

Copyright

by

Elise Marie Nacca

2006

Intellectualizing the Everyday:  
The Genre Paintings of Adriaen Brouwer

by

Elise Nacca, B.A.

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of the University of Texas at Austin  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Texas at Austin

December 2006

Intellectualizing the Everyday:  
The Genre Paintings of Adriaen Brouwer

APPROVED BY SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

---

---

Intellectualizing the Everyday:

The Genre Paintings of Adriaen Brouwer.

by

Elise Marie Nacca, M.A.

University of Texas at Austin, 2006

SUPERVISOR: Jeffrey Chipps Smith

Flemish painter Adriaen Brouwer (1605/06-1638) spent the most productive years (1626-1627) of his short career working in Haarlem as a member of the city's most popular *Rederijderskamer* (chamber of rhetoric), *De Wijngaartrancken* (the vine tendrils). Brouwer dwells in his genre scenes on the peculiarities of Dutch culture – its character, institutions, ideas and customs. It is in Brouwer's genre scenes, prized by both Rubens and Rembrandt, that we may note remarkable influences of Holland's new artistic self-awareness. These ideas were propelled by the activities of the *Rederijders*. This paper focuses on the intellectual environment of Holland from the year ca.1600 to ca.1630 covering the period surrounding the publication of Karel van Mander's treatise on painting to the explosion of genre painting occurring in the first half of the seventeenth-century. It is my contention that Brouwer's artistic choices are symptomatic of his participation in intellectual milieus. A focused discussion of the writings, traditions and activities of the *Rederijders* (and other intellectual sources) reveals consistencies with the prevalent trends in genre painting produced contemporaneously.

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Biography of Adriaen Brouwer.....	2
<b>CHAPTER ONE: ART AND NETHERLANDISH NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS</b>	<b>6</b>
The Myth of the Batavi .....	7
Haarlem, Karel van Mander, and the Creation of a Dutch Artistic Identity .	10
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE REDERIJKERS IN HAARLEM</b>	<b>23</b>
History and Practices of the Rederijkers.....	23
Bruegel, Hals, and Steen: from Word to Canvas .....	28
<b>CHAPTER THREE: BROUWER AND THE REDERIJKERS: CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>42</b>
Peasant Scenes .....	42
Referencing the Classical.....	46
Expression and Gesture.....	53
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>ILLUSTRATIONS</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>VITA</b>	<b>91</b>

## INTRODUCTION

In 1581 the Dutch declared their independence from Spain. The years following are considered Holland's "Golden Age" of art, characterized in large part by the celebration of genre paintings. These depictions of the everyday were immensely popular throughout the Netherlands, a phenomenon often explained by their low price or by their emphasis on the familiar. When discussing these works, however, one must not forget Holland's burgeoning intellectual movement, the strongest forces of which resided in the city of Haarlem. The members of its *rederijkerskamer* (rhetorician's chamber) included intellectuals from backgrounds such as philosophy, politics, theology, literature, and the visual arts. De Wijngaardtrancken's ('the vine tendrils') artist members and affiliates such as Karel van Mander, Hendrick Goltzius, Frans Hals, and Jan Steen are among the most important figures for the development of Dutch art during this period.

It is in Adriaen Brouwer's genre scenes, prized by both Rubens and Rembrandt, that we may note remarkable influences of Holland's new artistic self-awareness. These ideas were propelled by the activities of the *rederijkers*. In focusing on the intellectual environment of Holland from the year ca.1600 to ca.1630, covering the period surrounding the publication of Van Mander's treatise on painting to the explosion of genre painting occurring in the first half of the seventeenth-century, we may better understand the often ignored intellectual basis for the creation of these scenes.

## BIOGRAPHY OF ADRIAEN BROUWER

Art historians have little reliable knowledge of Adriaen Brouwer's life. His birth year is an estimate—between the years of 1605-1608—and his death is thought to have occurred in January 1638. Brouwer was born in Oudenaerde, Flanders, but by the age of twenty his presence is recorded in Amsterdam. His father was a textile designer, making patterns for expensive and elaborate tapestries.<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth century artist biographer, Arnold Houbraken attempts to place Brouwer's birthplace in Haarlem, citing documentation from Nicolas Six;<sup>2</sup> however, it is best to attribute this assertion to a constant desire of art historians to connect this artist to Holland, rather than to his southern birthplace. Indeed, many of the artist's contemporaries and biographers attached "painter from Haarlem" to Brouwer's name, most likely due to the artist's prominent activities in said city.

During the first decades of the seventeenth century, there was an influx of Flemish immigrants to Haarlem. A census from 1622 shows the population to have swelled to 40,000; fifty years before it was less than half that figure.<sup>3</sup> This migration can be attributed to religious and economic conditions, but it perhaps had its own artistic repercussions. Compared to their northern cousins, the Flemings, especially those coming from Antwerp, were a more cosmopolitan group. In intellectual and cultural matters, the Flemish were more closely tied to the continent. Artistically, Flemish immigrants may have brought with them the lively influence of Pieter Bruegel and other

---

<sup>1</sup> Knuttel, Gerard. *Adriaen Brouwer: the Master and his Works*. (The Hague: LJC Boucher, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Renger, Konrad. *Adriaen Brouwer und das niederlandische Bauerngenre: 1600-1660*. (Munich: Hermer Verlag, 1986), 13.

painters of peasant genre scenes. Among the most important Flemish artist immigrants was Karel van Mander, an individual whose influence on Netherlandish art was considerable. Van Mander and the artist community he helped to found established Haarlem as a place of artistic learning, thereby attracting artists to the city for decades to come. It is true that Brouwer's most prominent artistic and intellectual activities are associated with his stay in Haarlem; little is known of his life outside of the bustling cultural epicenter.

Because of the painter's perceived raucous and compelling personality, accounts of Brouwer are colored by his personal exploits. Thus, Brouwer's work is often seen as a reflection of his character and life experiences. Brouwer's legacy is, unfortunately, largely owed to the exaggerated and romanticized biography of Houbraken. The writer describes Brouwer as a rowdy, loose-living rake who himself frequented the taverns of the peasantry so often depicted in his works. Gerard Knuttel, in his 1962 work on the artist, places Brouwer in a more sophisticated environ. When we consider the artist's involvement with local intellectual milieus during the most prolific period of his career (1626-1637), we may draw interesting parallels between the Brouwer's ideas and his paintings. Citing the painter's membership to De Wijngaardtrancken, one of Haarlem's rederijderskamers, Knuttel maintains that Brouwer's participation in this intellectual organization signals that the artist was a critical and sensitive outsider looking into the world of the lower classes, much like his Flemish predecessor, Pieter Bruegel.

---

<sup>3</sup> Descargues, Pierre. *Frans Hals: Biographical and Critical Study*. Translated by James Emmons. (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1968), 6.

Brouwer is documented as having been a *beminnaer* (member or friend) of De Wijngaardtrancken from 1626 to the following year.<sup>4</sup> We may assume that Brouwer's cognizance of intellectual and cultural matters was a symptom of his involvement with the Haarlem rederijderskamer, De Wijngaardtrancken, whose motto was, "In Liefde Boven Al" ('love above all'). Brouwer's involvement with this group is well documented; he was known for his poetry and had at least one tragedy, written by fellow Haarlem rederijker Pieter Noostman, dedicated to "Den Constrijken en Wijtberoemden Jongman Adrieaen Brouwer, Schilder van Haarlem." When Brouwer returned to Antwerp in 1631/1632, he joined the rederijderskamer there, called *Violieren* (violets).<sup>5</sup>

Further connecting Brouwer to Haarlem, Houbraken claims that the artist studied under that city's preeminent painter, Frans Hals. There is no documentation that states this relationship explicitly. It is, however, known that these two artists were acquainted for at the same time they were both members of De Wijngaardtrancken. Slive also places Brouwer under Hals's tutelage, but under equally uncertain terms.<sup>6</sup> It is widely held by art historians that the reasons for asserting Brouwer as Hals's apprentice go no further than stylistic comparisons.

Even during his lifetime, Brouwer's paintings were sought after by some of the most prominent painters of the Netherlands. Rubens owned seventeen paintings by Brouwer, even going so far as to request documents attesting to the authenticity of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Slive, Seymour. *Fran Hals*. Volume 1. (London: Phaidon, 1970-1974), 11.

works, a request owing to the rampant copying of Brouwer's compositions.<sup>7</sup> Rembrandt, only a year or so younger than Brouwer, is recorded in his inventory of 1656 as having owned eight of Brouwer's paintings and an album of his drawings.

Wilhelm von Bode, in his 1924 study on Brouwer, divides the artist's career into three periods on the basis of stylistic analysis,<sup>8</sup> a typical technique used by art historians working after Heinrich Wölfflin. Much of Brouwer's oeuvre is impossible to date or, in some cases, to even confidently attribute to the artist. Nevertheless, Von Bode's periods are as follows: early work in Haarlem, later work in Haarlem and Antwerp, later work in Antwerp. Knuttel argues for more stringent distinctions to be made between those works produced in Haarlem and those in Antwerp. It is in Haarlem that Brouwer would have been exposed to a rapidly evolving artistic environment. Haarlem was home to the artists Karel van Mander, Hendrick Goltzius and Cornelius Cornelisz van Haarlem, individuals whose approach to painting was literary and appealing to upper class intellectuals. The work of these artists involves itself in the cultural dialog of the day, a tradition which would continue in Haarlem and spread throughout the Netherlands as Dutch and Flemish artists became aware of a formation of a national identity. Therefore, before addressing Brouwer, it is necessary to discuss the artistic and intellectual milieu in which he worked. Although by the time of Brouwer's arrival in Haarlem only Van Haarlem was living (Goltzius died in 1617), the city's culture was stirred by the writings, teachings and works of the artistic community.

---

<sup>7</sup> Branden, F. J. Van den. "Adriaen Brouwer en Joos van Craesbeeck." *Nederlandsche Kunstbode* 3 (December 1881), 64.

<sup>8</sup> Bode, Wilhelm von. *Adriaen Brouwer: sein Leben und sein Werke*. (Berlin: Euphorion Verlag, 1924), 35.

## **CHAPTER ONE: ART AND NETHERLANDISH NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

During the years of Holland's battle for independence from Spain, a strong emphasis on a national identity emerged among the Dutch people. After the iconoclastic riots of 1566 and the beginning of the Revolt in Holland in 1572, the Dutch rebels struggled to legitimize their revolt against Philip II, their lawful ruler. Crucial political documents, like the Union of Utrecht (1579) and the Act of Abjuration (1581), all addressed this problem. Cornelis Aurelius's (ca. 1460-1531) works on the Batavians, meanwhile, were reprinted in the 1580s, while the official historian of the States of Holland, Hadrianus Junius, presented newly-found primary sources in order to confirm the ancient freedoms of the province.

As Europe's economic leader, Holland began to evaluate its place in the continent's cultural arena. To the Italians, the Dutch were coarse and vulgar. The term, *Aurus Batava* ('Batavian Ear') had existed since ancient Roman times and described one who was crude or cultureless. Artistically, the Netherlands were perceived as inferior to the Italians, as evidenced by Michelangelo's famous critique of his northern contemporaries:

Flemish painting...will...please the devout better than any painting of Italy. It will appeal to women, especially to the very old and the very young, and also to monks and nuns and certain noblemen who have no sense of true harmony. In Flanders they paint with a view to the external exactness or such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill, as for example saints and prophets. They paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many figures on that. And all this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skilful choice or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigor. It is practically only the work

done in Italy which we can call true painting, and that is why we call good painting Italian.<sup>9</sup>

## THE MYTH OF THE BATAVI

In order to counter claims against their culture, Dutch intellectuals embarked upon a unique quest for the definition of their collective identity. Asserting that their culture had ties to the ancients, Dutch thinkers began to cleverly subvert the ancient model in their formulation of a cultural identity. Citing the writings of Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 56 – 120 A.D.), who, in his *Germania* of circa 98 A.D., lavishly praised the Batavians for their courage and their love of freedom, the Dutch, led by the writings of Aurelius, sought their origins in this ancient tribe of simple, barbaric people. This text was well-known to Netherlanders from the Middle Ages onwards and was manipulated in various ways to nationalistic ends.

Tacitus identifies the Batavians as a tribe from around the river Rhine. He identifies them as “weapons and armor, only to be used in war”. Led by Claudius Civilis, the Batavians revolted against their Roman allies in 70 A.D. In a passage that must have sparked recognition in the hearts of the Dutch people, so long oppressed by foreign rule, Tacitus explains the revolt:

“Civilis invited the [local] nobles and the most enterprising commoners to a sacred grove, ostensibly for a banquet. When he saw that darkness and merriment had inflamed their hearts, he addressed them. Starting with a reference to the glory and renown of their nation, he went on to catalogue the wrongs, the depredations and all the other woes of slavery. The alliance [with Rome], he said, was no longer observed on the old terms: they were treated as chattels. How long would they have to wait for the arrival of the governor, who, despite his burdensome and overbearing suite, did exercise real control? The Batavians were

---

<sup>9</sup> De Hollanda, Francisco. *Four Dialogues on Painting*. Translated by Aubrey F. G. Bell. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 15-16.

at the mercy of prefects and centurions who, when glutted with spoil and blood, were replaced by others looking for fresh pockets to pick and new labels for plunder. They were faced with a levy which parted children from parents and brothers from brothers, apparently for ever. The Roman state had never been in such low water. The permanent legionary camps contained nothing but loot and old men past service. They had only to lift up their eyes. They should have no fear of the legions: these were merely names without substance. The Batavians, on the other hand, could rely on a strong body of infantry and cavalry, kinship with the Germans and identity of purpose with the Gallic provinces.”<sup>10</sup>

For Dutch intellectuals, including historians, poets, playwrights and artists, a text such as this fueled the battle not only for political independence, but for cultural recognition. Hence the antiquarian Petrus Scriverius composed a history of the Batavians in 1609, *Batavica illustrata*, the poet Theodore Rodenburgh wrote two plays on the theme, *De trouwen Batavier* (1609) and *Bataviese vrijagie-spel* (1616), while his colleague Jan Sywertsen Kolm published his *Battaefsche vrienden-spieghel* in 1615. The historian Johannes Gijsius, in 1616, wrote *Oorsprong en voortgang der Neder-landscher beroerten en ellendigheden*, based on the Batavian myth, and, in addition, Tacitus’ translated works were reprinted three times between 1612 and 1616. The most important and best known literary applications of the myth written were by Hugo Grotius and P.C. Hooft, both members of rederijkerskamers in Holland during the first half of the seventeenth century.

