The Artist, the City and the Urban Theatre: Pieter Bruegel's 'Battle between Shrovetide and Lent' (1559) Reconsidered*

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Introduction

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1528-69) is generally known for his peasant brawls, rustic landscapes and proverbs. In addition, the contemporary city and urban culture were a vast source of inspiration, and Bruegel depicted this urban landscape in various forms; ranging from distant city views in the background of drawings or paintings to detailed multi-figured scenes located in the midst of a realistic-looking town. This paper focusses on the latter and wants to investigate the nature of such representations and the precise meaning(s) of the urban landscape. In particular, I want to examine how we can gain information on social realities through the study of the urban landscape. The case study concerns a large scale oil painting made by Bruegel in 1559: *The Battle between Shrovetide and Lent* (Figure 1).[1] This title was already given by Karel van Mander, the artist's first biographer,[2] and the painting belongs to the group of so-called encyclopaedic works, a pictorial and didactic genre devised by Bruegel around 1560.[3] In this cluster, Bruegel observes and renders the 'human menagerie' in a

[1] *The Battle between Shrovetide and Lent*, oil on panel, 118 x 164,5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. 1016.

[2] 'Hy heft oock ghemaeckt een stuck, daer den Vasten teghen den Vasten-avondt strijdt' (he has also made, a piece, where Lent is combating Shrovetide), Karel Van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck* (Haarlem: Paschier van Wesbusch, 1604), fol. 233v. This is also the designation given to the theme in Middle Dutch literature, see: Roger H. Marijnissen and others, *Pieter Bruegel. Het volledige oeuvre* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1988), p. 146.

[3] Besides *The Batlle between Shrovetide and Lent*, this group consists out of the *Children's Games* (1560, also in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, inv. 1017) and *The Proverbs* (1559, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. 1720). See: Marijnissen, *Bruegel*, pp. 133-57, 161-63; Manfred Sellink, *Pieter Bruegel: The Complete Paintings, Drawings and Prints* (Ghent: Ludion, 2007), pp. 128-31, 153. The similitudes regarding the medium, creation date, size and subject matter led several scholars to believe that the paintings were conceived as a whole. Unfortunately, we do not know the circumstances in which the works were created so this hypothesis can neiter be confirmed nor denied. See for example: Georges Hulin de Loo, Carl Gustav Stridbeck, *Bruegelstudien: Untersuchungen zu den ikonologischen Problemen bei Pieter Bruegel d.Ä., sowie dessen Beziehungen des niederländischen Romanismus* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956), pp. 200-2; Marijnissen, *Bruegel*, p. 162; Walter S. Gibson, *Bruegel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp. 85-88;

similar -albeit pictorial- way like Sebastian Brant, Erasmus of Rotterdam and François Rabelais had done before him.[4] One of the characteristics of these encyclopeadic pictures is the abundant rendering of social activity; a multitude of figures is scattered around the scene and the myriad of details reflects Bruegel's insatiable interest in the human condition in all its variety. Moreover, the paintings have a large panoramic format with an elevated viewpoint and a high horizon, creating the impression that the figures are performing on a scene while the viewer is watching the spectacle from a balcony. In the case of *The Battle between Shrovetide and Lent*, the composition is staged on a large public square of a realistic-looking town. The square is enclosed by buildings and the figures are scattered around and actively using the urban space. The emphasis on social activity enhances the real-life character of the urban setting. As the designation referred to by Van Mander already reveals, the central theme is the allegorical fight between Lent and Shrovetide or Carnival. Traditionally, Bruegel's *Battle* has been interpreted as a triumph of Virtue over worldly pleasures and self-indulgence.[5] Occasionally, the painting was even construed as an allegorical representation of Lutheranism (symbolized by Shrovetide and its retinue) engaging a battle with the Catholic Church (personified by Lent), interpreting the picture as an accusation against the pageantry that often accompanied devotional practices.[6] Unfortunately, such iconological explanations are purely speculative and not based on verifiable grounds. Also, more conventional interpretations are not entirely satisfactory since they seldom take into account the urban setting rendered so realistically by Bruegel. Some scholars mention the urban character, and in a number of cases, the authors shortly describe the setting.[7] However, a meticulous analysis of the urban landscape reveals the complex character of the setting and sheds light on the original intentions the artist must have had when he painted the picture. The current research provides insight into the manner in which different social groups effectively perceived and

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Margaret D. Carroll, *Painting and Politics in Northern Europe: Van Eyck, Bruegel, Rubens and their Contemporaries* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), pp. 28-63.

[4] *Pieter Bruegel the Elder at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna*, ed. by Wilfried Seipel (Milan: Skira Editore, 1998), pp. 18, 19.

[5] For an overview of different interpretations of the painting, see: Marijnissen, *Bruegel*, pp. 146-48.

[6] Stridbeck, *Bruegelstudien*, p. 198.

