Karel van Mander, in the ‘Life of Jeronimus Bos’ in his Schilder-Boeck of 1604, speaks of the ‘wondrous or strange fancies’ (wonderlijcke oft seldsaem versieringhen), which this artist ‘had in his head and expressed with his brush’ – the ‘phantoms and monsters of hell (ghespoock en gheedrochten der Hellen) which are usually not so much kindly as ghastly to look upon’.1 Taking one of Bosch’s depictions of the Descent of Christ into the Limbo of the Fathers as an example, van Mander further notes that ‘it’s a wonder what can be seen there of odd spooks (oubolligh ghespoock); also, how subtle and natural (aerdigh en natuerlijck) he was with /g193 ames, /g192 res, smoke and vapours’.2 In the Schilder-Boeck, van Mander frequently uses the word ‘aerdigh’ to describe the aesthetically pleasing quality of small works or small details;3 here, ‘aerdigh’ refers to the natural and lively depiction of fires.

As it has been observed, van Mander’s list of Bosch’s painterly expressions echoes Erasmus’s often-cited eulogy on Dürer in the Dialogue About the Correct Pronunciation of Latin and Greek, published in Basel in 1528. According to

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2 Mander K. van, Lives I 124f. (f. 216v): ‘Noch is van hem op de Wael een Helle/daer de oude Vaders verlost worden […] t’is wonder wat daer al te sien is van oubolligh ghespook: oock hoe aercharged en natuerlijck hy was/van vlammen/branden/roocken en smoocken.’ The painting has not been identified. See Miedema’s commentary on this passage in Mander K. van, Lives III 55–56 (f. 216v:25).

Erasmus, Dürer is superior to Apelles, since Dürer expressed ‘in black lines’ and without the aid of colours ‘that which cannot be depicted: fire, rays of light, thunder, sheet lightning, lightning, or, as they say, the “clouds on the wall”’. In the Adagia, published in Basel in 1520, Erasmus had given the meaning of the phrase ‘clouds on the wall’ as ‘something frivolous or vane’. Referencing the fourth-century Latin poet and rhetorician Ausonius, Erasmus further asserts in the Adagia that ‘a cloud is too insubstantial (inanior) to be expressed by colours’. Inanis, which literally means ‘containing nothing’ or ‘empty’, was commonly used in the sense of ‘fraudulent’ and ‘false’; inanis could further denote the ‘insubstantiality’ of the other world or the ‘incorporeality’ of the shades. Thus, while both Erasmus and van Mander include subtle, insubstantial things in their catalogues of artistic effects accomplished by Dürer and Bosch, respectively, the differences between the two lists are nonetheless striking. Van Mander explicitly praises Bosch for his exquisite painterly technique; no mention is further made by van Mander that the objects of Bosch’s imagination are at the boundary of what can be portrayed; and, perhaps most importantly, ‘ghespoock’ and ‘ghedrochten der Hellen’ are added to the fires and flames, which in van Mander’s text exist in three different places and forms: in hell; in Bosch’s head; and in Bosch’s works of art. In this essay I shall further explore the aesthetic and cultural values associated with ‘ghespoock’ as well as the place of images of fires, ghosts and spectres in the visual arts around 1600.
Ghespoock In and Around Bosch’s Head

Van Mander concludes the short vita of Bosch with his own slightly augmented Dutch translation of the Latin verses by the Liège humanist Domenicus Lampsonius that accompanied Bosch’s engraved portrait in the series Pictorum aliquot celebrium Germaniae inferiors effigies (Portraits of Some of the Famous Painters of Lower Germany). Collected by Lampsonius, the 23 ‘portraits’ were published by Hieronymus Cock in Antwerp in 1572:

Hieronymus Bosch, what means your frightened face
And pale appearance? It seems as though you just
Saw all infernal spectres fly close around your ears.
I think that all the deepest rings of miserly Pluto
Were revealed, and the wide habitations of Hell
Opened to you – because you are so art-ful
In painting with your right hand depictions
Of all that the deepest bowels of Hell contain.8

Van Mander’s image of the ‘wondrous fancies’ (wonderlijke oft seldsaem versieringen) in Bosch’s head is here supplemented, in a witty and visually evocative manner, by the motif of the ‘infernal spectres’ (helsch ghespoock) flying at close distance around Bosch’s ears. In fact, ‘versieringe’ can mean both ornamental detail and mental image or conception. ‘Versieren’ was often used synonymously with ‘dichten’, thus meaning ‘to devise’, ‘imagine’, ‘dream up’.9 The ‘infernal spectres’ whizzing past Bosch’s ears recall contemporary proverbs, moral tales and visual satires about monstrous insects and other devilish creatures that persecute the wicked, ridiculous, or mad.10 But the ‘wondrous fancies’ and ‘infernal spectres’ also expand on art theoretical notions that were, by the


beginning of the seventeenth century, commonplace in the humanist literature on Bosch and his works. Already the Spanish art critic and collector of Flemish paintings, Don Felipe de Guevara, in his manuscript *Comentarios de la Pintura (Commentaries on Painting)* of about 1560, views Bosch’s figural inventions in the tradition of the ‘comical figures’ and ‘grylli’ (crickets), which the Greek painter Antiphilus had elevated to a separate pictorial genre.  

