

Antithetical Iconography in Early Netherlandish Landscape Painting

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Introduction

Landscape is traditionally known as the genre in which the 'art for art's sake' concept finds its prime reflection. Until recently, therefore, there was a virtually total lack of any iconographic approach in the study of Netherlandish 16th and 17th-century landscape painting. Where there was any allusion to it, the 'content' of a painted landscape was primarily identified with the artist's experience of nature. The realism exhibited by these landscapes—to a greater or lesser degree—was associated with an intention on the artist's part to hold on to this aesthetic perception of the visible reality, so as to allow the spectator to share it. The broad compositional and spatial relationships in the picture were regarded as the formal bearers of this 'content', on which the spectator's reception ought also to be focused. Individual details, whether belonging to the landscape itself or consisting of human figures, were considered—literally and figuratively—only worth a glance in so far as they were the constituents of these formal relationships. Hence the human element, small or sometimes very small-scale as it is and often consisting in the 16th century of saints or biblical figures, was seen as completely secondary to the landscape as a whole. Rather than attention to the individual detail and its significance, an aesthetic 'holistic' perception of the picture was postulated as the correct response to this genre.¹

Of recent years, however, people have begun, albeit still only in dribs and drabs, to pay attention to other aspects of the content of these paintings. On the model of the iconographic approach of Panofsky and De Jongh to 15th-century religious painting and 17th-century genre painting respectively, they have also started to look at 16th and 17th-century landscapes on the premiss that an intellectual concept, such as an allegory, or a literary given, such as a story from the Bible, governs the scene down to its details.² Some authors have thought it possible to trace a fundamental theme in large groups of landscapes by different artists, e.g. Raupp and Bruyn, who see the allegories of life's pilgrimage and the 'vanity', *vanitas*, of

earthly life represented in many 17th-century landscapes from the Northern Netherlands.³ Others have concentrated on a sub-genre, like Goedde, who sees in 16th and 17th-century seascapes metaphors for the horror and disharmony of earthly existence as opposed to the harmony and peace of God's safe haven.⁴ Yet others have homed in on the oeuvre of a single artist and managed to trace a certain basic theme, e.g. Wiegand in a study of the *vanitas* symbolism in the landscapes of Jacob van Ruisdael and Falkenburg in one on the allegory of life's pilgrimage in the pictures of the first painter to make the landscape into an autonomous subject in the 16th century, Joachim Patinir.⁵ There are also art historians who, keeping more to the 'surface' of the scene, have opted for a descriptive approach to certain types of scene, e.g. Van Straaten, who has written a history of the rendering of winter in 16th and 17th-century Netherlandish art.⁶ Just as in many another study, one finds here too indications of the symbolism of individual landscape and figure motifs, although the content of the scene as a whole remains unexplained.⁷ Sometimes a separate publication may also be devoted to the symbolic content of a single composition, as in the case of L. and G. Bauer's explanation of Pieter Bruegel's *Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap*, Ellenius's interpretation of a wooded landscape of 1590 by Lucas van Valckenborch or Kauffmann's analysis of Jacob van Ruisdael's *Windmill at Wyk by Duurstede* of c. 1670.⁸ Finally, there are relatively numerous art historical studies which, although admittedly about the iconography of different types of scene—genre paintings, for instance—, nevertheless contain interpretations of individual landscape and figure motifs in paintings of which a number could also be classified as landscapes.⁹

This summary of iconographic studies of the Netherlandish 16th and 17th-century landscape is not complete, even in respect of its diversity, but it does allow the following general observations to be made. The more research is done into the iconography of this kind of painting, the clearer it becomes that the employment of a single monolithic concept 'landscape'—which is in fact a product of the

formal aesthetic approach sketched above—is questionable. What we really have to do with is a conglomerate of various types of scene, which may be closely related as far as their outward appearance is concerned, but are by no means necessarily so in respect of their content. It is not possible to write ‘the’ iconography of Netherlandish landscape painting of the 16th and 17th centuries.

From the iconographic viewpoint there is no reason for regarding the human figure, even at its small scale, as less important than the landscape itself. This means that the boundaries between landscapes and other genres—devotional painting in the early 16th century and the genre piece and history painting in the period thereafter—are blurred.

Yet at the present state of research it is nonetheless possible to point to some aspects of the iconography of Netherlandish 16th and 17th-century landscapes that repeatedly recur. In many of them it has been thought possible to detect an ‘iconographic structure’ of antitheses between various landscape and figure motifs, which are expressed visually in formal relationships in the scene, e.g. left versus right or foreground versus background.¹⁰ Quite often this antithetical relationship appears to have been conceived as a contrast between the sinful worldly order and self love (*amor sui*) and the divine order and love of God (*amor Dei*) within the overriding theme of the need for man to direct his life’s pilgrimage to God and eternal life in the hereafter.¹¹ Moreover, the symbolical quality that is hereby to be attached to individual landscape and figure elements in the scene implies a completely different type of reception, or rather ‘reception technique’, from the ‘holistic’ way of looking preferred by the formal aesthetic approach. It seems that the spectator must precisely look out for the individual, sometimes barely visible detail, so that he must as it were undertake a visual journey through the landscape in order to distill a coherent pictorial narrative and message from the different motifs. And here it is necessary to think not only of the eye wandering through the scene, but also of the accompanying mental act of the successive interpretation of individual motifs.¹²

Focusing attention specifically on Southern Netherlandish landscape painting of the 16th century, the question is do these observations, which in part are still of a preliminary character, also apply to paintings by those artists who determined the face of the landscape tradition before Pieter Bruegel appeared on the scene. In other words, are landscapes with an antithetical iconographic structure also to be found in the period between Joachim Patinir and Pieter Bruegel—c. 1525–65—and is the ‘reception-mode’ for which these pictures were

conceived also to be characterized as a visual journey of interpretation?

