

CHAPTER 1

Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Religion

A Historiographical Introduction

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“Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Religion” – the topic of this volume is both narrow and broad at the same time. It is narrow because it sets a clear focus on a single aspect of the artist’s varied and complex oeuvre. This single aspect, however, is in itself multifaceted and highly controversial, serving as a keyhole view of a broad field of connected issues. Thus, for our enterprise, the rather vague category of “religion” is not a direct pathway to the essence of Bruegel’s art but a flexible heuristic tool that might help to investigate diverse aspects of the artist’s imagery.

First, one has to acknowledge the fact that in the second half of the sixteenth century, “religion” is anything but a monolithic phenomenon. Although the Netherlands under Habsburg rule remained nominally Catholic until 1572, alternative and competing forms of worship and spirituality found increasing resonance during Bruegel’s lifetime.¹ Antwerp, the town where Pieter Bruegel started his artistic career in the early 1550s, was not only the contemporary “capital of capitalism” (Larry Silver) but also a hotspot of religious diversity, with a broad range of deviant positions from Erasmianism, Lutheranism, Zwinglianism and Calvinism to several branches of Anabaptism and Spiritualism.² Starting in the early 1520s, Emperor Charles v had taken great

1 Cf. Cornelis Augustijn, “Godsdienst in de zestiende eeuw,” in *Ketters en papen onder Philips II: Het godsdienstig leven in de tweede helfe van de 16de eeuw* [exh. cat., Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht] (’s-Gravenhage: 1986), 26–40; Robert P. Zipp, “Spiritualisme in de 16de eeuw: een schets,” in *Ketters en papen onder Philips II*, 75–93; George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Kirksville/Mo.: 1992), 95–103, 524–547, 723–753, 904–912; Mirjam van Veen, “Spiritualism in The Netherlands: From David Joris to Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33/1 (2002), 129–150; *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs* [Intersections 3], eds. Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan L. de Jong, and Marc van Vaeck (Leiden and Boston: 2004).

2 Cf. Eric Piltz, “Reinheit oder Frieden? Religiöse Devianz und die Rhetorik der Gottlosigkeit in Antwerpen 1562–1565,” in *Göttlicher Zorn und menschliches Maß: Religiöse Abweichung in frühneuzeitlichen Stadtgemeinschaften*, eds. Alexander Kästner and Gerd Schwerhoff (Konstanz and Munich: 2013), 123–154; Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis 1550–1577* (Baltimore: 1996).

effort to curtail the spread of Reformation thought in the Low Countries, culminating in the infamous 'Edict of Blood' from 1550 that stipulated the death penalty for religious dissenters and paved the way for the politics of Charles' successor, Philip II.³ Between 1550 and 1566, 131 'heretics' were executed in the city on the Schelde.⁴ However, despite the high risk of severe punishment, heterodox books were steadily being printed, sold and bought, unlicensed plays performed and clandestine religious meetings held. In the course of 1566, the situation came to a head after the Netherlandish nobility successfully requested the suspension of the Inquisition and a moderation of heresy laws from the regent Margaret of Parma on April 5.⁵ In the following months, countless exiled Calvinists came back to their homeland, accompanied by many new ministers and preachers who would flood the country with hedge sermons against 'idolatrous' Catholic worship.⁶ On August 10th, Calvinist iconoclasm began in the 'Westkwartier' and swept all across the Netherlands in the two subsequent weeks.⁷ In response to this violent outbreak of disobedience, Philip II sent Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, the Duke of Alba, and his troops to the Netherlands. After his arrival in Brussels on August 22, 1567, Alba installed the so-called 'Council of Troubles' in order to prosecute the iconoclasts and other wrongdoers who had been disobedient to the Habsburg authorities. A year later, he famously decried Antwerp as "a Babylon, confusion and receptacle of all sects indifferently, the town most frequented by pernicious people."⁸ During his six-year rule, 8,568 people were tried (mostly in their absence since they were in exile) and 1,083 were executed. Although Alba pursued a "political strategy of exemplary punishment" (Peter Arnade), largely focusing on well-chosen elite victims, his rule was labeled as ruthless tyranny by his Protestant opponents.⁹

3 Cf. Victoria Christman, *Orthodoxy and Opposition: The Creation of a Secular Inquisition in Early Modern Brabant* (Ph.D. University of Arizona: 2005), 37–52; Alastair Duke, "The 'Inquisition' and the Repression of Religious Dissent in the Habsburg Netherlands 1521–1566," in idem, *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*, eds. Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (Farnham: 2009), 99–118.

4 Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation*, 84.

5 Cf. Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY: 2008), 74–84.

6 Ibid., 85f.

7 Ibid., 90–165.

8 Quoted after Henk van Nierop, "Introduction," in *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs*, 1–7, here 2.

9 Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 168, 181–191.

The outlined events form the historical background for Pieter Bruegel's life and work in Antwerp and Brussels unto his death in 1569. And it is not easy to determine the position of the artist and his images within this complicated field of religious and political tension. Certainly, many of his works strongly resonate with their cultural environment. But how are we to understand this reverberation? Do his works passively register general cultural tendencies like a social seismograph? Or do they articulate a more specific position within this culture of conflict and dispute? Are they just expressions of a mid 16th century zeitgeist? Or do they also betray a certain agenda of their own – and possibly of their maker?

The contributions to this volume will try to answer these questions by means of thorough analyses of Bruegel's pictures. For this purpose, the notion of "religion" will serve as an umbrella term covering a variety of strongly diverse concepts and practices, ranging from image worship to iconoclasm, from silent prayer to violent upheaval, from political involvement to mystical withdrawal, from typology to *meditatio mortis*, from the "Andachtsbild" to genre-painting, from Catholicism to Spiritualism, from iconography and philology to the aesthetics of reception and the psychology of perception. In this vein, "religion" can refer to individual religious experience (potentially shaped by works of art) as well as to the formation or deconstruction of religious communities (also potentially shaped by works of art). Thus, by talking about "Pieter Bruegel the Elder *and Religion*," we do not run the risk of narrowing down Bruegel's art to a one-dimensional phenomenon. On the contrary, the topic of "religion" always urges us to ask a whole set of questions that call for complex answers. And despite the fact that most authors of this volume do believe that "religion" plays a central role in Bruegel's oeuvre, we need not to worry that their contributions will present uniform, concordant arguments that make all the problems of interpretation vanish into thin air. Rather, the essays in this volume present distinctive, competing perspectives onto Bruegel's art and religion that hopefully will spur debate – and further research.

Looking at Bruegel's oeuvre, we can find good reason to place the artist and his works within the religious culture of his day and age. As a young apprentice, Bruegel was involved in the production of the glove makers' guild's altarpiece in Mechelen in 1550/51.¹⁰ Remarkably, Bruegel would never again execute a comparable conventional, religious work. Unlike his artistic Antwerp competitor and opponent Frans Floris who painted several significant altarpieces

10 Adolf Monballieu, "P. Bruegel en het Altar van de Mechelse Handschoenmakers (1551)," in *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen* 68 (1964), 92–110.

in the course of 1550s and 60s, Bruegel seems to have avoided commissions for public liturgical spaces and instead focused on the production of panel and canvas paintings for private homes. However, this does not mean that Bruegel was uninterested in the artistic treatment of religious subjects. On the contrary, of Bruegel's approximately 40 paintings, about 20 contain explicitly religious, that is, Biblical iconography. And in most of his other (seemingly profane) paintings, scholars have found ties to Christian iconography and thought – though this remains a topic of interpretation and divisive discussion. There is less religious iconography in Bruegel's prints; of the about 90 engravings and etchings after drawings by Pieter Bruegel, only around 30 represent Biblical themes or traditional Christian allegories. For his contemporaries, however, who championed Bruegel as the “new Bosch,” these Christian allegories (namely the *Vices* and the *Virtues*) seem to have been his most famous and thus characteristic works.¹¹

According to the few extant archival sources, Bruegel was a loyal Catholic who got engaged to Maycken Coecke in the Antwerp Cathedral in July 1563 and got married to her in the Kapellenkerk in Brussels sometime later during the same year.¹² He worked for Catholic patrons like the tax collector Nicolaes Jongelinck and the Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, and he was buried in the same church in which he was married.¹³ Seen in the light of the archival documents, Bruegel's conduct was inconspicuous and did not cause friction with the Catholic authorities. And yet, his paintings deviate strongly from the standard Catholic imagery in the mid 16th century. Not only did he not produce any further altar paintings, he also did not make devotional paintings, put no emphasis on the Eucharist or the physicality of Jesus Christ and did not focus on the pictorial veneration of the Virgin Mary. Instead, Bruegel often wove thin threads of Biblical narratives from the New and the Old Testament

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- 11 The most recent contributions on this topic are Bertram Kaschek, “Die Hölle auf Erden: Hieronymus Boschs Erbe im druckgraphischen Frühwerk Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.,” in *Hieronymus Boschs Erbe* [exh. cat., Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden], ed. Tobias Pfeifer-Helke (Berlin: 2015), 14–28 and Marisa Anne Bass, “Hieronymus Bosch and his Legacy as ‘Inventor,’” in *Beyond Bosch: The Afterlife of a Renaissance Master in Print* [exh. cat., Saint Louis Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums], eds. Marisa Bass and Elizabeth Wyckoff (St. Louis: 2015), 10–33.
- 12 Jean Bastiaensen, “De verloving van Pieter Bruegel de Oude: Nieuw licht op de Antwerpse verankering,” *Openbaar Kunstbezit Vlaanderen* 51/1 (2013), 26f.
- 13 Anna Pawlak, “Künstlerruhm und Konfession: Das Grabmahl Pieter Bruegels d. Ä. In der Notre Dame de la Chapelle in Brüssel,” in *Künstlergrabmäler: Genese, Typologie, Intention, Metamorphosen*, eds. Birgit Ulrike Münch, Markwart Herzog, and Adreas Tacke (Petersberg: 2011), 80–96.

into complex textures of contemporary urban and rural life in a way that makes these themes almost disappear into their painted settings. His works reject any declarative, apodictic, or affirmative tone. Nevertheless, in their subtle management of conflicting elements, they betray Bruegel's deep engagement with the pressing questions of the religious debates during his own lifetime.

