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## **Pieter Bruegel the Elder: art discourse in the sixteenth-century Netherlands**

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## Chapter One

### Vernacular Discourse and the Art / Nature Debate

I much prefer that my style be my own, rude and undefined, perhaps, but made to the measure of my mind, like a well-cut gown rather than to use someone else's style, more elegant, ambitious, and ornamented, but suited to a greater genius than mine...An actor can wear any kind of garment; but a writer cannot adopt any kind of style. He should form his own and keep it, for fear we should laugh at him...Certainly each of us has naturally something individual and his own in his utterance and language as in his face and gesture. It is better and more rewarding for us *to develop and train this quality than to change it.* (emphasis added)<sup>40</sup>

Petrarch  
Letter to Boccaccio

As an introduction to the primary subjects of the first section of this chapter, I would like to first briefly discuss a few aspects of the three pictures that are addressed more fully in Chapter Three, as well as some of the issues and questions they raise. Scholars such as Charles de Tolnay and Walter Gibson, among others, have noted that in the last two years of his life, Bruegel departed noticeably from the early sixteenth-century practice of depicting peasant festivities, when he took miniature peasants from the printed and written page and transformed them into monumental figures in oil on panel.<sup>41</sup> For example, the ordered composition of the *Peasant Wedding Banquet*, particularly noticeable in the three bulky servers in the foreground that lead the viewer's gaze toward the bride, departs noticeably from previous representations of more chaotic peasant feasts, as portrayed by, for example, Pieter van der Borcht (1545-1608) and Hans Sebald Beham (fig. 10, 11).<sup>42</sup> As has been observed, the overt illustrations of negative behavior—such as vomiting, fighting and sexual embraces—that are prominent in these two festive depictions are in Bruegel's painting completely

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<sup>40</sup> *Letters from Petrarch*, trans. Morris Bishop, Bloomington and London, 1966. As quoted in Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, New Haven: Yale University Press (1982), 97.

<sup>41</sup> Almost every Bruegel scholar has made this observation; a few examples include Charles de Tolnay, *Pierre Bruegel l'ancien*, Brussels: Nouvelle Societe d'Editions, 1935; Carl Gustaf Stridbeck, *Bruegelstudien* (1977); Walter Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Two Studies*. Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas (1991), 37-41; Margaret Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants* (1994).

<sup>42</sup> Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inv. GG 1027), 114 x 164 cm. Roberts-Jones writes that when compared to earlier depictions of peasant weddings, Bruegel's *Wedding Feast* is striking above all because of its authenticity and form, whose "classicism" has been rightly emphasized. Philippe and Françoise Roberts-Jones, *Pieter Bruegel*, New York: Harry N. Abrams (2002), 270.

removed.<sup>43</sup> Especially intriguing is the diagonal perspective of the table, which is often mentioned by art historians as a compositional arrangement traditionally found in depictions of the biblical story of the wedding at Cana.<sup>44</sup> In an engraving of the Cana wedding designed by Gerard van Groningen (1515-1574), also active in Antwerp during the second half of the sixteenth century, guests are situated around a similar diagonally composed table (fig. 12). Two particularly comparable figures in these two pictures are the contemplative brides who are seated in the middle of the table with their hands folded in front of them and the servants on the opposite side of the picture who are busy pouring wine or beer (fig. 13-16). Others have pointed out several aspects of the painting as being Italianate, particularly that the three bulky servers I mentioned, who surround the makeshift serving tray, resonate with the figures of Michelangelo.<sup>45</sup> In addition, their complex assembly of arms and overlapping legs that help to visually communicate the narrative of the picture is a figural grouping more at home in a painting by Raphael than in a Flemish peasant scene. The formal

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<sup>43</sup> Having said this, the positive or negative character of these images is not an issue that I will address. On the history of this long debate, see the exchange between Svetlana Alpers and Hessel Miedema; Alpers, "Bruegel's Festive Peasants," *Simiolus*, vol. 6, no. 3-4 (1972-3), 166-175 and "Realism as a comic mode: low-life painting seen through Bredero's eyes," *Simiolus* vol. 8, no.3 (1975-6), 115-144; for Miedema's rebuttal see, "Realism and comic mode: the peasant," *Simiolus*, vol. 9, no.4 (1977), 205-219; Alpers defense is given in her article, "Taking pictures seriously: a reply to Hessel Miedema," *Simiolus*, vol. 10 (1978-9), 46-50. For a summary and insightful commentary on this debate, see Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Two Studies* (1991) and his most recent article "Festive Peasants Before Bruegel: Three Case Studies and Their Implications," *Simiolus*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2004/05), 292-309. See also Hessel Miedema, "Feestende boeren—Lachende dorpers. Bij twee recente aanwinsten van het Rijksprentenkabinet," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, vol. 29 (1981), 191-213; Margaret D. Carroll, "Peasant Festivity and Political Identity in the Sixteenth-Century," *Art History*, vol. 10 (1987), 287-314; Konrad Renger, "Flemish Genre Painting: Low Life-High Life-Daily Life," in Peter Sutton (ed.), *The Age of Rubens*, Ghent: Ludion Press, 1993; Bart Ramakers, "Kinderen van Saturnus: Afstand en nabijheid van boeren in de beeldende kunst en het toneel van de zestiende eeuw," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, Het exotische verbeeld 1550-1950*, vol. 53, Zwolle: Waanders Publishers (2002), 13-51; and De Costa Kaufmann, *The Eloquent Artist* (2004), 106-118.

<sup>44</sup> Since 1907, scholars have pointed to similarities between the diagonal composition of the *Peasant Wedding Banquet* and similar scenes of the wedding at Cana. See the following studies on Bruegel: René van Bastelaer and Georges Hulin de Loo, *Pieter Bruegel l'Ancien, son oeuvre et son temps: Etude historique, suivre des catalogues raisonnés de son oeuvre*, Brussels: Van Oest, 1907; Max Dvořák, *Pierre Bruegel l'ancien*, Brionne: Monfort, 1992 (original 1921); J. Weyns, "Twee bruiloften uit de oude tijd," *Noordgouw*, vo. 16, no. 4 (1976), 177-198; Walter Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1977; H.J. Raupp, *Bauernsatiren* (1986), 283-4; Margaret Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants* (1994); Matt Kavalier, *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (1999).

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Walter Gibson, *Bruegel* (1991). See also Peter Sutton, "Masters of Dutch Genre Painting," in *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting*, exhibition catalogue, Philadelphia Museum of Art (1984), xxvii where he refers to Bruegel's later representations of peasants as "heroically monumental." On Bruegel's "romanism" in general, see Stridbeck, *Bruegelstudien* (1977); Max Dvořák, *The History of Art as the History of Ideas*, London: Routledge (1984), 70-96.

construction that leads the viewer into depth toward the protagonist of the scene contrasts significantly with the previous chaotic compositions of peasant festivities that structured what was considered to be its equally chaotic subject matter.

On the one hand, Bruegel's representation is a detailed depiction of a local custom with all the necessary figures and objects present to make it look like an "actual" event taking place in a Brabant country village. On the other hand, what makes this painting different from previous practices of depicting peasants is not the subject matter it pictures, rather *how* the subject is portrayed. For a representation of peasants, Bruegel incorporates a composition and monumental figural constructions traditionally associated with what was considered to be the most ambitious type of painting: *historia*.<sup>46</sup> Despite the fact that scholars over the last century have noted elements of Bruegel's lofty presentation of peasants, connecting the composition with an arrangement used for a biblical story and the bulky servers in the foreground with Michelangoesque forms, if one were to take a survey of the vocabulary used in scholarly literature to describe these paintings, the list of words might look something like this: naturalistic, moralistic, satirical, comic, rustic, northern, vernacular.<sup>47</sup> For the most part, emphasis continues to primarily be placed on the previous iconographic tradition of peasant festivities inherited by Bruegel and on the question of whether or not his rustic scenes reveal a particular ideological perspective: social, economic or religious.<sup>48</sup> Although these scholarly endeavors offer valuable insights, what remains

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<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of painted *historia*, see p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> For overviews of the most recent literature, see n. 43; for overviews of early interpretations of Bruegel, see Michel Edouard, "Bruegel et la Critique Moderne," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 19, 6<sup>th</sup> periode, 27-46; Wilhelm Fraenger, *Der Bauern-Bruegel und das Deutsche Sprichwort*, Erlenbach-Zürich: E. Rentsch, 1923; Hans-Wolfgang von Löhneysen, *Die ältere niederländische Malerei, Künstler und Kritiker*, Eisenach: Röth Verlag, 1956; E. Duverger, "Pieter Bruegel, 1569-1969," *Spiegel Historiael*, vol. 4 (1969), 659-665; R.H. Marijnissen, "Het wetenschappelijk onderzoek van Bruegels oeuvre," *Vlaanderen*, vol. 18 (1969), 4-11; F. Grossman, *Pieter Bruegel: Complete Edition of the Paintings*, London: Phaidon, 1973; J. Muylle, "Pier den Drol—Karel van Mander en Pieter Bruegel. Bijdrage tot de literaire receptie van Pieter Bruegels werk ca. 1600," in *Wort und Bild in der niederländischen Kunst und Literatur des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Erfstadt: Lukassen Verlag (1984), 137-144.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Vandenbroeck, "Verbeeck's peasant weddings: a study of iconography and social function," *Simiolus*, vol. 14, 80-121; Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel* (1991); M. Carroll, "Peasant Festivity and Political Identity" (1987); Kavalier, *Parables of Order and Enterprise* (1999); Anabella Weismann, "Was hört und sieht der Dudelsackpfeifer auf der Bauernhochzeit? Bemerkungen über ein allzu bekanntes Gemälde von Pieter Bruegel," in Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (eds.), *Schweigen: Unterbrechung und Grenze der menschlichen Wirklichkeit*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1992; A. De Blaere, S.J. "Bruegel and the Religious Problems of His Time," *Apollo*, vol. 105, 1977.

to be addressed are the questions surrounding the function, beyond showing artistic influence, of employing such “artful” means, i.e. characteristics that resonate with history painting, for representing a subject like the peasant. Equally important is how Bruegel’s contemporary viewers would have discussed the tension created between form and content and whether or not the recognition of a compositional reference would have led to a discussion about possible thematic connections between referee, referent and the viewer.

