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## **An Interpretation of *Land of Cockaigne* (1567) by Pieter Breugel the Elder**

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This study argues that Breugel painted the *Land of Cockaigne* as a critical, humanist, political commentary leveled at the participants in the First Revolt and those involved in its suppression. Breugel fused two traditional popular genres, the fabled land of cockaigne and collections of illustrated proverbs, in order to set his interpretation of contemporary political events into a traditional, popular, humorous-satirical framework. The arcane details of the painting that Breugel finished during the end of the First Revolt illustrate proverbs that a Flemish audience could easily recognize and interpret. The *Land of Cockaigne* formed the link between sixteenth-century religious propaganda and the political satire of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which developed into the modern political cartoon.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP on Pieter Breugel the Elder has favored one of two approaches, both concerned with finding and explaining meaning in his art. The critical works on Breugel written early this century generally view him as an artist concerned with portraying the customs, proverbs, and aspirations of the Flemish people in the context of a rising nationalist sentiment. Accordingly, art historians have attempted to identify elements of political commentary or satire in his work. More recently, Breugel's works have been placed within the tradition of a culture formed by the pamphlets, proverbs, graphic art, and popular literature of sixteenth-century Europe. Adherents to this view claim that Breugel intended his art to convey a more generalized moralistic meaning rather than allude to the contemporary political situation.

Since the 1970s, discussion about meaning in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century northern art has opened on a fresh front. Compared to the earlier scholarship, the new approach focuses more on how the painter conveyed meaning than on what particular message his work contains. Stimulated by what to some art historians represents an overelaboration of iconographic and symbolic analysis, and informed by new ethnographic approaches in other social sciences, Svetlana Alpers proposed a "comic mode" to categorize realistic depictions in northern art of peasants, their surroundings, and their activities. From such a perspective, the explicit moral messages based on iconography so central to earlier interpretations become subsumed in a sense of humanistic, moral detachment animated by the "comic," "festive," and "infectious" peasant scenes. As Alpers concluded in reference to Breugel's

*Wedding Dance*,<sup>1</sup> “It appears that the social event of the outside visitor is distilled to raise a moral issue. Is it that the outsiders cannot, or will not take part? How does one experience such expansive pleasure if not by joining in the dance? . . . The painting offers us neither a judgment on the dance, nor on the observers; it rather poses the problem.”<sup>2</sup> This position has been extended further from the detailed iconographic approach towards a “reading” of popular themes in works of art which emphasizes larger issues of artistic communication, instead of the search for hidden, didactic meaning.<sup>3</sup>

This study of Breugel’s *Land of Cockaigne* (1567) returns to the first approach, arguing that in this work Breugel created a powerful and immediately understandable political comment on the situation in the Low Countries just after the failure of the “First Revolt” in 1566–67. This interpretation draws on the understanding of Breugel’s position in relation to his work gained through the recent studies of his sophisticated form of pictorial expression, but remains steadfastly iconographic in its basic analysis. At the same time, this reading of the *Land of Cockaigne* attempts to avoid the pitfall of anachronistic formulations that have plagued previous studies purporting to show political allusion in Breugel’s work. In the *Land of Cockaigne*, Breugel combined two traditions and iconographies, depicting the fabled land of Cockaigne using traditional visual elements, which also serve to represent Flemish proverbs. Breugel presented the contemporary political situation as a moral problem from a detached, satirical, humanist point of view; the painting shows the people, led by the Flemish nobles, delivered by their own actions to the Spanish, plucked and roasted like a fowl. The immediate, intuitive expression of this scene, as well as its pictorial language drawn from the tradition of literary and visual portrayals of the land of Cockaigne, helps to establish a meaning without didactic, moralizing, or hidden purpose. In this respect, the *Land of Cockaigne* follows the other works of festive peasants that have become such a source of controversy. Many of the specific images found in the *Land of Cockaigne* illustrate contemporary proverbs, providing a pictorial dialogue which Breugel used to weave a satirical commentary into his depiction of Cockaigne. The same proverbs appear in another, earlier work, Breugel’s *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1556), which provides a key to this visual text. According to this interpretation, the *Land of Cockaigne* represents the first instance of

<sup>1</sup>All plate numbers refer to illustrations in Fritz G. Grossmann, *Pieter Breugel: Complete Paintings*, 3d ed. (London/New York: Phaidon, 1973), pl. 125.

<sup>2</sup>Svetlana Alpers, “Breugel’s Festive Peasants,” *Simiolus* 6 (1972-73): 174-76. Also see Svetlana Alpers, “Realism as a Comic Mode: Low-Life Painting Seen through Bredero’s Eyes,” *Simiolus* 8 (1975-76): 115-44.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Snow, “‘Meaning’ in *Children’s Games*: On the Limitations of the Iconographic Approach to Breugel,” *Representations* 2 (Spring 1983): 27-60. See Paul Vandebroek, “Verbeeck’s Peasant Weddings: A Study of Iconography and Social Function,” *Simiolus* 14 (1984): 79-121, for an attempt to reconcile the moralistic and comic modes within the context of a more traditional iconographic analysis.

entirely secular political commentary and the model for the development of the satirical political print in Europe.

## I

Contacts with popular literature, engravings, and woodcuts become important when considering the precedents for the *Land of Cockaigne*, which represents a seemingly effortless fusion of two distinct, popular genres: the land of Cockaigne and the pamphlet of proverbs. Like many of Breugel's works, the *Land of Cockaigne* depicts a traditional subject translated into a contemporary Flemish setting. In keeping with the group of scenes depicting weddings, kermis, and other pastimes, Breugel based the *Land of Cockaigne* on a popular genre which has a long literary and pictorial tradition. The Western European concept of the land of Cockaigne comes from literary descriptions of the Muslim paradise through the medium of Petrus Alfonsi.<sup>4</sup> First appearing in a Latin text around 1106, the Muslim paradise became the preeminent example of indulgence in temporal existence at the expense of Christian values and spirituality. Peter the Venerable expanded its didactic purpose in 1143 and from there the concept entered Western literature in the thirteenth century as the "Land of Cockaigne," first appearing in a French poem, then in a very similar Dutch version, the "Luyeleckerland," and finally in Middle English during the first quarter of the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The English poem mentions the flying roast geese, baked lark, river of milk, and shingles made of cakes that figure so prominently in later versions, within the context of a satire against monks and nuns.

The first sixteenth-century reference to the land of Cockaigne appears in *Le Voyage et Navigation que fist Panurge, Disciple de Pantegruel aux Isles Incongnues et Estranges*. . . . The earliest known edition, published in 1538, has been attributed to Denis Johannot.<sup>6</sup> The chapter headings describe the general features of the land: "How Panurge sailed until he found a mountain of fresh butter and beside it a river of milk on which the boat floated" (chap. 18); and "How Panurge arrived at a flat country which is not cultivated but is very fertile, where hot pies grow. And about a cloud from which roast larks fall, and how the houses are roofed with warm tartlets" (chap. 19). Panurge says one may eat as much as one likes in this land but, "I would not show it to the Flemings, for big as it is, I believe they would eat it all up."

<sup>4</sup>Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 210-13.

<sup>5</sup>J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, eds., *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 138-44.

<sup>6</sup>M. Seidel and R. H. Marijnissen, *Bruegel* (New York: Putnam, 1971), 38-43.

Unfortunately for Panurge, someone did alert the Flemish. A Flemish text, dated 1546, describes the same land, compressing all the details into one geographical description:

A description of the slothful and delicious land (Van't Luyeckerland) which is much to be marvelled at; moreover, beautiful and precious, full of every pleasure and desire. And it has just been discovered in the year written: one thousand sugared cakes, five hundred egg tarts and forty six roast chickens in the wine month (October) when the pastries taste good. And it is most agreeable to read.<sup>7</sup>

This text, however, does not recommend the land of Cockaigne as an earthly paradise without reservation. The Luyeckerland encourages laziness and vice and accordingly attracts the useless and immoral members of society. These people reach the land, located in "North Hommelen," near the gallows, after eating their way through a huge mountain of buckwheat, three miles in length and height. Once inside, the traveler finds an overwhelming abundance of food and drink. Tarts tile the roofs, cakes grow on the trees like pineapples, sweet grapes grow under the hawthorne, and cooked pears grow in abundance and are powdered over in winter with sugar falling from the heavens. The beautiful "Fontaines de Malvosie" water the land, from which sweet drinks gush without effort into the waiting mouths of the inhabitants. A river with banks of white bread continually deposits that substance into the water so that one may help oneself to the delicacies. Fish float in the water, boiled or fried and perfectly prepared. Well-roasted chickens, geese, and woodcocks come close to the bank within easy reach. They are so abundant that they will fly into one's mouth if one yawns. The pigs prosper so much that they run in herds, deliciously roasted, and carry a knife in their backs so that one may cut a slice from them, replacing the knife for the next helping. The fish and cheeses grow well, too, and are as abundant as stones. Peasants and farmers even grow on pear-like trees and in good weather ripen and fall, each into a perfectly sized pair of boots! Horses can quickly lay a basket of eggs, donkeys lay figs, dogs lay mush-pears, and cows and oxen lay green crepes. In archery, the person furthest from the target hits first and the worst archer wins. In this land the lazy, idle dreamers who want nothing but to sleep are considered gentlemen. But if one wishes to escape, he will be strung up immediately on the gallows, near the land of Cockaigne. The beginning verse expresses the moral of the text: "To be lazy, greedy, and to love to eat too much; those are three things that are worth nothing."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 63 n. 92, and Louis Lebeer, "Le Pays Cocaigne (Het Luilekkerland)," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1955): 211, (tr. Martin Kauffmann).

