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YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY
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DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES M.A. PROGRAM**

M.A. THESIS

**THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PUBLIC
SQUARE IN THE WORKS OF BRUEGEL:
A PERSPECTIVE FROM CULTURAL THEORY**

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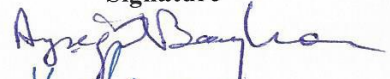


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ÖZ

KÜLTÜR TEORİSİ PERSPEKTİFİNDEN BRUEGEL'İN ESERLERİNDEKİ KASABA MEYDANLARININ TEMSİLİ

Hazırlayan: Handan Şule Özpek

Aralık, 2018

Sanat eserleri estetik görünümünden daha fazlasını sunar. Eleştirel şekilde incelenmeleri halinde bu kompozisyonlar çeşitli bilgi ve deneyimleri edinmemizi sağlayabilir. Böylece, sanat eserlerinin sosyo-tarihsel ilerlemeye katkısı, görsel olarak algılandığından fazla olabilir. Bu tez, Hollandalı büyük sanatçı Pieter Bruegel' in bazı sanat eserlerinin özünü ve temel faktörlerini aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bruegel fırçasını 16. yüzyılda Avrupa'daki sosyal etkileşimleri yansıtmak için kullanmıştır. Gözlem yeteneğini kullanarak sosyolojik ve tarihsel olayları gerçeğe uygun şekilde aktarmış ve tarih yazıcılığına katkıda bulunmuştur. Bruegel, yalnızca hoş temalı eserler üretmek yerine gerçek hayatta karşılaştığı olayları tüm gerçeklikleri ve hatta kaba ayrıntıları ile aktarmayı tercih etmiştir. Sıradan insanları doğal hallerinde resmetmesi onun Rönesans ressamı arasında eşsiz bir yere sahip olmasını sağlamıştır. Bu yaklaşımıyla Bruegel, içinde yaşadığı toplumun geleneklerini betimlemede önemli ölçüde başarılı olmuştur. Bruegel'in Antwerp'te yaşamış olması, farklı dil ve kültürden çok sayıda insanla karşılaşmasını sağlamıştır. Tüm bu etkiler, sosyal yaşamdan aldığı esin ile İncil'de geçen bazı bölümleri harmanlayarak resmetmesi için Bruegel'e zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu tez çalışmasında, Bruegel'in eserleri, içinde yaşadığı dönemin tarihsel yapısı ve Rönesans döneminin sanat anlayışı çerçevesinde incelenmiştir. Bu makro bakış açısıyla, eserlerdeki sosyal olguların daha anlaşılır hale getirilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Özellikle, birçok sosyal unsura ev sahipliği yapan *kasaba meydanlarının* betimlemeleri incelenmiştir. Bu unsurlar, 16. yüzyılda sıradan insanların gündelik hayatlarını yansıtan bir ayna olarak algılanabilir ve böylece tarih yazıcılığına katkıda bulunulabilirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sanat, Sosyoloji, Tarih, Pieter Bruegel

ABSTRACT

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE IN THE WORKS OF BRUEGEL: A PERSPECTIVE FROM CULTURAL THEORY

Prepared by Handan Şule Özpek

November, 2018

Artworks offer more than aesthetic scenes. Once they are examined critically, these compositions may offer diverse experience and knowledge. Their contribution to socio-historical progression may be more than they are perceived. This thesis attempts to illuminate the essence and the key factors of some of the artworks of the great Netherlandish artist Pieter Bruegel. He utilized his brush to present the social interactions of 16th century Europe. His remarkable ability of observation contributed to historiography by conveying sociological and historical events literally. Bruegel preferred to illustrate scenes from life with all their reality and vulgar details, rather than portraying pleasant themes, only. His depictions of ordinary people in their natural appearances provided him with a unique place among the Renaissance painters. He was significantly successful in depicting the codes of traditional practices of the society of his time. Bruegel lived in Antwerp. This city was located at an important geopolitical point and therefore, he encountered a lot of people from different languages and cultures. These influences prepared the ground for him to blend scenes from the social life and scenes from the Bible. In this dissertation, artworks of Bruegel are discussed within the framework of the historical structure of the period in which he lived and the concept of art during Renaissance. Through this macro perspective, the aim is to make the social facts more understandable. In particular, his depictions of town squares is examined in detail. These items can be perceived as a mirror that reflects everyday life of ordinary people in the 16th century; thus, they can contribute to historiography.

Keywords: Art, Sociology, History, Pieter Bruegel

PREFACE

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the elements in works of the Netherlandish artist Pieter Bruegel in order to indicate their contribution to historiography.

I would like to thank my professor, Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Baykan for her advice and encouragement she had provided throughout my study.

I have to express my gratitude to my husband K. İlker Özpek, my mother Bilge Hacıoğlu, my father Asım Hacıoğlu and my son Demir Özpek for their continued patience and support.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Reason is the primary feature of human beings, which distinguishes them from animals. We perceive our world through our intelligence and we are able to interpret facts we recognize. In accordance with the need of communication, we notice and accept the necessity of living in a community. From a broad perspective these communities form a social structure.

The indispensable components of a social structure are the social functioning of human societies and the social institutions. These abstract and complicated concepts, which are the core materials of sociology, have been discussed hitherto by various scholars and henceforth will be discussed. They are related to the unique phenomenon, which is defined as *human*. It is the human beings who make the necessary definitions about the facts as well as terming the things that we perceive. Everything we experience or work on become meaningful because they are all been identified and generally accepted by human beings. On account of the nature of human beings, people are capable of gathering knowledge as well as interpreting them. These interpretations, which are practiced in course of time transform into traditions and consequently into a multi variant concept: *culture*.

“Culture would be thus divided into physical, intellectual, moral, religious, aesthetic, economic, and political culture, and would comprehend the totality of the products of the corporate human mind.”¹

Societies are willing to convey their culture to the next generations. This transmission can be done in various ways with inclusion of historiography, arts and humanities.

Archeology, anthropology, history, philosophy, political science, linguistics, psychology, history, economy and sociology are the disciplines of Social Sciences.²

¹ Gustave Spiller **The Interpretation of Sociological Data** (University of Chicago Press: Jan., 1916), 527

² Robert A. Nisbet **Social Science** <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-science> [27.02.2018]

In order to satisfy our basic needs and to live better, we benefit from the Social Sciences' whether consciously or not.

Culture is a concept that nestles the ideas, customs and social behaviors of a particular society. As a comprehensive concept, culture paves the way for the social scientists both working on it in continuous basis and discovering the discrepancies between the societies. What do we understand from this very concept "culture"? Is our definition of culture the same as the people in another country? Via an objective and detailed examination, it can be seen that the perception and the interpretation of one basic concept may vary from one community to another. Norbert Elias designates the different perceptions of culture in German, French and English societies:

"the way in which a piece of the world is bound up in them, the manner in which they include certain areas and exclude others as a matter of course, the hidden evaluations, which they implicitly bring with them, all this makes them difficult to define for any outsider."³

Art's relationship to society makes it a worthwhile topic, thus sociologists widely tend to investigate it. These investigations brings valuable contributions to history. In this study, I will probe the contribution of art to the recorded history. By courtesy of pictorial art, we can form a picture of historical texts and I argue that this visualization contributes to the recorded history. Hans-Georg Gadamer states "The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art"⁴ On the other hand, pictorial art's materials deserve to be counted as documents containing valuable information about societies' customs and perceptions. Tim Dant stated that "The relationship between material objects and human bodies is characteristic of a particular culture...The material stuff of a people provides a document of the culture and...its documents...are material objects too"⁵ I will endeavor to maintain this argument by examining the artworks of the Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel. The selection of the themes of his artworks and his method of depiction distinguish him from the contemporaneous artists of his time. The main reason behind this

³ Norbert Elias **The Civilizing Process** (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), 6

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer **Truth and Method** (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), xxi

⁵ Tim Dant **Materiality and Society** (Maidenhead, England: Open University Press), 20

circumstance is the unusual themes of his works, which focus on “the ordinary people in daily life”. On the other hand, the extraordinary understanding of his art, which does not match with the aesthetic rules of the Renaissance, renders Bruegel’s art worth to analyze.

In the following chapters, the complex coding system of the designated artworks of Bruegel will be examined.



2 PIETER BRUEGEL' S TIME

In order to better apprehend the connotations of Bruegel's artworks, it will be suitable to acquire some historical knowledge about the territory that he lived on. Born in the first half of the 16th century, Bruegel was influenced by the social and artistic traditions of the previous centuries. Even though he associated to some of these traditions in his works, he did not hold back from transferring the social character of his homeland, which can be counted as a kind of artistic innovation. He successfully applied this artistic innovation through the medium of his style as well as his theme selection. By his extraordinary talent, he succeeded to produce artifacts, which nestle generous sociological facts of his time.

Bruegel's pictorial art can be taken as a valuable resource since these art pieces reflect the fragments of daily life in reality. Hence, through his expression, the culture and the historical information about the Low Countries as it was during Bruegel's time, can be better interpreted and matched to those obtained from other written sources. It must be kept in mind that the value judgments and social assumptions of a particular society, should be considered in accordance with the period that these social interactions take place. Social values have significant influence on the creation of art and recording of the history. However it should be taken into consideration that these values may change over time. When examining a sociological phenomenon that has taken place in any geographical area in the past, making interpretations by today's value judgments may cause us to get wrong results. In their book *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, Victoria E. Bonnel and Lynn Hunt refer to William Sewell, Jr., about the comprehensive understanding of culture. Sewell argues that:

“It [culture] is a system of symbols and meanings with a certain coherence and definition but also a set of practices; thus the symbols and meanings can and do change over time, often in unpredictable fashion.”⁶

In the following section, the facts that constructed the cultural frame of the 16th century will be probed as a background to Bruegel’s art.

2.1 The General Situation in Europe in the 16th century

2.1.1 The Impact of Renaissance

Following the middle Ages, Renaissance is the period of revival in every domain of life. Having originated in Italy it spread through Europe and it covers the time span between the 14th and the 17th centuries. Resulting in unprecedented changes especially in the disciplines of science, classical art and literature. Even today, Renaissance period fascinates the scholars with its unique singularities. The riot against the Medieval Ages’ dogmatic conception, together with Renaissance’s extraordinary transformation have generated results that impact even present day’s perception of life.

Among the distinguished scientists who made epoch-breaking discoveries, like Nicholas Copernicus, Isaac Newton, Galileo Galilei, Rene Descartes and Johannes Gutenberg; Copernicus’ courageous claim about the earth’s rotation on its axis and Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press can be counted as the most effective ones.

Contrary to the traditional perception of the period, Copernicus ushered a new perspective by claiming that the earth was not in the center of the universe. This information made a crucial contribution to the scientific knowledge of the era. The argument was the breaking point against the rigid doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently this process engendered a chained progression that enables people to “question” rather than just adhering to the traditional rules. On the other hand the printing revolution has been initiated in the middle of the 15th century;

⁶ Victoria E. Bonnel, Lynn Hunt **Beyond The Cultural Turn** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 12

therefore it granted a rapid propagation of information with respect to both scientific and religious messages. These messages spread out and settled in the life of Renaissance. Hence, caused the formation of new sociological phenomena as well as changing the existing social relations.

Religion was in the center of the societies and consequently clerics were regarded as a superior group possessing wisdom since they had mastered religious doctrines. Besides, in these conservative societies old people were closely involved with the decisions of the said communities. According to Max Weber, the reason behind this situation was that, traditional societies were identifying themselves with their pasts. Accordingly, an aged man can await respect from the young generation because the excellence includes experience and knowledge, and this can only be acquired by gaining age.⁷ Another text that supports this concept is Cynthia Skenazi's. "Portraits of old men as educators drew upon a wide variety of classical, medieval and biblical sources, (...)"⁸ However, printing press would ruin the established system. Knowledge meant power and it would illuminate the people. This transformation would spark new ideas. As printed material became prevalent, people began to read the Bible and other sources in their own language.

These developments as a result would lead to a new intellectual movement that would dominate the social philosophy of the period; *Humanism*.

2.1.2 Humanism

As a reaction to medieval scholasticism, humanism was the rise of human beings' agency. Fundamentally, humanism's basis was the rational philosophy. Until its revival, the allegiance to Christian doctrines trivialized human beings and restrained them from the worldly pleasures. Furthermore, the doctrines imposed the fact that people should live their lives in order to reach the shadowy afterlife, only. Thus, Renaissance was the period in which humans fluctuate between reason and faith. This mental conflict wouldn't be assimilated so smoothly; instead it would

⁷ Max Weber **The Theory of Social and Economic Organization** (New York: Free Press, 1947), 346

⁸ Cynthia Skenazi **Aging Gracefully In The Renaissance: Stories of Later Life from Petrarch to Montaigne** (The Netherlands: Brill), 63

take almost three centuries (from 14th century to the mid-16th century) for people to apprehend their own value as an individual.

