these pictures through a painstaking process of trial and error akin to that which he demonstrates in the preparatory drawings for his figure paintings. This hypothesis can only be tested by a more thorough technical examination of the surviving landscapes – an investigation which is long overdue. For the moment, the X-rays of the Pyramus and Thisbe stand as tantalizing evidence that, in landscape at least, Poussin’s classicism may have been more intuitive than has hitherto been suspected.

One other explanation may be offered for the complicated evolution of the Frankfurt picture. In his landscapes of 1648-50 Poussin often portrays themes of death or unrequited love against a natural setting which increasingly reflects their tragic mood. Thus, if the two Phocion pictures and the Landscape with a man killed by a Snake of 1648 still depict these themes against an heroic landscape background, the Landscape with Polyphemus of the following year already mirrors its ominous subject with a more irrational vision of nature. This tendency is carried further in the Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice of 1650, where the threatening sky, the smoking castle, and the encroaching foreground shadow reflect the fate of the mythological lovers and anticipate Poussin’s treatment of a similar theme in Pyramus and Thisbe.

In a drawing at Dresden which was included in the Frankfurt exhibition, Poussin depicts a panoramic landscape setting with a blazing castle at the left in the manner of the Orpheus and Eurydice and a townscape at the right which relates to that of the Pyramus and Thisbe. Given the similarity in theme and date between these two works, this suggests that they were closely associated in Poussin’s mind from the start and that his decision to repaint the Frankfurt picture arose from a determination to forge an even greater unity between subject and setting in this work than he had achieved in the Orpheus and Eurydice or the essentially classical Landscape with Polyphemus had previously suggested through the portrayal of a natural catastrophe which mirrored that of his mythological theme.

Bätschmann plausibly suggests that Poussin’s decision to depict the doomed mythological lovers in this way may have been inspired by a tragedy on the theme of Pyramus and Thisbe by Théophile de Viau, first published in 1623, in which Thisbe’s mother perceives a vision of her daughter’s death against the background of a raging storm. He also notes that the inclusion of these figures in the Frankfurt picture calls to mind Leonardo’s woe for a tempest – fortuna – a term which equally applies to the tragic twist of fate which has befallen Pyramus and Thisbe. The result is a dramatic vision of malevolent nature which constitutes a landmark in Poussin’s career and which paved the way for Poussin’s career decisions of human figures set against a stormy landscape, the Rouen picture of 1651 – which, interestingly, includes no major sentimenti – and the Deluge from the Four seasons of 1660-64. In this regard, the Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe represents Poussin’s fullest formulation to date of the forces which bind the life of man to the cycles of nature, a theme which was to preoccupy him in his final years and finds its definitive expression in the Four seasons.

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Amsterdam, Boston and Philadelphia
Seventeenth-Century Dutch landscape painting

First things first: the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape exhibition recently seen in Amsterdam and Boston is the most beautiful and comprehensive mounted in our time (closes 1st May; at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). The exhibition, conceived by Peter Sutton and organised in collaboration with Pieter van Thiel, and its encyclopaedic catalogue are musts for anyone with a passion for landscape painting. 1

To judge from the 123 paintings included in the catalogue, the organisers had virtually every key Dutch landscape on their list of desiderata, amply fulfilled, apart from some uncontestable candidates at the Hermitage and Dresden. Also missing is Rembrandt’s Landscape with the good Samaritan at Cracow, a painting few western students have seen and which provides the crucial visual evidence that the celebrated Landscape with obelisk at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is – as recently demonstrated – by Flinck, not Rembrandt. However, the exhibition’s curators were phenomenally successful elsewhere. They even convinced the Gardner trustees to allow their demoted Rembrandt to make the five-minute trip to the Museum of Fine Arts, becoming the second work lent from the Gardner since its opening in 1925. The Gardner landscape was exhibited only in Boston. A few other outstanding works also are restricted to one or two venues, an inevitability in a large travelling exhibition studded with masterpieces. Of course, no painting can stand in for another, but some are more equal than others. One brilliant trade-off was arranged: the Marques of Bute’s monumental, sun-drenched Cyp, arguably the summit of his achievement, was shown only in Amsterdam while its grandiose near-equal from Buckingham Palace and Cyp’s miraculously luminous View of Nijmegen from Indianapolis will be seen only in America. Other gaps are unfilable: Hobbe’s Aven entitled Middelharnis (Amsterdam only); two Rembrandts – his tiny Winter from Kassel that has the freshness and scale of his best – to the lesser leaves landscape drawings (Amsterdam and Boston only), and his tender, nocturnal Rest on the flight from Dublin (Boston only); Detroit’s version of Ruisdael’s Jewish cemetery (Philadelphia only). Despite the limited appearances of these and a small group of other outstanding loans (inconsistently signed, for example), the exhibition will feel deprived after seeing the abundant core of great and near-great paintings.

