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Published in:
Paedagogica Historica

DOI:
[10.1080/00309230.2015.1061565](https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2015.1061565)

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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2015

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Dekker, J. J. H. (2015). Images as representations: Visual sources on education and childhood in the past. *Paedagogica Historica*, 51(6), 702-715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2015.1061565>

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To cite this article: Jeroen J.H. Dekker (2015) Images as representations: visual sources on education and childhood in the past, *Paedagogica Historica*, 51:6, 702-715, DOI: [10.1080/00309230.2015.1061565](https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2015.1061565)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2015.1061565>

Published online: 19 Aug 2015.

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Images as representations: visual sources on education and childhood in the past

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(Received 21 April 2015; accepted 26 May 2015)

The challenge of using images for the history of education and childhood will be addressed in this article by looking at them as representations. Central is the relationship between representations and reality. The focus is on the power of paintings as representations of aspects of realities. First the meaning of representation for images as sources for the history of education and childhood – mirrors of realities, complex symbol systems or representations – is explained. A distinction is made between images of real people and images of patterns of human behaviour and the value of the phenomenon of historical sensation as a methodological instrument for insight in that relationship is dealt with. Second, a specific genre of paintings from the seventeenth century, namely portraits of dead children, will be described and analysed to make clear that their value for the history of education and childhood can be studied adequately only by using those images as representations and by interpreting them within the cultural rules and regulations of time and place. This analysis results in the conclusion that images should be considered in their function as representations of aspects of educational and childhood reality.

Keywords: methodology of history of education and childhood; representation; material sources; images; paintings

1. Introduction¹

When looking at *Children in Painting* by Marie-Christine Autin Graz, the reader is immersed in a diversity of cultures and epochs, and consequently in a variety of images of childhood. The images in the book are organised in line with national art schools and not with chronology. For each nation the focus is on its “golden age”, the most flourishing period of national painting. Reading the book and looking at its pictures seems like visiting famous museums such as the Louvre in Paris, the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin, the National Gallery of Art in Washington or the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence. A number of the paintings belong to the collection of those museums, where pieces of art are also mostly exhibited in line with national art

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¹This article develops further the argumentation of two recent publications: J. J. H. Dekker, “Looking at Filtered Realities: Images of Childhood and Parenting in the Dutch Golden Age,” in *Pädagogische Reflexionen des Visuellen*, ed. K. te Heesen (Münster/New York: Waxmann-Verlag, 2014), 27–46; and J. J. H. Dekker, “Mirrors of Reality? Material Culture, Historical Sensation, and the Significance of Images for Research into Long-Term Educational Processes,” in *Educational Research: Material Culture and its Representation*, ed. P. Smeyers and M. Depaepe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 31–51.

schools. In *Children in Painting*, almost all Italian paintings selected are from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, while for Dutch painting the focus is on the Golden Age of Rembrandt, and so on.² Jumping from one epoch to the other and from one nation to another when looking at images of childhood can easily result in confusion, for comparing the images is very complex because of the great variety in historical and cultural contexts.

This confusion has to do with the problem of representation. The art historian Alvar González-Palacios formulates this as follows in the introduction to *Children in Painting*: “The image of a child is not necessarily a portrait, it may be simply a representation; not the idea of a known individual but rather an allegory or simply an ornamental motif.”³ In fact, it seems that every image, including the portraits of children, is a representation.⁴ Indeed, both visual sources containing images of real people, among them portraits, and visual sources containing models or categories of people, of which the meaning is often strengthened by symbols, are representations.

Images are as a matter of fact part of material culture⁵ and they can be used for gaining knowledge on education and childhood in the past. They are important as representations for at least two main reasons.

First, images can compensate for the vast scarcity of written sources on childhood in the past, in particular for early modern history, due to the fact that sources on education and childhood in the past are not only in the great majority produced by adults, but also are generally focused on education, on educators, and on educational institutions instead of on children and youth. Second, images can stimulate the historical sensation by giving the researcher the methodologically important illusion of meeting people in the past almost directly by looking at them through their portraits. Looking at those pictures can result in looking at historical realities represented through those pictures. This seems to be different, although not principally but de facto, from getting an idea of people in the past by reading their own written products, among them their letters, or by reading written products produced about them, for example dossiers in child protection or medical settings. In brief: by looking at images, you can get the historical sensation of coming face to face with the person her- or himself.

In the following, the challenge of using images for the history of education and childhood will be addressed by considering looking at them as representations. The

²M.-C. Autin Graz, *Children in Painting* (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2002).

³A. González Palacios, “Preface,” in Autin Graz, *Children in Painting*, 9. Cf. N. Lacey, *Image and Representation: Key Concepts in Media Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 146–89.