As is well known, many scholars in the early 20th century saw things differently and chose to characterize Bruegel as a simple-minded painter of peasants whose genius was instinctive rather than intellectual. For authors like Wilhelm Hausenstein and Max J. Friedländer, who basically followed the account of the artist's life presented in Karel van Mander's *Schilderboeck* from 1604, Bruegel was even a peasant himself, who had a specific sensorium that allowed him to register the subtleties of nature and rural life.¹⁴ To quote Friedländer's book from 1921: "The painter, with the eyes of a peasant, looks at the earth as a nurturing mother, in fear and hope, gaining the flair of the country-dweller and the hunter for change in the weather and for all impulses of natural life."¹⁵

This assessment was radically overthrown and revised by scholars from the second and third generation of the so-called Vienna School of art history. In the next paragraphs of this introduction, I will present a historiographical sketch of Bruegel scholarship in the 1920s and 1930s in order to remind us of some of the founding fathers of our own discourse, today. The lively discussions of the 20s and 30s should also call to our attention the fact that fierce, sometimes even aggressive debates on methodology have always been part of modern Bruegel research. Moreover, the points of disagreement in these debates can be understood as a blueprint for most of the methodological and interpretive battles of the years to come, which I will shortly address afterwards. My introduction then will end with some further questions that still trouble Bruegel scholarship, today.

It was Max Dvořák, of the Vienna School, who first turned his back on "Peasant Bruegel" with a late essay written in 1920 and published posthumously in the year of his death 1921.¹⁶ In this text, Dvořák claims that Bruegel's images

14 Cf. Wilhelm Hausenstein, *Der Bauern-Bruegel* (Munich: 1910); Max J. Friedländer, *Pieter Bruegel* (Berlin: 1921).

15 Friedländer, *Pieter Bruegel*, 134: "Der Maler betrachtet die Erde als die nährende Mutter mit den Augen des Bauern, in Furcht und Hoffnung, und gewinnt den Spürsinn des Landmanns und des Jägers für Wetterumschlag und für alle Regungen des Naturlebens."

16 The text was first published as an introduction to *Pieter Bruegel der Ältere: Siebenunddreissig Farbenlichtdrucke nach seinen Hauptwerken in Wien und eine Einführung in seine Kunst* (Vienna: 1921). It was republished with the title "Pieter Bruegel der Ältere," in Max Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte: Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*, eds. Karl M. Swoboda and Johannes Wilde (München: 1924), 219–257.

would be greatly misunderstood if one would interpret them as “popular” and as “made for the entertainment of those people that are represented within them.”¹⁷ Dvořák’s own personal vision of Bruegel, in turn, is of almost metaphysical nature. For him, Bruegel’s works are the expression and manifestation of “the highest artistic, intellectual and ethical ideals of his age.”¹⁸ However, Dvořák explicitly and emphatically refused to link these manifestations to any ideological system – be it theological or philosophical. Rather, he sees Bruegel’s works as the emanation of “the whole spirit of his times and his people”¹⁹ – they are, in short, the artistic embodiment of the mannerist zeitgeist.

Dvořák’s understanding of Bruegel as an artist who has overcome the dualism between the observation of nature and the spiritual essence of the artwork is – by its very nature – highly speculative and cannot to be proven right or wrong by any historical or phenomenological analysis. However, it was fruitful for two of his pupils who proceeded to carry on and transform his thoughts about Bruegel after his death in different ways: Karl Tolnai and Hans Sedlmayr.

Karl Tolnai was born in Budapest in 1899, and as a teenager, he came into contact with prominent Hungarian intellectuals such as Georg Lukács, Béla Balász and Lajos Fülep who – according to his own statement – greatly shaped his early ideas about art.²⁰ In particular, Fülep promoted “Kunstgeschichte als Wesensschau” – “art history as the grasping of the essence.” He wanted to understand the work of art not as a document for something else – be it the zeitgeist or iconographic meaning – but as a self-sufficient organism in and of itself. In 1918, Tolnai went to Vienna in order to study art history under Max Dvořák; he also spent semesters in Berlin working with Adolph Goldschmidt and Frankfurt with Rudolf Kautzsch. After the untimely death of Dvořák in 1921, he chose to write his dissertation on Hieronymus Bosch with Dvořák’s successor Julius von Schlosser. The topic of his first book, however, was the draftsmanship of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. It was published in 1925 when Tolnai was only 26 years old.²¹

17 Dvořák, “Pieter Bruegel der Ältere,” 227.

18 Ibid., 248.

19 Ibid., 249: “Nicht aus philosophischen Dogmen, sondern aus dem ganzen Geiste seiner Zeit und seines Volkes, aus der Gedanken- und Gefühlsrichtung, auf der bewußt oder unbewußt die Edelsten und Tiefsten unter seinen Zeitgenossen eine neue Auffassung des Lebens aufgebaut haben, floß seine Lebensweisheit, wobei er nicht nur ein Empfangender, sondern auch ein Gebender war.”

20 Charles de Tolnay, “Erinnerung an Gustav Pauli und an meine Hamburger Jahre,” *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* 19 (1974), 7–12.

21 Karl Tolnai, *Die Zeichnungen Pieter Bruegels* (Munich: 1925).

The volume opens with a 50-page essay, in which Tolnai attempts to interpret Bruegel's drawings as "realizations of a worldview" ("Verwirklichungen einer Weltauffassung") that require a specific attitude or disposition ("eigene Einstellung") in order to be adequately understood as the attempt to "fathom the essence of the world" ("Ergründung des Weltwesens").²² According to Tolnai, Bruegel, in his oeuvre of drawings, visualized the split between reason and unreason by representing two different worlds: the world of nature (in his landscape drawings) and the world of man (in his allegories). Whereas nature is ruled by something like a reasonable "soul of the world" ("Weltseele"), human affairs are determined by folly. Along those lines, Tolnai characterizes Bruegel as a "weltleib-durchführenden Naturdeuter" (interpreter of nature who feels through the body of the world) who perceives and registers the formations of nature (mountains, valleys, etc.) as living organic beings.²³

Tolnai's prose and thought in this early text are a weird but not untypical amalgam of Renaissance and Romantic philosophy of nature mingled with tropes from vitalism, expressionism, and existentialism of the early 20th century. Like his teacher Dvořák, Tolnai is eager to grasp the spirit of Bruegel's art, but unlike Dvořák, he is not afraid to make a connection between Bruegel's images and specific philosophical positions. Throughout his book, the reader will find references to authors of the sixteenth century that still are discussed as potential sources for Bruegel's imagery today: Sebastian Brant, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Francois Rabelais, and – most prominently – Sebastian Franck, whose concept of human folly comes the closest to Bruegel, according to Tolnai.²⁴ In the appendix to the main text, Tolnai even added a chapter on Bruegel's position within intellectual history ("Zur geistesgeschichtlichen Stellung"), in which he claims that there is not just a "general affinity" but an "actual relationship" between Bruegel and what he calls the "religious-universalist theism" of authors like Sebastian Franck, Sebastian Castellio, and the Dutch humanist and engraver Dirck Volkertzoon Coornhert.²⁵

In 1927, Hans Sedlmayr, only three years older than his young colleague, published a scathing review of Tolnai's first book, in which he accuses the author of "intuitionism" and "irrationalism."²⁶ One of his main objections in methodological terms is Tolnai's use of concepts and preconceptions that

22 Ibid., XI.

23 Ibid., 1 f.

24 Ibid., 15.

25 Ibid., 65–67.

26 Hans Sedlmayr, "Karl Tolnai: Die Zeichnungen Pieter Bruegels," *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur* 1 (1927/1928), 24–32, here 25, 27.

are not drawn from aesthetic experience and instead predetermine and overburden the perception of Bruegel's drawings. Along the same lines, he reproaches Tolnai for neglecting the formal structures of Bruegel's images while focusing on their notional or ideological content. In Sedlmayr's view, Tolnai is only interested in "what Bruegel wanted to say" with his works and what he could have also expressed in words – like Sebastian Franck did.²⁷ The gist of Sedlmayr's criticism is that Tolnai turns Bruegel's visually complex images into "ideograms," simple tokens for theoretical ideas.²⁸

