

# Three Attempts at a Dutch Sublime<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In this article we present three central texts from the Dutch debate on the sublime between 1750 and 1850. It is surprising that hardly any attention has been paid to these three texts – and, by extension, to the translations of international works on the sublime that preceded their publication in the Dutch-language area. These texts, however, are not the work of second-rate authors: Paulus van Hemert, Johannes Kinker and Willem Bilderdijk are leading representatives of Dutch culture in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Each of these three authors was sufficiently familiar with the international debate on the sublime, as the occasional references in their texts to the writings of fellow authors on the sublime from other countries testify. They were also familiar with the history of the sublime, to which they no doubt hoped to contribute with their own texts. We give a short outline of this historical development and then try to place the Dutch interventions within the framework of the international debate. From this it may then transpire that ‘Dutch attempts at sublimity’ should not by definition be thought of disparagingly.

Keywords: Sublime, Netherlands, Kinker, Van Hemert, Bilderdijk

In October 1798 an anonymous review of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge which became legendary as soon as it appeared, was published in the *Critical Review*. The piece was written by the British critic and poet Robert Southey, a good friend of both authors and Coleridge’s brother-in-law. Southey’s views on the collection contrast with what one might expect given his friendship with both authors, and they are certainly not entirely positive. If anything Southey is most severe about Coleridge’s ‘The Ancient Mariner’. Nowadays this ballad is probably seen as Coleridge’s most important contribution to the collection, but Southey clearly had other views on it. First and foremost he did not agree with the composition of the poem: ‘Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful,’ he wrote, ‘but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible.’ It is essentially his harsh conclusion about ‘The Ancient Mariner’ that interests us here: ‘[The poem] is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit.’<sup>2</sup> ‘Dutch’ in this context

seems to refer to wanting to but not being able to. The 'Dutch sublime' clearly points to a pale imitation of the German original which itself is a tradition considered as the one and only true source of the sublime.

The idea that Kant's 'definitive' analysis of *das Erhabene* ultimately goes back to a considerable extent to Burke's definition of the sublime as 'delightful horror' is part and parcel of the international history of the concept. In recent decades this history has been studied extremely actively in regions surrounding Dutch-speaking areas.<sup>3</sup> However, until recently, scant attention has been paid to the place of the Dutch sublime in this *Begriffsgeschichte*.<sup>4</sup> This is partly understandable but also partly unjust. For example, we do not come across the concept in 1800: *blauwdrukken voor een samenleving* (2001) (*1800: Blueprints for a Society*), the general introduction to Dutch cultural life around 1800 by Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt which examines at length the development of philosophy. Much the same can be said of the place of the concept in the literary and poetical developments of that time: Gert-Jan Johannes and Jan Oosterholt only make indirect reference to the sublime in their respective discussions.<sup>5</sup> Admittedly none of the texts originally written in Dutch which take the sublime as their subject fundamentally influenced the international history of the concept. However, anyone looking for a fundamental understanding of the Dutch Enlightenment culture cannot simply ignore the debate concerning the sublime that took place between 1770 and 1830 in the Netherlands.

In this article we present three texts at the heart of that debate and the reader will see that they occupy a distinctive place in the development of the sublime between 1750 and 1850. Nevertheless, it is surprising that hardly any attention has been paid to these three texts in the Dutch-language world, and, by extension, to the translations of international works on the sublime that preceded their publication. These texts are not the work of second-rate authors: Paulus van Hemert, Johannes Kinker and Willem Bilderdijk are leading representatives of Dutch culture in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In various respects they helped shape this culture: Bilderdijk above all through his completely idiosyncratic literary exploits, and Van Hemert and Kinker as representatives of a philosophical and critical tradition that bridged Dutch culture and international developments. All three were sufficiently familiar with the international debate on the sublime, as the occasional references in their texts to the writings of fellow authors on the sublime from other countries testify. They were also familiar with the history of the sublime, to which they no doubt hoped to contribute with their own work. Below we shall give a short outline of this historical development and try to place the Dutch interventions within the framework of the international debate. From this it will emerge that Southey (who knew Bilderdijk well) was labouring under a misapprehension and that 'Dutch attempts at sublimity' should not by definition be thought of disparagingly.<sup>6</sup>

## From 'Je ne sais quoi' to Delightful Horror

Traditionally the Greek rhetorical treatise *Peri hupsous*<sup>7</sup> is taken as the starting point for the history of the sublime. The text was written in the first century A.D. but until approximately one hundred years ago it was incorrectly attributed to Cassius Longinus, an orator from the third century A.D. The anonymous author, however, is still referred to as Longinus or Pseudo-Longinus. For centuries this treatise remained unknown until the Italian humanist Francesco Robortello published the *editio princeps* in Basel in 1554. Soon Longinus's work was enjoying great popularity and the treatise was seen as an important poetical source for the knowledge of literature from Antiquity, at least as important as Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars poetica*.<sup>8</sup> Longinus's popularity culminated in 1674 when the French classicist Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux produced a French translation and commentary on the text. Boileau stayed reasonably faithful to the original intent of the treatise: he sees the sublime as a rhetorical effect, something marvellous in the text, a 'je ne sais quoi', in Boileau's well-known formula, 'the extraordinary and the marvellous that resonates from within the discourse, and which enables a work to carry us off, delight, and transport us',<sup>9</sup> by which the reader is taken beyond his or her everyday ability to comprehend. Longinus does not try so much to persuade his readers as to overwhelm them. Similarly, it is Boileau's ambition not so much to gratify the senses of the reader as to dumbfound them. Subsequent generations gravitated primarily towards this emotional component; the rhetorical aspect of the sublime gradually moved towards the background, but without disappearing altogether.

In the early eighteenth century the concept was picked up by a number of English Enlightenment thinkers, amongst whom John Dennis and Joseph Addison. In 1712 Addison published a series of articles in the *Spectator* on 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' in which he examined the difference between the beautiful and the great. In Addison's writings the terminology is still somewhat different, but in these texts a distinction is made for the first time between what today we call the beautiful and the sublime. Even in Longinus's treatise it was not always clear whether or not the sublime should be seen as the superlative degree of the beautiful. The difference between the beautiful and the sublime can be seen as an eighteenth-century invention. This distinction was rigorously maintained in what was to become one of the most important eighteenth-century texts in the field of aesthetics: *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke (1757).