Translated by van Mander, Lampsonius’s verses describe what can be called an effect of interaction or contagion. The interior experience of the places of hell affects the expression on Bosch’s face; he is terrified (*verschrikt, attonitus*) and turns pale from the blood’s withdrawal (*aenschijn alsoo bleeck, pallor in ore*). ‘Ghastly’ (*grouwlijck*) to look at, Bosch’s paintings in their turn ‘infect’ the beholders with corresponding emotions. Moreover, the monsters of hell find their doubles in the ‘infernal spectres’ (*helsch ghespoock*), fancies, or dreams (*versieringenhen*) in or around Bosch’s head. Finally, it was Bosch’s artfulness (*const*) that granted him access to the underworld and the habitations of devils and ghosts.

The concept of a mutual attraction between an artist’s temperament and a specific artistic genre lies at the foundation of van Mander’s biographical writing. In the dedication of the *Netherlandish Lives*, van Mander expands on Virgil’s dictum ‘that everyone is attracted to what pleases him’ (*Dat yeder is tot zijn wellust ghetrocken*):

> For one finds that each person’s desire and inclination pleasantly attracts and draws him towards something besides the necessities of life, that is towards something which agrees with the form and being of his spirit and nature.  

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12 For the role of contagion and interaction, in particular the ‘contagion of laughter’, in early modern literature, see Betrand D., “Contagious Laughter and the Burlesque: From the Literal to the Metaphorical”, in *Imagining Contagion in Early Modern Europe*, ed. C.L. Carlin (Houndmills: 2005) 177–94.


Desire is here explained as a natural inclination toward something that corresponds ‘in form and essence’ with one’s own spirit (gheest) and nature (aerd). While Virgil’s dictum is referred here by van Mander to honour his dedicatees’ love for the visual arts – van Mander dedicated this part of the Schilder-Boeck to the goldsmith Jan Mathijsz. Ban and the wine merchant Cornelis Vlasman –, the same mechanism of attraction is proposed throughout the Lives to explain artists’ habits. In early modern art theory, preferences for specific artistic styles, genres, subjects, or working techniques were often thought to reveal artists’ temperaments as well as these artists’ national and regional origins. In Italian art criticism, images of fire, smoke and spectres were soon to be identified with the ‘maniera Fiamminga’, that is to say, with a ‘foreign’ manner distinct from the dominant regional styles of Italian art. Vasari, in his Lives of 1568, lists ‘fantasticcherie, bizzarrie, sogni, imaginazioni’ with ‘fuochi, notti, splendori, diavoli’ as subjects in which Flemish artists excelled:

Franz Mostaert, who was passing skilful in painting landscapes in oils, fantasies, bizarre inventions, dreams, and suchlike imaginings. Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel of Breda were imitators of that Mostaert, and Lancelot Blondeel has been excellent in painting fires, nights, splendours, devils, and other things of that kind.15

The variety of airy, fiery, or ethereal ‘subtle’ substances is here expanded through other evanescent qualities, objects, and states such as ‘fantasies’, ‘imaginations’ and ‘dreams’. In early modern usage, ‘spook’ could equally refer to a ghost, a phantom, spectre, dream, fantasy, or delusion.16 Similarly, ‘ghedroch’ or ‘ghedrocht’ meant a false apparition,
vision, spook, or phantom\textsuperscript{17} and was often used synonymously with ‘tovernie’, sorcery.\textsuperscript{18} According to contemporary experts in demonology, demons enjoyed mingling with the gaseous and vaporous substances of the air in order to make themselves visible to human eyes.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{‘Poetic Hells’ by Jan Brueghel the Elder}

At the centre of my subsequent discussion are the nocturnal fires and hellish landscapes produced by Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1624) from about 1594 to about 1608, within a period of roughly 15 years.\textsuperscript{20} Jan Brueghel the Elder is generally seen as the ‘last heir’ of a generation of Flemish painters who worked in the manner of Bosch.\textsuperscript{21} His association with Bosch’s imagery followed a family tradition: Jan was the second son of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525/30–1569) who, in his turn, was already during his lifetime called a ‘great imitator of the science and fantasies of Hieronymus Bosch’, and, consequently, a ‘second Bosch’.\textsuperscript{22}

‘Invented’ in the mid 1590s in Italy, the ‘branden’, ‘fuochi’, or ‘incendi’ by Jan Brueghel the Elder exhibit Bosch’s monsters and spectres as part of new pictorial inventions that met the taste for the strange and wondrous shared by the aristocratic and clerical elites of the day. So unique and distinctive were these hellish landscapes that, by the end of the seventeenth century, they were excluded from Jan’s work and ascribed to his elder brother, Pieter Brueghel the Younger.

\textsuperscript{17} Verwijs E. – Verdaem J., \textit{Woordenboeck} II col. 470f.: Kilianus C., \textit{Etymologicum} 128, gives ‘ghedrogh/ghedroght’ as Latin ‘ludificatio, impostura, praestigiae, spectrum, phantasma, & Animalcula monstrosa’.

\textsuperscript{18} Verwijs E. – Verdaem J., \textit{Woordenboeck} VIII col. 620.


