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"For as the days of Noah were…"

Typology in Pieter Bruegel's Series of the Months*

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Series of the Months* is undoubtedly the epitome of a new earthy realism in early modern painting. His famous cycle of originally six paintings (only five of them are extant) was commissioned by the Antwerp tax collector Niclaes Jongelinck in 1565 and represents the course of the year on large-scale panels (*c.* 120 × 160 cm).[1] Due to its evocative depiction of seasonal change, Bruegel's *Series* has traditionally been considered one of the first prominent examples of autonomous landscape painting, freed from the bounds of Christian iconography.[2] This view is still upheld in one of the latest comprehensive monographs on the artist in which the *Months* are described as "fairly straightforward illustrations of country life at different times of the year" while all attempts of interpretation from a "religious point of view" are dismissed by the author – for the one and only reason that "we know very little about Bruegel and nothing at all about his religious beliefs."[3]

In this essay, I will argue for the opposite position. In my view, the ostentatious 'realism' of Bruegel's cycle is grounded in a typological and thus a religious concept of reality. Consequently, I would like to make the case that the lack of biographical knowledge does not release the art historian from the task of attentively analysing Bruegel's paintings, which themselves can help us better understand their complex pictorial language and their conceptual background. Admittedly, typology might not be the first thing that comes to mind when looking at the *Series of the Months*, since the beholder of Bruegel's landscape spaces is immediately absorbed by their atmospheric density. Yet, this immediacy is part of an aesthetic strategy that is meant to enhance the personal involvement of the beholder. As Reindert Falkenburg has argued, the viewer is not allowed to observe the landscapes from a safe distance but is subtly drawn into their pictorial world.[4] And Falkenburg was

1 Cf. Iain Buchanan, "The Collection of Niclaes Jongelinck: II. The 'Months' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder," *Burlington Magazine*, no. 132 (1990): 541-50.

2 The first modern and very influential monograph on the cycle is Fritz Novotny, *Die Monatsbilder Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.* (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1948). Novotny strongly emphasizes the paintings' "Unabhängigkeit von gedanklicher Bindung" (p. 11) – most scholars until today follow his lead. See, for instance, Inge Herold, *Pieter Bruegel. Die Jahreszeiten* (Munich / London / New York: Phaidon, 2002), 104, who emphasizes the "rein profanen Charakter" of Bruegel's cycle.

3 Manfred Sellink, *Bruegel. The Complete Paintings, Drawings and Prints* (Ghent: Ludion, 2007), 202. Almost equally reluctant to interpret the *Series of the Months* in religious terms is Larry Silver, *Pieter Bruegel* (New York and London: Abbeville, 2011), 316-36.

4 Reindert L. Falkenburg, "Pieter Bruegel's *Series of the Seasons*. On the Perception of Divine Order," in *Liber Amicorum Raphaël de Smedt*, ed. Joost Vander Auwera (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 253-75, here 254.

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also the first to recognize that the images actually do contain "religious vignettes of some sort" which point toward a theological dimension of the cycle.[5]

My own analysis will follow the general direction of Falkenburg's argument, but at some crucial points I will deviate from his path – mainly with my focus on certain typological intimations that so far have gone unnoticed by scholars. I will proceed in three steps: First, after a few general words about the cycle, I will take a closer look at two paintings of the series in order to pinpoint certain motifs that link Bruegel's cycle to the powerful tradition of typological art and thinking. Secondly, I will try to elucidate Bruegel's idiosyncratic staging of typological topoi by comparing it to traditional forms of visual typology in the late medieval and early modern period. Thirdly, I will outline the consequences of my approach for the interpretation of the *Series of the Months* as a whole. It goes without saying that by focusing on two paintings, I will not be able to offer a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of Bruegel's multipart cycle,[6] but I hope to highlight one essential aspect of its extremely complex aesthetic fabric.

Pieter Bruegel's *Series of the Months* has come down to us in five paintings, which now hang in three different museums. *The Gloomy Day, Return of the Herd* and the *Hunters in the Snow* are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna: the *Haymaking* is part of the Lobkowicz Collection within the confines of Prague Castle; and the *Wheat Harvest* is prominently displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. According to a theory by Karl von Tolnai, substantiated by Hans van Miegroet, Iain Buchanan, and Deborah Povey, 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), *Return of the Herd* (October/December), *Hunters in the Snow* (December/January).[7]

The many intricacies of this classification cannot be discussed here; nevertheless, I will point out some of its consequences.[8] First and foremost, it implies that Bruegel's ordering neither follows the conventional scheme of the four seasons nor the scheme of the twelve months of the year. Moreover, the latter system appears to be wilfully disrespected by the merging of January and December (as the first and last month of the calendar) into one image (*Hunters in the Snow*). In fact, this pairing makes it impossible to determine the beginning or the end of the series. Some art historians have argued on formal grounds that the *Gloomy Day* must be regarded as the first, and the *Hunters in the Snow* as the last painting within the cycle – with the mountain ranges on the left and the right as "framing" devices.[9] Others have tried to avoid the problem by claiming that in

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5   Ibid., 260.

6   For a comprehensive study, see Bertram Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit. Die "Monatsbilder" Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2012).

7   Cf. Karl von Tolnai, "Studien zu den Gemälden P. Bruegels d. Ä.," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, NF no. VIII (1934), 105-35; Hans J. van Miegroet, "*The Twelve Months* Reconsidered. How a Drawing by Pieter Stevens Clarifies a Bruegel Enigma," *Simiolus*, no. 16 (1986), 29-35; Iain Buchanan, "The Collection of Niclaes Jongelinck: II. The 'Months' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder," *Burlington Magazine*, no. 132 (1990), 541-50; Deborah Povey, "Abel Grimmer's Twelve Months and Four Seasons. Towards the Clarification of a Bruegel Dilemma," *Umĕní*, no. 51 (2003): 484-94.

8   For a detailed discussion, see Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit*, 39-49.

9   Cf. Klaus Demus, "The pictures of Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the Kunsthistorisches Museum," in *Pieter Bruegel the Elder at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna*, ed. Wilfried Seipel (Milan: Skira, 1999), 17-148, here 89.

16th-century Netherlands, the year only began on Easter, and therefore the lost painting must have formed the introduction, while the *Gloomy Day*, a representation of late winter, must be regarded as the finale of the series.[10]

As an alternative to these mutually exclusive options, one could emphasize the fact that a cycle – taken literally – has neither a beginning nor an end but keeps steadily turning. Perhaps Bruegel's peculiar arrangement was even meant to express the never-ending process of seasonal change.[11] In any case, the cycle's deviation from the conventional calendar-scheme clearly indicates that the artist was not only interested in formal innovation but also seems to have pursued a conceptual transformation of the iconographic tradition. Before Bruegel, the iconography of the twelve months and their respective 'labours,' were usually found in two artistic fields: medieval portal sculpture and the calendars of books of hours.[12] In these fields, the labours of the months exemplify the human condition after the fall of man and illustrate the repetitive, circular, temporal structure of the carnal world. At the same time, they open up a linear, temporal perspective that points toward the eschatological end of time. This becomes particularly evident in cathedral portals, where the labours of the months depicted in the archivolts function as framing devices for the representation of the *Last Judgment* in the central tympanum.[13] Thus, the topic of Bruegel's cycle is of undeniably religious descent – an iconographic basis that makes it almost impossible to argue that the artist completely departed from Christian iconography. Yet it is clear that Bruegel did not just perpetuate customary formulae, but radically remodelled the traditional imagery. A closer look at the *Gloomy Day* and the *Return of the Herd* can help us understand these continuities and changes, and will lead us directly into the typological dimension of Bruegel's cycle.

