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In Memoriam  
ERWIN PANOFSKY

March 30, 1892 – March 14, 1968

H. VAN DE WAAL †

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The death at 76 of Erwin Panofsky on 14 March 1968 marks not only the passing of one of the greatest art historians, but also that of probably the last humanist. Panofsky, born in Hanover, started at Berlin University as a law student. His wide interests soon became apparent when at the age of 19 he submitted a paper in an academic competition on the subject of *Die theoretische Kunstlehre Albrecht Dürers (Dürers Aesthetik)*.<sup>1</sup> His paper was awarded the prize, Panofsky had found his *métier*; the history of art theory was to remain one of his specialties throughout his life.

After study in Freiburg-im-Breisgau and again in Berlin, he had now become an art historian, familiar above all with the middle ages. He had intensively studied medieval architecture and sculpture under his first teacher, Wilhelm Vöge. Panofsky's second teacher, Adolph Goldschmidt, had deepened his knowledge of medieval sculpture and added to it a comprehensive acquaintance with medieval manuscripts and everything related to them—as what is not?<sup>2</sup>

At the age of 29 he went to Hamburg, first as *Privatdozent*, and shortly afterwards he became the first Professor of Art History at that young university. His contact there with Aby Warburg and the program proposed by Warburg for the study of *das Nachleben der Antike* added a new, and methodologically most important, aspect to his activities. Most studies from the first period of his life, which lasted until 1933, were directed to Warburg's central theme:

*Dürers Stellung zur Antike* (1922)

*Dürers "Melancolia I"* (with Fritz Saxl, 1923; Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, 2)

*Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst* (1930, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, 18)

Ernst Cassirer was also working in Hamburg then, and Panofsky's study *Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'* (1924/25, Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg) was, as it were, an independent answer to Cassirer's philosophy of culture. Cassirer had taught that our cultural forms bear the stamp of the times in which they develop. Panofsky demonstrated that even the mathematical perspective system of the

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<sup>1</sup> Published in 1914 (Berlin) as Inaugural Dissertation, Freiburg-im-Breisgau.

<sup>2</sup> He commemorated his teachers in "Wilhelm Vöge, 16. Februar 1868–30. Dezember 1952" (foreword to the posthumous publication of a collection of essays: W. Vöge, *Bildhauer des Mittelalters*, Berlin 1958, pp. ix–xxxii) and "Goldschmidts Humor" (in the memorial volume *Adolph Goldschmidt zum Gedächtnis*, Hamburg 1963, pp. 15–32).

Renaissance, the *perspectiva artificialis* of Brunelleschi and Alberti (considered by its inventors to be a universally valid method for depicting three-dimensional space), does not on closer inspection conform with our visual reality, despite the five centuries (1400–1900, broadly speaking) during which it had been accepted as such. Even this *perspectiva artificialis* turned out to be a *symbolische Form*.<sup>3</sup>

Although strongly influenced intellectually by Warburg's circle, Panofsky was never a part in any organizational sense of the remarkably quickly developing *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*; and that, too, was typical of him. He was not a man of institutes and highly organized research tools. He remained a man on his own, even later in America. In his case, however, this meant the complete opposite of aloofness. How he was able, year after year, without an institute and without a large staff of assistants, to produce fundamental studies in one area after another will very likely remain his secret, along with his ability to carry on a lively and valuable professional correspondence with anyone in art history on any topic; another aspect of his humanism.

From 1931 Panofsky was a half-yearly visiting professor at New York University. He was there in 1933 when darkness fell on Germany, but he turned back to help a number of imperilled students finish their studies. After that he was able to establish himself and his family in the United States. He taught at Princeton and Harvard, among other places, and for the last 27 years of his life he was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), an institution which, to quote Panofsky, "... owes its reputation to the fact that its members do their research work openly and their teaching surreptitiously, whereas the opposite is true of so many other institutions of learning."