\textsuperscript{22} See Guicciardini L., \textit{Descrittione} 100: ‘Pietro Brueghel di Breda grande imitatore della scienza, & fantasie di Girolamo Bosco, onde n’ha anche acquistato il sopranome di secondo Girolamo Bosco.’
(1564/65–1637/38), who was then dubbed ‘Hell Brueghel’ (‘helse Brueghel’), while Jan became to be known as ‘Velvet Brueghel’ (‘fluwelen Brueghel’). There is, however, no doubt that the hells were invented by Jan; and that the invention was most likely motivated by some of Jan’s early patrons in Rome. The first record of Jan Brueghel’s stay in Rome dates from 1593, when the artist, then in his twenties, scribbled his name as well as the year on the wall of the St. Domitilla catacomb, which had been discovered by the young antiquarian and archaeologist Antonio Bosio (1575–1629) that very same year. The excitement these archaeological findings caused among humanist and artistic circles sparked a general interest in the subterranean world. By 1593, Brueghel had already met Cardinal Federico Borromeo (1564–1631) who would become his lifelong patron and friend; in 1595, when Borromeo was appointed Archbishop of Milan, Brueghel followed his extended famiglia to Milan. The protectors of Jan Brueghel the Elder also included the Cardinals Benedetto Giustiniani (1554–1621), Francesco Maria del Monte (1549–1629), and, most probably, Ascanio Colonna (1560–1608), the owner of one of the richest collections of books and manuscripts in Rome. Federico Borromeo, Jan Brueghel’s senior of four years, was the youngest among them.

But why this renewed interest in the representation of fires and spectres at the end of the sixteenth century, in a period characterised

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by artistic and religious reform? By the mid-sixteenth century, no
turnal landscapes of hell featuring fires and lightning were almost
mass-produced and often signed with Bosch’s name, perhaps both as
homage to the original inventor as well as with the aim of enhancing
the aesthetic and monetary value of these artistic counterfeits.29 The
art lover and connoisseur de Guevara, however, dismissed, with one
exception, the imitators of ‘this kind of painting by Hieronymus Bosch’
who, motivated by greed, ‘fraudulently’ signed with his name. According
to de Guevara, such imitations ‘are in reality the work of smoke
and the short-sighted fools who smoked them in fireplaces in order to lend
them credibility and an aged look’.30 The harsh judgement passed by de
Guevera on these pictures reveals an increasing awareness about artistic
frauds.31 But de Guevara’s description also points to the stylistic and
iconographic features these compositions shared: these were paintings
that needed to be viewed at close range; and, among other subjects,
they also depicted fire and smoke.

From the mass-produced and often anonymous Boschian inventions
by earlier Flemish masters, Jan Brueghel’s hellish landscapes were dis-
tinguished in three ways. (1) Rather than painting his fiery scenes on
panel or canvas, Jan Brueghel the Elder adopted the practice of almost
every Netherlandish artist working in Italy and used small-format cop-


30 Guevara F. de, Comentarios I 159: ‘Ansi vienen a ser infinitas las pinturas de este género, selladas con el nombre de Hyerónimo Bosco, falsamente inscripto; en las cuales a él nunca le pasó por el pensamiento poner las manos, sino el humo y cortos ingenios, ahumándolas a las chimeneas para dalles autoridad y antigüedad.’ According to de Guevara, Bosch’s art consists of much more than ‘monsters and various imaginary subjects’ (monstruos y desvariadas imaginaciones). I cite from Stechow W., Northern Renaissance Art 1400–1600: Sources and Documents (Englewood Cliffs: 1966) 19.


32 On Jan Brueghel’s painting method when using copper: Isabel Horovitz, “The Materials and Techniques of European Paintings on Copper Supports”, Copper as Canvas: Two Centuries of Masterpiece Paintings on Copper 1575–1775, exh. cat., Phoenix Art
landscapes were, in contemporary sources, primarily described as virtuoso exercises, particularly in the imitation of natural colour and the rendering of light and various forms of reflection – topics concerning painterly and representational techniques discussed both in Italy and the north. (3) While Bosch’s fires are connected with the religious imagery of purgatory and hell, Jan Brueghel the Elder expanded the meaning and imagery of fire to include mythological, historical and allegorical themes. Next to representations of religious themes – such as *The Descent of Christ into Limbo* [Fig. 1] and *The Temptations of St. Anthony* – Jan Brueghel depicted the most famous descents into the underworld undertaken by Orpheus [Fig. 2], Juno [Fig. 3] and Aeneas [Figs. 4, 5]. He made further pictures of burning cities showing spectacles of fires but no demons, devils or ghosts. In about 1608, Jan Brueghel the Elder developed a series of allegories depicting the destructive power of fire as well as the benefits derived from fire and craft, some of which are painted on panel [Fig. 6].

My focus here is on Brueghel’s depictions of descents into hell. While the theme of *Christ’s Descent into the Limbo of the Fathers* has a long visual tradition dating back to seventh-century art, and is, in sixteenth-century northern art, closely related to a Boschian imagery of monsters and ghosts as well as to Pieter Bruegel’s art [Fig. 7], pagan descents into the underworld were, up to Jan Brueghel the Elder, not a common subject for cabinet paintings. These visits to the underworld figured, of course, in illustrations of Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* had an enormous impact on sixteenth-century

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54 For Jan Brueghel’s depictions of the burning Troy and the burning Sodom or Pentapolis, see Ertz K., *Jan Brueghel der Ältere* 130f.