[7] Gibson, *Bruegel*, p. 77; Marijnissen, *Bruegel*, p. 146, Philippe Roberts-Jones and Françoise Roberts-Jones, *Pieter Bruegel* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), p. 115; Klaus Demus, 'The Pictures of Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the Kunsthistorisches Museum', in *Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the Kunsthistorisches Museum*, p. 18, Ethan M. Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 111; Larry Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes. The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 67-68; Carroll, *Painting and Politics*, p. 50; Sellink, *Bruegel*, p. 18.

used urban space. To unravel these clues, a thorough investigation of the urban fabric is required.

The urban fabric

The appearing truthful rendering of urban landscape seems to suggest contemporary city life. The large square in the centre is enclosed by buildings. The precise investigation of each of these buildings is essential to gain insight into the composition and typological constellation of the urban fabric and the intended meaning underlying the built environment. The town square functions as a central point, a node in the representation. On the left we discern an inn with a recognisable sign which reads *In de blauwe schuit* ('In the blue barge', Figure 2). Just like the barge on which the stride barrel of Shrovetide is fixed, the designation recalls the Guild of the blue barge or Guild of fools. The oldest description of this mocking guild is to be found in *Van vrouwen ende van minne* ('Of women and of love'), a Middle Dutch poem written by Jacob van Oestvoren in the first half of the fifteenth century.[8] The guild appears to have been temporarily active during festivities associated with Shrovetide. Although Herman Pleij claims the guild never existed in real life, there are several indications that suggest exactly the opposite.[9] Written sources attest the presence of a *Blauwe schuit* ('Blue barge') in Antwerp and the guild seems to have been well-known.[10] Additionally, there are references both in Bergen-op-Zoom and 's-Hertogenbosch that suggest the actual existence of such organizations.[11] Moreover, several so-called buildings (guild houses or inns?) existed in the Low Countries during the Late Medieval and Early Modern period.[12] Also, we know of the

[8] Hs. 's-Gravenhage KB, 75 H 57. The manuscript was first edited by Verwijs, see: Eelco Verwijs, *Van Vrouwen ende van Minne* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1871). See also: Diederik Th. Enklaar, *Varende Luyden. Studiën over de Middeleeuwse groepen van onmaatschappelijken in de Nederlanden* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1956); Herman Pleij, *Het gilde van de Blauwe Schuit: literatuur, volksfeest en burgermoraal in de late middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); for a critique on Pleij's views see: Jan Dumolyn, 'Het corporatieve element in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde', *Spiegel der Letteren*, 2014 (forthcoming).

[9] Pleij, Blauwe Schuit, p. 225 and further.

[10] Floris Prims, 'Het oudste toneel te Antwerpen', *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 44 (1933), 865-72; Enklaar, *Varende Luyden*, pp. 54-55.

[11] Enklaar, *Varende Luyden*, pp. 54-60.

[12] For example in Antwerp, 'De Blauwe Schuyte' was situated at the *Peertbrug* ('Horses' Bridge'), see: Edmond Geudens, *Plaatsbeschrijving der straten van Antwerpen en omtrek naar het Charterboek van 1374 der H. Geesttafel van O. L. Vrouwekerk*, 3 vols. (Brecht: Braeckmans, 1902-13), Volume 3, p. 5. M. Rumpf, '*Der Kampf des Karnevals gegen die Fasten* von Pieter Bruegel d. Älteren: volkskundlich – kulturhistorisch – medizingeschichtlich interpretiert', *Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst* 40 (1986), 136.

utilization of blue barges during carnival processions.[13] The guild mocked the established social order in a humorous and moralizing manner and the subject was quite popular in sixteenth-century literature and iconographic sources. A well-known example is the engraving by Pieter van der Heyden, published by Hiëronymus Cock in 1559 and ascribed to 'Bosch' on the plate (Figure 3).[14] Just as Jheronimus Bosch' *Ship of Fools* in the Louvre,[15] this kind of popular imagery belongs to a common visual and literary tradition which also includes literary works such as Sebastian Brandt's *Narrenschiff* (1494) and Erasmus's *Praise of Foly* (1511). The imagery deals with socially unacceptable types such as beggars, cripples, mentally ill or other figures in the margins of society who are represented as passengers in a (blue) barge or ship; the voyage symbolizing the allegorical exclusion of such marginal types out of society. The presence of the inn *In the Blue Barge* in Bruegel's *Battle* is not at all surprising in this context since Carnival was the perfect occasion of mocking contemporary society and reversing prevalent values. Behind *The Blue Barge* we discern another tavern, recognizable by the sign *In den draak* ('In the dragon', figure 2). Both on the inns as well as on several other façades of the buildings in the back of the scene we distinguish particular rectangular and rhombus-shaped objects. Similar vignettes are to be found on the outside of the taverns in Bruegel's *Kermis at Hoboken* and *Saint George's Kermis* (Figure 4).[16] In both kermises,[17] theatre plays are being performed on a scaffold erected before a building. Also, we discern similar rhombus-shaped vignettes on the façade of the adjacent buildings where the play is performed. Such plays were organized by the *rederijkers* or local rhetoricians and they were a typical pastime during kermises and other festivities in the Low Countries. Moreover, the depiction of particular plays in kermis scenes appears to be a phenomenon originating in these

