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Dutch Romanticism: a provincial affair*

Louis van Tilborgh

“Come, you feeble draftsmen, better your ways!”

For well over a century the term Romanticism has been used in art-historical manuals to identify the nineteenth-century movement which succeeded Neo-Classicism and preceded Realism. The authors of these works base their description of the movement not only on changes observed in German art, but also on developments in France, where contemporary art was being related to the Romantic tendency in literature as early as the 1820s. That relationship has recently been perceived as problematical, but it was considered perfectly valid by art critics of the period.¹ As one of them wrote on seeing the French Salon of 1824: “Today... painters, like writers, appear to have dispensed with all rules. Each of these gentlemen follows his own genius alone, and each fancies himself infallible. Painting, in a word, has become romantic, like poetry and prose.”²

Many publications on Dutch nineteenth-century art

also refer to a Romantic period, frequently leaning on the authority of Knoef, who allocated the years 1830–1840 to Dutch Romanticism. “Then comes that complete upheaval which brings about the most profound change in the world of ideas, in mental attitudes, and in pictorial technique. Dutch spirits were also swept along in this tide.”³ Knoef identified the landscapist Nuyen as the leader of a deliberately modernistic trend, saying that he was “undoubtedly the first Dutchman to give expression to Romanticism, and the one who did so in the most European manner” (fig. 1).⁴

Knoef backed his general thesis by pointing out that art critics writing between 1830 and 1840 frequently used the word “Romantic” in connection with Dutch art of the day. That, to him, was the proof positive that there really was such a tendency as Dutch Romanticism.⁵ The value of his conclusion, however, is dubious,

* This article is the result of a research project which I undertook for my degree in a group of advanced students supervised by Peter Hecht and Evert van Uiter. I am extremely grateful to them and to the other members of the group for their suggestions and criticisms. The quotation at the head of the article is taken from “Beoordeelend overzicht van de beoorlijkheden van Amstels schoonen, die toegelaten zijn ter gelegenheid der jongste tentoonstelling met critische tusschenspelen,” *De arke Noachs* 2 (1828), p. 258. Michael Hoyle translated the article from the Dutch.

1 For the problematical relationship in the specific case of Delacroix see Peter Hecht’s review of Sara Lichtenstein, *Delacroix and Raphael*, New York & London 1979, *Simiolus* 11 (1980), pp. 186–95. The most useful survey of Romanticism in European painting is Hugh Honour, *Romanticism*, London 1979.

2 *Lettres Champenoises* 18 (1824), p. 240: “Aujourd’hui... les peintres, comme les littérateurs, semblent avoir secoué toute règle; chacun de ces messieurs n’interroge plus que son génie, et se croit modestement infallible. La peinture, en un mot, est devenue romantique, comme la poésie et la prose.” Quoted in Pontus Grate, *Deux critiques d’art de l’époque romantique: Gustave Planche et Theophile Thoré*, Stockholm 1959, pp. 31–32.

3 J. Knoef, *Van Romantiek tot Realisme: een bundel kunsthistorische*

opstellen, The Hague 1947, pp. vii–viii: “Dan komt de volledige revolutioneering, die en de gedachtenwereld en de gemoedsgesteldheid en het gebruik der expressiemiddelen de grondigste wijziging doet ondergaan en ook in ons land de geesten medesleept.” See also idem, *Een eeuw Nederlandse schilderkunst*, Amsterdam 1948, pp. 52–67; and idem, “De schilderkunst in Nederland voor 1860,” in H.E. van Gelder et al. (ed.), *Kunstgeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 10, Zeist & Antwerp 1965, pp. 1887–91.

4 Knoef, *Een eeuw*, cit. (note 3), p. 60: “...ongetwijfeld degene, in wie hier te lande de romantiek zich voor het eerst en het meest in Europese termen geuit heeft.” Knoef’s views on Nuyen were adopted by Fritz Novotny, *Painting and sculpture in Europe 1780–1880*, Harmondsworth 1960, p. 139.

5 Knoef, *Een eeuw*, cit. (note 3), pp. 53, 69. Writers who have recently followed in Knoef’s footsteps include Ronald de Leeuw, “Johannes Tavenraat 1809–1881,” exhib. cat. *Johannes Tavenraat 1809–1881*, Cleves (Städtisches Museum Haus Koekkoek) 1981, p. 8; John Sillevs, “Wijnand Nuyen,” exhib. cat. *Wijnand Nuyen 1813–1839: Romantische werken*, The Hague (Haags Gemeentemuseum) 1977, p. 12; and idem, “Romantiek en Realisme,” exhib. cat. *De Haagse School: Hollandse meesters van de 19de eeuw*, The Hague (Haags Gemeentemuseum) 1983, p. 43.



1 Wijnand Nuyen, *Old building by the waterside*, 1834. Private collection

for the way in which that important word was used in the Netherlands did not correspond at all to the designation of the new artistic concept as formulated in Germany at the beginning of the century.⁶ There the word was associated with art forms which deviated from Classicist art theory, while Dutch critics used it solely as a term of mild abuse for works by colorists with a poor grasp of technique.⁷ Knoef was also well wide of the mark in

believing that the concept played a key role in discussions of nineteenth-century art, for between 1830 and 1840 art critics only used the word "Romantic" twelve times in connection with contemporary Dutch painting.⁸

Some critics of the period may have pinned the suggestive label "Romantic" to the work of a few colorists, but by and large there is nothing in nineteenth-century

6 The literary circles of the day were admittedly far from precise in their definition of the new artistic concept, but as R. Wellek, *Concepts of criticism*, New Haven & London 1975, pp. 151–52, concluded in his history of the term Romantic: "On the whole there was really no misunderstanding about the meaning of 'romanticism' as a new designation for poetry, opposed to the poetry of neo-classicism, and drawing its inspiration and models from the middle ages and the Renaissance. The term is understood in this sense all over Europe." For Knoef's definition of Romanticism see *Een eeuw*, cit. (note 3), p. 53.

