtain. That shock was all the greater because it contrasted with the magnificence that Nicolas Sohier usually displayed in his home. Therefore, when in the sublimity of *magnum facere* terror was of minor importance, as we saw in Chapter 5, it overwhelmed Huygens in the painting. Two concepts of the sublime thus come into opposition here. In the second half of his description quoted above, he elaborates on the relationship between beauty and terror. Here it is difficult to fully assess which side he takes. First, he posits that connoisseurs admire the combination of beauty and terror, only to recall with pleasure an anecdote from Pliny's *Naturalis historia* (35.8) in which the value of a painting is equated with what it depicts. Huygens elaborates on this logic to hold Rubens responsible for inciting terror, but he identifies a possible problem rather than explicitly condemn it. Huygens is compromising here: Rubens demonstrates his excellence because his painting succeeds in shocking the viewer, but it would not belong in his own collection because the subject is simply too dreadful for his personal taste.

Rembrandt could have been mindful of the opinion of his protector Huygens when he painted Bellona at the beginning of his career (Fig. 6.4).[20] The painter saves sweetness for the portrayal of the war goddess, whereas he gives all the terror to Medusa. The young goddess looks us in the eyes, confidently and in full control but also somewhat absent-minded and dreamy. Her shield reflects a face that contrasts sharply with her expression, a sideways look and a threatening grimace with the mouth wide open. As part of a

Figure 6.4 Rembrandt, *Bellona*, 1633. Oil on canvas, 127 × 97.5 cm. The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

shield, the monstrous head works in an apotropaic way: she seems to be screaming at an imaginary enemy at the side. In this case, we do not have a combination of beauty and dread in one and the same figure, Medusa; the beauty has been transferred to Bellona, the goddess of war.

The painting with which we want to end our discussion of Medusa used in terrifying images is by an anonymous Netherlandish master (Fig. 6.5). Besides the obvious similarities to Rubens's version, which is more or less contemporary, we have moved deeper into the forest. Here, the impact of the sudden dropping of the head is clearly visible. The viewer is explicitly confronted with Medusa's last breath, which paralyses everything around her. The snakes in her hair meet a certain death, as no escape has been granted to them. Their rigor mortis parallels the paralyzing shock of the creatures crawling on the forest floors. Creatures traditionally chronicled for the revulsion they induce now show their own revulsion.[21] The lizards, the rat, and the frog in the foreground look stunned, while a second frog jumps away toward a skull, but the bats show the greatest shock, especially the one in the top right corner that has its wings spread wide to avoid losing its balance as it opens its mouth in dismay.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this anonymous painting was one of the favorite works in the Uffizi Gallery when it was thought to be a work by Leonardo, a counterpart of the Mona Lisa. Percy Bysshe Shelley was one of the painting's great admirers. In his poem of 1819, only the title "On the Medusa of Leonardo in the Florentine Gallery" reveals the representational status of the artwork.[22] In what follows, Shelley imagines that he plainly sees the monstrous head. Terrifying sublimity—Shelley's "tempestuous loveliness of terror"—is not defined as it is in Edmund Burke by the safety that physical distance offers, but by the beauty of the subject, which does not temper the terror but only increases it. In contrast with Burke's theory, the beauty and the sublime are allied, for the paralyzing effect of Medusa does not rely primarily on her monstrosity but on her beauty. Shelley writes:

Figure 6.5 Anonymous, *Medusa's Head*, first half of the 17th century. Oil on panel, 49 × 74 cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

"Yet it is less the horror than the grace/Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone." Just as in Huygens's response to Rubens's painting, the English poet explores the impact of beauty and terror manifest in one and the same figure. By contrast, where Huygens plays with the restriction to separate one from the other, Shelley surrenders to the breathtaking combination.

To Stage or Not to Stage

In the Dutch Republic discourses about depictions of Medusa start with recollections of being suddenly overwhelmed by her image. The terrifying sublime is thus defined as an instant shock, but it is also connected to imagination and memory. A similar connection is dominant when we leave Medusa and look at discourses on terror in the theater. The general consensus was that terror could only be beneficial if theatergoers could eventually reflect on it. In order to explain this prerequisite, diverse writers—from the humanist Gerardus Vossius, by way of the horror playwright Jan Vos, to the advocate of French classicist rules Andries Pels[23]—took the executions in Roman amphitheaters as their starting point. They learned from the Roman poet Martial how criminals in Roman antiquity were dressed up as mythological figures and put to death.[24] Dutch writers all expressed their annoyance that the real but staged executions disrupted the positive effect of both the judicial process and the theater.[25]

This consensus disappeared when it came to actual restrictions in the theater. The obvious solution to prevent the dumbfounding effect was to exclude explicit performances of horror and replace them with vivid descriptions. In this way, the prohibition in Horace's *Ars poetica* was complied with: "Yet you will not bring upon the stage what should be performed behind the scenes, and you will keep much from our eyes which an actor's ready tongue will narrate anon in our presence" (182–86).[26] However, this rule was not always followed. Jan Vos is the best-known opponent, and he even seems to have made it his life's work to contradict Horace's prescript. We can start by looking at the title page of the 1656 edition of his extremely successful *Aran and Titus* of 1641. The page does not show an actual scene of the play, but it brings the terrifying highlights of the theater performance together (Fig. 6.6).[27] The dishes in the foreground refer to the infamous meal of the villainous queen of Goths Thamera, who is unknowingly eating her sons. The daughter of the Roman general Titus, Rozelyna, who has been dishonored and robbed of tongue and hands by Thamera's sons, has entered with their heads on a platter. After this ultimate revenge, Rozelyna received the mercy blow from her father, and now her corpse is lying in the foreground. When Thamera cries for help, her lover Aran rushes in, but he falls into a trap, gets chained by his foot, and will soon die in a pool of fire. Titus, who already owes the loss of his right hand to Thamera and Aran, stabs the queen to death. At the right, we see Emperor Saturnius, whose love for Thamera ruined him, being killed by Titus's son with the help of the boy's uncle.

In the foreword to *Medea* of 1667, his second play, Vos explicitly cites Horace's prohibition. Like Horace, Vos does not focus on the risk of dumbfounding the audience, but he puts his attention to the credibility of the staged horror.[28] This demand for *vraisemblance*, or lifelikeness, will form a central building block in the stage rules of French classicism, but Vos counters its legitimacy. Whereas the Roman spectators of Horace's time were familiar with cruel gladiatorial battles, according to Vos, the Dutch theatergoers never had to witness this and were therefore more likely to go along with the fiction of a

Figure 6.6 Title page of the fifth edition of Jan Vos's *Aran and Titus*. Amsterdam: Lescaille, 1656. University Library, Leiden.

staged murder. Leading humanists affirm his point of view; Caspar Barlaeus, for example, praises Vos's theater as follows:

> Behold here art at its highest, the Theater at its peak,
> Tragedy at its cruelest, swollen with Revenge.
> Never in Greece did one see so much bloodshed or smoke …
> I stand as if intoxicated and overwhelmed.
> The Theater is elevated, striding on higher ground.[29]

For the Amsterdam humanist, there is more going on than just finding entertainment in Vos's thrilling horror, as he explicitly links the staged cruelties to the elevation of the theater, but how far can we relate this elevation to terrifying sublimity? To better understand the idea of elevation in this context, let us take a look at Seneca's thoughts on the arousal of terror in the theater. Erik Gunderson's *The Sublime Seneca* places Seneca's cruel plays in the Stoic project of controlling the emotions with the sublimation of our sufferings as the ultimate goal: "… the path from the here and now to the sublime beyond entails a radical encounter with death. This encounter begins by staring into the dead eyes of the corpse in front of us, but it ends by oneself insensibly seeing the spectacle of life."[30] So, in the end, we must have learned to see life through a theatrical frame, as if all the dread that confronts us is merely a spectacular performance. In his treatise *On the Happy Life (De vita beata)*, Seneca writes that man thus becomes indifferent to fortune: "Then will be born the one inestimable blessing, the peace and exaltation of a mind now safely anchored [*quies mentis in tuto conlocatae et sublimitas*]" (4.5).[31] Seneca's *sublimis* goes further than simply looking at the world as if it were a theater. With his cruel plays the

ancient playwright wants to firmly establish our control over our own emotions toward a permanent mental peace. Dread brought onto the stage first brings us a shock (*ictus*), but eventually it must elevate us, because the theatrical characteristic of dread provides us with the chance to profoundly probe our relationship to the experience of terror. Gunderson writes: "It is the representation, not the thing itself that provokes the sense of the sublime. Thus, the experience of the sublime provokes a species of introspection that yields a sense of awe and mystery."[32]

Vos did not only model his plays to the Senecan examples, but he also followed Seneca in the belief that theater can have a profound and long-lasting impact on the audience. But where the Roman aims at an audience of readers, the Dutch playwright stages the cruelties in an attempt to put in motion the process of *ictus* leading to *sublimis*. The shocking scenes of violence are interspersed with monologues in which his characters reflect their outrage. In doing so, Vos encourages his audience to dwell on the confrontation with violence and eventually develop their control over feelings of terror. For example, in *Aran and Titus*, Titus reacts just after he and the theater audience straightforwardly face the horrific consequences of the brutal assault on his daughter:

> If Apelles's hand, with a bloody brush,
> Had painted this knave's scene, who would
> Behold, whom the heart would not at once burst,
> Before a drop of liquid pressed itself from his eyes?[33]

Vos steps into the *paragone* between the theater and painting, expressing the opinion that visual representations of violence can be too strong and thus deadly for the viewers. The medical explanation for such a reaction was that when one is suddenly confronted with calamities, bodily fluids can get out of balance.[34] Hence, the body could suffer a heart attack. But this thought had not kept Vos from performing the mutilation of Titus's daughter on stage. Unlike painting, the theater, he believed, can go beyond the mortal shock and preserve a safe mental distance. It is precisely this reflection that Titus as protagonist offers in a monologue that saves the theatergoers from physical harm by offering an opportunity to reflect after being overwhelmed by terror.

Aristotle's Plot

Whereas Vos followed Seneca in his efforts to achieve *sublimis* thanks to an initial *ictus*, or shock, other Dutch playwrights explored Aristotle's poetics. There, shock (*ekplexis*) does not come from a sudden revelation of horror, because it must be woven into the plot. Everything starts with wonder (*thaumaston*) elicited by the extraordinary but credible confluence of circumstances, such as Oedipus unconsciously killing his father and becoming his mother's lover. This wonder generates the emotions of fear (*phobos*) that fate has something similarly unpredictable for us in store, and offers pity (*eleos*) for the misfortunes of the protagonist. However, eventually fear and pity lead to a catharsis of these emotions because the theater enables the theatergoers to deal with their own fears. Thus, for Aristotle emotions are the engine and not an element to be transcended, as it would become for Seneca centuries later. Yet the early modern reception of the Aristotelian catharsis and Senecan *sublimis* did not see them as miles apart, since both concepts rely on a shock effect by arousing terror within the shelter that the theater offers.

The concept of catharsis was vague in Aristotle's poetics. The question remained how feeling fear and pity could cure the theatergoers of these feelings. From the mid-sixteenth century on, Italian humanists like Francesco Robortello had closely linked Aristotle's catharsis to a conscious and rational use of the tragedy's content. In his *De constitutione tragoediae* of 1611, however, Daniel Heinsius insists on a therapeutic process based on a psychological automatism, a mental process that is not consciously begun by the theatergoer.[35] To this end, he combined catharsis with the harmony theory of the Pythagoreans, who believed that music can expel the audience's emotional unrest by creating harmony. Just like music, theatrical performances can start a process that creates an emotional balance in our minds. By repeatedly going to the theater and being shocked, we become increasingly able to deal with emotional challenges, and we can elevate ourselves above the shock. Dutch authors, with Joost van den Vondel as prominent example, took up Aristotelian concepts under Heinsius's influence.[36] In his preface to *Lucifer,* where he refers to the Biblical figure of Saul, he writes:

> The aim and purpose of proper tragedy is to encourage people to feel fear and pity … yes, it happens at times that high-flying geniuses who cannot be bent or changed by ordinary means are touched by the cleverness and the elevated style of the theater and are drawn beyond their expectations. Just as the noble sound of the string of a lute answers directly in the same tune, the sound of the same origin and nature produced by another lute strummed by a witty hand which while playing can chase away the mania from a disturbed and stubborn Saul.[37]
>
> (179–91)

The belief in a catharsis of the feelings of fear and pity had already influenced Vondel's stage practice before *Lucifer*.[38] His tragedy *Brothers* of 1641, inspired by the story of the second Book of Samuel dealing with the execution of Saul's relatives, is an early example.[39] The playwright shocked the audience, not by blunt cruelties as in his previous dramas but by bringing in a surprising turn at a crucial moment in the plot. When the audience expected to see the executions, the action was stopped to reveal a *tableau vivant*. Frozen and silent actors (or mannequins) were staged hanging at the gallows. So the theatergoers had to come to an understanding that the story was suddenly taken an important further step. The most important event of the story was eliminated because the execution of the sons and grandsons of Saul had already taken place. Whereas the performance of cruelties was omitted, the terrifying result of these cruelties was emphasized all the more. A monologue, recited when the *tableau vivant* was visible, urged the theatergoers to respond emotionally. The monologue is spoken by one of the ladies-in-waiting of old Rispe, the widow of Saul and the mother and grandmother of the men executed:

> Raise, raise, with bleak screaming.
> Beholders mourn for Saul's widow,
> Who sees here all the royal family,
> Most dreadfully executed.
> Imagine how the heart of a mother,
> Is staggered in the midst of all distress
> That she suffers for her offspring.
> No knife, no sting cuts sharper
> Than this that pierces her heart.