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[13] An example is to be found in a sixteenth-century Schönbartbuch in which the masquerades of Nuremberg butchers celebrating the return of Spring are illustrated. The manuscript is in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hamburg (SUB), cod. 55b. See: Karl Drescher, *Das Nürnbergische Schönbartbuch, nach der Hamburger Handscharift herausgegeben* (Weimar: Gesellch. D. Bibliophilen, 1908), available online: http://digital.ub.uni-duesseldorf.de/ihd/content/pageview/1424445; Eva Horváth, Hans-Walter Stork (eds.), *Von Rittern, Bürgern und von Gottes Wort: Volkssprachige Literatur in Handschriften und Drucken aus dem Besitz der Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg. Eine Ausstellung in de Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg vom 26. September bis 23. November 2002* (Kiel: Ludwig, 2002), cat. 49, p. 118-19.

[14] Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York (N. Y.): Abbeville Press, 2006), pp. 216-17, nos. 98, 99; Joris Van Grieken and others, *Hieronymus Cock. De Renaissance in prent* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 2013), cat. 63a.

[15] Jheronymus Bosch, 'The Ship of Fools', oil on panel, c. 1495, Louvre, Paris, inv. R.F. 2218. See: Roger H. Marijnissen, *Hiëronymus Bosch. Het volledige oeuvre* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 2007), pp. 310-15.

[16] Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Kermis at Hoboken*, drawing, 1559, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, Lee Collection, inv. 45, see: Hans Mielke, *Pieter Bruegel: Die Zeichnungen* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), cat. 44; Joannes or Lucas van Doetecum, after Pieter Bruegel, *Saint George's Kermis*, c. 1559, etching and engraving, 332 x 523 mm, see: Nadine Orenstein, *Pieter Bruegel, The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts* (Oudekerk aan den IJssel: Sound & Vision Publishers, 2006) cat. 42.

[17] Kermises are annual outdour fairs or festivals, typical for the Low Countries.

regions and Bruegel was one of the first artist to do so.[18] Both in the *Kermis at Hoboken* as well as in the *Saint George's Kermis*, the scaffolds on which the plays are being performed, are placed before a building on which a similar rectangular object is fixed. The precise location of such vignettes suggests they might be some sort of identity markers, e.g. blazons or emblems belonging to a particular group of rhetoricians. An engraving of a kermis scene in the Rijkprentenkabinet in Amsterdam after a design by David Vinckboons provides further clues; a man on the scaffold hands over a blazon to another figure standing inside the playhouse (Figure 5). The latter apparently plans on fixing the vignette to the décor.[19] Although the specific iconographic features of the blazon are not easy to discern, it is clear that it concerns a rhombus-like blazon in rebus, most likely from one of the local rhetoricians groups. Besides the existing habit of fixing their personal blazons on the scaffold or playhouse where they were performing, rhetoricians also hung their personal emblem on the façade of the building were they gathered. Moreover, inns and taverns were preferred locations for such meetings and the guild's device was often hung at the height of the first floor.[20] It seems to be no coincidence that the rectangular and rhombus-like vignettes on the buildings in Bruegel's *Battle* are exactly fixed at the height of the first floor. Additionally, the plays being performed before both inns enhance the connection with the local practices of the rhetoricians (cf. infra). Opposed to the inns, on the other side of the market place, the architectural ensemble is of a more serene and pious nature; the church partly rendered being the décor for churchgoing man, women and children. Apart from the inns on the left side and the church on the right side, it is rather difficult to discern the precise functions of the represented buildings and they seem to be significant for their general appearance and compositional role in creating the urban experience. They do not display such an explicit functional meaning as the inns and church. This clear-cut functional meaning is not without significance.

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[18] Wim M. H. Hummelen, 'Toneel op de kermis, van Bruegel tot Bredero', *Oud Holland*, 103 (1989), 1-45.

[19] Willem Isaaksz. Swanenburg after a design by David Vinckboons, *Village kermis*, c. 1610, engraving, 443 x 710 mm, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, inv. RP-P-OB-70.168.

[20] Hummelen, 'Toneel op de kermis', p. 25.