Bruegel's *Gloomy Day* (Fig. 10.1) is a threatening image. By showing an extremely dark and windswept landscape, it uncomfortably confronts the viewer with the unruly forces of nature. From a point of view high above the scene, the painting offers a grand vista onto a village at the foot of an impressive coastal mountain range. To the right of the village we find the mouth of a river that runs into the wide ocean and leads our gaze to the horizon in the background on the right. The first eye-catching elements of the image, however, are the colourful peasants on the hill in the right foreground, who are occupied with various activities. While some of them are cutting trees and pruning vines (traditional labours of February and March), the group on the far right seems to be having a good time. This rather enigmatic scene can be explained by a brief look at another work of Bruegel's, the *Battle between Carnival and Lent* (1559). Here, in the lower left corner, we can discover several motifs that have also made their way into the *Gloomy Day*: the waffles, the child with a paper crown, the kettle on the head, and the broom with candles. Thus, we can

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10   Cf. Sellink, *Bruegel*, 202.

11   This idea was already formulated by Tolnai, "Studien zu den Gemälden P. Bruegels d. Ä.," 125 f.

12   Cf. James Carson Webster, *The Labors of the Months in Antique and Medieval Art* (Princeton: University Press, 1938); Wilhelm Hansen, *Kalenderminiaturen der Stundenbücher. Mittelalterliches Leben im Jahreslauf* (Munich: Callwey, 1984).

13   Cf. Bruno Boerner, "Eschatologische Perspektiven in mittelalterlichen Portalprogrammen," in *Ende und Vollendung. Eschatologische Perspektiven im Mittelalter*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen and Martin Pickavé (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 301-20.

Fig. 10.1: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Gloomy Day*, 1565, panel, 118 x 163 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. [see colour plate 33]

conclude that the merry revellers in the *Gloomy Day* are also engaged in a carnival ritual of some kind.[14]

From this area of the image, our gaze is eventually led to a village in the lower left by the branches of a tree that apparently has been overthrown by the on-going storm. In the village, the carnivalesque scenery finds its continuation; at the entrance of an inn, a fiddler plays a tune for a dancing couple with a child, while a bawdy guest is emptying his bladder against the wall. And again, next to this scene of rather indecent leisure, we can find some people working. One man is preparing the wagons in front of the inn for departure, while another is fixing the thatched roof of the neighbouring house. It remains unclear, however, if all these people are actually aware of the danger of the storm. In the background, the river has already left its bed and is threatening to overflow into the streets of the small community.

Amidst the raging waters of the mouth of the river, small fisher-boats are struggling to reach land, but not always with success; some of them are overturned or have already sunken. On the other bank of the river, a little further along the coastline to the right, some bigger ships apparently have made it successfully to the shore. The situation is still

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14   Cf. Elke M. Schutt-Kehm, *Pieter Bruegels d. Ä. 'Kampf des Karnevals gegen die Faste' als Quelle volkskundlicher Forschung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1983), 47. Schutt-Kehm convincingly suggests Sebastian Franck's *Weltbuch* as a likely source for the motif of the child with the paper crown.

alarming, however. To the right of the beach, large polder areas are flooded and it seems questionable if the dikes will be able to withhold the rising sea.

This brief and cursory foray through Bruegel's late winter landscape has already made clear that the painting has far more to offer than just some scenes of seasonal labour. It unfolds an impressive panorama of natural grandeur and human existence in its extremes; hardship and leisure, disaster and rescue, stand directly next to each other and demonstrate the painter's concern with bigger issues than mere wall-decoration for a wealthy patron.[15] Moreover, Bruegel's visual rhetoric tempts the viewer to get lost in the picture's details and lures him to wander through the pictorial space again and again. Every new perusal will bring new details to light that might have been overlooked during the last run.

It is fair to assume that Niclaes Jongelinck, the first and the original beholder of this painting, enjoyed its aesthetically complex fabric and spent quite some time looking at it. Although we know almost as little about Jongelinck's personal convictions and beliefs as those of Bruegel, we do know something about his artistic interests. An inventory of Jongelinck's belongings that was taken as a security for a loan that he took out on behalf of his friend Daniel de Bruyne in 1566 tells us that he owned at least 22 paintings by Frans Floris and 16 by Pieter Bruegel.[16] Jongelinck had acquired Italianate works by Floris during the 1550s. However, his aesthetic preferences seem to have shifted around 1560 when he started buying works by Bruegel. Apart from the *Series of the Months*, there are two paintings by the artist that are directly named in the inventory: *The Tower of Babel* from 1563 and *The Carrying of the Cross* from 1564. Thus, we can say that in the two years preceding the big order of the *Months*, Jongelinck had purchased two major paintings with biblical themes that certainly shaped his expectations about the form and content of his new commission. Both panels represent biblical events in a setting that is contemporary and fantastical at the same time. The iconic construction-site of the *Tower of Babel* directly points the beholder to the Old Testament story of human hubris and folly. In contrast, *The Carrying of the Cross* rather veils its New Testament narrative by placing it within a spacious landscape, crowded with contemporary genre scenes. Consequently, Christ, although in the very centre of the image, is difficult to discover in the busy crowd.[17]

From this we may conclude that a landscape painting like the *Gloomy Day* was designed for eyes that were conditioned by looking at paintings in which past and present are merged, in which a religious narrative is embedded within a seemingly profane surrounding, and in which decisive details are not always displayed in the most obvious manner. These eyes were accustomed to look out for significant miniaturized motifs spread over the picture

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15 For such a rather reductionist view of Bruegel's series, see Claudia Goldstein, "Artifacts of Domestic Life: Pieter Bruegel's Paintings in the Flemish Home," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, no. 51 (2000), 172-93.

16 Buchanan, "The Collection of Niclaes Jongelinck," 541.

17 For recent discussions of the *Carrying of the Cross*, see Jürgen Müller, *Das Paradox als Bildform. Studien zur Ikonologie Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.*, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999), 136-42; Reindert Falkenburg, "Doorzien als esthetische ervaring bij Pieter Brueghel I en het vroeg-zestiende-eeuwse landschap," in *De uitvinding van het landschap. Van Patinir to Rubens 1520-1650*, ed. Natasja Peeters (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 2004), 53-65.

plane.[18] But whereas in a painting like the *Carrying of the Cross* all the manifold details can finally be related to the central, if small scene of the cross-bearing Christ, such a key narrative scene is lacking in the *Gloomy Day*. Everything in this pictorial world seems to be determined by the seasonal event of the late-winter storm flood. This mundane event, however, is exactly what opens up the possibility for a scriptural – or in this case, typological – reading of Bruegel's painting, since it calls to mind the most prominent natural catastrophe of the Old Testament: the Deluge.