In 1612 Otho Vaenius (Otto van Veen) published an illustrated version of Tacitus’s narrative of the revolt of Civilis in both Latin and Dutch. Mark Morford identifies this work as one in equipoise between the patriotic demands of the rebel

---

<sup>10</sup> Tacitus, Cornelius. *Agricola, Germania*. Translated by William Peterson and Maurice Hutton in *Tacitus in Five Volumes*. Volume 1. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970-1981), 290.

Netherlanders and the desires of reconciliation of the Hapsburg monarchy.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the Dutch version contained many additions and omissions, and provides commentary on Tacitus's text. The most notable inconsistencies are Vaenius's inclusion of towns and rivers in Holland and Flanders contemporary to the date of publication. Through the identification of specific locations and behaviors, Vaenius also fixes the Dutch as the rightful descendents of the Batavi, distinguishing them from the Germans and Gauls. These additions would no doubt secure within the minds of Vaenius's readers the authenticity of this ancient history. Vaenius had close ties to Antwerp artists. He was Rubens's teacher from 1596-1600, and was well-versed in the use of emblem and allegory. The publication of a text such as his prompts inquiry into the relationship between artists and intellectuals and nationalistic concerns of the day.

The rediscovery of this ancient text in the early sixteenth century inspired humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536) to reinterpret the previously disparaging term, Batavian Ear. According to Roman poet, Martial, it designated one who was rustic, untutored and boorish. Erasmus's interpretation conjures a far nobler character:

Which people has not been uncultured at one time? And when was the Roman people more praiseworthy than when they knew no arts except farming and fighting? If anyone argues that the criticisms leveled at the Batavi long ago still hold true today, what better tribute could be paid to my dear Holland, than to have it said that she recoils from Martial's pleasantries, which he himself calls vile? If only all Christians had 'Dutch ears', so that they would not take in the pestilential jests of that poet, or at least not be infected by them, if understood. If you call that rusticity, we freely admit the impeachment, in company with the virtuous Spartans, the primitive Sabines, the noble Catos. If you look at the manners of everyday life, there is no race more open to humanity and kindness, or less given to wildness or ferocious behavior. It is a straightforward nature, without treachery

---

<sup>11</sup> Morford, Mark. "Lipsius, Vaenius, and the Rebellion of Civilis." In *Recreating Ancient History: Episodes from the Greek and Roman Past in the Arts and Literatures of the Early Modern Period*, edited by Karl Enenkel, et al. (Boston: Brill, 2001), 57-74.

or deceit, and not prone to any serious vices, except that it is a little given to pleasure, especially to feasting. They say that there is no other country which holds so many towns in a small space, not large towns it is true, but incredibly civilized. As for domestic furniture, Holland is unsurpassed in neatness and elegance—or so say the merchants who travel over most of the globe. In no country are there more people who have a tincture of learning than in Holland. If there are a few deeply learned scholars, especially in the classics, this may be due to the luxury of life there, or it may be that they think more of moral excellence than of excellence in scholarship.<sup>12</sup>

### **HAARLEM, KAREL VAN MANDER, AND THE CREATION OF A DUTCH ARTISTIC IDENTITY**

Dutch art, and Netherlandish art in general, cannot be divided into regional categories as readily as can the art of Italy. Although every Dutch city had its own political and economic identity, efficient and well-organized travel allowed citizens to communicate freely between cities. This characteristic of Holland allowed artists to study with multiple teachers, and to exchange ideas within several different milieus, thus discouraging the development of deeply segregated local styles. Haarlem was no exception. As early as 1583 Haarlem was considered a place of intellectual learning. Having withstood the 1572-73 Spanish siege upon the city, Haarlem attracted artists and intellectuals from all over Europe, including Rene Descartes, Peter Paul Rubens, Spranger, and Liss.<sup>13</sup> A diversity of ideas developed, thus drawing attention from the seventeenth century's most important artists who visited or lived in the city, including, Buytewech, Van Goyen, Rembrandt and Steen.<sup>14</sup>

The artistic community of Haarlem is fundamental to the developments in art of seventeenth century Netherlandish art. The writings of artists in this city acted as a

---

<sup>12</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam. *Adages*. Translated with discussion by Margaret Mann Phillips. (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), 209-211.

<sup>13</sup> Hofrichter, Frima Fox. *Haarlem: The Seventeenth Century*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1983), 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

catalyst for change in the artistic community, along with their establishment of the first Netherlandish art academy. Although next to nothing is known about this so-called academy, its existence signals a growing interest in the establishment of a history of Northern art; one that could contend with the monumental artistic character of the ancients or the Italians.

Such a project was undertaken by Van Mander whose *Schilder-Boeck* of 1604 acted as the “first fully argued theory of northern European theory and practice of art”.<sup>15</sup> Van Mander’s book was immensely popular, the first edition sold out almost immediately. It is divided into four Books. The first, *Foundation of the Noble and Free Art of Painting*, is a handbook for the artist, which references, in part, the writings of Alberti. Books 2-4 are “Lives”, biographies of the ancient, Italian and Northern masters (books 2, 3 and 4, respectively) based upon the models of Pliny and Vasari. Walter Melion, in his work, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon*, argues that in Books 1-4 of Van Mander’s treatise, the writer incorporates rather than imitates the models of Pliny and Vasari in the formulation of a comparative history of the visual arts.<sup>16</sup> In this way, Van Mander uses these established models of excellence as a means to enhance the image of northern artists. For example, Goltzius is compared to Michelangelo, who is compared to Apollodorus, all for their achievements in *teyckenconst* (a term equivalent to Vasari’s *disegno*, what Melion summarizes as, “conceptual vigor and assured draftsmanship”).<sup>17</sup> Van Mander thus creates a work that encourages cross-reference between the art of the ancients, of the Italians, and of the northerners. These comparisons, however, are not a means of assimilation into an established canon, but rather a formulation of a new one. For as Van Mander praises northern artists alongside Italian ones, he also creates a

---

<sup>15</sup> Melion, Walter. *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 23.

language of difference. Whereas the Italians excel in figures, the no less skilled Dutch and Flemish painters are better versed in the depiction of landscapes, flowers and animals. Van Mander's method is well-suited to the ethos of this era: it is a clever tactic to improve the image of northern artists through comparison. Van Mander's yoking of three regional histories of art (ancient Greek and Roman, Italian, and northern) in "Lives" communicates to the reader the divergent ways in which the Italians and the Netherlandish masters have applied ancient pictorial skill.<sup>18</sup>

In Chapter 1 of *Foundation of the Noble and Free Art of Painting*, Van Mander addresses the problem in wedding oneself too wholeheartedly to the Italian model. He advises young painters not to journey to Italy. The Italians presume that northerners are good at landscapes, and inferior in the depiction of figures. Van Mander hopes that northern artists "can steal away from them in their area, too...so that they may no longer say in their speech, that Flemish painters can make no figures."<sup>19</sup> The Italians expect the northerners to work well in large format fresco, a method foreign to the smaller oil panels of the North. Van<sup>20</sup> Mander neither, as Melion notes, "prescribes the assimilation of Italian paradigms nor apologizes for the Flemish gift for landscape." He elects, rather, to urge "the cultural difference of Italy."<sup>21</sup>

It is with this sentiment that Van Mander constructs the biography of Jan van Eyck in his "Lives". Van Eyck, as the inventor of oil pigments, is considered by Van Mander to be the father of northern art. As Melion discusses, Van Eyck's discovery of this new medium promoted "a new kind of virtuosity—the production of astonishingly finished and detailed panels, whose execution demands *vlijt*, 'diligence,' *arbeydt*, 'labor,'

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Mander, Karel van. *Foundation of the Noble and Free Art of Painting*, translated and edited by E. Honig. Yale University, New Haven, 1985. Unpublished duplication.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Melion, 27-28.

and *tijdt*, ‘time.’”<sup>22</sup> Painters could now create highly detailed and, therefore, highly naturalistic panels. In addition, oil paint liberated the artist from “hatched” (*ghetrocken*) brushwork, thereby separating it fundamentally from Italian practices. Melion interprets Van Mander’s argument as a means to establish Jan’s invention as “an act of cultural self-determination, which requires that northern art, coterminous with the trajectory of Italian art until this time, engender its own history.”<sup>23</sup> Van Mander lists alongside the invention of oil paint, the inventions of gun powder and moveable type, further asserting that the history of art—alongside of war and learning—is reborn through the genius of northern minds. While the art of painting originated in Italy, the tradition was unalterably disrupted by the invention of a northern artist. Van Eyck is further compared to Erasmus, whose own works distracted the eyes of the intellectual world from Italy towards the North.

Melion aptly describes Book 4 of Van Mander’s work as an attempt to secure the Netherlanders, not the Italians, as the legitimate heir to ancient achievements in depicting descriptive subjects—*verscheydenheden*, such as animals, kitchens, flowers, and landscapes.<sup>24</sup> Van Mander adapted his list of ancient Greek and Roman artists skilled in *verscheydenheden* from Book 3 of Alberti’s *De Pictura*. Alberti mentions these artists’ skill in rendering non-figural elements, but asserts that their excellence in these specializations was part of their mastery of all aspects of *istoria*. Alberti praises these ancient artists above all for their mastery of figural painting. When Van Mander makes mention of the same ancient artists, he emphasizes their ability to paint inanimate objects after life. In the preface to his ancient “Lives”, Van Mander “invites the painter to

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 25.

deceive the eyes by imitating the mirroring properties of nature.”<sup>25</sup> In this way, Jan van Eyck and those following the tradition which he begat are the logical successors to the ancient mode of painting, more so than the Italians.

Van Eyck, for example, is compared to Protogenes, Apelles, Pausias, and Nicophanes. These ancient masters painted meticulously after life, so that their works were mistaken for nature. The same is said in the “Life” of Vredeman de Vries who is compared to Parrhasius, the ancient master who famously fooled Zeuxis with his painted curtain. De Vries’s panels offer naturalistic vistas in which the eye may immerse itself, extending “optical corridors that refuse at first to disclose their identities as representations.”<sup>26</sup> The same cannot and is not said of Italian masters, whose intentions in painting are separated from those of the northern masters.

When the traditions of the ancients, the Italians and the northerners ally themselves, Van Mander is quick to bolster the image of the northern masters with comparisons with the ancients. Michelangelo is compared by Van Mander to Apelles for his aptitude in *teyckenconst* (*disegno*). Like Michelangelo, Goltzius is a masterful draftsman. In his “Life” of Goltzius, Van Mander further compares the northern master to ancient master, Apelles by asserting Goltzius’s resourcefulness within the medium, his ability to draw from both memory and after life, and his virtuosity in restrictive mediums; all traits for which Apelles is championed.<sup>27</sup>

The format of Van Mander’s discussion of northern artists reveals his intention to differentiate, rather than assimilate, northern artists from Italian ones. As Melion astutely notes, Van Mander’s format for the northern “Lives” is similar to that of the writings of contemporary Dutch scholars. Melion remarks upon the “fastidious citation of sources,

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 35.

often in marginal notes; the disclosure of preliminary studies on which historical assertions were based; the examination of an expanded range of documentary materials...; the preference for eyewitness accounts and verifiable traditions; and the exercise of novel research skills, such as chronology and paleography.”<sup>28</sup> Dutch scholars, beginning with Franciscus Dousa (Frans van der Does), the author of *Annales*, a history of the Netherlands, were increasingly concerned with documentary evidence and systematic research. Junius’s *Batavia* of 1588 and Scriverius’s *Oudt Batavien* of 1606 are both examples of a new method in scholarship, one which relies more heavily on primary sources than ever before. In asserting his work to be as fact-based as possible, Van Mander dismisses the possibility for his readers to interpret his thoughts as sentimental or biased.

The major achievement of Italian masters was within the concept of *istoria*, a topic completely ignored in Van Mander’s “Lives” of northern artists. Stressing that northern artists exercised their descriptive skills in non-narrative elements, Van Mander succeeds in creating a separate, but not inferior canon for northern artists. In effect, he is challenging the assumed supremacy of Italian artists through juxtapositions. Van Mander is asserting a separate but no less honorable set of concerns for the northern artist. This set of concerns is dictated by simple issues of culture and geography. In chapter 12 of *Foundation*, Van Mander addresses Michelangelo’s claim that small oil panels, the standard for the North, are suited to the feminine tastes, whereas large frescos, the Italian format, are a far nobler and grandiose undertaking, ingenious and manly. Due to the weather and lack of lime deposits, fresco is physically incompatible to northern

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 18.

climates.<sup>29</sup> Michelangelo's insult, therefore, loses credence, because it is based upon ignorance and chauvinism, not fact.

Within the northern "Lives", Van Mander includes discussion on several Netherlandish painters who favor the Italian model over the artistic concerns of their homeland. The first Netherlandish painter credited with drawing attention to Italian techniques is Jan Gossaert (known as Mabuse). Although Van Mander finds praise with Mabuse's highly finished style of painting, the author takes issue with Mabuse's reliance on Italian practice. Mabuse's biography is set up like a contradiction. Although he possesses the natural talent to execute a panel with a fine hand (*oeffeningh*), his ideas about images (*gheest*), dependent upon Italian concepts, disrupts his abilities. What is inherently northern about him is being compromised by the contamination of foreign ideals.