Individualism was the integral tendency of humanism and it was humanism that played a provocative role on the “rebirth” of individualism. Even if individualism was composed of Greek and Roman principles, it was suppressed by the church and by feudalism up until the sprouting of humanism. The main reason of this suppression was the request of absolute obedience by church’s vassals. Any challenge against the traditions was accepted as a disobedience and considered as hostile to the authority. Due to this circumstance, Catholic Church was opposed to the idea that human beings were capable of having the right to make decisions on their own lives.

In Italy the city-states had been coming into contact with the Eastern countries by the diverse trade activities. By passage of time, these interactions permitted people an access to express their own voices. The inevitable transformation of the dominant social philosophy began. Hence, the development of individualism and the process of its expansion was proceeding by profiting the incitement of humanism.

"The man of the Renaissance dares to look at nature and life with more confidence, he enjoys voluptuously beauties and worldly goods at the same time, he frees himself from the principle of authority."⁹

On the other hand, humanism has a significant communality with another breakthrough of the Renaissance period and that is to be the Reformation. Humanism and Reformation share a particular worldview since both movements defend the critical thinking. Human beings ability to think and interpret was beginning to be remembered again after antiquity. Instead of obedience people started questioning their existence and the worldly matters through reason.

⁹ Hüseyin Gümüş **Cours d'Information à la Littérature Française I** (Marmara Üniversitesi Yayın No: 635, Teknik Eğitim Fakültesi Yayın No: 34, 1998), 91

2.1.3 Reformation

In the 16th century, it was comfortable for most of the people in Europe to live in conformity with the Western Church's spiritual offer. Composed of the Catholic doctrines, Western Church was also profoundly involved in political decisions and by the day its power was increasing.¹⁰

Nevertheless, religious dogmas started to be questioned by people in the light of the foregoing scientific developments and humanism. These innovative mental tendencies would engender one of the major religious forms of Christian practice: Protestantism. Originated in the process of Reformation.

“The start of the Protestant Reformation, often simply and better called the Reformation is traditionally dated to 1517 when Martin Luther (1483-1546) produced his ninety-five theses in protest against the scandalous sale of indulgences and other abuses of papal and clerical power.”¹¹ (Ninety-five theses is also known as “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences”.)

Protestantism is the religious reflection of the rebellion that has been conducted in various areas during the Renaissance period. Rather than accepting the strict Catholic teachings and making the religious confessions through the priests, Protestantism argued that the human beings are capable of making these confessions without the need for a mediator between themselves and God. They defend the idea that human beings possess the quality of “reason”.

Furthermore Protestantism exercises influence on the political issues whilst featuring innovations on religion. “(...) the princes and people who made the Reformation made it, not in the interest of dogma, but in the interest of freedom from the tyranny of Rome.”¹² The existing social order also began to be questioned by the influence of humanism parallel to Protestantism. This novelty can be counted

¹⁰ Martin E. Marty *and others* **The Protestant Heritage** <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Protestant-Heritage-1354359> [16.02.2018]

¹¹ R. Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), by Gerald J. O'Collins, Mario J. Farugia *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87

¹² C. A. Briggs **Reform in the Roman Catholic Church** (The North American Review, 1905), 83

as the dawn of new worldviews in European societies and it had a significant impact on history.

2.1.4 Renaissance Art

Since the main aim of this thesis is to reveal Pieter Bruegel's artworks as contributions towards interpreting social facts and understanding history; it is appropriate to discuss the concept of art during the Renaissance period. The comprehension of the Renaissance art in general, will lead the way to understand the artistry and the singularity of Bruegel as well.

Art can be considered as a means that contains information reflecting the social, religious, political and aesthetic understandings of the period in which it is performed. It is impossible for the artist not to reflect the phenomena and the social status of the era that he lives in. Hence, whether the artist prefers to convey the concrete environment that he experiences or he prefers to imply some abstract messages via his artworks, many inferences can be made through his works. From the selection of the theme to the color palette or from the application of the perspective to the painting style, many items of an artwork can provide information. Pierre Bourdieu explains this situation with "consciousness". According to him, "any art perception involves conscious or unconscious deciphering operation."¹³ Due to the fact that artists use their creation of art in order to convey their emotions, in one way or another, they reflect themselves or the general social mentality that they belong to, through their artworks.

As discussed previously, Renaissance was a turning point in every aspect of life, and art is the most significant connecting point among these aspects. The spirit of Renaissance originated in Italy and afterwards it made its great progress.

"At the beginning of the Renaissance, painters and sculptors functioned as craftsmen, creating objects largely for commercial use. (...) Little distinction were made between "fine" and "decorative" art. As the Renaissance progressed, artists increasingly came to be distinguished

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu **Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception**, The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 215

from other manual laborers. Painters became known for an individual style and won praise for their technical skill as well as their knowledge and imagination.”¹⁴

As we comprehend, the artists used to be regarded as artisans throughout the middle ages. Rather than being artists who reflect their own ideas to the artworks, they were producing the works, which had been ordered by the patrons. These patrons were the merchants that belonged to the middle class who were engaged in business and had gained a status in the society. As wealthy people, they knew how to read and write; consequently they were aware of the value of literature and art. Some of them did not have time to perform such skills of art because they were so busy with their business; whilst the others did not have any talent to produce the art they admired. Thus, the interests of the patrons were being reflected through the skills of the artists who were paid by the patrons.

“And what did the patrons get out of all this? What was their reward for paying artists to create paintings, statues, books, and buildings? The patrons became famous. The works of art they commissioned signaled their power, prestige, and importance. They were admired and celebrated for the works they paid to have created.”¹⁵

Under the influence of the transformations in life, artists began to develop some innovative artistic techniques in order to better perform their art. They established to use paler colors in the backgrounds of the paintings in the interest of creating three-dimensional perception, which is considered as one of the revolutionary changes in art. This technique is called the “Linear Perspective”. It is a system, which enables the painters to create the three dimensional perception on a two dimensional surface and it was devised by the Italian Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446).¹⁶ Through the perception of depth, the painters started to perform more realistic paintings. As the great artist of his time, Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) came into prominence by his superlative artworks of which he used the linear perspective. “Mona Lisa” is the most known painting of this extraordinary

¹⁴ Wilson, Withee, Friedman **The Inquiring Eye European Renaissance Art** (Washington, D.C.: National Art Gallery, 1991), 14

¹⁵ **The Renaissance Patrons, Artists and Scholars** Unit 6 (Core Knowledge Foundation, 2014), 9 https://d2gzbf7nvwohbx.cloudfront.net/resources/Grade5/RDR/G5_U6_RDR_Ed_2.pdf [08.03.2018]

¹⁶ Isabelle Hyman **Filippo Brunelleschi** <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Filippo-Brunelleschi> [05.03.2018]

talent.¹⁷(Figure 1) It is one of the best examples that linear perspective has been applied.

On account of the nature of the Renaissance period, religion was the core fact that was profoundly interwoven with in the structure of the societies. The art of painting was deeply affected by religion since the production of the statues and the icons of Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary and any kind of religious works of art were caused to be regarded as sacred items. Consequently, it was a common acceptance that the artists that produced these pieces and the people who were willing to buy or exhibit these art pieces, were showing the sign of faithfulness. The predominance of the church was certainly supporting this context. Once again Leonardo Da Vinci's talent should be stated. "Last Supper", which is one of the most known frescos by him, expresses a religious theme. (Figure 2) It is admirable with its shadow and light effects, the composition of the figures and the landscape that frames them all. This artwork is an indication of being devoted to religion with profound emotions.

"The painting was commissioned by the Duke of Milan. It shows Jesus having supper with his closest friends. Some scholars believe, in particular, Leonardo focused on the betrayal of Jesus Christ and the part of the story when Jesus made the shocking announcement, "One of you will betray me."¹⁸

Another significant talent of this period was Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1567)¹⁹. Although he considered himself a sculptor, he was convinced by the Pope Julius II to paint a fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel on which he depicted the scenes from Genesis²⁰ (Figure 3)

"The ancestors of Christ were a common subject for decoration of churches and religious monuments; but, as we shall see later, Michelangelo's particular portrayal of the ancestors,

¹⁷ Jerome Picon **Comprendre les grandes oeuvres de la Peinture** (Larousse, 2010), 22

¹⁸ See note 15, 24

¹⁹ Creighton E. Gilbert **Michelangelo** <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michelangelo> [08.03.2018]

²⁰ Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier **Michelangelo's Ignudi, and the Sistine Chapel as a Symbol of Law and Justice** (IRSA s.c., 1996), 19

like his portrayal of the other historical scenes, significantly changes their figurative meaning, adding particularly humanistic connotations to these traditional scenes”²¹

On the other hand Renaissance, the period of transformation, which spanned three centuries, was also the time in which the wonders of antiquity began to be remembered again by medieval Europe. By the escalation of knowledge, the way through which artworks were performed, started to change. Therefore, the artworks that reflect the anatomy of human beings in a realistic manner began to be applied in religious themes.

“La Renaissance is a term, which is (now) exclusively applied to the revival of art, the return to the Greek and Roman ideas of beauty as displayed in the ancient statues and the general diffusion of better taste in matters of art, which took place in the fifteenth century.”²²

By the spread of Humanism, philosophers and scientists, the artists of the Renaissance period became much more curious about nature. The admiration of nature encouraged them to produce artworks that depicted the nature itself, through the light of ancient teachings. Hence, the artists endeavored to reach a new level of vividness and their artworks began to diversify. Michelangelo’s famous sculpture “David” left a mark on Renaissance period. (Figure 4) He was under the patronage of the powerful Medici family, which was dealing in trade. In their household he had the chance to be among the great minds and he was involved in the debates about literature and art. In such context, his impressions smoothed the path for him to perform the beauties of nature. Thus, the most perfect representation of the human body, which is also a wonder of nature, was created.

“From the 20-foot block, he set out to carve a huge statue of David, the biblical hero who had used his slingshot to slay the giant enemy, Goliath. (...) Like ancient Greek statues, Michelangelo’s *David* shows a strong, muscular human form, almost a picture of perfection, a figure full of power and grace.”²³

²¹ Erin Elizabeth McConomy **Renaissance Humanism in Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel and Milton’s Paradise Lost** (Montreal: McGill University, 1997), 16

²² The Illustrated Magazine of Art “**La Renaissance**” (**The Revival of Art**), 351
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20538172> [28.02.2018]

²³ See note 15, 35

During the Renaissance period, artists who grew up and developed their talents in such an environment, began to ask questions in the light of science, rather than the absolute obedience to the religious teachings. In order to perform their art, the necessity of scientific knowledge started to be recognized.

“We often hear of the claim of this period that art should be regarded as a branch of knowledge or a form of science. (...) Alberti requires the artist to know geometry so as to be able to give a proper reproduction of what he sees. But when he expects the painter also to have a scientific understanding of the thing seen, he is pointing along a path, which might carry an artist far from home.”²⁴

Henceforth the rebirth of ancient teachings would be enjoyed by the artists. Thus, Italy in which the foundation stones of Renaissance art has been laid, would gradually influence other parts of Europe in the course of the 15th and the 16th centuries. The impact of Renaissance on the countries that are found in the north of Italy is called Northern Renaissance. The region, which is composed of Germany, Netherland and Belgium today, was called as Flanders during these eras.²⁵ The exercise of this influence would be on both the intellectual works and the art pieces. Thus, the artistic styles of the northern European artists would transform. Their expression changed from two dimension to three dimension whilst their pictures became less symbolic. Thus, the portraiture and the still life transmissions would develop.²⁶ The prominent artists of the Northern Renaissance were Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Dürer and Pieter Bruegel.

Jan van Eyck (1390-1441) is considered as the leading painter of the northern Europe.²⁷ As a Netherlandish master who was bound to the traditional techniques of art, he was seeking the innovative techniques as well.

