

On Diderot's Art Criticism

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The enormous and distinct difference in approach between art critics in past periods and those of the twentieth century is expressed mainly in that critics in the past devoted most of their energies to describing the picture itself in a kind of *ekphrasis*; Explanations of the significance of the work would appear as an appendix. This detailed description of the picture ceased to be an important cornerstone of art criticism with the appearance of photography and reproduction. Interpretations related to the description of the picture and its subject were given little significance as subject and story came to be regarded as inferior in modern art. Criticism of modern art has become marked by a formal analytical approach which all but ignores the iconography of the work and does not dwell on the subject of the picture. Recently, however, critics of modern art have again began turning to iconographic analyses of the kind typical of the approach to older works of art.

An examination of Denis Diderot and his criticism of the various art Salons held in France provides an excellent illustration of the difference in the older and modern approaches to art criticism. The modern reader, too, occasionally senses that the eminent art critic, who considered it his duty to supply the reader with background information, especially for historical and mythological paintings, sometimes saw fit to embellish the facts with figments of his own imagination. This was especially true of painting that were not historically-based or had no literary source.

In the following we shall discuss Denis Diderot's criticism¹ of Jean Baptist Greuze's painting "La jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort" (fig. 1),² which was exhibited at the 1765 Salon. The picture, which is oval shaped portrays the upper part of the body of a young girl, holding her head in her hand. She is dressed in white with a scarf around her shoulders. There are flowers on her



Fig. 1: Jean Baptist Greuze, *La jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort*.

breast, as if tucked inside her blouse, Her elbow is leaning on a cage on which there is a dead bird. Leafy branches are interwoven on the sides and above the cage.

Modern scholars, including some who have contributed important studies on Diderot, while not doubting his greatness, nevertheless saw in his criticism of the Greuze painting and the tale he embroidered around it, a scene in a novel, a kind of play, that was entirely the fruit of the writer's imagination, for which the picture itself constitutes no more than a pretext, a sort of starting point for his story and no more.

H. Osborn,³ who discusses the difference between past and modern art criticism, cites Diderot to exemplify the way in which critics used to weave a story. Osborn comments: "Where there was no familiar story, it was proper for

the viewer to construct one from his own imagination, and critics often undertook this function performing the job of *imaginative embroidery* on behalf of their readers. *Moral interpretations were read into the depicted scenes and moral lessons extracted from the pictures...* Both in their accounts of the narrative situation and in their interpretations of expressions *imaginative extrapolation* was the rule and *no sharp line was drawn between imaginative construction and what was visibly depicted in the picture.*" (The emphasis here and below, is mine, M.F.). To illustrate these comments Osborn cites Diderot's critique of Greuze's picture. Osborn not only sees the entire story as imaginative embroidery, but also Diderot's moral interpretation as the fruit of his imagination. He concludes by saying: "*Diderot uses the picture as an excuse for imaginative play.* Little or no change would be necessary if he were describing an actual scene which he had observed or a fictitious scene in the course of a novel."⁴

Ian J. Lochhead⁵ mentions Greuze as being one of the first of the artists who deliberately did not define exactly the subjects of their painting, and in so doing compelled the viewer to imagine the subject for himself. Lochhead saw the contents and meaning of Greuze's paintings as being provided by the viewer's own imagination and experience, citing as an example the painting "*La jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort*". He claims that Diderot engaged in an imaginary conversation with the girl, in which he not only consoled her for the loss of the bird, but also for the loss of her virginity "*this being, he imagined, the true cause of her distress.*"

That the description was the fruit of the critic's imagination Lochhead bases on the fact that Diderot's contemporaries had interpreted the picture differently, adding that even Diderot "*implied that every spectator's response to a work of art is unique.*"⁶ This supports Lochhead's opinion on "*the extent to which the subject of the painting depended on the imaginative reaction of the viewer.*" The viewer here is, of course, Diderot.

Rémy G. Saisselin⁷ also refers to Diderot as an art critic who is first and foremost a man of letters, and who generally prefers those works that can provide him with a starting point for the creation of a novel. In so saying, Saisselin relies on Diderot's comments elsewhere, in which he remarks about Greuze that he is an artist who will be able to depict events "*d'après lesquels il serait facile de faire un roman.*"⁸

Saisselin adds that occasionally, as in the case of his comments on the Greuze painting "*...he is not writing art criticism at all, but literature inspired by paintings*", and that the paintings "*give Diderot opportunities for moralizing*"; in other words, the moralizing, as well as the story that Diderot tells, are not found in Greuze's painting but are derived from Diderot's own imagination.

Regis Michel,⁹ in citing Diderot's comments on this picture as an example, states: "The picture is soon effaced and the critic's personality comes alive. *Criticism culminates in the imaginary Fiction then becomes the maieutic principle of deep psychology*".

Garry Apgar calls Diderot's comments "waxed ekphrastic" and adds that "Anyone seeking a *pretext* for the psychosexual reading of stuff like this need go no further than Diderot's long commentary on it."¹⁰

Jean Seznec, an important scholar and admirer of Diderot's works, who edited his *Salons*, goes even further and actually refers to Diderot's criticism of this painting with contempt. After quoting Diderot's comments about this picture, he says: "The Diderot who thus holds forth and *babbles on* is, *unfortunately*, the most widely, if not best known. Such, alas, is the effect produced upon him by the false innocence of Greuze's girls, these little hypocrites who have always broken their pitchers, cracked their mirrors, or lost their pets..."¹¹ And he goes on to discuss the other, serious, Diderot, not the one who comments on Greuze's picture, and to whom he refers as "The naughty Babbler". Furthermore, in the book of Diderot's *Salons* which Seznec edited, when he cites quotations from contemporary critics in various journals, discussing and praising the picture exhibited at the *Salon*, he adds briefly: "Personne ne semble voir les allusion que décèle Diderot."¹²

Edgar Munhall,¹³ relying on a letter to him by Andrew McLaren Young,¹⁴ says that in fact the painting exactly fits the description in a poem by Catullus "Lugete, O Veneris Cupidinesque."¹⁵ The poem is about the shock received by a child on his first encounter with Death. He adds that Greuze could have been familiar with this poem from the 1653 translation by Marolles. While he does not say so in so many words, it can be inferred that he takes this to be the source of Greuze's painting. He presents Diderot's remarks in summary form, just as he does with the comments of others, but does not express an opinion on them. At the same time, immediately after Diderot's comments, he adds emphatically: "Les allusions que saisit Diderot dans le tableau ne sont apparentes pour aucun des autres critiques en 1765", thereby implying that he considers that these comments, which were made only by Diderot, were apparently a figment of his own imagination.

While Else Bukdahl does not reject Diderot's comments, and in fact summarises them,¹⁶ from her remarks it would appear that she regards what he wrote as reflecting his own imagination. She talks about the fact that this picture is "dominés par des symboles érotiques", and she goes on to say: "La méthode narrative que Diderot utilise dans sa traduction poétique concernant le style et la vision du monde de la 'Jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort'... est

concue de façon à pouvoir fournir une interprétation du contenu symbolique et sémantique du tableau". She continues telling Diderot's story, stating "Ce 'conte morale' d'une grande tension émotive n'est pas simplement *une combinaison des associations attendrissantes et morales qu'aurait éveillées en Diderot la rencontre avec la jeune fille en pleurs*. Il offre aussi une *interprétation poétique* de la rupture entre le plan réaliste et la plan symbolique, élément particulièrement caractéristique, *selon Diderot*, de ce tableau... Quant à lui, il considère la mort de l'oiseau à la fois comme réalité et symbole. Comme réalité dans la mesure où *il prétend* que la jeune fille feint de ne pleurer que la mort de son oiseau... comme symbole, car... l'oiseau mort est aussi *à ses yeux* l'expression de ce qui déchire la jeune fille - la perte de sa vertu - et de ce qu'elle redoute un avenir misérable. Enfin, la triste conclusion de la narration que Diderot voit dans cette peinture... comporte une intention moralisatrice très nette." While she refers only to Diderot's approach throughout, and repeatedly makes the point that it is his personal opinion, at the same time, she respects his remarks and does not regard them as idle chatter. Her analysis is carried out from Diderot's point of view but she does not attempt to examine whether this was what Greuze had actually meant, or whether Diderot had simply invented everything, including the moral interpretation.

In contrast, Anita Brookner, who does not specifically relate to Diderot's comments, says that the 1765 Salon "saw his (Greuze) first discreet excursion into pornography with the Edinburgh 'Jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort'..."¹⁷ She does not try to clarify why there is, as she puts it, an erotic or even pornographic tone to the painting, but, it seems, is satisfied simply to accept Diderot's interpretation without protest.

In view of the above, it would have been appropriate to look more closely at what Diderot had actually said. This judgement of Diderot's criticism perhaps has its source in a contemporary aversion to the sentimentality expressed in Diderot's observations, and to the approach of artists and art critics who, until recently, saw the narrative aspect in the art of the past as mistaken.

