

Rethinking Horace in Dutch Classicist Art Theory and in the Theory of Poetry and Drama: Gerard de Lairese and Andries Pels

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From the very inception of art theory in the 15th century, the analogy between poetry and painting, that Horace's *Ars poetica* suggested, was of utmost importance to critics who sought to invest the art of painting with the dignity of a liberal art. Horace's dictum *ut pictura poesis* (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 361) – as is painting so is poetry – was used as an irrefutable testimony of close relationship between the sister arts and was hence reiterated in virtually every art theoretical treatise until well into the 18th century.¹ Along with *prodesse* and *delectare* (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 333–334), employed to admonish painters that their principal task was to instruct and delight, as well as analogies between poetry and painting indicated in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Aristotle, *Poetics*, VI, 1450a–1450b), it supported the view that just like in poetry, the ultimate goal of painting was to idealise human nature and present it to the beholder as a paragon of virtue.²

This ethics-driven definition of the purpose of art came to be inextricably linked with the ever-elusive notion of ideal beauty, in which the virtue of the content was inseparable from the virtue of the form. The interest in them was understood to be an interest in pursuing questions of how to perfect oneself, that is, how to live in the best possible way.³ Only in its highest form, consisting of nature perfected in scenes from memorable narratives, was painting able to meet the Horatian dictum that painting, like poetry, should instruct as well as delight.⁴ This highest form of art was understood to be the exclusive legacy of

1 Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: 1978); Lee R.W., “‘Ut Pictura Poesis’: The Humanistic Theory of Painting”, *The Art Bulletin* 22.4 (1944), 201.

2 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. Halliwell, W.H. Fyfe, D.C. Innes, W.R. Roberts. Revised by Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: 1995); Lee, “Ut Pictura Poesis”, 199; Grijzenhout F., “Between Reason and Sensitivity: Foreign Views of Dutch Painting, 1660–1800”, in Grijzenhout F. – Veen H. van (eds.), *The Golden Age of Dutch Painting in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: 1999) 12.

3 Turner J. (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, 34 vols., vol. 5 (New York: 1996) 175.

4 Lee, “Ut Pictura Poesis” 226.

the history painter, who was capable of competently directing a scene with several protagonists of different sex and age in action that are sporting historically accurate costumes and accessories.⁵ The history painter was not a specialist, but someone who ranged over the entire field of painting, and was sufficiently erudite to place crafted imitation at the service of poetic invention.⁶

This doctrine remained undisputed in art theoretical writings until Gerard de Lairese (1641–1711), Dutch painter and art theoretician, challenged its rigid application, loosened the boundaries of the Horatian notion of delightful instruction, and proposed hitherto unthinkable amendments. The Third Book of his *Groot Schilderboek* (1707) bears witness to this change in attitude and reveals that in the author's view representations that were not based on literary sources, and whose protagonists were not specific individuals, also had potential to serve as vehicles for communicating lofty thoughts.

1 Tilting at Windmills: A Staunch Classicist in Amsterdam

De Lairese was deeply dissatisfied with the overall artistic situation he encountered in the Northern Netherlands where he settled in the mid-1660s.⁷ Delighting the viewer through accurate imitation of nature seemed to have been the principal task of a successful Dutch painter at the time, who often specialised in only one of the so-called lower genres: scenes of every-day life, portraiture, landscape, or still-life. To add insult to injury, this aping of nature went hand in hand with depicting modish details that would fall out of fashion as taste inevitably changed.⁸ Worse still, many painters incorporated them into fine histories from classical antiquity, and, by doing so, created the 'Horatian monster' of the human head on a horse's neck (Horace, *Ars*

5 Lairese Gerard de, *Groot Schilderboek*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Amsterdam, Hendrick Desbordes: 1712) 194–201; In order to stay true to the tone of his writings, while not disturbing the flow of this article, Gerard de Lairese will be voicing his ideas as he speaks in the first, 1738 English translation, Lairese Gerard de, *The Art of Painting*, trans. Fritsch J.F. (London, Fritsch: 1738) 146–154; Žakula T., "Improving on Raphael: Gerard de Lairese's 'Heliodorus'", *Simiolus* 32.2/3 (2006) 150.

