

**“Through Marriage Marvelously Blended”:
Visual Representations of Matrimonial Rituals in the
Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands, 1384 to 1555**

by

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Abstract

**“Through Marriage Marvelously Blended”:
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The Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands constitute an interesting case for studying the function and symbolism of matrimony. This period marked an active time of change in the Low Countries: there was ongoing antagonism between the dukes of Burgundy and their Dutch subjects; shifts in the mercantile industry caused economic flux; the Reformation sparked religious tension; and the rapid expansion of the art market created a Europe-wide demand for Netherlandish fine and decorative art. In the face of upheaval, the act of marriage and the ideology surrounding it remained relatively consistent. Betrothal and marriage ceremonies in the Low Countries were quite formal compared to those in southern Europe; the quintessential northern ceremony customarily involved a priest, witnesses, and symbolic hand gestures. The images discussed in this thesis overwhelmingly reflect the importance of ritualistic behaviour in the late medieval Netherlands; the majority of them depict proper *in facie ecclesiae* unions, meaning “in the face of the Church.” These images of ideal marriage rituals were most commonly commissioned by members of the court or Church, and were used primarily to display wealth and power, to enhance the pageantry of court life, to draw connections with the mythic or biblical past, to promote canon law, and to reinforce cultural values.

The fifty-three images studied in this thesis not only relate to discourses on medieval marriage and art history; they also fit into the larger narratives surrounding civic authority, religious tension, economic change, and social mores. In this thesis, I use an interdisciplinary approach to reveal the main functions of matrimonial ceremonies in Early Netherlandish art, and to examine the gap between image and reality. This thesis contributes to a better understanding of ritual and visual expression in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
METHODOLOGY	10
VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF MARRIAGE RITUALS	27
REPRESENTATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL MARRIAGE RITUALS	57
REPRESENTATIONS OF HISTORICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL MARRIAGE RITUALS	77
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BETROTHAL OR MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN	105
Conclusion	119
Appendix A	124
Appendix B	128
Appendix C	129
Bibliography	150

Introduction

Austria's noble house now see
Joined with that of Burgundy.
For information full and clear
Observe the arms that now appear,
Royal escutcheons old and splendid,
Through marriage marvelously blended.¹

On August 18th, 1477, Habsburg prince Maximilian of Austria had the good fortune of marrying one of Europe's most eligible maidens, Mary, heiress to the wealthy Burgundian territories of the Low Countries.² Several idealized depictions of the ceremony exist in the form of drawings and woodcut prints, nearly all of them ordered by Maximilian himself to glorify his public image. Maximilian was both an avid self-promoter and an art connoisseur; he combined his interests by commissioning mass-produced woodcuts depicting his betrothal and subsequent marriage to Mary of Burgundy. As a result of this union, Maximilian became co-ruler of the Netherlands along with his new wife. Although Maximilian's Dutch subjects disliked him, he continued to bombard them with images depicting himself as a strong, authoritative ruler. In the words of Stanley Appelbaum, Maximilian "saw clearly how he could enhance the glory of himself and his Habsburg dynasty through the widest possible dissemination of inspiring words and pictures."³ Though the real effectiveness of these images is questionable, it is significant that Maximilian chose to advertise himself using visual media. Maximilian's use of marriage images demonstrates in part how art and

¹ Larry Silver, *Marketing Maximilian: The Visual Ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 200. Text caption describing "The Burgundian Wedding" scene from the *Triumphal Procession* (fig. 1), commissioned by Emperor Maximilian I.

² Jean Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire: 1273-1700*, translated by C.A. Simpson (New York: Longman, 1994), 123.

³ Stanley Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I: 137 Woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair and Others* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), v.

matrimony were tied to pomp and political reputation in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands.⁴

First and foremost, medieval marriage was a union of individuals and families, though marriage had several diverse functions. In the case of the dukes of Burgundy, marriage had a political function, but it was also important for expressing religious conviction, for honouring tradition, for maintaining or increasing economic status, and for emphasizing the validity of a union. Medieval marriage was not straightforward: a single marriage involved several intertwining meanings and implications. A couple might choose to marry primarily based on political or economic reasons, but their union would still have spiritual and social significance nonetheless. European marriage laws were dictated by the Catholic Church, though secular forces and local customs sometimes undermined ecclesiastical authority. The period between 1384 and 1555 was characterized by dramatic changes at all levels of Dutch society; there were economic fluctuations, war, civilian uprisings, religious tensions, territorial acquisitions, and cultural outpourings; yet the ideals surrounding marriage and its representation in art remained largely constant in the late medieval Low Countries, perhaps because marriage laws and representations of marriage in art did not entirely reflect reality.

Regardless of variation in medium, setting, or the types of figures represented, nearly all images of betrothals and weddings from the Burgundian and Habsburg

⁴ The Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands refers to the area of the Low Countries (presently Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) during the period between 1384 and 1555, when it was ruled by the dukes of Burgundy. The Burgundians, members of the house of Valois, ruled over the French duchy of Burgundy and the Low Countries from 1384 until 1477. At this point the duchy of Burgundy reverted to France, and the Habsburgs inherited the Netherlands. The Habsburgs ruled over the Netherlands until 1555 when the area was annexed by the Spanish. The Burgundians were the dukes of Burgundy both in territory and in title, whereas the Habsburg rulers were only titular dukes of Burgundy. In this paper I refer to both the Burgundian and Habsburg rulers as dukes of Burgundy. For a chronological list of rulers of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands, see Appendix A. For a genealogical table, see Appendix B.

Netherlands follow the same ideal formula: typically, the bride stands to the left of the bridegroom, and the couple joins right hands to physically signify the promise of their union in front of a priest and at least two witnesses. This type of ceremony was a standard prescription of canon law. According to art historian Michael Camille, visual cues like the ones mentioned first appeared in early illustrated canon law manuscripts as a way to emphasize the Church's new criteria for marriage rituals.⁵ Betrothal and marriage ceremonies that followed Church customs were referred to as *in facie ecclesiae*, translating to "in the face of the church."⁶ The Church attempted to control the institution of matrimony by spreading its doctrine via both word and image. The religious significance of marriage was engrained in medieval society through the transmission of marriage symbolism to a wide audience.⁷ Art was an important conduit for the expression of marriage symbolism, not only in terms of spiritual meaning, but also for the civic, economic, and social implications of matrimony. The visual iconography of marriage is particularly representative of the multi-faceted significance of matrimony in the medieval imagination. From the late-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, members of the ducal court were the primary patrons for Early Netherlandish matrimonial images, followed by ecclesiastics, and wealthy urbanites. Courtly patrons tended to commission images with political, historical, and mythological themes, whereas Church patrons preferred spiritual and scriptural themes. Urban patrons commissioned a small number of marriage images with varying themes. No matter the patron or subject, images depicting *in facie ecclesiae* unions were consistently popular.

⁵ Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 122-124.

⁶ Edwin Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal: Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of Van Eyck's Double Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 21.

⁷ D.L. D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

The political climate of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands was marked by elaborate public ceremony, squabbles between ruler and subject, and growing territorial centralization. The Burgundians and Habsburgs tried to unify their territories in the Low Countries, but their attempts were not entirely well-received; groups of Dutch people who wanted to maintain their autonomy continually challenged Burgundian and Habsburg administrations. Revolts erupted frequently, but the dukes usually succeeded in suppressing these uprisings. Despite resistance, the Netherlands became increasingly centralized between 1384 and 1555. In the words of Professors Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, “one of the most striking political developments in the history of late medieval and early modern Europe [was] the formation of the state of the dukes of Burgundy in the Low Countries.”⁸ The Netherlands were not imagined as a unified state before 1384, but the Burgundians gradually centralized the area into a political entity.⁹ It was a state in construction, meaning that territories were gained and lost continually over the whole period.

The process by which the Burgundians attempted to expand and unite their Dutch territory is referred to as “Burgundization.” Crucial to this process were public spectacle, cultural patronage, and carefully crafted political marriages. Through Burgundization, Philip the Bold and his heirs managed to unite several diverse principalities into what can be termed an “entity.”¹⁰ Philip and his son John the Fearless were both more preoccupied with the affairs of France than those of the Netherlands;

⁸ Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries Under Burgundian Rule, 1369-1530*, translated by Elizabeth Fackelman, edited by Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ Jacob Wisse, “Burgundian Netherlands: Court Life and Patronage,” in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).

however, under Philip the Good in the fifteenth century, the centre of gravity moved to the Low Countries.¹¹ The process of Burgundization was temporarily stalled with the accession of the Habsburg rulers in 1477, but in the early sixteenth century Margaret of Austria, acting as regent of the Netherlands, “initiated an ambitious revival of Burgundian patronage.”¹² Charles V maintained this Burgundian identity until around 1530, when he shifted focus to his territory in Spain;¹³ however, he continued to be influenced by the ideals of the Burgundian court, apparently having “acquired a taste for pomp.”¹⁴ Charles reorganized the Low Countries by creating the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands in 1543, and the Burgundian Circle in 1548. In the Pragmatic Sanction of 1549, Charles declared the Seventeen Provinces to be a unified entity, and stipulated that it should be inherited by his Habsburg heirs. After Charles abdicated in 1555, his son Philip II of Spain became ruler of the Netherlands, beginning an era of unprecedented revolt in the north.¹⁵

Ritual and art production were both significant elements of court ceremony, and of Burgundization. The Burgundian and Habsburg rulers used ceremony and art in equal measures to make spectacular impressions on the public and to emphasize their ducal power. The dukes of Burgundy publicized important betrothals and weddings by commissioning talented local artists to create idealized images of these events, thus simultaneously promoting themselves and supporting the burgeoning Dutch art market. Art and the economy were closely associated during this time. Dutch artists produced

¹¹ Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Bold: The Formation of the Burgundian State* (London: Longman, 1962), xiii.

¹² Wisse, “Burgundian Netherlands: Court Life and Patronage.”

¹³ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, xii.

¹⁴ Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 140.

¹⁵ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, xi.

their work at a surplus and marketed it to a wide audience; Blockmans and Prevenier argue that art became “more widely distributed and consequently more of a common cultural property.” Art was therefore an effective means of communicating ideas on a mass scale. Images of marriage were part of the “language of collective symbolism”¹⁶ that was clearly understood by medieval viewers. Visual representations of matrimonial rituals were uncommon before 1300, but became more popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, around the time that the first great age of Dutch artistic production began.¹⁷

When Philip the Bold became ruler of the Low Countries in 1384, it was already one of the wealthiest regions in Europe due to its status as an important trade centre. The Netherlands had long been celebrated for superior cloth production, and under Burgundian patronage the region also became renowned for impressive cultural outputs. The dukes of Burgundy are credited with stimulating the northern art market and with creating a Europe-wide demand for luxury goods made in the Low Countries. The Burgundian dukes and their Habsburg successors were connoisseurs of fine art — even more so than other European rulers of the time — and they enjoyed developing close associations with the foremost Dutch artists. Despite the period’s variability, visual arts flourished in the Low Countries, arguably because of a common interest in upholding the aura of pageantry that characterized court life. Ceremony and artistic patronage were part of the dukes’ ambitious methods of centralizing their vast territory. The early Burgundian rulers introduced some of their French traditions to the Netherlands,¹⁸ but

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 42.

¹⁸ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 216.

they also made use of the pre-existing and well-established iconography that was part of northern culture. The Burgundians identified the cultural values of the Low Countries and used this information to forge a relationship with their subjects based on a shared respect for ritual and tradition; this helped the Burgundians gain a political foothold in the area. Visual art remained a steady channel of expression in the late medieval Netherlands, and it was an effective way to transmit marriage symbolism.