“The oil-based medium first exploited to the fullest by Hurbert and Jan van Eyck (...) allowed painters to simulate the appearance of the real world with all its variety of textures and nuances

²⁴ Herbert Butterfield **Renaissance Art and Modern Science** (Edinburg University Press, 1954), 28

²⁵ See note 15, 68

²⁶ See note 14, 35 <https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/Education/learning-resources/teaching-packets/pdfs/European-Renaissance-Art-tp1.pdf> [09.03.2018]

²⁷ Susan Jones **Jan van Eyck** (Calwell College: October 2002) https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/eyck/hd_eyck.htm [11.03.2018]

of light and shadow. Flemish paintings, particularly portraits, were admired in Italy precisely for the naturalness this technical perfection allowed.”²⁸

“Arnolfini Portrait” and “Annunciation” are the most celebrated and frequently probed artworks of van Eyck. Although it wasn’t a common attitude of his contemporaries to sign their works of art, Jan van Eyck used to sign most of his pieces as: “als ich can (as best I can)”. ²⁹ (Figure: 5) (Figure: 6)

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), the preeminent artist of the northern Europe was considered as the German equivalent of Leonardo da Vinci. ³⁰ As well as being a painter he was also a printmaker, a mathematician and a theorist, who derived benefit from the means of scientific knowledge while performing his talent. His creative genius can be traced from his portraits, landscapes as well as the religious and allegorical themed paintings. It was a common practice for the artists of the 15th and the 16th centuries, to have a journey to Italy in order to be on notice about the new artistic developments and so did Dürer. As an artist who tried to improve his technique steadily, he was making an effort for the perfect representation of nature and certainly of the human body. ³¹ His most celebrated paintings are the “Wing of a Roller”, “Melancholia” and “Saint Jerome in His Study”. (Figure 7), (Figure 8), (Figure 9)

The great Netherlandish painter Pieter Bruegel’s (c.1526/31-1569)³² artistic genius and his approach to the social phenomena will be probed in detail through the following chapters. Nevertheless, I find it appropriate to briefly mention the art

²⁸ Guy Bauman **Early Flemish Portraits 1425-1525** (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), 4
<https://metmuseum.org/pubs/bulletins/1/pdf/3269088.pdf.bannered.pdf> [12.03.2018]

²⁹ Martha Wolff **Van Eyck’s Annunciation The Meeting of Heaven and Earth** (Art Institute of Chicago, July10-September 21, 1997), 3
http://www.artic.edu/sites/default/files/libraries/pubs/1997/AIC1997VanEyck_com.pdf [12.03.2018]

³⁰ Jacob Wisse **Albrecht Dürer** (Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University: October 2002) https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/durr/hd_durr.htm [11.03.2018]

³¹ Margaret Doyle **Albrecht Dürer: Master Drawings, Watercolors, and Prints from the Albertina.** (National Gallery of Art: Washington, 2013), 3
<https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/exhibitions/pdfs/durer.pdf> [12.03.2018]

³² Hagen, See note 32, 15

piece entitled “Fall of Icarus”, even if it does not comprise a scene depicting a “town square”.(Figure 10)

The significance of this art piece comes from its philosophical perspective. During the interpretation of this painting, we face an allegory and a genre scene at the same time from which multiple references can be made. In this unique painting that Bruegel approached a mythological theme, he combined the contemporary life with the mythological figures in order to transmit his opinions, which are consistent with Stoic ideas: “one should not rebel against the laws of the cosmos, but should be content to fulfil one’s tasks in the appointed place.”³³ There exist two tiny details here that are performed by master Bruegel and that can only be captured by careful eyes: Icarus and the dead man in the bushes.

The farmer and the shepherd are remarkably observed in the center of the painting, whilst the young Icarus can only be recognized by his legs thrashing on the sea, on the right side of the painting. (Figure 10a) Bruegel wanted Icarus to be observed in a ridiculous condition, to give the message of the brevity of human life. He preferred to depict “everyday life” instead of painting the mythological scenes.

“The setting sun places the activity of men in a perspective of time. The day is short, and life is short, but the plow will not slow ‘or a dying man’ and the farmer will not withhold his hand. The world continues turning and work must go on.”³⁴

Bruegel treats this subject through the depiction of the allegories with fine details. While the reality of life is expressed with an ordinary shepherd and farmer doing their daily work, which is necessary for the continuation of their mundane lives, they do not care about the dead man whose head barely appears on the left side of the painting.³⁵ (Figure 10b) Their focus is on the daily works, which will

³³ Hagen, See note 32, 61

³⁴ Lyckle de Vries **Bruegel’s “Fall of Icarus”: Ovid or Solomon?** (Simiolus: Netherland Quarterly for the History of Art. Vol.30 No:1/2, 2003), 17 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3780948> [13.03.2018]

³⁵ Anna Blume **The Delegated Intellect Emersonian Essays on Literature, Science and Art in Honor of Don Gifford** (Peter Lang, 1995), 238 https://www.fitnyc.edu/files/pdfs/HA_Blume_1995_Icarus.pdf [13.03.2018]

provide their own survival. They are not interested in events that develop outside, even in the dead man in the bushes or in the distress signal of Icarus.

Similar compositions have been processed in other artworks of Bruegel and will be probed in the following chapters. Although it is difficult to perceive the point of view of his time from the present day, these paintings constitute examples of the general social reaction of the human beings who lived in Bruegel's time.



3 PIETER BRUEGEL

3.1 Bruegel's Life

Although in some records Bruegel's place of birth was stated as Breda or as a village called Breughel from which he took a name for himself, the precise place and date of Pieter Bruegel is open to question since there are no church baptismal records.³⁶ Nevertheless, a conclusion can be drawn out of the historical data that he was born between 1525 and 1530. The reason behind this conclusion is that during those days, an artist's age should be between 21 and 26 in order to be registered as a master in a guild, and Bruegel's name was encountered as a master for the first time in the Guild of St. Luke in Antwerp in 1551.³⁷

Just as in the case of the birth records, researchers gather information about Bruegel's life by the means of the retrospective analysis. As is known, he settled down in Antwerp, then in Brussels and also he was in Florence and Venice for a while. Hence the history of these cities play a useful role in order to fill in the gaps in his life story. On the other hand, understanding the significance of these cities supply a better interpretation of his artworks. It is plain that the cities nestle different cultures within them and this diversity provides an efficient environment for the artists to be inspired. Besides, Bruegel's paintings generally reflect the cultural and the historical structure of the period he lived in; in other words every item, which is expressed in detail, represents a certain idea. Hence, via this broad perspectival analysis, the allusions in his works can be decoded more thoroughly.

³⁶ Karel Van Mander **Pieter Bruegel from Bruegel** (McFarlane: Dutch and Flemish Painters, 1936), 3 https://arthum.college.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/PDFs/arthum_bruegel_reader.pdf [20.03.2018]

³⁷ Hagen, See note 32, 15

Antwerp is situated by the sea and at the crossroads of major roads at the same time; thus it has a geographically strategic location. In the 16th century it was an important city of the western world where the commercial and financial activities were carried out intensively.

“(…) merchants found in Antwerp and in the nearby city of Bergen op Zoom, an ideal atmosphere in which to conduct their business. Merchants from England, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and beyond came to these cities to buy and sell products from all over Europe and its colonial possessions.”³⁸

Trade activities in this city and its vicinity, were influential in every aspect of life. As the days passed by, the way the money was traded in the market began to change. People who were prospered by trade, started to choose a new area to make investments. This new area was composed of the works of art. Thus, the interest in the art pieces encouraged the artists to produce varied artworks and this mutual interaction would have successive effects.

As a cosmopolitan cultural center, Antwerp turned out to be a very convenient place to get to know different cultures as well as the international artistic tendencies. It embraced various items that artists would be inspired; consequently artists and craftsmen profited from the vitality of the economy and they became a part of the economic system. During that period Antwerp was the best city for artists to live in northern Europe since it affords these kind of opportunities.

Bruegel’s world-famous painting *The Tower of Babel* reveals this situation in the most appropriate way. This magnificent painting displays a gigantic tower referring to the biblical story. According to this history, II. King Nimrod desired to build a tower reaching into heaven. Thence, God punished people because of this act of arrogance. Common language of human kind was thus restrained and the lack of communication caused people cease this work unfinished.³⁹ Details of this painting lead us to the point that Bruegel’s source of inspiration was the cosmopolite society in Antwerp. (Figure 29)

On the other hand, like many of the contemporary Netherlands artists of that era, Bruegel traveled to Italy in 1552. As the cradle of Renaissance, Italy was the

³⁸ Donald J. Harreld, **Merchants and International Trade Networks in the Sixteenth Century** (Brigham Young University: XIV International Economic History Congress, Helsinki 2006, Session 110), 1 <http://www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers3/Harreld.pdf> [09.04.2018]

³⁹ Hagen, See note 32, 18

place where most of the European artists dreamed to be inspired. Artists had the chance to learn from the Italian masters while studying the principles of antiquity. So to speak, this experience was the sine qua non factor for the painters to be a prestigious artist. Hence, Bruegel visited Venice, Florence and Rome. Even though there are no written sources about this trip, his artworks, which reflect the travel points of his journey like the mountain landscapes, can be counted as an evidence.⁴⁰ Van Mander who is the first biographer of Bruegel states that, “When he was in Alps, swallowed all the mountains and rocks and spat them out again as painting boards.”⁴¹

“Van Mander writes that he studied in Brussels with Pieter Coecke van Aelst who was one of the most important painters in the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century and whose daughter we know he eventually married.”⁴²

Even though we have very few knowledge about Bruegel’s training, we know that he performed his art with the disciple of Hieronymus Bosch. Bruegel renders his art pieces in the manner of Bosch and likewise the theme selections of his works have similarities with Bosch.

“Hieronymus Bosch’s paintings of *Everyman*, or *Traveler*, and Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s drawing for the print of *Everyman* or *Elck* published in 1558. (...) Bruegel’s *Everyman* is viewed as a continuation of the Boschian heritage adapted in the ways that reflect the interests of his own audience and the cultural and economic conditions of his time.”⁴³ (Figure 11)

Nevertheless, Bruegel was specialized in painting the landscapes with an influence of his trip to Italy and also he created a unique style of his own by depicting a specific element in most of his art pieces: ‘peasants’. In order to better emphasize the features that distinguish Bruegel from other contemporary painters of the era, it will be appropriate to mention this common element at this point, although the vernacular scenes of peasants will be discussed in the following chapters.

⁴⁰ Hagen, See note 32, 15

⁴¹ Hagen, See note 32, 52

⁴² Oranstein, See note 41, 5

https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=BTrAsGPA788C&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false [21.03.2018]

⁴³ Margaret A. Sullivan **Bosch, Bruegel, Everyman and the Northern Renaissance** (Brill, *Oud Holland* Vol. 121, No. 2/3, 2008), 120 http://www.jstor.org/stable/42712203?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A26e62fdd3d0be28a3f70578673c1a50a#page_scan_tab_contents [22.03.2018]

“Netherlandish painters had been adapting aspects of Italian art for a half century by the time Bruegel executed his large panels of peasants.”⁴⁴

Bruegel’s own practice of depicting the peasants’ ordinary life from a broad perspective and occasionally conveying the socio-political issues can be considered as a significant device for ‘history painting.’⁴⁵ He preferred to perform *faceless* peasants in order to communicate the natural scenes of peasants during their daily routines. These daily routines are composed of the occasions like coming together for religious or cultural events and harvesting. (Figure 12 – Figure 13) He used his artistic ability as a medium to reflect the volatile spiritual perception of Netherlands in the 16th century.

“(…) detailed figures, architecture and artifacts along with the thinly or heavily veiled symbolic imagery –mostly associated with axioms or proverbs- have yielded much more information that helps us understand that troubled era in the Antwerp and Brussels area.”⁴⁶

In 1554 Bruegel came back to Antwerp and in an effort to gather a regular income, he performed his artworks for the print publishers like Hieronymus Cock. This situation might have provided him to be in contact with the wealthy and powerful patrons, however there are no evidences to prove this interaction.⁴⁷ Howsoever, he gained a good reputation in the community and produced art pieces

⁴⁴ Todd M. Richardson, **Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Art Discourse in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands** (*Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* Vol. 36, No. 1 (WINTER / HIVER 2013)), 193
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43446343?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=Ethan&searchText=Matt&searchText=Kavaler&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Facc%3Drr%26amp%3BQuery%3DEthan%2BMatt%2BKavaler%26amp%3Bloggedin%3Dtrue> [08.05.2018]

⁴⁵ Tate Museum official web site <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/history-painting> [08.05.2018] See also: National Museum Gallery <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/history-painting> [08.05.2018]

⁴⁶ Gene Kritsky, Daniel Mader **The Insects of Pieter Bruegel The Elder** (*American Entomologist*, Volume 57, Number 4), 245 <https://academic.oup.com/ae/article-abstract/57/4/245/2462129> [20.03.2018]

⁴⁷ Oranstein, See note 41, 7
https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=BTrAsGPA788C&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false [21.03.2018]

for the private collectors.⁴⁸ Subsequent to his accommodation in Antwerp, he moved to Brussels and lived there until he died.

During the second half of 16th century the Netherlands provinces belonged to the Spanish King Philip II who was a member of the Catholic denomination. In 1567, Philip II sent the Duke of Alba to Brussels in order to quell the uprising of the Protestants.⁴⁹ At that time, Bruegel was living in Brussels and thus he became a witness of this brutality.

Even if there are no reliable sources that are declaring Bruegel's political or religious beliefs, he reflected his feelings about these historical facts through his artworks by using his own artistic style. The transmission of the ordinary forms of the daily life in Brussels, is the indication that he wasn't indifferent to the contemporary facts. *The Massacre of the Innocents (1566)* and *The Magpie on the Gallows (1568)* are the paintings, which can be examined in order to understand the considerations of Bruegel about the socio-political occasions in Netherlands. (Figure 14 –Figure 15) He was quite productive during this period. As a matter of fact, the themes of his paintings reflect his effort to note down the historical facts in his own style. Instead of trying to make the components of the paintings beseech in the regular aesthetics concept, he artfully portrayed the facts as they are, with all the sorrow and bitterness.