Fig. 2. Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Orpheus Singing before Pluto and Proserpina*, 1594, oil on copper, 27 × 36 cm. Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1298. Image: © Galleria Palatina, Florence.
Fig. 3. Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Juno in the Underworld*, 159(6?)?, oil on copper, 25.5 × 35.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie, inv. 877. Image: © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.
Fig. 4. Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Aeneas with the Cumaean Sibyl in the Underworld*, 1600, oil on copper, 22.5 × 35.5 cm. Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, inv. 553 (645). Image: © Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest.

Fig. 5. Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Aeneas with the Cumaean Sibyl in the Underworld*, shortly after 1600, oil on copper, 36 × 52 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. 817 (645). Image: © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
Fig. 6. Jan Brueghel the Elder, Allegory of Fire, 1608, oil on panel, 46 x 66 cm. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, inv. 68. Image: © Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.
visual and literary culture; Karel van Mander himself included in his *Schilder-Boeck* a commentary on Ovid, which he recommended as ‘very useful for painters, poets and lovers of art, as well as for teaching everyone’. Virgil’s *Aeneid* enjoyed continuous popularity throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; later in the sixteenth century, in a climate of religious reform, book six (which includes Aeneas’s visit to the underworld) was occasionally cited in order to confirm Catholic or Protestant views of the geography of hell. Sir John Harrington,

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poet at the court of Elizabeth I, in his 1604 commentary on the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, states:

Though this part of the booke for the lytterall & historycall sence ys meerly and apparawntly fabulous, yet the morall thearof contayns so many excellent points of Christianitye, as I thinke yt very to be noted though I must doe the same with more brevyty then so highe a matter requyreth to be handled.39

In all of Jan Brueghel’s compositions the underworld is crafted in a similar fashion: a hero or a heroine – Orpheus, Juno, Christ and Aeneas – visits, breaks into or rushes through an entirely artificial and foreign world [Figs. 1–5]. In each case the view is from a distant and high perspective into a rocky landscape with caves, abysses, tunnels and underground streams. Burning cities, fortresses and ruins are visible against a far horizon; rising flames and smoke colour the sky. Giant wheels indicate a world of eternal torment. In the foreground a plateau cut by deep canyons or a fragile bridge set on wooden posts provides a brightly illuminated stage. Upon this stage the main actors make their appearance, separated from but surrounded by a multitude of shades, demons and ghosts showing an extraordinary variety of human and hybrid forms. Next to Boschian monsters, figural inventions by Michelangelo and Tintoretto are also cited. Associated by Vasari and others with the ‘gran maniera’ of Italian art, the heroic figures are here adjusted to suit Jan Brueghel’s crowded compositions of diminutive size. Brueghel’s paintings on copper are further made distinctive through the use of various painterly techniques; while valued for the fine and accurate brushwork they also include passages that are more loosely worked.40

Dated 1594, *Orpheus Singing before Pluto and Proserpina* depicts Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X 40–46, and is generally seen as the first hellish land-

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scape created by Jan Brueghel the Elder [Fig. 2]. Orpheus has left the realms of the upper world and, after having wandered ‘through the insubstantial throngs and the ghosts’ (leves populos simulacraque), arrives before the king and the queen of ‘unlovely realms’ (inamaenaque regna) (X 11–15). Singing while striking the chords of his lyre, he moves the shades (umbra) and ‘bloodless spirits’ (exsangues animae) to tears. Even the furies ‘wet their cheek with tears’, and both Pluto and Proserpina feel pity and compassion in their hearts. Yet the cessation of movement caused by Orpheus’s song is translated in Brueghel’s painting as a visual noisiness that both attracts and challenges the attention of the viewer. Sisyphus, however, momentarily uses his rock as seat to enjoy the music, rather than pushing it up the mountain. Standing in front of the enthroned rulers, Orpheus turns his head toward the beholder, alerting the audience to the effect of his art on the inhabitants of the other world whose wondrous shapes are the actual theme of Brueghel’s painting. Delicately sketched over the dark imprimatura, a small lapdog, a beast resembling a dragon, and a red-eyed diabolical creature regurgitating reptiles bare their teeth at the spectator.

Another painting on copper, created about two years later, shows Juno in her carriage descending into Hades in order to ask the furies to drive Athamas mad [Fig. 3] (Ovid, Metamorphoses IV 451–560). Although present in all of Brueghel’s depictions of mythological descents, here, the furies – the infernal avenging spirits – play an especially prominent role. It has been noted that the group of women thrown by devils into a fiery furnace was copied from Tintoretto’s large canvas painting of the Murder of the Innocent Children in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice. The corpses heaped up in the left foreground recall some of the figural motifs in the Battle of the Amazons, a work Jan Brueghel the Elder executed in collaboration with Rubens at about the same time.

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There are further comical figures and visual jokes reoccurring in other depictions of descents into hell: an athletic winged devil seen from the back hissing and spewing at the heroine or the hero; variations of froglike, bat-like, or birdlike creatures spreading their arms and legs; a devil crouching next to a fire; a giant head positioned on a crab-like body. Particularly alluring are those shapes, shades and spectres in the foreground of the compositions, often hardly perceptible against the dark brownish tones in the foreground with which they merge.

The three versions of Aeneas with the Cumaean Sibyl in the Underworld show how Brueghel varied his inventions to compose a fiery and dark place swarming with monsters [Figs. 4, 5]. The most innovative painting is in Vienna where Aeneas, ready to draw his sword against some of the ghosts, is mocked and ridiculed by a large bearded face attached to a kind of tree whose branches partially morph into human hands. Executed in collaboration with the German artist Hans Rottenhammer (1564–1625), the Mauritshuis Descent into Limbo of about 1597 features many of the same monsters in a hell characterised by underground caves, cliffs and a dark river. Here, Brueghel’s inventions are made more precious through the contribution by Rottenhammer who painted the main figures [Fig. 1].

