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'Two savage beings': Van Eyck's Adam and Eve and the Propriety of the Nude in Fin-de-Siècle Belgium

In his influential *Les maîtres d'autrefois* of 1876, Eugène Fromentin vehemently criticized the Adam and Eve of the famed Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (1432) by the brothers Van Eyck. Fromentin described the pair as 'two savage beings, terribly hairy, the both of them coming [...] from I do not know which primitive woods, ugly, with a swollen torso and skinny legs'. This appraisal seems harsh today, but was hardly unusual at the time. Indeed, in Ghent, Van Eyck's Adam and Eve had by then been replaced with copies made in 1860, on which their modesty was protected by the addition of bulky pelts. Not until after WWI were the original panels back on display. In my paper, I aim to (1) trace the perception of Van Eyck's Adam and Eve in Belgium in the last quarter of the century and to (2) grant it a place within the broader debate on the propriety of the nude. More specifically, I will trace the relationship between such art-historical criticism and the reception of the nude which then dominated Belgian avant-garde painting: the symbolist nude. In fact, by some, symbolism was thought to be heir to Early Netherlandish art; for Albert Croquez, for instance, it represented 'all of our XVth century'. In so doing, I aim to elucidate how the nineteenth-century tug of war between idealism and naturalism impacted art-historiography, and how the embarrassment of Adam and Eve's 'scarcely decent nudity' was reconciled with the fashioning of a national artistic tradition.

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Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Not a Realist, Not a Symbolist, What Then?

Although recent scholarship on Pieter Bruegel the Elder has distanced itself from the 'Describe or Narrate' controversy of the late 1980's, these more recent arguments are, of course, inflected by the earlier one. While we may be too close in time to gain historical perspective on contemporary analyses, we are, I believe, distant enough from the original controversy to be able to discern how it was inflected by critical issues of the late nineteenth century. In the 1907 introduction to his catalogue raisonné of Bruegel's prints and drawings, René van Bastelaer offered the first extended analysis of this artist's oeuvre. He began with a spirited refutation of the French critic Jules Renouvier who had placed Bruegel with Hieronymus