⁴F. R. Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); F. R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁵See for an introduction in the use of visual and material evidence for historical research L. Jordanova, *The Look of the Past. Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

focus is on paintings, not on photography.⁶ First the meaning of representation for images as sources for the history of education and childhood will be addressed. Are they mirrors of realities, complex symbol systems or representations, and what is the relationship between representations and reality? Attention will be given to the distinction between images of real people and images of patterns of human behaviour, and of how the phenomenon of historical sensation could function as a methodological instrument for insight in that relationship (section 2). Then a specific genre of paintings from the seventeenth century, namely portraits of dead children, will be described and analysed to make clear that their value for the history of education and childhood can be studied adequately only by using those images as representations and by interpreting them within the cultural rules and regulations of time and place (section 3). This analysis results in the conclusion that images should be considered in their function of representations of aspects of educational and childhood reality (section 4).

2. Images: mirrors of realities, complex symbol systems or representations?

It was several decades after the publication in 1960 of the innovative study on family life and schooling in history by Philippe Ariès (1914–1984) entitled *L'enfant et la vie familiale*, translated in the 1963 English edition as *Centuries of Childhood*, and for a considerable part of its evidence based on an analysis of visual sources, before such sources were more widely accepted and used in the historical sciences, including the history of education, this notwithstanding the fact that the book became one of the founding texts for the emerging discipline of history of education.⁷ Ariès, long an outsider in French historiography with his appointment when aged 62 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 1978 being a very late acceptance by the French historic academic establishment, considered images, among them paintings and medieval sculpture, as essential sources for his

⁶On the use of photography for insight in educational issues, see the contributions by U. Hägele, "Armut als Stigma? Kindheit und die socialdokumentarische Fotografie der 1930er Jahre," 59–77, G. Thyssen, "Das Fremde im Vertrauen und das Vertraute im Fremden. Eine Bildanalyse jenseits des Verstehens im Kontext einer deutsche Waldschule (1923–1939)," 79–100, C. Leser, "Fotografien als Sinnbilder des Pädagogischen," 101–14, U. Palarczyk, "Drinnen und Draußen. Ein bildanalytischer Rückblick auf Jugend in den 1980er Jahren," 115–30, and S. Jormitz, "Sinndeutung von Situationen mit Jugendlichen Anhand einer fotografischen Analyse von Tobias Zielonys 'Kristina'," 131–40, in Te Heesen, *Pädagogische Reflexionen des Visuellen*, 2014. A methodological guide in this respect is P. Tinkler, *Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research* (London: Sage, 2013).

⁷Ph. Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1960). The English edition was published in 1962 as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf). Cf. J. J. H. Dekker and L. F. Groenendijk, "Philippe Ariès's Discovery of Childhood after Fifty Years: The Impact of a Classic Study on Educational Research," *Oxford Review of Education* 38, no. 2 (2012): 133–47. On visual sources, see F. Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); J. J. H. Dekker, *Educational Ambitions in History: Childhood and Education in an Expanding Educational Space from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010); W. Frijhoff, "Historian's Discovery of Childhood," *Paedagogica Historica* 48, no. 1 (2012): 11–29. Cf. Dekker, "Mirrors of Reality?," 33–34 on Ariès in his role as an outsider during the golden age of French historiography with Annales historians such as Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel.

studies on the history of the life cycle, including his famous book on childhood and the family in the past. He was “far more aware than any of the *Annales* historians of the significance of figurative sources”.⁸

Ariès would long remain the exception to the rule and images remained neglected as sources for cultural history in France and elsewhere for many years to come. This changed from the late 1980s with, for example, Simon Schama’s study on Dutch civilisation in the seventeenth century, including his interpretation of the Dutch Republic as a “Republic of Children”, partly based on an interpretation of a series of genre paintings and genre drawings and seemingly considering those seventeenth-century images as mirrors of social and cultural realities.⁹

The origins of those paintings formed the innovation of Dutch painting after the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566, the iconoclastic large-scale destruction of religious art because of the Reformation. From then, daily life replaced religious life as one of the main topics in Dutch paintings, with many of them depicting children, family life and parenting, core issues of the seventeenth-century Dutch moral discourse. Until the 1930s, those paintings were generally regarded as realistic, descriptive, mirrors of realities, and concerned with everyday life. They were the result of an innovation in painting: “a new style ... more true-to-life” and with “greater emphasis on everyday subjects and motifs”.¹⁰ This art history paradigm of interpreting those paintings as mirrors of reality changed with the publication of *Studies in Iconology* from 1939 by Erwin Panofsky, who, while developing a general theory of iconology, paid special attention to Dutch painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From then, those paintings were regarded less as mirrors of realities and more and more as transmitters of messages in code form. According to Haskell, “even images formerly assumed to depict only what could have been seen by an ‘innocent eye’ were in fact the products of conscious or unconscious

⁸Haskell, *History and its Images*, 496–97, n.21; Dekker and Groenendijk, “Philippe Ariès’s Discovery of Childhood after Fifty Years”.

