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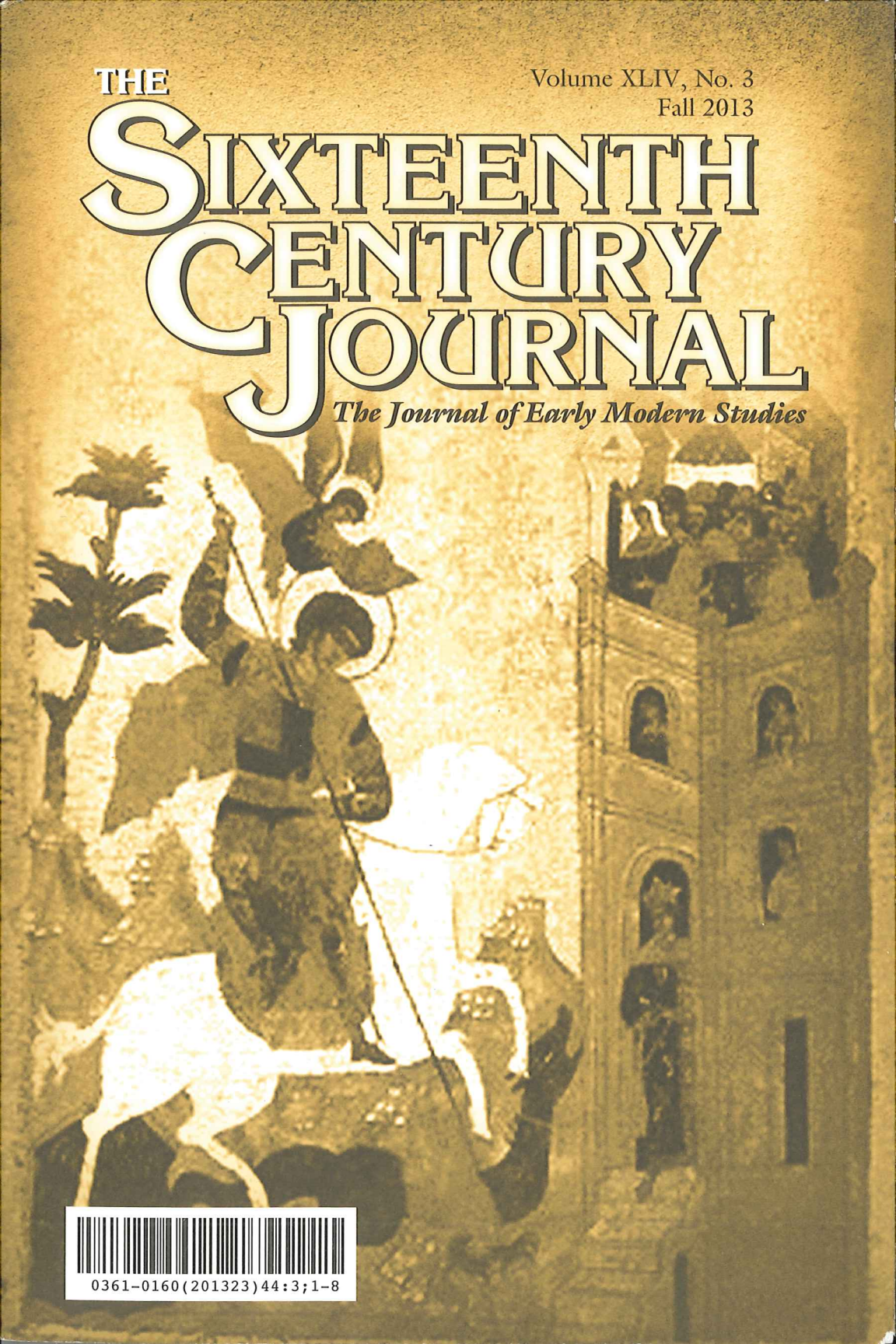

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Landscape and Religion: From van Eyck to Rembrandt. Boudewijn Bakker. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. 347 pp. $134.95. ISBN 978-1-4094-0486-6.

Reviewed by: Kimberlee A. Cloutier-Blazzard
Independent Scholar

In his book, Boudewijn Bakker presents the landscape art of the Low Countries as a distillation of a multilayered exegetical image of the Godhead, increasingly abstracted over four centuries yet ideologically espousing "one traditional world view…barely changed since late antiquity" (3). It relies on a close reading of the "Two Books": the Book of Creation (visible reality) and the Book of Holy Scripture (3).

