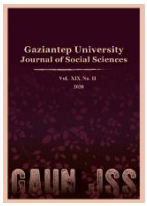

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Rediscovering Bruegel: Art and History in Michael Frayn's *Headlong*

Bruegel'i Yeniden Keşfetmek: Michael Frayn'in Headlong *Romanında Sanat ve Tarih*

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ÖZ

İngiliz oyun yazarı ve romancı Michael Frayn'ın 1999 tarihinde yayımlanan romanı *Headlong*, bir sanat tarihçisinin Flaman ressam Pieter Bruegel'in 1565 yılında yaptığına inanılan *Aylar* ya da *Mevsimler* resim serisinin kayıp altıncı tablosunun keşfine odaklanır. Roman boyunca söz konusu tablonun orijinalliğini doğrulama ve ona sahip olma güdüsüyle hareket eden başkahraman Martin Clay, Pieter Bruegel'in köylülerin, hasatçıların, avcıların günlük ve kırsal faaliyetlerle meşgul olduğu kalabalık tablolarıyla ünlü sanatı üzerine derinlemesine ve kapsamlı bir inceleme yapar. Bruegel'in sanat anlayışı, dinsel çatışmalardan İncil'deki geleneklere, alegorik manzaralardan değişen mevsimler çerçevesinde ayların emeklerine kadar farklı ve zıt şekillerde yorumlanmıştır. Bu sebeple Clay'in tablonun ardındaki siyasi, entelektüel ve sembolik tarihe ilişkin spekülasyonları yalnızca kitabın özünü oluşturmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda karakterin belgelediği uzun ve özenli araştırmalar, İspanyol egemenliğinin bir sonucu olarak zulüm ve baskının yaşandığı on altıncı yüzyılın başlarındaki Hollanda'nın tarihsel arka planını sunar. Bu bilgiler ışığında, bu çalışma Martin'in yolculuğunun, Bruegel'in eserlerinde bulunan ve insan davranışlarının karmaşıklığını irdeleyen tematik unsurları taşıyan bir maceraya nasıl dönüştüğünü incelemeyi ve anlamayı amaçlamaktadır; zira Frayn, kayıp eseri sadece Bruegel'in kendine has üslup ve mirasını yansıtan yerinde betimlemelerle hayata geçirmekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda Hollanda tür resimlerinin anlatı ve sanatsal gelenekleri ile bağlantı kurarak eserin ikonografisini-ikonolojisini siyasi ve sanat tarihsel bir bağlamda açıklama yoluna gider.

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ABSTRACT

British playwright and novelist Michael Frayn's 1999 novel *Headlong* centers on an art historian's discovery of the lost sixth painting from the collection *Months* or *Seasons* that Flemish painter, Pieter Bruegel is believed to have painted in 1565. Throughout the novel, driven by a quest to authenticate and possess the painting, the protagonist Martin Clay is engrossed in a thoughtful and thorough examination of Bruegel's art renowned for busy tableaus of peasants, harvesters, hunters engaged in daily and rural activities. From religious conflicts, biblical conventions to allegorical landscapes, labors of the months within the framework of changing seasons, Bruegel's artistic milieu has been interpreted and elicited in diverse and opposite ways. For that reason, Clay's speculations about the political, intellectual and symbolic history behind the painting are not only the substance of the book, but the lengthy and diligent research he takes on also provides historical backdrop of the Netherlands in early sixteenth century, a time of atrocity and oppression as a result of Spanish rule. In view of that, this study aims to examine and understand how Martin's journey turns into a headlong venture carrying thematic elements found in Bruegel's works delving into the complexities of human behavior. Frayn not only brings the missing masterpiece to life with relevant descriptions projecting Bruegel's idiosyncratic style and legacy, he also explicates its iconography-iconology in a political, and art historical context showing affinity with the narrative and artistic traditions of Dutch genre paintings.