The social fabric

The explicit emphasis on social activity (c. 200 figures) on the square, streets and in the surrounding buildings enhances the real-like character of the urban setting. The two protagonists -or more precise antagonists- are allegorical representations of Shrovetide and Lent (Figure 6). They are each other's counterparts in an almost caricatural way; Shrovetide being a hoggish figure who straddles a wine barrel that is mounted on a small blue barge and pushed by several carnivalesque figures. On his head he wears a fat pie stuffed with a bird while his right hand is holding a spit with roasted meat; a clear reference to the ubiquitous presence of food during the celebration of Carnival. In front of him, Lent is represented as an emaciated woman who is seated on a plain wooden chair, suitably drawn by a nun and a monk. She is adorned with a beehive, referring to the papal crown and thus to the Church, and in her right hand she holds a broiling-iron with two fish, a symbol for the abstinence that is so characteristic for the forty-day fast of Lent. Both allegorical figures seem to engage in a mock battle in parody of a medieval joust. In this regard we can refer to the *Bataille de Karesme et de Charnage*, a thirteenth-century French literary antecedent of which several editions were published during the first half of the sixteenth century.[21] The text elaborates on the battle between Carnival and Lent and numerous elements of the text were incorporated in Shrovetide plays. More specific, the motif of the combat most probably emerged in analogy with Shrovetide texts on the battle between summer and winter, preferably represented in the form of a joust.[22] Although it is not completely clear if such ritual combats were effectively preformed, several burlesque jousts are recorded in Bruges during Carnival in the fifteenth century.[23] A similar case during Nuremberg Carnival (1515) is described in a 'Schembartbuch' dating from the beginning of the seventeenth century.[24] Behind and next to the protagonists, or more precise antagonists, we discern different groups of figures and their activities can all be related to particular customs associated with Shrovetide or Lent. Bruegel's *Battle* appears to be a genuine source for the study of contemporary practices, and according to folkloristic research, the customs and costumes are portrayed down to the

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[21] Wim M.H. Hummelen, *Repertorium van het rederijkersdrama* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1968), vol. I, R8, N4; Marijnissen and others, *Bruegel*, p. 146; Claude Gaignebet, 'Le Combat de Carnaval et de Carême de P. Bruegel (1559)', *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 27 (1972), 313-45 (p. 316, note 11); Pleij, *Blauwe Schuit*, p. 20.

[22] Pleij, *Blauwe Schuit*, p. 20.

[23] Ethan Matt Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel and the Common Man. Art and Ideology in Sixteenth-century Antwerp* (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 1992), pp. 28, 255 (n. 10).

[24] Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel and the Common Man*, pp. 28, 225.

minimum details.[25] The retinue of Shrovetide on one hand, and the followers of Lent on the other, divide the scene in two substantial parts. They can be interpreted as processions: the cortege of Lent departing from the side entrance of the church and Shrovetide's retinue from the left side in the back where a small crowd is watching the ritual incineration of King Winter. Such processions were a characteristic feature of contemporary Carnival celebrations, including floats and people dressed as giants, goddesses, devils and so on.[26] Moreover, Bruegel's choice for this particular setting does also conform with contemporary urban festivities where marketplaces and other town squares functioned as central nodes during religious processions, *ommegangen* or royal entries (cf. infra).

In both retinues we discern different figure groups. By means of a strategic placing of these groups or vignettes Bruegel directs the observer's view through the image, implying relationships between different parts in the image.[27] In the left side the streets and square are filled with revellers and carnivalesque figures. Two folk-dramas are being performed before the inns: *The Maskerade of Valentin and Ourson* and *The Dirty Bride* or *The Wedding of Mopsus and Nisa*. The latter formed a part of the rhetoricians' repertory and the Dirty Bride herself was a well-known typical carnival figure.[28] Behind the plays we discern various groups of cripples, beggars and lepers. They represent various marginal types which, during the sixteenth century, were looked down upon as social inferiors by the urban burgher class. Moreover, they were suspected of deceitfulness, even in displaying their infirmities.[29] Most of the time these socially unacceptable people were depending on alms and other acts of charity. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, paupers were generally viewed from a rather positive perspective since they incited others, e.g. well-to-do burghers, to acts of charity and evoked the ideal of poverty. However, in the course of the fifteenth century, this ideal gradually changed and by the end of the century there was a clear negative attitude towards

[25] Jan Grauls, *Volkstaal en volksleven in het werk van Pieter Bruegel* (Antwerp – Amsterdam: Standaard Boekhandel 1957); Jozef Weyns, 'Bruegel en het stoffelijke kultuurgoed van zijn tijd', *Vlaanderen*, 18 (1969), 24-29; Jozef Weyns, 'Bij Bruegel in de leer voor honderd-en-één dagelijkse dingen', *Ons Heem*, 23 (1969), 97-113.

[26] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), p. 263.

[27] On Bruegel's use of this specific technique and structures of visual communication in sixteenth-century painting, see: Kavaler, *Parables of Order and Enterprise*, pp. 4-13; Carroll, *Painting and Politics*, pp. 30-31, 36-37, 46-50 ; Margaret A. Sullivan, *Bruegel and the Creative Process, 1559-1563* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

[28] Paul Vandenbroeck, *Jheronimus Bosch: tussen volksleven en stadscultuur* (Berchem: EPO, 1987), pp. 333-36; Dirk Coigneau, *Refereinen in het zotte bij de rederijkers* (Ghent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal-en Letterkunde,1980-1983), Volume 2, pp. 302-3.