Between 1384 and 1555, the Netherlands experienced shifts in religious atmosphere which called into question the purpose of art and the meaning of marriage. Reform groups like the Brethren of the Common Life and movements like the *Devotio Moderna*, both founded by Dutch preacher Gerard Groote, sprang up in the fourteenth century and remained popular until the Protestant Reformation.¹⁹ The Brethren of the Common Life and the *Devotio Moderna* both emphasized the importance of private devotion over liturgical ceremony, and encouraged the use of images to enhance personal piety. This created a demand for small panel paintings and Books of Hours. In the words of art historian Hans Belting, the new role of art in private devotion “increased participation in the institutionalized veneration of the image.”²⁰ Art became a tool for personal meditation and contemplation. Dutch art of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, though influenced by the technical developments of the Italian Renaissance, “held tenaciously to its legacy of Gothic spirituality”²¹ with sacred and mystical subjects rendered in palpable realism. The number of small religious-themed art objects —

¹⁹ John H. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 7-12.

²⁰ Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, translated by Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990), 56.

²¹ Elliott D. Wise, “Robert Campin’s “Betrothal of the Virgin”: Constructing Devotion in Fifteenth-Century Flanders” (PhD diss. Brigham Young University, 2009), 1.

mostly illustrated texts — discussed in this thesis may reflect the popularity of solitary worship in late medieval northern Europe.

Although there was no organized Reformed church in the Low Countries until 1554, the influence of the Protestant Reformation reached the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century; Martin Luther's works were sold in Antwerp as early as 1518, and at least ten Dutch editions of his writings were available by 1522. According to Professor Guido Marnef the wealthy, urbanized Low Countries, with its flourishing printing industry and large middle class, possessed the ideal conditions for mass circulation of Reformation ideas.²² As a result of the Reformation, people began to question the purpose of religious ceremony, marriage included; the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam warned that "external rituals were no substitute for actual piety,"²³ and Martin Luther rejected the concept of marriage as a sacrament. Despite these new theological debates surrounding ritual and matrimony most Dutch people, including Protestants, continued to marry in religious ceremonies presided over by priests.²⁴ This is reflected in the images of marriage from the Reformation period and beyond, which continued to depict *in facie ecclesiae* unions. On the other hand, marriage images with overtly religious themes — including those depicting the marriages of saints and the Virgin — are certainly less common in the sixteenth century than they were previously; further, ecclesiastical art patronage waned following the Reformation, whereas courtly patronage persisted.

²² Guido Marnef, "The Netherlands," in *The Reformation World*, edited by Andrew Pettegree (New York: Routledge, 2002), 344-347.

²³ Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁴ John Augustin Ryan, "History of Marriage," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 9, 69 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 698.

The ceremonial aspects of marriage served a variety of functions in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. Using an interdisciplinary approach, I have conducted a cohesive and comprehensive examination of marriage images in the late medieval Low Countries. Whether commissioned by a duke or a merchant, whether an oil painting or a jewelled brooch, every image depicting matrimony had a distinct function that reflected the wider political, economic, social, and religious discourses that were relevant at the time.

1

METHODOLOGY

In this thesis I demonstrate how images of matrimonial rituals evolved and functioned in relation to the political, legal, religious, cultural, and socio-economic conditions of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. My research employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on a number of fields including art history, gender studies, diplomatic history, social history, and religious studies. By determining the diverse functions of visual representations of marriage in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands, this thesis contributes new ideas to existing discourses on medieval marriage, the history of the Netherlands, and Early Netherlandish art.

At the start of this project I looked at a much wider range of images than what constitutes the final corpus; I began by looking for medieval¹ European² images of couples, including scenes of courtship and scenes of married life in addition to marriage ceremonies.³ After arriving at a preliminary group of images, depictions of Early Netherlandish betrothals and weddings attracted my attention because of their uniformity and consistent iconography;⁴ thus images matrimonial rituals made in the Low Countries emerged as a logical and focused topic that was worth analysis. My research is based on an extensive study of visual primary sources, comprising fifty-three

¹ I used a *longue durée* perspective to establish my concept of the term “medieval,” meaning the period between the years 500 and 1600.

² Not restricted to the Low Countries

³ When searching for these types of images in online databases, I used terms such as “couple,” “union,” “marriage,” “courtship,” “love,” “chivalry,” “romance” etc.

⁴ I allowed the images in the preliminary corpus to guide my understanding of what constituted medieval matrimonial rituals, instead of specifically looking for images based on preconceived notions about what constituted medieval matrimonial rituals. Once I narrowed my topic, I used secondary source research to confirm which images indeed represent betrothals and weddings.

images made between 1384 and 1555⁵ by Netherlandish artists, commissioned by Netherlandish patrons,⁶ or made in the territories in the Low Countries that were controlled by the Burgundian and Habsburg rulers. I compiled the corpus of images within the space of thirteen months,⁷ collecting every example I could find that fit the previously-mentioned criteria.⁸ The final corpus includes twenty-two miniatures, seventeen paintings, nine prints, two drawings, one example of textile, one sculpture, and one piece of jewellery. Of these fifty-three images, none were made in the fourteenth century, thirty-eight were made in the fifteenth century, and fifteen were made in the sixteenth century. I used a combination of online databases,⁹ search engines, museum websites, and print sources to find images that matched my criteria. Although I was not able to retrieve every extant Early Netherlandish marriage image, I believe the corpus is a solid representative sample.

My research does not simply rely on the study of two-dimensional images; I consider each artwork as a physical object by taking into account the materials and supports used. I have also taken into consideration the locations in which the artworks were housed or displayed, and their dynamic functions. Out of the entire corpus, I have viewed the following works in person: Hans Memling's *Virgin and Child with Saints*

⁵ I only included images that were verifiably created between 1384 and 1555. For example, I did not include images that were created in the late-fourteenth century but not for certain after 1384, nor images that were created in the mid-sixteenth century but not for certain before 1555.

⁶ I include the Burgundian and Habsburg rulers in the category of Netherlandish patrons.

⁷ From February 2012 to March 2013.

⁸ It is probable that more examples existed but have been lost over the course of time, or intentionally destroyed (e.g. by Calvinists, as previously mentioned in the introduction to this thesis). In his book *Valois Burgundy* (London: Penguin Books, 1975. p.190-192), Richard Vaughan explains that a great deal of precious Burgundian art and luxury objects were stolen during wartimes; for example, the Swiss took a lot of artwork after the battles of Grandson, Murten, and Nancy between 1476 and 1477, then subsequently sold it on the black market. Some artworks may still exist, but remain unidentified.

⁹ The online databases I used were ArtStor, Index of Christian Art, Bridgeman Education, Europeana, Oxford Art Online, BnF Picture Collection, Lukasweb Art in Flanders, and The University of Edinburgh Image Collection. Search terms included "marriage," "betrothal," "wedding," and "matrimony." I also conducted searches using French and Dutch translations of these four terms.

Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara (fig.2), *The Marriage of the Virgin* by the Master of the View of Saint Gudule (fig.3), *Virgin Surrounded by Female Saints* by the Master of the St. Lucy Legend (fig.4), *The Life and Miracles of Saint Godeliève* by the Master of the Saint Godeliève Legend (fig.5), and Robert Campin's *The Betrothal of the Virgin* (fig.6). I saw all but the Hans Memling, Robert Campin, and Master of the Saint Godeliève Legend paintings before I began this thesis, and my memory of them is not entirely clear. The Memling, Campin and Master of the Saint Godeliève Legend paintings are the only artworks I visited specifically for the purposes of this thesis. I record my impressions of the paintings in Chapters Four and Five. Overall, I did not find it detrimental to my research having not viewed most of the images in person. It would have been ideal if I had been able to physically view and handle each of the artworks and objects in the corpus; but this was not feasible. I found that the availability of high-quality images online worked to my advantage.

Twenty-two of the artworks discussed in this thesis come from illustrated manuscripts that include written content. In these cases I concentrated my analysis on the images instead of the text in order to keep focus on how the images communicate by themselves. I relied largely on secondary source research to understand what the texts convey, then used this information to compare word and image; however, this comparison is always supplementary to my study of visual expression. I prioritize depth of visual analysis over depth of textual analysis because my thesis is fundamentally about the meaning, function, and reception of images, not words. Studying miniatures separate from their accompanying text allows one to perceive ideas that can only be

conveyed in picture form; illustrations transmit a condensed version of the narrative, making it easier to identify the most important elements of the story or chronicle.

Images are both reflective and active; images can be the products of particular personal or societal attitudes, and they can also produce powerful reactions. In this paper, I explain how images reflected and affected the transmission of marriage symbolism in an important time and place. Further, I place images of matrimonial rituals within the larger context of evolving political, social, religious, and cultural identities throughout the Burgundian and Habsburg periods. The timespan between 1384 and 1555 represents the beginning and end of two significant political dynasties in the Netherlands; however, this era was not only characterized by politics. Every aspect of Netherlandish society was transformed during this time. In addition to the Flemings' continual resistance to the Burgundian and Habsburg rulers' state-building efforts, the Low Countries experienced economic instability, religious shifts, and an enormous surge of cultural production during the period in question. Though the Burgundian and Habsburg periods can be treated separately, I have chosen to study them together to make my research more compelling. I felt it was appropriate to treat these two dynasties as one single period because there was so much continuity from the Burgundian to the Habsburg era: the Habsburgs shared a direct bloodline with their Burgundian predecessors; they tried to maintain the Burgundians' project of unification; and they relied heavily on ritualized behaviour, just like the Burgundians before them. Additionally, Martha C. Howell and Marc Boone argue that the sixteenth century Low Countries had a very "medieval" character which many historians have overlooked; they

point to public ritual as something that evoked a “medieval consciousness,” which linked the Burgundian and Habsburg eras together. In Howell and Boone’s words, the Netherlands’ early modern period was not “as clearly demarcated from its medieval as historians have generally assumed.”¹⁰ This is why I refer to the Burgundian and Habsburg periods collectively as the “late medieval Netherlands.” Studying a broader timespan also allowed me to include more images in my corpus; this made my research more interesting, and made it easier for me to determine that for nearly two-hundred years Early Netherlandish marriage images remained relatively consistent in their iconography and idealism.

Chronologically, the majority of the images in this thesis (thirty-eight) were made during the fifteenth century; in terms of media, most (twenty-two) are miniatures from illuminated manuscripts; and most (twenty-one) are historical or mythological in theme.¹¹ Fourteen of the images are fifteenth-century miniatures depicting historical or mythological marriage rituals, and eight of these were certainly created for members of the Burgundian court. The fifteenth century was the peak of Netherlandish artistic production, so it makes sense that the greater part of the corpus was created during this period. Further, illuminated manuscripts were popular luxury items for wealthy patrons because they were portable, thus suiting the itinerant lifestyle of the nobility; the fifteenth-century Burgundian court was based in Brussels but the dukes and their entourage frequently travelled to their many other residences in northern Europe, thus spreading the influence of Early Netherlandish art throughout the region.¹² Illuminated

¹⁰ Martha C. Howell and Marc Boone, “Becoming Early Modern in the Late Medieval Low Countries: Ghent, Douai, and the Late Medieval Crisis,” in *Urban History* 23, pt. 3 (December 1996): 305.

¹¹ Including artworks depicting the marriage or betrothal of the Virgin.