Obviously, Bruegel's painting is not a narrative scene depicting the event of the biblical Flood, but there is at least one tiny and yet conspicuous motif that can initiate such a reading. It is to be found on the vertical axis above the red-blue tree-cutter, framed by barren trees on each side. High in the dark sky, a white bird, presumably a seagull, fights against the winds of the heavy gale. For a 16th-century beholder, a white bird above a dark stormy seascape most certainly would have triggered two related associations: the text of Genesis 8 – i.e. the story of the Flood as God's punishment for mankind's sinfulness – but even more, its pictorial representation in illustrated printed Bibles of the period, in which the story of the Flood is almost always accompanied by an image. And all the images of the Flood itself have one thing in common: they show Noah's white dove hovering above the Ark in front of a dark, rainy sky. Already in Luther's early edition of Pentateuch from 1523, there is a full-page woodcut from the Cranach workshop with such a white bird. In the first complete edition of Luther's translation of the Bible, the scale of the illustration is reduced, but the decisive feature of the dove in the dark sky above the Ark remains (Fig. 10.2).[19] This also applies to Flemish Bibles, which usually followed German models,[20] even supposedly Catholic editions like the ones from the printing press of Willem Vorsterman.[21]

Unlike the birds in these Bible illustrations, the white bird in Bruegel's *Gloomy Day* does not hover above Noah's ark but instead is exactly placed on the vertical axis above the sharp silhouette of a church tower at the horizon line in the far distance. This 'replacement' of the ark possibly alludes to a longstanding tradition of typological exegesis in which the ark was considered a prefiguration of the Christian Church.[22] For instance, in the *City of God*, Augustine remarks that the ark is "verily a figure of God's City here upon earth, that is, His Church saved by wood, that is, by that whereupon Christ the Mediator between God and man was crucified."[23] In the case of Bruegel's painting, however, the question

18   For this tradition in Flemish art, see Reindert Falkenburg, "Marginal Motifs in Early Flemish Landscape Painting," in *Herri met de Bles. Studies and Explorations of the World Landscape Tradition*, ed. Norman E. Muller (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 153-69.

19   The genesis of the *Lutherbibel* is conveniently summarized by Stephan Füssel, *The Book of Books. The Luther Bible of 1534. A Cultural-Historical Introduction*, supplement to the facsimile-edition of Hans Lufft's 1534 print (Cologne: Taschen, 2003).

20   Cf. Hendrik D. L. Vervliet, ed., *Post-Incunabula and their Publishers in the Low Countries* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), 60 f. For a comprehensive study see Bart Alexander Rosier, *The Bible in Print. Netherlandish Bible Illustration in the Sixteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Foleor, 1997).

21   Cf. Nicolaas Beets, ed., *De Houtsneden in Vorsterman's Bijbel van 1528* (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap, 1915), fig. 5; Ulco Proost, ed., *Nederlandse bijbels en hun uitgevers 1477-1952* (Amsterdam: Proost en Brandt, 1952), 9.

22   Cf. Hartmut Boblitz, "Die Allegorese der Arche Noah in der frühen Bibelauslegung," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, no. 6 (1972), 159-70.

23   Augustine, *The City of God*, transl. John Healy, 2 vols (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909), vol. II, 84 (*De civitate dei* XV, 26).

Fig. 10.2: Master MS, *The Flood*, woodcut from Luther's first complete edition of the Bible, Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1534, London, British Museum.

arises if the Church can actually be understood as the legitimate heir of Noah's ark, since a building made out of stone – unlike a wooden ship – cannot protect its inhabitants from the rising waters. In fact, the village church at the bottom of the foreground hill is placed especially close to the rising river waters and seems to be more in danger than most of the other buildings in the vicinity. Consequently, one can also wonder if the church at the horizon is actually already under water, since the nave next to the tower is hardly visible. Indeed, the idea of the Church as a 'sinking ship' was a powerful topos of late medieval anti-clericalism, which gained new force in the age of the Reformation and was widely spread in many editions of illustrated books like Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*, Johannes Lichtenberger's *Prognosticatio*, or Josef Grünpeck's *Spiegel der naturlichen sehungen*.[24] Moreover, the representation of a flooded church with just the spire of its tower peaking out of the water can be found in many illustrated pamphlets on the Flood that was prophesied for 1524.[25]

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24   Cf. Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk. Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 108-15; Petra Roettig, *Zeichen und Wunder. Weissagungen um 1500* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1999), 31 ff.

25   On this international debate in the first half of the 16th century, see Heike Talkenberger, *Sintflut. Prophetie und Zeitgeschehen in Texten und Holzschnitten astrologischer Flugschriften 1488-1528* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), 154-335.

Fig. 10.3: Dirck Vellert, *The Flood*, 1544, etching and engraving. London, British Museum.

Beyond these woodcut illustrations in Bible prints and prognostic literature, the visual association between the *Gloomy Day* and the Flood can be supported by reference to the pictorial tradition of the Deluge in book illumination, intaglio print, and panel painting that slightly predates Bruegel's work. Simon Bening's illumination of February in his *Flemish Calendar* has often been considered a possible pictorial model for Bruegel's *Gloomy Day*, since both images share several landscape features like the stormy mouth of the river, the backdrop of snowy mountains, and the brightening of the sky towards the right.[26] In this context however, it has been overlooked that the book of hours to which the *Flemish Calendar* belongs also contains a representation of the Deluge – a very rare subject in the realm of miniature painting.[27] If Bruegel was indeed familiar with Bening's work, he might have found the inspiration for his blending of a late winter seascape with intimations of the Flood in this very book of hours. Bening's illuminations, however, are colourful and brightly lit images. They certainly do not anticipate the sombre atmosphere of Bruegel's painting. This effect can be best related to near contemporary representations of the Flood in etching and painting. Dirk Vellert's large print *The Flood* from 1544 (Fig. 10.3)

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26 Walter Gibson, *Mirror of the Earth. The World Landscape in 16th Century Flemish Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 24; Buchanan 1990, p. 541.

27 By now, the book runs under the name of the *Munich-Montserrat Hours*. Its fragmented parts are located in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, in the Abbey of Montserrat, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles and the Bernard Breslauer Collection, New York. Cf. Thomas Kren, "Landscape as Leitmotif. A Reintegrated Book of Hours Illuminated by Simon Bening," in *Illuminating the Book. Makers and Interpreters. Essays in Honour of Janet Backhouse*, ed. M. P. Brown and Scot McKendrick (London: British Library, 1998), 209-32, here 213.

Fig. 10.4: Anonymous, *The Flood*, Brussels, ca. 1540, panel painting, Brussels, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten.

certainly was well known in Antwerp where the artist had served several terms as dean of the St Luke's guild. This impressive image showcases more than eighty figures dramatically struggling for their lives against the rising waters of the Flood. The dense graphical structure – which is the result of a mixed use of etching and engraving – gives this print its dark and dire tone.[28] Equally dismal and dramatic is a painted version of the *Flood* in the Brussels Museum voor Schone Kunsten by an unidentified painter (Fig. 10.4).[29] As in Vellert's print, the fantastical scenery is presented as a fictional space for the display of countless gruesome scenes of the hopeless struggle for survival. On the very right of the painting, however, we discover four figures in 16th-century clothing, who despite being fully integrated into the pictorial space, seem to be watching the scene rather like spectators from a safer distance. They most likely represent the artist's patron and his family. By looking at the painting, these people would have found themselves to be direct eyewitnesses of the Flood, which in turn – through their painted presence – is transformed into an event taking place in the present.

This particular merging of biblical past and 16th-century reality brings us back to Bruegel's *Gloomy Day* and by comparison can help us better understand its allusive pictorial language. In the Brussels *Flood*, the beholder is confronted with the catastrophic Old Testament

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28   David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print 1470-1550* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1994), 335 f.

