The Art of Laughter in the Age of Bosch and Bruegel

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Cover illustration:
PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
Wedding Banquet (detail: Bagpiper)

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1 PHILIPS GALLE AFTER PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
Death of the Virgin

In his *Schilder-boeck,* first published in 1604, Karel van Mander stressed the achievements of Pieter Bruegel the Elder as a comic artist. There are few of Bruegel's works, he insisted, that the observer 'can contemplate seriously and without laughing, and however straight-faced and stately, he may be, he has at least to twitch his mouth or smile.'[1] Nowadays, however, we usually view Bruegel's art as anything but a laughing matter. Instead, we focus on the serious-minded, didactic Bruegel, whose paintings and drawings, we assume, were like the allegorical dramas of the Netherlandish *rederijkers,* 'full of lovely moralizations.'[2] For us, Bruegel is above all the painter-philosopher who preached on sin and folly and on the proper relationship of humanity to God and the natural world, lessons that he often concealed, moreover, beneath the brilliant surface realism of his art. This view of Bruegel has been influenced, I think, by a misreading of Abraham Ortelius's epitaph on the artist, first published in part by A.E. Popham in 1931. In his epitaph, Ortelius praises Bruegel for having 'depicted many things that cannot be painted, ... in all his works he often gives something beneath what he paints.'[3] But Ortelius was not talking about any profound messages that Bruegel might have encrypted in his art. On the contrary, as various scholars have pointed out over the years,[4] Ortelius was thinking of something quite different, for he specifically relates his remark to Apelles and Timanthes, two Greek artists of antiquity discussed by Pliny the Elder. Pliny praises Apelles because 'he painted the unpaintable, thunder, for example, lightning and thunderbolts.' And Timanthes is praised for his ingenuity, of which Pliny cites several examples. One is a painting of the Sacrifice of Iphigeneia: having depicted the bystanders in various attitudes of grief, Timanthes conveyed the greatest grief of all, that of her father, by veiling his face.[5] Ortelius was celebrating, thus, not Bruegel's 'hidden' meaning, but his realism and his remarkable inventiveness, and his choice of these particular artists from antiquity for comparison with Bruegel was, in fact, very perceptive on Ortelius's part. In comparing Bruegel to Timanthes, Ortelius may have been thinking of a painting by Bruegel in his own possession, the *Death of the Virgin.* He must have thought much of this painting, for he had Philips Galle

copy it in an engraving (Fig. 1),[6] which he distributed to his friends and colleagues. Indeed, with its crowd of mourners, some veiling their faces, Bruegel's *Death of the Virgin* recalls Timanthes's *Sacrifice of Iphigeneia.* On the other hand, Apelles's ability to paint lightening, thunder, and thunderbolts brings to mind the winter storm raging in the *Gloomy Day* in Bruegel's *Labors of the Months* series.

Nevertheless, our persistent misreading of Ortelius's claim that Bruegel depicted 'things that cannot be painted' has long exerted a pervasive influence on our understanding of the artist. As early as 1935, just four years after Popham's article, Charles de Tolnay cited Ortelius's epitaph as proof that 'to the eyes of his contemporaries, Bruegel's art was esoteric.'[7] And many later scholars have have sought to 'penetrate the secret thought of the artist,' as De Tolnay put it,[8] and have done so with an enthusiasm and ingenuity hardly equaled by the most ardent medieval interpreter of sacred scripture.

It is true, of course, that this extensive probing of the symbolism and allusions in Bruegel's imagery has also yielded valuable insights into both his art and the world in which he lived and worked. His drawing of *Elck*, or *Everyman*, of 1558 (London, British Museum), is a complicated but witty commentary on the greed and self-seeking that he must have seen all too often in the mercantile Antwerp of his time. His *The Blind Leading the Blind*, painted in 1568 (Napels, Museo e gallerie nazionali di Capodimonte), may well be a commentary on the religious and political struggles that darkened the last years of his life and ultimately erupted into the Eighty-Years' War between the Netherlands and Spain. Nevertheless, in our concentration on the 'serious Bruegel,' Van Mander's 'humorous' Bruegel has largely been ignored or even dismissed out of hand as mere rhetoric by a writer younger than Bruegel by almost a generation and thus lacking a true understanding of his art. But Van Mander may not have been so very wrong after all. We have on record an incident in Bruegel's lifetime, in which viewers responded to Bruegel's art much as Van Mander describes.

This incident appears in Van Mander's account of Hans Vredeman de Vries, the famous architectural scene designer and Bruegel's contemporary. Vredeman once painted a wall mural showing a summer house in perspective for a wealthy patron, the Brussels government official Aert Molckeman. Vredeman's mural may have resembled the elaborate open-air pavilions that he included in several of his engravings of idealized Renaissance palaces.[9]

However this may be, as a joke, Bruegel painted in the figures of 'a peasant with a befouled shirt occupied with a peasant woman.' This embellishment of Vredeman de Vries's presumably elegant mural with a pair of rutting peasants caused much laughter and Molckeman was so enchanted with it that he refused to have it painted out.[10] There are some discrepancies in Van Mander's account, but it has been plausibly suggested that Vredeman de Vries painted Molckeman's wall mural sometime in the 1560s when Bruegel was living in Brussels.[11] This is only a brief anecdote, but it indicates that some of Bruegel's contemporaries reacted to some of his art, at least, with amusement and outright laughter. As Bart Ramakers has aptly put it, there was room in Bruegel's art for the smile and the guffaw, as well as for more serious thoughts.[12] In fact, it can be shown that a significant part of Bruegel's imagery, and particularly the mann er in which he treated it, can be situated very solidly within the context of laughter as it was understood and appreciated in his century. An exploration of this context will, I hope, increase our understanding of the crucial importance of laughter in sixteenth-century Netherlandish culture, especially in the art of Bruegel.

How much people of the sixteenth century laughed, and in what manner: these are topics about which there is very little agreement. It has been claimed, for example, that in Bruegel's day, people of the upper classes seldom laughed at all, but, to quote one scholar, 'they contented themselves by smiling with the mouth closed. The harder someone laughed, the closer he was to the object of that laughter: the aggressive scoffer, the doltish peasant.'[13] By this token, I suppose, we must conclude that Aert Molckeman and his friends did not comport themselves as gentlefolk, but I am not so sure. We know, of course, that beginning in the sixteenth century, the upper classes gradually withdrew from participation in popular culture, and manifested increasing self-control: this is a social process that has been well described by a number of scholars, above all by Norbert Elias.[14] But as Elias himself is at pains to emphasize, in the sixteenth century, this 'civilizing process,' as he calls it, was only it its earliest stages, and nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than in the case of laughter.