Joachim Patinir

In order to obtain a basis for our interpretation of a number of representative paintings of the period between 1525 and 1565, we must first turn briefly to the pictures of the founder of this genre, Joachim Patinir (c. 1485–1524).¹³ His landscapes show an obvious geographical divergence between a wilderness with high, bare rocks on the one hand and the gentle slopes of cultivated regions on the other (figs. 1 and 2). This divergence has been interpreted as a symbolic rendering of the contrast between the difficult narrow path that leads to eternal life and the easy broad way of worldly life that leads to eternal perdition respectively, in conformity with a landscape imagery that goes back to biblical and Antique sources. Thus in Patinir’s case the antithetical structure of the landscape relates to a Christian moralizing message focused on the perspective of eternity. The figure element, consisting of a main scene and various subsidiary ones, is also geared to this programme. The main scene, in the foreground, shows the Virgin and Child or a saint as representatives of the community of true pilgrims, who live on earth as strangers, but know that their ultimate destination is with God in the Heavenly Jerusalem. The subsidiary scenes, more in the background, illustrate episodes in the life of the protagonist, which reveal his or her exemplary virtue. This religious pictorial narrative is so placed in the landscape, i.e. in the part with the rocky wilderness, that the figure’s association with the difficult, narrow path is also given visual expres-



1 Joachim Patinir, *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*
Madrid, Museo del Prado

sion. The figures peopling the inhabited regions, on the other hand, engaged as they are in pursuing their worldly concerns, exemplify sinful behaviour. Individual landscape motifs too play their role in this symbolic world scene, where people are looking for salvation in either earthly goods or heavenly things.¹⁴

Thus Patinir's *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* in Madrid (fig. 1)¹⁵ shows in the foreground of a landscape consisting of the two distinct geographical regions described above the figures of the Virgin and Child. At the Virgin's feet lies the baggage belonging to the traditional outfit of the pilgrim. In the middle distance on the left can be seen Joseph, the 'foster-father' of the Child, clad entirely in pilgrim garb. These motifs make it plain to the beholder—also in conformity with the characterization of Christ as the exemplary pilgrim in contemporary devotional literature—that the Child on his flight into Egypt is held up as a model to him on his own earthly pilgrimage. The scenes in the background—on the right the Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem and the persecution by Herod's soldiers, from which the Holy Family was forced to flee, and on the left the Fall of the Idols, which according to the legends toppled off their pedestals on the Holy Family's arrival in Egypt—are a reminder and summary of this whole episode in Christ's infancy. In Patinir's day this was seen as a prefiguration of the sufferings of Christ on his earthly pilgrimage. Other individual landscape and figure motifs too make their contribution to the exemplary rendering of opposing ways of life on this earth. For example, a small crouching figure, to be seen in the background on the right, relieving himself in front of a farmhouse in the region with cultivated farmlands is a symbol of the sinfulness characteristic of this area. Conversely, the castle of difficult access high in the mountains in the background on the left is to be understood as a symbol of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which can only be reached by the narrow path that is hard to tread.

In Patinir's *Landscape with St. Jerome* in Madrid (fig. 2)¹⁶ the association of the protagonist with the difficult path of life is made even more clearly visible. St. Jerome is seated just in front of an opening in the rocks in the foreground, behind which can be seen a narrow path leading to the top of a mountain. In accordance with his legend, he is pulling a thorn out of a lion's paw, a motif which must be understood as containing an admonition to the spectator likewise to pull out the thorn of sin that pierces the flesh of everyone, to go through the 'strait gate' and climb the narrow path that leads to eternal life (for this biblical metaphor see St. Matthew 7:13-14). God's forgiveness, which awaits every repentant sinner at the end of



2 Joachim Patinir, *Landscape with St. Jerome*
Madrid, Museo del Prado

his life, is indicated here by a minuscule scene on top of the mountain in question, which reminds us of an episode in the saint's life in which he likewise forgave repentant robbers who had stolen a donkey. By contrast, various subsidiary scenes in the background, which show the robbers wandering lost in the inhabited world before they came to contrition, exemplify the sinfulness of the pursuit of worldly goods. This baleful striving is also expressed in all sorts of other small landscape and figure details to be seen in these regions, e.g. in the miners' hovels in the background on the right (which stand for delving for earthly treasures) and in the 'blind pilgrim' led by a boy in the right foreground, who is also blind in the spiritual sense and on his way to perdition.

The small dimensions of a number of the above-mentioned details in these paintings make it clear that for physical reasons alone it is impossible to perceive them individually at a single glance. These dimensions and the special significance of each separate motif make the reading of the picture in successive stages the most obviously adequate reception technique. Added to that is the fact that the compositional principle of a main figure to which subsidiary scenes are added is derived from Late Medieval devotional paintings, which were meant for a similar kind of reception. This type of painting usually showed the holy figures in close-up, in order to promote the beholder's empathetic identification with them, and in addition often contained all sorts of details, including subsidiary scenes with episodes from the life of the protagonist (fig. 3).¹⁷ These subsidiary scenes served as a visual guide for the meditation of the beholder on successive episodes in the life of the holy protagonist, which bear



3 Rogier van der Weyden *Madonna Enthroned*
Lugano Thyssen Bornemisza Collection

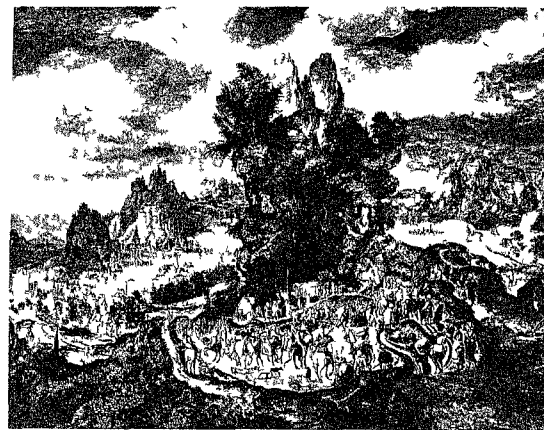
upon Christian virtue and mysteries of faith. Since the figure element in Patinir's landscapes is a direct evolution from this type of devotional painting (compare figs. 1 and 3), the 'reception-mode' of the series of small scenes in his landscapes will have been rooted in the traditional reception of subsidiary scenes in devotional painting.¹⁸ Patinir seems to have employed this narrative formula in order to involve the spectator via both his eye and his mind in the world he was portraying and its symbolic dimensions. When the beholder lets his eye travel over the landscape and his mind continually dwell on the many details and their meaning, he as it were himself undertakes the 'pilgrimage through the world' which is the subject of the picture. In this visual and interpretative journey he actualizes the theme of the painting for himself.¹⁹