29   For a while, it was thought to be by Jan van Amstel, Dietrich Schubert attributed it to the 'Meister des Augsburger Ecce Homo,' and the Museum in Brussels currently lists it under Herri met de Bles (inv. no. 9167). For the earlier positions of research cf. Dietrich Schubert, "Eine zweite 'Sintflut' vom 'Meister des Augsburger Ecce Homo'," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, no. 33 (1971), 321-28. In 2012, another Antwerp panel representing *The Deluge* (64,1 × 78,4 cm), attributed to Jan van Amstel, was on sale at Christie's (www.christies.com). The image shows many church towers peeking out of the water. Thanks to Dagmar Eichberger for this piece of information.

event as if he were directly present. In contrast, Bruegel's panel depicts a contemporary storm flood as if it were the biblical Deluge. Both paintings thus initiate an act of looking in which the distance between past and present is meant to collapse within the beholder's imagination. But whereas the Brussels *Flood* leaves no doubt about its Old Testament subject, the biblical dimension of the *Gloomy Day* is rather vague. In fact, it can only be established by an act of imaginative projection of the biblical event into the fictional contemporary scenery. Such an act of projection is licensed through the 'epistemological' framework of typology as a "Denkform" which, in the words of medievalist Friedrich Ohly, calls for a "synoptic view of what is divided in time" in order to "see" the past within the present.[30]

Typology is essentially a matter of detecting correspondences. As a method of interpreting the Christian Bible, it involves a specific practice of comparing and virtually adjusting the Old and the New Testaments. According to Erich Auerbach, this practice of typological or "figural" interpretation "establishes a connection between two events or persons [from the respective Testaments], the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfils the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life."[31] For example, Adam can be perceived as a type or prefiguration of Christ, and in return the Redeemer appears to be the antitype, the overcoming fulfilment of the first man. This particular typological pairing is confirmed and sanctioned by Romans 5.14 where Paul speaks of Adam as a *typos* of Christ.[32] In many cases, however, the correlation is not made explicit by the biblical text itself. As a consequence, the interpreter is invited or even compelled to ascertain possible links between the Testaments on his or her own terms – authorized by the words of Christ in Luke 24:44: "[…] everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." These mostly latent correspondences can be brought to light by means of attentive observation, imaginative perception, active commemoration, and creative interpretation.[33] Thus, typological relations do not exist *per se* – they have to be *performed* in order to come into being, at all. Only if one actively recognizes the resemblance between two different and yet similar 'figures' (persons, things, events) separated in time, i.e. if one is able to "see" the one within the other, the typological fabric of the two Testaments becomes apparent.

As I would like to argue, Bruegel's *Gloomy Day* calls for an interpretation along similar lines. At first glance, the painting seems to represent nothing more than a contemporary – if highly stylized – late winter landscape with scenes of seasonal labour and leisure. Alerted by the white bird in front of the dark rainy sky, however, the beholder is invited to 'see' the features of the biblical Flood within (or into) this very landscape. Since these features are shaped through texts and images, the beholder can only detect them if he/she actively recalls the biblical narrative or – even more importantly – pictorial representations of the

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30   Cf. Friedrich Ohly, "Typology as a Form of Historical Thought," in: idem *Sensus Spiritualis. Studies in Medieval Significs and the Philology of Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 31-67, here 40.

31   Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in: idem *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature. Six Essays* (New York: Meridian, 1959), 11-76, here 53.

32   Cf. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 79.

33   Cf. Friedrich Ohly, "Synagoge und Ecclesia. Typologisches in mittelalterlicher Dichtung," in: idem *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 312-37, here 322.

Deluge. Only if the visual experience of the painting resonates with the textual and visual memory of the beholder, can sparks fly between past and present.

Although such a reading is quite speculative and dependent on the beholder's previous knowledge, it is far from arbitrary. An Antwerp art lover of the 16th century like Niclaes Jongelinck must have been familiar with images like the ones mentioned above and was certainly well acquainted with Holy Scripture. If he did recognize the allusive nature of the *Gloomy Day* and its reverberations with the biblical Deluge, however, he also would have had to notice a conspicuous deviation from the usual typological scheme; in Bruegel's image, the Old Testament Flood does not correspond with an event of the New Testament but with the rural world of the 16th century. Yet, for a reader of the Gospel according to Matthew, this short-circuit between the days of Noah and present times would have called to mind Christ's speech on the end time in which he prophesizes:

> For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24:37-39)[34]

This prominent quote from the so-called *Synoptic Apocalypse* (a body of texts consisting of various passages from the Gospels, which deal with the eschatological return of Christ and the Last Judgment)[35] would have reminded Jongelinck that the Old Testament Flood does not find its typological counterpart in a New Testament event but in an indefinite future that might well fall in his own lifetime. As Volker Leppin has demonstrated, the texts of the *Synoptic Apocalypse* formed the most important source for apocalyptic expectancy in the 16th century.[36] They were widely used as a hermeneutic key for the theological interpretation of current events. In other words, through these texts, the present age could be deciphered as a sign-system forecasting the imminent end of the world.[37] It is in this vein that the rising late-winter flood of the *Gloomy Day* can be understood not only as the typological echo of the "days of Noah," but also as an acute symptom of the impending end time that eventually will culminate in the final "coming of the Son of Man," i.e. the Last Judgment.[38]

Interestingly, two Antwerp artists who are closely related to Pieter Bruegel also represented topics from the *Synoptic Apocalypse* around 1560. The first is Frans Hogenberg, who produced an undated etching that is a direct illustration of passages from Matthew 24 (Fig. 10.5) representing events of the "last days" as described in Christ's prophetic speech:

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34 *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal / Deuteronomical Books*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 37 (NT). All biblical quotations in this text are taken from this edition.

35 The most prominent passages are Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 17.

36 Cf. Volker Leppin, *Antichrist und Jüngster Tag. Das Profil apokalyptischer Flugschriftenpublizistik im deutschen Luthertum 1548-1618* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), 46.

37 Cf. Leppin, *Antichrist und Jüngster Tag*, 82.

38 For the medieval tradition of the typological pairing of Flood and Judgment in the visual arts, see Susanne H. Kolter, "Sintflut und Weltgericht. Beobachtungen zum Fünfzehn-Zeichen-Zyklus im 'Holkham Bible Picture Book'," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, no. 31 (2004), 61-82. Hieronymus Bosch, the young Bruegel's role model, had also made use of the typological connection between the Flood and the end time in his Rotterdam panels. Cf. Laurinda Dixon, *Hieronymus Bosch* (London: Phaidon, 2004), 298-305.

Fig. 10.5: Frans Hogenberg, *Christ's Prophecy of the Last Days*, c. 1560, etching and engraving, Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.

"famines and pestilences" (Matthew 24:7), "false messiahs and false prophets" (Matthew 24:24), "two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left" (Matthew 24:40); "two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left" (Matthew 24:41).[39] As has been recognized, Bruegel repeatedly picked up themes from Hogenberg's prints and reformulated them in the medium of panel painting – the two most prominent examples being the *Proverbs* and the *Battle between Carnival and Lent*. Thus, it is certainly possible that Hogenberg's utterly direct illustration of the "last days" also made an impact on Bruegel and inspired him to develop a more sophisticated version of the theme.[40]

In addition to Hogenberg, Frans Floris, Bruegel's strongest competitor on the Antwerp art market, also addressed the *Synoptic Apocalypse* in his design for a print probably during

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39 Cf. Ilja M. Veldman, "Protestantism and the Arts. Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Netherlands," in *Seeing beyond the Word. Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition*, ed. Paul Corby Finney (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 397-420, here 404 f.

40 On typology in an early print after a design by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, see Jessica Buskirk, "The First Temptation of Christ. An Evolving Iconographic Trope in Sixteenth Century Antwerp," in *Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Religion*, ed. Bertram Kaschek, Jürgen Müller, and Jessica Buskirk (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). For further evidence for the currency of typological topoi in the Antwerp print culture of the 1560s, see Dagmar Eichberger, "Der Prophet Jona zwischen Typologie und Historie. Akzentverschiebungen in der Kunst des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Der problematische Prophet. Die biblische Jona-Figur in Exegese, Theologie, Literatur und bildender Kunst*, ed. Johann Anselm Steiger and Wilhelm Kühlmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 117-38.

