

Wayne Franits

# Godefridus Schalcken

A Dutch Painter in Late  
Seventeenth-Century  
London

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# Godefridus Schalcken

*A Dutch Painter in Late Seventeenth-Century London*

*Wayne Franits*

Amsterdam University Press

The publication of this book is made possible by a grant from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.



Cover illustration: Godefridus Schalcken, *Self-Portrait*, 1695 (oil on canvas, 109.5 × 88.5 cm). Leamington Spa, Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum. Reproduced Courtesy of Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum (Warwick District Council)

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Newgen/Konvertus

ISBN 978 94 6298 711 1

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 863 8

DOI 10.5117/9789462987111

NUR 685

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# Acknowledgments

Like all books, this particular one reflects the contributions of many different individuals and organizations. First and foremost, I must recognize Guido Jansen, with whom in the autumn of 2013 I first broached the possibility of writing on Godefridus Schalcken. Even though my focus quickly narrowed to the artist's London period, Guido was overly generous in supplying countless documents, images, and scholarly references on all matters pertaining to the painter. Moreover, he and Anja Sevcik invited me to participate in the writing of the catalogue for the comprehensive exhibition on Schalcken that opened at the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne in September 2015. Anja, Guido, and I, along with Eddy Schavemaker, who likewise made numerous contributions to this book, have continued to exchange views and ideas about Schalcken ever since, much to my benefit. Sander Karst, who is completing a dissertation at the University of Utrecht on the impact of seventeenth-century Dutch art in contemporary England, was also generous in sharing his research and ideas with me.

Naturally, my topic necessitated several research trips to England, including one of a month's duration (mid-September to mid-October 2014) funded by a grant from the American Philosophical Society. It was a frantically busy month but an exciting one too, which, when I wasn't working in London, found me hopping on trains to travel all over the country in an effort to visit various archives and to see as many London period paintings by Schalcken as possible. In this regard, I wish to acknowledge the following institutions, country houses, and royal residences: the National Archives in Kew, the Guildhall Library, the British Library, the Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute of Art, the London Metropolitan Archives, the Society of Genealogists, London, the City of Westminster Archives Centre, the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford, the Cambridgeshire Archives, Northamptonshire Archives, Essex Record Office, Cumbria Archive Service in Carlisle, the Oxfordshire History Centre, the Ashmolean Museum, Attingham Park, Calke Abbey, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Chatsworth, Chevening House, Chilcomb House, Kensington Palace, the Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum, Sewerby Hall Museum and Art Gallery, and Windsor Castle. Among the staff members of these various places, the following individuals offered invaluable assistance: Gill Arnott, David Bartle, Christopher Brown, Helen Cunningham, Judith Edwards, Hayley Flynn, Francesca Halfacree, Matthew Hirst, Jill Iredale, Chloe Johnson, Jeremy Johnson, Alastair Mathewson, Jennie Montague-Jones, Charles Noble, John Parkinson, Katelyn Reeves, Helen Royal, Janice Smith, Alice Swatton, Jevon Thistlewood, and Lucy Whitaker. Other friends and colleagues in England who must be recognized include Jim Lowther of the Lowther Estate Trust, Geoffrey Planer, Aileen Ribeiro, Richard Stephens, and Betsy Wieseman.

Additional research was conducted at the libraries at Syracuse University, Cornell University as well as the New York Public Library, the Frick Art Reference Library,

the Thomas J. Watson Library of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague. And still other friends and colleagues patiently answered my queries related to their respective fields of expertise, offered help with translations, provided timely research assistance, and so much more: Ann Jensen Adams, Kate Anderson, Marten Jan Bok, David Christie, Nicole Cook, Sally Cornelison, Stephanie Dickey, Pamela Fowler, Stefano Giannini, Bria Koser, Emma Kronman, Christopher Kyle, Heidrun Ludwig, Giorgio Marini, Matthieu Herman van der Meer, Sheldon Peck, Eugene Pooley, Gary Radke, Romita Ray, Rupert Rokeby-Johnson, Dennis Romano, Gero Seelig, Christian Tico Seifert, Jan Six, Dominique Surh, Adriaan Waiboer, Nina Weibull, Herbert H. Westphalen III (my chauffeur in Derbyshire and an outstanding arbiter of color), Thijs Weststeijn, Thea Wieteler, Amanda Winkler, Lloyd de Witt, LeeAna Wolfman, Nancy Zinn, and Diva Zumaya.

The following art dealers and auction houses made inestimable contributions to this book: Luigi Caretto, Bob Habeldt, Johnny van Haeften (and Pippa Mason), Fergus Hall, Christophe Janet, Otto Naumann, and Bonhams, Christie's, and Sotheby's. And lastly, I wish to thank the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art for their generous grant that helped defray the production costs of this book.

## Introduction

The Dutch painter, Godefridus Schalcken (1643–1706), may no longer enjoy the fame that his fellow artists Rembrandt van Rijn and Johannes Vermeer do today, but he surely ranks among the most renowned painters of his own era. Largely raised in Dordrecht, where his father, Cornelis, was headmaster of the city's Latin School, Schalcken received his initial training (c. 1658/60–c. 1662) with Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–1678), a former pupil of Rembrandt's who enjoyed an international career as a respected artist.<sup>1</sup> Van Hoogstraten departed for England in spring of 1662, so around that time Schalcken moved to Leiden where he entered the studio of the preeminent genre painter in the Dutch Republic, Gerrit Dou (1613–1675).<sup>2</sup> The young man would spend several years under Dou's tutelage, mastering the latter's smooth and meticulous method of applying paint, which later generations of connoisseurs would identify as the *fijnschilder* or fine painting style. During the late 1650s Dou had also expanded his thematic repertoire to include night scenes (Fig. 1), which must have made an indelible impression upon Schalcken, who himself would become late seventeenth-century Europe's greatest candlelight painter.