⁹S. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: William Collins, 1987), 486, 541. See J. J. H. Dekker and L.F. Groenendijk, “The Republic of God or the Republic of Children? Childhood and Child-rearing after the Reformation: An Appraisal of Simon Schama’s Thesis about the Uniqueness of the Dutch Case,” *Oxford Review of Education* 17, no. 3 (1991): 317–35; J. B. Bedaux and R. E. O. Ekkart, eds., *Pride and Joy: Children’s Portraits in The Netherlands 1500–1700* (Ghent, Amsterdam and New York: Ludion & Abrams, 2000); Dekker, *Educational Ambitions*; J. J. H. Dekker, *Het verlangen naar opvoeden. Over de groei van de pedagogische ruimte in Nederland sinds de Gouden Eeuw tot omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006).

¹⁰J. Bruyn, “A Turning-Point in the History of Dutch Art,” in *Dawn of the Golden Age, Northern Netherlandish Art 1580–1620*, ed. G. Luijten, A. van Suchtelen, R. Baarsen, W. Kloek and M. Schapellhouman (Amsterdam and Zwolle: Rijksmuseum/Waanders: 1993), 112–21, p. 112.

manipulation: Dutch genre scenes and still lives, for instance”.¹¹ Iconologists and iconographers now regarded Dutch genre paintings, notwithstanding their remaining realistic magic, primarily as complex symbol systems, to be decoded by iconological methods in order to understand the languages hidden in those paintings. This way of looking at such paintings continued for many decades.

But from the 1980s this paradigm of looking at images as complex symbol systems was questioned too. Art historians such as Svetlana Alpers who emphasised the visuality and the visual competence of Dutch seventeenth-century culture and its descriptive art in contrast to narrative Italian art, Mary Durantini who focused on the child in Dutch paintings, and Jan Baptist Bedaux again placed emphasis on the realistic aspects of these paintings, although not with that “innocent eye” and the illusion of paintings as mirror of realities from the nineteenth century. Bedaux, who as a student was introduced to Dutch iconography by De Jongh, an adherent of the Panofsky-inspired iconology, eventually lost his Panofskyan faith. He even changed into an opponent of that approach and he joined the new “realistic” paradigm. The title of his academic dissertation, *The Reality of Symbols*, symbolised the change of paradigm.¹²

This new paradigm fits the idea of representation developed by Frank Ankersmit.¹³ Ankersmit prefers the horizontal model of sciences to the hierarchic one and is an adherent of the classic distinction between the nomothetic sciences, striving after the formulation and testing of general laws, and the ideographic sciences, focusing on the study of individual cases, a distinction made famous by the German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband. For the ideographic sciences,

¹¹Haskell, *History and its Images*, 5; cf. E. de Jongh, “Jan Steen, dichtbij en toch veraf,” in *Jan Steen. Painter and Storyteller*, ed. H. Chapman, Perry, W. Th. Kloek and A. K. Wheelock Jr. (Amsterdam and Washington, DC: Rijksmuseum/National Gallery of Art, 1996), 39–51, p. 40; E. de Jongh and G. Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life: Genreprints in The Netherlands 1550–1700* (Amsterdam and Ghent: Rijksmuseum/Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1986); E. de Jongh, J. B. Bedaux, P. Hecht et al., *Tot lering en vermaak. Betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1976); E. de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw. Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1986); E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972; orig. 1939); J. J. H. Dekker, L. F. Groenendijk and J. Verberckmoes, “Proudly Raising Vulnerable Youngsters: The Scope for Education in The Netherlands,” in Bedaux and Ekkart, eds., *Pride and Joy*, 43–60.

¹²Based on Dekker, “Mirrors of Reality,” 38–40. See S. Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) [French version: *L’art de dépeindre. La peinture hollandaise au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990)], 11; M. F. Durantini, *The Child in Seventeenth Century Dutch Painting* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983); P. Hecht, “Dutch Seventeenth-century Genre Painting: A Reassessment of Some Current Hypotheses,” *Simiolus. Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 21, no. 1/2 (1992): 85–95; P. C. Sutton, *Masters of Seventeenth-century Dutch Genre Painting* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), n. 49; De Jongh & Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life*, 71. Cf. W. Th. M. Frijhoff and M. Spies, *1650. Bevochten eendracht* (The Hague: SDU, 1999), 458, 100–02; Bedaux and Ekkart, *Pride and Joy*, 19–22; J. B. Bedaux, *The Reality of Symbols: Studies in the Iconology of Netherlandish art 1400–1800* (’s-Gravenhage and Maarssen: Gary Schwarz/SDU, 1990), 112–13.