Ruisdael has justifiably been given pride of place and number. The impact of his towering achievement would have been more impressive in Boston and Philadelphia if Braunschweig’s huge Hilly landscape with a large oak (No. 82) had been shown as planned. Regrettably, signs of a minor problem with its paint surface were detected in Amsterdam, and it was decided not to send it across the Atlantic. However, the Rijksmuseum’s Windmill at Wijk made the trip. Those familiar with this most famous seventeenth-century Dutch landscape will see it with new eyes. Removal of its veil of discoloured varnish during recent restoration reveals much more of Jacob’s varied touch, shifts in the viscosity of his paint and a pronounced cool tonality. Some old abrasion in the foreground, particularly in passages of the thinly painted reeds on the river bank, is now more apparent.

Of the thirteen categories Stechow established in his pioneering, essentially topographical typology of Dutch landscape (dunes, woods, winterscapes, panoramas and so on) Ruisdael plays a key rôle in
Since the grand exhibition of Dutch landscape at the Orangerie in 1950–51 our conception of the subject has been much enlarged. The Paris selection of more than one hundred important paintings (some included in the present show) and almost seventy superlative drawings was a rich one. But there Dutch landscape began with Avercamp and Esaias van de Velde, and came to a dead stop in c.1675, ignoring the Flemish landscapists who migrated into Holland at the turn of the century (Coninxloo, Vinekbooms, Savery), and the so-called ‘pre-Rembrandists’ (Lastman, Pynas, Wttenbrouck), not to mention Italianates such as Poelenburch, Breenbergh or Asselyn. L.J. Bol’s exhibition Nederlandse Landschappen uit de Zeventiende Eeuw held at Dordrecht in 1963 was the first to offer an extensive survey of the main phases and aspects of the theme. But working with a shoestring budget, before the days of sponsorship and government indemnity, Bol was unable to assemble many parade pieces. Even so, it is largely thanks to his pioneering effort that Hondecoeter and a number of other landscapists who have yet to become household names are represented.

Today the slender catalogues of the Dordrecht and Orangerie exhibitions would be dismissed as handlists. The catalogue of the present show, on the other hand, is an up-to-date, compendious reference book, which will be consulted repeatedly long after the show closes in Philadelphia.

The lion’s share of the biographies and entries were written by Sutton and Alan Chong. They and their collaborators’ informative biographies will be referred to as often as those in Neil MacLaren’s classic National Gallery catalogue of The Dutch School (1960). It is hard to think of higher praise, although some readers may regret that the Thieme-Becker-like references do not distinguish major from minor publications. Abbreviated references that follow here are those expanded in the catalogue’s collassal Bibliography.

The entries, generously accompanied by comparative illustrations, are crammed with detailed information. The commentary on the recently discovered early winter landscape, ascribed to Adriaen van de Venne when it appeared in 1682 and here convincingly attributed to Vinczkoons (No.111), includes a thumbnail history of a type of iceboat seen in the picture and a report on winter conditions in Holland in c.1610, the date assigned to the picture with sound reasons. In a discussion of Wijnants’s Dune landscape with figures attributable to Adriaen van de Velde (No.117) we learn that another Wijnants passed through the art market in 1963 that was signed and dated twice, first by Wijnants in 1661 and then by Lingelbach in 1664, establishing that three years could pass between the time the artist finished a landscape and another was called to provide its figures. The commentary on ten Oever’s View of Zwolle (Fig.72) includes a survey of nude bathers in Dutch landscape.

Occasionally one suspects that, in their enthusiasm to present the enormous amount of collateral material they have gathered, the cataloguers did not spend enough time looking anew at the paintings themselves. A fresh look, for example, at Ruisdael’s majestic Oaks beside a pool from Berlin (Fig.73) shows that parts of its background have turned unpleasant shades of powdery greyish-green and are virtually illegible. A technical analysis of the panel may reveal that there has been blanching of the medium or deterioration of small in these passages. Not a word is said about these disconcerting problems in the catalogue. Instead, we are given an inconclusive exegesis on the possible meanings of the large dead tree in the foreground, based on its identification as an oak – it is, in fact, a beech.