Svetlana Alpers, in her indispensable study of seventeenth century Dutch art, *The Art of Describing*, discusses the extent to which our understanding of the history of art is determined by our understanding of Italian art, specifically our desire to reference the Albertian definition of the picture. By upholding the Italian notions of picture-making as our model, we understand a painting as a narrative existing within a framed surface, what Alpers calls a "substitute world" that we may gaze into.<sup>30</sup> Dutch art of the seventeenth century does not adhere to this model. What has been established since the Renaissance is the implication of Italian superiority and northern inferiority. In Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, Alpers maintains, we see among artists "the strain of living in a native pictorial tradition while admiring, or being told that they should admire, foreign

---

<sup>29</sup> Honig, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Alpers, Svetlana. *The Art of Describing*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xix.

ideals.”<sup>31</sup> Van Mander understood this dilemma first hand, as is explained in his biography of Mabuse. What is championed by Van Mander is excellence in descriptive subjects; he is championing a way of art making that is primarily non-narrative, what Alpers would call, an art of describing. In recounting Huygens’s praise of Dutch naturalism, Alpers remarks that “it is not human events or narrations, but the representation of the movement of nature herself that delights. It is not order, but the momentary, unfixed aspects of nature’s passing show.”<sup>32</sup>

Alpers remarks upon the tendency of northern artists to lay claim to nature, rather than to art, as the source of their artistic accomplishment.<sup>33</sup> Alpers avoids the tendency to read seventeenth century Dutch paintings as being embedded with hidden moral meanings, but she does not adhere to the view that they acted as mere windows into reality. Dutch images were, she asserts, a means of self-representation and self-consciousness, a way to document or represent social behavior and cultural concerns.<sup>34</sup> It can be imagined that Van Mander would have sympathized with this sentiment. He was constantly evaluating the northern concept of selfhood as expressed through visual means.

Van Mander praises Pieter Bruegel in his biography of the artist for journeying to Italy, but executing no figures, only landscapes. It with a similar spirit that we may view the work of the Bamboccianti. Alpers touches briefly upon this group of Dutch artists working in Rome during the seventeenth century called alternately the Bamboccianti and

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, xxii-xxiii.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, xxiii.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, xxvii.

the *Bentvueghels* (loosely, ‘birds of a feather’). This group was known for their rowdy, carnivalesque celebrations and bacchanalian initiation ceremonies that mocked both antiquity and the Church. The graffiti they left, most memorably on the tomb of Emperor Constantine’s daughter, still exists today. Alpers calls their witty and comical rebellion against the society in which they found themselves a reflection upon their sense of difference, a brief triumphing over their sense of inferiority. David Levine, in his work on the Bamboccianti, would concur. Levine takes issue with the widely held notion that many Dutch genre paintings are realist depictions of everyday life. If we are to understand the work of the Bentvueghels, contemporaneous to the work of Brouwer, in this light, we can draw interesting parallels between some of the more important messages within the paintings of these Dutch artists working in Rome, and those of Brouwer.

What scholars today call the Bamboccianti was a group led by artist Pieter van Laer (1599-1642?), known as ‘Il Bamboccio’ (‘clumsy doll or puppet’ for his ungainly proportions), an artist working in Rome from 1625/6 to 1638. Settling in the parish of Santa Maria del Popolo, an area that attracted Northern artists working in the city, Van Laer joined up with the *Schildersbent* (band of painters) a fraternal organization whose members called themselves the Bentvueghels. It was a kind of society, but it had no statutes, no fixed program, and no particular leadership. Van Laer and his followers typically painted small figures in scenes of everyday life within Rome or its countryside. Travelers, brigand assaults, and stops at inns along with scenes of typical Roman sites such as the Calcare or the Acqua Acetosa all make an appearance in the works of this

group. One immediately recognizes types in these scenes: beggars, drunkards and other familiar members from Rome's underclass.

The first scholars to study the works of the Bamboccianti usually referred to the realism of the works. They were described by contemporaries as true portraits of Roman popular life. Giovanni Passeri wrote of them that they "seemed an open window through which one was able to see what went on without deviation or alteration."<sup>35</sup> It is with this tone that Brouwer scholars often discuss the artist's work. Houbraken, Knuttel, and Renger all allude to Brouwer's faithful depictions of the seedy underclasses. While this is a facet of Brouwer's paintings, there are further depths of understanding to delve into when discussing his work, just as Levine has proved to be the case with the work of Van Laer. It seems natural that paintings such as these should come about in the aftermath of Caravaggio's violent artistic revolution.

But just as there is more than meets the eye in Caravaggio's work, so too is the case with the Bamboccianti.<sup>36</sup> Van Laer's *Acqua Acetosa* of 1636 (figure 1), which depicts a spring outside of Rome believed to have medicinal value, offers insights into the painter's clever use of juxtapositions. Van Laer depicts people drinking the water and then purging and relieving themselves in a most indecorous manner. The surrounding landscape is rich and detailed; a majestic sky turns to twilight. This is hardly the setting for an outdoor vomitorium, but this is precisely the method Van Laer uses to make his point. With this delicate balance of contrasts the viewer is moved to laughter. A Roman

---

<sup>35</sup> Hess, Jacob. *Die Künstlerbiographien von Giovanni Battista Passeri*. (Leipzig: H. Keller, 1934).

<sup>36</sup> For more discussion on symbolism in Bamboccianti works, refer to the writings of David A. Levine. We will be discussing this scholar in brief throughout the paper, though he should be credited as a pioneer in the unraveling of some these paintings' complex symbolism.

viewer would surely recognize the place and its significance as an ancient site of magical powers. To see people literally defecating on this revered location would not only serve a comedic purpose, but also as a reminder of the fallibility of the sites and the beliefs of centuries and cultures past. It seems as though the very bedrock of Roman civilization is being desecrated.<sup>37</sup> As we shall see in Brouwer's works, this witty mocking of Classical tradition becomes part of a Dutch artistic identity.

Levine cites sources contemporaneous to Van Laer's lifetime that compare the painter to ancient artists. Peiraikos, a Greek artist discussed in Pliny, painted ignoble themes, and Pauson, discussed by Aristotle, represented men less noble than they are.<sup>38</sup> During the seventeenth century these artists were regarded as "practitioners of a form of contrived low painting that was conceived in conscious opposition to conventional ennobling art."<sup>39</sup> Additionally, Passeri compared the work being done by the Bent to *poesia bernesca*, a form of witty verse that challenged literary convention.<sup>40</sup> The philosophy of Socrates can also be considered a precursor to the irony existing within the work of the Bamboccianti. The philosopher taught that often the most ignoble things may be appropriate vessels for the most sublime truths.<sup>41</sup>

Levine's proposal that Van Laer and his followers referenced specific motifs from classical antiquity and Grand Manner painting will prove important for understanding the

---

<sup>37</sup> Similar discussion is presented in Levine, David. "The Roman Limekilns of the Bamboccianti." *Art Bulletin* 70, no.4 (1988), 569-589.

<sup>38</sup> Discussion on Pliny and Peiraikos can be found in Rosa, Salvator. *Satire*, edited by Danilo Romei and Jacopo Manna. (Milan: Edizione Integrale, 1995), 70. Discussion on Aristotle and Pauson can be found in Bellori, Giovanni Pietro. *Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, edited by Eveline Borea and Giovanni Previtali. (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 32.

<sup>39</sup> Levine.

<sup>40</sup> Hess.

<sup>41</sup> Levine.

work of Brouwer. In Van Laer's *Washerwoman and Shepherd in a Grotto* (1634-1638, figure 2) the seated figure in the foreground is modeled after the bronze *Spinario*, located in Rome. Van Laer's *Brigands Attacking a Traveler* (1628-1632, figure 3) also borrows from antiquity. The figure restraining the rearing horse is taken from the Horsetamer group on Quirinal hill (figure 4). The central figure holding the hair of the victim is taken from a motif found on Roman battle sarcophagi and also from paintings of the Italian Renaissance.<sup>42</sup> Levine posits that Van Laer's purpose in assimilating such grand motifs into an ignoble subject was to challenge the tradition of elevated art, a particular concern for any Dutch artist of this time. As we shall discuss below, Levine's theories may be well-adapted to analysis of Brouwer's works.

It is important to take into consideration the fact that Van Laer and Brouwer, although working contemporaneously, are producing art in very different environments. The Classical motifs used in Van Laer's works would have been more readily understood by the artist's Italian patrons, although many works were sent back to the Netherlands for buyers there. There would have existed a wholly different rhetorical dialog with the Antique in Italy than in the North. We must focus on the dialog of difference that Alpers and Levine remark upon in Van Laer's work. Van Laer, like Brouwer, was aware of the tension between northern and Italian artistic traditions. While Van Laer's patrons would have been more likely to have had direct experiences with Ancient art than would Brouwer's patrons, we can assume a good deal of knowledge of the Classical, especially within intellectual (humanistic) circles. This knowledge could be obtained through the prints circulated throughout cities. These prints were no doubt collected by the

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

intelligentsia, some of whom had the means to possess original artworks that would have been viewed by other intellectuals.

The activities of the Bamboccianti were not unique, as is shown by the above examples. It is interesting to note that Van Laer lived and worked in Haarlem prior to and after his stay in Rome. As previously noted, this city of volatile artistic and intellectual activity was home to at least one *rederijderskamer*. Many artists were members of these chambers and, as we shall see, the relationship of art to intellectual issues was a symbiotic one. An artist member such as Brouwer would have no doubt been influenced by the intellectual trends which played such a major role in *rederijder* activities.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE REDERIJKERS IN HAARLEM

The activities of the rederijkers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were at their artistic and intellectual peak. There exists no satisfactory account of the activities of the rederijkers. Most of the plays performed are still in manuscript form, and very little critical inquiry has been made on the subject. What scholarly attention does exist is in Dutch and primarily produced no later than the mid-twentieth century. The drama of the rederijkers is considered by scholars to be inferior to that of other countries producing theater contemporaneously. This prejudice can be attributed to our lack of understanding for the form and function of the works. During an era defined by the drama of Shakespeare and the performances of the *commedia dell'arte*, the rederijker play has little place.

### HISTORY AND PRACTICES OF THE REDERIJKERS

In the Low Countries nearly every town had one or more rederijkerskamer (chamber of rhetoric). The first Chambers were established in Flanders where they quickly gained popularity: by the sixteenth century Ghent had five chambers and Oudernarde had seven.<sup>43</sup> They began primarily for religious purposes during the fourteenth century, producing plays, poetry and music, but during the seventeenth century, the rederijker plays took a more secular turn concerning themselves with allegory, satire, and comedy. Each chamber formed like any other guild, by a group of

---

<sup>43</sup> Kernodle, George, R. *From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 112.

people with shared interests, purposes, and concerns. These chambers provided citizens who loved literature a forum for writing and reading their poetry, and for creating and producing plays and tableaux vivants. During both religious and secular festivals, triumphal processions of royalty, and public announcements, these chambers fulfilled a social function as the organizers of events and representatives of the city. They chose their names, their mottoes, and their symbols, usually in the form of *blazoenen*, which were banners, often designed by artist members, bearing the insignia for the particular chamber and involving symbolism and allegory.<sup>44</sup>

Each chamber had an elected “Keizer”, and princes, deacons, and elders. Most of the writing of the plays and poems for public occasions was the duty of the “Factor”; privately, all members submitted creative works. The principal player in farces and the source of amusement during public processions was the elected Fool. The hierarchy of the chamber can be considered only within a carnivalesque context, as we shall discuss below. In the chambers, as with many other theatrical organizations of the day, there was an emphasis on the subverting of established social order. The chamber was a close-knit group who wore the insignia of their chamber in public and marched together for a member’s funeral. They held large banquets to celebrate important events in the lives of the members.

The groups met regularly and all members were expected to contribute a piece of poetry, often in response to a work written previously by another member. Their poetry was not influenced by classical rhetoric, but rather vernacular traditions. In fact, the *rederijkers* were outspoken in their encouragement of using their native tongue for

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

serious works, rather than the traditional Latin. Marijke Spies writes that the rederijkers were influenced by what the French called, the ‘seconde rhetorique’, popularized by equivalent French chambers. This style concerned itself more with rhyme, stanzaic form, Biblical, mythological, and historical allusions, often vested with allegorical interpretations.<sup>45</sup> Although there was competition within each chamber, the rederijkers organized various religious and secular festivals and theatrical competitions called *landjuweels* (“jewel [or ‘prize’] of the land”) for inter-chamber contests. These gatherings were a highly public affair, taking place in town centers and consisting of music, poetry, orations, farces and theme plays. They were essentially contests with set rules and usually answering to a predetermined subject.

Each guild devised a triumphal entry procession and a procession to the church. These processions would consist of the display of their blazoen, and the performance of a “poetical point,” in which various objects and emblems were arranged, like a charade, to illustrate a moral or quotation.<sup>46</sup> These aspects were judged and prizes were awarded for the best blazoen, the best farcical entertainment, the best play, the best acting, the best poem, the best reader of a poem, the best orator, the best song, the best singer, and the fool who entertained best “without villainy.”<sup>47</sup>

In general, rederijker drama consisted of *facties*, *kluchten*, and *spelen van sinnen*. Facties were humorous plays with satirical or moralizing content, and kluchten were farces, often incorporating episodes from village life. The most popular play form was the *spelen van sinne* (literally, plays of the senses [or mind]) or “theme play” which

---

<sup>45</sup> Spies, Marijke. *Rhetoric, Rhetoricians and Poets*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 114.

served a didactic purpose.<sup>48</sup> It was an advantage that these morality plays of the street theatres brought religious doctrine to the populace more directly than a biblical play could. Based in some part upon the traditions of classical and Italian humanism, these were dramatic works whose characters were representatives of human conscience or emotions. The characters would be generic types named “youth”, “most men”, or “everyman” as is the case with the most popular and the most reprinted *spelen van sinne*, *Elckerlyc*. This allegorical play is the story of a young man who along his journeys meets many temptations and is eventually saved by a personification of Virtue.<sup>49</sup> The plays would illustrate a battle between good and evil, a typical Renaissance theme wherein man is depicted as a rational being who can be taught to choose between the opposing states. These plays always rhymed and incorporated double entendre, and hidden messages. As was often the case with these plays, characters were taken from Classical texts, a practice embraced and encouraged by such rederijkers as Van Mander.<sup>50</sup> Allegorical characters, such as Love, Desire for Knowledge, and Industry, were featured in these plays.