Upon his return to Dordrecht,<sup>3</sup> Schalcken's star rapidly rose among cognoscenti in his hometown and elsewhere in the Netherlands. He emerged as an outstanding specialist in genre painting and became an accomplished portraitist as well.<sup>4</sup> Within just a few years, our painter's fame had reached truly international heights with clientele in France, the Spanish Netherlands, and in various German principalities.<sup>5</sup> During the last fifteen years of his life, Schalcken embarked upon travels abroad in order to satisfy the demands of his ever growing clientele and to augment his status as a renowned artist. Schalcken initiated this enterprise in the late spring of 1692 when he resettled in London where he would live and work for roughly the next four years.

Despite the importance of Schalcken's so-called English period, both for his own career and for other painters of the time, his sojourn in London has barely been studied and hence remains shrouded in obscurity. Beyond a mere handful of catalogue entries on Schalcken's pictures that have appeared in connection with various exhibitions over the decades, the only scholar to make any attempt to address these years was Thierry Beherman, who published the sole monograph on the painter in 1988.<sup>6</sup> Marshaling surprisingly little evidence to support his claims, Beherman maintained that Schalcken remained in England until 1699 (if not beyond that date) and that he resided at Windsor Castle. Moreover, the author constructed a section of his critical catalogue around these dates, 1692–99, consisting of entries on specific works – mostly portraits – that were said to have been painted in London. Thankfully, recent research has amended many of Beherman's findings;<sup>7</sup> the results of that work are



Fig. 1. Gerrit Dou, *Astronomer by Candlelight*, late 1650s (oil on panel, 31 × 21.2 cm). Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum.

shared in their fullest form in this book, the first of its kind to focus specifically upon Schalcken's English period.

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A listing in the so-called proclamation book (*Proclamatie boek*) of the Dutch Reformed Church in Dordrecht informs us of the departure of Godefridus Schalcken and his wife, Françoisia (Françoisie) van Diemen (1661–1744), for London on the 18

May 1692.<sup>8</sup> By definition (and by necessity) such documents are always laconic. Is it possible to read between these very sparse lines, in other words, to gain insight into Schalcken's motivations for leaving his native town, and with it, an established and lucrative career? On a personal and psychological level this is, of course, out of the question. Yet, economic conditions and their ramifications for the visual arts at the time, in both the Dutch Republic and Great Britain, do potentially shed light on his decision.

With respect to the Netherlands, economic historians have explored the circumstances under which art was being produced and sold during the late seventeenth century, ones that had already changed significantly by that time. It is well known that the invasion of the Netherlands in 1672, the so-called "*rampjaar*" or year of disaster, by the armies of Louis XIV and his allies exerted a devastating impact on the economy and Dutch society.<sup>9</sup> But the art market was actually beginning to encounter difficulties in the decade preceding the French invasion.<sup>10</sup> The 1660s, for example, witnessed a downturn in the number of new master painters entering the profession. And, as Jan de Vries has documented, over the course of the next twenty years the number of new artists shrank to a level approximately one-quarter of that at mid-century.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for this rather rapid drop undoubtedly reside in the fact that paintings are durable goods and can thus very easily saturate a prospective market by causing conspicuous oversupply. Through the course of the seventeenth century the market continually expanded. But by the 1670s – early on in Schalcken's career – and 1680s, there was a glut of older pictures which, coupled with the severe economic downturn, generated a noticeable drop in demand, all of which must have rendered a potential vocation in painting extremely unappealing to many young men.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, one can justifiably speak of a quantifiable decline in the number of painters during this period. And a decline in traditional specialization in particular genres is likewise detectable.<sup>13</sup>

That the market was hardest hit in the arena of cheaper, mass-produced art comes as no surprise given the devastating economic consequences of the disastrous 1670s upon lower- and middle-class wage earners.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, wealthy citizens, particularly those of lofty social status, were less directly affected by the downturn.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, affluent art lovers could continue to purchase new paintings only now from a much reduced pool of artists. As (among others) the eighteenth-century Dutch art biographers, Arnold Houbraken (1660–1719) and Jan van Gool (1685–1763) observed, painters became increasingly dependent upon individual patrons for their livelihood because the more open, speculative market shrank.<sup>16</sup>

Schalcken not only weathered these calamities but managed to thrive despite them. Indeed, on the eve of his departure for London, his reputation had already reached meteoric heights.<sup>17</sup> His pictures were avidly sought, for example, in the Spanish Netherlands, Germany, and France. In the latter country, the art dealer Jan van der Bruggen (1649–1714?) was selling works by the artist and circulating reproductive

mezzotints he had made after them.<sup>18</sup> Closer to home, ever increasing commissions from high-ranking officials in the Dutch government in The Hague prompted Schalcken, in February of 1691, to enroll in that city's painters' society, the Confrerie, despite his Dordrecht residency.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of his propitious circumstances, London's lure must have proven irresistible to this eminent painter. A recent article by Sander Karst carried the pithy title, "Off to a New Cockaigne: Dutch Migrant Artists in London, 1660–1715."<sup>20</sup> Cockaigne, of course, refers to an imaginary land of untold luxury and comfort, but for the most successful Dutch painters working in late seventeenth-century England, Schalcken among them, there was nothing illusory about earning a lucrative living there.<sup>21</sup> Economic historians have observed how the latter decades of the seventeenth century witnessed a slow but steady rise in the economic fortunes of England at the expense of the Dutch Republic. David Ormrod, in particular, has written extensively on the subject.<sup>22</sup> He argues that through cohesive and aggressive economic policies, protectionism, and its overwhelming naval power, the English successfully challenged the Dutch in trade in the Atlantic and especially in the region of the North Sea, so much so that the political and military alliance between the two nations in the decades following the Glorious Revolution (1688) effectively shored up the Dutch Republic's economy, which had since become enfeebled. Thus by the 1690s England was well on its way to securing its place as Europe's preeminent economic power. And its capital, London, would fully emerge as the continent's premier entrepôt during the eighteenth-century proper.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had brought the Dutch stadtholder, William III (1650–1702), and his wife Mary (1662–1694) to the English throne, with auspicious prospects for persons who made their livelihoods in the creative arts. The couple were quite active in refurbishing such royal residences as Hampton Court and Kensington Palace and in patronizing artists and collecting pictures.<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, members of their extensive court, which naturally included a large Dutch contingent, offered still more possibilities for employment among painters. Cultural conditions then and the economic conditions that helped to foster them clearly made England immeasurably attractive to Schalcken and his fellow foreign artists.