Laughter, it is true, had long been condemned as frivolous and even sinful. An early father of the Church, John Chrysostom, traced the dreadful consequences of laughter: it leads often to foul speech, and from foul speech to foul actions and so on to murder. Centuries later, Hildegard of Bingen described the faculty of laughter as one of the unfortunate results of the Original Sin.[15]

Laughter was also condemned in Bruegel's century. In a volume on physiognomy published at Antwerp in 1554 and again in 1564, Jan Roelants insisted that much laughter was the sign of a foolish, unstable, and gullible nature (and also, he added, the sign of a great lover).[16] Somewhat earlier, Juan Luis Vives called hearty laughter the 'excessive convulsions of the ignorant, the peasants, and women.'[17]

Erasmus was another writer who insisted that '[l]oud laughter and the immoderate mirth that shakes the whole body ... are unbecoming to any age but much more so to youth,' primarily, he continued, because they distort the mouth and show a dissolute mind. Erasmus offered this observation in his little book called *Manners for Children.*[18] First published in 1530, it was often reprinted and translated into other languages, including a Netherlandish edition of 1559 and inspired many later treatises on social conduct.[19] But despite the spate of conduct books from the sixteenth century on, it would be hazardous to write a history of humor based exclusively on them. As the Dutch scholar Rudolf Dekker has cogently observed, while such treatises were certainly read, it may be asked if their contents were always taken to heart.[20]

Be that as it may, no one, to my knowledge, has made a careful study of how the upper classes of the sixteenth century laughed, and at what. Perhaps no such study is possible. But we can approach this problem through a famous manual on polite behavior, Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, composed between 1513 and 1518, when he was at the court of the Duke of Urbino. *The Courtier* was translated into many languages, including French, English, and German. While there was no Netherlandish edition until the seventeenth century, two Spanish editions appeared in Antwerp during Bruegel's lifetime.[21] In the second part of his book, Castiglione devotes considerable attention to subject of laughter. Laughter, we are told by Cardinal Bibbiena, one of the speakers, 'is something so peculiarly ours, that, to define man, we are wont to say that he is a laughing animal ... But what laughter is, where it abides, and how it sometimes takes possession of our veins, our eyes, our mouth, and our sides, and seems apt to make us burst, so that no matter what we do we are unable to repress it': this is something he cannot explain. But he does discuss the various types of humor that evoke laughter, ranging from verbal wit to practical jokes. As an example of the latter, he tells us how two fine ladies were tricked into believing that an uncouth but elegantly dressed peasant was really a polished dancing master, and they tried to converse with him

as a near social equal. All this took place in the presence of other members of the court, who were in on the deception, and in Bibbiena's words, 'everyone's sides ached from laughter.'[22] Castiglione apparently did not condemn this hearty laughter as a breach of polite manners, nor, apparently, did Queen Elizabeth I, who enjoyed the antics of the English buffoon Richard Tarleton, although she once asked him to be taken away 'for making her laugh so excessively.'[23]

More to the point, however, many people saw laughter very much as a positive virtue. Whatever moves to laughter, we are told in *The Courtier*, 'restores the spirit, gives pleasure, and for the moment keeps one from remembering those vexing troubles of which our life is full.'[24] The nature of laughter, its source, and the objects that excite it, had been discussed by the ancient writers, among them Quintilian and Cicero. In fact, the extensive section devoted to laughter in Cicero's *De Oratore* was the text from which Castiglione borrowed liberally for his own discussion of this subject.[25] It was probably also due in large part to Cicero and Quintilian that laughter occupied many other writers in the sixteenth century, with an emphasis on its effects on the body and the mind, particularly the role it played in treating melancholy, that disorder at once fashionable and greatly feared. The French physician Laurens Joubert published in 1579 a whole treatise on laughter, the *Traité de ris*, in which he informed the reader that 'God has ordained, among man's enjoyments, laughter for his recreation in order to conveniently loosen the reins of his mind.'[26] This was true even for the clergy. As the Catholic schoolteacher and poet Anna Bijns pointed out in a *refereyn* first published in 1528, if priests sometimes laugh and sing and make merry, so what? They are people, too, and need to unwind; he who is never merry is a beast.[27] Many people in Bruegel's day, in fact, would have agreed with Jacob van der Burgh, who in the next century wrote to Constantijn Huygens: 'I would not wish a wise man never to laugh and deprive himself of a faculty that is proper to him and not given to the rest of [God's] creatures.'[28]

Thanks to the pioneering work of Herman Pleij, and a number of younger Dutch and Flemish scholars, we now know that there was an abundance of literature published from the later fifteenth century on whose purpose was to recreate weary and melancholy spirits by inciting laughter.[29] Among them were the jestbooks, that is, collections of anecdotes, which often explicitly stressed the recreational function of their contents. Jestbooks occur in all countries and

2 PIETER BALTENS
Village Kermis with the Klucht van Pleijerwater

languages. The Netherlandish jestbook popular in Bruegel's day was *Een nyeuwe clucht boeck*, or 'A New Book of Anecdotes,' published at Antwerp in 1554, with a second enlarged edition of 1576.[30] What kind of stories does it have? They are often scatological in nature, and include tales about drunken peasants, greedy rent collectors, shifty lawyers, quack doctors, and clever servants. In one story, two dumb Hollanders travel to Antwerp and almost starve to death because they are not served butter with their eggs, as was the custom at home, and when one of them thinks that he is finally getting something to eat, has a tooth pulled instead. Another concerns the artist who made paintings of beautiful children: when asked why his own children were so ugly, he explained that he made the former in the daytime and the latter at night. This is an old joke, incidentally, that goes back at least to the fifth century of the Common Era,

when it was told by Macrobius, and reappears in later collections of comic stories, including one compiled by Petrarch.[31] The final tale in the *Nyeuwe clucht boeck* involves a bride on her wedding night, two kitchen assistants, and a bowl of gruel that is administered to a most unsuitable part of the anatomy. And who read such collections of comic stories? Many people, it seems, for they were owned by members of the upper classes, including a Regent of the Netherlands, Margaret of Austria, Jan Dirckz. van Brouchoven, a burgomaster of Leiden, and the famous Protestant writer Philips van Marnix van St. Aldegonde.[32]

Generating laughter was also an important function of the Flemish *rederijkers*, or rhetoricians, those groups of poets and their companions who put on public performances of poetry and drama. The *rederijkers* are most often consulted today for their 'lovely moralizations', the *zinnespelen* or morality plays characterized in the drama *Mariken van Nijmeghen* as being better than a sermon, and intended, according to one document of the period, 'for the teaching and edification of all people.'[33] But the *rederijkers* also provided much entertainment of a more lighthearted kind. Indeed, the foundation charter of one *rederijker* chamber, *De Fontaine* of Ghent, established in 1448, states specifically that its most important task was to provide pleasant and good recreation as an antidote against 'melancholy, the greatest enemy of humanity.'[34] As the Belgian scholar Dirck Coigneau has observed, a substantial portion of *rederijker* literary and dramatic production, in fact, was comic in nature.[35] They ranged from the *refreinen in 't sotte*, that is, 'songs in a foolish mode,'[36] to *tafelspelen* and *kluchten*, or banquet plays and farces. While some of these plays also sought to instruct their audiences in good Christian virtues, others were intended as pure entertainment: they are clearly *recreaties*, or 'recreations,' which in the sixteenth century designated an amusing or entertaining play.[37] In a *tafelspel* for a Twelfth Night celebration, one character tells us that he comes to create joy and drive away '*alle zware gheesten*,' that is, all heavy spirits.[38] The *kluchten*, especially, were purely *recreaties*. These farces often involved peasants B husbands and wives, wives and their lovers, and the like B in comic situations, and were performed on many occasions. An especially popular play was the so-called *Clucht van Pleijerwater*, often included in depictions of village kermises. A good example can be seen in a painting by Peter Baltens, done probably sometime after 1550 (Fig. 2).[39] Dating from the early sixteenth century, this play has a plot that can be briefly summarized. A wife feigns a severe illness and sends her husband on