7 See pp. 184 and 185 below.

8 Knoef, *Een eeuw*, cit. (note 3), p. 53. I have used the list of exhibition reviews published by Eveline Koolhaas-Grosfeld and Annemiek Ouwkerk as "Bibliografie van vroeg negentiende eeuwse Nederlandse kunstkritieken," *Oud Holland* 97 (1983), pp. 98–111. The word "romantisch" was associated with contemporary Dutch painting in

the following reviews: *Beoordeeling der schilder- en kunstwerken van nog levende Nederlandsche meesters, welke aanwezig zijn op de tentoonstelling te 's Gravenhage, 1833*, The Hague [1833], (referred to below as *Beoordeeling 1833*), pt. 1, p. 4 (twice); R., "Iets over de Stedelijke Tentoonstelling van Rotterdam," *Algemeene Konst- en Letterbode* 1832, pt. 2, pp. 189, 203 (three times); A., "Gedachten over den tegenwoordigen toestand der beeldende kunsten in ons vaderland, bij het zien der Haagse Tentoonstelling van Kunstwerken in 1833," *Algemeene Konst- en Letterbode* 1833, pt. 2, pp. 299–300 and 301–02 (three times); R., "Beoordeelend overzicht der voornaamste kunstwerken op de tentoonstelling te 's Gravenhage in 1835," *Algemeene Konst- en Letterbode* 1835, pt. 2, pp. 329 and 334 (three times); R., "De Tentoonstelling van Kunstwerken te Rotterdam in 1836," *Algemeene Konst- en Letterbode* 1836, pt. 2, p. 172 (once).

art criticism to suggest that there was a Romantic movement in Dutch art. The differences with contemporary French and German art were evidently too great. For instance, one critic writing in 1839 in the well-informed periodical *De Beeldende Kunsten* was worried that Dutch artists might follow their literary brethren and succumb to the influence of foreign Romanticism, for “whenever we view a collection of art works in this country which have been created by our compatriots and contemporaries [we are seized by] a fear that we too shall see our painters... stray from the proper path and gradually begin paying homage to unseemly taste. However, we count ourselves fortunate that this past exhibition [has] once again put our fear to shame and has demonstrated that the Dutch school of painting is still far from... abandoning truth and naturalness for vain luster and deformity.”⁹

It is my belief that the need to speak of a Dutch Romanticism must be sought towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the adherents of the Hague School maintained that the art of the first half of the century was of no more than local interest. It was an older critic, Gram, who first spoke enthusiastically of Dutch Ro-

manticism in an attempt to bolster the prestige of early nineteenth-century painting. In doing so he set out to give the older generation of artists an international status which van Santen Kolff, the advocate of the Hague School, wished to deny them, and not without reason.¹⁰ “When Victor Hugo wrote his *Nôtre Dame de Paris*,” Gram opened his speech for the defense, “De La Croix was painting his superb yet wild compositions. Isabey and others infused landscape and genre with Romanticism, and our own Nuyen, whose paintings cause some passionate devotees of the modern view to shrug their shoulders, was much esteemed at the time for the masterly way in which he followed this direction. *Follow* is perhaps not the right word; a man of genius is struck by the spirit of a movement, and he hands it on in an original manner.”¹¹

Gram’s view of Nuyen and Romanticism has so far remained virtually unchallenged, and it is generally taken as received dogma in publications on nineteenth-century painting. Veth, for example, believed that the youth of Holland saw Nuyen “as the representative of that heady excitement which the Dutch too called Romanticism.”¹² Nuyen, to Marius, was “the embodiment... of

9 “Tentoonstelling te ’s Gravenhage,” *De Beeldende Kunsten* 1 (1839-40), p. 130: “...zoo dikwijls wij ten onzent eene verzameling van de kunstgewrochten onzer land- en tijdgenooten zullen aanschouwen, [bevangt ons] eene zekere vrees, dat wij ook onze schilders van den goeden weg... zullen zien afdwalen, en dat het huldigen van eenen verkeerden smaak ook bij hen zachtens binnen sluipe. Wij roemen ons echter gelukkig dat de afgeloopen tentoonstelling onze vrees weder beschaamd [heeft] gemaakt en ons heeft doen zien, dat de Hollandse schildersschool er nog verre van verwijderd is... voor waarheid en natuurlijkheid, ijdele schittering en wanstaltigheid in de plaats te stellen.” The writer also referred to Jeronimo de Vries, “Verhandeling over het nationale in onze dichtkunst,” *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* 1839, pt. 2, pp. 625-45, who had criticized those Dutch authors who had come under the influence of foreign Romanticism.

10 J. van Santen Kolff, “Over de nieuwe richting in onze schilderkunst, naar aanleiding der jongste tentoonstelling te Amsterdam,” *De Banier* 3 (1877), pt. 1, pp. 222-53 and 349-99. In an issue of the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* of 1880 he once again explained his objections to Dutch painting of the first half of the century; see Gerben Colmjon, *De beweging van tachtig: een cultuurhistorische verkenning in de negentiende eeuw*, Utrecht & Antwerp 1963, p. 183. For the views of van Santen Kolff see Carel Blotkamp, “Art criticism in De Nieuwe Gids,” *Simiolus* 5 (1971), pp. 118-23.