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Introduction

Published in 1999 and shortlisted for Man Booker Prize, Michael Frayn's *Headlong* features a plot constructed around the world of art history, most prominently Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel (c. 1525-1530 -1569). The main character Martin Clay, an art critic is convinced that he has found the missing piece in Bruegel's *Months* or *Seasons* series, a collection of paintings corresponding to the months of the year reflecting the changing seasons and the activities associated with the time period. In an interview published in 2000, Michael Frayn reveals how he is drawn to the lost painting through frequent visits to Kunsthistorisches Museum. One day [he] "noticed a little sign saying that the paintings depicting the seasons were part of a series, and that one painting was missing" (Kahan). The landscape series is on the yearly cycle of changes in nature and each painting represents allocation of two months. Five, still in existence pieces are *Hunters in the Snow* (December- January), *Gloomy Day* (February-March), *Haymaking* (June-July), *Corn Harvest* (August- September) and *The Return of the Herd* (October-November). Frayn's novel intertwines fiction with art historical context using Bruegel's paintings as both inspiration and thematic guide as what drives the plot is not only the search for the lost piece from the series but the iconographic explorations of the allegorical landscapes also offer the readers intricate connections to be found between Bruegel's artistic heritage, Frayn's narrative and Clay's quest which turns into a progression from oblivion to irrational behavior mirroring the complex human nature depicted in Bruegel's works.

Frayn's *Headlong* and Bruegel's Art

The protagonist of the novel, Martin Clay is married to an art historian, Kate and decides to take a year off to launch a new career in writing a book on the impact of nominalism, art in Netherlands in fifteenth century. While working on his book with his wife in the country, he meets Tony Churt and his wife Laura who invite the couple for a dinner which supplies a promising and foreshadowing platform for Martin to dive into the theoretical aspects of art. While finding alternatives to writing his book, Martin already transitions to the territory of the philosophy of art rather than simply art with considerations and repetitive references to iconology and iconography. Discussions surrounding iconography and iconology go back to an essay published by Erwin Panofsky in 1955 as the renowned art historian attempted to decipher the interpretive approach to works of art which is based on three phases starting with pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis and iconological interpretation putting emphasis on the gradual aspect built up with description, analysis and interpretation. "Iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of arts, as opposed to their form" (Panofsky, 1939, p. 3). To put it in another way, iconography focuses on identifying visual elements and symbols reckoning with historical and cultural context in that the ideas, allegories, stories behind what is visible to the eye denotes the cultural meaning amplifying the familiarity with the objects and events. Iconology seeks a broader approach taking into account the cultural and intellectual principles of the time shifting the focus to intrinsic meaning. The novel's associations with explaining artistic merits of paintings through a parodic language turns into nothing but misreadings or misapprehensions most notably manifested in the dialogues between Martin and Laura. At the dinner, in spite of Laura's relentless look, Martin attempts to explain the difference between the two informing how "plain iconography has to be read in conjunction with a wider conception of style and artistic intention" (Frayn, 1999, p. 26). With a humorous intuition Martin attempts to articulate iconography in terms of the pretentious expression of interest on Laura's face and how iconology actually conveys the mockery behind it.

Martin's emphasis on the disparity between iconology-iconography is not arbitrary as he deploys both conceptions as a means of obtaining clues in order to clarify and affirm

authenticity of the painting he casts his eye on at Tony's house. After the dinner Tony wishes to show some pictures from his collection so that he can get an opinion and probably sell if he can get the right price. While one of them is about Helen of Troy and belongs to an Italian artist named Giordano, the rest are Dutch pictorials. While Martin tries to gaze respectfully at those works with pedantry in order to sound and look as a serious art historian reminding himself that he should "concentrate on the iconography" (Frayn, 1999, p. 35), Tony shows one painting that Martin's fixation is blindingly evident. It is signed as "Vrancz*: Pretmakers in een Berglandschap (um 1600 gemalt)*" (p. 46) in other words, *Merrymakers in a Mountain Landscape*. With such a familiar title Michael Frayn not only creates an imaginary painting with a notional and compositional sense of ekphrasis[1], but in order to make it part of the series he refers to Bruegel's early drawings like *Mountain Landscape with River and Travellers* (1553) or *Mountain Landscape with Ridge and Valley* (c. 1552-1553). Apart from transmitting real artworks into fiction, devising a narrative logic of describing imagined paintings through art historical writing is the foundation upon which Frayn is constructing his storyline which elucidates Martin's conscientious inquisition of Bruegel's artistic heritage. Thereupon, the amount of research his fictional character Martin Clay does into the origins and existence of that lost picture mirrors what Frayn himself actually did and got completely obsessed in the process.

