

Probationes Pennae:  
*Some Sixteenth-Century Doodles on the Theme  
of Folly Attributed to the Antwerp Humanist  
Pieter Gillis and His Colleagues\**

by STEPHEN H. GODDARD

Sometime between 1502 and 1509 one of Antwerp's city clerks took time to pen a small drawing and inscription on the flyleaf of a document in his care (fig. 1). His depiction of a naked soul seen from the backside while ascending into the clouds of heaven, succinctly labeled "ascensio," turns out to be only the first of several dozen doodles preserved in a special class of judicial manuscripts in the Antwerp city archives. Taken as a group, these pictorial and verbal jottings provide a unique opportunity to eavesdrop upon the spontaneous mental meanderings of several Antwerpians in the age of Metsys, Erasmus, Bruegel, and Plantin. The art of doodling is revealing by its very nature, and the possibility that one of the doodlers was the humanist Pieter Gillis provides an additional incentive for the discussion of this material, which is catalogued and translated in the accompanying appendix.

The first thorough formulation of artistic theory in Northern Europe, Carel van Mander's *The Foundation of the Noble Free Art of Painting* of 1604, begins with a lengthy introduction to potential young artists, whom he defined in his very first lines as, "you who in place of writing scribbled all over your paper and filled it with

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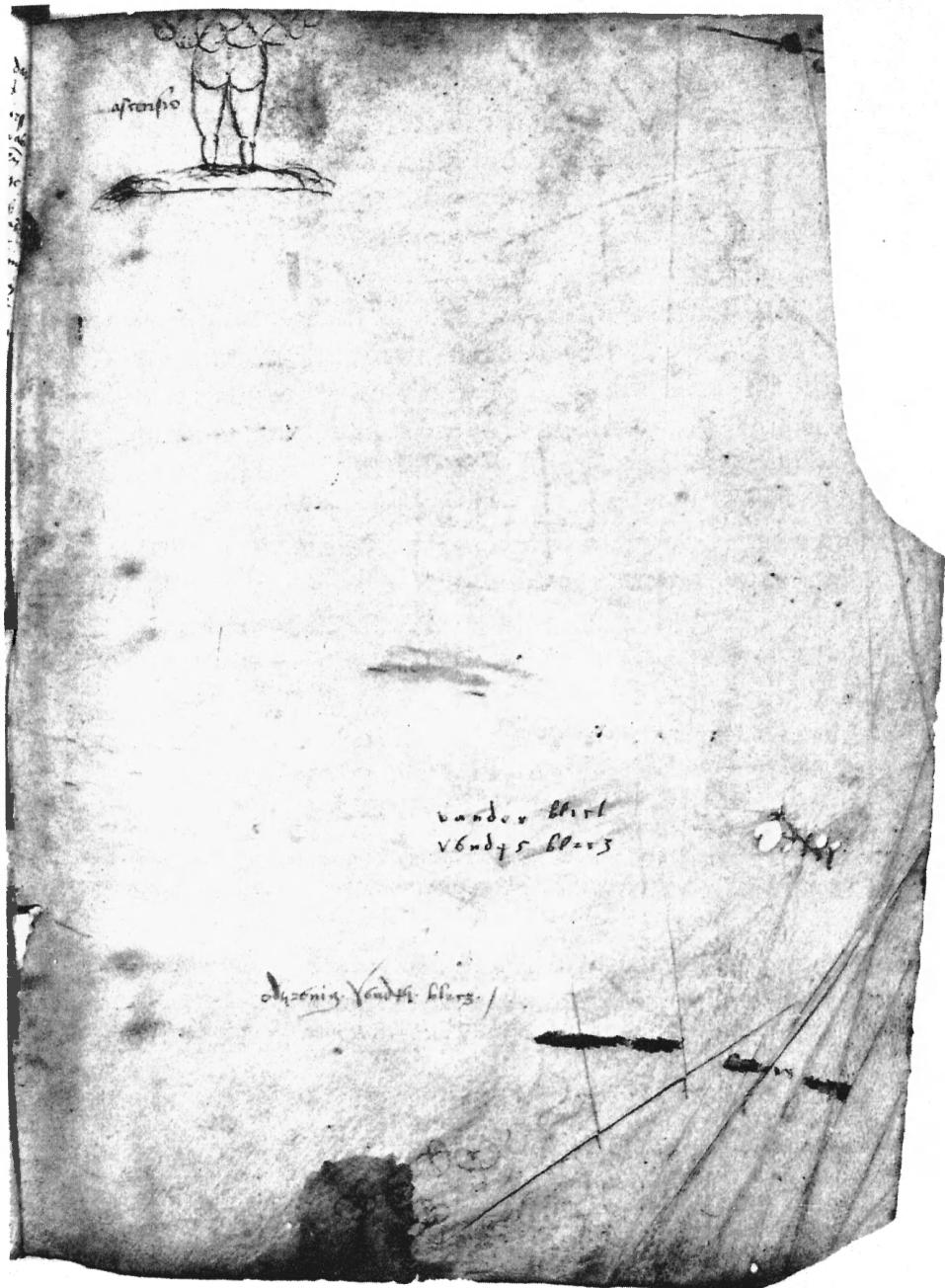


FIG. 1. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1233 (*Vonnisboek 1502-1509*). Rear flyleaf. Appendix no. 1.

little people, boats and various animals. . . .”<sup>1</sup> The playfulness of doodling and its ability to mediate between the verbal and visual worlds is implicit in this evocation of scribbling. Several of the examples discussed below demonstrate this many-sided quality of the doodle and its ability to slip from calligraphy into image, and vice versa (figs. 4, 9, 11, for example). This “bipartisan” quality of the doodle is exploited on a more conscious level in examples which contain rebus-like elements (figs. 3, 5, 7).<sup>2</sup> In either instance, the doodle displays a special characteristic: a freshness and immediacy due to its proximity to the scribbler’s preoccupations. This is due in part to the fact that doodling is, in the most positive and creative sense, playful.<sup>3</sup> The playfulness of the act does not preclude the observation that doodling dignifies itself by its closeness to thought; it may even bring us closer to a spontaneous idea than a carefully wrought image or phrase. The idea, to paraphrase Vasari, may begin its physical existence in drawing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I have used the translation edited by Elizabeth Honig in conjunction with a seminar at Yale University (New Haven, 1985). The original text is: Carel van Mander, *Den Grondt der edel vry schilderconst* (Haarlem, 1604) fol. 1. The opening lines are:

O Hebes spruyten, *Genius* Scholieren,  
 Ghy die hier en daer, in plaetse van schrijven  
 Hebt becladdert, en vervult u Pampieren  
 Met Mannekens, Schepen, verscheyden dieren  
 Dat nau ledighe plaets’ en laet blijven  
 Schijnend’ of. Nateur’ u voort wilde drijven  
 Een Schilder te wesen, soo dat u Ouders  
 U daer toe aenvoeren op lijf, en schouders.

Van Mander’s term “becladdert” is actually closer to the English “bespattered” or “dirtied.”

<sup>2</sup>The rebus was a very popular device in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, especially among the guilds of rhetoric. For some examples see E. van Autenboer, *Het Brabants landjuweel der redeijkers* (1515–1561), Leuvense studien en tekstuutgaven, n.s. 2 (Middelburg, 1981) ills. 3, 6, 15, 26.

<sup>3</sup>Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens, Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, 1955) 168, includes doodling as a “play-function.” For doodling and creativity see E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion, A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton, 1965) 356. It is worth recalling that the English term “to doodle” ultimately derives from the Slavonic and Germanic term “to play”—usually to play the bagpipes (German “duedelsack,” Dutch “doedelzak”), see *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* 1 (Oxford, 1977): 600, c.f. “Doodle,” third definition.

