THE BRUEGEL SUCCESS STORY

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Fig. 8.1 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Harvesters*, 1565, oil on panel, 119 × 162 cm, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1919

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Is Bruegel's Sleeping Peasant an Image of Caricature?

Yoko Mori

Abstract: Pieter Bruegel the Elder depicts sleeping peasants several times in his prints and paintings. The sleeping peasant in his *Harvesters* (1565, New York) is often mistakenly interpreted as a drunk and lazy figure anticipating his *Land of Cockaigne* (1567, Munich). The present contribution proposes positive readings of the sleeping peasant in the *Harvesters*, exploring both the pictorial background and the literary context. Sleeping peasants were represented without any moralizing intent in *July* by Hans Sebald Beham's workshop and *August* by Jost Amman, as well as in French calendar prints produced by Étienne Delaune, the Atelier de la rue Montorgueil and others. Bruegel might well have been familiar with such non-caricaturized peasant images. His portrayal of the peasant's well-deserved relaxation following hard labour in the fields merits attention as it challenges previous interpretations. Also worth discussion is an anonymous poem sympathetic towards peasants probably written by a rhetorician of Bruegel's time. It is interesting to note that renditions of sleeping peasants in grain or hay fields became 'popular' motifs in artworks after Bruegel (for instance, by Hans Bol, Jacob Grimmer, Bruegel's two sons and others), without properly incorporating Bruegel's true meaning.

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The 'sleeping peasant' in Bruegel's *Harvesters* (fig. 8.1; 1565, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) has often been considered as having negative connotations, and judgemental of presumably lazy or idle people. I propose some positive readings of this image through a review of Bruegel's pictorial and literary references, which highlight his innovative approach to the figure of the 'good peasant'.

Nicolaes Jonghelinck (1517–1570) commissioned Bruegel to paint the *Harvesters* and five other paintings for his 'Cycle of Seasons' for Jonghelinck's villa in Ter Beke, not far from Antwerp's southern city walls.[1] Jonghelinck was a merchant banker, an important tax officer for the Habsburgs, and Bruegel's major patron.[2] Based on Archduke Ernst's account book and several Habsburg inventories listing 'six panels of the twelve months of the year', this series seems to have consisted of six paintings, although only five remain today. According to Iain Buchanan[3] and Claudia Goldstein,[4] Jonghelinck might have displayed those paintings in his dining room. In addition, Goldstein gives the following reason as to why they might have been placed in the dining room: 'Bruegel's figures engage in activities which will put food on the table.'[5]

Bruegel's *Harvesters* needs to be discussed not in isolation but rather within the context of the overall concept of his 'Cycle of Seasons'.[6] In the *Harvesters*, attention should be paid to two significant elements of peasant activity: namely, hard labour and rest, including pastimes.

In *The Gloomy Day*, which represents early spring, peasants are busily collecting faggots and pruning willows, while devastating floods are wreaking havoc in the village and boats are left shipwrecked in the river. A peasant family returns from a carnival, and a young father enjoys eating waffles, a typical carnival batter cake. *Haymaking* represents

summer. Peasants are cutting, drying and transporting hay with two horses. The white horse and brown horse combination is reminiscent of Simon Bening's 'July' in his *Hennessy Hours* and *Da Costa Hours*. At the upper centre of *Haymaking*, we see a public archery game going on in the village. A similar scene in the *Harvesters* will be discussed in detail later. *The Return of the Herd* represents late autumn, with herdsmen bringing their cattle to the village. *Hunters in the Snow* represents winter, with hunters as well as village people singeing a pig in preparation for the long winter, and children enjoying sports on the ice.

In 1938, Jean Videpoche described the harvester figure in the *Harvesters* as 'The harvester, the man who works with his hands, the antithesis of everything that interested Bruegel's elegant contemporaries, in short: the proletarian, lies there in the center of this huge panel, savagely possessed by the kind of sleep that only the working class knows.'[7] In 1969, Wolfgang Stechow remarked that 'Where there is plenty of food, drink, and sleep, Bruegel characteristically indulges his habit of making man appear as a slave to them: the faces of the eating and drinking peasants have dumb, somewhat animal-like features, their poses and movements are awkward, the posture of the sleeper anticipates the total abandon of the idlers in *The Land of Cockaigne*' (fig. 8.2).[8] In 1994, Margaret Sullivan stated:

> In *The Harvesters*, the traditional laziness of the peasants is in evidence as well as their industry. Some are cutting and stacking grain, or collecting apples, but others play games in the background, and in the foreground, one huge peasant is stretched out sleeping in a pose that recalls the sleeping and gluttonous figures in Bruegel's *Land of Cockaigne* done about the same time, or the yawning peasant in Bruegel's little painting in Brussels. Perhaps the sleeper's nap in *The Harvesters* is due to the amount of drink he has imbibed rather than the result of hard work and honest effort. […] The accusation of laziness was frequently levelled at the peasants, as in [Sebastian] Brant's chapter on improvident fools in the *Ship of Fools*.[9]