Although little is known about Bruegel and his life, his epitome of interest is ostensibly observing the "organic life of forms in nature" (2016, p. 12). In this group of paintings from *The Months* "nature appears in its varied seasonal garb with its different atmospheres and weathers, while the acutely and eloquently characterized figures who are occupied in their diverse activities and labors as hunters, tree pruners, cultivators of the fields, cattle drovers, and harvesters…" (Zagorin, 2003, p. 95). As mentioned in Ian Buchanan's work "The Collection of Niclaes Jongelick: II The Months by Pieter the Elder", all with the exception of *Haymaking* are signed and dated 1565, belonging to the wealthy Antwerp merchant, Niclaes Jongelinck (1990, p. 541). The ongoing debate among art historians about the number of paintings in the series is added a new complication with the archival records from the mid-17th century. Buchanan refers to 1659 Inventory of Archduke Leopold Willhelm's collection which records originally five pieces but the possibility of being added a sixth painting to complete the series (p. 542). In the novel also, while pondering on the paintings, Martin constantly dwells upon the ideas by certain scholars like Charles de Tolnay, Gustav Glück, Wofgang Stechow, Max J. Friedlander, some of whom argue that there were twelve paintings in total, each representing a single month, while others suggest that each painting may have depicted two months. Martin discerns that all these paintings appear under a collective heading which is not *The Seasons* but "De Twelve maenden-The Twelve Months" (Frayn, 1999. p. 63) which arouses more mystery and doubt as there might be even more missing. But even with this reasoning, the added painting, depicting April-May, appears to be lost leaving the current five in present which composes the genesis of Frayn's novel. Although the debate concerning the number of panels

[1] One of the best ways of interpreting the mutual correspondences between words and images is ekphrasis, expression of visual artworks in verbal terms, an ancient Greek concept that is still used in literary and art criticism. In evoking the essence and details of the paintings and bringing them to life through the undeniable power of words, Frayn also relies on the literary device *ekphrasis*. His imaginative render on the lost painting is elaborated as notional ekphrasis referring to a fundamental theoretical aspect of ekphrasis brought up by John Hollander who contemplates that actual ekphrasis details the portrayal of a particular painting while notional ekphrasis involves imagining and conceptualizing an abstract, non-existing piece of art (1995, p. 3). Accordingly Martin tries to designate and verbalize a presumably existing but lost and never-seen artwork.

in the original series has been a division in the opinions of scholars, a matter further complicated by lack of historical documentation, Martin is firmly convinced that he found the lost piece and rather than seven missing in the collection, it must be one and he found it.

The difference between iconology and iconography is a crucial distinction to hinge upon for Martin in his quest to verify that he has found the missing painting. While doing so, finding thematic parallels with what Bruegel has been through is the culprit around which the plot is constructed by the author. No certain data on Bruegel's birthplace, education or training is available except for the journey he made to the south of Italy, Sicily, the Alps probably between 1552-1554 which could explain the influences of classic Italian Renaissance in his art as illustrated in *Babel Tower* (1563) and the mountainous backgrounds recognized in the *Seasons* series. Bruegel's realm of art resonates not only with realistic portrayal but also philosophic and emotional references could be unearthed from his substantial aesthetic principles inspired by traditional Flemish genre paintings. By a majority, what shaped Bruegel's engravings is the changing atmosphere of the months, the seasons and the labors associated with them which can be found in early Renaissance tradition of the *Labours of the Months*, pictorial calendars and the exemplary manuscripts by Limbourg Brothers and Simon Bening, major miniature artists of Dutch tradition.

Martin believes that Bruegel chooses "labours and activities traditionally shown associated with particular times of the year in the calendar that formed part of a Book of Hours" (Frayn, 1999, p. 68) which is the book through which Martin first met his wife Kate on a flight to Munich who was working on the iconography of it. Martin casts his mind into the weather in the painting he found which is supposed to represent April and May as he indulges into finding the iconographic symbols of these months from the *Book of Hours*. According to Kathryn M. Rudy, *The Book of Hours*[2] "opens with a calendar bearing illuminated roundels alternating between the signs of the zodiac and the labours of the months" (2007, p. 313). Rudy makes it clear that it is hard to argue that Bruegel necessarily knew of the book but the possibility cannot be ruled out as he incorporated certain motifs. Martin elaborates on the fact that in accordance with the changing aspects of seasons based on the iconography of *Book of Hours*, what is expected from an April-May painting would be peasants at their labours like ploughing, milking and gentry at their pleasure like dancing or courting. But what is divergent for Bruegel is his adamant devotion to freely adapting his own ideas into the pictures, which makes it even harder for Martin to believe that the painting at Tony's house could belong to Vrancz, probably referring to another Dutch painter Sebastiaen Vrancz who followed the same tradition of depicting four seasons or months of the year. For him, it is only in Bruegel's painting that one could find the congruence in the transformation of the traditional and attributing the work to Vrancz could only be oversimplification.