Fig. 10.6: Anonymous, after Frans Floris, *Mankind before the Flood*, ca. 1560, engraving. Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg-Wolfegg.

the 1550s, which was realized by an anonymous engraver (Fig. 10.6).[41] In this image, an antique-looking merry company is seated around a table in front of a vine bower. The scarcely dressed figures are shown eating, drinking, making music, and caressing each other and can be interpreted as a fairly direct illustration of Matthew 24:38 (as already quoted above): "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away [...]."[42] Although Bruegel's contemporary flood scene differs strongly from the antique style and setting of Floris' print, it also shares some of the latter's features. Like Floris' merry company, the protagonists in the foreground on the right and on the left of the *Gloomy Day* are occupied with sensual pleasures. They also make music, they dance,[43] they eat, they urinate in an unseemly fashion (i.e. from drinking), and they gently touch each other.

A pair of engravings by Jan Sadeler after Dirck Barendsz from the early 1580s, which expressly states the typological juxtaposition of the *Flood* and the *Last Judgment*, supports this line of reasoning.[44] The first of these prints (Fig. 10.7) reveals itself as an artful

41 Cf. Edward Wouk, *Frans Floris de Vriendt. The New Hollstein. Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450-1650* (Ouderkerk aan den Ijssel: Sound & Vision, 2011), no. 12, 32 f.

42 That Floris indeed represented "Mankind before the Flood" is made clear by the inscription on the second state of the print. Cf. Wouk, *Frans Floris*, 32.

43 In the engraving *The Wise and the Foolish Virgins* (*c.* 1560-63), Bruegel had chosen the activity of dancing for the foolish virgins in order to underline their obliviousness of the nearing bridegroom (Matthew 25).

44 J. Richard Judson, *Dirck Barendsz. 1534-1592* (Amsterdam: Vangendt, 1970), 126-31, no. 71 f.
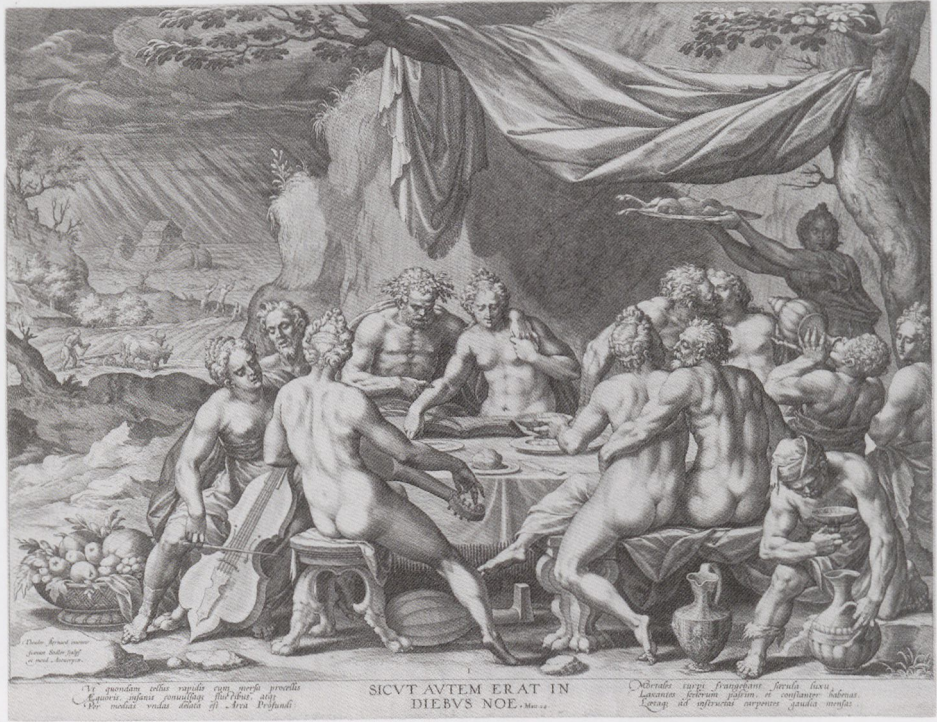
Fig. 10.7: Jan Sadeler after Dirck Barendsz, *Mankind before the Flood*, ca. 1580, engraving, London, British Museum.

variation of Floris' earlier composition. In the foreground, an antique merry company of mostly naked figures is enjoying food, drink, and erotic play. To the left of this scene, however, there is a peasant ploughing his field while in the very background Noah's ark is visible, floating on the rising waters under a rainy sky. As in the *Gloomy Day*, rural labour and leisure in the face of catastrophe are represented side by side – echoing Luke 17:28: "they were eating and drinking […], planting and building." The inscription below the image, though, refers to the standard passage from Matthew: "SICVT AVTEM ERAT IN DIEBVS NOE …" (For as the days of Noah were …) The sentence is completed only on the second print (Fig. 10.8): "… ITA ERIT ET ADVENTVS FILII HOMINIS." (… so will be the coming of the Son of Man).This print shows a contemporary merry company of the 16th century in decent bourgeois clothing, but with the same indecent and frivolous behaviour as their Old Testament predecessors. Moreover, the merry revellers do not pay attention to corpses in the left background who climb out of their graves in order to be judged by Christ, who appears on a rainbow in the sky. It is this very state of oblivion and neglect that unites mankind before the Flood with mankind before the Last Judgment – and that also characterizes the rural personages in the foreground of Bruegel's *Gloomy Day*.

Bruegel's typological blending of a contemporary storm flood with the Old Testament deluge not only relates present and past, but also – and most importantly – points towards

Fig. 10.8: Jan Sadeler after Dirck Barendsz, *Mankind before the Last Judgment*, ca. 1580, engraving, London, British Museum.

the shape of things to come. In this respect, Bruegel puts into effect the "full thrust of New Testament typology" that, according to Northrop Frye, "goes in two directions: into the future and into the eternal world, the two things coinciding with the apocalypse or Last Judgment."[45] As I have shown elsewhere, this orientation towards an eschatological future (that might have well already begun) is also characteristic of all the other extant paintings of Bruegel's cycle.[46] Further strong typological references to the "days of Noah," however, are only to be found in the *Return of the Herd*.

Like the *Gloomy Day*, the *Return of the Herd* (Fig. 10.9) shows a landscape of seasonal transition. This time, the painting offers a grandiose view of an alpine river valley that bottoms out into the sea in the far distance. Directly in the foreground, some herdsmen bring the cattle down from the mountain pastures. The high barren trees at the margins on the left and the right function as subtle framing devices and direct the gaze into the sky above the autumnally coloured landscape. Here, a dramatic meteorological change is going on: While the sky on the left is steel blue and clear, the sky above the high mountains on the right is covered with dark rain clouds. Directly in front of this dark cloudbank, there is

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45 Frye, *The Great Code*, 85.
46 Cf. Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit*, 109-301.

Fig. 10.9: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Return of the Herd*, 1565, oil on wood, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. [see colour plate 34]

a strangely pale, achromatic rainbow rising out of the rocky mountain on the right. Despite Bruegel's fame as an imitator of nature, this motif cannot be interpreted as a witness to the artist's quasi-scientific interest in the optical appearance of the visible world; in fact, it does not accord with any perceivable natural phenomenon. Like the white bird in the *Gloomy Day*, this motif functions as another implicit reference to the Old Testament story of Noah and the Flood.

