

# Japan & Belgium

## Four Centuries of Exchange

Edited by W.F. Vande Walle  
with the assistance of David de Cooman

## Illustrations on the dust jacket:

### Front

#### Left:

Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806), "Ushi no koku" (the hour of the ox) from a series entitled *Seirō jūni toki zoku* ("A sequel to the twelve hours in the Blue Pavilion"), woodblock. Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis/Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, Inv. 2, Catalogue no. 360. Ōban, 365 x 240 mm; yellow background; use of metal powder. Ca. 1796.

The print is part of a series depicting a courtesan's daily routines. In accordance with the traditional time division the day is divided into twelve double hours. The hour of the ox corresponds with the early morning. The courtesan has just got up and is putting on her slippers. Although this and other prints in the series actually represent rather mundane activities, in the West they were detached from the reality of their socio-cultural context and hailed as celebrations of Japanese female beauty. The stylistic treatment and pictorial techniques of this and similar prints by the ukiyo-e masters were a source of inspiration for European artists such as Fernand Khnopff.

#### Right:

Fernand Khnopff, *La dame en blanc* (Portrait of Marguerite), ca. 1887, oil on canvas.

Property of the Koning Boudewijn Stichting/Fondation Roi Baudouin, on loan to the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België/Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels. This portrait is a typical example of the kind of languid wistful female figures Khnopff liked to represent and which were reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelites, but at the same time echoed the slender and graceful beauties of Utamaro, upon which Edmond de Goncourt lavished so much praise.

### Back

clockwise from top left:

- Théo Van Rysselberghe, *Soleil couchant à Ambleuse, Pas-de-Calais*, 1899, oil on canvas, private collection.
- Utagawa Ichiryūsai Hiroshige (1797-1858), "Kai Ōtsuki no hara," from a series entitled *Fuji sanjūrokkei*, 1858, woodblock. Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis/Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, Inv. 781.
- Privat Livemont, *la Vague*, 1897, lithograph.
- Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849): "Kanagawa-oki nami ura," from a series entitled *Fugaku sanjūrokkei*, 1830-1831, woodblock.

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# The Appreciation of Bruegel in Japan

Yōko Mori

Bruegel is one of the most popular European painters in Japan. Generally speaking, the French impressionists have been very familiar to Japanese people since the Matsukata Collection of French impressionists was donated to the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, in 1959. Ever since, exhibitions of impressionists have attracted big crowds to museums and galleries. However, since the beginning of the 1970s Bruegel has become a favorite to the Japanese as the symbol of the "medieval" world. For the last twenty years, his paintings have appeared to the Japanese to embody the essence of the European heart. Bruegel is considered by Japanese intellectuals to be the nearest thing to a condensation of European medieval and Renaissance culture. It is also worth mentioning that since the Second World War Bruegel has made his appearance in Japanese literature in the work of several writers as a mental construct of the author.

## Exhibitions of Bruegel and His Dynasty in Japan<sup>1</sup>

Let us start by looking at the number of exhibitions related to Bruegel and his dynasty which have been organized since the 1970s. These exhibitions have not only stimulated art historians, scholars in other fields, writers, artists and art lovers to learn more about "medieval" ordinary life and acquaint themselves with lesser known European customs, but also to try to comprehend Bruegel's deep moral and critical attitudes towards human follies.

Ill. 2: Bruegel and Netherlandish Landscape Painting, 1990, cover of catalog.