In *The Massacre of the Innocents* Bruegel portrays the persecution against the people living in Bethlehem, by the Spanish troops who were under the control of the Duke of Alba. We see the town square under the snow, filled with terrified people who are begging the troops for mercy. Like in many of his paintings, Bruegel used the *town square* as a place to depict various scenes of the occasions that the peasants had experienced. In this painting, we see the reflection of the peasants who are exposed to be terrorized. Bruegel's desire to reflect the sociological events as well as the cultural items that are used to depict the town squares, will be examined in detail in the following chapters.

⁴⁸ Oranstein, See note 41, 8
https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=BTrAsGPA788C&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false [08.05.2018]

⁴⁹ Hagen, See note 32, 7

The Magpie on the Gallows displays a landscape with the fertile meadows and the dancing peasants while emphasizing the gallows in the center. It gives the impression as if the painting is separated by a diagonal line, from the upper left part to the lower right part. The part above this diagonal line displays the fertile meadows and at the bottom left we can see the dancing people near the gallows. The gallows is associated with the Spanish rule and it is placed in the center of the painting on purpose. To be hanged on the gallows was regarded as a dishonorable death in the society at that time.⁵⁰ The gallows and the dancing peasants create a dilemma and convey two emotions that are opposed to each other. Bruegel tried to reflect the fact that the peasants became accustomed to the persecution of the Spanish troops and they got used to see the gallows as an ordinary fact of their lives.

Since this treatise focuses on the *town squares* in Bruegel's paintings, which nestle a combination of many different forms of the social life in the 16th century Netherlands, the basic components of Bruegel's artistic style should be apprehended.

3.2 Pieter Bruegel's Art

Bruegel created many artworks including the engravings, landscape paintings and mythological themed paintings; as well as the narrative paintings that depict the peasants in their ordinary lives. Indeed, he was called as *Boeren* Bruegel (Peasant Bruegel) by reason of his many paintings with the vernacular scenes of the peasants.⁵¹

Bruegel portrayed the complex composition of the daily life in the society together with the rich variety of details. He preferred to depict two types of peasant occasions. The one, with a certain moment of a community, which is composed of a few people (Figure 16 – Figure 17) and the other one, which is undertaken from a

⁵⁰ Hagen, See note 32, 82

⁵¹ Manfred Selling, **The very lively and whimsical Pieter Bruegel: "Thoughts on His Iconography and Context**, Pieter Bruegel The Elder *Drawings and Prints* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2001), 57
https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=BTrAsGPA788C&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false [21.05.2018]

broader perspective with large number of figures (Figure 13 - Figure 14). Considering the mobility of the people, their dressings, the general details of the environment, we come to the point that he worked on his art pieces as if he had taken a snapshot of the moments. In order to reflect the subjects that he had selected, he had to form a picture of the moments with all the tiny details, like the color variations and the light, in his mind. The traditional subjects gained a new meaning by courtesy of his compositional techniques, which are enriched with the pictorial figures.

At this point it will be appropriate to mention some concepts about art, which are relative with transferring the sociological events to the works of art, before proceeding how these terms are reflected in Bruegel's art. Recognizing the contents of these concepts and terms can be used as a tool for a better comprehension.

To begin with the general framework, "narrative" should be cited. Basically, a narrative is the style with which a story is expressed visually by the instruments of art.

"Narrative art is art that tells a story. Much of Western art until the twentieth century has been narrative, depicting stories from religion, myth and legend, history and literature (...). From about the seventeenth century genre painting showed scenes and narratives of everyday life."⁵²

Narrative art is the way to reveal a story by using themes and symbols. It is the representation of any kind of aspect and action. "The great work of the painter is the narrative', declared Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise on painting, entitled the *De Pictura*."⁵³ Alberti is an Italian humanist architect and author lived in the 15th century Italy. He is considered as the principal initiator of Renaissance art theory.⁵⁴ In his treatise *On Painting* (*Della pittura*), which is considered as the first modern treatise on the theory of painting, he defends the idea that an artist should have developed representational skills in order to depict complicated compositions. Such

⁵² Tate Museum official web site <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/narrative> [20.05.2018]

⁵³ Keith Christiansen, **Early Renaissance Relative Painting in Italy** (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bulletin Fall 1983), 3
<https://www.metmuseum.org/pubs/bulletins/1/pdf/3259419.pdf.bannered.pdf> [22.05.2018]

⁵⁴ Joan Kelly Gadol, **Leon Battista Alberti**, (Encyclopedia Britannica)
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leon-Battista-Alberti> [20.05.2018]

compositions with numerous figures should also arouse emotions and Alberti defined these compositions as “istoria”. In *De re edificatoira*, Alberti explains as:

“I look at a good painting (to paint a bad picture is to disgrace a wall) with as much pleasure as I take in reading of a good ‘historia’. Both are the work of painters: one paints with words, the other tells the story with his brush. They have other things in common: both require great ability and amazing diligence.”⁵⁵

As it is understood up to this point, the roots of the Renaissance art theory reach to the 15th century. Hence, the publication and acceptance of this treatise by the community of art have already taken place almost a century before Bruegel’s trip to Italy. His artistic style shares a common ground with the artistic characteristics that Alberti stated in his treatise. These features can be indicated as, the complicated compositions made up of the numerous figures with variety of details. Thus, the fact that Bruegel might have been influenced by Alberti’s opinions, can be considered as a possibility.

On the other hand, in the 17th century another art term was defined by the French Royal Academy: “History painting”. During that period, history painting’s subject matter were the classical history, the scenes from the Bible or the mythological depictions, until the 18th century.

“(…) towards the end of the eighteenth century history painting included modern historical subjects such as the battle scenes painted by artists Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley.”⁵⁶

Thus, the modern historical subjects’ arise in the domain of art during the 18th century. In this case, Bruegel’s subject matter selection is considered as the proof that he had futuristic point of view as well as his willingness of conveying the social

⁵⁵ Anthony Grafton, *Historia and Istorica: Alberti's Terminology in Context* (Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance Vol. 8 (1999), pp. 37-68)
http://www.jstor.org/stable/4603711?loggedin=true&seq=6#page_scan_tab_contents [23.05.2018]

⁵⁶ *Adeline's Art Dictionary*, (New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 202
http://brittlebooks.library.illinois.edu/brittlebooks_open/Books2009-03/adelju0001adeart/adelju0001adeart.pdf [19.05.2018]

See also <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/history-painting> [23.05.2018]

issues. His paintings of *The Massacre of the Innocents* and *The Census at Bethlehem* displays historical events that took place in Netherlands during the 16th century. (Figure 14 – Figure 18) *The Census at Bethlehem* reflects a formal event, which is conducted in the name of Philip II and as stated before, *The Massacre of the Innocents* displays the persecution of the Duke of Alba, which is a historical fact.

The narrative art and the historical painting are interwoven in Bruegel's art pieces in such a way that enforces us to learn how to "read" a painting. While examining his artworks, we get the feeling that he conveys the information by using the setting and the symbols. In order to better "read" the painting, we need to be aware of the socio-historical facts of the territory in the related era. For instance, while examining painting *The Census at Bethlehem*, we can see the wreath hanging over a building in the left foreground, which is not recognizable at first sight. The wreath was used as a sign at that period to indicate that a building in the village serves as an inn. Another significant detail, which does not draw much attention is the pale red plaque, which is hanged next to the wreath. It is the crest of the Habsburgs and it is the sign that the taxes are being collected in that inn in the name of Philip II.⁵⁷

One other concept of art, which is relative to Bruegel's artworks that should be mentioned is the "genre painting".⁵⁸ Basically, it is the depiction of the scenes of the everyday life. As mentioned in the previous sections, Bruegel mostly preferred to reflect the ordinary life of the peasants. *Spring* and *The Harvesters* are the two examples of the genre painting of Bruegel. (Figure 19 – Figure 12) In both paintings we see the peasants engaged in the everyday activities such as planting flowers or harvesting crops. In a way, Bruegel contributed to the inscription of the history by conveying the ordinary events of the Netherlanders.

Today, it is accepted that the history is not composed of the wars or the lives of the kings and queens, only. The recorded knowledge of the past events is available

⁵⁷ Hagen, See note 32, 47

⁵⁸ See note 55, 178 http://brittlebooks.library.illinois.edu/brittlebooks_open/Books2009-03/adelju0001adeart/adelju0001adeart.pdf [19.05.2018]

See also <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/g/genres> [23.05.2018]

from a variety of sources, including the art pieces as well as the any type of written documents. The benefits of “the history of the everyday life” concept are consequently emerging at this point and its relation with the art pieces of Bruegel will be the discussed in the next section.



4 EVALUATION OF THE PAST: ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

4.1 Everyday Life History

Today, by means of recent scientific methods and research, new findings about the facts of the past can be achieved. Thus, the reality of the information, which is conveyed by the officially recorded history, can be questioned or enriched on occasion. Motivated from this logic, the historiography acquired a new perspective during the 1970's in West Germany, which is called "Alltagsgeschichte" or "the history of everyday life".⁵⁹ This movement mainly focuses on the development of the *micro history* through different methods of obtaining information, such as the general audience memoirs, literature, oral histories, diaries or tales, which bring a non-habitual point of view to the history. The content of the micro history in question, was composed of the everyday life of the *ordinary* people; unlike the history, which focuses on the extraordinary people who gained ground in history with the wars they have won or the inventions they have made. Everyday life history aims to convey that the events in the history can be evaluated much more differently than those that are officially recorded.

The memories of people have a considerable place in the formation of the common history of the societies and the said memories differ among people according to the circumstances that they live in. In general, the knowledge about the people in the society with low standards of life, could find little room in the official historiographies. At this point, Everyday Life History brings out new ways of

⁵⁹ Geof Eley, **The Journal of Modern History** (Labor History, Social History, "Alltagsgeschichte": Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday--a New Direction for German Social History?, Vol. 61, No. 2 Jun., 1989), 297

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1880863?read-now=1&loggedin=true&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
[26.07.2018]

perceiving to the acts of the ordinary people in their daily lives and consequently, it makes a contribution to historiography.

The everyday concept encompasses almost every aspect of life including the actions and attitudes like folk merriments, together with the rituals like the ecclesiastical elements.⁶⁰ By focusing on the facts of the cultural life, it renders the representation of the lower segment of the societies.

In his book *The Everyday Life Reader*, Ben Highmore gathers resources as references -which have been written by thirty seven thinkers, some of whom are Roland Barthes, Georg Simmel, Sigmund Freud, Pierre Bourdieu, Henri Lefebvre- in order to capture a comprehensive overview on ‘the everyday life’ concept. This inclusive concept, which has an inherently enigmatic structure, has been defined elliptically by Henri Lefebvre as “whatever remains after one has eliminated all specialized activities”.⁶¹

Even though, the everyday life encompasses almost everything, the distinction in this phase can be counted as the repetitive practices of the ordinary people in their everyday lives. The said practices like buying food, playing games or harvesting become unnoticed in the flow of the everyday life issues, although they influence directly or indirectly the sociological or historical phenomena.

The historiography develops with the contribution of the plural perspectives from the variety of disciplines like literature, art and philosophy. Almost a century before the Everyday Life History concept flourished, the art movement “realism” rose in late 19th century. Realism movement aimed to depict all the social classes without avoiding any of the unpleasant aspects of life. In this respect, realism and the concept of the everyday life have an overlapping purpose, which is to convey life as it is. Hence, these two movements, which acquired places in the history, can be utilized as a tool for revealing various sociological facts in different aspects of life.

In any discipline whatsoever, scientific approach requires an objective point of view, which means an evaluation of an event should be considered according to the

⁶⁰ Andreas Eckert, Adam Jones **Historical writing about everyday life** (Journal of African Cultural Studies, Volume 15, Number 1, June 2002, pp. 5-16), 5

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3181400.pdf?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [31.07.2018]

⁶¹ Ben Highmore, **The Everyday Life Reader** (Routledge, Taylor Francis Group, London and New York, 2002, ISBN 0-415-23024-1 (HB), ISBN 0-415-23025 X (PB))

conditions of the period that they occurred in. In this sense, it is necessary to appraise the various aspects of the past events, in order to properly evaluate the information we have. As far as the historiography is concerned, the sociological phenomena – therefore art and literature- should inherently be taken into account.

4.2 Intertwined Disciplines: History, Sociology and Art

In his book *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* Kurt H. Wolff explains how Simmel emphasizes the critical importance of using “sociology as a method” while trying to investigate and interpret the historical affairs from a sociological point of view. According to Simmel, when the idea of benefiting from the sociological perspective, is solidly entrenched, it becomes indispensable.⁶² His inclusive perspective submits that interdisciplinary researches nestle more realistic results. That is to say, it is not possible to evaluate the historical events without considering the sociological facts as well as the artistic approaches. Consequently, this perception may furnish the way for a better understanding of humanities. Simmel argues that a better apprehension of the value of the performances will be provided with this awareness:

“Color molecules, letters, particles of water indeed ‘exist’; but the painting, the book, the river are syntheses: they are units that do not exist in objective reality but only in the consciousness, which constitutes them.”⁶³

The way we express the sociological events in various forms such as art and literature, means that we convey a message to other people with the various elements that they contain. For instance, while examining the paintings of Bruegel, we observe the colors or the dressings of the people as well as their daily behavioral patterns. By viewing the details in his paintings we understand that it does not reflect a place from a tropical region or from somewhere in Far East. His paintings provide a valuable record about the traditions and the socio-cultural ethos of Netherlands in

⁶² Kurt H. Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1950), xxxvii

⁶³ See note 61, xxix

the 16th century. Bruegel consciously observed his surroundings and transmitted his remarks into history with his talent.