The Stygian Regions and the Realm of Vulcan

It was thus in Italy that Jan Brueghel the Elder ‘re-invented’ a manner intimately linked with the art of Hieronymus Bosch as well as his own father. How were such fires and hellish inventions valued and described in the literature on the visual arts around 1600? In accordance with previous authors, van Mander, in his Schilder-Boeck, considers Pieter Bruegel the Elder as the most accomplished imitator and successor of Bosch: Pieter Bruegel ‘had practiced a lot after the works of Hieronymus Bosch and he also made many spectres and burlesques (spoockerijen/en

45 Ertz K., Jan Bruegel der Ältere 116, 130, 568, cat. 65 (Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, inv. 551 (640); 568, cat. 66 (Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, inv. 553 (645); 130, 568, cat. 67 (Vienna); Ertz K. – Nitze-Ertz C., Breughel – Brueghel 177–180, cat. 41 (Budapest, inv. 551 (640, Ertz K.); 503, cat. 190 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wied A.); Silver L., Bosch 294–96.
drollen) in his manner so that he was called by many Pier den Drol’.\textsuperscript{47} In van Mander’s words, the sight of these spooks is enough to amuse even the most serious spectator:

This is why one sees few pictures by him which a spectator can contemplate seriously and without laughing, and however straightforward and stately he may be, he has at least to twitch his mouth or chuckle.\textsuperscript{48}

The expression ‘practiseeren nae de handelinghe’ is important since it elevates Bosch’s work to a model worthy of imitation and emulation, like the art of classical antiquity. Combining the friendly and the ghastly, Pieter Bruegel’s Bosch variations thus provoke a contagious chuckle or smile. Remarkably, the hostile or antagonistic elements van Mander perceives in Bosch’s art seem to have been transformed into less-threatening ‘drolleries’ by the most gifted imitator of Bosch’s ‘science and fantasies’; the ‘enmity’ associated with Bosch’s art has turned into a facetious, festive mood that engages the beholder.\textsuperscript{49} This also applies to other artists who are viewed by van Mander as working in the manner of ‘their’ Bosch. Among them, Jan Mandijn from Harlem was ‘clever at spectres (ghespoock) and drolleries (drollerije) very much in the manner of Jeronimus Bos’.\textsuperscript{50} ‘Veel ghespoock’ and ‘vreemde spoocken’ are also to be found in the works of Frans Verbeeck who was ‘clever at making works in watercolour in the manner of Jeroon Bosch’ (‘was fraey van

\textsuperscript{47} According to Kilianus C., \textit{Etymologicum} 98, ‘drol’ can refer to ‘trullus, drollus’, ‘homo facetus, festivus, lepidus’, and ‘gesticulator’.


\textsuperscript{49} For the hostility, by which Bosch’s works address their spectators, see Koerner J., “Bosch’s Enmity”, in \textit{Tributes in Honor of James H. Marrow: Studies in Painting and Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages and Northern Renaissance}, ed. J.F. Hamburger (London: 2006) 285–300.

\textsuperscript{50} Mander K. van, \textit{Lives} I 79 (f. 205r 17–18): ‘Noch was te Haerlem eenen Ian Mandijn, die seer op zijn Ieronimus Bos fraey was van ghespoock en drollerije’. Van Mander mentions Mandijn on two other occasions: Mander K. van, \textit{Lives} I 232f. (f. 243v 31): ‘[…] was very deft at burlesques in the manner of Jeroon Bos’ (‘welcken seer aerich was van drollerije op zijn Ieroon Bos’). See also \textit{Lives} I 332f. (f. 268v 35–36): ‘Ian Mandijn, van Haerlem in Hollandt/welcken op zijn Ieronimi Bos, aerich was van so drollicheden te maken’. On Jan Mandijn (active c. 1530–1559), see Silver, L., \textit{Bosch} 372–79.
Waterverwe te maken dinghen op zijn Ieroon Bos'); these spooks were ‘very inventive and well executed’ (seer versterlijck en wel ghedaen).\textsuperscript{51}

In the preface of *Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, the first part of the *Schilder-Boeck*, van Mander lists ‘nachtstukken’ and ‘branden’ among the possible subjects available to a (Netherlandish) painter.\textsuperscript{52} Artists specialising in this subject matter are mentioned throughout the *Lives*. Among them, the painter, architect, cartographer and engraver Lanceloot Blondeel (1488–1581) had a ‘wonderfully great knowledge of architecture and antique ruins’ and excelled in the depiction of ‘fires in the night and suchlike’.\textsuperscript{53} ‘Fires’ (*branden*) were also painted by Lodewijk Jansz. van den Bos from ’s-Hertogenbosch whose works were in the possession of art-lovers.\textsuperscript{54} Hans Soens from ’s-Hertogenbosch painted ‘smaller landscapes on panel and a few little fires’ (*brandekens*).\textsuperscript{55} The Antwerp painter Gillis Coignet, too, had ‘a subtle way of painting little night scenes (*historikens in den nacht*) very inventively’.\textsuperscript{56} In the *Grondt*, van Mander cites Coignet’s *branden* among the best examples in the representation of candle-light and other artificial light sources: Coignet ‘can perform miracles with paint, making the realm of Pluto burn or destroy Troy’;\textsuperscript{57} Chapter seven on various forms of reflection (*Van de Reflexy/Reverberaty/teghen-glans oft weerschijn*) in the *Grondt* contains indeed the most extensive discussion of ‘branden’ and ‘poetic hells’ (*poetsche Hellen*):\textsuperscript{58}