11 Johan Gram, *Onze schilders in Pulchri Studio*, Rotterdam [ca. 1880], pp. 29-30: “Toen Victor Hugo zijn *Nôtre Dame de Paris* schreef, schilderde De La Croix zijne heerlijke doch woeste compositiën. Isabey en anderen brachten het romantisme over in ’t landschap

en ’t genre, en onze Nuijen voor wiens schilderijen sommige hartstochtelijke aanbidders der tegenwoordige moderne opvatting de schouders ophalen, werd destijds om zijne meesterlijke navolging dier richting verheerlijkt. *Navolging* is eigenlijk het woord niet: de geest eener richting treft een geniaal man en wordt door hem op zelfstandige wijze teruggegeven.” Gram returned to his theme on several occasions, see for example his “De Haagse schilderkunst in de 19e eeuw,” *Die Haghe* 17 (1905), pp. 57-59. Gram’s opinion of Nuyen was rather exaggerated compared to that of the artist’s contemporaries, as is clear from the following passage from “W. J. Nuyen,” *De Beeldende Kunsten* 1 (1839-40), p. 19: “Bragt in later tijd de geest der romantiek, de aanschouwing der Fransche school, eene verandering van denkbeelden bij hem [Nuyen] te weeg, zoo zal niemand hem kunnen ten laste leggen dat hij zich daardoor liet verblinden; hij bezat gevoel om het schoone in het vreemde op te merken en aan te nemen, en zich niet door het schitterende van hetzelfde te laten verblinden.” (Although the spirit of Romanticism, the outlook of the French school, later brought about a change in his [Nuyen’s] ideas, no one could say that he allowed it to blind him. He had the sensitivity to perceive and embrace the beautiful in the exotic, while not permitting himself to be dazzled by its brilliance.) The apt comparison between Isabey and Nuyen had already been made by A. Raczynski, *Geschiede der neueren Deutschen Kunst*, vol. 3, Berlin 1841, p. 463.

12 Jan Veth, *Hollandsche teekenaars van dezen tijd*, Amsterdam 1905, p. 190: “...voor het jonge Holland van die dagen geheel dat overrompelende opwindende vertegenwoordigde, wat toen hier ook al de romantiek genoemd werd.”

what was known as Romanticism,” and Knoef’s view has already been noted above.¹³ The description of Nuyen’s landscapes as “Romantic works” in the title of the Hague retrospective exhibition of 1977 thus had a long pedigree.¹⁴

The general popularity of the word Romantic in nineteenth-century art criticism as the name for a new artistic ideal was largely due to the impact of the famous lectures on drama and literature given by the German author August Wilhelm Schlegel in 1808–1809. In those talks Schlegel used the words “classical” and “romantic” to indicate the historical difference between literature which was based on the classical tradition, and literature which departed from classical rules. Although that was not at all what he had intended, his distinction was soon being projected onto contemporary literature, and from then on the various anti-classical tendencies were referred to as “romantic,” notwithstanding the deep differences between them.¹⁵

1810 saw the publication of a shortened version of Schlegel’s lectures in the Netherlands, and it was followed ten years later by the Dutch translation of Mme de Staël’s *De l’Allemagne*, in which the author dwelt at length on the distinction between romantic and classical.¹⁶ Despite these early translations, it was not until around 1830 that the famous antithesis took hold in Dutch literary circles,¹⁷ when critics began paying more attention to the modern, anti-classical literature then appearing in France. The Dutch were also becoming

acquainted with the so-called Romantic school in Germany. According to the critics this international, Romantic movement displayed a neglect of classical rules, a craving for the fantastic, and an emphasis on the power of imagination. Most of them roundly condemned these traits, but since they were virtually absent in contemporary Dutch literature only one or two authors were stamped as “Romantic.”¹⁸

The literary critics, then, were clearly worried by certain anti-classical tendencies in modern literature, but some art critics had already taken up arms against the excessive use of color by contemporary artists—a trend which was supposedly gaining ground by the day. “Truly, WOUWERMAN, RUYSDAEL, OSTADE, POTTER, VAN DYCK and their like would be overlooked at these exhibitions, for their palettes lack the gaudy appeal which is now *de rigueur*,” wrote the anonymous art-lover R.P. in his brochure on the Hague exhibition of 1827.¹⁹ He named no names, so it is not clear which contemporary artists he had in mind.²⁰ As far as I know the showy, coloristic manner of painting only began to win a following in the Netherlands in the 1830s. Critiques of the period mention such names as Lamme, the genre painter from Dordrecht, Nicolaas Pieneman, the Amsterdam history painter, and Nuyen, the Hague landscapist. It was the latter who made the greatest impression, and after his early death in 1839 one writer observed that it was remarkable “what a transformation Nuyen’s brush has wrought in that of almost every other young artist.”²¹ According to the critics those “young

13 G.H. Marius, *De Hollandsche schilderkunst in de negentiende eeuw*, 2nd ed., The Hague 1920, p. 108; see also pp. 74–75.

14 Exhib. cat. *Wijnand Nuyen*, cit. (note 5).

15 For the history of the term “Romantic” see Welck, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 128–98; and for the situation in the Netherlands, W. van den Berg, *De ontwikkeling van de term ‘romantisch’ en zijn varianten in Nederland tot 1840*, Assen 1973.

16 A.W. Schlegel, *Geschiedenis der tooneelkunst en tooneelpoëzij* (trans. N.G. van Kampen), vol. 1, Leiden 1810; and Mevrouw de baronesse Van Stael Holstein, *Duitschland* (trans. from the second French edition by W. Baron V.G.), 3 vols., ’s Hertogenbosch 1818–1820. These translations discussed in van den Berg, op. cit. (note 15), pp. 156–63 (Schlegel) and 206–11 (Mme de Staël).