The sun sets, night is falling.
It falls with drips and dew.
But this woman cannot shed a tear.
The mother suffers the hardest punishment.
Well, can you not give her your tears?[40]

In other words, Vondel tries to emotionally overwhelm the audience without diminishing the cathartic effect of the plot. By playing with chronology and adding a monologue, Vondel elicits wonder in the theatergoer that results in pity for Rispe and fear that fate will strike us in a similar way. This catharsis not only supports the theatergoers but is also presented as a support for one of the characters. The salutary resonance of putting emotions in motion thus moves in two directions.

Lynching Party

Not only in representations of mythological, biblical, and Greco-Roman stories, but also in those of recent dreadful events, we find reflections on terrifying sublimity. Dutch artists visualized terror from the immediate past to overwhelm their audience, often in the service of a concrete political agenda, but they also expressed more general ideas on the overwhelming impact of terror and put limits on it in order to serve memory. To make this clear, let us shift our attention to the so-called Disaster Year of 1672, when the brothers Johan and Cornelis de Witt fell prey to an angry mob in The Hague incited by fervent Orangists who blamed them for dramatic defeats by the French.[41] Previous studies have pointed at the fervor with which the cruel acts were represented in pamphlets, plays, and prints. A team of interdisciplinary scholars—Frans-Willem Korsten, Cornelis van der Haven, Inger Leemans, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck et al.—have proposed the term "imagineering" to point at a crucial shift in the representation of violence in the Dutch Republic, with the images of the murder of the de Witts providing a prominent case study: "This shift took place in the context of a rapidly developing consumer market with a thriving industry producing printed images. In that industry, violence became less and less a matter of the public visualization of sovereign powers. It developed instead into something that sells."[42]

This imagineering entailed the speedy creation and sale of images depicting stirring events, such as the infamous lynching. Artists often remained anonymous but looked intently at each other's work. So, it is that we find several variations on the representation of one specific moment of the murder of the brothers, when peace descended in the evening and all that remained was the terrible sight of the corpses, which the murderous masses had hung from the gallows.[43] What is striking in the various representations of this moment is that there are one or more spectators present. In our discussion of the depictions of sea storms in Chapter 4, we saw that Dutch artists depicted spectators in order to use them as ways of displaying possible reactions to extreme forces. Here, we can explore a comparison that will allow us, by the end of this chapter, to realize that it was necessary in the Republic for the viewer to maintain a distance from all the horror in order to remember the cruelties and to draw lessons from it, but that it is a challenge to achieve this distance.

A famous example of this is in a painting now in the Rijksmuseum (Fig. 6.7).[44] Frans Grijzenhout pointed to its "crude realism," with the detailed depiction of the mutilated bodies as a climax.[45] This makes the work an exception in Dutch art history but not in a broader visual culture. An inscription on the back—from the time the work was made—accentuates that it was painted by an eyewitness: "These are the corpses of Jan and

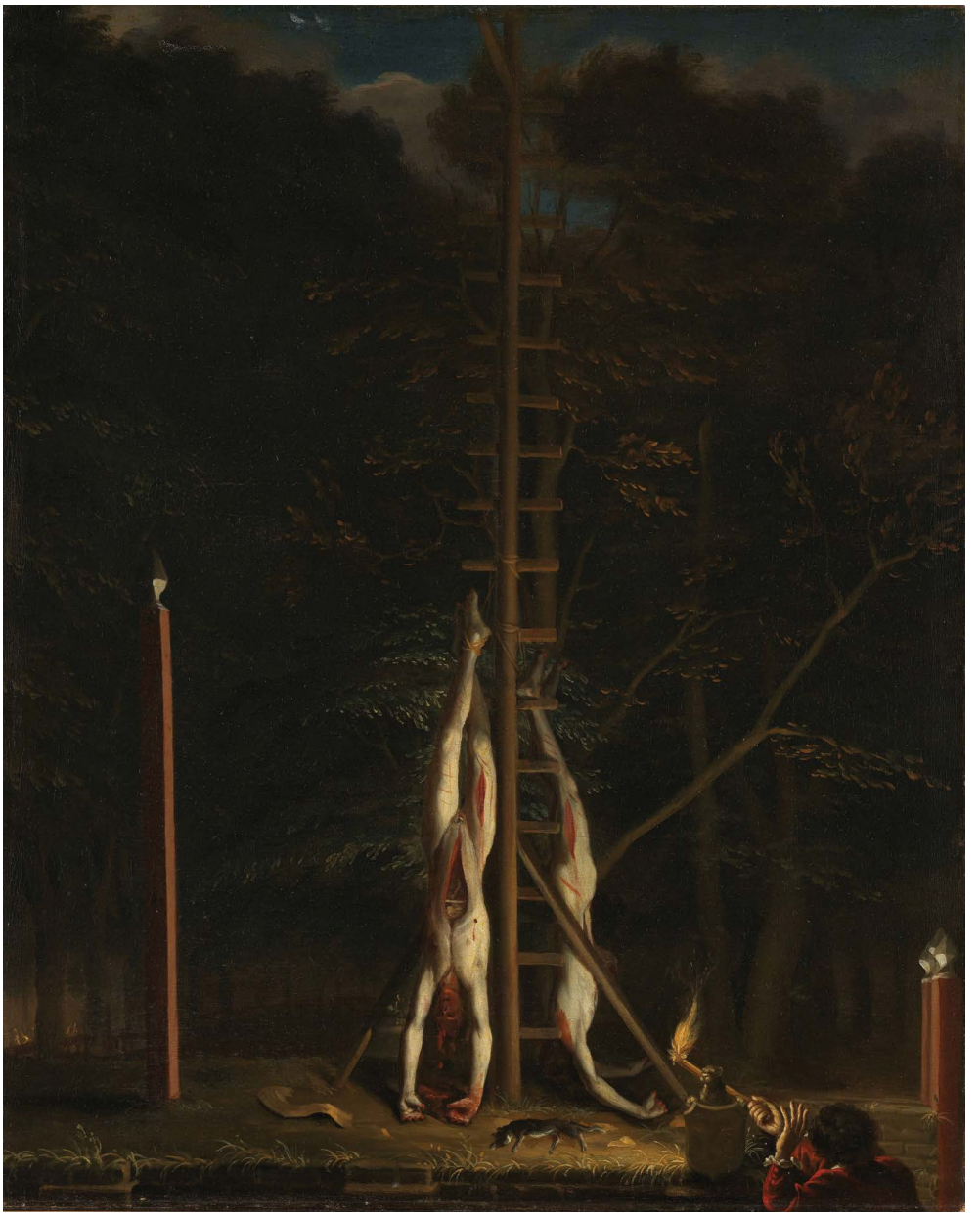

Figure 6.7 Anonymous, probably after Jan de Baen, *The Corpses of the Brothers de Witt*, after 1672. Oil on canvas, 69.5 × 56 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Cornelis de Witt painted after life by a prominent painter" and repeats "This is an original painting made after life."[46] Yet the artist has also exploited strategies that achieve a mental distance, as theatricality is put to use as well.[47] The lighting that illuminates the dreadful scene up from the ground brings the theater to mind. The scaffold looks like a stage and the darkness of the trees its backdrop. Moreover, a spectator stands in the parterre holding

Figure 6.8 Detail of Willem Paets, *The Corpses of the Brothers de Witt,* after 1672. Paper, 305 × 180 mm. Regional Archive, Dordrecht.

a torch and trying to keep it as close to the corpses as possible, although he shields his field of vision with the other hand. This ambivalent gesture seems to strengthen the combination of realism and theatricality, as it accentuates straightforwardness but also implies distancing. To further elucidate this point, let us look at drawings and prints that present variations by showing spectators and expressing their mixed emotions. It is hard to say that all these images try to elicit the terrifying sublime, but they thematize dealing with terror that should overwhelm but not completely dumbfound the viewer.

Several images correspond with the painting, such as the one by the Rotterdam draftsman Willem Paets that shows a spectator holding a torch. Unlike the painting, however, this spectator does not shield his view with his other hand but uses the arm holding the torch (Fig. 6.8). In his turn, the German migrant Cornelis Huyberts shows in a print a spectator who expresses his disgust at the scene. With his eyes wide open, his lips hanging down, and his tense facial muscles, he serves as a model of how to express being completely overwhelmed by dread (Fig. 6.9). The caption reads:

> Disastrous assembly, although you rage and rave,
> Time looks for revenge for the bloodshed,
> And once will give the successor that salvation, that victory,
> As out of these remains a Phoenix will be born again.

Here, the atrocities are once again linked to memory. The spectator witnessing is devoid of any hope, although after reading the text we learn that eventually he will be able to cope with the hard facts and take revenge on the troublemakers. By visualizing the terror, the print presents itself as a means to remember this injustice in order to go into action in due course.

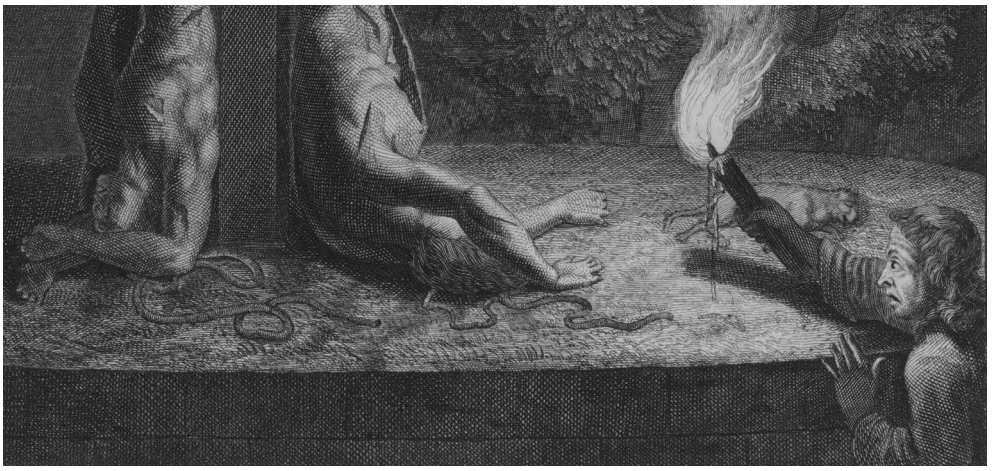

Figure 6.9 Detail of Cornelis Huyberts, *The Corpses of the Brothers de Witt*, after 1672. Etching and engraving, 310 × 255 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In a print attributed to the Amsterdam artist Roelant Roghman, we see two witnesses. One holds a torch in the right hand and watches the dreadful scene, whereas the other has turned his back to the scene and expresses shock (Fig. 6.10). The latter, however, cannot withstand the temptation to turn his head toward the dead bodies. Despite the resemblance to the previous images, this print is part of the Orangist discourse defending the murders. The poem below the image addresses viewers and urges them to look at the brothers who "wanted to kill the Prince [of Orange]" and had "cunningly ratified the Perpetual Edict" abolishing the office of stadholder in Holland in 1667. According to

Figure 6.10 Detail of Roelant Roghman (attr.), *The Corpses of the Brothers de Witt*, after 1672. Etching and engraving, 355 × 245 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

the poem, it is only because of the long and powerful sorrow felt by the people that the murder took place. Just as in the other pictures, however, the viewer of the image and the reader of the poem are urged to keep some distance from all horror in order to be able to draw conclusions from it.