By that reasoning, it can be said that a painting can be “read” by a mindful eye, which is capable of capturing the recurring themes as well as their elusive messages. According to Pierre Bourdieu, “We are reading ‘what we see’ according to the manner in which the objects and events are expressed by forms under varying historical conditions.”⁶⁴

The British historian Peter Burke supported Bourdieu’s point of view, on this subject, by referring the works to Pierre Francastel:

*“Art is a system of signs. (...) Art is like language, and looking at pictures is like reading them; to see is to decipher. (...) in each society there is a ‘repertory’ of objects on which the artist draws. (...) This repertory of objects may be considered the vocabulary of the ‘language of art’.”*⁶⁵

Every detail of a painting such as the images, the light and the shades of the colors should be considered as the necessary indicators for *reading* the picture. These indicators could easily be recognized by the contemporary spectators and perhaps they may be perceived as some ordinary features. However, in the present day they are considered as a means of understanding the significance of the painting and consequently, as the historical knowledge.

Three centuries after the death of Bruegel, the lives of the ordinary people began to be the subject of the performances in the frame of the *realist* movement. Aiming to express the truthful visions of the contemporary life without avoiding its vulgar scenes, the said movement bequeathed historical and sociological indications as a legacy and the paintings that reflect the everyday life are called “genre scenes”.⁶⁶ In this sense, there are some common elements that are consistent with the characteristics of the paintings of Bruegel.

⁶⁴ Bourdieu, See note 13, 2

⁶⁵ Peter Burke, **Problems of The Sociology of Art: The Work of Pierre Francastel** (European Journal of Sociology / Archives, Vol.12, No.1, 1971), 141,142
https://www.jstor.org/stable/23998570?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A2253f4a79b43afbc12b8733057f94380&seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents [26.09.2018]

⁶⁶ **Observing Everyday Life**, (The National Gallery of Art), 96
<https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/Education/learning-resources/an-eye-for-art/AnEyeForArt-JanSteenHendrickAvercamp.pdf> [24.09.2018]

From this point on, it would be appropriate to mention some performances of art that have contributed to historiography, before focusing on the sociological elements in Bruegel's artworks.

Dutch artist Jan Steen (1625/26-1679) was one of the first painters who desired to reflect the everyday life. Unlike Bruegel, Steen preferred to reflect moralizing stories by depicting the misbehaving people and the disorder. In his famous painting "Peasants before an Inn", we see a couple of peasants doing their daily affairs, dancing and chatting. (Figure 20) Through his painting, we become witnesses of a scene of a past era.

French painter Jean François Millet (1814-1875) is renowned for the scenes of peasant farmers and because of this, he faced the charge of being a socialist.⁶⁷ (Figure 21) In his painting "Harvesters Resting" we see a group of peasants resting in front of the three straw piles. Surrounded by a natural environment, some of the peasants are resting while others are chatting. They do not pose for the painter. The painting produces a sensation as if Millet is witnessing a random moment of the ordinary lives of the peasants.

Another painter depicting the real state of the ordinary people in their daily routines is Adolf von Menzel (1815-1905). In his famous painting "Iron Rolling Mill" the German painter represented the vision of industry in Germany since the effects of the Industrial Revolution were deeply felt by the workers. In this painting we see the workers struggling in a gloomy environment. The sensations of the overwhelmed workers are successfully transmitted by Menzel. (Figure 22)

"In all these industrial portraits [William Bell Scott, *Iron and Coal, Industry of the Tyne*, 1861 (Wallington Hall, Northumberland); John Ferguson Weir, *The Gun Foundry*, 1866 (Putnam County Historical Society); Paul Meyerheim, *History of the Locomotive*, 1872 (Stadtmuseum, Berlin)] the physical reality and the product of the company move to the center; often the owners are included, as workers or observers, along with their families.... Menzel, to the contrary, concentrated his eye on the worker, (...)"⁶⁸

Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894) captured the scene of the workers in his famous painting "The Floor Scrapers".(Figure 23) His realistic manner of depicting

⁶⁷ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Francois-Millet-French-painter-1814-1875> [18.09.2018]

⁶⁸ Françoise Foster-Hahn, **Ethos und Eros: Adolph Menzels *Eisenwalzwerk und Atelierwand***, (*Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, vol. 41 (1999)) 143, 146-7 <http://www.19thcenturyart-facos.com/artwork/iron-rolling-mill> [21.09.2018]

the working-class people was considered as a vulgar subject matter and consequently, the said painting was rejected by the prestigious Salon in 1875.

The modality of performing art by leaving the historical evidences, started centuries before these painters' applications, which were mentioned above. At this juncture, the extraordinary situation of Bruegel's paintings arises. He expressed his observations of the current sociological events of his time, by using the narrative art. Certainly he can be counted as, one of the pioneers of the realism movement. By depicting real experiences, Bruegel enhances our perception about life in Netherlands in the 16th century.

“(…), if visual art is to be more than the dramatic or memorable illustration of truths arrived at elsewhere, if, in other words to be a *form* of understanding, there must be some fashion in which it directs the mind to the apprehension of truth and reality.(…)”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Gordon Graham, **Value and The Visual Arts** (The Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol.28 No.4 Winter 1994),11 https://www.jstor.org/stable/3333358?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Aa1b8a9b3c574de484c135eab4fde0f28&seq=11#metadata_info_tab_contents [26.09.2018]

5 SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN BRUEGEL'S PAINTINGS

5.1 Significance of the "Town Squares"

As stated in the previous chapters, Bruegel preferred to construe the realistic details of his time rather than depicting the spheres of the classical antiquity or the biblical figures with didactic purposes. He paints as if he would like to leave "messages" from his time and depicts the scenes as realistic as possible. Thus, he allows the observer to better understand the spirit of the period in which the painting is made. It would be appropriate to make the analysis of Bruegel's artworks from the standpoint of our perception today, together with an historical perspective.

"The modal readability of a work of art (for a given society in a given period) varies according to the divergence between the code, which the work under consideration objectively requires and the code as a historically constituted institution, (...)"⁷⁰

Beyond appreciation of Bruegel's artistic style, his worldview, which nestles sociological messages, has also a very exceptional place. We are going to focus on his paintings that describe the scenes from town squares, in which he portrayed several overlapping events, as in; *Kermis at Hoboken* (1559), *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* (1559), *Children's Games* (1560), *Spring* (1565), *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1566), *The Census at Bethlehem* (1566), *Peasant Dance* (1567).

The common feature of these art pieces is, they were portrayed from an elevated point. This perspective provides a larger-scale view of the town squares. Thus, the observer has the chance to see all the details of the social interactions in order to better apprehend and interpret them.

⁷⁰ Bourdieu, See note 13, 11

At this point we need to try to understand the reason why Bruegel often portrayed the town squares. The creation of a painting is not an instant capture such as taking photos with a camera. It is a long and difficult process. First of all there should be an idea and enough intention that would make this painting to be worth portrayed. In Bruegel's case, the town square means a scene that hosts a lot of ideas; however it is on the move at the same time. Although this lively environment presents the material for the creation of new ideas, it requires a large imagination from the painter as well. Thus, we come to the conclusion that Bruegel depicts the scenes of the everyday life of the ordinary people, by utilizing his imagination, which is fed by his own observations.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that during that era the privileged people desired to decorate the walls of their houses with the artworks that depict their own portraits and the religious figures. It was considered as an indication of a status of prestige. That is to say, the paintings composed of difficulties or vulgar behaviors of the ordinary people were not desirable at all. In spite of all these circumstances, Bruegel's choice of the themes of the ordinary people's lives, is an indication of the historical and sociological messages that he wanted to leave for the future. The images and the gestures were selected meticulously and they cannot be considered as a random collection of symbolic forms.

His artwork entitled *The Proverbs* considered as one of the very satisfying examples. (Figure 24) In this painting, Bruegel makes us the witnesses of the vivid images of the peasant life presenting a catalogue of the proverbs and idiomatic expressions that had been used in that era. The painting consists of 120 different Netherlandish proverbs some of which are very striking. Trying to convey such folk sayings with this painting -instead of utilizing the written works- can be said to be a clever idea. Because of their abstract characters, the oral testimonies are the most difficult cultural values to be conveyed without losing any of their aspects. Thus, Bruegel once again helped to leave the cultural heritage of the society, to the future generations by this magnificent painting full of complex images.

“Kress and Leuween declared in their book *Reading Images* (Kress –Leuween, 2006) that social relations can be coded in images. (...) Pictures have the capacity to convey information

that cannot be coded in any other way (Nyíri 2009). Sources can be any kind of document within the presence of a human being: written words, photos, artefacts and oral testimonies.”⁷¹

The town squares had a special place in Netherlands in the 16th century. They were the major meeting places, where people met many of their needs. This used to be considered as a quite crucial matter, since life was a struggle for survival for the peasants of that era. The most basic needs like food and beverage, were being purchased or sold in the marketplaces and they were situated in the town squares. In other words, town squares provided the opportunity to spend and earn money at the same time.

Moreover, the bad living conditions were one of the other main reasons why people mostly spent their time in town squares. There wasn't enough light inside the houses, which were composed of one single room only, were quite small for all the members of the families. Even the beds were being shared in order to keep warm.⁷² In his book entitled *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias probed the medieval manners of the people living in Europe. From the said book, we learn that the “private space” concept, which is one of the basic needs of the human beings, was flourished around the 18th century. So, the 16th century was a very early period to talk about such concepts:

“1530, (...) “On the Bedchamber”: When you undress, when you get up, be mindful of modesty, and take care not to expose to the eyes of others anything that morality and nature require to be concealed. If you share a bed with comrade, lie quietly; do not toss with your body, for this can lay yourself bare or inconvenience your companion by pulling away the blankets.”⁷³

⁷¹ András Benedek, Ágnes Veszelski, **Paintings and Illuminated Manuscripts as sources of the history of Childhood: Conceptions of Childhood in the Renaissance** (In the Beginning was the Image: The Omnipresence of Pictures: Time, Truth, Tradition, Peter Lang AG, 2016), 94 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2t4cns> [26.09.2018]

⁷² Hagen, See note 32, 47

⁷³ Elias, See note 3, 136,137

Vomiting, spitting or urinating in the public places were not perceived as abnormal attitudes, it was even taken as a regular issue to greet someone relieving himself. Therefore, the guidelines for educational purposes were prepared. “1530, From *De civitate morum puerilium*, by Erasmus. (...) It is impolite to greet someone who is urinating or defecating...”⁷⁴.

In *Kermis at Hoboken*, in the bottom right corner, we see the back of a man who is standing alone, in front of the inn. From his posture, we understand that he is urinating. As stated before, Bruegel didn't refrain to depict the vulgar scenes, thus the vivid images of the socio-cultural climate of his time is successfully transmitted.

He created this artwork with pen and brown ink only; thence it is not possible to realize the rich details supplied by any kind of coloration. Even so, by means of his artistic talent, he portrayed all the details with the shading techniques. Like many of his other works, in this art piece, we see his desire of depicting the various cultural activities of the local people. They are dancing, playing, chatting and even urinating in the town square.

As an educated humanist, Bruegel was neither a member of a group, nor was a defender of a specific philosophy. He portrayed most of his paintings concerning the patterns of human beings lives. Thus, there wouldn't be a convenient place than the town squares for social observations.

“His humanistic sentiments were a matter of experience rather than reading; his view of the world was artistic and intuitive rather than philosophical. His work is imbued with a spirit of independence and impartiality towards the phenomena of his time, akin to such minds as Rabelais, Montaigne or Shakespeare.”⁷⁵

5.1.1 Town Squares: Religious Purposes

Town squares were also the places where people used to meet for the religious purposes. The churches were generally situated in the most accessible place of the town square. Thus, citizens who were going to church for any kind of purposes like

⁷⁴ Elias, See note 3, 110

⁷⁵ Jane Turner, **The Dictionary of Art** (Grove's Dictionaries Inc., New York, Vol. 4; Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 38000534310016), 897

marriages, carnivals or funerals, were filling the town squares. That is to say, other than the religious purposes, the churches had social functions. Consequently, Bruegel included the churches whenever he paints the town squares. It was a representation of the real part of life in the town. Besides, these buildings provided useful indications about the state of its community. For instance, the large and well-maintained churches offered clues about how crowded the town was, as well as the economic status of its community.