Those who depict well with colours Vulcan’s wrath – such horrible misery – demonstrate mastery in art: This is because they take on colours – red to purple, blue, or green – according to the food or matter by which he feeds his vehement flames, so that they soar heavenward, impossible to tame. But not only the flames, also vapours fill the air with different colours. Yes, this seems to be horrible Stygian smoke where, with many other ugly spooks, Hydra and Cerberus scream and cry. Painters need

\textsuperscript{52} Mander K. van, *Grondt* I 46f. (f. 6r).
\textsuperscript{54} Mander K. van, *Lives* I 126f. (f. 217r 16)
\textsuperscript{57} Mander K. van, *Grondt* I 196f. (f. 32v): ‘Met verwen can hy te wonder doen bernen | Plutonis stadt, oft Troyen doen te nieten […]’
\textsuperscript{58} For an extensive discussion of ‘reflexy-const’, see Melion W.S., *Shaping* 72f.
to see to that in order to make a fire look dreadful or to kindle a fire in the poetic underworld.\textsuperscript{59}

Van Mander further comments on depictions of the forge of Vulcan, advising the painters to consider the effects of the light of the fire and the blazing metal on the appearance of the half-naked men working at the anvil. While Jan Brueghel’s poetic hells are not mentioned by van Mander, there is little doubt that these small paintings on copper were understood by contemporary beholders in similar terms: as skilful renderings of poetic underworlds; and as a demonstration of Brueghel’s mastery in painting.

In about 1608, Jan Brueghel the Elder began to paint a series of allegories of fire that more closely link the Stygian regions to the realm of Vulcan as suggested in van Mander’s treatise. A particularly splendid example is the \textit{Allegory of Fire}, sent to Archbishop Federico Borromeo in December, 1608 [Fig. 6].\textsuperscript{60} In an architectural ruin partially formed by natural rock, the uses and destructive effects of fire are shown in impressive painterly detail. While the background presents various techniques of heating, refining and shaping metals, the foreground shows a rich and magnificent collection of artefacts produced by fire. Two tables display all types of jewellery as well as an assortment of vessels wrought in silver and gold or made of porcelain. On the edge of the larger table Jan Brueghel the Elder has signed his name. Next to these luxury items indicative of aristocratic pretensions various pieces of armour are piled atop each other. Scattered across the floor are pincers, mallets, chisels as well as other tools used by goldsmiths for decorative techniques. A charcoal fire burns in a small tripod; anvils and hammers line a round


bench. To the right, an alchemical laboratory with instruments both for metallurgy and distillation is shown at close range. Some of the bottles, phials and small glasses are labelled ‘mercuria corafatus’, ‘salmonia’ and ‘acqua’ – the represented substances referring to the alchemist’s trade (water as the opposite element of fire), and, one may assume, to the transformative quality of Jan Brueghel’s own art. A splendid chandelier of gilded copper with a single burning candle is suspended from a cavernous and indistinctly defined ceiling. The theme of fire is further developed in the landscape: Fire and smoke rise into the air; people flee from a house in flames; witches and devils gather in front of a brightly lit cave; demons take to the air.

The Allegory of Fire is the first painting in a series of Four Elements executed for Cardinal Borromeo between 1608 and 1621. In a letter dated June 3, 1608, Brueghel informs Ercole Bianchi, Borromeo’s agent, that he has now ‘the painting of fire at hand, which will be about various diabolical invention and very laborious’.61 Four months later Brueghel writes of the painting: ‘one can see all kind of armour, metal, gold, silver and fire, also alchemy and distillation, everything done from nature with outmost diligence’.62 From Brueghel’s correspondence with Bianchi we further know that he also executed a series of elements for him, which might be identical with the works now in the Galleria Doria-Pamphilj in Rome. While many of the motifs of the Milan Allegory of Fire are repeated in the Doria-Pamphilj version, the general theme of that painting is Venus visiting Vulcan’s forge; therefore, a smoking volcano is added to the scene.63

The Owners of Jan Brueghel’s Hells

Several scholars have suggested that these small copper images were exchanged as gifts among a few art-loving cardinals in Rome linked to each other through friendship. Both the Colonna and the Giustiniani

