

PROVOCATIONS

Allegory as Historical Method, or the Similarities between Amsterdam and Albania

Reading Simon Gikandi's *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*

Abstract: This essay critically reads Simon Gikandi's Slavery and the Culture of Taste (2011) and poses questions about Gikandi's method of reading allegorically. By closely analyzing his discussion of the painting Two Africans by Rembrandt van Rijn in particular, and scrutinizing how Gikandi sometimes relies on historical and art-historical contextualization and at other moments does not, I argue that his interpretations of the past are up for debate.

Keywords: Allegory; metonymy; Simon Gikandi; representation of black people; Rembrandt

"Some Committee?" she [Clarissa] asked, as he [Richard] opened the door. "Armenians," he said; or perhaps it was "Albanians". . . .

She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice (she had heard Richard say so over and over again)—no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?).

(Woolf 87, 88)

In the literary criticism on *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Virginia Woolf's famous modernist novel about a day in the life of middle-aged and upper-class Clarissa Dalloway, married to member of Parliament Richard Dalloway, there has been some debate about Clarissa's political-historical awareness or lack thereof. Scholars such as Kathy J. Phillips and Woolf's biographer Hermione Lee have used the passage cited above to blame

Clarissa for her apparent ignorance of, and lack of engagement with, one of the major human tragedies of her day and age, namely the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the way the Armenian claim for a nation-state was ignored by the international community after World War I. Michael Lackey, on the other hand, has argued that this passage in the novel functions to contrast Clarissa's philosophy of human interaction with that of Doris Kilman, the private teacher of Clarissa's daughter. Holding a different philosophy from the "empty universalism" of Doris Kilman, whom Lackey characterizes as "sensitive to abstractions but insensitive to individuals" (227), Clarissa believes in the importance of sensuous presence for a "profound experience of human communion" (226). In other words, whereas Kilman commits herself to the universal and believes that will help individuals, "Clarissa believes that we must learn how to interact with individuals before we can help a group of people," Lackey asserts (225). The passage highlights Clarissa's "political philosophy of intimacy," as Lackey calls it (227), for Clarissa *is* able to specifically remember which group is suffering, and so engage with them, after she thinks about her roses—flowers being the central metaphor of intimacy in the novel.

It is not my concern here to take a position in the critical debate about Clarissa Dalloway's political awareness, although this dispute about the importance of presence will be relevant to my argument. What strikes me in this passage most of all is how Woolf is satirizing that the difference between Armenia and Albania seems imperceptible from the perspective of the London metropolis, despite the fact that the two are thousands of kilometers apart. For many modern Anglophone or western European readers the confusion between Armenians and Albanians may still be relatable, perhaps even more so than for Woolf's contemporaries who, like Woolf herself, would regularly come across the Armenian question in the newspapers (Tate 160). For Albanian or Armenian readers, then or now, however, Clarissa's mix-up can hardly be anything else than absurd.

I was reminded of this passage in *Mrs. Dalloway* when I started reading Simon Gikandi's lastingly influential *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2011). In what to me as a Dutch reader is a weird confusion of geographical locations, Gikandi mistakes Fort Amsterdam on the Caribbean island of Curaçao for Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and bases an argument on it that—perhaps inevitably—founders. As I will argue, Gikandi's factual error and other inaccuracies in the way he handles his sources undermine

his methodological assumptions. While *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* could be read as an attempt to unite the universalizing gesture of Doris Kilman with Clarissa Dalloway's preference for sensuous presence, it weakens the first by failing to do justice to the latter. In what follows, I will first briefly present the outline of Gikandi's book, then discuss the questionable way he uses some of his sources and the methodological problems I believe this raises. These problems rest, as I will argue, on the weight Gikandi at some moments does, and at others does not, attribute to physical presence.

In his ambitious book, which received several awards, Gikandi sets out to read two seemingly remote cultural practices together: on the one hand, the Atlantic slave trade and slavery, and on the other the realm of taste and aesthetics, predominantly in Britain, its Caribbean colonies, and the United States, with excursions to Africa and South America. Rather than conceiving of slavery as an anachronism in the culture of modernity, Gikandi wants to restore the black figure as "occupying an essential and constitutive role in the construct of the interiority of modernity itself" (10). In short, Gikandi argues that the "culture of taste," as a central feature of the self-understanding of the modern enlightened subject, was closely connected to and in fact in many ways made possible by the political economy of slavery.