Panofsky's characteristic humour is apparent here, and one can imagine how willingly he applied himself to the freely undertaken task of "clandestine" teaching. Also, he was one of those émigrés whose English was notably clearer than their scholarly German: "the clarity of his adopted language belied the difficulties of his German."<sup>4</sup>

A single example of his lively style may be cited here. His translation of the writings of the 12th-century abbot of St. Denis, Suger,

<sup>3</sup> He had earlier treated a parallel problem in his article "Die Entwicklung der Proportionslehre als Abbild der Stilentwicklung", *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 14 (1921) pp. 188–219 (reprinted in the volume *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, Berlin 1964, pp. 169–204).

<sup>4</sup> W. McAllister Johnson in his contribution to the series of essays mentioned in the bibliography (no. 15), "Hommage au Professeur Panofsky", p. [263].

about his own activities as *maecenas* (Suger's *Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis*, among others<sup>5</sup>) is considered by many to be Panofsky's most scholarly work; scholarly because countless forgotten items of *ritualia* and *sacramentalia* demanded an explanation. His treatise *Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*, in which explanations of Greek, Latin, Vulgar Latin and Italian mathematical terms were necessary, had still been simple in that respect, because common sense can to some extent serve as a guideline in the clarification of the mathematical text. Suger's text, however, presented philological problems of the following nature: what is the exact meaning of *alae*, previously translated as "aisles", which is incorrect since Suger used this term exclusively for the ambulatory, while the term *cruces collaterales* was reserved for the transepts.<sup>6</sup>

But listen how Panofsky introduces the book:

"Rarely—in fact, all but never—has a great patron of the arts been stirred to write a retrospective account of his intentions and accomplishments. Men of action, from Caesars to country doctors, have recorded the deeds and experiences they felt would not attain deserved permanence save by the grace of the written word."

The same may be said, also, of "men of expression", poets, painters and sculptors, but not, however, of

"the patron, the man whose prestige and initiative summons other men's work into being: the prince of the Church, the secular ruler, the aristocrat and the plutocrat. From his point of view the work of art should render praise unto the patron, but not the patron unto the work of art. The Hadrians and Maximilians, the Leos and Juliuses, the Jean de Berrys and Lorenzo de Medicis decided what they wanted, selected the artists, took a hand in devising the program, approved or criticized its execution and paid—or did not pay—the bills."

So begins, in a language not his own, Panofsky's edition of one of the most difficult texts of medieval archeology. No wonder young American students, to whom everything he had to say was new, hung on his every word.

Almost every publication by young American art historians in the last two decades began with a footnote of thanks for his help. "Pan" had become the *praeceptor Americae*, at least as far as art history was concerned. It is true, however, that that was not the whole of

<sup>5</sup> *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its Art Treasures. Edited, translated and annotated by Erwin Panofsky, Princeton University Press 1946.*

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 168 ad 52,8.

America. His son, a physicist, was connected with the development of the atomic bomb, and our Panofsky used to tell how, at many an introduction, the response was, "Ah, you are the father of Panofsky." In such cases his paternal pride prevailed, and he remained silent about himself.

Panofsky's contribution to art history did not differ essentially from the proven philological method of clarifying, with the help of all possible resources and disciplines, those ancient forms which have become obscure through distance in time. The disciplines which Panofsky chiefly used were classical literature, the history of classical religions, the history of the sciences (including astrology and the history of mathematics), the history of law (including canon law), church history (including liturgics and the history of dogma), and above all, mythology (including the history of mythography).<sup>7</sup>

The method was not new. But it was noteworthy, because the art historians of his generation had for the most part entrenched themselves in rigid form-analysis and style-criticism, and the connoisseurship based on those grounds had become highly lapidary in its expression.

Significant in this respect is the difference between Panofsky's approach in his *Early Netherlandish Painting, its Origins and Character* (1953), and that of Max J. Friedländer, 25 years his senior, in the 14 volumes of his *Altniederländische Malerei* (1924–1937). While it is true that in his book Panofsky drew heavily on Friedländer's pioneer labour of sifting and ordering, he himself did trailblazing work in the complex field of the art of the miniature in French, Burgundian, and Netherlandish regions around 1400, a study which was the richest fruit of his work under Goldschmidt.