[29] Konrad Renger, 'Bettler und Bauern bei Pieter Bruegel d. Ä.', *Sitzungberichte, Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft zu Berlin* 20 (1971-72), 9-16; Erwin Pokorny, 'Bosch' Cripples and Drawings by his Imitators', *Master Drawings* 41 (2003), 293-304 (pp. 293-94); Larry Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes*, pp. 60-69.

paupers. They were even labelled dangerous and threatening. The poor, cripple and vagabonds were degraded and simultaneously assembled into some sort of stereotype; a caricatural negative image of all righteous members of society. From the second decade of the sixteenth century onwards, this aversion against paupers eventually led to repressive measures and a general reorganization of the poor relief.[30] In this period, representations of marginal groups thus often served as negative examples for the urban burgher class in defining and constructing their own identity.[31] In the right side retinue of Bruegel's picture we also discern some cripples and beggars. Some figures who have attended Mass are leaving the church and the poor have positioned themselves before the entrance in the hope of receiving some alms. The majority of the participants in the scene are people who belong to the lower social strata; the common people and marginal groups. The rather respectful way in which Bruegel rendered these figures catches the eye. They are depicted in a quite humoristic way compared to the then prevailing mocking manner in which such social groups were represented.[32] Another aspect that is crucial to our understanding of the urban landscape, is that well-to-do burghers and members of the aristocracy are almost entirely absent in Bruegel's Netherlandish town. An exception is to be found in the burghers distributing alms to the poor after leaving the church. Their absence seems rather unusual since carnival festivities included carefully orchestrated events in which the prominent citizenry and resident nobles played an appreciable role. Moreover, their participation tended to manifest itself in highly ritualised forms of behaviour.[33] Then again, their so-called absence is not necessarily surprising since the artist's picture does not appear to be a truthful rendering of an event that actually took place (cf. infra). Besides prominent citizenry and local nobles, an important role was also

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[30] For a concise overview on the changing attitude towards pauperism in the Early Modern Period (incl. bibliography), see: Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Brighton: The Harvester press Limited, 1979), pp. 72-90. See also: Bronishaw Gemerek, 'Criminalité, vagabondage, paupérisme: la marginalité à l'aube des temps modernes', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 21 (1974), 337-75; Michel Mollat, *Études sur l'histoire de la pauvreté (Moyen Âge – XVIè siècle)*, (Paris: , 1974); Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986)

[31] Paul Vandenbroeck, *Over wilden en narren, boeren en bedelaars. Beeld van de andere, vertoog over het zelf*, (Lier: Van In, 1987); Pokomy, 'Bosch' Cripples'; Silver, *Peasant Scenes*, pp. 60-69; Paul Vandenbroeck, 'Genre Paintings as a Collective Process of Inversive Self-Definition, c. 1400-c. 1800. II. Peasant Iconography and the Concept of Culture', *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (2006), 95-160.

[32] Kavaler, *Parables of Order and Enterprise*, pp.134-39; Silver, *Peasant Scenes*, pp. 58-67.

[33] Hans-Ulrich Roller, *Der Nürnberger Schembartlauf. Studien zum Fest- und Maskwesen des späten Mittelalters* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1965) *Kavaler, Parables of Order and Enterprise*, pp. 133-34; William Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage 500-1500*, ed. by Glynne Wickham and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 494-95.

granted to the rhetorician companies who were often asked to perform during the festivities.[34] For example, the plays performed before both inns are a typical manifestation of the local rhetoricians or *rederijkers*.

However realistically looking Bruegel's picture may be, the fact that it is not a recording of a specific festivity witnessed by the artist is also indicated by the natural landscape in the background; the vegetation represents two different seasons connected to the period of Carnival and Lent. In the right side of the panel, we discern a couple of trees with small green leaves which attest that in this side, spring has already made her entry. Above the houses on Carnival's side, we notice some bare trees. Their presence suggests winter, the season of Shrove Tuesday. Bruegel thus deliberately opted for a simultaneous representation of both periods and the customs associated with it.[35] This sequential rendering fits well into Bruegel's profound interest in the cycles of nature and the different activities linked to them.

Bruegel's *Battle between Shrovetide and Lent* in context

Comparing Bruegel's *Battle* with contemporary representations of the subject, the originality of the setting is striking. Bruegel most likely drew inspiration from a print made by Frans Hogenberg which was published in 1558, just a year before Bruegel finished his version (Figure 7).[36] Moreover, the etching was published by Hieronymus Cock, Bruegel's own print publisher.[37] Hogenberg focussed on the main allegorical personages and their retinues are also situated in the foreground. In the background we discern a square with a small parish church surrounded by different buildings and a natural landscape. It is a clear-cut rural setting and at the horizon we see the silhouette of a distant city. Unlike Hogenberg, Bruegel situates the battle in a specific urban setting which provides the scene with an essential urban context. Moreover, the represented architecture serves several inherent functions. Whereas Hogenberg's rural setting merely fulfils a background function, Bruegel's square and adjacent

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[34] Jacques Heers, *Fêtes, jeux et joutes dans les sociétés d'Occident à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Montreal : Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1971), pp. 32-34; Pleij, *Blauwe Schuit*, p. II; Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, *Om beters wille. Rederijkerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400-1650)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), pp. 34-38.

