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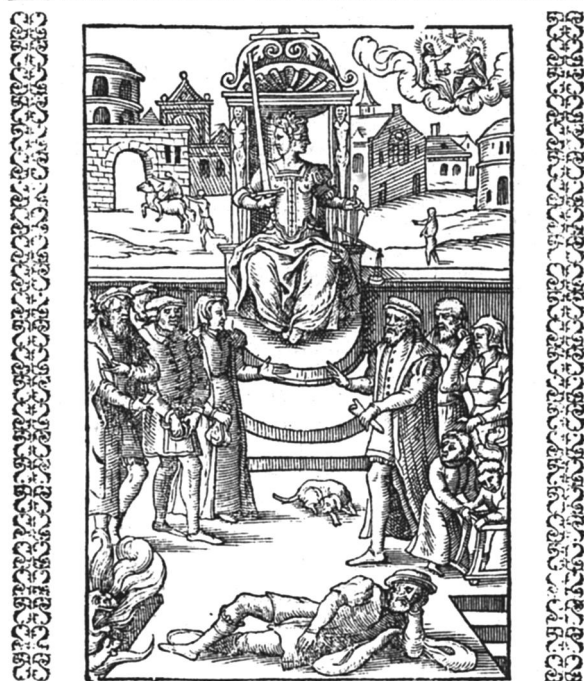
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Festive peasants before Bruegel: three case studies and their implications*

Walter S. Gibson

le de son oncle, et ainsi, ainsi que par le poème, par le poème
faire criminellement enuers le Prince, felô l'ordonnance de Char
les Cinquiesme, touchât le fait des jugemens criminelz artic. 97.

Le Simulachre de Iustice mondaine.



sep. 1.
Aimez Iustice, ceux qui jugez la Terre.

1 The peasant as the foundation of justice, woodcut illustration in Joos de Damhouder, *Practique judiciaire*, Antwerp 1564 (photo: Universiteitsbibliotheek, Amsterdam)

* I would like to thank Ger Luijten for his thoughtful comments on this article, and for several references cited in notes 2 and 11.

1 H. Wittenweiler, *Wittenweiler's Ring and the anonymous Scots poem Cockelbie sow: two comic-didactic works from the fifteenth century*, trans. G. Fenwick Jones, New York 1969, unnumbered page facing p. 1.

In the preface to the fifteenth-century Swiss poem *Wittenweiler's Ring*, the anonymous author distinguishes between two types of peasant, the one who "wisely supports himself by honest work" and the other who "lives wrongly and acts foolishly."¹ These two traditions regarding the peasantry were still very much alive in Bruegel's lifetime. The first is that of the good peasant: his is an honorable estate. The herdsman and plowman support the rest of society through their hard work;² they are contented with their humble lot, leading virtuous lives free of the vices and intrigues of court and city. These are the countryfolk celebrated by Horace in his *beatus ille* ("happy the man who, far from business cares,... works his ancestral acres with his oxen, from all money-making free"),³ and they were the last to harbor Justitia, the goddess of justice, according to an old myth recited by Virgil (*Georgics*, 2, 473-74), before she departed the earth forever. This particular story was repeated by Petrarch, among others,⁴ and in Bruegel's day, a woodcut illustration in Joos de Damhouder's judicial handbook, *Practique judiciaire* (first published in Antwerp in 1564) shows the peasant as the very foundation on which Justice rests (fig. 1).⁵

2 This is the gist of an undated print by Peeter van der Borch showing three gentlemen walking past a field of laboring peasants; see H. and U. Mielke, *The New Hollstein, Dutch & Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts 1450-1700*, Peeter van der Borch, Rotterdam & Amsterdam 2004, pp. 183, 186, no. 175.

3 Horace, *The odes and epodes*, trans. C.E. Bennett, Cambridge (Mass.) & London 1914, p. 365 (Epode 2).

4 See C.H. Rawski (ed.), *Petrarch's Remedies for fortune fair and foul: a modern English translation of De remediis utriusque fortune*, 5 vols., Bloomington & Indianapolis 1991, vol. 1, p. 172: "When Justice departed this earth,/ she left her last footprints among them [the husbandmen]."

5 E.M. Kavalier, *Pieter Bruegel: parables of order and enterprise*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 72-74.

2 Pieter Bruegel the Elder,
The wheat harvest, 1565. New York,
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art



If the concept of the good peasant stresses his labors, the stereotype of the bad one focuses, conversely, on his recreations. He is the stupid, boisterous, quarrelsome *boer*, whose drunken kermises and rowdy weddings, often ending in a bloody brawl, epitomize the very opposite of what the burgher and the courtier considered to be proper behavior. The bad peasant, or perhaps only the coarse and ill-mannered, is described at great length in *Wittenwiler's Ring*, as well as in its chief source of inspiration, *Metzi's wedding*, a German poem of the early-fourteenth century. The peasant and his female consort were also recurring figures in the Nuremberg *Schembart*, or carnival procession, and their Netherlandish counterparts, generally less violent but equally uncouth, long entertained audiences with their antics in innumerable rhetoricians' farces and *tafelspelen* (playlets performed between courses at banquets).⁶

Few observers would deny that the good peasant is

featured in Bruegel's *Labors of the months* of 1565, those far-flung panoramas in which the country people seem an integral part of the land itself (fig. 2).⁷ But what about Bruegel's depictions of peasant revels? These images have generated a controversy remarkable for both its intensity and duration.⁸ Some scholars see the *Detroit Wedding dance* and the *Kermis and Wedding banquet* in Vienna (fig. 3) as essentially benign, showing the good peasant taking a well-earned respite from his arduous labor. Others, however, insist that these pictures depict the bad peasant, that they are, in fact, satirical and didactic in function, expressing the contempt of the urbanite for the peasant, and exposing his pastimes as precisely the sort of sinful behavior to be avoided by the rest of society. Perhaps the best-known exponent of this view is Hans-Joachim Raupp, who devoted a detailed study to this thesis, claiming that the tradition of peasant satire was so pervasive that no artist could have es-

6 S.L. Sumberg, *The Nuremberg Schembart carnival*, New York 1966. For the peasant in the rhetoricians' plays see W.S. Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the art of laughter*, Berkeley & London 2006, pp. 24-25, with further literature.

7 For the tradition of harvest scenes, including those by Bruegel,

see L. Vardi, "Imagining the harvest in early modern Europe," *The American Historical Review* 101 (1996), pp. 1357-97. My thanks go to Fronia Simpson for this valuable reference.

8 For this controversy, and further literature, see W.S. Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: two studies*, Lawrence (Kansas) 1991, pp. 13-17.



3 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Peasant kermis*. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

caped it, not even Bruegel.⁹

Those who agree with Raupp place Bruegel's rustic revels within a visual tradition that apparently began with a series of woodcuts produced at Nuremberg in the 1520s and 30s. It includes Erhard Schön's *Peasant wedding celebration* and several scenes of church festivals by the brothers Barthel and Sebald Beham (fig. 4).¹⁰ These prints show coarse lovemaking, drunkenness and vomiting, and in the case of the church festivals, a free-for-

all battle with drawn swords. Similar subjects appeared in Antwerp prints shortly before mid-century,¹¹ and two prints after Pieter Bruegel, the *St Joris kermis* and the *Hoboken kermis*, depict comparable scenes, although the usual peasant brawl has been relegated to the background in the former and omitted altogether in the latter.¹² Nevertheless, the inscription on the latter print, critical of the activities depicted,¹³ has led many observers to assume that the same attitudes are expressed

9 H.-J. Raupp, *Bauernsatiren: Entstehung und Entwicklung des bäuerlichen Genres in der deutschen und niederländischen Kunst ca. 1470-1570*, Niederzier 1986. A more recent exponent of this approach is M.A. Sullivan, *Bruegel's peasants: art and audience in the northern Renaissance*, Cambridge 1994.

