

SYMON ANDRIESSOON

Duytsche Adagia ofte Spreecwoorden
Antwerp, Heynrick Alssens, 1550

In Facsimile, Transcription of the Dutch Text
and English Translation

Edited by

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With two introductory texts by

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Illustration on cover: Frans Hogenberg, *Die Blav Hwicke*. Engraving, 1558. Several of the proverbs collected by Symon Andriessoon also figure in this engraving.

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II Historical proverb scholarship in Flanders and the Netherlands

HERMAN ROODENBURG

It is a common belief among the Dutch that they possess more proverbs and proverbial phrases than, for instance, the English, the Germans or the French. If this were correct, if this self-image tallies, then Dutch scholars have sorely neglected this treasure. The Dutch contribution to international proverb scholarship is a modest one, particularly in the field of proverb history.¹ For instance, although W.H.D. Suringar published his masterful study, *Erasmus over Nederlandsche Spreekwoorden*, in 1873, it is still considered unrivalled.² Dutch proverb historians have been chiefly parœmiographers – they have collected proverbs and proverbial phrases. Still essential in this regard are the collections of P.J. Harrebomée and F.A. Stoett, though both collections also have their shortcomings.³ In the field of parœmiology, the proper study of proverbs, Dutch folklorists, philologists and other scholars have mostly sought to explain a single proverb; or they have published valuable editions of historical proverb collections, as did, for instance, G.G. Kloeke.⁴ Foreign scholars have mostly shunned such editorial work. A notable exception is the American parœmiologist Richard Jente, who produced the exemplary edition of the oldest Dutch proverb collection, the *Proverbia Communia* from ca. 1495.⁵

Remarkably, Dutch proverb scholarship has focused almost exclusively on the sixteenth century, in particular on the paintings and drawings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs*, among his most famous paintings, has attracted dozens of studies, by Dutch and Flemish, but also by German, American and other scholars. Most of this work, however, is more iconographic than iconological in its approach. Relying on contemporary proverb collections and on the spadework of Suringar, Harrebomée and Stoett, most authors have merely sought to identify the

1 In the last decade Dutch scholars have been interested in comparative parœmiology. For an excellent international bibliography, containing 4599 entries, see Wolfgang Mieder, *International Proverb Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography*, 3 vols., New York, Garland, 1982-1993.; see also the yearly bibliographies in Mieder's electronic journal *De Proverbio*.

2 W.H.D. Suringar, *Erasmus over Nederlandsche spreekwoorden en spreekwoordelijke uitdrukkingen van zijnen tijd*, uit 'smans Adagia opgezameld en uit andere, meest nieuwere geschriften opgehelderd, Utrecht, Kemink en Zoon, 1873.

3 P.J. Harrebomée, *Spreekwoordenboek der Nederlandsche taal, of Verzameling van Nederlandsche spreekwoorden en spreekwoordelijke uitdrukkingen*, Utrecht, Kemink en Zoon, 1858-1870; F.A. Stoett, *Nederlandsche spreekwoorden, spreekwijzen, uitdrukkingen en gezegden / naar hun oorsprong en beteekenis verklaard*, Zutphen, Thieme, 1901

4 G.G. Kloeke, *Uitgave van "Seer schoone spreekwoorden, oft Prouerbia" (in Franse en Vlaamse taal) in 1549 te Antwerpen verschenen*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1962; G.G. Kloeke, *Kamper spreekwoorden: naar de uitgave van Warnersen anno 1550*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1959.

5 Richard Jente (ed.), *Proverbia Communia. A Fifteenth Century Collection of Dutch Proverbs Together with the Low German Version*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1947.

proverbs and proverbial phrases depicted, and to provide brief accounts of their possible meanings. A few other artists who included proverbs in their paintings and drawings, for example Bruegel's 'forerunner' Hieronymus Bosch, Frans Hogenberg and Jan van Doetinchem, have been dealt with in a similar way. This joining of iconography and parœmiography has certainly enhanced our knowledge of sixteenth-century proverbs. At the same time other, no less interesting periods have come off badly.⁶ Where, for instance, is the proverb scholarship on painters such as Sebastiaen Vrancx, Jacob Jordaens or Jan Steen?⁷ And where are the studies of our seventeenth-century farces or on proverb collectors such as Jacob Cats, Johan de Brune and Carolus Tuinman?⁸ Furthermore, in its general lack of depth the majority of Bruegel studies have contributed only marginally to parœmiology and even less to a more broadly oriented social or cultural history of Netherlandish proverbs.⁹ Thanks to a number of art historians, mainly from the United States, this situation has now begun to change.