3 Follower of Hieronymus Bosch
Vision of Tundale

a wild-goose chase for *plaijerwater* (that is, 'phoney water'), a supposedly miraculous water that will cure her, all this so that in her husband's absence she can enjoy her priest-lover. Her plan is foiled, however, when a friend informs the husband of the deception and smuggles him back into his house concealed in a large basket, where, as we can see in Baltens' painting, he catches the guilty pair.[40] Such farces must have provided a welcome relief after the serious *zinnenspelen.* Farces were performed on other occasions, as well. The triumphal entry into Brussels of Prince Philip of Spain, later Philip II, in April, 1549, was celebrated by an evening performance of two *kluchten* on a stage erected in front of the city hall. A German observer, one Dr. Franz Kram, notes that everyone in the audience laughed, not only the men (and none, I suspect, more

4–5 *Songes drolatiques de Pantagruel*

heartily than Aert Molckeman and his friends, if they were present), but also the women and young maidens.[41]

In view of the spate of books and plays that were chiefly dedicated to the cause of amusement and laughter, it is tempting to ask if some works of art might have been created primarily for the same purpose. Among them, perhaps, were many of the pastiches after Bosch produced in such great numbers in Antwerp in the sixteenth century (Fig. 3). Their creators seem less concerned with warning us of the punishments awaiting us in the hereafter than with entertaining us in the here and now with their proliferation of frolicking devils.

I am encouraged in this speculation by a book of woodcuts published in Paris in 1565 and presenting a whole army of Boschian devils, no fewer, in fact, than a hundred and twenty of them (Figs. 4, 5). According to the title-page, these are the *Songes drolatiques de Pantagruel*, or the 'Droll Dreams of Pantagruel,' which, the publisher Richard Breton informs us, are intended 'for the recre-

6 After Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Allegory of Sloth

ation of witty minds.' He leaves the deeper meanings of these images to others to decipher, Breton says in his preface; for his part, he offers them simply as objects of laughter, as an antidote for melancholy, and as a pastime for the young.[42] Indeed, in their incongruous conjunctions of human and animal parts with everyday objects made by men, these figures have much in common with the kind of art described by Horace in his *Ars poetica*: 'if a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, ... so that what at the top is a lovely woman ends up below as a black and ugly fish, could you my friends, keep from laughing?'[43] Such hybrid forms, in fact, were common in ancient Roman decoration, vigorously condemned by Vitruvius, and rediscovered toward the end of the fifteenth century, when they were known as *grotteschi*, or grotesques. While some writers insisted that ancient grotesques must conceal profound meaning, most people saw them as essentially meaningless. Rabelais, for example, describes them as 'devices lightheartedly invented for the purpose of mirth.'[44]

Breton's *Songes drolatiques* are considerably less elegant than ancient and Renaissance grotesques, but they belong to the same genre. Although he attributed the invention of these figures in the *Songes drolatiques* to 'Master François Rabelais,' they of course have nothing to do with Rabelais. The publisher most likely exploited a name well-known to the reading public. Indeed, it has been suggested that some of the figures were inspired by the prints after Pieter Bruegel in circulation at that time. However this may be, the *Songes drolatiques de Pantagruel* alerts us to an important aspect of the audience response to Bruegel's overtly didactic prints that has all too often been overlooked. Prime examples occur in his *Seven Vices* series of 1558, published by Hieronymus Cock. In the *Allegory of Sloth* (Fig. 6), for example, Queen Sloth reclines with her head nestled on the devil's *oorkussen,* or pillow, one of her proverbial attributes. She and her companions are sunk in sleep, oblivious to the warnings of the bell-ringer and the whimsical clock from which a human arm reaches to point at the eleventh hour: time is running out. The indolence of Sloth and her retinue is well symbolized by snails and slugs, as well as by the giant oaf in the middleground, who is too lazy, it seems, to empty his bowels without some prodding from the little men in the boat. It is significant that when Christophe Plantin sent a batch of prints to a printseller in Paris, he identified Bruegel's *Seven Vices* as the 'seven sins, *droleries.*' Plantin also uses the word *drolerie* to identify several other prints after Bruegel, the *Temptation of St. Anthony* and the

7 After Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Allegory of Pride

Patience.[45] While the word *drolerie* originally had the sense of the demonic or evil, by the sixteenth century it had acquired strong overtones of the humorous.[46] In the case of Bruegel's 'droll sins,' it is surely the humor that dominates. This was certainly the opinion of Bruegel's contemporaries. Giorgio Vasari described Bruegel's *Seven Vices* series as 'with demons of various forms, which was a fantastic and laughable work.'[47] In his verses for the *Effigies*, a series of artist's portraits published in 1570, Dominicus Lampsonius distinguishes between Bosch and Bruegel: Bosch's art is essentially serious in meaning, but Bruegel's creations in the style of Bosch are 'certainly worthy of laughter.'[48] So Van Mander was not alone when he included Bruegel's many 'specters and burlesques' (*spoockerijen en drollen*) in the style of Bosch among the works that earned him the nickname of 'Pier den Drol,' or Piet the Droll.[49]

This humor is equally evident in Bruegel's *Allegory of Pride* (Fig. 7). Pride herself flaunts her sumptuous and very fashionable gown in the middle foreground, her haughty demeanor mocked by the frog-faced devil grinning at us from behind her skirt. She gazes fondly at her reflection in her hand-mirror, a traditional attribute of Pride that is humorously repeated at lower left, where one monster admires his posterior in a looking glass, and another, with a ring piercing his lips, gazing fondly at his reflection in a second mirror. The feathers of Pride's emblematic peacock recur in unlikely contexts throughout the foreground area, protruding from the tails of several other monsters, including the hybrid creature at lower left; at the right is a barber-cum-beauty shop. A nude man on the roof defecates into a bowl uncomfortably close to the mortar and pestle sitting at a lower level. It may well be the source of the liquid with which two attendants wash the hair of the woman below. Pride's love of vain display reappears in the ornate cupola rising from the roof of the beauty parlor, and in the elaborate structures in the left background, while pride of rank dominates the boat-like structure, where a group of naked people kneel in homage to a figure wearing only an oversized helmet. Just below, an owl-headed monster wears a crown whose four stages surpass the tripartite design of the papal tiara.