10 Illustrated in Gibson, op. cit. (note 8), pp. 14-15, figs. 4-6. See also A. Stewart, "The first 'peasant festivals': eleven woodcuts produced in Reformation Nuremberg by Barthel and Sebald Beham and Erhard Schön, ca. 1524 to 1535" (diss.), Columbia University 1974, and K. Moxey, *Peasants, warriors and wives: popular imagery in the Reformation*, Chicago & London 1989, pp. 35-66.

11 For the Netherlandish prints see Gibson, op. cit. (note 8), pp. 14-16, figs. 7-8, pp. 32-35, figs. 25-28, with further literature, and, more recently, Mielke and Mielke, op. cit. (note 2), pp. 172-75, 178-85, nrs. 167-68, 170-74. To these examples might be added, perhaps, *The narrow and broad ways*, an anti-Catholic print published by Johannes van Doetecum in 1583. On the "broad way" to perdition, a village kermis in full swing in the right background is about to be overwhelmed by divine flames. However, we may suspect that it is not the peasants who

are condemned so much as the plethora of church holidays in the Roman calendar and their misuse by all classes, a favorite target of Protestant invective. See D. Horst, "De Smalle en de Brede Weg als protestants thema in enkele 16de-eeuwse prenten," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 47 (1999), pp. 3-19, with an English summary on pp. 74-75.

12 For these two prints after Bruegel, see N.M. Orenstein (ed.), exhib. cat. *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: drawings and prints*, Rotterdam (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen), New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), New Haven & London 2001, pp. 196-200, cat. nrs. 79-80; and for the *Hoboken kermis*, E. de Jongh and G. Luijten, exhib. cat. *Mirror of everyday life: genreprints in the Netherlands 1550-1700*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) & Ghent 1997, pp. 44-48, cat. nr. 1.

13 According to the inscription on the *Hoboken kermis*, "The peasants rejoice in such feasts / to dance and jump and to drink themselves as drunk as beasts. They must hold their kermises / although they should fast, and die from chewing" ("Die boeren verblijven hun in sulken feesten, / Te dansen springhen en dronckendrincken als beesten. / Sij moeten die kermissen onderhouden, / Al souwen sij vas-



4 Sebald Beham, *Peasant kermis*, woodcut. London, British Museum (photo: British Museum, London)

in Bruegel's paintings of peasant festivities.

Several scholars, however, have suggested that the Nuremberg prints were not as condemnatory as generally claimed,¹⁴ and, even more to the point, there are other German images of roughly the same period depicting rustic revels in contexts that are unambiguously positive. If they have been largely ignored in earlier discussions, it is probably because they are a motley group, occurring in places in which we might not expect to find them, including a luxurious manuscript created for a Holy Roman Emperor, a painted house facade and a public fountain. I have mentioned two of these works briefly elsewhere,¹⁵ but all three merit a more detailed examination, if only because they extend our knowledge of the function and significance of peasant imagery in sixteenth-century Europe, including the Netherlands of Bruegel's time.

Perhaps no peasant revels were conducted in more overtly auspicious circumstances than the one included by Albrecht Dürer among the marginal drawings that he

contributed to the *Hours of Emperor Maximilian I*, done in collaboration with other artists about 1514–15 (fig. 5). Depicting a group of peasants dancing and playing the bagpipes, it serves as one of the illustrations for the text of Psalm 99, verses 1–3: “Sing joyfully to God, all the earth: serve ye the Lord with gladness. Come in before his presence with exceeding great joy. Know ye that the Lord he is God: he made us, and not we ourselves. We are the sheep of his pasture.”¹⁶ It may be that the reference to sheep and pasture in this verse inspired Dürer to entrust this praise of the Lord to such crude folk, one of whom balances an outsized hobnailed drinking glass on his head, but I think not. In another of Dürer's marginal drawings, the Lord is praised by the town band, or possibly some court musicians, but the peasants come forward in two other illustrations to glorify God or the Virgin Mary.¹⁷

Just why did Dürer allot such an exalted role as praising God and the Virgin to the countryfolk? The answer may well lie in the traditional part played in the Christ-

ten en sterven van kauwen”) The last word, “kauwen,” is usually translated as “cold” (i.e., to “die from the cold,” but I cannot find this spelling for the Netherlandish word “koud” (“cold”) in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, “kauwen” meant “to chew,” and I am inclined to accept Susan Gilchrist's rendering the sense of the last phrase as “and die from overeating,” that is, instead of fasting; see René van Bastelaer, *The prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder: catalogue raisonné*, trans. S. Gilchrist, San Francisco 1992, p. 282, note 250.

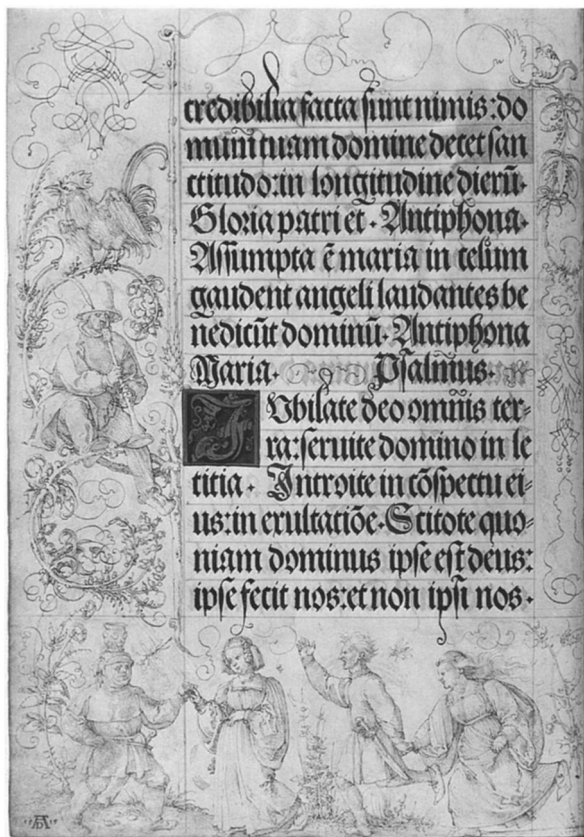
14 M.D. Carroll, “Peasant festivity and political identity in the sixteenth century,” *Art History* 10 (1987), pp. 289–314; and A. Stewart, “Paper festivals and popular entertainment: the kermis woodcuts of Sebald Beham in Reformation Nuremberg,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*

24 (1993), pp. 301–50.

15 Gibson, op. cit. (note 8) p. 49, note 92.

16 W.L. Strauss (ed.), *The Book of Hours of the Emperor Maximilian the First*, New York 1974, p. 112. Strauss quotes Psalm 100 from the King James Version, but in the Latin Vulgate it is Psalm 99, for which I have used the Douay-Rheims Bible, as being more faithful to the Latin original. See Strauss, pp. 320–29, 334, for an account of this manuscript and its copies.

17 Strauss, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 99 and 76, respectively for a town band and another pair of peasant musicians who praise God. On p. 12, a peasant bagpiper accompanies a long prayer addressed to the Virgin.