Bruegel's depiction of the church can be seen in his paintings of *Everyman*, *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*, *Massacre of the Innocents*, *Peasant Dance*, *The Census at Bethlehem*, *Kermis at Hoboken*, and *Children's Games*. Each painting has its own sphere and a common image: the church. (Figure 11-13-14-17-18-25-26)

In the compositions of the *Everyman*, *Massacre of the Innocents*, and *The Census at Bethlehem* the churches were depicted in the far side of the town squares. Even if these paintings have various different subjects, he illustrated the churches in one way or another. Thus, they can be counted as significant indications of Bruegel's sociological messages. (Figures 11-14-18)

Bruegel depicted *Peasant Dance* with another town square and its church. This time we see the foreground of the whole scene, as if we were in the town square like one of the villagers. (Figure 17)

Kermis at Hoboken exhibits the typical depiction of the town square with its church that was situated at the top. (Figure 25) As well as the town square, the more distant areas of the town were also depicted meticulously, in the upper part of the artwork. Thus, all social interactions that Bruegel wanted to transmit, were depicted in this town square dominated by the church.

In *Children's Games* Bruegel depicted more than 250 figures playing games in the town square. Town church, which is situated in the upper middle part of the painting, is pictured in the size that attracts our attention. Although the entire building is not in sight, its architectural structure indicates that it is a church. (Figure 26)

Bruegel illustrated a town square again in his famous painting *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*. (Figure 13) As the audience of this painting, in present day we are witnessing a crowded Netherlandish town square that is worth

scrutinizing. The chaotic atmosphere of this community, hides some elusive messages that cannot be understood at first glance. “The works forming the art capital of a given society at a given time call for codes of varying complexity and subtlety.”⁷⁶

Even if there exist some distinct scenes from the everyday life, the main theme of this painting is the religious rituals. Once again, Bruegel stages the portrayal of people in order to express the shared values of the society. His main concern was transmitted through the embodiments of religious affiliations in different ways. Together with the lively going-on, the moralizing messages take an important place. As can be apprehended from the name of the painting, it represents the opposition between the carnival celebration of the Protestants and the Lent period of the Catholics.

“(…) ‘Carnival, who belongs to the tavern side of the picture, as a symbol of traditional popular culture, and ‘Lent’, who belongs to the church side, as the clergy, who at that time (1559) were trying to reform or suppress many popular festivities.”⁷⁷

The indications of the religious devotions were demonstrated delicately and caricaturized in various fragments, by Bruegel. Just like in most of his paintings, he was endeavoring to express some allegorical messages. Thus, the painter did not only reflect the social practices of this community, but he also reflected his own world view through a visual interpretation.

In order to better comprehend the theme, it will be appropriate to consider an imaginary axis, which separates this painting into two parts from up to bottom. Bruegel preferred to depict the representation of the Catholics on the right side of the painting. He situated the church on the upper right corner. Although we cannot completely see the church with its bell tower, the adequate indications like the nuns dressed in black around the high walls of this building, convince us that this is a church. On the lower corner, there is a person sitting on a chair that is placed on a red cart. From the article of Oliver P. Rafferty SJ we come to know that this emaciated person carrying a beehive on her head, is a nun. A beehive is a signification that is

⁷⁶ Bourdieu, See note 13, 11

⁷⁷ Peter Burke, **The Triumph of Lent: The Reform of Popular Culture** (Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, Ch:8, Harper & Row, Publishers, ISBN:0-06-131928-7), 207

used for the Church. Surrounded by some pious people, she is the personification of 'Lent'.⁷⁸ She is carrying two herrings on the long peel in her hand. Thus, Bruegel emphasized that Catholics do not eat meat during the time of Lent.

The portrayal of people who are in strained circumstances, were exhibited on the lower corner. Poor, hungry and handicapped people were represented in various interactions with the Catholic Christians. They are begging for any kind of help. Unlike Protestants on the left side of the painting, Catholics represented on the right, look and discern the people in distress. Rather than ignoring them, they help the poor ones.

Just like his other paintings, Bruegel did not clearly depict the faces of the people in *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*. As mentioned before, the reason for this situation is his desire to convey the social interactions rather than the real personalities. Nevertheless, seriousness and sorrow in the atmosphere on the right side of the painting, was successfully conveyed to the observer. Laughter and consequently the fun activities were condemned by the pious Catholics. They believed that these attitudes were from the devil.⁷⁹

The concept of 'carnival' has an important and versatile place in European culture. In this section, the religious aspects of *The Battle between Carnival and Lent* will be narrated. Carnival's social functions will be the subject of the next section.

“**Carnival**, the merrymaking and festivity that takes place in many Roman Catholic countries in the last days and hours before the Lenten season. The derivation of the word is uncertain, though it possibly can be traced to the Medieval Latin *carne levare* or *carnelevarium*, which means to take away or remove meat. This coincides with the fact that Carnival is the final festivity before the commencement of the austere 40 days of Lent, during which Roman Catholics in earlier times fasted, abstained from eating meat, and followed other ascetic practices.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Oliver P. Rafferty SJ, **The Fight Between Carnival and Lent**, (The Online Journal of The British Jesuits, 3 March 2014, Copyright© Jesuit Media Initiatives), https://www.thinkingfaith.org/sites/default/files/pdf/20140303_1.pdf [17.10.2018]

⁷⁹ Pam Morris, **The Bakhtin Reader**, Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov (Oxford University Press, 2003, ISBN 0 340 59267 2), 208

⁸⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, **Carnival**, Pre-Lent Festival <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Carnival-pre-Lent-festival> [19.10.2018]

Bruegel maintained a neutral attitude to the denominations of Christianity.⁸¹ As a keen observer of the social interactions, he emphasized the most distinctive features of different religious views by portraying thought provoking images. Thereby, this splendid representation exhibits the antagonism between the religious practices. The tavern on the right and the church on the left confront each other. People enjoying themselves were depicted in front of the tavern. In this part of the painting Bruegel created a scene to express the pleasures of life, like eating meat, waffles and dough, making music, dancing, and even gambling. All these pleasures were considered as sinful attitudes by the Catholic sect and Bruegel utilized these images in order to represent the Protestants. Overindulgence restrained these people to observe the reality of life. The painter reflected them as if they were accustomed to the sadness in life; thus, they did not feel the necessity to interfere any kind of issue. In order to emphasize this point, Bruegel utilized the depiction of handicapped people, since they were the part of the daily life. These poor people were surrounded by the blind drunks who did not even realize them.

The fat man astride the barrel symbolized the Protestants. He was depicted to be the opponent of the nun carrying a beehive on her head. He was carrying a spear with some meat on it, and a piece of meat can be seen on the barrel as well. These exaggerated compositions allude the message of a protest against the Catholic doctrines. Bruegel emphasized that the practices, which were accepted as sinful attitudes by the Catholics, were not accepted as harmful attitudes by the Protestants.

Thereby, in this section I endeavored to present a glimpse of the religious elements in the sociological representations in the artworks of Bruegel.

5.1.2 Town Squares: Celebrations and Carnivals

Town squares were usually the places for diverse celebrations of popular festivities like carnivals, kermises and weddings. Thus, Bruegel often utilized the colorful displays from the town squares in order to reflect the communicational conducts of the society.

⁸¹ Campbell, See note 68, 263

“In traditional European popular culture, the most important kind of setting was that of the festival: family festivals, like weddings, community festivals, like the feast of the patron saint of a town or parish (...); annual festivals involving most Europeans, like Easter, May Day, Midsummer, the Twelve Days of Christmas, New Year, and the Epiphany; and finally, Carnival.”⁸²

Bruegel’s concern was to transmit the ambience of these festivities of the 16th century Netherlands through detailed descriptions; however the network of social interactions had a considerable complexity. Therefore, it will be suitable to examine the contents of the said festivities, in order to understand the hidden messages from the standpoint of present day.

Carnivals were the most complex celebrations with the combination of multiple elements. Religious aspects of carnivals were discussed in the previous section. At this point, its social motifs and their significations will be probed. These motifs were emanated from the depths of the folk culture, therefore it is important to understand them. As stated before, Bakhtin probed this concept in different aspects and due to its particular nature he called it as ‘Carnival Ambivalence’. This unofficial relaxation event had its own order:

“(…), the unofficial folk culture of the Middle Ages and even of the Renaissance had its own territory and its own particular time, the time of fairs and feasts. This territory, (…), was a peculiar second world within the official medieval order and was ruled by a special type of relationship, a free, familiar, marketplace relationship.”⁸³

Carnival celebrations were being held in the town squares where people from various caste divisions spent their time collectively. It was the time for all the people to contact each other, even though their communication used to be impossible in everyday life. Both people from high and low levels of the medieval social scale, were entertaining by common jokes. This unique experience was an opportunity for relaxation of people from different social classes, where they were free to behave as if their social roles were changed. For instance, a fool could be the ruler and a noble man could dance madly. It was a breaking point of the social framework that was composed of the peasantry and feudal politic structure. Russian philosopher Bakhtin described the essence of carnival as: “They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and

⁸² Peter Burke, **The World of Carnival** (Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, Ch:8, Harper & Row, Publishers, ISBN:0-06-131928-7), 179

⁸³ Morris, See note 78, 213

abundance.”⁸⁴ It was an opportunity for the ordinary people in order to satisfy their repressed desires. In other words, it was a kind of fictional revenge from the authorities they usually obey in their ordinary lives. This sense of freedom, which reached its peak, had also some side effects. It caused people to display some aggressive conducts. That is to say, it used to be acknowledged as if it was a justification of the degeneration of people. Abuse was also the integral parts of the carnival concept as much as praise and celebration.

In his research about the world-famous French writer François Rabelais’ works, Bakhtin conveyed the negative consequences of carnival amusement. As a Renaissance humanist, Rabelais is the author of comic master pieces entitled *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.⁸⁵ Rabelais criticized the events of his time through the medium of jokes, the concept of laughter and implications. Bruegel and Rabelais lived in the same era and Rabelais’ works presents rich sources that conveys many details that can be utilized during the analysis of the world of carnival.

“Mikhail Bakhtin has shown how the laughter of Rabelais expressed a strain of popular culture in which the riotously funny could turn to riot, a carnival culture of sexuality and sedition in which the revolutionary element might be contained within symbols and metaphors or might explode in a general uprising as in 1789.”⁸⁶

Hence, this extraordinary festivity was a temporary suspension of the ordinary issues of life and at the same time, it was the period where extravagant attitudes were widely lived out. During that era, carnival parades and celebrations were not the shows that people used to watch, only. They were a part of the entertainments in person.

Bruegel illustrated this topsy-turvy state of the world in *The Battle between Carnival and Lent* by constructing the right and the left part of the picture differently. As discussed in the previous section, these parts are intensifying the significations of each other. The contrast of their composition that are displayed in the foreground of the painting, let us realize the structural disparities of the religious attitudes. It was not a coincidence that Bruegel portrayed a clown at the very center

⁸⁴ Morris, See note 78, 199

⁸⁵ M.A. Screech, John Michael Cohen **François Rabelais**
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Rabelais> [06.11.2018]

⁸⁶ Robert Darnton, **The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History** (Copyright ©Basic Books, 1999, A Member of the Perseus Books Group ISBN 0-465-02700-8), 99

of the painting, among all these meaningful details. The clown was dressed up in a remarkable way and he was leading a couple with a torch in his hand. He lit the torch even if it was day time and as the observers of the painting, our attention was drawn to this enlightened section. According to some interpreters Bruegel emphasized this part on purpose, in order to transmit some didactic messages about the society. He criticized this topsy-turvy atmosphere by illustrating a disguised message. Moreover, this fancy dressed couple was exhibiting an implication of their social status. Their dress up was an obvious clue that these people were not from the peasantry. They probably belonged to the bourgeoisie. Like in most of his paintings, Bruegel used the head wear of people to represent the social class that they belonged to.

“(…); their various items of head wear could represent the different social groups, with the miter referring to the clergy, the crown to the aristocracy, the fur hat to the bourgeoisie, the paper helmet to the soldiery, and the cap to the peasantry.”⁸⁷

Thus, Bruegel used the means of distinctive accents in order to exhibit the sociological facts of this society. He utilized this purposive content in another painting *Kermis at Hoboken*, as well. We once again see a crowded town square that is exhibited from an elevated point. We are witnessing the various pleasures of people in the spirit of celebration. They are dancing, drinking, eating and even practicing archery. All these scenes are part of a carnival as a whole.

We see that the clown was portrayed in the lower central part of the painting. There is no doubt that we do not see it immediately in all this crowded composition, even so it was depicted in the foreground. This makes us think that Bruegel put the clown in a privileged place. Its message was implicitly portrayed so that a careful observer can receive. “(…) a fool is leading two children by the hand, in accordance with the motto ‘Folly leads men.’”⁸⁸

Peasant Dance was depicted as a scene of another festivity. Bruegel illustrated the peasants in various scenes like dancing, playing music, drinking and kissing. This time, we are not seeing the town square from an elevated point, he allowed us to be the witnesses of these moments of relaxation as if we are one of these peasants.

⁸⁷ Hagen, See note 32, 88

⁸⁸ Hagen, See note 32, 49

In addition to all these depictions of the town squares, Bruegel also transmitted some contemporary social circumstances from the similar perspective. Thus, he provided historical information about the period he lived in.