<sup>8</sup>Lebeer, "Cocaigne," 211-14.

A large woodcut composed of eight blocks, now in the New York Public Library, contains the earliest extant representation of the land of Cockaigne (fig. 1). Louis Lebeer attributes the print to the Swiss artist, Jacou Clusar, who worked from 1547 to 1578 and probably executed the woodcut some time before Bruegel's *Land of Cockaigne*.<sup>9</sup> Many of the features which appear



Fig. 1. *Das Gelobet Abgebildete Schlaraffen-Land*, Anon. (2nd half of 16th century), print. Courtesy of the Print Collection, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lennox and Tilden Foundations

in the woodcut link it to the text of 1546. Various intrepid pleasure-seekers embark on their journey over the mountain of buckwheat. In the middle of the woodcut is a large basin, containing people bathing, which can be tapped from below by using the spigot in its center. A profusion of breads and fish float in the river as it meanders through the land, to be picked up at will, and the roast fowl fly into yawning mouths; rooftop pies, and pigs ready for carving, all appear in the third panel (above, center-right), just as described in the text. Most striking are the trees growing men and women. The first two panels show each stage of their formation, from limp clothes, ripening forms hanging from the branches, to the mature human fruit dropping fully clothed into pillows set below to break their fall. These details indicate that

<sup>9</sup>Louis Lebeer, *Catalogue raisonné des estampes de Bruegel l'Ancien* (Brussels: Bibliothèque royale Albert Ier, 1969), 152.



Fig. 2. *Land of Cockaigne*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, signed and dated 1567, Munich, Alte Pinakothek. Credit: Foto Marburg/Art Resource, New York

the woodcut was based on either the 1546 text or a source close to it. Even its title, “The Praised, Depicted Schlaraffenland,” seems to allude to a literary source.

The woodcut also contains many details related to the *Land of Cockaigne* (fig. 2). Almost all of the similarities appear in panels three and four: the man tumbling out of the buckwheat mountain into the land, the sausage-wattle fence, the pig carrying its own carving knife, the tarts on the roof and the man (center and center-left of panel three) with roasted fowls flying into his mouth. The five groups of adventurers in panels four and eight each represent a recognizable class of society, which reminds one of the three figures, also representing specific classes, lying around the tree trunk in the *Land of Cockaigne*. This is not to suggest that the woodcut of Jacou Clusar was a direct source for the *Land of Cockaigne*, but it does demonstrate a link between Bruegel’s painting and the earlier literary and pictorial representations of this popular theme.

Bruegel’s relation to contemporary popular artists and workshops helps to explain his choice of the land of Cockaigne for the subject of a work of monumental art.<sup>10</sup> Louis Lebeer first remarked upon the relation of Bruegel’s

<sup>10</sup>Much of Bruegel’s income stemmed from the engravings he designed for Hieronymus Cock, the painter and engraver, at his Antwerp shop, “In de Vier Winden” (the Four Winds). From Bruegel, Cock received nearly 135 drawings for copper-plate engravings. These were then prepared for printing by the various professional engravers who worked in Cock’s shop. Pierre van der Heyden (also known as A. Marchi or Myricenus) also frequently engraved and printed Bruegel’s drawings. See Jacques Lavalleye, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Lucas van Leyden: The Complete Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 190.



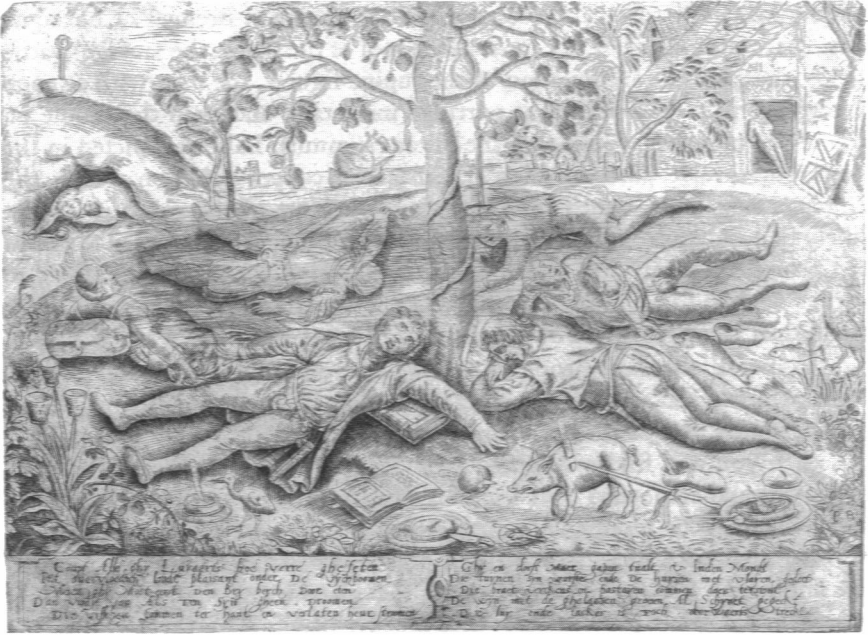


Fig. 3. *Land of Cockaigne (Gluttony)*, Pieter de Costere Baltenszoon (Peter Baltens), ca. 1520-98. Printed ca. 1925 from the original plate on museum etching press. Credit: The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of FitzRoy Carrington, 25.598

composition and a print of the *Land of Cockaigne* composed by Peter Baltens (fig. 3). He initially argued that Baltens was inspired by Breugel,<sup>11</sup> but a subsequent discovery has thrown this hypothesis into doubt. A document shows that in October 1551, Pieter Breugel collaborated with Peter Baltens on an altarpiece installed in the chapel of the glove-makers guild in the church of St. Rombaut in Malines (Mechelen), Brabant. Breugel worked on the wings of the altarpiece while Baltens painted the interior; in other words, Breugel worked as the subordinate artist. As Pieter Cock van Aelst, Breugel's presumed teacher, died in December 1550, and most scholars believe that Breugel travelled to Italy just after being made a master of the Guild of St. Luke in Antwerp (between October 1551 and October 1552), it appears that Breugel completed his apprenticeship under the direction of Peter Baltens.<sup>12</sup> Baltens, an older artist, had entered the Guild of St. Luke in 1540. The print of the *Land of Cockaigne* by Peter Baltens and the painting by Breugel are

<sup>11</sup>Lebeer, "Cocaigne," 207. Breugel and Baltens both entered the St. Luke's Guild, Antwerp, as masters in 1551; see Wolfgang Stechow, *Breugel* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1970), 120.