Yet, Schalcken probably had other motivations for resettling there: his uncle, the Reformed theologian Jacobus Lydius (c. 1610–c. 1679) had served as minister to the Dutch embassy in England between 1643 and 1645 and even wrote a book about that country's tumultuous religious history.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, his peripatetic teacher, Samuel van Hoogstraten had resided in London between 1662 and 1667.<sup>25</sup> Eventually, Van Hoogstraten would resettle in his native Dordrecht, where he lived from 1671 until his death in 1678. No doubt, both he and Lydius had regaled Schalcken with stories of their English experiences. For his part, Van Hoogstraten delighted his readers with anecdotes about his years in England in his art theory book, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (Introduction to the lofty school of painting) of 1678. In

one memorable passage, for example, the painter describes a dinner he attended with several members of the newly founded Royal Society, held at the home of the London merchant and politician, Thomas Povey (c. 1613/14–c. 1705), who was one of his patrons – though he does not mention this in the text.<sup>26</sup> In her monograph on the artist, Celeste Brusati perceptively noted that in these digressions Van Hoogstraten, ever conscious of carefully fashioning his social and professional identity, invariably presented himself as a gentleman fraternizing with gentlemen.<sup>27</sup> One can only imagine the impact of this for Schalcken, whose English period work reveals similar ambitions.

By 1692, the year of the Dutch painter's relocation, London had long enjoyed its position as England's largest and wealthiest city: by 1700, its population easily exceeded 500,000 inhabitants.<sup>28</sup> Schalcken was able to settle there in an area in close proximity to the English court, which can hardly be a coincidence. Thanks to Karst's research, Schalcken can actually be situated in a specific neighborhood. In his article cited above, Karst illustrated an advertisement from a popular weekly business periodical called *A Collection of Letters for the Improvement of Husbandry & Trade*, which was first issued in March 1692 and only ceased publication 583 issues later, in 1703.<sup>29</sup> This magazine was dedicated to providing its readers with the latest business information, including the prices of stocks and commodities, but it also contained advertisements for prospective services. Such advertisements, so lucrative for the magazine's publisher, John Houghton, eventually came to dominate the content of individual issues. Karst reproduces an advertisement from the issue published on 11 January 1695 (Fig. 2).<sup>30</sup> It provides a list of London's painters, their specific specialties, and the neighborhoods where they resided. Schalcken's name – misspelled Schalker – appears among the painters of "Life" (portraits) and "York-Buildings" is listed as his place of residence.<sup>31</sup>

York Buildings refers to a small neighborhood within the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, adjacent to the Thames, whose streets were laid out in the early 1670s on the grounds of the former York House, the mansion of the Dukes of Buckingham. The names of these streets were adopted from those of the most illustrious former owner of the property, George Villiers, the 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592–1628).<sup>32</sup> The leveling of this great house, and many others running along a thin ribbon of land wedged between the Strand and the river, resulted from burgeoning development to the north and especially the west of the old walled city (Fig. 3). Today, the area once called York Buildings lies in the heart of London. During the late seventeenth century, it was situated at the western edge of the city and therefore comprised part of the City of Westminster in the County of Middlesex – part of the greater "metropolis of London" – in essence, a fashionable suburb in proximity to Whitehall Palace and St. James's Palace.<sup>33</sup> Just like many of the neighborhoods in old London, those in the City of Westminster were socially and economically eclectic though they certainly housed significantly higher percentages of residents of wealth and distinction.<sup>34</sup>





Fig. 3. York Buildings, from William Morgan's Map of London 1682. *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-map-morgan/1682>.

in adjacent ones, including the parish of St. Margaret Westminster, one of the wealthiest in all of greater London, where the majority of his clientele lived.<sup>40</sup>

The business periodical, *A Collection of Letters for the Improvement of Husbandry & Trade*, only provides York Buildings as Schalcken's general address. Unfortunately, the rate books for St. Martin-in-the-Fields – tax assessments of the parishes' inhabitants to raise funds to support the poor – do not list Schalcken among its taxpayers. This is disappointing because these rate books always record the exact street on which the inhabitants resided. The very same frustrating lack of information also characterizes the Four Shillings in the Pound Aid, a tax implemented in 1692 by William III to help finance the Nine Year's War (1688–97), even though it has been studied extensively, and hence, much is known about the names and addresses of the inhabitants of particular parishes.<sup>41</sup> Schalcken's conspicuous absence from the rate books and other documented tax assessments has nothing to do with his status as a foreigner because foreign nationals were not exempt from paying taxes. Rather, he must have been subletting rooms from either the owner or, more likely, the renter of a particular home.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, one can imagine that the artist's dwelling space, was sizeable, if only for the presence of the tools of his trade, a servant, his wife, and, at one time or another, a baby.<sup>43</sup>

Schalcken's wife, Françoisia van Diemen, gave birth to two children during their London sojourn. In fact, Françoisia was already pregnant with the first one when she and her husband left Dordrecht in May of 1692. That child, a daughter named Françoisia (Françoise) after her mother, was baptized on 23 November 1692 in the Dutch Chapel Royal, an edifice at Whitehall Palace where Dutch nationals associated with the King and his court gathered to worship.<sup>44</sup> The very fact that this child was named Françoisia indicates that the "first" Françoisia, born in Dordrecht in late June of 1690, had already died. Often faced with the tragedy of the premature demise of their children, it was not uncommon for parents in that era to recycle their names for their future offspring.<sup>45</sup> In the wake of Gerrardys H. Veth's important archival research published back in 1892, it has always been assumed that the Françoisia born in Dordrecht was the only infant born to Schalcken and his wife who reached adulthood.<sup>46</sup> But it is now clear that it was actually the Françoisia baptized in London in 1692 who was the sole member of their progeny to survive.<sup>47</sup> In a document composed fifteen years later, in September 1707, she is described as a "young maid, fifteen years of age," living with her mother in a house in the Noordeinde (in The Hague),<sup>48</sup> her father having since passed away. Françoisia herself eventually married two times and died decades later, in 1757.<sup>49</sup>