Sedlmayr's review from 1927 can be read as a forceful critique of iconology *avant la lettre*.²⁹ It is written with great panache and thus betrays a high degree of personal involvement. In this context, it is interesting to note that Sedlmayr, like Tolnai, had begun his studies of art history in Vienna under the guidance of Max Dvořák, and like Tolnai, he wrote his dissertation with Julius von Schlosser (1923).³⁰ The book version of his dissertation on the Austrian architect Bernhard Fischer von Erlach was published in the same year and with the same publisher – Reinhard Piper in Munich – as Tolnai's book on Bruegel (and their teacher's "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"). Therefore, it is fair to assume that beyond its legitimate points of criticism, Sedlmayr's review also had the function of denigrating a successful fellow student and a potentially dangerous competitor on the academic job market. Even at this early stage, Sedlmayr attempts to stylize himself as the true heir of Max Dvořák's "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte" (Art History as Intellectual History – or rather, History of Ideas or even History of the Spirit) and consequently as the legitimate representative of the great tradition of the Vienna School of Art History from Alois Riegl onwards. Arguing against Tolnai, he claims that the real "Geistesgeschichte" has to explain the qualities and characteristics of artworks by directly deriving them from the "spirit of the age" ("Geist der Epoche," "Kulturwollen," "Weltanschauung"), which operates, one can say, mysteriously

27 Ibid., 29.

28 Ibid., 30.

29 Of course, Aby Warburg had already coined the term „kritische Ikonologie“ for his scholarly enterprise in his seminal lecture/article on the frescoes of the *Palazzo Schifanoia* from 1912/1922. Cf. Aby Warburg, "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara," in *L'Italia e l'arte straniera: Atti del X Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte in Roma* (1912), ed. Adolfo Venturi (Rome: 1922), 179–193, here 184. However, it seems like Sedlmayr at this early point is unaware of the scholarly activities of Warburg and his Hamburg compatriots.

30 On Sedlmayr's academic biography, see Hans Aurenhammer, "Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984)," in *Klassiker der Kunstgeschichte: Von Panofsky bis Greenberg*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer (Munich: 2008), 76–89.

“within” and “through” the artist and is not equivalent with the philosophical theories and convictions of the artist or his contemporaries.³¹

What is at stake here, beyond the apparent personal rivalry, is a twofold problem that is still relevant today. At the core of Sedlmayr’s criticism lies the question of what an interpretation of an artwork actually *is*. What do we aim to discover when we interpret a work of art? Are we looking for the artist’s personal ideas and beliefs? Do we want to find out the artist’s personal emotions and anxieties? Or are we looking for something that goes beyond personal articulation and expression? Is the artwork a symptom for greater trends in intellectual, social, political, or religious history that can be deciphered by some sort of art historical analysis? This is the starting point for the second set of problems that Sedlmayr’s review confronts us with: What is the appropriate way to proceed in our analysis? How can we validate our results? What are our legitimate sources? And how should we relate these sources to the object that is to be interpreted?

As we have seen, Tolnai, in contrast to Dvořák and Sedlmayr, chose to name and sometimes also quote concrete contemporary authors whom he believed to be relevant for a better understanding of Bruegel’s art. Looking more closely at his early text, however, we see that the references to these authors usually do not occur in relation with concrete images. Their function is to evoke a certain horizon of thought that can be loosely associated with certain features of Bruegel’s imagery, but they almost never are used to explain a specific work of art. This is strikingly different, however, in a longer article with the title “Studien zu den Gemälden P. Bruegels d. Ä.” that Tolnai published about nine years later in the *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* (1934).³² Here, he quotes a paragraph from Sebastian Franck’s *Paradoxa* in order to elucidate Bruegel’s *Procession to Calvary* (Fig. 1.1) from 1564. He had already used the same quote in his book on Bruegel’s drawings, yet without linking it to any specific image.³³ Now, in 1934, Tolnai uses it to interpret the *Procession to Calvary* as a truly “cosmic landscape” (as he writes) that visualizes the eternal circular flow of being as a “unitary process” (“Einheitsprozess”) in which the human beings unconsciously take part. The powerful paragraph from the *Paradoxa* reads as follows:

31 Sedlmayr, “Karl Tolnai,” 29.

32 Karl von Tolnai, “Studien zu den Gemälden P. Bruegels d. Ä.,” *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* N.F. 8 (1934), 105–135.

33 Tolnai, *Die Zeichnungen*, 48.

One day leads to the next, the world is round and all things go by in a circle like the sun; nothing on earth is fixed or remains. That's why they say: *Omnium rerum vicissitudo*: All things must pass. What has happened is not, anymore – but will be, again. That's why the whole bible repeats itself again and again: Adam's fall, the tree of knowledge, penitence and death, life and suffering ... of Christ and all the episodes from the bible are still taking place every single day ... Everything also happens within us; and if Christ would happen to come again in his flesh, the way he appears day by day in his members and suffers, we surely would crucify him again and again in order to fulfill the lot of our fathers ... The world remains the world and this globe or clump of the world needs to keep revolving so that what has happened today won't be tomorrow but come again later ... There is nothing new under the sun.³⁴



FIGURE 1.1 *Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Procession to Calvary, oil on oak, 124 × 170 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.*

34 Quoted after Tolnai, "Studien," 120f: "Es treibt ein Tag den andern, die Welt ist sinnvoll und gehen alle Dinge in einem Zirkel wie die Sonne, nichts Bleibendes oder Stetes ist auf Erden. Darum spricht man: *Omnium rerum vicissitudo*; was geschehen ist, ist nimmer, wird aber wieder. Darum muß die ganze Bibel für und für wiederholt und in einem Wesen gehen: Adams Fall, der Baum der Erkenntnis, die Buße, ebenso der Tod, das Leben,

Tolnai claims that it is only through this “intentional content” (“intentionierten Inhalt”) that the specific shape of Bruegel’s landscape – with its dynamic curve around the hub of the central rock with a mill on top – can adequately be understood in its deviation from traditional representations of the topic, for instance by the Brunswick Monogrammist/Jan van Amstel.

This example shows us that Tolnai remained faithful to his earlier intuitions about Bruegel’s interest in the organic nature of landscape and the “essence of the world.” And, it demonstrates that he did not take Sedlmayr’s criticism to heart. On the contrary, instead of avoiding a close link between the artwork and a philosophical theory, he even fortified and specified this connection. And even if we might be inclined to think that his interpretation of Bruegel’s *Procession* (with its accent on organic natural processes) is tendentious and misleading, we probably have to admit that there is a strong reverberation between the image and Franck’s text. For this reason, Jürgen Müller, writing around 60 years later, was able to use this paragraph in order to develop an interpretation of the *Procession to Calvary* that more convincingly focuses on the Franckian concept of the “inner Christ” in relation to a paradoxical concept of time, in which the future has already happened in the past.³⁵

Another remarkable feature of Tolnai’s article is the author’s extensive use of iconographical comparisons and derivations. This is particularly apparent in the chapter on Bruegel’s *Series of the Months*, in which he was able to establish an iconographical categorization of Bruegel’s paintings that is still widely accepted today.³⁶ With recourse to the tradition of late-medieval calendar illuminations, Tolnai makes the suggestion that each of Bruegel’s paintings can be connected with two months: *Gloomy Day* (February/March), *Missing Painting* (April/May), *Haymaking* (June/July), *Wheat Harvest* (August/September),

die Leiden ... Christi gehen noch auf ihre Weise täglich im Schwang und alle Historie der Bibel ... Es geht in uns innerlich alles daher, und wenn es sich begäbe, daß Christus äußerlich wiederkäme, wie er noch täglich in seinen Gliedern kommt und leidet, so kreuzigen wir ihn immerzu wieder, unserer Väter Maß erfüllend ... Welt ist allweg Welt und muß sich die Kugel der Welt immerzu herzmwalzen, damit was heut’ gewesen ist morgen nimmer sei und wiederkomme ... ist nichts Neues unter der Sonne.”

35 Jürgen Müller, *Das Paradox als Bildform: Studien zur Ikonologie Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.* (Munich: 1999), 140.

36 For the state of research on the *Series of the Months* (and for the most recent and elaborate interpretation) see Bertram Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit: Die “Monatsbilder” Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.* (Munich: 2012). A short glimpse into the larger argument is now available in English: Bertram Kaschek, “For as the days of Noah were ...”: Typology in Pieter Bruegel’s *Series of the Months*,” in *Visual Typology in Early Modern Europe: Continuity and Expansion*, eds. Dagmar Eichberger and Shelley Perlove (Turnhout: 2018, forthcoming).

