The Netherlandish Proverbs

An International Symposium on the Pieter Brueg(h)els

edited by
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"How Far Does the Apple Fall from the Tree?"

Pieter Brueghel the Younger's *Netherlandish Proverbs*

Alan Dundes

Introduction

It is indeed a special honor to welcome Prof. Alan Dundes and his wife Carolyn to Burlington and the University of Vermont. They have blessed us with their presence before during our bicentennial celebration, and we are pleased that Prof. Dundes is honoring us today by delivering the keynote address at the occasion of *"The Netherlandish Proverbs" by Pieter Brueghel the Younger* exhibition opening and the *International Symposium on the Pieter Brueg(h)els* that will take place during these two days.

We could not have found a scholar more renowned or qualified than Alan Dundes to take on this special task. As Professor of Anthropology and Folklore at the University of California at Berkeley since the early 1970s, he has gained an international reputation as the leading folklorist in the world. Not only has he been honored with the international Chicago Folklore Prize twice, he has also received the Giuseppe Pitrè Prize in Palermo, Italy, recognizing his lifetime achievement as the global master folklorist. His voluminous scholarship is legendary, but so is his reputation as a teacher and mentor of literary thousands of students. Every year he offers a giant "Introduction to Folklore" course at Berkeley that enrolls as many as 450 eager students. His dynamic and informed teaching style has also attracted the best folklore graduate students from around the world to Berkeley, making that famous campus the Mecca of comparative folklore studies. All of these activities have earned him the title of "Pied Piper of Folklore," and it has also been my special privilege once a year to follow his intriguing piping to Berkeley to lecture to his hundreds of students and to hunt for books with him in the many second-hand bookstores at Berkeley.

Prof. Dundes's scholarly oeuvre comprises hundreds of articles and dozens of books published on all continents. A scholar of his breadth and depth is hard to pin down, but it can certainly be stated that his major accomplishment lies in the international and comparative approach to folklore. His publications are replete with hundreds of sources from dozens of cultures and languages, and it is this linguistically highly diverse research approach that Prof. Dundes also instills in and expects from his students. Anybody wanting to study folklore with Alan Dundes better have the knowledge of at least two foreign languages. It is, after all, this comparative analysis of folklore that safeguards this intriguing academic discipline from being misappropriated and manipulated as it was during Nazi Germany.

Above all, Prof. Dundes is known for his morphological, structural, and psychoanalytical approach to various folklore genres. In fact, he is also the leading Freudian folklorist, something that will become quite clear during his lecture this afternoon. Unfortunately I cannot cite all of his intriguing publications, but let me at least mention a few titles of his myriad of books. Please note the vastness of ethnic, cultural, folkloric, and theoretical themes that inform these publications:

The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales (1964)
The Study of Folklore (1965)
Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire (1975)
Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder: Portrait of German Culture through Folklore (1984)
Cracking Jokes: Studies in Sick Humor Cycles and Stereotypes (1987)
Parsing through Customs: Essays by a Freudian Folklorist (1987)
The Blood Libel Legend: A Case Book in Anti-Semitic Folklore (1991)
Folk Law: Essays in the Theory and Practice of Lex Non Scripta (1994)
From Game to War: Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore (1997)
International Folkloristics (1999)
Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore (1999)
The Shabbat Elevator and Other Sabbath Subterfuges (2002)
Fables of the Ancients? Folklore in the Qur'an (2003)

The list of intriguing titles with meaningful and sense-making interpretations of folkloristic conundrums goes on, and it includes finally also the book *In Quest of the Hero* (1990). It should be clear to you who my hero is, to whom I owe so much of my own scholarly career and whose knowledge and friendship have inspired and supported me for three decades.

But finally, Prof. Dundes and his former student Claudia Stibbe have also authored the invaluable book *The Art of Mixing Metaphors: A Folkloristic Interpretation of the "Netherlandish Proverbs"* (1981). And so, wearing his hat

of distinguished Freudian proverb scholar, Prof. Alan Dundes will now honor and challenge us with his keynote address.

Lecture

There is little doubt that the one painting that has most fascinated both art historians and folklorists (especially paremiologists) is Pieter Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs.* In Mieder and Sobieski's immensely valuable *Proverb Iconography* (1999), there are 378 entries with at least 140 of them referring to this painting or the copies made by Pieter Brueghel the Younger. No other painting even comes close to receiving the scholarly attention of this remarkable translation of verbal idioms into striking vignettes. And the scholarship has continued since the publication of *Proverb Iconography.*

In terms of folkloristic methodology, there are two principal steps: the first is identification, and the second is interpretation. There have been a number of attempts to identify the idioms depicted in *Netherlandish Proverbs.* Most have concentrated on Pieter Bruegel's painting but several have studied one of the twenty plus copies of Pieter Brueghel the Younger. There is sometimes a question of whether a particular copy was actually in fact painted by Pieter Brueghel the Younger as opposed to having been painted by members of his atelier. Ertz, for example, claims that only nine of some twenty copies were actually painted by Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1988:312). There are differences among the copies, e.g., with respect to the number of proverbs depicted. The catalog for the present Klapper copy [Plate 4] lists 93 "Flemish Proverbs." Marlier in his study of several of Brueghel the Younger's copies of the painting, however, lists 132 proverbs (Marlier 1969:125-126).

The scholarly debate about identification concerns much more than numbers. One key issue concerning identification has to do with the general question of sources. Margaret A. Sullivan's erudite and daring essay "Bruegel's Proverb Painting: Renaissance Art for a Humanist Audience" which first appeared in the *Art Bulletin* in 1991 and was reprinted in Mieder's anthology *Wise Words* in 1994 argued that the proverbs contained in the painting were not so much oral or folk proverbs as Latin and Greek proverbs from classical antiquity as part of a general humanist tradition that was presumably recognized by Bruegel's audience. Meadow refers approvingly to her efforts as "a recent refutation of folkloristic approaches to Bruegel's art" (Meadow 1992:165n. 6). This hypothetical reconstruction of what Bruegel's audience knew with respect to proverb traditions is a curious