¹² Wisse, “Burgundian Netherlands: Court Life and Patronage.”

manuscripts were showcased prominently in upper-class homes to emphasize the patrons' elite status and distinguished taste, and to impress courtly visitors. The display of luxury books was part of the elaborate ritualistic behaviour that was engrained in Burgundian court life.¹³ Historical and mythological themes were favoured by the nobility because they were considered especially intellectual and could be easily appropriated for the purpose of political propaganda. There were two prominent schools of illumination in Flanders at the time; one in Ghent and the other in Bruges. The work of both of these schools demonstrates a recognizable northern style that was in demand all over Europe, sparking a "lively trade" in illuminated books.¹⁴ It appears that of the miniatures discussed in this thesis, most were made in Bruges. Individual miniaturists often worked anonymously, some only known by titles such as "Master of the Chronicles of England," though certain illuminators like Willem Vrelant and Loyset Liédet were recognized by name. Creating a luxury manuscript frequently involved collaboration between the patron and the head illuminator. Manuscripts with painted illustrations were expensive objects, and their quality reflected the prestige of the patron; therefore it was in a patron's interest to oversee at least some aspects of the production process.¹⁵

Analysis of the artworks' provenance shows that members of the Burgundian court were the most common patrons for Early Netherlandish marriage images; therefore, the nobility's opinions surrounding marriage are the ones that are most

¹³ Dhira B. Mahoney, "Courtly Presentation and Authorial Self-Fashioning: Frontispiece Miniatures in Late Medieval French and English Manuscripts," *Mediaevalia* 21 (1996): 97-99.

¹⁴ Janet Backhouse, *The Hastings Hours* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1997), 4.

¹⁵ Christopher de Hamel, *The British Library Guide to Manuscript Illumination: History and Techniques* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 36.

prominently expressed. The images reveal that noble patrons valued the role of the Church in marriage rituals,¹⁶ and that these patrons wanted to emphasize the political, historical, and mythological functions of marriage.¹⁷ Representations of saintly and scriptural marriage rituals were typically commissioned by ecclesiastical institutions; these images were usually meant for display in churches, to be viewed both by members of religious orders and the general public. It makes sense that the majority of the artworks in this thesis were commissioned by members of the court and Church, because these are the people who would have been able to easily afford such expensive objects. Further, the court and Church were the authoritative bodies responsible for deciding how marriage rituals should be performed, and thus would have been most interested in expressing their opinions about matrimony.

I divided the fifty-three images into four broad themes, which have become my chapter headings: Representations of Marriage Rituals (Chapter Two), Representations of Contemporary Political Marriage Rituals (Chapter Three), Representations of Historical and Mythological Marriage Rituals (Chapter Four), and Representations of the Betrothal or Marriage of the Virgin (Chapter Five). Separating the corpus into categories proved somewhat problematic, since every image has a wide variety of meanings and functions, but by identifying the primary subject matter of each image I was able to create a manageable and effective structure for studying the corpus. I used the chapter organization as a general guideline for discussing the broader themes I discovered within the corpus, but I also made sure to demonstrate the full meaning and

¹⁶ This is clear because of the frequency with which *in facie ecclesiae* unions are represented in works patronized by ducal court members.

¹⁷ In this case, use of the term “mythological” does not include saintly or scriptural marriage rituals.

function of each image by including some images in multiple chapters when appropriate.

To guide my study of images, I consulted publications by historians and art historians including Jérôme Baschet, Michael Camille, Edwin Hall, Jacob Wisse, Wim Blockmans, and Hans Belting. All of these scholars agree that interdisciplinarity is crucial to fully understanding medieval images. There is also a consensus among them that iconography should be analyzed carefully and without excessive generalization. Inspired by the work of Erwin Panofsky, art historians in the mid-twentieth century began looking for hidden symbolism in medieval images; however, in doing this many became so immersed in the symbols that their analyses lacked proper historical and social contexts.¹⁸ In the words of Edwin Hall, “iconography must begin with a study of institutions rather than symbols.”¹⁹ In this thesis, I analyze images of matrimonial rituals through the context of changes in the political, economic, social, and religious institutions that governed the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands.

In his book *L'Iconographie Médiévale* (2008), Jérôme Baschet proposes that the best way to analyze medieval images is to use the serial approach, grouping images into “hyperthemes” — networks of recurring motifs and iconographic themes. Baschet’s method has informed the way that I analyze visual primary sources in this thesis, particularly the way in which I have organized my chapters. Baschet also argues against Émile Mâle’s idea that the symbolic meaning of medieval art was codified; he suggests that medieval symbolism was not uniform, fixed or conventional.²⁰ According to

¹⁸ Benjamin A. Templin, “The Marriage Contract in Fine Art,” *Northern Illinois University Law Review* 30 (2009): 2.

¹⁹ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, xx.

²⁰ Jérôme Baschet, *L'Iconographie Médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 251-257.

Baschet, the Christian world was so vast and sprawling that it would have been difficult for the Church to impose a prescribed iconography; in fact, the Church had no formal control over iconography until the Council of Trent (1545-1563).²¹ What Baschet says about medieval iconography being fluid goes along with what Christopher N.L. Brooke says about medieval marriage: “marriage was so much a matter for local and variable custom that it would have been very unwise to propound universal definitions.”²² Brooke and Baschet’s remarks suggest that it is good practice (in both the field of history and art history) to avoid generalization, advice which I have followed. Baschet also stresses that each artistic medium has its own rules and its own modes of representation,²³ which I have taken into account by considering each image as a physical object with its own set of aesthetic standards. It was interesting for me to see how marriage rituals were sometimes represented differently depending on the artistic media, and how certain media lend themselves to certain themes; for example, images of contemporary political marriage rituals were often represented in woodcuts, because they were an economical way to distribute messages to a very wide audience. Images are particularly useful for perceiving variations of status and standing in an otherwise uniform event such as a betrothal or wedding. Most academics agree that Early Netherlandish art was in high demand throughout Europe, and that it was available to patrons of varied social standing. Art was an effective means of expressing ideas, intentions, and attitudes, therefore understanding images is important for understanding the society that created them. In this sense, art history can add a great deal of perspective

²¹ Ibid, 246-247.

²² Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 130.

²³ Baschet, *L'Iconographie Médiévale*, 265.

to the work of any historian. According to Michael Camille, although people of varying statuses expressed different views through art, “on all levels, from the political down to the psychological, the sacred and profane overlapped, shared languages, subjectivities, and even...identical visual codes.”²⁴ This may partly explain the uniformity I discovered among the images in the corpus.

In his book *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (1998), Camille examines the meaning and function of visual representations of love throughout medieval Europe. Though his book includes some images of matrimony, only a few are Dutch and he does not explicitly discuss the function of visual representations of marriage rituals. Camille says that images depicting love and matrimony were “constructed in part in order to obscure or cover over the real, crude contingencies of the medieval marriage market.”²⁵ He warns art historians to be wary of treating art like text, and treating art as though it always reflects reality.²⁶ Camille suggests that to properly “read” an artwork, one must understand both the process of artistic production and how the artwork was received by its audience.²⁷ I have tried to collect as much information as possible about each image in my corpus, though there are remaining gaps, generally concerning provenance. As such, I place more emphasis on those images that I have the most information about, and try to fill in the blanks using informed speculation.

Edwin Hall’s works concerning *The Arnolfini Portrait* (fig.7) was important to my research because it provided me with a model for my own study of matrimonial

²⁴ Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁶ Michael Camille, “Art History in the Past and Future of Medieval Studies,” in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, edited by John Van Engen (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 369.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

images. In Hall's words, *The Arnolfini Portrait* is "frequently called on to epitomize the entire tradition of early Netherlandish painting."²⁸ In the 1930s, Erwin Panofsky famously interpreted the painting as a clandestine marriage, though this has been since contested by many scholars.²⁹ Hall believes instead that the image depicts a betrothal in the presence of two witnesses, who can be seen through the round mirror in the background. According to Hall, "the couple touch or lay their hands together in what was then a characteristic betrothal gesture used to express the requisite mutual consent of the couple to the promise of future marriage."³⁰ Several historians who specialize in medieval marriage, including Christopher N.L. Brooke and James A. Brundage, endorse Panofsky's reading, but art historians have become more skeptical in recent years. I prefer Hall's interpretation of *The Arnolfini Portrait* to Panofsky's, because in my opinion Hall presents more convincing evidence than Panofsky does. Hall places the portrait in its wider historical, legal, and socio-economic contexts, whereas Panofsky loses perspective by focusing too much on the minutiae of the painting's symbols. Hall's method involves comparing Jan van Eyck's iconic painting to other medieval images of betrothal and marriage. Like Hall, I connect my knowledge of medieval marriage with an analysis of visual primary sources, but I do so by studying a large group of images together, and my images all follow particular criteria; all were produced between 1384 and 1555, and they all have a clear connection to the Low Countries.

In Chapter Two, I focus on images of matrimonial rituals involving ordinary people; this means people who are not identifiable as significant political, historical,

²⁸ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, xvii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

mythological, or religious figures. I analyze these images against the backdrop of the laws, customs, and actual practices that governed marriage in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. Important publications about medieval marriage include Georges Duby's *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (1996), Christopher N.L. Brooke's *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (1989), and the critical research of Michael Sheehan and James A. Brundage. Though the majority of studies about medieval marriage focus on England, France, and Italy, there are a few key works specifically about marriage in the medieval Netherlands, including Martha C. Howell's *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in Cities of the Low Countries, 1300-1500* (1998), and Charles Donahue's analysis of marriage law in court records from late medieval Cambrai. The study of medieval marriage has become quite popular in the last thirty-five years,³¹ and the scholars who study it have increasingly emphasized interdisciplinarity in their work. Before the 1970s, church lawyers comprised the majority of scholars researching medieval marriage, but recently more historians and art historians have engaged in the discussion.³² Medievalists have also begun to acknowledge the relationship between law and art, specifically the function of art in relation to social custom and legal norms.³³ Symbolism was a major part of medieval marriage law, and according to D.L. D'Avray symbolism had real effects on marriage practices. In his words, "the cumulative repetition of much of the same message by a

³¹ Charles Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

³² D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, 11.

³³ Templin, "The Marriage Contract in Fine Art," 2.

powerful mass medium does have an effect on the thoughts of the people at the receiving end.”³⁴

Scholars agree that the Church became progressively more involved in the institution of marriage from the twelfth century onward, but rivalries for control over certain aspects of matrimony persisted between ecclesiastical and secular forces. The laws and customs surrounding medieval marriage were numerous, varied, and complex. Donahue says that generalization is sometimes necessary when it comes to medieval marriage law in order to have a lucid sense of “what was normal and what was abnormal.”³⁵ Many of the sources I consulted agree that there were general similarities among the marriage practices of northwestern European regions. Legal historians like Donahue use court records as evidence for how ordinary people practiced marriage in the medieval period; however, he cleverly warns that court cases “are not normally evidence about how an institution works but about how it does not work.”³⁶

In Chapter Three I show how images of matrimonial rituals were connected to the political sphere by demonstrating how representations of important rulers’ betrothals and weddings impacted Burgundian and Habsburg authority. The images in this chapter represent non-fictional political leaders contemporary to the period between 1384 and 1555; all of the images were created during the lifetimes of the rulers represented. For information concerning the political history of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands, I relied primarily on the works of Wim Blockmans, Walter Prevenier, Richard Vaughan, Gerhard Benecke, Jean Bérenger, and Peter J. Arnade. *The Promised*

³⁴ D’Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, 19.