Ill. 1: 1972,

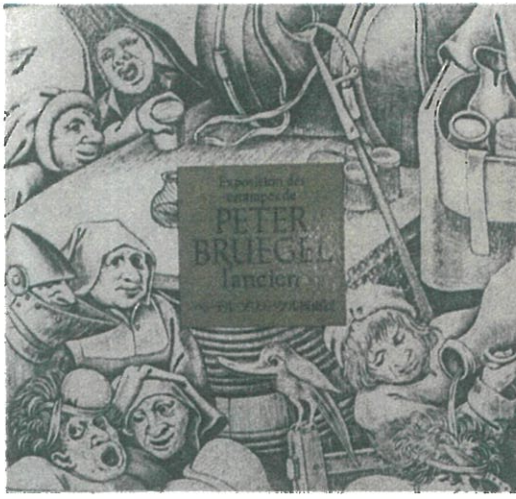
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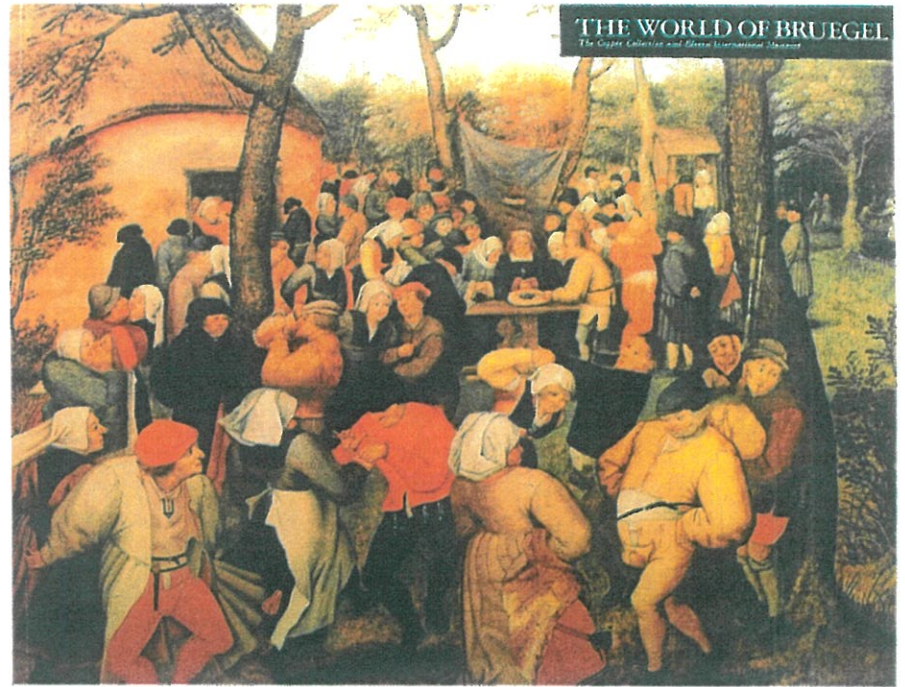
JAPAN





III. 1: Exposition des Estampes de Peter Bruegel l'Ancien, 1972, cover of catalog.

III. 3: The World of Bruegel, 1995, cover of catalog.



The first exhibition of Bruegel in Japan was "Exposition des Estampes de Peter Bruegel l'Ancien" (III. 1) held in 1972 at the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura.<sup>2</sup> Ninety-one prints made by Bruegel himself or in his style were exhibited. The catalog was a literal Japanese translation of Louis Lebeer's 1969 publication, which had been prepared for an exhibition of the same title at the Royal Library, Brussels. Lebeer was head of the Cabinet des Estampes / Prentenkabinet in the Royal Library and published the first scholarly catalog of Bruegel's prints since R. van Bastelaer's research in 1907. The Japanese version of Lebeer's catalogue was later published by the publishing house Iwanami Shoten as a large boxed book with high-quality reproductions.

Almost an identical exhibition, this time entitled "The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder," was held in 1989,<sup>3</sup> at various venues and lasting in all four months. It started in the Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo and then toured Kurume, the Mie Prefectural Art Museum and Hiroshima Prefectural Museum of Modern Art. I was invited to give public lectures on Pieter Bruegel and his world by three of the organizing museums, at Tokyo, Kurume and Mie. Each time I was impressed by the audience's eagerness to learn more about the allegorical meanings of Bruegel's prints and paintings. Once in Kurume there was heavy rain and thunder on a Saturday afternoon just before my lecture, but the organizer confirmed that my audience was the largest the museum had ever welcomed for a lecture. The younger generation paid special attention to Bruegel's versatility as a painter: including Bruegel's delineation of the Alpine landscape, his technological observation of ships and their construction, and his thorough familiarity with Flemish folklore including the seasonal labor of peasants, their ordinary life and their festivals.

In 1990 Bruegel's *Haymaking* (c.1565), from the National Gallery in Prague, was exhibited in "Bruegel and Netherlandish Landscape Painting" (III. 2)<sup>4</sup> at the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo,

and the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto. This work was in fact the first original painting by Bruegel ever shown in Japan. There were about 430,000 visitors to both museums during the two months of the exhibit, and the enthusiasm for Bruegel among the Japanese public increased spectacularly. They were especially moved by the hard work of the peasants in the fields and they were charmed by the pastoral and panoramic landscape depicted in the background. For the success of their exhibition, the cultural projects division of The Asahi Shinbun Company was awarded the prize of the company's president.