With all their humor, of course, these prints treat serious subjects, whose content is indicated in the inscriptions below. Sloth, we are warned, 'takes away all strength and dries out the nerves until man is good for nothing,' while 'Pride is hated by God above all, at the same time, Pride scorns God.' This coupling of learning and pleasure can be also found among the *rederijkers*. In their

Gar höflichen kan ich tantzen
Mit meiner greten vmber schwantzē
Die hatt ain mündlin das ist klūg
Ir naß wer gut zum essich krug

Die tantzen treibt sie ablich kunst
Darumb hat sie ach fil mein gunst
Ob ich dañ hab ain grossen bauch
So sind ich dannocht wol das rauch

8 Hans Weiditz
Grotesque Couple

zinnespelen, many of the *zinnekens*, or allegorical personifications, may work tirelessly at seducing humanity into sin and eternal damnation, but they also often engage in farcical interludes that are often extremely funny even to the modern reader.[50] Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that Bruegel's contemporaries bought prints of the *Vices* chiefly to learn about the dangers of sin; they had surely imbibed this lesson from many other sources from childhood on. Just as people attended performances of the *kluchten* to be entertained, it is equally likely that they acquired Bruegel's *Seven Vices* to admire and laugh at his ingenuity in transforming the old moral lessons into magnificently comic images.

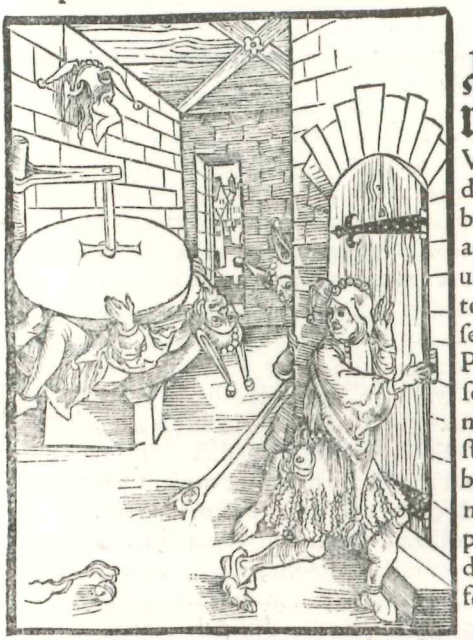
Bruegel was not the only artist, of course, who put moralizing images to comic use. The German artist Hans Weiditz did the same in his many single-leaf woodcuts. A good example is his woodcut of ca. 1521 (Fig. 8), showing a grotesque peasant couple, the woman balancing an outsized glass drinking vessel on her head. According to the German verses inscribed above the image, she wiggles her bottom as she dances and her nose is well adjusted to the tankard; hence the vessel on her head alludes to her propensity to drink, just as the grossly distended paunch of her partner testifies to his gluttony. This sheet may well poke fun at the peasants and warn against drunkenness and gluttony, but, like the *Songes drolatiques*, it must have been intended primarily to elicit laughter. This is probably true of many other works of the period that we now take so seriously, such as Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*. This book was surely reprinted so many times, and translated into Latin and other languages, not only for its moral lessons but also for what one twentieth-century critic has called its 'ribald, teasing humor,'[51] and for its wealth of amusing woodcuts, such as the illustration for the chapter 'Of Causing Discord' (Fig. 9). It shows a fool squeezed between two millstones, a comic visualization of a proverb describing how people who cause discord often get crushed by the very forces they set loose.

As this woodcut from the *Narrenschiff* suggests, taking proverbs literally was an important source of humor, then as now. The Netherlandish *rederijkers* were especially fond of proverbs, and so was Bruegel, as we can see, for example, in his *Netherlandish Proverbs* of 1559 (Fig. 10). People bang their heads against the wall, fall between two stools, try to bell the cat, and so forth. While this picture may indeed show the *weerelts abuisen* (deceptions of this world), as Frans Hogenberg proclaimed on the print that was most likely Bruegel's source,[52] it

XVIII

De delatoribus & litigiorũ ꝓmotoribus.

Qui duplici lingua liteſq; & iurgia vendit:
Et delatoris fungitur offitio:
Inter contiguos ponẽs ſua crura molares:
In precium ſceleris ſentiet exitium.



ꝓcuratõ
riꝝarum

Vir inſipiens fo=
dit malũ: & in la=
biis eius ignis ex=
ardeſcit homo ꝑ
uerſus ſuſcitat li=
tes: & verboſus
ſepat principes.
Parata ſunt deri=
ſoribꝰ iuditia: &
mallei ꝓcutiẽtes
ſtulto⁊ corpori=
bus. Qui in altuꝫ
mittet lapidẽ ſu=
per caput eius ca
det. Et qui foueã
fodit incidet i eã

Gaudia ſumma putat quidam miſcere ſiniſtris
Litibus: atq; homines ad iurgia vana mouere. puer. xvi.
Gaudet & interdum rixis turbare moleſtis &. xix.
Pectora: ſic igit̃ maleſani eſt criminis auctor: Eccle. xxvii. c. ii.

9 *Fool between two Millstones*
woodcut from Sebastian Brant,
Stultifera navis, Basel, 1497

10 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Flemish Proverbs

is also an hilariously cockeyed vision of a madhouse let loose upon an unsuspecting world. But perhaps no moralizing work of Bruegel's is funnier than his *Alchemist* (Fig.11), a drawing done about 1558. Here we look into a dilapidated make-shift laboratory littered with vials, retorts, and the like. At the right, a man sits at a hearth, engaged, most probably, in an attempt to transmute base metals into gold. This operation of 'the vayne & disceytfull craft of alkemy,' as one sixteenth-century writer called it,[53] is appparently directed by the personage in the long gown of a scholar, probably the chief alchemist, seated at the reading desk. He is the type of imposter who appears in two of Erasmus's colloquies, gulling his victims with fair words and with such tricks as pretending to transmute baser metals by throwing into the alchemic fire a hollowed-out coal filled with a bit of silver.[54] In Bruegel's drawing, the utter futility of this whole