[35] Gaignebet, 'Le Combat de Carnaval et de Carême', 313-45; Claude Gaignebet and Olivier Ricoux, 'Le Combat de Carnaval et de Carême de P. Bruegel (1559)', in *Carnavals et Mascarades*, ed. by Pierre Giovanni d'Ayala and Martine Boiteux (Paris: Éditions Bordas, 1988), pp. 12-21; Marijnissen, *Bruegel*, p. 147.

[36] Frans Hogenberg, *Battle between Shrovetide and Lent*, 1558, etching.

[37] On Cock and Bruegel, see: Timothy A. Riggs, *Hieronymus Cock (1510-1570): Printmaker and Publisher* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1977); Joris Van Grieken and others, *Hieronymus Cock*.

buildings form the immediate décor of the central scene. Additionally, the scenery is actively occupied by the figures. Bruegel was one of the first artists to integrate the subject into a realistically looking town centre.[38] However realistic-looking Bruegel's setting might be rendered, several indications suggest that the décor is a careful construction rather than a truthful rendering of an existing town. This realistic rendering enhances the real-life character of the scene and the familiarity of the everyday surroundings brings the viewer closer. Moreover, the typological constellation of the setting is neither coincidental nor accidental; the specific lay-out shows remarkable parallels with contemporary ceremonial festivities, which were characteristic manifestations of the early modern urban culture. Around 1560, the Antwerp metropolis was the second largest city north of the Alps. Evidently, in such an important commercial centre, there were a lot of squares and various marketplaces.[39] In Guicciardini's account of the city in his *Descrittione*, the author devotes a passage to the general outlook of the Antwerp squares; mentioning the *Beursplein* ('Place of the Stock Exchange') as the most beautiful and the *Grote Markt* ('Grand Place') as the largest.[40] The central location of marketplaces made them the focal point of the political, social and cultural life. Moreover, these particular key-places were used by townsmen to shape public life and ritualize all kinds of activity. During processions, *ommegangen* or royal entries, marketplaces and other town squares became the focal point of ritual movements.[41] Throughout these

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[38] For previous and contemporary representations of *The Battle between Shrovetide and Lent*, see Chapter 5 in my forthcoming PhD *The Artist, the City and the Landscape: Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Representations of Urban Landscapes in Context.*

[39] From a morphological point of view, squares or marketplaces are important constitutive elements that shape the form of a specific city. Besides buildings, roads and town walls, squares are one of the characteristic features that define the morphological space of late medieval and early modern cities. For a general introduction to the study of morphological features of the city, see my forthcoming PhD-thesis: *The Artist, the City and the Landscape: Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Representations of Urban Landscape* (Ghent University 2014). See also: Bernard Gauthiez, *Espace urbain: vocabulaire et morphologie. Principes d'analyse scientifique* (Paris: Monum, 2003) and the contribution of Bram Vannieuwenhuyze and Elien Vernackt in this volume.

[40] Ludovico Guicciardini, *Descrittione dit tutti I Paesi Bassi, altramenti detti Germania Inferiori* (Antwerp, 1567), the French edition of 1641 is available online on de site of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. For the description of the Antwerp marketplaces, see: p. 90: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k83431q/f166.image

[41] Peter Stabel, 'The Market-place and Civic Identity' in Late Medieval Flanders', in *Shaping Urban Identity in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. by Marc Boone and Peter Stabel (Apeldoorn: Garant, 2000), pp. 43-64; Élie Konigson, *L'éspace théâtral médiéval* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1975), pp. 90, 113-26; Mark A. Meadow, 'Ritual and Civic Identity in Philip II's 1549 Antwerp Blijde Incompst', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (1998), 37-62 (pp. 61-62); Donatella Calabi, *The Market and the City. Square, Street and Architecture in Early Modern Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing 2004); Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, 'Parcours festifs et enjeux de pouvoirs dans les villes des anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons au XVe siècle', *Histoire urbaine* 9 (2004), 29-45; Marc Boone and Hélène Porfyriou, 'Markets, Squares, Streets: Urban Space, a Tool for Cultural Exchange', in *Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400-1700*, ed. by Donatella Calabi and Stephen Turk Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007), pp. 227-53.

ceremonial occasions, the inherent competitive tensions and activities of economic life were temporarily suspended and marketplaces functioned as a stage for social action.[42] For example, during Philip II's *blijde inkomst* ('triumphal entry') in Antwerp in 1549, the ceremonial route included several important squares and marketplaces, such as the *Vlasmarkt* and the *Grote Markt*, where spectacles and *tableaux vivants* were being performed.[43] More specific, such public places were used to reiterate or reformulate the reciprocal power relations between sovereign and subjects. Marketplaces fulfilled similar significant functions during processions; these religious parades were also characterized by ritual movements through the city's actual morphological space, and public squares constituted important parts of the décor where these processions evolved.[44] The same accounts for contemporary theatre practices where marketplaces were important locations for the performance of popular plays.[45] Such public manifestations of late medieval and early modern urban culture can best be regarded as huge plays in which the main streets and squares became stages, the city became a theatre and the inhabitants and visitors who took part in the play became actors or spectators.[46] During such festivities and more specific procession plays, the adjacent buildings also acted as stages for the performed ceremonies.[47] Likewise, there was no sharp distinction between actors or spectators, since people standing on their balconies or watching from their windows also participated in the festivities.[48] This is precisely the setting in which Bruegel

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[42] Elizabeth A. Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 54-72; Carroll, *Painting and Politics*, p. 58.