It will be remembered that the text of Friedländer's *opus magnum* consists primarily of succinct, finely chiselled characterizations of the works of the more important painters of the Low Countries, followed by *oeuvre* lists, edited with the reticent eloquence of a *Guide Michelin*, which does not discuss its one-, two-, or three-star system either; what is not mentioned is not worth mentioning. As a matter of principle, the writings of predecessors are hardly ever cited, neither *in bonam*, nor *in malam partem*; one must presume that the author has read everything, and what is more important, has seen everything; it is for the reader to take or leave the final result.

It was high time that beside this indispensable, practically in-

<sup>7</sup> Beside these oceans of erudition one finds—and it is typical of the emancipated Jewry of the Germany of Bismarck and Wilhelm II—scarcely one drop from the *Mare Judaicum*. However, in 1921 Panofsky gave a lecture on *Rembrandt und das Judentum*,—of which a report did appear in the *Vossische Zeitung*, 4.1.1921, Morgenblatt, 2. Beilage. (Reprinted below, pp. 14–16, from a copy kindly provided by the Warburg Institute, London.)

fallible guidebook a more human publication should appear which explained why particular roads went where they did, which raised the question of possible connections with foreign lands, and which, above all, discussed the function of the traffic system under consideration.

Friedländer dealt only with problems of attribution and chronology; otherwise he left everything as he found it. Panofsky, building on the order established—be it repeated—by Friedländer and others, could go beyond that. His magisterial chapter, “Reality and symbol in early Flemish painting”, for example, sets forth how the increasing naturalism in the art of Jan van Eyck in no way signified the disappearance of medieval symbolism, as had been incorrectly assumed in the anachronous interpretation adopted by 19th-century scholars. Thus Panofsky rid us of a distorting perspective and taught us that this new naturalism was in fact still completely steeped in the medieval symbolic conception whereby every physical form was of necessity the bearer of a spiritual meaning: *spiritualia sub metaphoris corporalium*.

It has become almost inconceivable to us that the simple yet far-reaching question of the meaning or intention of a work of art should ever have caused alarmed surprise. If we remember, however, that just a few decades ago the labels under the portraits in our leading museum were rewritten to include only the name of the artist, because the name of the sitter was felt to be merely a distraction from “aesthetic emotion”, we shall understand how a student from Panofsky’s earliest Hamburg days could recall that “his interest in the meaning in the visual arts made him suspect to the establishment.”<sup>8</sup>

The general recognition that art history requires both the formal analysis of the connoisseur and the interpretative activity of the

<sup>8</sup> Hugo Buchthal, in the collection *A Commemorative Gathering*, p. 12, mentioned here in the bibliography (no. 12).

People held to the pronouncements of the celebrated Wölfflin, who had taught regarding the Raphael fresco cycle in the Vatican Camera della Segnatura: “Historisches Wissen ist zum Verständnis nicht erforderlich”, and regarding Delacroix’ Faust illustrations: “Wir denken nicht an Goethe, sondern an einen Gegensatz zwischen Hell und Dunkel . . .” (for these and other examples, see H. van de Waal, *Drie eeuwen Vaderlandsche Geschied-uitbeelding 1500–1800. Een iconologische studie*, I. The Hague 1952, pp. 8–10).

But also more recent examples of this mentality can be mentioned, e.g. J. Jahn, *Rembrandt*, Leipzig 1956, p. 102 regarding the “Jewish Bride”: “Ob hier ein alttestamentliches Liebespaar gemeint ist oder Titus und seine Braut, wie man auch geglaubt hat, oder wer sonst immer, ist unerheblich zu wissen . . .”. Even quite recently it has been pointed out that: “It is, of course, traditional for little or no attention to be paid to the interpretation of iconography [i.e. iconographic interpretation] in France . . .” E. Snoep, “Fine Flourishes from French Museums”, *Simiolus* 4 (1971) p. 126 on the occasion of the exhibition *Dutch 17th-Century Painting from French Museums* (Spring 1971, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

iconologist is largely a result of Panofsky's masterly application of the aforementioned well-tried philological methods to rescue 19th-century iconography from the discredit into which it had fallen, thus expanding it into a universally oriented iconology.