5.1.3 Town Squares: Contemporary Events and Private Circumstances

In *Census at Bethlehem*, Bruegel provides us many details that are necessary to comprehend the lives of the ordinary people in the 16th century Netherlands. (Figure 18) Once again he illustrates the whole composition as if he was looking at the village from a point above. However, this time he combines the trivial aspects of the everyday reality with an official gathering. The feature that makes this painting different from the other paintings that we already examined is that a biblical scene was also illustrated in the daily life cycle. The integration of the biblical scene was done in such a harmonious way with the whole composition of the painting that, only a careful eye can perceive it.

The private circumstance that was to be “the census”. On the left we see many people gathered in front of the inn (or the tavern). The circle shaped dark green wreath, which was hung in front of the building is an indication that this building was an inn (or tavern). On the right side of the wreath, the red colored rectangular signboard with the double eagle on it, was the symbol of the Spanish Habsburg Empire. Thus, Bruegel reflected that this was an official gathering. From the name of the painting we understand that the census-taking was being effectuated. At the same time, people depicted in front of the inn narrate that the financial transactions like paying and collecting taxes were being done. A person dressed in blue is depicted while he was giving some money to a person in the inn. On his left, we see another person in the inn who was registering the payment.

The biblical scene was depicted on the right side of the painting. It should be noted that depictions of the religious scenes in a contemporary setting were not unusual in the 16th century. On the foreground, near the chariots there is a person on the donkey; she is wearing a blue cape. There is a person leading the donkey; he is dressed in dark clothes and from the saw on his waist we understand that he is a carpenter.

“(…) It is not difficult to identify these two figures as Joseph and Mary who, upon the orders of Ceasar Augustus, were traveling to Bethlehem to register in the census of the Roman Empire.

However, the scene does not take place in ancient Judea, Bruegel sets the scene in his native 16th century Low Countries.”⁸⁹

On the background of the painting, Bruegel lets us visualize the numerous details of the daily pastoral life as well. He caught the interest of onlookers by the diverse representations of the figures that were depicted in detail.

As a keen observer of the social realities of his time, Bruegel touched the atrocities of Philip II of Spain in his famous painting entitled as *Massacre of the Innocents*. (Figure 14) Composed of multiple narratives, he reflected the Protestant resistance against the Spanish Catholic armies. The state oppression that was sustained without pity, was reflected by the figures of the desperate people. Thus, just like *Census at Bethlehem*, Bruegel interpenetrated the contemporary events of his time with the biblical knowledge.

“Its subject, the biblical scene described in Matthew 2:16, is the slaughter of the infant male children of Bethlehem at King Herod’s order. (...) it has been argued that the painting is an illusion to the cruel and punitive treatment of a Netherlandish community by Spanish soldiery (...)”⁹⁰

We, once again see the whole square from a higher point. The village is under snow. In the middle of the square, a group of equestrian soldiers attract our attention. They held their long lances in upright position as a sign of unity and power. At the forefront of the soldiers, there is a figure dressed in black. This figure is presumed to be the Duke of Alba, in some of the interpretations.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Véronique Vandamme, Jennifer Beauloye, **L’entreprise Brueghel** (Peter van den Brink (dir.), Gand Ludion, 2001 <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/zQKyGcrY3z1hKQ> [24.10.2018]

⁹⁰ Perez Zagorin, **Looking for Pieter Bruegel** (Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 65, No.1, Universtiy of Pennsylvania Press, Jan.2003), 80 https://www.jstor.org/stable/3654297?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A3f4c62b20d76d99fc560ae2d702bd0f0&seq=8#page_scan_tab_contents [05.11.2018]

⁹¹ Stanley Ferber, **Peter Bruegel and The Duke of Alba** (Renaissance News, 19, 1966), 205-19 80 https://www.jstor.org/stable/3654297?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A3f4c62b20d76d99fc560ae2d702bd0f0&seq=8#page_scan_tab_contents [05.11.2018]

“Philip II reaffirmed the death penalty for heresy among his Netherlands subjects; in 1566 there were Calvinist riots; in 1567 the Duke of Alba was sent with an army to try to crush dissent for good, resulting in one of the cruellest military campaigns in European history.”⁹²

Various tragic scenes were depicted in every corner of the square. Red-uniformed troops were tyrannizing over the people by slaughtering their baby boys. According to some scholars' interpretations, Bruegel's art reflects his political opinions about the opposition to the Spanish regime. This assessment is in line with van Mander's statements about Bruegel:

“Shortly before his death, according to van Mander, Bruegel had his wife burn certain drawings, ‘which were too sharp or sarcastic... either out of remorse or for fear that she might come to harm or in some way be held responsible for them.’”⁹³

Bruegel was a successful observer who wanted to transfer the social events of his era and consequently, the significant conflict occurred in the 16th century Netherlands between the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation inevitably effected the subjects of his works. By his extraordinary vision and talent, he embroidered the messages he wanted to transmit into the content of his illustrations.

5.1.4 Town Squares: Children's Games

Games and plays occupied a significant place in the societies of the middle ages, although it is very hard to understand in present day. They were a kind of means for people in order to feel united; consequently, their social role is undeniable. These relaxation mediums had distinct meanings for many people from various social classes and from different age groups. They used to be the way for the children to reflect their desire to imitate adults; and as for the adults it was a kind of entertainment that they used to forget the issues of the daily life. There were even some games that particularly nobles played.

⁹² Jonathan Jones, **End of the Innocents** (The Guardian International edition, 17, Jan,2004) <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2004/jan/17/art> [06.11.2018]

⁹³ Gordon Campbell, **The Grove Encyclopedia of Northern Renaissance Art** (Copyright © 2009 by Oxford University Press, Volume 1, ISBN 978-0-19-533466-1, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 38001675800018), 263

“(…), adults used to play games, which today only children play. A fourteenth century ivory shows the frog-game: a young man sitting on the ground is trying to catch the hold of the men and women who are pushing him around.”⁹⁴

Although the contents and the rules may vary, games and plays both had a common form of celebration and that was “dancing”. Bruegel featured games, plays and dancing figures in his paintings of *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*, *Peasant Dance*, *Kermis at Hoboken*, *Children’s Games*, *Winter Landscape with Bird Trap*, *Wedding Dance*. (Figures: 13-17-25-26-27-28)

Bruegel depicted *Children’s Games* in 1560. In this painting, we see many of the common features that we have already examined in the previous chapters. Once again, we are looking at the town square that was crowded with people, from an elevated perspective and we see a church located at a point that dominates the entire square. *Children’s Games* has a significant place among Bruegel’s art pieces. The said significant place emanates from the fact that he illustrated more than 250 children who were playing in the same town square.

Even though the mood of the scene does not reflect the feeling of joy at first glance and additionally, the name of the painting does not overlap with the feeling that the painting conveys us, this talented painter successfully illustrated most of the games that children used to play in that era. His topic selection for this painting -the portrayal of children from the lower classes- was quite unusual because there was no concept of childhood in the medieval world. “(…) childhood was a period of transition, which passed quickly and which was just as quickly forgotten.”⁹⁵ Life was short, and it was unclear whether the babies would be lucky enough to go beyond infancy and thus, to become a labor force. Medieval people considered a baby as a small “person” and from the moment she started walking, she was expected to do some work. In his book entitled *Centuries of Childhood*, Philippe Ariés probed this topic in detail and he claimed that children were regarded as a “person” as soon as they did not need the care of the womenfolk.

“Sociologists James and Prout (James-Prout 1997) published their theory about childhood as a social construction. The new paradigm is potentially fruitful for historians. If we analyze

⁹⁴ Philippe Ariés, **A Modest Contribution to the History of Games and Pastimes** (Centuries of Childhood, A Social History of Family Life, Copyright © 1962 by Jonathan Cape Ltd.), 62

⁹⁵ Ariés, See note 94, 34

paintings with iconographic methods, we can see children as social actors. Paintings could help us to assess the interpretations of childhood (...)"⁹⁶

When we look at the depictions of the children in *Children's Games* in detail, we see that the faces of the children were depicted like miniature adults, rather than "childlike" expressions on their faces. As the concept of childhood was out of question, their clothes were no different from the ones that the adults used to wear. Thus, the only recognizable difference from the illustration of the adults was their dimensions.

On the other hand, the details in *Children's Games* has been studied and interpreted by many iconographers whether they had a purpose of transmitting any hidden messages. According to some others, this would be an over-interpretation.

"(...) looking beneath the games for disguised meanings, view them as the inventions of "serious miniature adults" whose activities symbolize the folly of mankind and the "upside-downness" of a vain, deceitful world. The literalists, on the other hand argue that the games are innocent and carefree, and that they are depicted "without recondite allusion or moral connotation"."⁹⁷

However, it is an undeniable fact that his paintings present information of his time on a historical basis.

"This particular artistic construction, integrating the everyday life, the profane, the childhood, reflects the position that these elements occupied in the society of the 16th century. Projected by Bruegel himself, it reveals a common state of the culture and ideology of this period. Bruegel, (...), has an ethnographic look."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Orsolya Endrődy-Nagy, **Painting and Illuminated Manuscripts as Sources of the History of Childhood: Conceptions of Childhood in The Renaissance** (In the Beginning was the Image: The Omnipresence of Pictures: Time, Truth, Tradition, Publisher: Peter Lang AG, Copyright 2016) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2t4cns.11> [21.10.2018]

⁹⁷ Edward Snow, "Meaning" in **Children's Games: On The Limitations of the Iconographic Approach to Bruegel** (Representations, No.2 Spring 1983), 28 https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928383?read-now=1&loggedin=true&seq=3#page_scan_tab_contents [25.10.2018]

⁹⁸ "Cette construction artistique particulière, intégrant la vie quotidienne, le profane, l'enfance, reflète la position que ces éléments occupaient dans la société du XVI^e siècle. Projetée par Bruegel lui-même, elle révèle un état commun à la culture et à l'idéologie de cette période. Bruegel, en construisant ce qui a priori semble un répertoire, porte un regard d'ethnographie."

Marie Cegarra, **Le quotidien de l'enfance. À propos dun tableau de Bruegel l'Ancien** (Ethnologie française nouvelle serie, Presse Universitaires de France T. 30, No.1, **PLIURES, COUPURES, CÉSURES DU TEMPS** (Janvier-Mars 2000)), 122 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40991544> [16.10.2018]

Bruegel reflected children in many ways in his works. The illustrations of children playing in town squares, indicates that these children were from the lower classes of the society. Thus, this valuable work can be considered as a source that illuminates us about the state of the childhood in the 16th century. Bruegel once again provided us a window that opens to the past, in order us to gather information about their appearances and their social status.



6 CONCLUSION

Considered as a valuable part of culture, art is a significant source, which offers symbolic traces of the social realm. “Art is a language. Art objects are therefore decipherable into more or less elaborated and restricted codes.”⁹⁹ The suitable method to resolve these codes, which provide a variety of information, is to comprehend the period with the social environment in which the artist lived; and then making an evaluation in the light of the artist’s biography together with all the resolved codes at hand.

Subjects and composition of figures of an art object are not a random collection.¹⁰⁰ Artists are naturally inspired by the events they experience and by the characters they observe in the ambience they live in. The set of values like public attitudes, commemorations, beliefs and the common memories about the power structures can be considered as the basic components of cultural memory of which artists are usually influenced. Thus, an artwork may provide veritable knowledge that can contribute to historiography.

“Art is part of history; the moral of that conclusion is that art-historians should study general history more than they do, and that historians should make a greater use of art as a source of knowledge about society as valuable as any written document. For art is not inferior because artists do not work with words.”¹⁰¹

As in the case of Bruegel, the way in which a spectator perceives a work of art and how he makes use of this work in question, depends on the spectator himself. People perceive objects and events around them in different ways. Therefore, their interpretations are relative according to their perceptions.

⁹⁹ Albert Bergesen, **The Semantic Equation: A Theory of the Social Origins of Art Styles** (Sociological Theory, Published by: Wiley, Vol.2, 1984 DOI: 10.2307/223348), 187 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223348> [02.01.2018]

¹⁰⁰ Burke, See note 64, 142

¹⁰¹ Burke, See note 64, 146

“(…) One may look at a work of art only in regard to its artistic significance; one may place it, as if it had fallen from the sky, within a series of artistic products. Yet one may also understand it in terms of the artist's personality and development, his experiences and tendencies. (…)”¹⁰²

As a prosperous observer Pieter Bruegel was influenced by the environmental factors and social structures in Netherlands in the 16th century. He utilized these social subjects and reflected on the contemporary public interactions as they were, in order to produce unique works of art. There were many subjects to feed his inspiration and as discussed in the previous chapters, he mostly preferred to depict the everyday life of ordinary people. This was a feature that distinguished him from other painters and even for this reason he was given an alias: “Peasant Bruegel.”