These *spelen van sinne* contained comic material, but always within a serious framework. During theatrical competitions they were often concerned with a single, predetermined question posed to all of the guilds present. A question like “What should a dying man put his faith in?” was posed and all the participating guilds would act out a play to defend their answer. During the seventeenth century questions were based upon

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Kernodle, 120.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Van Mander included a discussion of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in his *Het Schilderboek*.

important social and cultural issues of the day such as impending war, civil disorder, grain shortages, and rising prices. Some questions reflected the inchoate cultural identity of the Netherlanders. These concerns prompted such inquiries as, “Wherein are we [the Dutch, Flemish] to be extolled above the Romans?” or “Wherein consists real freedom?” (winning answer: That we are Dutch, the old Batavians/crowned and decked with flowers to this day.) These questions would be played out with two main objectives: to present a detailed and realistic picture to the eye; and to symbolize using type characters that illustrate a theme.<sup>51</sup>

The rederijker stage was most often found in a public square or large hall. An open platform backed by an architectural façade or painted background would be erected and a speaker, or group of speakers would stand in front of the picture. This format was a showpiece in itself and in fact, the rhetoricians often collaborated with the artist members or area painters’ guilds for the decoration of pageant wagons or stages on which they represented tableaux vivants or real dramatic performances.<sup>52</sup>

Although the plays and poetry written were being produced by educated individuals, they employed language that made them appealing to wider audiences that would have seen and heard these works during public festivals. The rederijkers considered themselves first and foremost to be entertainers, but also teachers and promoters of religious and civic virtues; thus their plays almost certainly contained a moral or didactic message.<sup>53</sup> Gary Waite, in his study, *Reformers on Stage*, makes a

---

<sup>51</sup> Kernodle, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>53</sup> Waite, Gary K. *Reformers on Stage: Popular Drama and Religious Propaganda in the Low Countries of Charles V, 1515-1556*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

compelling case for the influence of the rederijkers in propagating the Reformation. Waite's argument contains compelling evidence for the immense influence these literary guilds had on the public.

### **BRUEGEL, HALS, AND STEEN: FROM WORD TO CANVAS**

Close ties between the rederijkers and the Flemish artist, Pieter Bruegel have been established by Walter Gibson. By Bruegel's lifetime, the Antwerp rederijderskamer, De Violieren, consisted almost entirely of artists.<sup>54</sup> It was not uncommon, Gibson notes, for artists to contribute to the literary functions of rederijker activities. Lucas d'Heere, a pupil of Frans Floris and a member of the rederijderskamer in Ghent, was a prominent contributor of poetry and plays. Adriaen Jacobsz, Pieter Baltens, and Jan van Scorel are all mentioned by Van Mander as accomplished poets and artists. Due to the close relationships of artists and rederijkers, it is not surprising to note that similar themes and subjects are treated in the works of both groups. Furthermore, both the painters and the writers employed similar allegorical devices.<sup>55</sup>

The use of theater elements is obvious in Bruegel's work. In addition to his print, *Elck* of 1558 (figure 5), which depicts a story popular among the rederijkers of Antwerp, Bruegel adapts many of the rederijker's practices in his works. Puns and proverbs existing in some Bruegel compositions, including *Ass in School*, *Big Fish Eat the Little Fish*, the *Seven Vices* and the *Alchemist*, were popular in rederijker activities.<sup>56</sup> In addition, prints and paintings, including *Feast of Fools* (figure 6) and the *Battle between*

---

<sup>54</sup> Gibson, Walter S., "Artists and Rederijkers in the Age of Bruegel." *Art Bulletin* 63, no.3 (September 1981), 426-446, here 431.

<sup>55</sup> Gibson, 434.

*Carnival and Lent* (figure 7), portray themes frequently used by rederijkers.<sup>57</sup> Both prints use elements of the stage and of processions, and both prints focus on the fool, an indispensable character in the rederijker canon.

It was not until the twentieth century, with the work of Renger and Alpers, that scholars began to credit Bruegel's humanistic ties and association with Antwerp intellectuals as inspiration for his works. Rather than viewing them as jokes about clumsy peasants, they were seen for their satirical nature as witty commentary on the human and social situation.<sup>58</sup> Brouwer was no doubt cognizant of Bruegel's use of gritty realism as a means of the discussion of intellectual issues. Although Brouwer's peasants are dissimilar to Bruegel's in source and his compositions different in subject matter, the intellectual backgrounds of each artist played an important role in their work. Like Bruegel, Brouwer was using base symbolism to communicate lofty ideas.

The work of fellow Fleming, Brouwer, being produced some decades later, is not such a far stretch from that of Bruegel, both in terms of style and theme. Both artists incorporate exaggerated facial and gestural expressions; both artists use members of the lower classes to convey themes of deeper significance. Gibson makes a convincing case for the influence of the rederijkers on Bruegel. Through the incorporation of some of Gibson's methods and those of other scholars, it is not difficult to uncover similar elements in the work of Brouwer.

Additional pictorial evidence for rederijker influences exists in the work of Frans

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 440.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Hals, whose relationship to the rederijkers is often glossed over in scholarly inquiry. This oversight proves foolhardy when we consider that the artist maintained close ties with the group for well over a decade during his most prolific period (1610-1626).<sup>59</sup> Like Brouwer, Hals was a native of Antwerp migrated to Haarlem about whom we have very little biographical information. Seymour Slive, in his important monograph of the artist, tentatively places Hals under the tutorship of Van Mander, as do other biographers, including Pierre Descargues who insists that the pupil read the *Schilderboek*.<sup>60</sup> Hals, like Brouwer, has a reputation for being high-spirited and somewhat of a rogue. Just as scholars infer from Brouwer's works that the artist was a depraved drunk, so too does Slive conclude from Hals's works that the artist was a merry drinker. Other biographers suggest, conversely, that Hals's financial and personal hardship was due in part to his excessive and belligerent drunkenness.<sup>61</sup>

Slive mentions Hals's activity in rederijker circles, but denies that any direct influence of rederijker ideas had any effect on the artist. Notable exceptions are *Shrovetide Revellers* (figure 8) and a portrait of Pieter van der Morsch as the comedic character, *Peeckelhaerring* (figure 9). The former painting incorporates more than one character from Dutch theater of the time. On the right, the man in the sausage clad beret making the lewd gesture is identified as Hans Wurst. Appearing frequently in the paintings of Haarlem artists, this comedic figure is the most recognizable buffoon. His

---

<sup>58</sup> Renger, Konrad. "Bettler und Bauern bei Pieter Bruegel d. A." *Sitzungsberichte der kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft zu Berlin*. (1972), 9-16. Alpers, S., "Bruegel's Festive Peasants." *Simiolus* 8 (1975/76), 115-144.

<sup>59</sup> Descargues, 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 15-17.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 14.

attribute is a sausage or string of sausages. Sometimes he is depicted as enormously wide, and therefore grotesque. Other times he is shown svelter with a codpiece, a common attribute for a buffoon. He is usually seen in similar garments, including an elaborate cap, so as to be recognizable to audience members. Hans Wurst is similar to the Italian comedic character, Brighella, or Falstaff in Shakespeare's oeuvre: a bloated merry maker that could often indicate human folly. The stout man on the left is Peeckelhaering. In Dutch slang of the time, to "give someone a herring" was to insult them or poke fun of them, often in a witty way. The central figure is often identified as a woman, despite the boyish features. As Slive notes, it was traditional in theater that a man would play the role of a woman, just as in Shakespeare's circle. The food present at the Shrovetide table has symbolic meaning. In addition to the obvious erotic implications of the sausage, pancakes were regarded as the food of fools. Judging by the quantity of copies, Hals's composition was apparently quite popular during his lifetime. Slive even identifies a small sketch by Brouwer as being modeled after Hals's Hans Wurst.

Hals's portrait of rederijker performer, Van der Morsch (1543-1629) shows the actor as comedic character, Peeckelhaering. In the 1613 competition at Haarlem, Van der Morsch won the prize for best fool for his Leiden rederijderskamer.<sup>62</sup> The jaunty comedian offers a herring to the viewer. Participating in the rederijderskamer for such a long period of time gave Hals the opportunity for many painting commissions, but it also provided inspiration for observing the various traditions of the stage. Hals could study first hand the exaggerated facial expressions and gestures. He could study the comedic types of the stage, the various costumes and habits that would have been immediately

recognizable to Dutch citizens of all social strata. In this way, Hals, and Brouwer, would have been inspired by the rederijkers to create familiar characters and themes within their works that would have held deeper significance for the contemporary viewer.

W.D. Hooft's play, *Heden-daeghsche verlooren soon* (The Contemporary Prodigal Son) was a popular parable at the time. Slive identifies Hals's *Jonker Ramp and His Sweetheart* (figure 10) as being an illustration of this theme. Like other depictions of this parable, Hals represents his broadly grinning and fashionably dressed son carousing in a public house, made evident by the presence of an innkeeper in the back. As Slive notes, the presence of a dog was a multivalent symbol in Netherlandish art. The dog in the right hand corner of this composition is reminiscent of Van Mander's suggestion that a dog should be the symbol of a "true teacher who continues to bark fearlessly as he watches over the souls of his pupils and punishes their sins."<sup>63</sup>

Hals's depictions of smokers are read by Slive as being reactions to the works of moralists and poets of the day. Pamphlets, emblems, and sermons were devoted to the admonition of this vice. As Slive notes, smoke was also a symbol of *vanitas*, as in Psalms 102:4, "For my days are consumed like smoke...." Hals depicted this theme frequently, most notably in his portrait of poet and historian, Petrus Scriverius, a member of De Wijngaardtrancken. It was also customary to depict smoking as a secular representation of the sense of taste.

Hals's *Rommel Pot Player* (figure 11) can be considered in tandem with his more obvious theater references. Rommel pot players were common street musicians, usually

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>63</sup> Slive, 73.

depicted as comedic peasant types. The winking figure in the upper right hand corner is wearing the fool's foxtail in his hat, probably identifying this as a carnival scene. Additionally, Hals depicts the Haarlem wit, Verdonck in a portrait hanging in Edinburgh (figure 12). The unruly personality was notorious for getting into trouble for his outspokenness. The jawbone is a symbol for his verbal attacks. Slive comments that prints of this painting would have hung in taverns, such as those frequented by Brouwer.

Hals's depiction of *Malle Babbe* (figure 13), a well-known gossip of Haarlem, also hung on tavern walls.<sup>64</sup> The presence of Malle Babbe's pet owl has complicated associations. The owl could at once be a symbol for wisdom, but also of drunkenness. Perhaps it is this double entendre, a technique used heavily by the rederijkers, to which we must turn our attention. A viewer would be confronted with this juxtaposition and would perhaps give pause to the contemplation of such disparate imagery. When we consider to the overstated facial gestures, the comedic look, and the symbolic attributes within these paintings, we can look no further than the stage for inspiration. These personalities were, like the characters of the rederijkers' plays, immediately recognizable to the general public. Their depictions provided popular entertainment and could be instilled with messages of deeper significance.

Although not contemporaneous with the work of Brouwer, the paintings of Jan Steen should here be discussed not only for the frequent rederijker appearances, but also for the artist's use of theatrical conventions. To aid in our understanding of Brouwer's potential relationship with the rederijkers, we must turn our attention to the work of Albert Heppner, the author of the only, to my knowledge, study of a specific seventeenth

century artist's relationship with the rederijkers. Albert Heppner maintains that Steen's depictions of rederijkers prove the artist's intimate ties with the group.<sup>65</sup> Heppner furthermore regards certain elements of Steen's works as being directly and significantly influenced by the rederijkers. Calling Steen's work didactic and humorous within a naturalistic style, Heppner's assessment is reminiscent of that of the rederijker's *spelen van sinne*. These plays contained comedy and lessons, but were always presented in a realistic manner to more easily communicate a message to the audience. Heppner regards Steen's work as accurate depictions containing symbolism, and never parodies with mocking or condescending tones.

Steen's works guide us in identifying the typical characters of the chambers which we know to exist from written sources.<sup>66</sup> In a large picture titled, *Meeting of the Rederijkers* (figure 14), held in the Brussels museum, Steen depicts a raucous meeting of the guild where all of the important figures are easily identifiable. Leaning out of the window, reading, is the drummer, identifiable by the drum, doublet and scarf. Behind him stands the factor, the chief producer of plays and poetry. He is identifiable by his solemn features which liken him to a scholar. Next to the factor stands the standard-bearer who carried the blazoen during processions and competitions. Next to this figure is the keizer, identifiable by his embroidered cap. The figure in the right foreground carousing with the woman is, of course, the fool, who is identifiable by his fool's cap with the ass's ears and cock's feather.

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>65</sup> Albert Heppner, "Jan Steen and the Rederijkers", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1939. 22-48.

<sup>66</sup> Prudens van Duyse. *De Rederijkerkamers in Nederland*. (Ghent, 1900-1902).

Besides the prominent position of the blazoen (the diamond-shaped banner on the upper portion of the rear wall), the scene is identifiable as a rederijker's gathering by even more elements. Fastened to the wreath of flowers hanging from the ceiling is a quatrain that reads:

Though Bacchus be their inspiration,  
The matter of their verse is dry;  
Flatness is beer's annihilation –  
Their Bellies now for victuals cry.<sup>67</sup>

The references to drink are echoed in the pitcher and tankard of wine hanging from the branch outside of the window, generally considered to be attributes of the rederijkers.<sup>68</sup> A popular derogatory rhyme of the day, “rederijker – kannekijker” (in de kan kijker – look into the can) is echoed in the figure in the rear right, who has his back turned from us.

