

A match not made in heaven: artist anecdotes and the 'Dialogues of the Dead'

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Divine Encounters

Around 1810 Franz Pforr – a founding member of the 'Brotherhood of St Luke', better known as the 'Nazarenes' – designed one of the most iconic compositions of German Romanticism. His original drawing is lost, but the design has come down to us in the form of an etching, commissioned by the Frankfurt Art Society and executed by Carl Hoff.¹ The scene depicted is an allegorical one: *Dürer and Raphael kneeling in front of the throne of Art*.² The composition clearly follows familiar patterns of Christian iconography, namely an adoration. In the center, we see the personification of 'Art', sitting on a grand and classically-styled throne. At her feet kneel the two Renaissance greats, Albrecht Dürer and Raphael, both glancing upwards, clasping their hands in adoration. In the background we see the skylines of two cities: Nuremberg and Rome, the respective hometowns of these artists. The etching bears the explanatory title 'Allegorical Composition. Amalgamation of the Old-Germanic and Old-Italian'. The art theoretical message is clear: a new artistic ideal can only be achieved by drawing on the traditions both North and South of the Alps.³

The symbolic significance of this allegorical encounter of Dürer and Raphael was already elaborated in Wilhelm Wackenroder's highly influential *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (Outpourings of an art-loving

An earlier version of this article has been published in German as 'Einleitung' in Georg Wolfgang Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung oder Gespräche In dem Reiche derer Todten, zwischen denen beeden Welt=bekannten Künstlern Albrecht Dürer und Raphael de Urbino* (FONTES 81), Heidelberg: Universitätsbibliothek, 2014: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-artdok-27522

¹ Cf. Stefan Matter and Maria-Christina Boerner, *... kann ich vielleicht nur dichtend mahlen? Franz Pforrs Fragment eines Künstlerromans und das Verhältnis von Poesie und Malerei bei den Nazarenern*, Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 2007, 186-188. See also: Elisabeth Schröter, 'Raffael-Kult und Raffael-Forschung. Johann David Passavant und seine Raffael-Monographie im Kontext der Kunst und Kunstgeschichte seiner Zeit', *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 26, 1990, 341, who assumes that Johann David Passavant, then director of the Frankfurt Art Academy, was the driving force behind the commission.

² On the Romantic tradition see comprehensively: Michael Thimann, *Friedrich Overbeck und die Bildkonzepte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2014, 156-161.

³ The full title of the etching reads: *Eine allegorische Composition, wodurch der Künstler andeuten wollte, was er für die Aufgabe der neueren Kunst hielt, nämlich: Verschmelzung des Altdeutschen und Altitaliänischen. Albrecht Dürer und Raphael knieen vor dem Throne der Kunst, welche ihre Namen und Verdienste für eine kommende Zeit aufzeichnet; im Hintergrund Nürnberg und Rom* (quoted after Schröter, 'Raffael-Kult', 341).

friar) of 1797. In this collection of essays, the eponymous young monk experiences a 'delightful vision' while asleep. He dreams he 'had gone with a torch out of the room [...] in which I was sleeping', and made its way 'toward the art gallery' of the castle. The masterpieces were visited by the ghosts of their makers, and the monk thus witnessed 'the venerable masters in living form and in their old-fashioned dress'. Two artists stood 'part from all the others, *Raphael* and *Albrecht Dürer* were standing hand in hand in the flesh before my eyes'.⁴ A bond of friendship seems to unite the artists, indicating once more that their artistic goals and ambitions were equally in tune.

Once awoken from his dream, the young friar is keen to read up on the historic background of his night-time revelation. Opening his copy of Vasari's *Vite*, he is predictably elated to find the accuracy of his dream confirmed by this source and reads how 'these two magnificent artists had also really been friends during their lifetimes through their works', without knowing each other personally.⁵ Wackenroder here refers to Vasari's famous anecdote about an exchange of letters (and drawings) between the artists. Wackenroder (and Pforr) might have also known the now-famous drawing of two male nudes, now in Vienna, that Raphael sent to Dürer in order to (as Dürer himself put it) 'guide his hand'.⁶ The young friar's dream thus might be a figment of his imagination, but could claim accuracy at least to a certain degree.

The encounter of Dürer and Raphael (though it never happened during their lifetime) is thus imagined in the heavenly realm – an appropriate setting for the two artists who were both considered aesthetic and ethical role models for the Nazarenes' aim of an artistic renewal rooted in the spirit of Christianity (Raphael) and Nationalism (Dürer) - two pathways that needed to be joined in order to carve a path to artistic perfection. Johann David Passavant, the Director of the Städel Art Institute in Frankfurt thus wrote (in his seminal monograph on Raphael of 1839) of both artists being 'likeminded' individuals', whose lives and talents correspond in many respects'. Both shared 'a similar richness of imagination, [...] and] universal talents in different genres of art'.⁷

The art theoretical importance of this anecdote for German Romanticism has been discussed eloquently and extensively. Less attention, however, has been paid to its 'precursors', dating to what is probably the most understudied period of German art literature: the early eighteenth-century, a period eclipsed by the towering figures of Joachim von Sandrart and Johann Joachim Winckelmann on either side.⁸

⁴ Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Confessions and Fantasies*, ed. and trad. Mary Hurst Schubert, University Park: Penn. State Univ. Press, 1971, 116.