In order to make this far-reaching argument, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* draws from a wealth of material: archival sources, travelogues, paintings, architecture, and popular culture from three centuries, with a stress on the eighteenth century. Gikandi's approach of casting his net wide in terms of sources, periods, and regions has advantages over other studies in history of slavery, historical sociology, or art history: he manages to weave together the material, affective, and symbolic dimensions of slavery as well as aesthetics, and shows manifold relations between slavery and the arts in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Clear causal connections between the two can be seen where plantation money financed the acquisition of art, as in the case of the British writer and art collector William Beckford, son of a planter. Other relations are more tenuous, as Gikandi is the first to admit, as when he juxtaposes a day in the life of two women—a middle-class English woman and an enslaved African woman on April 24, 1797—in order to reveal the sublimated connection of the enslaved to the "political and moral economy of the modern world" (81).

Gikandi justifies bringing together these very disparate figures in

one chapter by contending that “although they didn’t know this, the two women were operating in the same orbit,” namely that of “slavery and empire” (70). He uses the two coinciding stories to construct a shared conceptual space of slavery and empire that encompasses the whole of the modern world. This gesture is reminiscent of how Benedict Anderson has argued that the nation, as an imagined community, was formed by the “meanwhile”: the simultaneity of events captured most of all in the newspaper and the novel, which united a readership under the umbrella of the nation (24–25). Within the context of an imagined community, the temporal coincidence of any number of events can become meaningful: shared time results in a concept of shared space. The difference with Gikandi’s work is that, rather than a broad cultural development of print-capitalism, or “print-as-commodity” (37), which brings about new connections, here it is the author Gikandi who in a grand narrativistic act makes the two women’s life stories speak to each other.

This gesture of connecting vastly different sources is typical of the methodology Gikandi employs in his book, which he describes in terms of allegory: “What I set out to provide is not evidence from the archives but an allegory of reading, an exploration of the tropes and figures that often point, or lead, to sublimated connections” (xiii). This methodological choice seems indebted to how Craig Owens—even though Gikandi does not reference him—characterizes “the allegorical impulse” and what Owens considers to be “most proper to it: its capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear” (68). Gikandi’s drive to rescue speaks clearly from his preface: “I seek to recover transatlantic slavery, often confined to the margins of the modern world picture, as one of the informing conditions of civilized culture; my goal is to find a language for reading what lies buried in the crypt, what survives the ‘secret tomb’ of modern subjectivity” (x). This results in detailed analyses and thick descriptions, for example of the eighteenth-century debate on the aesthetic capacities of blacks.

Allegorical reading—juxtaposing two different objects in order to find symbolic connections between them—is also Gikandi’s solution to the notorious problem of a lack of sources from an enslaved perspective: “If I seem to prefer working with emaciated temporal frames rather than epistemological frameworks, it is because I believe that working with a weak sense of history or with porous boundaries is one way of liberating the

slave not from history but from the hold of historicism” (*Slavery* 39). The allegorical method allows Gikandi to draw connections that are otherwise invisible, and for example to interpret representations of blacks by Europeans not just as a reflection of material conditions (black slavery and bondage) but also, read against the grain and nonreferentially, as capturing moments of black sensibility and agency. It also enables him to interrogate the concept of modernity—hence the explicit rejection of slavery as anachronism, as out of time, a concept that is only meaningful within an understanding of time as linear and progressive. Rather than conceiving of slavery and a modern culture of manners as belonging to different temporalities, Gikandi insists on their contemporaneity, on being in the same “now.” He wants to see these starkly contrasting cultural practices as part of the same conceptual realm, the same temporality: modernity, and more specifically, the modern culture of taste. By bringing these together on the same page, he aims to demonstrate they are in the “same orbit.” In choosing this methodology, Gikandi is indebted to Walter Benjamin’s view of the task of the historian, which Benjamin developed in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” as concerned with redeeming the unmourned dead (*Illuminations*, esp. 253–57). In his deliberate rejection of contextualization (the historicist method of “telling it like it was”) Gikandi embraces a presentist approach to writing a cultural history of enslavement and taste. This poses some serious problems in the way he handles his sources, as I will argue by closely retracing one of his analyses.