Herrn met de Bles and Jan van Amstel

Turning to the thematic dimensions of some pictures by two of the most important representatives of landscape painting between Patinir and Bruegel, it is clear that there are in any case great formal parallels between the landscapes of Patinir and those of the first generations of artists after him. The paintings of Herrn met de Bles, the first follower of Patinir known by name, and the Brunswick Monogrammist, who is presumed to be identifiable as Jan van Amstel, stem roughly speaking from the period 1525–65 and have so much in common with each other that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish

their individual hands: perhaps they even collaborated with each other.²⁰

The landscapes of both painters are characterized by an enormous amount of small, sometimes minuscule details, both in the rendering of the landscape and the figure element. Their paintings follow the geographical bipartition of the landscape in Patinir's works, with a broad subdivision of the scene as a whole into a wilderness area with high rock formations on the one hand and a lower cultivated rural area with extensive urban building on the other (figs. 4–7).²¹ It must be noted here, however, that, particularly in Herrn met de Bles's landscapes, this division between wilderness and inhabited world is not rigorously maintained. One often also finds villages and isolated farmhouses in the first area and sometimes the tops of entire



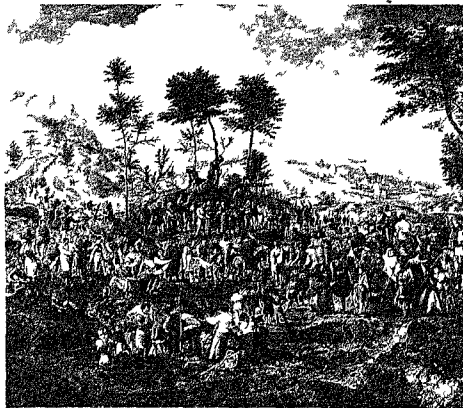
4 Herrn met de Bles *Landscape with the Road to Calvary*
Vienna Akademie der bildenden Künste



5 Herrn met de Bles *Landscape with St John the Baptist Preaching*
(Whereabouts unknown)



6 Jan van Amstel *Landscape with the Carrying of the Cross and Golgotha* Basle Kunstmuseum



7 Jan van Amstel *Landscape with the Entry into Jerusalem* Stuttgart Staatsgalerie

mountain ranges bristle with all sorts of castles and other fortifications, while, conversely, high mountains also loom up in the immediate environs of the inhabited regions. Hence not only is the geographical bipartition less obvious than in Patmir's work, but this also immediately raises the question of whether this configuration still contains a specific meaning, or whether this is perhaps merely a harking back to an existing compositional model, now divorced from its original intention. In other words, is the iconography of these landscapes still expressing an antithetical relationship at all?

To find an answer to this question, we can turn to the figure element in these landscapes. Here we find clear indications that Herri met de Bles and Jan van Amstel did also operate with antithetical imagery. In a *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* attributed to Herri met de Bles in Copenhagen (fig. 8)²² the Holy Family can be

seen in the left foreground emerging from a narrow opening in the rocks behind them (the 'strait gate' of St. Matthew 7:13-14?) and picking their way through an area of stony scrub. In the foreground on the right can be seen a large pleasure cart with rollicking peasants, carnival revellers so it seems, whose merrymaking has gone to their heads to such an extent that some of them are pitching into each other, partly as a result of unseemly pawing. They are passing a herd of pigs and the swineherd is showing them the way to the town in the distance, 'swine' evidently being a qualification that applies to the passengers too. Thus biblical pilgrims and worldly revellers unmistakably represent two opposite ways of life here.

In Herri met de Bles's *Landscape with the Journey to Emmaus* in Antwerp (fig. 9)²³ we come upon a theme which is new in landscape painting, but which is characteristic of the choice of New Testament



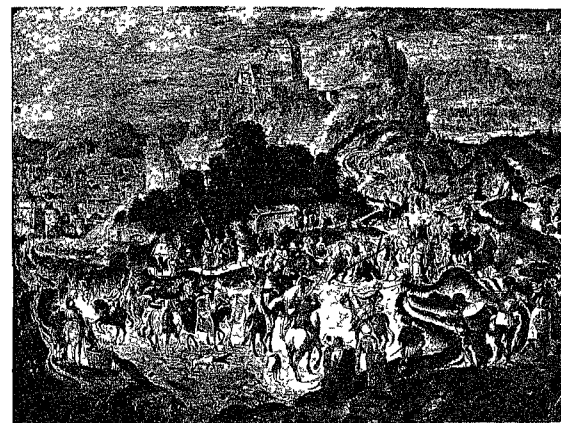
8 Herri met de Bles *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* Copenhagen Statens Museum for Kunst



9 Herri met de Bles *Landscape with the Journey to Emmaus* Antwerp Museum Mayer van den Bergh

subjects in many of his and Jan van Amstel's landscapes. The replacement of saints by biblical figures, whose lives can be held up to the faithful as models—a replacement already detectable in Patinir's transformation of the traditional devotional painting into an exemplary narrative²⁴—seems to be linked to a growing preference for strictly biblical givens, which characterizes the religious iconography of 16th-century Netherlandish art in general, certainly in the first half of the century. This preference for New Testament scenes was determined by the desire of many in the 16th century to take the Bible and the lives of biblical figures as direct models for their own way of life and no longer to give the preference as such to saints who had been the traditional models for the faithful in their efforts to live in a manner pleasing God.²⁵ The Emmaus story in Herri met de Bles's landscape is presumably also to be understood as such an example of 'Gospel ethics'. Since the High Middle Ages this story had been expounded as an example of life's true pilgrimage.²⁶ The Bible itself already describes how on their journey to Emmaus the two disciples were still blind to the true identity of their fellow-traveller and how it was only at the breaking of bread by Christ during the supper at Emmaus that their eyes were opened and they recognized their companion as the living Lord, raised from the dead (St. Luke 24:13–32). In Medieval exegesis this became an exemplary story about the inward turning to spiritual union and communion with Christ to which everyone must come on his earthly pilgrimage through life. In accordance with this we can also understand the biblical scenes in Herri met de Bles's landscape as an appeal to the spectator to enter on the true pilgrimage of life in emulation of the disciples on their way to Emmaus—see the scene in the left foreground—and to let his eyes be opened physically and spiritually to the Lord—note the minuscule scene of the Supper at Emmaus, shown in a window of the castle on the mountain in the left background.