⁵ Wackenroder, *Confessions and Fantasies*, 117.

⁶ Cf. Johann David Passavant, *Rafael von Urbino und sein Vater Giovanni Santi*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1839, 222.

⁷ Passavant, *Rafael von Urbino*, 220.

⁸ For a comprehensive account on the popularity of Dürer and Raphael in German Romanticism, see Michael Thimann and Christine Hübner, eds, *Sterbliche Götter. Raffael und*

The earliest example for the anecdotal 'heavenly encounter' of Dürer and Raphael dates back at least to 1738 when the Nuremberg artist and author Georg Wolfgang Knorr – one the most successful engravers of his time – published a short booklet with the title *Historische Künstler=Belustigung* (Historic artist-entertainment).⁹ Knorr decided to pen a 'dialogue of the dead', perhaps the most popular literary genre of its day, staging a meeting of Dürer and Raphael in heaven, where both artists recognize and entertain each other (and the reader) with anecdotes from their lives.

While the biographical content of Knorr's dialogue is in many respects conventional, with his writing certainly no literary highlight either, the *Künstler=Belustigung*'s significance does not exhaust itself as a predecessor for one of the key motifs of Romantic art discourse. Knorr's work can serve as a case study for strategies of dissemination of art historical knowledge amongst the new, significantly enlarged reading public of Enlightenment Europe, and shed light on the literary strategies employed for doing so. It also allows us to gain fresh insight into how artist anecdotes became a fertile ground for experiments with different literary forms and genres of art writing.

Knorr's pamphlet can be regarded as an important attempt to *vulgarize* art historical knowledge, and to disseminate biographical knowledge about the lives of the most important artists to a wide reading public. In this respect, the publication is a typical product of the early Enlightenment and represents an attempt to tap into a growing market for accessible yet informative publications by drawing on the rich well of artist anecdotes that were readily available in the works by Vasari and Sandrart.¹⁰

As such, the *Künstler=Belustigung* helps us to think about art historiography as a *literary* genre, and examine its writing style and readership. Remarkably, Knorr's book appears to be the only attempt to present art historical themes in one of the most popular and well-received genres of its day, namely the dialogue of the dead. By drawing upon the established historical anecdote of Dürer's and Raphael's (written) exchanges during their life, and reinventing this motif as an encounter

Dürer in der Kunst der deutschen Romantik, exh. cat., Kunstsammlung der Universität Göttingen, Göttingen, 19 April 2015–19 July 2015, Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2015.

⁹ Georg Wolfgang Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, Nuremberg: self published, 1739. Knorr's (1705-1761) fame is mainly founded on his illustrations for works of natural history, including work for some of the most popular eighteenth-century book publications, such as Johann Jacob Scheuchzer's *Physica Sacra*. Knorr also produced a series of very ambitious, monumental tomes with natural historical illustrations – most of them only published posthumously. Multi-volume works such as *Vergnügen des Augen und des Gemüths* (1757-1772), *Thesaurus Rei Herbariae Hortensisque Universalis* (1770) and *Sammlung von Merckwürdigkeiten der Natur und Alterthümern des Erdbodens* (1755-1771), were crucially informed by Knorr's own substantial collection of specimens of natural history. The many translations of his works, into Dutch and French among others, are testimony to Knorr's success.

¹⁰ On the 'vulgarization' of science in the 18th-century: Andreas Gipper, *Wunderbare Wissenschaft. Literarische Strategien naturwissenschaftlicher Vulgarisierung in Frankreich*, München: Fink, 1998.

between two men in heaven, Knorr sought to animate the traditional genre of artist *vite* by casting it in a novel and hugely popular literary form. The book on Dürer and Raphael was meant to be the beginning of an extensive series of publications, with many sequels on other artists to follow. Yet, none of the 'following volumes' announced in the booklet's introduction ever saw the light of day. It would seem that Knorr's publishing experiment, his attempt to popularize art history, was not overly successful. Nonetheless, the project affords fresh insight into the sociocultural place of art historiography in the reading public of Enlightenment Europe.