[43] Wouter Kuyper, *The Triumphant Entry of the Renaissance Architecture into the Netherlands. The Joyeuse Entrée of Philip of Spain into Antwerp in 1549, Renaissance and Mannerist Architecture in the Low Countries from 1530 to 1630* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 1994), Volume 1, Chapter 1.

[44] Élie Konigson, *L'éspace théâtral medieval* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1975), pp. 90 and further, 113-26, Wiliam Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage 500-1500* (Cambridge – New York – London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 534-35; Thomas Boogaart II, 'Our Saviour's Blood: Procession and Community in Late Medieval Bruges', in: *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Kathleen M. Ashley and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 69-116.

[45] See e.g.: Alois M. Nagler, *The Medieval Religious Stage: Shapes and Phantoms* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 81 and further; Bart A. M. Rademakers, 'De gespeelde stad. De opvoeringspraktijk van het rederijkerstoneel getoetst aan zeven belegeringsspelen', *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* (1993), 180-233; Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage*, p. 225 and further.

[46] Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 261.

[47] William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages. Western European Stage Conditions c. 800-1576* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 138-40; Aart Mekking and Marcel Zijlstra, 'Het Utrechtse 'Hanengeschrei': burengerucht of passietopografie?', *Madoc: Tijdschrift over de Middeleeuwen* 1 (1998), 25-31; Mark Trowbridge, 'Jerusalem Transposed. A 15th-Century Panel for the Bruges Market', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 1 (2009), 1-9 (p. 3, note 57).

[48] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, transl. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 7-8.

incorporated his *Battle between Shrovetide and Lent*. Moreover, the framing of the scenery and the specific setting resembles the set-up of contemporary theatre plays. The square being framed on three sides and the unusual high point of view provides the impression that the spectator is looking into a tribune where a puppet show or theatre is being performed. Furthermore, Bruegel's setting literally resembles stages in contemporary plays where the marketplace is the central scene and the adjacent buildings form the scenery.[49] Contemporary staging often consisted out of a central place surrounded by different mansions in juxtaposition. Those represented different locations or specific sites or buildings. Although in the second half of the sixteenth century, these in essence medieval 'multiple stages' were gradually replaced by renaissance stages, characterized by a unity of impression, such sceneries were still frequently used during Bruegel's lifetime.[50] The specific typology of the represented buildings also refers to contemporary theatre practices since bourgeois houses, inns and churches were part of the standard repertoire of décors.[51] It is striking that Bruegel's setting almost entirely resembles the one described by the Italian architect and theorist Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554). In the second book of his architectural treatise *Regole generali di architectura*, Serlio offers advice on building perspective stage-sets. The author says that for comedies, a street scene is appropriate, with 'a brawthell or bawdy house', an inn, a church, and various domestic dwellings 'for citizens'.[52] It is not inconceivable that Bruegel found inspiration in Serlio's description for his setting in *The Battle between Shrovetide and Lent* since his master and later father-in-law, Pieter Coecke van Aelst, was the first author to translate Serlio's writings.[53]

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[49] Such open sceneries were mostly figured with different groups of actors, scattered around the scene. This practice resembles Bruegel's strategically placed figure groups.

[50] Alois Maria Nagler, 'Sixteenth-Century Continental Stages', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4 (1954), 358-70 (pp. 359-60); Tydeman, *Theatre in the Middle Ages*, p. 238.

[51] Hubert Joseph Edmund Endepols, *Het decoratief en de opvoering van het Middelnederlandscha drama volgens de Middelnederlandsche toneelstukken* (Amsterdam: Van Langenhuysen, 1903); Leo Van Puyvelde, *Schilderkunst en toneelvertooningen op het einde van de Middeleeuwen. Een bijdrage tot de kunstgeschiedenis vooral van de Nederlanden* (Ghent: A. Siffer, 1912), p. 213; Wim M. H. Van Hummelen 'Typen van toneelinrichting bij de rederijkers', *Studia Neerlandica* 2 (1970), 51-109; Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage*, 525.

[52] Sebastiano Serlio, *Libro II d'architettura* (Vicenza 1584), fol. 45v. Translation in: *A Source Book of Theatrical History*, ed. by Alois M. Nagler (New York: Dover Publications, Incorporated, 1959), p. 77.

[53] George Marlier, *La Renaissance flamande: Pierre Coecke d'Alost* (Brussels: R. Finck, 1966), pp. 379-83; Herman de la Fontaine Verwey, 'Pieter Coecke van Aelst and the Publication of Serlio's Books on Architecture', *Quarendo: A Quarterly Journal from the Low Countries Devoted to Manuscripts and Printed Books* 6 (1976), 166-94.