¹³F. R. Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); F. R. Ankersmit, “Representatie als cognitief instrument,” *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* 103, no. 4 (2011): 243–62; F. R. Ankersmit, *De navel van de geschiedenis. Over interpretatie, representatie en historische realiteit* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij Groningen, 1990).

Ankersmit developed his idea of representation. According to him, and using Napoleon as an example for his theory of representation, representation has three main elements, namely (1) the historic Napoleon, or, a reality in the past, (2) a specific representation of Napoleon, for example a biography of him, and (3) certain aspects of Napoleon to which the representation, for example the biography mentioned under (2), refers. Those aspects are presented by the representation and they are considered as aspects of reality. Thus, representation has, according to Ankersmit, a strong relationship with reality: representation is emphasising or referring to aspects of that very reality. This does not mean that representing reality is mirroring reality, for the representation always refers only more or less to aspects of reality. Napoleon, to keep that example for a while, can be – and indeed was and even liked to be – represented as a Roman emperor. Of course we all know that he was not. But such a representation as a Roman emperor refers to certain aspects of the historic Napoleon, which were very important for his self-image. Indeed, for Napoleon, himself the emperor of France and major parts of Europe, looking like a Roman emperor could result in more respect and in more power.¹⁴ In other words, a representation always only lays down specific and selected aspects of the past, with the uniqueness of a representation being the specificity of those aspects. While representation is not limited to representation of real people, such representations, for example a portrait, show more aspects that suggest similarity to the represented than other representations like flags, which symbolise nations and states but do not suggest similarity to them.¹⁵

Ankersmit's idea of representation can be of value for how to use images as sources for the history of education and childhood. Both real people – children, youngsters, parents, educators – and ideas and messages on patterns of behaviour – *histoire des mentalités pédagogiques* – belong to historic realities.¹⁶ It is true that sources can be looked at as representations, but some images seem to be able to bring researchers nearer to those realities than others. While this happens most

¹⁴Ankersmit, "Representatie," 246–49. Cf. Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth and Reference*, 64–86.

¹⁵Ankersmit, "Representatie," 250, 252. Symbols in paintings or in drawings also can serve to better understand the meaning of those paintings in emphasising aspects of represented people or patterns of behaviour, for example in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblems and genre paintings; see J. J. H. Dekker, "Beauty and Simplicity: The Power of Fine Art in Moral Teaching on Education in 17th Century Holland," *Journal of Family History. Studies in Family, Kinship, and Demography* 34, no. 2 (2009): 166–88; A. Gruschka, *Der heitere Ernst der Erziehung. Jan Steen malt Kinder und Erwachsene als Erzieher und Erziehene. Eine Entdeckungsreise durch die Bildwelten Jan Steens und seiner Zeit* (Wetzlar: Büchse der Pandora Verlag, 2005).

¹⁶Several sources, both images and texts, among them belles-lettres, can expose general patterns of behaviour, including parental and child behaviour, with people reading those texts or looking at those images and recognising their own behaviour in those patterns, or seeing how their own behaviour differed positively of the bad behaviour shown in paintings, emblem books, or *belles-lettres*. See D. M. B. Sturkenboom, *Spectators van hartstocht. Sekse en emotionele cultuur in de achttiende eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), 84 (n. 202), 86, 88; Chr. Jouhaud, ed., "Littérature et histoire," *Annales, Histoire Sciences Sociales* 49, no. 2 (1994): 271–457; R. Chartier, "Le monde comme représentation," *Annales E. S. C.* 44, no. 6 (1989): 1505–20; R. Chartier, ed., *Les usages de l'imprimé (XVe–XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); J. Dane, K. Ghonem-Woets, R. Ghesquière, P. Mooren and J. J. H. Dekker, "For Religion, Education and Literature: A Comparative Study of Changes in the Strategy and Profile of Traditionally Religious Publishing Houses in Belgium and The Netherlands in the Twentieth Century," *Paedagogica Historica* 42, no. 6 (2006): 707–27.

with images of real people in individual and group portraits, also genre paintings that are not about real people but about patterns of behaviour can give the researcher a rather close experience with the realities studied. This is in many ways comparable with TV soaps nowadays: both genre paintings and TV soaps often show behaviour going wrong and present patterns of behaviour that should be followed and imitated, thus giving implicit or explicit moral messages.¹⁷ While certain categories of images, among them portraits of children, parents and families, can easily be considered to be mirrors of everyday life,¹⁸ they can also refer only to aspects of reality and as all representations are only partial they never do mirror reality as such. At the same time, looking at images as representation makes it possible to cover the seemingly mirror aspects of portraits, emblems, genre prints and genre painting and to use them adequately as sources for the history of education and childhood.