With these contrasts and variations in the depictions of physical responses to the corpses of the de Witt brothers—but actually also to sea storms discussed in Chapter 4—we arrive again at Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*. In "Somaesthetics and Burke's Sublime," Richard Shusterman made it clear how Burke emphasized the bodily dimensions of aesthetic experience, thus providing us with an alternative to the later dogma of aesthetic disinterestedness put forth by Kant and Schopenhauer, among others.[48] Specifically, Burke pointed out how the body is of primordial importance in the sublime experience. The preservation of the body is central to the contact with overwhelming horror and violence, albeit that immediate risks must be absent in order to elicit delightful horror. In such positions are the spectators of the corpses and sea storms depicted in the foreground of many images. They use an explicit body language (*sermo corporis*) that stems from the textbooks of rhetoric that link well-defined gestures to specific meanings. These bodies, however, do not speak an unambiguous language, but they demonstrate both attraction and repulsion. A century before Burke, therefore, Dutch artists were already pointing out the importance of the bodily experience of terrifying sublimity. Shusterman writes: "Somaesthetics, as I conceive it, aims to refine and extend Burke's insight that bodily factors can help explain our aesthetic reactions, but it further urges that improved somatic understanding and performance can also provide valuable means for enhancing our aesthetic response, not just explaining it."[49] Enhancing our experience of witnessing atrocities might also have been the intention of the Dutch artists who paid attention to bodily responses evoked by atrocities by depicting spectators.

By way of conclusion, let us look at the significance of eyewitnessing in raising terrifying sublimity. Artists who depicted dreadful scenes could put forward eyewitnesses prominently, as in the anonymous painting of the bodies of the de Witts (Fig. 6.7). But even in the fiction that Meyster generates, an artist none other than Michelangelo can have value as an eyewitness reporting on the terror he saw in the Amsterdam tribunal. In this reporting, however, memory and imagination are paramount, complemented by the element of bodily involvement. Dutch thinking about terrifying sublimity is rarely concerned with the work of art or theatrical performance on its own but relies on what it elicits. Here, body and mind were intimately involved with each other. Indeed, the mental images created through observation or imagination have a direct effect on our bodies. Rebalancing the bodily state after witnessing cruelty, either directly or through representation, is strictly necessary to avoid pain. It is a matter of survival to reflect on the shock after one has been shocked. The sublime is thus to be found in both attraction and repulsion but more specifically in its being carried away by cruelties to eventually rise above them and be armed against future terror. The sublime has become cathartic here.

Notes

1 Terrence Des Pres, "Terror and the Sublime," *Human Rights Quarterly* 2, no. 5 (1983): 135–46; Rodolphe Gasché, "… And the Beautiful? Revisiting Edmund Burk's 'Double Aesthetics'," in *The Sublime. From Antiquity to the Present,* ed. Timothy M. Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 24–36; Kari Elise Lokke, "The Role of Sublimity in the Development of Modernist Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 4, no. 40 (1982): 421–29.

2 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 39, italics by Burke.
3 Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry,* 197.
4 Aris Sarafianos, "'Wounding Realities and Painful Excitements': Real Sympathy, the Imitation of Suffering and the Visual Arts in Burke's Sublime," in *The Hurt(ful) Body: Performing and Beholding Pain,* eds. Tomas Macsotay, Cornelis van der Haven, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 170–201.
5 For an introduction, see Erika Kuijpers and Judith Pollmann, "Why remember terror? Memories of violence in the Dutch Revolt," in *Ireland 1641: Contexts and Reactions,* eds. Jane Ohlmeyer and Micheal Ó Siochrú (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 176–96. Cf. Michel van Duijnen, "Printed images of violence in the Dutch Republic, 1650–1700," Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Ph.D. thesis, 2019, chap. 3, accessed April 30, 2023, https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/a-violent-imagination-printed-images-of-violence-in-the-dutch-rep.
6 Frans-Willem Korsten et al., "Imagineering, or what Images do to People: Violence and the Spectacular in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic," *Cultural History* 10, no. 1 (2021): 1–30.
7 Tomas Macsotay, Cornelis van der Haven, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck, "Introduction," in *The Hurt(ful) Body: Performing and Beholding Pain,* eds. Tomas Macsotay, Cornelis van der Haven, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 1–21.
8 Pieter Vlaardingerbroek, *Het stadhuis van Amsterdam. De bouw van het stadhuis, de verbouwing tot Koninklijk Paleis en de restauratie* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2006), 30–32, 105. Cf. his "Dutch Town Halls and the Setting of the *Vierschaar*," in *Public Buildings in Early Modern Europe,* eds. Koen Ottenheym, Krista De Jonge, and Monique Chatenet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 105–18.
9 E.g., Joost van den Vondel, *Inwydinge van 't Stadthuis t' Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Fontein, 1655), vv. 965–74, 1063–92; Jan Vos, "Inwyding van het Stadthuis t'Amsterdam," in Jan Vos, *Alle de gedichten* (Amsterdam: Lescaille, 1662), 341–42.
10 "[…] zoo warens' uytgewrocht,/ Zoo zagens' op ons aen, of self het helsch gedrogh t/ Erynnis, en Medus', ons levend' hadden willen/ Verscheuren en vertreen; wy staen schier noch en treinen,/ Als wy'r gedenken aen, my dunkt, sy volgen noch." Everard Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel of Goden Kout, Der Amersfoortsche Landdouwen. Bevattende den buytensten Opstal van't Nieuwe Stad-Huys* (Amsterdam: s.n., 1655), 78 (our translation).
11 Caroline van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, Ekplexis, and the Sublime," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, https://jhna.org/articles/petrifying-gaze-medusa-ambivalence-explexis-sublime/.
12 This definition of sublime images will be repeated by later art theoreticians, such as Rembrandt's pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten who states in his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (Rotterdam: François van Hoogstraten, 1678), 179: "[T]hat is truly great. . . which appears time and again as if fresh before our eyes; which is difficult, or rather, impossible for us to put out of our mind; whose memory appears to be continuously, and apparently indelibly, impressed on our hearts." Translation in van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze," 3.
13 "*Terribilità* referred not so much to the expressive character of the images Michelangelo made–what so impresses us now–as to the character of the artist." David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 234.
14 Meyster, *Hemelsch Land-Spel,* 78.
15 We follow the online historical dictionary *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal,* lemma "snedig," accessed April 30, 2023, https://gtb.ivdnt.org/iWDB/search?actie=article&wdb=WNT&id=M064679&lemmodern=snedig&domein=0&conc=true.
16 Giorgio Vasari, *Stories of the Italian Artists,* trans. E.L. Seeley (New York: Duffield & Co, 1913), 147.
17 An exception is Van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze," 1 and 15. For a contextualization with the work of Rubens, see Ulrich Heinen, "Huygens, Rubens and Medusa. Relfecting the Passions in Painting, With Some Considerations of Neuroscience in Art History," in "The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands," eds. Stephanie Dickey and Herman Roodenburg, annual issue of *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 60 (2010): 151–76; Hans Vlieghe, "Constantijn Huygens en de Vlaamse schilderkunst van zijn tijd," *De zeventiende eeuw* 3 (1987): 190–207;

Barbara Welzel, "Barocke Leidenschaften in frühneuzeitlichen Sammlungen," in *Peter Paul Rubens. Barocke Leidenschaften,* eds. Nils Büttner and Ulrich Heinen (München: Hirmer Verlag, 2004), 69–82. See also Jürgen Pieters, "De blik van Medusa," in Jürgen Pieters, *Tranen van de herinnering: Het gesprek met de doden* (Groningen: Historische uitgeverij, 2005), 132–64.

18 For a recent essay on the crawly creatures in the *sottobosci*, see Erma Hermens, "Crawly Creatures, Forest Floors and Butterfly Wings," in *Crawly Creatures. Little Animals in Art and Science,* eds. Jan de Hond, Eric Jorink, and Hans Mulder (exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2022), 139–50. Cf. Gero Seelig, ed., *Medusa's Menagerie: Otto Marseus Van Schrieck and the Scholars* (exhibition catalogue, Schwerin: Staatliches Museum, 2017).

19 "De multis unam videor mihi perpetuo ob oculos habere, quam inter magnificam supellectilem vir amicus Nicolaus Sohierus Amstelodami spectandam aliquando exhibuit; Medusae obsciccum caput est, anguibus, qui de capillitio nascuntur, implicatum. In eo pulcherrimae mulieris gratiosum adhuc, et recneti morte tamen foedissimorumque reptilium involucro hurridum aspectum, tam ineffabili industriâ miscuit, ut subito terrore perculsum spectatorem (velari nempe tabella solet) ipsâ tamen rei diritate quod viuidâ venustâque delectet. Sed haec domi amicorum potius quam meae laudanti succurrit lepidum Teutonorum legati verbuma, qui, cum in foro Romano magni scilicet pretii tabula exhiberetur, pastorem senem referens cum baculo, interrogatus, quanti eum existimaret, respondit (sane pro candore gentis), sibi donari nolle talem vivum verumque. Ite pulchrarum rerum ex horrore aestimatores, si quis eâdem mihi vocis elegantiâ caedes et sanguinem praecinere amet, quâ festivitates, locus risusque valeat, illum ego ne simul ac dictione, ut me oblectet, rogem. Res pulchras aliquis minus eleganter, foedas nemo iucunde expresserit" (our translation). Manuscript in the Library of the Royal Academy, The Hague, Manuscripts of Huygens, n. XLVIII. See A. Worp, "Constantijn Huygens over de schilders van zijn tijd," *Oud Holland* 9 (1891): 119–20.

20 Walter Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), cat. no. 147, 596–604.

21 Jan de Hond, "Outcasts of Creation. Medieval Associations with the Devil, Sin and Death," in *Crawly Creatures*, 57–68.

22 Hal Foster, "Medusa and the Real," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 44 (2003): 181–90; Carol Jacobs, "On Looking at Shelley's Medusa," *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985): 163–79.

23 Gerardus Joannes Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones* (Amsterdam: Elzevier, 1647), 2.13.28; Jan Vos's preface to Medea, "Aan de beminnaars van d'oude en nieuwe tooneelspeelen," in Jan Vos, *Alle de gedichten* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lescaille, 1662), c3 recto; Andries Pels, *Gebruik en misbruik des tooneels* (Amsterdam: Albert Magnus, 1681), 7.

24 Stijn Bussels, *The Animated Image: Roman Theory on Naturalism, Vividness and Divine Power* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 130–35.

25 For a broader reflection on this, see Anna Seymour, "The Sublime in the everyday. How Theatre Crafts Art Out of the Ordinary," in *The Sublime in Everyday Life. Psychoanalytic and Aesthetic Perspectives,* eds. Anastasios Gaitanidis and Polona Curk (London: Routledge, 2020), 36–50.

26 Horace, *Ars poetica,* trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 464–67. This restriction is among other texts repeated in the second book of Gerardus Vossius's *Poeticae institutiones* of 1647 and in Andries Pels's *Use and abuse of the Theater* of 1681.

27 Wim Hummelen, *Inrichting en gebruik van het toneel in de Amsterdams Schouwburg van 1637* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers, 1967), 31.

28 Cf. Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones,* 2.13.25.

29 "Siet hier de kunst op 't hoogst, de Schouburgh op zijn top,/ Het Treurspel op zijn wreedst, de wraeklust vol van krop./ Noyt sachmen by de Griek meer bloedgespat noch rooks. (…)/ Ik stae gelijk bedwelmt en overstolpt van geest./ De Schouburg wort verzet, en schoeyt op hooger leest." Vos, *Alle de gedichten,* A4 verso (our translation).

30 Erik Gunderson, *The Sublime Seneca. Ethics, literature, metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 103. Cf. Antje Wessels, *Ästhetisierung und ästhetische Erfarung von Gewalt. Eine Untersuchung zu Senecas Tragödien* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2015) where the author describes how Seneca pointed his audience at the representational aspect of the cruelties in his plays, e.g., he had his characters reflect in monologues on the negative effects of emotions that deprive humans of the capacity to think and thus underlie all violence.