One additional child was born to Schalcken and Van Diemen during their London sojourn, a boy named Godefridus, after his father, who was baptized at St. Martin-in-the-Fields on 19 December 1694.<sup>50</sup> Presumably his parents were now attending this church because their English-language skills had improved, and more significantly because it had become their parish church. Just like Françoisia, this baby was given the same name as one that had been baptized in Dordrecht prior to the couple's English sojourn, on 20 October 1688.<sup>51</sup> And this child likewise died before the couple departed for London in May of 1692.<sup>52</sup> The couple were almost certainly childless again at that point in time – although Françoisia was pregnant – which likely explains the absence of the names of any children in the proclamation cited above that announced Schalcken's and Van Dieman's embarkation for England.<sup>53</sup> In any event, the second Godefridus does not appear to have survived for too long: he is identifiable with "Godfrey Scalgren," buried at St. Martin-in-the-Fields on 19 February 1695.<sup>54</sup>

The date of Schalcken's arrival in London, or rather, his departure from his native Dordrecht for England is well established. By contrast, the year that he left London itself has been the subject of much speculation among scholars, with most assuming that it must have occurred in 1697 at the earliest and most likely later.<sup>55</sup> Thierry Beherman, who published the sole monograph on the painter in 1988, maintained that Schalcken remained in England until 1699, if not beyond that date.<sup>56</sup> Curiously, no one seems to have noticed that a fairly precise date for Schalcken's departure for the continent had already appeared in print over a century ago, in the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of William and Mary*, an eleven-volume venture, issued between 1895 and 1937.

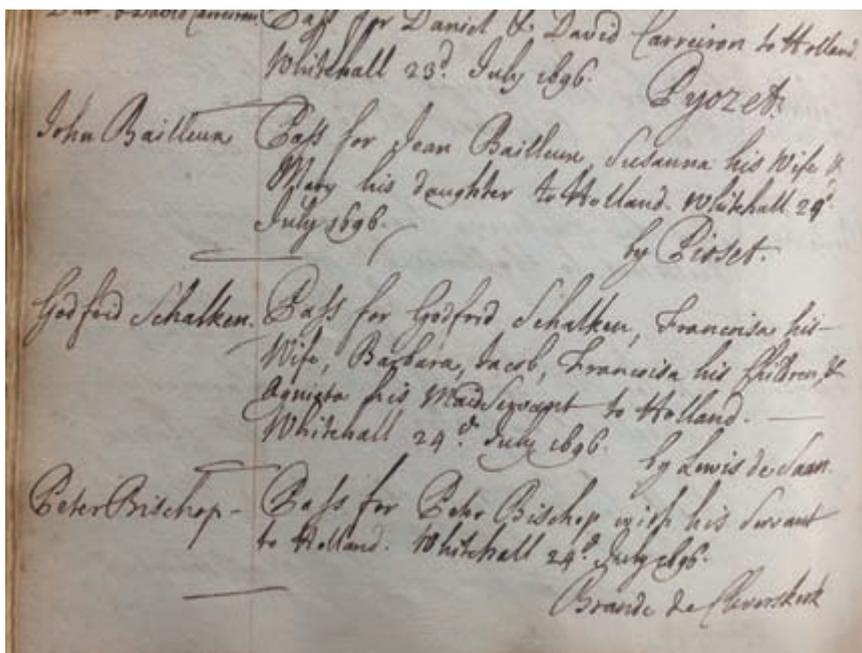


Fig. 4. Receipt for a pass for Schalcken and his family to leave England, 24 July 1696, Kew, The National Archives.

Volume seven (1913), lists the following information for a travel pass: “On 24 July 1696, at Whitehall Palace: passes for Godfrid [sic] Schalken, Françoisa his wife, Barbara, Jacob, Françoisa, his children, and Agnieta, his maidservant to go to Holland.”<sup>57</sup> The present writer was able to locate the actual record in the National Archives in Kew (Fig. 4). While the pass issued to the painter and members of his family certainly clarifies the dates of his stay in London it is simultaneously misleading. In the document, Barbara, Jacob, and Françoisa are named as Schalcken’s children; only Françoisa (Françoise) was the artist’s child. Barbara Schalcken (c. 1655–1709) was actually his spinster sister, who by that time, 1696, was about forty years old.<sup>58</sup> And Jacob was most certainly Jacobus Schalcken (b. c. 1681–82), the artist’s nephew and pupil, who was roughly fourteen years old in the summer of 1696.<sup>59</sup> Since the names of Barbara and Jacob are not included in the proclamation of 1692, we might infer that they had possibly traveled together to London at some point after Schalcken and his wife had settled there, all the more so because of their ages and familial relationship to the artist.

The archival findings surveyed above may be disappointingly scant, but they do shed some light on the painter’s stay in England. There is also a generally overlooked assessment of Schalcken’s art that is most valuable because it was made while the artist was working in that country. This succinct assessment can be found in a letter that Thomas Platt, the unofficial envoy in London for the Grand Duke of Tuscany,



Fig. 5. Carlo Dolci, *St. Jerome*, 1655 (oil on panel, 43 × 54 cm). New York, Otto Naumann Ltd.