Additional works provide us with interesting evidence for the rederijker's love of feasting and drinking. In a 1659 work by an unknown master of the Haarlem School (Hendrick Pot (?)) now in the Frans Hals Museum (figure 15), we have a depiction of a religious dispute erupting over wine and tobacco. It was a generally held belief of the time that the rederijkers owed their hot debates to an excessive homage to Bacchus. Judging by the blazoen depicting the motto “Liefde boven al” (love above all) and a picture of Christ's resurrection, we can assume this is the meeting room of De Wijngaardtrancken, the most prominent chamber existing in Haarlem during the

---

<sup>67</sup> “Sy rymen van droge cost/ Bachus poeten fijn/ Drooch is al een vat bost / Maer ook moet er eten sijn”

<sup>68</sup> Heppner, 26.

seventeenth century.<sup>69</sup> The various items found along the walls of this meeting place provide clues to the activities of the rederijkers. The wall cupboard contains various prizes won at competitions. Below them are the *mouwschilden*, or medals worn on special occasions. Beneath the bookshelf containing rederijker writings is a literary puzzle printed on a sheet of paper and answered on a sheet beside it. The guild flag is rolled up close to the ceiling. A personification of Charity is positioned above the chimney, and to the right, enthroned upon a wine barrel, is the god of wine, Bacchus. In addition, there is a personification of Rhetorica, an omnipresent figure in rederijker activities. All of these figures play important roles in understanding the rederijkers. Charity was a virtue held high by Netherlanders, and many chamber mottoes contained such sentiments. Bacchus's prominence can be understood in light of the rederijker's love of celebration. As is the case with the Haarlem chamber, many rederijkers incorporated wine imagery into their chosen names.

This very same Haarlem group commissioned Steen to make a portrait of one of their feasts (figure 16). It is important to note that the scene is situated near a gate through which we can see rooms. Rederijkers often used public places such as this for their meetings or rehearsals. De Wijngaardtrancken is specifically cited as holding their meetings in such a place.<sup>70</sup> A characteristic inscription is depicted on a banner being waved out of a window on the right. It reads:

When we have drunk and eaten right merrily

---

<sup>69</sup> Artist members of De Wijngaardtrancken, include Gerrit and Job Berckheyde, Richard Brakenburg, Salomon de Bray, Adriaen Brouwer, Dirck and Frans Hals, Maarten van Heemskerck, Esaias van de Velde, Jan Vermeer van Haarlem and Jan Wijnants, all of whom may have written poetry, performed in plays or painted scenery. The traditions of the chambers influenced other artists, including Jan Steen, Judith Leyster and Jan Miense Molenaer. Many of their costumed figures and subjects are derived from the theatre.

<sup>70</sup> Heppner, 31.

We must not forget our good pipes.

Below the group partakes in one of their frequent banquets. In typical Steen style the foreground is covered with symbolic flotsam lending a raucous air to the piece.

The former scenes can be understood in the context of Steen's privileged exposure to the activities of the rederijkers. More often, however, Steen chose a simple format to show how the rederijkers were seen by the public. Heppner identifies a self-portrait in *Rederijkers at the Window* (figure 17), held in Philadelphia. The smiling individual addressing the audience wears a painter's beret. As Heppner notes, the bells and cock's feather on his hat identify him as a fool, an unsurprising choice for self-representation. The fool was often the source for the most wisdom and was the most likely character to interact with the audience.

Heppner's most interesting argument is regarding Steen's use of comedy, which the author believes is directly derived from comedies written and performed by the rederijkers. Steen's *Poultry Seller* (figure 18) is identified by Heppner as being inspired by comedic conventions. The character of the poultry seller appears in many stories of the time in the form of a cheat or of one who is cheated. Furthermore, the expressions on the faces of many of the figures in Steen's oeuvre are so clearly defined, notes Heppner, that one may assume them to be observed after theatrical practices.

In his study of comedy in the works of Steen, S.J. Gudlaugsson identifies the presence of types in Dutch genre paintings of the seventeenth century as being indicative

of the influence of theater.<sup>71</sup> Everyone knew the doctors, the quacks who diagnosed peasants and ailing lovers; the jaunty swaggerers in their boastful costumes who frequented inns and houses of ill repute. These were recognizable characters that were often dressed in standard costumes so that the moment they walked onto a stage, the audience would immediately respond.

Gudlaugsson discusses Steen's tavern scenes in which brawls break out. In one work at the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, Steen depicts a drunken soldier boldly drawing his sword over losses at cards (figure 19). Brouwer depicts a similar scene many times, in one case Steen's composition is quite reminiscent of a Brouwer scene. In both works a woman stands between the brawlers, emphasizing the comedically innocuous nature of the fight. It seems that Steen, like Brouwer before him, is using clever juxtapositions to reveal hidden commentary. The viewer would immediately recognize the foolishness of the drunken combatants. This use of double entendre is one exploited by the rederijkers.

Mariet Westermann posits that Steen's frequent depictions of the rederijkers as being more mocking than celebratory.<sup>72</sup> There is some inconsistency with this theory, however, when one considers that Steen accepted commissions from these groups and maintained relationships with some of the members. Nevertheless, Westermann rightly points out that respect for these amateur literary guilds was in sharp decline by the mid-seventeenth century. Most of the ridicule aimed at the rederijkers was hurled by semi-professional playwrights and actors, such as Bredero, a playwright who began his career

---

<sup>71</sup> Gudlaugsson, S.J. *The Comedians in the Work of Jan Steen and his Contemporaries*. (Soest, Netherlands: Davaco Publishers, 1975).

<sup>72</sup> Westermann, Mariet. *The Amusements of Jan Steen*. (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997), 142.

as a rederijker in Amsterdam, but by the time his plays were being produced by the Netherlandish Academicians of Amsterdam, his tone changed drastically. More than anything, the rederijkers were scolded for their rascalion nature, and the poor quality of their literary output. Their works were considered by many contemporaries as obscene farce. Yet, as Westermann reveals, the rederijkers' special place in literary and cultural history of the Netherlands is their embrace of the native tongue and overall championing of Dutch nationalism. It was their ability to capture experience in earthly terms that impressed even the intellectuals of the day.<sup>73</sup>

The rederijkers' decision to insistently promote the Dutch language is an important facet of the character of these groups. Rederijker-artist Dirck Coornhert vigorously promoted language purification, opposing the infiltration of words borrowed from Latin or the Romance languages. Similarly, rederijker Hendrick Laurenszoon Spiegel wrote *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst*, the first organized printed Dutch grammar. The Leiden chamber of rhetoric campaigned for the city's university to use Dutch rather than Latin during lessons.

Dutch intellectuals, reacting to Europe's lambasting of their mother tongue, asserted the superior nature of Dutch for expressing all things simple to all things lofty. The guttural and fragmentary character of Dutch speech was ridiculed by foreigners as being indicative of the simple and barbaric origins of the Dutch people. Not surprisingly, the Dutch decided not to find shame in such condemnations, but rather merit. Championing the language for its straightforward nature, the Dutch declared that there

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

was no language better suited to express the true character of human nature. Furthermore, the character of the Dutch language, the fact that short words could be strung together to create larger ones, assured speakers the ability to express the most complicated concepts with the same simple core group of words.<sup>74</sup>

For their crusade to promote the vernacular, the rederijkers found support in the philosophy of the stoic, Seneca. Seneca writes that, “Speech devoted to truth should be straightforward and plain.” Seneca’s philosophy is not out of step with the Netherlandish morals promoted during the seventeenth century. Seneca despised the accumulation of vast wealth, claiming that “it is not the man who has little, but the man who craves more that is poor”. He was also a sensible moralist. He taught that one should “enjoy present pleasures in such a way as not to injure future ones”. Many of his ideas seem as if they may have been borrowed by such rederijker moralists as Roemer Visscher whose *Sinnepoppen*, an anthology of illustrated emblems, enjoyed a great deal of popularity and influence in the seventeenth century. J.A. Worp in his study of the relationship between rederijkers and the philosophy of Seneca, *De invloed van Seneca’s treurspelen op oons tooneel*, discusses the ways in which these Dutch intellectuals adapted Seneca’s words for their own poetry and plays. Worp identifies the rederijkers in particular as being advocates of Seneca’s philosophy, including Hooft among the most important playwrights to adapt his stoicism.

Just as Erasmus and Van Mander used the Classical model as a means to promote the image of contemporary Netherlanders, so too did the rederijkers. This aspect of their

---

<sup>74</sup> Woodall, J. ‘Love is in the Air: Amor as Motivation and Message in Seventeenth Century Netherlandish

influence and others outlined above can be detected in Brouwer's work. As we shall see below, Brouwer's cognizance of and observation of rederijker activities shaped the ways in which the artist communicated messages of lofty significance in conversely coarse compositions. Careful analysis of Brouwer's work reveals clever adaptations of the concerns present in the intellectual dialog of the day.

Rhetoric during the Baroque period had no subject, but rather could serve in all subjects. The ancient theory on which it is based never separated 'rhetoric' from 'art', thus allowing for the interaction of the theory and practice of the various modes of expression.<sup>75</sup> Rhetorical strategies could enter into all aspects of the arts and also into societal and cultural matters. As we have seen, Dutch intellectuals used rhetorical strategy to convince, persuade, to praise, and to blame. As artists began concerning themselves with intellectual discourse, they began to translate these strategies into a visual medium. Brouwer did just this by incorporating the concerns and symbolism used in rederijker performances and practices into his paintings. While this link between Brouwer and the rederijkers does not suffice to explain the core of the artist's oeuvre, it does offer a richer understanding of some of Brouwer's imagery.

---

Painting.' *Art History* 19 (1996), 208-246.

<sup>75</sup> Aercke, Kristiaan P. *Gods of Play: Baroque Festive Performances as Rhetorical Discourse*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 58.

## CHAPTER THREE: BROUWER AND THE REDERIJKERS: CASE STUDIES

### PEASANT SCENES

Brouwer's known catalog, consisting of about sixty paintings, is devoted completely to the depiction of the lower classes. Although not himself a rich man, Brouwer was by no means immersed in the seedy under-classes and peasantry. He was a well-known painter, a recognized member of two rederijderskamers, and was an acquaintance of some of the more prominent painters of the day, including Jan Lievens and Anthony van Dyck. It would be imprudent, therefore, to designate Brouwer's scenes as mere mimicry of the world around him, of his rowdy mischief in derelict taverns. Like Bruegel and the rederijders that influenced him, Brouwer used his depictions of the lower classes as a vehicle for the discussion of broader themes.

Alpers's ideas work well into a balanced interpretation Brouwer's depictions of peasants. Alpers claims that Dutch paintings tend to be more descriptive than prescriptive.<sup>76</sup> It is common for scholars to interpret Brouwer's images as visual representations of emblems, or proverbs. Renger posits that Brouwer's earliest works reflect his familiarity with German moralizing woodcuts.<sup>77</sup> Images of carousing or intoxicated merrymakers are imbued with a moralizing undertone, even while it is generally believed by the artist's biographers that Brouwer himself partook in such debauchery. This tendency to read didactic intentions in an artist's work, Alpers claims, stems from the desire to link Dutch painting with some of the only verbal clues to Dutch visual culture we have, namely, the emblem books by such writers as Jacob Cats and

---

<sup>76</sup> Alpers, 1983, xxiv.

<sup>77</sup> Renger, Konrad. "Flemish Genre Painting: Low Life– High Life– Daily Life." In *Age of Rubens*. Edited by Peter Sutton. (Boston: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 173.

Roemer Vischer. Because Dutch art regularly possesses no solid narrative element, in the Vasari sense of the term, and primary sources associated with artists and art-making are so scarce, these images are often confounding, especially within an art historical framework so steeped in the Italian model. More informed judgments about Brouwer's work may be made with Alpers's suggestion that we look at these paintings with a mind to the Dutch artist's desire for self-representation. As is made apparent by the work of Van Mander, Dutch artists were not ignorant of their identities as artists working contrary to the ideals of their perceived artistic, intellectual, and cultural superiors, the Italians. Their heightened self-awareness gave way to a concern for a deliberate crafting of their self-image as individual artists and as a unified culture.

Alpers's theory fits in nicely with this notion that Dutch artists were working in conscious opposition to established artistic traditions, or, to perhaps put it more aptly, working within yet transforming convention to better suit their artistic agenda. As E.H. Gombrich writes, the position of Northern artists in an Italian world of art was determined by their 'specialties': landscapes and still-lives.<sup>78</sup>

One painting listed in Rembrandt's inventory of 1656 is *The Pancake Baker* of the mid-1620s, which offers us a character taken directly from the theatre tradition (figure 20).<sup>79</sup> Pancakes were a cheap food of choice among the lower classes in Holland and the baker enters theatrical iconography as a comedic symbol of the coarse vulgarity of poor folk. Wearing a patched fool's cap and surrounded by squat peasants reminiscent of Bruegel, the hideous baker would have been instantly recognizable to the viewer who was surely exposed to such popular characters. The presence of this fool on stage would immediately incite laughter and set off numerous symbolic connections for the audience.

---

<sup>78</sup> Gombrich, E.H. "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape." In *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1966), 114.

<sup>79</sup> Bode, 54.

Similarly, Brouwer's incorporation of drunkards, smokers and other members of the underclass would have served the same purpose as in a *rederijker* play. Symbolism was used heavily in plays and often a seemingly trivial scene can intentionally obscure a theme of grand importance. Furthermore, in these scenes Brouwer uses the language of theatrical comedy so plainly that it must be assumed he was familiar with the traditions.