Bruegel’s similarly monumental *Peasant Dance* (fig. 17), also painted in 1568 and now in Vienna, is a representation of a village church festival in full swing.<sup>49</sup> The village is filled with peasants, many of whom are prominently displayed across the picture plane participating in the celebratory revelries: dancing, drinking, making music and kissing. The emphasis on the intertwined, monumental figures in motion, whose arms and legs are constructed so as to frame spaces that lead the viewer’s gaze into depth, has led some art historians, such as Klaus Demus, to describe the picture as possessing a full classical unity, attaining “a classicism, perceived as the highest level of artistically developed form.”<sup>50</sup> Other scholars, such as Margaret Sullivan, have likened the picture to an Italian style of representing bacchanals—and, therefore, to correlate peasant festivity with bacchic revelry—such as the crowd of mythological figures displayed across the foreground in Titian’s *The Andrians* (fig. 18).<sup>51</sup>

In Titian’s painting, a naked man on the left leans toward the center; his left arm is lowered to stabilize a plate and his right arm is extended in the air in order to pour the last bit of wine from a pitcher. This figure is coupled with another man opposite him, who also leans forward with his left arm extended. The figures and their actions function to frame a recessional space and guide the viewer’s gaze into depth toward a detail of a man kneeling while making wine. The formal arrangement of the monumental figures leads the viewer’s gaze through the painting, visually connecting foreground and background, and clearly constructing the narrative of the picture. However, such formal constructions of monumental figures were also common among Bruegel’s Northern contemporaries who represented Italian style bacchanalia—such as

<sup>49</sup> Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inv. GG1059), 114 x 164 cm

<sup>50</sup> Arnout Balis, et al. (eds.), *La Peinture Flamande au Kunsthistorisches Museum de Vienne*, Antwerp: Fonds Mercator (1987), 96.

<sup>51</sup> Sullivan, *Bruegel’s Peasants* (1994), 118-132.

Maarten van Heemskerck's *Triumph of Bacchus* (1536, fig. 19) and Frans Floris's *Feast of the Gods* (ca. 1555-60, fig. 20)—pictures that were much more readily accessible to Bruegel. And Bruegel's composition of peasants dancing is no less ambitious. For example, the complex assembly of the large dancing figures on the right of the *Peasant Dance* leads the beholder into depth through a constellation of arms and legs; the couple's raised clasped hands in the middle ground form an arch that both frames the recessional space as well as echoes and points toward the arches of the church in the background. To the left of the central peasant dressed in black in the foreground, a second similar recessional corridor constructed by bodies invites the viewer into the fictive space of the painting toward a fool with his left hand raised, standing next to a visitor from the city. The formal use of bodies to visually emphasize and juxtapose the church and fool in the background not only constructs the visual experience of the painting, but it is this visual experience itself, in addition to any iconographic details that are represented, that informs the process of discerning meaning.

Furthermore, Margaret Sullivan has connected the architectural background of the *Peasant Dance* with Serlio's stage setting for satyric scenes (fig. 21), which became a popular reference for artists after it was published by the widow of Pieter Coecke van Aelst, to whom Bruegel may have been apprenticed.<sup>52</sup> This particular woodcut was one of three designs which corresponded to the three modes of classical drama: tragedy, comedy and satire. In 1553, Marie Verhulst published a complete edition, including both text and images, of Serlio's treatise on architecture, a project that her husband had taken up years before his death.<sup>53</sup> The standards of Vitruvius soon became criteria in formal contracts.<sup>54</sup> Unlike the panoramic view of Bruegel's earlier representations of peasant kermises, such as the *St. George Kermis* (fig. 22), his painting of the *Peasant Dance* is similar to Serlio's model in that the ground plane is level with that of the viewer and a single dirt path leads into the distance. Two rows of receding country homes line the road.

<sup>52</sup> Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants* (1994), 19. Sullivan uses the connection to argue that, for Bruegel's humanist viewers, his painted peasants would have been understood as parallels to drunken satyrs and their debased morality.

<sup>53</sup> Herman de la Fontaine Verwey, "Pieter Coecke van Aelst en de uitgaven van Serlio's Architectuurboek," *Het Boek*, n.s. 31 (1952-4), 251-270.

<sup>54</sup> Kavalier, *Parables of Order and Enterprise* (1999), 48.

While we can not be certain that Serlio's design directly influenced Bruegel's later composition of peasants, we are, nevertheless, again faced with a monumental painting in oil on panel in which a detailed representation of local custom is combined with a mode of painting that resonates with visual concepts of a *historia*. Whereas the majority of previous depictions of village kermises, both in print or painting, offered a panoramic view of various local activities surrounding the celebration of a religious holiday, in the *Peasant Dance* the horizon line is shifted so that the viewer confronts the festivities from a completely different perspective—both ontologically and artistically. The peasant figures are not only “on equal ground” with their viewers but also the composition more strongly emphasizes the way the individual figures, as well as their grouping, are constructed to guide the gaze and communicate the narrative, framing space for depth perception while facilitating specific relationships between foreground and background motifs. In addition, the lingering question remains that if the viewer would have correlated Bruegel's visual presentation of a peasant kermis with a similar way of depicting classical bacchanalia, what bearing does this thematic connection have on our understanding of viewer reception, regarding both form and content? How were paintings of bacchanalia, a new subject in the North during the sixteenth century, received?

Bruegel painted a third peasant scene in 1568, the *Peasant and Nest Robber* (fig. 23).<sup>55</sup> A golden rustic landscape on the right and a cluster of trees on the left serve as the backdrop for the central figure in the picture who strides directly toward the viewer; his next step will send him plunging into the barely visible river in the foreground. The hazard is not only difficult to see for the viewer, it is also ignored by the peasant; he is preoccupied with pointing out a second figure who is high in the tree, busy plundering a bird's nest. As with the *Peasant Wedding Banquet* and *Peasant Dance*, comparisons have been suggested between this representation of a farmer on his land and an Italianate mode of expression. For example, scholars have connected the pose and stocky body of the central figure to a number of possible Italian sources, including a putto beneath an Erythraean Sibyl on the ceiling of Michelangelo's Sistine

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<sup>55</sup> Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inv. GG 1020), 59.3 x 68.3 cm

Chapel (fig. 24).<sup>56</sup> However, particularly striking is the peasant's gesture with his left hand, pointing upward across his chest, which has been associated with a painting of *John the Baptist* by Leonardo, now in the Louvre (fig. 25).<sup>57</sup> Upon closer observation, the two figures by Bruegel and Leonardo also share remarkably similar facial structures and expressions; they both have widely separated eyes, elongated noses and faint smiles. The peasant's gesture, coupled with the fact that he is walking in the countryside, is also identical to depictions of John the Baptist in the wilderness as represented by Marcantonio Raimondi (1475-1534) (fig. 26); the figure is in mid-stride between two trees and points across his chest in the direction of the cross at the end of his staff. In terms of its overall composition, including the facial expression and gesture of the central figure, Bruegel's *Peasant and Nest Robber* also resonates with a painting titled *Baptist/Bacchus*, dated ca. 1513-1516 and now in the Louvre (fig. 27), which was probably a collaboration between Leonardo and a pupil.<sup>58</sup> However, this particular presentation of John the Baptist in the wilderness, accompanied by a river and plants in the foreground and animals in the background, can also be found in earlier paintings of the subject, such as Pintoricchio's (1454-1513) representation in the Cathedral Chapel of John the Baptist, Sienna (1504, fig. 28).

As with the *Peasant Wedding Banquet*, whose composition resembles one employed for depictions of the wedding at Cana, in the *Peasant and Nest Robber* it is also possible that pictorial elements traditionally employed for a religious subject, a man who lived his life in the wilderness, are translated into a painting that, if taken at face value, seems to depict a farmer in the countryside. In addition, comparable to my comments in the Introduction about the Leonardesque face in Aertsen's *Pancake*

<sup>56</sup> See Stridbeck, *Bruegelstudien* (1977), 276; Jürgen Müller, *Das Paradox als Bildform*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag (1999), 82-89. For a general study of this painting, see Thomas Noll, "Pieter Bruegel d.Ä.: der Bauer, der Vogeldieb und die Imker," *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, vol. 50 (1999), 65-106.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. See also Charles de Tolnay, "Bruegel et l'Italie," in *Les Arts Plastiques* (1951), 121-130; Pierre Vinken and Lucy Schlüter, "Pieter Bruegels *Nestrover* en de mens die de dood tegemoet treedt," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. 46, Zwolle: Waanders (1996), 54-79.

<sup>58</sup> It seems that a student of Leonardo first painted the picture as a depiction of John the Baptist, following an earlier drawing by the master (fig. 76), but later, possibly later in the seventeenth century, the cross on the staff was painted out and the attributes of Bacchus—a crown of vine leaves, thyrsus and cluster of grapes—were added by a different artist. For a more detailed study on this painting, see C. Pedretti, *Leonardo. A Study in Chronology and Style*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (1973) 163-167. The painting was still a St. John when it was seen by Cassiano dal Pozzo in 1625. See also, Raymond S. Stites, *The Sublimations of Leonardo da Vinci*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press (1970), 353-360.



*Eaters*, it seems that Bruegel also mediates a similar Italianate style into his vernacular scene of a peasant. The tension generated between form and content, sacred and profane in Bruegel's paintings creates an ambivalence that, I will argue throughout this study, begs for more in-depth analysis from the viewer on both artistic and religious grounds. Bruegel's inter-pictorial discourse not only mediates religious subjects within everyday life, mixing the sacred with the profane, but also combines an Italianate artistic style with his own practice of depicting local custom. As a result, the viewers of this visual conversation have to follow the interplay of that mediation, shifting focus back and forth from the surface of the painting to the models mediated, from formal analysis to the revelations these observations inspire regarding possible thematic connections. Such visual and intellectual agility requires time and patience, a slow extrication of meaning through prolonged meditation on and experience of the painting.

This brief description of three peasant paintings made by Bruegel in the same year, as well as some of the visual concepts and pictorial elements they mediate, reiterates two issues I raised in the Introduction that the remainder of this chapter will address in greater detail. One issue regards the very different subject matter depicted in Bruegel's pictures—the everyday life of the peasant—in comparison to the original context of the formal and/or stylistic references that are incorporated, which are from representations of biblical or classical themes. This translation of form and content from one context into another—transgressing categories such as antique and modern, Italian and Northern or sacred and profane—leads to the second issue I have briefly discussed: the inherent contradiction between these observations and the assertion by modern art historians that Bruegel is an artist who was committed to the “natural life of Brabant” and “eschewed classicist, Italianate influences.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Freedberg, “Allusion and Topicality” (1989), 63. See also Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002).

## II.

As I briefly mentioned, by the mid-sixteenth century increased travel and circulation of reproductive prints made possible an influx of new Italian art into the Netherlands, creating tension between a more ornate, classicizing style of painting and a practice that rejected such models and looked instead to “local traditions” for its inspiration.<sup>60</sup> Reactions to Italian style from Northern artists varied: some artists like Frans Floris wholeheartedly incorporated the new style while others such as Pieter Aertsen attempted to hybridize the two traditions.<sup>61</sup> Until now, scholars have consistently placed Bruegel in a third category of artists who consciously rejected Italian art altogether and embraced local culture.

The local culture that forms the antithesis to Italian art in this polemic is termed by David Freedberg and Mark Meadow as the “vernacular.”<sup>62</sup> For Freedberg, the term indicates that Bruegel depicted an “unadorned truth to nature,” refusing to idealize his subjects as Italianists were known to do.<sup>63</sup> In this case, vernacular has to do with a style that is resolute in following nature, having little to do with subject matter, since Freedberg recognizes that in Bruegel’s work we see “an unparalleled combination of humanist [classical] and popular [local] themes.”<sup>64</sup> Freedberg supports the assertion that Bruegel emphasized following nature rather than art by his analysis of a statement made by Abraham Ortelius in a eulogy to Bruegel in his *Album Amicorum*, dating from ca. 1574.<sup>65</sup> In the second to last sentence of the encomium, Ortelius pays tribute to the

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<sup>60</sup> Freedberg, “Allusion and Topicality” (1989), 53-65.