In 2004, Annette de Vries newly observed that Bruegel applied his innovative take on the resting peasants, referring to the pictorial background of earlier such scenes. Bruegel depicts more resting peasants than workers. However, the issue is not convincingly delineated, and the boundary between well-earned rest and undeserved rest remains. De Vries relates Bruegel's sleeping peasant in the *Harvesters* to the sleepers or lying figures of the *Land of Cockaigne* and considers him as one of the idle inhabitants of the latter.[10] In 2018, Jürgen Müller and Thomas Schauerte also observed that the pose of the sleeping peasant of the *Harvesters* was carried into one of the figures of the *Land of Cockaigne* and interpreted as 'a negative embodiment of human vice, not least in the juxtaposition to the hardworking harvesters surrounding him'.[11] Indeed, the recumbent figures in Bruegel's *Land of Cockaigne* comprise a daydreaming clerk, a sleeping soldier and a dozy peasant. These are certainly idle people. The inscription on the print reads: 'Whoever is lazy and gluttonous: farmer, soldier or clerk / Who reaches there, may eat without working; / The fences are [made with] sausages and the houses with tarts; / capons and chickens fly already roasted.'[12] But Bruegel did not single out peasants. Rather, he implies that human beings in general, regardless of class, are inclined to the vain desire for a carefree life of comfort without work.

Sullivan assumes that Bruegel's peasant is sleeping 'due to the amount of drink he has imbibed rather than the result of hard work and honest effort'.[13] Mary Sprinson de Jesús also remarks that 'perhaps he is not exhausted from honest labor but rather, as Sullivan suggests, may have had too much to drink and illustrates Proverbs 10:5: "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame."'[14] Although Sullivan assumes the sleeping peasant to be drunk, it may be that Bruegel's sleeping peasant is not

Fig. 8.2 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Land of Cockaigne*, 1567, oil on panel, 52 × 78 cm, Munich, Alte Pinakothek (inv. 8940)

drunk at all. This is especially clear when comparing him with the drunken figure with red nose and cheeks in *Peasant Dance* (c. 1568, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum).

It is worth noting Bruegel's shrewd depiction of the mouth of the sleeping peasant, which reveals his teeth (fig. 8.3). According to periodontist Dr Shoichi Asano, his mouth is in very poor condition, with several missing teeth. Deep nasolabial fold wrinkles (laugh lines) suggest the loss of further teeth from the upper jaw.[15]

A tall jug is placed within the tall stems of grain to keep it cool. It is interesting to note that bread was also placed on a jug to protect it from the sun's heat. Bruegel was concerned with indicating a water source for the working peasants. In *Haymaking* a well is located in the garden of the farmstead. Similarly, in *Village Landscape with Well* (c. 1559–61; see fig. 8.4), the Master of Small Landscapes depicts a well in front of a farmhouse. Bruegel's contemporary, Maerten de Vos, also included a sitting peasant drinking water from a well in the foreground of his *Summer*.

In 2001, Reindert Falkenburg interpreted Bruegel's sleeping peasant as a negative image, referring to a barren pear-tree branch above the sleeping peasant and a group eating: 'The larger branch has a human echo in a sleeping peasant on the other side of the trunk, whose legs stretch away from the tree. […] Yet, barrenness in a world of fertility and productivity is potentially a charged theme.' He further compares those resting with the figures in Bruegel's *Land of Cockaigne*, stating 'the dry branches in Bruegel's *Wheat Harvest* may offer a similar, pictorial, gloss on peasants who sleep and eat and don't work'. He seems to go too far in interpreting 'a fruit-bearing tree with a large barren branch' as 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil'.[16]

Fig. 8.3 Detail from the *Harvesters* (fig. 8.1)

Observing Bruegel's *Harvesters* in detail, it is noticeable that peasants are using scythes rather than the more usual sickles. According to Paul Lindemans, this kind of scythe, called a Brabant scythe (*zeis*), to mow grain, is used only in the Brabant and Henegouwen (Hainaut) regions of Belgium.[17] Bruegel shows peasants tying the grain together at the top of the stalks, women carrying sheaves on their backs towards a heavily loaded cart in the middle ground, and others collecting apples from an apple tree in the background. Bruegel does not neglect relaxation in the scene and we can see a peasant group taking lunch. An old woman cuts a big round of old (brownish) cheese, while another grey-haired peasant opposite her cuts bread. Bruegel's depiction of eating peasants in different ways is distinctive. They eat pap (porridge) with floating pieces of bread in the bowls (the floating pieces are often thought to be raisins but this is probably not the case, given that raisins would sink),[18] drink liquid from a big jug or milk from bowls, and eat '*brood en boter*' (bread and

Fig. 8.4 Johannes and Lucas van Doetecum after Master of Small Landscapes, *Village Landscape with Well*, c. 1633–76 (first edn, 1559–61), etching, 137 × 200 mm, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, KBR

butter), typical peasant foods. Peasant midday meals already appeared in the 'July' or 'August' illuminated pages of several Flemish books of hours, such as the *Hennessy Hours* of the 1530s (fig. 8.5) or the so-called *Golf Book* (London, British Library) of the early 1540s, both of which are famous manuscripts illustrated by Simon Bening.[19] Bening and other miniaturists, however, might never have had the idea of depicting a sleeping peasant stretched out freely in a grain field (in particular, rye for baking brown bread).