<sup>12</sup>Lebeer, *Catalogue*, 7-8; and see A. Monballicu, "P. Breugel en het altaar van de Mechelse Handschoenmakers (1551)," *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelin* 68 (1964): 92-110.

closely related on internal evidence as well. Looking at Breugel's *Cockaigne* (fig. 2) from right to left, the tarts on the roof of the shack, the sausage-wattle fence, the general configuration of the supine figures, the man with a spoon emerging from the buckwheat porridge mountain, and even the candle on top of the mountain (visible on the distant summit), Baltens depicted in the same but reverse position (fig. 3). Since the copper plate on which the engraver originally etched the image is the reverse of the print, it is most likely that Baltens produced his rendition after Breugel had painted the *Land of Cockaigne*. In any case, the Baltens composition appears much closer to earlier depictions of this theme, in contrast to Breugel's distillation of the traditional iconography. The verse accompanying the Baltens print reads:

Come all you lazy people, however far you are from the land of happiness and abundance, lying under the fig trees: but first of all you must eat your way through the mountain of buckwheat and then you will find everything provided. . . . Fish will leave their rivers and come into your hands. You have only to yawn and it will fall into your mouth. The hedgerows are sausages and the houses are tiled with tarts. The roasted pigs and pastries will arrive in a moment. Wine shoots forth with the glasses, although that may seem bizarre. To be fat, lazy and greedy, that is nevertheless what attracts one.<sup>13</sup>

The text and the iconographic details of the work establish its close relation to both the 1546 text and the woodcut by Clusar. Just as the last line of the caption adds a strong element of satire to the meaning of the earlier text, Baltens has transformed his composition into a powerful picture of the garden of earthly paradise gone sour. The new entrant from the buckwheat mountain looks quite ill after his eating ordeal. He joins the other men lying around the tree, too bloated to move. In the early seventeenth century, Johannes Galle interpreted the painting by Breugel as an engraved illustration of Prov. 26:15; "The sluggard loses his hand in the dish; he is too weary to lift it to his mouth" (fig. 4). The links of sausage that wrap themselves around the trunk of the tree and hang down over the bottom limb in the Baltens print make this moral explicit by providing the serpent in this perversion of the Garden of Eden. The symbolism links self-indulgence, which brought these men to their torpid state, with the particular act of gluttony which led to the Fall and the expulsion of Adam and Eve. The ship carrying the world in the background emphasizes the universal nature of the message. The sausages replace Breugel's two breast-like knots on the trunk of the tree (fig. 2), which shifts the emphasis of the allusion from Breugel's personification of human weakness – Eve – to a more generalized source of evil.

To many, the relationship of the *Land of Cockaigne* and the engraved print issued by Peter van der Heyden directly after its completion (fig. 5),

<sup>13</sup>Lebeer, "Cocaigne," 205 (tr. Martin Kauffmann).



Fig. 4. *Land of Cockaigne*, Pieter Breugel, Johannes Galle exec., print, second state. Credit: Bibliothèque royale Albert I<sup>er</sup>, Bruxelles (Cabinet des Estampes)



Fig. 5. *Land of Cockaigne*, Pieter Breugel, Peter van der Heyden, ca. late 1560s, print. Reprinted courtesy Bibliothèque royale Albert I<sup>er</sup>, Bruxelles (Cabinet des Estampes)

to the Baltens print and the earlier sources, proves that Breugel was simply reworking the subject while reinterpreting it according to his particular artistic vision.<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Stechow saw the work as “the first climax” in Breugel’s move towards expressing a single theme in each particular work, “the concept of gluttony, instead of being illustrated in a host of details (as it had been in the *Gula* of 1557 in the series of *Vices*), has been conveyed with overwhelming power through a group of only three representatives of humankind who are defined by the roundness and bulk of their bellies as relentlessly as the scenery is by the corresponding roundness and bulk of the tree, table and “riceberg.”<sup>15</sup> Walter Gibson, who entertains the idea that some of Breugel’s paintings may have political connotations, says, “No topical allusions, however, can be found in Breugel’s *Land of Cockaigne* of 1567; for this picture, he drew upon an old folk theme whose humor particularly captivated sixteenth century Europe.”<sup>16</sup>

## II

It is quite true that Breugel has taken the concept of the land of Cockaigne and expressed it far more forcefully, in artistic terms, than in any previous depiction. At the same time, the appearance of this particular subject in a panel painting by Breugel, let alone the sparse, arcane manner in which he rendered the traditional delicacies of the land, cannot be explained adequately simply as a reworking, however masterful, of the popular theme of Cockaigne. As a rustic, “low-life” scene, it merits inclusion with the peasant scenes such as the *Wedding Dance* or *Peasant Wedding*, although no one has seen fit to include it in any discussion of these works. At the same time, the *Land of Cockaigne* belongs to a particular group of secular works by Breugel, as do *Two Monkeys* and *Dulle Griet* before it, in which the full import of the painting is not contained in the ostensible subject.<sup>17</sup> The difficulty in explaining what Breugel sought to convey in this painting suggests the need for an examination of the proverbial element common to much of the artist’s work.

Considering the frequency with which proverbs appear as themes in Breugel’s work, it seems surprising that more work has not appeared concerning their use and interpretation, particularly as they relate to the iconography of the *Land of Cockaigne*. Breugel often took a figure or scene used in one work and transplanted it into another, sometimes making a minor detail into the

<sup>14</sup>“Cela ne pourra jamais avoir pour effet que de déceler plus sûrement dans l’oeuvre bruegelienne le sens qui lui est réellement propre et ainsi, de finir par révéler combien Breugel était génialement grand, dépassant infiniment, par son esprit et par son art, les contingences temporelles et locales de son époque et de son milieu, contingences temporelles et locales dont il s’inspira pour en dégager ce qu’elles avaient d’universellement humain et d’éternellement actuel.” Lebeer, “Cocaigine,” 210.

<sup>15</sup>Stechow, *Breugel*, 32.

<sup>16</sup>Walter S. Gibson, *Breugel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 178.

<sup>17</sup>See Grossmann, *Breugel*, 3d ed., pls. 131, 56, 47.



Fig. 6 *The Netherlandish Proverbs*, Pieter Breugel, signed and dated 1559. Berlin, Gemaeldeergalerie Dahlmen. Credit: Foto Marburg/Art Resource, New York

subject of the new work. In one example, *Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, the group of deformed beggars in the left-center of the painting Breugel later made into the principle subject of *The Cripples*, now in Paris.<sup>18</sup> *The Netherlandish Proverbs* (fig. 6) in particular, provided Breugel with numerous ideas for other works. In the back, to the left (fig. 6, no. 1) the three blind men who follow each other, silhouetted against the skyline, he repeated as the subject of *The Parable of the Blind* at Naples.<sup>19</sup> The man kneeling inside the world (fig. 6, no. 2) has very likely provided the theme for the thief in *The Misanthrope*.<sup>20</sup> The reverse relationship exists as well. The drawing of *Big Fish Eat Little Fish* (1556) in the Albertina in Vienna and the subsequent engraving by Van der Heyden, published by Cock (1557), Breugel used to provide one of the illustrations in the *Netherlandish Proverbs* (fig. 6, no. 3).

Breugel's painting *Netherlandish Proverbs*, in which Fraenger identified 118 contemporary proverbs, forms a repository for themes to which the artist repeatedly returned. Breugel used proverbs from the *Netherlandish Proverbs*

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pls. 25, 137.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pl. 143.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pl. 144.

in the *Land of Cockaigne* to give his depiction of the mythical land an additional layer of satirical meaning. Many scholars have suggested that proverbs form the subject of a number of his other paintings. A few should be touched upon here, in addition to the *Two Monkeys* already mentioned: *The Misanthrope* may illustrate the proverb “Because the world is so untrustworthy I am wearing mourning”;<sup>21</sup> *The Parable of the Blind*, “the blind leading the blind”; and *The Peasant and the Birdnester* probably refers to the proverb “He who knows where the nest is, knows that and nothing else; he who steals the nest, has it.”<sup>22</sup>

In painting the *Netherlandish Proverbs*, Breugel drew upon a tradition of similar engravings which contained a visual encyclopedia of proverbs.<sup>23</sup> Frans Hogenberg engraved one set, illustrating over forty, no later than 1558, the year before Breugel’s work (fig. 7). Copies of the print were in the possession of both Hieronymus Cock and Christopher Plantin, Breugel’s employer and friend, respectively.<sup>24</sup> The many impressions of the engravings treating this subject testify to its popularity. Breugel’s panel, the *Netherlandish Proverbs* on the other hand, comprises the first known painting utilizing this source of popular imagery.

Breugel’s familiarity with the genre of the collection of proverbs and the connections between *Netherlandish Proverbs* and other of his works becomes important in interpreting the *Land of Cockaigne*. The pies on a roof in the *Netherlandish Proverbs* (fig. 6, A) can be found in the *Land of Cockaigne* (fig. 8, A). A comparison of the Munich painting, with the engraving by Baltens, reveals that Breugel reshaped the iconography in order to illustrate proverbs as well as the elements traditional to the *Land of Cockaigne*. For instance, the man in the work by Baltens (fig. 3) crawling out of the cave which he has just fashioned by eating, Breugel depicted emerging at an unexpected height. The man clutches at a branch in order to lower himself to the ground, illustrating the proverb “He is hanging between heaven and earth,” or “He falls from the ox to the ass” (fig. 8, H<sup>1,2</sup>), also found in the *Netherlandish Proverbs* (fig. 6, H<sup>1,2</sup>). Breugel distilled the traditional elements, as found in the engraving by Baltens for example, in order to emphasize each one individually, as well as its contribution to the general humor of this illustration of Cockaigne.

<sup>21</sup>The reservation is due to the possibility that the inscription and the thief are later additions. See Piero Bianconi, *The Complete Paintings of Bruegel*, trans. R. Hughes (London: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), 108.