Renger posits that Brouwer's favoring of peasant scenes indicates his allegiance to his Flemish artistic ancestry.<sup>80</sup> Renger points out the sixteenth century topos used by Bruegel wherein the peasant is not depicted to be ridiculed, but rather as an example of the moral degradation of the urban bourgeoisie. Alpers may concur with Renger's assessment of Bruegel, but her theory of seventeenth century Dutch art allows for a richer discussion of Brouwer's pieces than does Renger's insistence on a direct artistic lineage between the two Flemish artists. When we consider the influence of the *rederijkers*, we can interpret Brouwer's works as a reflection of the perceived differences in culture between that of the northerners and those of cultures following faithfully in Classical footsteps.

Brouwer's images of seemingly trivial quotidian affairs are not, as previous scholars might assert, a simple, dumb recounting of the activities of the lower classes. Equally antithetical to Brouwer's choices is the contention that there is a veil between image and meaning. Brouwer's works are to be understood, rather, in terms of cleverly crafted representation. Like Steen or Hals, Brouwer uses that which is visually accessible and familiar to express themes of loftier significance. Brouwer's meanings are not hidden, but rather explained, or described. Brouwer's concerns as an artist and as a northerner are being expressed in a manner that is far simpler than one might expect.

---

<sup>80</sup> Renger, 1986, 25.

This straightforward nature is one specifically related to the perceived Dutch character of the day.

As Levine notes, Passeri likens the work of the Bamboccianti to *poesia bernesca*, a kind of witty verse that challenged literary tradition.<sup>81</sup> This style of poetry, conceived by Francesco Berni (1497-1535), was popular during the sixteenth and seventeenth century as it simultaneously referenced the elevated Petrarchan style whilst bringing the subject matter to a coarser level. Literature such as this was popular among educated circles as it facetiously mocked the accepted high-minded style of poetry fashionable at the time. This method is also used by French author, Rabelais, who through the use of light, carnivalesque imagery made broader critical observations upon people's situation in society.

By showing themes like fighting, drunkenness, smoking, and card-playing, Brouwer shows us the ignoble in a frank and direct manner, a practice that comically reverses our expectations for subject matter. It is not enough for us to understand Brouwer's imagery as a reflection of the coarse everyday, but as a violent debasing of accepted themes and topoi that pokes fun at canonical works, such as those of the Italians. An image like *Fight over Measures* in the collection of Lord Carlisle or the *Fight over Cards* in the Rijksmuseum (figure 21) both display a drama and a heroism hitherto reserved for grand battles. In each piece, a man reaches for his sword with dauntless determinism as a woman reaches to restrain him. The scene appears immediately comedic because the combatants are mortally fighting over pithy games. In

---

<sup>81</sup> Levine.

both scenes, dowdy peasant women have to interfere with the fight, showing just how inoffensive the brawls really are.

## REFERENCING THE CLASSICAL

As humanism spread to the Netherlands, thinkers began adapting the Classical and Renaissance texts in self-interested ways. As we have seen, Van Mander used Pliny's and Vasari's texts to establish connections between the art of the ancient Greco-Romans and that of his own northern heritage. Aurelius, Vaenius, and Erasmus used Tacitus's text to lay claim to an important and heroic history. The rederijckers became the popular ambassadors of these ideas, promoting the use of Classical and Renaissance motifs in their plays, yet translating these traditions to their own agenda. What occurs in all instances is a simultaneous embrace of the ancient or Italian model, and a clever reworking of it that results in a larger commentary on art and culture. Integration of Classical elements into a piece is best understood as a sort of witty aside to the viewer. It does not shape the entire meaning or direction of the painting, but rather acts a private joke for the intellectual viewer. This approach fits well into the practices of the rederijckers who delighted in analyzing the intricacies of a poem, play or painting during their meetings, mostly to humorous ends.

As has been established by Levine, Van Laer's use of Classical motifs in paintings of ignoble themes points to a commentary on the ennobling aspect of art being created in Italy. Just as Levine finds a figure mimicking the *Spinario* in one of Van Laer's paintings, we may find a similar adaptation in Brouwer's early Haarlem period piece, the *Village Barber* in Munich (figure 22). This composition stands out as one of Brouwer's more thoughtful works. The picture space is balanced with careful attention paid to the recession of space. Unlike many of his works of this period which seem loud

and confused in their composition, there is a harmony in this piece, owing in part to the considered placement of figures and to the subdued palette. Indeed, this piece is an early indication of Brouwer's more monochromatic works to come.

With all the seriousness and elegant calm of a Renaissance altarpiece, Brouwer presents us with a simple peasant scene. Barbers were still the village physicians during the seventeenth century, aiding the working classes in minor pain relief for a fee. The man in the foreground takes his pose from the *Spinario*, crossing one leg over the other and holding his foot as the barber bows elegantly in an almost deferent stance on one knee and squints closely to remove the thorn or splinter in the bottom of the patient's dirty foot. The Greek youth's rounded back and right-angled leg placed firmly on the ground are both reflected in Brouwer's image. Where the Classic model's curly abundance of hair once sat are now sparse tufts of grey. The graceful nudity of the ancient thorn-puller is now sheathed in faded peasant's work clothes. Behind the patient an old hag acknowledges an incoming patient, who seems in the throes of some physical ailment. In the background another barber seems to be peering into a patient's mouth, perhaps performing some dentistry. Brouwer's piece is an impressive achievement in the study of figural and facial expression. Each figure's pose is contemplatively rendered with a variety of movements that would impress even the Italian art theorists. Especially in the grimacing thorn-afflicted man, we see Brouwer's masterful execution of expression. The artist captures so competently the subtle movements of the human face.

It was common for Netherlandish artists returned from their Grand Tour to share the drawings they had made after works of antiquity. Marten van Heemskerck returned to Haarlem with his study after the *Spinario* (figure 23), as had Goltzius with his study after the *Farnese Hercules* (figure 24). In her essay, "Goltzius's Great Hercules: mythology, art and politics", Beth Holman links Goltzius's depictions of the Greek

demigod with the current political atmosphere of the Netherlands.<sup>82</sup> She posits that Goltzius deliberately adapted this Greco-roman character to represent the Dutch primordial hero (the Batavian) and the embodiment of the Dutch nation.<sup>83</sup> Goltzius's *Farnese Hercules*, which includes a depiction of a Dutch audience craning their necks to view the great statue, can also be seen as a witty commentary on the Northern artist's position in European culture. Goltzius turns the iconic statue away from us; the front is visible only to the two men contemplating it below. The subject of the print, therefore, becomes less to do with the Classical statue than with the Dutchman's unique experience of it. What we begin to see during the seventeenth century is a developing dialogue on artistic tradition and values within Italian and Northern cultures.

Brouwer's use of the *Spinario* pose is a deliberate one. It acts as a subversive homage to the ancient model so lauded by the Italians. By placing the revered pose in a base environment such as this, Brouwer seems to be calling attention to the fallibility of the ancient paradigm. What once stood in elaborate villas and courtyards now squats in a dingy hovel. The *Spinario* itself invites a reassessment of artistic values in the history of art. The statue, dating from the late first century B.C., is one of the rare instances of a large scale bronze statue surviving from antiquity. As such, the statue has been revered since its discovery in the twelfth century and is one of the most copied works from antiquity. The statue is a copy of a third century B.C. Greek work and as such offers an important insight into the ways in which Romans adapted and transformed the Greek model. For the Greeks, the thorn-puller would have been a naturalistic study after a peasant youth. The Romans, and their Italian successors, began to use idealize such

---

<sup>82</sup> Holman, Beth. "Goltzius's Great Hercules: mythology, art and politics." *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 42-43 (1991-1992), 397-412.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 403.

models to propagate a certain image for themselves: a self-image of power and perfection.

Brouwer is mocking the blind veneration that Europe had for Classicism. The Romans and the Italians had so lauded this statue that they lost sight of the subject itself: a peasant boy pulling a thorn out of his foot. Not many works of art from this period could boast such lowly subject matter, yet the form had been studied after and adapted over and over again in the works of artists such as Filippo Brunelleschi and Lucas Signorelli. Brouwer is drawing our attention to the coarseness of the statue's subject matter and calling to question our reverence for it. Indeed, the barber kneeling before the peasant like a knight before a king can be considered a sly commentary on the worship of ancient statuary such as the *Spinario*. One could well imagine this painting acting as a conversation piece during a rederijker meeting, or hanging in the home of an intellectual art lover.

It would not be implausible to argue that artists like Brouwer, mingling in the same circles as the artistic descendents of Van Mander, may have been acquainted with Pliny's *Lives* and Van Mander's adaptations of it. Specifically, the accounts of artists like Pauson, or Peiraikos who painted nothing but barber's stalls, barnyard animals, and other base scenes.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, it was entirely commonplace beginning in the fifteenth century to identify living artists with figures from Pliny.<sup>85</sup> Brouwer shows himself to be working in the tradition of Netherlandish intellectuals of the day by working in conscious opposition to accepted ideals. The method he adapts to his painting shows a cognizance of the exemplar and a deliberate subversion of it.

---

<sup>84</sup> Gombrich, 113.

The Classical model can be seen in additional works by Brouwer, reinforcing the theory that he was indeed thinking about these forms in his compositions. *Fighting Card Players in a Tavern* in Munich probably dates back to Brouwer's later Haarlem period. Characteristic of this period, Brouwer uses a monochromatic palette. His brushwork and paint handling are becoming more and more economical; the figure farthest back seems to blend into the rear wall almost completely. Engaged in a battle befitting the façade of an ancient temple, four peasants brawl over a game of cards. Their gestures are wild and violent; the audience can almost hear the shouting. The center figure lifts a ceramic jug high over his head, intending to bring it down with a severe crash to the head of the man whose hair he clenches in his fist. The potential victim of this fierce rage screams out and reaches for his sword, while the man behind the two tries to restrain the bludgeoner. The two figures on either side of the trio, the one on the left shouting his protests from the table, the other on the right yelling through the door, act as bookmarks to the scene, balancing the composition and calling attention to the asinine nature of the skirmish.

Hair pulling during battles is a pose often seen in ancient art. One example is the façade of the Altar of Zeus at Pergamon depicting Athena battling Alkyoneos (figure 25). This figural arrangement is seen as a reoccurring motif on ancient Roman battle sarcophagi, such as the Ludovisi example (figure 26). The pose persisted through the Renaissance, such as in Baldassare Peruzzi's *Perseus and Medusa* (figure 27).<sup>86</sup> Brouwer and his northern contemporaries may have been more familiar with more current Italian examples, such as Caravaggio's *David Holding the Head of Goliath* (figure 28). Further

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> This example is found in Levine's 1988 article.

connecting Brouwer's scene to ancient art, the collection of figures resembles a ramshackle *Laocoon and his Sons* (figure 29). The figure with the jug raises his arm high above his head and stretches his other straight out as he struggles to avoid the interference of his restrainer. The tense and activated poses of the surrounding figures complement the dynamic pose of the central figure, creating a swirl of movement not unequal in energy to that of the Hellenistic *Laocoon*. A similar use of this ancient pose of struggle can be seen in Brouwer's *Two Peasants Fighting over a Barrel* in Munich produced during the same period (figure 30). The frontal view of the figure, with his arms stretched out to defend himself and his legs spread apart, reflects the *Laocoon* in pose and also in dramatic expression.

In examples such as these, Brouwer seems to be bringing classical monumentalism to a coarse level, a characteristic of Dutch painting that begins to take hold during this period. These ironic witty allusions to grand tradition serve a similar purpose as does the incorporation of ancient ideas into northern culture: the Netherlandish seem to be answering to the insults of the Italians in a sly way. Rembrandt, an artist who studied Brouwer's works, begins to take up this tradition in his own paintings, a feature noted upon by Alpers. She posits that Rembrandt used a sketch of Raphael's *School of Athens* as inspiration in laying out his grand mural depicting the *Oath of Claudius Civilis* of 1662. As Alpers remarks, it would have taken a lot of nerve to replace the Greek philosophers with a tribe of Batavian ruffians conspiring against Rome.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Alpers, Svetlana. *The Vexations of Art: Velázquez and Others*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

It is important to here address the broader cultural arena of Brouwer's day for we may further illumine the ways in which art and literature of the time was linked to popular traditions. The carnival was still an important social institution during this time period. Rederijker performances may be considered part of the carnival tradition. The rederijkers put on public processions and performances which relied heavily on comedy to relay a message. Particularly important to the study of the carnivalesque is the sixteenth century French novelist, Rabelais. Of the genius of Rabelais, French historian Jules Michelet writes:

Rabelais collected wisdom from the popular elemental forces of the ancient Provençal idioms, sayings, proverbs, school farces, from the mouths of fools and clowns. But refracted by this foolery, the genius of the age and its prophetic power are revealed in all their majesty. If he does not discover, he foresees, he promises, he directs.<sup>88</sup>

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais's works were written in a tradition closely tied to popular culture and folk humor.<sup>89</sup> Carnival pageants and shows of the market place celebrated important feast days and church holidays. In addition, social and civil ceremonies took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools mimicked serious rituals such as the initiation of a knight or the election of a king or queen.<sup>90</sup> It is within this culture of laughter that Rabelais created his epic of mock-heroes, Gargantua and Pantagruel.

The carnival meant a suspension of hierarchical order. It is indeed a characteristic of carnivalesque humor that prevailing truths and established orders be suspended temporarily or otherwise inverted. According to Bahktin, such reversals of societal

---

<sup>88</sup> Michelet, Jules. *Histoire de France*, vol. 10 (Paris, 1852-67), 355.

<sup>89</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1965).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 5

norms were done for purely comic reasons.<sup>91</sup> Deeper philosophical and moral commentary is not considered by Bahktin to be part of carnivalesque humor. It is at this point, then, that the plays of the rederijkers depart from the folk humor traditions described by Bahktin. According to humanist, Erasmus, levity should lead to gravity – *ex nugis seria*.<sup>92</sup> Arguably it is the essence of northern art and literary style to bring together wit and teaching.<sup>93</sup> Such tactics can be seen in the paintings of Brouwer's Flemish predecessor, Bruegel. In the same way that the carnival acted as a comedic subversion of society, so too do Brouwer's works demonstrate a reversal of conventional ideas.