31 Seneca, *Moral Essays,* trans. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library 254 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 111.
32 Erik Gunderson, *The Sublime Seneca. Ethics, literature, metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 112.
33 "Indien Apelles handt, met een bebloedt penseel,/ Dit schelmstuk had gemaalt, wie zou het tafereel/ Beschouwen, die het hart niet t'enemaal zou barste,/ Eer zich een droppel nats uit zijnen oogen parste?" Vos, *Alle de gedichten,* 50 (our translation).
34 For the influence of the concept of the four humors in the theater of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, see Jan Konst, *Woedende wraakghierigheidt en vruchtelooze weeklachten* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), esp. the introduction.
35 Jan Hendrik Meter, *The Literary Theories of Daniel Heinsius: A Study of the Development and Background of his Views on Literary Theory and Criticism During the Period from 1602 to 1612* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 535.
36 For the European reception of Heinsius, see Anne Duprat, "Introduction," in Daniel Heinsius, *De constitutione tragoediae,* ed., trans., and notes Anne Duprat (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2001), 7–73, and Meter, *The Literary Theories.*
37 "Het wit en ooghmerck der wettige Treurspelen is de menschen te vermorwen door schrick, en medoogen. (…) ja het gebeurt by wylen dat overvliegende vernuften, by geene gemeine middelen te buigen, noch te verzetten, door spitsvondigheden en hooghdravenden tooneelstyl geraeckt, en, buiten hun eigen vermoeden, getrocken worden: gelyck een edele luitsnaer geluit geeft, en antwoort, zoo dra heur weêrgade, van de zelve nature en aert, en op eenen gelycken toon, en andere luit gespannen, getokkelt wort van een geestige hant, die, al speelende, den tuimelgeest uit eenen bezeten en verstockten Saul dryven kan." Joost van den Vondel, *De werken van Vondel. Deel vijf,* ed. Bernard Molkenboer (Amsterdam: De Maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur, 1931), 601 (our translation). *Lucifer* is also available online at Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (DBNL), accessed April 30, 2023, http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001luci01_01.
38 Painters can be related to a similar experiment in finding alternatives to the Senecan way of dealing with violence as well. On the influence of Aristotle's poetics via Vondel on the late Rembrandt, Eric Jan Sluijter writes: "I do not maintain that Rembrandt consciously followed Vondel's theory of drama and his notions of *peripeteia* and *agnitio,* but I do think that Rembrandt's views about the rendering of the passions went through an analogous process of change. They evolved from an outspoken Senecan rhetorical mode of rendering the passions to a mode in which the viewer can empathize with the inner thoughts, conflicts and agonies of the protagonists, a transformation that seems to parallel Vondel's articulation of *staetveranderinge* and *herkennis*." Eric Jan Sluijter, "Rembrandt's portrayal of the passions and Vondel's 'staetveranderinge,'" in "The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands," eds. Stephanie S. Dickey and Herman Roodenburg, annual issue of *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 60 (2010): 285–304.
39 Stijn Bussels, "Vondel's *Brothers* and the Power of Imagination," *Comparative Drama* 49, no. 1 (2015): 49–68.
40 "Hef op, hef op, met naar geschreeuw,/ Aanschouwers treurt met Sauwels weeuw,/ Die hier al 't koninglijk geslacht/ Soo deerlijk siet om hals gebracht,/ Maar denkt hoe 't moederlijke hart/ Ontstelt sij midden in dees smart/ Die sij om hare vruchten lijt/ Geen mes noch vlim dat scharper snijt,/ Als dit dat haar gemoet doorvlimt,/ De son daalt neer, den avond klimt,/ En valt met drup'len en met douw./ Maer niet een traan ontsijgt dees vrouw,/ De moeder lijd de grootste straf./ Nu mach' er niet een traantjen af." Joost van de Vondel, *De werken van Vondel. Deel drie*, ed. J.F.M. Sterck (Amsterdam: Maatschappij voor goede en goedkope lectuur, 1929), 902 (our translation).
41 Detailed accounts have survived of what happened. First, Hague gunmen bore the hopeless men's heads with rifle butts, emptied their rifles on the mortal remains, and hung them on the gallows. Then it was the turn of the mob. These cut off fingers and toes, lips and tongues, noses and ears, even pubic parts from the corpses. For an extensive bibliography, see Ronald Prud'homme van Reine, *Moordenaars van Jan de Witt. De zwartste bladzijde van de Gouden Eeuw* (Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Antwerp: De Arbeiderspers, 2013).
42 Korsten, "Imagineering," 1. Cf. Donald Haks, *Vaderland en vrede, 1672–1713: Publiciteit over de Nederlandse Republiek in oorlog* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2013); Van Duijnen, "Printed images." A special issue of the *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* was dedicated to the

concept of Imagineering with this introduction: Karel Vanhaesebrouck and Kornee van der Haven, "Imagineering violence. The Spectacle of Violence in the Early Modern Period," *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* 11 (2020), accessed April 30, 2023, https://jnr2.hcommons.org/2020/5930/.

43 For a discussion of how these depictions can be placed in the broader imaging of the brothers, see Frans Grijzenhout, "Between Memory and Amnesia: The Posthumous Portraits of Johan and Cornelis de Witt," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 7/1 (2015), accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2015.7.1.4.

44 On the provenance, see Frans Grijzenhout, "Tempel voor Nederland: De Nationale Konst-Gallerij in 's-Gravenhage," *Nederlands Kunsthistorische Jaarboek* 35 (1984): 20.

45 Grijzenhout, "Between Memory and Amnesia," 8.

46 "Dit zijn de lijcken van/ Jan en Cornelis de Witt/ door een voornaem schilder/ near het leven affgeschildert" and "Dit is het eenichste principael naer het leeven gedaen" (our translation). On the inscription, see Yvette Bruijnen and Michel van de Laar, "Geschreven, gestempeld of geplakt: Verscholen informatie op de keerzijde van schilderijen," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 54 (2006): 433.

47 For a more thorough discussion of the theatricality of this scene, see Frans-Willem Korsten, "Theatrical Torture Versus Dramatic Cruelty: Subjection Through Representation or Praxis," in *The Hurt(ful) Body: Performing and Beholding Pain,* eds. Tomas Macsotay, Cornelis van der Haven, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 238.

48 Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and Burke's Sublime," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 4 (2005): 323–41.

49 Shusterman, "Somaesthetics," 326.

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7 Wonder by Touch

One of the most famous objects produced in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic is at the same time one of the most curious and captivating. It is a ewer that the Amsterdam silversmiths' guild commissioned Adam van Vianen in 1614 to create in memory of his brother and colleague, Paulus (Fig. 7.1). It is considered the ultimate creation in the so-called auricular ornament, whose modern English name indicates that the shapes bear resemblance to a human ear, whereas the modern Dutch name, *kwab*, refers to lobes formed by skin. Ambiguity is a paramount feature of this ornament; even specialists recognize different elements in the ewer.[1] The figure forming the foot of the ewer is usually seen as a monkey, but some also see references to a satyr, putto, cow, fox, or person with stunted growth. The figure moves over the water by surfing on a fish-like creature; indeed, this suggestion of fluid mobility is a constant element in the ewer. The anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures are engulfed and seem washed out by a syrupy substance. Or should we say that these human and animal creatures emerge from beneath a thick fluid? A female nude at the top leans back and seems to be pouring out a liquid, but she is headless, so she seems to be pouring out herself as well, as she forms a handle for the ewer by flowing onto the nose of a monster. The flow resembles a pair of human legs, but eventually it ends in a long moustache that evokes the wriggling of eels. The central shell motif that dominates the body of the ewer curls in such a way that it seems to splash up or bulge out into a tongue. In turn, the waterspout that crowns the ewer and functions as its lid is tufted in such a way that it reminds one of a dragon with the long neck of a swan.

The ambiguous nature of the ewer is effectively captured in a video made by the Rijksmuseum that shows from three camera angles how the object rotates. Then one camera moves over the object enabling us to look inside the ewer.[2] This video does the object justice more than photographs can do. The variable shapes evoke what Aloïs Riegl called a haptic experience or a tactile vision as opposed to the optic perception of a distant and long-range vision.[3] The video creates the impression that we are holding the object in our hands, and it is in this haptic perception that we can best approach the object. The exceptional mastery of Adam van Vianen who was praised by his contemporaries for managing to create the ewer from a single piece of silver is made almost tangible in the video.[4] In addition, we are encouraged to feel how the smooth forms of the seamless object are interspersed with protrusions, bulges, and pits, by forms that evoke humanity, animality, and monstrosity in combination.

This creation by Adam van Vianen has already been the subject of research. Its precursors, its immediate genesis, its representation in print and painting, and its influence

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Figure 7.1 Adam van Vianen, *Lidded Ewer,* 1614. Silver-gilt, h. 25, w. 14, d. 9 cm, 910 gr. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

on later objects have received attention.[5] Scholars such as Jessica Whittle and Reinier Baarsen have examined historical contexts, such as alchemy at the court of Rudolf II and the Amsterdam silversmiths' guild, while others, such as Antje-Maria von Graevenitz, have explored deeper, subconscious motivations that did not even have a name at the time the object was made but are now studied under the heading of psychoanalysis.[6] We would like to explore the suggestion made in the Rijksmuseum video which distances itself from rational understanding by focusing on the senses, specifically the physical contact provoked by the sense of touch, or at least by haptic perception. In what follows, we ask to what extent can we interpret the contact brought about by touch and the haptic as a sublime experience.[7]

Boundless Objects

In his 1993 inaugural lecture "The Historical Experience," Frank Ankersmit developed the argument that through touch an intimate contact between past and present can be evoked and lead to a sublime experience.[8] For us, the theme of historical experience in terms of a sublime experience is not the primary focus. More important is the way in which Ankersmit treated the relationship between the sublime and the sense of touch as complementary to the Kantian sublime. *In Kant's Kritik der Urteilskraft*, the sublime is not just an overwhelming experience provoked by an external object; it should ultimately lead to an overwhelming experience within us, such as the experience we have the moment we enter St. Peter's Basilica. We are intimidated by the grandeur of the building, but at the same time we also feel the deficiency in our powers of observation, the unfathomability of its size. We cannot fully grasp the building and must resort to mathematical specifications, but these really do no justice to the experience. Besides including the response provoked by a well-defined object, Kant's notion of the sublime includes the overwhelming experience caused by the awareness of one's own shortcomings. Kant's experience of the sublime is, in Ankersmit's words, "Janus-faced: it is an experience that points in two directions simultaneously. On the one hand, it is aroused by something outside us that is given to us in the experience; on the other hand, however, it has the character of a self-experience."[9]

With Kant, however, there is no contiguity between object and subject in this Janus-faced character of the sublime experience.[10] Both are fundamentally separate. But, Ankersmit argues, the separation between object and subject implied by Kant is not a necessary condition for the self-experience that can culminate in the sublime experience.[11] For this, Ankersmit contrasts Kant's sublime experience with Aristotle's ideas about the importance of the sense of touch in our experience of reality. Within Aristotle's epistemology, touch is the first and most important sense. Touch, he argues in *De anima*, gives us the most reliable knowledge.[12] By touching, our hands take on the form of the object itself, making the knowledge we obtain from it direct and unmediated. In this sense, according to Aristotle, touch is the only and most basic sense a human (or animal) needs. Without touch, we cannot position ourselves in the world.[13]

Although touch is a basic sense, it still has sublime potential. After all, as our hands and fingers mold themselves to the object we touch, we experience not only the object but also ourselves. This experience of the self does not require a separation between object and subject, as with Kant, but rather arises from a surprising fusion of the two. The stable relationship between object and subject is then disrupted, and this, as Ankersmit deduces from Aristotle, can also lead to a sublime experience. Touching something can

generate a strange friction of identification and distance between ourselves and what is in our hands, thereby giving us the same conflicting self-experience, as in the Kantian sublime. Touch generates a liminal experience between object and subject provoking ambiguity and disorientation and can therefore be considered as an important feature of the sublime. The object being touched marks a boundary in one way, but it also lifts that boundary. It evokes a boundlessness that can disturb the stable relationship between object and subject in various ways and take the subject beyond itself.

Van Vianen's ewer is primarily an object that generates this liminal experience through haptic perception. Although the valuable object cannot be touched today, the Rijksmuseum video shows how much it invites us to touch it and makes our gaze travel along its surface as if we were touching it. Perhaps the haptic experience is all the stronger, for we need to activate our imagination. Whether through actual touch or tactile vision, the object does not reveal itself in its full form but is constantly changing. The fluid movements contained in the object, and therefore in our perception, seem to transform it into ever-changing forms that leave us with no control over it. Louis Marin saw the continuous transformation of a perceived object as a specific feature of the sublime and describes it in terms of infinity. The sublime, according to him, is therefore not only a matter of spatial grandeur and infinity that is unfathomable—as we saw in Kant—but is also an infinity in the variety and variability of representations that our minds cannot grasp and whose rules escape us.[14] This is no different in our ewer where we cannot find a stable point at which we can fix our hands or tactile vision. The object generates a boundlessness in our experience owing to its excessiveness, which causes a shiver to run down our spine.[15]

Moreover, the ewer counts as a unique masterpiece because the silversmith managed to make the functional form coincide with the ornamental. In other words, the ornament is not simply added to the object but defines it completely.[16] So we touch both the ewer and the ornament, not an ornament placed on the ewer or pushed to the side. In this way, we may have an ewer in our hands, but at the same time we have an object that transcends everyday experience through its wealth of ambivalent forms. But, interestingly, Van Vianen presents both touch itself and the infinite transformations as themes as well. The arms of the figure that forms the foot of the ewer do not end in hands and fingers but dissolve into the object, flowing out in thick circles of liquid substance (Fig. 7.1). Where the figure might have touched the body of the ewer, everything flows into each other.