11 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Alchemist, drawing

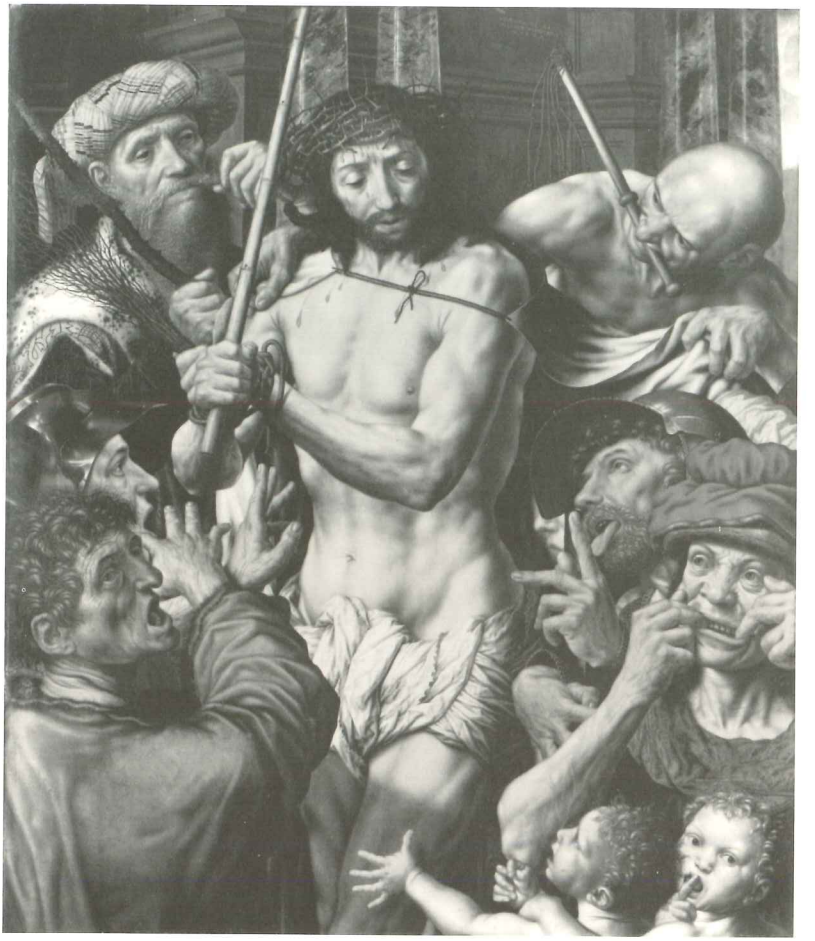
operation is indicated by the open book in which he points to the words 'Algemist,' a pun on the words 'alchemist' and '*al-gemist,*' a Netherlandish expression for both 'all is lost' and 'all is dung,' that is, nothing. The poverty of this household is evident in the tattered clothing of the man at the fireplace and by the empty purse that the wife displays to the viewer. And through the opening in the back wall, the destitute family is seen once more, being received into the poorhouse. The long-robed alchemist, of course, is not among them, having departed, presumably, to find another victim to fleece. Showing once more Bruegel's delight in word-play, this drawing also shows one of the earliest manifestations of his remarkable gift at rendering the human face, especially evident in the old woman with her half-demented grimace and in the fool, his features screwed up with effort, as he frenziedly pumps the bellows.

It cannot be denied that Bruegel's physiognomies, especially those of his

12 Frans Floris
Judgment of Solomon

small-scale figures, often look as if they had been formed with the same round cookie cutter, with eyes and mouths pressed in like raisons. It may have been such faces that led Otto Benesch, for example, to describe Bruegel's faces as masks and to claim that the artist understands humanity 'as an anonymous mass, subservient to the great laws that govern the earth,' and inspired Robert Delevoy to assert that Bruegel lacked the ability to 'render a smile or the psychological content of a gaze.'[55] But these observations hardly do justice to Bruegel's remarkable ability to depict the human countenance. This ability, in fact, constituted a very important part of his art of laughter, and surely must have appealed greatly to his contemporaries.

It is my impression that until the sixteenth century, the prevailing subject matter in art offered only limited opportunities for representing the human face in its more animated moments. Scenes of Christ's Passion, of course, often show expressive physiognomies, especially the suffering Christ or His grieving Mother and her companions, but the heroes and heroines of sacred and secular history generally adopt attitudes of noble restraint appropriate to their sta-



13 Jan Sanders van Hemessen
Mocking of Christ

tion. This is evident, for example, in a *Judgment of Solomon* by Frans Floris (Fig. 12); the participants, including the two mothers, face the prospect of judicial infanticide with remarkable equanimity.

Indeed, depictions of laughter in the visual arts, and most other emotions as well, except sadness or mourning, were restricted to the lower classes who had supporting roles in scenes of sacred history, especially the torturers of Christ. The contrast between the calm and dignified Christ and his voracious, beast-like tormenters was exploited in the Passion scenes of Quentin Massys, Maerten van Heemskerck, and Jan van Hemessen (Fig. 13). That is why I find it rather curious that artists were slow to take a similar advantage of the secular 'lowlife' subjects that were then coming into fashion. In many tavern interiors and rustic celebrations before Bruegel, the actors conduct themselves with much the same decorum that we encounter in the history painting of the period. Jan van Hemessen's *Tavern Scene* (Fig. 14), for example, is often called a 'Merry Company,' although there is actually not very much merry about it. The middle-aged man at the table receives the attentions of the young women with the same gravity with which they bestow them. Similarly, in Pieter Aertsen's pictures of celebrating peasants, such as the *Peasant Festival* of 1550 (Fig. 15), the quite sober, even wooden behavior of the participants belies the presumably festive occasion. There are, of course, some exceptions. A prime example appears in a picture by Quentin Massys done about 1520-1525 (Fig. 16). Massys, in fact, was one of the most remarkable painters of the human physiognomy before Bruegel, and in this picture he transformed the old lesson about the folly of ill-matched lovers into an especially funny scene, in which the feelings of the three players B the smiling courtesan, the leering old man who paws her, and the fool slyly lifting the old man's purse B are vividly portrayed in their faces.

The potential afforded by comic subjects for the representation of often extreme facial expressions was articulated much later, in the early eighteenth century, by Arnold Houbraken, when he said that 'it is the mark of true comedy that one knows how to depict and imitate everything equally naturally, both sadness and joy, composure and rage B in a word all the bodily movements and facial expressions that spring from the many impulses of the spirit.'[56] Houbraken was talking about a great Dutch comic painter of the seventeenth century, Jan Steen, but he also offers us an important insight into the popularity of such subjects in general.

Not only Steen, but many other artists, including Adriaen Brouwer and

14 Jan Sanders van Hemessen
Tavern Scene

Adriaen van Ostade painted humorous scenes of peasant brawls, smoke-filled tavern interiors, and the like. Why did people buy such subjects? The usual answer, of course, is that these images showed viewers precisely the sort of undesirable behavior they should avoid. But if such paintings were indeed intended by their makers to function as 'mirrors of morals,' then the very numbers in which they were produced and acquired might lead us to conclude that the Dutch public needed constant reminders of its proper conduct in life. Perhaps, but I suspect that such pictures were widely collected and cherished by successive generations, not so much as 'little sermons on sin,' as for the astonishing virtuosity displayed by their creators in rendering human figures convincingly and vividly in the throes of often violent passions.