17 Van den Berg, op. cit. (note 15), pp. 235–37, 308–09.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 360–61, 464–65.

19 R.P., *Beoordeeling der schilderwerken van levende Nederlandsche meesters, op de tentoonstelling te ’s Gravenhage, in 1827*, Rotterdam 1827, p. 3: “Waarlijk, WOUWERMAN, RUYSDAEL, OSTADE, POTTER, VAN DYK, ENZ. zouden op onze tentoonstellingen voorbijgezien wor-

den, wyl hun coloriet de thans vereischte bonte aantrekkingskracht mist.” One anonymous reviewer, “De tentoonstelling van schilderwerken van levende meesters, te ’s Gravenhage, in september 1827,” *Magazijn voor Schilder- en Toonkunst* 2 (1828), p. 22, maintained that the criticism of the coloristic manner was rather overdone. He merely conceded “dat velen onzer Nederlandsche schilders tegenwoordig verleid worden door schitterende verwen, welke de nieuwere scheidkunde in eenen zeer volmaakt staat uitvindt en oplevert.” (...that many of our Dutch artists are presently being seduced by brilliant paints, which are being discovered and supplied in the most perfected state by modern chemistry.) On technical developments in the use of paints see Jacques Lethève, *La vie quotidienne des artistes français au XIXe siècle*, [Paris] 1968, pp. 83–86.

20 One of his targets may well have been Cornelis Kruseman, who used particularly harsh colors; see R.P., op. cit. (note 19), p. 8.

21 “Album der Kunstchronijk,” *Kunstchronijk* 2 (1841–42), p. 39: “...welk een verandering en wending Nuyen door zijn penseel aan dat van bijna al de andere jeugdige kunstenaars gegeven heeft.”



2 Nicolaas Pieneman, *Lieutenant-Admiral Michiel Adriaansz. de Ruyter mortally wounded at the battle off Mount Etna*, 1834. The Hague, Stichting Historische Verzamelingen van het Huis Oranje-Nassau

artists” included pupils and friends like Bosboom, Ruyten, Waldorp and Rochussen, and it is in this connection that one finds the occasional mention of a “school.”²²

The colorful, sketchy style of Nuyen and others was particularly offensive to the panjandrums of the conservative periodical, *Algemeene Konst- en Letterbode*, although one or two critics also aired their views in pamphlets. “Is there a Dutch artist who has *not* been to Paris who is honored in this country,”²³ asked an irate pamphleteer in 1833 apropos the Hague exhibition of that year. “Take nature as one’s model? Bosh and balderdash! No, it is the phantasmagoria of color which is the *non plus ultra*, the be-all and end-all today, and it also has its admirers in this country.”²⁴ According to the perturbed critics the coloristic style of young artists only

appealed to an “unenlightened public,” to borrow a phrase which was used a few years later.²⁵ They felt that the artists were flouting the traditional rules of good art in their thirst for innovation, and that in their desire to excel in the use of color they were neglecting draftsmanship and had lost sight of the rules of perspective. In 1835, for example, one critic wrote that Pieneman’s style suffered from “an exaggerated variety of costume and palette, a striving for effect and a disregard of accessories” (fig. 2), while two paintings which Lamme had shown at an exhibition in 1832 were dismissed as sketches. “They hang there as a warning to all of the depths to be plumbed by those who follow an incorrect manner in painting. ... There is neither draftsmanship, expression, nor a true use of color. All is a frenzied, gaudy farrago

²² For example, the author of the article “De tentoonstelling te ’s Gravenhage,” *Historisch Tijdschrift* 2 (1842), *Nieuwsblad* p.86, refers to the “present school” of Nuyen, Bosboom, Waldorp and van Hove. See also “De tentoonstelling te ’s Gravenhage,” *De Nederlandsche Kunstspiegel* 1 (1844-45), p. 369 (Ruyten), and “Album der Kunst-kronijk,” cit. (note 21), p. 39 (Rochussen).

²³ *Beoordeeling* 1833, cit. (note 8), pt. 1, p.4: “Welk Nederlandsch

kunstenaar, die niet in *Parijs* geweest is, wordt hier geacht?”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4: “De natuur tot voorbeeld nemen is onzin; eene fantasmagorie van kleuren: ziedaar het *non plus ultra* dat men thans beoogt, en hetwelk ook hier bewonderd wordt.”

²⁵ *Tentoonstelling der tentoonstelling*, The Hague 1841, p. 7. The copy consulted is in the Meermanno-Westreenianum Museum, The Hague, and is catalogued by the Royal Library as nr.9197 D20.

of colors and figures, with neither discrimination, nor recession [i.e. perspective], nor interstice."²⁶

This prejudice against a colorful style was not entirely new; colorists had been accused of an ignorance of drawing and perspective since time immemorial.²⁷ What is so remarkable about nineteenth-century Dutch art criticism is that the errant artists were contrasted with traditional colorists who were considered to be representative of the Dutch seventeenth century, such as Dou, Potter, Wouwerman, Ter Borch and Metsu.²⁸ Their supposedly simple, natural style (which nationalistic feelings elevated to the hallmark of the Dutch school to which all artists should aspire) was invoked by the alarmed critics to show up the inflated, sensation-seeking style of the modern colorists.²⁹ In 1835, for example, one of them contrasted "the florid swirls of color" and "the ornate frames" of the works of contem-

porary colorists with the "moral simplicity" of seventeenth-century artists, "when all that was good bore the stamp of simplicity and truth."³⁰