<sup>4</sup>Le Opere di Giorgio Vasari, ed. by Gaetano Milanesi, 1 (Florence, 1906): 168–69, or the English translation, *Vasari on Technique being the Introduction to the Three Arts of Design, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting, Prefixed to the Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Louisa A. Maclehose (New York, 1960) 205. Similarly, in his

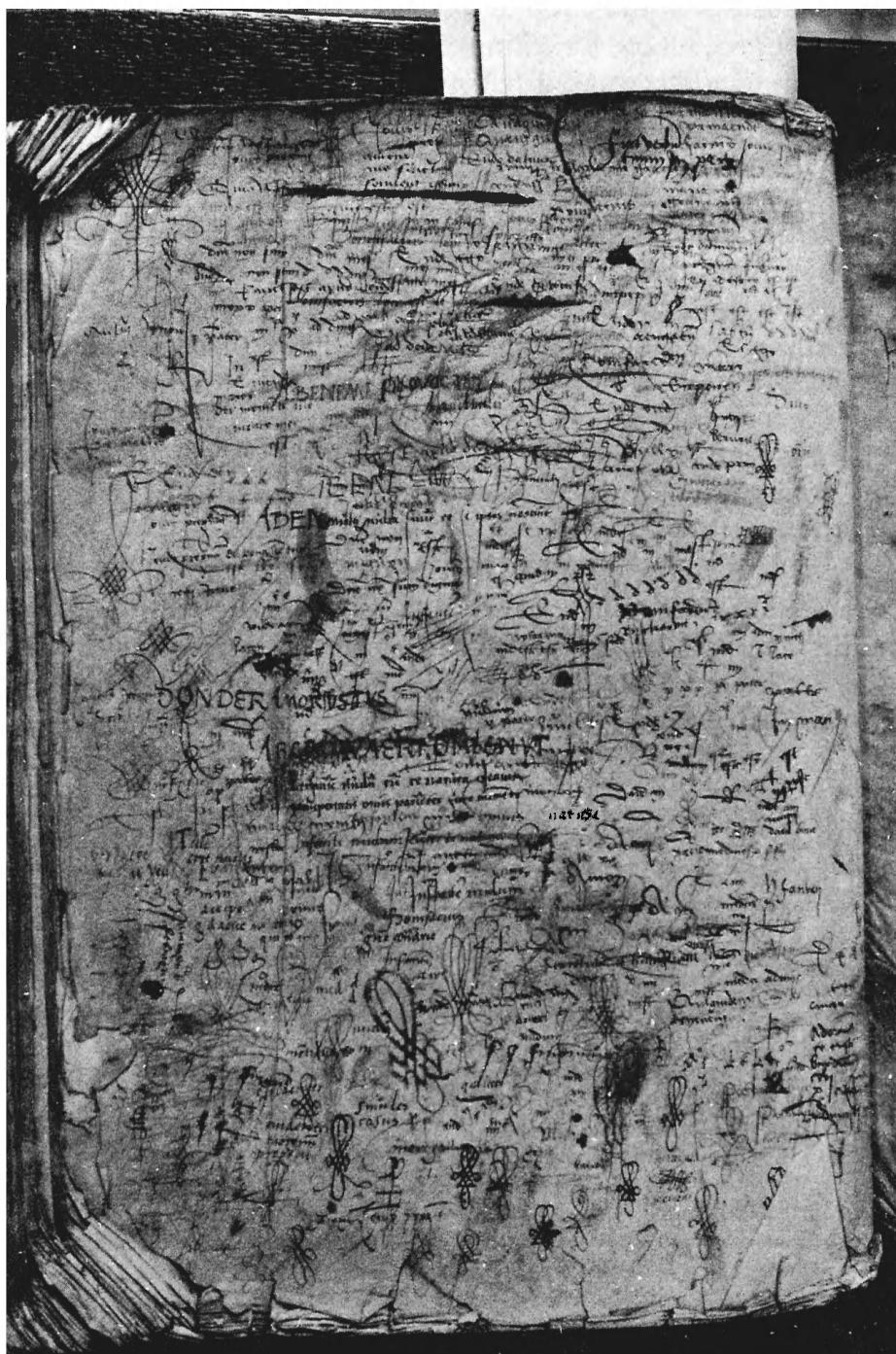


FIG. 2. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1235 (*Vonnisboek* 1517-1520). Rear flyleaf.

The creators of the doodles discussed in this article were Antwerp's *griffiers*, whose function was similar to that of town clerks.<sup>5</sup> The office of *griffier* was created in 1480 in order to assist the Aldermen and City Secretary with various clerical duties. By the early sixteenth-century there were three *griffiers*, a fourth being added in 1563. These officials were trained Latinists, and they were licensed in both civil and criminal law.<sup>6</sup> Among their responsibilities was the recording of court decisions (*vonnissen*), in the so-called *vonnisboeken*. The flyleaves of these bound documents served as scratch pads where the *griffiers* could get the ink in the nibs of their pens flowing and practice their clerical flourishes (fig. 2). It is also on these flyleaves that most of the doodles under discussion are found.<sup>7</sup>

Paul Génard identified a number of the *griffiers* as men of remarkable accomplishment, including, Adriaan vander Blict (served from 1480–1511); Pieter Gillis, alias Aegidius (served 1509–1533), and Joachim de Borghere, alias Polites (served 1542–1565).<sup>8</sup> Of these, Pieter Gillis, a close friend of Sir Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus, is by far the most prominent figure.<sup>9</sup> More's *Utopia* is dedicated to Gillis, and Erasmus and Gillis had their portraits painted in Antwerp by Quentin Metsys and sent to their mutual friend in Eng-

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essay, *Vie des formes* (Paris, 1947) 99, Henri Focillon observed "Par elles [mains] l'homme prend contact avec la dureté de la pensée," which has been translated by C. Hogan and G. Kubler, "through his hands man establishes contact with the austerity of thought," *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York, 1948) 65.

<sup>5</sup>Leon Voet, *De Gouden eeuw van Antwerpen: Bloei en uitstraling van de metropol in de zestiende eeuw* (Antwerp, 1973) likened the role of the *griffier* to that of the town clerk in an English borough. I have used the English edition: *Antwerp, the Golden Age: The Rise and Glory of the Metropolis in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. R. H. Kaye (Antwerp, 1973) 107.

<sup>6</sup>Voet, *ibid.*, and R. Bouwmans, *Het Antwerps stadsbestuur voor en tijdens de Franse overheersing: Bijdrage tot de ontwikkelingsgeschiedenis van de stedelijke bestuursinstellingen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden* (Bruges, 1965) 50.

<sup>7</sup>This article studies doodles in one particularly rich vein in the Antwerp archives, however, they may be found elsewhere as well. For example, a passage from Horace's *Ars Poetica* may be found in Antwerp Stadsarchief, Schepenregister 225 (1547) on the rear flyleaf; and an image of a naked woman with a scant veil is drawn inside the cover of *Het Gulden boeck der laken gilde* (Antwerp Stadsarchief, Gilden en Ambachten 4017, ca. 1576).

<sup>8</sup>Paul Génard, *Anvers à travers les ages*, 2 (Brussels, 1888): 170. This list of *griffiers* who were "hommes remarquables" also included Cornelis Dyck (served 1534–1563), and Adrian Dyck (served 1559–1583 and later). For a complete list of *griffiers* see Paul Génard, "Naamlijst der greffiers van Antwerpen," *Antwerpsch archiveenblad* ser. 1, 6 (1864): 385–93.

<sup>9</sup>See especially Eckhard Bernstein, "Erasmus and Pieter Gillis: The Development of a Friendship," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook Three* (1983): 130–45.

land. In 1521 Albrecht Dürer recorded that he dined at the home of Gillis ("maister Peter secretary"), and that Erasmus was also present.<sup>10</sup> In addition to editing the letters of Erasmus, Gillis authored works in Latin ranging from Aesop's Fables to a description of the funeral of Emperor Maximilian I.<sup>11</sup> Joachim Polites (d. 1569) was a prominent poet and musician, and held the post of *griffier* from 1541 until 1565. Originally from Zeeland, he had been a professor of Greek and Latin in Leuven, a student of medicine in Paris, and a student of law in Padua, before arriving in Antwerp via Bordeaux.<sup>12</sup> According to Leon Voet, the poet and musician Cornelis Grapheus (1482–1558), who had held the position of City Secretary from 1520 until his imprisonment in 1522 (for his mocking of the church in the preface to one of his works) also served as *griffier*, succeeding his friend Gillis in 1533. Gillis and Grapheus have been singled out as the leading humanists in early sixteenth-century Antwerp, and it was to them that the city turned in 1520 to supply the rhetorical themes accompanying the thirteen triumphal arches set up to welcome the new Emperor, Charles V, into the city.<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not Gillis, Grapheus, or Polites were among our doodlers would be difficult to prove (recalling that there were usually three *griffiers* at any given time, a total of twelve having served between 1480 and 1564); however, the earliest of the *vonnisboek* doodles, "ascensio," is inscribed at the bottom of the page "vander Blict," and further in a chronogram which may be deciphered as "Adrianis vander Blict" (Appendix no. 1). Whether or not this is taken as a signature, it clearly associates the *griffiers* with the flyleaves of the *vonnisboeken* and supports an identification of the doodlers with Antwerp's intellectual elite.

<sup>10</sup>Hans Rupprich, *Dürer: schriftlicher Nachlass*, 1 (Berlin, 1956): 166.

<sup>11</sup>Bernstein, "Erasmus and Pieter Gillis," and Jules De Le Court, "Gillis, (Pierre)," *Biographie nationale*, 7 (Brussels, 1880): cols. 780–83.

<sup>12</sup>Ferdinand Donnet, "Polites (Joachim)," *Biographie nationale*, 17 (Brussels, 1903): cols. 909–10.