<sup>22</sup>See Grossmann, *Bruegel*, 3d ed., pl. 140. For the problems with this interpretation, see Bianconi, *Complete Paintings*, 109.

<sup>23</sup>See Louis Lebeer, “De Blauwe Huyck,” *Gentsche Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis* (1939): 161-229.

<sup>24</sup>Lebeer, “Blauwe Huyck,” 180-85, records for purchase of three “Blue Hoods” by Plantin, from Cock, in 1558 can be found in A. J. J. Delen, *Histoire de la gravure dans les anciens Pays-Bas et dans les provinces belges*. . . . (Paris: G. van Oest, 1924-35) vol. II-2:156.



**Fig. 7.** *Die Blau Huicke: Allegorical Scene with Flemish Proverbs*, Frans Hogenberg, (ca. 1558), print. Credit: Bibliothèque royale Albert I<sup>er</sup>, Bruxelles (Cabinet des Estampes, F 16039)



**Fig. 8.** *Land of Cockaigne*, Pieter Breugel the Elder, signed and dated 1567, Munich, Alte Pinakothek. Credit: Foto Marburg/Art Resource, New York

The key to understanding the *Land of Cockaigne* lies in the three main figures sprawled around the trunk of the tree in the center of the painting. They illustrate the proverb, “to put a spoke in the wheel” (fig. 8, N). The burgher (a humanist, perhaps) and the soldier form corresponding spokes in this wheel and the peasant, situated perpendicularly to the other two, suggests a fourth which should radiate outwards from the other side of the tree trunk. The goose on the plate forms the fourth, and the offending spoke in the wheel referred to in the proverb. Breugel uses only three figures in order to emphasize their arrangement, as opposed to earlier representations of Cockaigne and the loosely organized group of six found in the Baltens print (fig. 3). No less telling is Breugel’s choice of the men depicted, again in contrast to the Baltens print. Breugel shows three divisions within society: soldier, peasant, and wealthy burgher.<sup>25</sup> While the fourth group, the nobles, does not appear, the goose on the plate holds the position of a missing figure.

Breugel arranged the figures in Cockaigne in order to invoke a play on words in pictorial form. Instead of a noble, Breugel has substituted the image of a goose. During the early years of Calvinism in the Netherlands, followers had to travel some distance to attend services because Calvinist meetings were barred from the towns. Scenes of Calvinists in boots walking through mud on their way to Sunday meeting places evoked the term *geus* (goose) which appeared frequently in contemporary broadsheets.<sup>26</sup> Further, a later example appears in two pamphlets written by the German Protestant minister, Johannes von Noyen, in 1607 and 1609, and addressed to the nobles of the Netherlands.<sup>27</sup> An illustration with explanatory captions (fig. 9-1) forms part of Von Noyen’s work. The lines accompanying the illustration in the upper right corner, showing “Madame de la Parma” and labeled “an.1566,” reads: “The Belgian lion, tightly bound to the pillar, is saved by the goose (or *geus*) gnawing through the ropes.”

At the same time, *geus* sounds very much like the French word for beggars, *gueux*, which figured so prominently in the political upheavals of 1566. This pun immediately became part of the Netherlandish political vocabulary. During the autumn and winter of 1565-66 Flemish nobles met and formulated the “Request” of April 1566. At its presentation to Margaret of Parma, Baron de Berclaymont, one of the regent’s counselors, made the famous reference to the procession of Flemish nobility as the *Gueux* (Beggars),

<sup>25</sup>Louis Maeterlinck identified the figures as representatives of three classes: cleric, peasant, and soldier. See “Le genre satirique dans la peinture flamande,” *Académie Royale des Sciences de Belgique* 62 (1903): 310-11.

<sup>26</sup>John Roger Paas, personal communication, January 13, 1988.

<sup>27</sup>John Roger Paas, *The German Political Broadsheet, 1600-1700* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985), 1: P-89, P-90, PA-22. According to Paas, the latter is the immediate Dutch model for the Ney illustrations. The 1607 example is also reprinted in J. Scheible, *Die fliegenden Blätter des XVI und XVII Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1850), pl. I.





Fig. 9. Detail, panel 1 of illustration to pamphlet by Johannes von Noyen, Ulm, 1607. Reprinted courtesy Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen, Band 2<sup>e</sup> Hist. germ. un. VIII, 82 Rara

which the group seized upon as a slogan for their movement.<sup>28</sup> Soon afterwards, Brederode gave a banquet at the Brussels residence of Culemborg for the three hundred petitioners and served wine in wooden begging bowls instead of goblets.<sup>29</sup> Within a few days the cry “Vive les Gueux!” was familiar in the Flemish towns. The Beggars wore liveries of grey, trimmed their beards in sympathy, and fashioned medals and badges depicting a beggar’s wallet.<sup>30</sup> The epithet became so persuasive as a symbol of political opposition that, during the iconoclastic fury that swept parts of the Netherlands in August and September of 1566, school children in Ghent placed statues of the saints in the street and shouted, “Say ‘Long live the Beggars’ or we’ll cut your head off.”<sup>31</sup> In the period following the first “Request,” the petitioners

<sup>28</sup>See René Bastelaer, “Sur l’origine de la dénomination des Gueux de XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Mélanges Godefroid Kurth*, 2 vols. (Liège: Imprimeur Vaillant-Carmanne, 1908), esp. 261-62, for a discussion of the various versions of Berclaymont’s remark.

<sup>29</sup>C.V. Wedgwood, *William the Silent* (New Haven: Yale, 1944), 80-81.

<sup>30</sup>Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 72.

<sup>31</sup>Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, 80. See also Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1978), 260-61.

commonly rendered their slogan in Flemish “Vive les Gues!”<sup>32</sup> The goose which forms the fourth, malformed spoke, then, represents the nobles among both the *gueux* (petitioners) and the *geuzen* (Calvinists).

The view that the grandee leaders of the first revolt formed a defective spoke that prevented the wheel of society from functioning properly fits well with the historical record.<sup>33</sup> Two major parties of nobles involved themselves in the protest movement of 1566. One included the grandees who had responsibilities of government, the counts of Egmont, Hornes, Hoogstraten, Culemborg, and William, Prince of Orange. The other at first contained predominantly minor noblemen, many of them openly Calvinist, such as John and Philip Marnix, who had been educated in Geneva. Twenty such men, at a meeting held at the home of Count Culemborg on November 2-3, 1565, proposed a league for the purpose of making the government abolish the Inquisition and ease the heresy laws (*placards*) to allow for freedom of worship. John Marnix put the league’s requests in writing and in December affixed the first signatures, among which were those of Brederode, Luis of Nassau, and Charles de Mansfelt. About four hundred eventually signed the “Request” which Brederode formally presented to Margaret of Parma on April 5, 1566 in the company of some three hundred armed signatories. The grandees did not sign the “Request” but at the same time refused to carry out the order of the king to enforce the laws against heresy in their own provinces. Jean de Geymes, the Marquis of Berghes, resigned from the Council of State, and Orange asked to be relieved of his authority. Faced with the threat of losing the men on whom the government of the provinces depended, Margaret had no choice but to accept the “Request.” Her concessions, issued in a letter of April 9 to the provincial magistrates and tribunals, allowed for more liberal judgment of heretics. As regent, Margaret secretly communicated the full text of the “Moderation” to the estates of the provinces pending approval from the king.

The radicalization of politics between the first “Request” and the armed conflicts which erupted later in December 1566 resulted from the tremendous surge in Calvinist activity after the de facto liberalization of the heresy laws which the “Request” had won. Calvinist preachers led open air meetings, *presches*, and drew large crowds – at first consisting of hundreds, then thousands – to their services. The Calvinists established a Reformed Church organization, in most areas for the first time. The nobles rapidly lost control of what began as a narrow political movement in the face of an overwhelming popular response fomented by a small number of radical Calvinists.

The attitude of the higher nobility, led by Hornes, Egmont, and Orange, as well as the *Gueux*, is crucial to the understanding of the meaning of the

<sup>32</sup>P. Geyl, *The Revolt of the Netherlands, 1555-1669* (London: E. Benn, 1945), 88.

<sup>33</sup>The following account follows Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, 64-117.