Return of the Herd (October/December), *Hunters in the Snow* (December/January).³⁷ Tolnai used his conclusions as evidence for the fact that Bruegel's peculiar arrangement was meant to express the never-ending process of seasonal change, thus again emphasizing his idea of Bruegel expressing the unity of natural processes. Be that as it may, in our context, it is interesting to note that Tolnai's new methodological inclination towards iconography is certainly not a coincidence. After finishing his dissertation on Bosch and publishing his book on Bruegel in 1925, Tolnai spent three years in Rome researching the topic of his habilitation project on the late architectural projects of Michelangelo. His habilitation finally took place in Hamburg in 1929, where he also taught as a Privatdozent for the next four years until he resigned from his *venia legendi* in an act of protest against National Socialism in the summer of 1933. It was probably under the spell of the Warburg school in Hamburg that Tolnai revised or at least tempered his earlier intuitionism with tools that Erwin Panofsky called the "principles of correction" (i.e. "Typengeschichte" and "Allgemeine Geistesgeschichte").³⁸ Panofsky personally held Tolnai in high esteem and actively supported his younger colleague. In a letter of recommendation from 1934, he wrote: "I [...] am glad to state that Dr. Karl von Tolnay is, in my opinion, one of the most brilliant art-historians I know. Dr. v. Tolnay [...] excels by a rare combination of constructive scientific imagination and thorough connoisseurship [...]."³⁹ Tolnai apparently fully embraced the iconographical method and also integrated it into his teaching. In a footnote in his article from 1934, he references seminar presentation by his student Lotte Brand (who in her later life would publish on Hieronymus Bosch and on Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*), in which she made the initial identification of the group in the lower right corner of Bruegel's *Gloomy Day* as a carnival scene.⁴⁰

As Tolnai himself remembered in a short autobiographical text from 1974, he fully shared the conviction of the scholars around Ernst Cassirer and the Warburg Library that a purely formal approach to art had been surpassed and that art had to be analyzed within the context of its concrete historical

37 Tolnai, "Studien," 120.

38 Cf. Erwin Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst," *Logos* 21 (1932), 103–119. In this seminal text, Panofsky sketches out some of his ideas on the interpretation of artworks that he later would simplify and incorporate into the highly influential introduction to his *Studies in Iconology* (New York: 1939).

39 Quoted after Ulrike Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil: Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler*, 2 vols. (Munich: 1999), vol. 2, 711.

40 Tolnai, "Studien," 125 (footnote 46).

context.⁴¹ After leaving Germany for Paris in 1933, Tolnai, who from this point on called himself Charles de Tolnay, continued his Bruegel research and in 1935, he published a two-volume monograph on Bruegel paintings in French, in which he, even more adamantly than before, tries to locate Bruegel within the culture of his time and place.⁴²

Building on Arthur Popham's seminal article on "Pieter Bruegel and Abraham Ortelius," published in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1931, Tolnai tries to sketch out the intellectual circle of Bruegel and his humanist-libertine friends and customers.⁴³ Beyond Popham's source-based information, however, Tolnai formulated the hypothesis that Bruegel had contact with the libertine sect of the so-called "Family of Love" ("Schola Charitatis" or "Huis der Liefde") or even might have been a member of the sect himself.⁴⁴ Admittedly, the evidence for this particular claim is rather scant, and Tolnai in this case makes almost no effort to prove his point by analyzing specific paintings (he only makes a few general and rather vague remarks about the "hermetic" and "esoteric" character of Bruegel's *Resurrection of Christ* and *Death of the Virgin*).⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in this book, Tolnai offers the first plausible attempt to reconstruct Bruegel's audience by referring to the entries in the *Album Amicorum* of the geographer Abraham Ortelius and the inventories of the collections of paintings by Nicolaes Jongelincq and the Cardinal Granvelle.

41 Tolnai, "Erinnerung an Gustav Pauli," 9.

42 Charles de Tolnay, *Pierre Bruegel l'Ancien*, 2 vols. (Brussels: 1935).

43 Arthur E. Popham, "Pieter Bruegel and Abraham Ortelius," *The Burlington Magazine* 59 (1931), 184–188.

44 Tolnay, *Pierre Bruegel l'Ancien*, vol. 1, 9–11. For a positive response to Tolnay's claim see Gotthard Jedlicka, *Pieter Bruegel: Der Maler in seiner Zeit* (Erlenbach-Zürich and Leipzig: 1938), 140f. To my knowledge, there are only two authors who emphatically (and unconvincingly) tried to really substantiate Tolnay's claim: Herbert Stein-Schneider and Richard C. C. Temple. Stein-Schneider stated that Bruegel's whole oeuvre can be explained by exclusively tracing all iconographic motifs back to Hendrik Niclaes' first major work *Van dat geestelike Lande der Beloften* (Deventer: ca. 1552). See Herbert Stein-Schneider, "Les Familistes: Une secte néo-cathare du 16^e siècle et leur peintre Pieter Brueghel l'Ancien," *Cahiers d'Études Cathares* 36/105 (1985), 3–44; idem, "Les quarante symboles hérétique de Hendrik Niclaes: Une lecture des peintures de Pieter Brueghel l'Ancien à la lumière des quarante symboles hérétiques de la secte familiste," *Cahiers d'Études Cathares* 36/106 (1985), 3–50; idem, "Pieter Bruegel, peintre hérétique, illustrateur du message familiste," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 107 (1986), 71–74. Stein-Schneider was followed more recently by Richard C. C. Temple, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Esoteric Tradition* (The Prince's School of Traditional Arts, London: 2006, unpublished Ph.D. thesis).

45 Tolnai, *Pierre Bruegel l'Ancien*, 50f.

Once more, I now want to address my interest to Hans Sedlmayr, who in 1934 – coincidence? – also published an article on Bruegel in the very same volume of the *Jahrbuch der Kunstsammlungen in Wien*, in which Tolnai's aforementioned "Studien zu den Gemälden" had appeared.⁴⁶ In fact, Sedlmayr's essay directly followed Tolnai's, a placement in the journal, which suggests reading it as a direct response to, or a rebuttal of, the preceding text. Sedlmayr, however, claims in a footnote not to have read Tolnai's recent study. Yet, he adds an appendix to his article that contains a revision of his criticism of Tolnai's first book. Apparently, he intended to discredit Tolnai's new piece of scholarship, right from the point of its publication.

Sedlmayr, inspired by contemporary Gestalt theory, proposes a strictly formal – and in the end, a pretty modernist – reading of Bruegel's paintings, highlighting one artistic feature that he labels as Bruegel's "macchia" – a term with which he designates a structure of colored blots or patches that constitute the beholder's primary visual experience of the painting. He had borrowed the term "macchia" from Benedetto Croce, who was Julius von Schlosser's favorite philosopher. With this gesture, as Hans Aurenhammer has argued in a recent study, Sedlmayr successfully tried to win the favor of his teacher whose successor he would become only two years later.⁴⁷

According to Sedlmayr, Bruegel's "macchia" is fundamentally shaped by objects, which can dissolve into basic geometrical forms like circles, globes, ovals, cylinders, cones and cubes. Along these lines, he declares Bruegel's *Land of Cockaigne* to be a true "treasure trove" for such objects: flat cakes, bowls, plates, jugs, tabletops, eggs and – as a paradigm for such an assembly of forms – the cactus that purely consists of six disks. Sedlmayr interprets this pictorial structure as a visual equivalent of "alienation" from a world that is literally falling into pieces, and it remains programmatically unclear throughout the essay if Sedlmayr is diagnosing the art and world of Pieter Bruegel or his own day and age. In any case, the rivalry between Sedlmayr and his younger colleague

46 Hans Sedlmayr, "Die 'Macchia' Bruegels," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* N.F. 8 (1934), 137–160. For an English translation see Hans Sedlmayr, "Bruegel's *Macchia*," in *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, ed. Christopher S. Wood (New York: 2000), 323–378.

47 Cf. Hans Aurenhammer, "Zäsur oder Kontinuität?: Das Wiener Kunsthistorische Institut im Ständestaat und im Nationalsozialismus," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 53 (2004), 11–54, here 18f. On Sedlmayr's *Macchia*-text, also see Daniela Bohde, "Pieter Bruegel's *Macchia* und Hans Sedlmayrs physiognomisches Sehen: Psychologische Interpretationsmodelle von Hans Sedlmayr," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 57 (2008), 239–262.

had turned from a battle within the Vienna School into a battle between the Vienna and the Hamburg schools of art history – formalism vs. iconology.

What can we learn from these historiographical notes? With regard to Tolnai, we can say that his writings from the decade between 1925 and 1935 allow us to observe and retrace the slow and sketchy process of the discovery of “religion” in the works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. This discovery – as problematic and imperfect it may be in itself – marks a great achievement in the exploration of Bruegel’s pictorial cosmos and paved the way for all further research on the topic, even for those who rejected Tolnai’s often daring and untenable interpretations. Moreover, it is apparent that although none of the very famous members of the Warburg school wrote on Bruegel, this circle of scholars in Hamburg had a significant, direct impact on modern Bruegel research. Tolnai’s renunciation of intuitionism in favor of more carefully crafted arguments grounded in historical documents (pictures and texts alike) was certainly strongly inspired by the spirit of the Warburg school. And with regard to historical documents, one has to admit that he really did have great intuition; he certainly spotted some of the most enlightening sources for a better understanding of Bruegel’s works.