There is another way of saying this. For many years historiography has known two complementary forms: the first, particularizing, directed towards the thorough study of a single item; the second, more general, directed towards the exposition of the characteristics of a larger whole. In the first case the researcher may be said to use a microscope to arrive at the most precise specification possible of the material under scrutiny. In the second—to continue our metaphor—he uses a reversed telescope in his effort to sketch an overall view of a wide panorama. Every general history of literature is an example of the latter method, every case of philological text interpretation an example of the first. In art history critical connoisseurship is clearly a “microscopist” discipline *par excellence*. In Panofsky's day every form of art history that was oriented towards cultural history presented itself exclusively in the second, the panoramic variety. General surveys, of the culture of the Renaissance, for instance, had existed even before Burckhardt's unsurpassed example. And when Dvořák and others of the Vienna school practised art history as *Geistesgeschichte*, their work too, entirely took the form of the second, more generalizing method.

Panofsky now, set himself to study the single, individual work of art, working just as scrupulously as the connoisseur (and often led by an intuition at least as strong). It was his innovation to practise this detailed form of art study within the broad framework of general cultural history. His question “what did this individual work of art mean in its own time?” tended to cause raised eyebrows, because, with regard to an *individual work of art*, the posing of such questions had fallen into disfavour. One asked: to which school does it belong? Who made it? What is the dating? At most one might ask: whom does it depict?—since the identity of the person portrayed might provide irrefutable evidence for the chronology problem. But *what* does the work of art depict? One did not ask that. “Allegory”; after all, one can't know everything.

Nothing, however, is less accurate than the idea that Panofsky's major contribution lay in the solution of particular iconographic puzzles which had baffled others. If his work attracted attention through its love of detail, then it was in the manner of the work of Jan van Eyck, where, to use Panofsky's own words, “. . . all details [are] perfectly integrated with total form . . .”.<sup>9</sup> He had no wish to

<sup>9</sup> E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Cambridge, Mass. 1964<sup>3</sup>, pp. 181–182.

see iconology established as a discipline in its own right. He even regretted a form of compartmentalisation whereby architectural history was split off from the history of art.<sup>10</sup> He was fully aware of the danger that the iconology he championed in contrast to the earlier iconography might develop in an undesirable direction, "... not like ethnology as opposed to ethnography, but like astrology as opposed to astrography".<sup>11</sup>

His great merit lay in his ability to demonstrate largely on the basis of new, detail research, the interrelation of certain problems, in a way which appealed to a larger public. His books were often the products of his classroom lectures, and even of lectures "to minks and chinchillas rather than to colleagues and students."<sup>12</sup>

His two-volume monograph on *Dürer* (complete with *oeuvre* catalogue) of 1943 has gone through four reprintings so far. His *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art* (1960), which grew out of a series of addresses, is again the sort of book in which the rich harvest of a lifetime dedicated to research into the phenomenon "renaissance" is intelligibly summarized.

His last work of this nature was the study *Tomb Sculpture. Four Lectures on its changing aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (1964). He began a lecture on this subject with the remark that he had reached an age when one could take pleasure in being able to look at a grave from the outside.

It may seem strange that Panofsky, methodological innovator as he was, and given his talent for dealing with problems in the history of art theory, has left no system of aesthetics, nor even a comprehensive methodology. One might even say that Panofsky was not at his best the few times he attempted to force his craft into a system.

<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Dr. J. G. van Gelder, June 2, 1965, he expresses himself on this point: "But as regards the crucial question whether iconology is a discipline in its own right or just one of the methods that may be applied for the elucidation of works of art, I always was, and still am, of the opinion that the second alternative is true. Being an eclectic by nature I am basically opposed to all divisions, particularly within one discipline which, after all, has a history of at least five-hundred years. I even deplore the basic distinction which is made in this country between art historians and students of architectural history, and it would be a real misfortune if people were "iconologists", "analyst of space", "analyst of colour", etc., instead of being art historians *tout court*. Of course, everybody has his natural predilections and shortcomings and should be conscious of these in order to develop some kind of humility". (kindly made available by Dr. Van Gelder).