Other creations by Adam van Vianen also overwhelm the viewer by evoking a haptic experience, as well as presenting this experience as a theme (Fig. 7.2).[17] On the top of a cup from 1625, a female nude, possibly one of the Nereids, embraces the rim of the central shell but at the same time forms that rim herself. Like the monkey on the ewer, in this cup the woman's hands are completely absorbed by the object she is touching. Once again, then, a figure is shown losing itself in touch. Furthermore, we see two mermen forming the foot of the cup. They are intertwined to avoid collapsing under the weight of the huge shell. Besides the weight of the shell, the force of the water at the bottom also poses a threat. Touch here is expressed as a fierce clinging based on determination not to go down. When you would hold the foot of this cup, you would be confronted directly by the two mermen. Central to the touch are the curves that show how human arms and fish tails intertwine. When you would put the cup to our lips, then you would be in turn encouraged to feel how the arms subtly merge into the aperture of the shell. Tactile vision increasingly separates us from the figurative and gradually lead us into a representational vacuum. We surrender to subtle undulations alternating with more whimsical forms.

Figure 7.2 Adam van Vianen, *Cup*, 1625. Silver, h. 18, w. 15,5, d. 12 cm, 462 gr. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Pandora's Box

To see how the sublimity of touch was also employed as a theme by van Vianen's contemporaries who represented his creations, let us go back to the famous ewer. The ewer was depicted in paintings and prints surprisingly often, usually placed front and center in scenes that evoked a biblical or mythological story. Hence, the ewer was considered a tangible object that could transport the viewer to another world through its haptic vision. As a material object, the ewer belongs to our world, but because it evokes our desire to touch, it transports us into the past. And let us not forget that for Longinus and his seventeenth-century reception, transportation was an essential element in the sublime effect. Of particular note here is Barent Graat's 1676 painting of Pandora (Fig. 7.3).[18] The first woman in Greek mythology holds her infamous box of curses with both hands. At first glance, the box appears to be a faithful representation of van Vianen's ewer, but a

Figure 7.3 Barend Graat, *Pandora*, 1676. Oil on canvas, 113 × 102 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

closer look reveals that the figure holding the ewer relates to the object in a remarkable way. The way the ewer is turned makes it clear that the nude female figure forming the handle has disappeared but is echoed in Pandora's body. By replacing the female figure of the handle with Pandora's, the fusion of object and figure once again confronts us with excess and boundlessness, accentuated by the fact that the top of the silver handle above Pandora's arm and the mouth of the grotesque figure at the edge of the ewer fade against her white dress. There is also a connection between the folds of the red cape and the shape of the ewer. Specifically, the line of the red cape above Pandora's arm is continued on the part of the ewer between the grotesque shape on the left and the snail shape on the right, as if the fold of the cape has shifted to the ewer itself, or vice versa. In fact, Graat refuses to give the object sharp contours and by not doing so, he emphasized the elusiveness and amorphous form of the object, which fascinated viewers then (and now).

In Graat's painting, touch is gendered and eroticized.[19] At first glance, the eroticization of Pandora seems organized around the voyeuristic (male) gaze: Pandora is absorbed in looking at the boy on the left, but is unaware of being observed herself. This changes

when we consider the ewer. The passive, voyeuristic gaze becomes an active one as the foot of the ewer is placed at the level of Pandora's covered genitals, emphasizing sexual desire. Through the haptic vision evoked by the ewer, the voyeuristic gaze is diminished and the viewer is enticed to perceive the painting as an imagined sexual experience. The effect of the variable forms of the ewer, both in the representation of the famous object and in the viewer-painting relationship, disrupt the distinction between object and subject. With Louis Marin, we have seen how the constant transformation of shapes is also a feature of the sublime that can destabilize the viewer's secure position, creating a liminal situation. But this does not suffice to enable us to understand how this boundless object can evoke erotic if not sexual desires that fascinate but can also be repulsive. For this we can find solace in Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, the horror elicited because subject and object or self and other cannot be distinguished from each other.

In *Powers of Horror* from 1980, Kristeva states that "the abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject."[20] The abject is always related to the body and has pejorative sexual connotations in many cultures, especially in the Christian tradition. The abject, as Kristeva famously argues, can be found in bodily fluids, blood, excrement, vomit, or food—the skin of milk that we see or touch with our lips—that make us shudder and fill us with horror. But she explicitly notes that the abject is too easily associated with filth or disease: "It is thus not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, composite."[21] Within the uneasy distortion between subject and object, the abject occupies the position of an intermediary as an uncertain space and moment of intrusion and ejection that has a sexual connotation in the exchange of body parts and fluids.

This instability, boundlessness, or transgression characteristic of the abject is visible in the ewer, whose formal dynamics are determined precisely by the ambiguity of intrusion and expulsion: the amorphous figures on the ewer attempt to invade the silver surface, while the bulging surface simultaneously expels the figures. There is a power play going on that we also see in the disturbing relationship Graat reveals between Pandora and the object. The goddess holds the ewer firmly in her arms and uses some pressure to restrain the curling forms of the amorphous object, which nevertheless escapes her by crawling around her upper arm like a snake or an eel. This object is dangerous: indeed, in the painting, the ewer acts like Pandora's box, containing all the evils of the world, not in the least sex.

Wunderkammer

Ankersmit's definition of the sublime haptic experience, as well as Marin's sublimity in the constant transformation of forms and Kristeva's abjection, help us go deeper into the complexities of seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture. In this chapter, we are confronted with a sublimity that we do not see expressed so much in theoretical texts of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic as in its visual and material culture. To clarify this further, we can look at the context of van Vianen's creations, as well as the cradle of the auricular ornament, the *Wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosities that displayed, side by side, extraordinary natural objects, the so-called *naturalia*, as well as *artificilia*, objects made in the distant past or in other regions, or revealing exceptional skills. Let us examine to what extent the sublime haptic experience created by this prestigious work of silver corresponds to the wonder that was attributed to these cabinets. The auricular ornament was developed

by Paulus van Vianen in the early seventeenth century for Emperor Rudolf II's cabinet of curiosities at the Prague court, but soon thereafter, the precious objects in the auricular ornament or their casts appeared in numerous other *Wunderkammern*. Rembrandt, for example, had in the cabinet in his house on the Breestraat a plaster cast of Paulus van Vianen's basin with Diana and Acteon, the original of which is now in the Rijksmuseum,[22] and "a cast of a basin with nude figures" by his brother Adam.[23] These stood alongside such objects as world globes, lutes and viols, busts of Roman emperors and Greek philosophers, stuffed rare or deformed animals, exotic shells, rocks of all kinds, albums of prints, as well as weapons, clothing, and other artifacts from Europe and beyond.[24]

Research on the early modern *Wunderkammer* is exhaustive.[25] These cabinets have long been associated with transformations in natural history, as well as with the early history of museums and their classification principles.[26] In addition, cabinets have been linked to identity, because individuals from the old nobility to the wealthy citizens constructed *Wunderkammern* to convey good taste, wealth, and influence. In addition, the cabinets also strengthened group identities. Claudia Swan has made clear how the objects brought together in such cabinets were the pride of the trading metropolis of Amsterdam and also, more generally, of the Dutch Republic, which could thus profile itself as the center of the world or the warehouse of the continents.[27] For this chapter, Surekha Davies's essay in the volume *Early Modern Things* provides interesting insights as she points out the importance of the tangible presence of the objects:

> Rather like world maps and costume books from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and casta paintings from the eighteenth century, such cabinets provided viewers with a visual encyclopedia with which to think comparatively about the world's peoples and their entanglements with nature. However, cabinets were distinctive in two ways: first, they allowed their viewers to experience great distance, space, time, and culture via physical things in a compressive space and not merely via representations (although images and descriptions also circulated). Furthermore, fleshwitnessing in a cabinet was an efficient way to acquire "unique" and "admirable" expertise.[28]

Davies has borrowed from Yuval Noah Harari the concept of "fleshwitnessing," which complements "eyewitnessing," to describe the cabinets of curiosities.[29] Both concepts focus on direct observation, but whereas eyewitnessing is characterized by objectivity granted to the knowledge that can be derived from it, fleshwitnessing indicates emotional and sensitive intensity. However, both types of direct observation are not mutually exclusive. Previous studies had already pointed to the role cabinets played in acquiring knowledge at the origin of modern sciences, but fleshwitnessing did not previously receive much attention. Observation of objects in the cabinets, however, was in large part determined by an emotional involvement provoked by the paradoxical combination of tangibility and the unfathomability of the objects.

The famous Danish collector Ole Worm wrote in a letter from 1639: "I conserve [the things in my cabinet] well, with the goal of, along with a short presentation of the various things' history, also being able to present my audience with the things themselves to touch with their own hands and to see with their own eyes, so that they may judge for themselves who that which is said fits with the things, and can acquire a more intimate knowledge of them all."[30] Whereas it is hard to abstract precisely what Worm meant by "intimate knowledge," fleshwitnessing is part of the perceptional modus he intended for

his visitors. In the Dutch Republic the cabinets were meant to be similarly perceived. In 1628, a year after the death of the Leiden pharmacist, botanist, and collector Christiaen Porret, the objects from his *Wunderkammer* were offered for sale. The title of the auction catalogue read: "Exceptional items or rarities and rare sensualities [*uitgelesen sinnelickheden*] such as Indian and other foreign conches, shells, terrestrial and sea creatures, minerals, and also strange animals; as well as some artfully made handicrafts and paintings, which Christiaen Porret, pharmacist of late, assembled in his cabinet."[31] By describing the collection as *sinnelick*, the catalogue notes that the auction offers concrete objects that can be directly perceived.[32] Moreover, *sinnelick* also implies charming and beautiful, as well as sensual and sentient. So we are dealing with a set of exceptional objects that are tangibly present and whose beauty knows how to charm. Moreover, the *Wunderkammer* overwhelmed not so much by establishing a direct contact with one specific distant past or place as by the tangibility of a wonderful world that could only be evoked within the four walls of the cabinet. That aspect is also touched upon by van Vianen in his most famous creation, which merges the highlights of early modern cabinets of curiosities, for we can discern in the ewer references to their most popular items: a nautilus cup, a stuffed monkey, a dragon-like monster, and a classical statuette.

Sensual Shells

In Hendrick Goltzius's portrait of Jan Govertsz. van der Aar, the haptic contact with objects is the center of attention (Fig. 7.4). Full of self-confidence, the Haarlem merchant and collector looks us straight in the eye, but his contact with his collection of

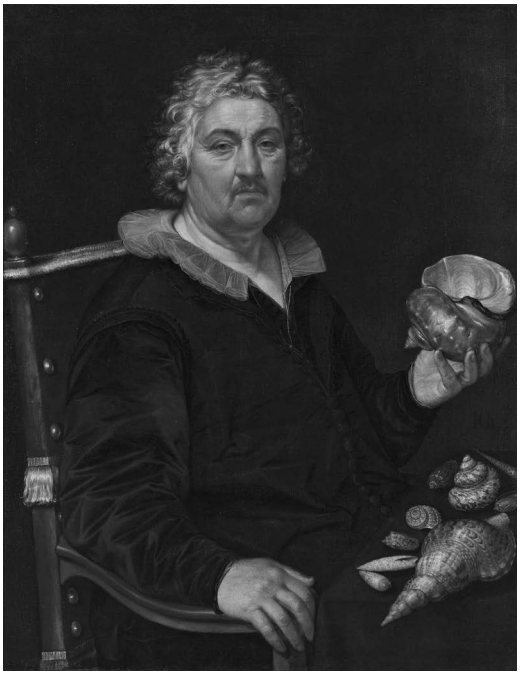

Figure 7.4 Hendrick Goltzius, *Jan Govertsz. van der Aar,* ca. 1603. Oil on canvas, 107 × 82 cm. Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

shells is defined by touch. Van der Aar was a famous *liefhebber van fraeyicheyden*, a "lover of beautiful things,"[33] a phrase often used to name owners of curiosity cabinets. In another depiction of van der Aar, the emphasis is more explicitly placed on how his sense of touch may be related to his loving relationship with the collection. In a 1607 painting by Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, van der Aar takes center stage seated at a table surrounded by allegorical figures of peace, the arts, and the sciences (Fig. 7.5).[34] Jan Blanc identifies the men closest to van der Aar as the artists Karel van Mander and Hendrick Goltzius and the composer Jan Pietersz. Sweelinck.[35] But the figure that arouses our interest is the nude female figure at whom van der Aar is staring. Although he has looked away from his shells to gaze at her, he is clearly touching them delicately with his fingertips. The woman herself holds a statuette in such a way that the man next to her can touch it while also touching her. This man's attentive gaze only enhances the emphasis on the haptic experience. Touch and tactile vision are thus explicitly portrayed in a constellation between the sensuous shells, the female nude, and the statuette that gives the painting its erotic allure. The erotic dimension is accentuated by the fact that the statuette is likely a variant of the Cnidian Aphrodite of Praxiteles. The original Greek statue was lost in antiquity, but the countless ancient and early modern copies and variants indicate that the statue was repeatedly linked to sensuality and sexuality.[36] Sculpture features here as an intermediary between the world of the collector and the sensual world of Venus.