As already mentioned, representations in the form of images of people seem to be able to bring researchers nearer to realities than other representations. Looking at paintings or at other remainders of material culture in the past by using them as sources for insight in that past can indeed contribute to the so-called historical sensation. Those remainders of material culture can have the power to bring the researcher almost face to face with the person her- or himself. That illusion – for that is what it is – of direct contact with the past is different from gaining knowledge of people in the past by only reading their products, among them letters, or by reading products on them, for example dossiers.

The concept of historical sensation was coined by the historian Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) in his essay entitled “The task of the history of culture” (*De taak der cultuurgeschiedenis*) from 1929.¹⁹ Huizinga formulated this as follows: “[H]istorical sensation ... that is accompanied by the absolute conviction of complete authenticity and truth, can be provoked by a line from a chronicle, by an engraving, a few sounds from an old song.... Historical sensation does not present itself to us as a re-living, but as an understanding that is closely akin to the understanding of music, or, rather of the world *by* music.”²⁰ Although those forms of direct contact with the past eventually remain illusions, for methodological reasons historians do need that

¹⁷For the similarity in producing patterns of behaviour between eighteenth-century fiction and soaps, see Elizabeth Johnston, “How Women Really Are: Disturbing Parallels between Reality Television and 18th Century Fiction,” in *How Real Is Reality TV? Essays on Representation and Truth* ed. D. S. Escoffery (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), 115–32. Cf. N. Lacey, *Image and Representation: Key Concepts in Media Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 146–1=89. This way of looking at representations resembles Carlo Ginzburg’s position. He stated that only *spie*, or clues or traces, can give us insight into the past, comparing the art historian’s craft with that of the detective Sherlock Holmes, created by Arthur Conan Doyle: “The art connoisseur resembles the detective who discovers the perpetrator of a crime (or the artist behind a painting) on the basis of evidence that is imperceptible to most people.” C. Ginzburg, *Miti Emblemi Spie. Morfologia e storia* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore s.p.s., 1986), 160; C. Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) [enlarged English version of *Miti Emblemi Spie*], 97–98; cf. Ankersmit, *De navel*, 50–51, 57). See further in Dekker, “Images of Reality?,” 31.

¹⁸See de Jongh and Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life*.

¹⁹J. Huizinga, “De taak der cultuurgeschiedenis,” in *Verzamelde Werken 7: Geschiedwetenschap, Hedendaagsche Cultuur* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1950, orig. 1929).

²⁰Translation by F. R. Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 120–21.

illusion, that historical sensation, that direct contact with the past. At the same time they should always be aware of the fact that, in the words of Willem Frijhoff, we “only see the child of the past well if we manage to keep a closely guarded distance”.²¹

For Huizinga, historical sensation is the result of “what happens between the historian and the past”.²² According to him, a variety of historical objects could provoke a moment of historical sensation, including masterpieces of art, but not exclusively these: all sorts of historical objects could contribute to a moment of historical sensation. And it also is true that when looking at masterpieces of art only the burden of numerous interpretations already made could complicate an open way of gaining direct contact with the past.²³ For the rest, Huizinga himself received one of his most influential historical sensations when visiting the Flemish Primitives Exhibition in Bruges in Belgium in 1902, when looking at masterpieces by painters such as Van Eyck, Van der Weijden and Van der Goes. That historical sensation inspired him in the writing of the book that made him famous, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.²⁴

In the next section, the focus will turn to some specific representations from the material culture of early modern Europe, namely images from the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic on children's death. These images are representation both of those children themselves and of patterns of affection and ways of looking at children by their parents.

3. Representations from the material culture: seventeenth-century images of children's death

Seventeenth-century Dutch images often depicted everyday life, including education and childhood. They were exceptional in quantity and often also in quality. Looking at their own reality, at themselves, at their own family and their own children, by looking at paintings or at other images was fundamental for the Dutch seventeenth-century collective mentality and a normal way of life for many burghers. Indeed, the Dutch Republic was a bourgeois society, not an aristocratic society.²⁵ As a consequence, the ownership of paintings, drawings and engravings was no privilege for a small elite. Paintings were normal furniture for the broad middle class, as

²¹Frijhoff, “Historian's Discovery of Childhood,” 28.

²²Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 121.

²³*Ibid.*, 127.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 126; J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and The Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955) [orig. J. Huizinga, *Herfsttij der middeleeuwen. Studie over levens- en gedachtenvormen der veertiende en vijftiende eeuw in Frankrijk en de Nederlanden* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1919)].