<sup>13</sup>Voet, *Antwerp, the Golden Age* 402, 452. In Voet's words, "Through Gillis and Grapheus, Antwerp shared some of the luster of Erasmus and More." Voet, however, is virtually alone in recording Grapheus as a *griffier*. Grapheus is not given in the lists of *griffiers* by earlier writers, such as Génard, "Naamlijst der greffiers," and Floris Prims, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen V, onder Habsburgers 1477–1555* (Antwerp, 1938–1940) 135. J. Roulez, in his entry on Grapheus, "De Schryver (Corneille)," *Biographie nationale*, 5 (Brussels, 1876): col. 721, says only that it was probably toward the end of 1533 that Grapheus was named *griffier* or secretary of the city.

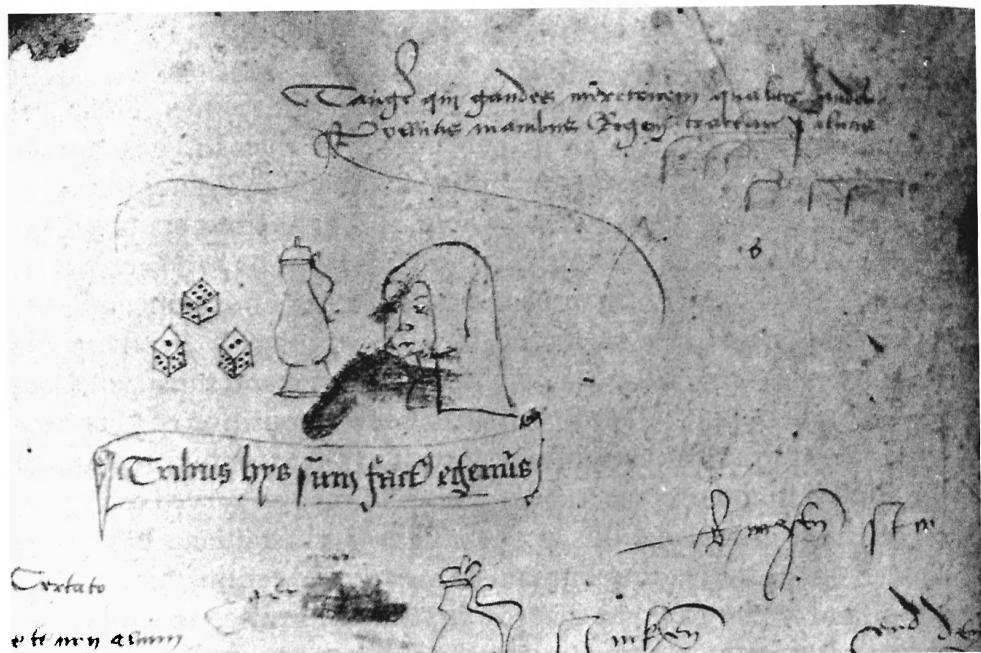


FIG. 3. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1234 (*Vonnisboek* 1509–1513). Front flyleaf. Appendix no. 2.

By far the wittiest doodles found in the *vonnisboeken* are contained in the small but discrete group of images concerned specifically with worldliness and folly (figs. 3, 4, 5, 7). These four doodles were produced between 1509 and 1520, a period covered by the overlapping terms of Adriaan vander Blict, Pieter Gillis, and Jan de Coelenere.<sup>14</sup>

The doodle of “ascensio” from the *vonnisboek* of 1502–1509 (fig. 1), perhaps by vander Blict, may serve as an introduction to the griffiers’ treatment of folly.<sup>15</sup> There can be no doubt that what is de-

<sup>14</sup>The dating of the doodles is an admittedly precarious issue. I am making the assumption that the doodles on the flyleaves and bindings of documents of a given date are similarly dated.

<sup>15</sup>Bare bottoms are themselves sometimes associated with folly. Quentin Metsys’ panel painting, *Allegory of Folly* (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Julius Held), shows a fool with a fool’s stick fashioned of a long staff whose end terminates in a small fool who has dropped his trousers and bent over, backside to the viewer (illustrated and discussed by Larry Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys with Catalogue Raisonné* [Oxford, 1984] 146–47, pl. 135; and by James A. Wehn, *The Collector’s Cabinet: Flemish Paintings from New England Private Collections* (Worcester Art Museum, 1983) no. 23, pp. 88–91. A much more enigmatic painting in the University Library, Liège, also falls into this category: a Dutch diptych which, when closed, shows a figure leaning out of a window and, when opened shows the figure’s backside with thistles stuck in his lowered trousers and, on the facing panel, a figure making a face and sticking out his tongue. See Paul Vandenbroeck, “Over Jheronimus Bosch met een toelichting bij de tekst op tekening KdZ 549 in het Berlijnse Kupferstichkabinett,” in *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de*

picted is a figure ascending into heaven. The serpentine curves at the top of the page must not be misinterpreted as raised skirts; they are an excellent example of a well established convention for the depiction of clouds.<sup>16</sup> It is possible, though, that the author had a visual pun in mind as well, for although he has written “ascensio,” he has drawn “arse-ensio.”<sup>17</sup> The image is evidently intended as a mildly irreverent view of an otherwise holy moment, and as such joins a broadening circle of sarcasm directed at the church. The inherent wit in this doodle and in its attendant chronogram surfaces again in the images which follow, but to attempt stylistic analysis on the basis of these few scribblings would truly be folly.

The following *vonnisboek* covers the years 1509–1513, when the *griffiers* were vander Blict (until 1511), de Coelenere, and Gillis. Significantly, this period precisely brackets the authorship (1509) and publication (1511) of Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly*, whose Latin title, *Moriae encomium*, contains the well known pun on the name of Sir Thomas More, in whose house the text was written. The front flyleaf of this second *vonnisboek* contains a rebus-like drawing showing three dice, a wine pitcher, and a woman’s head, labelled in a bannerole beneath (the original Latin inscriptions are given in the Appendix), “these three have made me poor” (Appendix no. 2, fig. 3). Alfred Henderson records the Latin proverb of which this phrase is a fragment, but gives no source for it: “But now I was a rich man, three things have left me bare; dice, wine, and women, these three have made me poor.”<sup>18</sup> An alternate inscription given above the doodle admonishes, “you, who like to touch a harlot just as you dare to touch the King of Salvation with polluted hands;” and another to the lower left counsels, “strive to conquer yourself, not another, rule yourself, not the other person.” The source of these phrases is uncertain, but their combined thrust is clear. As with the large body of Prodigal Son imagery from early sixteenth-century Northern

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*Kunst der Nederlanden Opgedragen aan Prof. Em. Dr. J. K. Steppe* (Leuven, 1981) 151–88; see 177n. 123, pl. I–III. We await Vandebroeck’s further discussion of this diptych and its inscriptions.

<sup>16</sup>See for example, Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Le Moyen age fantastique, antiquités et exoticismes dans l’art gothique* (Paris, 1955) 256–59 for “nuages conventionnels.”

<sup>17</sup>The Middle Dutch for “arse” is given as “ers,” “ars,” “aers,” or “eers,” all close in pronunciation to the English “arse.” See E. Verwijs and J. Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek*, 2 (Den Haag, 1889): 719; and M. De Vries and L. A. Ter Winkel, *Woor-denboek der nederlandsche taal*, 1 (Brussels/Ghent, 1882); cols. 575–76.

<sup>18</sup>Alfred Henderson, *Latin Proverbs and Quotations* (London, 1869) 88.