Bakker's armature recapitulates the "World Landscape (*Weltlandschaft*)" concept wherein landscape and its *staffage* contain meaning and mirror of the scope of Creation—a term first coined by Eberhard von Bodenhausen in his monograph on Gerard David (1905). While this reading has largely been confined to Renaissance works, Bakker novelly extends such moral and religious sentiment in landscape art to the age of Rembrandt. Following in the hermeneutic tradition of Wilhelm Martin and Johan Huizinga, Bakker argues that the "emancipation" of landscape, as Bakker refers to a *l'art pour l'art* assessment, is a misconstrued idea since freedom from political, religious, economic, and artistic sensibilities was impossible in that time (204). Bakker rallies evidence that 1670s humanists still referenced God's "First Book" in art and culture. In his final chapters, Bakker explores the intertwined professions of publisher, poet, and "painter" (221), though "printmaker" should be appended as much of Bakker's evidence revolves around the latter medium. Indeed, sparse attention is invested in differentiating between media in the book, and delving a bit more into how medium impacts convention and subject would greatly enrich Bakker's enterprise. Patronage, too, is largely unconsidered, though somewhat understandably as many of the patrons are unknown. Still, one longs to understand more about markets and which audiences found landscapes explicitly religious and moralistic in nature.

There are many laudable aspects to Bakker's book, including its lavish illustrations—twenty-eight color plates and seventy-five black-and-white illustrations—an enviable rarity nowadays. It is also well that Bakker makes explicit mention of period calls for religious harmony by Dutch rhetoricians: an important social current that has too often been downplayed in past scholarship. One might wish that more was said on this, but Bakker's discussion of period writers—a cross-section of Reformed, Mennonite, Catholic, and Calvinist citizens—is well done.

Differences between the Ashgate volume and the original Dutch version (Bussum: Uitgeverij Thoth, 2004) may explain some brevity of discourse; the author himself apologizes in both his preface and several footnotes for streamlined text. Nevertheless, Bakker's command of intellectual history remains impressive. Chapter 10 grapples with the issue of the historiography of landscape art, culminating in Bakker's disappointment with the "many fruitless arguments" (221). One is tempted to agree with him and certainly with his call for a more coherent, integrated view that includes the possibility of ecumenical inflections.

Bakker's knowledge of and openness to new avenues of thought make his subtle sweeping aside of much American scholarship all the more regrettable. Likewise, there is little discussion of contemporary Flemish or other European influence on early modern Dutch artists. This leads to the exclusion of some historical chestnuts, such as a quotation by a seventeenth-century painter who personally knew Rubens and Paul Bril: Edward Norgate. Norgate wrote:

> But to reduce this [landscape] part of painting to an absolute and intire Art, and to confine a man's industry for the tearme of Life to this onely, is as I conceave an Invencon of these later times, and though a Noveltie, yet a good one, that to the Inventors and Professors hath brought both honour and profitt. (E. H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form* [NY: Phaidon, 1971], 107, and n. 1, Edward Norgate, *'Miniatura' or the Art of Limning*, ed. By Martin Hardie [Oxford, 1919], 44f.)

While Bakker's arguments are solid and provocative, one would like to have clarified, as E. H. Gombrich desired, "…to do justice to what Norgate called the 'Noveltie' of the *genre*" (108).

A few more observations are in order. Bakker makes too clean a division between what he terms "classicism" versus "realism," or the related "*schilderachtig* (picturesque)." He goes so far as to state they "cannot even be reconciled" (225). Yet, in the very next sentence he articulates how Constantijn Huygens himself synthesized the two in his 1651 Georgic poem (*hofdicht*) about his country estate, *Hofwijck*, the subject of two-thirds of Bakker's chapter 12. The Dutch *hofdichten* were an integral part of the landscape-related, pastoral literary tradition of the North. A synthesis of the poetic/prosaic and the high/low within the Dutch pastoral mode, in the tradition of the *genera mixta*, has been outlined by the American scholar David R. Smith (see David R. Smith, "Rembrandt's metaphysical wit: The Three Trees and the Omval," *Word & Image* 21, no. 1 [2005]: 1–21). We know that the pastoral was an ironic mode from its inception, placing epic dactylic hexameter into the mouths of lowly shepherds. It follows that Huygens's self-deprecating humor in writing and illustrating his poem evinces indebtedness to this classical form of the seriocomic mode.

Like the pastoral, realism is skirted as an issue in Bakker's book. As has also been argued by Smith (see David R. Smith, "Realism and the Boundaries of Genre in Dutch Art," *Art History* 32, no. 1 [2009]: 78–114), realism is more than just one approach to depiction; as a mode it creates self-awareness that what is presented in an image can never fully embrace human experience. Artists were therefore wont to explore the resultant paradox.

Ultimately, Bakker's book goes a long way toward opening another avenue of investigation into the Golden Age *Weltanschauung*, one that does not discount the "traditional Christian world view" of the "Book of Nature." Though the book reads a bit like a dissertation, this is not an insult. Bakker does a workmanlike job of surveying the literature on the subject, and *Landscape and Religion* would function well as an accompanying handbook for a course on both topics. Any unanswered questions are rife places where future scholars can build on Bakker's important contribution.