5 Albrecht Dürer, *Peasants dancing*, from the *Hours of Maximilian I*, fol. 56v, drawing. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek



6 *Annunciation to the shepherds and Adoration of the shepherds*, from the *Spinola Hours*, Ghent or Mechelen, c. 1510–20. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 83. ML.114 (Ms. IX.18), fol. 125v

mas story by one particular kind of peasant, the shepherd. It was the shepherds, after all, to whom the angels first announced the birth of Christ. This episode is told in Luke 2:8–18, in which the shepherds, after receiving the message, went very soberly to Bethlehem to view the Child. But in the later middle ages, particularly in books of hours, the shepherds postpone their journey long enough to celebrate the angelic message with rustic rev-

els. Thus in the *Rohan Hours* of c. 1415, a shepherd plays a flute and dances; and in the *Angoulême Hours* of around 1480, country men and women engage in a ring dance to the music of a bagpiper.¹⁸ A round dance accompanied by a bagpiper also appears in the *Spinola Hours*, a lavishly illuminated book of hours produced in Ghent or Mechelen around 1515; one shepherd even dances with his dog (fig. 6). In no book of hours, howev-

¹⁸ M. Meiss and M. Thomas (eds.), *The Rohan Master: a book of hours*, New York 1973, pl. 46 (fol. 70). For the *Hours of Charles d'Angoulême* see J.J. Mak, *Middeleeuwse kerst voorstellingen*, Utrecht & Brussels 1948, fig. 51 (between pp. 184 and 185). For other examples see P. Verheyden, "De boerendans op Vlaamsche boekbanden," *De Gulden Passer*, n.s. 20 (1942), pp. 209–37, esp. figs. 1–3. That these musical

peasants were directly inspired by Nativity plays and the *tableaux vivants* shown in religious processions is suggested by L. van Puyvelde, *Schilderkunst en tooneelvertooningen op het einde van de middeleeuwen: een bijdrage tot de kunstgeschiedenis, vooral van de Nederlanden*, Ghent 1912, p. 112, and note 114.



7 Hans Weiditz, *Grotesque peasant couple*, ca. 1521, hand-colored woodcut. Gotha, Stiftung Schloss Friedenstein Gotha, Schlossmuseum

er, does a peasant balance a glass on his head, but in a woodcut of about 1521 by Hans Weiditz (fig. 7), showing two grotesque peasant-like figures, the woman has a tall, outsized hobnailed drinking vessel, presumably made of glass, affixed to her headdress. The German verses inscribed above the image tell us that the woman wiggles her bottom as she dances and her nose is well suited to the tankard; hence the vessel on her head alerts us to her drinking habits, just as her partner's great belly betrays his gluttony. In Dürer's case, however, given the generally favorable context of his peasants, the drinking glass may allude to the feasting that will come after the dance, or it may simply be a bit of whimsy: we can only speculate.

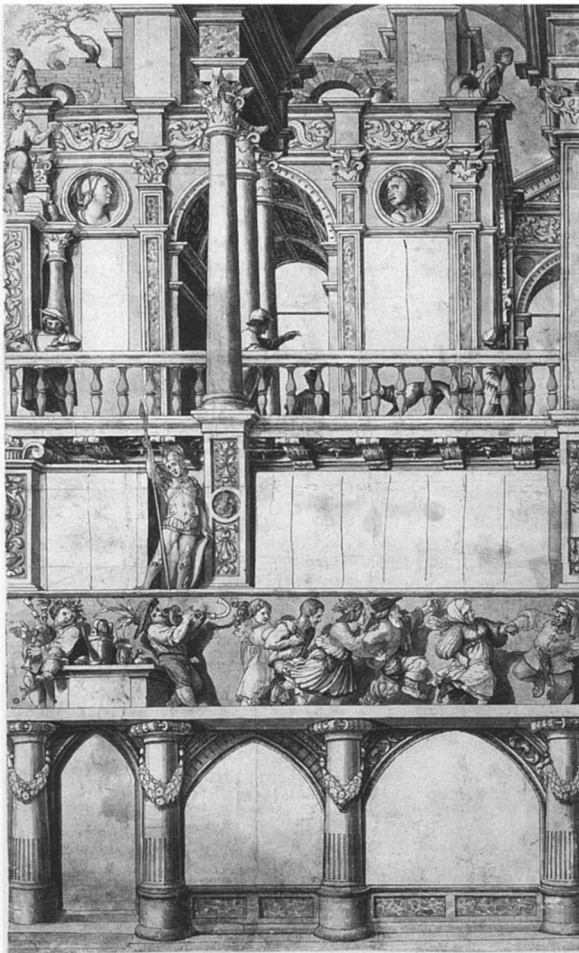
A few years after the completion of Maximilian's book of hours, Hans Holbein the Younger designed a painted facade for the so-called Haus zum Tanz in Basel, executed probably about 1520–21 (figs. 8–10). The house was demolished in 1909, but Holbein's design has survived in several drawings.¹⁹ The structure was situated on the corner of the Eisengasse, the main street of Basel, and a narrow alley then called the Helmgässlein (now the Tanzgässlein), and the word "Tanz" occurs in the city records as part of the house's name as early as 1401. It was most likely this circumstance that inspired Holbein to include a frieze of dancing figures on the cornice of the ground floor. One might expect the artist to have chosen a fashionable bourgeois dance such as Israhel van Meckenem depicted in a print of the late fifteenth century (fig. 11). Although van Meckenem's print probably represents the court of Herod, as suggested by the presence in the background of episodes from the beheading of John the Baptist, the three musicians in the center wear badges identifying them as members of the official town band of Münster, and it has been plausibly suggested that the artist was depicting a public dance held in a building near the town hall for members of Münster's leading families.²⁰

However, instead of a properly dignified urban dance, Holbein has depicted pairs of robust country

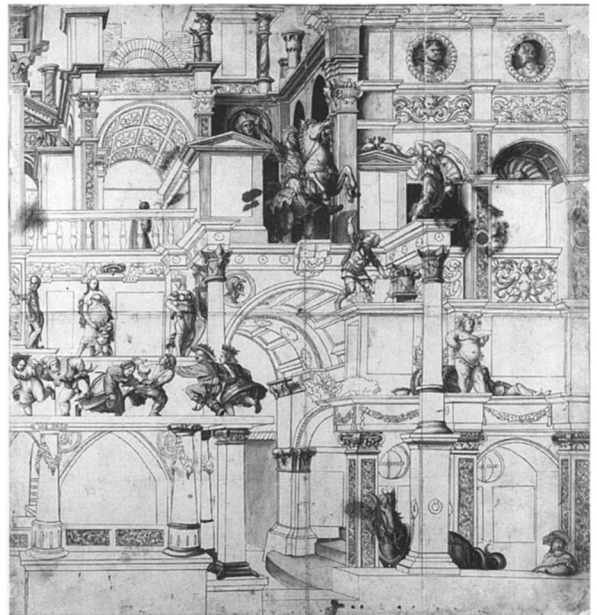
¹⁹ P. Ganz, *The paintings of Holbein: complete edition*, New York & London 1950, pp. 266–70, cat. nrs. 162–65, figs. 40–44, and J. Rowlands, *The paintings of Hans Holbein the Elder: complete edition*, New York 1985, pp. 53–55, 219–20, cat. nr. L.41, and pls. 156–58. See also C. Klemm, "Der Entwurf zur Fassadenmalerei am Haus 'Zum Tanz,'" *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte* 29 (1972),

pp. 165–75, who suggests that the facade was designed much later, in 1539.