exercise in speculative reception theory. From a folkloristic perspective, it is quite reminiscent of "gesunkenes Kulturgut" theory, an elitist notion that basically felt that proverbs and other folklore was much too artful and ingenious to have been created by ignorant, illiterate peasants. Rather it was claimed, such folklore could only have been created by educated aristocratic individuals after which such folklore trickled down to the folk who often mangled it. Sullivan notes for example that "Casting roses before swine" is a variant of the Biblical "Casting pearls before swine." This is surely accurate, but the point is that Bruegel was unquestionably clever enough to have painted "pearls before swine" if he had so desired. The fact that he chose a folkloristic variant rather than the standard Biblical text could be construed as prima facie evidence that Bruegel favored folk material rather than elitist classical or biblical versions. Bruegel also utilized the folk version in one of his twelve proverb scenes of 1558. The pertinent question that should always be addressed to advocates of the "gesunkenes Kulturgut" theory or a variant thereof is: where do they think that the classical literary presumed source came from? Poets and painters in antiquity also drew on folklore around them for inspiration just as later poets and painters did and do. It would be analogous to assuming that Aarne-Thompson tale type 1137, Polyphemus, originated with Homer's version of the tale in the Odyssey (Hansen 2002:289-301) or that Aarne-Thompson tale type 901, The Taming of the Shrew, began with Shakespeare's play whereas in fact it is undeniable that Homer borrowed the tale from oral tradition just as Shakespeare borrowed the plot of AT 901. Mozart in his "Variationen über Ah, vous dirai-je maman" writes a theme and variations to the melody we know as Twinkle Twinkle Little Star or Baa Baa Black Sheep or the Alphabet Song. Mozart surely did not invent the melody. The point is that it is folklore which is the source of high culture, not the other way round.

One striking example of the critical importance of proper identification involves the depiction of an eye shown between the two blades of a scissors. [Plate 3, Figs. 1 and 2] I believe this image is absolutely essential for a comprehensive understanding of *Netherlandish Proverbs*. Yet if it has been noticed at all, it is often misidentified. Marlier proposes "It is a large lantern that gives no light" which does not explain the image at all. The catalogue for the Klapper version lists "An eye for an eye." There is such a proverb reflecting the lex talionis of the Old Testament but it completely misses the point of the idiom Bruegel obviously had in mind which is "Een knip oog" or a "snip-eye" or a "wink." To understand this idiom's significance we must consider the traditional folkloristic gesture of the wink. If A is talking to B and C comes along and A winks at C, it is to tell C not to interfere in the conver-

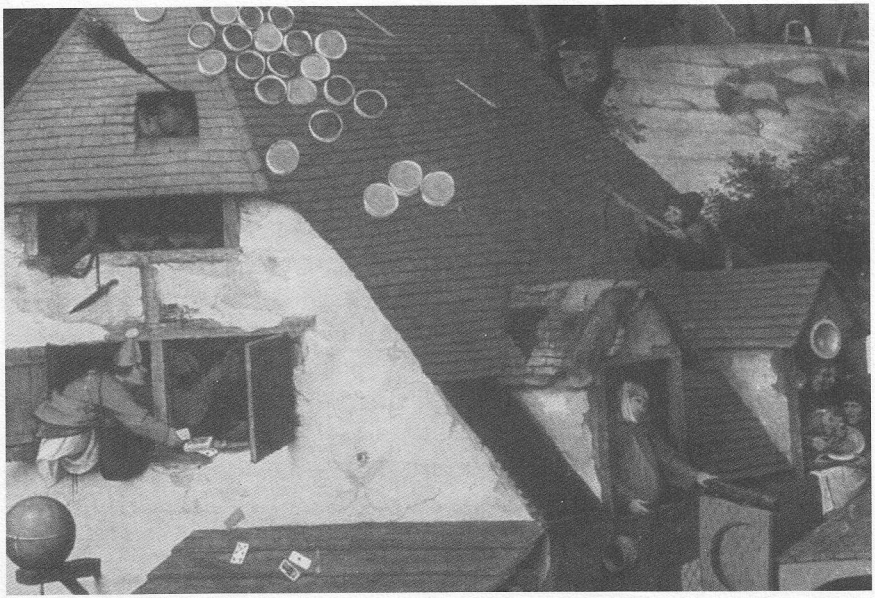

Fig. 1

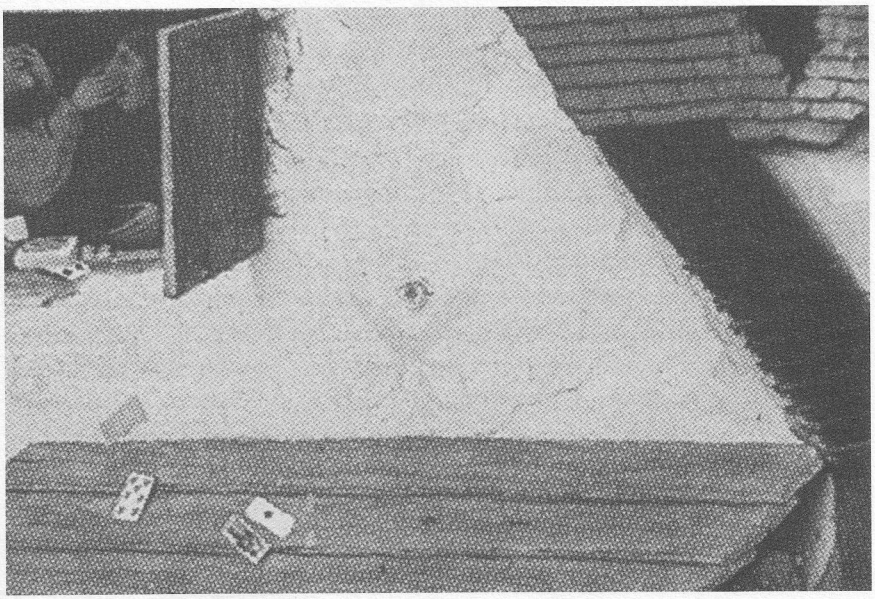

Fig. 2

sation because A is not telling B the truth. A is putting on B and does not want C to give him away. The wink is a way of entering into a contract sometimes conspiratorial in nature. It is as if to say, "I know that what I am saying is not the truth and I know that you will realize this, but please don't spill the beans and give me away." What this means for our painting is that Bruegel the artist is winking at his audience and he expects the viewer to understand that what he has painted is a huge put-on. The failure of art historians to identify this idiom has, in my opinion, led them astray in their understanding of this famous painting. The wink is also a somewhat playful gesture and it is precisely playing with metaphors that constitutes the very heart of the painting's meaning. Art historians agree that one of the central images of the painting is the blue cloak, but this too has a double meaning. Blue is the color traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary, and among the connotations of blue is honesty as in English with the phrase "true blue." But at the same time, the blue cloak refers to adultery and the suggestion that the *wo*man wearing the blue cloak is cuckolding or should we say "hood**winking**" her husband. So it is a double image (Snow 1983:44-45): honesty and virginity with cuckoldry. This in turn is also related to the topsy-turvy world image and the idea that things are not always what they seem. To miss this idiom of "snip-eye" or wink is to miss the fact that Bruegel may have intended his painting to be an elaborate put-on. It is analogous to taking literally what was meant metaphorically. And what Bruegel and his son have done is to display dozens of metaphors in a literal but deliberately playful way.