<sup>11</sup> "Iconography and Iconology. An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art", first appeared in *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York 1939, pp. 3-17. The passage cited was added to the original text in the reprint, published in the volume *Meaning in the Visual Arts. Papers in and on Art History*, Garden City 1955, pp. 32 ff. (In the paperback edition, London 1970, Penguin, Peregrine Book, p. 58).

<sup>12</sup> Cited by W. McAllister Johnson in "Hommage au Professeur Panofsky" (no. 15 of our bibliography) p. [263].

This, too, is consistent with the picture already presented. Having no natural bent for abstract systems, he was foremost a pragmatist in all provinces of the human mind. That is, perhaps, a further explanation of his easy rapport with his American students. It is possibly also the reason why a unique exhibition could recently be organized, *Symbols in Transformation. Iconographic Themes at the Time of the Reformation*, in which Panofsky's favourite themes were demonstrated *ad oculos*.

Art history is remarkable among its sister disciplines in that, on the face of it, scarcely any interpretation seems to be needed for an understanding of its material, which has come down to us in tangible concreteness, or in clear colours, or at least in black and white.

In reality, this evident clarity is combined with at least as great a natural limitation. The realm of *icones* may be clearly and commodiously structured as no other; it is inhabited by beings which, though passing *lucē clarius* before our eyes, yet speak—like all other witnesses from earlier cultures—no language other than their own. Much of the clarity of the *icones* is merely apparent, and as a result, there can be more serious misapprehensions and greater confusion of minds in this area than anywhere else. Also, the *icon's* powers of expression are intrinsically helpless before some of the commonest categories of human thought (negations, wishes, etc.).

One could leave this for what it is, had not previous generations, each in the way which to them seemed obvious, entrusted their ordinary human feelings, admonitions or expectations to these hyperclear but at the same time insufficiently articulate interpreters.

Obviously, the need for interpretation of these interpreters will be felt more strongly as the traditional bonds with the culture in which the *icones* confronting us did originate, have grown weaker. As long as art lovers directed their gaze only towards the products of the great European renaissance (the period between 1400 and 1900, broadly speaking), of which they themselves formed a part, there was not much that required explanation. The situation changed fundamentally, however, when the field of vision rapidly expanded to include the pre-renaissance European past as well as non-European cultures.

At the same time and in close connection with this expansion of vision the bonds with the classical renaissance culture slackened. The new dimensions that loomed into view would by themselves have posed countless questions. But when simultaneously the whole of western society underwent the most drastic technological, psychological and sociological changes, the renaissance world view could not but lose its unique validity. Paradoxically, then was the very time when the renaissance was bound to become the object of inter-

pretation. The work of Warburg and his colleagues was a manifestation of the phase just outlined. It seemed as if the problems concerning the renaissance increasingly forced themselves on the mind as that period itself was losing its impact on contemporary culture and was being superseded by new, altogether differently structured forms.

It is hoped that this digression will be forgiven on the grounds that it serves to summarize most conveniently the range, research orientation and methodological background to Panofsky's lifework.

A single example may illustrate this. It is borrowed from one of the most brilliant contributions that appeared in the *Festschrift* for Ernst Cassirer published in 1936.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to Poussin's famous painting in the Louvre *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1650–1655) the following interpretation had always been accepted and quite rightly too. The shepherds who find a tomb in their Arcadian landscape read with difficulty the inscription, which they translate as: *I, too, have been in Arcady*. The words are, thus, placed in the mouth of the dead person, as in many tomb inscriptions, and the whole, then, signifies a melancholy glance backward to an ideal life. Goethe placed *Auch ich in Arkadien* as motto above his *Italienische Reise*, and the significance becomes still more trivial, or even hedonistic, when the hero of Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers* (1858) sings with melancholy, in the German translation of the libretto: *Als ich noch Prinz war von Arkadien (Quand j'étais Prince de Béotie)*.