<sup>61</sup> Meadow, “Bruegel’s *Procession to Calvary*” (1996), 182. See Carl van de Velde for a study on the painting of Floris, *Frans Floris: Leven en Werken*, 2 vol., Brussel: Paleis der Academiën, 1975.

<sup>62</sup> Meadow and Freedberg, see n. 10. See also Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* (1991).

<sup>63</sup> Freedberg, “Allusion and Topicality” (1989), 63.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. See, for example, Bruegel’s *Fall of Icarus* and his two depictions of the *Tower of Babel*.

<sup>65</sup> Ortelius’s *Album Amicorum* was compiled between 1573-1596 and contains 134 entries, consisting both of inscriptions from Ortelius’ friends and colleagues, and of others written and dedicated by him to them. On the connection between Bruegel and Ortelius, see A.E. Popham, “Pieter Bruegel and Abraham Ortelius,” *Burlington Magazine* 59 (1931), 184-188. For further discussion on the relationship between Bruegel and Humanist connections, see C. De Tolnay, *Pierre Bruegel l’Ancien*, Brussels: Nouvelle Société d’Éditions, 1935; Z. Urbach, “Notes on Bruegel’s Archaism: His Relation to Early Netherlandish Painting and Other Sources,” *Acta Historiae Artium*, XXIV (1978), 237-356; J. Muylle, “Pieter Bruegel en Abraham Ortelius. Bijdrage tot de literaire receptie van Pieter Bruegel’s werk,” in *Archivum Artis Lovaniense: Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de kunst der Nederlanden opgedragen aan Prof. Em. Dr. J.K. Stegge*, Leuven: Peeters (1981), 319-377; Iain Buchanan, “Dürer and Abraham Ortelius,” *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 124 (1982), 734-741.

artist by referring to Eunapius in his negative commentary on Iamblichus where he says that “Painters who are painting handsome youths in their bloom and wish to add to the painting some ornament and charm of their own thereby destroy the whole character of the likeness, so that they fail to achieve the resemblance at which they aim, as well as true beauty.” Ortelius continues: “Of such a blemish our friend Bruegel was perfectly free.”<sup>66</sup> Freedberg asserts that it is to the “natural life of Brabant” Bruegel commits to highlighting in his work, not idealized forms; as a result, “in his art the vernacular is given the same status as the classical.”<sup>67</sup> In other words, whereas classicizing painters prioritized idealized forms, Bruegel represented forms as they were presented to him, i.e. naturally.

Regarding Ortelius’s reference to the commentary of Eunapius, Jane Ten Brink Goldsmith claims that “Surely he [Ortelius] is referring here to Bruegel’s Romanist contemporaries. The artist [Bruegel] is understood as being more attentive to nature than art.” She goes on to conclude: “His peasants are primarily in his art an extension of the landscape, that is, a human metaphor for nature.”<sup>68</sup> Freedberg also argues that Ortelius’s statement is indicative of a polemic between the art of Italy and a Northern vernacular school, especially if compared to a similar artistic criticism that is directed at Frans Floris, who is said by modern art historians to paint in a more idealizing, Italianate style.<sup>69</sup> In 1565, Lucas de Heere published *Den hof en boomgaerd der Poë sien*, in which he writes an “Invective against a certain painter who scoffed at the painters of Antwerp” in order to defend his teacher, Floris.<sup>70</sup> De Heere has the anonymous artist he addresses condescendingly refer to Floris’s paintings as “sugar images” [*suuckerbeeldekens*] because they are “ornamented (*verciert*), becomingly (*betamelijck*) and richly (*rijcke*).”<sup>71</sup> The reference implies something

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<sup>66</sup> “Eunapius in Iamblichio. Pictores qui formosulos in aetatis flore constitutos pingunt voluntque picturae lenocinium quoddam et gratium de suo adjicere, totam depravant repraesentatam effigiem, sic ut et ab exemplari proposito pariter et a vera forma aberrant. Ab hac labe purus noster Brugelius.” As translated in Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002), 109-110. A. Ortelius, *Album Amicorum*, Antwerp, 1573-1596, 12v-13r.

<sup>67</sup> Freedberg, “Allusion and Topicality” (1989), 63.

<sup>68</sup> J. Ten Brink Goldsmith, “Pieter Bruegel and the Matter of Italy,” *Sixteenth Century Studies*, vol. 23 (1992), 231. Melion makes a similar assertion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* (1991).

<sup>69</sup> Freedberg, “Allusion and Topicality” (1989), 62-63.

<sup>70</sup> Lucas de Heere, *Den hof en boomgaerd der Poë sien*, W. Waterschoot (ed.), Zwolle: W.E.J. Tjeenk Willink, 1969. For an additional analysis of this poem, see van de Velde, vol. 1 (1975), 1-6.

<sup>71</sup> As translated in Meadow, “Bruegel’s *Procession to Calvary*” (1996), 181.

superficial, attractive on the outside yet bearing no substance. De Heere counters by explaining that Floris, indeed, paints this way, but “not all over, but where it belongs and is befitting.” Besides, De Heere proclaims, “you are yourself entirely unmannered, / Since you ornament your paintings like kermis dolls.” He goes on to say that for him to paint slow and carefully, like Floris presumably, “Is far too artful for you.” Following this reference to artfulness, he continues, “Although you have been to Rome, it is a pitiful thing / That occurred, [just as] the hound goes through the wicker. That you have been to Rome, one cannot see / In your paintings, full of wretched, bad strokes, / That truly look neither Romish (*Roomachtig*), nor antique (*antijcx*).”<sup>72</sup> Not only is Floris criticized for being “ornamented, becomingly and richly,” adverbs indicative of standards of art rather than nature, Freedberg claims that De Heere’s allusion to the lack of grace in the anonymous painter’s work is rather like Ortelius’s similar remark about Bruegel—that he does not add ornament or charm. In fact, scholars are often tempted to read De Heere’s “certain painter” as being Bruegel. They do so because Bruegel had ‘been to Rome,’ and yet he returned to Antwerp to specialize in landscapes and peasant subjects, subjects associated specifically with the Northern tradition. The reference to kermis dolls (*kaermes poppen*) brings to mind Bruegel’s figures and their faces as represented in images such as the *Battle Between Carnival and Lent* and *Children’s Games*. Regardless, of whether or not Bruegel is actually the anonymous artist, in his discussion of this passage Freedberg leads the reader to believe that the painter of “kermis dolls,” who is “unmannered,” represents the third category of artists mentioned above—those committed to “local culture,” and in whose company Bruegel belongs—while the “artful” Floris is representative of the first, Italianate, category.

Despite his emphasis on vernacular style, for Meadow the term “vernacular” is equally applicable to Bruegel’s subject matter. Addressing the artist’s *Procession to Calvary* (fig. 29), painted in 1565 and now in Vienna, Meadow observes that the Marian group in the lower right foreground is segregated from the rest of the painting spatially.<sup>73</sup> On the one hand, they are set apart in narrative terms, forming an island of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. It is interesting to note here that, unlike modern art historians, De Heere does not equate the “romish” (i.e. Italian Renaissance) style with the antique.

<sup>73</sup> Meadow, “Bruegel’s *Procession to Calvary*” (1996), 189.

grief, turned in upon themselves, neither directly participating in Christ's torment nor regarding it. On the other hand, stylistically the group differs from the rest of the scene, evocating in both figure type and costume the style of fifteenth-century Netherlandish paintings.<sup>74</sup> Unlike the figures surrounding them, these figures are tall and slim, with elongated limbs, reminiscent of a type associated with Rogier van der Weyden (1399-1465). The juxtaposition of an anachronistic citation within a composition clearly belonging within a distinct sixteenth-century landscape tradition would have been striking to its original viewers. Citing Bruegel's previous work, which primarily references Netherlandish artists and traditions, and the growing tension between Italian and Netherlandish styles of painting, between what Meadow describes as "Latinate and vernacular modes," within the context of the humanist "archeological agenda" for recovering the classical past, he argues that Bruegel's reference to early Netherlandish painting can be understood within a similar agenda:

Whereas for Italy the archeological disinterment of the classical past was simultaneously a reengagement with and an alienation from a culture from which it directly descended, this was not so for the Netherlands. There were no, or at any rate very few, traces of the ancient Roman Empire and its culture to be found in its soil. Encouraged by the methods and tools of humanist education to take an interest in archeological examination of the past, it was inevitable that scholars, linguists and even artists and art critics would turn to their own tradition, their own past, for models to follow [...] Bruegel consistently turned to prior Netherlandish art as sources for his own production, taking an interest in categories of art which even at the time were recognized as peculiarly Northern: landscape, peasant scenes and Boschian drolleries.<sup>75</sup>

According to Meadow, Bruegel's "enterprise of vernacular painting" constitutes, therefore, a distinctly Netherlandish mode which has to do with both subject and style.<sup>76</sup>

At this point, according to Freedberg, the term vernacular as applied to the visual arts indicates, in formal terms, art that adamantly follows nature. An artist who paints in the vernacular is one who rejects "innovation of his own" or embellishment

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<sup>74</sup> Svetlana Alpers makes a similar observation in, "Style is what you make it: the visual arts once again," in *The Concept of Style*, ed. by Berel Lang, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1979), 95-117.

<sup>75</sup> Meadow, "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*" (1996), 199-200.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-195. See also Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes* (2006), 1-15; especially his discussion of what he terms the "brand name" effect of artistic identity around a pictorial type.

(art that seeks to improve upon nature). At the same time, according to Meadow, certain pictorial subjects seem to be associated with the vernacular as well, such as peasant scenes and landscapes; subjects that either did not exist or were not as pictorially prominent in other regions. It is a visual tradition that can take on a combination of many different forms (Rogier's slender figures vs. Bruegel's stocky peasant) and/or subject matter, yet is identified with one specific region.<sup>77</sup> But, how are we to evaluate the examples from Bruegel's later work, such as the ones I described at the beginning of this chapter, pictures in which the artist showcases art as much as nature by employing visual concepts and pictorial elements associated with history painting to shape his vernacular scenes of peasants, artful forms and ambitious compositions to construct images of country life?<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, what questions do these formal observations raise about the polemic, supposedly between Northern and Italian art, that is present in the texts of Ortelius and De Heere, as well as about the term vernacular as it has been defined thus far?

In the following, I argue against the assertion that the texts by De Heere and Ortelius represent a polemic between Italian art and a Northern, vernacular tradition, however one defines it. I also argue, rather predictably, against the assumption that Bruegel's later work belongs to a Northern school that rejected classicist, Italianate influences. To do so, I expand the concept of vernacular as it has been applied to visual art by modern scholars through an examination of two contemporary artistic discussions which were intricately related and widespread in Bruegel's artistic

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<sup>77</sup> On the possible political, or nationalistic, motivations for a Northern vernacular style, see M. Carroll, "Peasant Festivity and Political Identity" (1987).