The next original painting by Bruegel to be shown in Japan was *The Tower of Babel*, exhibited in 1993 at "The Boymans Masterpieces Exhibition," which featured a selection of masterpieces from the Rotterdam Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (in the full Dutch spelling) and was held at the Sezon Museum of Art, Tokyo.<sup>5</sup> Japanese were more familiar with Bruegel's other and larger version of *The Tower of Babel* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, because it was often used to illustrate school textbooks. Thus, many Japanese visitors were surprised to see the other smaller version, which is equally striking in its enigmatic and detailed depiction of each storey of the tower.

In 1995, the exhibition "The World of Bruegel" (III. 3) at the Tōbu Museum of Art, Tokyo, presented mainly works from the Baron Coppée Collection, Brussels. The exhibition included only one painting of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Magpie on the Gallows*, from the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, together with five drawings and fifteen engravings. It made clear how his sons and descendants, while inheriting the style of Bruegel the Elder, gradually developed their own pictorial world, in response to their own time. It is interesting to note that for the main big poster the organizer chose the *Peasant Dance in the Open Air* by Pieter Brueghel the Younger rather than his father's *Magpie on the Gallows*. The



Ill. 4: Masterpieces of Flanders' Golden Age, 2001, cover of catalog.



*Peasant Dance in the Open Air* appealed to the Japanese as a typical Bruegel motif, more so than the *Magpie on the Gallows*, although the latter miniature-like masterpiece is esteemed by art historians as one of the most important works by Bruegel. In the course of preparing an essay for the exhibition catalogue, the present author discovered in this painting the old Flemish expression *aan de galg dansen* (to dance on the gallows). This expression cynically refers to a condemned criminal's body dangling from the gallows rope.<sup>6</sup> Also noteworthy is that the painting by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Triumph of Death*, discovered in 1987 in Cleveland, Ohio, in the United States, was also exhibited on special loan. The visitors could see for themselves that Pieter the Younger truthfully copied his father's work (now in the Prado Museum, Madrid), and only added his own interpretation in the form of the Latin inscriptions from the Old Testament. He also inscribed the presumed date of his father's birth, 1526, below the skull in the five black flags.

In 2001, "Masterpieces of Flanders' Golden Age"<sup>7</sup> (Ill. 4) from the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp was held in the Isetan Museum of Art, Tokyo and curated by the present author. It toured four other museums, namely the Iwaki City Art Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki, the Museum of Modern Art, Shiga, and the Miyazaki Prefectural Art Museum. The exhibition included sixteen works by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, two by Jan Brueghel the Elder and his workshop, one by his eldest son, Jan Brueghel the Younger, four by his daughter Ann's husband David Teniers the Younger, and two by his daughter Pascasia's son, Jan van Kessel. It was the first comprehensive "Festival of the Bruegel Dynasty" in Japan.

Visitors enjoyed this comprehensive view on the art of Bruegel's sons and his descendants in the seventeenth century and also learned that the family of Jan Brueghel occupied an important position in the genres of landscape and flower still life in the seventeenth century. It was the first time that such wide selection of outstanding Flemish paintings of the Golden Age from the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp was shown in Japan. It furthermore included very important paintings by the sixteenth-century masters Quinten Metsys, Jan Gossaert, Joachim Beuckelaer, as well as the seventeenth-century artists Rubens, Jordaens, Van Dyck, Cornelis de Vos, Daniel Seghers and others.

One should not fail to mention that almost every exhibition related to Bruegel was televised by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) in its serialized program "Sunday Museum" (broadcast twice every Sunday).<sup>8</sup>

### Exhibitions of Flemish Art from the Golden Age

Starting from the 1980s there were numerous exhibitions devoted to Rubens and his time. "Rubens en zijn tijd" (Rubens and his Time)<sup>9</sup> (Ill. 5) was held in 1982 at Seibu Museum, Tokyo, and was one of the earliest exhibitions to introduce to the Japanese public the richness and importance of Flemish art in the history of European art. They were familiar with great Italian masters like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael, or French impressionists, but they did not have many chances to see Rubens, unless they saw his paintings in Europe and the United States. In the above-mentioned exhibition, the paintings, drawings, engravings, and plans for buildings came not only from Belgian museums in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Kortrijk and Liege, but also from churches like the Sint-Jacobskerk and Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe-kathedraal in Antwerp, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk in Dendermonde, as well as from the Rubenshuis in Antwerp. Representative works by Jordaens, like *The Artist's Mother* and *As the Old Sing, So the Young Twitter*, were also included. Such a remarkable joint project had never before come to fruition.

Ill. 5: Rubens en zijn tijd, 1982, cover of catalog.