An attempt will be made here to determine whether Diderot's interpretation of Greuze's painting was a game played by an author with a vivid imagination, or whether perhaps it was based on iconographic information, which Diderot, in keeping with his generation and as a friend of Greuze, would have been more familiar with than a twentieth century viewer; and also more than other critics of the time, who lacked his deeper knowledge. We present here Diderot's observations on the picture in an attempt to examine in detail the romantic story which he tells against a background of various iconographic traditions.

Diderot wrote his commentaries as a sort of dialogue with a friend and with

the girl herself:

"What a charming elegy! What a charming poem! What a lovely idyll Gessner would make of it! It might be a vignette illustrating a piece by this poet... Her grief is profound, she is quite obsessed with her sorrow. What a pretty catafalque the cage makes! What grace there is in that garland of leaves that twines around it!... One could easily catch oneself speaking to the child, consoling her. So true is this that I remember myself talking to her as follows on a number of occasions.

But, little one, your grief is so very deep, so very profound. What is the meaning of this dreamy, melancholic air? What, for a bird! you do not weep. You are distressed and thought is mingled with your distress. Come, little one, open your heart to me, tell me the truth. Is it really the death of this bird which causes you to shut yourself up inside yourself so sadly?... Ah, now I understand. He loved you, he swore it to you and for a long time. He was so unhappy. How could one see a person one loved so unhappy?... Let me continue... That morning your mother was unfortunately absent. He came; you were alone. He was so handsome, so passionate, so tender, so charming! Such love there was in his eyes! Such truth in his features! He spoke the words which go straight to the soul, and while speaking them he was of course kneeling before you. He held one of your hands. From time to time you felt the warmth of the tears which fell from his eyes and flowed down your arms. And still your mother did not return. It was not your fault, it was your mother's fault... And why weep? He promised you and he will fail in nothing that he promised. When one has been fortunate enough to meet a child as charming as you, to grow fond of her and win her affection, it is for the whole of one's life... And the bird? You smile... Ah, yes your bird. When one forgets oneself does one remember a bird? When the time of your mother's return was at hand, your lover left. How happy he was, how beside himself! How hard it was to tear himself from your side! You look at me. I know all that. How many times he got up and sat down once more! How often he said goodbye without going! How often he went and came back! I have just seen him at his father's house. He is full of a captivating gaiety, a gaiety which takes hold of everyone willy-nilly... And your mother? Hardly had he gone when she returned. She told you to do one thing and you did another... Your absent-mindedness tried your mother's patience. She scolded you and that gave you the excuse to weep openly... Well, your good mother blamed herself for making you sad, she took your hands, kissed your forehead and cheeks, and you wept still more freely. Your head dropped and your face, which was coloured by your blushes - as you are now blushing - hid in her bosom. How many tender things your mother spoke to you - and how those

tender words hurt you! In vain your canary sang to attract your attention, called to you, flapped its wings, complained of your neglect; you did not see it, did not hear it, your thoughts were elsewhere. No one renewed its water or its birdseeds; and this morning the bird was no more... Ah, I understand. It was he who gave you the bird. Ah, well he will find another as good. But there is something else, Your eyes fix themselves on me, full of sadness. What is there more? Speak, I cannot guess what is in your mind. Suppose the death of this bird was an omen! What should I do? What would become of me? If he were ungrateful... What silliness! Don't be afraid. That won't happen, it is impossible... I don't like causing grief, and yet I would not mind myself being the cause of her distress.

The subject of this little poem is so subtle that many people have not understood it. They have thought that the little girl was only weeping for her canary. Greuze had already painted the subject once. He painted a grown up girl in white satin in front of a cracked mirror, filled with a profound melancholy. Don't you think it makes as little sense to attribute the tears of the little girl in this exhibition to the loss of her bird as to attribute the grief of the young lady in the earlier picture to her broken mirror? The little girl is weeping for something else, I assure you. You have heard her admission, and the pensiveness of her sorrow tells the rest. Such sorrow at her age! And for a bird?...¹⁸

It is worth noting again that not one of the other critics who were contemporaries of Greuze and Diderot, and who wrote about the pictures at the Salon, even so much as hints at a hidden meaning, other than that implied in the primary description of the picture, and its name, "*La jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort*".¹⁹ Diderot himself says: "The subject of this poem is so subtle that many people have not understood it. They have thought that the little girl was only weeping for the canary."

We shall dwell first on the actual depiction of the picture and its primary meaning. The modern viewer, accustomed to the bold style of expressionist art, will perhaps not sense at first glance the girl's deep sorrow which Diderot describes. However, the position of the girl's head, resting on her hand, was the conventional posture of melancholy, common in different periods in the history of art, from that of the melancholic temperament at the end of the Middle Ages²⁰ to Durer's work, *Melancolia I*.²¹ Similar portrayals are also prevalent in religious art, in the East, as in the depiction of the grief of St. John the Evangelist, standing at the foot of the Cross, in the Hosios Lukas mosaic near Phocis in Greece,²² as well as in the West, in the portrayal of the prophet Jeremiah grieving in Michelangelo's fresco in the Sistine Chapel. Over a hundred years later, Rembrandt painted "*The Prophet Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of*

Jerusalem" in a similar posture.²³

The girl in Greuze's picture is portrayed in keeping with a long and established iconographic tradition, without the artist having to resort to any other kind of dramatic depiction. In contrast to this traditional posture, it is harder to invent the girl's romantic love story and its bitter consequences from other details in the picture. Since Diderot emphasizes the fact that the subject is not explicit and obvious to most viewers, it may be concluded that the picture has another underlying dimension of meaning, a kind of hidden symbolism which must be interpreted from the elements which make up the painting.

The oval shape of the picture determines the frame through which the girl is seen. The cage takes up the entire bottom part of the picture, so that the girl appears to be looking out of a window, with the cage representing a kind of window-sill.

Throughout the ages, and even as far as the Bible, the image of a girl seen through a window has been associated with love. Thus, for example, when David returned the Holy Ark from the Philistines, "Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window" (2 Sam. 6:15 - 23.). However, since she mocked him in his dance before God, the chapter ends: "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death". She looked through the window - in other words, she expected his love for her, but was not worthy of it because she had mocked him. The meaning is even clearer in the story of Ahab's wife, Jezebel. Jehu, having usurped the throne, was anointed King of Israel. He killed her son, the heir, and came to Jezreel, "Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window." (2 Kings 9:30), and this she did to lure him into marrying her, the previous queen, and in this way establish his kingdom legally.²⁴ A further allusion is found in the Song of Solomon (2:9) "My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice."

Similar connotations for the image of a woman at the window were also familiar in other countries. In the mythology of the Near East, the image of the window occurs frequently in stories about the goddess of love and her husband, the god of rain and of fertility.²⁵ In Ugaritic mythology, for instance, Baal forbade windows in his palace so that his wives would not be seduced by his enemy Yamm, god of the sea, but in the end he gave in, because the window was essential for the rains which would ensure fertility.²⁶

The image of the woman at the window is also common in seventh and eighth century Phoenician ivory reliefs found in Samaria, Arslan Tash, Nimrud and Khorsabad.²⁷ These reliefs apparently decorated ritual couches or beds, as

may be seen from the relief of 655 B.C.E. from Kuyunjik, in the British Museum. It depicts Ashurbanipal celebrating the New Year with his queen, and on the foot of his bed there is a similar decoration, although with two women, behind a double window. The image was interpreted as the goddess of love, Astarte, at the window, or perhaps as the temple prostitutes (*hierodules*), looking through the window for lovers, for the purposes of carrying out their religious ritual duties.

Mesopotamian texts also mention the goddess, *Kilili sa abati*, "The crowned one at the window", or she who "leans out of the window", a kind of Babylonian or Canaanite Astarte from the Ashurbanipal period (669 - 626 B.C.E.). She has the nature of a courtesan, and she can be either beneficial or harmful, the protector of the house or even the seductress.²⁸ There is also a similar image of Astarte seen through the window in Cyprus. The goddess there has the name or Aphrodite Parakypousa, "She who is peeping" or "looking sideways with glances of love",²⁹ a name which hints at prostitution.³⁰ It follows that the image of the woman at the window is a goddess, a kind of Aphrodite, whose worshippers taking part in her ritual of love were women, whose duty it was to give their love, and who would watch at the window in order to attract men from the street. The motif of the woman at the window is, accordingly, a symbol of the religious sacrifice of virginity, and there is ample evidence of these customs in the rituals of Phoenicia and Cyprus.³¹ For the Greeks, a woman at the window was seen as a symbol of seduction, as one who offers herself and as a prostitute, as can be learned from the comedies of Aristophanes. When Aristophanes wants to talk about prostitutes or infidelity in love, he talks about the image of the woman at the window, looking for adventure with passersby.³²

A similarly perceived image of the girl at the window also made a reappearance in seventeenth century Holland, as can be ascertained from a series of paintings by Gerard Dou, showing young girls looking through the window. While on the surface appearing simply to depict scenes from daily life, there is also a connotation of love, and so the girl may be interpreted as a prostitute beckoning to men passing in the street, as will be further discussed below.