Parallel Lives

The narrative of Knorr's *Künstler=Belustigung* is summarised quickly: once upon a time in heaven, Raphael spotted the recently deceased Albrecht Dürer. Since Dürer had once sent his portrait likeness to Raphael, the latter recognizes him. Raphael thus approaches his esteemed peer and asks him to relate his life story. There is little effort expended on creating a convincing setting; out of the blue Raphael asks Dürer: 'since we have this good occasion, please tell me about your birth, life, and other occurrences in the world of the living'.¹¹ Dürer happily obliges – and once he finishes narrating his life story, he promptly asks Raphael to do the same. The report of the two artist's *vite* is framed by a short introduction¹² and a final connoisseurial evaluation of both artist's achievements.¹³

Knorr's dialogue was based on the material provided in the canonical early modern collections of artists' lives, with Giorgio Vasari's *Vite* and Joachim von Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie* being the two most important examples. Both authors provided an abundance of material for paralleling the lives of the two giants of Renaissance art, from cradle to grave: both Raphael and Dürer were, for example, born on Good Friday, and the death of each was caused by the deeds of a woman (though in very different ways). As already mentioned, there is also historical evidence of a direct personal interaction between the men: Dürer had sent a drawing to Raphael, initiating a conversation between the artistic ideals of North and South.¹⁴

Knorr's familiarity with Vasari's *Vite* is clear; he quotes several anecdotes that can only be found in this book, for example an anecdote from Michelangelo's

¹¹ 'Aber saget mir bey dieser Gelegenheit, wie es mit eurer Geburt, Leben und andern Begebenheiten in dem Reiche der Lebendigen beschaffen gewesen' (Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 13).

¹² Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 3-12.

¹³ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 30-32.

¹⁴ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, vol. IV trad. Gaston du C. De Vere, London: Philipp Lee Warner, 1913, 131. Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* [1675–1680], ed. and annotated Thomas Kirchner et al., 2008–2012, II.3, 224 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-440>). See Christopher S. Wood, 'Eine Nachricht von Raffael', in Friedrich Teja Bach and Wolfram Pichler, eds, *Öffnungen. Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Zeichnung*, München: Fink, 2009, 109-137.

childhood, relating that his wet nurse was the daughter of a mason. His main source, however, is undoubtedly Joachim von Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie*.¹⁵ This is not restricted to the artist biographies themselves, but also applies to the preface in which Knorr outlines several art theoretical themes. Knorr writes, for example, about the high esteem for art and artists in antiquity, and illustrates this with anecdotes on Nicodemus, King of Pythia, who 'spent almost all his wealth for purchasing an artistically-sculpted Venus that was the work of Praxiteles', and of Marcus Scaurus, 'who during a noteworthy celebration presented the Roman magistrate with 3000 sculptures cast from metal'.¹⁶ Knorr more or less lifted whole passages directly from Sandrart. This practice, bordering on plagiarism, can be detected in numerous passages, such as the report on Dürer's journey to Venice (and his lawsuit against Marcantonio Raimondi's copies of his *Passion of Christ*)¹⁷; the anecdote on Dürer's motivation for his journey to the Netherlands, sparked by his anger about his wife¹⁸; remarks on the reception of Masaccio by the masters of the High Renaissance¹⁹; Raphael's decoration of the *Stanze*²⁰; the rise of Rome as the centre of Italian art, or the reports on Raphael's death and his encounter with the Bolognese painter Francia.²¹

In short, Knorr depended on Sandrart in almost every aspect of the biographies of his protagonists. This is probably not very surprising. The early eighteenth century saw a considerable rise in interest in the lives of artists, and the emergence of the new genre of monographs of individual artists – but this did not go hand in hand with an increase in biographical research. Only ten years prior to Knorr's *Künstler=Belustigung*, the first ever biography of Albrecht Dürer had been published by the theologian Heinrich Conrad Arend [fig. 1].²² His work is in fact the first printed single artist monograph on any German artist – yet the text is, once

¹⁵ Heinz Lüdecke and Susanne Heiland, *Dürer und die Nachwelt. Urkunden, Briefe, Dichtungen und wissenschaftliche Betrachtungen aus vier Jahrhunderten*, Berlin (East): Rütten & Loening, 1955, 322.

¹⁶ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 5. Cf. Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, II, Vorrede, 3 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-201>); Book 1 (antike Künstler), 48 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-250>).

¹⁷ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 18; Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, II, Buch 3, 223 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-439>).

¹⁸ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 20; Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, II, Buch 3, 225 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-442>).

¹⁹ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 24; Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, II, Buch 2, 93 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-303>).

²⁰ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 25; Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, II, Buch 2, 93 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-303>).

²¹ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 26-7; Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, II, Buch 2, 79 (<http://ta.sandrart.net/-text-287>).

²² Heinrich Conrad Arend, *Das Gedächtniß der Ehren eines der vollkommensten Künstler einer und aller nachfolgenden Zeiten*, Goßlar: Joh. Chr. König, 1728. See Anja Grebe, *Dürer. Geschichte seines Ruhms*, Petersberg: Imhof, 2013, 154-157

again, not much more than a compilation of (and commentary upon) the *vite* by Sandrart, Carel van Mander, Vasari and others.²³



Figure 1 Jakob Wilhelm Heckenauser, Frontispice to Heinrich Conrad Arend, *Das Gedechnis der Ehren...*, Goßlar 1728.

Knorr apparently had little interest in rectifying this: innovation and departure from a well-trodden path was not his principal aim. He opted, as the little *florilegium* of themes listed above demonstrates, for relating an array of anecdotes, some pertaining directly to the artist's biography, others focusing on more general historical facts. What they all have in common is that they drew on anecdotal episodes, for entertainment and education. Throughout, Knorr clearly is primarily interested in keeping a light tone and to write an agreeable and appealing dialogue for the non-specialist.