6 Hecht P.A., "Exhibition Review: A. Blankert et.al., Gods, saints, and heroes: Dutch painting at the age of Rembrandt. Washington (National Gallery), Detroit (Institute of Arts) & Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum), 1980–81", *Simiolus* 12.2/3 (1981–1982) 184.

7 Lammertse F., "om dat die Haas hem niet ontslippen zoude': De Lairese vlucht uit Luik en zijn stormachtige entree in de Amsterdamse kunstwereld", Beltman J. – Knolle P. – Meer Mohr Q. Van der (eds.), *Eindelijk! De Lairese: Klassieke schoonheid in de Gouden Eeuw*, exh. cat., Rijksmuseum Twente (Zwolle: 2016) 16–17.

8 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 170–172; Lairese, *Painting* 128–130.

Poetica, 1).⁹ This blasphemous practice was to be avoided at all cost, along with compositions showing unbecoming subjects that would ‘disquiet the Mind and put Modesty to the Blush’. The painter who would follow ‘this Method, could never expect the Reward of Virtue (which, *Horace* says, is *an immortal Name*), but rather eternal Infamy’.¹⁰

Unlike his predecessors, however, de Lairese did not sneer at what he undoubtedly deemed inferior, if not unacceptable. Instead, he concocted a coherent programme, all in the hope that many of his colleagues would be eager to follow his instruction and ultimately convert to his own artistic idiom.

In his *Groot Schilderboek*, the content of which he dictated to his sons after having gone blind in 1690, de Lairese invoked Horace’s *Ars poetica*, and intimated that the proper use of painting lay in executing noble and edifying subjects in a virtuous and decent manner so as at once to delight and instruct (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 333–334). To make the guidelines amenable to the artistic climate of the northern Netherlands, however, de Lairese extended the Horatian beautiful manner of delightful instruction beyond histories into the domain of genre painting. He claimed that various quotidian situations such as assemblies for public worship, court proceedings, plays, family occurrences, and the like, were often perceived, and subsequently interpreted, as amorous, majestic or sorrowful, i.e. were suitable to convey a moral message. Hence, he suggested that representations of everyday life could be ‘handled in *both manners* [*antique and modern*] *alike natural and proper, without either’s borrowing any thing from the other, but the Subject*’, and thought it was worthy of note that to his knowledge ‘no Author, treating of *Things Antique and Modern*, [had] said any thing touching it’.¹¹ And indeed, connecting the tenets of Classicism to the practice of genre painting was a truly pioneering endeavour, of which de Lairese was fully aware and evidently very proud.

Nature corrected and improved by a judicious master remained the core business of the serious artist, nonetheless. Even if he were a genre specialist, showing life not as it is but as it ought to be was the only way to ensure that a painting was noble and perfect. To achieve this aim, the painter was advised to adhere to the rules of the *antique*, which, in de Lairese’s vocabulary, came to denote the marriage between beauty and morals. Its essential ingredients were beauty, grace, proper costumes, and interiors, and, no less significant,

9 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1 171; Lairese, *Painting* 129; Žakula T., *Reforming Dutch Art: Gerard de Lairese on Beauty, Morals and Class* (Amsterdam: 2015) 34–36.

10 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 106; Lairese, *Painting* 81; Žakula, *Reforming Dutch Art* 37.

11 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 175–176; Lairese, *Painting* 132–133; Vries L. de, *How to create beauty* (Leiden: 2011) 119; Žakula, *Reforming Dutch Art* 45.

competently painted emotions, which were of paramount importance in moving the beholder.¹² If the painter followed the *antique*, beauty and virtue would be bestowed upon his images, and make them fit to convey a morally uplifting message to the audience in a perfectly delightful instructive Horatian manner.