Figure 7.5 Isaac Seeman, after Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, *Allegory of the Arts in a Time of Peace*, 1746 (original 1607). Oil on canvas, 175 × 236 cm. Collection Lacock, Wiltshire. © National Trust UK.

The shells must have aroused an erotic longing as the nude figures did. In her contribution to the volume *Conchophilia*, Anna Grasskamp makes it clear that rare shells from the Pacific and the West Indies were considered *invitations au voyage* to places that were unfamiliar but nevertheless sultry.[37] However, both Goltzius and van Haarlem present van der Aar as a confident collector in complete control of his love for his objects. But in another painting depicting Neptune as *liefhebber*, van Haarlem plays a complex game with the foreground and background that results in a tension between the experience of proximity and distance and brings us back to the sublime (Fig. 7.6).

As we have seen with Aristotle, touching an object—and certainly a shell—is an unmediated experience that creates a close relationship between the observer and the observed object. On the other hand, however, holding the shell opens the door to other distant and strange worlds. The exotic shells in the foreground function in a similar way as van Vianen's ewer in Graat's painting (Fig. 7.3), as mediators between the viewer's world and the exalted world of the ancient gods. Hence, Neptune can take on the role of a proud collector, and he assumes the same body posture as van der Aar in his two portraits. Love is in the air, for behind him Amphitrite, with her mouth slightly opened, admires her husband's strong body and stares at the shells in his hair. But the painting is disturbing for two reasons: Neptune's hand is out of proportion, and the way the shell and hand are connected has a repulsive quality. But it is mainly the background that catches our attention and to which Neptune even hints by leaning back. It is the bottom of the deep

Figure 7.6 Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, *Neptune and Amphitrite*, ca. 1616. Oil on canvas, 71 × 93 cm. Stichting P. en N. de Boer, Amsterdam.

ocean, painted in a blue and somber grisaille, where naked women and men carry baskets to collect the shells. Although the bottom of the sea is the actual habitat of the shells, it is also represented as the underworld, populated with the dead appearing and disappearing like the disturbing shadows of what they once were. The nude female figure on the far right is modeled after the Cnidian Aphrodite, but it is also reminiscent of Euridice, languishing dazed and unaware in the darkness of death.

In this painting, van Haarlem places shells that were tangibly present in Dutch collections in a context that emphasizes their ambiguity. They are objects of astonishing beauty that evoke wonder. Thanks to their complex shapes and smooth surfaces, they evoke the desire to be touched, although they are never fully graspable. Moreover, they lead us to distant and exotic places, even to death. As every child knows, by holding a shell to your ear you can *hear* the sea, a fascinating but also strange experience: the small size of the shell and the vastness of the ocean, which for Blaise Pascal is only a difference in the size of the sublime, are here united in what Hanneke Grootenboer has rightly called a synesthetic experience of the sublime.[38]

Exotics in Context

The boundlessness evoked by the haptic experience in the cabinets of curiosities was not limited to shells or statuettes, as all *naturalia* and *artificialia* reinforced each other there. The rich diversity in origin and material did not interfere with this. For example, Anna Grasskamp has pointed out that Chinese porcelain having the same tactility as the exotic shells only enhanced the sensuality and eroticism of the experience in the cabinet:

> By inviting both the gaze and the touch of the hand, ceramic as well as shell vessels offered seductive surfaces attractive to behold and possess. As part of what Jonathan Hay has called the complex "surfacescapes" of early modern collecting, the cups engage the human capacity for erotic response. "Thinking materially" with the body of the early modern beholder, the artifacts' "sensuous surfaces" embody a powerful affective potential in addition to conveying a plethora of metaphorical meanings.[39]

Exotica are not something that exist before they are discovered but arise in the act of discovery.[40] When objects such as shells or porcelain, as well as stuffed animals, lacquerware, and weapons, were taken away from their original environment, the cultural meaning they exerted there also disappeared, but the objects were appropriated by collectors and thus acquired new meaning. The nautilus shell that was mounted in silver or gold illustrates how an exotic object could be created by literally and figuratively containing and disciplining its foreign origin (Fig. 7.7).[41] Here, we seem to find ourselves at the limits of sublimity with haptic experience moving toward a self-profiling through the exotic exquisite.[42] Collectors showed their wealth through the rare, foreign beauty that was combined with excellent European craftsmanship.[43] Pride in possessing takes over from the overwhelming effect of touch—or perhaps not completely?

Let us turn to Willem Kalf, the celebrated painter of so-called sumptuous still lifes (*pronkstillevens*).[44] Through Kalf's special attention to light reflections and shadows, his use of monochromatic backgrounds, and his sophisticated compositions, he draws attention to the materiality of the precious objects, while at the same time depicting the materials in such a way that he arouses a sense of alienation from these objects, although they

Figure 7.7 Utrecht manufacture, *Nautilus Shell with Gilded Silver Mounts*, 1602. H. 27.9 × w. 16.8 × d. 10.8 cm. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

are tangibly present in the cabinets. In a painting of 1662, Kalf presents a nautilus cup next to Chinese porcelain, a rug from Persia, a Venetian glass, a silver plate and spoon with the auricular ornament, and fresh tropical fruit on a marble table (Fig. 7.8). The gilded figures mounted on the shell glimmer intensely in the light. At the top, Neptune chases one of his victims by riding a sharp-toothed sea monster, a recurrent motive in actual nautilus cups (Fig. 7.7).[45] Whereas the cup itself can be seen as a shape-shifter by simultaneously representing a vessel, a monster, and the sea, Kalf goes further by evoking an even greater boundlessness. He gives the originally stiff statuettes on the cups a more convincing suggestion of movement in his painting, thus competing with famous sculptors and silversmiths. In the triton that forms the foot, the viewer can admire a refinement that cannot be found in the actual objects but that brings to mind grand statues of Atlas carrying the firmament. Kalf might have had the ancient Atlas in the Farnese collection in mind,[46] but, living in Amsterdam,[47] he was more likely inspired by Artus Quellinus's design of a colossal Atlas from the early 1650s that would eventually crown the rear façade of the town hall.[48] If the triton is transformed into Atlas, then the nautilus shell must become the firmament or at least a celestial body. Kalf removes the wrinkles that are normally visible on the surface of nautilus shells after they are processed by European craftsmen. The painter creates a smooth surface on which the light is reflected in soft shades of yellow and gray, in a manner similar to the moon. Although the smoothness of this moon landscape has lost the tactility of the actual nautilus, the sharp edges of the scrubs and the monster's teeth of the monster still evokes tactile vision.

Figure 7.8 Willem Kalf, *Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, Nautilus Cup, and Other Objects,* 1662. Oil on canvas, 79.4 × 67.3 cm. © Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

Norman Bryson has argued that Kalf's depiction of objects "indicates a deficiency in the original object that will not be remedied by the supplement but contaminates it and so to speak hollows it out." This has "the unnerving consequence of suggesting a virtuosity that circles endlessly around a kind of void."[49] Applied to our attention to the wonder evoked by touch, we can say that Kalf's presentation of the objects generates tangibility, but at the same time presents them as intangible. This can also be seen in the way Kalf presents the Chinese bowl taking central stage in the painting.

Figure 7.9 Anonymous, *Bowl with Lid,* 1620–40. Porcelain, height 16.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

He depicts a precious object manufactured in Jingdezhen, China, for the European market, only few decades before the painting was made (Fig. 7.9).[50] Perhaps, it is one of the bowls found in the collection of Amalia van Solms.[51] These bowls were admired for the contrast between the characteristically smooth surface of the porcelain decorated in the typical underglaze bleu and the protruding biscuit figures that appear as four couples representing the Daoist Immortals. Kalf, however, does not render these figures, nor the lion that forms a finial on top of the cover, but instead allows them to attract attention with eye-catching red and gold attire instead of white. Kalf emphasizes their brightness and three-dimensionality to such a degree that the original object cannot fully be recognized. The contrast with the texture of the lemon adds an extra layer to the haptic sensation felt by the viewer. In addition, both the biscuit figures and the lemon tend to break up the two-dimensionality of the painting and entice viewers to imagine them as in their own space, inviting them to touch these precious, breakable objects.

Grasping the Past

Mary Helms writes in her essay "Interpretations of Distance" that the "European worldview was forced to accommodate novel concepts of 'distance' identified in time by a new recognition of classical antiquity and in space by the identification of heretofore unknown foreign lands." *Wunderkammern* "were available to effect such control, to keep the pieces—or at least representative pieces—of these expanded cosmological realms literally in hand."[52] We can complement this observation by focusing on the tactile experience evoked by objects from antiquity. Direct contact with ancient coins, jewelry, statuettes, busts, and other artifacts functioned in the early modern period as a starting point for an exploration of the possibilities and impossibilities of making contact with a bygone past. Following Ankersmit, they were the bearers of a historical experience that was often generated by touch.

In his painting *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* of 1653, Rembrandt takes this search for unity across the ages as his theme (Fig. 7.10).[53] By highlighting a stack of writings in a niche behind a curtain that has been opened, the master shows how Aristotle has left book wisdom behind in order to contemplate the bust of Homer. To this day, the appeal of this work is largely determined by where the musings led Aristotle.[54] Rembrandt makes every effort to pose this question as succinctly as possible, but he also makes it clear that it is the touch that leads Aristotle to surrender to his own thoughts. Moreover, it is touch that allows geniuses to meet over the centuries. Once again, we see an object presented as a way of being transported to a different time and place. Rembrandt contrasts this with Aristotle's other hand, which is not touching the bust

Figure 7.10 Rembrandt, *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer,* 1653. Oil on canvas, 143.5 × 136.5 cm. Purchased with support of friends of the Museum. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

but nonchalantly resting on a chain from which hangs a pendant depicting his powerful pupil Alexander the Great.[55] Hence, the bridging of the centuries is made the central focus of attention.

In this painting, Rembrandt proves that he can evoke diverse materials like no one else, without having to paint them in minute detail. He excels in creating the folds of Aristotle's sleeves, as well as the reflection of his golden chain, but the depiction of the bust requires our special attention (Fig. 7.11). White and yellow strokes evoke the marble at the top of the bust, in contrast with the pink tones of Aristotle's skin. Here, Rembrandt indicates the difference between the touching hand and the object touched, a difference that Aristotle himself emphasized in *De anima* as the primary way to secure reliable knowledge through touch. However, the Amsterdam master gradually moved away from painting different colors in the bust and Aristotle's figure. In the choice of color for Homer's hair and neck, as well as his chiton, Rembrandt does not try to evoke the actual colors of a bust. We see red and gray-green tones in the rendering of the chiton, far from a realistic rendering of marble. Although the hand touching the bust differs from the object it is touching, other parts of the bust are equated with the person touching it, as the same color is used. Consequently, Rembrandt shows both the physical impossibility and the mental ability of the person touching the bust to make contact with the person whose bust is being touched.

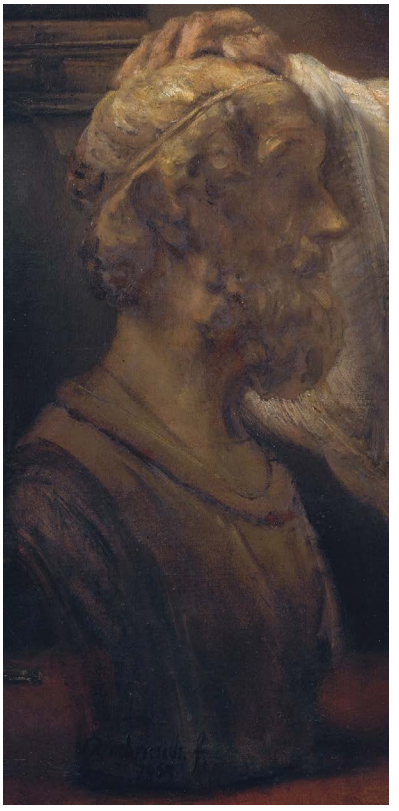

Figure 7.11 Detail of Fig. 7.10.