The right side of the composition contains individual motifs that are difficult to interpret in any other way than as symbols of conduct antithetical to that of true pilgrims. The activity around the farmhouse and that of the fishermen on the river need not be explained pejoratively perhaps, although it has to be said that a dovecote built on to a farmhouse does not have a positive connotation either in Patinir's work or in later landscape paintings, since in the 16th century 'dovecote' was a well known synonym for a brothel.²⁷ However, the small place of execution behind the fishermen suggests little that is good about the inhabitants of these regions.²⁸ Still further in the background one sees people in a pleasure cart hurrying to the town,



10 Herri met de Bles, *Landscape with the Road to Calvary*
Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphili.

preceded by the two tiny figures of the 'blind pilgrim' and his guide. Here too these figures must be seen as diametrically opposed to the true pilgrims on the left of the landscape.

In a series of landscapes by Herri met de Bles and Jan van Amstel with the Road to Calvary and the Crucifixion at Golgotha we encounter amid the extensive human staffage unmistakable examples of a life literally and figuratively crosswise to the Passion of Christ. The *Landscape with the Road to Calvary* by Herri met de Bles in Rome (fig.10) offers a wide panorama with many figures.²⁹ They are accompanying Christ on his way from Jerusalem, in the background on the left, to Golgotha, the place of his crucifixion, in the background on the right. In the middle distance—although this is rather difficult to see amid the tangle of figures—Christ is shown at the moment when he falls under the weight of the cross and Simon of Cyrene is forced by soldiers to carry it for him (see St. Luke 23: 26–32). Just behind them can be seen the women among Christ's followers, who are weeping and wailing over the approaching death of their Lord. At the side of the road, on the other hand, this scene is being watched, apparently impassively, by little groups of peasants on their way to market with their wares. In itself the scene with Simon of Cyrene contains few visible indications of the idea that it embodies an appeal to the spectator also to come to the imitation of Christ, although it must be said that this is in fact an obvious implication of this theme. What is striking is that Simon is the only person in the picture who is looking straight at the spectator, as if by so doing to raise the question of the latter's involvement with Christ's sufferings.³⁰ A further point is that Simon's travel requisites strongly resemble the

pilgrim's outfit at the Virgin's feet in Patinir's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (fig. 1), thus associating the whole scene with the theme of the pilgrimage of life. Thanks to the contrast between Simon and the women on the one hand and the peasants looking but not participating on the other, however, we can still be certain that the painter's intention in this picture was to bring out the imitation of Christ as opposed to the *amor sui* of those pursuing their worldly concerns.

The reason why we can be so certain about the antithetical role of the peasants is that they also play it in another series of landscapes by Herri met de Bles and Jan van Amstel and that even more clearly than here.³¹ In Bles's *Landscape with St. John the Baptist Preaching* (fig. 5) St. John is shown on the left calling his hearers to repentance, while on the other side peasants go their way unperturbed, making for a busy market in the background on the right, laden with their goods. In a *Landscape with the Road to Calvary* by Jan van Amstel (fig. 11)³² the role of peasants as examples of the worldly life is expressed by the fact that the procession they form with a farm cart drawn by horses is literally crosswise to that of the people accompanying Christ to Golgotha. That going to market and transporting worldly goods exemplifies a life that is the reverse to the way of the cross is also made directly visible in Jan van Amstel's *Landscape with the Road to Calvary* in Paris.³³ Here the procession with Christ and a number of peasants with a horse and cart piled high with hay are passing each other in opposite directions, each going their own way.³⁴ In Van Amstel's *Landscape with the Carrying of the Cross and Golgotha* (fig. 6) even more emphasis is placed on the identification of peasants with earthly goods and worldly life. While the Carrying of the Cross and the Crucifixion are placed in the back-



11 Jan van Amstel, *Landscape with the Road to Calvary*
Amsterdam, Stichting P and N de Boer Collection

ground and middle distance, the foreground is occupied by peasants who, unmoved by the spectacle, are continuing on their way to the town heavily laden with all sorts of market wares. Some of them are so deeply absorbed in their own world that as they pass Golgotha they even fail to look up or around, blind and deaf as they are to the Passion of Christ and the appeal to compassion and emulation contained in this tragedy.

The bipolarity between two ways of life, which is also expressed in these paintings by formal means, is handled the most subtly in this entire series of landscapes in Jan van Amstel's *Landscape with the Entry into Jerusalem* (fig. 7). Here Christ can be seen in the centre of the composition riding on a donkey along a road leading from the mountains in the background on the left to Jerusalem in the distance on the right. A number of elements in the composition closely follow the biblical account in St. Matthew 21: 1–11, in particular verses 6–9, which speak of an ass and a colt, which the disciples brought to Christ for his entry, and of clothes which they draped over the ass. In accordance with this text one also sees a large multitude of people spreading their garments on the road to welcome Christ, while others have cut branches from the trees and strewn them in his path as a mark of honour. Yet others are lifting up their arms or clapping their hands in elation to praise God for the coming of his Son. Here again peasants observe this scene from a distance and are clearly in no mind to be diverted from their plan of going to market. But a much sharper contrast to the homage and jubilation of the multitude is the attitude of various participants in the procession and some of the bystanders. The Pharisees on the right—representatives of 'official' religion recognizable from the inscriptions on their garments—look on disapprovingly. One of them is having his hand read by a peasantwoman (or gipsy), while a servant accompanying him is holding a cap in his hand and has a mantle thrown over his shoulder, in contrast to those who are spreading out their garments before Christ. While the conduct of the Pharisees is still a motif that goes back to the biblical account of the entry (in this case St. Luke 19:39), there is not a single biblical source for that of other figures. A magistrate immediately beside the Pharisees is coming to blows with a number of boys in a way quite at odds with his dignity and there are others too who are not doing what one would expect of them. A man in Jesus's train is kicking the colt, while behind him a fight has broken out among three men over the garments that have just been laid down in Christ's honour and right beside them some children are acting improperly in their own way with what only a moment ago were marks of respect,