This meant that protagonists of genre pieces *à l'antique* could not have possibly been painted from life. To meet de Lairese's requirements, the painter was expected to rise above nature and demonstrate his familiarity with the antique statues that were the surest guide to ideal beauty. The artist was thus admonished to use a *Grecian Venus* as a model for a virtuous and well-behaved 20-year-old maiden starring in an imaginary tableau, for not even a person of very fine appearance would fit the bill. And not the wanton Venus, but the heavenly version of this goddess, the Venus Urania, who, through her ideal beauty, was capable of transmitting the moral message to the beholder, 'for as much as the Soul differs from the Body, and the Body from the Dress, does Nobility from Commonalty, Virtue from Defect'.¹³ This admonition was informed by the sacred rule of decorum that came from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and encompassed the plea that each age, each sex, each type of human being must be represented with its proper characteristics (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 153–178).¹⁴ Each and every of the categories was accorded a suitable form of beauty, and, if the artist was in search of this, he was instructed to peruse Perrier's *Statues* – a collection of prints made after classical sculptures.¹⁵

It is safe to say that de Lairese's concepts fell on fertile ground, as is corroborated by a number of paintings by Willem van Mieris (1662–1747), in which he used Francis van Bossuit's (1635–1692) *Venus* [Fig. 2.1] as the model for female protagonists. In the *Neglected lute* [Fig. 2.2] she features as a luxuriously dressed lady taking a sip of wine. In the *Lute player* [Fig. 2.3] one sees Venus in the guise of the female musician, while in *The market stall* the goddess appears as a young customer [Fig. 2.4].¹⁶

In the *Lute Player* of 1711 [Fig. 2.3], a curtain is drawn aside to introduce the spectator to an elegant hall in which Venus appears twice: as the ancient

12 Kemmer C., "In search of classical form: Gerard de Lairese's *Groot Schilderboek* and seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting", *Simiolus* 26.1/2 (1998) 94; Geahtgens B., *Genremalerei* (Berlin: 2002) 31.

13 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 177; Lairese, *Painting* 134; Žakula, *Reforming Dutch Art* 46.

14 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 26–27; Lairese, *Painting* 17; Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis" 228–235; Vries, *How to Create Beauty* 85.

15 Perrier François, *Segmenta nobilium signorum et statuarum quae temporis dentem invidium evasere* (Paris: 1638); Perrier François, *Icones et segmenta ... quae Romae adhuc extant* (Paris: 1645), Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 26–27; Lairese, *Painting* 17.

16 Aono J., "Ennobling daily life: a question of refinement in early eighteenth-century Dutch genre painting", *Simiolus* 33.4 (2007–2008) 243–248.



FIGURE 2.1 Willem van Mieris after Francis van Bossuit, *Venus and Cupid*, drawn between 1677 and 1747. Black chalk on parchment, 40.8 × 25.9 cm. Present whereabouts unknown



FIGURE 2.2 Willem van Mieris, *The neglected lute*, c.1708. Oil on panel, 47.2 × 38.8 cm. London, Royal Collection



FIGURE 2.3 Willem van Mieris, *The lute player*, 1711. Oil on panel, 50 × 41 cm. London, Wallace Collection



FIGURE 2.4 Willem van Mieris, *The market stall*, c.1730. Oil on panel, 41.9 × 35.9 cm. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum

goddess herself in the niche to the left, and for the second time in the foreground stealing the show as the lute player whom we are invited to admire. Decked out in a splendid gown, this domestic goddess is being approached by a suitor, who is offering her a glass of wine.¹⁷ That he is worthy of her attention is clear from the way he is holding his glass – ‘handily and cautiously on the foot’ – which reveals, as one learns from the *Groot Schilderboek*, his princely elegance and manners [Fig. 2.4].¹⁸

De Lairese thought of beauty as the exclusive prerogative of the rich and powerful. The right to look good was directly related to class and one’s upbringing, for, even though ‘great people [were] subject to Deformity of Body as well as little ones, their Deformity [was] not so visible as in meaner Persons’. Beauty and virtue were to be expressed through grace, and, because of this, ‘The Effects of Education between People of Condition and more common Persons [were] very worthy of a Painter’s Notice’, for only people of distinction and civility were capable of conveying grace through state and carriage.¹⁹ They could parade their status effortlessly, while observing the subtleties of social intercourse, marking their exact relation to everyone above and below them by their manner of greeting and their choice of words. Given that the audible component did not apply to painting, the artist was limited to expressing the traits of genteel deportment only through gestures and facial expressions, in art theory also known as passions.