*Land of Cockaigne.* Although the great nobles refused to enforce the placards, they did not sign the "Request." In contrast, the lesser nobles showed less hesitation in support for the Gueux, especially Calvinists like Brederode, who later became their leader. Just after the presentation of the petition, Orange, Egmont, and Hornes announced to the Council of State that they wished to relinquish their responsibilities in the Netherlands and return to their lands in Germany. Margaret persuaded them to stay for two months longer with the offer of more liberal patronage. In early July, the danger that the presches presented became clear from reports that some thirty thousand people who went to meetings in the Antwerp area had begun to carry arms.<sup>34</sup> At a Council of State meeting on July 9, it fell to Orange and Egmont to meet with the Gueux to ask them to prevent the presches. The two nobles returned with twelve delegates from the Gueux who, on July 30, presented a second "Request" to Margaret asking for full toleration and a meeting of the Estates-General to confirm the matter. Margaret asked for twenty-four days before responding, expecting to hear from Spain in response to the first "Request," during which time the Gueux promised to keep the peace. This agreement placed the Gueux in a difficult position, caught between the delaying tactics of Margaret, and the Calvinists, who had no intention of curtailing their activities to please anyone. As a result, the active support for the Gueux dropped dramatically.

The wave of iconoclasm began on August 10 in Steenvoorde, in western Flanders near the French border, and spread rapidly northwards. Newly returned Calvinist exiles inspired the outbreaks with their preaching and also formed the core of iconoclasts in each town. The two months of civil disorder changed the political situation entirely, especially that of the grandees. In August, Margaret found herself forced after the acts of destruction to concede the religious toleration of the second "Request" because the government of many towns would not cooperate against the iconoclasts. Over the next month, led by Orange's agreement in Antwerp, the grandees made a series of local compromises allowing toleration and the building of Protestant churches in and around the cities under their control. These agreements infuriated Margaret because they went much further than her own concession which had allowed toleration for only those places already Protestant. The regent held the grandees responsible for not having acted to prevent the iconoclasm, especially Orange, Hornes, and Egmont, who between them controlled the whole of the western Netherlands. After the dust settled, when the town magistrates and nobles in these areas began arresting and executing some of the leaders behind the "fury," the Calvinists felt equally betrayed. The key to the vacillating policy of men like Hornes, Egmont, and Orange was the need to balance themselves between the positions of the Calvinists

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

and the government. They stood for the type of settlement which the first "Moderation" seemed to offer:

They wished to preserve the "uncertainties" of the faith; they wanted a church which taught morals rather than doctrine. They stood for the magnificent religious anarchy of the days before the Tridentine, Genevan and Augsburg confessions defined what a Christian must and must not believe. Theirs was a middle-of-the-road position, both in religion and politics, and it was rapidly becoming untenable. . . .<sup>35</sup>

The dilemma of the great nobles became starkly apparent at the beginning of the revolt in 1567. In the armed resistance which followed the "Three Million Guilders Request," none of the grandees gave direct assistance to the rebels, nor did they contribute to the fund created by the Gueux to purchase either toleration or the use of mercenaries. At the same time, some of the nobles actively encouraged the resistance of the more Protestant towns in their revolt. Count Hornes told a magistrate at Valenciennes (in the province of Hainaut) that after Lannoy, and the subsequent Calvinist disaster at Watterlos in Flanders, the danger from armed rebellion had subsided. When in January 1567, Brederode took over the remnant of the resistance, the Grand Gueux received no support from the grandees. In addition, about half of the eight hundred troops employed in the surprise attack during March on the rebel camp at Osterweel received supplies from Count Egmont, and the Calvinists at Antwerp found themselves prevented from attempting to save the situation by the personal intervention of Orange. After Osterweel, Egmont took control of the siege at Valenciennes. In April, after the surrender of the city, both Orange and Brederode left the Netherlands for Germany. Count Egmont stayed behind, the only one of the grandees who remained in support of Margaret. As Count Meghen said, "the fat birds have flown . . . leaving only the thin ones."<sup>36</sup>

By the summer of 1567, then, the grandees of the Netherlands had taken steps which alienated every section of the country. To supporters of the government, the "middle-of-the-road," and the committed Protestants alike, the Counts of Egmont and Horne and the Prince of Orange appeared weak, selfish, and shortsighted. The grandees seemed far more concerned with their property, wealth, personal prestige, and security than with the political issues which they had been among the first to raise. The Gueux, too, commanded far less popular enthusiasm than they had in 1565. To many it seemed as if in their haste to realize all of their goals at once, as appeared to be the case in 1567, they had adopted a deliberately provocative stance which made the

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 99. Preceding account from 94-99.

government's position untenable. As a result, they lost the broad appeal which their first reasonable and moderate petition had evoked among a great part of the population. The outbreak of iconoclasm outraged the vast majority of burghers and simple folk alike – in short, everyone except a small corps of radical Calvinists. It is significant that every one of Bruegel's known friends and patrons, excepting Archbishop Granvelle who left the country in 1564, placed themselves squarely within the group most likely to sympathize with the aims of the grandees and the earliest petitions of the Gueux.

In addition to the goose, almost all of the other details in the Bruegel painting can be identified from their illustration in the *Netherlandish Proverbs*. A list of these proverbs follows, giving the literal Flemish meaning and an explanation or equivalent English saying, where appropriate.<sup>37</sup> Each letter refers to a labelled detail in Figs. 6 and 8.

	FLEMISH PROVERB	ENGLISH EXPRESSION (or Interpretation)
A.	1. Tarts tile the roof.	
	2. Cakes are born on his roof.	To be born with a silver spoon.
B. <sup>1</sup>	1. The pig has been stuck through the belly.	(It is irrevocable.)
	3. He settles a disputed question; he boldly plunges into something	He gets down to brass tacks
B. <sup>2</sup>	2. The pigs are running wild in the corn.	(Everything is going wrong.)
C.	1. Horse dirt (dung) is not figs.	All is not gold that glitters.
	3.	To pull the wool over one's eyes.
D.	1. Patient as a lamb.	
	2. Meek as a lamb.	
E.	1. Leave one egg in the nest.	
	2.	(Be discreet.)
	3.	(Refrain from spending the last penny.)

<sup>37</sup>Notes to table: (1) Gustav Glück, *The Paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1952), 35-38, or where indicated, Gustav Glück, *Bruegel* (Paris: Hyperson Press, 1937), pl. II; (2) Piero Bianconi, *The Complete Paintings of Bruegel* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), 91-93; (3) Marijnissen and Seidel, *Bruegel* (New York: Putnam, 1971), 83-43.

- |                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| F.              | 1. She goes for the hen's egg and leaves the goose's.                               | To win the battle but lose the war.                      |
|                 | 2. To take the hen's egg and miss the goose's egg.                                  | (To lose a big advantage in order to gain a little one.) |
|                 | 3.  | (A bad bargain.)   |
| G.              | 1. He gets the cake thrown at his head.   | (It was a failure.)                                      |
|                 | 3.  | (To have to face the music.)                             |
| H. <sup>1</sup> | 1. He is hanging between heaven and earth.<br>To fall through the basket.<br>(1937) |  |
|                 | 2.  | To have one's head in the clouds.                        |
|                 | 3.  | (To fail or come to grief; to be turned down.)           |
| H. <sup>2</sup> | 1. He falls from the ox to the ass.   | Out of the frying pan into the fire.)                    |
|                 | 3. To fall on bad times; to constantly skip subjects.                               | (To be moody and changeable; to talk nonsense.)          |
| I.              | 1. He who spills his gruel cannot get it all up.                                    | Don't cry over spilt milk.                               |
|                 | 3.  | (A blunder cannot be retrieved completely)               |
| J.              | 1. He can catch fish with his hands.  |  |
|                 | 2.  | (He is a sly one.)                                       |
| K.              | 1. It is easy to sail before the wind.  |  |
|                 | 2. To sail with a fair wind behind one.   |  |
|                 | 3.  | (To be alert, not miss anything.)                        |
| L.              | 1. To light a candle for the devil.   |  |

- 2. (To ask favors from one's enemies.)
- 3. (To flatter in order to gain help or support.)

M. See engraving of *La Paresse* (fig. 10, m). The man in the center illustrates "Gossip sows the street with buttocks." The tray behind his back is related to the table in the Land of Cockaigne. It has two pitchers on it which look like gossips' oversensitive ears and probably illustrates the proverb "little pitchers have big ears."<sup>38</sup>

- N. 1. To puts a spoke in the wheel.
- 3. (To put an obstacle in the path.)



Fig. 10. *Die met Lanterfantery, or La Paresse, Proverbs with commentary*, Anon. Flemish version, ca. 1550 Credit: Bibliothèque royale Albert I<sup>er</sup>, Bruxelles (Cabinet des Estampes)

<sup>38</sup>Richard Jente, ed., *Proverbia Communia* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1947), 147.