This also holds weight for the portrait likenesses of both protagonists that (as is typical for the genre) form the frontispiece of the book and are intended to give a physiognomic summary of their life and character. The artists are clearly defined as opposites: Raphael is youthful and aristocratic, Dürer is a stern, bearded, elderly man. Once again, Knorr's choices are unsurprising – the author simply based his composition on the two most widely available portrait prints of the artists, at the

²³ 'Nicht mit neuen Quellen, aber dafür mit einem umfangreichen Anmerkungsapparat konnte [Arends Buch] aufwarten' (Grebe, *Dürer*, 154).

time thought to originate from self-portraits [fig. 2].²⁴ In particular in the case of Dürer – one of the most frequently portrayed artists²⁵ – Knorr referenced a well-established physiognomic model: the chosen image of a grim, bearded, and long-haired, truly Germanic artist had been firmly established since the 16th century.²⁶



Figure 2 Frontispice to Knorr, *Historische Künstler-Belustigung*.

Popularising art theory

This attempt to write in a lighter register also extends to the introductory parts of the text, where Knorr presents some more systematic, theoretical questions. Centre of attention is the old question of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*: whether antiquity is an unsurpassable model – or if modernity can claim to have its own, original merits. Knorr is an unequivocal defender of the moderns. The arguments presented are within the well-rehearsed canon of art literature: for example that we know less about the art of the ancients than we might think we do – and thus should not be fooled to think ourselves in a position to judge the merits of ancient art adequately. The almost complete lack of knowledge of actual antique paintings is of

²⁴ The critics were not very impressed by Knorr's portraits and judged (as Knorr wrote with indignation) that 'meine beygefügte Portraite wären so abscheulich, daß sie nicht ungestalter seyn könnten, wenn ein Bauer ihre Köpfe aus Holz geschnitzt hätte, daß sie seinen Kindern zum Puppenspiele dienen sollten' (quoted after Eva Bettina Krems, *Der Fleck auf der Venus. 500 Künstleranekdoten von Apelles bis Picasso*, München: C.H. Beck, 2003, 148).

²⁵ Joseph Heller counts over 100 printed portraits of the artist prior to 1827, cf. Matthias Mende, ed., *Wirkung und Nachleben Dürers*, Nürnberg: Stadtgeschichtliche Museen, 1976, 125.

²⁶ Mende, *Wirkung und Nachleben*, 132.

course the prime example here.²⁷ Most prominently – and perhaps unsurprisingly, considering Knorr's profession – he argues at length for the art of engraving being a genuinely new and original innovation of modernity, unknown to the ancients; again, a familiar argument that features prominently in all main authors of the *Querelle*, from Charles Perrault to Roger de Piles.

The aim clearly is not to present anything original, but to rehearse well-known tropes and arguments. Anecdotes are, once more, the preferred medium to convey the message in a light-hearted manner. Knorr recounts, for example, the story of Michelangelo who buried one of his own sculptures, hoping that some art lovers digging for antiquities would mistake it for an antique statue – which the treasure hunters obligingly did, thus proving the equality between the works of modern and ancient times.²⁸

Knorr's argument is mainly developed against the background of the writings of another author who is, perhaps surprisingly, not an authority on art. His main opponent is the Göttingen law professor Ludwig Martin Kahle, who is quoted in the text as the author of the *Philosophical Reflections on Painting* – the title of an essay he had published in the popular journal *Abriss von dem neuesten Zustande der Gelehrsamkeit*.²⁹ Kahle was indeed a staunch advocate of the superiority of the ancients who claimed that 'we would have reason to be embarrassed' when attempting to compare modern and ancient art. His only concession in this case is that 'nobody has ever achieved something analogous to the ancients other than Raphael, immortalised in the memories of all who are learned in the arts'.³⁰

The text by Kahle might seem an odd choice – though it should remind us that the modern 'canon' of art literature does not always reflect accurately what was consumed by the historic reading public. This is especially true when it concerns 'popular' writings by non-art historians who wrote for non-specialist journals. Knorr's book was similarly addressed at a popular audience, outside of the artistic discourse. His choice of genre suggests that he aimed to address educated readers who follow current debates, and vernacular writings – the same readers who might reach for a journal like the *Abriss* where Kahle's essay appeared. The author's mission clearly is to 'vulgarize' art theoretical knowledge, and to put his writings in dialogue with publications that are mainly read outside of the art world – and not with the tomes of Vasari et al., none of which is quoted in Knorr's text.

Knorr was no zealot when it came to defending the moderns; he happily acknowledged the superiority of antiquity when it came to genres such as sculpture. The reason for this, however, according to Knorr, is not to be found in some

²⁷ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 9.

²⁸ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 7. Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences*, Paris: Coignard, 1692, 21-23.

²⁹ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 4 and 10. Ludwig Martin Kahle, 'Philosophische Gedanken von der Mahlerkunst', *Abriss von dem neuesten Zustande der Gelehrsamkeit* 1, 1737/39, 49-61.