Meadow's doctoral dissertation, published as *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs and the Practice of Rhetoric* in 2002 makes a good case for considering the painting as a kind of collection of proverbs. Bruegel as a collector of folklore worked in more than one genre as his painting of *Children's Games* dating from 1560, one year later than the proverb painting, attests. And as a collector, he did just what folklore collectors often do even to this day, he based his collection on previous collections. So Bruegel used thirty-seven of Hogenberg's forty-three proverbs contained in the latter's 1558 etching *Die Blau Huicke*. In Hogenberg's print [Plate 2], the proverbs are labelled which obviates any problem for the viewer in terms of identification. In Bruegel's painting, in contrast, he obviously preferred to let the viewer try to identify the proverbs depicted. In the light of so-called "performance theory" in which it is argued that folklore does not live in printed texts but lives only when actually performed, Bruegel's painting constitutes a kind of performance insofar as the verbal expressions are enacted or to put it another way "performed." In that sense the painting represents a performance if a somewhat puzzling one of proverbs and folk metaphors.

Speaking of genre, it is worth noting, again from the folkloristic perspective that the vast majority of idioms in the painting are not proverbs at all but are rather folk metaphors. This was pointed out by Archer Taylor in a brief note in *Proverbium* in 1965. A proverb is a complete fixed phrase topic comment structure. In contrast, a folk metaphor is much more flexible as the subject and verb tense can vary. "Time Flies" is a proverb. One can certainly say "Time flew" or "Time will fly" but neither of those expressions would be deemed proverbial. With a folk metaphor, for example, "to paint the town red," one can have "I'm going to paint the town red," "You painted the town red," "He would like to paint the town red." It is the metaphor which is traditional not the precise wording. The advantage of a folk metaphor rather than a proverb is precisely its greater flexibility making it easier to render it in visual form. Meadow rejects the folkloristic genre distinction on the grounds that "it is not one supported by the original sources, and should be, if not dismissed altogether, at least set aside when considering pre-modern materials" (2002:56). This is a mistake. Folklorists have devoted much energy to defining genres. If a writer confuses myths, folktales, and legends in his or her compositions, that is no reason for these standard folkloristic genre distinctions, known and employed by folklorists since the Grimms at the beginning of the nineteenth century to be set aside.

The second step in folkloristic analysis is "interpretation." Sad to say that too often folklorists tend to stop with identification and that is why one sees footnotes laden with motif or tale type numbers in books or articles penned by folklorists. But identification per se, though a necessary prerequisite for interpretation is no substitute for interpretation. And interpretation involves meaning. So the critical question is: what is the meaning or are the meanings (plural) of the *Netherlandish Proverbs* painting? Here I find art historians to be just as derelict as folklorists. Art historians will describe the milieu or historical background of the period in which the painter worked and mention some details of the painter's biography (though in the case of the Brueg(h)els, father and son, this information is rather meager) and then utterly fail to say much if anything about the possible meaning of the painting. Of course, it is easy enough to fall back on the maxim that "Beauty is its own excuse for being." It is deemed sufficient simply to enjoy the painting for its clever translation of verbal idioms into pictorial terms or the wit in playing one proverb off against another, but is there any overarching theme implicit in the painting?

One clue is provided by one of the alternative names of the painting, Besides the *Blue Cloak* referring to an adultery theme, there is the "world upside down" or mundus inversus. Meadow reminds us that these alterna-

tive titles of the painting postdate the painting and the painter (2002:133). But there may yet be some hidden significance in the upside down world motif. Kunzle, however, warns us in his 1977 essay on the subject that "the inverted globe in Bruegel's painting and the proverb engravings represents not so much the philosophic leitmotif of the picture as whole, but just one proverbial phrase among a hundred others, and not one that may be properly said to characterize proverb "philosophy" here or elsewhere." Meadow too is dubious about attributing too much significance to a single proverb, "It seems highly questionable to attempt to assign a single meaning to over a hundred proverbs" (Meadow 1992:147).

Here I would like to comment briefly on the notion that proverbs are somehow repositories of philosophy or wisdom. The fact that there are contradictory proverbs, e.g., "Look before you leap" vs. "He who hesitates is lost" reminds us that if there is wisdom in proverbs, it is relative, not absolute. "The devil can quote the scriptures" suggests that one can almost always find a proverb to justify any particular course of action. But what folklorists know that some art historians do not is that there is an ancient folkloristic motif J 2450 "Literal fool." Indeed there is an entire section of the six-volume *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* devoted to the foolishness ensuing from a literal interpretation of metaphor. The equation is: Interpreting a metaphor literally (Motifs J2450-J2499) is a recipe for folly. Since Bruegel and son by translating proverbs and folk metaphors into visual representations, they are interpreting metaphors literally. Hence the painting depicts not wisdom but folly and does so in traditional folkloristic fashion.

This brings us to a critical issue in interpreting the painting. Both art historians and folklorists share a common mistrust if not outright antipathy to considering unconscious motives as an influence in artistic representation. The idea that an artist's unconscious could be a factor in his or her art production appears to be unthinkable. Typical would be Kavaler's statement made about Bruegel's paintings in general, not specifically about *Netherlandish Proverbs*: "Bruegel's paintings often suggest an obvious recourse to Reason as a means of gaining control over threatening chaos" (199:23). If one reads the vast literature on *Netherlandish Proverbs*, one sees virtually nothing but discussions of conscious reasoning, e.g., recourse to recorded historical events, local details of peasant or political life, etc. Meadow summarizes the current thinking very well. "Historians of art now seek to discover insights into his art not in the fertile landscape of the Brabant countryside, but in the intellectual landscape of the humanists...the allegories of the rederijikers, in the company of Rabelais, Erasmus, Coornhert and Ortelius" (1992:141). Intellectual landscape means **con-**

scious sources and conscious sources only. It does not include unconscious sources. There is no hint that there could be anything in Bruegel's psychological make-up that would explain anything about his paintings. This adamant refusal to take into account possible personality idiosyncrasies in evaluating paintings remains the rule. Meadow, for example, was critical of my earlier psychoanalytic speculations when he claimed that my and my student Claudia Stibbe's identifications and associations were unfortunately "frequently speculative and anachronistic, particularly when they wax into psychoanalytic readings" (2002:159n. 27), a view which he bothers to repeat in a second footnote: "The reader should be cautioned that the explanations of the proverbs provided by the authors are frequently anachronistic or unsubstantiated and are at times misleading, particularly when they venture into pseudo-psychoanalytic territory" (2002:160:48). I find this comment both offensive and absurd. The identification of the proverbs or folk metaphors in *Netherlandish Proverbs* is an empirical objective undertaking and is certainly not in any way dependent upon advocacy of a psychoanalytic perspective. Once the proverbs or folk metaphors are positively and accurately identified, then and only then can one indulge in speculations about meaning and such speculations can be informed by any one of a number of theoretical biases.