Rather than focusing exclusively on working peasants in his 'Cycle of Seasons', Bruegel sometimes represented labour with rest and pastimes. This was the pictorial statement of his humanistic beliefs. Bruegel was not constrained by traditional representations of monthly labours. Calendar pages in illuminated manuscripts generally depict meetings of lovers, sports or other pastimes of the upper class, as well as the monthly labours of peasants. Bruegel, however, was also concerned with expressing the seasonal changes of nature as well as meteorological and celestial phenomena. The most remarkable meteorological phenomenon is the spring storm in *The Gloomy Day*. The celestial case is the light blue moon at noon represented by Bruegel in the upper left corner of the *Harvesters*. The moon only became visible when the old frame was removed from the panel during the restoration, prior to the 1998 *From Van Eyck to Bruegel* exhibition. According to Maryan Ainsworth's research concerning 'the moon' at midday in high summer in this painting,[20] this could be related to a solar eclipse that had taken place about ten years before Bruegel's

Harvesters.[21] Might Bruegel have been so amazed by the solar eclipse that he decided to include the moon in his painting a decade after the event?

Bruegel seems to enjoy the villagers' pastimes in the *Harvesters*. This is one of the most characteristic elements of Bruegel's 'Cycle of Seasons'. Several boys in the centre throw sticks at a goose strung up as a target (fig. 8.6), while monks and others swim in a pond (fig. 8.7). A recent interesting argument by Reinier van 't Zelfde suggests that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries swimming and bathing inside many cities were forbidden because of the risk of immorality due to public nudity (since swimsuits were not used at that time).[22] However, according to the Latin inscription on a sixteenth-century print depicting *July* by Étienne Delaune, swimming was a necessity during summer work: 'In July when the thirst of the haymaker is inexhaustible, a person having free time learns to swim in order to cool down his limbs.'[23] This indicates no moralizing view concerning swimmers. In the composition, one peasant in

Fig. 8.6 Detail from the *Harvesters* (fig. 8.1)

Fig. 8.7 Detail from fig. the *Harvesters* (fig. 8.1)

OPPOSITE

Fig. 8.5 Simon Bening, 'August', *Hennessy Hours*, 1530s, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, KBR

the field drinks water from a vessel, while a naked person in a river takes care of his child. As the second person takes off his shoes to swim, the third is naked and about to jump into the water.

Apparently, Bruegel was not the first to depict a sleeping peasant in the field. Several sixteenth-century German calendar prints are worth of analysis as examples of precedents for Bruegel's image. One of the earliest sleeping peasants appears in *July* (*c.* 1529–30; fig. 8.8) executed by the workshop of Hans Sebald Beham, which is adapted after Beham's print for Martin Luther's Prayer Book of 1527.[24] A peasant at the centre is cutting grass vigorously with his scythe. Beside him, a co-worker humorously leans against a haystack, about to fall asleep. But his figure is inconspicuously placed at the left corner of the foreground under a zodiac lion in a cloud-like frame.

Jörg Breu the Younger copied his composition from the Beham workshop print when he illuminated the *Ehrenbuch der Fugger* (*Honourable Book of the Family Fugger*, 1545–9).[25] He depicts a dozy peasant, but whether or not the peasant will fall asleep is not clear. Breu the Younger turned the scene into one that is more picturesque, adding two other working peasants in a pastoral landscape that includes a castle, a village church, farmhouses and so on. Virgil Solis's *July* (fig. 8.9) depicts a sleeping peasant also taken from the motif of the Beham workshop. It is interesting to note that the sleeping peasant of Solis's *July* was copied in the *Sint-Truiden Hours* (fig. 8.10) from the late sixteenth century.[26] The composition was, however, simplified in comparison with the print by Solis: the latter's sleeping peasant leaning against a haystack is changed by the Master of *Sint-Truiden Hours* into a sleeping peasant holding a hay-fork (pitchfork), against which he comfortably rests his back.

Franz Isaac Brun's *August* (fig. 8.11) is divided into two sections. While, on the left, Brun depicts peasants cutting grain, binding stalks or carrying stalks, on the right he represents the group eating their midday meal. Among the latter group, a sleepy peasant is lying on the ground, holding his head in his arms. This does not seem to indicate any moral message concerning the sleepy peasant. The print could have been used as a design to decorate silver or earthenware plates.

Fig. 8.8 Workshop of Hans Sebald Beham, *July*, *c.* 1529–30, woodcut, 250 × 570 mm, London, The British Museum

Fig. 8.9 Virgil Solis, *July*, 1530–62, engraving, 41 × 61 mm, London, The British Museum

Jost Amman may have got an idea from Brun's sleepy peasants for his prints of *April* and *August* (fig. 8.12). In *April* a logger holding his axe lies under a large tree for comfort in the middle foreground, while in *August* a peasant sleeps under the shadow of the tree in the right foreground. In fact, the main purpose of this series is to depict the monthly pastimes of the upper class and the labours of the peasants. Yet Amman inserts a sleeping peasant as a small humorous motif.