III. 6: The 17<sup>th</sup> Century: The Golden Age of Flemish Painting, 1988, cover of catalog.

"The 17<sup>th</sup> Century: The Golden Age of Flemish Painting"<sup>10</sup> (Ill. 6), held in 1988 at the Tokyo Fuji Museum, comprised 86 oil paintings and 24 engravings from major Belgian museums in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, Liège, Tournai, and the Rubenshuis, from six private collections in different towns and from the Brussels Cathedral. Thus, the exhibition at the Tokyo's Fuji Museum was on a larger scale than that at the Seibu Museum. Not only were works by major Flemish painters exhibited, but a guide in the catalogue about the Belgian museums also provided useful information, because the Japanese were at that time not so familiar with Belgian museums except those in Antwerp and Brussels.<sup>11</sup> As the Tokyo Fuji Museum is located on the outskirts of Tokyo, the exhibition unfortunately did not draw the number of visitors the organizers might have expected.

"Rubens und seine Zeit"<sup>12</sup> from the Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna, was held in 2000 at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, the Matsuzakaya Museum, Nagoya, and the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art. Among the seventy-one paintings, two-thirds were Flemish works and included twelve by Rubens and six by his workshop. Therefore, it was reasonable to title the exhibition "Rubens und seine Zeit", although more than twenty of the exhibited works were Dutch paintings. An artist's name, such as Rubens's, is very important when one wants to advertise the exhibition to the public. Therefore, when the Dulwich Pictures Gallery lent their collection to the Isetan Museum, Tokyo and six other museums in Japan in 1999, the title chosen for the exhibition was "Old Master Paintings from the Dulwich Pictures Gallery: Rubens and Baroque Masters"<sup>13</sup> (Ill. 7). In fact there were only seven paintings by Rubens, while another forty-three were from Italian, Dutch, French and British schools.



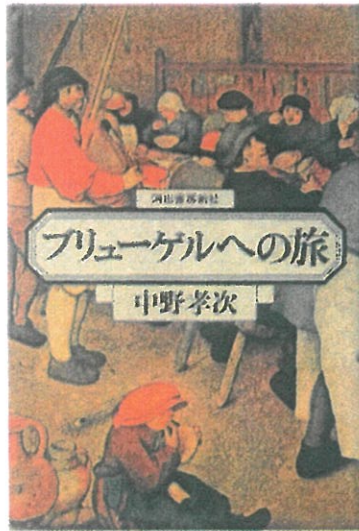
III. 7: Old Master Paintings from the Dulwich Pictures Gallery: Rubens and Baroque Masters, 1999, cover of catalog.

### Bruegel in Japanese Novels

One of the earliest known essays on Bruegel was written by Saitō Mokichi (1885-1953),<sup>14</sup> a physician and a famous poet. His short essay on the impression Bruegel's small painting, *Suicide of Saul* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, left on him, appeared in the magazine *Kaizō* in 1922. He was very impressed by the scene of self-slaughter, which reminded him of Japanese depictions of defeated armies killing themselves. "I thought Bruegel was an extraordinary artist. Whenever I felt lonely, I came here to see his paintings," he writes.<sup>15</sup>

The earliest known literary work in which the name of Bruegel appears as an important motif in the book is *Dark Pictures*, published in 1946 by Noma Hiroshi.<sup>16</sup> The book was published shortly after World War II. On several occasions while visiting his friend Nagasugi Eisaku of Kyoto University, the protagonist Fukami Shinsuke saw in his friend's room a thick octavo volume with reproductions of Bruegel's work, a book in French with a white cover.<sup>17</sup> During World War II, Eisaku rented a six-mat room in an apartment. Shinsuke and his friends spent dark times during their student days, having too little money to eat properly and no freedom of expression under the political repression of the time. Shinsuke's pessimistic feelings found resonance in some of Bruegel's prints, such as *Vice* with its crowds of devils and *grillos* (crawling human creatures), or in the frightening deformed figures of Bruegel's paintings, such as the *Fall of the Angels* and *Dulle Griet*. He interpreted Bruegel's works as the artistic expression of the oppression the people of the Low Countries suffered at the hands of the tyrannical rule of the Spanish King Philip II. He compared his own agony during the lonely and depressed days to the suffering,





Ill. 8: Nakano Kōji, *Trip to Bruegel*, 1975, dust jacket of bound edition.

torment, and spiritual anguish of the figures in Bruegel's paintings. Shinsuke tried not to look at the paintings, but they had some strange power which forced him to turn the pages. "The many dark, lamenting, suffering, groaning, tormented forms in the book patently reminded him of his own suffering."<sup>18</sup>

Talking with Eisaku and his other friends in Eisaku's small room, Shinsuke found out that they felt very close to each other and shared each other's suffering. Above all, they all liked Bruegel's paintings, although their moods were not entirely the same. His paintings impressed the young men as powerful expressions of the wounds of existence: "The beings in the pictures laid bare the failures of society; the hearts of all four were oppressed by the lamentation of the flesh that seemingly thrust out at them like the expression of some corrupt and swollen thing, a condition like the smart of a painful wound."<sup>19</sup> Later Shinsuke's friends were arrested by the police on suspicion of left-wing deviationism, and they died young in jail.