By means of his artistic style, Bruegel provided invaluable information in order us to understand the period in which he lived. While reflecting on folk culture, his artworks present religious and moral subjects in great harmony with worldly issues. Bruegel spent a significant period of his life in Antwerp where commercial and financial activities were carried out intensively and was a junction point for a number of different languages at the same time. As a good observer, Bruegel managed to create a unique composition and he reflected this theme in the most striking way in his paintings.

His skillful depictions of the *town squares* tell the continuity of life in Netherlands in many aspects. Together with the demonstration of aesthetic experience, trying to give meanings to the details in his artworks, is like solving a puzzle with pleasure. The onlooker is always welcomed with surprising details.

There was a reason Bruegel often depicted town squares in his compositions. Town squares were places where people find opportunity to socialize in various ways. These places were particular areas for different types of gatherings like religious purposes, carnivals and festivities. He also used town squares as a medium in order to convey some of the historical events he witnessed. While he was perpetrating all these topics, he had chosen a theme that was considered unusual in number of ways: children. Just like the other paintings of Bruegel that were examined in throughout this thesis, his extraordinary theme selection amazes us.

¹⁰² Wolff, See note 61, 17

Children's Games is one of the best examples of depiction of town square and this fabulous painting offers us a large number of items that need to be examined. The most important reason is that children were regarded as “small people” since there were no concept of childhood during the Middle Ages. Under these circumstances, depicting more than 250 children in a town square was not a conventionally preferred topic. While describing “childhood” of his time, at the same time Bruegel was able to present details of the concept of “play”, which had a special place in the Middle Ages. This distinct feature of Bruegel, distinguished him from the contemporary painters of his time. Thus, he made a valuable contribution to historiography.

In conclusion Pieter Bruegel's remarkable pieces render valuable information about “Everyday life of ordinary people” in Europe during the Middle Ages. Considering that these kind of sociological issues were rarely depicted in those eras, his artworks can be evaluated as an additional source to the written texts of historiography.

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APPENDIX

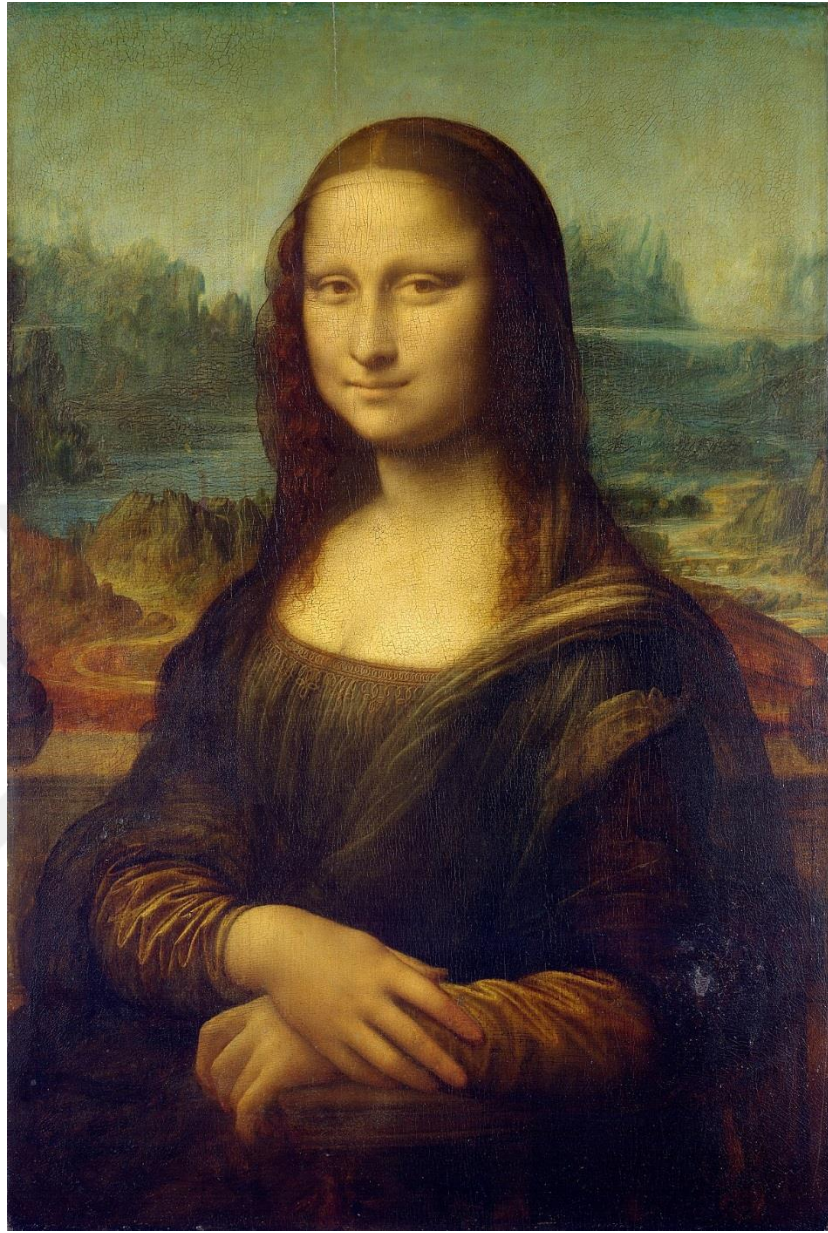


Figure 1: Leonardo Da Vinci, “Mona Lisa”, 1503-1506 and 1510-1515



Figure 2: Leonardo da Vinci, "Last Supper", 1495-1498



Figure 3: Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, “Sistine Chapel”, 1508-1512,

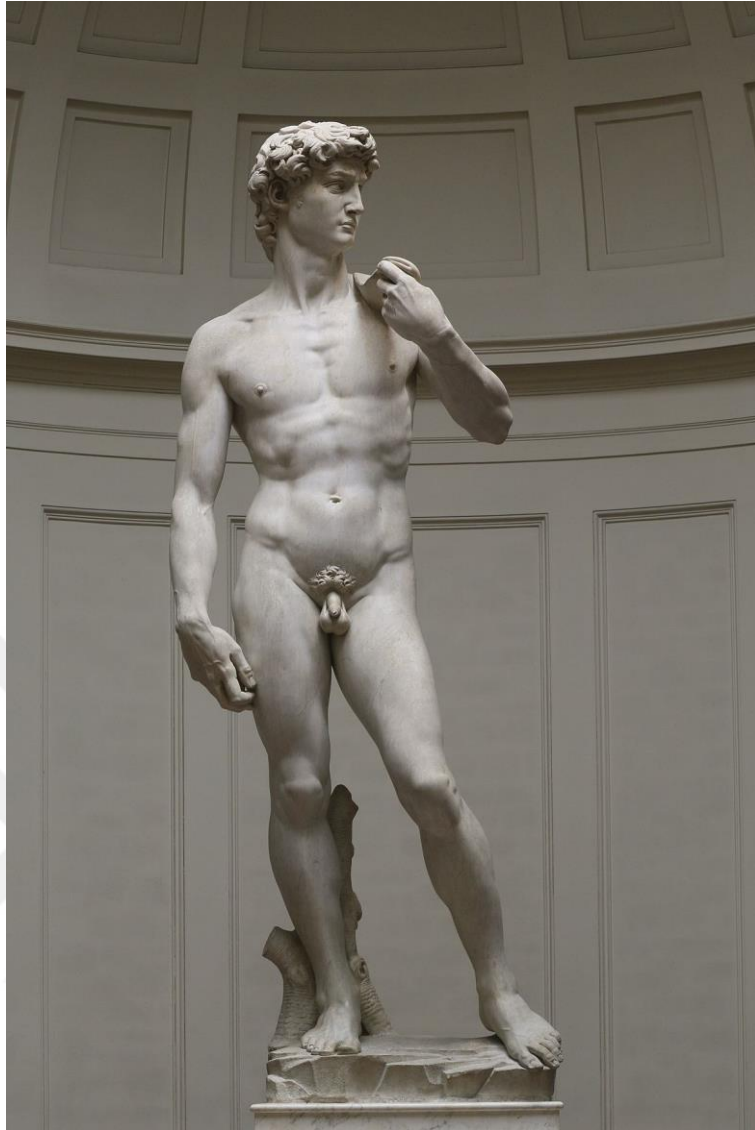


Figure 4: Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, “David”, 1501-1504



Figure 5: Jan van Eyck, “Arnolfini Portrait”, 1434



Figure 6: Jan van Eyck, “Annunciation”, 1434-1436



Figure 7: Albrecht Dürer, “Wing of a Roller”, 1512



Figure 8: Albrecht Dürer, "Melancholia", 1514



Figure 9: Albrecht Dürer, "Saint Jerome in His Study", 1514



Figure 10: Pieter Bruegel, "Fall of Icarus", 1555



Figure 10a



Figure 10b



Figure 11: Pieter Bruegel, "Everyman", 1558



Figure 12: Pieter Bruegel, “The Harvesters”, 1565



Figure 13: Pieter Bruegel, “The Fight Between Carnival and Lent”, 1559



Figure 14: Pieter Bruegel, “The Massacre of the Innocents”, 1566



Figure 15: Pieter Bruegel, “The Maggie on the Gallows”, 1568



Figure 16: Pieter Bruegel, “Peasant Wedding”, 1566-1567



Figure 17: Pieter Bruegel, "Peasant Dance", 1567



Figure 18: Pieter Bruegel, “The Census at Bethlehem”, 1566



Figure 19: Pieter Bruegel, “Spring”, 1565



Figure 20: Jan Steen, "Peasants Before an Inn", 1653



Figure 21: Jean François Millet, "Harvesters Resting", 1853



Figure 22: Adolph von Menzel, “Iron Rolling Mill”, 1875



Figure 23: Gustave Caillebotte, “The Floor Scrapers”, 1875



Figure 24: Pieter Bruegel, “The Proverbs”, 1559



Figure 25: Pieter Bruegel, “Kermis at Hoboken”, 1559



Figure 26: Pieter Bruegel, “Children’s Games”, 1560



Figure 27: Pieter Bruegel, “Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap”, 1565



Figure 28: Pieter Bruegel, “Wedding Dance”, 1566

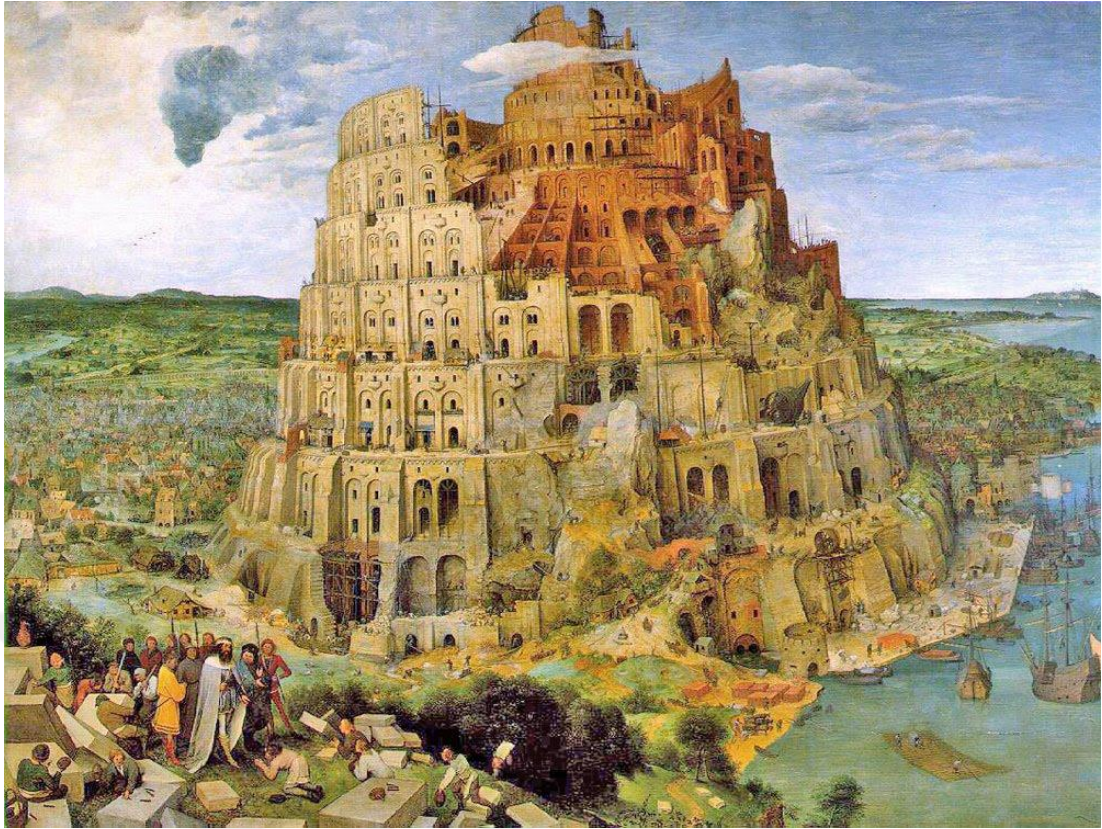


Figure 29: Pieter Bruegel, “Tower of Babel”, 1563

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GRADES

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Business Support Assistant

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