Burke's *Enquiry* fits into the British sensationalist-empiricist tradition of philosophers such as Hume and Locke. It is no wonder then that Burke bases his theory on people's emotional response to well-defined stimuli. At the most basic level, according to Burke, there are only two distinct feelings that are aroused when we perceive objects: pain and pleasure. These feelings are antithetical rather than complementary. Therefore when pain subsides this does by no means automatical-

ly lead to pleasure. However, as Burke acknowledges, when the cause of pain is removed, this undeniably results in the pain being alleviated and in a certain sense, this positive feeling is related to pleasure. Burke calls this relative pleasure 'delight'. It is in this context that he situates the sublime.

When our lives are in danger, we experience a strong feeling of pain or fear (which are seen as variations of the same feeling). Objects or situations that arouse the idea of pain and suggest danger can be sources of the sublime, writes Burke. However, a certain distance is necessary: the dangerous object must instil fear but at the same time a sense that one is not really in danger. It is the *idea* of pain and the suggestion of danger that push the fear towards a feeling of delight. It is this *delightful horror* that Burke calls sublime. Elements which according to Burke can contribute to the stirring of this sublime feeling are darkness, the suggestion of power and force, emptiness, silence, the suggestion of infinity, etc. In short, everything that seems to go beyond our immediate cognitive powers, everything that seems to overwhelm us, everything that presents a threat of physical pain. The sublime has moved a long way from Longinus's characterization of it as a rhetorical effect. Now it seems to have become an experience of nature: it is no longer about the great idea or the profound inspiration of an orator, but rather about the (almost physical) reaction of the observer. The sublime is therefore no longer simply a textual effect. The emotional was always an important component of the sublime, but with Burke the shift that started in the early eighteenth century with Dennis and Addison is complete: the sublime is a feeling. Furthermore, it is not so much a feeling as a mixed feeling. Herein lies precisely the difference with the beautiful: whilst the beautiful is still associated with a simple feeling of pleasure, the sublime is a feeling of delight combined with fear, and it is for this exact reason that it is such an alarmingly strong feeling. It makes us face our own mortality, yet at the same time we feel relieved because death (for now at least) can be kept at bay. Because the sublime has a place in an overarching philosophy, this sublime could be called a philosophical sublime or – because of the importance of natural phenomena such as storms or desolate mountains – a natural sublime, along with the essentially rhetorical sublime of Longinus and Boileau.

In Burke's wake, from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, a vast number of English, German and French works on the sublime appeared. These often included attempts to reconcile the rhetorical tradition of Longinus with the natural one of Burke. Interestingly it is mostly this type of text that was translated into Dutch in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Perhaps the most important of these translations is the *Theorie der schoone kunsten en wetenschappen* (*Theory of the fine arts and sciences*) (2 volumes, 1778-1780) by Hiëronymus van Alphen. This version of the 1767 handbook by Friedrich Justus Riedel, in which there is an elaborate discussion of the sublime, is the first systematic study of aesthetics in Dutch.<sup>10</sup> In addition, there are translations of texts by the Scottish philosophers James Beattie and Hugh Blair<sup>11</sup> and, earlier on, of Moses Mendelssohn's *Betrachtun-*

gen über das Erhabene und das Naive in den schönen Wissenschaften (1758).<sup>12</sup> The latter translation, by Rijklof Michaël van Goens, sparked a debate in 1775-1776 on the cultural decline which the translator thought was taking place in the Netherlands.<sup>13</sup>

## ‘Das Erhabene’: A German Stab at the British Sublime

The text that Van Goens translated and provided with a ‘Voorrede van den Vertaeler’ (foreword by the translator)<sup>14</sup> was Mendelssohn’s first work on the sublime, which underwent radical revision after his review of Burke’s book in the *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*.<sup>15</sup> Immanuel Kant was clearly inspired (through Mendelssohn) by Burke’s insights when writing his *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, Kant’s first discussion of the sublime in 1764<sup>16</sup>, but it is of course above all the subsequent discussion of the concept in Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) which is of pre-eminent importance in the canonical history of the sublime.

In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) Kant does not set about studying knowledge per se, but the preconditions for the possibility of knowledge: it is not *what* we can know, but *how* we can know as we know reality only through our senses and our knowledge of reality is shaped by our senses. According to Kant, what we perceive is formed into an image which gets meaning through the interaction between imagination and the understanding. Knowledge is the end result of that interaction. Kant’s logical conclusion is that human knowledge is limited to the sensible realm, and that there is an unbridgeable gap between the sensible and the supersensible.

Yet the supersensible does play an important part in our lives. Concepts such as Divinity, Infinity and Freedom (in the sense of ‘free from sensible boundaries’) do not exist in the sensible reality, but we ‘know’ that these concepts (should) give our life direction. In his first *Critique*, Kant analyzes our power of reasoning; in his second *Critique*, the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788), he deals with our motive for action: our power to desire, our free will. Thanks to this free will, which in theory is guided by Reason, we participate in the supersensible world. Since free will guides our actions, this is where Kant looks for a fundamental moral principle. Our whole being strives for the supersensible ideal of Reason but we cannot know that ideal, precisely because it is supersensible. We cannot know an ultimate moral principle. However, given that our minds can think more than they can know, Kant manages to formulate a guiding principle that is at the same time impossible to prove and undisputable, the famous, infamous even, categorical imperative: act according to the maxim that can at the same time be made into a general law.

After analyzing cognitive powers and the power to desire (and the possibility of acting on that desire), Kant examines the power to make judgements. The first part of his book deals with aesthetic judgement, and more specifically with the beautiful. In fact, Kant offers an impressive analysis of the experience of the beautiful. This

experience is very similar to the process of acquiring knowledge: the aesthetic experience, too, starts with the sensible perception of an object and the image of the object sets in motion an interaction of understanding and imagination, but in this case the interaction does not result in knowledge: it remains a *play*, which gives the subject experiencing the play a feeling of pleasure or *Lust*. It is an *aesthetic* judgement because the judgement concerning the object depends solely on the pleasure that it gives us. It is worth noting that, although the object is called beautiful, this judgement is not connected in any way to the object itself. It is only a matter of our *subjective* judgement concerning the shape of the object.