³⁰ While opposing Kahle's position completely, Knorr nevertheless mines his text for historic examples and arguments, e.g. the anecdote on the forger Sigonius, cf. Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 6.

engrained predisposition and natural superiority of the Greeks and Romans, but simply in fortunate socio-economic conditions. In antiquity, Knorr argues, there were simply many more patrons and collectors of sculpture who were consequently willing to pay high prices for their favourite art – circumstances that made the profession of the sculptor exceedingly attractive, thus attracting the best talent.³¹

Knorr seems first and foremost a pragmatist who refrains from any dogmatic aesthetic convictions. The lack of great modern achievements in the field of sculpture is nothing he deplores excessively. Instead he emphasises that the history of art is simply subject to an ever-evolving public taste. The ideal style of antique sculpture thus could never be eternally satisfactory to the public, who would necessarily become bored by the eternal sameness of such an ideal. The human mind requires variety; any style becomes 'disgusting if you always have more of the same'. Art becomes 'pleasant' through 'change and plurality of manners'.³²

Though keen on defending the moderns (and championing the art of engraving in particular), Knorr does not pursue a distinct aesthetic agenda. This becomes apparent especially in the 'remarks by a curious amateur' that conclude Knorr's booklet.³³ Here, Knorr compares the merits of both Dürer and Raphael. Once again, he follows closely what other writers have stated – in this case, the opinion of 'certain Frenchmen'; Roger de Piles seems to have been Knorr's main source.³⁴ Following the latter's opinions, Knorr seems to concede more praise to Raphael than to Dürer, rehearsing once more the well-known argument that Dürer, had he been born Italian, 'would have been just as able' as the superior Raphael.³⁵ This verdict is remarkable. Local allegiances – both Knorr and Dürer were from Nuremberg – would have suggested that Knorr launch a patriotic defence of and apologia for the art of Dürer. Instead, Knorr takes a measured and downright historicist approach, and characterises Dürer's work as first and foremost a product of its time. The aim of this 'connoisseurial' appendix to the dialogue seems simply to give the reader some tools and terms to draw upon in a polite conversation, and to familiarise them with widely established, mainstream opinions.

Knorr's heavenly union of Dürer and Raphael is evidently missing the emphatic underpinnings that were going to make similar anecdotes a key theme in German Romanticism. The parallelisation of these artists does not serve as a metaphor for a divinely inspired artistic ideal, or a call for artistic rebirth, but is used in a very matter-of-fact way. For Knorr, there seems to be very little at stake when staging the encounter of the two great masters of the past. The chosen format of the anecdotal exchange between both artists seems to serve no other purpose than to provide an entertaining framework for communicating knowledge about their lives.

³¹ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 4.

³² Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 10.

³³ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 30-32.

³⁴ Roger de Piles, *Cours de Peinture par Principes avec une Balance des Peintre*, Paris: Jacques Estienne, 1708.

³⁵ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 30.

In this respect, Knorr's text is very different to all later adaptations of the anecdote. Already in 1791, a short text on the 'Apparent Similarities' of Dürer and Raphael was published by a little-known Nuremberg historian named Georg Ernst Waldau. Here, the parallelisation already acquires a heavy art-theoretical underpinning, and the author argues programmatically that the union of both artists can serve to inspire an artistic renewal – a new Renaissance.³⁶ In this context, the fact that both artists were born on Good Friday is not just a mere curiosity, but gains almost eschatological significance, making both artists predestined allies for the revival of a specifically *Christian* art. Texts like Waldau's are thus the more relevant predecessors for the Romantic Dürer- and Raphael-cult that led to the quasi-sacred staging of their heavenly encounter in the work of Wackenroder, Pforr, and many others.

The *Artist=Entertainment*, on the contrary, mentions the fact of their birth on a Good Friday only in passing, and without any specific emphasis.³⁷ For Knorr, such patterns of destiny held little sway. The biographical parallel discussed most intensively in his booklet is a more mundane fact, namely that the death of both artists was caused in one way or the other by the encounter with a woman. The relations with the opposite sex can almost be described as the narrative framework that appears time and again throughout the text. Early on, when narrating Dürer's engagement with his future wife, Knorr indicates that the marriage would lead to a bad end. Raphael's reply to this is a similar premonition, and he states that both men 'suffered the same fate' in this respect.³⁸ While Dürer's death was hastened by his anger and frustration about his unloving and greedy wife, Raphael's demise was brought about through 'debauchery' that led to a fatal 'fever'.³⁹ Clearly, this is not a parallel that is meant to tell us anything about the nature of their style and artistic principles, but a welcome opportunity to present the reader 'in an agreeable way'⁴⁰ with some good entertainment.

Dialogues of the Dead and early Enlightenment in Germany

Again, the *Künstler=Belustigung* remains polite, measured, and agreeable. Knorr's booklet never aims for the saucy frisson that was characteristic for many representatives of the genre, with authors delighting in staging unequal encounters, for example between Madame de Pompadour and the Virgin Mary (as did no other than King Frederick II of Prussia).⁴¹ On the contrary, the encounter between Raphael

³⁶ He argues that it 'ihres grossen Genies bedurfte, um die Finsternisse und die Barbarey zu zerstreuen, worein die schönen Künste verhüllt lagen'. Georg Ernst Waldau, 'Auffallende Aehnlichkeit zwischen zwey berühmten Mahlern, Raphael von Urbino und Albr. Dürer', *Neue Beyträge zur Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 2, 1791, 112.

