



Godefridus Schalcken

(Made 1643 – 1706 The Hague)

How to cite

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Godefridus (also called Godfried) Schalcken was born in Made near Geertruidenberg in 1643 to the clergyman Cornelis Schalcken (1610–74) and Aletta Lydius (1612–78), who came from a respected family of preachers and theologians.^[1] When Cornelis was made rector of the Latin school in Dordrecht, he and his family moved to that city in 1654.^[2] There, in 1656, the thirteen-year-old Schalcken was apprenticed to his fellow townsman Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), after which he went to study under Gerrit Dou (1613–75) in Leiden around 1663.^[3] Exactly when Schalcken returned to Dordrecht is unknown, it was presumably shortly after he completed his training. In any case, he was living in Dordrecht again around 1669.^[4]

In October 1679 Schalcken married Francoisia van Diemen (1661–1744) from Breda, the daughter of Christoffel van Diemen (d. 1661), an officer in the State army, and Elisabeth Beens (d. 1661), who came from a prominent Breda family.^[5] Schalcken and his wife had seven children, of whom only their daughter Francoisia (b. 1690) reached adulthood. She married twice; the first time in 1713 to the Hague architect Pieter Roman (1676–after 1733).^[6]

Together with Eglon van der Neer (1635/36–1703) and Caspar Netscher (1639–84), Schalcken was among the most important representatives of a third generation of *fijnschilders* (fine painters) after Dou and Frans van Mieris (1635–81). Schalcken was the first *fijnschilder* from outside of Leiden, although naturally he was introduced to *fijnschilderkunst* (a fine and meticulous manner of painting) there.^[7] According to Arnold Houbraken, he was influenced primarily by Dou, “whose facture he was able to emulate almost perfectly.”^[8] As an example, he mentions Schalcken’s *Vrouwtje komt ten Hoof* (*Game of “Lady, Come into the Garden”*), which enjoyed a certain renown in Dordrecht in the 1670s.^[9] Still, this early work already demonstrates that Dou’s influence remained limited to his technique and that Schalcken assimilated Van Mieris’s style, as did Van der Neer and Netscher.^[10]

Schalcken and the other *fijnschilders*, however, soon took a new tack. Responding to the shifting and more internationally oriented tastes of the upper class who were becoming tired of traditional subjects, Schalcken became increasingly captivated by the classicism emanating from France, which had begun to leave its mark on Dutch painting in the 1660s.^[11] Schalcken expressed his striving for a classical ideal of beauty not only in the rendering of figures and their refined, “aristocratic” lifestyle, but also in experimenting with more elevated scenes from the Bible and classical antiquity.^[12]

Though Schalcken’s history paintings were satisfying, his reputation at home and far beyond the boundaries of the Dutch Republic rested on his *kaarslichtjes*, or pictures with figures in a nocturnal setting illuminated by artificial light. The artist’s rendering of artificial light was unsurpassed and this talent stood him in good stead when painting portraits: the diffuse candlelight allowed for a soft modeling of the face, giving the sitter an amiable and elegant impression. Two notable examples are his portrait of Stadholder-King William III (1650–1702) by candlelight,^[13] and his nocturnal self-portrait, which he sent around 1695 to Cosimo III de’ Medici (1642–1732), Grand Duke of Tuscany, in response to the latter’s request for a painting by the artist.^[14]

Schalcken achieved great renown with his portraits. Portraiture did not lend itself well to the time-consuming “fine painting,” and thus “from time to time he turned to a more pleasing and airier manner of painting.”^[15] After Nicolaes Maes (1634–93) moved to Amsterdam in 1673, Schalcken became Dordrecht’s leading portrait painter, and his reputation soon extended well beyond that city. In 1676 he painted portraits of the wealthy Leiden cloth merchant Pieter de la Court (1618–1685) and four members of his family.^[16] As of the 1680s Schalcken traveled regularly to The Hague to work on the many lucrative portrait commissions he received from the distinguished circles around first Stadholder and then, as of



1689, King William III. The artist's Hague interests led him to join the local painters' society *Pictura* in 1691, although he continued to reside in Dordrecht.