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61 ‘[...] che ha in mane il quadro del fuoco qual sera de vario invencion diabolica peina de lavor.’ I cite from Bedoni S., Brueghel 115.
62 Letter dated September 26, 1608: ‘[...] e de vedere oigni sorte d armeria, metali oro argento e fuoco, ancho l’alchimio et distilattioni, tutti fatti del natural con grandismo diligent.’ I cite from Bedoni S., Brueghel 116.
63 Woollett A.T. – Suchtelen A. van, Rubens & Brueghel 140–45, cat. 17; Ertz K., Jan Brueghel der Ältere 599–600, cat. 251.
families hosted Federico Borromeo during his various visits to Rome;\textsuperscript{64} Borromeo’s palace in Rome was close to the residence of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte.\textsuperscript{65} Since Jan Brueghel was invited to live with Borromeo’s family both in Rome and Milan, the cardinal may well have presented his friends with some of the artist’s works. Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani, who had a particular liking for nocturnal scenes, owned seven of Jan Brueghel the Elder’s small copper paintings which must have entered the collection in 1601 or shortly thereafter. Six of these are referred to as pairs, a \textit{Judgement} and a \textit{Deluge}, a \textit{Paradise} and a \textit{Hell}, an \textit{Adoration of the Magi} and a \textit{Fire of Troy}.\textsuperscript{66} The \textit{Judgement} and the \textit{Deluge}, both images of crises and catastrophes as well as turning points in the history of salvation, are explicitly listed as ‘compagni’ or pendant pieces; an additional \textit{Fire of Troy} is listed separately.\textsuperscript{67}

With ten works, all of them very small and painted on copper, Jan Brueghel the Elder was among the best-represented artists in the collection of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte.\textsuperscript{68} Among these copper images were two \textit{Temptations of St. Anthony} and one ‘fable of Euridice’ which has been tentatively identified with the \textit{Orpheus} in the Palazzo Pitti [Fig. 2].\textsuperscript{69} Another possible owner of Jan Brueghel’s hells may have been Cardinal Ascanio Colonna (1560–1608), protector of Flanders, who, in the winter of 1605–06, appointed Peter Paul Rubens’s brother Philip as his personal secretary.\textsuperscript{70} It is, however, not clear when


\textsuperscript{65} Gilbert C.E., \textit{Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals} (University Park: 1995) 128f.


\textsuperscript{67} Danesi Squarzino S., “Giustiniani I” 781, no. 87: ‘Un quadretto mezzano in rame del incendio di Troia con cornice di pero tinte negre’.


\textsuperscript{70} For Peter Paul Rubens’s \textit{Lamentation} on copper (Cummer Gallery of Art in Jacksonville, Florida), which was possibly presented to Cardinal Ascanio Colonna in late 1605
the landscapes with fires, now in the Palazzo Colonna, Rome, entered the collection. The 1714 inventory of the Colonna collection lists two pairs of paintings: an *Adoration of the Magi* is mentioned together with a *Descent of Christ into Limbo* ‘with many and diverse original figures by Brueghel’; a *Fire of Troy* is listed with a *Scene of Witchcraft*. Another *Scene of Witchcraft with Fire* is further ascribed to the ‘school of Brueghel’.

Finally, Federico Borromeo, in addition to the *Allegory of Fire*, owned two other fiery images by Jan Brueghel the Elder: a *Hell*, featuring the traditional punishments of a Christian hell in a vast burning landscape, and the so-called *Fire of the Pentapolis*, showing Lot and his daughters fleeing from a Sodom in flames.

As I hope to have shown, in both northern and Italian treatises of art, hells, nocturnal scenes and scenes of witchcraft, dreams, fantasies, and imaginations are often mentioned together and treated as similar or comparable themes. While the subject matter is indeed very diverse, all these images challenge the artists to show their skills in the representation of light sources other than the sun: the moon, candlelight, torches, natural fire, and the fires of hell. Karel van Mander considers, as we have seen, the representation of fires ‘in a dark night’ and ‘with reflections’ among the most challenging artistic tasks, which require exceptional skills. Around 1600, artists, humanists, scientists and religious reformers shared an interest in shadow and light and the rules of reflections. In his *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (*Considerations on Painting*) from the early 1620s, the physician and art collector Giulio Mancini (1558–1630), a contemporary of the cardinals Borromeo, Colonna, Del Monte and Giustiniani, praises a small landscape with the burning mount Etna by Jan Brueghel the Elder:

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He worked very well in the small format. In particular, for a gentleman he made out of pleasure a landscape representing the fire of Mount Etna, with city, villages and a number of men of various nations; most of the figures were just the size of an ant, nonetheless they represented and expressed what he wished. And even more importantly, he considered here the reflections of light, which are to my taste a very artful thing and worthy of viewing.\textsuperscript{75}

But what was it that made these cardinals and art lovers delight in these poetic hells? It has been proposed that Borromeo started to collect landscapes by Jan Brueghel and other Flemish masters because his increasing duties wouldn’t allow him to refresh his mind in the contemplation of nature and the creation of God; the painted landscapes would then have served as substitutes for a direct experience of nature and as meditation tools. Jan Brueghel’s ‘poetic hells’, however, reveal views into completely artificial and fictional worlds; many of the motifs and elements can also be found in his depictions of the \textit{Temptations of St. Anthony}, a theme the artist developed in the very same years. In the \textit{Wtlegghingh op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ovidij Nasonis (Interpretation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses)}, the last part of the \textit{Schilder-Boeck}, Karel van Mander defines ‘poetic hells’ in the following way:

Concerning poetic hells, these are nothing else than various sins, as well as the calamities and catastrophes that seize the vicious and frivolous because of evil deeds, and the gnawing and biting conscience, which torments and judges.\textsuperscript{76}

A poetic hell, thus, is the interior hell of the gnawing conscience rather than the hell of eternal punishment that awaits the sinner after death. Jan Brueghel’s crowded images of hells with their monstrous and frivolous details have an interesting parallel in contemporary Jesuit meditations on the inner faculties of the soul, in particular on one’s own imagination. Around 1600, it had long become fashionable in

\textsuperscript{75} Mancini G., \textit{Considerazioni sulla pittura}, ed. A. Marucchi (Rome: 1956) I 260: ‘Dopo questo vi fu […] Broglo, di nation […], nato in […]. Fece in picciolo molto bene et in particolare ad un gentilhuomo di diletto fece un paesaggio che rappresentava l’incendio del monte di Ethna con città, villaggi et numero di huomini di diverse nationi che le figure le maggiori ero quant’una formica, nondimeno rappresentavano et esprimevano quello che desiderava; et quel ch’è più, in esse vi riservava quei reflexi dei lumi ch’a mio gusto era cosa molt’arti/g192 ciosa et degna di esser vista.’