As Leonard Barkan puts, iconography and iconology relate "artistic images of pre-existing verbal formulations and, conversely, seeing poetic works as composed of pre-existing motifs deriving from the same nexus of poetic and pictorial traditions" (1995, p. 328). This observation underscores a crucial point in throwing a light on Frayn's engagement with visual descriptions of pictures from Bruegel's oeuvre, trying to transport readers into viewers offering more than a glimpse. In retrospect, Martin does not give a lengthy, elaborative render on the

[2] "In the last quarter of the sixteenth century traditional representations of the Twelve months, allegorical landscapes and seasons were quite popular in Flemish painting. The tradition derived from calendar miniatures in Books of Hours, where each month is characterized by both the condition of the landscape and the typical human activities associated with the month" (Miegroet, 2023, p. 32).

painting he intuitively accredits as Bruegel's but depicts a springtime landscape keeping in mind that "occupations suitable for April and May would include leading sheep to pasture, milking cows in the fields, and ploughing and sowing- a significant omission from Bruegel's series" (Buchanan, 1990, p. 546). His accumulated recollection of it focuses on the valley, wooed hills, a village, a river and the mountains as what visually connects the paintings in the series is not just the adjacent months that they represent but also the mountainous landscape at the background. He describes:

> It is spring. On the woods below the snowlike, and tumbling away in front of me from where I'm standing, there's the first shimmer of April green…. The season seems to shift in front of you from April to May as you travel south into the eye of the sun. Among the trees just below me is a group of clumsy figures, some of them breaking branches of white blossom from the trees, some caught awkwardly in the middle of a heavy clumping dance. A bagpiper sits on a stump; you can almost hear the harsh, pentatonic drone. People are dancing because it's again, and they are alive to see it. Far away in the mountains a herd is being moved up the familiar muddy scars towards its summer pasture (Frayn, 1999, p. 44).

Apart from real paintings, Frayn is also producing examples of notional ekphrasis in which the visual impression and narrative representation completely depend on the non-existing works of art; hence the imagination of the writer. *Merrymakers* (the title Martin refers to throughout the novel) has a visual and verbal existence in the novel only through the cognition of the writer which is lucidly impressed by his artistic configurations and introspections in art criticism and pictorial arts. On the other hand, Beatrix Hesse interprets this as "pastiche writing" (2003, p. 214) as the painting has an iconographic type and should bear some of the similar elements from the series making it rational and credible in the eyes of the readers. As iconography is concerned with astute details, identification and interpretation of visual elements, figures, colors, symbols in the work of art, Martin uses such prominent seasonal features that it becomes easier to identify the time of the year and the social, cultural interaction incorporated into the painting through certain agricultural activities.

Frayn is fully aware of the arduousness of providing specificity for *Merrymakers* which could be predicated upon both the anomalies of converting a visual experience into a verbal one and the non-existentiality of the painting. Martin's confessional dialogue with his wife about the painting and his ostensible discovery incorporating further remarks on *Merrymakers* supports this idea:

> The shimmer on the leaves, the snow-capped peaks, the great diagonals, the feet stamping in the mud- they all flash through my mind and immediately fall victim to my drive for verbal economy. How can I condense it all into one unsystematic aphorism? (Frayn, 1999, p. 121)