by making a large branch the object of their game. Contrasting even more flagrantly with the behaviour one would have expected of Christ's followers is that of a man a bit further away who, unobserved, is using a knife to cut off the purse of his companion deep in discussion. Another companion seems to have more of an eye for the produce of one of the watching peasantwomen than for the procession itself.

This landscape too unmistakably exhibits a basic antithesis in the pictorial narrative, which can be read directly from the outward appearance of the scene itself and for which no knowledge of literary sources is necessary apart from that of the Bible. However, there still remains the question as to what the precise connection is between all these examples of unchristian behaviour, which contrast so strongly with the rejoicings and homage of those welcoming Christ. The key to this is perhaps to be found in the central figure of Christ. He has his right hand pressed against his eyes, a gesture undoubtedly derived from the biblical account in St. Luke's Gospel (19: 41-42).³⁵ There Christ is said to have 'wept over' the city of Jerusalem in his sorrow that 'the things which belong to the peace' of the people were still 'hid from their eyes'. Hence it is not only obvious that Christ's gesture in Van Amstel's landscape should be interpreted as an expression of his 'weeping' over the people, but also that the misconduct of some of those in this picture should be seen as visualizations of the inner blindness of both the bystanders and his own followers to the gospel he brought. Behind his back they are practising the opposite of the love of one's neighbour and the peace of the kingdom of God which he continually preached.

It is possible, but further research would be needed to prove it, that with this theme—the outward seeing of Christ and his deeds on earth, but inner blindness to his message—we touch on a purport conveyed by a number of landscapes by Herri met de Bles and Jan van Amstel. The inner imperturbability of the peasants on beholding Christ's sufferings in Bles's landscapes with the Carrying of the Cross and their absorption in their earthly concerns in those of Jan van Amstel—to the extent that they sometimes have no outward eye for Christ either—could equally exemplify this inner blindness. As we have seen, the Emmaus story also centres on the basic theme of the initial blindness of the disciples to the true identity of Christ, which they only recognize during the supper at Emmaus.

It seems to all appearances that when we view the landscapes of Patinir, Bles and Van Amstel together, the basic bipolarity of the iconographic structure of the picture can be discerned to be a con-

stantly recurring phenomenon. Their paintings make visible a complex of themes which encompasses not only the allegory of life's pilgrimage, but also a contrast between the 'Gospel ethics' that Christ held up to his followers as a model and the conduct of the world that is blind to his message.

Implicit in this theme itself, of course, is an appeal to the spectator to take this teaching about the good and evil path in the world personally, in conformity with the lessons in Christian morality people in the 16th century were used to take to heart from other forms of visual art.³⁶ But there is reason to believe, as was the case with Patinir, that Herri met de Bles and Jan van Amstel also wanted to stimulate the spectator's involvement in the edifying implications of the scene by formal means.

The great quantity and diversity of landscape and figure details in these paintings make them difficult to read. The fact that the biblical protagonists are often of minuscule dimensions and situated in distant corners of the landscape or amid a great mass of other figures prevents them from being immediately obvious to the eye. Only after some searching is it possible for the spectator to perceive them and then often only with difficulty. As has been said, this type of pictorial narrative stems from Late Medieval devotional painting, where it serves as a visual guide for the spectator's meditation on successive events in the life of the protagonist—a visual meditation which could actually encompass many more aspects of the events (moral and emotional ones, for example) than the composition itself shows in its few small stereotyped figures. It may be doubted whether the word 'meditation' remains an adequate term for the 'reception-mode' of this serial type of pictorial narrative in 16th-century landscapes. But the mere tracing of the scenes itself indisputably implies a successive reading of the composition, which carries an element of duration such as belongs to the process of meditation in the sense described. Moreover, it is also the case here that events are often rendered in a kind of shorthand, so that the spectator has to have great powers of imagination in order to recognize the episode in question in a few summary figures. This holds good, for instance, for the Supper at Emmaus in Bles's landscape in Antwerp (fig. 9), for the Baptism of Christ in the left background of his *Landscape with St. John the Baptist Preaching* (fig. 5) and for the various scenes of the Road to Calvary and the Crucifixion in the landscapes by him and Van Amstel mentioned above. Late Medieval meditation methods demanded of the faithful, precisely where contemplation on the life of Christ was concerned, a high degree of mental visualization of the events in his

life, as well as a large measure of empathy with their Lord and willingness to model their own lives after his.³⁷ Thus everything points to the pictorial narrative in Bles's and Van Amstel's landscapes being meant for a type of reception that had a very great deal in common with these traditional methods of meditation as regards the demands made on the spectator's mental visualization and participation. It has also been explained above that the landscapes of Bles and Van Amstel with their great multitude of human figures also invite the beholder to view each non-biblical figure individually at its anecdotal value and to look for a possible deeper meaning in the broader context of the subject of the picture as a whole. That is to say, the personal contribution of the spectator in interpreting the scene is not an exaggerated and misplaced 'reading in' of motifs, but a mental activity which the picture demands and which is entirely in line with traditional meditation on images.