This novel is considered one of Noma's masterpieces. He characterized Bruegel's works as dark pictures and defined Bruegel as a peasant painter: "There is the peasant, his back bowed, as if under a boulder, beneath the weight of the feudal system, the cruelty of forced labor. The peasant is thin and looks cold, his body protected only by shapeless, dirty garments."<sup>20</sup> Since then this image of Bruegel's peasants has been firmly entrenched in the mind of the readers. Even today Bruegel is often characterized by amateurs as the peasant painter depicting the peasants' suffering under the exploiting classes. However, I believe that Noma's observation was colored by the suffering of his own times and was prejudiced by Carel Van Mander's biography (1604), which describes Bruegel as having been born in a peasant family.<sup>21</sup> It is regrettable that Noma had no chance to see the original paintings by Bruegel before he published his *Dark Pictures*.

The next popular novel after Noma's work is *Trip to Bruegel* by Nakano Kōji (Ill.8), published in 1975.<sup>22</sup> During a sabbatical leave, Nakano, a university professor of German literature, took the opportunity to see Bruegel's paintings in several museums in Europe and America. When he saw the *Corn Harvest* at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, he was so moved that nothing else in the city could any longer charm him. The author had also experienced unexpectedly melancholy days due to living in a basement in Vienna. He was very happy to come across Bruegel's paintings in the Kunsthistorisches Museum and was immediately deeply impressed by them. He could not leave the Bruegel room

any more. He appreciated Bruegel's works, because he probably projected his own life into Bruegel's paintings. He started to wonder what his life was about while standing in front of Bruegel's works. His attachment may have sprung from his wish to find in Bruegel's works the fulfillment of what he had failed to achieve so far in his life. However, his interpretation of the peasants or disabled persons such as the blind or the crippled was based on a very personal impression. He sees Bruegel's *Magpie on the Gallows* as, in his own words, an enigmatic painting that suggests that Bruegel seems to be hanged on the gallows.

*Bruegel Has Flown* (Ill. 9) by Ogino Anna, 1989,<sup>23</sup> was the author's first novel after she had received the Akutagawa Prize. Ogino, a professor at Keiō University and a specialist on François Rabelais, is interested in Bruegel's keen observations of human beings. In the novel she identifies the empty feeling of the female protagonist with the look in the eyes of Bruegel's peasants. It is as if their wide-open and hollow eyes and dry skin will infect her.

She uses the name Bruegel in her novel as a metaphor for the parody of human follies, devilishness or idleness. She also uses conversations in *Kansai-ben* (dialect of the Osaka-Kyoto area), a device often used in novels to emphasize comical features. When she meets her former painting teacher B at the exhibition "The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder" in the Bridgestone Museum of Art (1989), she imagines him as a crouching thief, an allegorical figure in Bruegel's *Misanthrope*, because B's head reminds her of the thief's round head in the painting. The title of her novel is derived from the following sentence: "Bruegel has flown / how far has he flown? He has flown to emptiness, burst open and fallen." Yet this author too, just like Noma and Nakano, has a superficial and prejudiced view of Bruegel's peasants. In the *Nihon keizai shinbun* (the Japanese "Financial Times"), the journalist Nishijima Takeo wrote about Ogino's work in a sympathetic tone and agreed with her attitude: "Bruegel embraces both a sense of destruction and festivity. And that is characteristic of our times."<sup>24</sup>

All this has little to do with the historical Bruegel. Bruegel obviously depicts the peasants not as objects of a caricature or an exemplum



of immoral or foolish beings, but as a new pictorial object to be represented with a humanistic attitude and sympathy. The peasants appear to Bruegel as hard working people through the seasons and dynamic beings who live honestly. No painter before Bruegel depicted the peasants' ordinary activities in such vivid detail and with such superb artistry. In the work of Bruegel the peasant became a subject-matter in its own right.