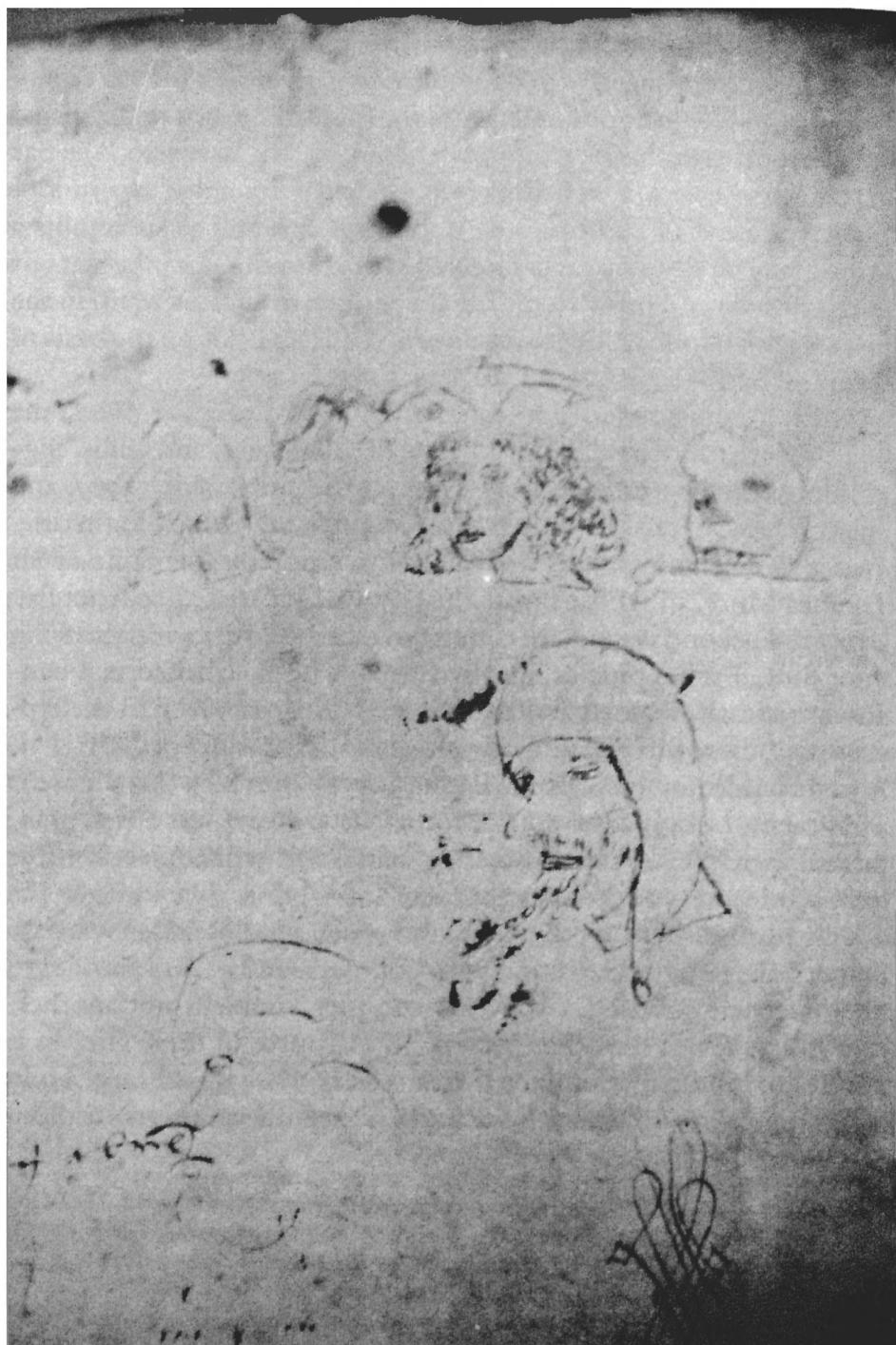


FIG. 4. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1234 (*Vonnisboek 1509-1513*). Rear Flyleaf. Appendix no. 3.

Europe, the vicarious participation in the depicted or described debauchery carries an equal but opposite moralizing lesson.<sup>19</sup>

The currency of the theme of "wine, women and gambling" may be demonstrated by citing several specific examples. *Acolastus* may be the most important sixteenth-century play inspired by the story of the Prodigal Son. It was written in Latin by Willem de Volder (or van de Voldersgraft, alias Gulielmus Gnapheus, 1493–1568) and was first published in 1528, in Antwerp. The author summarizes the action at the outset, "The boy takes his inheritance and immediately goes abroad. There he attaches himself to some out-and-out rogues and soon he has shamefully squandered his money on dice, wantonness and debauchery."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, this doodle of dice, winepot and woman's head recapitulates the essential elements found in the woodcut illustration to Sebastian Brant's treatment of card players and dicers in his moralizing *Ship of Fools*, where we see two female fools playing at cards and dice and sharing wine from a wine pitcher with two male fools.<sup>21</sup> Other examples from contemporary prints and the literature of the *rederijkers* (members of the guilds of rhetoric) could be added, but the point is clear; the image is informed by the method of moral instruction which has been called "instruction through ridicule" by Larry Silver, in reference to the secular paintings of Metsys, and Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>For the popularity of the theme of the Prodigal Son see especially Konrad Renger, *Lockere Gesellschaft: Zur Ikonographie des Verlorenen Sohnes und von Wirthausszenen in der niederländischen Malerei* (Berlin, 1970). See also H. Colin Slim, *The Prodigal Son at the Whores', Music, Art, and Drama*, n.p., n.d. (lecture presented at the University of California, Irvine, May 21, 1976).

<sup>20</sup>See W. E. D. Atkinson, intro. and trans., *Acolastus. A Latin Play of the Sixteenth Century by Gulielmus Gnapheus*, University of Western Ontario Studies in the Humanities, 3 (London, Ontario, 1964) 93. For the proliferation of this theme see Ewald Vetter, *Der Verlorene Sohn* (Düsseldorf, 1955). It may also be worthwhile to mention the play, *Mary of Nijmegen*, sometimes attributed to the Antwerp author Anna Bijns. In this work published in Antwerp in 1515, a young woman, Emma, is led astray by the devil, who takes her to Antwerp in order to carry out their pranks in a tavern of ill-repute called The Tree. Emma, like the Prodigal Son, finds her way back to her family (her uncle in this case) and the tale ends happily with a moral. See the commentary and text in *Middeleeuws toneel: Esmoreit, Glorian, Lanseloet van Denemerken, Nu Noch, Elckerlyk, Mariiken van Nieuwmeghen*, Nederlandse Letterkunde, 3 (Utrecht and Antwerp, 1984).

<sup>21</sup>Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff Illustrirt mit Neunzig Holzschnitten des Originals* (Hamburg and Berlin, 1958) 179, "von Spielern," or the English translation by Alexander Barclay, *The Shyp of Foly of the Worlde*, 2 (orig. London, 1509; repr., New York, 1966): 69–74, "Of carde players and dysers" (illustrated).

<sup>22</sup>Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys* 135, where Silver further notes, "For Massys, as well as for Erasmus, the moral dimension of religion is revealed through satires in the secular realm. . . ." For examples from the writings of the *rederijkers* see *ibid.* 145. Some further related pictorial examples from the graphic arts of the Low Countries



FIG. 5. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1234 (*Vonnisboek 1509–1513*). Rear vellum cover. Appendix no. 4.

On the final flyleaf of this same *vonnisboek* we find a series of five heads (Appendix no. 3, fig. 4). The head of a presumably vain young man (he wears a lavish plumed hat) is adjacent to the heads of the two forces to which he is perhaps the most susceptible: death (skull and bone), and folly (recognizable by his belled cap).<sup>23</sup> On the vellum cover of this same collection of documents we again encounter folly, now in the form of three fools' heads inscribed, "Infinitus est numerus" ("the number is infinite," Appendix no. 4, fig. 5). The combined image and phrase make a complete rebus-like quotation

include the roundel by Master PVL (Bartsch no. 1) showing men (one with a wine pitcher) playing a game of dice while two women and a fool look on, illustrated and discussed in Ellen S. Jacobowitz and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and his Contemporaries*, National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C., 1983) 304–305; and a small (uncatalogued?) roundel from the circle of Master S, in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, which shows a woman pouring wine for two dicers at a table with the inscription "ALLA KANSEN bOEN" (all lucky throws of the dice [are] good). For "canse" see J. Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch handwoordenboek* ('s-Gravenhage, 1979, repr.) 282; and for "boen" (derivative of the French "bon") see J. W. Muller and A. Kluyver, *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, 3 (Leiden, 1902): 149.

<sup>23</sup>For an account of the dress and accouterments of the fool see Erika Michael, *The Drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger for Erasmus' "Praise of Folly"* (New York, 1986) 197–229.

from *Ecclesiastes 1:15*, which is given in the Vulgate edition as “Et stultorum infinitus est numerus,” and which is usually translated as “and what is lacking cannot be numbered.” The appropriateness of the image of several fools to supply the first term of this quotation is clarified by the rendition of “stultorum” as “fools.” As it turns out, Erasmus had played with exactly this phrase in his *The Praise of Folly*, in a passage which is invariably translated, “Ecclesiastes saith in his first chapter, ‘the number of fools is infinite.’”<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere on this flyleaf is a passage from the *Song of Solomon*, “Behold you are beautiful, my love”; a quotation from Virgil, “Each man is by his special pleasure led”; and another from Horace, “O citizens, citizens, money you first must seek; virtue after pelf.” To the right of the three fools’ heads, another foolish trio can just barely be discerned: the already encountered dice, wine pitcher, and woman’s head. Again, the doodles on this vellum cover and the previous flyleaf are of a consistent Erasmian theme; man is practically incorrigible in his striving after pleasure and wealth, and his foolishness is beyond calculation.