Gikandi’s method of juxtaposing seemingly distant sources and connecting these on a symbolic level takes a very concrete form in the first chapter, which contrasts Rembrandt van Rijn’s painting of two black men known as *Two Moors*, *Two Africans*, or *Two Negroes* with a receipt for the sale of sixty-two slaves. Gikandi reads Rembrandt’s painting as an act “to reclaim the human from the detritus of enslavement” (*Slavery* 1), for he assumes Rembrandt’s models had “most probably arrived in the European Low Countries as slaves or servants” (1). Here I have a first point of contention: this may or may not have been the case. First, Rembrandt may not have painted from live models at all: it is known that he often used prints or paintings from predecessors and colleagues (Kolfin, “Rembrandt’s Africans” 291). Second, if Rembrandt did in fact paint from live models, these were not necessarily enslaved. In 2008, the Dutch historian Dienke Hondius wrote about a small population of African men and women living

in Amsterdam from the early 1600s onward. Most of them were indeed domestic slaves or servants to Portuguese Jews—their status often unclear because slavery was prohibited on Dutch soil—but some were free and were living on their own. Around 1635, seven free African men and women were living with their children in the Jodenbreestraat in Amsterdam, the street where Rembrandt lived from 1639 onward (Hondius 90, 95). For all we know, if Rembrandt painted these men from live models, they may have been second-generation Africans in Amsterdam, and the painting may as well be called *Two Amsterdammers*. I make the point not to say that there were no enslaved Africans in Amsterdam at the time, but to note that reading Rembrandt's painting as an act of "reclaim[ing] the human from the detritus of enslavement" and thus attributing a highly moral dimension to it rests on assumptions that the sources do not necessarily support.

In Gikandi's argument, the Rembrandt painting offers a stark contrast to a second source: a receipt to the Dutch governor Matthias Beck for the transaction of sixty-two slaves, signed by Captain Pedro Diez Tzorrilla. (Gikandi writes "Troxxilla," which is the name used in the description of the archival source, but as the source itself says "Tzorrilla" I will use that name.) Gikandi calls him "a Dutch merchant" but he is actually from Spain: the Curaçao papers from which Gikandi cites also contain Governor Beck's report of February 4, 1660, about this same transaction of sixty-two slaves, in which Beck refers to "captain Sarilho" of Cadiz. This must be the same person as Tzorrilla or Troxxilla (*New Netherland Curaçao Papers* 172). Gikandi writes about the painting and the receipt:

[I]t is hard to believe that the two were produced in the same culture, in the same city, in the same year. And yet, in spite of the powerful moral geography that separates them, these cultural texts were united by their physical and cultural proximity. They represent the two sides of our modern identity. How could such elevated images of art exist in the same realm as the harsh world of enslavement and the slave trade? (*Slavery* 3)

How could they coexist?, Gikandi asks rhetorically. Well, one answer to that question is that they *did* not. There is no coincidence here: the receipt was not written in Amsterdam, where Rembrandt worked, but in *Fort Amsterdam*, the colonial governor's residence in Willemstad on the island of Curaçao, one of the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean and a nodal point

in the transatlantic trade. Amsterdam or Fort Amsterdam: here was my Albanian/Armenian moment. Apparently, for Gikandi as well as for his Anglophone reviewers, the difference between the two is imperceptible even though the receipt (cited verbatim by Gikandi) mentions “Curaçao in Fort Amsterdam” at the bottom (2). For me as a Dutch reader it is absurd to confuse them.

I would argue that this is more than just a topographical error because of the way Gikandi uses this example to ground his key arguments. The juxtaposition of painting and transaction of slaves is made significant through the assumed historical coincidence of both events, and the shock about the contrast between black people represented as human subjects or as commodities fuels Gikandi’s book as a whole. When he returns to the Rembrandt example later in the chapter, Gikandi takes another imaginative leap: “How could Rembrandt and Troxilla, living in the same city at the same time, occupying the same habitus, engage in a different set of economies (symbolic and real) and yet not be troubled by each other’s presence?” (34). In this second reference, Gikandi animates his sources in a dubious way: he shifts the discussion from the texts to their makers, and pictures the Dutch painter and the Spanish captain as crossing paths (“not be troubled by each other’s presence”) in a city which at that point had about 175,000 (!) inhabitants (Frijhoff and Spies 168). As stated above, Gikandi wants to open up an allegorical way of reading in his book, but here the force of his example and the astonishment he rhetorically demands from his readers rests on Rembrandt’s and Tzorrilla’s supposedly shared historical space and time, *quod non*. It demonstrates his preference for a spatial, metonymical connection between the two realms, based on contiguity, their actual proximity and physical presence, rather than a metaphorical (allegorical) one based on similarity. Or should we read “Rembrandt” and “Tzorrilla” as allegorical placeholders, personifications of the two poles of Gikandi’s overarching thesis about art and slavery? If I sound skeptical it is because I find this use of sources questionable.