<sup>78</sup> On the few occasions that the observations regarding Bruegel's 'artful' depiction of 'natural life' are taken up by art historians, they are seen as indications that Bruegel's view of the peasant was more positive than some earlier scholarship would have us believe. See for example, S. Alpers, "Taking pictures seriously" (1978-9), 46-50. Since the artful manner in which Bruegel portrays peasants in his later paintings differs drastically from the largely charicatural depiction of peasants found in earlier prints and texts, the conclusion would be, therefore, that Bruegel's pictures were not negatively commenting on rustic life, but were viewed as either empathetic indications of social change or harmless comedy. Jürgen Müller takes a different direction and argues that the mediation of "artful" forms into peasant scenes should be understood in the Erasmian ironic sense, the most well-known example being his *Praise of Folly*. For example, in the *Peasant and Nest Robber*, the mixture of a lowly peasant subject within an Italian artistic manner reverses the visual trend depicting peasants and highlights the contradictory relationship between form and content, a contradiction that simultaneously makes fun of the peasant and ridicules Italian style. See Jürgen Müller, *Das Paradox* (1999), 82-89. See also Franzsepp Würtenberger, "Zu Bruegels Kunstform. Besonders ihr Verhältnis zur Renaissancekomposition," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 9 (1940), 30-48.

community: first, the debate around art and nature and, second, the way in which this discussion informs the Pléiade poets' understanding of the term vernacular as applied to language, as well as the way it shapes their program for vernacular cultivation. I will show how the influence of Pléiade poetics in the work of Lucas de Heere and Jan van der Noot, as well as the general attitude regarding the enrichment of the vernacular language emerging among the rederijkers in the sixteenth century, is foundational to better understanding the art theoretical issues at stake in the polemic asserted in De Heere's "Invective."

### III.

If compared to the vernacular language in the sixteenth-century Netherlands, especially considering the humanist interest in the "verrijking van de moedertaal," as it is described by Lode van den Branden, our understanding of the term vernacular as applied to the visual arts, defined thus far by style and/or subject matter, should be revisited and expanded.<sup>79</sup> For example, as I mentioned, the literary program of the Pléiade poets, highly influential for the Antwerp rhetoricians Van der Noot and poet/painter De Heere, was to defend the vernacular language and show that it was just as capable of copious, apt and ornate expression as were the languages of Antiquity.<sup>80</sup> Although not a member of the Pléiade group, the movement finds its first advocate in the work of Clément Marot, in whose *Adolescence clémentine* the French language emerged from its medieval dialects to begin its evolution into a syntactically coherent language.<sup>81</sup> Like Du Bellay and Ronsard, Marot defended and sought to cultivate the French language as a vehicle of poetic expression, whereas Latin was still thought by some humanists to be more nuanced and rich in its vocabulary. This idea defined the poetics of the Pléiade, who developed it into a systematic theoretical agenda. Rather than abandoning that which comes natural to their people (French) for a language that

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<sup>79</sup> Lode van den Branden, *Het streven naar verheerlijking, zuivering en opbouw van het Nederlands in de 16e eeuw*, Gent: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde (1956), 117.

<sup>80</sup> Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (1964), 8.

<sup>81</sup> Hope Glidden, *Lyrics of the French Renaissance: Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard*, trans. by Norman R. Shapiro, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2002), 2.

is indigenous to another region (Latin), these poets advocated a higher and better style for the vernacular and campaigned to encourage the translation and imitation of the ancients and Italians, including the subject matter of classical writers, into one's own vernacular tongue.<sup>82</sup> The ideal was for a poet to be so well-versed in the inner principles that had guided the composition of Ancient literature that he would be able to imaginatively mediate these forms to restructure the vernacular in new and inventive ways. If we take this program for the cultivation of the vernacular language, which characterizes both that of the Pléiade in France and the rhetoricians society in the Netherlands, as a comparable phenomenon to the visual arts, we acquire a model in which both classicist, Italianate forms and subject matter are mediated within the vernacular (language) and not only does it remain the vernacular, it becomes an even better, more enriched, form of expression.

Likewise, I will argue that the later works by Bruegel, peasant scenes and a festival of fools, should also be seen in a comparable light of vernacular cultivation (i.e. an artistic program for local custom that shows innovation and ambition); pictures that mediate visual concepts and pictorial elements employed for history painting, including classical subject matter or biblical stories, into representations of local character. The result is not an antithetical or polemical mode of pitting the “indigenous” against the “foreign” but the promotion of the status and possibilities, both in style and subject matter, for a manner of painting that is increasingly identified with a visual mode specific to the North.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> They understood this initiative to be in itself an imitation of what antique writers did for classical Latin, cultivating the language with Greek forms.

<sup>83</sup> This argument might be compared to Meadow's discussion of Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs*, in which he argues for a similar interaction between classical Latin and the vernacular in regards to proverbs: “The inclusion of Erasmus' classically derived parabolæ, explicitly acknowledged as such, in a collection of vernacular and at times earthy proverbs confirms the slippage between what we now term ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ cultures, or perhaps should bring us to question how apt these categories are for the material we are studying [...] Where the earliest example of a vernacular proverb collection, the *Proverbia communia*, served as a means for introducing pupils to Latin through the use of familiar, native expressions, we have now reached the point where carefully garnered classical Latin is translated in the vernacular to add to the repertoire of available figures for enriching plays or poems, or everyday conversation.” And later, when specifically referring to the stylistic differences between Netherlandish and classicizing artists, the author explains: “As with the relationship between vernacular and classical proverbs, the two styles were seen as engaged in a fruitful interchange and as inalienable parts of a single whole.” See Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel's the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002), 79, 128. Although he does not mention the Pléiade or vernacular cultivation, Max Dvořák observes this artistic development in Bruegel's earlier works, such as the *Adoration of the Magi* (1564, London). “Bruegel attempted, in his *Adoration of the Magi*, to compose a picture that was wholly Italianate in style. He



In order to more fully grasp possible similarities between the process of cultivation for the vernacular language versus the cultivation of a vernacular as applied to the visual arts, it is first necessary to examine the complex and changing interaction between the concepts of art and nature during the mid-sixteenth century, an interaction, I will show, that is foundational for both the cultivation of the visual arts as well as for the Pléiade's definition of language enrichment.<sup>84</sup> To trace the relationship of art and nature for the visual arts in the sixteenth century, I discuss the terms as they are used in another section of Ortelius's eulogy to Bruegel included in his *Album Amicorum*, which praises the artist's talent. I then make a comparison with similar concepts at play in the campaign of the Pléiade.

After discussing two possible culprits of Bruegel's premature passing away, either Death who thought him more advanced in age judging from his artistic skill or Nature who feared his genius would surpass her, Ortelius praises Bruegel by comparing him to a painter from classical antiquity: "The painter Eupompus, it is reported, when asked which of his predecessors he followed, pointed to a crowd of people and said it was Nature herself, not an artist, whom one ought to imitate. This applies also to our friend Bruegel, of whose works I used to speak as hardly works of art, but as works of Nature. Nor should I call him the best of painters, but rather the very nature of painters. He is thus worthy, I claim, of being imitated by them."<sup>85</sup> There is much to consider in this complex comparison of Bruegel to a classical artist and

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was not, however, conforming to any particular model, but rather trying to capture what was essential in the Italian manner of composition and unite it to his own art." See Dvořák, *The History of Art as the History of Ideas*, London: Routledge (1984), 85.

<sup>84</sup> The artistic debate about art and nature extends back to Antiquity and is revisited extensively during the Renaissance, particularly in regards to the issue of imitation. Literature in this field is vast and I can only address one small portion in this chapter. For more general studies, see Anne Eusterschulte, "Imitatio naturae: Naturverständnis und Nachahmungslehre in Malereitraktaten der frühen Neuzeit," in Helmut Laufhütte (ed.), *Künste und Natur in Diskursen der Frühen Neuzeit*, Weisbaden (2000), 701-807; A.J. Close, "Commonplace Theories of Art and Nature in Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 30 (1969), 467-486 and "Philosophical Theories of Art and Nature in Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 32 (1971), 163-184. Specifically in regards to Bruegel, see Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs*, (2002), 99-152.

<sup>85</sup> Eupompus pictor interrogatus quem sequeretur antecedentium, demonstrare hominum multitudinem, dixisse fertur, naturam ipsam imitandam esse, non artificem. Congruet nostro Brugelio hoc, cuius picturas ego minime artificiosas, at naturales appellare soleam. Neque eum optimum pictorem, at naturam pictorum vero dixerim. Dignum itaque indico, quem omnes imitentur. A. Ortelius, *Album amicorum*, Antwerp, 1573-1576. As translated in Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002), 109.

Bruegel to nature. Ortelius's declaration that Bruegel's works are not of art but of Nature itself communicates that his imitation of Nature is so effective that the two become indistinguishable. As Meadow has explained, this can be understood on two levels: on the one hand, Bruegel's paintings imitate Nature to the extent that they are no longer a product of artifice, but nature itself; on the other hand, Bruegel, the artist, imitates Nature so effectively that the painter is not merely an artist, he is equivalent to Nature in his creative abilities.<sup>86</sup> Ronsard's *Hylas* provides a helpful illustration, and poetic parallel, for the imitation of nature as representing the natural world and the imitation of nature as a creative force:

...I am like a bee  
Which gathers sometimes from the scarlet flower,  
Sometimes from the yellow: drifting from meadow to meadow,  
Flying to the place which appeals to it most,  
Piling up much food for winter:  
In the same way, running and leafing through my books, I accumulate,  
sift and choose the most beautiful,  
Which I sometimes make into one picture with a hundred colors,  
Sometimes into another: and, master of my painting,  
Without forcing myself, I imitate Nature.

(lines 417-26)<sup>87</sup>

Ronsard's metaphor of the bee poignantly describes the two-fold artistic process of imitating nature: reproducing that which has been created while also reenacting the process of production.

Both he and Ortelius's comments refer back to the double meaning of the concept of nature, rooted in classical philosophy of art, which Jan Białostocki labels as "passive" and "active." By passive, Białostocki is referring to the imitation of nature as creation (*natura naturata*), i.e. the reality of daily experience; by active, he means the imitation of nature as creative force (*natura naturans*), its performative creational powers.<sup>88</sup> Ortelius's praise of Bruegel

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 108-119.

<sup>87</sup> Pierre de Ronsard, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. P. Laumonier, vol. XV, Paris: Didier (1914-1975), 252. As translated in Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*, Oxford: Polity Press (1991), 265.

<sup>88</sup> Jan Białostocki, "The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity," in *The Renaissance and Mannerism, Studies in Western Art, Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art*, Vol. II, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1963), 19-30. On the connection between Bruegel and the twofold concept of nature in Van Mander's *Schilder-boeck*, see Hessel Miedema, "Pieter Bruegel

functions on both levels: Bruegel does not merely make art that imitates nature, his creative powers are equated with the creative force of nature itself; therefore, his creations should be imitated by other artists. Through his creative abilities, his identity as an artist is inseparable from that of Nature's. To repeat Ortelius's conclusion: "Nor could I call him the best of painters, but rather the very nature of painters. He is thus worthy, I claim, of being imitated by them."<sup>89</sup> The irony, and important point I want to emphasize, is that Ortelius's concluding declaration contradicts his comparison of Bruegel to Eupompus. On the one hand, Ortelius lauds Bruegel, like Eupompus, for following nature instead of other artists. On the other hand, Ortelius goes on to instruct artists after Bruegel to imitate the artist rather than nature; his work has supplanted nature as the appropriate model. Implicit in this shift is that Bruegel's creational abilities have surpassed not only Nature, but also his classical comparison, Eupompus.