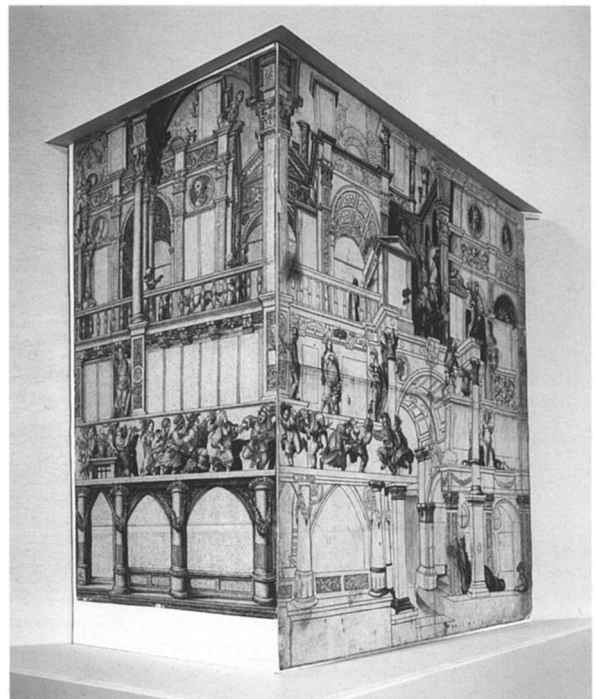
²⁰ H. Meier, "Some Israhel van Meckenem problems," *Print Collector's Quarterly* 27 (1940), pp. 27–67, esp. pp. 28–31. Meier suggests that the dance is shown in the great hall of the Gruthaus, the town brewery adjoining the Münster town hall.



8 After Hans Holbein the Younger, *Record of the final design of the Eisengasse facade design for the Haus zum Tanz*, pen and ink with watercolor. Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz (photo: Jörg P. Anders)



9 Copy after Hans Holbein the Younger, *Design for the facade painting of the Haus zum Tanz in Basel (on the Tanzgässlein)*, c. 1520/25, pen and watercolor. Basel, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kupferstichkabinett



10 Model of the Haus zum Tanz in Basel, with main and side Facades, pen and ink with watercolor. Basel, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kupferstichkabinett

11 Israhel van Meckenem,
Dance of Salome, engraving,
 c. 1500. Cleveland,
 The Cleveland Museum of Art



men and women stomping vigorously across one facade and part of the adjoining one (figs. 8, 10).²¹ This rustic episode stands out as a visually cohesive unit amid an astonishing array of classical columns, pediments and the like, medallions with the heads of Roman emperors and other ancient worthies, and, on the Helmгässlein facade, a great triumphal arch from which Marcus Curtius on horseback prepares to leap into the alley below. The peasants' earthy exuberance, moreover, presents a striking contrast to the fictive statues of pagan divinities posed on the second storey, and to the four men, probably urban dwellers, and an elegant hunting dog occupying the third-storey balcony. Only Marcus Curtius's horse evinces a comparable energy (fig. 9). The owner of the house was Balthasar Angelrot, a wealthy goldsmith,

and if he did not dictate the subject matter, we may assume that he was at least consulted as Holbein worked out the details of his design. But no record has survived that tells us just why these lumbering rustics were so prominently featured on the facade, and no modern scholar has adequately explained their presence.²² But it may be significant that the peasants are engaged in a harvest dance; this is clearly suggested by the presence in their midst of baskets of farm produce and sheaves of wheat, visible on a stone block between the bagpiper and a horn player. The harvest theme is complemented on the Helmгässlein facade (fig. 10) by the presence of a nude Bacchus standing on the same level and holding a wine cup, most likely alluding to the grape harvest.²³ Placed just above the ground-floor openings, the peas-

21 Maurer correctly emphasizes the fantasy of Holbein's design and asks if he had been influenced by contemporary stage and festive architecture; see E. Maurer, "Holbein jenseits der Renaissance," in "Im Niemandsland der Stile: Bemerkungen zur schweizer Architektur zwischen Gotik und Barok," *Unsere Kunstdenkmäler* 31 (1980), pp. 306–16, esp. p. 313; reprinted in E. Maurer, *15 Aufsätze zur Geschichte der Malerei*, Basel, Boston & Stuttgart 1982, pp. 123–33, esp. p. 127.

22 Raupp, op. cit. (note 9), pp. 175–76, discusses the Haus zum Tanz as an example of the "niedrige Stil" ("humble style"), but attaches no particular moralizing significance to its imagery. H. Kronthaler,

Profane Wand- und Deckenmalerei in Süddeutschland im 16. Jahrhundert und ihr Verhältnis zur Kunst Italiens, Munich 1992, pp. 22–37, esp. pp. 30 and 28 respectively, devotes several pages to the iconography of the facade, but concludes that the program reflects Angelrot's "Privatikonographie," now largely lost to us, and dismisses the peasant dance as simply reflecting the house's name.

23 Kronthaler, op. cit. (note 22), p. 29, pairs the heroic Marcus Curtius and the Bacchus figure as an allegory of temperance and intemperance.



12 Robert Campin, *Mérode triptych*, detail of the right wing. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection

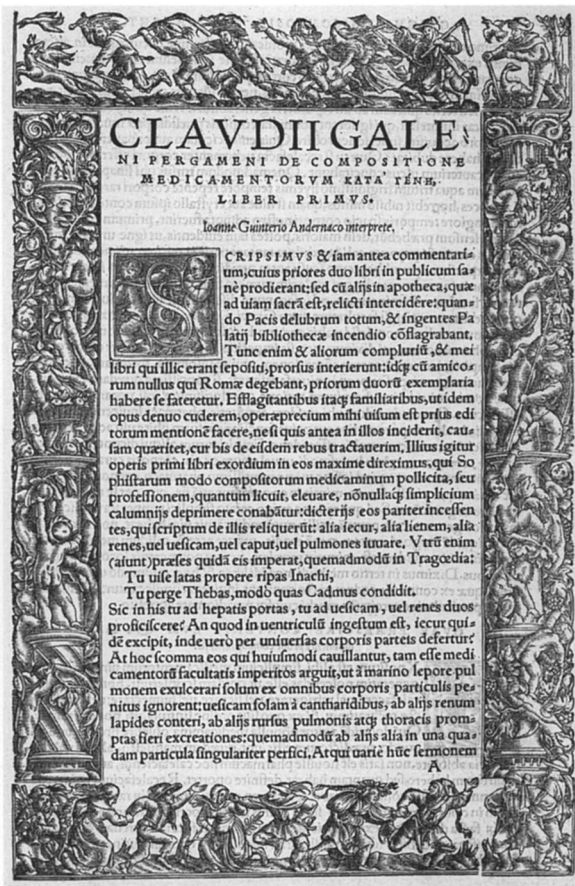
ant dance forms the visual base for the more 'noble' illusionistic architecture above. The ground floor appears to be a loggia open to the street, and was probably given over to Angelrot's shops and workrooms. As was customary, he may also have rented out space to other craftsmen and businessmen. Although different in architectural style, similar ground-floor shops can be seen in various Flemish paintings of the fifteenth century. One example occurs in Robert Campin's *Mérode triptych*, where through the window of Joseph's workshop

in the right wing we can see the buildings across the square (fig. 12). The second floor of this kind of structure probably contained the office and living quarters, while the third floor would have been allotted to bedrooms, storage rooms and the servants' quarters.