The passions played an immensely important role indeed, because the perfection of the human figure entirely depended on the action it was meant to perform. As it was unlikely that a model was willing and able to strike different poses and pull an entire array of facial expressions for hours on end, de Lairese claims himself to have modelled them all. Not only was his method economical, but also very much in line with what Horace prescribed. ‘Si vis me flere, dolendum est | primum ipsi tibi’ (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 102–103) had already gained proverbial status through its constant repetition in art-theoretical musings, and it is little wonder that De Lairese believed that one of his principal tasks as a painter was to move the beholder with the emotions expressed by his figures. This was only possible if the painter, just like the tragic actor, felt those emotions himself, be it for the purposes of a history painting, or scenes of everyday life.

To comply with De Lairese’s precepts a well-executed genre painting was supposed to be dominated by graceful protagonists. From Erasmus, writing

17 Žakula, *Reforming Dutch Art* 46.

18 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 54; Lairese, *Painting* 39.

19 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 53; Lairese, *Painting* 39; Vries, *How to Create Beauty* 87.

De Civilitate morum puerilium libellus in 1530, to de Courtin's *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, which was published in Amsterdam in 1672, the authors on etiquette and deportment were unanimous and consistent in saying that a well-mannered person had to observe a certain measure and consonance in his carriage, and this entailed composure and erect posture.²⁰ As one may well imagine, this was not at all easy to paint. In order to understand what graceful carriage was, the painter was urged to go to the church, the playhouse, and the park, and observe how elegant people behave, make quick sketches of them, and ponder on the reasons for people's grace. This was the only way to fathom what exactly the grand and imposing entailed, the key ingredients of the 'true Greatness', which was 'the very Soul of a good picture'. This 'true Greatness' was inseparable from virtue, and, ultimately, what de Lairese considered as good art, the principal task of which was to instruct and edify.²¹

2 Similis simili gaudet: Gerard de Lairese and Andries Pels

Like many of his illustrious predecessors, de Lairese was no stranger to name-dropping. However, unlike multifarious classical authors to whose names De Lairese perfunctorily refers throughout the *Groot Schilderboek*, Horace is perhaps the only one about whom he seems to have had a thorough knowledge. In all likelihood de Lairese got intimately acquainted with Horace's *Ars Poetica* through his contact with the learned society *Nil Volentibus Arduum* (Nothing is too difficult for the willing) and its *spiritus movens*, Andries Pels (1631–1681), who set out to translate and adapt Horace's famous instruction in the *Poetics*, ca. 1669.²²

The two likeminded authors had met one year earlier, when Pels commissioned de Lairese to make a series of prints meant to illustrate Pels's plays *Didoos Doot* (Dido's Death, 1668) and *Julfus* (1668).²³ This assignment marked the beginning of a fruitful collaboration, and it is little wonder that as of 1676 *Nil Volentibus Arduum* started convening at de Lairese's house on Nieuwmarkt,

20 Roodenburg H., "The 'hand of friendship': shaking hands and other gestures in the Dutch Republic", in Bremmer J. – Roodenburg H. (eds.), *A cultural history of gesture* (Cambridge: 1993) 154–158.

21 Lairese, *Schilderboek*, vol. 1, 56–57; Lairese, *Painting* 41–42.

22 *Nil Volentibus Arduum* is a version of Horatius's *Ode* 1, 3, 37: 'Nil mortalibus arduum est': in Harmsen A.J.E., *Onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy: De opvattingen van het Kunstgenootschap Nil Volentibus Arduum* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam: 1989) 1.