According to Genesis 9, the rainbow is a visual confirmation of God's promise to Noah and his descendants that he will never again punish the earth with a Deluge:

> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:13-15)

The rainbow thus can be understood as a mnemonic token that is addressed to God and to Noah's descendants alike. Apparently, God is of the opinion that in the future, he might be in need of a reminder that brings his own promise back to mind. For him, the bow in the clouds is an aide-mémoire to not break his word. On the other side, for mankind, the bow is a reminder of the fact that God is still angry at the continuously

sinful world and that it is the covenant alone that keeps him from sending a second flood.[47]

Correspondingly, the rainbow in the *Return of the Herd* might also announce the morally problematic status of the world represented. This direction of thought is supported by another motif derived from Genesis: the raven at the upper margin. During the Flood, Noah not only sent out a dove but also a raven, but this bird turned out to be an unreliable messenger that just flew "back and forth" instead of effectively searching for land. Moreover, the raven was supposed to have eaten the flesh of floating corpses – an episode often depicted in representations of the Flood.[48] For the same reason, the raven also frequently appears as an emissary of doom in representations of Golgotha – most prominently in Bruegel's own *Carrying of the Cross* where the black bird sits on top of the wheel at the right margin. The hill with gallows in the middle ground of the *Return of the Herd* can thus be read as a confirmation of this frame of reference.

The notion of a postdiluvian sinful world is furthermore enhanced by the motif of the vineyard. Next to the hill with the gallows in the middle ground, there is a relatively small vineyard in which some harvesters work, doing the traditional "labour" of September or October. There is, however, a second appearance of the motif in a far less obvious location. At closer inspection, one can see that large parts of the high rocky mountain on the other side of the river are also used as vineyards – surprisingly even at the very top. We can conclude from the prevalence of the vineyard motif that the growing of vines is far more important for this world than it might seem at first sight.

Like the rainbow that rises above it in Bruegel's painting, the vineyard is a crucial reference to the story of Noah and the Flood. In Genesis 9, right after God's comments on the rainbow, we read about the invention of wine-growing and its fatal consequences: "Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent." (Genesis 9:20) In this undignified state, his son Ham saw him and told his other two brothers about it. But while Ham had looked at his father directly, "Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father […]." (Genesis 9:23) Later, Noah cursed his youngest son for his indecency and blessed the other two for their discretion – one of the many Old Testament crossroads where the paths of the elect and the damned depart.

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47 In this context, it is important to note that the rainbow shares its mnemonic dimension with the phenomenon of seasonal change since right after the end of the Deluge, the Lord had already promised never again to destroy every living creature: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." (Genesis 8:21 f.) Thus, in biblical perspective, seasonal change and rural labor form a significant unity that testifies to the Lord's adherence to his promise and at the same time commemorates the bygone Deluge. With regard to Bruegel's *Series of the Months*, this implies that the cycle's very basic iconography, the labors of the months in seasonal landscapes, is deeply connected with the story of Noah and the Flood. This connection is still reflected in Nicolas Poussin's *Winter* from his *Seasons*-cycle (1660-64). Cf. Willibald Sauerländer, "'Nature through the Glass of Time': A Reflection on the Meaning of Poussin's Landscapes," in *Poussin and Nature. Arcadian Visions*, ed. Pierre Rosenberg and Keith Christiansen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 103-17.

48 See "Rabe," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2004), vol. III, 489 f.

The story of the first vineyard and Noah's drunkenness is significant for the history of salvation because it offers an explanation for the continuation of sin (and man's on-going need of redemption) after the Flood. For this reason, it is often illustrated in Bibles of the sixteenth century. In a woodcut by Jost Amman from the early 1560s, for instance, we can see the discovery of the drunken Noah in the foreground while in the background on the left God appears in the clouds beside a rainbow that arches over Noah's hilly vineyard.[49] Bruegel's particular placement of the rainbow touching down in a mountain vineyard can be understood as a reference to this pictorial tradition and thus functions as a subtle reminder of the fact that the Deluge did not end human weakness and depravity.[50]

For our context, the most important feature of Bruegel's rainbow, however, is its peculiar pale design. Most likely, it refers to a particular exegetical tradition, which holds that the rainbow does not consist of six colours but of two. In the popular and widely read world-chronicles of Werner Rolevinck, Hartmann Schedel and Sebastian Franck, we find the following topical statement, here quoted after Franck, Bruegel's most likely source:

> The rainbow has two main colors – although many claim that there are four or six. The watery one signifies the past Flood, the fiery one signifies the future Judgment of fire (2 Peter 3). And as it is a sign not to worry anymore about the first, it is certainly a sign to expect the other in the future.[51]

As the quote tells us, the rainbow not only signifies the covenant between God and man, but also can be read as a key typological motif. Its bi-coloured design functions as a temporal double-index pointing back to the past and at the same time forward into the future. This way, the Flood and the Last Judgment are directly associated with each other as typological counterparts.[52] Bruegel's achromatic bow, consisting of a transparent watery and a yellowish fiery layer, perfectly accords to this line of exegesis. Consequently, it marks the historical moment that is represented in Bruegel's picture(s): the time *after* the Flood and *before* the Last Judgment.

The previous observations demonstrate that Bruegel's seemingly secular landscapes are actually deeply rooted in a theological tradition of typological exegesis. Yet, the way they extend this tradition is far from conventional. In the final section of this essay, I would like to elucidate Bruegel's idiosyncratic concept of pictorial typology in somewhat broader terms and to outline its consequences for a better understanding of the *Series of the Months* as a whole.

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49   Gero Seelig, *Jost Amman. Book Illustrations, part 1. The New Hollstein German Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts, 1400-1700*, (Rotterdam: Sound & Vision, 2002), 22, no. 6.7 and 348, fig. on 42.

50   Early modern authors like Sebastian Brant or Sebastian Franck discuss Noah's invention of wine growing along similar lines. Cf. Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*, ed. Joachim Knape (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 161; Sebastian Franck, *Ein Künstlich höflich Declamation vnd hefftiger wortkampff / zanck vnnd hader dreyer brüder vor gericht* […] (Nuremberg: Friderich Peypus,1531), fol. ijr f.

51   Sebastian Franck, *Chronica Zeitbuch und Geschichtbibell* (Ulm: Hans Varnier d. Ä., 1536), 1. Chronik, fol. xv.: "Der regenbogen hat zwo fürnemlich farb / wiewol etlich von .iiii. oder .vi. sagen. Die wässerig bedeüt den vergangnen sündflus. Die feürig des zükünfftig gericht des feürs. ii. Pet. iii. und wie er ein zeichen ist / das man sich des ersten nit mer sol besorgen / also ist er ein gewis zeichen des anderen zukünfftigen zu gewarten."