Just as questionable is how Gikandi goes to quite some length to claim that the two sources, Rembrandt’s painting and Tzorrilla’s receipt, stem from the same year, clearly to reinforce his argument of shared space and time. Gikandi’s narrativistic style is manifest from the first sentence: “Sometime around 1659, the Dutch painter Harmenszoon van Rijn Rembrandt [sic] sat in his studio in Amsterdam and commenced work on *Two*

Negroes" (1). By providing a semiexact timeframe ("sometime around 1659") he stretches the genesis of the painting to match the date of the receipt, which he takes to be June 26, 1659. This is another mistake, however: the date of the receipt, which is in fact mentioned in the passage Gikandi quotes in his book, is January 11, 1660. The date of June 26, 1659, mentioned in the cited document is the date of the initial contract concluded in Amsterdam between the Amsterdam Chamber of the West Indies Company and the merchants Messrs. Hector Pieters and Guillaume Momma. Ironically, the genesis of the Rembrandt painting is uncertain, but it is highly *unlikely* that it was painted in 1659. It is dated 1661 on the front side, but experts think Rembrandt painted it in or before 1656 because an inventory of that year mentions it, and that he only signed and dated it when it was sold, a common practice (Kolfin, "Rembrandt's Africans" 299).

In short, from a historical (or historicist) perspective the interpretation of these two sources is in many ways problematic if not plainly wrong. I am not the first to express criticism of Gikandi's book: reviewers have put question marks at his hypothesis of cultural repression and his rejection of historicism and have pointed out several other historical errors (J. Anderson; Boulukos; Freeburg; Olaniyan; Quayson). Still, one could wonder: does it ultimately matter for Gikandi's argument that the two events did not coincide? After all, a document *was* signed in the city of Amsterdam in June 1659: not Tzorilla's receipt maybe, but a contract for the delivery of slaves between the Dutch West Indies Company and the merchants, and Rembrandt *did* paint in the 1650s, so it is still true that slave trade and art were happening in the same period in the same culture, if conceived less strictly. Or, put differently, for an allegorical connection between the two phenomena we would not need their proximity, the sensuous presence, after all—was that not the point Gikandi was trying to make in the first place?

I think it matters because, for one, Gikandi's misinterpretation of his sources turns seventeenth-century Amsterdam into a space where black people were enslaved and traded, which is apparently imaginable from a twenty-first-century perspective but is a distorted version of the past. Hondius's article mentioned earlier provides a detailed insight into the dynamics of historical categories: how the archival records in Amsterdam do and do not mention the term *slave* at various times; how Africans at first were not allowed to be buried within the fence of the Jewish cemetery, but

later were. This testifies to the dynamic boundaries of civic and religious identities and resists an all too easy categorization. Though Portuguese merchants (slave traders) allegedly asked permission for slave markets to be held in Amsterdam, Hondius has not been able to find a source that confirms this. But, again, we could wonder whether for Gikandi's thesis about the close connections between the rise of modern aesthetic culture and the economy of slavery, the physical act of slave trading on Curaçao is so different from the symbolic act of trading in humans performed in Amsterdam.

If it is, it is not in the least because of the emphasis Gikandi himself puts on the issue of space—which becomes obvious through his frequent use of words like *geography* (including *moral geography*, *cultural geography*), *orientation*, and *proximity*. This preference for spatial (metonymical) connections I take as expression of a desire to find traces of a historical reality, most of all of an embodied black subjectivity; a desire to animate history giving weight to sensuous presence but holding on to making generalizing claims as well: combining Clarissa Dalloway's empathy fueled by physical presence with Doris Kilman's universal solidarity based on conceptual abstractions.