Together with his family Schalcken crossed the North Sea around 1692 and established himself in London. According to Houbraken, he met with great success there and the English elite was eager to sit for him. Weyerman, who had little liking for Schalcken's work, perceived his London years in an entirely different light.^[17] He maliciously informed his readers that the English soon had had enough of Schalcken's portraits, which were "as flat as unrisen pancakes," lacking "the firm, round, loose, and powerful manner that [viewers] discerned in the delightful likenesses by the Knight [Godfried] Kneller [...] and many others in that century of blossoming portraitists." As a consequence, Schalcken was forced "to paint history scenes and 'night lights' [nocturnal scenes]."^[18] Whether Schalcken actually had such a dearth of patrons in London is unknown, but it is true that very few portraits by Schalcken can be linked to his London years.

The artist was back in the Dutch Republic in June 1698 and settled in The Hague to build further on the success he had enjoyed there prior to his departure. Particularly notable was his intensive contact with Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm II (1658–1716), an aficionado of Dutch painting who, together with the Danish king Frederick IV (1671–1730) and the Prussian king Frederick I (1657–1713), was one of the artist's most important patrons in the final phase of his life. The contact with the Elector even led to a brief sojourn in Düsseldorf in 1703. During this visit Johann Wilhelm presented Schalcken with a gold chain in gratitude for his service, which he depicted in his self-portrait of 1706.^[19] This was to be his last self-portrait; Schalcken died in The Hague on 13 November of that same year.

- Piet Bakker, 2017

Endnotes

1. For the biographies of various celebrated members of the Lydius family, see Abraham Jacob van der Aa, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden* (Haarlem, 1865), 11: 775–91.
2. His father was initially a parish minister in Eethen and Drongelen (west of Den Bosch), and in Drimmelen and Made from 1643 to 1654.
3. Houbraken's assertion that Schalcken completed his training with Dou is confirmed by an inscription on a contemporary portrait print of Schalcken: "Ger. Dow, Pictor Lugd. Batav. Honoris ergo Praeceptorem suum delineavit G. Schalcken." Alfred von Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler Lexikon* (Leipzig, 1911), 2: 568; Annegret Laabs and Christoph Schölzel, *The Leiden fijnschilders from Dresden*, ed. Chrsitiaan Vogelaar (Exh. cat. Leiden, Museum De Lakenhal; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister) (Zwolle, 2000), 111n238.
4. On 30 September 1672, Godefridus Schalcken, together with several other members of his civic guard, made a statement regarding an unfortunate fellow militiaman who had accidentally shot two people. Those who made the statement are described as "hebbende nu enige jaren herwaerts gewoont en gewaeckt [hebbende] onder het vaendel van de Nieuwstraet (having now lived there several years and guarded [having been part of the militia company] under the banner of Nieuwstraat). Exactly how long ago this was depends on one's interpretation of "enige" (several). The year 1669 as the earliest evidence of Schalcken's presence in Dordrecht seems entirely plausible, certainly because he had presumably been living in Dordrecht for quite some time. In any case, documentation concerning a stay in Leiden in the 1660s has yet to be found.
5. For the Beens family, see G. van Niekerken, "Het geslacht Beens te Breda," *De Nederlandsche Leeuw* 98 (1981): 287–405.
6. For Pieter Roman, see Hans Vollmer, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler* (Leipzig, 1934), 28: 543.
7. Peter Hecht, ed. *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 16. That this relationship between these consecutive generations was also perceived by contemporaries is tellingly illustrated in a statement given in Dordrecht in 1676 incriminating the painter Theodorus Hartkamp (1635–89), who "met verachtelycke expressiën en cleyne estime soude gesproken hebben van de schilderconste van Srs. Douw, Mieres en Schalcken" (allegedly spoke of the painting of Messrs. Dou, Mieris, and Schalcken with disdain and low regard). His contempt, presumably stemming from professional rivalry, was reserved specifically for Schalcken. When Hartkamp refuted the accusation, he admitted that he could no longer remember his derogatory remarks about Dou and Van Mieris, "maer sooveel de schilderkonste van Sr. Schalcken was aengaende" (but as regards the painting of Mr. Schalcken) it is certain "dat [Hartkamp] in geselschap heeft geseyt; Foutre Schalcke schilderkonst, Foutre het stuckje bij denselven Schalcke van 'vrouwken