However, this judgement is only concerned with what the shape of the object evokes. What if another object evokes a similar aesthetic experience, whilst seemingly completely shapeless? The aesthetic judgement begins with the perception of the shape, but what if this perception is inadequate? Some objects are simply too great to be contained within one image, others are simply too powerful to be resisted physically. In such cases too much is expected of human comprehension and this necessarily leads to a short circuit: we suddenly become aware of our own limitations. Compared with things that are too great or too powerful, humans are insignificant beings, limited by their sensible existence. Such a feeling of frustration generates a strong sense of displeasure or *Unlust*. However, over and above this limitation of sensible existence is the infinity of the supersensible and thanks to man's power of reason he participates in this too. When we appeal to our reason, according to Kant, even the greatest and most powerful things are insignificant. This is when man becomes aware of his superiority over nature, says Kant, and this leads to the greatest feeling of pleasure that we are able to experience. This complex mechanism lies at the root of the experience of the sublime.

The sublime does not allow us to apprehend the shape of the object and therefore the play cannot be set in motion. Understanding and imagination, which are both bound to the senses, therefore fall short in their combined action. At the very moment when (supersensible) Reason steps in, understanding is overtaken as it were. The imagination on the other hand does continue to be entirely involved, but cannot cope on its own with the experience evoked by the object. It is only thanks to Reason that we are able to derive any kind of pleasure at all from the object.

In every respect the sublime seems like a purely aesthetic experience (as with the beautiful), but at the same time it has a supersensible dimension that makes it analogous to the experience of the moral.<sup>17</sup> Kant himself points out the close relationship between the experience of the sublime and of the moral: 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and longer we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*'<sup>18</sup> Moreover, it is unclear whether there is in fact any room in the Kantian sublime for art – normally the area par excellence for aesthetic experience. Can anything that is made by humans (and which is therefore necessarily and explicitly sensible) evoke the supersensible? What status does the sublime still have in today's secularised

world? Such questions were asked quite soon after Kant's analysis, firstly by the Romantics, later by philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and more recently by Lyotard. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Kant's analysis for aesthetics. Although in the early days there was already much strident opposition to Kant's analysis, there were also thinkers who very soon wanted to study, disseminate and improve on Kant's *Critiques*, including in the Netherlands.

*Paulus van Hemert (1756-1825): The Sublime Moralized*

Compared to these revolutionary new insights, the atmosphere seemed to remain perfectly calm in the Netherlands. True, the translations of Van Alphen and Van Goens did cause some commotion, but these debates did not lead to fundamental or widespread changes in the cultural landscape: common sense, domestic bliss and virtuousness were more highly thought of than the unsettling genius and spirited idealism of foreign pre-Romantic movements such as the German *Sturm und Drang*.<sup>19</sup> However, at the end of the eighteenth century things became livelier in the Dutch palaces of culture when a small group of fanatical Kant supporters made themselves heard. The central figure in these circles (in the initial period) was Paulus van Hemert, a theologian and Kantian from the start.<sup>20</sup>

Van Hemert discovered an ethical basis for his rational vision of religion in Kant's writings. Due to his wife's deteriorating health, he resigned from his position at the Remonstrant Seminary in Amsterdam in 1796 and moved to Germany, where his wife died a year later. From that moment onwards, Kant became Van Hemert's great love. He promptly returned to the Netherlands and fanatically began to disseminate this critical philosophy, first with his four-part *Beginzels der Kantiaansche Wijsgeerte (Principles of Kantian Philosophy)*,<sup>21</sup> and subsequently with the *Magazyn voor de critische wijsgeerte en de geschiedenis van dezelve (Magazine for Critical Philosophy and its History)*.<sup>22</sup> He soon gathered a small group of followers, amongst whom the poet-philosopher Johannes Kinker, but an important breakthrough for Kantianism failed to materialize. Van Hemert tried to popularize this new philosophy in the journal *Lektuur bij de ontbijt- en theetafel (Reading for the Breakfast and Tea Table)*, but even that did not bring the hoped for success. The fact that Van Hemert was nevertheless widely read may be deduced from the many arguments that he became involved in – more than once leading to everyday slanging matches – but he could not convince the public at large. In 1814 he became secretary of the Society for Benevolence and in doing so gave up his philosophical ambitions once and for all. He died on 10 February 1825.

In 1804, however, his enthusiasm for Kant's philosophy was still very much alive. On 1 February of that year, he delivered his *Redevoering over het verhevene (Address Concerning the Sublime)* in the select company of the members of the Felix Meritis society in Amsterdam, in the 'Temple of Enlightenment' on the Keizersgracht. In this address he emphasizes his belief in 's Menschen voortreffelijken aanleg, zichtbaar

vooral ook in zijne vatbaarheid voor het Verhevene' ('Man's outstanding predisposition, visible above all also in his susceptibility to the Sublime') as the subtitle of the address reads. Van Hemert begins – of course – almost immediately with Kant, but he takes fully into account the fact that his public is not necessarily entirely familiar with Kant's complex philosophy.

Although at that time there was no Dutch translation of Burke's *Enquiry*, Van Hemert assumes that his audience will have heard at least of what he calls the 'schrikkelijk verhevene' ('the terrible sublime'), a clear reference to Burke's 'delightful horror'. Although Van Hemert does not reject this interpretation of the sublime, he emphasizes from the start that fear need not be the only reason for a sublime experience. This is where he sides more clearly with Kant than with Burke. In line with Kantian tradition, he names the too great and the too powerful as the most important sources of the sublime, referring to Kant's distinction between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime. According to him, man's outstanding predisposition is found precisely in the way in which he is able to deal with such objects. Whilst animals recoil, humans, being rational, are able to stand at a moral distance. In this experience of the sublime, humans come into contact with the supersensible and, in the wake of his master, Van Hemert emphasizes the moral character of this awareness. However, at the end of his address, he takes a direction that seems less explicitly Kantian. Van Hemert suddenly starts talking about the 'zedelijk-verhevene' ('moral' or 'ethical' sublime). Seen from the perspective of Kant's rigid system of thinking, Van Hemert takes a sharp detour: for Kant the sublime is a purely aesthetic concept. Although Van Hemert seems to echo Kant's statement about his amazement at and respect for the starry heavens above him and the moral law inside him, at the same time he cuts across Kant's distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic. This is what we would expect: he wants to demonstrate man's excellent disposition, above all with regard to his susceptibility to the sublime. The shift from the aesthetic to the ethical is a swift one, certainly in an address which admits no systematic exposition.