²⁵See J. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century: and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) [orig. J. Huizinga, *Nederland's beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw. Een Schets* (Groningen: Tjeenk Willink, 1941)].

foreign visitors often discovered to their surprise.²⁶ And indeed, the Dutch art market's main customer was the broad middle class.²⁷ As a result, painting was a flourishing economic sector with, in around 1650, approximately 700 active painters, a good working art market, and a production of c.70,000 paintings each year, both highly and modestly priced.²⁸ Seventeenth-century Dutch paintings and drawings of education and childhood can be distinguished in two main categories, i.e. paintings intentionally made to represent real people, mainly family portraits and children's portraits, and images intentionally made to show patterns of behaviour, among them genre paintings and emblem books, the latter relying on the combined strength of text and image of the emblem. Both categories of paintings, notwithstanding their seemingly different intended relationship with reality, with portraits as a matter of course having a much stronger relationship with reality than genre painting, are of great value for more insight in education and childhood in that culture and that epoch.

We now turn to a specific topic in seventeenth-century Dutch painting, namely the portraits of dead children, as an example of the value of paintings for the history of childhood and education. *Ancien régime* demography dominated Dutch educational space too. It is true that the Dutch Republic was one of the richest countries in the world. And yet, even in such a flourishing economy, about 50% of the children never reached adulthood, with the great majority of that 50% dying very young.²⁹ And this was the reality for both the rich and the poor, although even more so for the poor. With this harsh reality in mind, parents – both the rich and the poor – often panicked when young children became sick. And parents showed deep grief when their children died, as we know from personal documents, for example

²⁶Frijhoff and Spies, 1650, 496, 637 [note 60]; J. De Vries and A. van der Woude, *Nederland 1500–1815. De eerste ronde van moderne economische groei* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1995), 147, 701; J. Loughman, and J. M. Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth Century Dutch Houses* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000); J. M. Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft. A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); J. M. Montias, *Art and Auction in 17th Century Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002); De Jongh and Luijten, *Mirror*.

²⁷Also the Stadhouder's court, the cities, the boards of orphanages, and the Protestant churches commissioned painters to work for them. But those customers together were much less important than the broad bourgeoisie, see Frijhoff and Spies, 1650, 497, 504–05.

²⁸J. I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 48, 98, 548, 873; De Vries and Van der Woude, *Nederland 1500–1815*, 404; Luijten et al., *Dawn of the Golden Age*; A.M. van der Woude, "De schilderijenproductie in Holland tijdens de Republiek," in *Aards geluk. De Nederlandse en hun spullen van 1550 tot 1850*, ed. A. Schuurman, J. de Vries and A. van der Woude (Amsterdam: Balans, 1997), 223–58, p. 239, estimates the production of paintings during the Republic at between five and ten million pieces.

²⁹E. Becchi, "Humanisme et Renaissance," in *Histoire de l'enfance*, Vol. 1: *De l'antiquité au XVIIe siècle*, ed. E. Becchi and D. Julia (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 160–99, p. 161; Ch. Klapisch-Zuber, "L'enfant, la mémoire et la mort," in Becchi and Julia, *Histoire de l'enfance*, Vol. 1, 200–30, pp. 208–17 on parental grief in early modern Europe. On the Dutch case, see De Vries and Van der Woude, *Nederland 1500–1815*, 97; A. Th. van Deursen, *Mensen van klein vermogen. Het "kopergeld" van de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1992); C. Vandenbroeke, F. van Poppel and A. M. van der Woude, "De zuigelingen- en kindersterfte in België en Nederland in seculair perspectief," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 94, no. 3 (1981): 461–91; A. M. van der Woude, "Variations in the Size and Structure of the Household in the United Provinces of The Netherlands in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Household and Family in Past Time*, ed. P. Laslett (London, 1974), 299–318.

written by the Huygens' fathers, Christiaan and Constantijn, while as pious Christians parents eventually accepted the harsh reality and were resigned to the will of God. But at the same time the parents' strong attachment to and affection for the beloved child was no less evident than their grief.³⁰ For the rest, their panic at their children becoming sick was right when we realise that they saw the fatal effects of regular epidemics of the plague, smallpox, typhoid and dysentery, to list only the most common of disasters that could hit their children, and which belonged to *Ancien régime* demography.

Apart from being an important issue in personal documents, care of young children, consciousness of the fatal effects of sickness and grief when their children died also formed an important topic in Dutch seventeenth-century painting. An important example comprises the tradition among well-to-do parents of having painted portraits of their children while they were still very young because of the known reality of their possible poor life expectancy. According to the art historian Bedaux, almost half of the children pictured in Dutch seventeenth-century child portraits were aged between 0 and 12 months, revealing both the affection of the parents and their realistic fears for the future of their children.³¹