## EXPRESSION AND GESTURE

One of the most compelling aspects of Brouwer's paintings is his unparalleled renderings of gestural and facial expression. With a remarkable economy of paint handling and brushwork, Brouwer conveys the most profound and palpable emotions. We may conclude, as Heppner does with Steen, that his convincing expressions were observed on the stages of popular theater. Handbooks on gesture in theater must have existed during this time, but only a few titles come down to us from the seventeenth century. The emblems of Jacob Cats, Roemer Visscher, and Giovanni Pierio Valeriano established a tradition of gesture as language, as did handbooks such as Jean Tabourot's *Orchesographie* published in French in 1588, and John Bulwer's English text, *Chironomia: or, The Art of Manual Rhetoric* published in 1644. These books stress the

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>92</sup> Schama, Simon. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. (New York: Knopf, 1987), 499.

importance of the symbolic uses of gesture and explain the necessity of clear, broad gestures to convey emotion and mood to audiences perhaps far away from the stage.<sup>94</sup> By and large, however, actors learned their techniques from authors, scholars, paintings and school performances.<sup>95</sup> Amsterdam professor, Petrus Francius (1645-1704) writes that actors of the early seventeenth century were beholden to the techniques of Cicero and Quintilian for mastering vocal delivery and gestures.<sup>96</sup> Exaggerated facial expressions could be used for comedic ends as well. One would expect that the fool, often the prime communicator of ideas for the audience, would be a master at facial contortions.

In paintings like *The Smokers* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brouwer experiments with an entirely new painting subject matter: facial and bodily expression (figure 31). Classifying and describing emotions has roots in the rhetoric and philosophy of Antiquity. Actors were experts in the exact rules of portraying gestures and facial expressions. In order to convey meaning quickly and effectively and with clarity, actors developed and followed strict guidelines, as set out by Cicero and Quintilian. Italian art theory of the fifteenth and sixteenth century emphasized the importance of facial expression as well. Da Vinci and Alberti both addressed artists on the mastering of facial expressions and gesturing.<sup>97</sup> Da Vinci writes,

A picture or representation of human figures, ought to be done in such a way as that the spectator may easily recognize, by means of their attitudes, the purpose in their minds. Thus, if you have to represent a man of noble character in the act of

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 498.

<sup>94</sup> Peters, Julie Stone. *Theatre of the Book, 1480-1880. Print, Text, and Performance in Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 147-165.

<sup>95</sup> Brandt, George W. *German and Dutch Theatre, 1600-1848*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 387.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Rogerson, Brewster. "The Art of Painting the Passions." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1953), 68-94, here 73-76.

speaking, let his gestures be such as naturally accompany good words; and, in the same way, if you wish to depict a man of a brutal nature, give him fierce movements; as with his arms flung out towards the listener, and his head and breast thrust forward beyond his feet, as if following the speaker's hands. Thus it is with a deaf and dumb person who, when he sees two men in conversation – although he is deprived of hearing – can nevertheless understand, from the attitudes and gestures of the speakers, the nature of their discussion.<sup>98</sup>

In Constantin Huygens's private writings of 1629-31, the secretary from The Hague praises the mastery of facial expression and gesture in the work of Rembrandt and Lievens. Although this text was not published, one may assume that Huygens's interest in such skills hints at a greater trend in art at the time.<sup>99</sup>

It was not until 1649 that Rene Descartes, a visitor to Haarlem while Brouwer was working there, wrote *Traites sur les passions de l'ame* wherein he describes and categorizes the various emotions and their corresponding facial expressions. During Brouwer's lifetime, Franciscus Junius of Amsterdam wrote *The Painters of Antiquity* (1637) in which he discussed the art of the Greeks and Romans and its relationship to the famous instructions of Quintilian on the rhetorical use of gesturing and mimicking on stage. Quintilian's rules are for the most part apparent: a red face indicates shame whereas a pale face indicates fear. According to Quintilian, the eyes are the most important element in expressing emotion. For Junius, the most important skill in depicting emotions is the artist's grasp of naturalism.<sup>100</sup>

There is no need to assume that Brouwer had any direct familiarity with expression theory. Rather we may infer from the generally increasing interest in

---

<sup>98</sup> Da Vinci, Leonardo. *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*. Compiled and edited by Jean Paul Richter with translations mainly by Mrs. R.C. Bell. (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 593.

<sup>99</sup> Worp, J.A. "Constantyn Huygens over de schilder van zijn tijd". *Oud Holland* 9 vol. 26, (1891), 128.

<sup>100</sup> Rogerson, 73.

expressions that artists of such prominence as Brouwer would have been at least indirectly inspired by it. A document published in 1773 under Rubens's name describes the difficulty in capturing an expression in a fleeting moment in time.<sup>101</sup> Surely Rubens would have found a great deal of inspiration in the works he collected by Brouwer, who seems to have mastered such a skill. It must not be ignored that Brouwer likely found inspiration in the work of Bruegel. It is, however, important to note that the innovation of Brouwer lies in his simpler compositions. A painting like *The Smokers* offers us a concentrated experience of the figures' laboriously studied and intensely naturalistic expressions.

One of Brouwer's most compelling exercises in facial expressions the *Bitter Draught* in Frankfurt executed during Brouwer's later period in Antwerp (figure 32). Often this work is understood to be a depiction of one of the five senses (taste), a common theme for artists of this time. The theme of this painting is unclear, most likely it is simply the expression itself that is the subject. We may regard it as a brilliant execution of a complexly contorted countenance, the likes of which were previously unseen. Scholars have noted that Brouwer's interest in the human face was influential to Rembrandt. In devoting the entire panel to this half-length figure and emphasizing the exaggerated expression, Brouwer presents us with an image of immediacy. It is bold in its simplicity and direct in its impact upon the viewer.

One treatise on expression that Brouwer may have had direct experience with is Seneca's three books on anger (*De ira*). As previously noted, the rederijckers championed Seneca. Many of their ideas and plays were structured around Seneca's basic

---

<sup>101</sup> Renger, 1986, 42.

philosophies. *De Ira* treats completely the expression of anger. The ancient philosopher discusses the characteristics of the emotion, the ways in which to express it and the effects of this passion. Antwerp humanist, Justus Lipsius discusses *De ira* in 1615. Erasmus uses Seneca's text as an example in a 1529 work, which also resurfaces in Antwerp during the 1630s, a time when Brouwer was working in the city.<sup>102</sup>

Brouwer uses the expression of anger more than any other emotion in his oeuvre. His numerous depictions of peasants brawling all describe anger so directly and so passionately, that the emotion seems to transcend the actual subject matter. When looking at a picture of men fighting so wildly, their faces twisted in rage, it is easy to overlook the fact that what is being fought over is a game of cards or some other equally trivial event. In *Fighting Card Players* in Munich, for example, Brouwer's characters display many of Seneca's guidelines for representing anger: jerking hands, trembling lips, red face, wrinkled forehead, clenched teeth, and disheveled hair. Seneca further discusses the ways in which drunkenness affects anger. Seneca writes that anger, fear and drunkenness can combine to provoke shameful actions.<sup>103</sup> The all consuming power of anger and the uncontrollability of it are important issues in the teachings of the stoic philosophers. Whether Brouwer became acquainted with Seneca's philosophy through Antwerp humanism, through Rubens, or through the rederijkers in Haarlem, Amsterdam or Antwerp, we cannot say for certain. It seems, however, that stoic philosophies were popular enough among intellectual crowds that Brouwer would have had some knowledge of them.

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

It is perhaps more important to take into account the actual performances of the rederijkers, which Brouwer without a doubt observed and collaborated on in some way. Renger believes that Brouwer's later pictures lack a clear moralizing intent, favoring instead a focus on gesture and expression. No longer does the vice stand as the subject, but rather the audience's attention is shifted entirely to the faces and the movements of the figures.<sup>104</sup> This is a completely new approach to picture making and one that may be understood in the context of Brouwer's relationship to the rederijkers. It seems that Brouwer's interest changed from one dealing with witty puzzles, like those performed by rederijkers, to an interest in dramatic practice itself, namely, acting. Indeed, in Brouwer's work we see an overall lack of an obvious narrative. Beginning with Brouwer's later Haarlem work and onwards we see what seems to be a mastery of depicting expression above all.

It is at this point that Brouwer breaks away from the sixteenth century tradition of depicting the vices in works of moralizing intent. The actions of Brouwer's characters are not judged in terms of Christian ethics. More quickly than most artists of this time period we see a rapid progression in style. Brouwer seems to be working with the tradition upheld by Bruegel in such early works as *Fight over Cards* in The Hague (figure 33). In this work Brouwer uses standard iconography to denote that this is a scene depicting vice. The pigs, symbols of gluttony, seem to be angrily rushing toward the scene as a dog restrains one pig by mounting it from behind. This is perhaps a reflection of the central male figure being restrained by a woman. In later works, which we must

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 44.

keep in mind appear within five years of this artist's short career, Brouwer eliminates suggestive symbols. The pictures can no longer be clearly read as moralizing works.

Brouwer's choice in shifting intent may be understood in light of his relationship to secular intellectual environments, like those of the various *rederijker* guilds with which he had contact. Although the *rederijkers* used moralizing elements in their plays, their meetings were not always given to the discussion of ethics, but rather to the form of art and language in and of themselves. The *rederijkers* had a profound interest in ancient philosophy, in poetry and drama, and in the visual arts. As demonstrated earlier, it was not the vice of anger which so compelled the intellectuals who read Seneca, but the philosopher's detailed guidelines for communicating it.

Analyzing Brouwer's painting technique better illuminates this point. We may liken Brouwer's approach to painting to the theories of the *rederijkers* concerning speech. As noted, Seneca was a favored source of inspiration for the *rederijkers*. It seems as if Brouwer's paintings are a visual solution to the call for communication marked by plainness and clarity. Brouwer's work, and perhaps Hals's as well, seems to translate the championed virtues of the Dutch language onto the canvas.<sup>105</sup>

The use of vibrant facial language is not just symptomatic of Brouwer's cognizance of theater practices. The *rederijkers* began to promote the virtues of the Dutch language during the sixteenth century. In addition to encouraging the publication of serious scholarly works in the vernacular rather than the traditional Latin, Dutch

---

<sup>105</sup><sup>105</sup> Although hitherto unpublished, information regarding Frans Hals's brushstroke and its relation to the Dutch language has been culled from lectures by David Levine at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven circa 2002.

intellectuals began to respond to the criticisms of foreigners. It was insisted upon that the Dutch language, for all of its barbarism and clumsiness, was better suited to express the human condition than any other tongue. There is an immediacy to the staccato cadence and the guttural tone of the Dutch vocabulary, belying its Germanic origins. By the seventeenth century, the Dutch were answering Europe's insults with a proud affirmation. The simple and barbaric was embraced as straightforward, honest and unpretentious.

Brouwer was no doubt mindful of the Dutch self-image during this period. Genre paintings of this period are indeed marked by an unpretentious plainness and sincerity. As Alpers would contend, the Dutch display themselves in these everyday scenes with a mind to self-representation in a broader cultural dialog. The Dutch prided themselves on being unadorned and sincere. In his compositions Brouwer pays special attention to physical expression to eliminate the complicated obscurity observed in Mannerist paintings still popular at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Further adding to the immediacy of his works, Brouwer often uses primer as the base coat of his work. This allows the painter's characteristic thinly applied paint to seep into the canvas, creating a saturation of color and form. The artist's brushstrokes range from quick dabs, nervously applied, to broad economical sweeps of paint. It would seem then that Brouwer's technique is an answer to the cultural slings and arrows hurled by foreigners. In an art world dominated in large part by tight and meticulous paint handling, Brouwer's skillful, but fragmented treatment of the medium stands apart as a boisterous rebellion against hitherto uncontested tradition. Brouwer owes this technique to Hals, whose wild brushstroke became so popular during this time. It is apparent, however, that Brouwer

was courageous enough to go much further, expanding the method to unimaginable lengths.

Brouwer's most expressive paint handling appears at the end of his career when he was most likely back in Antwerp. At this point, Brouwer had begun to focus on smaller, simpler scenes of half-length figures. Panels like *Good Friends* and the *Fat Man*, use rough strokes, sparsely applied dabs of paint which present the subject in a vivid and fresh way (figures 34 & 35). The sketchy and uneven surface of the coarsely rendered, *Fat Man* echoes the overall mood of the piece. An unkempt peasant with a scraggly beard reaches into his shabby jacket as he glances in the indistinct distances towards a pair of lovers. There is a slight resemblance between this figure and those seen in confirmed portraits of the artist. Perhaps owing to the pathetic expression on the tired man's face and to the fact that this is one of Brouwer's last known works, many of the artist's first biographers treat this work as a self-portrait. More recent theories refuse to assign such an honor to this clumsy peasant, preferring to trust the work of Lievens who depicts Brouwer in the last year of his life as a svelte, elegant gentleman (figure 36).

## CONCLUSION

It will never be entirely clear how directly Brouwer was influenced by the intellectual milieu with which we know him to have had at least a few ties. A discussion of Brouwer's environment yields important clues into complex paintings that have received surprisingly little attention in art historical inquiry. In some cases art historians have consistently taken Brouwer's works at face value, as depictions of everyday life. In other cases, the deeper meanings of these works has been hinted at, but never systematically approached. Indeed it is difficult to approach Brouwer's work, which seems to speak so plainly yet confound so much. It is as if we know we are being fooled into thinking there is no more than meets the eye. In this way, the similarities between Brouwer and the rederijkers' plays are striking. It is as if Brouwer painted the *tableaux vivants* so carefully constructed by the rederijkers. In both cases the audience is presented with a scene that looks simple enough, that offers a view into the recognizable, but quickly reveals hidden meanings. This format would have been more effective in inciting emotions and inspiring ideas than anything fantastic or grandiose. Perhaps it is this depth that so enraptured Rubens and Rembrandt.