Sigmund Freud in his books *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *On Dreams*, identified the image of the room in dreams as a substitute for the image of the woman, with the entrances to the room symbolizing the female sex organ.³³

We turn our attention now to the actual images that appear in the Greuze painting. In addition to the dead bird lying on top of cage, the artist adorned the picture with flowers, appearing to emerge from the girl's blouse. Fresh leaves are placed on and interwoven round the cage. Flowers, whose lives are



Fig. 2: Rome, Sta. Maria in Trastevere, *The Prophet Isaiah*.



Fig. 3: Rome, Santa Maria in Trastevere, *The Prophet Jeremiah*.

short and which wilt quickly, were one of the distinct symbols of ephemerality and of *Vanitas*, and are common in many still-life *Vanitas* paintings, both in seventeenth century Holland and eighteenth century France.³⁴ The leaves, although difficult to identify in the painting, are also characteristic of *Vanitas* still-life painting. Ivy, juniper and laurel leaves point to the transience of fame and honor.³⁵ The leaves, arranged like garlands adorning a sarcophagus, as also mentioned by Diderot, reinforce this connotation. It is appropriate to add here that dead birds are also common in *Vanitas* paintings.³⁶ The girl's grief over the death of her bird and the image of the dead bird, garlands of leaves twined round the cage and adorning it like a sort of coffin, the bouquet of flowers on the girl's breast, all of these evoke associations of ephemerality. The images of *Vanitas* and ephemerality are not limited to still-life paintings. There are also other images which allude in other ways to transience, such as depictions of men and, especially, women who live for fleeting pleasures, particularly love. Thus, Durer's well-known engraving "Young Couple Threatened by Death",³⁷ or later on, Hans Baldung Grien's series of pictures, in which he portrays the semi-nude woman of pleasure, engrossed in the vain

pleasures of this world while combing her hair and looking in the mirror at her ephemeral beauty.³⁸ The depiction of a woman combing her hair in front of a mirror was still associated with forbidden love and *Luxuria* in the Middle Ages, as in the image of the Great Whore of Babylon in the Angers tapestry, who is portrayed looking at the mirror and combing her hair.³⁹ The image of a young and beautiful girl, with the attributes of *Vanitas* links the image of transience to love and pleasures of the flesh. However, Greuze's painting does not resemble those mentioned. While there are allusions to transience, the allusion to the ephemerality of love is apparently lacking. The flowers on the girl's breast, however, and in the folds of her blouse, could perhaps also suggest something else. According to E. Jones: "Flowers have always been emblematic of women, and particularly of their genital region, as is indicated by the use of the word defloration and by various passages in the Song of Solomon".⁴⁰ Unconsciously, or perhaps even consciously, the flowers on the girl's breast may thus be an allusion to defloration. In our quest for allusions of which both Greuze and Diderot were undoubtedly aware, we note here several additional points upon which Diderot's story could have drawn.

The central image in the picture next to the girl is the dead bird on the cage. This could also be a key or symbol for the underlying meaning of the story. The bird has had various connotations since ancient times. In the Bible it had also been interpreted as an image of the soul, as in certain passages in Psalms: "How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" (11:1) and "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers..." (124:7). In Ancient Egypt man's soul is depicted as a bird with a man's head.⁴¹ In Roman art, as in the early Christian period, and mainly in the Byzantine mosaics of the sixth century, the image of a bird in a cage is common. It is interpreted in Christianity as the soul trapped in an earthly body, or the spirit trapped in flesh, as if imprisoned and unable to escape.⁴² The bird which flies out of the open cage is the human spirit asking to be released from the prison of the body.⁴³

In Rome, in the later Middle Ages, the image took on an additional meaning. Thus, for example, in the twelfth century apse mosaic in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, there is a depiction of a bird in a cage on both sides of the triumphal arch: on the left, next to the figure of Isaiah carrying a scroll on which is written "*Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet Filium*" (Isa. 7:14) (fig. 2); and on the right, next to Jeremiah, on whose scroll is written: "*XPC DNS caput est in peccatis nostris*" (Lam. 4:2) (fig. 3). The image of the bird in the cage next to Jeremiah is related to the prophet's words, since the Book of Lamentations is attributed to him, and it alludes to the fact that when Jesus was born he took on the image of a man, was realized in the flesh and imprisoned in it in order

to absolve us of our sins. This also corresponds to the verse in Isaiah's scroll, which alludes to the incarnation. It is thus clear that the image of the bird in the cage alludes directly to the incarnation.⁴⁴

The development of symbolic images and their transfer from religious to secular art, is extremely interesting.⁴⁵ The religious Christian origin can occasionally be recognized in various secular symbols and attributes. When the image undergoes secularization, it goes through an extremely strange metamorphosis, as also occurred with the image of the bird in the cage. This image, which in religious art is the image of the incarnation, or, in other words, the impregnation of Mary and the conception of Jesus and His realization as a man of flesh and blood found its way into secular art transformed into images of the act of love itself, as well as of conception and loss of virginity. This metamorphosis appears somewhat strange at first glance, and borders, as it were, on sacrilege. It is nonetheless, quite common in art. Thus the image of a caged bird turned from being an image of incarnation into an image of love-making in secular art.⁴⁶ This secular meaning of the image of the bird and the cage becomes clearer in a much later period - with the occurrence of many more secular depictions and accompanying clues to their meaning.

However, even earlier, secular literature and art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance is full of metaphorical analogies between birds and love, both sublime and physical.⁴⁷

According to Cesare Ripa, there is no better way to illustrate immoderate lust and unbirdled lewdness than through the partridge, which, according to common belief, breaks its own eggs in order to be able to mate as frequently as possible.⁴⁸ The significance that the partridge had as an image of love even in the daily life in Holland of the seventeenth century may also be learned from a letter of 1635 to the poet P.C. Hooft by Caspar Barlaeus, who was widowed. In the letter Barlaeus thanks him for the surprising gift of a pair of partridges: "Sending partridges to me, a widower is strange any way you look at it. You send me the lewdest of birds, the very symbol and hieroglyph of Venus. This attention of yours can only evoke in me memories of the caresses I miss as a widower. Is this any different then bringing saliva to the mouth of a hungry man deprived of his desired food?"⁴⁹

It should be noted that in various languages, the slang use of the word "bird", has analogies with love-making. In Italian, the word *ucello* is used in slang as a name for the male sexual organ, as is the name of the Bulbul bird in Hebrew. In English, the slang for the male sexual organ is the name of a kind of bird, the cock. In Hebrew, the word *gever*, which means "male", is used as one of the names for the cock. The Dutch word for hen, *kip*, and the French *poule*

both mean "loose girl" or "prostitute", and chicken-coop is a brothel. In both German and Dutch, the word *vogelen* taken from the word *vogel* meaning "bird", is used to indicate love-making, and so, "to copulate" = *vogelen*; *Vogel* = "penis"; *vogelaar* = "procurer or lover".⁵⁰

These names also have their source in the ancient world. The inhabitants of the harem, i.e., the virgins consecrated to the Ishtar cult, are referred to as "birds" (*hu*), a euphemistic expression for prostitutes, or more especially, as "doves" (*tu hu*) and their habitations are "dovecotes".⁵¹

Psychoanalysis sees the bird as a phallic symbol *par excellence*, often consciously. The bird (the stork) is a symbol of children being brought into the world, and the flight of the bird is related to erection.⁵²

In the sixteenth century, the bird in a cage was a common image in paintings illustrating brothel scenes. It is difficult to separate inns from brothels in Holland of the seventeenth century.⁵³ The waitresses increased their wages by rendering "extra services", and in the inns there were rooms specially set aside for this purpose. In this connection there is even a Dutch proverb which says: "Inn in front, brothel behind",⁵⁴ as illustrated in the painting by The Brunswick Monogramist, "A Party in a Public House".⁵⁵ The picture depicts a gay band of men and women, drinking and engaging in love play. At the entrance to the house hangs a cage with a bird. There is a similar depiction in the painting by Jan van Hemessen, "Loose Company".⁵⁶ In this picture of a brothel too, a cage is visible hanging in the entrance. In both pictures, the bird in the cage serves as a kind of sign indicating the type of entertainment those who visit the house may expect.⁵⁷ The same applies to "The Prodigal Son",⁵⁸ by Hieronimus Bosch, which depicts the prodigal son after he is turned out of the courtesans' house, which can be seen in the background, with one of the prostitutes standing at the entrance and being hugged by a man. At the window, another prostitute is trying to solicit a male passerby to enter the house. Here, as in the ivory tablets of early times, the image of a woman through the window is that of the prostitute awaiting her customers. In the doorway of the house, as a sign indicating the quality of the institution, hangs a cage with a bird.