Grief on the death of children together with affection for them seems to be the major force behind the genre of child funeral portraits, with some dozens of them from those produced in the seventeenth century still existing. The genre, which during the eighteenth century was almost non-existent, made a comeback at the end of the nineteenth century. Examples from the seventeenth century include paintings by Nicolaas Maes (1634–1693), Johannes Thopas (c.1620–c.1682) with *Girl from the Van Valkenburg Family on her Deathbed* from 1682, and Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613–1670). His *Young Boy on his Deathbed* from 1645 shows the child on a bed of straw, so that his soul would not attach itself to the bed (Figure 1).³²

³⁰Christiaan and Constantijn Huygens, *De jongelingsjaren* [edition by E. de Heer and A. Eyffinger, "De jongelingsjaren van de kinderen van Christiaan en Constantijn Huygens"], in *Huygens herdacht*, ed. A. Eyffinger (Den Haag, 1987), 75–165, pp. 79–80, 91, 96–101. Other personal documents expressing grief when children died include P. Gerbenzon, ed., *Het aantekeningenboek van Dirck Jansz.* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), 140, and J. Blaak, ed., *Hermanus Verbeeck. Memoriaal ofte mijn levensraijsinghe* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), 91–92, 159–60, 209. See R. Dekker, *Children, Memory and Autobiography in Holland: From the Golden Age to Romanticism* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Dekker, *Het verlangen*, 138–46; B. B. Roberts, *Through the Keyhole: Dutch Child-rearing Practices in the 17th and 18th century. Three Urban Elite Families* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), 213. Cf. Dekker, *Educational Ambitions*, 36–37, 40–41.

³¹J. B. Bedaux, "Introduction," in Bedaux and Ekkart, eds., *Pride and Joy*, 11–31, pp. 23, 32 n. 29.

³²See J. B. Bedaux, "Funeraire kinderportretten uit de 17de eeuw," in *Naar het lijk. Het Nederlandse doodsportret 1500-heden*, ed. B. C. Sliggers (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1998), 88–114. Johannes Thopas, *Girl from the Van Valkenburg Family on her Deathbed*, c.1682, oil on panel, 58 x 71.5 cm (Van Valkenburg Foundation); Bartolomeus Van der Helst, *Young Boy on his Deathbed*, 1645, oil on canvas, 63 x 90 cm (Gouda: Stedelijk Museum Het Catharina Gasthuis, on loan from the Instituut Collectie Nederland); see Bedaux and Ekkart, *Pride and Joy*, 292–93, 192–93. See L. F. Groenendijk and F. A. van Lieburg, *Voor edeler staat geschapen. Levens- en sterbedbeschrijvingen van gereformeerde kinderen en jeugdigen uit de 17e en 18e eeuw* (Leiden: Groen, 1991), 71 and frequently on the phenomenon of pious children having on their deathbeds exceptional knowledge of their religion and trust in God; Dekker, Groenendijk and Verberckmoes, "Proudly Raising Vulnerable Youngsters," 56–57.

Figure 1. Bartolomeus Van der Helst, *Young Boy on his Deathbed*, 1645, oil on canvas, 63 x 90 cm. Gouda, Stedelijk Museum Het Catharina Gasthuis, on loan from the Instituut Collectie Nederland. Reproduced by kind permission of Stedelijk Museum Gouda: photograph by Tom Haartsen.

Connected to this genre of child funeral portraits are family portraits that include children who were already deceased. That was a way of emphasising that those children continued to be part of the family. An example is the anonymous portrait from 1638 of the family of Jan Gerritsz Pan, a shipowner from Enkhuizen. The painting depicts the father, the mother and two living children, but also nine children, among them probably several twins or even triplets, in those times with very low survival chances, who all had died. With this painting, the parents ensured that their dead children too remained part of the family and that they could continue to look at themselves as the parents of all those children together (Figure 2).³³

³³ Anonymous, *Family Group, probably the Family of Jan Gerritsz Pan*, 1638, panel, 87 x 178 cm (Collection Stichting Portret van Enkhuizen/Thade van Doesburgh), see Bedaux and Ekkart, *Pride and Joy*, 162–63. Cf. Sliggers, *Naar het lijk*. Marie-Christine Autin Graz, *Children in Painting*, 106, is of the opinion that all children on the panel are still alive and that the nine babies would die a few weeks after the picture was painted. The very detailed analysis of Bedaux and Ekkart, however, is more convincing and fits the cultural framework of depicting the family including the dead ones.

Figure 2. Anonymous, *Family Group, probably the Family of Jan Gerritsz Pan*, 1638, panel, 87 x 178 cm. Collection Stichting Portret van Enkhuizen / Thade van Doesburgh; reproduced by kind permission.