\textsuperscript{76} Mander C. van, \textit{Wtlegghingh f. 32r}: ‘Nu aengaende de Poeetsche Helle/die en is niet anders/als alderley zonden/en de ongevallicheden en rampen/die den roeckeloosen ondeugende Menschen door quade wercken overcomen en treffen/en de knagende wroegende Conscientie dieze pijnight en veroordeelt.’
elite circles to practice prayer and meditation at home, and there is little doubt that our cardinals were intimately familiar with Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* and other meditation treatises that began to appear in these years. The most unique element of the *Spiritual Exercises* is the ‘composition of place’, which is acquired through the ‘five senses of the imagination’ and particularly through the ‘sight of the imagination’ – or the ‘imaginative sense of sight’, as Ignatius also calls it. The ‘composition’ or ‘forming’ or ‘figuring of place’ was understood as a mental activity of the soul’s image-making faculty. The meditation on hell, which concludes the first week of the *Exercises*, is the most powerful example of this form of meditation by application of the senses. However, there were ambivalent views about Ignatius’s meditation on hell. On the one hand, imagination of that place of horror was promoted as a safeguard against the vagaries of the imaginative faculty of the soul. On the other hand, spiritual beginners were advised to avoid the uncanny, the grotesque, the frivolous and the curious, since this could easily take them to dangerous grounds.

The picture-producing imagination itself served as topic of a meditation in the *Meditaciones de los Mysterios de nuestra Sancta Fe* (*Meditations on the Mysteries of Our Holy Faith*) by the Spanish Jesuit Luis de la Puente (1554–1624), first published in Valladolid in 1605, but soon translated into Latin and other European languages. The imagination is one of the themes of chapter 27 treating the sins of the interior faculties of the soul. The meditation first considers vices having their seat in the understanding (ignorance, imprudence, temerity, inconstancy, perverseness and pertinacity, subtlety and curiosity); then those springing ‘from myne owne will’; and finally those of the soul’s interior faculties, the imagination and sensitive appetites. Here, the faithful are instructed to

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ponder that my imaginative faculty, is like a hall painted with many
ingures, some foul, some profane, and others ridiculous,
monstrous, and deformed, entertaining itself in painting them; taking
pleasure to beholde them, soliciting the understanding to gaze upon them,
and oftentimes, drawing it after it to cogitate upon them.

Puente thus likens the vis imaginativa to both a picture gallery and an
artist engaged in painting, beholding and copying the many ‘monstrous’
and ‘ridiculous’ pictures displayed in a hall. It is in this context that
Puente mentions the sin ‘which they call delectatio morosa, a continuing,
or lingering delight, in matter of carnalities, revenges, ambitions, and
avarices, delighting my selfe with the imagination of these things, as
if they were present’.

Immediately followed by the examination of conscience in chapter 28, the meditation on the profuseness of pictures
in the imagination was meant to have almost an iconoclastic effect in
that it cleansed and emptied the mind.

Populated with ant-like spectres, monsters and shades, Jan Brueghel’s
fiery landscapes must have provided these cardinals both devotional and
recreational experiences. The ever-changing shapes, forms, lights and
reflections of Jan Brueghel’s poetic hells made visible and motivated
the crafting and figuring of mental images in the beholder’s mind.

Around 1600, Bosch’s figural inventions, perceived as wondrous spectres,
fancies, imaginations and inventive designs, had become collectibles
among European lovers of arts. A nocturnal sky vividly coloured by
smoke and flames or a dark landscape inhabited by spirits and ghosts
functioned as emblems of mastery of the most aesthetic aspects of the
visual arts, the representation of optical phenomena and reflections.

It was, finally, the subtlety and ingenuity of Brueghel’s art that lit a fire
in the poetic underworld, made mountains and cities burn and incited
the minds of his viewers.

79 I cite from Puente L., Meditations upon the Mysteries of Our Holie Faith, with the Practise
of Mental Prayer Touching the Same, trans. J. Heigham (St. Omers: 1619) I 194. See the
room of the counselor Phantastes in Edmund Spenser’s Faerie Queene: ‘His chamber was
dispainted all within, | With sundry colours, in the which were writ | Infinite shapes
of things dispersed thin; | Some such as in the world were never yit, | Ne can devised
be of mortall wit; | Some daily seene, and knowen by their names, | Such as in idle
fantasies doe flit: | Infernall Hags, Centaurs, feendes, Hippodames, | Apes, Lions, Aegles,
Owles, fooles, lovers, children, Dames[ […] All those were idle thoughts and fantasies, |
Devices, dreames, opinions unsound, | Sherews, visions, sooth-sayes, and prophesies; |
And all that fained is, as leasings, tales, and lies.’ I cite from Harvey E.R., The Inward
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