A final sketch in this volume strays from the previous concise commentaries on folly and worldliness, but it still bears mention as a wry glance at mankind. Bound in with the outer cover is a heavy piece of card stock with a large doodle of a soldier of uncertain nationality holding a halberd and a sword, labelled, in Flemish, “knecht” (“footsoldier”), and in French, “poevre et leal” (“poor and loyal,” Appendix no. 6, fig. 6).<sup>25</sup> Although soldiers, especially soldiers of fortune, were often associated with pillaging and dissolute living in the early sixteenth-century, there is no compelling reason to see much more in this image than an ironic jab at a motley foot soldier.<sup>26</sup>

The next extant *vonnisboek* (1517–1520) contains a final image of folly. On the rear vellum cover there is an elegiac couplet which may

<sup>24</sup>P. S. Allen, ed., *The Praise of Folly Written by Erasmus 1509 and Translated by John Wilson 1668* (Oxford, 1913) 158. For the original text see Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae encomium* (Basel, 1522) 328, “Scripsit Ecclesiastes capite primo: Stultorum infinitus est numerus.”

<sup>25</sup>I am grateful to James Helyar for suggesting this reading of “poevre et leal.” For “pouvre” and “leal” see Edmond Hugnet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle* (Paris, 1925–1967).

<sup>26</sup>For negative qualities assigned to soldiers see, for example, Ursula Meyer, “Political Implications of Dürer’s ‘Knight, Death and the Devil,’” *Print Collector’s Newsletter* 9. 2 (May–June 1978): 35–39, with further bibliography.



FIG. 6. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1234 (*Vonnisboek* 1509–1513). Rear card cover. Appendix no. 6.

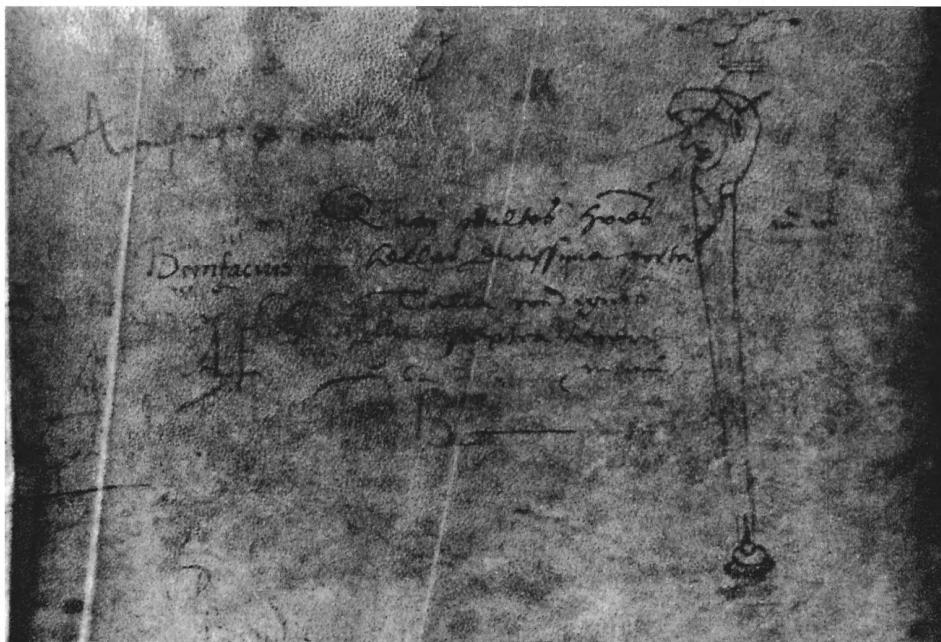


FIG. 7. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1235 (*Vonnisboek 1517-1520*). Rear velum cover. Appendix no. 8.

be translated, "However many men a very rich land bears, that many scepters are they worthy to bear in hand," and a drawing, as if a footnote to the word "scepter," which shows a fool's marot or bauble (Appendix no. 8, fig. 7).<sup>27</sup> None of the standard concordances have turned up a source for this couplet, and it is possible that it was composed by the doodler himself. As in many of the previous examples, the vitality of this image of folly resides in a provocative and punning interplay between text and image. Although the authorship of these jottings, beyond their having been penned by the *griffiers*, is not the key issue, we will turn briefly to some inferences about their maker or makers.

There are several common elements which run through the six doodles so far considered: the theme of folly; a playfulness between

<sup>27</sup>I am particularly grateful to Dr. G. Spiessens of the Antwerp Stadsarchief, and Dr. Oliver Phillips of the University of Kansas, for their help with the orthography and translation of this difficult passage. For "marot" see Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys* 147, and for intriguing parallels in the early Jewish tale of Solomon and Marcolf (king and fool), Psalm 53, and a drawing by Holbein the Younger of Emperor Maximilian and a fool, see Michael, *The Drawings by Holbein the Younger* 245-49.

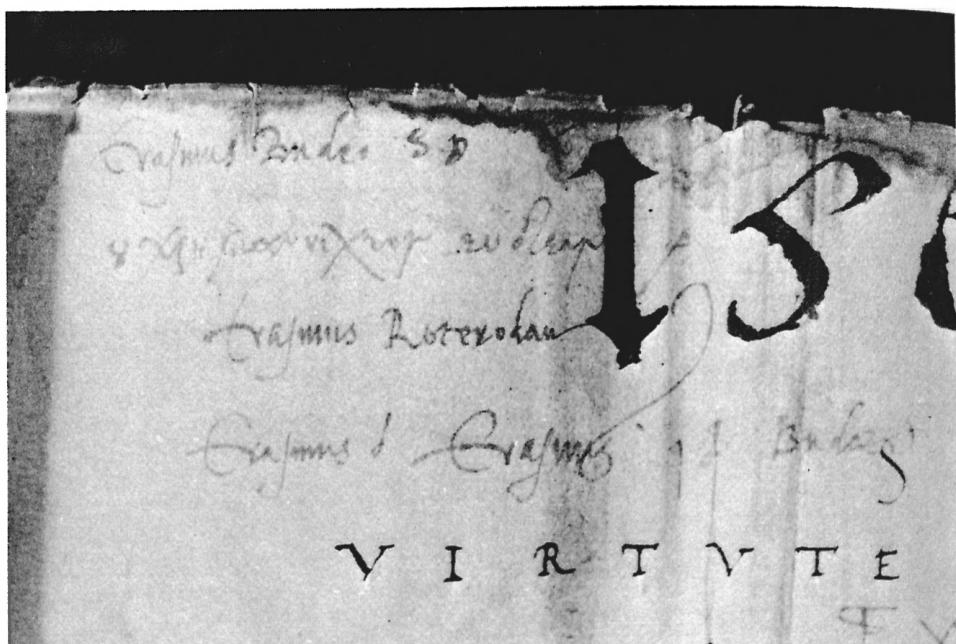


FIG. 8. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1246 (*Vonnisboek* 1564). Front flyleaf.  
Appendix no. 23.

image and text which may find expression as a visual pun, a rebus-like construction, or a chronogram; and a marked facility with Latin and with Biblical and Roman literature. It is unlikely, however, that this is enough to demand common authorship of the doodles. To recapitulate, there were four *griffiers* who served between 1502 and 1520. Jan van Woelputte seems to have served only in 1506, and we know nothing about Jan de Coelenere, who was *griffier* from 1512–1534. It could easily be argued that Adriaan vander Blicht, who appears to have been the witty doodler of “ascensio,” was also responsible for some of the other doodles put down prior to his departure from the post of *griffier* sometime in 1511. On the other hand, Pieter Gillis’ tenure as *griffier* spans the entire period under consideration (serving from 1509 to 1533), and he could conceivably have been the author of “ascensio,” although vander Blicht’s name on this particular sheet militates against this notion. It is not too surprising to learn that Erasmus himself was a doodler, and it is important to note that his pictorial vocabulary included many of the same elements as the images concerned with folly from the Antwerp *vonnisboeken*:

fools' heads, wine pitchers, and dice.<sup>28</sup> The similarity of this temperament to that expressed in the *vonnisboek* doodles, coupled with Gillis' close friendship with Erasmus and long tenure as *griffier*, allows the tempting proposal that Gillis may have been the author of the images of folly, with the probable exception of the image of "ascensio."

It must be emphasized, however, that fools and folly played a powerful role in the arts and letters throughout the Northern Renaissance, and Erasmus' contribution is only one facet of the phenomenon. Court fools are well documented in France from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> In the Low Countries the local military guilds and guilds of rhetoric from the late fifteenth century onward included fools in their competitions and performances, and in some cities there were even guilds of fools.<sup>30</sup> The flood of interest in human folly is further underscored by the prints of Master E. S. and Lucas van Leyden (among many others); the publication in 1494 of Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*; the appearance of a related work, Jodocus Badius' satire on the follies of women (published in Strassburg in 1503, the same year that Brant became

<sup>28</sup>Illustrated in Emil Major, "Handzeichnungen des Erasmus von Rotterdam," *Historisches Museum Basel* (1932):35–45. These doodles are all from a manuscript of 1515, and are further discussed by Erwin Panofsky, "Erasmus and the Visual Arts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32 (1969): 200–27, see 203–04.