Martin is so enamored by the painting that he underscores the difficulty of capturing the full essence of the visual experience. Therefore, he charts out his great project of taking the picture from the possession of Tony by giving a fully detailed account of Bruegel's *Months* and the missing piece from the collection. At this point, Frayn endows his character with such a voice that it leaves an impression of listening to an art historian's highly surveyed data, giving lengthy quotes from secondary sources with scholarly authenticity. Frayn almost fully documents a comprehensive historiographic search both on the Netherlands at the time and the artistic scholarship on Bruegel without trying to insert them into the plot. Such that, Martin even begins interiorizing the pictures by feeling the underlying emotions like going out on an expedition as the hunters do in *Hunters in the Snow* only to find that no one will ever give them a glance upon their return. For *Hunters in the Snow* he remarks that:

> There they go again, those weary men with their gaunt dogs, on the walls of hospital waiting rooms and students' lodgings, on your mantel piece Christmas after Christmas, trudging away from us off the winter hills behind our backs, down into the snow bound valley beneath (Frayn, 1999, p. 58).

Apart from the procession of the hunters down the hill into village life, Martin's introductory

notes on the painting clearly adverts the reproductions of it given that *Hunters* is probably the most popular or familiar piece from the cycle.

> Their heads are lowered, their spoils are meagre. Three hunters with thirteen dogs to feed and nothing but a single fox to show for their labors. There is no great rejoicing at their return; the women making a fire, outside the inn with the sign that's hanging half of its hooks, don't give them a glance, any more than the ploughman looks up to see Icarus vanishing into the sea in that earlier painting of Bruegel's that Auden made almost as famous as the *Hunters* (Frayn, 1999, p. 58).

Fig. 1: *Hunters in the Snow*, 1565, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.[3] Photo by author.

Besides wintry landscape, celebration of peasant life and a group of men returning from a probably unsuccessful hunt as indicated with one fox in sight, the reference made to Icarus and the popularity of W. H. Auden's poem "Museé des Beaux Art" (1938) carries resonance with what Frayn is embarking on with a book totally built around the missing painting from Bruegel's series. It is possible to affirm that the title is suggestive in the sense that Martin himself is delving 'headlong' into an adventure. *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1558) is the most dioristic work of art in eliciting the painter's treatment of frivolous human nature. The poem uses Bruegel's painting as a poignant inspiration and metaphor in reflecting the human tendency to overlook the suffering of the others by juxtaposing the detachment of those from seemingly unimportant Icarus and those in the foreground going on in their mundane activities. In that sense, it is possible to draw connections between Bruegel's works and Frayn's novel in exploring the aspects of human nature as Martin Clay embarks on a journey with potential consequences akin to Icarus's 'headlong' fall or unsuccessful hunt of the hunters.

Martin remembers the first time he saw *Hunters* along with other prominent pictures in the same room of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. He takes the readers into a visual journey through the rooms and corridors of the museum which houses many Bruegel paintings like *Babel Tower* (1563), *Children's Games* (1560), *The Wedding Banquet* (1567). But on the same wall with *Hunters,* two more paintings, *The Return of the Herd* and *Gloomy Day* are also exhibited which are plainly related to each other. The darkened sky, a simply portrayed

[3] The photos of the paintings belonging to Kunsthistorisches Museum were taken by the author of the article.

peasantry life, men pollarding trees which is a common practice of February-March time of the year, predominate *Gloomy Day.*

Fig. 2: *Gloomy Day*, 1565, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo by author.

Fig. 3: The Return of the Herd, 1565, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo by author.

But Martin exclusively specifies that two more in the same series are separated from those pictures.

> If you go to the National Gallery in Prague- or turn over the page of your Bruegel book, as I am doing now- you find yourself looking down on a fourth river and up to a fourth lot of precipitous cliffs. This time it's brilliant summer's day, and we're further back from the valley, on more level ground, watching the Haymaking (Frayn, 1999, p. 61).

Representing early summer, while haymaking as the central activity in the painting is thought to fall in July in the calendars, the ensuing harvesting coincides with August. He continues:

> And if you turn over once again, or go to the Metropolitan Museum next time you're in New York, you're looking out over a fifth valley. The country here is gentler, the weather hotter. There are no high mountains, and only a flash of the river as it joins the calm and busy sea. You're in The Corn Harvest (p. 61)...