In the seventeenth century as well, the cage with the bird continued to have a similar function. While in the past Dutch genre paintings were simply taken at their face value, with no underlying meanings at all, there is currently a growing trend to find a double meaning in these secular paintings,⁵⁹ like the hidden symbolism in the religious paintings of the fifteenth century in Flanders.⁶⁰ There was a strong link between art and literature in Holland of the seventeenth century, as also noted at the time by Dutch writers themselves who saw art and literature as "sister arts". Many artists dabbled in literature,

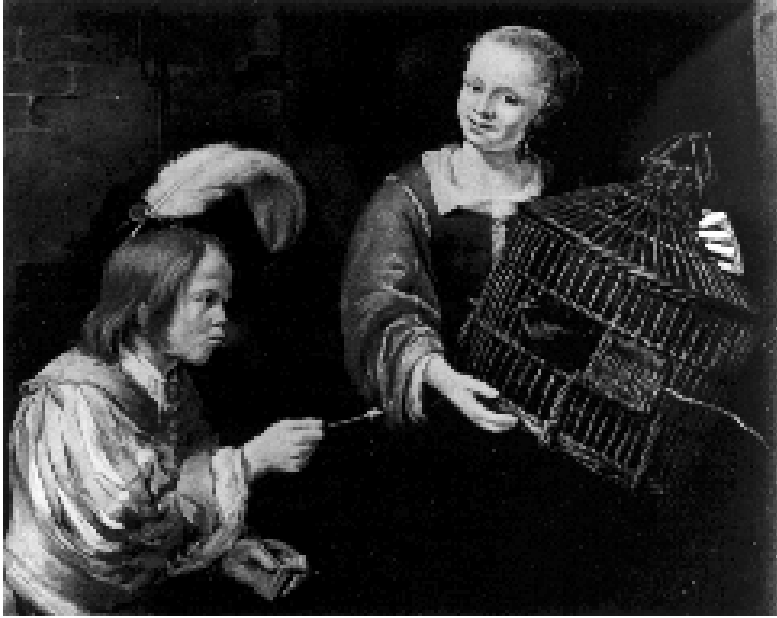


Fig. 4: Pieter van Noort, *The Tame Sparrow*.

and poets tried their hands at painting.⁶¹ Dutch literature too abounds with allegories, in which metaphors and various forms of double entendre are common. This is also expressed in the Dutch love for emblem books.⁶² These books, which present visual emblems with accompanying rhymes, were very common and were reprinted in a great number of editions for many years, even after the seventeenth century as well as being translated into many languages. One of the better-known ones was by Jacob Cats, "*Spiegel van den ouden ende nieuwen tijd*" ("Mirror of Old and New Times"),⁶³ which was published in many editions and translated into various languages, including French.⁶⁴ Cats himself in the preface to his book writes about the importance of the use of hidden symbolism: "Proverbs are particularly attractive, thanks to a mysterious something, and while they appear to be one thing, in reality they contain another of which the reader having in due time seized the exact meaning and intention, experiences wondrous pleasure in his soul; not unlike one who after some search finds a beautiful bunch of grapes under thick leaves. Experience teaches us that many things gain by not being completely seen, but somewhat veiled and concealed."⁶⁵

Other authors, contemporaries of Cats, such as Karel van Mander, valued painting with "pleasant adornment and depictions pregnant with meaning";⁶⁶ and Samuel van Hoogstraeten said that one should paint "accessories which

covertly explain something."⁶⁷

The hidden meanings in secular genre paintings were discovered mainly through analogy between paintings and popular prints dealing with the same subjects, and popular and well-known rhymes by contemporary poets. Those rhymes or inscriptions that appear occasionally on engravings or next to the prints in various emblem books of the period were especially important.

The image of the bird in the cage is common in prints in emblem books, and within the contexts and inscriptions their meanings are made unequivocally clear, as for example, the depiction of Cupid holding his bow while looking at a bird in a cage, in the engraving in the emblem book by Daniel Heinsius, *Emblemata Amatoria*. In the engraving there is an inscription, a quotation from Petrarch: "Perch'io stesso mi strinsi,"⁶⁸ indicating an analogy between love and the bird in the cage. That birds symbolise fertility and, therefore, indirectly, love-making too, may be learned from the entry "Fecondità" in Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*.⁶⁹ The picture illustrates fertility as a young woman adorned with a wreath of juniper leaves with a nest of baby goldfinches in her lap. Small rabbits and chicks are playing around her. The text explains that birds, rabbits and a hen with her chicks all symbolise fertility. The allusion to goldfinches is apparently related to the legend in the Apocryphal History of James, which relates the birth of Mary. When St. Anne saw a nest of small birds (sparrows or goldfinches) she bemoaned her barrenness. The angel then appeared and brought her the news of Mary's birth.⁷⁰ Here, too, the image is linked to the conception of St. Anne.

It is occasionally difficult to uncover the covert meaning in a picture without the help of a print accompanied by an inscription. The seventeenth century Dutch painting by Gabriel Metsu, "The Bird Seller",⁷¹ depicts an old man holding a rooster which he has just taken out of its cage. Next to him stands a woman who wishes to buy the rooster from him. The picture appears to be no more than an ordinary genre painting. Its covert meaning hidden from the modern viewer, becomes clear from a print by Gillis van Breen,⁷² which also depicts a similar bird seller. In front of him there is a basket with a live rooster, and above him, a dead duck. Next to him stands a woman, accompanied by a girl carrying different kinds of vegetables bought at the market. The scene is very similar to that by Metsu, but at the bottom of the print there is an inscription which illuminates the underlying meaning of the scene, both in the engraving and also in the Metsu painting. The rhyme explains that the old man refuses to sell the bird to the woman because it has been put aside for another woman whom he "birds" the whole year round.⁷³ The meaning of the Dutch verb "to bird" - *vogelen*, as already noted is "to copulate".



Fig. 5: Francois Eisen, *Girl with a bird*.



Fig. 6: Francois Eisen, *Boy with a Mousetrap*.

From the above, it is possible to draw conclusions regarding many other paintings as well. In some of them, the erotic significance of the image may be understood from the picture itself. Thus, for example, Jan Steen's "A Romping Pair", depicts a pair of lovers embracing at the foot of a tree, from the top of which hangs a cage with a bird.⁷⁴ A birdcage hanging out in the open, for no logical reason, indicates an underlying meaning, which can only be interpreted as an image for the lovemaking of the couple. There are additional images in the picture symbolizing fertility, such as a rabbit, and a yoke, symbolizing marriage.⁷⁵ The painting by Pieter van Noort, "The Tame Sparrow" (fig. 4)⁷⁶ depicts a young man encouraging a bird to fly away out of the open door of a cage being held by a young girl. The painting attempts in this way to depict the young man enticing the girl to lose her virginity. The cage symbolizes the love that chains men and women, in the same way as the bird is imprisoned in the cage. The cage may also signify the female sexual organ, while the bird itself symbolizes virginity, and thus the flight of the bird from the cage symbolizes loss of virginity.⁷⁷ One of Cats's emblems explains unequivocally that a bird that has been released is a metaphor for the loss of virginity.⁷⁸ Regarding the significance of the bird as a symbol of lust, it is worth mentioning

the painting by Abraham Janssens, "Lascivia".⁷⁹ The painting depicts a woman naked from the waist up, seated by a mirror in which her image is reflected. Her pose is erotic and she appears to be showing off the delights of her body. On her left two birds are depicted copulating. The woman's naked body is partly covered by cloth fastened by a strip on which "Lascivia" is written. The dead bird also symbolizes the sexual act, as can be seen from another picture by Gabriel Metsu, "The Hunter's Gift",⁸⁰ in which the interior of a room is depicted, and in it a man offering the woman a dead pheasant as a symbol of seduction. Behind the woman, on top of a cupboard, is a plaster statue of Cupid, emphasizing the significance of the image.

