



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

ABSTRACT: CRAIG ASHLEY HANSON

Craig Ashley Hanson (Calvin College, Michigan)

'Looking to the Lowlands: Anglo-Dutch relations and artistic continuities in the decades after 1688'

Growing out of a larger project addressing Anglo-Dutch relations in both the fine arts and natural history (particularly medicine), this paper focuses on the impact of the Dutch on British country houses with an eye toward the construction of new historical narratives from the period. The series of Dining Room pictures from Goodwood – commonly known as the 'British Worthies' or the 'Tomb Pictures' – anchors the discussion.

The brainchild of Owen McSwiney, an Irishman whose earliest career pursuits revolved around the theater, the series of Goodwood pictures seems always to have looked both to the particular context of Goodwood, or more precisely the interests of its owner Charles Lennox, the 2nd Duke of Richmond, who did end up purchasing most of the pictures, and to a larger public audience, eventually included among the pictures' viewers thanks to a volume published in 1741 as *Tombeaux des Princes* that included plates based on nine of the paintings. A pamphlet from the 1730s addressed "To the Ladies and Gentlemen of Taste" promised "a more compleat Work of the Kind, than has ever yet been published in any part of Europe," with fifty plates – twenty four depicting illustrious men from recent British history commemorated through the conceit of monumental tombs, twenty four decorative inscription plates, a frontispiece, and a title page. In the end, the actual published volume with just nine tomb pictures was rather more modest than the ambitious proposal; and yet, the print component of the project suggests the degree to which McSwiney was envisioning paintings for a specific patron while at the same time working with a national audience in mind.

While the painting themselves are the work of Venetian and Bolognese artists, Charles Lennox had important family ties to the Dutch court, in particular to Count Bentinck (the son of the first Earl of Portland, the Dutch favorite of William III) and William Keppel (2nd Earl of Albemarle, whose father Arnold Joost van Keppel had rivaled Portland as William's intimate).

The paintings have long benefitted from art historical interest, but they have rarely been used to think about the construction of historical narratives in the 1720s in relation to the events of 1688 and the place of the Dutch in British cultural and political life.