When we now realize that the perception of the various anecdotal motifs—biblical and non-biblical—must have implied a process of some duration and that this must, moreover, have been allied to a certain degree of visual and mental effort, we are struck by the fact that the reception of the picture must have led the spectator to experience its basic theme as it were in his own person. The difficult path of life propagated by the various motifs was actually trodden by the beholder in a certain sense, as, in his interpretative journey through the landscape, he tried to find his way through the multiplicity and variety of the details with his eye and his thoughts pausing to consider their external appearance and intrinsic meaning. Hence the question of whether he ranked among those who are blind to the moral appeal of the Gospel and, like the peasants, opt for the way of the flesh, or whether he paid heed to the signs of salvation that are still difficult to see in this world, became for him a personal and actual one. These landscapes will naturally have been a delight to the eye of the 16th-century beholder, but at the same time they will have been able to help him to gain an insight into the quality of his own morality.

At the present state of research it is still difficult to trace the precise character and roots of the spirituality revealed by the underlying subject-matter of these landscapes. Yet it can in general be said that this subject-matter, including the thinking in antitheses bound up with it, fits in with the thought of Erasmus of Rotterdam. The fundamental antithesis between the domain of the flesh and the realm of the spirit, the spiritual blindness of those who keep only to outward rituals versus the spiritual enlightenment of those who avow the true inner experience of faith, the hypocrisy of the representatives of the

church (cf. the role of the Pharisees in Van Amstel's painting in Stuttgart), the ethics of the Gospel as the key to the imitation of Christ and the allegory of the pilgrimage of life, all these constitute central themes in the works of this Christian humanist.³⁸ It would, however, be taking too narrow a view to associate the spirituality evinced by Erasmus with him alone. The need to decide for oneself on questions of religious belief and ethics and the tendency to see the Bible as the word of God, from which the precepts for daily life can be directly distilled, to see an opposition between spirit and flesh and especially to regard the imitation of Christ as the sure way to salvation comprised an ideal that had gripped many in the first half of the 16th century.³⁹ Thus Erasmus did not invent this new spirituality, but he will have been regarded by many at this period as its most eloquent advocate. At the time when institutional religion had reached a crisis—roughly the period between the appearance of Luther and the re-institutionalization of the Catholic and Protestant churches after 1550—many will have consulted the writings of Erasmus in their growing need to see religious and ethical questions as problems of personal choice and responsibility.

The landscapes by Patinir, Bles and Van Amstel reviewed here breathe the same spirit.⁴⁰ As is often indicated by the term 'world landscape' they do indeed give a picture of the world, albeit not so much of the outward beauty as of the inner blindness of the world; they focus not on visual reality rendered for its own sake, but on biblical ethics as seen from the perspective of a new spirituality.