³⁵ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 7.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

Lands: The Low Countries Under Burgundian Rule, 1369-1530 by Blockmans and Prevenier provided me with an excellent survey of important events and transformations that took place in the Netherlands during the period of study. Additionally, Vaughan's four-volume series about the Dukes of Burgundy, and Benecke and Bérenger's books about the Habsburg dynasty helped me to assess the changing character of political rule in the late medieval Netherlands. Most historians who specialize in this region and time period agree that ritual behaviour defined Burgundian and Habsburg court life, and most agree that ceremonies had a real impact on political power.³⁷ According to Arnade, historians looking at the Burgundian period have recently started to "engage cross-disciplinary studies of court life and royal ritual to seek new answers to Burgundian spectacle."³⁸ However, the relationship between politics, ritual, and Early Netherlandish art has not yet been explored to its full potential. This is what I set out to do in Chapter Three; I draw on the fields of history and art history to analyze the role of marriage images as expressions of political power and court ritual. For ease of writing, I use the terms "Netherlands" and "Low Countries" interchangeably, just as Blockmans and Arnade do. I also use the term "Netherlandish" to describe both the artistic style and the people of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands; additionally, I use both "Netherlandish" and "Dutch" in reference to the population of the late medieval Low Countries.

In Chapter Four, I examine images representing historical and mythological marriage rituals. This category includes images of real-life historical political unions

³⁷ Andrew Brown and Graeme Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries, c. 1420-1530* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 28.

³⁸ Peter J. Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 3.

created after the death of the couple, images depicting unions between mythological figures, images of saints' betrothals and marriages, and images of betrothals and marriages from Scripture. I decided to group these themes together because in the medieval imagination, dead rulers, Greek heroes, saints, and biblical figures all inhabited the same historical timeline. History and mythology were inseparably intertwined. Several scholars, including Arnade, Blockmans and Prevenier, and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene emphasize the importance of history and mythology to the Burgundian and Habsburg rulers. In the words of Arnade, "reality, history, and time were all at the prince's magical command."³⁹ Public ceremonies, including weddings, often incorporated symbolic references to historical and mythological events, and these were also popular themes in Early Netherlandish marriage images. The research of Andrew Cranmer, Dyan Elliott, and Christa Grössinger was crucial to my analysis of images depicting saintly, spiritual, and scriptural matrimonial unions. These authors explain how saints' marriages gave Christians examples to abide by, and showed them that "marriage and sanctity could coexist."⁴⁰ Depictions of saintly and scriptural betrothals and weddings demonstrate both the earthly and holy aspects of the subjects depicted.

In Chapter Five, I investigate visual representations of the betrothal or marriage of the Virgin Mary. I could have included these thirteen images in Chapter Four, since the Virgin counts as a historical or mythological figure, but I decided that there were enough of them to warrant their own chapter. The Virgin is one of the most commonly

³⁹ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁰ Andrew Cranmer, "Marriage and Sanctity in the Lives of Late Medieval Married Saints," (M.A. diss. Queen's University, 2001), 1.

represented figures in medieval art, and although she is most frequently shown fulfilling a maternal role, another popular subject is the betrothal or marriage of the Virgin. Like images of married saints, images of the Virgin's betrothal or marriage often function as links between the earthly and the holy. Baschet and others assert that the growing significance of images in the medieval period was in part an attempt to materialize the spiritual realm, and I believe this applies to images of the Virgin performing matrimonial rituals.⁴¹ These images made the Virgin seem more accessible and more human, because they showed her carrying out normative actions. The Virgin's marriage gave lay Christians a model to revere, though few could truly emulate Mary and Joseph's perfect, pure union because consummation was a necessary part of most marriages. The main function of Chapter Five is to investigate the significance of consummation and consent in the late medieval Low Countries through an analysis of the iconography and ideals surrounding the Virgin Mary.

Having a solid methodology is crucial to the work of any historian, particularly medievalists due to the age and sometimes fragmentary nature of many medieval primary sources. Another important aspect of this thesis is interdisciplinarity; I study the images in my corpus from a number of perspectives in order to make my research comprehensive. I consider the historical and iconographical contexts of my research to be mutually dependent, because I could not fully understand one without the other. I consider art a valuable primary source, and it is particularly valuable for studying the late medieval Netherlands, which was a highly image-based society. In the simplest terms, my work is an intersection of marriage history, Dutch history, and art history.

⁴¹ Baschet, *L'Iconographie Médiévale*, 259.

Methodology

Each of these fields has its own standards and methods of research, so I had to develop my own approach. This paper is not solely about art history, or about marriage, or about the Netherlands; it is about all of these things concurrently. My work builds off the research of others but also presents something completely new, which is a triple-pronged study of visual culture and marriage rituals in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands.

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF MARRIAGE RITUALS

In late medieval Europe, marriage was a normative and highly idealized social institution. Though people married for a variety of reasons, every marriage had unavoidable legal, economic, and religious implications despite the couple's social standing. Firstly, marriage was a social act between two people, but this did not prevent other parties from getting involved. Both the Church and state created extensive marriage laws, including some on matrimonial rituals. Though technically no ceremony was necessary to make a marriage valid, people were still punished for marrying privately without the presence of a priest or witnesses.¹ Such a marriage was forbidden by the Church, deemed illicit and *non legitimum* according to canon law texts.² The Church strongly encouraged couples to follow ritual procedures, but this was difficult to enforce. In the words of Michael M. Sheehan, "the Church's position was often locally stated, was not always consistent, nor was it organized and complete."³ For most of the medieval period and beyond, the Church defined marriage and this was achieved partly through the use of visual symbolism.

The Church relied heavily on symbolism to communicate marriage doctrine to the public. In the Middle Ages, law and Christian symbolism were deeply interlocked,

¹ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 2.

² Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 24.

³ Michael M. Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage," in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies*, edited by James K. Farge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 91.

and this was especially true of marriage legislation. According to D.L. d'Avray in his book *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society*, "symbolism gave meaning to practice and affected it."⁴ Practice often differed from legal prescription, but the Church's regulations concerning marriage were generally accepted and gradually became the norm. The legal system absorbed many of the symbolic elements of matrimony — including popular abiding cultural notions about the meaning of marriage — making the laws more effective since they complemented the public's pre-existing beliefs.⁵ Images were a powerful method of transmitting marriage symbolism. Visual representations of betrothals and weddings often reflect attempts to reinforce marriage legislation according to canon law. The increasing number of such images after 1300 accompanied the growing importance of marriage law in medieval Europe. In this chapter, I study the relationship between marriage law, marriage customs, symbolism, and images in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. Considered as a whole, the images in this chapter do not reflect the real pervasiveness of informal marriage customs in the Netherlands. Nearly all of the images express Church ideals concerning marriage rituals; meaning that they depict formal marital unions being conducted by a priest and in the presence of witnesses. Most of the patrons who commissioned these images belonged to the Church or to the upper classes, and I suspect that the common reason for ordering such images was the patrons' duty to promote lawful Christian behaviour as a form of social control.

⁴ D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, 206.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

According to Edwin Hall, Western beliefs and practices surrounding matrimony were influenced by “a complex intermingling of Roman, Germanic, and Christian elements.”⁶ By the middle of the twelfth century, the Catholic Church acquired jurisdiction over marriage in western Europe through the administration of canon law. Ecclesiastical authorities preached that God had instituted the rules of marriage, and that the Church was responsible for ensuring matrimonial rituals complied with Christian values. The priest’s role in the wedding ceremony was not to create the marriage bond, but rather to proclaim that God had willed the union to take place.⁷ The union of a married couple became associated with the union between Christ and the Church, further emphasizing the new religious significance of matrimony. Marriage was now considered a sacrament, and priestly involvement in wedding ceremonies became increasingly more common throughout the medieval period.⁸ In 1215, marriage laws were reworked and formalized at the Fourth Lateran Council, headed by Pope Innocent III.⁹ From then on, the Church’s basic position on marriage remained largely the same until the Council of Trent in 1563, though there were regional variations in the administration of marriage law, which I will discuss later on in this chapter.¹⁰

Medieval canon law was an intricate set of rules with multiple exceptions and loopholes. By the late fourteenth century, the most basic principle was that present consent had to be exchanged freely between a Christian man and a Christian woman to constitute a valid, sacramental marriage, and once their union was consummated, it

⁶ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 13.

⁷ Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden, “Girl power: The European Marriage Pattern and Labour Markets in the North Sea Region in the Late Medieval and Early Modern period,” *The Economic History Review* 63 (2010): 5.

⁸ Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, translated by Jane Dunnett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11.

⁹ D’Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, 129.

¹⁰ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 633.

became indissoluble, though legal separation was possible in some cases. This came with a slew of caveats, conditions, and exceptions; canon law included a set of impediments — which were categorized as either impedient or diriment impediments — that invalidated impending marriages (impedient) or rendered existing marriages unlawful (diriment). Couples who married despite impedient impediments to their union were punished, but their marriage would still be considered valid and indissoluble. One of the most contentious diriment impediments was incest; the law stated that a couple could not marry if they were related to each other within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity, or related to each other by affinity (including spiritual affinity). The laws surrounding consanguinity were among the most developed in canon law,¹¹ yet the issue of consanguinity is not represented in Early Netherlandish art.

Another significant diriment impediment was the “vice of consent,” which included nonage: marriage involving a partner who lacked the mental capacity to consent. Young children were among those considered to be incapable of proper consent. The marriageable age was typically set at twelve for girls, and fourteen for boys, to ensure that both were capable of understanding the implications of their consent.¹² Regardless, many brides and bridegrooms were underage at the time of their marriage. The law strictly dictated that any marriage involving a partner under the age of seven would be dissolved, though some parents continued to arrange betrothals on behalf of their infant children.¹³ Statistical data concerning the year 1505 reveals a relatively low marriage age in the Netherlands, compared to other countries in the North

¹¹ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 18-27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 138.

Sea region; the average age at the time of first marriage was around twenty for women and twenty-one for men, though marriage before age twenty was still very common, especially in political unions as I will discuss in Chapter Three. The images discussed in this thesis tend to represent couples of similar ages; wide age gaps between bride and groom are not visually apparent in any of the images. This reflects the extant data, which shows that relatively small age gaps were prevalent in northern marriages during the period.¹⁴

Another vice of consent involved forcing or “fearing” someone into marriage. On paper, the Church declared that marriage should be a “strong, free, individual choice,” based on Gratian’s influential canon law textbook in which he emphasizes “the power to choose.”¹⁵ Though canon law technically only required the consent of the bride and bridegroom to constitute *sponsalia* in a valid marriage, this rule did not stop family members from meddling in marriage arrangements. In the words of Professor D.L. D’Avray, “the social forces pushing against free consent in practice must have been hard to withstand.”¹⁶ In many cases, regardless of social status, the couple’s consent — especially that of the bride — was not actually taken into account.¹⁷ Marriages continued to be arranged throughout the medieval and early modern periods, the wishes of the family often taking precedence over the consent of the couple. Canon law allowed couples to marry without parental consent, and this was controversial because families, particularly upper class families, wanted to assert their interests in marriage unions.¹⁸

¹⁴ Moor, “Girl power,” 17.

¹⁵ D’Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, 124-125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷ Capri Montgomery O’Neal, “Marriage and the Status of Women as Viewed Through Early Medieval Law Codes,” (M.A. diss. Rice University, 1983).

¹⁸ Larry Silver, “Middle Class Morality: Love and Marriage in the Art of Lucas van Leyden,” in *In Detail: New Studies of Northern Renaissance Art in Honor of Walter S. Gibson*, edited by Laurinda S. Dixon (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 105.