³⁷ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 23.

³⁸ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 17.

³⁹ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 21 and 28.

⁴⁰ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 12.

⁴¹ Riccarda Suitner, 'Der Krieg der Biographen. Zu den ersten literarischen Darstellungen der Leben von Christian Thomasius und August Hermann Francke', in Karl Enekel and Claus

and Dürer is an entirely plausible pairing, given that the two artists were actually in touch during their lifetime. The crucial gist of the dialogue of the dead, namely the opportunity to bring into conversation individuals from vastly different epochs, cultures, or social spheres is thus not explored. Knorr's dialogue is a comparatively sober, factual piece that aims at conveying biographical information; there is little to be sensed of the polemical nature of the genre that was so characteristic for the writings of its antique inventor, Lucian, but also for the *dialogues* by modern writers such as Bernard de Fontenelle whose *Dialogues des Morts* (1683) were conceived as a piece of enlightened critique of historic and religious authorities.⁴²

All of this makes Knorr a typical representative of his time, and the 'new earnestness and didactic focus of the dialogues of the dead' in early-Enlightenment Germany.⁴³ From of 1700, the genre gained unprecedented popularity in the German-speaking countries, and a veritable flood of *dialogues*, published as broadsheets, periodicals, or as separate book publications was vying for the attention of an ever-increasing readership.⁴⁴

The most notable example for this publishing trend is David Fassmann's (1683-1744) monthly periodical *Gespräche im Reiche derer Todten*: between 1718-1739, Fassmann edited no less than 240 issues of this publication, each with an extremely high print-run of several thousand copies.⁴⁵ It is hard to overestimate the popularity and reach of these publications that addressed themselves – both in terms of price and level of erudition – to an 'averagely educated, middle-class audience'.⁴⁶ Fassmann's publications were devoted to communicating historical facts in an

Zittel, eds, *Die Vita als Vermittlerin von Wissenschaft und Werk. Form- und Funktionsanalytische Untersuchungen zu frühneuzeitlichen Biographien von Gelehrten, Wissenschaftlern, Schriftstellern und Künstlern*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013, 295-327; 298.

⁴² On Fontenelle's practice of staging anachronistic and often intentionally absurd dialogues: Gernot Krapinger, 'Totengespräch', in Gert Ueding, ed., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 10, Darmstadt: WBG, 2011, 1310).

⁴³ Krapinger, 'Totengespräch', 1311.

⁴⁴ John Rutledge, *The Dialogue of the Dead in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Frankfurt a.M. et al.: Peter Lang, 1974 (with a selective catalogue of German *Dialogues of the Dead*, 133-166).

Research on this genre remains slim, its historic popularity notwithstanding, cf. Krapinger, 'Totengespräch', 1310.

⁴⁵ Ralf Georg Bogner, *Der Autor im Nachruf. Formen und Funktionen der literarischen Memorialkultur von der Reformation bis zum Vormärz*, Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012, 207-208.

⁴⁶ Suitner, 'Der Krieg der Biographen', 298. Cf. Ulrich Schmid, 'Gespräche in dem Reiche derer Todten (1718-1739)', in Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, ed., *Deutsche Zeitschriften des 17. bis 20. Jahrhunderts*, Pullach bei München: Verlag Dokumentation, 1973, 49-59. Fassmann explicitly (and polemically) distances himself from the 'philosophical' erudition of professional academics: 'Da sitzt z.E. Ein grund=gelehrter Mann und schwitzet bißweilen ein halbes Jahr, nur damit er ein paar *Theses* mit Ruhm *defendiren* und behaupten könne. Die gantze *Disputation* ist zwey oder drey Bogen starck [...] Meine geringere Arbeit, nach Stande=Gebühr angesehener und geehrter Leser! Gestattet mit nicht, daß ich zwey biß drey Monathe, auch wohl ein halbes Jahr Zeit auf ein paar Bogen wende, sondern es müssen in sechs Monaten, bey nahe eben so viel Buch Papier von mir um Druck befördert werden' (David Fassmann, *Gespräche in dem Reiche derer Todten, Drei und dreyßigste Entrevue...*, Leipzig: Wolfgang Deer, 1721, s.p. (preface)).

entertaining way to a broad, popular audience. The *Dialogues of the Dead* had become an exemplary vehicle for the Enlightenment's ambition to vulgarise and popularise knowledge.