### *Johannes Kinker (1764-1845): Beyond the Sublime*

In his address, Van Hemert praises another early follower of Kant, who was moreover much more famous than he himself ever would be: Friedrich Schiller. Schiller was one of the great models for Van Hemert's good friend Johannes Kinker. Kinker was a man to be reckoned with. He was a committee member of numerous societies, a respected poet and thinker, and also a well-known playwright.<sup>23</sup> As a young lawyer, he had entered service in the same law firm as Willem Bilderdijk, with whom he became very friendly. Shortly after Bilderdijk left the Netherlands in 1795, Kinker became engrossed in Kant's works, much to Bilderdijk's dismay. They gradually drifted apart, and more than once would later confront each other as true rivals. Between 1799 and 1803, Kinker was one of the most important contributors

to Van Hemert's *Magazijn*, and even after that he continued to disseminate Kantian ideas whenever the occasion arose. His first explicit exposition of the sublime dates from 1805. That year he wrote an allegorical morality play in honour of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the well-known Amsterdam actress Johanna Wattier. The play's title is revealing: *De vereeniging van het verhevene met het schoone* (*The Union of the Sublime and the Beautiful*). Kinker's text was put on stage on 31 October 1805 at the Amsterdam municipal theatre. The performance was the highlight of the celebrations marking Wattier's anniversary. At the end of the evening, Kinker went on stage and recited a 'lyrical poem' in which he praised Wattier's talent again.<sup>24</sup>

On account of his close relation with Paulus van Hemert, Kinker is usually seen as a Kantian, but *Iets over het schoone* (*Something about the Beautiful*) (1823) actually shows that Kinker did not refrain from criticizing Kant's work. To a certain extent this can also be deduced from the title of his play for Wattier. Kant draws a sharp distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, whilst Kinker actually tries to link both categories again. A number of aspects of Kinker's thinking suggest that he was closer to the philosopher he was in awe of, Friedrich Schiller. In his philosophical writings, Schiller also took Kant's Critiques as his starting point but he did not appropriate Kant's insights indiscriminately. Schiller's main problem with Kant's aesthetics was their purely subjective status: the work of art itself as a cause of the sublime experience was completely ignored by Kant. As a poet and playwright, Schiller wanted to know more about the object that is called beautiful or sublime than about the subjective experience that ascribes that characteristic to it. He adopted Kant's analysis but explicitly inquired about the (artistic) object that Kant neglected.

With both Schiller and Kinker, the sublime gradually takes on the character of an exalted form of beauty. Moreover, in their work – just as in Van Hemert's – the sublime experience has an explicitly ethical dimension. Thus, for example, Schiller begins his essay *Über das Erhabene* with the message that everything is subject to necessity (read: primitive impulses), except humanity: man is the being that wills.<sup>25</sup> This free will is our highest good and only in difficult situations is our will put to the test, which is why one can appear great in fortune, but sublime only in misfortune. In his magnum opus, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*<sup>26</sup>, he argues resolutely that beauty is a guiding principle that can put us in a position to become better people. Art (this refers above all to the theatre) is the means par excellence for exemplifying this image. Thus in his analysis Schiller goes beyond Kant: he adds an analysis of the object and gives that object a central position in his project for aesthetic education.

In his analysis of the beautiful Kinker goes one step beyond. He starts by asking what the beautiful is and at the same time deals with his understanding of the sublime, which he calls a 'sort of' beauty at the end of the text. This is where he is in direct contradiction with Kant, despite following him to a large degree in his analysis of the beautiful. He examines Kant's analysis of the beautiful point by point

and concurs completely, except with the notion of ‘necessary pleasure’ according to which each new object that is experienced as beautiful also is necessarily beautiful, although its beauty is not subject to general rules or laws. According to Kinker, Kant, when discussing this aspect, somewhat contradicts himself when he suggests that, although the object of beauty generates a number of feelings, it does not lead to knowledge. In rejecting this part of Kant’s analysis of the beautiful, Kinker concludes that knowledge is involved in the experience of beauty. According to Kinker, in this experience we can actually combine the sensible with the supersensible and thus via the sensible come into contact with the supersensible. Kant considers these two areas as necessarily separated from one another: the experience of the sublime brings us face to face with this fundamental separation. For Kinker, there is in essence only one world, in which the sensible and the supersensible form a unity. This unity is pre-figured in the beautiful object.<sup>27</sup> In this analysis of the beautiful, the Kantian sublime is unimaginable: the absolute liminal experience in which man’s dual nature is felt does not work here as it appears that this duality can be discarded.

The importance of *Over het schoone (About the Beautiful)*<sup>28</sup> cannot be overestimated in the context of Kinker’s own development either. In fact this work is the final part of a series of writings on the aesthetic, the basis of which was laid down in the introductions of the three-part publication of his *Gedichten (Poems)*.<sup>29</sup> Taken together, these texts reveal Kinker as a thinker inspired more by Schiller than by Kant in the development of his views on aesthetics.

### *Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831): Back to the Rhetorical Sublime*

As we have just seen, at the end of the eighteenth century – before he came into contact with Van Hemert and Kant – Kinker had close ties with Willem Bilderdijk. At that time, Bilderdijk was one of the leading figures in Dutch literary life, and Kinker greatly admired him. However, in 1795 Bilderdijk had to leave the Netherlands for political reasons.

The political situation in the Netherlands in those days was complicated, to say the least. In the 1780s, in the wake of the American independence, there were stirrings all over Europe. The most famous result of this was of course the French Revolution, but in the Netherlands there were hotbeds of enlightened popular resistance as well. Militias of ‘patriots’ were set up, the so-called ‘exercitiegenuootschappen’ (drill companies), which rebelled against the Stadtholder, Willem V, who was accused of absolutist tendencies. However, in 1787 the Prussian army invaded the Dutch Republic – the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm II, was the brother of Princess Wilhelmina, Willem V’s wife. Many patriots fled to northern France, only to return at the end of 1794 with French revolutionary troops. In January 1795, the Batavian Republic was inaugurated, as an associate republic of France.

Bilderdijk, a confirmed Orange supporter, resolutely (and loudly) refused to take

the oath of allegiance to the new regime (which he was expected to do as a lawyer) and was forced into exile. After wandering for some time through England, where he met his second wife, and Germany, which he hated with a passion, he returned to the Netherlands in 1806. There were two reasons for his return. Not only had Willem V died in the meantime – he died on 9 April 1806, which Bilderdijk considered to release him from his oath of allegiance – but moreover it seemed that after this the political order would radically change. Indeed, on 5 June 1806, the Batavian Republic was renamed the Kingdom of Holland, and Louis Napoleon, Napoleon Bonaparte’s brother, ascended the throne. In 1810, however, Napoleon set his brother aside and incorporated the Netherlands into the French Empire. The Netherlands were to stay French until the end of 1813: after their defeat at Leipzig in October 1813, Napoleon’s troops were driven back behind the Rhine, the Netherlands became independent again and Willem I of Orange (the son of Stadtholder Willem V) became sovereign prince of the Netherlands and subsequently, on 16 March 1815, king of the Netherlands.