The print of *November* by French engraver Étienne Delaune inserts a sleeping female peasant leaning on the trunk of a tree near the bank of the river. Her companion is busy throwing sticks

Fig. 8.10 Flemish Master of *Sint-Truiden Hours*, 'July', *Sint-Truiden Hours*, late 16th century, The Hague, Royal Library of the Netherlands (inv. 75A2/4)

Fig. 8.11 Franz Isaac Brun, *August*, 1559, engraving, 26 × 176 mm, London, The British Museum

Fig. 8.12 Jost Amman, *August*, late 16th century, etching, 75 × 277 mm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

Fig. 8.13 Atelier de la rue Montorgueil, *July*, *c.* 1580, woodcut, 260 × 370 mm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 8.14 Johannes and Lucas van Doetecum after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Fair of St George*, *c.* 1559, etching and engraving, 332 × 523 cm, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, KBR. Detail

Fig. 8.15 Pieter van der Borcht, *Peasant Fair*, 1559, etching, 298 × 477 mm, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, KBR. Detail

against branches, getting acorns to fall off the tree. The print is inscribed 'November satisfies pigs with acorns, and it provides us with fowl and fat animal meat.' There is also no negative word concerning the sleeping woman.

Another French print, of *July* (fig. 8.13) by the Atelier de la rue Montorgueil, depicts three sleeping peasants in the foreground. It reads: 'Les prez fleuris ont leur temps & saison / Pour faire veoir leur beauté tant exquise: / Mais quand ce vient au temps de fenaison / Le faucheur lors sa faux tortue aiguise. / Et ne l'à pas plustost au trauers mise / Qu'on voit soudain perir ceste beauté, / Ieunes & vieux ce miroir vous auise / De mediter vostre fragilité.'[27] The inscribed verse mentions nothing about the sleepers, meaning that the sleepers in the field were not objects of criticism, and their behaviour was viewed as natural after heavy labour. The inscription instead warns young and old that the fragility and vanity of beauty is like that of the pasture.

In sum, German and French printed calendars did not carry moral messages related to sleeping peasants. The artists showed labourers taking a nap as natural after a long morning of work. Bruegel might have been familiar with the above-mentioned German series and may have been interested in the sleepy or sleeping peasant figures.

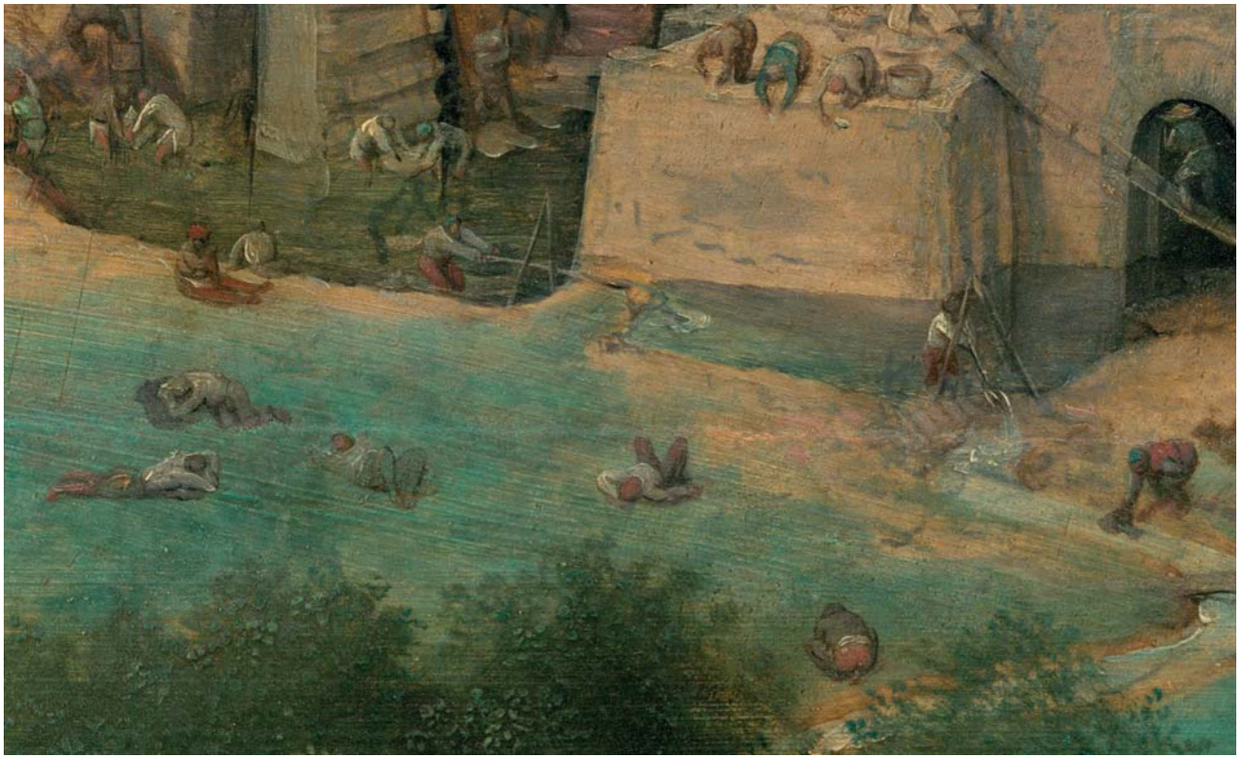

Fig. 8.16 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel*, 1563, oil on panel, 114.3 × 155.1 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (inv. 1026). Detail