We have already mentioned the images of the girls at the window as depicted by Gerard Dou, whose significance as women calling to their lovers becomes clear from various allusions to love and its attributes. Thus, in the picture called "A Girl with a Candle at the Window",⁸¹ a girl is depicted opening a curtain and looking through the window while holding a candle in her hand. While the illustration appears to resemble a genre scene, the window-sill is decorated with Cupids playing, alluding to the girl's "profession" and to the reason for her looking through the window. She is holding a candle in her hand so that the men passing in the street will see her. Gerard Dou repeated this image of a girl at the window with Cupids on the window-sill in a series of paintings.⁸² Some of the paintings contain additional allusions to love-making, and common among them is the hanging cage outside the window, mostly on the jamb, so that passersby will see it and know that it is a brothel. The picture "Girl at the Window"⁸³ shows a girl pouring water from a broken pitcher, which is also an attribute of love.⁸⁴ In the background one can see a typically Dutch bed surrounded by a curtain. Gerard Dou's "A Poulterer Shop"⁸⁵ also shows Cupids on the window-sill, as well as a young boy at the window talking to an older woman who is evidently the procureress. She is holding a rabbit, which is a symbol of fertility. There are some dead birds on the window sill and a cage with a bird on the jamb. A second cage with a duck or hen is shown outside the window. At the entrance to the interior of the room a man, apparently a customer, is talking to a young woman, evidently another prostitute. In other Gerard Dou paintings of girls at the window, there are many allusions to love-making, even when the Cupids are missing, as in "Woman with Fowl",⁸⁶ in which the young girl is depicted holding a dead fowl in her hand. On the jamb there is a cage with a bird, and on the window sill a pitcher, a frequent uterus symbol, whose opening is directed towards the viewer.⁸⁷ Another girl in a painting by Gerard Dou, "Girl with a Mousetrap"⁸⁸ is also looking through the window. In her hand there is a mousetrap, which is also a symbol of love.⁸⁹ On

the window sill there is a pitcher whose opening is directed towards the viewer, and on the window frame a dead fowl is hanging.⁹⁰ These are just a few examples from seventeenth century Holland.

French art of the eighteenth century was greatly influenced by Dutch art. Dutch and Flemish art were the favorite schools in many collections in France, and prints of works by artists of the North were most popular.⁹¹ Greuze too, is known to have bought some Dutch drawings and paintings.⁹²

Besides the above-mentioned emblem books, which were also translated into French, similar symbolism can be found in eighteenth century France and in works of art familiar to Greuze, as can be seen from several examples.

In the 1763 Salon, two years before Greuze's picture was shown, a painting by the artist Joseph Marie Vien, "La Marchande d'Amour"⁹³ was exhibited. The painting portrays a girl, a maidservant, selling a basket of Cupids to a respectable lady. The painting was based on a 1762 engraving by C. Nolli, called "Selling of Cupids", published in the book *L'Antichità di Ercolano*, as a copy of a mural discovered in 1759 near Naples.⁹⁴ Vien himself suggested that those visiting the Salon compare his painting with the ancient original. In the engraving, the Cupids about to be sold are not taken out from a basket, but from inside a cage. In Vien's painting, the Cupid offered to the lady is portrayed making an indecent gesture with his arm, about which Diderot remarked: "C'est dommage que cette composition soit un peu déparée par un geste indécent de ce petit Amour papillon que l'esclave tient par les ailes; il a la main droite appuyée au pli de son bras gauche qui en se relevant indique d'une manière très significative la mesure de plaisir qu'il promet."⁹⁵

The engraving of the Cupid seller was so familiar that many copies were made.⁹⁶ One can assume that Greuze was familiar with the Vien painting exhibited in the 1763 Salon in which Greuze himself took part. In Vien's painting, although the cage contains Cupids rather than the symbolic image of a bird, their wings and the whole setting immediately brings to mind birds being released from their cage.

Furthermore, in one of a pair of 1763 pendent paintings by the French artist Francois Eisen, a girl is apparently attempting to grab her bird which has flown away and escaped from the open bird cage (fig. 5), while the second painting depicts a boy next to a mousetrap and a cat (fig. 6).⁹⁷ The paintings are not accompanied by any written text, although the analogy between the two images seems to indicate that they both relate to the same referent, as in the seventeenth century in Holland, and that they clearly allude to the loss of virginity.

These are not the only examples. In the eighteenth century, various artists in France regularly portray scenes in which the images of pairs of lovers with



Fig. 7: Francois Boucher, *Le Marchand d'Oiseau*.

a bird, birds in a nest or in a cage, appear again and again. These scenes, in which an erotic tone is dominant, are common, for example, in works by Nicolas Lancret.⁹⁸ The same applies to Francois Boucher's paintings,⁹⁹ as in "Le pasteur complaisant", done as overdoors for the hôtel de Soubise, in 1737-39. The picture portrays a young man offering a young girl an open cage from which she is taking out a bird.¹⁰⁰

In order to prove not only how widespread the image of the bird in the cage was, but also how familiar its meaning as the act of love and loss of virginity was in eighteenth century France as well, we may find it helpful once again to



Fig. 8: Jean Baptist Greuze, *The Broken Mirror*.

rely on popular prints done after Boucher. Boucher's work was widely circulated through many prints. They popularized the meaning of the image and bear testimony to the public's familiarity with them. The correlation between the pictures and the text written next to them is also helpful. The image of the bird in the cage, or that of the bird being released from the cage in contexts which allude to love, are very frequent in these prints.¹⁰¹ The important prints, for the subject under discussion, are mainly those accompanied by inscriptions which make it possible to infer unequivocally to the underlying meaning of the image. As a first example, we shall examine the print called "L'Amour oiseleur".¹⁰² The print depicts three Cupids playing with a bird taken out of the cage and allowed to fly around while tied to a string. The analogy between love and the bird becomes clear from the rhymes below the print:

*"L'Amour ne songeoit dans l'enfance
Qu'à la liberté des oiseaux
Nôtre coeur fait l'expérience*

Qu'il luy faut des plaisirs nouveaux."

In one of the four prints of "Les amours pastorales",¹⁰³ a young man is playing the bagpipes to a young girl. Above them, on a tree, there is a cage with a bird. The text below the print reads:

*"Ce pasteur amoureux chante sur sa musette
Et cet oiseau captif répond à ses accens;
Aux habitans des airs, la timide Lisette
Tend ainsi qu'aux bergers, des pièges innocens.
Regarde cet oiseau, Tircis, c'est ton image,
Il chante aussi l'amour dont il est agité
Et comme lui si tu n'es pas en cage
En as tu moins perdu ta liberté."*

These words express the analogy between the lover imprisoned in his love and the caged bird. Boucher took some of his subjects from the popular theater of the period. Certain of his pictures, and the prints that were made of them, including this one, present scenes that the public was familiar with from the plays of the *Theâtre de la Foire*, which were presented at the annual fairs, and these in turn occasionally drew inspiration from Boucher's work.¹⁰⁴ The texts accompanying Boucher's prints are sometimes taken from rhymes by Charles Simon Favart, a writer who made a major contribution to the fairground theater, and who was also a friend of Boucher.¹⁰⁵ The influence of the popular fairground theater on Boucher, and the reciprocal influence of Boucher on these plays, as well as the meaning of the bird flying out of the cage in both of them, shows clearly that the French public in the eighteenth century was very familiar with these symbolic meanings.¹⁰⁶ The preliminary drawing was apparently done in 1740, and the engraving in 1752, about ten years before Greuze's painting "La jeune fille qui pleure", and it is clear that the meaning was also understood ten years later.

In other prints based on Boucher's work, it is also possible to find Favart's rhymes. Thus, in the pair of prints "Le Marchand d'Oiseau"¹⁰⁷ and "La Marchande d'Ouefs",¹⁰⁸ a pair of lovers pointing at a birdcage is depicted in the first print (fig. 7).¹⁰⁹ The rhymes below the picture point to an analogy between the lover leaving his beloved and the bird flying away:

*"Ne laissez point échapper de leur cage,
Ni ce berger vif, inconstant,
Ni cet Oiseau jeune et volage
Vous les perdrez l'un et l'autre à l'instant."*

The matching print, which supposedly deals with the same subject, depicts a young man embracing a young girl, and trying to take eggs from her basket.



Fig. 9: Jean Baptist Greuze, *La Cruche Cassée*.

The inscription below the print reads:

*"Dans ce panier tout est fragile,
D'un Villageois ces Oeufs sont le trésor
L'Honneur est plus fragile encore
La bien garder n'est pas chose facile"*

From the analogy, it is clear that not only the breaking of the eggs alludes to the loss of virginity, but also the bird's flight and escape from the cage.