When Willem was installed as sovereign prince, Bilderdijk’s hopes for the professorship which Louis Napoleon had held out before him, rekindled, but in vain. Financially too, things were not going well for him and the relatively widespread recognition which he enjoyed was not enough for him. In short, these times were not to his liking. In the 1820s, the *éminence grise* of Dutch letters was to gain a small group of fanatical followers (who would later become known as the leading lights in the ‘Réveil’ movement). However, during that time Bilderdijk grew even more bitter: times were bad, immoral, sinful and this was borne out in his view by the fact that his immeasurable genius was not recognized. He died, aged 75, on 18 December 1831.

Bilderdijk’s *Gedachten over het verhevene en het naïve* (1821) (*Thoughts on the Sublime and the Naïve*) dates from this latter period. Despite the cultural pessimism and bitterness, this work is first and foremost an aesthetic treatise. Bilderdijk was particularly well-informed about the contemporary developments in his discipline, both in the Netherlands and abroad. The references to Dutch language writings on the sublime are implicit, but we may safely assume that his views on the beautiful and the sublime are in opposition to the Kantian tradition that both Van Hemert and Kinker tried to develop. Moreover, he conspicuously does not mention the translation that Matthijs Siegenbeek published in 1811 of the ‘mother text’ on the sublime, *Longinus over de verhevenheid* (*Longinus on the Sublime*). Instead of quoting from this translation, Bilderdijk translates numerous passages himself.

This clearly shows that Bilderdijk, as can be expected on the basis of his poetical views,<sup>30</sup> harks back to the rhetorical sublime and puts the Kantian tradition that forms the point of departure for Van Hemert and Kinker completely aside. For Bilderdijk, a return to a state of pious pre-Enlightenment thought was desirable. He considered all these new philosophies as mere delusions, inspired by the arrogance of human understanding. How can our understanding fathom the world, if

it is based on what we see and hear? Is not all perception by definition limited, even distorted? It is not understanding, but feeling that leads to wisdom; we cannot understand the true and the divine, we can only feel them. And who else but the poet has developed a more refined sensibility towards it? And which poet has a greater sensibility thanks to his unsurpassed genius? Bilderdijk.

It is in the light of this anti-rational logic that we should place Bilderdijk's association with Longinus. At first sight, Bilderdijk's text seems somewhat difficult to follow – just like Longinus's treatise in fact. This is actually intentional: a tightly structured text might suggest that we are dealing with a theoretical exposition. Bilderdijk, precisely for programmatic reasons, has in mind a series of views, comments and insights that come from the liberated mind and sensitivity of the poet. For this reason, early on in this work, Bilderdijk makes a distinction between *Poëzy* and *Dichtkunst* (both meaning poetry) that is also to be found in his *Kunst der poëzy* (*Art of Poetry*): *Poëzy* is a straightforward outpouring of the feeling experienced, whereas *Dichtkunst* is no more than this feeling moulded into a system by understanding.<sup>31</sup> It may be clear that the verse mongers who practise *Dichtkunst* will never attain the sublime of *Poëzy*. The products of reason (such as poetry) will always remain cold and distant; it is only when readers allow feeling to overwhelm them that they can come into direct contact with the divine. In this sense, Bilderdijk sees *Poëzy* as 'wedded to' philosophy (something Kinker also believes, albeit for different reasons), but this link was lost as a result of increasing specialization. Feeling could unite everything again, but people were not open to this.

After this anti-rationalist plea, Bilderdijk finally discusses the sublime. He repeats the familiar claim that the sublime cannot be proven as it is an 'inner feeling'. He refers to Longinus, in whose work the identification of the sublime with the feeling of self-exaltation can also be found; this has an immediate and irresistible effect and leaves a lasting impression. Bilderdijk was a man of deep faith. However, his faith was far from orthodox; he was too stubborn for that.<sup>32</sup> A central element in his thinking was the widespread ideal of 'harmony'. He believed that the ultimate harmony (with God) could only be attained through feeling. In poetry, harmony expresses itself through a unity of rich imagery, language, form and content. However, we should be aware that, although this unity is beautiful, it is only sublime when it is 'tremendous in richness and fullness.' Stated in terms that remind us of Longinus: the experience of the sublime leaves us dumbstruck. However, what distinguishes Bilderdijk from Longinus is the former's explicitly religious interpretation of the sublime. In his eyes, the beautiful is earthly, whilst the sublime brings man closer to the divine.

### *The Dutch Sublime: From Kant to Schiller?*

Bilderdijk sees the sublime and the beautiful as clearly flowing into one another and, in doing so, he does not depart, ironically enough, from the position that we

have associated with Kinker and Van Hemert. Thus, in the final analysis, he appears to be closer to his 'Kantian' opponents than he himself would ever have thought possible.<sup>33</sup> In the three texts that we have presented here, two constant elements seem to recur and both seem to indicate a clear departure from orthodox Kantianism. What we postulated in our discussion of Kinker's text – the greatest correspondence seems to be with Schiller – is also true in a certain sense for the other texts that are examined here.

In the first place, the sublime is quite explicitly moralized. The opening paragraph of Schiller's first work on the sublime, *Vom Erhabenen (Zur weitern Ausführung einiger Kantischen Ideen)* points explicitly to the relationship with the ethical.

We call an object sublime when, as we conceive of it, our sensible nature feels its limits, but our rational nature its superiority, its freedom from limits; in the face of this we thus derive our brevity physically, which we rise above but morally, i.e. through ideas.<sup>34</sup>

In the experience of the sublime we come up against the limits of our sensible possibilities, but it is precisely as a result of this that the superiority of our moral being is emphasized. To this day, the question of whether or not there is an ethical quality to the sublime is a contentious point in the reception literature on Kant, of which Schiller's text is an early example.<sup>35</sup> These three Dutch authors, too, made a connection between the ethical and the aesthetic.