Cosimo III de' Medici (1642–1723), wrote in early June 1694 to Apollonio Bassetti, his patron's secretary in Florence, concerning a potential commission for a self-portrait proposed by none other than the artist himself.<sup>60</sup> Platt states the following: “For more than two years, we have in this city [London] a very famous Dutch painter named Schalcken, who paints in the manner of Carlo Dolci, making large and small-scale portraits, pictures of night-time scenes, fruit, flowers, etc ..., to marvel at ...”<sup>61</sup>

Platt had spent years in Italy and was therefore quite familiar with the art scene there and, of course, with the Grand Duke's tastes.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the Englishman's claim that Schalcken paints in the manner of the contemporary Florentine master, Carlo Dolci (1616–1687) is fascinating.<sup>63</sup> No doubt, Platt linked the two men because he knew that Dolci was one of his patron's favorite painters.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the equation of Schalcken with Dolci, who was (and is) noted for his religious pictures of intense piety rendered with an enamel-smooth technique (Fig. 5), is plausible in that the former likewise painted smoothly though, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, his style of painting in England varied (especially that of his portraits) and deliberately so, depending on the tastes of his clientele. Platt also observes that Schalcken made pictures of fruit and flowers – subject matter also found in the work of Dolci<sup>65</sup> – thereby providing confirmation of the Dutch artist's production of still-life painting during his London sojourn, a phenomenon that scholars have occasionally questioned.

Additional information concerning Schalcken's English period can also be found in several eighteenth-century biographies, though this material must be used with extreme caution since much of it consists of uncomplimentary stories. The artist's younger Dordrecht-born colleague, Arnold Houbraken wrote the earliest biography to appear in print. Like Schalcken, Houbraken too studied with Van Hoogstraten (c. 1674–78) in Dordrecht. He also knew Schalcken personally, remarking that he had been to the master painter's studio.<sup>66</sup> Appearing posthumously in 1721 in the third volume of Houbraken's ambitious book, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Great theater of Netherlandish painters and painstresses), the biography of Schalcken is, generally speaking, the most straightforward and hence the most reliable one written during the eighteenth century, particularly compared with those that would follow (see below).<sup>67</sup>

Although Houbraken's account of the painter's English years is extremely brief, it is quite complimentary. He simply mentions that from time to time, Schalcken practiced an "*aangenamer en luchtvaardiger wyze van schilderen*," which enraptured the English who consequently lured him to their country.<sup>68</sup> Apparently, the master alternated this manner of painting with one involving a tighter more precise application of paint in the tradition of the Leiden *fijnschilders* in which he had been trained.<sup>69</sup> This succinct statement is a therefore fascinating one, because it helps to explain certain aspects of Schalcken's painting style in England. It is indeed fascinating but also highly frustrating, owing to Houbraken's phrasing and the problems that arise when one attempts to translate it.<sup>70</sup> *Aangenam*, meaning "pleasant," is easy enough, but *luchtvaardig*, is either a neologism unique to Houbraken in early modern Dutch, or it is a typographical error that should actually be read as *lichtvaardig*.

If the former, namely, *luchtvaardig*, then scholarly translations of it as "lighter" somewhat miss the mark.<sup>71</sup> Dividing Houbraken's word into its constituent parts, *lucht* can obviously be translated as air. *Vaardig*, with variant spellings in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch, is associated with readiness, in the sense of being in a state of preparedness or prowess.<sup>72</sup> *Luchtvaardig* then means literally to be prepared or ready for the air, to the effect of being ready to fly. So Houbraken's use of *aangenamer en luchtvaardiger* to describe Schalcken's alternative style indicates that it was more pleasant than his other style and, if this translation is correct, was more suited to allow him to fly away, take flight, that is, to rise rapidly as an artist.<sup>73</sup>

However, if *luchtvaardig* is a typographical error for *lichtvaardig*, by invoking the adjectives "*aangenamer en lichtvaardiger wyze van schilderen*," Houbraken is perhaps describing Schalcken's more pleasant and more fluid (or easy) manner of painting.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, Nicole Elizabeth Cook's recent translation of *luchtvaardig* as airy could very well be correct.<sup>75</sup> The adjective airy in this context would thus most likely be understood in a Van Dyckian sense, that is, referencing the eminent Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), who had spent his later career in England.<sup>76</sup> As Jeffrey M. Muller has demonstrated, Van Dyck's airy style evoked gracefulness in his pictures, a reflection of

his effortless facility as a painter as well as the delicate spirit said to animate them.<sup>77</sup> Ensuing chapters in the present book will shed further light on Houbraken's terminology linking Schalcken to a particular style practiced during his English period. The biographer concludes his pithy assessment of the artist's residence in England by stating that Schalcken spent several years there and became very wealthy.<sup>78</sup>

The famous antiquary Horace Walpole (1717–1797) wrote the only account of Schalcken's life published in English, in his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*. However, as the subtitle of his four-volume venture, which first appeared in 1762–63, informs us, these anecdotes were initially collected by George Vertue (1684–1756). Over several decades Vertue had compiled some forty volumes of notebooks to lay the groundwork for an ambitious venture on his part to publish a comprehensive history of painting and sculpture in England, with the projected title, *Museum pictoris Anglicanum*. This project was left unfinished at his death in 1756. Vertue himself was also an antiquary and a professional engraver to boot, who authored several scholarly books and was deeply engaged with various English cultural institutions during the first half of the eighteenth century, including learned societies, academies of art, and even clubs of artists and art lovers.<sup>79</sup>

Walpole, who knew Vertue – the two men were in repeated contact during the 1740s – purchased his notebooks en masse from the latter's widow in 1758, mined them for material, and within four years, released his four-volume *Anecdotes of Painting in England*.<sup>80</sup> In his preface to this first volume, Walpole declares his aim to “enliven” Vertue's markedly dry presentation of the material. As Karen Junod has observed in her study of biography and artistic identity in eighteenth-century England, far from merely enlivening Vertue's work, Walpole transformed it with goal of providing erudite entertainment for his readers.<sup>81</sup> In the interests of presenting engrossing narratives, Walpole jettisoned many of Vertue's tedious details in an effort to create witty biographies to amuse and educate his audience of gentlemen connoisseurs.