In *Rembrandt's Roughness* Nicola Suthor discusses the bust as follows: "The fringe-like, pendent quality of the brush strokes above the base is more suited to the materiality of the cape placed over the philosopher's shoulders than to the bust's marble solidity."[56] Hence, in his rendering of the bust, the master confuses his audience by intermingling sculpture and painting. This intermingling goes beyond the iconographical level. The bold brushwork helps Rembrandt to activate the spectator's tactile vision. Giorgio Vasari and Karel van Mander admired Titian's ability to create the illusion of lifelikeness from afar but that up close viewers were confronted with the material nature of the paint because of the rough brushstrokes.[57] Half a century after van Mander, Rembrandt seems to respond to the invitation to use rough brushstrokes thoughtfully and skillfully in exploring the sculpture's three-dimensionality. Indeed, the Metropolitan Museum describes the masterpiece as an "almost sculptural buildup of paint."[58] Moreover, the master matches the style of painting to the subject he is painting, but the original intermingling of sculpture with painting has been reversed. Just as the musing philosopher touches the bust to get closer to the epic poet, viewers are invited to use a tactile vision and approach the painting as if it was a sculpture. In doing so, they get closer to the painter and his so-called *handeling* (handling of the brush).[59]

Prima Materia

The thick layers of paint that Rembrandt used pointed viewers at the material nature of the work, but, as Vasari and van Mander put it, excellent painters could create the illusion that the subjects depicted were present. Painting, then, is creating something from almost nothing, and perceiving the thick layers of the paint one is consciousness of the act of painting. Yannis Hadjinicolaou connects the late paintings of Rembrandt and his followers with the Aristotelian idea of *prima materia*, "of formless matter, which gradually takes shape."[60] *Prima materia* exists at first only in potentiality but eventually can transform itself into all possible materials.[61] Therefore, scholars often made the link between painters and God's act of creation.[62] Aristotle could therefore be included in early modern readings of the Genesis story, especially by the alchemists. This emphasis in the interpretation of God's creation often came to rely on the tension between the immaterial and the material and on that which was originally intangible but was eventually made tangible.[63]

Prina materia brings us back to van Vianen's creation (Fig. 7.1). We might argue that the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms of the ewer are not engulfed by the thick substance, as we suggested above but are emerging from it, much as Rudolf II's alchemists cherished the thought of the *prima materia*.[64] Indeed, when we lend the suggestion of the thick liquid substance to the *prima materia*, we are again confronted with a representation of creation, as well as a haptic re-experiencing of this act of creating. While the ewer makes us witnesses to the moment when darkness and chaos are transformed into tactile shapes, it also invites us to be overwhelmed by touch. The ewer thus incites us to fleshwitnessing, for that what is impossibly to observe, namely God's creative act, is placed in our hands.

Notes

1 Reinier Baarsen, "Adam van Vianen. Kan met deksel van verguld zilver, Utrecht, 1614," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 37 (1989): 201–3; Reinier Baarsen, *Kwab. Dutch Design in the Age of Rembrandt* (exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2018), chap. 2 and cat. no. 5; Dirk Jan Biemond, "Beschermheren van de kunst. Virtuoze edelsmeden en hun klantenkring

in de Republiek," *Tijdschrift voor Interieurgeschiedenis en Design* 42 (2020): 21–38; C.H. de Jonge, "Adam van Vianen. Zilversmid te Utrecht: omstreeks 1565–1627," *Oud Holland* 54 (1937): 100–114; Theresia Margaretha Duyvené de Wit-Klinkhamer, "Een vermaarde zilveren beker," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 17 (1966), 79–103; Johan ter Molen, "Van Vianen. Een Utrechtse familie van zilversmeden met een internationale faam," University of Leiden, Ph.D. thesis, 1984; Walther Karl Zülch, *Entstehung des Ohrmuschelstiles* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger kunstgeschichtliche Abhandlungen, 1932).

2 Accessed April 30, 2023, https://rijks-web.azurewebsites.net/en/kwab/discover-kwab. The catalogue of this exhibition is mentioned in the previous note: Baarsen, *Kwab*.

3 See Michael Gubser, "Time and History in Alois Riegl's Theory of Perception," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 3 (2005): 451–74.

4 Von Sandrart expresses his admiration by pointing out that the ewer was chased "from a single piece of silver" ("aus einem Stück Silber"). Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* (Nuremberg: Johann-Philipp Miltenberger, 1675), 223.

5 Cf. note 1.

6 Baarsen, *Kwab*; Antje-Maria von Graevenitz, *Das niederländische Ohrmuschel-Ornament: Phänomen und Entwicklung dargestellt an den Werken und Entwürfen der Goldschmiedefamilien Van Vianen und Lutma* (Bamberg: Bamberger Fotodruck Rudolf Rodenbusch, 1973); Jessica Whittle, "Chaos & Creation: Adam van Vianen's Gilt Ewer," *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (2021): 197–215, accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.52476/trb.11048.

7 With this question, we expand on recent research on objects and emotions, see especially Susanna Burghartz, Lucas Burkart, Christine Göttler, and Ulinka Rublack, eds., *Materialized Identities in Early Modern Culture, 1450-1750. Objects, Affects, Effects* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), as well as on a renewed interest in the sense of touch as among others pointed out in Adrian Randolph, *Touching Objects. Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-Century Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Randolph Starn, "Touching the Intangible: Toward an Alternative Genealogy of Intellectual Property," *Representations* 132, no. 1 (2015): 130–42.

8 Although Ankersmit addresses the relation between touch and the sublime in his famous *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) as well, the argument is developed more substantially in his inaugural lecture: Frank Ankersmit, *De historische ervaring* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1993), 25–45, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/anke002hist01_01/.

9 "De ervaring van het sublieme heeft bijgevolg een *Janushoofd:* zij is een ervaring die in twee richtingen tegelijk wijst. Enerzijds wordt ze gewekt door iets buiten ons dat ons in de ervaing is gegeven, anderzijds echter heeft zij het karakter van een zelfervaring." Ankersmit, *De historische ervaring,* 29, italics by Ankersmit (our translation).

10 Ankersmit, *De historische ervaring,* 32.

11 Ankersmit, *De historische ervaring,* 34.

12 Aristole, *De anima,* 418a3-6, referred to in Ankersmit, *De historische ervaring,* 35.

13 Ankersmit refers to Herman Parret, *Le sublime du quotidien* (Paris-Amsterdam-Philadelphia: Hadès-Benjamins, 1988). Cf. Anastasios Gaitanidis and Polona Curk, eds., *The Sublime in Everyday Life. Psychoanalytic and Aesthetic Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2020).

14 Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1995), 218.

15 Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence. From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 197–209.

16 Baarsen, *Kwab,* 50; Whittle, 'Chaos & Creation', 197.

17 Baarsen, *Kwab,* cat. no. 9.

18 Baarsen, *Kwab,* cat. no. 83.

19 For the visual experience and erotics in Dutch seventeenth century art, see Angela Vanhaelen and Bronwen Wilson, eds., *The Erotics of Looking. Early Modern Netherlandish Art* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), esp. the first chapter of Angela Vanhaelen and Bronwen Wilson, "The Erotics of Looking: Materiality, Solicitation and Netherlandish Visual Culture," 8–19.

20 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection,* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 11–12.

21 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 4.

22 Accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zoeken/objecten?q=paulus+van+vianen&p=2&ps=12&st=Objects&ii=4#/BK-16089-A,16.
23 "(…) a becken gepleystert met naeckte figureen." Roelof van Gelder and Jaap van der Veen, "'Een Kunstcaemer aan de Breestraat.' Rembrandt als liefhebber van kunst en rariteiten," in *Rembrandts Schatkamer,* ed. Bob van den Boogert (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1999), 119.
24 Van Gelder and van der Veen, "Een Kunstcaemer," 33–90 and app. 2.
25 An early study is Julius von Schlosser, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaisance. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sammelwesens* (Leipzig: Kunstgewerbes, 1908), but the interest in the cabinets of curiosities gained momentum thanks to Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museums. The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). Other important publications on the topic are among others, Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995); Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), esp. chaps. 2 and 7; Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature. Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1994); Martin Kemp, "'Wrought by No Artist's Hand.' The Natural, the Artificial, the Exotic, and the Scientific in Some Artefacts from the Renaissance," *Reframing the Renaissance. Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450–1650,* ed. Claire Farago (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 117–96; Joy Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous* (Hanover: Hood Museum of Art, 1991); Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment. Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). For studies regarding the cabinet of curiosities in the Dutch Republic, see Ellinoor Bergvelt and Renée Kistemakers, eds., *De wereld binnen handbereik: Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585–1735* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1992); Eric Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575–1715* (Brill: Leiden, 2010), chap. 5; and Marika Keblusek, "Merchants' Homes and Collections as Cultural Entrepôts: The Case of Joachim de Wicquefort and Diego Duarte," *English Studies* 92, no. 5 (2011): 496–507.
26 Mark Meadow, "Introduction," in *The First Treatise on Museums. Samuel Quiccheberg's* Inscriptiones, *1565,* trans. Mark Meadow and Bruce Robertson (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2013), 1–41.
27 Claudia Swan, *Rarities of These Lands. Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Dutch Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), chap. 3. For a discussion of still lifes and their expression of international commerce, see Julie Berger Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007). Cf. Jochen Sander, ed., *The Magic of Things. Still-Life Painting 1500–1800* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008).
28 Surekha Davies, "Catalogical Encounters. Worldmaking in Early Modern Cabinets of Curiosities," in *Early Modern Things. Objects and Their Histories, 1500–1800,* ed. Paula Findlen (London: Routledge, 2020), 231.
29 Yuval Noah Harari, "Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War: A Tense Relationship," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 7, no. 2 (2009): 213–28.
30 Translated from the Danish by Valdimar Hafstein, "Bodies of Knowledge. Ole Worm and Collecting in Late Scandinavia," *Etnologic Europaea* 33 (2003): 9. Quoted in Swan, *Rarities,* 102.
31 "Sonderling-Heden oft Rariteyten ende Wtgelesen Sinnelickheden van Indiaensche ende ander wtheemsche Zee-Horens/ Schelpen / Eerd ende Zeegewassen / Mineralen / ende oock vreemde Gedierten; mitsgaders eenighe constichlijck ghemaecte handwercken ende schilderijen / Die Christiaen Porret, wijlen Apoteker / in zijn Cunstcamer vergadert had." Discussed in Swan, *Rarities,* 100. The translation is by Swan. Cf. van Gelder and van der Veen, "Verzamelen in Rembrandts tijd," 30–31; Thijs Weststeijn, "Introduction: Global art history and the Netherlands," *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 66 (2016): 13.
32 See lemma "zinnelijk" in the online version of the *Woordenboek der Nederlansche Taal*, accessed April 30, 2023, https://gtb.ivdnt.org/iWDB/search?actie=article&wdb=WNT&id=M089309.re.1&lemmodern=zinnelijkheid&domein=0&conc=true.
33 Swan, *Rarities,* 23–25. Cf. Claudia Swan, "Liefhebberij: a market sensibility," in *Early Modern Knowledge Societies as Affective Economies,* eds. Inger Leemans and Anne Goldgar (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 141–64.
34 We could not reproduce the original painting: Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, *Allegory of the Arts in a Time of Peace*, 1607. Oil on canvas, 70 x 92 cm. Private collection of Lord Sackville,

Knole House, on loan to the National Trust UK. Lawrence W. Nichols, "Jan Govertsz. van der Aar. On the Identification of Goltzius's Patron," *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 38 (1987): 241–55; Emil Reznicek, "De achtste tronie van de schelpenverzamelaar," in *Essays in Northern European Art Presented to Egbert Haverkamp-Begmann on His Sixtieth Birthday,* ed. Anne-Marie S. Logan (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1983), 209–12; Pieter J.J. van Thiel, *Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem, 1562–1638. A Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné,* trans. Diane L. Webb (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1999), 372–73.

35 Jan Blanc, *Le siècle d'or hollandais. Une révolte culturelle au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Citadelles and Mazenod, 2019), 66.

36 Stijn Bussels, "Meer dan beeldende liefde: Extreme reacties op Praxiteles' *Venus van Cnidus*," in *Levende beelden: Kunst werken en zien,* eds. Stijn Bussels and Caroline van Eck (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011), 28–43; Stijn Bussels, "*Da' più scorretti abusata:* The *Venus de' Medici* and its History of Sexual Responses," in *Secret Lives of Artworks,* eds. Caroline van Eck, Joris van Kessel, and Elsje van Kessel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2014), 38–55.

37 Grasskamp, "Shells." Cf. Claudia Swan, "The Nature of Exotic Shells," in *Conchophilia. Shells, Art, and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe,* eds. Marisa Anne Bass, Anne Goldgar, Hanneke Grootenboer, and Claudia Swan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 21–48.