The novel *Bruegel's Family* by the well-known Catholic novelist Sono Ayako (Ill.10) (1992-1994),<sup>25</sup> was ranked fourth in a list of the top ten novels. The main character is a fifty-four year old housewife, with only a high school education, while her cold-hearted husband, who graduated from a top-ranking university, is a workaholic and an elite businessman. She finds solace in a book with reproductions of Bruegel's paintings together with her mentally retarded twenty-four year old son who was born with Down's syndrome. The book consists of twenty-four chapters each entitled after one of Bruegel's proverbs or the title of one of his paintings.



Ill. 9: Ogino Anna, *Bruegel Has Flown*, 1989, dust jacket of bound edition.

When she comes across the proverb "to cast roses before swine," she recalls an unforgettable memory about the kind help she received from an aged woman of the neighborhood. One day her retarded son unexpectedly left home and completely lost his way. However, her neighbor found him sitting on a bench in front of the train station of the neighboring town and brought him back to his house. The protagonist was very grateful to her old neighbor and gave her a gorgeous blouse, about which her husband ironically stated, "It's like casting pearls before swine" (actually in Bruegel's painting the proverb is "to cast roses before swine"). Later, when the old neighbor is hospitalized and fears for her life, she asks her friend to

dress her with the blouse and put her in her coffin if she should die. Her own son cried to see his dead mother so beautifully dressed in the blouse as if she was a countess.

In the chapter entitled "Hunters in the Snow," the name of a famous winter landscape by Bruegel, the story tells of an unhappy trip. The mother and her son have to wait for hours in the station because of the delay of the train by a typhoon. While his mother is much exhausted by just waiting, her simple-minded son is very happy with this out-of-the-ordinary experience (because he was basically never allowed to travel), and he enjoys every moment as a new experience. He was suddenly excited and pointed with his finger to the reproduction of Bruegel's "Hunters in the Snow" on a poster in the window of a station bookstore advertising the forthcoming publication of a series on "Painters and Their Lives." In that way, admiration for paintings by Bruegel produces a short story in each chapter that describes the characters and behavior of members of the protagonist's family and especially her love for her son. Sono raises a question for readers in asking, by means of Bruegel's paintings, what true happiness is. She does not straightforwardly interpret paintings, but tries to describe the human problems of daily life which happen to the family in the novel. Unlike the abovementioned novels, Sono's does not encourage the widespread misconceptions about Bruegel.

## Bruegel in Painting

One of the earliest Japanese painters inspired by Bruegel's works was Kayama Matazō (1927-2003). Among his paintings in Japanese traditional style, a few works reveal an apparent influence of Bruegel's landscapes. Kayama's *Winter* of 1957 (Ill. 11), in the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, has a diagonal composition from top left to bottom right. The fore and middle grounds, on the left, are dominated by the vertical black lines of leafless trees, broken only by the presence of two wolves; from the middle to the background, on the right, there are snowy mountains and valleys, with numerous birds on the wing, a scene reminiscent of Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow* of 1565. Kayama painted it eleven years after the publication of Noma's *Dark Pictures*, mentioned above; it is quite possible that Kayama came to know Bruegel's paintings through Noma's novel. It is also interesting to note that the name of Bruegel appears in a playful *tanka* (a traditional poem of 31 syllables) which was published in one of the major dailies: "My dream of seeing the paintings of Bruegel at long last came true, but I examined them too closely and was reprimanded."<sup>26</sup> We imagine that the poet wanted





Ill. 10: Sono Ayako, Bruegel's Family, 1992-1994, dust jacket of bound edition.



Ill. 12: Hijikata Teiichi, Bruegel, 1963, dust jacket.



Ill. 13: Kuramochi Fumiya, The Structure of Feasts: Bruegel, Carnival, and Folkloric Culture, 1984, dust jacket.



Ill. 14: Mori Yoko, The Proverbial World of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1992, dust jacket.

to have so close a look at the paintings in the Kunsthistorisches Museum that he got a reprimand from a museum attendant.

