[margin:]

32

Around 1654

Canvas, 71 x 73 cm

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

LITERATURE

G 110

HDG 186

PF 49

[image]

The Paternal Admonition

This picture became famous under an erroneous name. In his *Elective Affinities*, Goethe mentions the print of an engraving by J. G. Wille (from the 18th century), based on the version in Berlin, which the engraver had entitled *L’Instruction Paternelle*. On closer inspection, however, the viewer can distinguish a coin in the hand of the cavalier. ‘Auro conciliator Amor’ (Money makes Amor favorably disposed) is the phrase used by the emblematist (Otto van Veen, *Amorum Emblemata*, Antwerp 1609; see illustration left), or: ‘Des pennigs reden klinckt best’ (The speech of money sounds best; cf. Cats: *Maechden Plicht*, Middleburg 1618, No. 30). Thus the supposedly admonishing gesture turns out to be that of a monetary offer, and the setting that of a brothel.

That such a misunderstanding could occur at all speaks for itself. Unlike other artists, this one does not choose a bawdy, vernacular tone. He places the amatory content into a respectable ambiance, seeking to discreetly elevate the transaction into a refined, patrician realm. Ter Borch himself probably lived in just such an environment; several of the objects shown – the four-poster canopy bed, the red upholstered chairs, the silver candle holder. the little brandy bowl – appear repeatedly in his pictures. The woman is depicted standing, dressed in the style of an elegant social circle. Her hairstyle too is that of an elegant young woman.

The effect of the picture results entirely from the characteristics of the individuals. “The girl’s back is turned, and both her shimmering satin gown and the expressiveness of her simple, quiet stance enhance the beauty of her figure. The cavalier, in significant contrast, is not at all an impressive figure as he sprawls casually on his chair. How finely perceived, too, is the bearing of the woman dressed in black who, gazing deeply into her glass, attempts to distance herself from her complicit involvement in the scene, and how nicely observed the dog that comes ambling and sniffing along.” (GI, p. 97)

In its severity, the composition underscores the calm and measured feeling of the scene – a tendency that Ter Borch reinforced in a second version (now located in Berlin-Dahlem). The door and the dog on the right no longer appear, and image is now in a vertical format.

The large number of copies, partial copies, and imitations of the picture, of which Gudlaugsson has listed no fewer than 26, gives us some indication of the image’s popularity.

The essay by J. P. Guepin on pages 31-38 of this catalogue includes a discussion of this picture.