Ortelius's comments speak volumes about Bruegel's gift as a painter but also serve as evidence for the complex relationship between what it means to follow Nature and to follow art in the creative process—especially since there are cases, such as in Bruegel's work, where the two are synonymous with one another. The dual role of the artist in imitating created nature in addition to nature as a creative force can also be paralleled to earlier concepts of *ars* and *ingenium*. *Ars* was the skill or competence that was learnt by rule and imitation; *ingenium* was the innate creative talent that could not be learned. In his *De Oratore*, Cicero explains what is meant by *ingenium*. The term includes natural faculties of sensitivity and imagination, an ability to receive deep impressions which may develop penetrating invention, a capacity for learning, and a retentive memory.<sup>90</sup> Whereas *ars* was acquired from following rules and models, *ingenium* brought with it connotations regarding innovation and imagination natural to the artist.<sup>91</sup> For humanist the two words coupled together, or not, became in the

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weer; en de geloofwaardigheid van Karel van Mander," *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1998), 309-327.

<sup>89</sup> As translated in Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002), 109.

<sup>90</sup> Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (1964), 42.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350-1450*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1971), 15-16. On the historiography of *ingenium*, see also Patricia Emison, *Creating the Divine Artist: from Dante to Michelangelo*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

sixteenth century a polemical means of criticism. The association between *ars* (skill) and *ingenium* (imagination) was so intimate that if one were to speak of *ars* alone, especially in the context of praising an artist, the suggestion would be that he had no *ingenium*.<sup>92</sup>

Białostocki argues that two important changes in artistic outlook occurred in the sixteenth century due to the increasing importance of the imaginative creating abilities of the artist: the rule of the imitation of created nature gave way to the appeal to improve upon nature by imitating the antique (art that had already made the ideal selections from nature and therefore could help the modern artist surpass her); but at the same time, since the creational character of art was stressed, the rule of the imitation of nature as creative force increased in significance.<sup>93</sup> An explanation of the first change can be found in Ludovico Dolce (1508-1568): “If then the artist, correcting (nature’s) imperfections would ‘surpass nature,’ would render her fairer than she is, he must be guided by a study of the faultless antique. For the antique is already that ideal nature for which the painter strives and “the ancient statues contain all the perfection of art.”<sup>94</sup> The antique thus becomes the ideal, or second nature. Vasari offers an example of the second change when he writes in the preface to the third part of his *Lives* that there appeared in the sixteenth century an artist who surpassed “not only those moderns who have, as it were, vanquished nature but even those most famous ancients who without doubt did so gloriously surpass nature.”<sup>95</sup> After emphasizing the genius of Michelangelo, as well as Raphael, in not only surpassing nature but also the art of the ancients, Vasari concludes that the only way for art to progress further is for subsequent painters to emulate the art of these two Italian masters.<sup>96</sup> Implicit in this game of emulation is the ability of the artist to select, imitate, compose and figure

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<sup>92</sup> On the polemical connection between the two in Antique literature, see Robert J. Clements, *Critical Theory and Practice of the Pléide*, New York: Octagon Books (1970), 190. “Pindar writes that the genuine poet is the one whose knowledge comes as a gift of nature; those poets whose wisdom comes only through learning are crows who caw in vain against the godlike bird of Zeus.”

<sup>93</sup> Białostocki, “The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity,” (1963), 27.

<sup>94</sup> Rensselaer W. Lee, “Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting,” *Art Bulletin*, vol. 22 (1940), 205.

<sup>95</sup> Georgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, vol. 1, New York: Penguin Press (1987), 327-442; Vasari makes a similar statement about Raphael: “Nature sent Raphael into the world after it had been vanquished by the art of Michelangelo and was ready, through Raphael, to be vanquished by character as well.” *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>96</sup> Lisa Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print*, New Haven: Yale University Press (2004), 25. See also Emison, *Creating the Divine Artist* (2004).

pictures in such a way that they surpass that from which they adopt.<sup>97</sup> Ortelius's epitaph of Bruegel shows that the circular evolution from imitating nature, to imitating the antique which perfects nature, to imitating that art which vanquishes both—and, therefore, itself becomes the nature that should be imitated—was also known in the North. In just a few lines of praise, Ortelius' comparison of Bruegel and Eupompos indicates that Bruegel's *ingenium*, or innovativeness, was such that he integrated art and nature so perfectly that his work surpassed both nature and his classical counterpart. Regardless of whether or not it is an intentional reference, Ortelius's instruction to subsequent artists that it is Bruegel, not nature or Antiquity, who is the authority that should be imitated creates a status beyond the two similar to the commentary by Vasari about Michelangelo and Raphael.<sup>98</sup>

#### IV

Debate about the interaction between art and nature is also instrumental for the rise and cultivation of the vernacular language, both in status and use, in comparison to Latin during the sixteenth century. Equally important is the role of *ingenium*, or invention as it is more often referred to by poets in the period, in negotiating the two.<sup>99</sup> Up to the late Middle Ages, certain humanist scholars and writers argued that the

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<sup>97</sup> Meadow was the first to connect the process of emulation with Bruegel's work; see *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002), 99-152. On the competitive spirit of emulation, see also G.W. Pigman III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1980), 1-32 and Greene, *The Light in Troy* (1982).

<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of Vasari's praise of Michelangelo's inventiveness, new forms, and worthiness to be imitated, see D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. That Bruegel's posthumous reputation equaled the Italian masters who for Vasari are the pinnacle of art, specifically Raphael, is suggested by a seventeenth-century drawing that reproduces the portrait of Bruegel from Lampsonius's epigram on the painter. The anonymous copyist added four more lines to the poem, praising Bruegel with formulas taken from Martialis and Bembo's epitaph for Raphael; Jochen Becker, "Hic Ille Est Bruegel." *Beobachtungen zum Bilde Bruegels und zu Raffaels Ruhm anhand des Blattes KDZ 11 949 im Berliner Kupferstichkabinett*," in Marc Van Vaeck, et al.(ed.), *De Steen van Alciato: Literatuur en visuele cultuur in de Nederlanden. Opstellen voor prof. dr. Karel Porteman bij zijn emeritaat*, Louvain: Peeters (2003), 161-190. Lucas de Heere asserts the same status to Frans Floris when he says that it will be the name of Floris, not Apelles, that would receive the most honor of all the magnificent painters; Carl van de Velde, *Frans Floris* (1975), 3; Jochen Becker, "Zur Niederländischen Kunstdliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Lucas de Heere," *Simiolus*, vol. 6 (1972-3), 114-16.

<sup>99</sup> For a general study of this phenomenon, see Van den Branden, *Het streven naar verheerlijking* (1956).

vernacular language had been neglected in favor of Latin, with the result that it still had only limited powers of expression and little elegance.<sup>100</sup> Whereas the vernacular had followed usage or custom, Latin is regulated by art. The Pléiade argued, therefore, to further develop the vernacular language was a matter of integrating art as much as custom as a regulating factor.

To this end, in his *Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise*, Du Bellay recommended a rejection of much of the earlier native, rough French formal tradition and advocated vernacular innovation based on Greek and Roman poetic forms, emulation of specific models, and the creation of neologisms based on Greek and Latin—“si pauvre et nue, qu’elle a besoing des ornementz et...des plumes d’autrui” (so poor and naked, it needs ornaments and ... plumes from others).<sup>101</sup> Adjectives, comparisons, periphrasis and other rhetorical devices, and the use of myth were advocated as ways of achieving such an enrichment. The changes, argued Du Bellay, incorporate both style and images and he advocated that poets primarily use odes and sonnets. As an act of innovation, he even encourages the poet to coin new words and to Frenchify Greek and Latin proper names—*dy Hercule, Thesée, Achile, Ulysse, Virgile, Ciceron, Horace*.<sup>102</sup> As Hope Glidden states, “Through the imposition of formal constraints, the Pléiade elevated speech to become song, all the while creating an effect of naturalness in the most artificial of mediums, lyric poetry.”<sup>103</sup>

In a famous passage, Du Bellay describes the development of languages as being like the process of grafting and the bearing of fruit. As classical Latin was

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<sup>100</sup> For example, see Joachim Du Bellay, *Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise*, ed. Henri Chamard, Paris, 1966 and Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (1964), 8. See also Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (eds.), *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Post-Medieval Vernacularity*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003. A similar situation regarding the neglect of Italian in favor of Latin occurred in Italy a century before; see Sarah Stever Gravelle, “The Latin-Vernacular Question and Humanist Theory of Language and Culture,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 49, no. 3 (July 1988), 367-386.

<sup>101</sup> Clements, *Critical Theory and Practice of the Pléiade* (1970), 189. Michel Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion: Transforming Shapes in the Renaissance from da Vinci to Montaigne*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press (2001), 181. Montaigne deplored the weakness of the language and argued that it was not a lack of words but gaps and imprecision in the conceptual apparatus. Alberti advocates the same for Italian: “Our own tongue will have no less power [than Latin] as soon as learned men decide to refine and polish it by zealous and arduous labors;” Gravelle, “The Latin-Vernacular Question” (1988), 381.

<sup>102</sup> Dorothy Gabe Coleman, *The Chaste Muse: A Study of Joachim Du Bellay’s Poetry*, Leiden: Brill (1980), 20.

<sup>103</sup> Glidden, *Lyrics of the French Renaissance* (2002), 19.

formed and enriched by the remains of Greek, so French poets should reproduce the efforts of classical and Italian writers, germinating the vernacular from seeds sown by both languages. Ronsard uses the same analogy of grafting to describe the interweaving of the petrarchan intertext into his own work.<sup>104</sup> In the first preface to his fifty sonnets dedicated to *L'Olive* (1549), Du Bellay says freely that he has imitated Petrarch: "Vrayment je confesse avoir imité Petrarque, et non luy seulement, mais aussi l'Arioste et d'autres modernes Italiens: pource qu'en l'argument que je traicte, je n'en ay point trouvé de meilleurs."<sup>105</sup> But, in the 1550 preface he has to justify himself against the criticism of *L'Olive*, particularly that of plagiarism, and describes his process of assimilation:

Si, par la lecture des bons livres, je me suis imprimé quelques traictz en la fantasie, qui après, venant à exposer mes petites conceptions selon les occasions qui m'en sont données, me coulent beaucoup plus facilement en la plume qu'ilz ne me reviennent en la memoire, doibt-on pour ceste raison les appeler pieces rapportées? [...] en mes escriptz y a beaucoup plus de naturelle invention que d'artificielle ou supersticieuse imitation.<sup>106</sup>

Similarly, Ronsard's *Amours* and *Sonets pour Helene* contain many motifs and images for which parallels can readily be found in Petrarch's *Rime* and in the works of his Italian imitators.<sup>107</sup> However, as Castor explains, it is also suggested in the first sonnet of the *Sonets pour Helene* that to some extent this will be an "anti-petrarchan" collection—or rather that there will be clear (ironic) variations from the standard petrarchan patterns. Just one example is that instead of emphasizing fate as the inspiration to love, as is often the case with Petrarch, Ronsard credits self-determination. In doing so, the concept of 'chance' is substituted, or at least is a deflating antithesis, for the petrarchan 'destiny'. Through the subtle, even allusive, references to Petrarch throughout the poem, albeit primarily in an antithetical way, Ronsard indicates that he is both accepting the petrarchan conventions while simultaneously using them as a kind of melody against which to set his own

<sup>104</sup> Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words* (1991), 266.