### Bruegel Studies in Japan

One of the earliest scholarly books on Bruegel in Japan was *Buryūgeru* (Ill.12) written in 1963 by Hijikata Teiichi,<sup>27</sup> a study that was awarded the Mainichi shuppan bunka shō 毎日出版文化賞 (Mainichi Publishers' Culture Prize). Hijikata, director of the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Modern Art and a very good writer, influenced Japanese intellectuals who wanted to understand the allegorical meanings of Bruegel's paintings after they had been impressed by Noma's *Dark Pictures*. Hijikata's main interpretation was based upon the political oppression and the religious persecution of Protestants in the Netherlands during the reigns of Charles V and Philip II, kings of Spain and rulers of the Low Countries in Bruegel's time. Hijikata's sources were various books and articles written in Europe and the United States that interpreted the political allusion of Bruegel's paintings, such as J. Ledere's 1961 article.<sup>28</sup> Hijikata conjectures that soldiers in Bruegel's *Suicide of Saul* of 1562 were the Spanish troops stationed in the Netherlands. He interprets the *Beggars* of 1568 putting foxtails all over their clothes as badges for the political protest of the so-called *Gueux* (*Geuzen*) party which from 1566 was organized by rebellious nobles against the Spanish government. I have since argued against Hijikata's theory, showing that no Spanish soldiers were stationed in the Netherlands between January 1561 and August 1567. I also pointed out that almost the same figures with foxtails are found in Bruegel's much earlier work, *Combat between Carnival and Lent* of 1559. Therefore, Bruegel's *Beggars* should be interpreted rather as a caricature of human beings of different classes each of whom tries to flatter the higher classes in order to obtain professional promotion, an interpretation based on the caption of a German anonymous woodcut print of 1546. I stated that the Dutch proverb "to saw off someone's head with a foxtail," which accompanies the painting, means "to fob someone off with fair words." The five beggars seem to be dressed as a king, bishop, soldier, merchant and peasant, representing all the classes the society.<sup>29</sup> Although Hijikata's book

was very informative about Bruegel's time, he emphasizes the direct relationship between Bruegel's paintings and the political events, in such a way that the humanistic, moralistic, cultural, and folkloric aspects of Bruegel's paintings are shaded under Hijikata's dramatic descriptions about religious suspicions, persecutions, executions, oppressive taxes, and other tragedies in the Netherlands. Thus, a distorted image of Bruegel has been established since his famous book; it is very often said that Bruegel is an artist rebellious against authority.

The influence of Hijikata's book is still seen today in the television program on Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow* in the series entitled "The Masters of the Arts", broadcast in February of 2004. The narrator speculated that Bruegel might have suggested the gravity of the political situation of his time in depicting the harsh winter landscape with Alps, which are foreign to his own country. This is in fact an unfortunate and farfetched interpretation of Bruegel's beautiful snowy landscape painting.

Kuramochi Fumiya, Professor of Anthropology at Waseda University, published *The Structure of Feasts: Bruegel, Carnival, and Folkloric Culture* (Ill.13) in 1984<sup>30</sup> in which the author analyzes twenty-eight folkloric and festive activities in Bruegel's *Combat between Carnival and Lent* from the folkloric point of view. He also points out that Bruegel clearly represents the various dramatic features of the feasts even though the figures are involved in everyday activities, such as a woman peeping into the water tub. *The Combat between Carnival and Lent* is the best example for understanding Bruegel's keen observation of Flemish folklore and his sympathy for the common folk through the space-time perspective of the festive calendar. The author points out that the feast is a cultural activity that creates a bond, and is an integral part of life.

I myself received a scholarship from the Belgian government in 1976 and studied Bruegel and his contemporaries under the guidance of Dr. Roger H. Marijnissen, author of several outstanding books on Bosch and Bruegel.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Marijnissen suggested that rather than reading contemporary scholarly monographs I should direct





III. 11: Kayama's "Winter."

my research towards primary sources, such as the texts of the *rederijkers* (rhetoricians), the legends in prints by Bruegel, Pieter van der Borch, or Hans Bol, and folk books such as the Dutch version of *Eulenspiegel*, in order to comprehend the kind of literary background Bruegel drew upon to produce his allegorical paintings. The result of this research was a major book with 370 pages and more than 570 illustrations of Bruegel's complete works was *The Complete Paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, published in 1988.<sup>32</sup> In it I discussed the relationship between Bosch and Bruegel, Bruegel and the cultural context in Antwerp, German prints as pictorial sources, the debates on Bruegel's peasants during the 1970s and the early 1980s, the true image of Bruegel which restored his previously distorted images, the four generations of Bruegel. In the second part of my book, I interpreted and analyzed the pictorial sources and iconographic background of all Bruegel's paintings and gave commentary on 24 paintings by his descendants. In 1989 I published my Ph.D dissertation, *The Children's Games by Bruegel*,<sup>33</sup> in which I compared Bruegel's 91 children's games with games found in manuscripts, sculptures, paintings, and graphic works roughly from ancient Greek art to seventeenth-century Dutch art. I also dealt with the history of the idea of children's games as discussed by philosophers, moral thinkers, theologians from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. I argued against those interpretations that see Bruegel's children's games as a mirror of the foolishness of adults, as suggested for example by Sandra Hindman (1981),<sup>34</sup> and proved that the painting reflects the recommendation by Bruegel's contemporaries that children play as much as possible