38 Hanneke Grootenboer, "Sublime Still Life: On Adriaen Coorte, Elias van den Broeck, and the Je ne sais quoi of Painting," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), 12–13, accessed April 30, 2023, https://jhna.org/articles/sublime-still-life-adriaen-coorte-elias-van-den-broeck-je-ne-sais-quoi-painting/.

39 Grasskamp, "Shells," 64.

40 Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism. Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

41 Marsely L. Kehoe, "The Nautilus Cup between Foreign and Domestic in the Dutch Golden Age," *Dutch Crossing* 35, no. 3 (2011): 275–85.

42 Thijs Weststeijn made it clear that the display of wealth using foreign objects, esp. Chinese porcelain, also encountered a certain awkwardness that can be described, in Simon Schama's words, as "the embarrassment of riches." Thijs Weststeijn, "Unease with the Exotic. Ambiguous Responses to Chinese Material Culture in the Dutch Republic," in *Making Worlds: Global Invention in the Early Modern Period,* eds. Angela Vanhaelen and Bronwen Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 436–76.

43 To this we can add that, even though the popularity of the nautilus cup went far beyond the Republic, there it expressed the Dutch power over the seas, for the shells came to the Netherlands thanks to the United East India Company, the precious metal for framing thanks to the West India Company. Michiel van Groesen, "Global Trade," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age*, eds. Helmer Helmers and Geert Janssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 166–85.

44 Sam Segal, *A Prosperous Past. The Sumptuous Still Life in the Netherlands 1600–1700* (exhibition catalogue, Delft: Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof, 1988), 185; Miya Tokumitsu, "The Currencies of Naturalism in Dutch *Pronk* Still-Life Painting. Luxury, Craft, Envisioned Affluence," *RACAR. Revue d'art Canadienne/Canadien Art Review* 41, no. 2 (2016): 30–43.

45 Eugenia Zuroski, "Nautilus Cups and Unstill Life," *Journal 18. A Journal of Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture* 3 (2017), accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.journal18.org/issue3/nautilus-cups-and-unstill-life/.

46 Accessed April 30, 2023, https://mann-napoli.it/en/farnese-collection/.

47 Accessed April 30, 2023, https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/artists/record?query=willem+kalf&start=0.

48 Maarten Hell, "Een gebreidelde Atlas en zijn hemelkloot. De geschiedenis van een stadhuisbeeld," *Oud Holland* 129, no. 3/4 (2016): 131–48.

49 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 126. Cf. Joanna Woodall, "Laying the Table. The Procedures of Still Life," in *Making Worlds: Global Invention in the Early Modern Period,* eds. Angela Vanhaelen and Bronwen Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 111–37; Zuroski, "Nautilus Cups."

50 See Karina Corrigan, Jan van Campen, Femke Diercks, and Janet Blyberg, eds., *Asia in Amsterdam. The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age* (exhibition catalogue, Salem: Peabody Essex Museum, 2015).

51 Christian Jörg, *Chinese Ceramics in the Collection of the Rijksmuseum, the Ming and Quing Dynasties* (London: Philip Wilson, 1997), cat. no. 31; D.F. Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Chine de Commande* (Lochem: Tijdstroom, 1989), fig. 37. Several museums have this kind of bowl in their collections, e.g., Musée Guimet in Paris, Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zoeken/objecten?q=acht+onsterfelijken&p=1&ps=12&st=Objects&ii=3#/AK-MAK-563,3.
52 Mary W. Helms, "Essay on Objects: Interpretations of Distance Made Tangible," in *Implicit Understandings. Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other People in the Early Modern Era,* ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 355.
53 Jonathan Bikker, "Contemplation," in *Late Rembrandt,* eds. Jonathan Bikker and Gregor J.M. Weber (exhibition catalogue, London and Amsterdam: National Gallery and Rijksmuseum, 2014), 214–33; Julius Held, *Rembrandt's Aristotle and Other Rembrandt Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).
54 In her article "Grace, Genius, and the Longinian Sublime," Joanna Sheers Seidenstein argues that Aristotle questioned his own poetic rules in light of the ancient genius and links this to the role *On the Sublime* played in Junius's *De pictura veterum*. The tightening of rules for writing and painting during the seventeenth century in which Aristotle's poetics played an important role was nuanced thanks to the growing importance of Longinus's text in which, as we saw in the first chapter, genius is paramount that need not be flawless. By depicting Aristotle's reverie, Sheers Sedenstein argues, Rembrandt wanted to make the viewer reflect on the relativity of rules in the creation of art and literature and weigh how much freedom genius should be given. The question remains, of course, to what extent Rembrandt was familiar with Junius's book, let alone Longinus's text. Joanna Sheers Seidenstein, "Grace, Genius, and the Longinian Sublime in Rembrandt's *Artistotle with a Bust of Homer*," in "The Sublime and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art," eds. Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt, special issue of *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed April 30, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.5.
55 Held, *Rembrandt's Aristotle*, 29–41.
56 Nicola Suthor, *Rembrandt's Roughness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 131.
57 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, vol. 3 (New York: Abrams, 1979), 1981-2 (quoted in Bikker and Weber, *Late Rembrandt,* 14). Karel van Mander, *Foundation of the Noble, Free Art of Painting,* trans. Walter Melion (Leiden: Brill, 2023), chap. 12, stanzas 23–25. Cf. Walter Melion, "Introduction," in van Mander, *Foundation,* 75–79 and 150–51; Suthor, *Rembrandt's Roughness,* 17.
58 "Aristotle with a Bust of Homer," The MET, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437394.
59 Yannis Hadjinicolaou, *Thinking Bodies—Shaping Hands*. Handeling *in Art and Theory of the Late Rembrandtists* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
60 Hadjinicolaou, *Thinking Bodies,* 275. Cf. James Elkins, *What Painting Is. How to Think About Oil Painting, Using the Language of Alchemy* (New York: Routledge, 1999), chap. 3 'The mouldy *materia prima*'.
61 Teresa Esposito links this belief to some paintings by Rubens in her "Black Ethiopians and the origin of "materia prima" in Rubens' images of Creation," *Oud Holland* 133, no. 1 (2020): 10–32.
62 Hugh R. King, "Notes. Aristotle without *prima materia*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 3 (1956): 370–89; Friedrich Solmsen, "Aristotle and Prime Matter: A Reply to Hugh R. King," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19, no. 2 (1958): 243–52.
63 Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
64 Whittle, "Chaos & Creation," esp. 200–202.

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8 Conclusion

If we want to understand seventeenth-century visual culture in terms of the sublime, there seem to be better candidates to start the quest than the Dutch Republic. Overwhelming experience closely linked with feelings of astonishment, awe, and wonder appears fundamental to the visual culture of the Counter-Reformation rather than that of the austere Reformation: The splendid dynamism of Rubens, the terrifying landscapes of Salvator Rosa, the religious ecstasy of Bernini, the spectacular funerals and canonizations designed by Jean Berain, or the unfathomable grandeur of St. Peter's—for Kant the starting point of his thinking on the mathematical sublime—are indeed diametrically opposed to the stillness of Vermeer or the modesty of Saenredam. We might also think it more likely to find the sublime in the architectural and theatrical rhetoric of absolute monarchs than in the thrift- and profit-driven Dutch burgher society. Against the magnificence of Versailles or the east façade of the Louvre designed by Charles Perrault, everything seems to fade. In France, even William III was scorned for building his palace Het Loo, which Jean Racine described as "ce lieux sombre & mélancolique."[1]

And yet, as we have shown, these assumptions are not accurate. The sublime was indeed to be found in the visual and intellectual culture of the Dutch Republic; more than that, the Republic played a pioneering role in the development of ideas relating to the sublime. For a long time—and in some cases even today—it has been assumed that it was only with Boileau's influential translation of *On the Sublime* in 1674 that the concept of the sublime began, marking the shift from rhetoric and poetics to aesthetics. We have argued that this is incorrect because we have found the first instances of the sublime in the Republic half a century earlier. Although Longinus was discovered and first studied by Italian humanists in the sixteenth century, it was only at Leiden University that a new perspective on his text was developed. Thanks to Heinsius and Vossius, *On the Sublime* became more than just a handbook of rhetoric dealing with stylistic matters or a catalogue of literary quotes from antiquity; it became a text about overwhelming words bringing their subjects to life. It is important to recognize that it was within this intellectual network that the sublime first found its place in reflections on the visual arts. In his opus magnum *De pictura veterum* Franciscus Junius relied on Longinus's central idea of *phantasia* to define artistic imagination. For the art theoretician, the overwhelming impact of a work of art lies in the mental images of highly elevated subjects that artistic geniuses can elicit.

As we have seen, to understand the importance of the sublime in the Dutch Republic, however, we cannot rely on Longinus alone. The early modern sublime did not operate as a strictly codified concept that referred only to *On the Sublime*, but it was much more flexible and often operated with neighboring concepts. These concepts could be

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appropriated from ancient authors—Ovid's distinction between *sublimis* and *humilis*, Seneca's ideas about representing terror in the theater in order to rise above it, and Lucretius's metaphor of the shipwreck with spectator. Aristotle in particular emerges as a source of thinking about the sublime through his treatment of the virtue of magnificence and his attention to catharsis in his poetics. We ourselves, in turn, were influenced by Aristotle's definition of touch to see how extraordinary objects can elicit feelings of awe and wonder through touching or haptic vision. The kaleidoscopic view we took of the sublime was not reserved for the appropriation of ideas from antiquity alone. We looked at the fear of God as appropriated by Calvinist ministers. We also reviewed such concepts as *le merveilleux* and *je-ne-sais-quoi*, which have remained best known today under their French names but were actually current throughout all of early modern Europe, and certainly in the Dutch Republic. And finally, Burke and Kant gave us the possibility to question how in the visual culture of the Dutch Republic feelings of "delightful horror" or experiences of what goes beyond measure and substance can destabilize the beholder and question his fixed position as a subject.

The sublime experience in almost all our examples was above all a visual experience, whether imaginary or real. Artists, as well as authors dealing with the impact of images, gave viewers their primary attention, but they seldom saw the viewers' experience and position as stable or safe. *Phantasia*, as we have seen with Longinus and Junius, is about the creation of powerful images in the mind of artists in order to have an overwhelming and transporting effect on readers or viewers by making them witnesses to the subject represented. As an effect of presentification, the sublime brings persons, events, nature, or objects directly before the eyes. So, the viewers of the image become involved witnesses who can experience confusion and even threat, which is often prepared by the representation of viewing modes and experiences within images, in performances or in texts about architecture. Moreover, the act of witnessing in a representation can be blinded by God's light, or it can evoke in the viewers of a seascape the feeling to disappear beyond the horizon into the void and into infinity. The witnesses, whether within or before a representation, can feel torn between the irresistible desire to look and to look away. Furthermore, the belief that they see an object itself and not its representation can evoke a shock as well as the terrifying thought that the object could petrify them by returning their gaze. Finally, the sublime appears when the act of viewing as a mode of perception becomes utterly confusing and where beholding turns into holding. Basically, in profoundly affecting the viewers, in destabilizing them and evoking strong emotions, the seventeenth-century sublime revealed, in one way or another, vision itself as problematic and troublesome.

Interestingly, the sublime as the act of looking that results in this destabilizing experience occurred in a period in Europe when vision was privileged above the other senses and became the dominant epistemological instrument that was defining for modernity itself.[2] Distanced and objectifying vision was the thriving force in the early modern scientific revolution in which the Dutch Republic played a significant and decisive role.[3] But distanced and objectifying vision was not only the necessary position in acquiring objective knowledge to understand the world; it was also necessary for an accurate pictorial representation of the world. This is true for a large and most characteristic part of Dutch art that, as Svetlana Alpers has brilliantly shown, depends on "description" instead of on Albertian narration. [4] Inspired by recent optical innovations and questions of perception, the Dutch visual arts turned viewers into detached observers who carefully scrutinized—and enjoyed—that which was before their eyes.

The sublime, however, does not allow this clear-cut distinction between the observer and the observed object. It is a liminal experience that refuses to accept the fixed position of the viewers and continuously brings them out of balance, questioning their position vis-à-vis God, nature, the world, and the self. This is exactly what we have seen in all our examples, whether in theory, painting, print, theater, architecture, or objects.

Notes

1 Jean Racine, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé au siège de Namur* (Paris: Denys Thierry, 1692), 6.
2 Martin Jay, *The Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1994), chap. 1.
3 For a more nuanced view, see among other publications: Eric Jorink, *The Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575–1715* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); Albert Van Helden et al., eds., *The Origins of the Telescope* (Amsterdam: KNAW Press, 2010).
4 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).

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