In the case of the Haus zum Tanz, Holbein's peasant frieze, placed as it was so prominently on the facade, surely cannot have had the negative connotations supposedly expressed by the Nuremberg prints of peasant revelry. As we have seen, it was a venerable common-

place that while the peasantry was the lowliest of the traditional three estates (and often despised by the other two), its agricultural activities were essential for the wealth and prosperity of the other social orders. In this context, it may be suggested that in addition to playing on the traditional name of Angelrot's house, Holbein's harvest dance may also allude to the material prosperity of Angelrot and his family, whose social position, and one may assume their cultural ambitions as well, are manifested by the newly fashionable classical architecture and sculptural ornament of the upper sections of the facade.²⁴

Whatever the ultimate significance of this peasant dance, it must have soon found admirers among Holbein's contemporaries, because shortly after its creation it inspired a metalcut by the Basel printmaker Jacob Faber, perhaps commissioned by a local publisher, Andreas Cratander, who employed it in a number of books that he issued from 1523 on (fig. 13). It forms the lower part of an ornamental page border, together with an upper frieze of peasants chasing a fox running away with a bird in its mouth, presumably a domestic fowl that it has stolen. The side pieces show nude children plucking fruit from branches entwining a Renaissance column, with apples on one border and grapes on the other. These lateral designs vaguely evoke a harvest theme, but hardly more than that. Employed exclusively, it seems, for dedication and first pages (but never for title pages), this border first appeared in Andrea Alciati's *Paradoxa, ad Pratum libri VI* of 1523, and thereafter in nine of Cratander's books by 1534. It was also used at least twice by Johann Bebel in books published in 1526 and 1534.²⁵ A second metalcut border after Holbein's design, this time from the hand of a Master CV, otherwise unknown, features dancing peasants accompanied by two bagpipers in the bottom segment, with the side pieces displaying rustic musicians and clothed and naked boys climbing branches toward the top, where



13 Jacob Faber, Ornamental page border, in Claudius Galenus, *De compositione medicamentorum*, Basel (Andreas Cratander) 1530 (photo: Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel)

²⁴ A similar opinion is offered by Janey Levey, who says of the Haus zum Tanz that the presence of the peasant dance "on a par with the grandeur of classical antiquity... presents it in a positive light"; see S.H. Goddard (ed.), exhib. cat. *The world in miniature: engravings by the German Little Masters, 1500-1550*, Lawrence (Spencer Museum of Art), New Haven (Yale University Art Gallery), Minneapolis (Minneapolis Museum of Arts) & Los Angeles (Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts) 1988, p. 211.

²⁵ For this border and the list of publications in which it appeared

see T. Falk (ed.), *Hollstein's German engravings, etchings and woodcuts, ca. 1400-1700: Hans Holbein the Younger*, compiled by Robert Zijlman. 2 vols., Roosendaal 1988, vol. 1, pp. 83-85, cat. nr. 51a, and F. Hieronymus, exhib. cat. *Basler Buchillustration 1500 bis 1545*, Basel (Universitätsbibliothek) 1984, p. 473, cat. nr. 425, who notes several instances in which only parts of the border were printed. See also C. Müller, *Hans Holbein d. J.: die Druckgraphik im Kupferstichkabinett, Basel*, Basel 1997, pp. 252-53, cat. nr. 43, ill. on p. 63.



14 The Holbein Fountain, Basel, general view. Historisches Museum (photo: M. Babey)



15 The Holbein Fountain, Basel, detail of dancing peasants. Basel, Historisches Museum (photo: M. Babey)

nude infants perform a round dance. This particular border seems to have been the property of the Basel publisher Adamus Petri, who employed it a number of times from 1527 on.²⁶

One of the books to employ Faber's metalcut border is Caelius Apitius's *Culinariae re disciplina*, an ancient Roman cookbook that enjoyed considerable popularity in the sixteenth century. It might be tempting to assume that in this case the peasant dance was selected as a conscious allusion to the land as a the source of foodstuffs in general, were it not that both borders occur in other books of the most diverse kind: medical treatises, an edition of the Gospels, and texts by Ovid, Polydorus Virgil,

²⁶ Falk and Zijlman, op. cit. (note 25), vol. 1, nr. 82, pp. 165-66. For its use by Petri see Hieronymus, op. cit. (note 25), nr. 426, p. 473; and Müller, op. cit. (note 25), p. 224, cat. nr. 60, ill. on p. 85.



16 The Holbein Fountain, Basel, detail of the bagpiper. Basel, Historisches Museum (photo: M. Babey)



17 Albrecht Dürer, *Peasant bagpiper*, engraving, 1514. Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (photo: Clark Art Institute, 1993)

Isocrates, Ovid and Plutarch, to name only a few. The second border, used by Petri, also turns up in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* and Ptolemy's *Geographia*. In addition, sometime around 1523 Holbein designed a Roman majuscule alphabet made up of peasant figures. Translated into woodcuts by Hans Lützelburger, they begin with a pair of musicians for the letter A, followed by nine letters depicting dancing couples, and then by other scenes, including one peasant vomiting and another defecating, and figures like these may explain why this particular series was apparently not often used.²⁷

If this use of peasant subjects was confined to the

publishers of Basel I cannot say, but even earlier, bagpipers and dancing peasants seem to have enjoyed a certain vogue among bookbinders in the southern Netherlands, the earliest being those of Antoon van Gavere of Ghent (1459–1505). Often they are paired with the figures of saints, including St John the Baptist, St Michael and St Anne. In one instance, they accompany the in-

²⁷ Falk and Zijlman, op. cit. (note 25), vol. 2, nr. 152, pp. 147–48; Müller, op. cit. (note 25), pp. 323–24, cat. nr. 154; ill. on p. 224. They do not seem to have been employed much. Falk and Zijlman record single initials from this series used in books published in Basel by J.

Froben in 1525 and 1526. It should be noted, however, that similar obscene motifs appear in printers' ornaments elsewhere, including the first edition of Erasmus's Latin New Testament.

scription "Ora pro nobis sancta dei genitrix" (Pray for us, Holy Mother of God) and they appear on books of all sorts, from prayer books and books of hours to Augustine's *City of God*.²⁸ Perhaps most incongruously, festive peasants appear on the sixteenth-century binding of an eighth-century illuminated manuscript, *Apocalypsis figurata*.²⁹ The appearance of peasant revels in such various and often exalted company suggests that they did not possess a socially negative connotation; indeed, they may be as innocent of deeper meaning as the grotesques, putti and other conventional ornaments that one so often encounters in Renaissance book decoration.

Nevertheless, Faber's metalcut after Holbein's peasant dance inspired a more monumental work in Basel whose public presence once more raises the question of significance. This is our third example, the so-called Holbein Fountain, which was erected in Basel probably sometime around 1546 (figs. 14–16).³⁰ Its original location is not certain, but by 1839 it had been placed in the city square, where we see it in a painting of 1854 by Johann Jakob Neustück.³¹ Despite its name, the Holbein Fountain is only partly indebted to Holbein; the bagpiper crowning the top (fig. 16) was adapted from an engraving by Albrecht Dürer of 1514 (fig. 17). The peasants on the fountain appear especially lumpish, with large heads and long, ape-like arms on short, stumpy bodies, even shorter than the sturdy proportions given them by Dürer and other German artists.³² With these physical distortions, the anonymous sculptor of the Holbein Fountain may have been expressing his opinion of peasants as an inferior social class, but it is rather more likely that he was trying to compensate for the fact that they were placed considerably above the viewer,

who would see them in a worm's-eye view.³³

There were, of course, many public fountains in German and Swiss cities, and they were decorated with a wide range of religious and allegorical figures, but secular figures predominated, especially warriors, various local heroes and standard-bearers.³⁴ They also included peasants. A fountain of c. 1540 is crowned with a goose-bearer, a rather well-dressed country man holding two geese from whose beaks water pours. The choice of subject was most likely inspired by the place for which the fountain was destined, for it originally stood in the fruit market at Nuremberg, where geese were also sold.³⁵ Another fountain, this one in Bern, bears a bagpiper (again modeled after Dürer's print).³⁶ To my knowledge, however, no other surviving fountain bears a peasant dance. Did the peasants on the Holbein Fountain have a purely decorative function, or did they have some further connotation? It is possible, for example, that the fountain was originally destined for a place near the Haus zum Tanz, and thus paid homage to its location, although this must remain speculation. But if the dancing peasants were also intended to evoke material prosperity and the bounty of nature, this would not have been inappropriate for a fountain that supplied fresh water to an urban neighborhood. A similar association between natural bounty and peasants, incidentally, may lie behind the appearance of rustic figures, including an egg-wife and a bagpiper, that feature on table fountains, covered goblets and the like in several sixteenth-century drawings, some by Dürer himself.³⁷ And as Claudia Goldstein has noted, peasant dances decorate stoneware jugs of German origin used by Antwerp households, their designs often modeled on the prints of Sebald Beham.³⁸

²⁸ Verheyden, op. cit. (note 18), pp. 221–37. Interestingly enough, Verheyden claims that the use of this subject as a decorative motif in bookbinding was inspired by the reveling peasants in scenes of the Annunciation to the shepherds in earlier manuscripts and printed books.