The success of Fassmann's take on the genre can be fully gauged only when taking into account the sheer number of copycat endeavours. The German book market in the middle of the 18th century was flooded by periodicals, such as Christoph Gottlob Richter's *Todtengespräche* (Dialogues of the Dead) and Moritz Flavius Trenck von Tonder's *Politische Gespräche im Reiche der Todten* (Political Dialogues in the Realm of the Dead). Already the title of the latter example might indicate that art and culture was not a subject that featured prominently in these publications. In the 18th century, biographies – as independent book publications – were almost exclusively reserved for the life histories of eminent individuals from the political field.⁴⁷ The first monograph on a German artist, Dürer, was published only, as mentioned above, several years later. In short, the biographical genre was dominated by political, historical, and religious subject matter, with little room given over to aesthetic reflection. Artists as protagonists of dialogues of the dead are virtually unknown: not a single one of Fassmann's 240 volumes features a practicing artist as its protagonist.

Even where the protagonist of a 'dialogue of the dead' is an artist, the *content* of the conversation is not necessarily art historical. A good example of this is Bernard de Fontenelle's dialogue between Raphael and Strato, a legendary Phoenician King from Tyros, who is chiefly known through Marcus Iunianus Iustinus' *Historiarum Philippicarum*. Here, Raphael is cast as representative for all craftsmen, thus as a (lower) social opposite to the prince. Instead of arguing for lofty artistic ideals, Raphael defends the 'common man's opinions and judgments', whom he characterises as 'more agreeable and useful' than the 'rather philosophical' gibberish of educated men.⁴⁸ The great Renaissance artist is thus by no means presented as an idealistic, reflective genius, but as a grounded, salt-of-the-earth craftsman whose artistic judgments are not rooted in philosophical erudition but rather common sense.

It is evident that Fontenelle's dialogue just quoted, even though it features an artist as its protagonist, has little interest in *art historical* facts. Indeed, art historical content seems conspicuously absent from this genre as a whole – there is hardly a single example for a 'dialogue of the dead' that revolves around art historical matters.

Exceptions prove the rule: Francois Fénelon's *Dialogues des morts* (1712) features two dialogues between artists – between Parrhasius and Poussin, and Leonardo da Vinci and Poussin. This book, however, is remarkably different to the popular dialogues published by Fassmann and others, both in terms of intended audience and sophistication: Fénelon's book was written for the French Dauphin, and was thus targeting a very different socio-economic readership than the popular

⁴⁷ Olaf Hähner, *Historische Biographik. Die Entwicklung einer geschichtswissenschaftlichen Darstellungsform von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1999.

⁴⁸ Bernard Bouvier de Fontenelle, 'Das V. Gespräch. Strato und Raphael von Urbino', in *Auserlesene Schriften*, ed. Johann Christoph Gottsched, Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1771.

broadsheets of this genre. While the French author also opts for the *Querelle* as the framing topic of his dialogues, his chief aim is evidently neither entertainment or art historical reflection. Rather it is to familiarise the young Prince with the most important works in his own collection.⁴⁹

Unlike their antique predecessors, most 18th-century *dialogues of the dead* in Germany were, as already highlighted, not conceived as satires, but as informative texts, though they also wanted to provide entertainment as well as moral and ideological orientation. The main focus of each of Fassmann's dialogues is the re-narration of the biographies of the respective interlocutors.⁵⁰ Knorr clearly follows his famous model in this respect, and he even imitates the former's style to a high degree. It is notable that neither Knorr's nor Fassmann's dialogues ever develop the quips and chit-chat that one would expect in an actual (or better, theatrical) dialogue.⁵¹ Instead, the protagonists of the dialogues hardly ever engage with the content of their interlocutor's speech, but present their life-stories in monologues that are only occasionally punctuated by comments by the other protagonist. Disagreement is virtually absent – only in one instance does Dürer act vaguely defensively and refers to his lack of resources in Germany.⁵² Real objections – a persistent feature, for example, in Fénelon's dialogue between Leonardo and Poussin – are never voiced. The effect of this is that Knorr's booklet reads almost more like a classical *vita* than a real dialogue. Furthermore, no attempt is made to link the biographies of both men in an actual, historical (and not just anecdotal) way, for example by allowing both men to discuss mutual acquaintances such as Marcantonio Raimondi. Again, these are characteristics shared with the successful 'didactic' dialogues by an author like Fassmann.

In the few instances where one of the protagonists interrupts the monologue of his interlocutor, it is in order to express assent to what had just been said. In most cases, these interjections serve primarily to highlight the parallels between the biographies of both men, with one of them stating that something very similar had happened to himself as well. In such cases, the main biographical narrative is picked up speedily where it was left. As Dürer once states after an interjection by Raphael: 'But let's not interrupt our *discours*'.⁵³

⁴⁹ Francois de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, *Gespräche der Todten alter und neuer Zeiten, zur Unterweisung eines Prinzen*, Frankfurt/Leipzig 1755, 216, 227.

⁵⁰ On the relation between biographies and dialogues of the dead see Suitner, 'Der Krieg der Biographen'.

⁵¹ On discursivity in Enlightenment dialogues: Thomas Fries, *Dialog der Aufklärung. Shaftesbury, Rousseau, Solger*, Tübingen/Basel: Niemeyer, 1993; Jörn Steigerwald, 'Galante Gespräche: Fontenelles Dialogues des morts', in Gabriele Ribémont-Vickermann and Dietmar Rieger, eds, *Dialog und Dialogizität im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003, 13–30.