Parents certainly influenced marriage choice in the late medieval Netherlands, but in general Dutch marriage was characterized by an emphasis on the couple's consent instead of the parents'.¹⁹ This emphasis on consent was reflected in ducal policy: in 1409, John the Fearless outlawed marriages contracted through force or through "the exertion of moral pressure in the name of the government."²⁰

The Church wanted people to marry *in facie ecclesiae*, in a publicly solemnized ceremony involving ritual exchanges before a priest and at least two witnesses — typically separated by gender, with female witnesses alongside the bride, and male witnesses accompanying the bridegroom. Following the exchange of future consent between a couple (the betrothal), a proclamation of the impending marriage — called marriage banns — had to be read out publicly, so that neighbours would have time to reveal any known impediments to the union.²¹ According to Hall, "because betrothal ceremonies are less richly documented than marriage rites, what actually happened at a fifteenth-century betrothal is relatively difficult to determine."²² What we do know is that public betrothals, unlike weddings, were not usually accompanied by religious ceremony.²³ Nor were betrothal rituals legally necessary, and in some cases even the requirement for banns could be waived.²⁴ If a couple was betrothed prior to marrying, it was customary for the wedding to happen within forty days of exchanging future consent.²⁵ The exchange of present consent — the wedding — ideally took place at a

¹⁹ Moor, "Girl power," 4.

²⁰ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 48.

²¹ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 26.

²² *Ibid.*, 67.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁴ Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 3.

²⁵ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 64.

church door. After certifying that there were no impediments, the priest would confirm the couple's consent and read out the dowry settlements. The priest would also bless the betrothal ring, which then became the wedding ring, and he would help the groom place it on the bride's finger.²⁶ After the wedding ceremony the pair went inside the church to receive further blessings at a nuptial mass.²⁷ Following these rituals and celebrations, consummation was required to complete the union. Before the Council of Trent reinforced the legal necessity of *in facie ecclesiae* marriage ceremonies, marriage in the home was quite common.²⁸ Though many people married without a priest or witnesses, it was advantageous to do so because, as Michael M. Sheehan says: "the private exchange of consent, inasmuch as it was without witness, was difficult of defence before the courts."²⁹

Rogier van der Weyden's *Altar of the Seven Sacraments* (fig.8) depicts an idealized version of how the Church wanted marriage rituals to be carried out. The triptych depicts the seven Catholic sacraments in order from left to right: Baptism, Confirmation, and Confession in the left panel, Eucharist in the centre panel, and Ordination, Matrimony, and Last Rites in the right panel. Christ is the focus of the altarpiece, his Passion dominating the centre panel to visually emphasize the dominance of Christ in the lives of good Catholics.³⁰ The altarpiece was most likely created for Jean Chevrot, Bishop of Tournai, who intended the painting for display at the Cathedral of Tournai.³¹ Chevrot was a known client of Rogier van der Weyden, who was a well-

²⁶ Ibid, 23-24.

²⁷ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 250.

²⁸ Ibid, 139.

²⁹ Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages," 99.

³⁰ Shirley Neilsen Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs: A Study in Patronage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 32.

³¹ Susan Koslow, "The Chevrot Altarpiece: Its Sources, Meaning and Significance" (PhD diss. New York University, 1972), 3.

established artist working in Brussels as the official court painter at the time this altarpiece was created.³²

The *Seven Sacraments* altarpiece is the first known example of a painting depicting all seven sacraments in one unified spatial and temporal setting.³³ The scene occurs within a realistic contemporary church, and the people are clothed in contemporary dress. These elements help to emphasize the terrestrial nature of the Church, making the sacraments seem more accessible to everyday people. The colour of each angel's gown symbolizes the character of the sacrament it represents.³⁴ The angel hovering over the marriage scene wears blue, representing virtue, eternity, and divinity. Matrimony is represented in the centre of the right-hand panel (fig.9). The bride and bridegroom hold right hands, facing each other, with an officiating priest standing between them; in other words, this is a perfect *in facie ecclesiae* marriage ceremony. According to Edwin Hall, the joining of right hands was a standard practice in betrothal rituals and wedding ceremonies throughout the middle ages. This gesture symbolized either the promise of future marriage in the case of a betrothal, or the promise of fidelity in the case of a wedding. It was a well-established tradition by the fifteenth century, and was widely used in the Burgundian Netherlands.³⁵ The presence of the priest in the image reinforces the rule of canon law that required a priest to approve of marriages and to perform the marriage ceremony. It also emphasizes the Church's presence in all stages of people's lives. The bride's gaze is downward, representing her modesty,³⁶ and her

³² Vaughan, *Valois Burgundy*, 168.

³³ Koslow, "The Chevrot Altarpiece," 4.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 19.

³⁵ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 67.

³⁶ Silver, "Middle Class Morality," 101.

long hair is left loose to show that she is still a maiden; it was customary for married women to wear their hair covered.³⁷ Near the bride's feet there is a small white terrier; in this period dogs were symbolic of faithfulness and fidelity.³⁸ Both the bride and bridegroom wear scarlet, evoking the blood of Christ and emphasizing what is written on the banner that the angel holds above them:

Matrimonium a Christo commendatur, Dum sponsa sanguinum in carnecopulatur. Exodi IIII capitulo (A marriage which is recommended by Christ, the bridegroom of blood, is joined in the flesh. Exodus chapter 4).

This passage refers to a story in Exodus about Moses. God wanted to kill Moses' son because the child had not been circumcised according to His wishes. Moses' wife, Zipporah, recognized God and immediately cut off her son's foreskin, saying "A bloody husband thou art because of the circumcision."³⁹ Though not directly relevant to the marriage scene, Susan Koslow argues that it suggests "matrimony is sanctified only when it has been consummated."⁴⁰ Interestingly, though the original text in Exodus uses the phrase *sponsus sanguinum* ("bloody husband"), the angel's banner says *sponsa sanguinum* ("bloody bride"). This may imply that the bride's virginity must be lost for the marriage ritual to be complete.⁴¹

Sacrament cycles were popular in the fifteenth century, and it seems that Rogier van der Weyden's *Altar of the Seven Sacraments* set the standard for this theme in Early Netherlandish art. Vrancke van der Stockt's *Redemption Triptych* (fig.10) is one work

³⁷ Koslow, "The Chevrot Altarpiece," 22.

³⁸ Templin, "The Marriage Contract in Fine Art," 12. Alternatively, Hall suggests that the dog may be real instead of (or in addition to) being symbolic. He says that "Dogs frequently even went to Church...and, to the consternation of bishops, who waged a futile battle to rid convents of dogs, some nuns were so inseparable from their pets that they took the dogs with them into the choir for the monastic offices." (Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 67).

³⁹ Koslow, "The Chevrot Altarpiece," 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

that takes inspiration from Van der Weyden's epic triptych; Van der Stockt has arranged images of the sacraments around a central image of the Crucifixion, and certain elements appear to be directly copied directly from Van Der Weyden.⁴² The left wing shows the Expulsion from Paradise, with the Temptation in the background and scenes from Genesis decorating the Gothic arch above the central figures of Adam and Eve. The right wing depicts the Last Judgement, with the seven acts of mercy in the arch that frames Christ, who gives the gesture of benediction while gazing directly at the viewer. The centre panel features the Crucifixion, with series of small images inlayed in the surrounding architecture. Marriage is represented within the column on the right side of the centre panel (fig.11). In front of witnesses, the bride and groom hold right hands while the priest blesses the union by placing his stole over their joined hands. As in the Van der Weyden triptych, the couple both wear red, and the bride gazes downward in the same show of modesty. Here marriage is certainly not the focus or subject of the triptych, but as a sacrament it is imbued with spiritual meaning. In the medieval Christendom marriage was a major part, a sacred milestone, of every lay person's life. This image shows that marriage had an important supporting role in Christian conviction; it was not a central pillar of the religion, but it was important nonetheless. Marriage was considered to be a "lesser" sacrament in comparison to baptism and eucharist because it could not "be enjoyed by all Christians alike," but marriage was still a normal part of most people's lives.⁴³ For the Church, marriage was a convenient and wholesome way to regulate sexual behaviour.

⁴² "Redemption Triptych: Sacrament of Marriage, from the series of small images portraying the sacraments surrounding the central image of the crucifixion, c.1460 (oil on panel)," Bridgeman Education, accessed 14 October 2013, <http://www.bridgemaneducation.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ImageView.aspx?result=0&balid=488610>

⁴³ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 274.

Though the Church strongly encouraged couples to follow its official laws of matrimony, these rules were often difficult to enforce, resulting in a large discrepancy between the law and actual practice. Clandestine marriages — marriages lacking all or some of the prescribed legal requirements — were a particular problem for the Church throughout the Middle Ages. Many couples married without banns, without a priest conducting the ceremony, and without the presence of witnesses, which was deemed illicit by the Church.⁴⁴ Clandestine marriages could be considered valid if there were no impediments, but such unions were judged illegitimate nonetheless.⁴⁵ The Church typically remedied clandestine marriages by demanding that the couple solemnize their vows after a period of penance, though harsher punishments were sometimes given depending on local rules. From 1304 to 1559, the diocese of Tournai — which also held dominion over Bruges and Ghent — ruled that any person in the region who entered or arranged a clandestine marriage would be excommunicated and “denied the right of Christian burial.”⁴⁶ Despite this law, people continued to marry without the involvement of a priest. Clandestine marriages frequently took place between couples who could not receive Church approval due to impediments. According to Hall, “some clandestine marriages were intentionally contracted by upper-class couples who were related within the forbidden degrees and for whom a public and ecclesiastically approved wedding was therefore impossible.”⁴⁷ Couples like these could sometimes successfully appeal to papal authority and bypass excommunication,⁴⁸ but for the most part local church

⁴⁴ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 8-9.

⁴⁵ Templin, “The Marriage Contract in Fine Art,” 23.

⁴⁶ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

officials were responsible for handling cases of clandestine marriage.⁴⁹ Despite the relative frequency of illicit weddings in the Low Countries, Early Netherlandish artwork consistently represents idealized ceremonies that follow Church prescription.

Marriage was practiced differently by different sections of society, especially taking into account variables of class and geographical area.⁵⁰ Marriage rules depended not only on canon law but also local custom, rendering universal definitions trivial.⁵¹ Additionally, the interests of ecclesiastical authorities and secular forces often clashed with each other when it came to marriage, though, as medievalist Georges Duby explains, “In this age-long contest, the spiritual power tended to gain the advantage over the secular.”⁵² Interestingly, medieval historian Christopher N.L. Brooke contradicts Duby, suggesting that local courts generally inclined more towards secular law than canon law in actual practice.⁵³ Marriage law in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands was dictated by a mixture of Church legislation, secular law, and local custom, just as it was in the rest of medieval Europe; however, the Low Countries can be treated separately based on their unique political, economic, and cultural position. Though the Burgundian dukes were quite successful at introducing French customs and culture to the great cities of the southern Netherlands, their efforts were less effective in the north and in the many rural communities that dotted the territory; as such, the rules and practices surrounding marriage depended largely on local administration. Beginning in the Burgundian period there was a push for legal officials to receive better education,

⁴⁹ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 32.

⁵⁰ Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, 6.

⁵¹ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 130.

⁵² Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, 6.

⁵³ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 128.

which led to the establishment of several law colleges. Additionally, civil court judges started to base their rulings on legal texts rather than local custom.⁵⁴ Both of these developments made secular legal administration more consistent, including the administration of marriage law. Secular and ecclesiastical courts were, in Duby's words, "two distinct powers, partly combined and partly in competition";⁵⁵ but both were interested in making marriage conform to legal and ceremonial standards.