In terms of methodology, Sedlmayr in the early 30s undoubtedly was the more adventurous and advanced scholar, who drew his inspiration from current scientific and psychological research.⁴⁸ His refusal to ground his analysis in history, however, makes it difficult to hold onto his brilliant thoughts about Bruegel’s “macchia.” Yet, we should be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water and keep the possibility in mind that Bruegel himself was well aware of some basic principles of perceptual psychology. Both Sedlmayr and Tolnai point out a curious detail in Bruegel’s *Children’s Games*: Four hats, fallen on the ground, three are black and one is red, all of a sudden form the features of a face that blankly stares at us. As Michel Weemans demonstrates in his contribution to this volume, such a “Kippbild” is not just a gimmick of 20th century perceptual psychology but was already a fairly common pictorial device in the 16th century, frequently used by Bruegel and his contemporaries. Moreover, it should not be considered to be merely a visual pun but also an exegetical instrument in religious terms.

This little preview has been meant to call to our attention to the fact that the methods of Sedlmayr and Tolnai (one strongly emphasizing formal analysis

⁴⁸ For a broader context, see Christopher S. Wood, “Introduction,” in *The Vienna School Reader*, 9–72; Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven: 2005); Daniela Bohde, *Kunstgeschichte als physiognomische Wissenschaft: Kritik einer Denkfigur der 19020er bis 1940er Jahre* (Berlin: 2012).

and the other aiming at historical contextualization) should not be taken as mutually exclusive options. Indeed, we have seen that the shortcomings of both approaches are a direct result of their one-sidedness. For a better understanding of Bruegel's images, we need a constant mediation between visual analysis and source-based research.

Carl Gustaf Stridbeck, who most forcefully carried on the legacy of Tolnai after the Second World War, did not always achieve such a neat balance. His voluminous and prolific book *Bruegelstudien* from 1956 is unquestionably a major contribution to the field since it attempts to systematically decipher Bruegel's enigmatic inventions with recourse to the writings of Sebastian Franck and Dick Volkertzoon Coornhert.⁴⁹ Whereas Tolnai made highly selective use of a few striking quotes, Stridbeck refers to written sources for almost every single detail. Because of the extremely additive nature of his method, he was occasionally accused of treating Bruegel's complex pictorial inventions as simply crossword puzzles.⁵⁰ But despite his deficiencies in analyzing the specific pictorial logic of Bruegel's images, he was able to demonstrate the relevance of certain authors – especially Sebastian Franck – for a better understanding of Bruegel's art. And it was his book that brought the question of Bruegel's religious identity really to the fore.

His thesis of Bruegel as a spiritualist painter, however, has mainly been met with a certain reservation or even skepticism. The monographs on Bruegel from the following decades – by scholars like the Austrian émigré Fritz Grossmann or the German émigré Wolfgang Stechow – largely downplay the role of religion in Bruegel's works and rather choose to place him in a diffuse realm of northern humanism.⁵¹ In a substantial article from 1979, Justus Müller Hofstede tried to be much more specific in this respect and made an effort to attribute a Neo-Stoic worldview to Bruegel.⁵² The key witness for this thesis was Abraham Ortelius who included quotes from Cicero into his atlas (the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*), which Müller Hofstede then used for his analysis of Bruegel's early landscape drawings and prints. However, Müller Hofstede

49 Carl Gustaf Stridbeck, *Bruegelstudien: Untersuchungen zu den ikonologischen Problemen bei Pieter Bruegel d. Ä. sowie dessen Beziehungen zum niederländischen Romanismus* (Stockholm: 1956).

50 Cf. Beat Wyss, *Pieter Bruegel Landschaft mit Ikarussturz: Ein Vexierbild des humanistischen Pessimismus* (Frankfurt am Main: 1990), 23.

51 Fritz Grossmann, *Bruegel: The Paintings: Complete Edition* (London: 1955); Wolfgang Stechow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder* (New York: 1968).

52 Justus Müller Hofstede, "Zur Interpretation von Bruegels Landschaft: Ästhetischer Landschaftsbegriff und stoische Weltbetrachtung," in *Pieter Bruegel und seine Welt*, eds. Otto von Simson and Matthias Winner (Berlin: 1979), 73–142.

himself admits that his hypothesis doesn't apply well to Bruegel's later painted landscapes⁵³ – and he doesn't even try to integrate images with religious iconography into his argument.

Around the same time, the heated debate between Svetlana Alpers and Hessel Miedema about “Bruegel's Peasants” took place in the journal *Simiolus* – but religion did not play a role in this fight; it was all about fun versus morality.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, we can roughly state that in methodological terms, this debate was a redux of the conflict between Sedlmayr and Tolnai, with the one side focusing on visual evidence, the other on textual substantiation.

In the aftermath of this debate, the interest in the role of religion in Bruegel's oeuvre seemed to fade in American scholarship of the 1980s and 90s. The important books of Margaret Sullivan, Mark Meadow, and Ethan Matt Kavaler almost programmatically exclude reflections on a potential religious dimension of Bruegel's works and rather focus on ancient literature, classical rhetoric, or socio-economic aspects.⁵⁵ Especially interesting for our context is Margaret Sullivan who, in her *Bruegel's Peasants* from 1994, attempted to present Pieter Bruegel as a classical humanist whose paintings and prints are filled with allusions to works of ancient literature and philosophy, which are meant to be discovered and deciphered by the beholder. She argues for this thesis with what she calls an “audience-response” methodology.⁵⁶ Like Tolnai, Sullivan uses Ortelius' *Album Amicorum* in order to reconstruct a network of Bruegel's potential customers that might give insight into the mentality and interests of Bruegel's audience. Unlike Tolnai, however, she focuses on classical learning, on the audience's likely familiarity with literary texts from antiquity.

At this point, we encounter a certain problem of the “audience-response” method that needs critical rethinking. Of course, it is important to imagine a potential audience in order to determine, or at least estimate, the expectations with which the artist probably was confronted. But as we can see in the case of the circle around Ortelius, the same people who were intensely interested

53 Ibid., 141.

54 Svetlana Alpers, “Bruegel's Festive Peasants,” *Simiolus* 6 (1972/73), 163–176; idem, “Realism as a Comic Mode: Low Life Painting Seen Through Bredero's Eyes,” *Simiolus* 8 (1975/76), 115–144; Hessel Miedema, “Realism and Comic Mode: The Peasant,” *Simiolus* 9 (1977), 205–219; Svetlana Alpers, “Taking Pictures Seriously: A Reply to Hessel Miedema,” *Simiolus* 10 (1978/79), 46–50.

55 Margaret A. Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants: Art and Audience in the Northern Renaissance* (Cambridge: 1994); Mark A. Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs and the Practice of Rhetoric* (Zwolle: 2002); Ethan Matt Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (Cambridge: 1999).

56 Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants*, 5.

in questions of religion and spirituality also had a number of different other interests – not only ancient literature but also history, geography, cartography, archeology and numismatics – to name but a few. How should we decide which of these interests are really relevant for the interpretation of Bruegel's imagery? On the one hand, one could be liberal and not ask for a decision, and Sullivan herself indeed seems to be in favor of this option when she writes, "For viewers in the habit of developing a cluster of associations on the basis of one stimulus, a single image could give rise to many different meanings."⁵⁷ On the other hand, one would like to know, then, how these different meanings – once they are discovered as such – interact with each other and if the picture itself might speak for one more than another. Unfortunately, Sullivan leaves these questions untouched.

A year before Sullivan's book, Reindert Falkenburg proposed a tentative solution for the basic methodical problem in an article in *Oud Holland* (1993), by calling for a close reading of Bruegel's paintings, namely the *Procession to Calvary*.⁵⁸ Such a close reading, or close looking, can be understood as an open process in which the share of the beholder plays a significant part (an argument also made by Sullivan) but which at the same time is strongly determined by the visual givens of the painting itself. Falkenburg also directs the attention more strongly to the pictorial sources of Bruegel's art – and these are often religious paintings from the earlier sixteenth century. In this respect, Falkenburg's article is an early indication of the return of religion as a topic in Bruegel research. Anabella Weisman's eschatological interpretation of Bruegel's *Peasant Wedding Banquet* is another highly original contribution from around the same time, although often overlooked and thus far less influential.⁵⁹ Weisman argues that Bruegel's seemingly simple realistic or comical scene can be read as a visualization of the moment before the Last Judgment. Even if some of her iconographical attributions are questionable, her overall argument is based on keen attentiveness to the formal structure of the painting, the various conspicuous motifs and their potential semantic interplay.

57 Ibid., 57.

58 Reindert L. Falkenburg, "Pieter Bruegels *Kruisdraging*: een proeve van 'close reading,'" *Oud Holland* 107 (1993), 17–33.

59 Anabella Weisman, "Was hört und sieht der Dudelsackpfeifer auf der Bauernhochzeit?: Bemerkungen über ein allzu bekanntes Gemälde von Pieter Bruegel," in *Schweigen: Unterbrechung und Grenze der menschlichen Wirklichkeit*, eds. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (Berlin: 1992), 225–245. Also see idem, *Golgotha: Vergangenheit mit Jetztzeit geladen* [Serie Kamper Cahiers 72] (Kampen: 1992).