Let me also say something about the label anachronistic. This is a common complaint from historically oriented critics (which includes most if not all art historians. The name of their discipline includes the word "history" after all.). The critical theoretical issue is: Can a theory which was formulated at the end of the nineteenth century or in the early twentieth century be usefully applied to literary or artistic works composed in earlier times? In other words, can psychoanalytic theory be applied to anything that existed prior to the end of the nineteenth century? I find the question itself to be ridiculous. Human psychology did not begin at the end of the nineteenth century. It is surely no accident that Freud chose terms from classical folkloristic texts for many of his discoveries. The Oedipus complex comes from Aarne Thompson tale type 931 Oedipus. Narcissism similarly takes its name from a classical Greek legend. There is ample scholarship on record to show that psychoanalytic insights can be applied to classical, medieval and Renaissance texts. I have argued, for example, that Shakespeare's *King Lear* is related to a subtype of Cinderella, "Love Like Salt," in which a younger of three daughters is unable to declare her love for her father. I have interpreted the tale in terms of what I call projective inversion such that the father's wish to marry his own daughter is an inversion of the daughter's unconscious wish to marry her own father. Ernest Jones wrote an important book on the

Oedipal aspects of Hamlet (1950). To dismiss such efforts as anachronistic on the grounds that Freud's discoveries occurred after such literary masterpieces were written is unacceptable. In geological theory, there is a notion labelled "uniformitarianism" according to which a principle no matter when discovered may be assumed to have been operative in the past. It assumes that earlier geological processes are not different from those observed now in the present time. I would say that uniformitarianism is appropriate with respect to psychoanalytic insights. Let us assume for the sake of argument that this is so. What can it teach us about Bruegel and his and his son's *Netherlandish Proverbs* paintings? Even the most conservative art historian admits that there is a good deal of fantasy in Bruegel's paintings (Barnouw 1947). If there is fantasy, then the use of psychoanalytic theory ought to be relevant. The issue I am addressing is whether or not psychoanalytic theory can give us any help into peering into the psyches of both Brueg(h)els centuries after they lived and painted.

According to one relatively recent essay among many discussing the psychoanalytic approach to art, "Applying psychoanalysis to art, then, amounts to demystifying and unmasking it. For Freud, the work of art is a kind of dream—if a social one—and the poet and the artist daydreamers" (Kuspit 1991:4). I do not think it would be amiss to consider Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* as a kind of Wimmelbild (Foote 1968:147) dreamscape. The same might be said of *Children's Games* painted one year later, a painting which was also copied by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, though unfortunately those few copies appear to have been lost (Hindman 1981:448). Just as dreams are products of the unconscious, so also are paintings as are all works of art to some extent, even if not always recognized as such by conventional art critics. From a psychoanalytic perspective, "A work of art is essentially the internal made external" (Spitz 1985b:11). To the extent that it is legitimate to regard such paintings as dreams, we can see that most art historical discussions are limited to considering the manifest content only with little or no concern for possible latent content.

Standard analytic theory contends that "painting is a sublimation of anal impulses." According to Hungarian analyst Melitta Schmideberg in her essay "On Sublimation," "Painting is derived from smearing with excrements" but what we have in painting, thanks to libidinal sublimation is "the wish to beautify instead of the original wish to smear" (1947:98; for another consideration of the role of sublimation in art production see Pickford 1970). Ever since Freud's ground-breaking essay "Character and Anal Erotism", there has been a steady stream of papers on the subject by Karl Abraham, Ernest Jones, and many others, e.g., Grunberger (1976). That is to say, "the

individual has inhibited his primitive desire to play with excrements, and gratifies these unconscious impulses in an aim-inhibited form by way of substitution. He substitutes paint for excrements, the brush for his fingers, the canvas for ambivalently-loved persons" (Schmideberg 1947:97). However the original wish may not completely disappear. Although there is a substantial literature devoted to the psychoanalytic study of art in general (Kris 1952, Kuhns 1983, Spitz 1985a), only a few art historians have explored the possible anal erotic contribution to art products, e.g., Howard's 1990 study of Duchamp and Dali, and Cecelia Klein's 1993 study of ancient Mexican art in a special issue of the *Art Journal* devoted to "Scatological Art." There is also a superb chapter entitled "Tailpiece: the Uses of Scatology," in Malcolm Jones' tour de force *The Secret Middle Ages* (2002:274—294). Famed art historian E. H, Gombrich greatly admired Ernest Jones. Gombrich's essay "Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art" presented as the Ernest Jones Lecture to the British Psycho-Analytical Society in November of 1953, certainly demonstrated a familiarity with Ernest Jones' writings and Gombrich was also an admirer of Bruegel calling him "The greatest of the Dutch sixteenth-century masters of 'genre' " (1950:280). But it apparently never occurred to Gombrich to apply Jones' ideas about anal character to Bruegel's paintings. Art historians tend to prefer eschatology to scatology. Only a lone unpublished master's thesis in art history at UC Santa Barbara has raised the issue of scatology in Bruegel's oeuvre (Wyshak 1991). In the present context, we intend to take up the question of whether there is any explicit evidence of playing with feces in *Netherlandish Proverbs.*

Some of the discussion to follow may strike some of you as unpleasant if not downright disgusting. I can only hope that you will keep an open mind and remember that in Bruegel's day there was much more openness about the act of defecation. In contrast, we modern cultivated folk tend to keep such matters very private both in terms of carrying out the act behind closed doors and using a host of conventional euphemisms to refer to it. Traditionally in Dutch (as well as in German) culture, there was much less shame in referring to such natural bodily functions. So I hope you will forgive my use of the vernacular in describing some of the scenes depicted in *Netherlandish Proverbs.*