Bruegel and the *rederijkers*

How should we explain and interpret these peculiar references to urban ceremonial festivities so clearly present in Bruegel's *Battle between Shrovetide and Lent*? Obviously, the particular setting resembles contemporary locations where similar carnival celebrations actually took place. On the other hand, several details indicate that Bruegel did not record a specific Shrovetide celebration he had witnessed. Besides the specificity of the setting, the décor is deliberately organized in a particular way and the figures are well orchestrated. The inherent relation between Bruegel's representation and contemporary festive culture evokes a clear connection with the practices of the local rhetorician companies. The close relation between artists and rhetoricians during the sixteenth century has long been acknowledged.[54] A number of scholars investigated the parallels between pictorial subjects and specific *rederijker* themes.[55] During the past decades, the relationship of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the local rhetoricians received a increasing attention and nowadays a knowledge of the *rederijkers* and their activities is considered crucial for an understanding of Bruegel's art.[56] However, these studies have merely focussed on thematic parallels and not so much on morphological similarities in staging subjects.[57] The case study *Battle between Shrovetide and Lent* demonstrates that the acknowledged connections between Bruegel and contemporary plays reach further than the mere adaptation and alteration of specific themes. Moreover, the crowded and theatrical composition in *The Battle between Shrovetide and Lent* is closely related to the notion of the *theatrum mundi*, a humanistic concept that was well-known in the sixteenth century. The widespread use of the metaphor of the theatre of the world is reflected in Erasmus *Praise of Folly* (1511) where the world is literally described as a theatre and in

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[54] Louis Maeterlinck, 'L'Art et les rhétoriciens flamands', *Bulletin du Bibliophile et du Bibliothécaire* (1906), 293-98. A more general scope was provided by Kernodle: George R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre. Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

[55] Gerard Brom, *Schilderkunst en literatuur in de 16e en 17e eeuw* (Utrecht / Antwerp: Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, 1957), 56-67; Jean Jacquot and Sheila Williams, 'Ommegangs anversois du temps de Bruegel et de Van Heemskerck', in *Les fêtes et cérémonies de la Renaissance, II. Fêtes et cérémonies du temps de Charles Quint*, ed. by Jean Jacquot (Paris: CNRS, 1960), 360-68; Max Seidel and Roger H. Marijnissen, *Bruegel le Vieux* (Brussels: Arcade, 1969); Ilja M. Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism in the Sixteenth Century* (Maarssen: Gary Schwartz, 1977), pp. 123-41.

[56] Walter S. Gibson, 'Artists and *Rederijkers* in the Age of Bruegel', *The Art Bulletin* 63 (1981), 426-46; Bart A. M. Ramakers, 'Bruegel en de rederijkers. Schilderkunst en literatuur in de zestiende eeuw', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 47 (1996), 81-105.

[57] An exception is Bruegel's representation of *Temperantia* in the series of *The Virtues* where the allegorical figure is standing on a small stage. See: Sellink, *Bruegel*, p. 144, cat. 86.

Ortelius' *Theatrum orbis terrarium* (1570).[58] Walter Gibson already remarked the relation between Bruegel's painting and the *theatrum mundi*.[59] The attitudes of this philosophical concept are pervasively present in the general composition and more specific in the urban stage setting and the compendium-like character of the Bruegel's scene. The figures and figure groups then function as actors and spectators of this *theatrum*. The peculiar parallels between the setting and contemporary urban festivity staging emphasize the intentional meaning of the artist. Although the painting is often interpreted as a triumph of Virtue (on the right side) over worldly-pleasures and self-indulgence (on the left), this interpretation is not satisfying.[60] The picture contains an important humoristic aspect that is often neglected.[61] Moreover, the conformities with Sebastiano Serlio's setting for a comedy play are an additional indication in favour of a more comic interpretation. Furthermore, this correspondence again stresses the importance of the humoristic element in Bruegel's oeuvre and the artist's highly developed pictorial wit. Bruegel's city scene appears like a vast stage in which human life is rendered as an absurd spectacle. In this way, the artist incites the viewer to choose the path of moderation which literally lies between the excessive conducts of the parties represented.

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[58] Linda G. Christian, *Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea* (New York: Garland, 1987); Ann Blair, *Theatre of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 153-79; René Van Stipriaan, 'Het *theatrum mundi* als ludiek labyrint. De vele gedaanten van het rollenspel in de zeventiende eeuw', *De zeventiende eeuw* 15 (1999), 12-23 (pp. 13-14).

[59] Gibson, *Bruegel*, pp. 77-78.

[60] Sellink, *Pieter Bruegel*, 131. For an overview, see: Marijnissen and others,, *Bruegel*, pp. 146-48.

[61] This humoristic aspect applies to a large part of Bruegel's work. See: Walter S. Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2006). On the importance of humor and laughter in carnival representations, see: Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World.*