The artistic agenda of Rembrandt has been a subject long contested in art historical inquiry. Alpers suggests that we discuss Rembrandt's work in reference to the artist's estrangement from Dutch pictorial tradition and his refusal to embrace the Italian ideal. It seems then that according to Alpers's theory, we are to understand Rembrandt as figure working in a state of conflict. In some ways we may discuss the art of Brouwer as an influence on Rembrandt's strange imagery. Brouwer's art calls attention to the

differences between the modes of art making among his countrymen and those of foreigners. This celebration of difference did not begin with Brouwer, rather it was taking form in Haarlem and elsewhere in the Netherlands since the middle of the sixteenth century. Brouwer's work, however, offers us the clearest and most direct interpretation of these differences.

Throughout the seventeenth century, genre painting of the Netherlands changed in style and intent. The sixteenth century tradition of depicting scenes of everyday life in order to speak dogmatically about Christian morality, gave way to an era when, as noted by Alpers artists began to shift attention to self-representation. The works of Bruegel are commonly understood as being about vices and the ill effects of partaking in them. By the 1650s Pieter De Hooch begins to paint his scenes of immaculate interiors, scenes which produce very little in the way of subject matter. Jan Vermeer's women by windows can be best understood as exercises in the process of art making. There is not a complete lack of moralizing intent in genre painting of the seventeenth century, rather it is de-Christianized to express more general statements upon ethics, as in the work of Jan Steen.

In Brouwer's work we are presented with juxtapositions. These paradoxical images provoke critical inquiry from the viewer simply through their clever placement of disparate themes. As Alpers remarks, Dutch artists used a visual vocabulary that included culturally familiar themes and images. The rederijkers used base imagery and language in their street performances, but these plays always brought profound messages to the public. The individual characters and actions would be saturated with double entendres and hidden meanings. Both the rederijker plays and Brouwer's paintings were

realistic to the eye and therefore easily recognizable. Just as in the case of these plays, Brouwer's works are witty examples of how imagery can prove to be more than meets the eye.

## ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1: Pieter van Laer. *Acqua Acetosa*. 1636. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.



Figure 2: *Washerwoman and Shepherd in Grotto*. 1630. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 3: Pieter van Laer. *Brigands Attacking a Traveller*. 1628. Galleria Spado, Rome.



Figure 4: *Horsetamer Group on Quirinal Hill.*

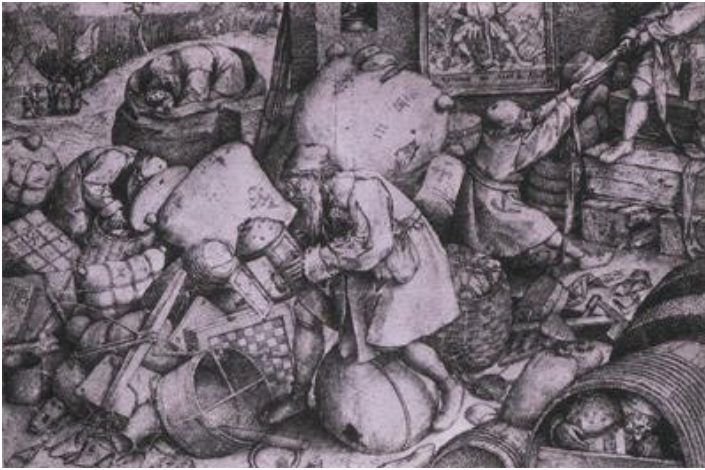


Figure 5. Pieter Bruegel. *Elck*. 1558.



Figure 6. Pieter Bruegel. *Feast of Fools*. 1559.



Figure 7. Pieter Bruegel. *The Combat Between Carnival and Lent*. Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna. 1559.



Figure 8. Frans Hals. *Shrove-tide Revellers*. 1615. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 9. Frans Hals. *Monsieur Peeckelhaering*. 1628. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem.



Figure 10. Frans Hals. *Jonker Ramp and His Sweetheart*. 1623. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 11. Frans Hals. *Rommel Pot Player*. 1618. Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.

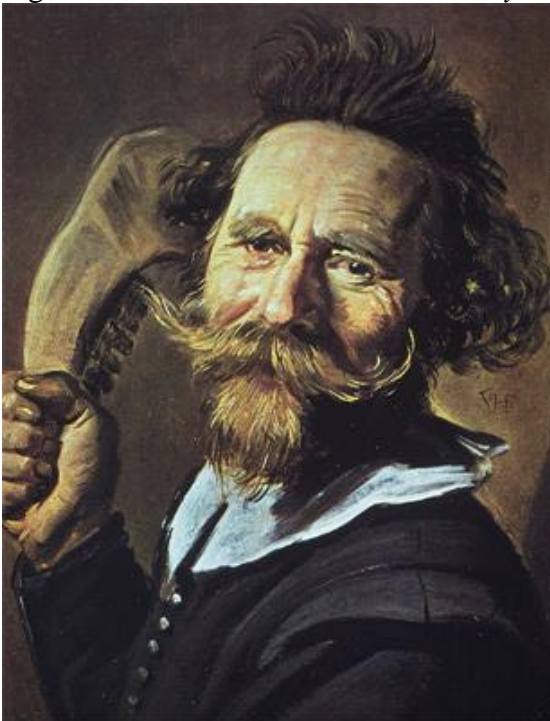


Figure 12. Frans Hals. *Verdonck*. 1627. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.



Figure 13: Frans Hals. *Malle Babbe*. 1630. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 14: Jan Steen. *Meeting of the Rederijkers*. 1660. Musee des Beaux-Arts, Bussels.



Figure 15: Unknown master of the Haarlem School (Hendrick Pot?) *Religious Disputes at a Meeting of the Haarlem Rederijkers*. 1659. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem.



Figure 16. Jan Steen. *Rederijker Feast*. 1661. Mandl Collection, Wiesbaden.



Figure 17. Jan Steen. *Rederijkers at a Window*. 1661. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Figure 18. Jan Steen. *Poultry Seller*. 1661. De Boer Collection, Amsterdam.



Figure 19. Jan Steen. *Card Players Quarreling*. 1664. Staatliche Museen, Berlin.



Figure 20. Adriaen Brouwer. *Pancake Baker*. 1625. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Figure 21. Adriaen Brouwer. *Fight Over Cards*. 1631-35. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 22. Adriaen Brouwer. *The Village Barber*. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Figure 24. Hendrick Goltzius. *Farnese Hercules*. 1617.



Figure 25. Altar of Zeus at Pergamon. Athena battling Alkyoneos. 180-175 B.C.

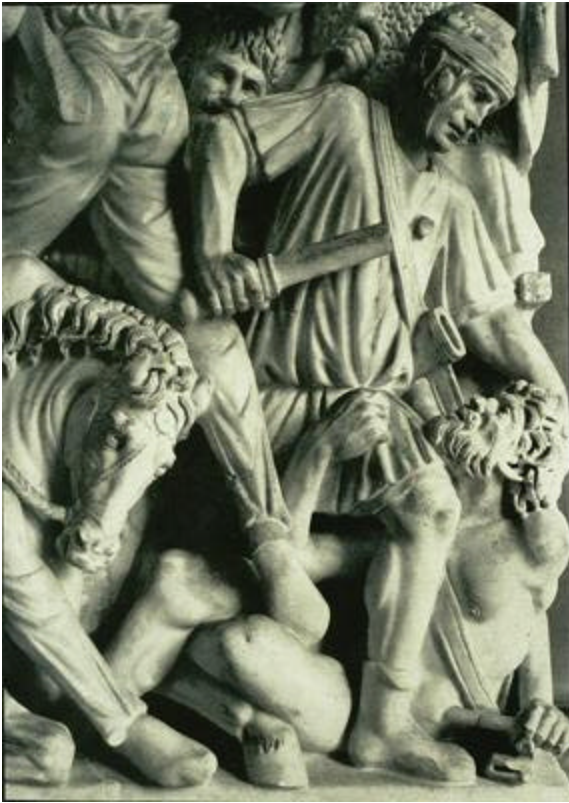


Figure 26. *Ludovisi Battle Sarcophagus*. 250-260. Roman National Museum, Palazzo Altemps, Rome.



Figure 27. Baldassare Peruzzi. *Perseus and Medusa*. 1511. Villa Farnesia, Rome.



Figure 28. Michelangelo Caravaggio. *David with the Head of Goliath*. 1605. Galleria Borghese, Rome.



Figure 29. Agesander. *Laocöon and His Sons*. 50 B.C. Vatican Museum, Rome.



Figure 30: Adriaen Brouwer. *Two Peasants Fighting Over a Barrel*. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Figure 31. Adriaen Brouwer. *The Smokers*. 1626. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 32: Adriaen Brouwer. *The Bitter Draught*. 1635. Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt



Figure 33. Adriaen Brouwer. *Fight Over Cards*. 1625. Mauritshuis, The Hague.



Figure 34. Adriaen Brouwer. *Good Friends*. 1637. Dutch Private Collection.



Figure 35. Adriaen Brouwer. *The Fat Man*. 1637. Mauritshuis, The Hague.



Figure 36. Jan Lievens. *Portrait of Adriaen Brouwer*. 1638.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aercke, Kristiaan P. *Gods of Play: Baroque Festive Performances as Rhetorical Discourse*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
- Alpers, Svetlana. *The Art of Describing*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Bruegel's Festive Peasants," *Simiolus* 8 (1975/76), 115-144.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Vexations of Art: Velàzquez and Others*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1965).
- Bellori, Giovanni Pietro. *Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, edited by Eveline Borea and Giovanni Previtali. (Turin: Einaudi, 1976).
- Bode, Wilhelm von. *Adriaen Brouwer: sein Leben und sein Werke*. (Berlin: Euphorion Verlag, 1924).
- Branden, F. J. Van den. "Adriaen Brouwer en Joos van Craesbeeck." *Nederlandsche Kunstbode* 3(December 1881).
- Brandt, George W. *German and Dutch Theatre, 1600-1848*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- De Hollanda, Francisco. *Four Dialogues on Painting*. Translated by Aubrey F. G. Bell. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).
- Descargues, Pierre. *Frans Hals: Biographical and Critical Study*. Translated by James Emmons. (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1968).
- Duyse, Prudens van. *De Rederijkerkamers in Nederland, Ghent, 1900-1902*.
- Erasmus of Rotterdam. *Adages*. Translated with discussion by Margaret Mann Phillips. (Cambridge: University Press, 1964).
- Gibson, Walter S., "Artists and Rederijkers in the Age of Bruegel," *Art Bulletin*, vol.63, no.3 (September 1981), 426-446.
- Gombrich, E.H. "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape." In *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1966).

Gudlaugsson, S.J. *The Comedians in the Work of Jan Steen and his Contemporaries*. (Soest, Netherlands: Davaco Publishers, 1975).

Heppner, Albert. "Jan Steen and the Rederijkers," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 3 (1939). 4-48.

Hess, Jacob. *Die Künstlerbiographieren von Giovanni Battista Passeri*. (Leipzig: H. Keller, 1934).

Hofrichter, Frima Fox. *Haarlem: The Seventeenth Century*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1983).

Holman, Beth. "Goltzius's Great Hercules: mythology, art and politics." *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vols. 42-43 (1991-1992). 397-412.

Kernodle, George, R. *From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

Knuttel, Gerard. *Adriaen Brouwer: the Master and his Works*. (The Hague: LJC Boucher, 1962).

Levine, David. "The Roman Limekilns of the Bamboccianti." *Art Bulletin*, 70 (1988), 569-589.

Mander, Karel van. *Foundation of the Noble and Free Art of Painting*, translated and edited by E. Honig. Yale University, New Haven, 1985. Unpublished duplication.

Melion, Walter. *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Michelet, Jules. *Histoire de France*, vol. 10. (Paris, 1852-67). 355

Morford, Mark. "Lipsius, Vaenius, and the Rebellion of Civilis." In *Recreating Ancient History: Episodes from the Greek and Roman Past in the Arts and Literatures of the Early Modern Period*, edited by Karl Enenkel, et al. (Boston: Brill, 2001).

Peters, Julie Stone. *Theatre of the Book, 1480-1880. Print, Text, and Performance in Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Renger, Konrad. *Adriaen Brouwer und das niederlandische Bauerngenre: 1600-1660*. (Munich: Hermer Verlag, 1986).

\_\_\_\_\_. "Bettler und Bauern bei Pieter Bruegel d. A." *Sitzungsberichte der kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft zu Berlin*. 1972, 9-16.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Flemish Genre Painting: Low Life – High Life – Daily Life." *Age of Rubens*, edited by Peter Sutton. (Boston: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 173.

Rogerson, Brewster. "The Art of Painting the Passions." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14, 1953, 68-94.

Rosa, Salvator. *Satire*, edited by Danilo Romei and Jacopo Manna. (Milan: Edizione Integrale, 1995).

Schama, Simon. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. (New York: Knopf, 1987).

Slive, Seymour. *Fran Hals*. Volume 1. (London: Phaidon, 1970-1974).

Spies, Marijke. *Rhetoric, Rhetoricians and Poets*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

Tacitus, Cornelius. *Agricola, Germania*. Translated by W. Heinemann in *Tacitus in Five Volumes*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970-1981).

Waite, Gary K. *Reformers on Stage: Popular Drama and Religious Propaganda in the Low Countries of Charles V, 1515-1556*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

Westermann, Mariet. *The Amusements of Jan Steen*. (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997).

Woodall, J. 'Love is in the Air: Amor as Motivation and Message in Seventeenth Century Netherlandish Painting.' *Art History* 19 (1996), 208-246.

Worp, J.A. "Constantyn Huygens over de schilder van zijn tijd." *Oud Holland* 9 (1891), 128.

The vita has been removed from the reformatted version of this document.