One of the character traits supposedly stemming from anal origins involves "bedaubing the property of rivals with paint" (often found in fraternity or collegiate pranks) (Menninger 1943:172). This hints that there can be elements of anal aggression as well as defiance. There are several folk metaphors which display such features, e.g., "He shits on the gallows" (93). We may note that in the Bruegel painting "Landscape with the Magpie on

the Gallows," the magpie supposedly represents gossip which is equated with "shit" as Stechow observes (1969:144), an interpretation based on the image of a dancer breaking away to defecate in the bushes (Gowing 1970:25). An even more forceful folk metaphor is: "He shits on the whole world" (17). Others include: "He moves along as though his backside was on fire" and "He wipes his ass on the door" (66). In the catalog, this last item is identified as "He rubs up against the door (of the prison)" which is not nearly so striking. Another example would be "Two shit through one hole" (73). The folk metaphor involving "throwing one's money into the water" (74) is a structural and symbolic parallel to defecating into the canal (Dundes and Stibbe 1980:37-38). Then there is a scene which we identified as "That hangs like a shithouse over a canal" but for which Mark Meadow has recently suggested an alternative: "to make a castle out of a shithouse" which in his unpublished dissertation he notes (1994:9) was not previously identified. This proverb could well serve as an epigram for the entire painting and I am grateful to Meadow for having identified it. In any case, there is surely both aggression and defiance implicit in shitting on the gallows (showing disrespect for the ultimate punishment meted out by lawful society) and shitting on the whole world similarly requires no additional gloss. The idea of sitting on top of something also has anal roots. As Grunberger phrases it, "Since Freud we know that possession possedere: 'sitting on top of' and "possessiveness are anal traits" *(1976:106). Even today, in our own society, scholars* suffering from writer's block are sometimes negatively described as "sitting on their material," clearly an allusion to symbolic constipation. Thus "publish or perish" could be a more polite rendering of "Shit or get off the pot."

One of other prominent features of the anal erotic is the fascination with the digestive process such that food is perceived in terms of its end product feces and accordingly food and feces are often confused. As an example of reversal or inversion, feces becomes food. "Horse manure is not figs" would fit into this rubric. In a well-known Bruegel print, in which the hay pursues the rear end of a horse, we have a food item placed at the wrong end of the digestive track. This is parallel to the image in *Mad Meg* in which a bowl of food is proffered to the anus-mouth. In *Netherlandish Proverbs* a similar inversion is suggested by "There hangs the pot outside" in which a chamber pot is suspended outside of an inn instead of a jug. A sign of elimination is thereby substituted for a sign of drinking According to Sym in an essay entitled "Derivatives of Anal Erotism," oral and anal apertures are sometimes conflated (Sym 1963:142). A rather brilliant example of this occurs in Bruegel's *Dulle Griet* or *Mad Meg.* In the lower left hand quadrant we have a creature whose mouth has a spoon protruding from it but with the wrong

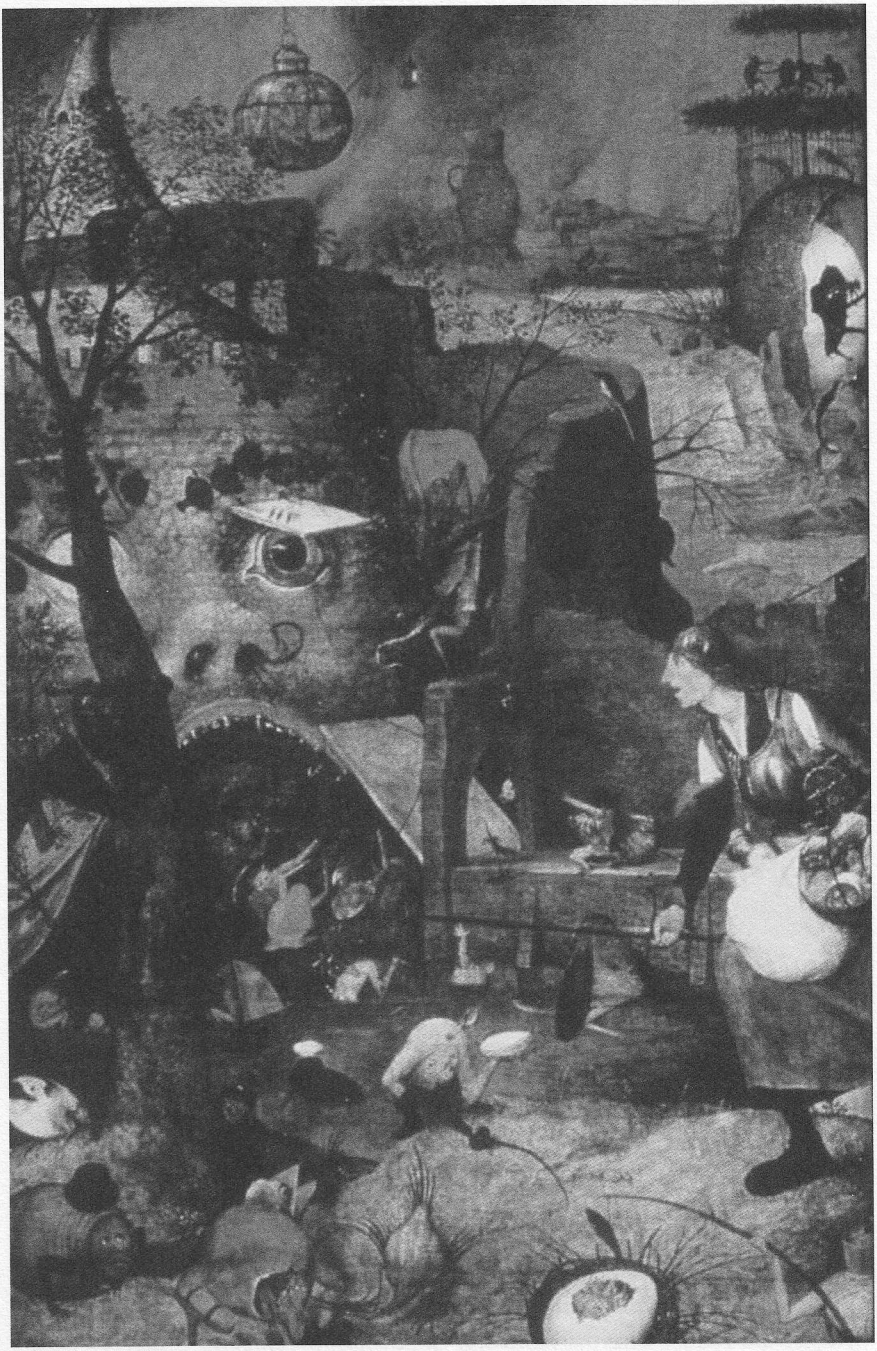

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

end in the mouth, a blatant reversal, and the nominal open mouth doubles in a kind of visual pun as an anal aperture [Figs. 3 and 4]. This image is the psychological analog to the world upside down. Another analyst has suggested in this connection that anality can include the entire sequence of capturing, digesting and absorbing the object (Heimann 1962:406). If this were valid, then the proverb "Big fish eat little fish" (75) would fit the pattern. It may be noteworthy that Bruegel made a print (1557) of this very proverb besides including it in *Netherlandish Proverbs*.