Translated by Patricia Wandle

1. As an example of this approach to the 16th-century landscape see H. G. Franz, *Niederländische Landschaftsmalerei im Zeitalter des Manierismus*, 2 vols., Graz 1969, and to that of the 17th century W. Stechow, *Dutch Landscape Painting of the Seventeenth Century*, London 1966
2. Cf. E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: its Origin and Character*, 2 vols., New York 1971 (1st ed. Cambridge, Mass. 1953), pp. 131–48, and E. de Jongh, *Zinne- en minnebeelden in de schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1967, and *idem*, 'Realisme en schynrealisme in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw', in exhib. cat. *Rembrandt en zijn tijd*, Brussels (Palais des Beaux-Arts) 1971, pp. 143–94.
3. H.-J. Raupp, 'Zur Bedeutung von Thema und Symbol für die holländische Landschaftsmalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg*, 17 (1980), pp. 85–110, and J. Bruyn, 'Toward a Scriptural Reading of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Paintings', in P. C. Sutton et al., exhib. cat. *Masters of 17th-Century Dutch Landscape Painting*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum)—Boston (Museum of Fine Arts) 1987–8, pp. 84–103.
4. L. O. Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art Convention, Rhetoric and Interpretation*, University Park, Penn.—London 1989.
5. W. Wiegand, *Ruisdael-Studien Ein Versuch zur Ikonologie der Landschaftsmalerei*, (diss.) Hamburg 1971, R. L. Falkenburg, *Joachim Patinir: Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life*, Amsterdam—Philadelphia 1988 (1st Dutch ed Nijmegen 1985). For a comparable, but far less well supported approach see also H. D. Brumble III, 'Pieter Brueghel The Elder: The Allegory of Landscape', *Art Quarterly*, n.s. 2 (1979), pp. 125–39.
6. E. van Straaten, *Koud tot op het bot. De verbeelding van de winter in de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw in de Nederlanden*, The Hague 1977.
7. Cf. for example, A. P. de Mirmonde, 'Le symbolisme du rocher et de la source chez Joos van Clève, Dick Bouts, Memling, Patinier, C. van den Broeck (?), Sustris et Paul Brill', *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen*, 1974, pp. 73–99
8. L. and G. Bauer, 'The Winter landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap by Pieter Bruegel the Elder', *The Art Bulletin*, 66 (1984), pp. 145–50, A. Ellenius, 'The concept of nature in a painting by Lucas van Valckenborch', in *Netherlandish Mannerism Papers given at a symposium in Nationalmuseum Stockholm, September 21–22, 1984* (ed. G. Cavalli-Bjorkman), Stockholm 1985, pp. 109–16, H. Kauffmann, 'Jacob van Ruisdael, "Die Muhle von Wijk bij Duurstede"', in *Festschrift für Otto von Simson* (ed. L. Giesebach and K. Renget), Frankfurt a/M 1977, pp. 379–97
9. See, for example, exhib. cat. *Tot Lermg en Vermaak*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1976, no. 16 for an iconographical interpretation of a dead tree versus a living one in Gerard Dou's *Quack* of 1652, no. 39 for a symbolic explanation of a ship in a 'painting within a painting'—a seascape in Gabriel Metsu's *Woman Reading a Letter in an Interior*; and no. 46 for a painting by Carel de Moor showing an angler, which could properly also be seen as a landscape.
10. See, for example, Raupp 1980, Ellenius 1985, Bruyn 1987–8, Falkenburg 1988 (note 5) and Goedde 1989.
11. For this antithetical iconography in the 16th-century market and kitchen pieces of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer and the link between these paintings and early 16th-century landscape see J. A. Emmens, "'Eins aber ist notig"—Zu Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt- und Küchenstücken des 16. Jahrhunderts', in *Album Amicorum J. G. van Gelder*, The Hague 1973, pp. 93–101, and R. L. Falkenburg, 'Iconographical connections between Antwerp landscapes, market scenes and kitchen pieces, 1500–1580', *Oud Holland*, 102 (1988), pp. 114–26 respectively. For various interpretations of the antithetical structure in a single painting see R. H. Fuchs, 'Over het landschap' een verslag naar aanleiding van Jacob van Ruisdael, "Het Korenveld"', *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis*, 86 (1973), pp. 281–92. The allegory of life's pilgrimage as the basic theme of landscape painting takes pride of place in the publications of Brumble 1979, Raupp 1980, Bauer 1984, Falkenburg 1988 and Bruyn 1987–8.
12. These reception-aesthetic or technical implications of iconographic analyses of landscape painting are generally not commented on in the relevant literature. They are considered, however, in R. L. Falkenburg, 'De betekenis van het geschilderde Hollandse landschap van de zeventiende eeuw: een beschouwing naar aanleiding van enkele recente interpretaties', *Theoretische geschiedenis*, 16 (1989), pp. 131–53, esp. pp. 142 ff., and in Goedde 1989, *passim*, esp. 116 ff. D. Freedberg, *Dutch Landscape Prints of the Seventeenth Century*, London 1980, pp. 9–20, was the first to link the idea of the visual journey through the scene with Dutch 17th-century landscape, but in making the connection he says nothing about the landscape's metaphorical content. For the idea of the visual journey through the landscape in Patinir's case see the literature mentioned in note 19.
13. For the following see Falkenburg 1988 (note 5).
14. For the idea that Patinir's landscapes are representations of the visible world see, for example, D. Zinke, *Patinir's "Weltlandschaft"*, *Studien und Materialien zur Landschaftsmalerei im 16. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a/M 1977, and W. S. Gibson, 'Mirror of the Earth', *The World Landscape in Sixteenth-Century Flemish Painting*, Princeton, N.J., 1989.
15. Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. nr. 1611.
16. Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. nr. 1614.
17. Rogier van der Weyden, *The Madonna Enthroned* (with scenes from her life carved in the aedicula over her head), Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection.
18. See Falkenburg 1988 (note 5), pp. 37–41.
19. For this see also below. Other authors have already suggested that the making of a visual journey through the landscape is an adequate way of responding to Patinir's paintings, see R. A. Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, Princeton, N.J., 1968, pp. 24 and 68, W. S. Gibson, 'Herrn met de Bles: Landscape with St. John the Baptist Preaching', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, 55 (1968), pp. 79 ff., and Zinke 1977, pp. 11–19, esp. 16 and 17. Gibson 1989, pp. 8, 19, 54, 56, 57, 77 and 78 has suggested that the making of an imaginary journey through the landscape is the appropriate kind of response not only to Patinir's world landscapes', but also to those of his followers. However, all these authors regard this form of reception as an aesthetic pleasure in itself, quite separate from any thematic content whatever.
20. See, for example, R. A. Koch, 'A rediscovered painting "The Road to Calvary" by Herrn met de Bles', *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 14 (1955), pp. 31–51, R. Genaille, 'Au temps d'Erasmus et de Luther. L'œuvre de Jan van Amstel, Monogrammist de Brunswick', *Bulletin, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles*, 23–29 (1974–80), pp. 65–96, and H. G. Franz, 'Landschaftsbilder als kollektive Werkstattsschöpfungen in der flämischen Malerei des 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhunderts', *Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch Graz*, 18 (1982), pp. 165–81. Franz 1982, note 1, thinks that the paintings that can be attributed to Herrn met de Bles must be dated between 1535 and 1565; D. Schubert, *Die Gemälde des Braunschweiger Monogrammistens*, Cologne 1970, who agrees with the now virtually generally accepted identification of the Monogrammist with Jan van Amstel, places the period of this painter's activities between 1528, when Van Amstel was registered