<sup>29</sup>André Stegmann, "Sur quelques aspects des fous en titre d'office dans la France du XVIe siècle," in *Folie et déraison à la renaissance*, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Travaux de l'institut pour l'étude de la renaissance et de l'humanisme, 5 (Brussels, 1976) 53–73, with further bibliography.

<sup>30</sup>For military guilds see G. Jo Steenbergen, *Het Landjuweel van de rederijkers*, Keurreeks van het Davidsfonds, 44 (Leuven, 1950–52) 24. Pictorial evidence is given in a painting of 1494 of a festival of the Antwerp archers by an Antwerp artist usually known as the Master of Frankfurt (probably Hendrik van Wuelwe); see Voet, *Antwerp, the Golden Age*, frontispiece and 94–95. Stephen Goddard, *The Master of Frankfurt and his Shop*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academic voor wetenschappen, letteren, en schone kunsten van België, klasse de schone kunsten, jaargang 46, no. 38 (Brussels, 1984) 126–29. For fools in the guilds of rhetoric, see, for example, E. van Autenboer, *Het Brabants Landjuweel*, *passim*, and p. 82 for an example where fools' prizes included a fool's cap and a fool's stick (marot). For fools' guilds see E. van Autenboer, *Volksfeesten en rederijkers te Mechelen (1400–1600)*, Koninklijke vlaamse academie voor taal- en letterkunde, verhandelingen, ser. 6, no. 89 (Ghent, 1962):71–73.

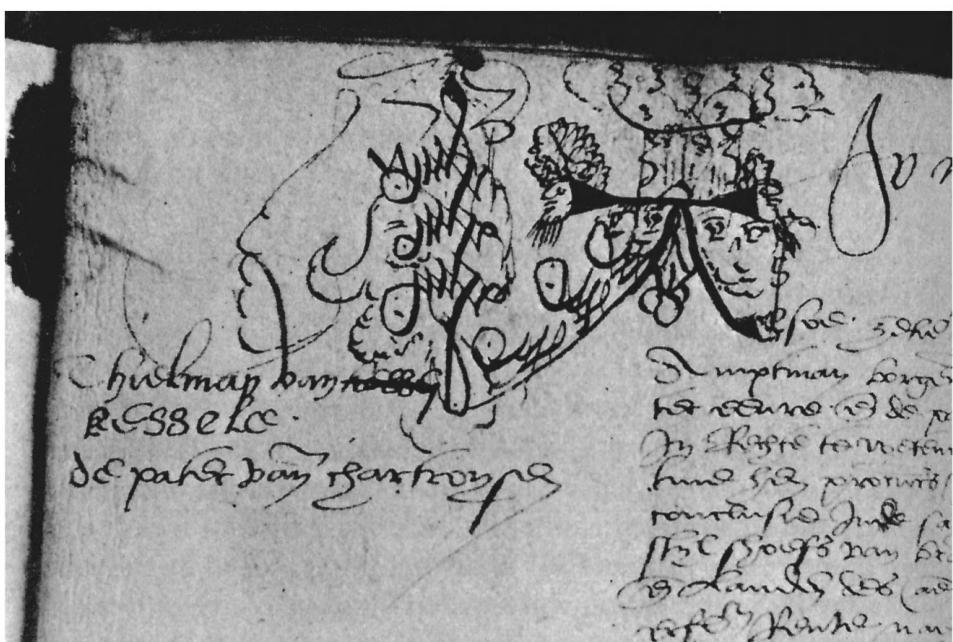


FIG. 9. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1244 (*Vonnisboek 1555-1556*) Folio 1. Appendix no. 18.

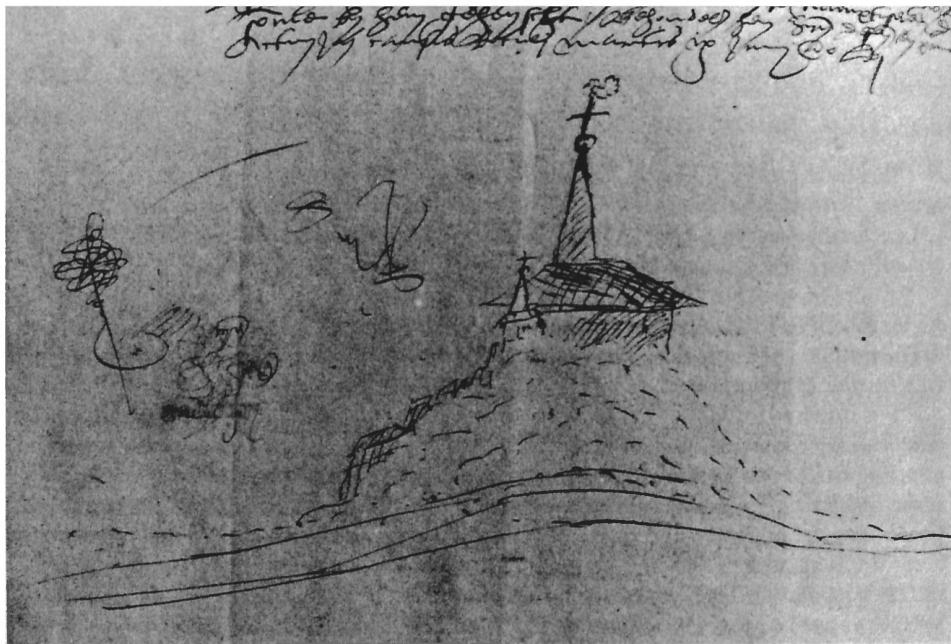


FIG. 10. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1244 (*Vonnisboek 1555-1556*). Folio 258<sup>v</sup>. Appendix no. 19.

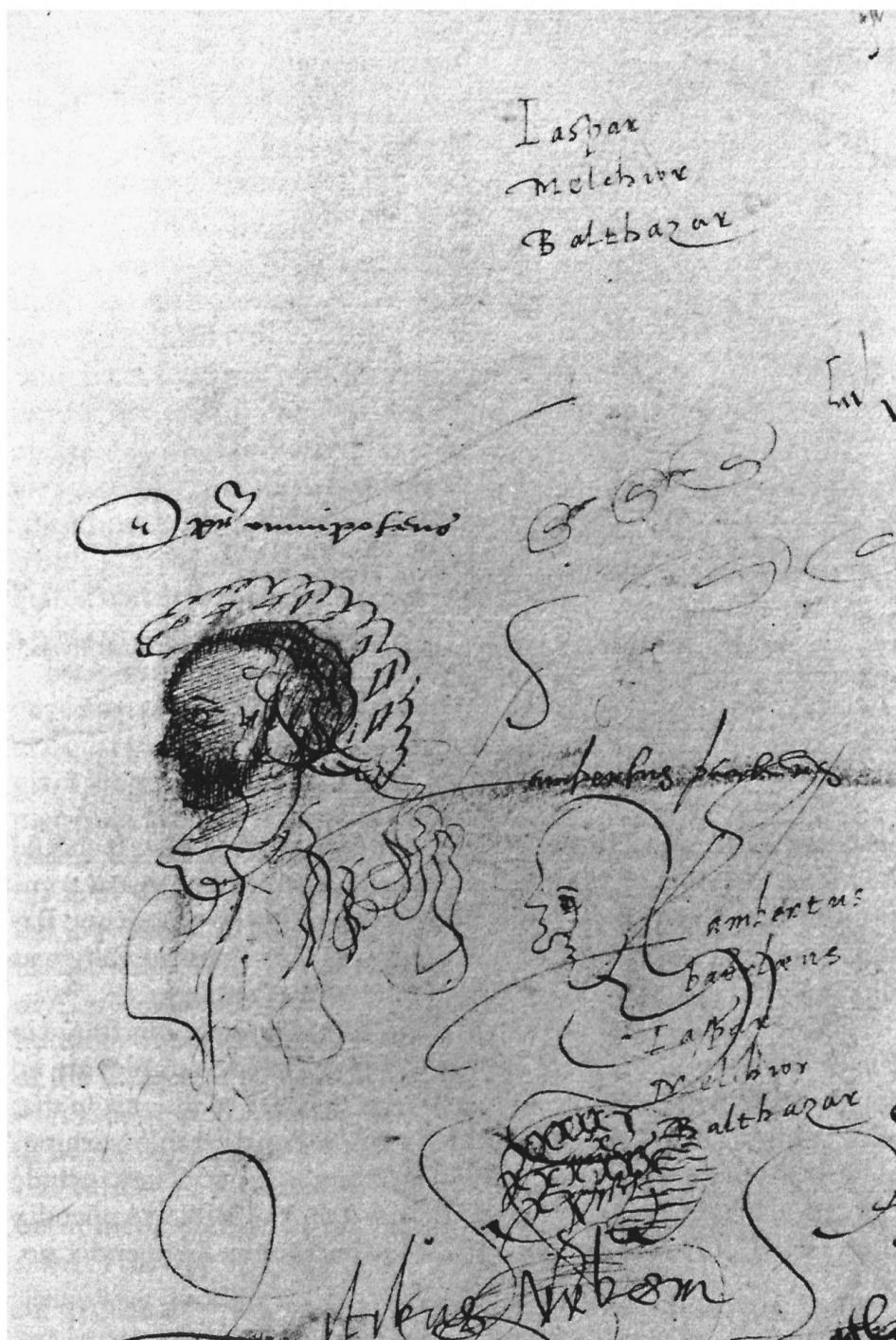


FIG. 11. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1245 (*Vonnisboek* 1559). Rear flyleaf.  
Appendix no. 21.