⁵² Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 24. Dürer's modesty is overemphasised by Gabriele Rohowski, *Albrecht Dürer "Almanis pictor clarissime terris": zur Geschichte einer Künstlerlegende*, Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1994, 249.

⁵³ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 17.

Art literature and its audiences

In many respects, the most interesting aspect of Knorr's booklet is the sheer fact that he attempted to present art historical content in the form of the popular genre of the 'dialogue of the dead'. But Knorr's is a failed project. No further volume of his projected series was published; the single 'dialogue' that saw the light of day was apparently not widely read.⁵⁴ The reasons lie probably in part in the literary quality of the text, which was undoubtedly not terribly high – though not lesser than the highly successful volumes published by Fassmann had to offer either. On the contrary, Knorr's dialogue mimics the successful model so closely that one would expect it to find a similar readership.

A more convincing explanation for the lack of success of Knorr's *Dialogue* can be found when considering his future writing career. The dialogue between Dürer and Raphael of 1739 was Knorr's earliest venture into the realm of the printed word. In 1759, he published a comprehensive *General artist-history* [Allgemeine Künstler=Historie] – a collection of artists' lives. While the title might suggest a mere compilation from the writings of Vasari, Sandrart and others, the actual content goes far beyond this and draws heavily on Knorr's professional expertise and life-long research in the art and history of engraving. As the subtitle proclaims, the argument is based primarily on *reports of rare, old and new engravings* and demonstrates the author's extensive connoisseurial and academic expertise. The later volume is by no means an intellectual epiphany either: the lives of both Raphael and Dürer do not present substantially new material, compared to the *Belustigung*. What is different though is the scientific apparatus that accompanies the lives of the artists. Most importantly, Knorr compiled a pioneering catalogue raisonné of Albrecht Dürer's etchings: *Alberti Düreri Opera Omnia*, which was published as a supplement to the *General Artist-History*.⁵⁵ Here, the anecdotal form of art writing was replaced by the more traditional genre of a collection of *vite* and the more cutting-edge Enlightenment project of a scientific catalogue raisonné.

To some extent this gives further purchase to the oft-discussed professionalisation and academisation of art writing in the eighteenth century: from the anecdote to the catalogue raisonné. More importantly, however, it also allows

⁵⁴ Knorr's book is quoted in Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, vol. 2 E-Ion, 2nd ed., Leipzig: Weidmann, 1786, 498; Georg Andreas Will, *Nürnbergisches Gelehrtenlexikon oder Beschreibung aller Nürnbergischen Gelehrten...*, vol. 2, Nürnberg: self published, 1756, 300.

⁵⁵ Georg Wolfgang Knorr, *Allgemeine Künstler-Historie oder berühmter Künstler Leben, Werke und Verrichtungen mit vielen Nachrichten von raren, alten und neuen Kupferstichen, mit einem Aufsatz: Alb. Düreri Opera omnia nach der Silberradischen Sammlung*, Nürnberg 1759, 31-94. The catalogue is mainly based on the extensive collection of Johann Gustav Silberrad, cf. Gudrun Carlov, *Museen und Sammler des 19. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969, 49. See also Rainer Schoch, Matthias Mende and Anna Scherbaum, *Albrecht Dürer. Das druckgraphische Werk*, Vol. 1, München u.a.: Prestel, 2001, 20. On the history of the catalogue raisonné as a genre: Anja Grebe, 'Albrecht Dürers "Kunstabücher"'. *Ordnungssysteme frühneuzeitlicher Graphiksammlungen und die Anfänge des Catalogue raisonné*, *Marburger Jahrbuch* 39, 2012, 49-51.

one to speculate about the audiences of art writing in Enlightenment Germany. The target audience of Knorr's *General Artist-History* are those 'who are interested in Dürer's oeuvre of etchings and woodcuts, and collect them' – i.e. the art collector, not the wider reading public.⁵⁶ This is a notable shift, and it allows us to reflect afresh on the lack of success of the *Künstler=Belustigung*. Maybe the chosen, popular genre was simply not a good fit with those readers who actually had an interest in the subject matter. The genre of the 'dialogue of the dead', in its popular form as pioneered by Fassmann, was addressed to a lesser educated middleclass readership. Dialogues of the dead with art historical content, however, were only produced by authors such as Fénelon, whose audience – the French Dauphin primarily – was of a very different social standing. It is thus worth contemplating whether Knorr, by opting for the anecdotal genre of the dialogue of the dead, aimed too low, and addressed an audience that simply had less interest in art historical knowledge. The target audience of the 'amateur' who has works by the artists in question in his collection was not reached by this popular genre. For such collectors, the catalogue raisonné which Knorr published in later years, was undoubtedly of better use than the dialogue of the dead where detailed information on singular works was considered 'more laborious than pleasant'.⁵⁷

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⁵⁶ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 25.

⁵⁷ Knorr, *Historische Künstler=Belustigung*, 18.