Not all students of Ruisdael will accept the unsupported late date of c.1668–72 assigned to Detroit’s version of the Jewish Cemetery (No.86), or that Braun’s Schaeck’s Large oak (No.82) and the Wallace Collection’s Landscape with a small village (No.P136) include views of Steinfurt Castle or that Boston’s lovely small panorama depicts Egmond Castle near Alkmaar (No.89; Philadelphia’s painting of ruins [No.564] cited in the entry as another view of the castle certainly does not depict Egmond; the Duke of Sutherland’s panorama [Hofstede de Groot 1908–27, No.67] does not show Alkmaar’s Grote Kerk, but a distant view of Heemstede Castle on a plain near Haarlem). And not only students of Ruisdael will raise their eyebrows when they read deep in the commentary on his Windmill at Wijk (No.88) that the famous Mill at Washington (Fig.74) has been removed from Rembrandt’s aware. The attribution of The Mill has indeed been controversial since it was acquired by P.A.B. Widener of Philadelphia from the Landeume collection in 1911 for £10,000, a loss to England’s patrimony that raised questions in Parliament, caused an avalanche of letters to the press and stimulated numerous editorials, including two in this Magazine.5

Although The Mill was omitted from Rembrandt’s aware by Breudi, Bauch and Gerson, none of them offers reasons and, to my knowledge, no one has convincingly demonstrated that the picture is not by Rembrandt. Stechow and Rosenberg continued to defend its traditional attribution, and more recently its ascription to Rembrandt has been accepted by Arthur

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72. View of Zwolle, by Hendrick ten Oever. 1675. 66.5 by 87 cm. (Torrie Collection, University of Edinburgh, edh. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).
The catalogue’s suggestion that The Mill is ‘probably by Aert de Gelder’ (p.462, note 11) — reviving a forgotten attribution first offered by W. von Seidlitz in 1902, and elaborated by him in 1911 after the landscape was acquired by Widener — could not be tested here, since, regrettably the painting was not included in the exhibition. It would have been particularly helpful to examine The Mill afresh in Boston, alongside Rembrandt’s Rest on the Flight (No.78), with which it has much in common despite differences in subject, scale and support. The powerful chiaroscuro effect that made Constable describe The Mill ‘of itself sufficient to form an epoch in the art’ has altered considerably since Washington’s conservators removed layers of darkened varnish about a decade ago, but it retains other outstanding qualities which would have been recognised and enjoyed by the crowds that thronged the exhibition, no matter who painted it.

Sutton’s catalogue introduction is nothing less than a compact history of Dutch landscape from its origins in early fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting to late-seventeenth-century classists, relating its trends and tendencies to the social, political and cultural climate of the time. His amply documented survey takes into account more recent as well as older literature, a formidable feat since the study of Dutch landscape has become an ever-growing industry since the mid-sixties, when Stechow’s standard general volume and Albert Blankert’s reappraisal of the Italianates were published. Sutton manages to discuss almost every aspect of the multi-faceted topic — and three are discussed in more detail by Simon Schama, Josua Bruyn and Alan Chong. Sutton offers rewarding sections on studio practice, on van Mander’s pioneer chapter on landscape in Den Grondt and on what can be gleaned from Hoogstraeten, Lairesse, contemporary pastoral poetry and hofdichtum (the special genre of Dutch landscape poetry) towards country houses. His account of stylistic development is admirable, as is his characterisation of the major figures, and he helpfully discuss Cornelis Vroom, Frans Post, Herman Saftleven and a few other artists hard to fit into stylistic pigeon holes. Given the wealth of material presented by Sutton and the two other contributors, the lack of an index is a serious drawback.

Schama’s essay ‘Dutch Landscapes: Culture as Foreground’ offers an abundance of delicious aperçus. But he provided much more, stressing the radical break in form and subject that occurs in landscapes by Salomon van Ruysdael and Molijn about 1625-30, and asking why they and their contemporaries painted their modest, down-to-earth pictures. Although he does less than justice to some of his predecessors Stechow et al. (1966) and Rosenberg, for example, did not mistakenly link Elsheimer as the prime mover of the shift — he convincingly argues that the sudden transformation is linked less to the ‘sudden discovery of realism’, than to the emergence of a new aesthetic that took pride in its countryside and the virtues of homeland. In their highly and deceptively selective art Salomon and Molijn substituted one kind of subjectivity for another.