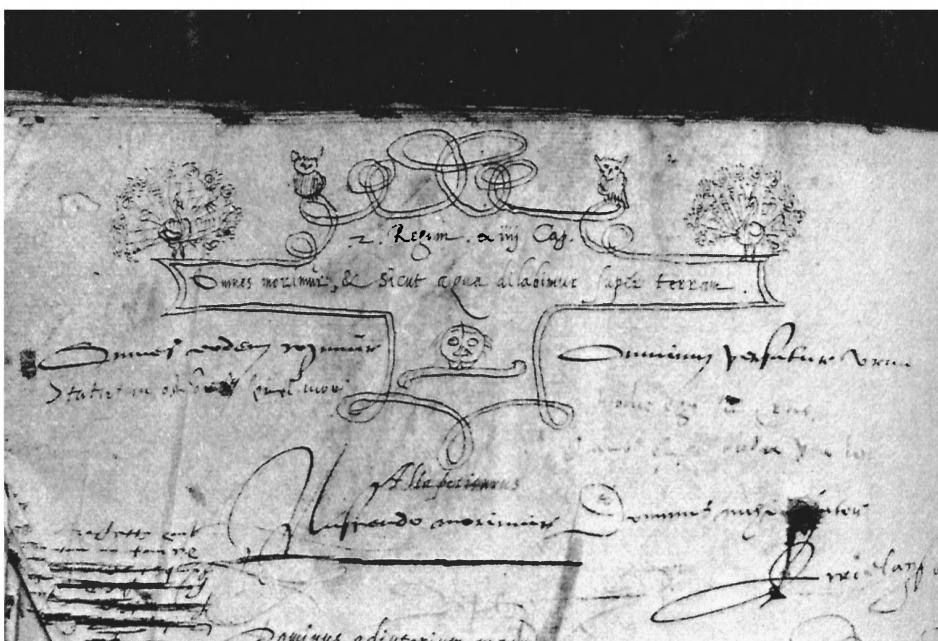


FIG. 12. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, Vierschaar 1246 (*Vonnisboek* 1564). Rear flyleaf. Appendix no. 26.

its City Clerk); and Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* of 1511.<sup>31</sup> It should be mentioned that all of these books had an important visual component. Brant's work was illustrated with nearly 100 woodcuts, Badius' included seven, and a famous copy of *The Praise of Folly* was illustrated in pen and ink by Hans Holbein the Younger.<sup>32</sup>

The next sizable body of extant doodles and inscriptions found in the *vonnisboeken* appears from 1544 to 1564. These examples are no longer unified by a consistent theme, but they are of interest in that they continue to give evidence of the *griffiers'* considerable learning, as well as what might be called the doodling instinct. They include quotations from Juvenal (Appendix no. 11), the Bible (Appendix nos. 14, 26), Ovid (Appendix nos. 15, 20), Homer (Appendix no.

<sup>31</sup>Keith P. F. Moxey, "Master E. S. and the folly of love," *Simiolus*, 11, 3/4 (1980):125–48. Larry Silver, "Fools and Women: Profane Subjects by Lucas van Leyden," *Print Collector's Newsletter*, 14, 4 (Sept.–Oct. 1983): 130–34. Jacobowitz and Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden*, nos. 39, 71, 72, 77. Jodocus Badius, *Stultifera navicula seu scaphe / Fatuarum mulierum: circa sensus quinq[ue] exteriore fraude navigantium* (Strassburg, 1503).

<sup>32</sup>Fully discussed and illustrated by Michael, *The Drawings by Holbein the Younger*.

23), Terence (Appendix no. 25), and Horace (Appendix no. 26); as well as evocations of the Italian fifteenth-century humanist Lorenzo Valla (Appendix no. 16), and the sixteenth-century humanists Guillaume Budé and Erasmus (Appendix no. 23, fig. 8). Although from the years 1555–1556 there is a phrase dealing with dice playing (Appendix no. 17), and several other passages are clearly concerned with vanity, fortune, morality or proper living (Appendix nos. 11, 15, 23, 25), the images that have survived from the *vonnisboeken* penned after 1520 are no longer concerned with the theme of folly. We find, for example, an embellished letter “A” (Appendix no. 18, fig. 9), a church on a hill with an enormous bird atop the spire’s cross (Appendix no. 19, fig. 10), the heads of the three magi (Appendix no. 21, fig. 11), an elaborate epitaph incorporating phrases from the Bible and Horace (Appendix no. 26, fig. 12), and a banderole inscribed “Truth, the daughter of time” (Appendix no. 26). Although there is little unity to these images and texts of 1544–1565, it might be suggested that in three instances the choice of phrases from the Bible and Ovid contain potential lascivious puns (Appendix nos. 14, 15, 20).

Despite the gaps in the *vonnisboeken* from the some sixty years surveyed here, a discrete group of textual and pictorial doodles from the period 1509–1520 emerges, which, regardless of their authorship, gives eloquent testimony to the general currency of the lore of human folly in the first decades of the sixteenth-century. It must be emphasized that the witty and learned doodles catalogued here were made by members of the intellectual elite, and not, so far as we can tell, by dicers, drinkers, or prodigals. Again, Pieter Gillis, *griffier*, close friend of Sir Thomas More and Erasmus of Rotterdam, host of Albrecht Dürer, and patron of Quintin Metsys, seems to have had both the opportunity and the temperament to have penned several of the images of fools and worldliness illustrated here.

As suggested at the outset of this article, the proximity of the act of doodling with the act of brooding renders the doodle a very special variety of historical document: one which is spontaneous and unpremeditated, and brings us wonderfully close to the preoccupations of the day. In closing, however, I would like to observe that the *vonnisboek* doodles are but one manifestation of a tradition of play between word and image found throughout Renaissance Europe. Like the Greek verb γράφειν which refers to either writing or drawing, the doodle exemplifies the interrelatedness of visual and verbal thought. This potential, frequently tapped by artists of the sixteenth-century Low Countries (notably in the works Bosch and

Bruegel which often visualize proverbial wisdom), also finds expression in the puns and rebuses of the guilds of rhetoric.<sup>33</sup>

The *vonnisboek* doodles participate in this tradition, but, couched in a knowledge of Latin and the classics, they also bespeak the world of the Renaissance humanist, and, in the midst of the tedium of formal judicial decisions, they seem to demand the inverse of Erasmus' dictum, "if you can't praise my wit and learning, at least give me credit for hard work."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>The literature concerning the guilds of rhetoric in the Low Countries is enormous. A good point of access for the English reader with further bibliography is Walter Gibson's, "Artists and Rederijkers in the Age of Bruegel," *Art Bulletin*, 63 (1981):426-47.

<sup>34</sup>In a letter to Sylvester Gigli of 1521, "Hic si nihil laudis debetur ingenio meo, si nihil eruditio certe non nihil debetur industriae," translated in John P. Dolan, *The Essential Erasmus* (New York, 1964) 95.

## APPENDIX

This appendix includes a catalogue and translation of material through the year 1564 (after which the frequency of the doodles in the particular manuscripts under discussion declines significantly). The selection of doodles treated here is of necessity subjective. I have tried to include all instances of doodles which seemed of interest either by virtue of their wit, their source, or simply their uniqueness. The choices of text have been limited to complete and legible passages. I extend special thanks to S. Lombardo, O. Philips, S. Prete, and G. Spiessens for help with the texts. The following sources are cited: François Pascal Dutripon, *Concordantiae Bibliorum Sacrorum Vulgate Editionis* (Paris, 1844); Thomas Benfield Harbottle, *Dictionary of Quotations (Classical)* (London, 1897); Alfred Henderson, *Latin Proverbs and Quotations* (London, 1869); Homer, *The Iliad with an English Translation*, trans. A. T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1924); Horace, *Satires Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans., H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1928); Juvenal, *Sixteen Satires Upon the Ancient Harlot*, trans. Steven Robinson (Manchester, 1983); *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York and Oxford, 1973); Ovid, *The Fasti, Ristia, Pontic Epistles, Ibis, and Helientica of Ovid*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London, 1903); H. T. Riley, *A Dictionary of Latin and Greek Quotations, Proverbs, Maxims and mottos* (London, 1902).

## 1. Vierschaar 1233 [1502–1509] (Fig. 1)

Last flyleaf

*Image:* Naked figure seen from behind ascending into clouds.