Panofsky, starting from textual criticism, indicates certain reservations. If the inscription is really concerned with a shepherd (or shepherdess) who had lived in that lovely area and had been entombed there, what meaning could really be attached to a tomb inscription I, TOO, WAS BORN OR LIVED IN ARCADY? But there is more: elliptical sayings such as ET IN ARCADIA EGO can never be completed with a preterite; a present tense belongs here. Finally, in such abbreviated forms *et* always takes the adverbial sense of *even*, and invariably refers to the noun or pronoun directly following it. The only conceivable translation is therefore *Et in Arcadia* (even in Arcady) *ego* [*sum*] (there am I), and thus speaks Death. The saying belongs in origin to the centuries-old genre of *Vanitas* representations and contains the following *memento mori*: See, even in the loveliest surroundings, even during your most pleasant occupations, shepherd, I, Death, am present.

<sup>13</sup> "Et in Arcadia Ego. On the Conception of Transience in Poussin and Watteau", in: *Philosophy and History, Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, Oxford 1936, pp. 223–254. Reprinted in: *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, pp. 295–320, as "«Et in Arcadia ego». Poussin and the elegiac tradition".

Poussin's interpretation, therefore, rested on an incorrect translation. Even this error, however, turns out to be a *symbolische Form*, because a scarcely concealed moralization giving way to an openly admitted elegiac sentiment is characteristic of a development in European thought from the 17th century on, in which "a mellow meditation on a beautiful past" was given preference over macabre admonitions.

The farthest point in this development was reached by Fragonard, who had two little cupids in whipped-cream rococo forms gambolling above a broken sarcophagus, with light provided by a wedding torch. Here the moral has been turned into its reverse: "Even in death, there may be Arcady."

It has been argued that this interpretative art history, this iconology, which does not shrink from borrowing its arguments from Latin grammar, should not be considered more than an auxiliary to art history. It is a matter of definition really. This much is certain, however, that no study of art history which deserves that name can limit itself to a strictly formal Mondrian-like approach.

Or, to let the master himself speak, now in German, "Man kann sich selber und anderen immer wieder die Erfahrung machen, dass eine gelungene Inhaltsexegese nicht nur dem 'historischen Verständnis' des Kunstwerks zugute kommt, sondern auch dessen 'ästhetisches Erlebnis', ich will nicht sagen: intensiviert, wohl aber in eigentümlicher Weise zugleich bereichert und klärt."<sup>14</sup>

Panofsky, who became a foreign member of our Academy in 1954, was never—as far as I know—present at a meeting of this section. But I have heard him say that he valued this appointment most highly, along with so many others of a similar nature. In 1936, for example, he was granted an honorary doctorate by the University of Utrecht, the first of the thirteen he was to receive.<sup>15</sup> He knew our country well and sojourned here gladly.

Some of us preserve a thankful memory of his warm, human friendship; there are few among the members of the Liberal Arts section who have not come into contact earlier or later in their work with some part of his *oeuvre*, a series of works on topics starting in Egyp-

<sup>14</sup> *Hercules am Scheidewege*, Leipzig 1930, p. x.

<sup>15</sup> "The [doctorate] dearest to him was that conferred by the University of Utrecht in 1936, not only because it was his first but because it came to him at a time when the trauma of expatriation still weighed heavily upon his mind. There followed Princeton University (1947) . . ." H. W. Janson, *Yearbook 1969 [of the] American Philosophical Society*, Philadelphia 1970, p. 152. Another recognition from this country came when he was named a foreign member of the *Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde*.

tian antiquity and continuing to our own day with studies on the iconology of the film.<sup>16</sup>

No discussion of Panofsky is complete without mention of the significance that music, particularly that of Mozart, had for him, and without an attempt to evoke his lively personality. His sparkling spirit made every conversation with him an unforgettable experience. He knew the secret of coining memorable phrases (e.g. his definition of a humanist: "somebody who rejects authority but respects tradition").<sup>17</sup> But he possessed in addition an admirable quality, rare among great men: he could listen. It is probably to this quality that can be attributed the remarkable fact that after his death each of his friends thought he had known the *real* Panofsky.

Seldom has a more natural man been seen, but it is entirely consistent with the picture that I have sketched, that nature meant little to him. Flowers and children were outside his sphere; "a child should be seen, much less heard until he could read his Latin". Erasmus could have said it—and perhaps did say it; Pan's memory was encyclopaedic.