Gikandi's allegorical impulse stems from a desire to recover, to remember something that has not been remembered yet. It is not about "keeping alive" memories of a distant past, but rather about animating these past representations, or "unearthing" something that has been "buried" all this time—to use another metaphor Gikandi employs—and seeing the past in a new way. Sympathetic as this aspiration is, Gikandi's desire to recover black subjectivities occurs at the expense of contextual accuracy, not only in a historical but also in an art-historical sense. Again it is his discussion of the Rembrandt painting that allows me to make this point.

Two Africans is a rare specimen in Gikandi's research in the sense that it seems to respond, unlike many other sources, to this desire for a reality whereby black people could embody a modern subjectivity, characterized by freedom, interiority, and sensibility. According to Gikandi, Rembrandt's painting signifies a moment in history when blackness was "associated with dignity, decency and virtue, if not equality" (*Slavery* 1), as opposed to later periods in which Western visual art stereotypically depicted black people as objectified and unfree. Gikandi is certainly not the only one to read *Two Africans* this way, and it has thus become a cultural icon of early modern

blackness: it is hardly coincidental that this painting is on the cover of the first volume of the current state-of-the-art publication on this topic, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Bindman et al.).

So besides highlighting the contrast between the realms of art and trade, the Rembrandt painting fulfills a second function in Gikandi's argument: it serves as an illustration of how the representation of black people in European art allegedly changed from the baroque period to the late eighteenth century from dignified to dehumanized, literally from the center (in Rembrandt's painting) to the margins (in paintings depicting slave masters). In Gikandi's narrative about the shaping of modern identity, the Rembrandt painting functions as the exception in a representational regime that only becomes more objectifying over time. As art historian Elmer Kolfin comments, "this is Rembrandt as we like him best: a profoundly unprejudiced genius . . . , who is ahead of his time, with views more akin to ours than to those of his contemporaries" ("Rembrandt's Africans" 271). Kolfin has reservations about this view of Rembrandt for art-historical reasons, reservations I share and want to discuss in order to highlight the limitations of Gikandi's reading of Rembrandt.

Kolfin argues that the appearance of objectified images of black slaves—in chains or as suffering—marked an iconographic change that happened in a relatively short period between 1773 and 1792. Representing black people as suffering, utilizing familiar Christian images of martyrdom, was something new around 1770. Previously, black people were depicted as a labor force in a documentary fashion, as allegorical figures, or as part of idyllic representations of plantation life ("Becoming Human"). Kolfin attributes this change in representational regime to the rise of abolitionism, which pushed aside earlier iconographic traditions. So, paradoxically, the new images of suffering blacks functioned in a discourse aiming to include black people in the category of humanity, while reinforcing the association between blackness and bondage. Kolfin summarizes these changes in the representation of blacks as "becoming human," which seems to be the opposite of what Gikandi argues, who sees dignified men over time turned into objects.

These diametrically opposed readings are triggered by the different weight Gikandi and Kolfin attribute to contextual information to arrive at their conclusions. There is an ambivalence in how Gikandi sometimes relies upon historical context and at other times chooses not to: when com-

paring the Rembrandt and the Tzorrilla source he chooses to historicize (i.e., compare synchronically), but when interpreting the Rembrandt he leaves out considerations of context almost entirely and concentrates on the allegorical connections in order to bring out the similarity between on the one hand Rembrandt, Velázquez, and Rubens (other baroque painters who painted black men) and on the other a present-day conception of self.¹ Kolfin interprets *Two Africans* in the contexts of Rembrandt's own oeuvre and of a much larger corpus of visual representations (prints, drawings, paintings) of black people ("Rembrandt's Africans"). Kolfin too concludes that *Two Africans* is exceptional, but for quite different reasons than Gikandi. Within the context of Rembrandt's own work and early modern painting more broadly, *Two Africans* is remarkable because it departs from conventional early seventeenth-century iconography in which Africans were most commonly depicted as servants or soldiers in history paintings, or as spectators or listeners in biblical scenes. While Rembrandt tended to alter some of these stereotypical conventions in other works as well, as Kolfin believes under the influence of the aforementioned arrival of Africans in Amsterdam, *Two Africans* departs even more from conventional representations. Possibly this is because they are so-called tronies: expressive faces Rembrandt painted as a study, an artistic challenge to discuss with his pupils, something he liked to do for all kinds of technical challenges, in this case as "a demonstration piece of how to solve the pictorial problem of a black skin" ("Rembrandt's Africans" 298).² All the baroque paintings Gikandi mentions were studies, and this may explain their exceptionality: their makers painted them largely unrestricted by generic conventions or conventional iconography. In the case of Rembrandt it was probably left unfinished intentionally, and it may be this openness that allows the *Two Africans* painting to function as a palimpsest that can be overwritten with new meanings again and again. This openness testifies to the creativity and dynamics of culture, but it can hardly be extrapolated to an early modern artistic view of black people as Gikandi claims it does, or to Rembrandt's "ennobling the black in the aesthetic sphere" (*Slavery* 1). So it would be better to support this reading of Rembrandt with reference to the historian's desire rather than to make it stand for an early modern view.