The sixteen proverbs identified in the *Land of Cockaigne* fall into three distinct categories. The first group, A, B<sup>1</sup>, B<sup>2</sup>, D, H<sup>1</sup>, H<sup>2</sup>, and N, describe the life in Cockaigne and its inhabitants. Those who enter expecting a better world find themselves sadly mistaken (H<sup>1</sup>, H<sup>2</sup>, B<sup>2</sup>) and once inside, cannot escape (B<sup>1</sup>). Rich delicacies (A) fill the land and overcome its inhabitants (D). The goose on the plate (N), which forms a faulty spoke in the human wheel around the tree trunk, further emphasizes the danger which stems from the land's attractions.

The second group, C, E, J, K, and M, contain messages of warning and advice aimed at both the viewer and the inhabitants of Cockaigne. The underlying meaning conveys the danger of being naive in one's assessment of the situation – do not trust appearances (C); one must watch what one says as even pitchers can hear (M). Be alert (K) for a very cunning opponent (J), and take care to provide for any eventuality (E).

The last group of proverbs, F, G, I and L, provide a commentary on the outcome of what has transpired. The adventurer has grasped at the opportunity for immediate advantage at the expense of the grander designs (F). Failure results (G); he has delivered himself into the hands of his enemies (L). Once done, despite all efforts, no one can perfectly repair the damage (I).

It is difficult for the modern viewer to appreciate how important a function the proverb served as a medium of communication in Europe during the sixteenth century. François Rabelais seasoned *Gargantua and Pantegruel* with proverbs which he used to provide themes, morals, and punctuation for his tapestry of tales and learned digression. In Book Two, Pantegruel settles a thorny lawsuit by having the litigants, Lords Kissmyarse and Suckfizzle, argue their case before him in person. The plaintiff and defendant, as well as Pantegruel when responding with his verdict, render their speeches in sentences made up of proverbs strung back to back.<sup>39</sup> Rabelais' characters even use proverbs that are garbled or reversed to intensify meaning and parody.<sup>40</sup> Rabelais clearly depended on his audience's immediate recognition of an enormous variety of proverbs and their meanings.

Sixteenth-century engravings and broadsheets also relied on a stock of common proverbial knowledge as well as serving as a popular and effective means of their transmission. Hogenburg's (fig. 7) engraving contains a caption

<sup>39</sup>François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantegruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1955), Book Two, chaps. 10-13, 202-11. This book was written in 1532, and includes the introduction of the character Panurge, around whom the 1538 description of the land of Cockaigne was written. Also see Book Four, chap. 9, 468-71 where the "strange relationships" on the Island of Ennasin [Any-sin] are depicted by a dialogue between the couple which illustrates a proverb (or proverbs) which in turn serves as a euphemism for intercourse.

<sup>40</sup>See Rabelais, *Gargantua*, Book One, chap. 33, 111 for the use of "More haste, less speed," and 113, "I'll kill a comb for a pedlar," instead of "to kill a pedlar for a comb, is to take a man's life for a trifle." There are countless other examples.



for each proverb so that it could be readily understood. Other engraved compilations had the scenes numbered, referring to a separate printed sheet of proverbs.<sup>41</sup> Proverbs slipped into all kinds of speech and printed matter. M. van Vaernewijck, writing of Ghent in 1566-68, illustrated the degree to which the Flemish used and recognized proverbs in describing the events which took place around them.<sup>42</sup>

Breugel painted the *Land of Cockaigne* in 1567 to convey far more than a satirical critique leveled at the nobles of the land. Although the Netherlandish nobles, the natural leaders of the country, had failed in their leadership and therefore figure conspicuously in their diminished state at the wheel of Cockaigne, the sense of distance and moral detachment of the work coupled with its intrinsic humor impel the viewer to contemplate, rather than judge, the issue.<sup>43</sup> The responsibility for what has taken place belongs to all participants; the possessions and interests of all of the inhabitants of the land of Cockaigne, where "cakes tile the roof" (A), has bound them irrevocably to the outcome of contemporary events (B). The very wealth of the country, and the luxury that it afforded, has rendered each inhabitant "meek as a lamb" (D). The higher nobility, with their vacillating allegiance within and territorial interest outside of the Netherlands, both figuratively and literally "hang between heaven and earth" (H). This is also the position of the contemporary viewer, who watches from outside the consequence of his past actions depicted within the painting. The failure of the nobles to lead the movement either prudently or decisively, and the support given them by their followers, has "placed the spoke in the wheel" (N). More specifically, the Gueux let down those whose hopes had been raised by their initial cause and success.

Breugel also alerted his viewers of the dangers that threatened in the tense climate of 1567. As early as August 1566, the grandees had information that Philip II was preparing an expedition led by the Duke of Alba with the purpose of restoring order in the Netherlands. By November, it was general knowledge that Spanish troops from Italy were amassing in Milan, and that Philip had recruited mercenaries from Germany and negotiated with the Dukes of Savoy and Lorraine for permission for Alba's troops to pass through

<sup>41</sup>Lebeer, "Blauwe Huyck," 173.

<sup>42</sup>"At that time - on March 25, 1568 - the Duke of Alba issued an order to all officers, and men who were quartered in houses of good repute, to stop taking girls of easy virtue home with them, and thus make an end of the nuisance. Many people thought the order had been issued only because Easter was approaching; thereafter, the merrymaking would go on as before. 'And so a flaxen beard is stuck on our Lord and Saviour.' But the soldiers refuted this allegation and said the order they had received was very strict (fig. 6, no. 4)." From M. van Vernewijck, *Van die beroenlijcke tijden in die Nederlanden en voornamelijk in Ghendt - 1566-1568* quoted in Seidel and Marijnissen, *Bruegel*, 96.

<sup>43</sup>See Edward Snow, "Children's Games," especially the discussion of the *Blind Leading the Blind* and *The Cripples*, 50-51. Breugel painted both of these works based on well-known proverbs towards the end of his life, along with the *Land of Cockaigne*.

their territories. Breugel's warnings seem appropriate, although in view of the state of oblivion displayed by the men lying around the table, they carry a strong satirical undercurrent: appearances deceive (C); the ability of the enemy (J) calls for alertness (K); and an avenue of escape must be readied in case of an emergency (E), such as the "nest egg" many nobles nurtured in England or Germany. The pitcher lying on the table above the figures on the ground implies that one must beware of informers, "little pitchers have big ears" (M), and suggests that Breugel may have finished the painting after Alba established the "Council of Troubles" in September, 1567. The tenor of the new order became obvious in October, if not earlier, by the indictments of the prominent towns and orders for the arrest of their magistrates and legal advisers.<sup>44</sup>

The same kind of interpretation fits the third group of proverbs. Everyone, the grandees, the Gueux, and those in between, have in the end "gone for the hen's egg and missed the goose's" (F). Whatever their motives, the grandees played safe until the end. The Gueux allowed the more radical Calvinists to force events to such an extent that they provoked a reaction for which they were neither prepared nor strong enough to meet. The first revolt ended in utter failure, "the cake was thrown at their heads" (G). Perhaps to emphasize the point, Breugel positioned the falling cake directly above the soldier's head. The great nobles relied upon the good will and generosity of their enemies, "lighting the candle for the devil" (L). The latter proverb may allude to a specific political event: on September 8, 1567, Alba summoned the grandees to Brussels and the following day ordered the arrest of Egmont, Hornes, and their aides. The two counts were executed in Brussels on June 6, 1568. The apparent allusion to their arrest again suggests that Breugel's painting was completed in late 1567. Finally, the mistakes made can never be completely repaired: "he who spills his gruel cannot get it all up" (I).

The word play on goose also explains another puzzling feature about the painting. In front of the open mouth of the helmeted figure (O) under the roof of tarts, a patch remains where the paint has been rubbed off and subsequently retouched. The engravings based on the *Land of Cockaigne* show that the work originally depicted a bird flying – plucked and roasted – into the man's mouth (fig. 5), a feature typical of earlier versions of the subject (fig. 1). No museum or inventory record suggests that the damage was done recently, and the limited area affected would seem to indicate that the act was deliberate.<sup>45</sup> Although the later engravings show what looks like a miniature fowl, the damaged area seems large enough to have held a goose.

<sup>44</sup>Geyl, *The Revolt*, 103-4.

<sup>45</sup>Bianconi, *Complete Paintings*, 108, is clearly speculating when he says that the bird had been destroyed by excessive cleaning. The rest of the panel is in excellent condition.