This painting is no exception. In many family portraits, dead children are included. Often, they floated through the air like angels.³⁴ This seemingly typically Roman Catholic iconography was used for many Calvinistic family portraits too. Also those parents showed that they believed in a God who admitted those children to heaven. And indeed, the Dutch Calvinistic position on predestination made an exception for the very young, an exception laid down in the rules of the Dordrecht Synod (1618–1619), a synod during which a religious struggle within the Dutch Calvinistic Church took place, which ended with victory for the Orthodox Contra-Remonstrant adherents of the theologian Gomaris and defeat of the more liberal Remonstrant adherents of the theologian Arminius. It is true that orthodox Calvinists were often reproached for a very harsh and cruel image of God, a God who damned even infants forever. But it can be read in the articles of the Dordrecht Synod that Calvinistic parents who believed in God should not have doubts about the fact that their God should choose their infants when taken away from this life and should guarantee them eternity.³⁵ This made it possible for them to let their dead children be depicted in family portraits, sometimes even as angels. An example is the anonymous portrait of the quadruplets of Jacobus Pietersz. Costerus and Cornelia Jans Coenraadsdochter, called the Dordrecht quadruplets from 1621. Immediately

³⁴Bedaux, “Funeraire kinderportretten,” 92–99.

³⁵The original text is as follows: “de Godsalighe Ouders niet [moeten] twijffelen aende Verkiesinghe ende salichheyt harer kinderen, welcke God in hare kintsheyt uyt dit leven wech neemt,” quoted by Bedaux, “Introduction,” 25. Cf. Bedaux, “Funeraire kinderportretten,” 92–99.

Figure 3. Anonymous, *The Children of Jacobus Pietersz. Costerus and Cornelia Jans Coenraadsdochter* (“*The Dordrecht Quadruplets*”), 1621, panel, 75 x 104 cm. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, extended loan from the Noordbrabants Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch; reproduced by kind permission of Dordrechts Museum.

after their birth, they were depicted with one of them, Elisabeth, having already passed away (Figure 3).³⁶

5. Conclusion: images as representations of aspects of educational and childhood realities

The images presented above, namely family and children's portraits and genre paintings on the death of children, can be considered as representations of realities of childhood and education in the past. Family and children's portraits present aspects of real people and thus are representations of those people: parents and children both still living and already dead. Genre paintings, for example inspired by the classic myth of Ganymede, do not present real people. They give insight into

³⁶Anonymous, *The Children of Jacobus Pietersz. Costerus and Cornelia Jans Coenraadsdochter* (“*The Dordrecht Quadruplets*”), 1621, panel, 75 x 104 cm (Dordrecht: Dordrechts Museum, on extended loan from the Noordbrabants Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch), Bedaux and Ekkart, *Pride and Joy*, 130–32. Other examples are Jan Mijntens (c.1614–1670), Jan Mijntens, *Willem van den Kerckhoven and His Family*, 1652/1655, canvas, 134 x 182 cm (The Hague: Haags Historisch Museum), Bedaux and Ekkart, *Pride and Joy*, 221–23, with no less than five children depicted as angels; and Nicolaes Maes (1634–1693), *Two Angels Bearing a Dead Infant up to Heaven*, c.1675, canvas, 64 x 52 cm (The Hague: Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder art dealers), Bedaux and Ekkart, *Pride and Joy*, 276–78, and Nicolaes Maes, *George de Vicq as Ganymede*, 1681, canvas, 97 x 82 cm (Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums), Bedaux and Ekkart, *Pride and Joy* 289–91. On the Greek myth of Ganymede, see Bedaux, “Funeraire kinderportretten,” 102–05.

how and why people in the past continued to remember their already dead children as members of their family. Both categories of representations emphasised or referred to aspects of realities and thus both are not mirroring realities. The painting by Nicolaes Maes, *George de Vicq as Ganymede*, is a complex in-between category. While it is, as was the case with much of genre painting, full of symbolic layers, and in this case refers to antique mythology, it is also about real people, namely George de Vicq depicted as Ganymede, and thus also represents real people.

The paintings analysed, which present real people without an abundance of symbolic layers, namely the *Young Boy on his Deathbed* by Bartholomeus van der Helst, the anonymous Enkhuizen *Family Group*, probably the *Family of Jan Gerritsz Pan* with nine dead children, and the anonymous *The Children of Jacobus Pietersz. Costerus and Cornelia Jans Coenraadsdochter* (“*The Dordrecht Quadruplets*”), seem to bring us closer to aspects of reality. Yet those paintings also present only certain aspects of reality (with, in the case of the Enkhuizen family group, even the most essential aspect, namely that the nine children are dead, contested in the divergent interpretations by Bedaux and by Autin Graz as we have seen). The idea of representation can be of methodological value – and this value can be strengthened further by making use of the power of historical sensation that can bring the researcher face to face with the historical child or parent or educator – when using images as sources for the history of education and childhood. When looked at in that way, images can become strong sources that give insight into important aspects of realities of education and childhood in the past.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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