for their mental and physical development. My following book, *The Proverbial World of Pieter Bruegel the Elder* (III. 14) published in 1992<sup>35</sup> included a list of important collections of proverbs from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I introduced the reader to the rich visual tradition of proverbs as it appears in tapestry, carvings (misericords), paintings, and prints from the end of the fifteenth century. I analyzed 85 Netherlandish proverbs in Bruegel's painting in Berlin, compared them with contemporary visual representation of the same proverb, and explained in what context the proverb occurs in European literature. My recent research focuses on the comparative study of Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) and Japanese proverbs in old Japanese art.<sup>36</sup> Although the two cultures have completely different backgrounds and traditions, the ethics and moral conventions are sometimes the same, as for instance in the Western proverb "big fish eat little fish." They can also have sometimes completely different semantics, as in the case of "when the blind leads the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," which is based on the New Testament (Matthew 15:14) and in the West satirizes the foolishness and mental blindness of human beings. By contrast, in the East there is an almost identical proverb, "A blind person leads blind people," which originated in a Buddhist scripture compiled by a Chinese monk, and which means that the blind leader is the true leader of human beings, for he is able to move forward from the top of the 100 *shaku* (100 feet) high pole. Needless to say, the entire world is blind according to Buddhism. My next project is a comparative study between Bruegel's *Children's Games* and Japanese ukiyo-e woodcuts.



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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This section is largely rewritten and expanded from the second chapter, "Exhibitions of Bruegel and his Family in Japan" of my previous paper "A Comparative Study of the Brothers Pieter Breughel the Younger and Jan Bruegel the Elder," in the exhibition catalogue *Masterpieces of Flanders' Golden Age*, trans. Yumiko Yamazaki, p. 47. [Tokyo:] The Yomiuri Shinbun, 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> Bruegel 1972.
- <sup>3</sup> *Pīteru Buryūgeru zenhangaten*.
- <sup>4</sup> *Buryūgeru to Nēderuranto fūkeiga*.
- <sup>5</sup> *Boimansu Bijutsukan-ten*. At the occasion of the exhibition the special issue, *The Boymans Masterpieces Exhibition, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Tower of Babel* was published by the Sezon Museum of Art, Tokyo 1993.
- <sup>6</sup> Mori 1995a.
- <sup>7</sup> Mori 2001c.
- <sup>8</sup> NHK's "Bruegel," 12 June 1985 and NHK's "Bruegel and His Two Sons," 21 June 1998, and other programs.
- <sup>9</sup> *Rūbensu to sono jidai*.
- <sup>10</sup> Fuji Bijutsukan Gakugeika 1988.
- <sup>11</sup> Mori 1988b.
- <sup>12</sup> *Rūbensu to sono jidai-ten*.
- <sup>13</sup> Senzoku 1999.
- <sup>14</sup> Saitō 1926 and Saitō 1973, pp. 125-128.
- <sup>15</sup> Saitō 1973, p. 128.
- <sup>16</sup> Noma 1946 and Noma 1947.
- <sup>17</sup> One of the possible French books with a white cover Noma saw at that time is probably Michel 1931, but this book is larger than octavo size.
- <sup>18</sup> Noma 2000, p. 6.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>21</sup> Van Mander 1994, vol. 1, p. 190.
- <sup>22</sup> Nakano 1975 and Nakano 1976.
- <sup>23</sup> Ogino 1989 and Ogino 1991.
- <sup>24</sup> *Asahi shinbun* 1995.
- <sup>25</sup> Sono 1992-94, Sono 1995.
- <sup>26</sup> *Asahi shinbun* 2002.
- <sup>27</sup> Hijikata 1963.
- <sup>28</sup> Ledere 1961.
- <sup>29</sup> Mori Yoko's critique of Hijikata Teiichi's interpretation, see Mori 1974.
- <sup>30</sup> Kuramochi 1984.
- <sup>31</sup> Marijnissen and Seidel 1969; Marijnissen 1988.
- <sup>32</sup> Mori 1988a.
- <sup>33</sup> Mori 1989.
- <sup>34</sup> Hindman 1981.
- <sup>35</sup> Mori 1992.
- <sup>36</sup> Mori 2003.