Fig. 8.17 Crispijn de Passe the Elder after Maerten de Vos, *June*, 1580s, engraving, diameter 120 mm, London, The British Museum

Fig. 8.18 Julius Golzius after Gillis Mostaert, *August*, late 16th century, engraving, 115 × 165 mm, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, KBR

Bruegel's representations of sleeping peasants prior to the *Harvesters* reveal a compassionate attitude towards them. In two prints after Bruegel depicting village feasts, the *Fair of St George* (fig. 8.14) and the *Fair at Hoboken*, drunken and sleeping peasants are being well taken care of by sympathetic wives or girlfriends. The figures are comparable with those of Pieter van der Borcht. In Van der Borcht's *Peasant Fair* (fig. 8.15), a wife is distressed by the unsightly demeanour of her inebriated husband. In contrast to Van der Borcht's sharp caricature of disorderly drunks, Bruegel humorously depicts peacefully sleeping figures, and he does not treat them as caricatures.

Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* (1563, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum; fig. 8.16) presents four sleeping labourers in the foreground garden. Bruegel did not depict them as lazy workers. He more likely simply intended to show them napping, having laboured arduously for many hours. Bruegel depicted all kinds of labourers' workplace activities, including their rest or defecation. Indeed, in this composition several hundreds of labourers are involved in busy activities, including cutting and carrying stones, making mortar, building arches, and pulling heavy stones by operating crane wheels with their feet.

The engraving after Maerten de Vos's *June* (fig. 8.17) bears a Latin inscription regarding a peasant's nap, which translates as 'June, behold. I trim my rich sheep and pasture. Shade, green lettuce, and a short sleep are pleasant.'[28] Such positive words as 'a short sleep is pleasant' are noteworthy. A young couple joking with each other sits

Fig. 8.19 Hans Bol, *July*, *c.* 1580, engraving, 144 × 147 mm, Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, KBR

in the centre of the composition and they may soon fall asleep, while other peasants are working very hard in the background. Besides *June*, in seven other monthly representations, De Vos seems to enjoy himself and to express the merry pastimes of wealthy citizens for the entertainment of the viewers. However, the same artist, in his *Time Rewards Industry and Penalizes Idleness* (1582), depicts a working peasant as a virtuous person, and a reclining peasant, supporting his head in his arm, as a lazy person. Here, we can see that the vicious person in fact is represented as an unworking person, who is therefore not meant to be seen as someone simply resting after hard work.

In Gillis Mostaert's *August* (fig. 8.18), a sitting woman is asleep covering her face with her clothes against the strong sunlight. We also see three peasants in the field taking lunch, indicating noontime.

Fig. 8.20 Jacob Grimmer, *Summer*, oil on panel, diameter 73.8 cm, whereabouts unknown

Mostaert does not depict any hard workers, but he shows the peaceful midday meal of the peasants in the field in the midst of a pastoral landscape.

Hans Bol's *July* (fig. 8.19) has a very balanced composition of haymakers, hay collectors, transporters, someone drinking water and someone sleeping behind the haystack. However, Bol is simply cataloguing all the elements of haymaking, and the function of his sleeper is quite different from that of Bruegel's sleeper as mentioned above.

Abel Grimmer's *July*, as well as several of his other paintings, imitate Bol's prints. In his painting, one can see a tiny sleeping figure leaning on a haystack. His father, Jacob Grimmer, in his *Summer* (fig. 8.20), depicted people cutting wheat, a group engaged in eating, a kissing couple lying on a haystack and a peasant in the front falling asleep. All are given equal emphasis, rendering the activities simply as parallel occupations. Painters of the generation after Bruegel insert a sleeping figure as

Fig. 8.21 Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Summer*, 1624, oil on panel, 72.4 × 104.8 cm, whereabouts unknown

Fig. 8.22 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Allegory of Summer*, *c.* 1595–6, oil on copper, diameter 12 cm, Munich, Alte Pinakothek (inv. 13710)

Fig. 8.23 Circle of Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Allegory of Summer*, *c.* 1590, oil on copper, 20.3 × 27.3 cm, whereabouts unknown

a popular motif for the amusement of viewers without any other particular significance. A young peasant joking with a girlfriend as they lie on a haystack is seen in Cornelis Dusart's *June*. Sleeping and joking peasants seem to be a favourite motif of the seventeenth century rather evoking laughter.

Bruegel's son, Pieter Brueghel the Younger, combined sleeping and eating peasants (fig. 8.21) from his father's *Harvesters* and working peasants from his father's engraving *Summer*. Moreover, Pieter the Younger added the landscape in the background at the right from his father's *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*,[29] but he pointedly removed a tall tree, possibly thinking such a tall tree standing in the middle of a field would be unnatural.