In 1996, a full volume of the *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* was dedicated to the art of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. In most of the contributions to this volume, religion does not play a crucial role. Some of the essays, however, offer bold interpretations of Bruegel's works that try to place them in various theological discourses of the 16th century.⁶⁰ Most prominently and elaborately, Walter Melion proposes an exegetical reading of Philip Galle's engraving *Death of the Virgin* after Pieter Bruegel's famous grisaille, in which he reconstructs the early reception history of Bruegel's image from which he then draws far-reaching conclusions for its interpretation.⁶¹ The aim of his essay is "to establish the orthodoxy of [Bruegel's] version of this theme, by locating his invention within the context of demands placed upon Catholic imagery in the wake of the Council of Trent."⁶² Here, religion's effect on Bruegel's oeuvre is seen in a very different framework than in the tradition of Tolnai and Stridbeck. According to Melion, Bruegel's imagery does not testify to the artist's heterodox inclinations but, on the contrary, to his allegiance to Counter-Reformation theology. Several aspects of this interpretation, however, need critical rethinking. First, Melion's painstaking analysis focuses exclusively on Philip Galle's print from 1574 and is mainly based on written sources from the three decades after Bruegel's death, leaving aside the grisaille's immediate context. However, the political and religious situation had dramatically changed in the years since 1564, when the grisaille was designed. So even if Melion's observations might hold true for the later recipients of the print, this tells us little about Bruegel's artistic intentions or the expectations of *his* (not Galle's) contemporary audience. Also, the question remains open how the alleged Counter-Reformation "orthodoxy" of Bruegel's image relates to the rest of his oeuvre that, thematically and formally, barely points in this direction. Another point of contention concerns Abraham Ortelius for whom Bruegel painted the grisaille and who probably also devised the inscription for the print that he later commissioned. As Melion points out himself, Ortelius, despite remaining a member of the Catholic Church throughout his life, held a "sympathetic stance" toward certain spiritualist thinkers like Hendrik Niclaes or Hendrik Jansen Barrefelt.⁶³ As has been long acknowledged, Ortelius was skeptical toward any form of

60 Contributions with a focus on religious questions are the ones by Walter S. Melion, Ursula Härting and Joseph F. Gregory.

61 Walter S. Melion, "'Ego enim quasi obdormivi': Salvation and Blessed Sleep in Philip Galle's *Death of the Virgin* after Pieter Bruegel," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (1996), 14–53.

62 Melion, "'Ego enim quasi obdormivi,'" 16f.

63 Melion, "'Ego enim quasi obdormivi,'" 22.

religious orthodoxy, which would attempt to bind spiritual enlightenment to the observance of churchly rituals of any kind. In 1567, after the Antwerp Council of Blood, he compared the situation in the Low Countries with a sick man threatened by “Catholic evil, Protestant Fever, Huguenot disease and different vexations from black riders and other soldiers” and in 1592, he still expressed the hope that his fellow humanist Justus Lipsius was neither “an adherent of the pope or a Calvinist [...] for sins are committed on both sides.”⁶⁴ Recent research has confirmed and fortified Ortelius’ religious position on the periphery of confessional churches and pointed out his fondness for the writings of the German spiritualist Sebastian Franck, one of the most forceful opponents of institutional religion in the 16th century.⁶⁵ So even if Galle’s print with Ortelius’ inscription might resonate with certain texts in defense of the cult of the Virgin (most importantly Petrus Canisius’ *De Maria Virgine incomparabili* from 1577), it seems questionable to ascribe a clear Counter-Reformation agenda to it (let alone to its authors, Ortelius and Bruegel).

Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that some of Bruegel’s works show affinities to orthodox Catholic forms of art and exegesis. Walter Melion’s contribution to the current volume, for example, argues for this option anew.⁶⁶ In surveying the bulk of Bruegel’s oeuvre, however, it seems very unlikely that the artist conformed to traditional Catholic ideals of worship. If only for the sake of formal inventiveness, ingenuity, and innovation, Bruegel always strongly deviated from the pictorial formulae that he certainly knew and used as stimulating points of departure. Apparently, he was more interested in the creative deconstruction of conventional forms of image-making than in continuing or renewing them. Joseph F. Gregory, in his contribution to the 1996 *Jaarboek*, sees Bruegel’s *Procession to Calvary* with its inversion of iconic core (the face of Christ) and supplementary scenes (market peasants) as an assault on the relative integrity and stability of the traditional *Andachtsbild* and thus

64 René Boumans, “The Religious Views of Abraham Ortelius,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 17 (1954), 374–377, here 376.

65 Jason Harris, “The Religious Position of Abraham Ortelius,” in *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs*, 89–140, here 127–130. On Ortelius’ religious leanings also see Giorgio Mangani, “De providentiële betekenis van het *Theatrum orbis terrarum*,” in *Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598), cartograaf en humanist* [exh. cat. Museum Plantijn-Moretus, Antwerpen] Turnhout 1998, 93–103. With regard to Bruegel, see Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit*, 35–37.

66 Another is Melion’s reading of Bruegel’s *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery*. See Walter S. Melion, “Visual Exegesis and Pieter Bruegel’s *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery*,” in *Imago Exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments 1400–1700*, eds. Walter S. Melion, James Clifton, and Michel Weemans (Leiden and Boston: 2014), 1–41.

as a symptom of a new interpretive uncertainty and subjectivity that Gregory, rather vaguely, aligns with the hermeneutic models of Erasmus and Luther.⁶⁷ In a consecutive publication, Gregory goes on to argue that Bruegel, in his highly contemporized biblical paintings from the mid-1560s, not only subscribed to certain Reformation ideas but also took an implicit, yet strong stand against the Habsburg rulers of the Low Countries and the Catholic Church by including motifs of topical significance (like soldiers with Habsburg uniforms).⁶⁸ Gregory's politico-religious interpretation thus is in sharp contrast to Melion's conception of Bruegel as an orthodox Catholic artist.

How is one to come to terms with such different readings? Are they mutually exclusive? Or is there a way to mediate between them? On the one hand, there is no doubt about the fact that Bruegel held close ties to Catholic officials, like the cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle or the Antwerp tax collector Nicolaes Jongelincx. On the other hand, there is strong iconographical evidence that Bruegel at least problematized, if not openly criticized, the Habsburg rule and Catholic authorities in many of his images. A productive option for a potential reconciliation of this conflict is to assume that these Catholic officials themselves, despite their public adherence to the Roman Church, were interested in or even privately preferred alternative forms of spirituality – an attitude and behavior that was prominently labeled and criticized as “Nicodemism” by John Calvin.⁶⁹ In 1989, David Freedberg suggested that Bruegel and his patrons could be characterized with this term.⁷⁰ And indeed, Bruegel's friend Abraham Ortelius, with his great admiration for Sebastian Franck and his simultaneous loyalty to the Catholic Church, can be taken as a relatively well-documented and paradigmatic case in point.⁷¹ Beyond this, the Pauline principle of self-knowledge – which is central to traditional late medieval theology, mysticism,

67 Joseph F. Gregory, “Toward the Contextualization of Pieter Bruegel's Procession to Calvary: Constructing the Beholder from within the Eyckian Tradition,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (1996), 206–221.

68 Joseph F. Gregory, *Contemporization as Polemical Device in Pieter Bruegel's Biblical Narratives* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: 2005).

69 See Carlos M. N. Eire, “Calvin and Nicodemism: A Reappraisal,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10/1 (1979), 45–69; Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 904–912; Mirjam van Veen, ‘Verschooninghe van de roomsche afgoderye’: *De polemiek van Calvijn met nicodemieten, in het bijzonder met Coornhert* [Bibliotheca humanistica et reformatrica 60] (Houten: 2001).

70 David Freedberg, “Allusion and Topicality in the Work of Pieter Bruegel: The Implications of a Forgotten Polemic,” in *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder* [exh. cat. Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo], ed. David Freedberg (Tokyo: 1989), 53–65.

71 Jason Harris, “The Religious Position of Abraham Ortelius,” 127–130.

mundane humanism, Erasmus, and Franck⁷² – might have helped Bruegel at times to navigate between the Catholic and the heterodox camps.

In his book *Das Paradox als Bildform* (1999), Jürgen Müller took up the mostly neglected mantle of Tolnai, Stridbeck and Freedberg by interpreting Bruegel's images as documents of the artist's spiritualistic and anti-confessional attitude as well as of his patrons' potential Nicodemism.⁷³ In the spirit of Falkenburg's close reading, Müller not only unfolded meticulous iconographic and formal analyses of Bruegel's paintings and prints but also attempted to establish certain theological texts as indispensable hermeneutic tools for a proper understanding of Bruegel's idiosyncratic visual language.