Fig. 5: *The Corn Harvest*, 1565, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Each of these pictures represent four seasons "characterized by its ever-returning round of rural labours and weathers" (Frayn, 1999, p. 61). Peter Wagner coins such a remarkable and striking statement in his work saying "every museum of art is also a museum of words" (1996, p. 280). Frayn not only transposes those images into texts, he also demonstrates interpretive dimension and provides a framework for examining the deeper levels of meaning embedded in the common motifs in relation to broader contexts of culture, history and politics. The way Michael Frayn draws from various fields in an interdisciplinary manner is analogous to the approach of offering insights into the ways those artworks were produced creating layers of associations which is a key asset in Clay's iconographic search.

While reading the historical and etymological scholarship in the Reading Room of London Library, Martin cannot help considering the epoch of turmoil in Netherlands against Spanish domination by the end of Bruegel's life. What is echoed most in art historical enquiries regarding Bruegel is his political (un)consciousness. In particular, the reign of King Philip II of Spain against whose policies grew political and religious upheavals and armed resistance, projected the tensions and complexities of the time. Witnessing such a tumultuous period right before his death in 1569 might have penetrated into Bruegel's compositional devices used in works like *The Massacre of the Innocents* (c. 1565-1567), *The Numbering at Bethlehem* (1566). As no-one knows in which order Bruegel painted the months, the comparison of a chronological progress is hardly available. While some condemn him for evading overt political stance in his depictions probably because of his reliance on being commissioned by rich, powerful patrons or using art as a form of escape during hard times, ingenious social expositions on human condition rather than direct, harsh propaganda that he capitalizes on cannot be overlooked. Such disregard of the political events in the country might align with the inattentive and reckless

attitude of his mass figures but no definitive answer is conjured up on the alternative scenarios whether he collaborated with the nationalist mutineers or Spanish oppressors. Yet with the awareness that 1560s were a harsh decade for Netherlands in every sense, Martin attempts to build a political course in accordance with the situation in the country. He begins his chronology around March which also meets *Gloomy Day* in the series. The gloomy atmosphere in the country is evidenced by King Philip's determination not to moderate the repression and no single change in the matter of religion is allowed. Skipping the months of the lost painting, Martin transitions to summer, the time of the Spanish Inquisition and the rising intensity of people's cry. In the meantime, Bruegel's *Haymaking* features women in hayfields, men carrying baskets with cherries, peas and down the hill men gathering hay. In the *Harvesters*, on a hot summer day, while some men are shading, refuging and a man laying asleep under a large tree, beyond them some other are stacking and bundling wheat. When the autumn comes, Bruegel renders workers, peasants bringing back a herd of cattle while in the streets of Netherlands, violent debates among leaders burst out with placards being posted outside the palaces. Finally, winter arrives, the continuation of the Inquisition in the country and the rumors of planning a massacre of Protestants coincides with the return of the hunters in the snow.

A similar political configuration is also traced in the scene Martin confesses his tentative discovery to Kate. After revealing his plans of getting it, Martin sees how panicked she is and identifies himself with "Saul, in the great Conversion" (p. 128) making a reference to Bruegel's 1567 work *The Conversion of Paul* which is also housed at Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Fig. 6: *The Conversion of Paul*, 1567, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo by author.

In the Biblical narrative, on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus, Saul miraculously hears the voice of Jesus upon seeing a ray of light and turns into Paul, a Christian devotee. Although the same story has been portrayed numerously by different painters, most notably Caravaggio, Bruegel's version once again characteristically diverges in the sense that the main theme is embedded and almost lost within a large scene made up of the procession of an army through the mountains. Some art historians have attempted to find political interpretations in Bruegel's works which generally contain layers of symbolism with subtle and complex commentaries as this particular work could address 1567 Alpine crossing of the Spanish Duke

Alba. As in the painting, Martin feels "felled and blinded" (128), "small, unnoticed" (129) but cannot help putting an emphasis that he "shall rise as Paul and [his] awkward little fit will have changed the world" (129). Through such an introspection, Martin tries to draw parallelism between his discovery, its potential impact on the art world and Paul whose conversion had an eminent effect on Christianity. Finding such thematic elements incorporated into the narrative implies a liaison between Martin's unfolding journey and the prospect of underlying characteristics in Bruegel's works as his artistic range is too broad to be encompassed in one, single direction and the most notable recurring pattern in his art is his unique sense of observation on human experience, an aspect integrated into *Months* series.