When he had once spent the afternoon in the company of his then very young granddaughter, he dreamed the next night the following epitaph for himself:

*He hated babies, gardening and birds ;  
But loved a few adults, all dogs, and words.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "On Movies", *Bulletin [of the] Department of Art and Archaeology*, Princeton University (1936) pp. 5–15; "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures", *Transition* 26 (1937) pp. 121–133 (reprinted in D. L. Durling, *A Preface to Our Day*, New York 1940, pp. 570–582); "Style and Medium in the Motion Picture", *Critique* (New York) I, 3 (1947) pp. 5–28 (several times reprinted, see *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, p. 17, no. 97.)

<sup>17</sup> Cited by David Coffin in *A Commemorative Gathering* (our bibliography no. 12), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Cited, from a letter to Harry Bober, in *A Commemorative Gathering*, p. 20.

## REMBRANDT UND DAS JUDENTUM

VORTRAG VON DR. ERWIN PANOFSKY

In der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums sprach Dr. Panofsky, Privatdozent der Kunstgeschichte in Hamburg, vor einem die Aula überfüllenden Publikum über die Beziehungen Rembrandts zum Judentum und entwickelte sehr fein an der Art, wie er in seinen verschiedenen Epochen die Juden darstellte, die Geschichte der Rembrandtschen Kunst überhaupt.

Seit dem 16. Jahrhundert wurden die sog. Marannen, die entflohenen spanischen und portugiesischen Juden, in Holland aus intellektuellen, politischen, religiösen und ästhetischen Sympathien heraus mit offenen Armen aufgenommen. Besonders die Künstler zogen es zu ihnen, deren Typus die Patriarchen wieder lebendig zu machen schien. Rembrandt wurde der Erwecker einer religiösen Malerei, weil nur er imstande war, den historischen Stoff mit individuellem Leben zu erfüllen und auch die greifbarste Wirklichkeit in das Menschlich-Edle hinaufzuläutern. Gerade dies Bestreben aber führte ihn zur genauen Beobachtung der Juden. So zählte er auch den Amsterdamer Oberrabbiner zu seinen Freunden und verfertigte Radierungen zur Illustrierung eines seiner Bücher—ja, das berühmte Blatt Rembrandts, das fälschlich als "Alchymist" bezeichnet wird, stellt jedenfalls eine kabbalistische Beschwörungsszene dar, deren Verständnis ihm jener Manasse Ben Israel vermittelt hatte.

An Hand vorzüglicher Wiedergaben von Radierungen und Porträts wies nun Panofsky nach, dass Rembrandt, der von Anfang an nur ein gewissermassen äusserliches Interesse an den Juden genommen hatte, dies allmählich in unerhörter Weise vertiefte. In seiner ersten Periode interessierte ihn vor allem dreierlei: der Charaktertypus, die starke Ausdrucksbewegung und das Malerisch-Phantastische. Ein jüdischer Bettler, der berühmte Rabbiner des Herzogs von Devonshire und der Belsazar zeigen, wie stark ihm hier die jüdischen Typen entgegenkamen. Rembrandt kam es darauf an, das seelische Leben des einzelnen festzulegen, seinen Charakter bis ins einzelne hinein durch seine Kunst zu verdeutlichen.

In seiner zweiten Periode dagegen geht er über dies Bestreben hinaus: er gibt Menschen, die uns stimmungsmässig vertraut erscheinen, ohne dass wir etwas über ihren Charakter auszusagen vermöchten. So tritt auch beim Juden, den er porträtiert—etwa dem Ephraim Bonus—, das spezifisch Äusserlich-Jüdische zurück

hinter dem allgemein Menschlichen und der besonderen innerlichen Art, in der der Jude eben dies Menschliche repräsentiert. Die Gesticulationen, die in der ersten Periode etwas Dramatisches hat, wird in der zweiten (etwa beim predigenden Christus) fast völlig unbestimmt: sie verzichtet gewissermassen darauf, bestimmte Gefühle auszudrücken. So gewinnt auch erst der mittlere Rembrandt eine Beziehung zum Familienleben der Juden, das er z.B. ergreifend in den beiden Eltern des Tobias darstellt, die durch das Gefühl langen, ergebenen Wartens miteinander unlöslich verbunden ruhig in ihrem Stübchen sitzen; in ihrem gerade im Gegensatz zur ersten Periode völlig undramatischen Leiden ein um so menschlich rührenderes Bild!