Perhaps one of the most striking anal metaphors is one that appears in some, though not all of Pieter Brueghel the Younger's renderings of *Netherlandish Proverbs*, but which may or may not have been in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's original painting. In at least three of the Younger's paintings we have in the lower left quadrant a hat containing feces [Figs. 5 and 6]

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

(Dundes and Stibbe 1980:61). This image is one of the details Duckwitz uses to distinguish two different groups of the Younger's copies of the painting (2002:69). Marlier offers, "Van buiten bont, van binnen stront" "On the outside fur; on the inside shit." Stibbe and I cite 'He does badly who lets others shit in his hat, but even worse off is he who puts it on his head" (Dundes and Stibbe 1980:62), but we also cite an earlier critic who suggested that the feces in the hat may be a play by Pieter Brueghel the Younger on his father's nickname "the droll," as "droll" in Dutch can mean both quaintly amusing and feces.

Since this image does not appear in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's original painting, there would seem to be two possibilities. One that we proposed was based on the theory underlying the historic-geographic method or the Finnish method in folkloristics. In this method, the folklorist gathers as many versions or texts of an item as he or she can in order to attempt to reconstruct the archetype or ur-form of the item. If we regard Pieter Brueghel's copies of his father's paintings or so-to-speak as versions of that painting then it could in theory be possible to reconstruct the hypothetical archetype which we could then compare with the actual original form, a luxury not ever available to practitioners of the Finnish method. Since the hat filled with feces appears in several of Pieter Brueghel the Younger's copies (versions) of the painting, we might logically assume that the scene was in the original and that perhaps in the original by Pieter Bruegel the Elder it might have been painted over as being too overtly offensive. (Professor Mark Meadow in hearing this suggestion indicated that this was not the case. This part of the Berlin original had not been painted over.) (Not only is it absent in the Klapper version, but the feces produced by the adjacent pig found in Pieter Bruegel's original painting is also absent.) On the other hand, the relationship between an original and copies is an extremely complex one. In the history of art scholarship, the issue covers all aspects of art, not just the graphic arts. There are copies of sculptures, for example, and of architectural monuments. The issues are discussed at some length in volume 20 in *Studies in the History of Art*: "Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies, and Reproductions" published by the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC (Preciado 1989). Experts are constantly being asked to authenticate a particular piece of art though often a copy may be stigmatized by being labelled a forgery. The so-called search for authenticity (Bendix 1997) also plagues folklorists who are constantly on the alert for "fakelore," that is, items which are claimed to be authentic examples of orally transmitted traditions but which turn out to be fabrications by entrepreneurs usually inspired by the profit motif.

The second possibility which I now propose for the first time is that Pieter Brueghel the Younger may have added the image because he was trying to go one up on his famous father. No art historian to my knowledge has thought it necessary to comment on the obvious implications of Pieter Bruegel endowing his son with his own name and given the fact that this son grew up to be a painter, it would be easy to believe that there might have been some kind of competitive rivalry between son and father albeit unconscious. Even though the father died when Pieter Brueghel the Younger was only five years of age, the Oedipal competitive struggle would still be possible. I would suggest further that the normal Oedipal feelings between a father and son would be greatly exacerbated if the son had the very same name as the father, even if both were not following the same occupation. Given the masterful achievement of the *Netherlandish Proverbs*, it would clearly be a difficult if not insurmountable task for the son to improve upon his father's masterpiece. Thanks to the summary provided by Klaus Ertz of proverbs and metaphors added by Pieter II to his father's painting (2000:56-59) and his analysis of the various differences between Pieter II's copies and his father's Berlin original (2000:60-67, cf. also Duckwitz 2002) we can speculate that the son may very well have had thoughts of improving upon if not surpassing his father's masterpiece. In that light we may conjecture that perhaps his adding this punning reference to his father's nickname might constitute his putting his individual mark on his copy of his father's painting. Even the insistence on adding an "h" to the spelling of his last name could be construed in the same Oedipal light. In the course of making so many copies of his father's painting, the Oedipal issue must almost certainly have led to some feelings of ambivalence. As a fellow artist and a talented painter in his own right, Pieter Brueghel the Younger must surely have appreciated the genius of his father, but at the same time there must have been some resentment, perhaps unconscious, at being reduced to copying his father's work due to the exigencies of making a living. So on the one hand, for reasons of filial piety he remained faithful to the overall organization and content of *Netherlandish Proverbs* but at the same time, he did not hesitate to make a few alterations within that set of constraints. So there is variation in the coloration of the two dogs in "Two dogs on one bone" (61) and thus there are five cards rather than four in "The fool gets the card" (16), a scene for which Stibbe and I have quoted an earlier identification as "When the card is dealt, I shit on the world" (Dundes and Stibbe 1981:29). So the apple may not have fallen far from the tree, but it did fall nonetheless.

But there is more to be said about anal erotic elements in *Netherlandish Proverbs* than merely enumerating all the metaphors that explicitly refer to

the act of defecation or the results thereof. It may or may not be of interest that in several of Pieter Brueghel the Younger's copies of *Netherlandish Proverbs*, the contents of the chamber pot hung outside the inn (11) are depicted while they are not in the original by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. It is not that Pieter Bruegel the Elder was the least bit shy about depicting feces and he does so in "The one shears the sheep, the other the pigs" (37). But to more fully analyze Bruegel's scatological tendencies, we need to review more aspects of anal erotic character.