To the great nineteenth-century collectors, proverbs were one with the 'folk'. Proverbs contained the 'wisdom of the folk'; they belonged to a national and dateless 'folk tradition'. Such essentializing notions dominated proverb scholarship for a long time. As the Flemish folklorist Alphons de Cock phrased it in 1920, proverbs 'climb up to centuries long gone'; they 'mirror the realm of thought of our ancestors in ancient times'.¹⁰ Scholars of a younger generation were less mythologizing in their concepts, but they still saw proverbs as reflecting 'folk life' or the 'folk spirit'.¹¹ In fact, the enigmatic figure of Bruegel matched these notions perfectly. Supposedly of peasant origin himself, as his first biographer, Carel van Mander, observed, Bruegel depicted this peasant world time and again. It earned him the nickname of 'Boeren-Bruegel' among later generations. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, this epithet acquired a new and very different meaning. As romantic nationalism spread across Europe, Flemish, Dutch and German scholars came to see the painter as the true son of an

6 For a still impressive study, see Jan Grauls, *Volkstaal en volksleven in het werk van Pieter Bruegel*, Antwerpen, Standaard-Boekhandel, 1957.

7 On Vrancx: Jan Grauls, 'Het spreekwoordenschilderij van Sebastiaan Vrancx', *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles* 9 (1960), pp. 107-164 (Grauls elaborates on an older study by Leo van Puyvelde from 1930); on Jordaens and Steen: I. Németh, 'Het spreekwoord "Zo d'ouden zongen, zo pijpen de jongen" in schilderijen van Jacob Jordaens en Jan Steen: motieven en associaties', *Jaarboek voor het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 1990, pp. 271-286.

8 But see on Cats, M. van Vaecq, *Adriaen van de Venne's Tafereel van de belachende werelt* (Den Haag, 1635), Gent, Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1994, vol. III, pp. 808-816; and on De Brune: Paula Koning, 'Spreekwoorden als bouwstenen', in P.J. Verkruijse (ed.), *Johan de Brune de Oude (1588-1658). Een Zeeuws literator en staatsman uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Middelburg, Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, 1990, pp. 92-106.

9 A 'social history of language', as outlined in several volumes by the historians Peter Burke and Roy Porter, is still lacking for the Netherlands. On proverbs, see: James Obelkevich, 'Proverbs and Social History', in: Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds.), *The Social History of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 43-72.

10 Proverbs 'klimmen op tot lang vervlogen eeuwen'; and constitute the 'afspiegelingen van den gedachteschat onzer voorvaderen uit oude tijden'. De Cock refers here to proverbs from 'popular belief'. See A. de Cock, *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloof berustend*, Antwerp, De Sikkkel, 1920, p. 4. For an older, more modest claim by a literary historian, see J. Verdam, *De geschiedenis der Nederlandsche taal, in hoofdtrekken geschetst* (Leeuwarden, Suringar, 1890), esp. pp. 114-115, where he explicitly links the study of proverbs to the rising discipline of 'volkskunde'.

11 See for instance K. ter Laan, *Nederlandse spreekwoorden, spreuken en zegswijzen*, The Hague and Djakarta, Van Goor en Zonen, 1950, 'Voorbericht'; *Apologische spreekwoorden, verzameld en ingeleid door Dr. C. Kruyskamp*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1947, p. 10; Grauls, *Volkstaal en volksleven*.

anonymous and timeless 'folk'.¹² Surprisingly, we still meet with such allochronic views in a folkloristic and strongly Freudian study of 1981.¹³ Convinced that both Bruegel and the collectors of his time were directly drawing on popular culture, the majority of Bruegel studies do not reflect on the actual functions and structures of the visual and written sources in question. They keep to a rather naive conjoining of iconography and parœmiography.

Reading proverb collections from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century France, even cultural historian Natalie Davis hoped to 'hear the voice of the people', but she quickly abandoned the idea. French proverb collectors were not interested in popular culture nor did they show any respect for it. Their collections were aimed at a learned elite, to be used in education or as compendia in speaking and writing.¹⁴ These are severe conclusions and they have certainly left their mark on proverb scholarship, recent Bruegel studies included. Relying on Davis, the art historian Margaret Sullivan, brushed the old, folkloristic interpretations aside. Pointing, for example, to the painter's friendship with the Antwerp orthographer Abraham Ortelius, she situated him in a learned, humanist circle. Once a true son of the 'folk', Bruegel now found himself recast as a high-brow urban intellectual.¹⁵

In critically assessing the romanticizing Bruegel interpretations, Sullivan and other art historians have brought parœmiology back into the picture.¹⁶ In the meantime, Sullivan's own views have been criticized as well. Other scholars now situate the painter in the urban middle classes of sixteenth-century society: befriended with the humanist Ortelius but also a typical representative of Antwerp's *rederijker* culture.¹⁷ As a consequence, Sullivan's rigid opposing of elite and popular culture (classifying, for instance, Latin proverb collections as 'elite' and vernacular collections as 'popular') may be discarded. The only thing a parœmiologist can do is to follow the proverbs on their peregrinations through both cultures.¹⁸ More recently, in an impressive and innovative study by the art historian Mark Meadow, one of the editors of the present volume, six-