In der letzten Periode endlich wird der Psychologe Rembrandt zum Metaphysiker. Er erfasst in seinen Menschen etwas, was nicht mehr definierbar, ja nicht einmal mehr erfahrbar ist: die "Stimmung" der mittleren Periode weicht einem Zustand, bei dem das Individuell-Bestimmbare in einer höheren Einheit aufgegangen ist. Die Menschen, die Rembrandt nun malt, sind nicht mehr typisch oder individuell-stimmungsmässig aufgefasst, sondern nach Spinozas Wort *sub specie aeternitatis*. Sie sind Wesen, deren empirisches Einzelbewusstsein nur der "Modus" einer allumfassenden metaphysischen Substanz ist. Jetzt erst fand Rembrandt in den Juden die Zeitlosigkeit des Orients und die Vertieftheit einer uralten Rasse. Er malt sie nur noch als Köpfe, und diese Köpfe eigentlich nur noch als Augen; aber aus diesen spricht mehr, als was in diesem einen Menschen vorgehen kann; die Juden werden ihm zu bevorzugten Repräsentanten eines seelischen Verhaltens jenseits alles nur Individuellen. Er vertieft den Menschen bis zu seinem Aufgehen in Gott, umgekehrt ausgedrückt: er findet Gott im Menschen. Schliesslich verschwindet Christus überhaupt aus seinen Darstellungen; vorher ist er nicht mehr der Handelnde, sondern der zeitlos Erkennende, zeitlos Fühlende, dabei tritt er jetzt stets als Typus des Judentums vor uns, wie in dem herrlichen Berliner Bild.

Jetzt verschwinden "*sub specie aeternitatis*" auch die Gegensätze von Gut und Böse, sie lösen sich auf in der Stimmung seelischer Gemeinschaft. Während der Saul auf dem früheren Bilde, das ihn mit dem harfenspielenden David zusammen zeigt, noch ganz Grimm und Hass ist, verbindet ihn auf dem Spätbild mit seinem jungen Gegner eine Gemeinsamkeit der Stimmung, die sich in seinem lautlosen Weinen beim Spiel Davids äussert. Am stärksten tritt diese Auffassung in einem seiner letzten Bilder, der Abführung Hamanns zum Tode, hervor, wo es sich viel mehr um einen unwiederbringlichen Abschied eines Verlorenen aus der Mitte seiner Freunde als um die Strafe für einen hartgesottenen Bösewicht zu handeln scheint.

Dieser Rembrandt erinnert nun in der merkwürdigsten Weise an die Denkungsart Spinozas, der in seiner Ethik erklärt: "Die Dinge werden von uns auf zweierlei Weise als wirklich erfasst: entweder insofern wir sie mit Beziehung auf eine bestimmte Zeit und einen bestimmten Ort als existent denken oder insofern wir sie als in Gott begriffen und aus der Notwendigkeit der gottlichen Natur folgend denken. Die Dinge nun, die auf diese letzte Weise als real erkannt werden, die erfassen wir sub specie aeternitatis". Die Philosophie Spinozas, in denselben Jahren gereift wie der Spätstil Rembrandts, ist die Geistesrichtung eines Menschen, bei dem eine ähnliche Tiefe und antidogmatische Religiosität ebenso unmittelbar zum Gedanken wurde wie bei Rembrandt zur Gestalt, eines Menschen, für den deshalb die Philosophie in demselben Sinne Metaphysik wurde wie für Rembrandt die Kunst. So ist denn auch in den Spätwerken des Künstlers der Gegensatz zwischen Geist und Körper, zwischen Bewegung und Ruhe, wie bei Spinoza aufgehoben: Alles Transitorische verschwindet, es bleibt das eine urewige Sein, eben jenes Sein, das nach Spinoza entgegen der Lehre Descartes Gott ist.

H i.

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\*Mrs. Hedy Backlin-Landman and Prof. W. S. Heckscher kindly provided me with several additions to the titles I had already collected.

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