The comic scenes of Brouwer, Steen, and their colleagues ultimately have

15 Pieter Aertsen
Peasant Festival, 1550

their roots, of course, in the art of Pieter Bruegel, and along with Quentin Massys, Bruegel was one of the few Netherlandish artists of his century who consistently explored the human face in its many varied expressions. We have already seen this in his *Alchemist* of 1558. Probably later in time is his head of a gaping peasant woman, a painting now in Munich (Alte Pinakothek). We also have the superb head of a man whose prodigious yawn would cause any viewer to respond in kind (Fig. 17). This latter picture has often been attributed to Bruegel himself, although recent scholars consider it a copy after a lost original.[57] Whatever the case, it is of much higher quality than several other paintings also considered copies after Bruegel, the *Head of a Lansquenet* (Montpellier, Musée Fabre) and the *Head of an Old Man* (Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts). It has been thought that these last two pictures, along with the *Yawning Man*, represent 'Anger,' Envy,'and 'Sloth,' remnants of a series of the Seven Deadly Sins, but that, I think, is to misconstrue their original function.[58] As Lyckle de Vries has pointed out, such studies were characterized in this period simply as *tronies*, meaning 'head,' 'face,' or 'facial expression.'[59] The *Yawning Man* was probably owned by Peter Paul Rubens, who also had several other pictures by Bruegel on panel designated in the inventories simply as *klyne tro-*

16 Quentin Massys
Ill-Matched Lovers

17 Attributed to Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Yawning Man

nien, or 'little heads'.[60] But paintings of this kind were not unique to Bruegel. A number of studies have come down to us from Frans Floris, the leading Italianate painter in Antwerp in Bruegel's day, depicting the heads of both men and women. They represent idealized types of youth and old age, although except for an occasional smile, they are less animated in expression than the *tronies* attributed to Bruegel, and it has been thought, probably correctly, that Floris created them as models to be used by his workshop assistants.[61] If Bruegel made any *tronies*, they were more likely intended as exercises for his

18 Anonymous, after Pieter Breugel the Elder?
Peasant Man and Peasant Woman

19 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Dance

own use, although they may have been also sought after by collectors. An Antwerp estate inventory of 1589 lists 'one *tronie* of a peasant man and three of peasant women;' no artist is given, so we can only speculate if they were by Bruegel.[62] In this connection, too, may be noted two series of prints depicting peasant physiognomies that were published several times in the seventeenth century (Fig. 18). One, a set of 24 images was etched by none other than Adriaen Brouwer, who indicated on the first sheet that these were the invention of Pieter Bruegel. The heads of both series are fairly crude in style, and if any of them actually go back to drawings from Bruegel's hand is a matter of dispute.[63] What is significant, however, is that such physiognomical studies were associated with Bruegel a generation or so after his death.

20 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Peasant Kermis

Bruegel's genius at rendering human expression, of course, appears often in his serious subjects, of which the most moving example surely must be his *Blind Leading the Blind,* in which he not only differentiates among the various afflictions of the eye from which they suffer, but also conveys the anguished desperation of these unfortunate creatures. But Bruegel also employed his keen eye for the human face for more comical effects, especially in his depictions of peasants. One telling instance is the snoring peasant sprawled beneath a tree in the *Wheat Harvest* (New York, Metropolitan Museum)*;* he is the perfect companion of the *Yawning Man* in Brussels.

This interest in the peasant subjects culminates, of course, in the Detroit *Wedding Dance* (Fig. 19), and above all in the two scenes of peasant revelry in Vienna (Figs. 20, 21). Of all of Bruegel's works, it is these three paintings of rustic revels whose reputation has suffered the most, perhaps, from the scholars who have sought to 'penetrate the secret thought of the artist.' Thus the

21 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Banquet

Wedding Dance has been termed a 'dance of death.' The *Wedding Feast* has been interpreted as a sermon condemning gluttony, as an allegory of the Church abandoned by Christ, and most recently as an image of the Last Judgment, in which the two bagpipers evoke the angels sounding the trump of doom.[64] And all this industrious deciphering of the supposedly profound meanings hidden in these paintings has only served to blind us to the miracle that Bruegel created on their surfaces. This is a pity, for it is precisely in these works that Bruegel shows the greatest diversity of human types, ages, social interaction, and even personality, all realized with an astonishing fidelity to nature. I will point out only a few examples.

In the Detroit *Wedding Dance*, for instance, the whole village, it seems, has turned out for the wedding celebration. The male dancer in the left foreground catches our eye by virtue of his distended codpiece, but Bruegel has

22 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Peasant Kermis (detail)

also caught his slightly tipsy smile. This gift for capturing expressive physiognomies in paint emerges more fully in the two peasant scenes in Vienna (Figs. 20, 21). In the *Kermis*, the couple hastening from the right to join their reveling companions show a striking contrast of age and character: the elderly man, who seems of a belligerent nature, and his younger, rather bovine partner. At lower left, a young man chats with the grizzled old bagpiper (Fig. 22), while at the table behind them a violent argument has broken out between three men, obviously in their cups, which a housewife strives vainly to stop. This fracas is ignored by the slightly lumpish young couple further locked in an amorous embrace.

If in the *Kermis*, Bruegel presents all the noisy release of social inhibitions

23 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Banquet (detail: Bagpiper)

common to a village fair, the *Wedding Feast* shows a more orderly gathering, but it is still incomparably livelier than Aertsen's staid celebration (Fig. 15). Bruegel has deftly included many humorous observations, from the boy seated at lower left, greedily licking his fingers, to the old man above him who pauses in his drinking to look at the food being carried in on a door serving as a tray, and the younger man across the table who concentrates all his energies, it seems, on eating. The sight of so many people drinking, with more drink on the way, it seems, from the large jugs at lower left, might well have recalled the old adage about guests who 'sooner sit by the wine jug than by the bride.'[65] They are entertained by two bagpipers at the left, their instruments decorated

24 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Banquet (detail: Bride)

with festive tassels. One piper, however, has paused (Fig. 23), his gaze fixed intently, it seems, on the makeshift tray carried by the two young men. The shallow bowls distributed by their companion, incidentally, is most likely *rijst potagie B rijstpap* in modern Netherlandish, a sort of rice pudding, in this case some of it colored yellow with saffron; it seems to have been a popular dish at festive occasions.[66] The hungry bagpiper is a figure that Bruegel adapted from earlier art,[67] but contemporary viewers would surely have marveled how Bruegel painted him so that *honger ziet hem wt den oogen*, a proverb of Bruegel's time that can be translated as 'hunger looks out of his eyes.'[68] It could also be said of him that '[i]f the bagpipe is not full, it does not screech,' a common say-

ing in which, of course, the sack or bagpipe refers both to the rustic musical instrument and to the bagpiper's empty belly.[69]

Another stock figure revitalized by Bruegel is the bride (Fig. 24). Although she sits enthroned in the middleground, the whole composition focuses on her. Both her crown and the cloth of honor are traditional bridal attributes, although in this case, the rustic cloth has been affixed to the stack of hay with a rake or some other farm implement. Traditional, too, are her ample figure and demure pose, hands folded and eyes discreetly lowered, for the bride was expected to show a modest demeanor during the wedding festivities. She almost always assumes this pose in depictions of a famous biblical wedding feast, the marriage feast at Cana. There is also an old German expression, 'to sit there like a peasant bride' that might have come to mind, and a Netherlandish variant, to be 'as quiet as a bride.'[70] But it is precisely here that Bruegel has fashioned, I think, one of his greatest comic figures: her modesty seems assumed. Is she a *vuile bruid*, a 'dirty bride,' as Bruegel's contemporaries termed a woman made pregnant before marriage?[71] However this may be, we may well wonder just what lies behind her slightly simpering expression.