And for this we turn to Ernest Jones' remarkable, insightful essay on "Anal-Erotic Character Traits." He notes, "Interest in the act of defaecation often leads to interest in the site of defaecation—i.e., in the anal canal itself." Among the various chacterological consequences, Jones observes that "The most interesting one is the tendency to be occupied with the reverse side of various things and situations. This may manifest itself in many different ways: in marked curiosity about the opposite or back side of objects and places—e.g., in the desire to live on the other side of a hill because it has its back turned to a given place; in the proneness to make numerous mistakes about right and left, east and west, to reverse words and letters in writing; and so on. Another curious trait of the same origin is a great fascination for all underground passages, canals, tunnels, etc." Analyst Heimann in her "Notes on the Anal Stage" adds that "Reversal consists in the change of the original direction into its opposite. Akin to reversal are the mechanisms of turning upon the self and undoing" (1962:413). Here we may also recall the centrality of the topsy-turvy element in the *Netherlandish Proverbs.* The globe (read world) is turned upside down so that its bottom is on top. This is not just a reversal but one that puts the bottom into prominence. So the whole metaphor of the mundus inversus from this perspective also conforms to the anal erotic pattern. To be sure Bruegel did not invent the world upside down image. There is considerable scholarship devoted to tracing its history. But he certainly featured it. I also found of interest in the present context that one art historian (Gowing) noted that "Most of the figures that Bruegel noted were drawn **from behind**....He often drew the figure again from in front, but the effect is less convincing. (my emphasis)" (Gowing 1970:23). Just reflect on how many bottoms are on display. Balancing the bottom protruding out of the window that shits on the entire world in the upper left hand quadrant, we have in the lower right quadrant "He falls through the basket" (50), showing a man whose naked buttocks have fallen through a basket. The latter basket case's use of the thumbing the nose gesture, the so-called Shanghai gesture, studied by Archer Taylor, is also balanced by the man just above the individual shitting on the entire world, in the upper left hand corner of the

painting, thereby suggesting that the two scenes are somehow interrelated. Bruegel liked this gesture as he apparently also used it in a print of 1560 entitled "La Fête des fous" which according to Taylor (1972:300) is the earliest illustration, a terminum ante quem, of the Shanghai Gesture that he was able to find. Incidentally, Bruegel seems to have liked the idea of defecating out of a window because he used a similar scene in *Children's Games* (Hindman 1981:471). This reminds us of the old custom of dumping the contents of chamber pots out of windows which according to one plausible folk etymology explains the English slang term "loo" for bathroom. Supposedly it comes from the French "Gardez l'eau" meaning "watch out for the water" (contents of chamber pots) which is about to be poured from a window of a building above the street onto an unsuspecting pedestrian. As for *Children's Games* painted just one year after *Netherlandish Proverbs*, we also see in the lower left front quadrant, a woman with a stick twirling a dung cake or cow patty, surely a curious kind of child's play [Figs. 7 and 8]. But by the same token we also see a "training potty" as Snow labels it in his study of the painting. Strange to consider a potty chair as a children's game.

As for Bruegel's penchant for bare backsides, we can see several in his 1557 print "The Ass at School," This image, incidentally, also illustrates Bruegel's fascination with folklore. There is even an allusion in the Qur'an (Surah 62, line 5) comparing unbelievers who refuse to accept the obligations of the Mosaic Law to "the likeness of an ass carrying books that understands them not". Perhaps one of the most seemingly bizarre facets of anal erotic character has to do with the money-feces equation. Folk speech such as filthy or stinking rich or filthy lucre, or having money up the ass or idioms like pay-dirt or making a shitpot full of money or the goose that laid the golden egg in folk narrative all support the equation. Bruegel, of course, could have no conscious knowledge of this equation but his print "The Fight of the Money-Bags and Strong-Boxes"(1567?) [Fig. 9] with its anthropomorphic pots and treasure chests full to the brim with coins is certainly suggestive. Bruegel tended to conceive of bodies as containers. The question is what do they contain? Suggestive also is one of the scenes in the lower right hand quadrant of "Avarice", one of the seven vices, in which a bloated buttocks dragging on the ground is strikingly similar to the money bags adjacent.

Even more dramatic is one of the "Twelve proverbs" entitled *Der Schmeichler* which in German and Dutch refers to a sycophant or flatterer who is imagined as creeping into the rear end of a potential donor. The idiom in German is "Arschkriecher". Again this reminds us of the difference in attitudes towards displaying or discussing this part of the body in comparison with our own mores regarding such representations. I am not aware

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

of any cognate idiom in English, but actually there is a partial parallel. When a student makes a concerted effort to curry favor with a teacher or a professor, he may be said to be trying to earn "brownie points." Many Americans using the phrase are completely unaware of its derivation. If asked, they will typically refer to the precursors of Girls Scouts, a group known as Brownies who have to carry out designated tasks in order to earn "Brownie points." But the etymological truth is that the idiom is related to a gesture with a verbal equivalent, namely to kiss ass. Anyone who kisses ass or who kisses up to a superior is very likely to wind up with a brown nose. The expression "to brown nose" is thus the parallel to "Arschkriecher." Entering the buttocks area in search of money (displayed as coins in the print) would certainly appear to exemplify Freud's feces-money equation. Pieter Brueghel the Younger's colored version highlights the image more than his father's earlier proverb print [Figs. 10 and 11]. In the (1562) print "The Peddler Pillaged

Fig. 9

by Apes" [Fig. 12] we find more evidence of Bruegel's scatological penchant. One monkey inspects the naked buttocks of the sleeping peddlar while one to its immediate left defecates in the peddler's hat, a scene reminiscent of the missing "feces in the hat" segment of the *Netherlandish Proverbs*. In the 1557 print "Pride" [Fig. 13] we find once again a naked buttocks defecating onto a platter which spills down onto a piece of music resting on a roof. Barnouw