12 Most programmatic in: Wilhelm Fraenger, *Der Bauern-Bruegel und das deutsche Sprichwort*, Zürich, 1923. For an earlier, Flemish assessment: L. Maeterlinck, *Le genre satirique dans la peinture flamande*, Brussels, Hayez, 1903, p. 249: 'C'est incontestablement Pierre Brueghel le Vieux qui caractérisa le mieux le génie populaire de notre race'. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, 'race' closely resembled what in later decades came to be subsumed under the concept 'national character'. See George W. Stocking, 'The Turn-of-the-Century Concept of Race', *Modernism/Modernity* (1994) 1, pp. 4-16.

13 Alan Dundes and Claudia A. Stibbe, *The Art of Mixing Metaphors: A Folkloristic Interpretation of the Netherlandish Proverbs by Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, Helsinki 1981, esp. pp. 68-69. On old-style folkloristics in the Netherlands and its notion of an anonymous and ageless popular culture embodying the 'folk spirit', see Herman Roodenburg, 'Ideologie en volkscultuur: het internationale debat', in: Ton Dekker, Herman Roodenburg en Gerard Rooijakkers (eds.), *Volkscultuur. Een inleiding in de Nederlandse etnologie*, Nijmegen, Uitgeverij SUN, 2000, pp. 66-109.

14 Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Proverbial Wisdom and Popular Errors', in: idem, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1975, pp. 227-267.

15 Margaret Sullivan, 'Bruegel's Proverbs: Art and Audience in the Northern Renaissance', *Art Bulletin* 73 (1991), pp. 431-466. Recently, Jan Steen passed through a similar career. In both cases the original misreading of their lives go back to a misreading of the rhetorical topoi cherished by their contemporary biographers.

16 For a survey of this recent work, see Mark Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs and the Practice of Rhetoric*, Zwolle, Waanders, 2002, pp. 16-17.

17 Bart Ramakers, 'Bruegel en de rederijkers. Schilderkunst en literatuur in de zestiende eeuw', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 47 (1996), pp. 81-105. For an earlier exploration: W.S. Gibson, 'Artists and Rederijkers in the Age of Bruegel', *Art Bulletin* 63 (1981), 3, pp. 426-446.

18 For a reevaluation of Erasmus' interest in Dutch proverbs, see Ari Wesseling, 'Dutch Proverbs and Expressions in Erasmus' Adages, Colloquies, and Letters', *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002), pp. 81-147.

teenth-century proverbs have been linked to the contemporary practice of rhetoric and the art of conversation. As the author argues, rhetoric constituted a central epistemological moment in the way in which sixteenth-century people must have enjoyed the proverb and its visualization by Bruegel.¹⁹ This situates the proverb collections nearer to the contemporary collections of apophthegms and anecdotes, which have been linked to the art of conversation as well.²⁰

With this new edition of Symon Andriessoon's *Duytsche adagia* the focus is again on the sixteenth century, although with broader goals than in many earlier such publications. Editing a proverb collection would appear to belong, strictly speaking, more to parœmiography than to parœmiology. Clearly, the first objective of the two editors, Anneke Fleurkens and Mark Meadow, was to unlock this unique proverb collection for a broad Dutch- and English-speaking audience. However, as both the introduction and the annotation make clear, we may safely situate this edition within the new trend of analytical proverb studies of the last years. Like Bruegel, the notary Symon Andriessoon was not a humanist, nor do we know about any links between him and Amsterdam humanists. As Bas Dudok van Heel explains, Andriessoon belonged to the urban middle classes and his interest in the vernacular reminds us in the first place of other Amsterdam notaries, such as Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert or Gedeon Fallet. I am convinced that this edition will prove a welcome contribution to both Dutch parœmiography and parœmiology, and perhaps to a nascent social history of the Dutch language as well.

19 See note 12. This study is partly based on two essays, published in *Volkkundig Bulletin*. See Mark Meadow, 'On the Structure of Knowledge in Bruegel's Netherlandish Proverbs', *Volkkundig Bulletin* 18 (1992), pp. 141-169; idem, 'Volkscultuur of humanistencultuur? Spreekwoordenverzamelingen in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden', *Volkkundig Bulletin* 19 (1993), pp. 208-240.

20 See, for example, Herman Roodenburg, 'To Converse Agreeably: Civility and the Telling of Jokes in Seventeenth-Century Holland', in: Jan Bremmer en Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour from Antiquity to the Present Day*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, pp. 112-133; cf. Peter Burke, 'The art of conversation in early modern Europe', in: idem, *The Art of Conversation*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993, pp. 89-122.