*Text:* Ascensio

*Translation:* Ascent

*Text:* vander blict / 76nd45 bl2c3 [chronogram for “vander blict”] / 6d526nis  
76nd45 bl2c3 [chronogram “adrianis vander blict,” based on previous line]

## 2. Vierschaar 1234 [1509–1513] (Fig. 3)

Front flyleaf

*Image:* three dice, wine pitcher, woman’s head.

*Text:* Tribus hys sum factus egenus

*Source:* Latin proverb: [Dives eram dudum; fecerunt metria nudum; Alea, vina, Venus;] Tribus his sum factus egenus.

*Translation:* [But now I was a rich man, three things have left me bare; dice, wine, and women,] these three have made me poor.

*Text:* Tangere qui gaudes meretricem qualiter audes pollutis manibus

Regem tractare salutis

*Translation:* You who like to touch a harlot just as you dare to touch the King of Salvation with polluted hands

*Text:* Certato Vincere te non alium Imperato tibi non alteri

*Translation:* Strive to conquer yourself, not another. Rule yourself, not the other person.

## 3. Vierschaar 1234 [1509–1513] (Fig. 4)

Rear flyleaf

*Image:* Two fools, a man in a cap, a death’s head.

4. Vierschaar 1234 [1509–1513] (Fig. 5)  
 Rear vellum cover  
*Image:* Three fools' heads  
*Text:* [Et stultorum]Infinitus est nu[meru]s  
*Source:* Ecclesiastes 1:15  
*Translation:* [and what is lacking] cannot be numbered  
*Text:* q[uam] pulcra es, amica mea  
*Source:* The Song of Solomon 4:1  
*Translation:* Behold you are beautiful, my love  
*Text:* Trahit sua quemque voluptas  
*Source:* Virgil, Eclogues II 65  
*Translation:* Each man is by his special pleasure led.  
*Text:* O cives cives quaerenda pecunia primu[m] est / Virtus post nummos.  
*Source:* Horace, I Epistularum i 53  
*Translation:* O citizens, citizens, money you first must seek; virtue after pelf.
5. Vierschaar 1234 [1509–1513]  
 Rear vellum cover  
*Image:* Interlaces and an acanthus pattern
6. Vierschaar 1234 [1509–1513] (Fig. 6)  
 Rear card cover  
*Image:* Standing footsoldier  
*Text:* Knecht  
*Translation:* Footsoldier  
*Text:* Poevre et leal  
*Translation:* poor and loyal
7. Vierschaar 1235 [1517–1520]  
 Rear flyleaf  
*Image:* Calligraphic embellishment  
*Text:* Infantem nudu[m] cum te natura creavit / paupertatis onus patienter  
 ferre memento  
*Translation:* Since nature created you a naked infant, remember to bear the  
 burden of poverty patiently.
8. Vierschaar 1235 [1517–1520] (Fig. 7)  
 Rear vellum cover  
*Image:* Fool's stick (marot)  
*Text:* Quam multos homines / tellus ditissima porta / talia condignos /  
 sceptra tenere manu  
*Translation:* However many men a very rich land bears, that many scepters  
 are they worthy to bear in hand.
9. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]  
 Front flyleaf  
*Image:* Bearded figure with wavy hair

## 10. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]

Front flyleaf

*Image:* Three bearded heads

## 11. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]

Folio 2

*Text:* Stemmata quid faciunt quid prodest pontice longo sanguine censeri pictos ostendere vultus maiorum & stantis in curribus A[e]milianos Et curios iam didimus umeroq[ue] minorem coruinum & galbam auric[ulis] nasoque carentem?

*Source:* Juvenal, *Satires* VIII.1

*Translation:* What use are pedigrees? What good is being esteemed  
For long blood, Ponticus, displaying the painted masks  
Of ancestors, an Aemilianus standing in his car,  
A Curius now in half, reduced at the shoulder some  
Corvinus and a Galba [missing ears and a nose?]

## 12. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]

Folio 2<sup>v</sup>*Text:* O cives, cives Antverpiae excelsa colentes moenia*Translation:* O citizens, citizens [living] in high-walled Antwerp.

## 13. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]

Front flyleaf

*Image:* Running legs

## 14. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]

Folio 234

*Image:* A spiral, a bearded man wearing a fur collar and a cap, closed doors*Text:* Virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa me consolata sunt

[repeated]: Baculus tuus et virga tua ipsa me consolata sunt

*Source:* Psalm 22:4*Translation:* Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

## 15. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]

Folio 235

*Text:* Omnia sunt hominum tenui pendentia filo et subito casu quae valuere ruunt*Source:* Ovid *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.3-35*Translation:* All that belongs to man is pendent from a slender thread, and that which was firm falls headlong with a sudden descent.

## 16. Vierschaar 1239 [1544]

Rear flyleaf

*Image:* Two heads [Bust of Valla?]*Text:* Aspide quid Magis*Translation:* What more than an asp*Text:* l'annotationes in laurentium vallam*Translation:* The annotations on Lorenzo Valla

## 17. Vierschaar 1244 [1555–1556]

Front flyleaf

*Image:* Bearded man*Text:* Ludere taxillis bene respice quid sit in illis mors / tua restua sors tua pendet in illis*Translation:* Player at dice, consider well what is in them. Your death, your substance, your fate depends upon them.

## 18. Vierschaar 1244 [1555–1556] (Fig. 9)

Folio 1

*Image:* Embellished letter A.

## 19. Vierschaar 1244 [1555–1556] (Fig. 10)

Folio 258<sup>v</sup>*Image:* A church on a hill.

## 20. Vierschaar 1245 [1559]

Front cover

*Text:* Omnia sunt hominum tenui [ ] filo et subito casu [ ] valuere ruunt*Source and Translation:* See #15

## 21. Vierschaar 1245 [1559] (Fig. 11)

Rear flyleaf

*Image:* Heads of the three magi*Text:* Iaspar Melchior Balthazar [traditional names of the three magi]*Text:* Opus Omnipotens*Translation:* All-powerful work

## 22. Vierschaar 1246 [1564]

Front flyleaf

*Image:* Bearded head*Text (stricken):* Dominicus noster tunc se putat esse beatum / cum multa in loculis [cera?] suis [aderit?] / Recte equidem sentit nec talis opinio fallit*Translation:* Our Dominic believes himself to be happy when there is much wax(?) in his coffers(?) [This] he rightly feels and his opinion is not deceiving.

## 23. Vierschaar 1246 [1564] (Fig. 8)

Front flyleaf

*Text:* Erasmus Budeo S[alutem] D[icet]. / οὐ χρὴ παννύχιον εῦδειν / Erasmus Roterodam / Erasmus Erasmus -Bude-*Source:* Homer, *Iliad* Book 2, 24 & 61: οὐ χρὴ παννύχιον εῦδειν [βουληφόσον ἀνδρα]*Translation:* Erasmus sends greetings to [Guillaume] Budé / it is not right for a counsellor to sleep all night / Erasmus of Rotterdam / Erasmus Erasmus -Bude-

## 24. Vierschaar 1246 [1564]

Front flyleaf

*Image:* Banderole*Text:* [In the banderole]: 1564 Anno xvciLxiiii Mense Aprili xxix april*Translation:* 1564 Anno XVcLXIII the month of April, April 29

## 25. Vierschaar 1246 [1564]

Rear flyleaf

*Text:* Ad omnia alia aetate sapimus rectius: solum unum hoc vitium adfert senectus hominibus, Attentiores [sumus] as rem omnes quam sat est

*Source:* Terence, *Adelphi*, Act V, scene III, 46

*Translation:* With age we acquire wisdom properly for all other things. Old age brings one vice alone to men, being all more attentive to property [or wealth] than is proper.

## 26. Vierschaar 1246 [1564] (Fig. 12)

Rear flyleaf

*Image:* Epitaph with a death's head, peacocks, and owls

*Text:* 2. Regem. xijij cap / omnes morimur, & sicut aqua dilabimur super terram / omnes eodem cogimur . . . omnium versatur urna

*Source:* 2 Samuel 14:14: omnes morimur, et quasi aquae dilabimur in terram

*Translation:* 2 Kings xiv chapter / We must all die, we are like water spilt on the ground.

*Source:* Horace, *Odes* II.3.25:

omnes cogimur; omnium versatur urna [serius, ocius sors exiturna].

*Translation:* We are all impelled onward alike; the urn of death is shaken for all [and sooner or later the lot must come forth].

*Text:* [Et Quemadmodum] Statutum est ho[mini]bus semel mori / Hodi ego [i]lle cras

*Source:* Hebrews 9:27

*Translation:* [And just as] it is appointed to die once

*Source:* Latin Proverb

*Translation:* Today he, I tomorrow

*Image:* Banderole

*Text:* [In banderole]: Veritas temporis filia

*Translation:* Truth, the daughter of time