23 Timmers J.J.M., *Gerard de Lairese* (Amsterdam: 1942) 95; Vries L. de, *Gerard de Lairese: An Artist between Stage and Studio* (Amsterdam: 1998) 166–174.

the very place where de Lairese delivered the lectures that were to be published as the *Groot Schilderboek*.²⁴ Akin to de Lairese's agenda, the ambitious programme of *Nil Volentibus Arduum* was meant to improve the overall cultural climate in Amsterdam. In order to do so, its members, who all belonged to the upper class and intellectual elite of the city, embarked on a number of projects, whose aim was to enlighten audiences with edifying drama that adhered to the rules of French Classicist theatre. They strongly disagreed with the current repertoire of the Amsterdam Theatre, which, in their opinion, was substandard and pandered to the taste of a broad audience desperately in need of instruction and cultivation. They expressed this dissatisfaction through their 'corrections' to every piece that was performed on stage. These improved versions, which closely observed the rules of the art, were often preceded by a foreword replete with pointed remarks that exposed all mistakes made by the playwright.²⁵ Horace's insights on decorum, both in terms of what was decent and appropriate in taste, and with respect to character types, played an immensely important role in *Nil Volentibus Arduum*'s critical observations.²⁶ This should come as no surprise though, for all the members of the learned society were exceptionally well versed in classical literature and tradition.²⁷

Pels's original intention was to translate relevant passages from Horace's *Ars Poetica* for the benefit of a larger and decidedly ambitious volume entitled *Naauwkeurig onderwys in de tooneelpoëzy* (Education in Stage Poetry, 1765). This monumental tome, which was based on discussions held during *Nil Volentibus Arduum*'s meetings, was envisaged as an all-encompassing instruction in theatre studies. The *Toneelpoëzy* was, however, published in a reduced version almost a century later, by which time the influence of *Nil Volentibus Arduum*'s concepts had already dwindled. Once Pels started working on single quotes from Horace destined for the *Toneelpoëzy*, however, he decided to extend the scope of his project and to 'translate the entire *Art of Poetry* in verse'.²⁸ During

24 Timmers, *Gerard de Lairese* 12; Schenkenveld-van der Dussen M.A., A. Pels: *Q. Horatius Flaccus Dichtkunst, Op onze tyden, én zéden gepast* (Assen: 1973) 9; Dongelmans B.P.M. (ed.), *Nil Volentibus Arduum: documenten en bronnen. Een uitgave van Balthazar Huydecopers aantekeningen uit de originele notulen ven het genootschap* (Utrecht: 1982) 150 and 290.

25 Harmsen, *Onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* 2.

26 Harmsen, *Onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* 9.

27 Harmsen, *Onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* 8.

28 'Dat ik Hém vertaald heb, is by toeval geschied, alzo ons Kunstgenootschap, bekénd door de Zinspreuk van *Nil volentibus arduum*, voor eenige jaaren bezig zynde mét in het Néderduitsch eene verhandeling van de Toneelpoezy te maaken, veele plaatsen in zyne Dichtkunst vond, dienstig om de meeste, én de voornaamste wétten, die een Tooneelspéldichter ter onderhouden heeft, door het gezag van dien grooten Man te bekrachtigen; dierhalven oordeelen wy, dat het niet onaangenaam zoude zyn die plaatsen

this endeavour Pels is likely to have relied on various earlier editions and commentaries of *Ars Poetica* that were circulating in Amsterdam at the time.²⁹

Pels's translation was instantly embraced and avidly read by the Dutch intellectuals.³⁰ The reason behind its success was that Pels's version was more straightforward and clearer than the previous one by the famous Dutch poet Joost Vondel.³¹ Pels's clever update of Horace's instruction may also have helped. By clarifying his intention in a subtitle reading 'op onze tyden, én zéden gepast' (adjusted to our times and mores), he hoped to reach out to a broader audience and increase the importance of Horace's text for the contemporary reader. In order to achieve this goal, Pels omitted paragraphs he deemed less relevant, and replaced a number of original names and facts by people and events that Dutch readers would more easily recognise and relate to: in lieu of the Pisones stood the wealthy and educated Geelvinck brothers; what Horace said on the influence of the Greek on Latin theatre now pertained to the role French dramaturgy played in the development of Dutch theatre; the old Latin poets, who, unlike Horace and his contemporaries, were allowed to enrich the language with neologisms, were brought up to date through the opposition between Coornhert and Lodewyk Meyer.³²