52   Cf. Matthew 3:11 (Sermon of St John the Baptist): "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Throughout the Christian era, particularly from the twelfth century on, we can find works of art in which typological correlations are visualized in a diagrammatic fashion in order to represent the figural structure of the history of salvation.[53] An early and very famous example is the so-called *Verdun-Altarpiece* (1181), which consists of fifty-one (originally forty-five) enamel plates, displayed in three horizontal registers.[54] The middle register is dedicated to the New Testament (*sub gratia*) and shows, from left to right, scenes from the life of Christ, beginning with the *Annunciation* and ending with the *Last Judgment*. The upper and lower registers represent corresponding events from the Old Testament (*ante legem* and *sub lege*), independent of chronological order. From the middle of the thirteenth century on, this format of a central New Testament narrative scene, framed or accompanied by Old Testament types, was widely disseminated in popular illustrated manuscripts like the *Biblia pauperum* and the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, both of which maintained their popularity into the early modern period.[55] In the 15th century, after the invention of the printing press, the *Speculum* was among the first books to be printed in the Netherlands.[56] And as late as 1530, Jacob Cornelisz and Lucas van Leyden designed a *Biblia pauperum* in the form of a great, ornate woodcut cycle.[57]

Recent research has emphasized that the typological relations in these works are not only established by scriptural principles but also emerge from visual criteria (spatial proximity, axial coordination, similarity of the pictorial composition). As Mohnhaupt and Falkenburg have argued, certain images even encourage the beholder to move beyond the traditional typological pairings and make connections between different images on the basis of their similar *Gestalt*.[58] Thus, although the static pictorial system seems to predetermine the typological correlations between the respective individual images, the beholder is still asked to actively engage in a dynamic and creative process of interpretation based on visual evidence. Typology, then, goes together with a habit of viewing that transcends the diagrammatic pattern and leads to what Falkenburg calls a "method of perception that is both comparative and projective."[59]

As we have already seen, Bruegel's *Gloomy Day* and *Return of the Herd* also call for a projective mode of perception, in which the particular painting has to be compared to other images and conceptions stored in memory. In this respect, Bruegel's pictures, like their late-medieval predecessors, call for a high degree of hermeneutic imaginativeness.

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53 Cf. Wolfgang Kemp, *Christliche Kunst. Ihre Anfänge, ihre Strukturen* (München: Schirmer and Mosel, 1994); Bernd Mohnhaupt, *Beziehungsgeflechte. Typologische Kunst des Mittelalters* (Bern: Lang, 2000).

54 Cf. Arwed Arnulf, "Studien zum Klosterneuburger Ambo und den theologischen Quellen bildlicher Typologien von der Spätantike bis 1200," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, no. 48 (1995), 9-42; Mohnhaupt, *Beziehungsgeflechte*, 118-38.

55 Cf. Bert Cardon, *Manuscripts of the Speculum humanae salvationis in the Southern Netherlands (c. 1410-1470). A Contribution to the Study of the 15th Century Book Illumination and of the Function and Meaning of Historical Symbolism*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1996).

56 Cf. Cardon, *Manuscripts*, 36 f.; for a modern reprint of the 15th century block-book, see *Speculum humanae salvationis. Ein niederländisches Blockbuch*, ed. Ernst Kloss (Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1925).

57 Jan Piet Filedt Kok, "Een *Biblia pauperum* met houtsneden van Jacob Cornelisz. en Lucas van Leyden gereconstrueerd," *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin*, no. 36 (1988), 83-116.

58 Cf. Mohnhaupt, *Beziehungsgeflechte*, 45 ff., 120; Reindert Falkenburg, *The Land of Unlikeness. Hieronymus Bosch 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'* (Zwolle: W Books, 2011), 76-81.

59 Falkenburg, *The Land of Unlikeness*, 77.

Unlike traditional works of visual typology, however, they do not present type and antitype side-by-side. Instead, they provoke the beholder to look for features of the biblical past within a contemporary landscape setting, which then, by virtue of the image's subtle regime of interconnected motifs, becomes legible as the potential place for the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. By alluding to the past castigation of the Flood, these paintings also evoke the future retribution of the Last Judgment and thus occupy the middle position between these major events in the history of mankind. Past and future, type and antitype virtually collapse in Bruegel's sublime vision of a present-day world.

Here, it is important to note that the typological correlation of the Flood and the Judgment productively resonates with a distinctive feature of the *Speculum humanae salvationis*.[60] Before presenting the Life of Christ (with its respective types), the *Speculum* offers a prologue including a sequence of eight images in chronological order: the *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, the *Creation of Eve*, the *Marriage of Adam and Eve*, *Eve's seduction by the snake*, the *Fall of Man*, the *Expulsion from Paradise*, *Adam and Eve at Work*, and finally *Noah's ark* (Fig. 10.10). This opening sequence not only visualizes the genealogy of sin in order to explain man's need for redemption but also mirrors the structure of the book as a whole; the prologue of the *Speculum* ends with an image of the *Flood* just as the entire work ends with the representation of the *Last Judgment*. In this vein, the Flood is established as the prefiguration of the final Judgment, and the two events even constitute "brackets" for the history of salvation, i.e. the Life of Christ, which dominates the centre of the book.[61]

In addition to biblical typology, Bruegel's references to the "days of Noah" and, consequently, to the "coming of the Son of man" can be understood as allusions to this temporal framework of the *Speculum humanae salvationis*. Against this background, however, one particular feature of Bruegel's typological conception comes to the fore that is at odds with a central principle of all traditional typology. As Ohly points out, and as the *Speculum* demonstrates, typological thought is Christocentric.[62] Only if the historically incarnate Christ is the centre of history, can the arc of salvation be divided in a period of types (before Christ) and a period of antitypes (with and after Christ); and only if Christ has already made his first appearance, can one expect his return at the end of time. And yet, despite the presence of numerous typological allusions, Christological motifs seem to be lacking in Bruegel's paintings.

Reindert Falkenburg has argued in the opposite direction. For him, the vineyard, seen in conjunction with the nearby rainbow, "may signal in particular the promise of the best

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60   Already three years earlier, in his *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1562), Bruegel had picked up a prominent theme from the *Speculum* – probably inspired by his role model at the time, Hieronymus Bosch. For Bosch's conception of the *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, see Falkenburg, *The Land of Unlikeness*, 102-16. For our context, it is important to note that Bosch, in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and other works, had already developed a form of visual typology, in which, as Falkenburg writes, type and antitype, "prophecy and fulfillment, veil and revelation, are condensed into a single image" and consequently have to be deciphered in "one imaginative-hermeneutic act of figurative 'seeing'" (79f). Later in his book, Falkenburg speaks of a "(para-) typological superstructure of the triptych" (248).

61   A term coined by Mohnhaupt, *Beziehungsgeflechte*, 114, who argues that the visual and narrative similarity between the Fall of the Rebel Angels in the very beginning and the Last Judgment at the very end establishes a "große Klammer."

62   Cf. Ohly, "Synagoge und Ecclesia," p. 323; Ohly, "Typology as a Form of Historical Thought," 37.

Fig. 10.10: *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, ca. 1460, Netherlandish block book, private copy.

future harvest possible, the blood of Christ on Golgotha."[63] Unlike the references to the story of Noah and the Flood, however, which form a leitmotif in the *Return of the Herd* (and also in the *Gloomy Day*), the Christological reading of the vineyard, as far as I can see, does not resonate with other elements of the image. For this reason, the rather negative association of the vineyard as the origin of insobriety, and thus as the cause for the continuity of sin after the 'cleansing' Flood, seems more compelling. Beyond that, I am sceptical that one can interpret the vineyard, and other motifs within the series, as "manifest signs of the presence of Christ in the world."[64] In my view, it is less the hidden "presence" of Christ than Christ's almost palpable *absence* that is to be perceived in Bruegel's landscapes (the space between the brackets of the Flood and the Last Judgment stays empty, so to speak). As Falkenburg rightly points out himself, the personages that populate the *Series of the Months* seem utterly consumed with themselves and their physical well-being and rather negligent toward spiritual matters. Despite the ubiquitous churches, everyone seems completely oblivious of a truly Christian way of life. In this way, Bruegel portrays a world that could not be further removed from Christ and his message. It is only the beholder who, by certain motifs, might be reminded of the absent Christ and his impending eschatological return. These "signs," however, should not be characterized as "manifest" but rather as latent. They are *potential* signs that do not clearly reveal themselves as such, but leave the beholder in a state of uncertainty about their semiotic identity.[65]

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63 Falkenburg, "Pieter Bruegel's *Series of the Seasons*," 268. The biblical source for this reading is John 15:1-7 where Christ says: "I am the true vine, and my father is the vinegrower. [...] I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

64 Falkenburg, "Pieter Bruegel's *Series of the Seasons*," 268.

65 For a closer analysis of these signs, with reference to the "signs of the end time" as they are discussed in Bruegel's presumptive source, Sebastian Franck's *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtbibell*, see Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit*, 306-21.