To have inspired these or similar pleasantries, however, would not have transformed Bruegel's peasant revels into allegories of sin and damnation, but would only have enhanced the good-natured appeal of the rustic festivities that he so brilliantly portrayed. How would their fortunate owners and their guests have responded to Bruegel's peasant revels gracing their walls? They would have recalled with pleasure, surely, the many occasions when they had left their urban cares behind them to relax in the country at kermis time, or during extended holidays on their landed estates, observing the festivals and other pastimes, and perhaps even taking part. And if the townspeople regarded Bruegel's peasant revels with a sense of their own superior social status, I suspect that their laughter would have been an indulgent laughter, not untinged, perhaps, with the envy of the peace and freedom from care that city dwellers of every period have attributed to the country folk.

Some evidence for these speculations can be found in a forced auction that took place in Antwerp in September 1572, and I would like to end my talk by looking briefly at this event. The auction involved the household goods of a certain Jean Noirot, a bankrupt former Master of the Mint at Antwerp. From the two inventories that were made before this auction, we know that Noirot had one of the largest picture collections in sixteenth-century Antwerp.[72] As it

happens, they included five pictures by Pieter Bruegel the Elder: a winter landscape, two paintings of peasant weddings, and two peasant kermis scenes. Bruegel himself had died only three years before this auction, in August, 1569, so these were very likely genuine pictures from his own hand. Four of these pictures, the winter landscape and three scenes of the peasant revels, were hung in a room listed as *d'achter eetkamerken*, literally 'the small back dining-room.' And although we cannot identify the peasant scenes with any certainty with the three paintings we have been looking at (Figs. 20-22), they were most probably similar.

Now just why did Noirot have three of his peasant scenes by Bruegel hanging in his dining room?[73] The inventories do not tell us, of course, but we can make some good guesses, and once more they have to do with laughter. The meal time was traditionally the occasion for relaxation and light conversation, both to recreate the spirit and to promote digestion. A late medieval Latin treastise on table manners, the *Mensa philosophica*, emphasizes the value of laughter at meals.[74] And in his famous *Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621, Robert Burton quotes a sixteenth-century medical writer to the effect that the melancholy man should 'Feast often, and use friends not still so sad / Whose jests and merriments may make thee glad.'[75] Thus the dining room was a very appropriate place for Bruegel's rustic revels, where they would have contributed greatly to the mealtime merriment. And they must have lightened the spirit of the people who contemplated them, no matter how 'straight-faced and stately,' as Van Mander would later put it, they might be on other occasions. And I like to think that even Jean Noirot might have responded to such images with laughter, or at least twitched his lips in a smile, before he was overtaken by the events that ultimately drove him to bankruptcy, exile, and the loss of his prized Bruegel paintings in the forced sale of 1572.[76]

NOTES

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2 See *Spelen van sinne, vol scoone moralisacien...*, Antwerp, 1562.

3 A.E. Popham, 'Pieter Bruegel and Abraham Ortelius,' *Burlington Magazine* 59 (1931), pp. 184-188; the original text in Abraham Ortelius, *Album amicorum*, facsimile ed. and trans. Jean Puraye, with Marie Delcourt, et. al., Amsterdam, 1969, facsimile fols. 12v-13r; French translation, pp. 21-22.

4 Most recently by Mark Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs and the Practice of Rhetoric*, Zwolle, 2002, pp. 108-117.

5 *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*, trans. E. Jex-Blake, ed. E. Sellers, Chicago, 1968, pp. 116, 117 (XXXV, 73).

6 For works by or attributed to Bruegel discussed in this lecture, the following may be usefully consulted: F. Grossmann, *Bruegel: The Paintings, Complete Edition*. London, [1955]; Robert Hughes and Piero Bianconi, *The Complete Paintings of Bruegel*. New York, 1967; exh. cat. *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Drawings and Prints*, ed. Nadine M. Orenstein (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen; New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), New York, New Haven, and London, 2001.

7 Charles de Tolnay, *Pierre Bruegel l'Ancien*, 2 vols., Brussels, 1935, vol. 1: pp. 61-62, n. 15.

8 Ibid., vol. 1: 5 (unpaginated).

9 E.g., a plate from his *Small Architectural Perspective Views* (Antwerp: Hieronymus Cock, 1562); see F.W.H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450-1700*, vol. 47, Rotterdam 1997, no. 100.

10 Van Mander, (as in note 1), vol. 1: pp. 322-325 (fols. 266r-266v).

11 A. Monballieu, 'Een werk van P. Bruegel en H. Vredeman de Vries voor de tresorier Aert Molckeman,' *Jaarboek Antwerpen*, 1969, pp. 113-135.

12 B.A.M. Ramakers, 'Bruegel en de rederijkers: Schilderkunst en literatuur in de zestiende eeuw,' in *Nederlands kunsthistorisch jaarboek* 47 (1996), pp. 80-105, esp. p. 102.

13 Hessel Miedema, 'Realism and the Comic Mode: The Peasant,' *Simiolus* 9 (1977), pp. 205-219 , esp. p. 211.

14 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephett, rev. ed. Eric Dunning, *et al.*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 61, 71, 110-111.

15 For Chrysostom and Hildegard, see Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion*, London and New York, 1997, pp. 63, 79 respectively.

16 Jan Roelants, *Een nyeu Complexie-Boeck* (Antwerp, 1554); also an edition of 1564, cited in Johan Verberckmoes, *Schertsen, schimpen en schateren: geschiedenis van het lachen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, zestiende en zeventiende eeuw*, Nijmegen, 1998, pp. 40-41.

17 Luis Vives, *De Anima et Vita* (Basel, 1538), quoted in Vera Cecília Machline, 'The Contributions of Laurent Jourbert's *Traité du ris* to Sixteenth-Century Physiology of Laughter,' in *Reading the Book of Nature: The Other Side of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. Allen G. Debus and Michael T. Walton, Kirksville, MO, 1998, p. 256.

18 Desiderius Erasmus, *On Good Manners for Boys. De civilitate morum puerilium*, trans. Brian McGregor, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 25, *Literary and Educational Writings* 3, *De conscribendis epistolis, Formula, De civilitate*, ed. J.K. Sowards, Toronto, Buffalo, and London, 1985, pp. 277-289.

19 For Erasmus's manual and its successors, see Franz Bierlaire, 'Erasmus at School: The *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium Libellus*,' in *Essays on the Works of Erasmus*, ed. Richard L. DeMolen, New Haven, and London, 1978, pp. 239-251; and Jacques Revel, 'The Uses of Civility,' in *A History of Private Life*. III. *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1989, pp. 168-190.

20 Rudolf Dekker, *Lachen in de Gouden Eeuw: een geschiedenis van de Nederlandse humor*, Amsterdam, 1997, p. 84; he speaks of the seventeenth century, but it is equally true for the sixteenth.

21 Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the* Courtier*: The European Reception of Castiglione's* Cortegiano, Cambridge and Oxford, 1995, pp. 105 and 159-160, nos. 39, 69. For recent perspectives on the *Courtier*, see the essays in Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation*, ed. Daniel Javitch, New York and London, 2002.

22 Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Charles S. Singleton, Garden City, NY, 1959, pp. 144-145, 182.