By the mid-thirteenth century, "virtually every bishop had a regularly sitting court, normally presided over by an officer called an official."⁵⁶ Each court functioned slightly differently, with its own clerks, records, and lawyers. The hierarchy of ecclesiastical courts proceeded as such: archidiaconal courts were the lowest and most common; after that, people could appeal to the court of the bishop; then came the metropolitan courts (the seats of archbishops); and lastly, the papal court was the highest level of appeal.⁵⁷ This structure was increasingly formalized after the early thirteenth century, as was the documentation required for marriage and court cases dealing with matrimonial issues.⁵⁸ Ecclesiastical court records also suggest that marriage cases were treated progressively more strictly starting in the late fourteenth century, perhaps because of tighter measures, or perhaps because many members of the laity were not following the rules closely enough, continuing "to marry informally and to separate at their convenience."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 119-120.

⁵⁵ Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, 3-4.

⁵⁶ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 33.

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Murray, *Love, Marriage, and Family in the Middle Ages: A Reader* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001), 169.

Sentence records from the episcopal court of the bishop of Cambrai further demonstrate how matters of marriage were dealt with in a large part of the Netherlands. The diocese of Cambrai covered a significant stretch of territory, from Cambrai to Antwerp. It also included Valenciennes, Mons, Brussels, and part of Tournai. Between 1238 and 1240, Guiard de Laon, bishop of Cambrai, issued several synodal statutes regarding marriage.⁶⁰ In these, he emphasizes the importance of marriage banns and condemns clandestine marriage. The Cambrai statutes indicate that betrothals (*sponsalia de futuro*) had to be public, and that marriage required a license from the bishop. If a couple exchanged *sponsalia de futuro* in private, they were allowed one week to publicize their betrothal or else they would be excommunicated.⁶¹ This rule was enforced well into the fifteenth century, as evidenced by extant sentence registers. The Brussels court records show that couples in the diocese of Cambrai often married clandestinely to “find a way out of an earlier matrimonial entanglement.”⁶² In general, couples appealing to the court at Cambrai had a much easier time getting a marriage separation or dissolving or annulling *sponsalia* than getting permission for marriage.⁶³ It seems that officials were more concerned with entrance into marriage than they were with the exit out of marriage.

In general, marriage in the Netherlands was more rigidly controlled than in other regions of Europe, especially in comparison with Italy, where couples tended to prefer civil ceremonies conducted by notaries over ecclesiastical rites performed by priests.

⁶⁰ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 383.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 388.

⁶² *Ibid*, 30.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 399.

Analysis of Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* (fig.7) inevitably leads to a discussion of the differences between northern and southern marriage customs. The painting is one of the most widely recognized depictions of a couple in art, and has long been the subject of fierce debate. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Edwin Hall and other scholars have rejected Erwin Panofsky's famous interpretation of the painting, which he claims represents a clandestine marriage. The main problems Hall has with Panofsky's interpretation are his use of loose speculation, his fixation on the meaning of symbols, and his lack of historical context. The people represented in the painting were long believed to be Giovanni di Arrigo Arnolfini, an upper-middle-class Italian merchant banker, and his wife Giovanna Cenami.⁶⁴ More recent research has suggested that the portrait probably does not depict Giovanni di Arrigo and Giovanna Cenami since the couple was not married until 1447, thirteen years after the painting was completed and six years after the death of Jan Van Eyck.⁶⁵ Rather, the people depicted are likely Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini — a cousin of Giovanni di Arrigo — and his first wife, Costanza Trenta, who died in 1433, the year before *The Arnolfini Portrait* was completed.⁶⁶ Like his cousin, Giovanni di Nicolao was also a merchant, and also hailed originally from the city of Lucca, in Tuscany.⁶⁷ In any case, the painting certainly represents two people of Italian origin who belonged to the merchant class in the Flemish city of Bruges. As such, it is important to consider the differences between

⁶⁴ Christa Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 73.

⁶⁵ Lorne Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings* (London: The National Gallery, 1998).

⁶⁶ Margaret L. Koster, "The Arnolfini double portrait: a simple solution," *Apollo* 158 (September 2003): 3-14.

⁶⁷ Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings*, 174-211.

Italian and Flemish matrimonial rituals in order to understand what is happening in this painting.⁶⁸

Whereas in northern Europe it was custom for marriage ceremonies to take place publicly at a church door, in southern Europe upper-class families typically wed in the home with a notary presiding.⁶⁹ Tuscan marriage tradition placed a great deal of emphasis on the financial transactions involved in nuptial unions. For a marriage to be complete, a notary had to testify in a signed document that the groom had fulfilled all of his contractual obligations, at which point the dowry was transferred.⁷⁰ No other ceremonies were required, making Tuscan nuptials, and Italian nuptials in general, far more informal than Flemish marriage rituals. Marriage in the north was sacramental and spiritual, whereas in the south it was more civil and secular. Considering *The Arnolfini Portrait* in a northern context, if the painting represents a marriage it would be a clandestine union by Dutch standards; however, it would have been acceptable according to Italian tradition. But in Hall's words, "local tradition was supposed to prevail even when the bride or groom came from some other region with different uses," so the Italian couple depicted in the painting would have been expected to follow Flemish marriage customs.⁷¹

A legitimate marriage according to Flemish practice was required to take place *in facie ecclesiae*, but *The Arnolfini Portrait* clearly does not depict an *in facie ecclesiae* union; the scene occurs in a domestic setting, there is no sign of a priest, and the hand

⁶⁸ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, xxi.

⁶⁹ Ibid, xx-xxi.

⁷⁰ Linda Seidel, "'Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait': Business as Usual?" *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Autumn 1989): 68.

⁷¹ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 14-24.

gestures are different from those typically used in northern marriage rites. Panofsky argues that the hand gestures in the portrait — the joining of hands (what he terms *fides manualis*) and the posture of the man's right arm (*fides levata*) — signify a marriage ritual, in this case a clandestine union because the scene does not take place in a church and there is no priest present.⁷² Conversely, Hall argues that the Arnolfini couple would not have purposely entered into illicit nuptials, nor would Jan Van Eyck have been so bold as to paint a real-life clandestine marriage. Clandestine unions were punished quite harshly in the Low Countries, so it would not be in the couple's nor the artist's interest to visually publicize illegal activity. If their clandestine marriage was discovered by Church authorities, the Arnolfinis could have received steep fines, their children could be declared illegitimate, and worst of all they may have been excommunicated.⁷³ It is much more likely that the painting shows a legitimate northern betrothal ceremony; Hall says that the couple's hand gestures actually indicate their mutual consent for *sponsalia de futuro*, or betrothal.⁷⁴ It was a well-established custom for couples to join right hands during marriage ceremonies, whereas betrothal rites required little or no ritual posturing. In the portrait, the man joins his left hand to the woman's right, indicating that this is not a wedding scene, at least not by Flemish standards.⁷⁵ Hall argues that the gestures depicted in the painting, combined with the domestic setting and the presence of two witnesses (reflected in the mirror) are characteristic of Flemish betrothal rituals.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid, 8-9.

⁷³ Templin, "The Marriage Contract in Fine Art," 22-23.

⁷⁴ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 83.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 46.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 83.

The inscription above the mirror reads *Johannes de Eyck fuit hic 1434*, translating to “Jan Van Eyck was here 1434.”⁷⁷ Hall interprets this to mean that Van Eyck attended the actual events represented in the painting, and even suggests that Van Eyck is one of the two witnesses reflected in the mirror. In Hall’s words, the inclusion of witnesses in the painting was to “further solemnize the engagement.”⁷⁸ Panofsky originally interpreted the mirror as a symbol for the Virgin Mary’s purity, however, this association is anachronistic; mirrors were not common attributes of Marian imagery until the early sixteenth century, seven decades after *The Arnolfini Portrait* was painted. Hall argues that the main function of the mirror is decorative, but I believe there is a deeper meaning. Mirrors were certainly expensive in the north during the fifteenth century, so the mirror in this painting could serve to emphasize the couple’s material wealth.⁷⁹ Margaret Koster suggests instead that it is a “mirror of death,” a common *memento mori* symbol. The ten roundels on the mirror frame depict scenes of Christ’s Passion and his life after death. If the woman depicted in the painting is Costanza Trenta, then it follows that the mirror acknowledges her untimely death.⁸⁰

The domestic setting in *The Arnolfini Portrait* exemplifies the importance of private devotion in Dutch religious practice, and the inclusion of witnesses shows that the couple’s betrothal was at least somewhat public.⁸¹ Hall suggests that the painting may have been intended as a visual record of the couple’s solemn betrothal oath, as opposed to Panofsky’s argument that the painting functioned as a literal visual marriage

⁷⁷ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 89.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 119-126.

⁸⁰ Koster, “The Arnolfini double portrait”

⁸¹ Jacob Wisse, “Burgundian Netherlands: Private Life,” in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).

contract. In Hall's words, "everything about the picture," including the gestures, setting, and even the couple's clothing, "attests to individuals whose families, by long residence in Franco-Flemish lands, had become completely attuned to northern ways."⁸² Though the true meaning of *The Arnolfini Portrait* may never be fully proven, I find Hall's interpretation extremely convincing.

An important Franco-Flemish manuscript of Boccaccio's *Decameron* includes several images representing matrimonial rituals which, like *The Arnolfini Portrait*, highlight the differences between northern and southern matrimonial rituals. The *Decameron* was first translated into French by Laurent de Premierfait in 1414 for the duke of Berry, and thereafter illustrated French editions became very popular in northern Europe. The French versions are interesting because their illustrations place the stories in northern settings, and they reinterpret the Italian matrimonial scenes using depictions of northern rituals. One of these Franco-Flemish manuscripts, currently held in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, was made around 1440 and belonged to Philip the Good, although he was not its original owner.⁸³ The Arsenal manuscript depicts four different marriage rituals, including three betrothals of ascending formality. Though the text is faithfully translated from Italian to French, the matrimonial imagery in the Arsenal manuscript subverts Boccaccio's original meaning to make it more moralistic.⁸⁴

The first and least formal betrothal illustration shows the espousal of Pietro and Agnolella (fig. 12). Boccaccio uses the word *sposare* in the original text, meaning a

⁸² Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 89-90.

⁸³ Ibid, 70. The original owner of the Arsenal manuscript is unknown.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 70-71.

“betrothal in the present tense.”⁸⁵ The Arsenal manuscript translates the word *sposare* into the French *épouser* and the visual rendering shows a betrothal instead of a marriage. Italian marriages customs were less formal than those prescribed by northern European Church authorities; the miniatures in this manuscript convey ideas about marriage that would have been appropriate for a northern audience. In this case, the message is didactic. The espousal scene accompanies the third story from the fifth day of the *Decameron*. Pietro Boccamazza, a young man from a wealthy family, wants to marry Agnolella, a girl of lesser social standing. Pietro’s family does not want him to marry Agnolella, so the couple flees to Rome only to be attacked by bandits. They get separated from each other and both go through a series of ordeals before being reunited by coincidence at a castle belonging to the Orsini family. The lady of the castle arranges for them to be “espoused” forthwith, and then she escorts them back to Rome and helps to reconcile Pietro with his family. According to Hall, “though the text envisions an impromptu marriage de praesenti with the lady assisting, the Arsenal miniaturist portrays a betrothal, depicting Pietro and Agnolella outside the castle and without witnesses, executing with their right hands a simple touching gesture.”⁸⁶ Hall suggests the image implies that the couple will marry in a more formal and binding manner later on, perhaps when their families can be involved as was common in Dutch marriage arrangements.⁸⁷ I interpret the scene as the type of betrothal that northern ecclesiastical authorities would not approve of, mainly due to the lack of witnesses; it is rather a hasty and illicit expression of mutual consent. The composition reflects the clandestine nature

⁸⁵ Ibid, 71.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 72.

of the union: Agnolella appears to be hiding in the bushes while Pietro stands on a bridge over moving water, neither inside nor outside, possibly representing his indecision and the fleeting nature of his affection. This miniature appears to convey a didactic message, warning young couples neither to rush into matrimonial unions nor to express *sponsalia de futuro* in secret.