It was in their search for a better formulation of this distinction between the exuberance of the modern style and the simplicity of the seventeenth century that a number of troubled and somewhat unlettered critics seized on the popular antithesis between Romantic and classical which was being used by their literary colleagues in Dutch periodicals.³¹ In the process, though, they managed to twist the meaning of the two terms. In contrast to Schlegel, they did not use the concepts in their exhibition reviews to identify two contrasting artistic ideals of equal merit.³² Although the word "classical" was used in these reviews in the old, eighteenth-century sense of "excellent, exemplary, most eminent, serving as a guide,"³³ "romantic" meant little more than "gaudy,

²⁶ R., op. cit. (note 8), 1835, pt. 2, p. 329 (Pieneman); and R., op. cit. (note 8), 1832, pt. 2, p. 189 (Lamme): "Zij hangen nu daar, als eene waarschuwing voor allen, waartoe men vervallen kan, als men eene verkeerde manier in de schilderkunst volgt... Hier is noch teekening, noch uitdrukking, noch waar coloriet te ontmoeten, alles is een woest en bont mengelmoes van kleuren en figuren, zonder eenige tact van schildering, zonder wijking en tusschenlucht."

²⁷ J. A. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst (Verzameld werk, vol. 2)*, Amsterdam 1979, pp. 38-66, esp. pp. 49-51.

²⁸ See, for example, *Beoordeling 1833*, cit. (note 8), pt. 1, p. 5, and A. van der Hoop Jr, "Redevoering over de verpligting des schilders, om in zijne voorstellingen te streven naar waarheid," *Bijdragen tot Boeken- & Menschenkennis* 1 (1835), pt. 2, p. 339.

²⁹ For the nationalistic approach to seventeenth-century art see E. Koolhaas-Grosfeld, "Nationale versus goede smaak: bevordering van nationale kunst in Nederland, 1780-1840," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 95 (1982), pp. 605-36.

³⁰ [J.S.], *Algemeene beschouwing der afgeloopene tentoonstelling van kunstvoorwerpen te 's Hage, 1835*, The Hague [1835], p. 4: "...het kakebont gewemel der kleuren... de opgesmukte lijsten," and "...zedige eenvoudigheid... toen eenvoudigheid en waarheid het kenmerk van het goede waren."

³¹ See, for example, *Beoordeeling 1833*, cit. (note 8), pt. 1, p. 5, where the author writes: "wij spreken bij ondervinding, ...dat vele hoogverdienstelijke kunstenaars in ons vaderland, die wezenlijk den klassieken smaak onzer beroemdste meesters volgen, door gebrek aan voorspraak en aanmoediging, en omdat zij niet in den romantischen smaak schilderden, zich in de behoefte omstandigheden bevinden." (We speak from experience... when we say that many exceedingly meritorious artists in this country, who are true to the classical taste of our most renowned masters, are in the most needy circumstances due to an absence of advocacy and encouragement, and because they failed to paint in the Romantic taste.) See also idem, pt. 2, p. 4. See further van der Hoop Jr, op. cit. (note 28), p. 339.

³² The Dutch art critic Alberdingk Thijm was later to restore this

balance; see F. v. W. (the pseudonym of A. Thijm), "Klassiek romantiek: een brief, ter beschikking van den Spektator," *De Spektator* 6 (1847), pp. 133-40, esp. p. 137: "De *Klassikus* heeft zich-zelven regelen gesteld, waaraan de eindeloze grilligheden van zijn geest onderworpen zijn; die laatste wordt dus altoos enigszins in toom gehouden en werkt vrij egaal; Maar de *Romantist*... drukt zich heden zus, morgen zoo uit; behandelt dit voorwerp in dezen, dát in geenen trant, en kent geen voorschriften dan die van zijn oogenblikkelijke geeststemming." (The *Classicist* has established rules for himself to which the endless caprices of his mind are subject, so that it is constantly held in check to some degree and works reasonably uniformly. But the *Romanticist*... expresses himself thus today and so tomorrow, treats this subject in that manner and that subject in no manner at all, knowing no rules beyond the momentary mood of his spirit.) In other reviews Thijm emerges as a true adherent of Schlegel's views. In his anonymous "De Haagsche ten-toon-stelling," *De Spektator* 9 (1850), p. 265, he had the following to say about contemporary Dutch art: "Maar hunne voortreffelijkheid is doorgaans in verhouding tot de sterkte van hun bewijs, dat de Romantieke kunst, in den edelen zin des woords, geen scholen vormt. De geheele Romantiek—is zelve de school, en de Romantiek dat is: natuur, Christendom, historische volkomenheid der techniek. De Romantiek, dat is de school die hare vertakkingen over geheel Europa uitstrekt; dat is de Europeesche School, dat zal eenmaal de Waereldschool zijn." (But their excellence is generally in proportion to the force of their argument that Romantic art, in the noblest sense of the word, forms no schools. The entirety of Romanticism is itself the school, and Romanticism is: nature, Christianity, history and perfection of technique. Romanticism is the school which has sent out branches through all of Europe; it is the European School and, one imagines, the World School as well.)