It is safe to say that these adjustments demonstrated Pels's own conviction that the *Ars Poetica* had not lost a bit of its relevance. However, Pels's updated translation may also have been prompted by an ongoing argument between *Nil Volentibus Arduum* and their archenemy, Jan Vos, whose claim to fame rested upon his sensational plays drenched in blood and gore.³³ In the prologue to his play *Medea* (1665), Jan Vos launched an attack on Horace and his 'lofty rules', by which Vos, as a free man, did not want to abide. He was probably blissfully unaware that the *Ars Poetica* was never meant to be a formal treatise on poetry and drama, but was accorded the authoritative grounds by its later interpreters.³⁴ Be that as it may, Vos certainly lived up to his anti-Horatian premises, as he introduced carnage on the stage, broke the sacred rule of unity,

op maat, én rym te verduitschen, wélk wérk my te beurte gevallen zynde, wierd my in bedénking gegeven, én naderhand verzócht, zyne geheele Dichtkunst in vaerzen over te zétten ...', in Pels Andries, Q. Horatius Flaccus, *Dichtkunst*, Op onze tyden, én zéden gepast (Amsterdam, Jan Bouman: 1677), reprinted in Schenkeveld, *Dichtkunst* 49.

29 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dichtkunst* 14–18.

30 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dichtkunst*, unpaginated.

31 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen M.A., *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt: Themes and Ideas*, (Amsterdam: 1991) 119–121.

32 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dichtkunst* 21.

33 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dichtkunst* 13; Bussels S., "Staging Tableaux Vivants in the Theatre of the Dutch Golden Age", *RACAR*, 44.2 (2019), p. 89.

34 Horace, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge (MA): 1978) 442.

and let no fewer than ten actors speak on stage in place of the Horatian three (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 192).³⁵

To show that Vossianic art was headed towards a profound fail, in 1681 Pels authored a didactic poem.³⁶ Entitled *Gebruik en misbruik des toneels* (On the use and abuse of theatre), it heavily relied on Horace's concept of decorum. It goes without saying that *Nil Volentibus Arduum's* theatre, whose principal aim was to promulgate morals and bourgeois values, steered clear of smutty subjects delivered in vulgar language.³⁷ Even farces, which had brimmed with obscenities in the first half of the seventeenth century, were supposed to observe the rule of decorum and address edifying subjects, such as the remorse of lazy students, or the change of heart of pants-wearing, rolling-pin wielding housewives, in a language that was purged of filth.³⁸

To be instructive, plays were supposed to feature not individuals, but different types of characters.³⁹ This process of typification required that nature be perfected, and this may well be the reason why Pels extended his criticism to the visual arts. At the receiving end of his scathing attack was none other than that epitome of Dutchness in art, Rembrandt van Rijn, who, much like Jan Vos, used flawed life as his surest guide. Pels condemned Rembrandt's aping of nature, which, in his view, went as far as to have a washerwoman, or a peat-stamper with sagging breasts, clad in the guise of Aphrodite.⁴⁰

It should thus come as no surprise that De Lairese jumped on this bandwagon and included a chapter entitled *On the use and abuse of art* in his treatise, which is replete with Horatian admonitions. 'For you won't dodge that vice if you careen down that crooked avenue' (Horace, *Satires*, II, 2, 54–55) warns the artist against depicting all aspects of a story, even the inappropriate and smutty ones.⁴¹ The naked truth was either to be veiled, or cast into the shade, in order to prevent the stirring of illicit desires. True decorum was inextricably intertwined with a process of careful selection, for 'Sight affects the senses in a greater degree.'⁴²

35 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dichtkunst* 14.