The second, more formal betrothal scene illustrates the story of Teodoro and Violante (fig.13). An Armenian Christian slave named Teodoro falls in love with his captor's daughter Violante and gets her pregnant. Violante's father discovers her giving birth, then orders the baby and Teodoro to be killed, and Violante to commit suicide. Just before Teodoro is about to be executed, his ambassador father appears and saves him. Teodoro's father convinces Violante's father that the couple should be "espoused." In this "espousal" scene, the informal Italian wedding is "reinterpreted as a betrothal in the strict sense," with the couple joining right hands; but this time the couple have two witnesses accompanying them, so it is certainly a more acceptable expression of intent than the previous image.⁸⁸

The third and most formal betrothal scene accompanies the story of Perdicone and Lisa (fig.14). A wealthy Florentine girl named Lisa falls in love with King Pietro of Aragon, who is already married. Knowing that she can never marry King Pietro, Lisa becomes depressed and her parents hire a minstrel to raise her spirits. The minstrel becomes Lisa's confidant, and soon learns about her secret love for the king. The minstrel, who has connections in court, tells the king about Lisa's obsession, and the king decides to find a husband for her. He chooses Perdicone, a young gentleman who

⁸⁸ Ibid, 74.

has little money. Both Lisa and her parents accept the offer, and the couple is “espoused” in the presence of the king, who presents Perdicone with Lisa’s dowry in the form of two lordships.⁸⁹ Boccaccio intended this scene to represent *sponsalia de praesenti* marriage in which “Perdicone gives Lisa the ring characteristic of the Italian marriage rite.”⁹⁰ However, the miniature does not match the text; the scene depicts a betrothal that would have been typical in a Netherlandish context, leaving out the ring ceremony entirely.⁹¹

Another miniature from the Arsenal manuscript shows the Pope formalizing Alessandro's clandestine marriage (fig.15). The story features Alessandro, a Florentine Merchant who meets an abbot on his way to Rome. One night Alessandro and the Abbot must share a room, and it is revealed that the abbot is in fact “a beautiful young woman in disguise.”⁹² The two fall in love and marry clandestinely. When they reach Rome, the “abbot” visits the pope and confesses her clandestine marriage and the fact that she is the daughter of the king of England; she had fled England after her father tried to force her into marrying the king of Scotland. Sympathetic to the princess’ plight, the pope solemnizes her union with Alessandro, in the presence of cardinals and other important people acting as witnesses to the ceremony.⁹³

The *Decameron* miniatures certainly demonstrate the moral character of northern unions; but they do not explicitly reveal the function of financial exchange, which was another important aspect of Dutch marriage. The Netherlands were extremely wealthy

⁸⁹ Ibid, 75-76.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 76.

⁹¹ Ibid, 77.

⁹² Ibid, 28.

⁹³ Ibid, 28.

during the Middle Ages, largely due to their successful mercantile industry. The economy was a huge preoccupation for Netherlandish urbanites, thus the commercial transactions involved in marriage were granted special priority.⁹⁴ Gifts had particular symbolic and economic importance in Netherlandish marriages, to the extent that written records accompanied the giving of gifts.⁹⁵ *Arrha sponsalicia*, usually a gift of money or jewellery, was a common way for couples to cement the betrothal promise. If the party who gave the *arrha* broke off the betrothal, the receiving party would keep the *arrha* as payment for breach of contract. If the receiving party broke off the betrothal, they would have to pay up to quadruple the value of the *arrha* to the pledging party. One example of a betrothal *arrha* is a fifteenth century Flemish betrothal brooch, made with enameled gold, pearls, and jewels, and featuring the figures of a man and a woman joining hands (fig. 16). Michael Camille suggests that the brooch “probably depicts the betrothal of two wealthy young people;”⁹⁶ others believe that Maximilian of Austria gave this brooch to Mary of Burgundy upon their betrothal, and that the figures are meant to be the Archduke and his soon-to-be bride. The brooch represents a betrothal in two ways: as an object it signifies the couple’s promise to each other, and as an image it visually depicts a betrothal. The physical format of the brooch also expresses its symbolic content. The circular brooch features two standing figures holding hands through a chaplet of flowers; the woman’s left hand is joined to the man’s right hand in a common betrothal gesture.⁹⁷ The circular outer part of the brooch is made of woven

⁹⁴ Howell, *The Marriage Exchange*, 201.

⁹⁵ David Herlihy, “The Medieval Marriage Market,” *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 16 (1976): 3.

⁹⁶ Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 75.

⁹⁷ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 61-62.

gold, made to resemble a twig fence. Leafy details made with gold and pearls decorate the outer and inner perimeters of the fence, creating the look of an enclosed garden or *hortus conclusus*, a garden of love. The figures are both dressed in blue, possibly to represent the constancy and virtue of the marriage bond. There are two jewels in the centre of the brooch, a triangular diamond on top and a ruby below; Camille suggests that the colours of these gems represent the “elemental symbolism between the hot and the cold that we often find in love imagery.”⁹⁸ Diamonds were associated with durability, while rubies signify passion. That the diamond is above the ruby may signify the idea that in marriage durability is more important than passion. Brooches such as this were very common, and were worn by both men and women; in fact Catherine of Burgundy gave a similar brooch to Leopold of Austria on the occasion of their wedding in 1388.⁹⁹ Twelfth century poet Johannes de Hauville once wrote about a betrothal brooch, showing how these tokens could be used to ward off other potential suitors:

My bride shall wear a brooch, a witness to her modesty and a proof that hers will be a chaste bed. It will shut up her breast and thrust back any intruder, preventing its closed approach from gaping open and the entrance to her bosom being cheapened by becoming a beaten path for any traveler, and an adulterous eye from tasting what delights the honorable caresses of a husband.¹⁰⁰

Dowries were important in any medieval marriage, but particularly so in the Low Countries, where marriage was the most crucial financial transaction of one’s life.¹⁰¹ In the words of Michael Camille, “marriage was a form of gift exchange, in which men bound themselves to each other in kinship bonds using the circulating currency of

⁹⁸ Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 75.

⁹⁹ Unfortunately I could not find an image of this brooch.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Antheun Janse, “Marriage and Noble Lifestyle in Holland in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Showing Status: Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Willem Pieter Blockmans, p.113-138 (Turhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1999), 115.

women as conduits of exchange.”¹⁰² This was especially true in medieval Bruges, where the success of the financial community often depended on opportunistic marriages.¹⁰³ According to canon law, a marriage was not considered valid without a dowry.¹⁰⁴ By the fourteenth century, dowries were seen increasingly as status symbols, reflecting a family’s social position and affecting marriage choice. Less affluent families with several daughters sometimes chose to marry off only one daughter with a large dowry, sending the rest to convents.¹⁰⁵ In a 1463 betrothal contract between Jehan d’Argenteau, lord of Ascenoy, and Marie de Spontin, there is a clear emphasis on dowry arrangements. The document was written by priest and notary Jacques de Celles, and signed on a public road by the bridegroom and the bride’s father, Gielle, lord of Pousseur; the bride was not present.¹⁰⁶ It is interesting that the focus of this *sponsalia de futuro* is not the consent of the bride and bridegroom; rather, the focus is an exchange of property between the bride’s father and the bridegroom. In the words of Irvén Michael Resnick, “a bride’s mere presence at the *desponsatio* or betrothal was constructed as a form of implied consent.”¹⁰⁷ Dutch merchants wanted trades to stay in the family, so people from the merchant class tended to marry other people from the merchant class; they protected their businesses through marriage. Merchants operated within a very hierarchical marriage structure “which restricted entry into trades.”¹⁰⁸ Powerful guilds in industrial cities like Ghent sometimes created their own rules concerning intermarriage

¹⁰² Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 12.

¹⁰³ James M. Murray, “Family, Marriage and Money-Changing in Medieval Bruges,” *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988): 116..

¹⁰⁴ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Janse, “Marriage and Noble Lifestyle in Holland in the Late Middle Ages,” 127.

¹⁰⁶ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ Irvén Michael Resnick, “Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent Theory and the Case of Joseph and Mary,” *Church History* 69 (2000): 352.

¹⁰⁸ Howell, “Becoming Early Modern in the Late Medieval Low Countries,” 320.

and inheritance.¹⁰⁹ Family law was crucial both to the function of Netherlandish economic activity and to the contracting of marriage agreements; but regulations were not enforced consistently before 1500, prompting people to take advantage of legal flexibility.¹¹⁰

During the Reformation, discourses on marriage became heated. Dutch theologian Erasmus was particularly vocal about his thoughts on marriage. In his 1523 *Colloquies*, he wrote two dialogues on matrimony titled “Courtship” and “Marriage.” Six additional dialogues on marriage were added in subsequent editions. In his treatise called *Institution of Christian Marriage*, published in 1526, Erasmus “extolled matrimony as a sensible, appropriate, and even spiritually beneficial way of life.”¹¹¹ Erasmus believed that parental consent was necessary for creating a harmonious match. He also warned parents to keep their young daughters from consuming “suggestive readings,” including courtly romances and particular sections of the Bible. Erasmus was not in favour of “unequal” matches, meaning couples who were far apart in age, or who came from drastically different economic backgrounds. He emphasized proper conduct between couples, especially female conduct, praising women who were chaste and modest, and condemning vulgar harlots. He recommended that couples avoid engaging in courtly love, because it involved the “idolization of womankind.” In his dialogue titled “Courtship,” Erasmus expresses his disapproval of clandestine marriage,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Martha C. Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in Cities of the Low Countries, 1300-1500*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 203.

¹¹¹ Silver, “Middle Class Morality,” 104.

unsurprising considering the long precedent of distaste for such practices in the Netherlands.¹¹²

Though in reality clandestine unions were relatively common in the Low Countries, there are very few representations of clandestinity in Early Netherlandish art. According to some scholars, one such example is Lucas van Leyden's *The Betrothal* (fig.17). The scene depicts two young people absorbed in a private interaction, making the viewer feel like they are "eavesdropping" on an intimate moment.¹¹³ The young man places a ring on the woman's left-hand index finger. This unusual gesture may have some particular meaning, but it has not yet been satisfactorily explained; nevertheless, the fact that the action involves the woman's left hand instead of her right reinforces that this is a betrothal instead of a marriage. The lack of a priest, witnesses, and family members also indicates betrothal; additionally, the absence of these extra figures may be a way for the artist to express the couple's mutual consent, free from the influence of others. Though a legitimate betrothal did not require any religious ceremony, it did require the public reading or posting of banns. This rather informal, secret betrothal would be deemed acceptable as long as the couple publicized their *sponsalia de futuro* within one week;¹¹⁴ however, there is no evidence in the painting to suggest that the couple intend to do so.