<sup>105</sup> Joachim Du Bellay, *L'Olive*, with notes and introduction by E. Caldorini, Geneva: Droz (1974), 169.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 50. For elaboration on the various ways in which Du Bellay mediates Petrarchian texts and ideas, as well as those of antique writers, in his poetry, see Coleman, *The Chaste Muse* (1980).

<sup>107</sup> For an elaboration on the similarities, and differences, see Grahame Castor, "Petrarchism and the quest for beauty in the *Amours* of Cassandre and the *Sonets pour Helene*," in Terence Cave (ed.), *Ronsard the Poet*, London: Methuen & Co. (1973), 79-120.

counterpoints that are often ironic in nature.<sup>108</sup> These two poems by Du Bellay and Ronsard offer poignant examples of the central creative principle for Pléiade poetics: in familiarizing himself with the work of model authors, the would-be poet should concern himself not simply with imitating its outward appearance, but more with the inner principles which had guided its composition [motifs, diction, formulas, themes, image patterns], then innovatively mediate these forms to restructure their own poetic voice in the vernacular language.<sup>109</sup>

The Pléiade's theories of imitation and rules for composition were based on the assumption that any writer of the time, no matter how great his natural talents, could learn to write better through rules of art. The forms that dominate the poetic production of the poets are the Petrarchan sonnet cycle and the Horatian / Anacreontic ode (of the 'wine, women and song variety, often making use of the Horatian "carpe diem" topos). Throughout the period, the use of mythology is frequent, but so too is a depiction of the natural world (landscapes, woods, seas and rivers).<sup>110</sup> In his *Divers Jeux rustiques*, Du Bellay describes an ideal landscape full of the harvest of wheat and grape-rich wine. Written during his stay in Rome, the poems vividly paint the fields of the countryside and the peasants who inhabit them. Such poetry about "natural" surroundings would seem to avoid learned allusion. However, Glidden points out that the *Divers Jeux rustiques* are derivative, in one case, referencing the Neo-Latin poet André Navagero, friend of Bembo and Raphael in Rome, and author of the Latin collection *Lusus* (1530), from which poems II-XIII in Du Bellay's collection are taken.<sup>111</sup> Du Bellay's borrowing does not boast originality, but rather his gift for absorbing into French the elements it needs to enrich it.

As a result of the emphasis on the translation and mediation of ancient and Italian models into one's own vernacular tongue, issues of imitation and invention, *ars* and *ingenium* were at the center of Pléiade poetic theory. Whereas *ars* was the skill or competence that was learnt by rule and imitation, following nature represented two

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>109</sup> They advocated the adjustment not only of words and word order but also the entire economy of the sentence structure and distribution of literary forms; Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion* (2001), 193.

<sup>110</sup> Michel Simonin (ed.), *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises—Le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris: Fayard, 2001. See also G. Demerson, *La mythologie classique dans l'oeuvre lyrique de la Pléiade*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972.

<sup>111</sup> Glidden, *Lyrics of the French Renaissance* (2002), 13.



aspects of the creative process. On the one hand, one's immediate surroundings constitute nature. On the other hand, only that which is an innate quality of the artist, not learned, is natural, such as creativity, imagination and *ingenium*. Therefore, these attributes can be polished and improved by *ars*, but they cannot originally be produced in a man by *ars* if he does not already possess them.<sup>112</sup> Following this line of thought, one's own language, argued the Pléide members, represents one's immediate surroundings, a "natural" gift, whereas other languages than one's own must be acquired through learning. Therefore, to truly follow nature in making art one must employ this natural "gift." The vernacular language is an example of "nature," what comes innately, but, according to Jacques Peletier du Mans (1517-1582), demands the aid of an artisan hand. For Peletier, writing in French (or presumably whatever tongue is native) is preferable to Latin because it is the natural condition, perhaps requiring the refinement of artifice for perfection, but natural nonetheless. Latin, and other non-native languages, are comparatively more removed into the sphere of artifice, requiring as they do the discipline of schooling.<sup>113</sup> Although the vernacular language (nature) should be one's form of communication, other more decorative, cultivated languages (art) should be used to improve it. Thus, Nature provides the material (language) and an indication of what is to be made of it (invention); Art then looks after the actual fashioning. As Peletier explains: "Nature donne la disposition, e comme une matiere: 'l'Art donne l'operation, e comme la form...Nature ouure le chemin, e le montre au doë: l'Art conduit, e garde de se deuoyer....An somme, la Nature bien demande le secours e la mein artisane: E l'Art, ne peut rien sans le naturel....Ensi, Nature, sera difuse par tout son ouurage: e l'Art mêlé par toute sa Nature."<sup>114</sup> Art and nature are each dependent upon the other in the production of a work of poetry.<sup>115</sup> The culmination, or goal, of this process is that once custom and art are skillfully integrated

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<sup>112</sup> Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (1964), 42.

<sup>113</sup> Meadow, "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*" (1996), 198.

<sup>114</sup> As reprinted in Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (1964), 46. In his *La Deffence*, Du Bellay argues that a language is like a plant but left to itself it will remain wild and sterile. Unless nature is sustained, regulated, and guided, it produces nothing worthwhile.

<sup>115</sup> Clements, *Critical Theory and Practice of the Pléiade* (1970), 210; Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (1964), 46. Dante expresses a similar view toward the nobility of the vernacular over Latin; see John A. Scott, *Understanding Dante*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press (2004), 35-62, 109-112.

as the regulating factors, one's vernacular language would become so much better that it would surpass Latin in its eloquence and expressive capabilities.<sup>116</sup>

Although sixteenth-century writers of the Pléiade never offer a formal definition for invention, its importance for the creative process described above is consistently central throughout their theoretical work.<sup>117</sup> The etymological meaning of invention indicates a "coming into." The concept is not so much that of producing something entirely new, but rather that of coming into and revealing for the first time something which already exists.<sup>118</sup> As a result, invention is often set against imitation, taken in the sense of following literary models. While in imitation the poet is drawing upon other authors for his material, when he invents he is relying entirely upon himself. The Pléiade always insisted that it was incumbent upon the poet not to stop short at the level of imitation, but to go on to the higher stage of invention.<sup>119</sup> Donald Maddox interprets the writing of Du Bellay to say that invention is a process which envelopes two modes: imaginative and imitative. The first is a "natural" product of perception and imagination (that which is a gift and cannot be learned) and the second is a product of these *plus* "artificial" authorial models (such as classical texts). In the context of the Pléiade program, two "gifts" are engaged which represent the two aspects of nature previously mentioned: the vernacular language (one's natural surroundings) and the natural "inventive" abilities of the poet. Both aspects of nature are then cultivated by the study and imitation of Latin and Antiquity.<sup>120</sup> Despite the fact that it might take a century, the idea, or goal, is that this imaginative process of integrating art and nature will culminate in the cultivation of poetry written in the vernacular language such that

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<sup>116</sup> The concerted effort of the Romans to perfect Latin was constantly imposed as a model to follow. To enrich their indigent speech, the Romans employed Greek remains, making plunder a means of cultural promotion. In the first chapters of *La Deffence*, Du Bellay lingered admiringly on the method of systematic appropriation and development of patrimony that made the Romans what they were. He exhorted his readers to fight in turn for the cause of French and to broaden it by grabbing all available resources, antique and modern, local and foreign; Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion* (2001), 183.

<sup>117</sup> For a detailed analysis on the indeterminacy, yet defining role of invention in Pléiade poetics, see Donald Maddox, "Inventing Invention: process in Pléiade poetics," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 15 (1985), 211-230.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>119</sup> Castor, *Pléiade Poetics* (1964), 115.

<sup>120</sup> In *La Deffence*, Du Bellay argues that inspiration and innate qualities are passive dispositions and, being "natural," must be relayed by effort, actualized by will and technique, if they are to engender masterpieces; Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion* (2001), 184.

it supplants classical texts as the model to be imitated.<sup>121</sup> In this explanation, we hear an echo of similar emulative processes active in the visual arts between art, nature and antiquity that is represented in both Vasari's praise of Michelangelo and Ortelius's praise of Bruegel.

The Pléiade program was well known in the Netherlands. As I mentioned, Lucas De Heere and Jan van der Noot, though not members of the group, were prominent advocates of the cause. In Dutch literary history, Van der Noot is generally considered to be the first major Renaissance poet. Knuvelde explains that in the Netherlands, the awareness of poetic genius was established by the high opinion of the poet's task and the place of beauty in society and Van der Noot is the herald of the new time.<sup>122</sup> He lived in Antwerp and was a faithful follower of Ronsard.<sup>123</sup> He produced the first collection of lyrical Renaissance poems, *Het Bosken*, in Antwerp in 1567. His second collection, *Het Theatre oft Toonneel* (dedicated to Petrarch and Du Bellay), was published in 1568 and shows especially the influence of Ronsard in the sonnet and song forms.

The love poetry of *Het Bosken* is typical Pléiade poetry: sonnets and odes composed in a metre previously unknown in Dutch literature, many of them adaptations from Ronsard, some Jean-Antoine Du Baïf, and others from Petrarch.<sup>124</sup> Consistent with the Pléiade, Van der Noot believed that other languages should be plundered for the betterment of one's own native tongue: "For it had already been in fashion to adorn Flemish with Italian words and phrases, to make it Italianate or 'Petrarchian.'" <sup>125</sup> K. ter Laan explains that he has the merit of representing the Pléiade in the Netherlands and succeeds in translating sonnets and odes (the new poetic form)

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<sup>121</sup> Greene, *The Light in Troy* (1982), 189

<sup>122</sup> G.P.M. Knuvelde, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde*, dl. 2, 's-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, (1971), 126. On the influence of Van der Noot, see K.J.S. Bostoen, *Dichterschap en Koopmanschap in de zestiende eeuw*, Deventer: SUB ROSA, 1987.

<sup>123</sup> He came in contact with Ronsard during his stay in France while fleeing religious persecution from the Duke of Alba; see F. Jos. van den Branden en J.G. Frederiks, *Biographisch woordenboek der Noord- en Zuidnederlandsche letterkunde*, Amsterdam: L.J. Veen, 1888-91.