Jan Brueghel the Elder's *Allegory of Summer* (fig. 8.22) departs somewhat from his father's *Harvesters*. Jan delineated the sleeping peasant in the left foreground next to the resting peasants, but his sleeping figure is not comparable with the pronounced pose of his father's sleeping peasant. Jan places the sleeper and the resting peasants as a single group in the foreground, as if they were simply inserted to complement his idyllic landscape. Jan's main concern for his small oil on copper was to impress viewers with a heavenly landscape of beautiful old castles, woods, villages, sea and rocky mountains. A well-dressed upper-class hunter with his hunting dogs appears with the peasant group, as is typical of Jan Brueghel's mixing classes, as seen in several of his coastal landscapes. Klaus Ertz[30] and Konrad Renger[31] brought attention to the fact that Jan's concept of the sleeping and eating peasant group is influenced by his father's *Harvesters*. It is clear, nevertheless, that Jan's concept is quite different from that of his father.

Fig. 8.24 Pieter van der Borcht, *Laborious Peasants*, second half of the 16th century, etching and engraving, 227 × 295 mm, Coburg, Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg

The *Allegory of Summer* (fig. 8.23) by an artist in Jan Brueghel's circle is largely influenced by Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Harvesters*, particularly in the motifs of a sleeping peasant and the group of his companions eating under the tree. Yet, Pieter the Elder's concept is weakened in this composition. In contrast to his powerful working peasants, this anonymous painter depicted the reaping labourers in a secondary role, with village people resting and walking among them. The main impression of the *Allegory of Summer* marks a pastoral landscape in the style of Jan Brueghel, populated with workers and resting figures that add to the idyllic atmosphere. Ertz attributed the *Allegory of Summer* to Jan Brueghel and dated it *c.* 1590, and rejected the attributions to Pieter Schoubroeck, Maerten Ryckaert and Anton Mirou given at auctions. A more convincing analysis is offered by Elizabeth Honig who makes a comparison with the quality of secure works by the hand of the master and concludes that the *Allegory of Summer* may have been produced outside Jan Brueghel's studio.[32]

As Bruegel left no written documents, it is useful to explore his humanist thinking, paying attention to the ideas respected by the rhetoricians of his time. In 1561, a Haagspel (literally, Hedge Play; meaning a small-scale play) was held in Antwerp after the Landjuweel, the larger scale rhetoricians' national competition.[33] Four Chambers of Rhetoric, from Turnhout, Brussels, Lier and Berchem,

participated, the theme being 'What kind of manual work is the most useful and honourable, although it has very little esteem?'[34] The answer to the question from all four chambers was 'agriculture'. In other words, peasant toil was appreciated among the rhetoricians.

A very interesting print entitled *Laborious Peasants* (fig. 8.24), by Pieter van der Borcht, first mentioned by Jeroen Vandommele,[35] is worthy of discussion in this context.It is very clear that the idea of the print is to praise the peasant's full day of heavy work. The Latin inscription in the top margin conveys the importance of the peasant: 'These seeds, Good God, which are entrusted to that earth belonging to you, may bring multiple fruit to the peasants.'[36] In the print, a richly dressed gentleman accompanying two fashionable young men encounters a hard-working peasant operating a heavy plough. The young man says, 'Goodbye, bumpkin!' and the peasant replies, 'Without us you would starve to death. Let us pray to God, our Lord, that he will bless our hard work.' The French text below is more critical of the haughty well-dressed rich man: 'See the gentleman strutting about and despising this courageous peasant, who plants the seeds on the ground. And this latter answers him, think oh great one, that you and yours are fed through our labours.'

Their conversation recalls the Dutch proverb 'arbeid adelt' (working ennobles people). It is true to state that the peasant in Van der Borcht's print is a noble person, not a bumpkin. 'Without us you would starve to death' is similarly implied in a sixteenth-century poem in the popular *Antwerp Songbook* of 1544:

Let us praise the farmer
With songs and delight,
For he alone excels in true virtue.
Villages, castles and towns,
Day in day out he nourishes and feeds
With his limbs aglow in sweat
The noble and good farmer
To whom everyone owes life.
To feed dukes, princes and earls,
The farmer must toil like a slave,
It is right to praise him.
At times when fine gentlemen shine
And gaily celebrate,
One can see him labour,
The noble and good farmer,
To whom everyone owes life.[37]

Although the anonymous Flemish poet highly praises the peasant, another serious piece of writing about the peasant by Sebastian Franck, the sixteenth-century German humanist and freethinker, makes the sharp observation that every peasant works extremely hard, but whether peasant, day labourer or shepherd, all live in miserable houses, and have wretched clothes and poor food. Moreover, they have the obligation of *corvée* to their landlords, including heavy requirements to perform community service and the payment of various taxes. 'Yet they are not more pious [than others] and not simple-minded people, but wild, cunning, disobedient folk. Their duties, traditions, holy services, their construction are well-known. However, they are not everywhere the same, but rustic and moral as in all other places.'[38] It is very interesting to realize that Franck does not simply praise the industriousness of the peasant, but that he sees the reality of the peasant's life and the peasant's flexibility to adjust to harsh conditions.