- comt ten Hove' gemaect, en veele diergelijcke verachtende woorden meer" (that [Hartkamp] said in public: fuck Schalcken's paintings, fuck the painting by this same Schalcken of "Game of Lady Come into the Garden" and many more equally scornful words). Abraham Bredius, "Onbekende schilders, o.a. Casparus Smits zich ook genoemd hebbende Theodorus Hartkamp," *Oud-Holland* 33 (1915): 116–17. See also Peter Hecht, ed. *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 182–85, no. 37.
8. "Welker behandeling hy vry wel heeft weten na te bootsen." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandsche konst-schilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 175.
 9. Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 175. This is *Vrouwetje kom ten Hoof* (*Game of "Lady, Come into the Garden"*), late 1660s (Royal Collection Trust, Buckingham Palace, London).
 10. A telling example of Van Mieris's influence on painters such as Schalcken, Van der Neer, and Netscher is found in their various scenes of women making music, which all rely on a prototype by Frans van Mieris, *Lute Player*, 1663 (Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh); Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: pl. 52. Works with this motif by Johannes Vermeer (1632–75) and Jan Steen (1626–79) also appear to be variations on Van Mieris's composition. John Loughman et al., "Godfried Schalcken," in *De Zichtbare Werelt: Schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad* (Exh. cat. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum) (Zwolle, 1992), 268–69, no. 73.
 11. Peter Hecht, ed. *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 13–19. Ekkehard Mai, "De Nederlandse historieschilderkunst omstreeks 1700. Traditie, bloei en 'verval'," in *De Kroon op het werk: Hollandse schilderkunst 1670–1750*, ed. Ekkehard Mai, Sander Paarlberg, and Gregor M. Weber (Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum; Kassel, Museumlandschaft Hessen Kassel) (Zwolle, 2006), 29–48. For a survey of Classicism in North Netherlandish history painting, see Albert Blankert et al., *Dutch Classicism in Seventeenth-Century Painting* (Exh. cat. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen; Frankfurt am Main, Städelsches Kunstinstitut) (Rotterdam, 1999), 12–33.
 12. Weber, "Een steile klim. Enkele aspecten van de 'veradelijking' van de schilderkunst rond 1700," in *De Kroon op het werk: Hollandse schilderkunst 1670–1750*, ed. Ekkehard Mai, Sander Paarlberg, and Gregor M. Weber (Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum; Kassel, Museumlandschaft Hessen Kassel) (Zwolle, 2000), 51–60; Junko Aono, "Ennobling Daily Life: A Question of Refinement in Early Eighteenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting," *Simiolus* 33 (2008): 237–57.
 13. *Portrait of William III (1650–1702), Prince of Orange, Stadholder and from 1689 on, King of England*, ca. 1692–97 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).
 14. *Self Portrait*, signed and dated 1695 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence).

15. “Geraakte hy van tyd tot tyt tot een aangenamer en luchtvaardiger wyze van schilderen.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 138.
16. Peter Hecht, ed. *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 186–89, no. 38
17. Peter Hecht, “Candlelight and Dirty Fingers, or Royal Virtue in Disguise: Some Thoughts on Weyerman and Godfried Schalcken.” *Simiolus* 11 (1980): 23–38.
18. “Zo plat als ongereeze pannekoeken” / “die vaste, ronde, losse en krachtige manier niet [konden] zien, die zij zaagen op de heerlijke konterfeijtsels van den Ridder [Godfried] Kneller [...] en meer andere in die eeuw bloeiende Konterfijters” / “begeeven tot het schilderen van historiestukjes en nachtluchtjes.” Jacob Campo Weyerman, *De levensbeschryvingen der Nederlantsche konstschilders en konstschilderessen* (The Hague, 1729), 3: 13; Peter Hecht, “Candlelight and Dirty Fingers, or Royal Virtue in Disguise: Some Thoughts on Weyerman and Godfried Schalcken,” *Simiolus* 11 (1980): 25n11.
19. Ekkehard Mai, Sander Paarlberg, and Gregor M. Weber, eds. *De Kroon op het werk: Hollandse schilderkunst 1670–1750* (Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum; Kassel, Museumlandschaft Hessen Kassel) (Zwolle, 2000), 264. For Schalcken’s relationship with Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm, see B. Roland, “Das letzte Selbstbildnis von Godfried Schalcken,” *Die Welkunst* 33, no. 3 (1963): 10–11. For his sojourn in Düsseldorf, see Friedrich Schaarschmidt, *Zur Geschichte der Düsseldorfer Kunst* (Düsseldorf, 1902), 15.

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