The first of these texts is Erasmus' *Adagium Sileni Alcibiadis*, published for the first time in a revised version of the *Adagia* in 1515, and reissued multiple times in the consecutive years.⁷⁴ The text lays out an idea of the Silenic logic of inversion, which posits that ugliness can be the external surface of true inner beauty and a beautiful façade may cover up a rotten interior. All outer appearances are potentially deceptive and thus call for utmost attentiveness and discernment. In this light, Bruegel's rather crude representations of human bodies, usually swaddled in cloth, imply a certain skepticism towards the celebration of physical beauty and the nude in Italian Renaissance art and its reverberation in contemporary Netherlandish painting.⁷⁵ At the same time, it is important to note that the Erasmian text formulates a sharp criticism of the Catholic Church by emphasizing the humility of Christ as a counter-image to the pompous appearance and conduct of the Roman Pope. Thus, it is fair to assume that Bruegel's pictorial idiom possessed a certain polemical charge.

72 See, for instance, Mitchell Merback, "Freedom, Dissent, Self-Knowing, and Other Possibilities in Sebald Beham's *Impossibile*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 63/4 (2010), 1037–1105.

73 Müller, *Das Paradox als Bildform*.

74 *Ibid.*, 90–125. Cf. Desiderius Erasmus, *Sileni Alcibiadis*, ed. Margaret Mann Philips (New York: 1969). Erasmus' text was translated into several European languages and was intensely read far into the 17th century. Peter Schöffler the Younger published the first German edition: Desiderius Erasmus, *Die Auszlegung dißes Sprichworts Die Sileni Alcibiadis* (Mainz: 1520).

75 Cf. Jessica Buskirk and Bertram Kaschek, "Kanon und Kritik: Konkurrierende Körperbilder in Italien und den Niederlanden," in *Jenseits der Geltung: Konkurrierende Transzendenzbehauptungen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Stephan Dreischer et al. (Berlin: 2013), 103–126; Bertram Kaschek, "'Weder römisch noch antik': Pieter Bruegels *Calumnia des Apelles* in neuer Deutung," in *Antike als Konzept: Lesarten in Kunst, Literatur und Politik*, eds. Gernot Kamecke, Bruno Klein, and Jürgen Müller (Berlin: 2009), 167–179.

The second text that Müller draws on for his interpretations of Bruegel's images is Sebastian Franck's *Paradoxa*, published first in German in 1534 by Hans Varnier the Elder in Ulm. Willem Gaillaert published a widely disseminated Dutch translation in Emden ca. 1560.⁷⁶ According to Müller, Franck's negative theology offers a fitting theoretical blueprint for interpreting Bruegel's art. Franck's text argues against the possibility of communicating divine truth through the discursive medium of language and writing; likewise, Bruegel's pictures seem to formulate a certain skepticism towards the visual representation of transcendent entities and events. And yet, his imagery, again in analogy to Franck's text, aims at evoking awareness of this very incommensurability of the godly essence. Unsurprisingly, Franck draws clear religious consequences from this theoretical setup and discredits all attempts of officially administering spiritual truth. His outright rejection of any confession that claims to have the only pathway to salvation is directed against Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anabaptism alike. The total absence of artworks produced for churches as well as his deviation from traditional formulae of religious painting might indicate that Bruegel shared Franck's antipathy toward institutions as mediators of faith.

In the new millennium, the discourse of Bruegel research appears to be rather fragmented. Various potentially conflicting strands of interpretation coexist, though often without taking notice of, or issue with, each other. However, many studies of Bruegel (like studies of many other mid-16th-century Netherlandish artists) use the writings of Erasmus as a crucial literary point of reference. But this does not actually entail consensus in questions of interpretation – mostly due to Erasmus' protean versatility that allows for a broad range of interpretive options. Some scholars refer to Erasmus as a classical humanist and philologist; others highlight his theological work. Some think of him as a theologian in the tradition of medieval exegesis; others emphasize his renunciation of scholasticism. Some see him as an apologist of Catholicism, defending free will against Luther; others accentuate his criticism of the Catholic Church, his call for reforms, or even his outspoken disapproval of sacramental rituals.⁷⁷

76 See Klaus Kaczerowsky, *Sebastian Franck: Bibliographie* (Wiesbaden: 1976), 84, 87; Cornelis Augustijn and Theo Parmentier, "Sebastian Franck in den nördlichen Niederlanden 1550 bis 1600," in *Sebastian Franck (1499–1542)*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Wiesbaden: 1993), 303–318; Bruno Becker, "Niederlandsche vertalingen van Sebastiaan Franck's geschriften," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 21 (1928), 149–60.

77 For the 16th century reception of Erasmus as a sharp critic of the Church, see Peter G. Bietenholz, *Encounters With a Radical Erasmus: Erasmus' Work as a Source of Radical Thought in Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: 2009).

Accordingly, in recent monographs on the artist, art historians do not agree about which aspects of Erasmus are of importance for a better understanding of Bruegel's art.

Anna Pawlak, for instance, puts strong emphasis on Erasmus' *Enchiridion* and argues for Bruegel's images being visual tools for meditation and spiritual insight.⁷⁸ Along similar lines, Todd Richardson employs the Erasmian notion of spiritual self-knowledge (borrowed from Pauline theology) for the analysis of Bruegel's imagery. Following Sullivan and Meadow, he also refers to Erasmus' *Convivia* in order to argue that Bruegel's paintings and prints were meant to elicit open-ended discussions without prioritizing their religious dimension.⁷⁹ Claudia Goldstein even uses the *Convivia* as a theoretical framework for a purely secular and pragmatic approach to Bruegel's pictures.⁸⁰ Matthijs IJssink and Stephanie Porras only refer to Erasmus to explain certain rhetorical elements in Bruegel's paintings – otherwise they focus on self-referentiality and historicity as key concepts for their respective interpretations of Bruegel's art.⁸¹ And a number of monographs just leave Erasmus aside and completely omit or downplay questions of religion.⁸² I myself have tried to demonstrate that,

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- 78 Anna Pawlak, *Trilogie der Gottessuche: Pieter Bruegels d. Ä. Sturz der gefallenen Engel, Triumph des Todes und Dulle Griet* (Berlin: 2011). For the most recent study of Bruegel's *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, focusing on the interplay between nature, art, and science, see Tine L. Meganck, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 'Fall of the Rebel Angels': Art, Knowledge and Politics on the Eve of the Dutch Revolt* (Milan: 2014).
- 79 Todd M. Richardson, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Art Discourse in the Sixteenth Century Netherlands* (Farnham: 2011). For a similar recent approach, see Koenraad Jonckheere, "An Allegory of Artistic Choice in Times of Trouble: Pieter Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (2014), 187–212.
- 80 Claudia Goldstein, *Pieter Bruegel and the Culture of the Early Modern Dinner Party* (Farnham: 2013). Similarly, Amy Orrock refers to the Erasmian writings on education for a secular understanding of Bruegel's paintings. See Amy Orrock, "Homo ludens: Pieter Bruegel's Children's Games and the Humanist Educators," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 4:2 (Summer 2012), DOI:10.5092/jhna.2012.4.2.1 (article derived from the author's unpublished Ph.D. thesis *Play and Learning in Pieter Bruegel's 'Children Games'*, University of Edinburgh: 2010).
- 81 Matthijs IJssink, *Bosch en Bruegel als Bosch: Kunst over kunst bij Pieter Bruegel (c. 1528–1569) en Jheronimus Bosch (c. 1450–1516)* (Nijmegen: 2009); Stephanie Porras, *Pieter Bruegel's Historical Imagination* (University Park/Pennsylvania: 2016).
- 82 Volker Gerald Grimm, *Pieter Bruegel d. Ä., Italien und die Antike* (Göttingen: 2009); Katrien Lichtert, "The Artist, the City and the Urban Theatre: Pieter Bruegel's 'Battle between Shrovetide and Lent' (1559) Reconsidered," in *Portraits of the City: Representing Urban Space in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe* [Studies in European Urban History 31], eds. Katrien Lichtert, Jan Dumolyn, and Maximiliaan Martens (Turnhout: 2014),

beyond Erasmus, the enthusiasm for late medieval mystical thought in the Netherlands during the 1560s can serve as a proper context for a better understanding of Bruegel's idiosyncratic imagery.⁸³

A number of the latest comprehensive surveys of Bruegel's oeuvre dismiss the question of whether there is religious content in his imagery as irrelevant or unanswerable.⁸⁴ Joseph L. Koerner's book on *Bosch and Bruegel* from 2016 reiterates, with great rhetorical panache, the idea that in the period between Bosch and Bruegel, painting was emancipated "from its subservience to the sacred" and allowed to discover the "profane world."⁸⁵ This narrative, which dominated 20th century scholarship, has been relativized or outright rejected in the past two decades in the recent contributions (unacknowledged by Koerner) discussed above. By focusing on Bruegel as the "unsurpassed painter of common humanity," Koerner comes to the conclusion that "in Bruegel nothing transcends the stage of the world."⁸⁶

In his recent survey from 2011, Larry Silver comments extensively on the potential religious dimension of Bruegel's images, yet the contours of their religious content often remain fuzzy.⁸⁷ In contrast, the most recent Bruegel books by Anabella Weisman and Jürgen Müller make bold statements about very specific political and religious messages encoded in the pictures.⁸⁸ Thus, we are far from any consensus about the religious positioning of Bruegel's art, and we are still confronted with the question that had occupied Tolnai and

83–96 (chapter from the author's unpublished dissertation *The Artist, the City and the Landscape: Representations of Urban Landscape in the Oeuvre of Pieter Bruegel the Elder* (c. 1528–1569), Ghent University: 2014); Rudolf Kuda, *Arbeit und Gesellschaft bei Pieter Bruegel d. Ä.* (unpublished dissertation, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main: 2014).