In reality, the medieval peasant suffered hardship and toil throughout his life. The German fifteenth-century Carthusian monk and historian Werner Rolevinck wrote the moral booklet *Von der Unterweisung der Bauern* (*Libellus regimine rusticorum*, 1472), instructing the peasant that he was required to fulfil his religious duties as well as his obligations towards his landlord.[39] The peasant should draw hope from the daily admonitions and, by passing through earthly hardships, learn how to attain eternal happiness and endless bliss. Rolevinck mentioned the sixteen requirements of the peasant among which four may have been particularly important for the peasant:

1. Above all, every pious peasant should fear God.
2. He should respect his profession as ordained by God and he should merrily perform it.
3. He should obey his landlord humbly.
4. He should pay his tithe and taxes and meet his obligations faithfully.[40]

Paul Freedman points out that 'servitude and seigneurial rights attendant on serfdom were major issues in German revolts that antedated 1525', the year of the Peasants' War. He also remarks that 'Peasants asserted claims of human freedom against servitude without specifically invoking Christian doctrine at Altbirlingen' and other cities.[41] The situation in Flanders may not have been totally the same. However, the toil of the peasant, the arbitrary lordship and the problem of poor crops due to bad weather were the same everywhere. Bruegel, with deep compassion, expresses humanistic attitudes towards the hard-working peasant living under such difficult circumstances. The old Dutch proverb 'Der heeren zonde, der boeren boete' (The lord's sin, the peasant's penance) also reflects this situation.

In conclusion, Bruegel's sleeping peasant in the *Harvesters* is one of his most innovative and humanistic figures. It seems that Bruegel wished to convey to his viewers the image of a peacefully sleeping peasant as symbolizing well-deserved relaxation after exhausting work from before sunrise to midday. Peasants needed to sleep to refresh their energy for work in the afternoon. Although several German prints depict a sleeping peasant without any irony, Bruegel goes much further than those preceding examples. With this sleeping figure, Bruegel ingeniously depicts the popular Dutch proverb 'Na gedaan werk is het goed rusten' (After the work is done, it is good to rest).

There are extensive traditions of medieval Latin proverbs concerning the significance of rest for regenerating energy and powerful activity: 'Nil amentius labore, cui non est finis suus' (Nothing is more senseless than work with no end); 'Tam malum est labor perennis quam optium perpes malum est' (Continuous work is as much an evil as endless inactivity).[42]

Koenraad Brosens has also pointed out parallel Italian expressions in 2006: *ozio vile* (vile indolence) and *ozio onesto* (literally, honest indolence or leisure; metaphorically, regeneration).[43] Thus, Bruegel's sleeping peasant can be observed as *ozio onesto*, rather than as *ozio vile*. For Bruegel, peasants are also not slaves of labour to provide food for aristocrats and citizens. They have the right to enjoy their leisure when they are free of work. Recognizing Bruegel's humanistic and compassionate feelings towards peasants, his sleeping figure in the *Harvesters* is one of the most significant peasant figures expressed by Bruegel.

Bruegel's 'Cycle of Seasons' is considered a unique series and his profound concept is different to those of the early sixteenth-century calendar pages of Flemish manuscripts and German, French and Flemish calendar prints. This is because these earlier manuscripts and prints depict labourers' activities in certain months and the pastimes of the upper classes, such as hunting and picnicking, in other months. On the contrary Bruegel's protagonists are none other than the peasants and workers. He did not include landlords or supervisors in his 'Cycle of Seasons', with the exception of *The Return of the Herd*.[44] In addition, Bruegel tried to capture the natural landscapes of the different seasons by showing the changing colours of leaves, flowers, ground and sky, as well as various cloud configurations due to sudden storms or calm winds and other natural phenomena.

In sum it should be emphasized that the behaviour of the sleeping peasant in the *Harvesters* is extraordinarily free from such constraints, allowing the sleeper peacefully to take a nap without the watching eyes of a supervisor. After Bruegel's *Harvesters*, sleeping peasants in grain or hay fields became 'popular' motifs in prints, appearing in those by Hans Bol, and in paintings by Jacob Grimmer, but these representations did not follow the true spirit of Bruegel's interpretation.

Notes

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1 Buchanan 1990b, p. 541.

2 Buchanan 1990a, pp. 102–4.

3 Buchanan 1990b, p. 549.

4 Goldstein 2013, p. 54, 137–8.

5 Ibid., p. 138.

6 Mori 1985, Mori 2005, Mori 2012, Mori 2021 (forthcoming).

7 Videpoche 1938, p. 55.

8 Stechow 1969, p. 104.

9 Sullivan 1994, pp. 43–4.

10 De Vries 2004, pp. 39–42.

11 Müller and Schauerte 2018, pp. 288–9.

12 Van Bastelaer 1908, p. 50, no. 147; Van Bastelaer 1992, p. 201.

13 Sullivan 1994, p. 43.

14 Sprinson de Jesús 1998, p. 386.

15 Dr Asano surmises that the sleeping peasant's tooth loss may not have been due to the consumption of too much sugar. Sugar was not common in the lives of peasants in sixteenth-century Northern Europe. Rather, in Dr Asano's assessment, poor sanitary conditions would have been the cause of dental problems. Personal communication, 2018.