Compared with Walpole's biography of Schalcken, Vertue's own assessment, mainly recorded in notebooks compiled in 1713 and 1721, is quite laudatory. Regrettably, scholars often quote Walpole's deprecatory comments and in doing so, mistakenly assume that his words are, in fact, those of Vertue.<sup>82</sup> The older antiquary calls Schalcken an excellent painter of night scenes by candlelight, “curiously wrought & highly finisht.”<sup>83</sup> He cites the high cost of such pictures, which, in his view, “still keep or increase their value.” Furthermore, the Dutch painter is said to have gained “respect & Esteem among people of Qualitie & distinction,” through his art and especially “his gracefull behaviour & courtesie.” He is said to have traveled to England not once but twice, the first time for a brief stay, and the second, with his family for “many years.”<sup>84</sup> Vertue concludes with a description of Schalcken's method for creating candlelight paintings: “he had a little dark room, where he Plac'd a candle lighted with the person or subject he designd to Paint looking thro' a hole made purposely. he painted by day light what there he saw. by Candle light.”<sup>85</sup>

By contrast, Walpole, writing in 1762, damns Schalcken with faint praise as “a very confined genius, when rendering a single effect of light [which was] all his excellence.” The implication is that he was an artist of limited talent, incapable of doing anything else, save this visual “trick.”<sup>86</sup> Despite his contempt for such work, Walpole paraphrases Vertue’s description of Schalcken’s working method: “He placed the object and a candle in a dark room and looking through a small hole, painted by day-light what he saw in the dark chamber.” And like Vertue, Walpole claims that the Dutch painter came to England not once but twice, “the last time with his wife and family.” His intention was to make portraits, “but [he] found the business too much engrossed by Kneller, Closterman and others.”

Walpole also derides Schalcken’s tactlessness in creating a portrait of William III: “... as the piece was to be by candle-light, he gave his majesty the candle to hold, till the tallow ran down upon his fingers.” For Walpole, this signified Schalcken’s “ill-breeding,” and in order to justify this defect, he made a portrait of himself “in the same situation.” Apparently, “delicacy was no part of his character,” as witnessed by the impertinent manner in which he interacted with his patrons, even to the point of rudely substituting the hands of a housemaid for those of a lady. This allegedly uncouth habit of Schalcken’s, namely, of inserting his servants’ hands into the portraits of socially elevated sitters, must have struck Walpoles’s gentlemanly audiences, acutely sensitive as they were to issues of class and rank, as the very height of audacity.

Walpole’s impugning second-hand accounts must have been distilled from gossip, chatty tales in early magazines, and, above all, from passages in the Dutchman Jacob Campo Weyerman’s biography of Schalcken published in volume three of his *Levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche konst-schilders en konst-schilderessen* (Biographies of Netherlandish painters and paintresses) of 1729.<sup>87</sup> Vertue, who could read Dutch, owned a copy of this work, which was then acquired by Walpole, most likely at auction in 1758.<sup>88</sup> Weyerman (1677–1747), himself a painter, playwright, and journalist, spent several years in England in the early eighteenth century – his mother was of British descent – working as an artist for highly placed patrons (and as a flower painter to Godfrey Kneller [1646–1723]), and, if his autobiography is to be believed, studying medicine in Oxford.<sup>89</sup> His biography of Schalcken, laced with quips, is, like those of all the other artists in his book, frequently libelous and caustic.<sup>90</sup>

Weyerman relates how the Dutch artist went to England to paint portraits, having developed an expeditious manner of making them.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, Weyerman remarks, this made his larger portraits look as “flat as unleavened pancakes,” an impression not lost upon English connoisseurs who very quickly tired of them. Here, the author, with his characteristically acerbic wit, draws an analogy between Schalcken’s tedious art and fading physical pleasures following a month of marriage. More problematically, Schalcken was flattened (to continue the metaphor) by competition from such established portraitists in England as Kneller, John Closterman

(1660–1711), Michael Dahl (1659–1743), and Marcellus Laroon the Elder (1653–1702). Unable to paint in his rivals’ “firm, loose, round and forceful manner,” the Dutchman returned to making “little history pieces and little night-lights,” that is, subjects from his established repertoire. The production of small-scale work presumably allowed the artist to compensate for the weaknesses of his failed, larger-scale portraiture. Weyerman goes on to discuss the painter’s uncouth and insensitive manner of addressing his sitters’ requests. He too tells the story of William III’s grease-smeared fingers; thanks to Schalcken’s ineptitude he had not provided a candlestick or sconce, which the author then construes as an allegory demonstrating that a person of any social class will suffer similarly messy consequences without a holder for a burning candle.<sup>92</sup> Weyerman wonders what sort of blockhead would do such a thing, which is said to reflect badly on the training and reputation of Dutch painters in general.<sup>93</sup>

The expatriate Flemish painter Jean-Baptiste Descamps (1714–1791) composed the final eighteenth-century biography of note to be assessed in this introduction.<sup>94</sup> Writing in French, he cautioned his readers in the *avertissement* to his impressive four-volume work that Weyerman’s book contained “filth.” Nevertheless, Descamps’s low opinion of Weyerman did not prevent him from borrowing liberally from his text, which he could read because it was written in his native tongue.<sup>95</sup> He relates that Schalcken had established a reputation for making small-scale portraits and for this he was called to England. Lamentably for the painter, the tremendous promise harbored in his relocation went unfulfilled because he struggled to compete with Kneller, Closterman, Dahl, and Laroon in making grand portraits on a large scale; his efforts were said to lack “force” and “truth.” Schalcken was humiliated and his pride assailed but his greed blinded him to these realities.<sup>96</sup> Still, he was able to re-establish his reputation in England by reverting back to painting his “pretty pictures” (*jolis tableaux*) and small portraits. Descamps claims that in terms of etiquette the artist had “little use for the world,” as his uncultivated interactions with patrons amply testify. And his lack of intelligence was exposed in painting William III with candle wax sullyng his hand. Here, Descamps admits that Weyerman was the source of this calumnious information that, he concedes, was perhaps first told by painters jealous of Schalcken’s reputation.