Fig. 10

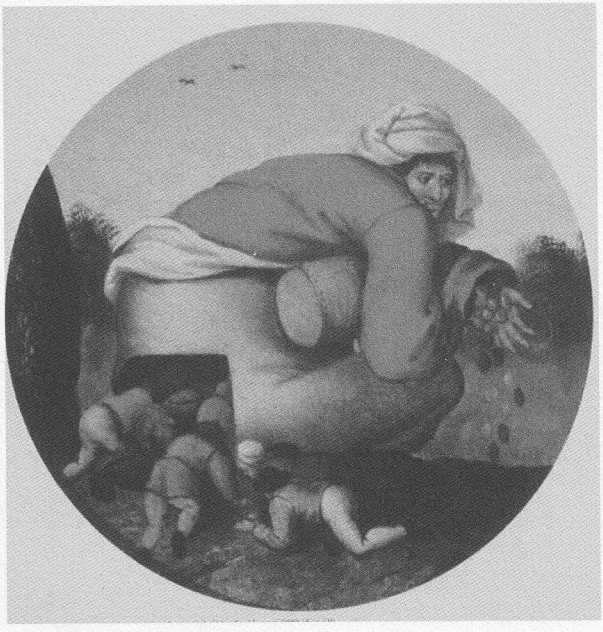

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

claims that this represents a Dutch expression of verbal contempt: "daar scheit ik op" (I shit on that) (1947:14). In the (1557) print "Envy" [Fig. 14] in the same series, we see a winged monkey perched on the gunwale of a boat evacuating into the stream. In "Lechery" (1557) [Fig. 15] a human in the lower left hand corner squats to defecate apparently aided by the beak of a demonic bird. In "Sloth" (1557) [Fig. 16] we have a lazy giant "too lazy to shit," though again a group of beings sitting in a boat is prodding the giant with spears to force the feces out. What could be the meaning of creatures depicted as prying out feces from in one case a giant? Is it just an attempt to relieve a severe case of constipation? Here the anal erotic hypothesis may prove helpful. According to Freudian theory, infants sometimes show defiance and resistance to parental urgings to defecate by intentionally withholding their feces. Supposedly this is the precursor to later adult personality traits of "defiance" and "independence", with both these traits, by the way, generally attributed by art historians to Pieter Bruegel. With the knowledge that giants are parents as perceived through the eye of an infant, we can understand that infants see parents as giant versions of themselves, In that light we can see that trying to pry feces from the buttocks of a giant is a reversal of the typical parent's attempt to encourage a small infant to evacuate.

In any event, there are simply too many repetitions of a creature engaged

Fig. 15

Fig. 16

in the act of defecation for it to be dismissed as merely an accident or coincidence. Rather it surely reflects a definite cultural and esthetic choice on the part of Bruegel and in the case of *Netherlandish Proverbs*, a choice copied by Pieter Brueghel the Younger. There are two additional details which support the scatological thesis argued here. First, we recall Meadow's astute observation that in some sense, Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* represents a kind of collection (as does *Children's Games*). Hungarian analyst Sandor Ferenczi in a brilliant essay "The Ontogenesis of the Interest in Money" demonstrated how the early initial interest of the infant in his feces which seems to be at once valuable as it attracts the attention and interest of the parent but at the same time seems to be valueless as the parent quickly disposes of it can lead to later hobbies in collecting various waste products, e.g., cancelled stamps, empty sea shells, empty beer cans, and other unconscious symbolic substitutions. The child is gradually weaned from his initial curiosity in his body product to less objectionable drier and odorless substitutes: mud pies, sand piles, and perhaps indulging in finger paints and manipulating play doh. Ernest Jones in his essay makes an unequivocal blanket assertion: "All collectors are anal-erotics, and the objects collected are nearly always typical coprosymbols: thus, money, coins (apart from current ones), stamps, eggs, butterflies...books, and even worthless things like pins, old newspapers, etc." ((Jones 1961:430). I have argued elsewhere (Dundes 1962) that folklore collectors may well exemplify this same anal erotic impulse: collecting materials which many regard as trivial and useless materials, as a total **waste** of time, but which folklorists insist are valuable. To the extent that Bruegel can legitimately be regarded as a collector of folklore, he would also fit this profile. A second detail is the esthetic choice made by both Brueg(h)els involving the use of the color brown. Most of Bruegel the Elder's prints are in pen and **brown** ink. The overwhelmingly predominant color in *Netherlandish Proverbs* is **brown** (which of course makes the blue of the cloak and the red of several costumes stand out). But in the present anal erotic context, one may well wonder about Bruegel's choice of brown as the principal color of his paintings. From all the evidence here presented, we feel that it is reasonable to conclude that the emphasis on the nether area of the body in *Netherlandish Proverbs* is part of a consistent pattern in the art of Bruegel and we would hope that art historians acknowledge this. We should note finally that this is not a case of interpreting a work of art in the light of the artist's biography (since we have precious little detail about Pieter Bruegel's childhood and life) but rather an attempt to see the art work as a psychic product or reflection of the artist's personality (Spitz 1985:13). There is, however, one tantalizing tidbit, a reported incident that may well be apocryphal. In Carel van Mander's

(1548-1606) *Dutch and Flemish Painters* first published in 1604, he recounts as part of his life of an artist contemporary of Bruegel, Hans de Vries (1527-1606) that De Vries was commissioned to paint a view of a summer house in perspective and "he painted an open door in this picture, to increase its beauty." Then according to Mander, "Pieter Bruegel happened to visit while Vries was away, he took the tools, and, in the doorway, painted a peasant with a soiled shirt, in intimate relations with a peasant woman" (Mander 1936:300. I am indebted to Professor David Kunzle for calling my attention to this reported incident). If there is any truth to this incident, it would demonstrate Bruegel's impish sense of humor and it might possibly reflect Bruegel's own long living arrangements with a peasant girl prior to his getting married (Mander 1936:154). The fact that the shirt was said to be soiled or dirty in addition to Bruegel's act being considered as spoiling the De Vries painting are consonant with the personality profile proposed here. Ernest Jones in his analysis of anal traits mentions a sublimation of the primitive smearing impulse as consisting of implanting one's mark on some substance as in leaving a memento of themselves which may injure and soil something beautiful (Jones 1961:432). In any case, one can only assume that Bruegel in some sense knew perfectly well on some level what he was doing and that may be why he decided to wink at his audience in *Netherlandish Proverbs*. No one should be embarrassed by Bruegel's earthy wit which accounts in part, I believe, for the continued engaging appeal of his oeuvre including, of course, *Netherlandish Proverbs*. It allows a much more uptight and Puritanical culture such as our own to consider in a socially sanctioned artistic framework a fundamental part of the human experience which is deemed taboo.

Lest anyone think I may have overemphasized just one theme in *Netherlandish Proverbs*, I would like to close with a joke. On the Berkeley campus I am known as the joke professor and a letter once addressed to the "joke professor" UC Berkeley was actually delivered to me. So it is entirely in character that I conclude with a joke: "A patient goes to a psychiatrist for the first time and is given some tests. The psychiatrist draws a circle and says, "What does this make you think of?" "Sex." The psychiatrist draws a tree and repeats his question. "Sex," the patient answers again. The psychiatrist proceeds to draw simple figures of all sorts—a house, a car, an apple, and so on—each time getting the same response. Sex, sex, and sex. Finally the psychiatrist says, "You have an obsession with sex. " The patient says, "Me? You're the one who's drawing all those dirty pictures!" In this paper, I have relied on pictures drawn by Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Pieter Brueghel the Younger and I appreciate your patience.

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