Secondly, the Dutch contributors to the international debate on the sublime seldom made a sharp distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. This brings us back to our starting point in this introduction. Can the sublime be thought of in a flat country, divided into plots of land, called the Netherlands? It is tempting to answer this question in the negative, especially when we bring the following passage from Schiller's second text on the sublime *Über das Erhabene* into the discussion. This passage is part of Schiller's reflection on the sublime as a natural given that troubles the human mind and literally undermines it. This undermining in turn teaches us that there are things that exceed our immediate imagination, but that we can experience with our soul: the eternal, the magnificent and the complex. 'Who does not prefer to linger in the spirited disorder of a natural landscape, than in the spiritless regularity of a French garden?' Schiller asks rhetorically:

Who does not rather admire the wonderful struggle between fertility and destruction on Sicily's open fields? Who does not rather feast his eye on Scotland's wild waterfalls and misty mountains, Ossian's great nature, than admire the sour victory of patience over the most obstinate of elements in straight-laced Holland? No one will deny that in Batavia's pastures better care is taken of man's physical nature than beneath the treacherous crater of Vesuvius, and that understanding, which wants to comprehend and order, profits from a regular farm garden far

more than from a wild natural landscape. But man has a need greater than merely living and ensuring his well-being, and another destiny beyond that of comprehending the phenomena round about him.<sup>36</sup>

Here, we seem to go back to square one with Schiller. Although the Netherlands, the flat country of straight lines, with its fields of tulip bulbs and ditches that divide up the countryside, may have an excellent chance of having a useful beauty, its landscape cannot really be called overwhelming. Perhaps, as he was writing this passage, Schiller had in mind the fragment from Kant's *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, in which he sees the ordered and earnest mentality of the typical Dutch person as a clear hindrance to experiencing sublime feelings.

The Dutchman is of an orderly and diligent disposition and, as he looks solely to the useful, he has little feeling for what in the finer understanding is beautiful or sublime. A great man signifies exactly the same to him as a rich man, by a friend he means his correspondent, and a visit that makes him no profit is very boring to him.<sup>37</sup>

Schiller's *History of the Revolt of the Netherlands* (1788), however, shows that he was less prone than the young Kant to confuse physical landscapes with mental ones. Schiller's enthusiastic reception of the revolt as the manifestation of human freedom fits irrefutably into his vision of history as a process of sublimity to the extent that it lays bare the freedom of mankind in the face of external circumstances.<sup>38</sup> The quoted passage from *Über das Erhabene* shows that, according to him, man is destined for more than mere outward appearance, by which Schiller means that the moral person can resist the overwhelming forces of nature. At the same time this must mean that the moral person can experience the sublime even in a flat landscape.

In 1825, the English poet Robert Southey, whom we discussed earlier, set off on the Grand Tour through the European mainland, including the Low Countries. At the invitation of his friend Willem Bilderdijk, he went to Leiden to recover from a foot injury sustained in Antwerp. In or around 1818, the two poets had started a correspondence as a result of the translation of one of Southey's works by Bilderdijk's wife. Southey was enthusiastic about his reception by the Bilderdijks and would later repeatedly refer to this short but happy period of his life.<sup>39</sup>

It was the very same Southey who some thirty years earlier had scornfully called Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' a 'Dutch attempt at German sublimity'. His opinion of the poem might not have changed much in the course of time but he must clearly have reassessed his opinion of the Netherlands. The fact that the author of a vitriolic poem such as 'Zeg, Kreuple, dans ik wel; zeg, Bultnaar, ga ik recht?' ('Tell me, Cripple, am I dancing well; tell me, Hunchback, am I going straight?') – the addressees being respectively Van Hemert and Kinker<sup>40</sup> – played an important role in this is strange, to say the least. Between Southey's reproach and his enthusiasm appeared the three

texts that we have discussed and which show that even in ‘straight-laced Holland’ thoughts of the sublime are in fact the most normal thing in the world.

## Notes

- 1 Translated by Christopher Joby.
- 2 The passages from the discussion that are relevant for us are quoted in Richard Holmes, *Coleridge. Early Visions* (London 1989), p. 200. The question also comes up in the most recent biography of Southey: see W.A. Speck, *Robert Southey. Entire Man of Letters* (New Haven / London: 2006), p. 75-76, and in David Chandler, ‘Southey’s “German Sublimity” and Coleridge’s “Dutch Attempt”’, *Romanticism on the Net*, 32-33 (Robert Southey-issue) (2003-2004), <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2003/v/n32-33/009257ar.html>>.
- 3 For the sublime in France, see Sophie Hache, *La Langue du ciel. Le sublime en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), and Lawrence Kerslake, *Essays on the Sublime* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000). The German sublime is discussed in Carsten Zelle, *Angenehmes Grauen. Literaturhistorische Beiträge zur ästhetik des Schrecklichen im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1987), and Dietmar Till, *Das doppelte Erhabene. eine Argumentationsfigur von der Antike bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006). Regarding England, apart from the compilation by Ashfield and De Bolla, see also Samuel Holt Monk, *The Sublime. A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1935; repr. 1960) and Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).
- 4 Silvia Contarini, ‘Van verhevene tot romantiek: een prijsvraag van de Hollandse Maatschappij der Wetenschappen uit 1808’, in *Geschiedenis van de wijsbegeerte in Nederland 1-2* (1990), pp. 137-151, revised as ‘De Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen als verbreider van het verhevene’ in *Haarlemse kringen. Vijftien verkenningen naar het literair-culturele leven in een negentiende-eeuwse stad*, ed. by W. van den Berg, H. Eijssens and T. van Kalmthout (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), pp. 47-58; Silvia Contarini, ‘In de spiegel van de natuur. Het verhevene bij Paulus van Hemert’, in *Tussen classicisme en romantiek. Esthetica in Nederland van 1770 tot 1870*, ed. by H. Krop and P. Sonderen (Rotterdam: Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 1993), pp. 97-106; André Hanou, ‘Subliem? Romantisch?’, in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 115-9 (1999), pp. 356-364. At Ghent University a BOF (Bijzonder Onderzoek Fonds) research project on the sublime in the Netherlands (1770-1830) has been completed recently by Christophe Madelein, under the supervision of Jürgen Pieters. Its findings are published in Christophe Madelein, *Juigchen in den adel der menschlijke natuur. Het verhevene in de Nederlanden (1770-1830)* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2010).
- 5 Gert Jan Johannes, *Geduchte verbeeldingskracht. Een onderzoek naar het literaire denken over de verbeelding – van Van Alphen tot Verwey* (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1992); Jan Oosterholt, *De ware dichter: de vaderlandse poëtische discussie in de periode 1775-1825*