²⁹ Verheyden, op. cit. (note 18), p. 234.

³⁰ See E. Landolt, *Der Holbeinbrunnen*, Basel 1984.

³¹ Ibid., p. 11, fig. 4.

³² Dürer prescribes the proportions of "Ein pewisch man van 7 hawbten" ("A peasant man of seven heads," i.e., seven heads tall); see H. Rupprich (ed.), *Dürer: Schriftlicher Nachlass*, 3 vols. Berlin 1956–69, vol. 3, p. 60.

³³ See Landolt, op. cit. (note 30), p. 27, for this observation.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 13–14. M. Jones, *The secret middle ages: discovering the real medieval world*, Phoenix Mill 2002, pp. 120 and 113 respectively,

notes that several surviving fountains are decorated with the figures of fools. One is the so-called Narrenbrunnen in Ettingen, executed c. 1540, the other a German fountain in a private American collection.

³⁵ J. Chipps Smith, *German sculpture of the later Renaissance, c. 1520–1580: art in an age of uncertainty*, Princeton 1994, pp. 220–21, fig. 184.

³⁶ See Landolt, op. cit. (note 30), p. 14, who suggests that the Bern fountain may have been known to the sculptor of the Holbein fountain.

³⁷ See Raupp, op. cit. (note 9), pp. 99–103, who stresses the purely decorative function of this type of peasant imagery.

³⁸ C.E. Goldstein, "Keeping up appearances: the social significance of domestic decoration in Antwerp, 1542–1600" (diss.), Columbia University 2002, pp. 86–91.

In any event, the associations that I have suggested between peasant revels and peace and prosperity are more explicitly enunciated in public ceremonies and pageants of the period. During their royal tour of France in 1564–66, Catherine de' Medici and her son Charles IX were entertained by country dances performed by shepherds and other peasants, as a manifestation, we are told about one such occasion, of the peace and contentment of rural France under the benign rule of its new king. In Elizabethan England, the countryfolk were called upon by at least one writer of the time to celebrate the anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne by singing carols and playing rustic games.³⁹ The crucial role allotted to the peasant on such occasions may owe something to the venerable story, previously mentioned, of Justice's last dwelling-place among the peasants.⁴⁰ This goddess was often identified as Astraea, an epithet that was also applied to Queen Elizabeth I. Jan van der Noot, for example, in his *Theatre for worldlings*, dedicated to Elizabeth, described the queen's reign as one in which "the Virgin Astraea is descended from heaven to builde hir seate in this your moste happye cuntry of England."⁴¹ As for the Netherlands, the peasants were assigned an important role in the festivities attending the entry of William of Orange into Brussels on 18 September 1578. According to Jean Houwaert in his description of this occasion, the "boeren oft lantluyde[n]" ("peasants or country people") lit a number of great bonfires on the dikes in the harbor along Orange's route, and these "brande[n]de berghen", or "burning mountains," could be seen at a great distance; not

even the fires made on high mountains by the Muhamadans to welcome the new moon were more beautiful.⁴²

Other positive uses of peasant imagery occur in the Netherlands during this time, above all in the allegorical floats that figured in the various annual civic processions.⁴³ In the procession for the Feast of the Assumption in August of 1564, one *waghen*, or float, was labeled "The vale of fruitfulness ("Dal der Vruchtbaerheyt")."⁴⁴ On the float rode a personification of Commerce ("Comenschap"), accompanied by Hercules, nymphs and other allegorical figures, and flanked by Joy and Merriment. The choice of Commerce as a theme reflects Antwerp's position as one of the most important commercial centers of sixteenth-century Europe. What is interesting, however, is that Joy and Merriment are followed not by urban pleasures, but by figures of "Sowers and mowers, butter-wives and milkmaids, egg-wives and yet more [country people], with all kinds of fruits and with geese and chickens."⁴⁵ We learn about this and other floats from the *Ordinantie*—literally "order" or "sequence," a descriptive booklet that probably functioned much like a souvenir program of the procession, but it does not tell us if there was any spoken dialogue or if the peasants simply mimed the action. In any event, it is very likely that they were not real peasants, but members of some chamber of rhetoric in rustic costumes. These costumes may have been realistic, much as Bruegel presumably showed them in his *Kermis or Wedding dance* (fig. 3), or they may have been idealized in a vaguely classicizing fashion, such as can be found in a

39 For these and other examples, with references, see Gibson, op. cit. (note 8), pp. 24–26.

40 See note 4 above.

41 Quoted in J.N. King, *Tudor royal iconography: literature and art in an age of religious crisis*, Princeton 1989, p. 241. My warmest thanks to Erin Webster for this reference. Van der Noot's volume is an English translation by Edmund Spenser of his *Het theatre* published in London in 1568. For Astraea, see also F.A. Yates, *Astraea: the imperial theme in the sixteenth century*, London 1985.

42 See J.B. Houwaert, *Declaratie van die triumphante jncompst vande doorluchtighen ende hoogheboren Prince van Oraingnien, binnen die princelijcke stadt van Brussele, geschiet t'iaer ons Heeren duysent, vijfhondert, achtentseuwentich, den achthiensten Septembris*, Antwerp 1579, p. 15: "De boeren oft landluyte[n] hadde[n] overal opde dijke[n] neffens die nieuwe schipvaert (doer zijn Excellentie moeste passeren) so veel groote triumphviere[n] van hout gemaect/ dat die van dijken van verre

al brande[n]de berghen schenen te zijne: ick en gheloove niet dat die Machomettiste[n] schoo[n]der triumphvieren maken op de hooghe berghen als sy alle maenden (naer hun maniere van doen) die nieuwe ghehorende mane welecom heeten."

43 On these processions see W.S. Gibson, "Artists and *rederijkers* in the age of Bruegel," *Art Bulletin* 63 (1981), pp. 426–46, esp. pp. 432–40, and B.A.M. Ramakers, *Spelen en figuren: toneel en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen middeleeuwen en moderne tijd*, Amsterdam 1996, pp. 192–96.

44 For the two floats discussed here see Gibson, op. cit. (note 8), p. 24, with further literature.

45 *Ordinantie inhoudende die oude en nieuwe poincten, van onser Vrouwen Ommeganck, der stadt van Antwerpen, gheschiet inden iare 1564*, Antwerp (1564): "Saeyers en Mayers, Botervrouwen ende Melckdeeren, Eyerwyfs, noch meer ander met alle sorten van Fruyte ende met Gansen en Kieckenken."



18 Maarten van Cleve, *The visit to the wet nurse*. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection

Brussels tapestry depicting a country wedding, made between 1550 and 1575.⁴⁶ In any case, what is manifested here is the tradition of the good peasant whose labors secure the bounty of the land.⁴⁷

It is in this context, perhaps, that we can best understand the significance of the group, apparently previously unnoticed, that brings up the rear of this float. It is described as a “Voesterheere, met synen Waghen vol Voesters ende Voesterkinderen, dese volghen alle die Kermissen duer die Overvloedicheyt,” which may be

translated as a “foster-father, with his wagon full of wet nurses and their infant charges, these follow all the kermises through this abundance.” This tableau probably alludes to the custom of city families of entrusting their newborn infants to country women for wet-nursing, the countryside being considered healthier than the city for babies.⁴⁸ The “voesterheere” was most probably the man who acted as a broker between the city folk and the wet nurses.⁴⁹ Putting out newborn infants to wet nurses was condemned by many writers of the day, including

⁴⁶ P. Vandenbroeck, exhib. cat. *Beeld van de andere, vertoog over het zelf: over wilden en narren, boeren en bedelaars*, Antwerp (Museum voor Schone Kunsten) 1987, p. 71, fig. 78.