83 Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit*.

84 Manfred Sellink, *Bruegel: The Complete Paintings, Drawings and Prints* (Ghent: 2007); Christian Vöhringer, *Pieter Bruegel der Ältere: Malerei, Alltag und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert: Eine Biographie* (Stuttgart: 2013). Also see Walter S. Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: 2006).

85 Joseph L. Koerner, *Bosch and Bruegel: From Enemy Painting to Everyday Life* (Princeton: 2016), 72. This (questionable) narrative of secularization is also upheld in *De ontdekking van het dagelijks leven van Bosch tot Bruegel* [exh. cat., Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam], eds. Peter van der Coelen and Friso Lammertse (Rotterdam: 2015).

86 Koerner, *Bruegel and Bosch*, 277, 298.

87 Larry Silver, *Pieter Bruegel* (New York: 2011).

88 Anabella Weisman, *Pieter Bruegel d. Ä.* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: 2015); Jürgen Müller, *Pieter Bruegel d. Ä.* (Köln: forthcoming). Also see the catalogue of the print-exhibition *Pieter Bruegel d. Ä. und das Theater der Welt* [exh. cat., Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz], eds. Ingrid Mössinger and Jürgen Müller (Berlin: 2014).

Sedlmayr almost a century ago: What is the evidence for our respective interpretive hypotheses and conclusions – be they cautious or daring?

The contributions to this volume, which I will summarize shortly in the following paragraphs, will try to demonstrate that the integration of religious and theological perspectives facilitates not only an iconographical analysis of Bruegel's work but also an analysis of the media-specific strategies that the painter employs in his images. And in spite of their partially differing and competing perspectives, all contributions share the conviction that religious issues are at the core of Bruegel's imagery and that ignoring or downplaying these issues would result in a depletion of the semantic and aesthetic bounty of Bruegel's art.

JÜRGEN MÜLLER offers a new interpretation of one of Bruegel's most mysterious works, the *The Beekeepers*, in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett. Whereas prior research either read the image as a simple visualization of proverbial wisdom (referring to the Dutch inscription at the bottom of the sheet) or understood it as a veiled political message, Müller interprets it as a visual support of religious heterodoxy by disentangling the various iconographic traditions that Bruegel effectively blended into each other. The bird-nester in the upper right corner, for instance, not only refers to a famous woodcut from Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (illustrating the chapter on heresy) but also alludes to the iconography of Zaccheus, the tax collector (Luke 19) who climbed into a tree in order to see Christ arriving at Jericho. According to Müller, by merging several branches of the iconography of heresy, Bruegel creates a suggestive, yet subtle image of the individual search for Christ.

LARRY SILVER proposes a somewhat different take on *The Beekeepers* and some other images. Rather than seeing a specific plea for a deviating religious position in Bruegel's inventions, he perceives them as expression of skepticism toward a theoretical and contemplative attitude and consequently as a modest call for practical wisdom. In Silver's view, Bruegel initiates open sequences of viewing by offering visual contrasts and alternatives that each observer is supposed to discern individually. In the light of the politico-religious conflicts of the late 1560s, this stimulation of a stoic attitude towards the extremes is understood as the attempt of cultivating spiritual humility and mediation.

GERD SCHWERHOFF takes a fresh look at Bruegel's *Justitia* (1559), an engraving from the series of the *Virtues*, from a historian's perspective. Against the backdrop of religious persecution in the 16th century Netherlands, Schwerhoff argues that Bruegel's print can be read not only as a criticism of justice in general, but also – more specifically – as a criticism of the Inquisition during the artist's lifetime. A comparative analysis of illustrated law codices from the late middle ages and early modern period allows Schwerhoff to

conclude that Bruegel's *Justitia*, with its conspicuous deviations from iconographic convention and its critical tension between the image and its inscription, was meant to mock legal theory and condemn the legal practice of the period. Considering the dramatic increase in executions of heretics following the so-called *Blutplakat* (proclamation against heretics) of 1550 and the discussion of the dangers of a new Inquisition accompanying the diocese reform by Pope Paul IV in 1559, it is more than fair to assume that Bruegel's print directly takes issue with these contemporary events and debates.

JESSICA BUSKIRK addresses the marriage of landscape and narrative in the first known collaboration between Bruegel and the print publisher Hieronymus Cock, who in this case also etched the image she analyzes, *The Landscape with the Temptation of Christ*. She investigates why most Early Netherlandish artists staged their representations of the biblical event in a well-ordered garden space and why Bruegel chose to deviate from this tradition by locating it in a rather disorderly swampland. As Buskirk argues, artists from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were so steeped in a typologically structured discourse that it only seemed natural for them to place Christ's Temptation in the same space as its Old Testament prefiguration: Eden. Bruegel and his printmaker/publisher, on the other hand, willfully demolished this pre-stabilized harmony in order to challenge the beholder's conceptual and perceptual discernment.

ANNA PAWLAK presents Bruegel's *Triumph of Death* (1563) as a true *theatrum mortis* combining encyclopaedically traditional motifs from the *Danse macabre*, the Triumph of Death, the Apocalypse, the Encounter Between the Three Living and the Three Dead, and a large number of other familiar elements from the iconography of death. In her view, the painting not only forms a visual compendium of the manifold images dealing with death as an abstract concept but also as a complex pictorial reflection on the possibilities and boundaries of the visual representation of immaterial reality. Against the backdrop of the late medieval *ars moriendi* and sixteenth-century controversies about the status of religious images, she interprets Bruegel's painting as a call for a *meditatio mortis* that enables the beholder to subdue the fear of death, which – paradoxically – the painting itself evokes, through the use of the viewer's own imagination.

WALTER MELION places Pieter Bruegel's *Resurrection* (1562–63), executed as an engraving by Philips Galle, in the medieval tradition of exegesis, ranging from the Church Fathers, the *Glossa ordinaria* and the *Postillae* of Nicholas of Lyra to Erasmus of Rotterdam's immensely popular *Paraphrases* of the four Gospels that were printed both singly and in comprehensive editions from 1524 on. According to Melion, Bruegel's *Resurrection* promotes vision and image as

divinely sanctioned instruments of spiritual insight. Moreover, it does so in a meta-discursive fashion, by asking how a mystery of faith that is by nature bound to its invisibility can be visually known by means of signs and images. Through meticulous alignment of the image with an extensive body of texts, Melion argues that Bruegel directly engages with the exegetical tradition instead of just adhering to pictorial conventions. Thus, he explains Bruegel's deviation from customary visual formulae as the artist's attempt to reinvent and sustain a Catholic discourse on image making.

RALPH DEKONINCK, in a similar fashion, sees Bruegel's imagery as being in resonance with not only the contemporary debate on the cult of images but also with late-medieval religious practice, specifically cults of the Virgin embedded in nature. In his analysis of Bruegel's *Flight into Egypt*, Dekoninck points out that the motif of the Fall of the Idol (which traditionally accompanies the representation of the Flight) is typologically linked to the erection of the true Christian image, i.e. the Virgin and Child. Departing from the observation that there is no idol lying at the foot of the broken column on the rocky promontory in the left middle ground, Dekoninck draws on the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* and Ludolph's *Vita Christi* to argue that the idol can be found in an anthropomorphic crypto-image located in the rocky formation in the lower left foreground. The grandeur of the mountainous landscape thus can be interpreted as an echo of Christ's greatness, which overcomes idolatrous imagery.

MICHEL WEEMANS uncovers the hitherto unnoticed presence of crypto-imagery in Bruegel's famous painting *Hunters in the Snow* (1565) and in his early print *Insidiosus Auceps* (ca. 1556). Focusing on the Boschian motif of the Mouth of Hell, Weemans demonstrates that Pieter Bruegel, following Hieronymus Bosch and Herri met de Bles, made use of double images throughout his career in both his paintings and drawings/prints. In the course of Weemans' close reading of rhyparographic motifs and other "emblematic details" like the fowler or Bruegel's signature under the bush of brambles, a network of motifs comes to light that helps us detect the crypto-image of the icy mill, which can also be read as a stylized Hellmouth. By creating a certain semantic climate, all these motifs do not so much show us what should be seen, but the way we should see. By playing with our attentiveness and our perceptual capacities, they are meant to arouse our visual, intellectual, and spiritual discernment.

To sum up, each article of this book makes an effort to unfold the aforementioned semantic and aesthetic bounty of Bruegel's art by demonstrating how the artist's works operate within a complex network of internal and external references – be they visual, textual, or historical. And each article

acknowledges this complexity by interweaving close visual analyses with contemporary discourses. In the end, it is up to the readers to judge the persuasiveness of each individual argument. The assemblage of differing subjects and perspectives in this book will hopefully allow them to come to their own conclusions about Bruegel's art and its religious spirit.

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