- (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1998). The absence of the concept is not only of note in recent publications. The sublime is also absent from the classic study by De Deugd on Romantic poetics: Cornelis de Deugd, *Het metafysisch grondpatroon van het romantisch literaire denken; de fenomenologie van een geestesgesteldheid* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1966).
- 6 In addition to the three texts that are being discussed here, the *Redevoering over het gevoel van het verhevene* by Johan Frederik Lodewyk Schröder (not dated, but most likely from the first decade of the nineteenth century) and two texts by Theodorus van Swinderen, *Redevoering over het verhevene in de natuur* (1806) and *Redevoering over de afwisseling van het schoone en het verhevene in de natuur, als juist geschikt naar de behoeften van den zinnelijken en zedelijken mensch* (1810) may be of interest. Schröder and Van Swinderen were both confirmed Kantians and had contacts with Van Hemert and Kinker. Their views on the sublime are virtually identical to Van Hemert's, whose text is given priority here because of his more central position in Dutch culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
  - 7 Meaning literally 'on height', but usually translated as 'on the sublime'. A notable departure from this tradition is the (very early) English translation by John Hall, *The Height of Eloquence* (1652).
  - 8 In the Penguin Classics series the three texts are still published together as icons of 'Ancient Literary Criticism'.
  - 9 '...cet extraordinaire et ce merveilleux qui frappe dans le discours, et qui fait qu'un ouvrage enlève, ravit, transporte', Nicolas Boileau, 'Préface' in Longin, *Traité du Sublime. Traduction de Boileau. Introduction et notes de Francis Goyet* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1995), p. 70.
  - 10 See Hiëronymus van Alphen, *Literair-theoretische geschriften*, ed. by J. de Man, 2 vols. (The Hague; Constantijn Huygens Instituut, 1999), in particular volume 2, *Commentaar*.
  - 11 Hugo Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), trans. by Herman Bosscha as *Lessen over de Redekunst en Fraaije Letteren, of voorschriften over taal, stijl, welsprekendheid en dichtkunst, en uitgegeven door B.H. Lulofs*, 3 vols. (Deventer: B.H. Lulofs, 1788-1790). James Beattie, *Dissertations moral and critical* (1783), trans. by Petrus Loosjes Adriaansz. as *Wijsgeerige en oordeel- en zedekundige verhandelingen*, 2 vols. (Haarlem 1785-1786), and *Elements of Moral Science* (1790-1793) as *Grondbeginzelen der zedelijke wetenschappen*, trans. by Joh. Fred. Hennert, 3 vols. (Utrecht: Willem van Yzervorst, 1791-1794).
  - 12 An English translation of a later version of that text can be found in Moses Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
  - 13 Moses Mendelssohn, *Verhandeling over het verhevene en naïeve in de fraaje wetenschappen*, trans. by R.M. Van Goens (Utrecht: Samuel de Waal, 1774). The first edition of 1769 had a very limited print-run.
  - 14 See P.C.J. De Boer, *Rijklof Michael van Goens (1748-1810) en zijn verhouding tot de literatuur van West-Europa* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1938), p. 147. The aesthetics of Mendelssohn are extensively discussed in Jean-Paul Meier, *L'esthétique de Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)*, 2 vols. (Lille: Université de Lille, 1978). For a recent biography, see Do-

- minique Bourel, *Moses Mendelssohn. La naissance du judaïsme moderne* (Paris; Gallimard, 2004).
- 15 See Meier, *L'esthétique de Moses Mendelssohn*, 849. Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Nach den Originaldrucken und Handschriften herausgegeben von G.B. Mendelssohn (Hildesheim: Verlag Dr. H.A. Gerstenberg, 1843; repr. 1972), I, p. 106.
  - 16 A Dutch translation of this work, ascribed to Hendrik Croockewit (who became President of the Dutch National Bank in the late 1850s) was published in 1804. For an English translation, see Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. by John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).
  - 17 See, amongst others, Paul Guyer, 'The Difficulty of the Sublime' and Bart Vandenabeele's response, 'The Feeling of the Sublime: Aesthetic not Ethical. Comment on Paul Guyer, "The Difficulty of the Sublime"' in *Histories of the Sublime* ed. by Christophe Madelein, Jürgen Pieters and Bart Vandenabeele (Brussels: KVAB, 2005), pp. 33-50.
  - 18 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 133. "Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmenden Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht, je öfter und anhaltender sich das Nachdenken damit beschäftigt: Der bestirnte Himmel über mir, und das moralische Gesetz in mir." Immanuel Kant, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*. Herausgegeben von der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Band V, ed. by Paul Natorp and Wilhelm Windelband (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1913), p. 161.
  - 19 See, amongst others, Gert Jan Johannes, *De lof der aalbessen. Over Noord-Nederlandse literatuurtheorie, literatuur en de consequenties van kleinschaligheid 1770-1830* (The Hague: SdU Uitgevers, 1997) and Ellen Krol, *De smaak der natie. Opvattingen over huiselijkheid in de Noord-Nederlandse poëzie van 1800 tot 1840* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997). Wim van den Berg names Rhyvis Feith as one of the founders of the Dutch 'bescheidenheidsdiscours' (discourse on modesty) in 'Onze poëzie is reëel en praktisch. Het denken over de identiteit van de Nederlandse letterkunde in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw' in 'Typisch Nederlands' *De Nederlandse identiteit in de letterkunde*, ed. by K. Enenkel, S. Onderdelinden and P. J. Smith (Voorthuizen: Florivallis, 1999), p. 153.
  - 20 On Van Hemert: H.IJ. Groenewegen, *Paulus van Hemert, als godgeleerde en als wijsgeer* (Amsterdam 1889) and J. Plat and M.R. Wielema (eds.), *Paulus van Hemert. Gezag en grenzen van de menselijke rede* (Baarn 1987).
  - 21 Paulus van Hemert, *Beginzels der Kantiaansche wijsgeerte, naar het Hoogduitsch vryelyk gevolgd, en met aantekeningen, en eene voorreden uitgegeven, door Paulus van Hemert*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Wed. J. Doll, 1796-1798).
  - 22 Paulus van Hemert, *Magazyn voor de critische wijsgeerte en de geschiedenis van dezelve*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam: Wed. J. Doll, 1799-1803)
  - 23 Maurits Cornelis Van Hall, *Mr. Johannes Kinker. Bijdragen tot zijn leven, karakter en schriften* (Amsterdam: Wed. L. Van Hulst en zoon, 1850) is still the standard biography. See also, amongst others, André Hanou, *Sluiers van Isis. Johannes Kinker als voorvechter van de Verlichting, in de vrijmetselarij en andere Nederlandse genootschappen* (Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1988) and Georgius Joseph Vis, *Johannes Kinker en zijn literaire theorie* (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1967).