The authors of three of the four published biographies considered in detail above, Walpole, Weyerman, and Descamps, clearly relied upon disparaging anecdotes – usually the very same disparaging anecdotes – to drive home the point of Schalcken’s supposedly uncouth character. Their denigrating assessments most likely stemmed from the growing aversion among some circles of eighteenth-century connoisseurs to meticulously painted pictures, especially those with candlelight illumination – consider, for example, Walpole’s left-handed compliment, labeling Schalcken “a very confined genius, when rendering a single effect of light.” Walpole’s distaste for works of this sort echoes that of classicist art theory in expressing an antipathy to night-time scenes by calling attention to the disjuncture in painting between darkness and

beauty.<sup>97</sup> For instance, in a section of his *Groot schilderboeck* (Great book of painting; first published in 1707), dedicated to “agreeable and beautiful coloring,” Gerard de Lairesse (1640–1711) wrote: “As a pure light causes objects to appear clean and beautiful, so it must needs be, that the more it is broken and sullied by darkness, the objects will also become darker and less beautiful: many great masters have, in this very particular been much mistaken; as among the Flemish, Rubens; and in Holland, Rembrandt, Lievens and many others of their followers ...”<sup>98</sup> Conversely, a closer reading of Lairesse’s treatise confirms that a brighter, polished style that conforms to theoretical precepts, as practiced by such contemporary Dutch artists as Willem van Mieris (1662–1747), Eglog van der Neer (c. 1635/6–1703), Adriaen van der Werff (1659–1722), and De Lairesse himself, was judged more agreeable, refined, and civil.<sup>99</sup>

Walpole shared the opinions of several earlier eighteenth-century English writers, among them, Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, who censured the meticulous imitation of nature in highly finished pictures, such as can be seen in Schalcken’s. In their view, finely wrought surfaces undermined truth and beauty in art, because they distracted the viewer and thus prevented him or her from contemplating the totality of a given work wherein the essence of its moral purpose lay.<sup>100</sup>

Questions of Schalcken’s supposedly dubious character and its impact upon his art can certainly be set aside here, yet these biographies do share two common threads that merit further analysis. First, settings illuminated by candle light in Schalcken’s paintings may have been perceived by a younger generation of cognoscenti as frivolous visual tricks to entice the uninitiated, but they were very well received among the artist’s English patrons during the 1690s, given their centrality to the master’s contemporary reputation. For instance, Marshall Smith, in his *Art of Painting ...*, first published in London in 1692, provides commentary on masters “now living” in England, including Schalcken – whose name he misspells as Scalker – whom he commends for “Night-pieces and lamps [that come] next to Dow [Dou] himself.”<sup>101</sup> In the chapters that follow, the motif of the burning candle will be almost omnipresent, and its function in creating astonishing English period portraits and genre paintings alike will be examined. Far from having to revert back to the creation of “night-lights,” because of business exigencies, as Weyerman claimed, such pictures seem to have been intrinsic to Schalcken’s marketing strategy in England from the start.

The second pejorative issue highlighted in three of the four biographies is Schalcken’s alleged inability to compete with England’s most accomplished portraitists: Kneller, Closterman, Dahl, and Laroan. There can be no question that upon Schalcken’s arrival in London in the late spring of 1692, competition was rather stiff. In Smith’s treatise, the author comments briefly on sixteen portraitists besides Schalcken who were presently active in England, with Kneller heading the list.<sup>102</sup> And in the aforementioned issue of *A Collection of Letters for the Improvement of Husbandry & Trade* that appeared in January of 1695, Schalcken was named in an advertisement



Fig. 6. Godfrey Kneller, *Portrait of Charles Beauclerk, Duke of St. Albans*, c. 1690–95 (oil on canvas, 126.7 × 102.9 cm). New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of Jack Ruppert, 1939.

with twenty-two other painters who specialized in “Life” (that is, portraiture), all working in London. Still, the biographers’ citing of Kneller, Closterman, and Dahl – setting Laroon aside,<sup>103</sup> since he worked primarily as an assistant to Kneller – is not at all random, since all three artists, especially Kneller, had captured a significant share of the market for portraits in late seventeenth-century England.

German-born and trained in the Dutch Republic, Kneller had emigrated to England in 1676. He was at the peak of his career when Schalcken settled in London, having been named Principal Painter to William III in 1688.<sup>104</sup> Working in specific formats and with canvas sizes that had been codified decades earlier (Fig. 6), Kneller’s three-quarter-length and full-length portraits in particular display pictorial roots that harken back, via his influential near contemporary Peter Lely (1618–1680), to the venerable Anthony van Dyck, who had spent the last nine years of his celebrated career at the court of Charles I (1600–1649) and Henrietta Maria (1609–1669) where

he laid the groundwork for the future course of painting in England.<sup>105</sup> Kneller's sitters invariably occupy sequestered foreground spaces in which rocky outcrops or classical architecture serve as screens that block out much of the sky. Moreover, they are often enveloped in drapery, especially if they are female, which imparts weight and solidity to their loosely and thinly painted forms.

Like Kneller, Closterman hailed from Germany but came to England by way of Paris where he had spent two years (1679–81) in the atelier of the gifted French portraitist, François de Troy (1645–1730).<sup>106</sup> Upon settling in London, Closterman was almost immediately engaged in the studio of John Riley (1662–1691), with whom he soon developed a partnership that would last at least three years, if not longer. Malcolm Rogers, who produced a catalogue raisonné of Closterman's pictures, surmises that his collaboration with Riley likely explains the general lack of works attributable to him during the 1680s. In the long run, however, Closterman's connections with Riley would prove highly profitable as he inherited the English painter's clientele – and even completed unfinished paintings in his studio – after the latter's death in 1691. The 1690s were the most active and successful years of Closterman's entire career. He left England to travel to Spain and Italy in 1698 and upon his return in 1700, gradually abandoned painting altogether in favor of a lucrative career as an art dealer. Closterman's client base was large (though not as large as Kneller's), socially prominent, and well-to-do, ranging from the Dukes of Marlborough and Somerset to members of the landed gentry and prosperous merchants. His portraits generally follow well-established compositional formulae but what principally distinguishes him from Kneller is his cool, glossy palette, often with brilliant color accents and richly rendered fabrics (Fig. 7).