In the context of typological thought, this ambivalent semiotic status of the reality represented in the *Series of the Months* strongly resonates with what Erich Auerbach, in reference to Dante, called "figural realism," a concept closely linked to typology.[66] According to Auerbach,

> a figural schema permits both its poles – the figure and its fulfillment – to retain the characteristics of concrete historical reality, in contradistinction to what obtains with symbolic or allegorical personifications, so that figure and fulfillment – although one 'signifies' the other – have a significance which is not incompatible with their being real. An event taken as a figure preserves its literal and historical meaning. It remains an event, does not become a mere sign.[67]

With regard to the *Gloomy Day* and the *Return of the Herd*, one can say that the "figural" quality of these paintings is constituted not only by the numerous topical references to scriptural types and antitypes but also by the vivid painterly evocation of visual reality. As Auerbach remarks in his etymology of the term, *figura* originally meant "plastic form," expressing "something living and dynamic, incomplete and playful."[68] With these sensual connotations, *figura* is closely linked to the act of bodily perception and can be characterized as something that physically shapes this act of perception.[69]

In the *Gloomy Day*, for instance, the late winter storm flood is not a "mere sign" that just refers to the biblical Flood or the Last Judgment. First and foremost, this storm flood is an atmospheric event that is rendered with great painterly care in order to draw the beholder into the virtual reality of the image. In return, the 'reality' of the painted event takes shape as a 'figure' of both the Flood and the Judgment; it 'post-figures' the first and prefigures the latter. The substantiality of the 'figural' event itself, however, despite its signifying capacities, remains intact and is not diminished by its typological 'meaning'.[70] On the contrary, by virtue of Bruegel's rich imagination and painterly skill, the event is able to retain the full thrust of historical life as it appears within the painting. For this reason, everything in the painting matters – even the elements that are supposedly 'meaningless.' The strong impact of the picture is due to its disturbing subject and also to the material making of the painting, i.e. its dark and muddy colouring, sometimes course brushwork, and idiosyncratic rendering of the human figure. All of this contributes to the effect of a "vigorous realism" that is

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66 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, transl. from the German by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 196. Also cf. Auerbach, "Figura," 62 ff.

67 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 195 f.

68 Auerbach, "Figura," 11 f.; see also 15 and 23. Cf. also the original German version, in which the emphasis on the sensual aspect is much stronger: Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in: idem *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (Bern / Munich: Francke, 1967), 55-92, here 55, 57, 62. For an insightful discussion of Auerbach's concept of *figura*, see Niklaus Largier, "Allegorie und Figuration. Figuraler Realismus bei Heinrich Seuse und Erich Auerbach," *Paragrana*, no. 21 (2012), 36-46, esp. 40-43.

69 Cf. Largier, "Allegorie und Figuration," 41: "*Figura* ist, was mit einem Ereignis zunächst als Sinnliches in die Wahrnehmung tritt, nicht etwas, was schon Bedeutung besitzt. Als plastische Formung der Wahrnehmung, gewissermaßen als *adaequatio rei et perceptionis*, ist es Teil einer Welt von Wahrnehmungsereignissen, die sich (noch) nicht hermeneutisch erschließen."

70 In this context, it is noteworthy that Augustine in the *City of God* explicates the principles of figural interpretation using the example of the Deluge. In his words, "the meaning thereof is neither merely historical, nor merely allegorical" (Augustine, *City of God*, 85).

supposed to stimulate and sustain the beholder's sensual interest in the painting.[71] In this respect, the 'realism' of the *Gloomy Day* (and to different degrees of all the paintings of the cycle), is not simply the result of Bruegel's faithfulness to 'nature' but has to be understood as a rhetorical device with the goal of involving, moving, and even agitating the beholder.[72] Typology, in the shape of "figural realism," not only informs the *Gloomy Day's* iconographic sign-system, but also its painterly mode of representation, which is meant to produce the visual presence of an almost tangible physical world.[73] To that effect, the opaque materiality of the painting stimulates the beholders' sensibility of the picture's factual fabric *and* the material constitution of the world it represents. This physical concreteness of the painted world, however, forms, at the same time, a 'figure,' in the words of Auerbach, of "something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event."[74] In other words, "there is no choice between historical and hidden meaning; both are present. The figural structure preserves the historical event while interpreting it as revelation; and must preserve it in order to interpret it."[75]

The previous remarks on "figural realism" do not exclusively apply to the *Gloomy Day* and the *Return of the Herd*; they also hold true for the other paintings of Bruegel's cycle. All of them share the twofold logic of evoking "real life" and, simultaneously, calling for figural exegesis of some sort.[76] For beholders of the mid-1560s, and most of all for their first owner, Niclaes Jongelinck, they were a great aesthetic and intellectual challenge. In a time of religious crisis, culminating in the iconoclasm of 1566, Bruegel's *Series of the Months* would have offered an opportunity, as pleasurable as it was disturbing, to reflect on matters of great existential and spiritual importance: body and soul, life and death, sin and forgiveness, past and future, damnation and salvation, time and eternity. The allusive pictorial language of Bruegel's paintings would not have delivered straight guidelines for mastering these pressing issues. But it would have provided a new and stimulating artistic framework in which to negotiate them.

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71 Cf. Auerbach, "Figura," 66, who ascribes "energische[n] Realismus" to Tertullian. The English translation "Tertullian was a staunch realist [...]." Auerbach ("Figura," 30) does not capture the notion of 'energy' and 'forcefulness'.

72 Cf. Müller, *Das Paradox als Bildform*, 33-35. Under reference to Auerbach, Müller convincingly argues for an understanding of Bruegel's "low" style as a visual form of *sermo humilis* and thus as "Christian realism". Müller, however, does not touch upon the 'figural' dimension of Bruegel's imagery. For Bruegel's "realism," also see Jürgen Müller, "Überlegungen zum Realismus Pieter Bruegels d. Ä. am Beispiel seiner Darstellung des *Bethlehemitischen Kindermordes*," *Morgen-Glantz. Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft*, no. 8 (1998), 273-94, where the author discusses Bruegel's visual rhetoric in the *Massacre of the Innocents* in light of Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime*.

73 The key terms in the last part of this sentence are borrowed from Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence. What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), xiii f.

74 Auerbach, "Figura," 58.

75 Ibid., 68.

76 Cf. Kaschek, *Weltzeit und Endzeit*, 109-301. On close inspection, all the extant paintings of the cycle turn out to be stunning panoramas of the end time, which implicitly announce the impending Judgment Day. In the context of the revival of late medieval mysticism that took place in Antwerp around the middle of the 16th century, however, this announcement was not to be understood as a sensationalist prognosis of the imminent return of Christ at the end of history but as a request to the beholder to make the return of Christ happen within his own soul (conceptualized by authors as Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler or Sebastian Franck as "Gottesgeburt" – birth of god – in the soul of a believer or a good person). In this respect, Bruegel's *Series of the Months* promotes a visual form of 'proleptic eschatology' (see ibid., 330-46).