⁴⁷ In this connection one can cite an engraving by Jacob Matham after Pieter Aertsen, *Market stall-holders*, accompanied by a Latin poem that tells us, in translation, that “This path to the stars leads only through hard work,/ And without striving no one can win a crown./ The fruits of victory are for everyone; but he who secures/ Victory through his own strength will be honored above all./ This is why our Father calls us always to tend the vine/ And does not wish our hands to rest idle./ Enduring praise mitigates the fatigue of the passing days,/ And if we find pleasure in our work, He too is delighted.” The relationship of these rhetorically grandiose lines to the stall-holders is not entirely clear, but one scholar has concluded that the peasants “with their hands in their laps,” as he puts it, exemplify the very idleness condemned in the text. Surely it can be more justly argued that the peasants are shown at rest, displaying the results of their labors to potential

customers, the results that are, in fact, celebrated in the poem! See G. Irmscher, “*Ministrae voluptatum*: stoicizing ethics in the market and kitchen scenes of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer,” *Simiolus* 16 (1986), pp. 219–32, esp. pp. 226–27, and fig. 5.

⁴⁸ For the preference for country women as wet nurses, see V. Fildes, *Wet nursing: a history from antiquity to the present*, Oxford 1988, p. 44.

⁴⁹ The dictionary defines “voedsterheer, voesterheer” simply as “foster-father”; see *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, 29 vols., The Hague 1882–1998, vol. 22, col. 139. An early sixteenth-century *refrein* praises Joseph as Christ’s “voister heere,” or foster-father; see F. Lyna and W. van Eeghem, *Jan van Stijvoorts Refereinenbundel, anno MDXXIV*, 2 vols., Antwerp 1930, vol. 1, pp. 97–98, nr. 51. Similarly, later in the century, Caspar Coolhaes described magistrates as the “voedster-heeren der kercken” (“nurturers of the church”); see G. Voogt, *Constraint on trial: Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert and religious freedom*, Kirksville 2000, p. 161. In the Antwerp procession of 1564, how-

Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives and Henri Etienne.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, this practice seems to have been common, especially among the wealthier classes, a circumstance that inspired at least several paintings attributed to Maarten van Cleve, a contemporary of Bruegel (fig. 18). Commemorating yet another occasion on which city and countryfolk came together, these paintings show an upper-class, fashionably dressed couple visiting a rustic cottage, the gentleman often distributing money to the peasant family, his lady kneeling to play with her child.⁵¹ To return to the Antwerp float of 1564, the reference to kermises suggests that wet nurses and their agents (who may often have been their husbands) attended such events to solicit prospective patrons. This apparently was the custom in fifteenth-century Florence, for example, and several Florentine carnival songs have survived from this period in which wet nurses boast of their superior abilities in infant care.⁵² Thus it would seem that the wet nurses and their charges in the “Vale of fruitfulness” float of 1564 represent yet another contribution of the peasantry to the amenities of urban life.

Equally important is the notion that commerce should generate joy and merriment; this would have greatly appealed to Antwerp’s many resident and visit-

ing merchants. As Ethan Matt Kavalier has shown, the merchant had long been viewed with suspicion; not only did he lack a clearly defined place in the hierarchy of the three estates, his activities were routinely condemned as self-serving and ultimately destructive for society in general.⁵³ Indeed, the merchant is employed to represent Everyman in his relentless search of “eigenbaet,” or self-interest, in Bruegel’s drawing of *Elck* of 1559, published as a print in the same year.⁵⁴ The second half of the century, however, saw a number of treatises published in defense of the merchant, arguing that his pursuit of profit benefits everyone.⁵⁵ And the same thought informs the Gate of Honor erected by the city of Antwerp for the Joyous Entry of Philip II into Antwerp in 1549; it celebrated Antwerp’s commercial preeminence with appropriate personages, including Mercury, the god of trade, and “Negotio,” or Negotiation, both standing on coffers and bales.⁵⁶ Similarly, in the Antwerp *Landjuweel* of 1561, the prologues offered by the participating chambers of rhetoric of Brabant uniformly praised the merchant and his social utility, and some even claimed that the merchant is as indispensable as the peasant. The businessman, according to the prologue offered by the Goudbloeme chamber of Antwerp, is “so useful as the morning dew present/ At all times to

ever, the “voesterheere” who leads the wagon probably represents the person who acted as an intermediary between city families and country wet nurses, a custom documented in Renaissance Florence; see Fildes, op. cit. (note 48), p. 50.

⁵⁰ For a survey of wet-nursing in early modern Europe and its condemnation by various writers, see H.F.M. Peeters, *Kind en jeugdige in het begin van de moderne tijd (ca. 1500–ca. 1650)*, Antwerp & Hilversum 1966, pp. 19–26. Fildes, op. cit. (note 48), pp. 1–78, gives a good account of wet-nursing from antiquity through to the sixteenth century. The traditional arguments against wet-nursing are conveniently assembled in E. Clinton, *The Countess of Lincolnes nurserie, Oxford 1628*, Amsterdam & Norwood 1975. I am indebted to Zirka Filipczak for this reference. Country women were generally preferred to city women as wet nurses; see, for example, Peeters, p. 20, and Fildes, p. 44.

⁵¹ For other paintings of this subject attributed to Maarten van Cleve and his followers see K. Ertz, *Pieter Brueghel der Jüngere (1564–1637/38): die Gemälde mit kritischem Oeuvrekatalog*, 2 vols. Lingen 1988–2000, vol. 1, pp. 478–81, figs. 360–64. L. van Puyvelde, *La peinture flamande au siècle de Bosch et Brueghel*, Paris & Brussels 1962, p. 151 and note 153, suggests that the Philadelphia version (fig. 18) may be the “voesterheer, van Merten van Cleeff” listed in the 1669 inventory of the collection of Pierre Wynants in Antwerp. The peasant interior by Maarten van Cleve in Vienna repeats the group of the city woman, child, and wet nurse, but whether this picture similarly shows the parents’ visit to the wet nurse is uncertain; see *Flämische Malerei von Jan van Eyck bis Bruegel d. Ä.*, Vienna 1981, pp. 153–54. A related subject,

existing in a number of versions usually attributed to Jan Brueghel the Elder and Pieter Bruegel the Younger, is generally considered as being possibly after a lost painting by their father. See G. Marlier, *Pierre Brueghel le Jeune*, ed. J. Folie, Brussels 1969, pp. 255–61; Ertz, vol. 1, pp. 482–86, cat. nrs. 462–88; and K. Ertz, *Jan Brueghel der Ältere (1568–1625): die Gemälde mit kritischem Oeuvrekatalog*, Cologne 1979, pp. 461–62, figs. 560–61, and p. 564, cat. nrs. 40, 41. It does not represent the visit to the wet nurse, as formerly assumed, but most likely the visit of the landlord to his impoverished peasants; see K. Ertz and C. Nitze-Ertz (eds.), exhib. cat. *Pieter Brueghel der Jüngere—Jan Brueghel der Ältere: Flämische Malerei um 1600. Tradition und Fortschritt*, Essen (Kulturstiftung Ruhr, Villa Hügel), Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum) & Antwerp (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten) 1997, pp. 115–20, cat. nrs. 15–17. More study is needed before we can fully understand the contemporary significance of this latter group of pictures.