- 24 See Christophe Madelein and Jürgen Pieters, 'Het verheven theater van de filosofie: Johannes Kinker (1764-1845) bezingt Johanna Wattier (1762-1827)' in *Liber Amicorum Prof. Dr. Jaak van Schoor. Meester in vele kunsten*, ed. by S. Bussels et al. (Ghent: UGent, 2003), pp. 122-135; later revised as Christophe Madelein en Jürgen Pieters, 'Spiegel voor het peinzende verstand. Johannes Kinker (1764-1845) en het sublieme in de Nederlanden' in *Feit en fictie*, 6-2 (2005), pp. 35-51. On Wattier see Marlies Hoff, *Johanna Cornelia Ziesenis-Wattier (1762-1827). 'De grootste actrice van Europa'* (Leiden: Astraea, 1996).
- 25 'Alle andere Dinge müssen; der Mensch ist das Wesen, welches will.' Friedrich Schiller, 'Über das Erhabene' in: *Schillers Werke, Nationalausgabe* (Weimar, 1963), II, p. 38.
- 26 In 1793 Schiller wrote a series of letters to the duke of Augustenburg. He published a revised version of those letters in 1795 as *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in his journal *Die Horen*. He revised them again in 1801 for his *Kleinere prosaische Schriften*. This 1801 edition is considered to be the definitive version.
- 27 This makes Kinker seem like an absolute idealist like Hegel and Schelling, but actually he is not in that he does not claim the supersensible to be the only truth, but rather that the sensible and supersensible are in harmony. In fact he values the sensible more than the absolute idealists did.
- 28 Kinker's text was published in 1826, but it was read on 30 June 1823 at the Royal Dutch Institute for Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts by Maurits Cornelis van Hall (Kinker himself was teaching Dutch at the university of Liège at the time).
- 29 These introductions were published with a commentary by George J. Vis in *Johannes Kinker en zijn literaire theorie*.
- 30 These poetic views can be found in his long poem *De kunst der poëzij* of 1809 (Amsterdam: Van den Berg and Kloek, repr. 1995).
- 31 Note the close resemblance to Wordsworth's famous 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. It is true, however, that Bilderdijk scorned the calm reflection (of the emotion recollected in tranquility) that the English poet extolled at this time.
- 32 For a clear exposition of this, see Joris van Eijnatten's impressive study of the theological background to Bilderdijk's thinking, *Hogere sferen. De ideeënwereld van Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998).
- 33 Kinker had already noticed this. In an unpublished review of Bilderdijk's *De ziekte der geleerden* (The sickness of the learned) he asserted that Bilderdijk's views often show similarities to Kant's philosophy and that he was perhaps the most Kantian poet of the Netherlands (the review was reproduced some 160 years later in Vis, *Johannes Kinker en zijn literaire theorie*, pp. 338-347).
- 34 'Erhaben nennen wir ein Objekt, bey dessen Vorstellung unsre sinnliche Natur ihre Schranken, unsre vernünftige Natur aber ihre Ueberlegenheit, ihre Freyheit von Schranken fühlt; gegen das wir also physisch den Kürzern ziehen, über welches wir uns aber moralisch d.i. durch Ideen erheben.' Friedrich Schiller, 'Vom Erhabenen (Zur weitem Ausführung einiger Kantischen Ideen)' in *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*

- (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1962), I, p. 171.
- 35 See, amongst others, the above-mentioned articles by Guyer and Vandenabeele. The subtitle of Paul Crowther's *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) also points in this direction. We can find yet more recent echoes of Schiller in Allen Wood's discussion of the sublime in his introduction to the thought of Kant: 'What we experience as transcending the power of nature is not "the numinousness" of a powerful alien Being who takes some sort of sadistic pleasure in overwhelming and terrifying us, but rather the sublimity of our own moral freedom. The truly sublime object to which our aesthetic experience relates is therefore not God but our own moral disposition and vocation.' Kant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 164.
- 36 'Wer bestaunt nicht lieber den wunderbaren Kampf zwischen Fruchtbarkeit und Zerstörung in Siciliens Fluren, weidet sein Auge nicht lieber an Schottlands wilden Katarakten und Nebelgebirgen, Ossians großer Natur, als daß er in dem schnur-gerechten Holland den sauren Sieg der Geduld über das trotzigste der Elemente bewundert? Niemand wird läugnen, daß in Bataviens Triften für den physischen Menschen besser gesorgt ist, als unter dem tückischen Krater des Vesuv, und daß der Verstand, der begreifen und ordnen will, bey einem regulären Wirtschaftsgarten weit mehr als bey einer wilden Naturlandschaft Seine Rechnung findet. Aber der Mensch hat noch ein Bedürfnis mehr, als zu leben und sich wohl seyn zu lassen und auch noch eine andere Bestimmung, als die Erscheinungen um ihn herum zu begreifen.' Schiller, *Über das Erhabene*, pp. 47-48.
- 37 'Der Holländer ist von einer ordentlichen und emsigen Gemüthsart, und indem er lediglich auf das Nützliche sieht, so hat er wenig Gefühl für dasjenige, was im feineren Verstande schön oder erhaben ist. Ein großer Mann bedeutet bei ihm eben so viel als ein reicher Mann, unter dem Freunde versteht er seinen Correspondenten, und ein Besuch ist ihm sehr langweilig, der ihm nichts einbringt.' Immanuel Kant, 'Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen', in *Vorkritische Schriften bis 1768*, ed. by W. Weischedel, II (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 875.
- 38 Schiller, *Über das Erhabene*, p. 49.
- 39 'I can truly say that unpleasant as the circumstance was which brought me under their roof, no part of my life ever seemed to pass away more rapidly or more pleasantly.' R. Southey, in a letter to his daughter Kate, quoted in Speck, *Robert Southey. Entire Man of Letters*, p. 198. See also: De Deugd, 'Friendship and Romanticism: Robert Southey and Willem Bilderdijk' in *Europa Provincia Mundi. Essays in Comparative Literature and European Studies Offered to Hugo Dyserinck on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by J. Leerssen and K.U. Syndram (Amsterdam / Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 369-388 and J. Wesseling, *Bilderdijk en Engeland* (Ghent: [n.pub.], 1949), pp. 166-167.
- 40 Bilderdijk, 'Mr. J. Kinker aan Paulus van Hemert', in *De dichtwerken* (Haarlem: A.C. Kruseman, 1859), XIII, p. 420.

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