- as an independent master in Antwerp, and 1544, when his wife is mentioned as a widow. Genaille 1974–80, pp. 70–74, points out a possible confusion around the name of his wife—so that the date of his death is open again—and sets the period of his activities between 1525 and 1550. According to Gibson 1989, p. 23 (and note 50), the date of Jan van Amstel's death is c. 1540, after all. In the light of this discussion, I regard the dating of both Herri met de Bles's and Jan van Amstel's landscapes as an open question and consider them for the time being roughly datable between 1525 and 1565.
21. Herri met de Bles, *Landscape with the Road to Calvary*, Vienna, Akademie der bildenden Künste, inv. nr. 548; Herri met de Bles, *Landscape with St. John the Baptist Preaching*, whereabouts unknown, Jan van Amstel, *Landscape with the Carrying of the Cross and Golgotha*, Basle, Kunstmuseum, inv. nr. 1343; Jan van Amstel, *Landscape with the Entry into Jerusalem*, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie, inv. nr. 479.
 22. Statens Museum for Kunst, inv. nr. 1965.
 23. Antwerp, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, inv. nr. 40.
 24. Compare, for example, Patinir's *Landscape with the Baptism of Christ* in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (inv. nr. 981) with his *Landscape with St. John the Baptist Preaching* in Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (inv. nr. 1041), Koch 1968, cat. nos. 5 and 6 (figs. 8 and 9). In the first of these the mystery of the baptism by the Holy Spirit takes pride of place, while the motif of St. John preaching, in which the moralistic moment of an appeal to conversion is contained, is shown in a subsidiary scene in the background. In the second painting the roles are reversed, with the Baptism scene relegated to the far background and the Preaching brought more into the foreground.
 25. Cf. C. Augustijn, 'Godsdienst in de zestiende eeuw', in exhib. cat. *Ketters en papen onder Filips II*, Utrecht (Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent) 1986, pp. 26–40, and R. L. Falkenburg, 'Bijbelse iconografie en spiritualiteit: enkele beschouwingen over de Nederlandse schilderkunst en grafiek van de zestiende eeuw', *Theoretische geschiedenis*, 15 (1988), pp. 5–15. Here it is emphasized that the close following of biblical texts in visual art, while linked of course with the Reformation, was at the same time an expression of a new spirituality which manifested itself across all the denominations (which were still in the process of crystallization), i.e. also among those who remained faithful to the Catholic Church. For this see also below.
 26. See F. C. Gardiner, *The Pilgrimage of Desire: A Study of Theme and Genre in Medieval Literature*, Leiden 1971.
 27. Cf. D. Bax, *Hieronymus Bosch, his picture-writing deciphered*, Rotterdam 1979, pp. 124, 295, Falkenburg 1988 (note 5), pp. 71, 84 and 99, and Bruyn 1987–8, pp. 85–6.
 28. Cf. Bax 1979, p. 275.
 29. Galleria Doria Pamphili, inv. nr. 493. Cf. the silmar version in Vienna (fig. 4).
 30. Cf. F. O. Buttner, *Imitatio pietatis, Motive der christlichen Ikonographie als Modelle zur Verähnlichung*, Berlin 1983, figs. 45–53, for Late Medieval devotional images which make explicit the appeal to the beholder to follow the example of Christ bearing his cross, through additional figures assisting him in doing so, or bearing a cross themselves.
 31. For the antithetical role of peasants in the work of Herri met de Bles and Jan van Amstel see also Falkenburg 1988 (note 11).
 32. Amsterdam, Stichting P. and N. de Boer Collection, inv. nr. 961.
 33. Musée du Louvre, inv. nr. R. F. 733.
 34. R. Genaille, 'La Montée au Calvaire de Bruegel l'Ancien', *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 1979, pp. 156–9, has already pointed out that in this scene Christ is an isolated figure in the spiritual sense and that the bystanders are absorbed in their own concerns, making specific mention here of the peasants with the haycart. (He interprets the contrast between the bystanders and Christ and the latter's isolation as indicative of a Lutheran mentality on the painter's part, p. 159, note 32, see also below, esp. note 40.) Peasants are also used in many other 16th-century paintings and prints as current types who serve to exemplify all manner of sinful and reprehensible behaviour, see H.-J. Raupp, *Bauernsitzen Entstehung und Entwicklung des bäuerlichen Genres in der deutschen und niederländischen Kunst ca 1470–1570*, Niederzier 1986. For the haywain as a familiar 16th-century image of the sinful preoccupation with earthly goods see P. Vandenbroeck, 'Nieuw materiaal voor de studie van het Hooiwagen-motief', *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 1984, pp. 39–65 (with references to the earlier literature as well), esp. pp. 55 ff., and *idem*, 'Jheronimus Bosch, "Hooiwagen": enkele bijkomende gegevens', *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 1987, pp. 107–42, esp. 107–11 (here it is pointed out, among other things, that the haywain motif, as it appears in Bosch's work, for example, can be equated with the hell wagon to be found on the *via mortis*, the way of perdition.)
 35. As far as can be made out, this motif is a new addition to the iconography of the Entry into Jerusalem in painting and it evinces Van Amstel's tendency to follow the biblical text literally; see the literature mentioned in note 25 for the general tendency in 16th-century Netherlandish art of strict adherence to the biblical text. It is striking that while, according to tradition, Van Amstel's painting once bore the date (15)37 (see Schubert 1970, p. 199), in that same year a richly illustrated account of the life of Christ was published, in which there appears a woodcut of the Entry into Jerusalem in which Jesus is also making this gesture. For this see I. Veldman and K. van Schaik, *Verbeelde boodschap, De Illustraties van Lieven de Witte bij 'Dat leven ons Heeren' (1537)*, Haarlem 1989, fig. 129. Veldman and Van Schaik likewise note an inclination to follow the biblical text literally on the part of the designer of the woodcuts (Lieven de Witte), linking this phenomenon, in this case at least, with the Reformation.
 36. For good analyses of the moralizing quality of other kinds of 16th-century art in the Netherlands see, for example, K. Renger, *Lockere Gesellschaft Zur Ikonographie des Verlorenen Sohnes und von Wirthauszenen in der niederländischen Malerei*, Berlin 1970, and I. M. Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch humanism in the sixteenth century*, Amsterdam 1977.
 37. For Late Medieval devotional literature that stimulated this kind of meditation see, for example, R. Lightenberg, 'Rondom de Meditatie', *Studia Catholica*, 3 (1927), pp. 217–39 and 334–59, C. C. de Bruin, 'Middelieeuwse Levens van Jezus als leidraad bij meditatie en contemplatie', *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, 58 (1977–8), pp. 129–55, and 60 (1980), pp. 162–81, and W. Baier, *Untersuchungen zu den Passionsbetrachtungen in der Vita Christi des Ludolf von Sachsen. Ein quellenkritischer Beitrag zu Leben und Werk Ludolfs und zur Geschichte der Passionstheologie* (Analecta Cartusiana, 44), 3 vols., Salzburg 1977. Cf. C. Harbison, 'Visions and Meditations in Early Flemish Painting', *Simulacrum*, 15 (1985), pp. 87–118.
 38. See, for example, A. Auer, *Die vollkommene Frömmigkeit des Christen Nach dem Enchiridion militis Christiani des Erasmus von Rotterdam*, Düsseldorf 1954, R. Stupperich, 'Das Enchiridion militis christiani des Erasmus von Rotterdam nach seiner Entstehung, seinem Sinn und Charakter', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 69 (1978), pp. 5–23; C. Augustijn, *Erasmus*, Baarn 1986; R. L. DeMolen, *The Spirituality of Erasmus of Rotterdam*, Nieuwkoop 1987, esp. 35–67.
 39. See Augustijn 1986.

40 As regards Jan van Amstel, Genaille has already drawn attention earlier to the 'Gospel spirit' emanating from his paintings, see Genaille 1974–80. However, he adduces as evidence of what he at the same time characterizes as 'Erasmian' and 'Lutheran' religiosity and ethics not the landscapes—with the exception of the *Road to Calvary* in Paris (see note 34)—but other biblical scenes and genre paintings by Van Amstel.