As a scholar trained in literature but moving toward cultural history, like Gikandi, I was drawn to reading his book because I was curious to see how he connects the different planes of the material and the symbolic, the

historical and the artistic, in the context of colonialism and slavery. My own research on the cultural icon of the Flying Dutchman and its after-life has made me think about these issues and the way fictional figures function in cultural memory. The Flying Dutchman is an extremely mobile and flexible object, rendered in many different genres, languages, and periods as anything from despicable slave trader to national hero. How should these operations be read? As acts of repression by a culture that did not want to remember its colonial past, as acts of creative recycling prompted by changing contexts (like the invention of the airplane), resulting in oblivion of previous meanings, as both, or as other, more random processes of creation and memory?

What has become increasingly clear to me is that each adaptation, recycling, or reanimation of the Flying Dutchman was, and is, molded according to demands of the present. And that I as a researcher, by asking questions like the ones above, am actively taking part in constructing a memorial tradition that may suggest more continuity than there actually was. In the context of discussing the longtime reception of Sir Walter Scott, Ann Rigney has attributed the prominence of literary works in cultural memory to their memorability—facilitated by such aspects as their being part of public discourse and their captivating style. Rigney’s article is helpful in staking out a framework for the function of literary works—or works of visual art, I would add—in “memorial dynamics.” We should realize how dynamic, how nonlinear and discontinuous are the ways in which the past is actualized in the present, also or especially by historians. By recognizing that the Rembrandt painting is such a memorable icon, we can see Gikandi’s reading of it as an intervention driven by a desire from the present, as to a certain extent all historians’ interventions are. This desire is noticeable in Frank Ankersmit’s description of history’s value (here paraphrased by Rigney): “its value may lie not just in its ‘telling it as it was,’ but in its offering images of the past for ethical and aesthetic contemplation” (382). Gikandi’s book is a historical intervention but also a product of today’s memory culture that wants to offer up the past for ethical contemplation, in this case of the atrocities of slavery and the congratulatory self-image of Western modernity. What I find lacking from *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* is an acknowledgment of the consequences of this desire, for it results, as I hope to have shown, in generalizations about the past that are hard to defend. To be fair, Gikandi has addressed this topic of the demands

of the present much more explicitly recently, in his article about the “archives of enslavement” (“Rethinking the Archive of Enslavement”). While this does not fix the shortcomings of *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, it offers a good starting point to think through the need for and possibility of incorporating both Clarissa Dalloway’s intimate engagement and Doris Kilman’s universal solidarity into cultural history.

NOTES

I want to thank Marijke Huisman, Geertje Mak, and Tijana Zakula for their valuable comments on previous versions of this essay, and students of the Humanities Lab course at University College Utrecht for critically reading Gikandi with me.

1. The question of whether Rembrandt’s, Velázquez’s, and Rubens’s paintings of black men can be grouped together so easily is an argument in itself. Bal, in an article on the controversial Dutch tradition of Black Pete, distinguishes the Velázquez from the Rembrandt and Rubens because his is the only portrait of a recognizable individual. She compares the modern-day blackface Petes to the deindividualized “tronies” (faces) of Rembrandt’s (and Rubens’s) painting to make a point about the stereotypical representation of blackness.
2. Another painter who discussed the issue of representing black skin was de Lairesse. Thanks to Tijana Zakula for pointing this out to me.

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