

'draperies, green fields, shady trees, rivers, bridges and what they call landscapes (*a que chaman paisagens*)'. But he is quick to add that he does not altogether condemn Flemish art for attempting these things, but only because they want to excel in too many fields, every one of which is sufficiently hard to demand a lifetime of study.³⁷

The future course of Flemish painting under the influence of Renaissance prejudices is almost anticipated in this remark. The school, after all, did really split up into those who wanted to vie with the Italians in figure painting³⁸ and those who preferred to cultivate and exploit their traditional specialities rather than excel in too many fields.

The Renaissance view, in short, that the Flemings had a field of their own, if only in the *parenga* of art, was generally accepted, not only in the South but among the Northerners themselves. The view is neatly expressed in the verses which Lampsonius affixed to the portrait of a landscape 'specialist', Jan van Amstel.³⁹

Propria Belgarum laus est bene pingere rura;
Ausoniorum, homines pingere, sive deos
Nec mirum, In capite Ausonius, sed Belga cerebrum
Non temere in gnava fertur habere manu
Maluit ergo manus Jani bene pingere rura
Quam caput, aut homines aut male scire deos. . . .

The implication that Northerners are famous for their good landscape painting because they have their brains in their hands, while Italians, who have them in their heads, paint mythologies and histories shows that Lampsonius accepts the academic prejudice. Yet, he adds, it is better to paint landscapes well than to bungle figures, and Jan van Amstel was right to stick to his last.

There is more in these verses than mere resignation to an inferior position. The idea that each nation and each school of art should do what it can do best is symptomatic of a complete change in the notion of art. The division of labour in the workshop of late Gothic times had served the practical aim of speeding up the work on a given commission. Now the division of labour no longer applies to a concrete painting but to Art as such. It is to Art as an abstract idea that each nation should make its contribution where it is best equipped to do so.

For centuries to come the position of Northern artists in the Italian world of art was determined by general acceptance of this view. From the Flemings whom Titian kept in his workshop to paint landscape backgrounds to Bril, Elsheimer, Claude and even Philip Hackert, the Northern artist in Italy could make a living if he accepted the role of the specialist into which he had been cast by Northern tradition and Southern theory.⁴⁰

There is evidence that this apparent national superiority of the *oltramontani* in a certain branch of art puzzled their Italian colleagues at a relatively early date.