<sup>124</sup> Carlo A. Zaalberg, *'Das Buch Extasis' van Jan van der Noot*, Assen: van Gorcum and Co. (1954), 252.

<sup>125</sup> "t was immers reeds mode geworden zijne taal met Italiaansche woorden en spreekwijzen op te sieren, te Italianiseeren of te Petrarquiseeren" (my translation). G.P.M. Knuvelde, 'Jan van der Noot (ca. 1539-ca. 1600)' *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde*, dl. 2, 115.

with a delicate touch.<sup>126</sup> Significantly, Lucas de Heere is the only poet he ever praises by name.

De Heere also greatly valued the Dutch language; the majority of his literary work, including his anthology of poems in *Den hof en boomgaerd der Poë sien*, are written in the vernacular. According to Waterschoot, as a rhetorician De Heere felt obligated to embellish his own language with countless borrowed words, as well as to hopelessly mix the sentence constructions for the sake of his “reghels mate.”<sup>127</sup> Although *Den hof en boomgaerd* is written in Dutch, the structure of the poems introduce for the first time in the Netherlands what De Heere called “reghels mate,” which is based on French meter.<sup>128</sup> Like Van der Noot, his goal was to mediate, even translate, style and subject matter from French literature and classical antiquity into his native tongue. Regarding the state of his former vernacular tradition, De Heere writes in the dedication of his collection that the “ouden vlaemschen treyn van dicten zijn in veel zaken te ruut, ongheschickt en rouw (uncivilized, unsuitable / unqualified, bad / rough).” In referring to his own vernacular tradition as “uncivilized, bad and rough,” De Heere, like Du Bellay in his *Deffence*, sets forth his enterprise of cultivation.<sup>129</sup> After rejecting old Flemish diction as something to imitate, De Heere instead combines the vernacular with formal elements from more cultivated languages, such as French and Latin, in order to enrich it. Regarding the *Den Hof en Boomgaerd*, G. Kalf writes, “De Heere realized that he was producing something new. With regard to his ‘verses, poems or rhymes,’ he knew and followed more Latin, French and German examples.”<sup>130</sup> De Heere calls himself an imitator of Latin and French poets, both in matters of subject and meter, and he exhorts his readers to enrich and magnify their own Dutch language by following the French models. As a result, the poetry in his

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<sup>126</sup> K. ter Laan, *Letterkundig woordenboek voor Noord en Zuid*, Den Haag: Van Goor (1952), 375.

<sup>127</sup> Lucas de Heere, *Den hof en boomgaerd der Poë sien*, W. Waterschoot (1969), xxviii.

<sup>128</sup> S. Eringa writes about the “Invective” that “Cette pièce appartient à genre devenu à la mode en France depuis la fameuse querelle de Marot et de Sagon. Nous n’y avons pas relevé d’emprunts directs au grand satirique français du seizième siècle.” Waterschoot, *Den hof en boomgaerd der poesien* (1969), 102.

<sup>129</sup> For a comparison between De Heere’s *Den Hof en Boomgaerd* and the work of Ronsard and Du Bellay, see S. Eringa, *La Renaissance et Les Rhétoriciens Néerlandais: Matthieu de Casteleyn, Anna Bijns, Luc de Heere*, Amsterdam, 1920.

<sup>130</sup> “De Heere zelf beseft, dat hij met iets nieuws komt. Wat zijne ‘vaersen, dichten oft rithmen’ betreft, zoo bekent hij Latijnsche, Fransche en Hoogduitsche voorbeelden meer te hebben gevolgd.” (my translation) G. Kalf, “Dichters en Proza-schrijvers uit Noord- en Zuid-Nederland”, ‘Zuid-Nederlanders’, ‘Lucas de Heere’ in *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, Deel 3 (1907), 330-335.

collection is extremely heterogeneous. It starts with a translation of Marot's (1497-1544) 'Le Temple de Cupidon'. The subsequent pages contain no fewer than twenty-two adaptations of poems by Marot; among them such typical Marot genres as two 'blasons' and one 'Du Coq a l'Asne'. Moreover, the structure of the collection—the succession of epigrams, New Year's wishes, epitaphs and epistles—clearly follows the pattern of sixteenth-century Marot editions after the model of Antoine Constantin published in 1544 and are all new genres in Dutch literature.<sup>131</sup>

Although it is safe to assume that both De Heere's poems and his agenda for the cultivation of the vernacular language would have been known in his artistic community, it is also important to note that the defense for the use of Dutch was echoed in the rhetorician societies (*rederijkerkamers*), a literary community to which De Heere and Van der Noot belonged. In fact, in the introduction to his *Den hof en boomgaerd*, De Heere provides a defense of the chambers of rhetoric, which he sees as institutions for the encouragement of the use of the vernacular.<sup>132</sup> Van den Branden writes that, "The enrichment of the vernacular language through translating ideas or following concepts from classical antiquity or contemporaneous foreign works also drew the attention of the rhetoricians. The Leidse town secretary Jan van Hout, who so vehemently argued against those who misused the name of rhetorician, was someone who the rhetoricians urged time and time again to improve and enrich their language."<sup>133</sup> In 1541, Jan Gymnick compared the poor state of the vernacular to Latin and asserted that the only way Latin authors were able to enrich their own language into the model of elegance that is classical Latin is by appropriating "diverse forms of speaking from other languages [Greek]." With equivalent efforts expended to improve

<sup>131</sup> W. Waterschoot, "Marot or Ronsard? New French Poetics among Dutch Rhetoricians in the Second Half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century," in J. Koopmans et al (ed.), *Rhetoric-Rhetoriciens-Rederijders*, Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (1995), 146. De Heere acquired familiarity with French literature during 1559-1560 when he stayed in Paris as an artist in the service of the queen-mother, Catherine de Medici. Not only does De Heere introduce new literary forms from France into the Low Countries, he translates many French poems, sometimes giving them a local twist. For example, the poem "Vanden Hane op den Esel" is partially based on Marot's "Du Coq á l'asne," but alludes to the endemic political situation; Waterschoot, "Lucas de Heere" (1969), 90.

<sup>132</sup> De Heere (1969), 3-4.

<sup>133</sup> "Verrijking van de moedertaal via vertaling van begrippen of navolging van denkbeelden uit de Klassieke Oudheid of uit contemporaine buitenlandse werken stond ook de rederijders daarbij voor ogen. De Leidse stadssecretaris Jan van Hout, die zo duchtig te keer kon gaan tegen hen die de naam van rederijker misbruikten, was iemand die de rederijders keer op keer aanspoorde om hun taal te verbeteren en te verrijken." (my translation) Van den Branden, *Het streven naar verheerlijking*, (1956), 117-126.

Dutch, he saw no reason it should not rise to similar or even greater heights.<sup>134</sup> In his discussion of the rederijker's emphasis on using their native language for classical literature, Walter Gibson, one of the first few scholars to discuss at length the importance of the relationship between artists and rederijkers, explains that they also disseminated a humanist culture through the subjects that they drew from ancient mythology.<sup>135</sup> For example, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe was reworked into several contemporary plays. Furthermore, many chambers of rhetoric counted artists among their members; the *Violieren* in Antwerp, for instance, was directly associated with the artists's St. Lucas Guild (De Heere and Bruegel were members). These close ties would have provided the place and opportunity for discussions about such interdisciplinary theoretical matters and led to mutual influence and an exchange of ideas in respect to themes, subject matter, presentation and structure. Their interaction is significant not only with respect to individual artists or particular themes, but also for broader contextual research, such as similarities between artistic topics and cultural development.<sup>136</sup> Gibson writes that "artists and poets drew from a common fund of subject matter [...] In these chambers, artist and poet could be united in the same individual, and where they were not, they seem to have collaborated on numerous projects."<sup>137</sup> In his study on drama and processional culture between the Middle Ages and Modern Era, Bart Ramakers discusses the interaction of various forms of artistic production—rederijkers, poets, artists—in the implementation of theatrical processions, an event for which the guild that represented these professions was largely responsible.<sup>138</sup> Rhetoricians such as Matthijs de Castelein (1485-1550), Ramakers

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<sup>134</sup> Meadow, "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*" (1996), 199.

<sup>135</sup> Walter Gibson, "Artists and Rederijkers in the Age of Bruegel," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 63, no. 3 (1981), 430. There are, of course, earlier important studies. See, for example, G. Brom, *Schilderkunst en Literatuur in de 16e en 17e eeuw*, Utrecht and Antwerp, 1957; H.A.E. van Gelder, *Erasmus, schilders en rederijkers. De religieuze crisis der 16<sup>de</sup> eeuw weerspiegeld in toneel- en schilderkunst*, Groningen: Nordhoff, 1959.

<sup>136</sup> Gibson, "Artists and Rederijkers" (1981), 427, 435.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>138</sup> Bart Ramakers, *Spelen en Figuren: Toneelkunst en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen Middeleeuwen en Moderne Tijd*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996. See also Ramakers, "Bruegel en de rederijkers: Schilderkunst en literatuur in de zestiende eeuw", in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. 47, Zwolle: Waanders (1997), 80-105.

explains, began to incorporate motifs from antique literature into his texts for *omkeringsfeesten*, which were originally manifestations of folk culture/local custom.<sup>139</sup>

This brief exposition on the theoretical framework of Pléiade poetics and its influence in the work of Van der Noot and De Heere, as well as the general attitude regarding the cultivation of the vernacular language emerging among the *rederijkers* in the sixteenth century, is foundational to understanding the art theoretical issues addressed in De Heere's "Invective." If we understand that De Heere prized the vernacular, yet believed that it should be enriched by mediating styles and forms from other more decorative, cultivated languages, we acquire a model through which to better assess the opinions he expresses about the visual arts. The rebuttal articulated by De Heere in defending Floris, criticizing the anonymous painter's style as "unmannered" and "full of wretched, bad strokes," is reminiscent of his evaluation of earlier Flemish poetry, that it is "uncivilized, bad and rough." Yet, his instruction to his fellow poets is not to abandon the vernacular language for Latin or French, rather to understand and utilize "the inner principles that guide their composition" and use them to innovatively cultivate their own language. Similarly, we can understand his disparagement of the *quidam* painter, that he had "been to Rome, it is a pitiful thing / That occurred... That you have been to Rome, one cannot see / In your paintings... That truly look neither Romish, nor antique," has little to do with the fact that the painter's style is not Italianate, rather that he did not take the opportunity to learn from Italian methods to enrich his own native style. Although De Heere's poem campaigns for good painting (as opposed to wretched, bad strokes)—and he implies that Romish or antique defines, at least in part, what he determines as good—if one takes into consideration the contemporary literary agenda for the vernacular language and the creative process by which it is to be cultivated, his focus is rather on an imaginative integration of artistic forms, especially one that considers and experiments with styles and standards outside one's local custom.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ramakers, *Spelen en Figuren* (1996), 123.