Dahl was a Swedish émigré, who initially settled in England in 1682 in connection with an extended study tour of Europe's great art centers.<sup>107</sup> He soon became acquainted with Kneller and perhaps received some supplementary instruction from him.<sup>108</sup> Thereafter, Dahl embarked upon lengthy travels on the continent, most likely departing in late 1684. After working in Paris, he would spend at least two years in Italy, and then continued on to Frankfurt am Main, before returning to London in 1689. A prolific and long-lived painter, Dahl became Kneller's chief rival. Although the pinnacle of his career was reached in the early eighteenth century during Queen Anne's reign (1702–14), Dahl, like Kneller and Closterman, was already in great demand during the 1690s. The Swedish master's style at that time still contained vestiges of his Italian, specifically Venetian experiences. His tendency was to paint relatively thinly, using the ground layer as an interactive agent with subsequent strata applied with broad brushwork. Employing characteristically soft yet rich colors, Dahl excelled at the rendition of drapery, which in his larger-scale pictures can be quite animated (Fig. 8).

During his four-year stay in London, Schalcken certainly competed for commissions with Kneller, Closterman, and Dahl as well as other portraitists. Be that as it may, were the Dutch painter's earliest biographers correct in claiming that he could



Fig. 7. John Closterman, *Portrait of John Poulett, 1st Earl Poulett*, c. 1680 (oil on canvas, 194.3 × 132.1 cm). New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon collection.

not contend with his rivals, and was hence forced to hark back to his earlier, successful styles and themes? As the ensuing chapters will make clear, it is not at all accurate to view Schalcken's English period as one in which rival portraitists simply vanquished him. To the contrary, his already established reputation along with the noted catholicity of taste in art among English patrons helps to explain why he was able to secure portrait commissions from the most auspicious social circles from the beginning to the end of his four-year stay in London (with many of them concentrated within the years 1694–95).<sup>109</sup> And these commissions called for pictures executed on both



Fig. 8. Michael Dahl, *Portrait of Lady Mary Somerset, Duchess of Ormond*, c. 1695 (oil on canvas, 127 × 101.5 cm). London, Fergus Hall Master Paintings.

small (see Fig. 12) and large (Fig. 22) scales – recall Thomas Platt’s observation that Schalcken made both small and large portraits. In the process, the artist managed to appropriate stylistic devices and motifs from his competitors, fusing them with the distinct features of his own established modes of working.

Schalcken’s portraiture is the subject of the first three chapters of this book. Chapter 1 investigates portraits of specific sitters to help situate the painter in late seventeenth-century London, for Schalcken’s ability to cultivate social networks must have played a role in his success in securing patrons, all of whom were accomplished and moneyed elites. In several instances it is even possible to posit specific social ties between the painter and his clients. Most interestingly, one of these patrons was his neighbor in York Buildings. The second chapter turns to Schalcken’s portraits of William III and members of his court. Here, the reader is introduced to Sir John Lowther (1655–1700), 2nd Baronet (and from 1696, 1st Viscount Lonsdale),

one of the king's favorites and our painter's hitherto unrecognized Maecenas during his London years who commissioned no less than five portraits from him. This chapter also examines an unusual portrait of the long-deceased James Stuart (1612–1655), 4th Duke of Lennox and 1st Duke of Richmond. In essence, this picture constitutes a clever emulation of a much earlier portrait by Van Dyck, reworked into a night scene, replete with candlelight and moonlight. The chapter culminates with an extensive analysis of Schalcken's *Portrait of William III by Candlelight*, his best-known English period work and, as we have already seen, the subject of many derisive comments by Schalcken's eighteenth-century biographers. The third chapter also provides an in-depth analysis of the three surviving self-portraits – all nocturnes – that Schalcken made during his years in London. All three are assessed in terms of the circumstances of their production, their function, and the artist's probable motivations in creating them. Each self-portrait served to promote Schalcken as a virtuosic master in his quest for social and economic advancement.

Schalcken was an accomplished and successful portraitist in London, but his work there encompasses other genres. Chapter 4 delves into the Dutch master's activities as a genre painter. Because many of Schalcken's portraits were painted in the years 1694–95, one wonders whether his first year to year and a half in the metropolis was principally devoted to the production of genre paintings, for which he was already justly acclaimed. Unfortunately, the formidable problem in general of establishing a chronology for the artist's pictures, which he dated only infrequently, makes it difficult to determine which genre paintings were executed in England. In view of his outstanding reputation as a painter of candlelight scenes, Schalcken's genre pictures suggest a propensity to market himself by painting what for English audiences were unusual subjects in nocturnal settings. Owing to their exquisite pictorial effects and the high prices they commanded, such works were undoubtedly intended for elite buyers. Moreover, in at least one instance, there is a record of a London-based art dealer acting as an intermediary in 1694 in the sale of one of the artist's genre paintings.

Our painter's production of history paintings is addressed in Chapter 5. Schalcken was already making history paintings by the early 1670s. He continued to do so in England, providing stunning pictures with frequently intricate iconographies to audiences largely accustomed to purchasing history paintings by continental artists via auctions and private sales. Moreover, the impressive light effects of these paintings (especially those portraying the penitent Mary Magdalen), which the artist relentlessly exploited in all genres during his four-year stay in London, made them quite marketable among the city's collectors. Market considerations must have likewise motivated Schalcken's venture into still-life painting, also examined in the fifth chapter of this book. Although precious few of the master's still-life paintings survive today, those that do, depicting flowers and fruit, suggest an attempt on his part to exploit a gap in the art market created by the declining health of the preminent

Dutch flower painter working in late seventeenth-century London, Simon Verelst (1644 to between 1710 and 1717).

In sum, the ensuing chapters will make abundantly clear just how successful Schalcken was during his four-year stay in London. Multiple literary and archival sources and, of course, the pictures themselves confirm this and in the process, cast suspicion upon the primarily negative assessments set forth by the artist's eighteenth-century biographers.