36 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dutch literature in the age of Rembrandt* 16.

37 Pels Andries, *Gebruik én Misbruik des Toneels*, ed. M.A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (Culemborg: 1978) 26.

38 Grootes E.K. – Schenkeveld-van der Dussen M.A., "The Dutch Revolt and the Golden Age, 1500–1700" in Hermans T., *A literary history of the Low Countries* (Woodbridge: 2009) 226.

39 Pels, *Gebruik én Misbruik* 26.

40 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt* 125–126.

41 'Nam frustra Vitium vitaveris illud, Si te alio pravum detorseris', Lairese, *Schilderboek* 107; Lairese, *Painting* 82; Horatius, *The Satires of Horace*, eds. A.M. Juster – S. Braund (Philadelphia (PA): 2008) 81.

42 Lairese, *Schilderboek* 107. Lairese, *Painting* 82.

In De Lairese's view, this process of selection and rejection carried out in conjunction with competently painted chiaroscuro, well-chosen colours, and a variety of motifs, would ensure that a painting was decorous regardless of its genre. With the Dutch artistic situation in mind, De Lairese once more broadened the scope of the Horatian ideal, and claimed that landscapes, still-lives, architecture pieces, and pictures of animals could be perfectly decorous if they were painted in a 'virtuous and decent' manner, which was linked to correcting the notion of class and required that nature's flaws be corrected.⁴³

This was a brilliant idea for it helped his fellow artists cope with the ebb and flow of the Dutch art market that was undergoing a sea change at this time. Moreover, it also discouraged specialists from trying their hand at histories – an exercise that would inevitably lead to the creation of the Horatian Monster. The Erasmian adage *Ultra vires nihil aggrediendum* (Nothing should be undertaken beyond your powers), drawn from the words once uttered by Paris to warn Hector against a personal conflict with Achilles (Homer, *Iliad* XIII, 787), was perfectly suited to convey the message that the painter, much like the Horatian poet, was well advised to stay within his own area of expertise.⁴⁴

3 From Great Reformers to Fuddy-duddy Rule Sticklers: The Rise and Fall of Pels's and de Lairese's Creative Classicism

Many painters working well into the eighteenth century cherished de Lairese's ideas and benefited from his advice: Willem and Jan van Mieris followed his programme in the domain of genre scenes, Johannes Glauber and Isaac de Moucheron introduced the spirit of the *antique* in landscape painting, Nicolaas Verkolje was keen to make his portraits as timeless as possible, while Rachel Ruysch and Jan van Huysum practiced this 'virtuous and decent' manner in their idealised flower pieces.⁴⁵

Unlike their predecessors, who were not dependent on commissions and worked mainly for the free art market, these painters – active in the second half of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century – catered for a new breed of art enthusiasts. At the time, especially after 1672 – the so-called year of calamities, the Dutch art market was dominated by art lovers who descended from a relatively newly established stratum of urban patriciate.

43 Žakula, *Reforming Dutch Art* 129.

44 Homer, *Iliad*, trans. by A.T. Murray, revised by W.F. Wyatt (Cambridge (MA): 1999); Lairese, *Schilderboek* 109; Lairese, *Painting* 83.

45 Žakula, *Reforming Dutch Art* 129.

They enjoyed intellectual conversation, dancing, hunting, tea drinking, fencing, and the collecting and patronage of art as their leisurely pursuits. They embraced more refined codes of behaviour so as to distinguish themselves from the middle class, and the cultivation of a classicising taste in art was part of this process.⁴⁶