A similar analogy appears in Boucher in a pair of sanguine and crayon drawings. One, called "Les oeufs cassés",¹¹⁰ depicts a young woman, almost a girl, crying over the eggs which have fallen out of her basket and broken. The pendant drawing, called "Le Maraudeur",¹¹¹ portrays a boy carrying a pair of captured birds on this back. We have already dwelt on the significance of captured birds in Holland of the seventeenth century. From the pair of drawings by Boucher, there is a clear analogy between the broken eggs, which symbolize the loss of virginity and lost honour, and the dead birds, the girls captured in the love trap.¹¹²

Molière used the bird in the cage as an erotic image in act II, scene III of his play *Melicerte*¹⁶⁶⁷ and Boucher also painted the scene, which shows a young girl and next to her a cage with a bird; a painting which was also popular in print form.¹¹³

The universal significance of the analogy between bird hunting and the pursuit of love in the eighteenth century may also be learned from the song by Papageno, the birdhunter, in Mozart's "The Magic Flute" (even though the opera was composed only in 1791):

*"Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja...
Ein Nets für mädchen mochte ich
Ich fing sie dutzendweis für mich!
Dann sperrte ich sie bei mir ein,
Und alle Mädchen wären mein".*¹¹⁴

The subject of the broken eggs appears with the same meaning among Greuze's paintings as well. His picture "Les Oeufs Cassés (1756)",¹¹⁵ was exhibited at the 1757 Salon and described in the Salon catalogue: "A mother scolding a young man for having upset a basket of eggs which the servant girl was carrying to market: a child is trying to mend a broken egg. This little boy who was playing with a bow and arrow and now attempts the impossible repair, is an allusion to the danger of playing with cupid's darts."¹¹⁶ The same meaning can also be learned from a letter sent by Abbe Barthélemy,¹¹⁷ in which he describes the picture in detail, and interprets its allegorical significance. The image of the girl in Greuze's picture was painted after an engraving done by Moitte based on the painting called "L'Oeuf cassé"¹¹⁸ by the seventeenth century Dutch painter Frans van Mieris the elder.¹¹⁹ Here, too, the meaning of the image may be understood from the rhymes in Moitte's print.¹²⁰ Thus, it is clear, both from the description in the catalogue and from Abbe Barthélemy's comments, that the allegorical meaning of the picture was familiar and obvious at the time the

picture was painted and exhibited.¹²¹

Greuze repeats the same subject, the girl lamenting her dead bird and the broken eggs, in another, different image, which Diderot notes when he writes: "Greuze had already painted the subject once. He painted a grown up girl in white satin in front of a cracked mirror, filled with a profound melancholy."

The picture is apparently the one called "The Broken Mirror" (fig. 8), in the Wallace Collection in London.¹²² The significance of the mirror has a long tradition in Christian thought and in the history of art.¹²³ The pure mirror, unblemished, *speculum sine macula*, served in both literary and artistic tradition, as an attribute of the Virgin, as a symbol of her purity and virginity, and as an image of the incarnation.¹²⁴ In three of the altar pictures by Jan van Eyck (in Ghent, Dresden, and Brussels), the painting or its frame is embellished with the words "The Unspotted Mirror", *speculum sine macula*, which refer to the Virgin.¹²⁵ The mirror is also an attribute of the Virgin in the altar piece by The Master of Flemalle, painted for Heinrich von Werf in 1438,¹²⁶ as well as in the work by Hans Memling in the diptych of Martin van Nieuwenhoven,¹²⁷ and in the 1476 triptych of "The Burning Bush" by Nicolas Fromant.¹²⁸ This last painting depicts the Virgin seated in the middle of the burning bush, which is also an allegorical image of Mary's virginity, and in her lap is the Child, holding a mirror in his hand.

As a symbol of the purity of the Virgin, the mirror also becomes a symbol of virginity for other women. Thus, in the painting by Petrus Christus, "St. Eloy" (1449) the mirror alludes to the bride's virginity.¹²⁹ It would appear that in the painting of the Arnolfini couple by Jan van Eyck, the mirror may again be interpreted not only as a symbol of the Holy Virgin and the salvation of the world through the incarnation and death of Jesus - because of the passion pictures surrounding it - but also as an image of the virginity of the bride on her wedding day.¹³⁰

The mirror, besides being an emblem / symbol of virginity, as in other cases in the Middle Ages, also had an antithetical significance: as a symbol of *Vanitas*,¹³¹ *Luxuria* and the sin of lust, as in the Angers tapestry, in which the mirror is an attribute of the Great Whore of Babylon. The mirror plays the same role in the earlier-mentioned painting of *Lascivia*.

Since the mirror is an attribute of virginity, the broken mirror may also be interpreted as symbol of spoilt virginity. Thus, Greuze's painting does indeed, as pointed out by Diderot, depict the same topic, as in "The Young Girl Mourning her Dead Bird", and also in "The Broken Eggs".

Greuze depicts the same topic in another image, in a painting, "La Cruche Cassée" (fig. 9).¹³² The picture depicts a young girl standing, flowers in her hair

and a rose adorning her dress - in a way similar to the flowers adorning the blouse of the girl weeping over her dead bird. Many other flowers are gathered in her apron. On her left arm, a pitcher is hanging, with its broken part clearly visible. At the back there is a well, embellished with rams' heads and laurel garlands, resembling an ancient sarcophagus. There is an artistic and literary tradition to the broken pitcher as a symbol of loss of virginity.¹³³ The pitcher is related to the well-known proverb: "So long goes the pot to the water till at last it comes home broken" (*Tant va pot à rivière qu'il s'y trouve rompu*).¹³⁴ The proverb originally referred to human life in general and to its vulnerability, but in Holland in the seventeenth century, the image had already taken on an underlying meaning, to the effect that frequent romantic involvements lead to a loss of virginity. This can be ascertained from, among other things, the book by Cats, which, it will be recalled, was published in many forms and many languages, including French, German, English, Italian and Latin.¹³⁵ The proverb,¹³⁶ is accompanied in Cat's book by a long rhyming text, which tells about a young girl who would frequently draw water from the well, and would play and laugh with the young men from the neighbouring village, until one young man pierced the pitcher with such force again and again that it began to leak, and in the end broke into pieces. The young girl carries on and talks about her worry and shame, and being frightened of her mother and how the neighbours will react to her because of the broken pitcher, and ends with the abovementioned proverb.¹³⁷ The accompanying picture does not in fact allude to lovemaking, although next to it there is a text which says that virgins who are reckless (or loose) will lose their honour because of lack of self-restraint.¹³⁸ Cats describes the young girl as "A virgin, dishonoured because of her frivolity."

The image and its meaning is very common in various countries, both in art and in literature, and Greuze's painting belongs to this artistic tradition.¹³⁹ An anecdote about this painting, possibly from a later source, relates that Greuze told his friend about the young maidservant in his house, who, when she went to the well every evening to fill the pitcher, used the opportunity to take a short stroll in the park, where an engraver worked. When Greuze said that he would like to paint her, his friend remarked that in the painting it would not be possible to see the kisses the young girl got in the park. Greuze replied that he could portray the lovers' kisses through the painting of the broken pitcher.¹⁴⁰ The anecdote shows that the public well understood the meaning of the image.

The proverb became very popular in art and in literature and is described in a rhyming idyll, which was later turned into prose and published in 1756 as "The Broken Pot" by the poet Salomon Gessner.¹⁴¹

As will be recalled in his comments about the painting "La jeune fille qui

pleure son oiseau mort", Diderot adds, among other things, "What a lovely idyll Gessner would make of it!". It may be assumed that Diderot was familiar with Gessner's idyll about the broken pot. Although Greuze's painting "The Broken Pot" was done after Diderot had already made his remarks about the girl mourning the dead bird, Diderot knew that it was the same subject that was being discussed - loss of virginity - and accordingly commented that Gessner could also have written about the death of the bird in exactly the same way that he wrote about the broken pot.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that the story Diderot wrote about the painting was in fact a way of interpreting the allegory depicted in it, and was indeed intended to explain the meaning behind it, as Greuze had intended in the painting itself. Diderot embellished his remarks and expanded on them, in the tradition of the rhymes and stories that were woven around the pictures in various emblem books, such as in the lengthy description by Cats of "The Broken Pot". All of Diderot's apparently casual comments, therefore, - for example, the painting depicting the broken mirror, as well as his remarks about Gessner - were in fact made deliberately.

Diderot's remarks about the girl "lamenting her dead bird" are thus not were idle chatter, nor simply the result of a fertile imagination, but rather the literal translation of the allegorical story that Greuze had depicted in his picture.

NOTES

1. Seznec, 1979, ii, 34-35; 145-48.
2. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland. No. 110 in the 1765 Salon. Cf. *Ibid.*; Munhall, 1977, 104-105, no. 44. Greuze refers to the subject three times.
3. Osborn, 1970, 237-38.
4. *Ibid.*, 241.
5. Lochhead, 1982, 60-61, 101 n. 64.
6. Seznec, 1979, III, 156-57.
7. Saisselin, 1961, 152.
8. Seznec & Adhémar, 1960, II, 144.
9. Michel, 1985, 38, tr. and repr. from *Diderot*, 1984-85.
10. Apgar, 1985, 110.
11. Seznec, 1961/62, 25.
12. Seznec, 1979, II, 53 & n.
13. Munhall, 1977, 104-105, no. 44.
14. Written communication to Munhall, 17th of July, 1967. Cf. *Ibid.*
15. *Catulle de Vérone*, 1653, 5, 7.
16. Bukdahl, 1980, 209, 313.
17. Brookner, 1956, 161.