<sup>140</sup> Lucas de Heere stands in a longer line of important figures who took it as their responsibility to define and develop artistic norms and values specific to the North. As a student of Frans Floris, he was also directly connected with the thought of Dominicus Lampsonius and Lambert Lombard. These three men are very similar in that each person was a practicing artist, visual and/or literary, and each wrote tracts describing and appraising the art of their period, especially in regards to the way in which Italians were making and discussing art. Beginning in the early 1560's, both Lampsonius and Lombard

Sixteenth-century readers would have understood the polemic in De Heere's poem not to be between Northern and Southern artistic practices, rather as one advocating ambition and invention and addressing the means by which an artist should cultivate his work. It is a representation of an emerging judgment in the North about what constitutes "good" art, a judgment that is defined by an imaginative exploration and mediation of visual concepts and pictorial elements—both from inside and outside the Netherlands, whether they be German, French or Italian—into one's own vernacular visual mode. It is not the local custom of Netherlandish art *per se* that De Heere campaigns against in his disparaging remarks against the anonymous painter, rather he criticizes the way in which this mode is employed. As with the vernacular language, if anything like a Northern artistic tradition existed for De Heere, his agenda was not that it be abandoned in favour of a classicist, Italianate model. On the contrary, his concern was that it be developed into a more ambitious and elegant presentation.

In addition, Freedberg has argued that since De Heere's "Invective" campaigns for a classicist style of painting and against a Northern tradition that rejects such influences—represented by the anonymous painter—a contradiction arises between his visual and literary aesthetic.<sup>141</sup> For example, De Heere praises Floris's "Italianate" art in a poem that is written in "the coarse language of the Flemish populace," rather than Latin verse. The reason, Freedberg claims, is because De Heere is criticizing the anonymous painter for having had access to the culturally privileged model of the antique, but did not avail himself of that opportunity, opting instead to turn to the crude local traditions of Netherlandish art. Therefore, "Instead of praising by allusion to the

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corresponded with prominent figures in Italy, including Vasari, Titian and Giulio Clovio. While their correspondence praised the art of Italy, as well as the texts that describe its history, the letters also indicate that their reception of the Italian tradition was not without reservation; for example, in a letter to Vasari, Lampsonius offers his own suggestions for revisions to the *Vité* based on his allegiance to and appreciation of his Northern heritage. He suggests landscape as equivalent to history painting. See G. Denhaene, "Lambert Lombard et la Peinture Flamande de la Renaissance dans la Littérature Artistique," in *Relations Artistiques entre les Pays-Bas et L'Italie à la Renaissance: Études Dédiées à Suzanne Sulzberger*, Rome: Academia Belgica (1980), 101-121 and Jochen Becker, "Zur niederländischen Kunstliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Domenicus Lampsonius," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. 24 (1973), 45-61. Walter Melion argues that Lampsonius characterizes the art of Lombard as a hybrid, one who takes a Northern stance toward Italian painting, yet implements Tuscan and Venetian criteria that revise his painting and drawing; see Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* (1991), 165.

<sup>141</sup> Freedberg, "Allusion and Topicality," (1989), 62.



best classical sources, [De Heere's 'Invective'] damns by descending to the level of the popular language of abuse."<sup>142</sup>

Having discussed the emerging status of the vernacular, and in particular De Heere's affinity for it, the argument that the low form of the poem matches the low form of the anonymous painter, that the painter/poet intentionally chose to write in the "vigorous" vernacular in order to emphasize his disdain for "crude local tradition," does not accurately characterize the sixteenth-century literary context of the poem, nor how contemporary readers would have understood De Heere's use of the vernacular. In fact, the exact opposite is the case. Waterschoot writes that De Heere's *Den Hof en Boomgaerd* is a complex work: old and new forms, medieval and modern ideas are equally present. The influence of the new, of the Renaissance, is most striking.<sup>143</sup> The construction of De Heere's anthology of poems illustrates what for him is the literary ideal, a heterogeneous compilation of forms and styles mediated in the vernacular, and praises an artist whom he deems to be the visual artistic equivalent of his literary enterprise. The logical conclusion is that De Heere did not understand Floris to be someone who, as modern art historians claim, abandoned the Northern style and wholeheartedly adopted the new Italian idiom.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the hybrid nature of his poetry served to emphasize the contrast between his ambitious literary agenda and the uniform—probably in De Heere's mind, lazy—mode of the anonymous painter.

Scholars have also interpreted the final praise by Ortelius in his eulogy to Bruegel as being representative of a polemic between northerners who "follow nature" and Italians who strive to idealize it. To summarize my earlier comments, Ortelius pays tribute to Bruegel by saying that he does not share the fault of many artists who "add to the painting some ornament and charm of their own thereby destroying the whole character of the likeness, so that they fail to achieve the resemblance at which they aim."<sup>145</sup> Freedberg, Meadow and ten Brink Goldsmith argue that this statement criticizes those painters who attempt to idealize their work, that by adding

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Lucas de Heere, *Den Hof en Boomgaerd* (1969), XXIV.

<sup>144</sup> For an additional argument that De Heere understood Floris to paint in the Netherlandish tradition, see Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* (1991), 134.

<sup>145</sup> See n. 66.

ornamentation or elaboration of their own, they depart from the model of nature before them and, therefore, from “true beauty.”<sup>146</sup>

However, regarding Ortelius’s remarks Hessel Miedema observes that it is clear language; but it is humanist language: it is a citation from an antique text and it says nothing about a Northern mindset in contrast to an Italian one.”<sup>147</sup> If we look to the antique source that Ortelius directly refers to in the text, the precise meaning of his praise becomes a bit more ambivalent. The passage comes from Eunapius’s *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, in which the author critiques Iamblichus’s biography of Aplysius. In recounting the life and works of that figure, according to Eunapius, Iamblichus often included pointless anecdotal elaborations and obscured the narrative by his own stylistic extravagances.<sup>148</sup> Although several scholars argue that, as used by Ortelius, this reference refers to the tendency to embellish or over-ornament, to value art over nature, a fault that somehow characterizes Italianists, the antique source indicates that “to destroy the whole character of the likeness,” as stated by Ortelius, could have more to do with the obstruction of narrative rather than the idealization of nature. If this is the case, sixteenth-century humanist readers would have understood Ortelius’s statements as having little to do with a North/South polemic, rather with disciplined ornamentation and the clarity of narrative, issues that were also of particular importance for Italianate painting.

In his book *On Painting*, published in Italy in 1554, Alberti also takes up this classical model when he offers his own criticism of an anonymous painter, whom Michael Baxandall argues is Pisanello.<sup>149</sup> Abundant diversity seemed to be the emphasis of Pisanello and the humanist descriptions of his paintings, with little emphasis on narrative relevance. In reaction to this, Alberti writes, “I should wish this *copia* to be *ornata* with a degree of *varietas*, and also *gravis* and *moderata* with

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<sup>146</sup> An additional reference to Bruegel as an artist who refused to idealize his painted subjects is found in the form of a distich on the back of his painting of *The Cripples*: “What nature lacks, is lacking in our art, / So great was the grace accorded to our painter. / Here nature, expressed in painted forms, is astonished / To see through these cripples that Bruegel is her equal.” See Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002), 117.

<sup>147</sup> Hessel Miedema, review of Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon, Oud Holland*, vol. 107 (1993), 156. See also Miedema, “Pieter Bruegel weer” (1998).

<sup>148</sup> Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel* (2002), 113. Regarding this source, particularly the translation by Hadrianus Junius, see Jan Muylle, “Pieter Bruegel en Abraham Ortelius” (1981).

<sup>149</sup> Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* (1971), 135.

*dignitas* and *verecundia*. I certainly condemn those painters who, because they wish to seem *copiosi* or because they wish nothing left empty, on that account pursue no *compositio*. But indeed they scatter everything around in a confused and *dissolutus* way, on which account the *historia* seems not to enact but rather disorder its matter.”<sup>150</sup> Alberti’s criticism specifically refers to his desire for a composition to be clear, yet copious, in enabling its narrative. According to him, the false pursuit of *ornatus* (variation from the ordinary and commonplace) and *copiosus* (profusion or abundance) led to *dissolutus*, the opposite of *compositus* and what the florid style fell into if not disciplined.<sup>151</sup> For Alberti, the very basis for these artistic instructions is grounded in nature: in the preface to his book he writes, “I will enlarge on the art of painting from its first principles in nature.”<sup>152</sup> As artistic categories, they are a means to an end, namely to insure naturalness. But, when pursued as ends in themselves, their artificiality overruns the composition.

## Conclusion

I have been careful not to suggest that, in general, a polemic did not exist between a classicist, Italianate style of painting and a Northern practice which rejected such models and held fast to local customs for their artistic expression. This is not my issue. Rather, I have focused specifically on whether or not such a polemic is represented in particular texts by De Heere and Ortelius in order to counter the argument that these texts somehow illustrate that such a polemic typifies the work of Bruegel. On the contrary, it is my contention that Bruegel’s later scenes of peasants and foolish revelries would have been viewed during the period in similar, or at least comparable, terms as the campaign of the Pléiade group and rederijkers for the cultivation of the vernacular language; only Bruegel’s efforts are directed to developing and enriching a visual, rather than linguistic, vernacular style.

As I have shown, within the visual arts the vibrant, emulative discourse around art and nature, imitation and invention characterizes and informs both Ortelius’s

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<sup>150</sup> As reproduced and translated by Baxandall, *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>152</sup> Białostocki, “The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity” (1963), 22.

assessment of Bruegel's art as well as the cultivation of the vernacular language. I argue that if one takes De Heere's collection of poems in *Den Hof en Boomgaerd* as a whole, written in Flemish using Greek, Latin and French meters, among other formal and stylistic references, coupled with passages of old Flemish diction, we can understand his "Invective" as advocating that the cultivation of painting, like contemporary poetry, is a process of negotiating similar heterogeneous sources. If we read the art theoretical ideas expressed in the "Invective" in this broader context, the term vernacular as applied to the visual arts can be expanded. Rather than representing something that is exclusively "other than" or antithetical to that which is foreign, we can redefine the concept to include a visual mode that is associated with a specific region, yet can mediate styles and subject matter from outside its indigenous tradition and not only does it remain within a vernacular idiom, according to readers, or viewers, of the period it becomes even better.

Understanding this complex practice of art-making, creating a hybrid picture that is at the same time grounded in a vernacular style, I will argue in Chapter Three that the unique formal presentation of Bruegel's pictures of peasants participates in a visual and viewing culture that is rooted in an analytical approach to art—an ongoing discussion in which Bruegel takes a particular position about how art should look and function. As a result, the pictures beg the viewer to engage in a visual analysis and unravel, or dissect, and put back together, the complexities of their making. This process inspires questions from the viewer on a number of different levels that have to do with ideas and assumptions about art as much as the different socio-cultural contexts of the peasant and viewer. Rather than thinking about these later works solely as representative of his sympathy with or objective distance from the peasant class, I suggest these witty paintings should also be understood, even more fundamentally, as statements about art *per se*; an effort toward cultivation, to show that his "visual language," both in style and subject, was just as capable of copious, apt and ornate expression. I now turn to the contemporary setting that would have provided Bruegel's viewers the context, and inspiration, to interact with and discuss these multivalent pictures on such a deep level, an environment which valued analytical discussions that engaged such diverse topics as art, religion and social behavior on multiple levels of inquiry.