Acknowledging a debt to John Barrell’s The Dark Side of the Landscape, Schama calls attention to the subject matter of Dutch landscape, particularly the figures, emphasising that the latter are not mere staffage, but have specific cultural associations. Images of the countryside, rivers, towns and villages were often, he concludes, a kind of history painting, though not in the traditional sense, containing historical references, without narrative structure. A good example of the insights Schama’s method offers is his discussion of the sudden popularity of the fishing village motif during the 1620s and 1630s. After the resumption of war with Spain in 1621 Dutch herring boats, fishing villages and fishermen suffered devastating losses. The fortitude of Dutch fisherfolk during this time was held up in contemporary commentaries as a model of pious, patriotic conduct. Schama suggests that the difficult time had produced in the ‘collective mentality’ of the Dutch an idealised version of fishing villages, in the light of which such landscapes were produced. The reference to ‘collective mentality’ — with its overtones of Zeitgeist — is, however, troublesome. The force of Schama’s argument is not dissipated if it is acknowledged that contemporary beholders who saw modest fishing villages and their inhabitants as embodiments of patriotism have yet to be identified.

Schama’s text is not without some hasty generalisations. The Marquess of Bute’s magnificent Cuyyp (No.25) of the late 1650s can hardly serve to typify the ‘Rest of the Century’ (p.80) when the young Hobbema had just learned to mix his colours and Ruysdael was not to produce his mature works for another ten years. There are also a few slips: the cannon in van Goyen’s large riverscape at the Fogg which Schama asks us to read as an image of Dutch concern with the defence of their communities (p.76 and Fig.07) is not to be found in this painting. Another miss is the statement that on at least two occasions Cuyyp ‘painted near-contemporary histories of Frederick Henry at Nijmegen and Dordrecht that celebrate dynastic paternalism, at a time when it was politically unfashionable’ (p.81). This is evidently based on Stephen Reiss’s mistaken identification of posthumous portraits of Frederick Henry at Nijmegen in a Cuyp river scene in the Duke of Sutherland’s collection (Reiss 1975, p.142, No.105) and at Dordrecht in another Cuyp at Waddesdon Manor (ibid., p.145, No.106). The Sutherland Cuyp is almost certainly identical with a large painting by Aelbert Cuyp described in a testament written in Dordrecht in 1673 as ‘... een grote schilderij wytheldende een leger ofie retywed van schepen leggende voor Nimkgeen, gemaakte door Aelbert Cuyp’ (Dordrecht 1977-78, p.53). The unusually ample description makes no reference to Frederick Henry. It is hard to imagine that the compiler of a testament written in 1673, a year after William III assumed power, would have failed to note that William’s illustrious grandfather was depicted.

Bruyn’s ‘Toward a Scriptural Reading of Seventeenth-Century Landscape Paintings’ is a decorous polemic against virtually all of the interpretations offered by the other contributors to the catalogue. Bruyn maintains that the spoken and written word of the Bible is the point of departure for the landscapist’s images and themes, which were intended to bring to the contemporary beholder an unmistakable message — that man lives in a transient world where he is beset by sinful temptation but may hope for eternal salvation. Such a moralising reading of Dutch landscapes was first attempted in Wilfred Wiegand’s dissertation (1971), based on a study of Ruysdael’s motifs. A few additional studies have since been devoted to this subject (Kuznetsov 1973, Kaufmann 1977, Raupp 1980, Walford 1981), of which Bruyn’s essay now offers the most comprehensive treatment. He acknowledges that it is premature to claim a ‘religio-literary interpretation’ for all the landscapist’s themes, but he offers representative examples by van Goyen, Rembrandt and Ruysdael.

Best known in this context are Ruysdael’s versions of the Jewish Cemetery at Detroit (No.86) and Dresden. These are unques-
tionably moralising landscapes that allude to transience and the vanity of life. Though nearly all students see them as exceptional pictures in Ruisdael’s œuvre, Bruyn argues that they show the iconographic essence of Ruisdael’s work, which he reads as visual sermons.

Thus, in Ruisdael’s paintings of Bentheim Castle, the dead trees are taken to refer to the vanitas theme, the forest to represent the dangerous world through which man must move, before he reaches his goal – the castle on the high mountain, symbolising the eternal city of Zion. In Ruisdael’s numerous waterfall paintings the rushing torrents refer to transience, the castles and churches to eternal salvation. Van Goyen and Rembrandt do not escape similar interpretations (Nos.34 and 76).

It should be stressed that Bruyn’s interpretations are supported by references to visual traditions and an impressive array of literary sources going back to St Augustine. He also admits that from van Mander’s time onwards, the eighteenth-century moralising texts by Jan Luyken, there are few Dutch literary sources relevant to his readings. Bruyn assumes that the tradition of using landscape images as metaphors for Biblical messages was so well-rooted that there was hardly a need to articulate it. Even if we grant that this was the case, to maintain that the principal intent of the landscape was to paint visual sermons and that most of their patrons used them to direct their thoughts toward their salvation strains credibility to the breaking point. Bruyn himself is apparently aware of the scepticism with which some readers will receive his interpretation, writing at the end of his essay ‘perhaps it is necessary to be something of a puritan in order to be able to admit’ such a large scale scriptural reading; to this both puritans and non-puritans may assent.