Reindert Falkenburg discusses a different view of order through the representation of nature in *Months* which accentuates a religious context contradicting the dominant view of secularism in Bruegel's paintings. From panoramic landscapes to religious conflicts, Bruegel's artistic milieu has been interpreted and elicited in diverse and opposite ways as during his lifetime both Netherlands and northern Europe faced religious and political divisions. While northern Netherlands embraced Protestantism, southern parts were predominated by Spanish Catholics. Bruegel's training and career thrived in Antwerp but his move to Brussels placed him in Catholic environment and in spite of spending most of his life in Catholic Spanish Netherlands, minimalist tendencies pertaining to Protestantism, rural scenes is also evident. Falkenburg holds the idea that even the order of the paintings is significative as it could be "brought out by small vignettes and signs with a religious theme that bring to mind particular events from the life of Christ and the History of Salvation" (2017, p. 83). As early 16th century landscape paintings thematize stories from the New Testament or Scriptures, contemplating the popularity of religious art in Middle Ages, presuming that it had a lingering echo in 16th century genre painting is deductive. On the other hand, the fact that Bruegel is a precursor in observing human activities and labors with humor should not go unnoticed. Although Bruegel's associations with some mystical groups like Family of Love also known as the Familists rely purely on speculations rather than historical facts; exhibiting absurd, foolish or sinful aspects of human nature in his works resonate with a satirical and ironical approach while maintaining a humorous level. Besides following established iconography and using conventional motifs like "agricultural occupations such as sheep shearing (June), haymaking (July), harvesting corn (August), ploughing and sowing (September),gathering grapes for wine (October) or slaughtering pigs (December)" (Borchert, 2019, p. 97), Bruegel also infused anthropomorphic elements into his landscapes which is most distinctly put forward by Charles de Tolnay, a distinguished art historian whose works shed light on some painters' life and artistic evolution.

In his book *Pierre Bruegel l'Ancien,* Tolnay proposes that Bruegel uses landscapes as settings for aspects of human life and folly (1935, p. 3) adding a new layer to the interplay between human existence, humanlike qualities and the natural world. Employing humorous imagery, Bruegel depicts human fatuities, idiomatic expressions with contemplation on human nature most notably in the iconic work *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1557). As a draughtsman, peasant, illustrator, landscape painter, he might be manifesting nature as a realm of escape from human follies or simply utilizing art to speculate on human beings defiantly disregarding anthropocentric perspectives in favor of topographic elements. In *Headlong,* what drives the plot is both Martin's pursuit of the supposed lost painting with a historical curiosity on the art world of sixteenth century Netherlands underscoring the political tensions of the time and intellectual speculation and exploration with comical, hilarious situations which add intriguing layers to the narrative. By integrating human activities and nature into his landscape paintings, Bruegel recognizes the cyclical nature of life which aligns with hardships and joys of rural life in the changing aspects of seasons and could be expressing a subtle commentary with political undertones giving indirect insight into the complexities of human nature rather than discernible

allegorical themes or satirical elements. Chapman adverts that "*Headlong* reads like a Bruegelesque farce updated to the twentieth-century English countryside (2009, p. 786)." Situating Frayn's novel in satirical farce genre given the misunderstandings and complications built upon one another until the denouement, is not arbitrary as the writer's career has started with composing columns for certain newspapers with a humorous and witty touch and then consolidated with plays like "Noises Off" or most recent novel, *Skios.* Frayn engrosses farcical comedies to penetrate human behavior which could converge him into drawing comparisons or analogies with Bruegel whose artistic oeuvre has been discussed by many critics and scholars having philosophical allusions to human follies. Accordingly, in the novel Martin also muses on the ambiguity surrounding the philosophy of Bruegel which is a testament to the richness and depth of his art. The seasons are generally characterized by monthly labors but Bruegel also concentrates on the indifference and negligence of people while certain peasantry activities are carried out.