18. Seznec, 1979, II, 145-147. English translation see Osborn, 1970, 237-38.
19. Muhn hall, 1977, 104; Seznec, 1979, II, 35.
20. Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl, 1964.
21. Panofsky, 1945, II, 156-171, 210-214, 221, pl. 209.
22. Diez and Demus, 1931, pl. XIII.
23. 1630. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, cf. Haak, n.d., 61, pl. 86.
24. In connection with the pretenders' marriages to the king's wife or even to his concubine see also Sam. 16:22; 1 Kings 2: 13-15.
25. Gottlieb, 1981, 31
26. Pritchard, 1955, 134-135; Gottlieb, 1981, 31.
27. Hall, 1928, 44, pl. XLI/2; Barnett, 1957, 145-151; 172-173; no. C. 12, pl. IV; Gottlieb, 1981, figs. 15, 16. See for example the ivory relief at the British Museum, London, cf. *Ibid.*, fig 14, or the Nimrud relief at the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad, cf. Akurgal, 1966, 145 ff. fig. 38. See also: Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, 1970, 13-14 & fig. 1.
28. Zimmer, 1928, cc. 1-3.
29. Gottlieb, 1981, 40 ff.
30. Wyettenbach, 1843, 2, 638. The Greeks regarded the ceremonies of her fertility ritual as prostitution as told by Herodotus. It was condemned later by St. Augustine. Cf. Roscher, 1884-1937, s.v. "Aphrodite", cc. 291-392.
31. Barnett, 1957, 149.
32. Aristophanes, 1950 ff, *Achharnians*, 16; *Peace*, 974-986; *Thesmophoriazusae*, 789-791; *Ecclesiazusae*, 877-880, 884, 924-925.
33. Freud, 1962, II, 346, 683; Jones, 1964b, p. 12; *Idem*, 1964d, 132.
34. Veca, 1981, English text 161-221, esp. 203-206; Bergström, 1983, 154-190, esp. 154; Sonnema, 1980; Faré, 1974, 149-174, esp. 155-157; 169; 171-173.
35. Bergström, 1955, 345. All evergreen trees and plants and especially ivy, and juniper were symbols of immortality already in antiquity. Being symbols of immortality they became symbols of ephemerality. Cf. Cumont, 1955, 219, 220, 236 n. 4, 238 n. 1, 239 & n. 1, 482 n. 3.
36. Veca, 1981, 212, 286-89; Faré, 1974, 158, pls. 160, 166, 169.
37. Called also "Der Spaziergang", probably 1498. Cf. Panofsky, 1955, fig. 99; Bartsch, 1800, VII, 94 (201).
38. Cf. *Baldung Grien*, 1959, cat. no. 13, pl. 3; no. 39, pl. 18; no. 38; no. 146, pl. 48.
39. Souchal, 1969, pl. 36.
40. Jones, 1964e, 324; On Flowers as love symbols see *Idem*, 324 ff, 328. See also Vinken, 1958, 153. See also Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book V (Rape of Proserpine).
41. Desroches Noblecourt 1982, 188-98; *Toutankhamon*, 1967, 158-60, no. 34.
42. Grabar, 1966, 9-16.
43. St. Augustine apparently follows Porphyry. *Sententiae*, 28; *Ad Gaurum* II, 3, XIV, 4, *Soliloquia*, I, 14, 24.
44. Hjort, 1968, 21-23, figs. 1, 2. Similar images with similar connotations may also be seen in the twelfth century mosaics of Sta. Francesca Romana and S. Clemente in Rome.

45. Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, 1964, 303; Friedman, 1978, English abstract, II, 1-71, *passim*; Friedman, 1989, 157-175.
46. Schapiro, 1945, 182-87, repr. in Schapiro, 1979, 1-11. On the meaning of the mousetrap in secular art of seventeenth century Holland, as well as eighteenth century France see: de Jongh, 1976, 284-87, pl. 75, and figs. 75 a-d; *Dutch Genre Painting* 1984, 357, cat. 125, pl. 125 & figs. 1-3. See also the paintings by Francois Eisen below.
47. Hensel, 1909, 639 ff., 642 ff.; also in German medieval poetry, for example Lachmann und von Kraus, 1950, 8, 33; Thomas, 1968, p. 57; de Jongh, 1968-69, 22-72 (English summary: 72-74); Friedman, 1978, 400-402; 418-20; 423-33; 437-88; English summary 44-56; Friedman, 1984, 165 ff; Friedman, 1989, 157-175, and mainly 158-59 & ns. 7-13.
48. Ripa, 1644, 143-44.
49. Barleus, 1667, 627-29. The letter is dated 20.10.1635. Cf. de Jongh, 1968-69, 29 (English 72-73).
50. *Cassel's German Dictionary*, 1964; de Jongh, 1968-69, 25, 27 n. 4, 28.
51. Röheim, 1930, 161, cf. Schnier, 1952, 106.
52. Jones, 1964c, p. 56; *Idem*, 1964e, 326-328.
53. De Jongh, 1976, 252; Naumann, 1981, I, 104 n. 94; Brown, 1984, 182.
54. "Voor herberg, achter bordeel", cf. Naumann, 1981, I, 104, n. 94.
55. "A Party in a Public House", Berlin, Dahlem, Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen, Cf. Friedländer, 1975, XI, 49, 113, pl. 126, no. 235.
56. "Loose Company", Karlsruhe Kunsthalle. cf. Friedländer, 1935, XII, 46, 112, fig. 218. pls. 40, 42; Friedländer, 1975, XII, pl. 117, no. 218.
57. Naumann, 1981, 104, n. 94.
58. "The Prodigal Son", called also "The House of Ill Repute", Rotterdam, Museum Boymans van Benningen, cf. Linfert, 1959, 78-79; de Tolney, 1966, 283-84.
59. Panofsky, 1934, 117-27; de Jongh, 1976, *passim*; de Jongh, 1968-69, 22-74. Naumann, 1981, 95, and bibliography in n. 40; On the hidden symbolism in religious and secular art in Holland and outside it, see also Bergström, 1955, I, 303-308; II, 342-349; Friedmann, 1946, *passim*; *Idem*, 1947, 65-72.
60. Panofsky, 1953, 131-148;
61. Sutton, 1984, XXII.
62. Praz. 1964; Sutton, 1984, XXII.
63. Cats, 1632.
64. Zick, 1964, 153.
65. Cats, 1712, II, 480, tr. by Praz, 1964, 87. See also Sutton, 1984, XXII, & n. 56; de Jongh, 1976, 20 & n. 18.
66. Van Mander, 1616, cf. de Jongh. 1976, 20 & n. 19; Sutton, 1984, XX.
67. Van Hoogstraeten, 1678, 90, cf. de Jongh, 1976, 20 & n. 19.
68. The writing under the picture says: "Cupido sit vast met verlangen om het vogeltje te vangen". Cf. Heinsius, 1616, 21, no. 46; cf. de Jongh, 1968-69, 48-50, fig. 20.
69. Ripa, 1709, 29, fig. 116.

70. "Book of James, or Protoevangelium", in James, 1975 (1924), 40; H. Friedmann, 1946, 29.
71. Dresden, Gemäldegalerie, cf. de Jongh, 1968-69, 22-25, fig. 1.
72. After C. Clock, cf. de Jongh, 1968-69, 24, fig. 2.
73. "Hoe duur dees vogel vogelaer? hy is vercocht 'waer? / aen een waerdinne claer' die ick vogel tgeheels Jaer". *Ibid.*
74. Leiden, Museum de Lakenhal, cf. de Jongh, 1968-69, fig. 19.
75. *Ibid.*, 50, n. 62.
76. Zwolle, Overijssels Museum, cf. de Jongh 1968-69, fig. 23; de Jongh, 1976, 200-201, no. 50.
77. *Ibid.*, 201; *idem*, 1968-69, 49-52.
78. The inscription next to the emblem reads: "De doos is opgedaen, de vogel uyt-gevlogen / Ach! maegdom, teer gewas, dat ons so licht ontglijt ..." (The box was opened, the bird flew out, / Oh Virginity, fragile bloom that escapes us so easily...) Cf. Cats, 1700, 42. Cf. de Jongh, 1976, 286 and n. 15. See also Naumann, 1981, 95, 121 for the English translation, and fig 170 (from Cats, 1618). See also Cats, 1622, 102.
79. Brussels, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, de jongh, 1976, 168, fig. 40 b.
80. C. 1658-60, The city of Amsterdam, on loan to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, cf. de Jongh, 1968-69, 35-36, fig. 9; *Dutch Genre Painting*, 1984, no. 71, pl. 65.
81. 1650-55. Coll. Thyssen-Bornemisza, Castagnola, Villa Favorita. Cf. Martin, 1913, pl. 152. See also Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, 1970, 17, fig. 10.
82. Martin, 1913, pls, 121, 128, 135, 139. 152.
83. C. 1640. Munich, Alte Pinakothek. There are several versions of the picture: cf. Martin, 1913, pl. 121. See also: Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, 1970, 17, fig. 9.
84. On the broken pitcher and its meanings, see below.
85. 1660-65, London, The National Gallery. Cf. Martin, 1913, pl. 128.
86. 1650. Paris, Louvre. Cf. Martin, 1913, pl. 120; de Jongh, 1968-69, 43-44, fig. 15.
87. *Ibid.*, 45-47, figs. 15-18. On the symbolism of the pitcher as uterus or organ of birth in psychoanalysis, see Jones, 1964d, 132.
88. 1670-75, Private collection. Cf. Martin, 1913, pl. 113; de Jongh, 1968-69, 43-44, pl. 16.
89. De Jongh, 1976, 284-287, pl. 75 & figs. 75 b,c; *Dutch Genre Painting*, 1984, 184-85 fig. 1; 357-58, cat. no. 125, pl. 125 & figs. 1-3.
90. The dead bird appears a great deal in these paintings as a love symbol. Cf. de Jongh, 1968-69, 35-45, figs. 9-16; *Dutch Genre Painting*, 1984, 184; 250-51, cat. no. 71, pl. 65 & figs 1-2.
91. Snoep-Reitsma, 1973, pp. 158-162; The favourite school of art in France of the early 18th century was that of the north. Cf. Wildenstein, 1956, 113 ff.
92. Hautecoeur, 1913, pp. 23-24.
93. Called also "Marchande à la Toilette", Fontainebleau, Château. Cf. Rosenbloom, 1970, 3-6, fig. 1.
94. *Ercolano*, 1762, III, 41, pl. 7, cf. Rosenblum, 1970, fig. 2.
95. Sez nec & Adhémar, 1957, 210.