Whether goose or small fowl, Breugel included the detail to comment that by their actions, the Flemish people had delivered themselves, plucked and ready to be eaten, into the mouth of their Spanish oppressors.<sup>46</sup> The goose on the ground not only still lives, but voluntarily places its neck on the plate, suggesting both the naiveté of the Gueux and an element of martyrdom. The second fowl represents the only directly anti-Spanish element in the painting. Without it, or with a less recognizable smaller version, the painting could pass for a traditional land of Cockaigne or as a satire of the Gueux. The possibility that someone removed the goose for reasons of safety appears more significant in the light of a much celebrated passage in Van Mander's *Het Schilderboek*. Breugel made engravings that were "strange and full of meaning" and drawings with his own inscriptions:

But as some of them were too biting and sharp, he had them burned by his wife when he was on his deathbed, from remorse or for fear that she might get in trouble and have to answer for them.<sup>47</sup>

No less important to the *Land of Cockaigne*, the walking egg punctured by a knife serves as a symbol of destroyed potential, in addition to its meaning in conjunction with a proverb (F). Its prominent position in the foreground makes it particularly noticeable. The ruptured egg also appears in a print of Calisto appearing before Diana, originally engraved in 1558 by Peter van der Heyden.<sup>48</sup> The engraving was altered after 1584 by an anonymous Dutch artist to show Queen Elizabeth I with female allegorical figures, each holding the shield of a Protestant European ally, and the Pope struggling on the ground, uncovered by the allegorical figures of Time, Truth, and a naked woman. Beneath the Pope a nest of eggs hatches, and out of one marked "Inquisition," a cocatrice emerges. One of the eggs has an inscription referring to Balthazar Gerrard, who in 1584 murdered William of Orange with a dagger. A Dutch text below describes the subject and praises Elizabeth. The egg containing the Inquisition and the dagger shown in this print represent the two principal weapons of the papacy to be employed against the Protestant queen, as they had been against William of Orange. Breugel used these symbols in a similar fashion in *Cockaigne*, but the artist who later altered the engraving reversed the meaning of the egg. The Dutch artist used the eggs to represent the agents of the Inquisition, Catholic heretics according to the

<sup>46</sup>The same type of Spanish helmet and visor appears, for example, in fig. 10-2. This can be compared to the Netherlandish/German type found in the center foreground of the *Triumph of Death* (Grossmann, *Breugel*, pl. 32 and detail pl. 36) and the *Conversion of St. Paul* (Grossmann, *Breugel*, pl. 130 and detail pl. 12).

<sup>47</sup>Wolfgang Stechow, *Northern Renaissance Art 1400-1600* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), 40.

<sup>48</sup>British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, *Political and Personal Satires*, Vol. 1, 1320-1689 (London, 1870), p. 6, no. 2.

Protestants; Breugel intended the egg to symbolize the Protestant “heresy,” killed by the dagger of the Inquisition. Breugel added to the proverb “to take the hen’s egg and miss the goose’s,” the suggestion that the result is the destruction of the fertile egg in which the future of Protestantism incubated.

### III

The *Land of Cockaigne*, painted during the first year of the Duke of Alba’s harsh actions in the Netherlands, has naturally excited speculation that Breugel intended it to embody a veiled attack on the contemporary political situation in his country. Louis Maeterlinck, for example, wrote in 1903,

the painter may have wished to satirize his fellow countrymen, who were too ready to indulge in the pleasures of the table and idleness, and to show that – as coming events were to prove – an excessive preoccupation with physical well-being would undermine their moral courage and make them ready to accept oppression and tyranny.<sup>49</sup>

Robert Delevoy, writing much later, linked the picture to the Flemish saying “Nothing is more stupid than a lazy glutton” and added that the figures in the work “represent men who have escaped from the Spanish reign of terror into a world of make-believe.”<sup>50</sup>

Despite the number of interpretations of particular paintings by Breugel which see general satirical allusions critical of contemporary political events, few have attempted to substantiate these claims by referring either to specific iconographic details or to pictorial meaning used to express such sentiments.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Maeterlinck, “Le genre satirique,” 312.

<sup>50</sup>Robert L. Delevoy, *Breugel* (London: W. Heinemann, 1954), xix. Bob Claessens and Jeanne Rousseau, *Our Breugel* (Antwerp, 1969), supported this view in a volume commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of Breugel’s death in 1569. More recently, Arturo Bovi quotes Giorgio Faggini who said: “It is not improbable that Breugel intended to allude to the Utopian kingdom which reformers and prophets were offering to all classes of society during these revolutionary times.” Bovi added, “Breugel may have wished to exhort his people to make some attempt at least to defend their rights to dignity and freedom,” Faggini (1953) and Bovi, quoted in Arturo Bovi, *Breugel* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 35.

<sup>51</sup>An example will suffice to illustrate the difficulty. Delevoy, *Breugel*, xiv, says that the *Two Monkeys* (1562) in Berlin, “is a thinly disguised allusion to the enslavement of the Netherlandish provinces. They are chained miserably together in panoramic view of the city of Antwerp, seen dimly through the mist.” However compelling the description, without a literary passage or iconographic evidence, such as the proverb Stechow, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 80, provides there is no reason to accept the interpretation. For a failed attempt to find an iconographic basis, see Irving L. Zupnick, “Breugel and the Revolt of the Netherlands,” *Art Journal* 23, no. 4 (Summer 1964): 283ff., who argues that Breugel showed opposition to Spanish methods of Inquisitorial justice in his works of 1560-64 and then silenced himself because of the danger which exposure presented. Unfortunately, the iconographical interpretation which Zupnick uses to support his theory is spurious. For example, in the engraving of *Justicia*, of the series of the Seven Virtues the scales of the blinded *Justicia* are said to be unbalanced in criticism of the harshness of Spanish punishment. The scales are unbalanced only if one ignores the fact that Breugel shows the scales head on and uses perspective to achieve the illusion that they would be balanced if one were to view them properly from the side. In the engraving, *Prudencia*, he accuses Breugel of

Stanley Ferber advanced the most cogent argument which identified the figure in the *Massacre of the Innocents*, dressed in black with a long white beard, as the Duke of Alba, based on a number of other sixteenth-century engraved portraits.<sup>52</sup> Contemporaries apparently called him "Black Alba," because of his Inquisitorial work and his distinctive habit of dressing in black. This evidence also allows Ferber to identify Alba as the man in black on horseback facing away from the viewer in the *Conversion of St. Paul*.<sup>53</sup> Breugel painted the panel in 1567, the year in which Alba crossed the Alps at the head of a Spanish and German army. Ferber argues that Breugel intended to show a parallel between St. Paul and Alba; the men had both made reputations by suppressing heresy and had then embarked on a mission to defend orthodoxy against rebellion. By painting the conversion as a contemporary scene set in an alpine landscape, and St. Paul as the Duke of Alba, Breugel, says Ferber, wished to express the hope that a similar vision would overtake Alba during his journey. He adds as further evidence that, although neither the Bible nor the Apocrypha indicate a time of year during which the conversion took place, the Golden Legend places it on the twenty-fifth of January. The painting, however, depicts the event in the summer, the time of year Alba began his journey north from Italy.

The identification of Alba in the *Massacre of the Innocents* forms the key to the entire theory. Without it, Ferber has no grounds for his identification of the figure in the *Conversion*. Grossman has rejected the argument for the *Massacre*, noting that, while undated, on stylistic grounds it is conventionally thought to have been painted between 1564 and 1566, before any Spanish troops arrived in the Netherlands.<sup>54</sup> Marijnissen notes the existence of two versions of the *Massacre* (Musée de Beaux Arts, Antwerp, and the Brussels collection of Dr. Delporte) painted by Pieter Breugel the Younger, signed as if by his father, and dated 1564. Although the compositions differ somewhat from that painted by the elder Breugel, they follow the original in content and style to the extent that the date and signature are probably exact copies. If the assumption that the younger Breugel derived the two works from the *Massacre* proves correct, the person in black could not be the Duke of Alba, since he arrived in the Netherlands for the first time three years later.<sup>55</sup> More likely, as Terlinden pointed out, Breugel simply depicted the massacre as it

deliberately undermining the sincerity of the subject by depicting a neglected house in such bad shape that it is about to collapse. The point of Breugel's example is that the three workers in front of it are repairing the house to prevent it from collapsing, a fine illustration of prudence.

<sup>52</sup>Stanley Ferber, "Pieter Bruegel and the Duke of Alba," *Renaissance News* 19, no. 3 (1966): 205-19. See also Grossmann, *Bruegel*, 3d ed., pl. 112.