Until a thorough study of the patronage of Dutch landscape appears, Chong’s welcome essay on ‘The Market for Landscape Painting in Seventeenth-Century Holland’ helps fill the gap. He surveys types of patronage (the court, municipalities, private patrons), the open market and artists’ activities abroad. His section on prices, offering statistical analyses and commentaries, is particularly interesting. On the basis of widely scattered published studies, as well as his own archival research, Chong has charted the average prices assigned to paintings during the course of the century by genre (landscape, religious, portraits, still-life, and so on). His sample is large; more than 6,600 paintings were surveyed, of which 2,700 were priced. It is not astonishing to learn, but good to be tabulated, that the percentage of attributed landscapes (marines and historiated landscapes are included in this category) rose during the century (from 25% to 41%) and attributed religious paintings declined (from 26% to 14%). Naturally, if the religious significance Bruyn assigns to Dutch landscape paintings were to be accepted these figures would have to be radically revised, as would Chong’s statement, based mainly on unpublished material provided by Michael Montias, that ‘Protestants (Calvinists) owned proportionally twice as many landscapes as Catholics’ (p.113). From 1600 to 1700, landscapes were consistently a bit lower in price (fl.30-fl.44) than religious pictures (fl.33-52).

Another table, based on a much smaller sample (272 paintings) gives the average price by motif (marines, Italianate landscapes, winterscapes, waterfalls, and so on) from 1625 to 1675. The average price for landscapes with mythological figures emerges as higher by 8 stuivers than paintings done by Italianates (fl.58-22, fl.58-14, respectively). Marines ranked next (fl.45) and were followed by waterfalls (fl.36) and winterscapes (fl.9.3). Conclusions from this small survey should be drawn with caution. Yet another chart lists the average prices for landscapes by more than fifty Dutch artists active from 1600 to 1725, also giving the years in which the artists’ most expensive works were inventoried or sold. The highest prices were consistently awarded to marine painters, not landscape artists (e.g. Hendrick Vroom, fl.1,800 in 1610; Ludolf Bakhuizen, fl.1,275 in 1665), Ruisdael reaching only fl.100 in 1673, and Allart van Everdingen fl.130 in 1657. Works by Molijn, Salomon van Ruysdael and van Goyen were cheap, usually in the fl.10-20 range. Compared to the low prices van Goyen’s landscapes usually fetched, the fee of fl.650 that he received in 1651 from the city fathers of The Hague for his enormous townscape of the city (170 by 438 cm.) was astronomical, but low in the light of prices municipal officials usually paid for portraits of their towns or cities. The almost total absence of works by Hobbema from contemporary inventories is unexpected. Paintings by Cuyp are evaluated at surprisingly low prices and apparently had little circulation outside his native Dordrecht.

The adjunct exhibitions of graphic art shown in Amsterdam and Boston not only display another rich and remarkably varied aspect of Dutch landscape, but also help explain its origins. Since not a single painted landscape by Golzius, de Gheyn, Vianen, Claesz Jansz Vischer, or Buijtewech has been discovered, their seminal contributions can be enjoyed only in their drawings and prints.

For the Amsterdam venue Marijn Schapelophem and Peter Schatborn prepared Land & Water, 100 landscape drawings of the Rijksmuseum’s Prentenkabinet. Their beautiful catalogue (every sheet reproduced in colour) is particularly welcome since, apart from drawings by Rembrandt and his followers, not many of the Prentenkabinet’s holdings of the period have been published. Dutch Landscape on Paper: Rembrandt to Mondrian was arranged by Clifford S. Ackley from Boston’s own collection and shown at the Museum (closed 10th April; many of its important prints appear in the masterly catalogue Ackley prepared on the subject for his 1980-81 exhibition). A major international loan exhibition at Harvard’s Arthur M. Sackler Museum: Landscape in Perspective: Drawings by Rembrandt and His Contemporaries (closed 3rd April) may be seen at the Montreal Museum of Art March 24th to April 20th and catalogued by Frederick J. Duparc, it is a representative show of more than one hundred drawings, including key works by artists active during the first decades of the century, rare sheets by Hobbema and Aert van der Neer, eight Ruysdaels and nine Rembrandts, four of which appeared in the recent Chatsworth sales.

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