In order to verify the authenticity of the painting, Martin directs his attention to the question of whether there was a little walker in the picture as in some of his works like *The Painter and the Connoisseur* (1565), *The Peasant Wedding* (c. 1567-1568) and *The Sermont of St John the Baptis*t (1566), Bruegel shows his face among the messy crowds and many figures. But Martin is so absorbed in the possession of the painting that, once he learns that Tony took it to a workshop for cleaning, he immerses into a great deal of anger, panic and shock. Rather than just simply seizing a chance to look at the painting again, he is dismayed at how Tony can entrust it to other people as Martin's growing and blinded obsession for the ownership of the painting involves orchestrating and rationalizing a tenet that Tony is not capable of appreciating such an elusive discovery as well as gaining wealth and dignity from the art world. At that point, Beatrix Hesse draws attention to the inverse proportion in Martin's increasing knowledge of Netherlandish art and his declining moral sense like "lying, cheating, making himself an accessory to Tony's own attempts at tax evasion and theft and almost committing adultery with Tony's wife Laura" (2003. p. 211). Martin's discovery of Tony's intentions, the misunderstanding with Tony's wife, Laura, and the conflicts between characters, contribute to the narrative tension and likely build toward an explosive and engaging dissolution at the very end of the novel which also coincides with Martin's final interpretation or examine on the *Merrymakers.* The car chase with Martin and Laura being pursued by crazed Tom culminates in an accident which leads the painting to be burnt to ashes in the fire. Martin notices that:

> … the little man tumbling into the millpool has his head bound between his knees. That they are not ducking him. Not saving him. They're drowning him. Way off in the middle distance, unnoticed by anyone around, remarked only by an eye outside the world of the picture, a secular martyrdom is taking place. The small event at the edge of things that gives the scents significance, just like the fall of Icarus and the blinding of Saul and the unnoticed arrival of that pregnant woman among the crowds in Bethlehem. The busy year revolves, but before the first season's out the small concealed murder has occurred that turns the whole idyll into an irony (pp. 383-384).

The small, unnoticed events happening at the corners of the painting, most notoriously like Icarus is the focus of much critical response to Bruegel's aesthetic principle. The indifference to a drowning man let alone save him equals to a murder for Martin and ironically a painting disclosing that incident turns into a murder victim as well. In *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,* with just tiny legs in the sea, Bruegel not only marginalizes the Greek myth of Icarus who flew too close to the sun with waxed wings in order to stress the indifference to individual suffering in iconological sense, but he also delves into rural scenes, peasants engaged in daily labors as in the landscape series and many of his paintings while tragic events go completely unnoticed. As Panofsky's iconology is applied to utter a broader meaning beyond apparent imagery, incorporation of subtle political messages or reflections on human conditions through changing seasons or rural life metaphors could be indicated as the ideas beyond immediate visual content.

According to Falkenburg's contention, the multi- scenic device that we often see in Bruegel's paintings "is derived from late medieval "Andachtsbilder", devotional images designed to engage the viewer in a process of meditation on events epigrammatically represented in minuscule figures" (2001, p. 260). In doing so, Bruegel illustrates more than peripheral attention but he also distinguishes the disregard, negligence and blindness which regrettably rule the world. Bruegel not only prompts viewers to meditate on events or narratives represented through minuscule figures, he also illustrates a means of critiquing societal and human shortcomings. What is more to the point, in contrast to the first iconographic depiction regarding *Merrymakers*, the final iconological figuration posits Martin as the incurious people in Bruegel's painting with his complete engrossment in the lost painting and cumulative insensibility to his family. Insomuch that Martin's identification with certain paintings turns into an embodiment of human follies Bruegel wants to underlie unclosing Michael Frayn's farcical convection in the overall of the novel.

Conclusion

Bruegel's composite pictures, which is a continuation of medieval traditions of allegorical landscapes, characterise a morally flawed world with a focus on the individual, mundane acts reflecting how irrational human behaviors could be. Martin's adventurous road to decipher and prove that *Merrymakers* is the lost painting is intertwined with Bruegel's life and artistic canon insomuch that the character's oblivion turns into irrational behaviors at some points drawing inspiration from scenes and figures depicted in Bruegel's works mirroring inherent complexities of human nature. Frayn's narrative strategy involves employing the conventions of art history writing to describe imaginative paintings which are projected into Martin's rigorous exploration of Bruegel's artistic legacy, creating a rich and layered narrative that combines elements of art and history. Martin Clay's quasi-obscure textual insights into the painting, which is reminiscent of Bruegel's method of demanding further, visual search and engagement, are emblematic of both iconography and iconology providing not only a visual language but a deeper understanding of the multivalent, symbolic representations in Bruegel's works.

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