³³ P. Weiland, *Kunstwoordenboek*, The Hague 1824, p. 82, s.v. *Classisch*: "voortreffelijk, voorbeeldig, voornaamste, als rigtsnoer dienende." The best account of the use of this word is René Wellek, *Discriminations: further concepts of criticism*, New Haven & London 1971, pp. 55-89.

exaggerated, unnatural," and even occasionally "tasteless." As yet it did not have any iconographic connotation.³⁴ The two concepts, in the sense of the exemplary versus the gaudy and tasteless, are to be found in a talk given by the poet A. van der Hoop Jr, who in 1835 castigated the Dutch modernists as follows: "It would thus be a sorry development for Dutch painting... if we were to abandon the road travelled by our forbears and sacrifice the *palette* of the Nestors of that glorious century of our art for a so-called *romantic effect*, and if, instead of DOU's happy nuances of light, and the magical brushwork of TER BORCH and METSU we were to embrace the phantasmagorical lighting and florid costumes of certain foreign artists."³⁵

Apart from the occasional brochure and essay, the use of the word "Romantic" was generally restricted to exhibition reviews in the *Algemeene Konst- en Letterbode*. "Romantic painting" was first attacked in its pages in

34 For the connotation of "Romantic" see, *inter alia*, A., op. cit. (note 8), 1833, pt. 2, p. 302, where the coloristic manner is described thus: "Deze is niet anders dan eene modemanier, die geen' stand zal houden, maar even als die van Boucher en Charles van Loo zal verdwijnen; men zal van de zoogenoemde Romantische schilderwijze even zoo verzadigd zijn, als van deze; schoone voorstellingen, natuurlijk uitgedrukt, en met eene verstandige uitvoerigheid behandeld, zullen in de kunst alleen eene blijvende waarheid behouden." (This is no more than a passing fad which will disappear like the manner of Boucher and Charles van Loo. The public will become as surfeited with the so-called Romantic manner as with theirs. Fine conceptions, naturally expressed, will alone retain a permanent truth in art.) The use of the word "Romantic" in this kind of review contrasts sharply with that in an article of 1829 describing contemporary French art, "Uittreksel uit eenen brief van eenen reizenden kunstenaar," *Magazijn voor Schilder- en Toonkunst* 2 (1829), pp. 56-57: "Dan heeft men de *Romantiken*, die uit Walter Scott, Goethe en anderen, hunne onderwerpen ontleenen; en uiteindelijk de coloristen, die alles aan de kleur opofferen... Wie van deze de slechtste zij, kan moeilijk bepaald worden, omdat beide scholen dikwerf in elkander overgaan." (Then there are the Romantics, who derive their subjects from Walter Scott, Goethe and others, and finally the colorists, who sacrifice all to color... Which is the worst it is difficult to say, for both schools frequently merge one with the other.) The only occasion when the word Romantic was associated with iconography in a Dutch context was in a review of 1835, and even then the reference is not particularly clear; see R., op. cit. (note 8), 1835, pt. 2, p. 329: "De stukken van N. Pieneman... zijn niet vrij van de gebreken die de zoogenoemde Romantische schilderwijze eigen zijn... No 158 het doodelijk verwonden van den Admiraal de Ruyter, is niet meer dan eene uitvoerige schets en het tafereel van Magdalena Moons en Valdez (no 161) is eer eene episode uit eenen Romantischen historischen roman van de overdrijvers der manier van Walter Scott, dan eene echte geschiedkundige voorstelling; hoezeer

1832, and the practice continued until 1836, by which time the critics felt that the once-fashionable style had already lost much of its importance.³⁶ In the intervening period they spoke not only of "Romantic painting," but also of a "Romantic" style, manner or taste. It was an inflated style which lacked all "discrimination," and that presumptuousness was the cause of all the trouble.³⁷ The offending artists would do better to concentrate on "correct drawing, noble expression, a more harmonious ordering and refinement of local color and the palette," according to a review of 1836.³⁸ One could say that "the Romantic manner" was the absolute opposite of that ideal.³⁹

So although the term "Romantic" was used solely as a pejorative in the 1830s, it gradually took on a more neutral connotation as the years passed. In the end it was merely used to designate the characteristics of a manner of painting which had once been so despised, and it is in

men derzelve uit een dichtstuk ontleend heeft." (The pieces by N. Pieneman... are not free of the blemishes peculiar to the so-called Romantic manner of painting... Nr. 158, the mortal wounding of Admiral de Ruyter, is nothing more than an elaborate sketch, and the scene with Magdalena Moons and Valdez (nr. 161) is more an episode from a Romantic historical novel in the style of the hyperbolists of Walter Scott than a true historical scene, notwithstanding that it has been taken from a poem.) On the latter topic see exhib. cat., *Het vaderlandsch gevoel: vergeten negentiende-eeuwse schilderijen over onze geschiedenis*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1978, cat. nrs. 22 and 22a.

35 Van der Hoop Jr, op. cit. (note 28), p. 339: "Het zoude daarom voor de schilderkunst in ons vaderland... een treurig verschijnsel wezen, indien men den weg door het voorgeslacht ingeslagen, verliet, om aan een zoogenoemd *romantisch effect*, het classische *coloriet* van de Nestors onzer schildereeuw ten offer te brengen, en in plaats van de gelukkige lichtschakeringen van DOU, en de penseelbegoochelingen van TERBORCH en METZU, Phantas-magorische verlichtingen en kakelbonte costumes van eenige uitheemsche schilders beproefde."

36 See R., op. cit. (note 8), 1832, pt. 2, pp. 190, 203; A., (op. cit. (note 8), 1833, pt. 2, pp. 299-302; R., op. cit. (note 8), 1835, pt. 2, pp. 329, 334; and R., op. cit. (note 8), 1836, pt. 2, p. 172. On the question of the anonymity of critics see Annemiek Ouwerkerk, "*Hoe kan het schoone geprezen, het middelmatige erkend en het slechte gelaakt worden?*": de praktijk van de kunstcritiek in Nederland ca. 1808-1840 (unpublished thesis), Utrecht 1981, pp. 22-23.