96. Rosenblum, 1970, 6-8, figs 3-5.
97. De Jongh, 1976, 286, figs, 75 c, d. The paintings are listed in a catalogue of a Sotheby's sale dated 26.6.1963. Their present whereabouts are unknown. Cf. *Sotheby*, 1963, II, no. 86.
98. Wildenstein, 1924, 100-101, nos. 455-468, figs, 111-118, 198.
99. For example: "Le dénicheur d'oiseaux", c. 1733-35, present location unknown, cf. *Boucher*, 1986-87, 69, fig. 103; "Les présents du berger (le nid)", the thirties, Musée du Louvre, cf. *Ibid.* 69, 176, fig. 50. See also the print, cf. Jean-Richard, 1978, nos. 1373-1374; "Putti Playing with Birds (Summer)", Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, cf. *Boucher*, 1986-87, 127-129, no. 15; "The Bird's Nesters", whereabouts unknown, *Ibid.*, fig. 103, photograph in Witt Library. On the allusions in Boucher of birds and cages to sexual organs and virginity see *Ibid.*, 69.
100. Paris, Archives Nationales (Hôtel de la Soubise). On the erotic allusions of this painting, cf. *Ibid.*, 69, no. 31. Also Laing, 1986, fig. 3. See also the print done after it, cf. Jean-Richard, 1978, nos. 1314, 1315.
101. On cupids playing with birds or a birdcage in Boucher's prints see: *Ibid.*, nos. 3, 277, 533, 1377. On the depiction of Venus with birds, as in the print called "Venus tenant le symbol de l'amour", *Ibid.*, no. 389. See also nos. 816, 865, as well as a nude woman with birds (Venus perhaps?), *ibid.*, nos. 866, 867; and young girl with cage and bird, *ibid.*, nos. 580, 1011; and couple with cage and bird, *ibid.*, nos. 704, 1153.
102. *Ibid.*, no. 1377. Engraved after the painting of c. 1733-34 in the Derbais Coll. Another version was sold by Sotheby's, London, 1 Nov. 1978, lot 33, cf. *Boucher*, 1986-87, 127, fig. 98.
103. 1752. *Ibid.*, no. 929. See also the preliminary drawing of c. 1740. cf. Laing, 1986, fig. 9.
104. *Ibid.*, 55-64; *Boucher*, 1986-87, 67-68, 70-71, 176.
105. Laing regards this work an echo of an episode from the play by Favart, probably *Vendanges de Tempé*. Cf. Laing, 1986, 57.
106. About the bird in the cage as an erotic symbol in eighteenth century France see also Snoep-Reitsma, 1973, 215-216, 226-227.
107. Jean-Richard, 1978, no. 544.
108. *Ibid.*, no. 546.
109. In this print as well it is possible to see, next to the cage, branches with leaves, possibly ivy, similar to those interwoven round the cage in Greuze's picture.
110. *Ibid.*, no. 702.
111. *Ibid.*, no. 703.
112. Munhall already points to the relation between the birdhunter and setting a love trap for the innocent in the eighteenth century in France, while referring to another picture by Greuze, "Un Oiseleur qui, au retour de la chasse, accorde sa guitar", Warsaw, Muzeum Narodow, cf. Munhall, 1977, 46, no. 12.
113. Jean-Richard, 1978, no. 427.
114. Original text by Emanuel Schikaneder, Deutsche Grammophon, no. 2709 017, n.d.
115. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Cf. Munhall, 1977, 40-41, no. 9.

116. Sterling, 1955, 174-75.
117. *Voyage en Italie*, 1801, 137 f. Cf. Sterling, 1955, 175.
118. St. Petersburg, Ermitage. Cf. Brookner, 1972, pl. 17. See also Naumann, 1981, fig. c 17.
119. When Greuze returned from Italy in 1756, the Dutch painters were very well-known and in much demand in Paris. As mentioned above, there were also Dutch drawings and paintings in his collection. Till approximately 1760 Greuze's paintings are reminiscent of works by van Mieris and Gerard Dou. Cf. Hauteceur, 1913, 23-24.
120. The verses are by Moraine: "Soyez plus politique, imprudente Isabelle, / Riez plutôt que de verser de pleurs, / Qui divertiroient les railleurs. / D'ailleurs casser un oeuf n'est pas qu'un bagatelle: / Si c'est un mal, c'est le moindre de tous: / Bien d'autres l'ont fait avant vous". Cf. Snoep-Reitsma, 1973, 185 & n. 45. fig. 27.
121. C. F. Beavarlet, engraving after E. Jeaurat, "L'eplucheuse de salade". In the engraving, next to the girl peeling vegetables, there is a boy trying to steal an egg from the plate on the table. The rhymes under the engraving read: "Prenez garde a vos oeufs la belle / Cet enfant les dérobera: / Un jour si n'etes pas cruelle, / Bien d'autres chose il vous prendra". Cf. *Ibid.*, 185 & n. 44, fig. 26.
122. London, Wallace Collection. Its name varies in the prints, as "Le miroir cassé" and "Le malheur imprevue". In the 1763 Salon, a painting entitled "Une jeune fille qui a cassé son miroir" was exhibited, to which probably Diderot refers. Cf. *Wallace Collection*, 1928, p. 121, no. 442; Brookner, 1972, pl. 26.
123. On the meanings of the image of the mirror see: Schwarz, 1952, 97-118; Hartlaub, 1951, *passim*.
124. The source of the image is *The Book of Wisdom*, 7. "For she (Wisdom) is the brightness of the everlasting light the unspotted mirror of the power of God and the image of His goodness". On the mirror as an attribute of the Virgin see: Schwarz, 1952, 98-100; Hartlaub, 1951, 147-48. See also Jacopo de Voragine *Mariale*, the last of his Golden Sermons, written after 1255, cf. Richardson, 1935, II, 64 f.
125. Schwarz, 1952, 99.
126. *Ibid.*, 100.
127. Genaille, 1954, 72.
128. The Cathedral of Saint Sauveur, Aix en Provence, cf. Schwarz, 1952, 99.
129. Collection Robert Lehman, New York. Cf. *ibid.*, 103, fig. 2.
130. London, The National Gallery, cf. *ibid.*, 97-99, fig. 1.
131. On the mirror as an attribute of Vanitas see: *ibid.*, 105-109; Hartlaub, 1951, 149-158, figs. 148-49, 151-63, 165-66, 172, 174-75.
132. Paris, Louvre. Cf. Martin, 1908, cat. no. 442; Brookner, 1972, fig. 49.
133. Vinken, 1958, 149-174; Zick, 1969, 149-202.
134. The proverb was originally found in a collection of French proverbs from 1485, written in old French. Today in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, fol. 192. Cf. Frank & Miner, 1937, pl. 37; Frank, 1940, 209-238. See also Zick, 1969, 149-150, pl. 100.
135. *Ibid.*, 153.

136. "De kanne gaet soo lange to water, totse eens breeckt", Cats, 1635, 120-121, no. 40.
137. The condensed text here is according to the German translation of Cats from his collected writings, which were published in Hamburg in eight volumes between 1710 and 1717. Cf. Cats, 1711, 74-75, no. 41, cf. Zick 1969, 153.
138. Cats, 1632, repr. in Cats, 1700, p. 531, cf. Naumann, 1981, 119.
139. On the popularization of the subject in eighteenth century French art and in Boucher's work, see: Zick, 1969, 161.
140. Vinken, 1958, 150; Zick, 1969, 161 & n. 37.
141. Gessner, 1756, 48-52. The book was published only a few years before the 1763 Salon, and Diderot was therefore aware of it when he made his comments.

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