<sup>53</sup>Grossmann, *Bruegel*, 3d ed., pl. 130.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>55</sup>Seidel and Marijnissen, *Bruegel*, 48.

would have been carried out in the 1560s: the knights belonged to a *bande d'Ordonnance*, their esquires did the dirty work, and the *drossart van Brabant*, dressed in black represented the official which corresponded to the one who in Herod's day would have carried out the sentence.<sup>56</sup>

Further, many of the interpretations of Breugel's work ignore the information that does exist about the painter's life which emphasizes his ties with humanism, and not with any specific contemporary political movement. Information about the artist's patrons has laid to rest claims that Breugel was a "libertine," heretic, or active sympathizer with the political ambition of the rebellious Flemish nobles led by Counts Egmont and Horne and William, Prince of Orange.<sup>57</sup> Breugel's known friends and patrons suggest that he belonged to a group of intellectual humanists who had, by and large, conventionally orthodox religious, if not political, convictions. One of Breugel's better known patrons was Cardinal de Granvelle, Archbishop of Malines and the center of political controversy until his recall from the Netherlands in 1564. He assembled major painting collections at his palace in Brussels, Malines, and Besançon, including a number of works painted by Breugel. After the sack of the Archbishop's palace in 1572, Granvelle gave special instructions for the recovery or replacement of pictures by Breugel which apparently had been lost.<sup>58</sup> This patronage has been interpreted by some authors as convincing evidence of Breugel's religious orthodoxy, as has his move in 1563 from Antwerp to Brussels, the center of the Spanish Catholic administration and capital of Brabant.<sup>59</sup> No evidence suggests that the Archbishop's connection with Breugel endured after 1564. While Granvelle's patronage seems to indicate that Breugel did not openly deviate from political and religious orthodoxy before 1564, it tells nothing of his reaction to the situation afterwards until his death in 1569, a period which saw the radicalization of political and religious attitudes over much of the Netherlands.

Among Breugel's other patrons were such men as Nicholas Jonghelinck, an Antwerp banker (who at that time possessed sixteen paintings by Breugel), Hans Franckert, who Van Mander says was a merchant from Nuremberg; Abraham Ortelius, the famous geographer and good friend of Breugel through their wives; and the theologian, engraver, and philosopher, Cornelius Cornhert. Cornhert wrote a manifesto for William of Orange which led to the former's imprisonment at The Hague in 1566.<sup>60</sup> Ortelius and Plantin may have had some connection to the Familists, a mystical sect of dubious orthodoxy begun

<sup>56</sup>Geoffrey Parker, personal communication, September 12, 1988.

<sup>57</sup>Grossmann, *Breugel*, 3d ed., 48-49.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>59</sup>See Bianconi, *Complete Paintings*, 86 and Gibson, *Breugel*, 121, respectively.

<sup>60</sup>Zupnick, "Bruegel and the Revolt," 283ff.

by a German merchant, Hendrick Niclaes. Although this group believed that true salvation could be reached through a personal communion with Christ and without the intercession of the Church, they also encouraged members to maintain outward conformity. Plantin may have secretly published literature for them but, at the same time, never ceased the publication of a large variety of Catholic texts.<sup>61</sup> He also embarked on a project to publish the *Biblia Polyglota*, which attempted to set an original text of the two testaments on a scientific basis, a project supported by Phillip II.<sup>62</sup> In 1570, Phillip named Plantin "Archtypographer to the King," which made him virtually the censor of all books published in Antwerp. At the same time, he contributed a printing press which was set up in Brederode Castle (Vianen), to publish Calvinist tracts and seditious literature like the "Three million guilder request."<sup>63</sup> Whatever one argues about the religious implications of Familist thought, it seems clear that they were regarded, and saw themselves, as perfectly circumspect Catholics. Breugel's association with this group of highly cultured patrons and friends certainly does not show him to harbor anti-Catholic feeling, nor does it imply that he held a partisan political view that he expressed in his work. The theme which most clearly ties together his friends, relations, and patrons is humanism, not religion or politics.

#### IV

The sophistication with which Breugel conveyed an interpretation of contemporary politics in the *Land of Cockaigne* adds a new dimension to the understanding of his art. The spatial arrangement of the three figures, the Spanish soldier under the tart-covered roof, and the play on words on "goose," embed the political criticism of the work in the rich, moralistic framework of a popular topos whose connotations and language were readily understandable to Breugel's contemporary audience. The *Land of Cockaigne* was painted with a political message in mind.

The *Land of Cockaigne* contains a humanist satirical comment on the political situation of 1567 in the Netherlands. Breugel reproaches the Gueux for allowing the movement to lose sight of its original goals, bringing the committed Calvinists to the fore in the pursuit of a more radical solution. The wave of iconoclasm shocked many and proved to some that the Gueux could not control the movement. The grandees, Hornes, Egmont, and Orange, were not very helpful during the 1566-67 revolt: each tried to do as little as possible so as not to compromise his position with either the Gueux or the government. When events forced them to choose, each went in his own direction, only to find their bridges burned on both sides. The sharpness and

<sup>61</sup>See Gibson, *Breugel*, 120-21; Bianconi, *Complete Paintings*, 85-86; and Grossmann, *Breugel*, 3d ed., 27.

<sup>62</sup>Keith Roberts, *Bruegel*, (London: Phaidon, 1971), 11.

<sup>63</sup>Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, 96.

bite, as van Mander put it, of the satire of Flemish Cockaigne stems from Breugel's dismay at the disorder and suffering left in the wake of the reform movement of 1566. Nor did Breugel approve of the Spanish who in 1567 had taken all control of the province out of the hands of the Flemish nobles, a task made much easier by the ineptitude of its inhabitants, as well as its natural leaders. On a fundamental level however, as in his paintings of peasant festivities, children's games, and other proverbial scenes, Breugel does not take sides. In fact, Breugel refuses to do so; like the peasant pointing behind him to the nest robber (fig. 11), he simply presents the problem, in all of its complexity, to the viewer.

The painting of the *Land of Cockaigne* appears to have a wider significance in the history of Northern European art. Of the many paintings by Breugel, it was the only work distributed unchanged in the form of a print during the lifetime of the artist.<sup>64</sup> Peter van der Heyden in 1567 or 1568 executed the engraving, and before Breugel's death, Heyden and Hieronymous Cock circulated two later states. Two further states had been printed by the turn of the seventeenth century. The popularity of the work is perhaps understandable in the light of subsequent political events in the Netherlands; it also related to the appealing and compelling process by which Breugel took a proverbial mode of artistic expression and converted it into a new pictorial language. Breugel's achievement is to have developed this form of expression, a landmark in what Peter Burke calls the "politicization" of European popular culture.<sup>65</sup> The *Land of Cockaigne* apparently represented the first and, judging from its immediate popularity in engraved replicas, the most influential work in which Breugel forged a connection between elements from popular art and

<sup>64</sup>There are a number of engravings that are closely related to Breugel paintings which appeared before his death in 1569: (1) *The Fall of Icarus* (1553) and the *Wedding Dance* (1558) were produced before the paintings done on the same subjects (1562 and 1566 respectively). The compositions are quite different. The engraving of *Christ taken in Adultery* (1565) was made after a drawing. Breugel did the painting from the drawing in 1565; (2) A set of single Flemish proverbs was issued in 1568. Seven were extracted from the *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) and five were added by Peter van der Heyden; (3) In 1574, Abraham Ortelius had the *Death of a Virgin* (1564-65), which was painted for him by the artist, copied by the engraver Philip Galle to be presented to his friends. Philip Galle copied the *Resurrection of Christ* in the same year. The *Head of a Peasant* was also engraved after Breugel's death in 1569. This means that the *Land of Cockaigne* is the only panel painting copied for distribution as an engraving during Breugel's lifetime. Given that the two original states were reprinted by Van der Heyden and Cock, the issue of the *Land of Cockaigne* was likely to have been done under the supervision of Breugel.

<sup>65</sup>Burke, *Popular Culture*, 259. See also Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 161-63.





Fig. 11. *Peasant and the Nest Robber*, Pieter Bruegel, signed and dated 1568, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Credit: Foto Marburg/Art Resource, New York

culture, and contemporary political events.<sup>66</sup> It represents the link between the religious propaganda and satire of the post-Reformation period and the political satire of late sixteenth century northern Europe which developed into the modern political cartoon. The wars of independence in the Netherlands, the Thirty Years War in central Europe and in England, the Spanish war of the 1580s and again during the English Civil War, all saw a flood of politically motivated satire and cartoons in the form of engravings and occasional paintings. These works ultimately derive from the political, cultural, and artistic forces brought together to create a novel, powerful form of visual expression in the *Land of Cockaigne*, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

<sup>66</sup>The other known work related to the political situation in the Netherlands is not extant but is described in Baron de Reiffenburg, "Notice sur un Tableau satirique relatif au gouvernement du Duc d'Albe," *Bulletin du Bibliophile* V, 3d ser. (1838): 99-104. The depiction of the Counts Egmont and Hornes receiving their death blow dates the composition of this panel after June 1568, at the earliest. Another allegorical work, similar in subject matter, also symbolically showing the destruction of the Netherlandish provinces by the Spanish, was painted by Hans Callaert, circa 1600-1630. See Maeterlinck, *Le genre satirique*, 62:335, fig. 190.