37 R., op. cit. (note 8), 1832, pt. 2, p. 189.

38 R., op. cit. (note 8), 1836, pt. 2, p. 172: "...eene juiste teekening, op eene edele uitdrukking, op eene meer harmonieuze rangschikking en nuancering van de locale kleur en het koloriet."

39 The "Romantic manner" can be elucidated to some extent by analogy with Emmens' so-called "Tuscan-Roman negative"—the pattern of constantly recurring clichés about colorists; see Emmens, op. cit. (note 27), pp. 49-51.



3 Johannes Tavenraat, *After the rain*, 1843. Rotterdam, Boymans-van Beuningen Museum

that sense that we encounter it in Bosboom. In 1881 the elderly artist wrote his autobiography, and in speaking of a Romantic movement he betrayed certain reservations about the style of painting to which it had given birth. “The Romantic movement under the leadership

of Nuyen, who was a genius... seduced me, and although that path led to colorfulness and showiness, often degenerating into the chic, it also gave rise to a more intelligent search for a livelier palette, greater impact and enhanced relief.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ [Johannes Bosboom], *Een en ander betrekkelijk mijne loopbaan als schilder*, Rotterdam & Antwerp 1946 (reprint of the original 1891 edition), p. 9: “De Romantische beweging onder aanvoering van de genialen Nuyen... trok mij aan tot volgen. En al verviel men langs dien weg in gekleurdheid en oppesmuktheid, vaak ontaardende in chic, er ontsproot daaruit een meer verstandig zoeken naar verlevendiging van coloriet, verhooging van effect, vermeerdering van relief.” Bosboom

originally wrote this autobiographical sketch for C. Vosmaer, “Bosboom,” *Onze hedendaagsche schilders*, pt. 2, The Hague 1881. The use of the word “movement” (“beweging”) suggests that Bosboom had more in mind than just a group of colorists. That is certainly not impossible, for he may have been influenced by Gram’s ideas when he wrote the sketch. See note 11 above, and [Bosboom], *op. cit.*, p. 15.

In Bosboom's time, as today, an artist's words could be misconstrued. The word "Romantic" had come to mean more than an unbridled use of color, as is clear from the associative images used by Vosmaer to characterize Dutch painting around 1840: "Romantic, middle ages, the Orient, color and fantasy."⁴¹ Such an extension of meaning had indeed taken place as early as the 1840s, when the term "Romantic manner" had served its purpose and art critics had begun using nouns like Romanticism.⁴² From then on the term was also used to describe the unbridled fantasy of certain foreign artists, sometimes combined with criticism of their coloristic style. Tavenraat was the only Dutchman whose work was condemned on these grounds (fig. 3). In 1844, for instance, a critic pronounced the following, telling judgment on Tavenraat's entries for the Rotterdam exhibition of that year: "Two paintings which belonged fully in the sphere of Romanticism; two freaks of genius, two *songes échevelés* conceived among the horrors of a Walpurgis Night."⁴³

In the meantime the many different associations conjured up by the term Romantic were merely muddying the waters. One of the few people to be disturbed by this was the critic Loffelt. In 1895 he set out to characterize the landscapist J. W. Bilders as a Romantic. In his article he drew a distinction between the original meaning of the word, when it was used to refer to the daubing of

colorists, and another meaning which applied to the mental attitude of the artist. Loffelt defended Bilders by asserting that the artist was in no way "a slave to the spirit of the times or to fashion. He was no Nuyen seeking his salvation in fantastic prettiness and romantic colors and failing to take nature as his prime preceptress. Bilders' Romanticism was such that the term should not be construed as a reproach... The industrious man, immersed in his art, did not view nature as if he were speeding past in an express train, or with the eye of a stage designer, but with the enamored heart of the pantheist."⁴⁴ Loffelt's distinction was not shared by others, with the result that the sense of the concept was irretrievably altered. While the artist Servaas de Jong could still write in 1835 that in "the Romantic paintings of today... the choice of subject is no choice at all, for frequently it... [is] not made until the artist starts painting," the Nuyen *oeuvre* catalogue of 1977 states that "the concept of Romanticism very rarely touched on the style of a work of art. Above all it was a matter of the choice or interpretation of a theme."⁴⁵

The last quotation correctly suggests that when modern historians define Romanticism they should not be seduced by some nineteenth-century critics who nervously attached the label "Romantic" to the paintings of a few extravagant colorists.⁴⁶ That definition of Romantic

41 C. Vosmaer, "Herman Frederik Carel ten Kate," *Onze hedendaagsche schilders*, pt. 6, The Hague 1882, p. 1: "Romantisch, middel-eeuwen, het Oosten, kleur en fantasie."

42 The three synonyms for Romanticism in Dutch were "romantisme," "romantismus" and "romantiek." For their use at this period see "Tentoonstelling van schilder- en kunstwerken van levende meesters te Rotterdam," *Kunstkronijk* 5 (1844-45), pp. 6 (Fleming), and 8 (Tavenraat); and Sleenckx, "Noord-Nederland op de tentoonstelling te Brussel in 1851," *Album der Schoone Kunsten 1852*, p. 15.

43 *Kunstkronijk*, cit. (note 42), p. 8: "Twee schilderijen die geheel op het gebied van romantiek behoorden; twee spelingen van het genie, twee songes échevelés te midden der verschrikkingen eener Walpurgisnacht gedroomd." Also quoted in Knoef, *Van Romantiek*, cit. (note 3), p. 84.