23 See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, and London, 1978, p. 26.

24 Castiglione (as in note 22). p. 145.

25 Cicero, *De oratore*, trans. E.W. Sutton and H. Rackham, 2 vols., London, and Cambridge, 1942, vol.1: pp. 372-419 (II. lviii. 235 - lxxi, 290).

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27 Anna Bijns, *Refereinen*, ed. M. Bogaers, Rotterdam, 1875, p. 43 (Book I, no. 13).

28 Quoted in René van Stipriaan, *Leugens en vermaak. Boccaccio's novellen in de kluchtkultuur van de Nederlandse renaissance*, Amsterdam, 1996, p. 36.

29 Herman Pleij, *Nederlandse literatuur van de late middeleeuwen*, Utrecht, 1990, pp. 79-100; Stipriaan (as in note 28); Johan Verberckmoes, *Laughter, Jestbooks and Society in the Spanish Netherlands*, Houndmills (Basingtoke), London, and New York, 1999; Dekker (as in note 20).

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31 *One Hundred Renaissance Jokes: An Anthology*, ed. Barbara Bowen, Birmingham, AL, 1988, p. 3, no. 5.

32 For Margaret of Austria, see exh. cat. *Le bibliothèque de Marguerite d'Autriche. Exposition* (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale), 1940, p. 56, cat. no. 123. For the other two, see Pleij (as in note 29), p. 96.

33 See, respectively, *Mary of Nemeghen*, in *Medieval Netherlandish Religious Literature*, trans. E. Colledge, Leiden and London, 1965, p. 211; and B.A.M. Ramakers, *Spelen en figuren: toneel en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen Middeleeuwen en Moderne Tijd*. Amsterdam, 1996, p. 157.

34 W.M.H. Hummelen, 'Toneel op de kermis, van Bruegel tot Bredero,' *Oud Holland* 103 (1989), pp. 1-45, esp. p. 24.

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39 For depictions of this play in Netherlandish kermis scenes, see Hummelen (as in note 34).

40 See Hans van Dijk, *et al.*, 'Plaijerwater. A Sixteenth-Century Farce, with an English Translation,' *Dutch Crossing*, no. 24 (December, 1984), pp. 32-81.

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44 François Rabelais, *The Histories of Gargantua and Pantagruel,* trans. J.M. Cohen, Harmondsworth, etc., 1955, p. 37 (Prologue to *Gargantua*).

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52 Walter S. Gibson, *Bruegel,* London, 1977, pp. 71-76, and fig. 43.

53 Alexander Barclay, *Ship of Fools,* fol. ccvvii; quoted in Robert C. Evans, 'Forgotten Fools: Alexander Barclay's *Ship of Fools,*' in *Fools and Folly,* ed. Clifford Davidson, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 22, Kalamazoo, MI, 1996, p. 64.

54 'Alchemy' and 'Beggar Talk,' in Desiderius Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Erasmus,* trans. Craig R. Thompson, Chicago and London, 1965, pp. 238-245, and 248-254 respectively.

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61 De Vries (as in note 59), p. 191. For Floris's *tronies,* see Carl Van de Velde, *Frans Floris*

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63 René van Bastelaer, *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Catalogue Raisonné. New Edition*, trans. and rev. Susan Fargo Gilchrist, San Francisco, 1992, pp. 312-333, nos. 230-241 and 242-277. Some of prints by Brouwer were copied in reverse in the second series, whose second state bears the name *C J Visscher* as the publisher.

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66 Gibson (as in note 64), p. 39.

67 Gibson, *ibid.*, pp. 37, 39.

68 *Kamper spreekwoorden naar de uitgave van Warnersen anno 1550*, ed. G.G. Kloeke, Assen, 1959, p. 48, no. 26.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 48, no. 23.

70 The Netherlandish proverb listed in E. Verwijs and J. Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek*, 11 vols., The Hague, 1885-1952), vol. 1: col. 1469, s.v. *Bruut (Bruyt)*; its German counterpart in Lutz Rörich, *Lexikon der sprichwörtlichen Redensarten*, 2 vols., Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, 1974, vol. 1: p. 151, s.v. *Brautsar*.

71 *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, 29 vols., The Hague, 1882-1998, vol. 3, pt. 1: p. 1621, s.v. *Bruid* (1).

72 Luc Smolderen, 'Tableaux de Jérôme Bosch, de Pieter Bruegel l'Ancien et de Frans Floris dispersés en vente publique à la Monnaie d'Anvers,' *Revue belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art* 64 (1995), pp. 33-41.

73 Cf. Claudia Goldstein, 'Artifacts of Domestic Life: Bruegel's Paintings in the Flemish Home,' *Nederlands kunsthistorisch jaarboek* 51 (2000), pp. 173-193.

74 Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes, Chicago, 1991, p. 96.

75 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith, New York, 1927, p. 485 (Part. 2, Sect. 2, Memb. 6, Subs. 4).

76 My warmest thanks to Elvy O'Brien for reading – and listening to – several earlier drafts of this lecture and for her valuable comments.

1 PHILIPS GALLE AFTER PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
Death of the Virgin, engraving and etching, (from H. Arthur Klein, *Graphic Works of Peter Bruegel the Elder*, New York, Dover Publications, 1963)
2 PIETER BALTENS
Village Kermis with the Klucht van Pleijerwater, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
(Photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)
3 FOLLOWER OF HIERONYMUS BOSCH
Vision of Tundale, Madrid, Museo Lázaro Galdiano
4/5 *Songes drolatiques de Pantagruel*
(by permission of the Houghton Library Harvard University)
6 AFTER PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
Allegory of Sloth, engraving and etching, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection
7 AFTER PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
Allegory of Pride, engraving and etching, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection
8 HANS WEIDITZ
Grotesque Couple, woodcut, (from Max Geisberg, The German Single-Leaf Woodcut: 1500-1550, rev. and ed. Walter L. Strauss, New York, Hacker Art Books, 1974)
9 *Fool between two Millstones*
woodcut from Sebastian Brant, *Stultifera navis*, Basel, 1497 (Photo: Courtesy of the Chapin Library of Rare Books, Williams College)
10 PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
Flemish Proverbs, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie
11 PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
Alchemist, drawing, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett
(Photo: Jörg P. Anders)
12 FRANS FLORIS
Judgment of Solomon, Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten
(Photo: © IRPA-KIK Brussels)
13 JAN SANDERS VAN HEMESSEN
Mocking of Christ, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen
14 JAN SANDERS VAN HEMESSEN
Tavern Scene, Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum
15 PIETER AERTSEN

Peasant Festival, 1550, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
16 Quentin Massys
Ill-Matched Lovers, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art
17 Attributed to Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Yawning Man, Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (Photo: © irpa-kik Brussels)
18 Anonymous, after Pieter Breugel the Elder?
Peasant Man and Peasant Woman, engraving, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Andrew W. Mellon Fund
19 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Dance, Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts
20 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Peasant Kermis, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
21 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Banquet, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
22 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Peasant Kermis (detail), Vienna, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
23 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Banquet (detail: Bagpiper), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
24 Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Wedding Banquet (detail: Bride), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

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