16 Falkenburg 2001, pp. 272–4.

17 Lindemans 1952/94, vol. 2, pp. 62–3.

18 Dr Eiko Funada, ethnologist in food culture specializing in bread, suggested what the peasants of the *Harversters* may have been eating. Personal communication, 2018.

19 Tolnay 1935, text vol., p. 37–42. Charles de Tolnay was one of the earliest scholars to state that Flemish books of hours and breviaries may have inspired Bruegel's 'Cycle of Seasons' iconography of monthly peasant activities in fields and yards. Herold 2002.

20 I thank Maryan Ainsworth (Curator of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) for allowing me to cite her research on the moon (8 June 1999, memo from Maryan Ainsworth to the Director's Office, in European Paintings Department files).

21 The suggestion of a possible solar eclipse was made to Maryan Ainsworth by Neil deGrasse Tyson, Director of the Hayden Planetarium at the Rose Center for Earth and Space at the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

22 Van 't Zelfde 2007.

23 Latin inscription translated by Karin Winner and Eugen Ritzinger.

24 Hans Sebald Beham designed and made the woodcut for Martin Luther's printed Prayer Book of 1527.

25 Munich 2010, p. 46, Clm 9460, p. 76.

26 *Sint-Truiden Hours*, The Hague, Royal Library of the Netherlands, inv. 75A2/4. Jeroen Vandommele, Curator of Postmedieval Manuscripts, generously informed me about a sleeping peasant in the calendar page of *July* in the Flemish book of hours from Sint-Truiden Monastery. I identified the model for this manuscript as Virgil Solis's *August* (one of his calendar prints series of the mid-sixteenth century) and I date the manuscript to the late sixteenth century. The Royal Library dates it to *c.* 1570–80.

27 'Flowery meadows have their time and season / To display their exquisite beauty. / But when harvest time comes / The reaper sharpens his crooked scythe / And as soon as he swings it / We suddenly see this beauty perish. / Young and old, may this mirror urge you / To meditate on your fragility.' (Translation by Dominique Vanwijnsberghe.)

28 Latin text translated by Akihiko Watanabe.

29 Marlier/Folie 1969. Marlier did not mention about Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, p. 230 (fig. 141) and p. 231.

30 Ertz 1979, pp. 104–5. Ertz describes Jan Brughel's *View over the Valley River*, *Harvest* and *Busy Country Street with an Inn* as follows: 'Alle drei Kompositionen sind mehr oder weniger dem Vater Pieter Bruegel d. Ä. verpflichtet …' Ertz and Nitze-Ertz 2008–10, vol. 3, p. 1103.

31 Renger and Denk 2002, p. 105. 'Neben der allgemeinen Übereinstimmung des Themas zeigt die Gruppe der rastenden Bauern unter dem Baum im Vordergrund noch eine besondere Auseinandersetzung mit dem Werk des Vaters.' Mirjam Neumeister, 'Jan Brueghel d.Ä., *Die vier Jahreszeiten*', in Munich 2013, pp. 144–7.

32 Honig, <janbrueghel.net/object/allegory-of-summer> and personal communication, 2019 and 2020.

33 Gibson 1991b, p. 23; Cartwright 1998; Kavaler 1999, pp. 67–70; Vandommele 2011, pp. 42–5.

34 Translated by Jeroen Vandommele (Vandommele 2011, p. 43) from the Dutch: 'Welck hantwerck oirboirlycste is van doene en eerlycste, nochtans seer cleyn gheacht?'. Silver 2006, pp. 21.

35 Vandommele 2016.

36 Latin inscription translated by Karin Winner and Eugen Ritzinger.

37 Meertens and De Groot 1942, pp. 29–32. *Een schoon liedekens-boeck* 1544, see Vandommele 2011, p. 358. Gibson 1991b, pp. 23, 48 (footnote 73).

38 Sebastian Franck, *Weltbuch*, Tübingen, 1534, p. 47a, quoted in Epperlein 2003, p. 267.

39 Werner Rolevinck, *Von der Unterweisung der Bauern (Libellus regime rusticorum)*, 1472, pp. 77ff, translated in Epperlein 2003, pp. 256–7.

40 Ibid., p. 257.

41 Freedman 1999, pp. 282–3.

42 Hay 2006, p. 84. Latin proverbs translated by Karin Winner and Eugen Ritzinger.

43 Brosens 2006. He also pays attention to *ozio onesto* of Bruegel's sleeping peasant.

44 In *The Return of the Herd*, the inconspicuous man on horseback to the right is most likely a 'Schaffner' (a guide?) or 'Meier' (a steward of a manor) according to Klaus Demus (Demus 1981, p. 99; Demus 1997, p. 87). He would have accompanied shepherds and cattle returning from the mountain meadows to the village, and does not appear to play a dominant supervisory role in Bruegel's painting.