44 A. C. Loffelt, "Johannes Warnardus Bilders 1811-1890," *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* 10 (1895), p. 242: "...een slaaf van den tijdsgeest en van de mode was, een soort van Nuyen, die in fantastische mooiheid en romantische kleurtjes zijn heil zocht en niet in de allereerste plaats bij de natuur ter school ging. Gelijk Bilders "romantist" was mag die betiteling niet als een verwijt gebezigd worden... De werkzame en steeds in zijne kunst verdiepte man bekeek de natuur niet als

uit een sneltrein, of met het oog van een toneeldecorateur, doch met het verliefde gemoed van den pantheïst." Also published in Max Rooses (ed.), *Het schildersboek: Nederlandsche schilders der negentiende eeuw in monographieën door tijdgenooten*, vol. 3, Amsterdam 1900, pp. 67-101.

45 [Servaas de Jong], *Wenken ter handleiding in de beoefening der schilderkunst*, Utrecht 1835, p. 5: "...de tegenwoordige Romantique schilderijen... de keuze des onderwerps geen keuze is, daar zij... meestal onder het schilderen eerst [wordt] bepaald;" and Sillevius, "Wijnand Nuyen," cit. (note 5), p. 15: "...het begrip Romantiek vrijwel nooit betrekking heeft op de stijl van een kunstwerk, maar vooral op de keuze of interpretatie van een thema."

46 The chameleonic nature of the word Romanticism has caused a number of scholars to have grave doubts about its usefulness. For instance, Arthur O. Lovejoy maintains in his *Essays in the history of ideas*, New York 1960, p. 232, that the word has taken on so many meanings that, in itself, it has come to mean nothing. The term certainly has many drawbacks, but this is no reason to retreat into an extreme nominalism. Names are quite simply essential for classifying historical developments. For a well-founded criticism of Lovejoy's standpoint see Welck, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 128-30, 151-52.

painting is so specific that it excludes the most important characteristics which are generally attributed to the Romantics.

Although one should always be wary when describing Romanticism, Honour did allow himself to be tempted into the following formulation: "It is here, perhaps, that one essential, distinguishing characteristic of Romantic art becomes evident—the supreme value placed by the Romantics on the artist's sensibility and emotional 'authenticity' as the qualities which alone confer 'validity' on his work. Instead of reflecting the timeless, universal values of classicism, every Romantic work of art is unique—the expression of the artist's own personal living experience."⁴⁷ This description shows why the term "Dutch Romanticism" is so problematical. Spontaneity, individuality and faithfulness to inner feelings were by no means accepted norms for assessing paint-

ings in the Netherlands in the first half of the nineteenth century. As far as I have been able to discover, the old, eighteenth-century mimetic theory of art had not yet made way for an expressive doctrine.⁴⁸

Viewed in this light it seems to me that the only justifiable conclusion is that the changes which took place in Dutch art around 1830 were so innocuous that one cannot possibly speak of a separate movement. Nuyen and a few artists of his circle merely tried to paint the traditional repertoire with a slightly more colorful palette. That some of their excitable contemporaries occasionally referred to this as "Romantic" is no reason why we should speak of a Dutch Romanticism. Developments in the Netherlands were simply not comparable with the situation in France and Germany.

UTRECHT

⁴⁷ Honour, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 11–20 (the quotation on p. 20).

⁴⁸ It is of course hard to put a precise date on the replacement of the old, mimetic theory of art by an expressive doctrine, as described at length by M. H. Abrams, *The mirror and the lamp: Romantic theory and the critical tradition*, New York 1953. In Holland, the idea that an artist expressed his emotions in a work of art was recognized at an early date by Rhijnvis Feith, *Dicht- en prozaische werken*, vol. 2, Rotterdam 1824, p. 221 (previously published as *Brieven over verscheiden onderwerpen*, vol. 2, Amsterdam 1785): "Zie hier dan waar, naar mijne gedachten, eene schoonheid der genie in bestaat. In de natuurlijke uitdrukking van de gevoelige ziel des kunstenaars, hij zij dan dichter, schilder, beeldhouwer, of wat gij wilt." (Behold then, where I believe the beauty of genius lies. In the natural impress of the sensitive soul of the artist, be he poet, painter, sculptor, or what you will.) However, this view, which was derived from foreign publications, did not catch on in the Netherlands for many years. The only early nineteenth-century critic to subscribe to it was Jeronimo de Vries, as in his anonymous review, "Gesprek over de tentoonstelling te Amsterdam," *Vaderland-*

sche Letteroefeningen 1818, pt. 2, p. 713. He did not, however, draw any practical conclusions from this viewpoint. Spontaneity, individuality and a faithfulness to "inner feelings" were by no means the yardsticks for judging a work of art at this date. As far as I have been able to discover, criteria of this sort only came into their own in the latter half of the century, when a distinctly expressive doctrine was preached by various writers, including Frederik van Eeden, "Over schilderijen-zien," *De Nieuwe Gids* 3 (1888), pt. 2, pp. 296–97: "Vraag nooit of het [schilderij] wel op de natuur lijkt, of het wel precies, of natuurlijk is. Dit is onzin. Dit is boeren- en fotografenbegrip. De natuur—dat is onze ziel met haar gewaarwordingen en sentimenten. Daarop moet een schilderij lijken. Het moet niet natuur-getrouw,—het moet gevoelsgetrouw zijn... Wat gij de natuur noemt, dat zijn uw gevoelens." (Never ask whether it [the painting] truly resembles nature, or whether it is precise or natural. That is nonsense. It is a notion shared by peasants and photographers. Nature is our soul, with its perceptions and feelings. They are what a painting must resemble. It must not be true to nature, it must be true to feeling... What you call nature is your emotions.)