⁵² Fildes, op. cit. (note 48), pp. 50–52. Husbands of wet nurses could apparently serve as agents for women other than their wives; for an example, see *ibid.*, pp. 54–56.

⁵³ Kavalier, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 93–94.

⁵⁴ For the imagery of this print, see W.S. Gibson, “Speaking deeds: some proverb drawings by Pieter Bruegel and his contemporaries,” *Drawing 14* (1992), pp. 73–77, esp. p. 74, and Kavalier, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 89–90.

⁵⁵ Kavalier, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 93–97.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94, and fig. 43, p. 95.

19 Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The fat kitchen*, engraving, 1563. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (photo: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen)



fragrant herbs and plants/ So useful as the laboring peasant/ Who to the world his industry grants.”⁵⁷ It is this very association, of course, that was reaffirmed on the processional float of 1564, when Commerce appeared in the company of the humble workers of the land.

A somewhat different use of peasant imagery appears in another Antwerp procession, this one held on the Feast of the Circumcision in February 1559, an annual event in honor of Christ’s foreskin, a particularly venerated relic preserved in Antwerp.⁵⁸ On this occasion, the general program commemorated the return of peace

and good times to the Lowlands after the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis had ended a long and economically devastating war between Emperor Charles V and France. The seventh *point*, or float, consisted of a tableau showing the Nine Muses accompanied by a personification of the Common Good; the accompanying placard bore verses proclaiming “Let there be *sempen ende dempen* everywhere, for peace will bring us good pleasure.”⁵⁹ This tableau was followed, as a second part of the float, by a *sledde*, or sled, apparently a construction on runners pulled by men or horses.⁶⁰ This sled contained peasant men and women, “eating and drink-

⁵⁷ The English translation is from *ibid.*, p. 107, the original Dutch text on p. 302, note 109: “Soo orboorlijck als oock den dau mach sijn/ Tot elck termijn, den cruydekens ghuerich,/ Soo orboorlijck als den landtman labuerich/ Int bouwen volderich, is op de weerelt.”

⁵⁸ Ramakers, *op. cit.* (note 43), p. 292; S. Urbach, “On the iconography of Campin’s Virgin and Child in an Interior: the Child Jesus comforting his mother after the Circumcision,” in M. Smeyers and B. Cardon (eds.), *Flanders in a European perspective: manuscript illumination around 1400 in Flanders and abroad*, Louvain 1995, p. 563.

⁵⁹ For this float and its accompanying placard see Carroll, *op. cit.* (note 14), p. 300 and note 96. The original Netherlandish text, transcribed by Carroll, is “Alle menschen nu inwendich verblijen/ Over

den Peys vercreghen nu in onsen tijen/ Laet sempen ende dempen/ vrij overal/ Den Peys ons goets ghenouch by brengen sal.” My present description of the float corrects several errors in Gibson, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 24. The word *point* (also *point*, *punt*) is derived from the Latin *ponto*, ferryboat; see Ramakers, *op. cit.* (note 43), p. 190.

⁶⁰ Sleds can be found in earlier processions; see Ramakers, *op. cit.* (note 43), pp. 55, 65, and esp. p. 190. Ramakers, p. 190, note 101, also refers to depictions of floats pulled by horses presumably on sleds, since they lack wheels. For some later depictions, including a painting by Denis van Alsloot, see J. Laver, *Isabella’s triumph (May 31st, 1615): Denis van Alsloot*, London 1947, figs. 7, 12; and L. van Puyvelde, *L’omnégang de 1615 à Bruxelles*, Brussels 1960, pp. 22, 28, pls. ix, x.

ing in peasant fashion.”⁶¹ It is significant that this celebration of peace was entrusted not to representatives of the burgher class, but to the peasants, and we may assume that in feasting “in peasant fashion,” they accepted literally the invitation of the verses on the main float for everyone to *sempen ende dempen*: this is, in fact, a stock expression with a meaning not unlike our “guzzling and gobbling.”⁶² A variation of the Netherlandish phrase occurs only a few years after the procession itself, in Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert’s translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*, published in 1561. Returning home from his wanderings, Odysseus is informed by his son Telemachus that the suitors of Penelope have been staying in her palace, where each one “eats, drinks, guzzles and gobbles like a pig.”⁶³ But not only do the peasants in the 1564 procession guzzle and gobble, their sled carries the title “Al vette te keukene,” or “all fat to cook.” This may bring to mind the enthusiastic feasting in Bruegel’s *Fat kitchen*, issued as a print in 1563 (fig. 19), and it was, of course, precisely the sort of unrefined behavior for which the peasants were often condemned. In the float of 1559, however, it is employed to commemorate an occasion no less favorable than the return of peace and material prosperity.⁶⁴ It might be tempting to see this positive use of reveling peasants as an eccentricity peculiar

to the Netherlanders, but we have seen that it forms part of a tradition of ‘positive’ peasant imagery whose earlier manifestations include Dürer’s frolicking rustics in the book of hours of Emperor Maximilian I, the harvest dance in the classically-inspired facade paintings on Balthasar Angelot’s fine town house, and very likely the peasant dance on the Holbein fountain as well. And as Johan Verberckmoes has demonstrated in an important recent article, peasants continued to play similar festive roles in Spain and the Spanish Netherlands.⁶⁵ This tradition, in fact, must be taken into account in any evaluation of the significance of the rustic festivities created by Bruegel and other artists of the period. If, as I have suggested elsewhere, scenes of reveling peasants reminded viewers of occasions when they had witnessed and perhaps even participated in such country pastimes,⁶⁶ they could also serve as visual guarantees, as it were, of the fecundity and peace that should lie beyond the city, so necessary to the prosperity of those who lived within its walls. Peasant festivities, no less than peasant labors, had their place in the good life as envisioned by Bruegel and his contemporaries.

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61 *Ordinantie van den Besnijdenis Ommeganck van desen tegenwoordighen jare. M. D. ende L.I.X.*, Antwerp (1559); see also Carroll, op. cit. (note 14), p. 312, note 95.

62 See *Woordenboek*, cit. (note 49), vol. 3, pt. 2: col. 2401, s.v. “Dempen,” art. 7. The two expressions inscribed on the float are brought together in a Flemish-French dictionary of 1562, s.v. “dempen”: “dempen en vaeghen/ slampampen ofte goede chiuer maken: Faire groz Ro, gaudir ou grand chiere.” See Joos Lambrecht: *Het naembouck van 1562: tweede druk van het Nederlands-Frans woordenboek van Joos Lambrecht*, ed. R. Verdeyen, Liège and Paris 1945, p. 72.

63 Dierick Volckertsz Coornhert, *De dolinge van Ulyse*, Amsterdam 1939, p. 337: “...eet, drinckt, slempet en dempt, als een vercken.”

64 Perhaps some parallels could be drawn between the float of 1559

and the “refreinen in het zotte,” or comic poems, recited at wedding banquets and other occasions of celebration, which describe excesses of eating and drinking, that is, gobbling and guzzling, and other crude behavior. While parodying the activities of the guests, such poems also contributed to the festive atmosphere of the occasion. See D. Coigneau, *Refreinen in het zotte bij de rederijkers*, 3 vols., Ghent 1980–83, vol. 2, pp. 297–305.

65 J. Verberckmoes, “Parading hilarious exotics in the Spanish Netherlands,” in J. de Jong et al. (eds.), *Het exotische verbeeld 1550–1950: boeren en verre volken in de Nederlandse kunst / Picturing the exotic 1550–1950: peasants and outlandish people in Netherlandish art*, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 53 (2002), pp. 53–69, esp. pp. 53–59.

66 See Gibson, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 77–105, 151–54.