These *connoisseurs* were the exact audience for whom *Nil Volentibus Arduum's* plays were written and destined. That the members of the learned society belonged to the same social stratum undoubtedly helped promote their quest. In 1672 the Theatre closed its doors to the public, to reopen after five years of imposed silence under the leadership of *Nil Volentibus Arduum*.⁴⁷ Once staunchly opposed to what the *Schouwburg* had to offer, *Nil Volentibus Arduum* and its members were now calling the shots.⁴⁸ Berated by Horatian instruction, crass farces had no place in *Nil Volentibus Arduum's* theatre. Politics and events from recent history were equally unwelcome as they treated subjects deemed potentially dangerous to the fragile apparatus of the state.⁴⁹ Ultimately, Biblical accounts had no place on stage either, for preacher and playwright were a world apart. *Nil Volentibus Arduum's* plays, much like De Lairese's proposals for paintings *à l'antique*, were purged of religious content, and were therefore symptomatic of the Enlightenment to come.⁵⁰ Bourgeois virtues performed in an orderly and decorous manner became central to the repertoire, for they were of paramount importance to the task of edifying Amsterdam's *jeunesse dorée*.⁵¹

Making sure that the theatre did not stage anything that might cause offence did not bode well for the critical fortune of *Nil Volentibus Arduum's* theatrical adventures. Their emphasis on irreproachable language received nothing but condemnation in centuries to come. *Nil Volentibus Arduum's* plays focussing on the trials and tribulations of the bourgeois life came to be perceived as exsanguinated and humourless, while the learned society's members were painted as dull sticklers for rules, whose pedantry was detrimental to their creativity.⁵² Little wonder that in her seminal study of Andries Pels's adaptation of Horace's

46 Spierenburg P., *Elites and Etiquette: Mentality and Social Structure in The Early Modern Northern Netherlands* (Rotterdam: 1981) 22; Žakula, *Reforming Dutch Art* 129.

47 De Vries L., *Gerard de Lairese: An Artist between Stage and Studio* (Amsterdam: 1998) 136.

48 Harmsen, *Onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* 2.

49 Grootes – Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, "The Dutch Revolt and the Golden Age" 224.

50 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Gebruik en misbruik* 26. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Literature at the time of Rembrandt* 123–124.

51 Grootes – Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, "The Dutch Revolt and the Golden Age" 223.

52 Grootes – Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, "The Dutch Revolt and the Golden Age" 226; Harmsen, *Onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* 6–7.

Ars Poetica (1973), Maria Schenkeveld-van der Dussen excused her choice of topic in a straightforwardly apologetic fashion by saying that even bad seeds deserve scholarly attention.⁵³

Such hostile attitude may well have stymied more thorough investigation into *Nil Volentibus Arduum*'s, and, ultimately, Horace's role in shaping de Lairese's views on art. They were unique and unprecedented musings on painting, albeit perfectly in line with Horace's wish not to depart so far from the tone of tragedy, even if in the writing of satyric dramas.⁵⁴ Especially noteworthy, as this essay has shown, was de Lairese's wish to demonstrate that the ideal *ars longa, vita brevis* was attainable in a range of subjects. If the painter followed de Lairese's creative take on the Horatian adage of instruction and delight, while keeping an eye on decorum, he would invent a piece, whose lustre outlived one's earthly existence and became truly timeless – be it a history, domestic goddesses enjoying a cup of tea, or a fine cattle-piece.⁵⁵ De Lairese, too, suffered at the hands of art historians whose principal aim was to distinguish what constituted true Dutchness in painting. This standpoint originated with Théophile Thoré, whose loathing of de Lairese's Classicism affected and infected virtually all later writings on de Lairese's art theory.⁵⁶ From Thoré onward, de Lairese came to embody not only unwanted foreign influences, but also stodgy and stale views of art. So much so that the creative side of de Lairese's classicism, tailor-made for Dutch artistic situation, remained overshadowed by his bad reputation.

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53 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Dichtkunst* 1973, introduction.

54 Lyckle de Vries failed to recognise the influence of Horace in de Lairese's musings on the passions, but rather sought it in van Hoogstraaten's treatise on art, Vries, *Stage and Studio* 143.

55 Lairese, *Schilderboek* 109–110; Lairese, *Painting* 83–84.

56 Bürger W., *Musées de la Hollande*, 2 vols. (Paris: 1858–60) 145; Hecht P.A., "Rembrandt and Raphael back to back: the contribution of Thoré", *Simiolus* 26.3 (1998) 171.

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