Lucas van Leyden's painting can be contrasted with a later reinterpretation titled *A Warning Against Hasty Marriage* (fig.18). The anonymous artist copies Van Leyden's couple almost exactly, but now there is a fool represented on the left-hand side,

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 98.

¹¹⁴ Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 383.

presiding over the exchange as if in the place of a priest, and making a mockery of the union. Additionally, the man's garment is now black instead of light green, the woman's eyes are half-closed, and she wears a cross around her neck. These seemingly small changes, in conjunction with the presence of the fool, significantly alter the tone of the couple's interaction: the black cloak makes the man appear more sinister; the woman's gaze now seems lustful; and the introduction of the cross may serve to remind the viewer that by conducting such an informal union the couple has disregarded Church prescription. Larry Silver suggests that someone who was uncomfortable with the content of Van Leyden's original image either commissioned or painted this second work themselves to reinforce their Christian values;¹¹⁵ perhaps its patron or creator disapproved of secret, informal matrimonial unions and felt the need to visually express their distaste. Unfortunately, not enough is known about the painting's provenance to form a solid conclusion about its function and meaning.

After the Reformation the Church forfeited some of its authority to secular powers, and as a result art became more secular, especially in the Netherlands. Portraits, landscapes, and scenes depicting ordinary life became more popular, but even still Netherlandish art maintained an underlining moralistic message.¹¹⁶ At the same time, the Church was trying hard to increase its control over marriage. Towards the mid-sixteenth century, Dutch marriage customs and local norms were compiled, written down, and made more uniform.¹¹⁷ This accompanied the general push throughout Catholic Europe for the hardening of matrimonial legislation. Threatened by Protestant theologians' ideas

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 75.

¹¹⁷ Howell, *The Marriage Exchange*, 204.

about matrimony, the Council of Trent made marriage *in facie ecclesiae* mandatory for all Roman Catholics.¹¹⁸ Despite major religious tension throughout Europe during the Reformation period, “canon law still held sway” in the Netherlands.¹¹⁹ Of the fifty-three images in my corpus, only four were certainly made after 1517; two of these depict marriage rituals involving important political figures, one represents the marriage of the Virgin Mary, and the remaining is *A Warning Against Hasty Marriage* (fig.18). Only one of these four images is conspicuously religious in nature, depicting the typically Catholic subject of the marriage of the Virgin. The lack of highly religious marriage-themed artworks after 1517 may suggest that Catholics did not rely very heavily on matrimonial imagery to promote Catholic doctrine in the Netherlands during the Counter-Reformation. Alternatively, it is plausible that more images of this character existed, but were destroyed by Calvinists after 1560. A third possibility is simply that less marriage images were produced in the second quarter of the sixteenth century; I previously mentioned that artists began to avoid depicting religious subjects after the Reformation.

Visual representations of marriage rituals always take a stance, whether intentionally or not. If an image represents a couple conducting marriage rituals *in facie ecclesiae*, this reinforces Church values; if an image shows a non *in facie ecclesiae* union, it contradicts Church values. Most of the images in this chapter represent couples marrying *in facie ecclesiae*. Images such as these further enhanced the public nature of matrimony, helping to emphasize the religious and legal legitimacy of a union. Other

¹¹⁸ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 139.

¹¹⁹ Silver, “Middle Class Morality,” 105.

Visual Representations of Marriage Rituals

images emphasize local custom or contain didactic messages to encourage couples away from marrying clandestinely.

REPRESENTATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL MARRIAGE RITUALS

In 1369, Philip the Bold — son of the late French king John II — wed Margaret, daughter to the count of Flanders, in a politically arranged union intended to forge a closer relationship between France and the Low Countries.¹ In 1383, Philip’s father appointed him first Valois Duke of Burgundy, charging him to take care of the Netherlands, which was “one of the largest and richest fiefs of the crown.”² When Philip’s father-in-law died in 1384, Philip inherited the wealthy territory of Flanders, along with Rethel, Antwerp, Mechelen, Artois, Franche-Comté, and Nevers.³ This marked the beginning of the Burgundian dynasty in the Netherlands, succeeded in 1477 by the House of Habsburg. Though the Low Countries were densely populated and notoriously difficult to control, Blockmans and Prevenier say that the Burgundian dukes set in motion “a sweeping process of unification that brought the whole of the Low Countries under a single crown and homogenized much of its institutional organization and culture.”⁴ The Habsburgs continued this project of centralization during their ruling period. The Burgundian and Habsburg leaders were mostly successful in maintaining a

¹ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 1.

² Vaughan, *Philip the Bold*, 3.

³ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 1. Though this inheritance was economically attractive, it was equally ominous because the Flemish cities were notoriously rebellious against their fourteenth century rulers. The Low Countries were densely urbanized, with a population of roughly 2.5 million by the end of the fifteenth century, which was the densest population in Europe at the time apart from northern Italy. Intricately interwoven tensions — between ruler and subjects, between French and Flemish, and between urban centres — resulted in occasional uprisings between the 14th and mid-16th centuries. Still, the Burgundians’ and Habsburgs’ attempts at controlling the population were quite successful considering their unfavourable circumstances.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

relative harmony with and among their numerous and sometimes violent subjects. This success has often been attributed to the introduction of an elaborate court system involving mass spectacles and magnificent displays of luxury, including public marriage ceremonies. Strategic marriages created valuable political and economic alliances, and extravagant wedding celebrations reinforced the theatrical pomp of court life, which in turn helped to glorify the ruling family.

The images in this chapter largely depict *in facie ecclesiae* betrothals and marriages. It was advantageous for the dukes to conduct unions according to Church laws so that there would be no question of legitimacy, both in terms of their nuptials and the children born of these marriages. Additionally, it was a way for the dukes to set an example for their subjects. The dukes also found ways to manipulate insubordinates into following certain codes of behaviour, including the prescribed marriage customs. In Blockmans' and Prevenier's words, "a form of social control was achieved by reserving assistance to the poor and creating social safety nets for those marginal parts of the population who were prepared to conform in their social conduct and to respect ecclesiastical rituals and the prevailing morality."⁵ Visual representations of important political marriages further emphasized the dukes' system of ritual, civility, and power.

The Burgundians' rise to power in the Netherlands can be attributed not only to the strength of their administrative and military institutions, but also to their complex system of courtly pageantry.⁶ According to Professor Susan Broomhall, "The importance of lavish spectacles and elaborate court ritual to the Dukes of Burgundy's maintenance

⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁶ Ibid, 133.

of prestige and rank has been widely noted by historians.⁷ The influence of ritual reached every part of Burgundian society, “even routine social interaction,” as medievalist Peter J. Arnade points out.⁸ This ritualistic behaviour was especially important in diplomatic situations, including major international marriages. Grand courtly weddings — like those of the Burgundian dukes and Habsburg rulers — usually took place in large cities of the southern Netherlands, particularly Bruges and Brussels. These urban centres were the “central political and cultural pillar of the Burgundian Netherlands.”⁹ Hosting celebrations in large cities was a way for the Burgundians to ingratiate themselves with the mercurial urbanites. The Burgundians tried to create a sense of unity by making use of pre-existing urban traditions and by having the townspeople participate in these celebrations; this was also the case for events taking place in the northern Netherlands.¹⁰

Though most important court events took place in cities, the rulers’ authority was not necessarily weaker in less-visited regions.¹¹ Despite their sprawling territory, the Burgundians and Habsburgs maintained an impressive level of control over the population of the Low Countries which historians often link to their imposing use of stately ritual. In *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Johan Huizinga identifies the Burgundian court as a major cultural authority in northern Europe, on par with the sophisticated city-states of Renaissance Italy.¹² Further, Blockmans and Prevenier argue

⁷ Susan Broomhall. “Gendering the Culture of Honour at the Fifteenth-Century Burgundian Court,” in *Women, Identities and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Susan Broomhall and Stephanie Tarbin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 183.

⁸ Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹ Brown and Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries*, 3.

¹² Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 2.

that in the late medieval period “the Low Countries surpassed the rest of Europe...on both a cultural and economic level,” though they consider Italian culture to have been superior.¹³ Burgundian court culture was revered and imitated throughout Europe, proving how influential this pomp and ritual truly was. Initially inspired by French court culture, the Burgundians quickly created their own unique brand of pageantry that often bordered on absurdity. The rituals surrounding court life were connected to “the elaborate, ceremonial life of the Flemish and other Low Country cities.”¹⁴ Burgundian and Habsburg rituals played on the “collective emotions” elicited by ceremonial behaviour, and this strengthened the bond between the rulers and their people.¹⁵ Ritual helped the Burgundians and Habsburgs communicate with their subjects, and also helped them build the Netherlands into a unified state.¹⁶

Elaborate weddings made up a significant part of this ritualistic behaviour; additionally, both courtly ceremony and marriage were strongly linked to political power in the Burgundian (and later Habsburg) Netherlands. In the Burgundian court, women were ranked based on their husbands’ social statuses, so choice of marriage partner was no small matter.¹⁷ Further, marriage could facilitate social mobility, as court chronicler Georges Chastellain demonstrates when he writes about a commoner, Jean de la Driesche, who was “richement marié à une noble femme en Bruges, avecques laquelle il monta en estat.”¹⁸ According to Professor Antheun Janse, in the Middle Ages “a good

¹³ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, xii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁵ Brown and Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries*, 28.

¹⁶ Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, “The Habsburg Theatre State, Court, City and the Performance of Identity in the Early Modern Southern Low Countries,” in *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, Volume 149: Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650*, edited by Judith Pollmann and Robert Stein, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 134.

¹⁷ Broomhall, “Gendering the Culture of Honour at the Fifteenth-Century Burgundian Court,” 191.

¹⁸ Graeme Small, *George Chastelain and the Shaping of Valois Burgundy: Political and Historical Culture at the Court in the Fifteenth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1997), 24.

marriage was both a result and a cause of further social advancement.”¹⁹ Likewise, Blockmans says that “one of the most useful aristocratic and royal means of obtaining allies and furthering dynastic interests was the carefully planned marriage.”²⁰

Beginning with the union of Philip “the Bold” to Margaret of Flanders (1369), a series of opportunistic political marriages contributed to the rulers’ largely effective attempts at asserting dominance and spreading their influence over the territory. Philip the Bold was devoted to arranging influential marriages for his children, a practice that his son John the Fearless continued when he inherited the dukedom. Philip the Good’s strong diplomatic policy involved carefully planning his own marriage to Isabella of Portugal in 1430 and the first two marriages of his son Charles the Bold.²¹ Charles’ daughter Mary of Burgundy, under threat of losing much of her territory in the Low Countries, accepted a marriage proposal from Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III’s son Maximilian in 1477. Rulership over the Netherlands passed to the House of Habsburg via Mary of Burgundy’s marriage to Maximilian, who later inherited his father’s title of Holy Roman Emperor. After Mary’s death in 1482, Maximilian arranged strategic re-marriages for himself and created marriage alliances for his children that would secure the Habsburgs’ dynastic survival in European power-politics.²² Though technically ruled by a new house, the theatrical Burgundian character of Netherlandish court life persisted through Habsburg rule with the survival of the Valois line until the abdication of Mary’s grandson Charles V in 1555.²³

¹⁹ Janse, “Marriage and Noble Lifestyle in Holland in the Late Middle Ages,” 134.

²⁰ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 72.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

²² Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 123-124.

²³ Brown and Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries*, 6.

Of course, we must not forget the role that images played in this web of ritual, matrimony, and politics. In Blockmans' words, "with the link between court life and political image firmly established, the personal influence of an artistically inclined ruler was crucial."²⁴ The Burgundians and Habsburgs were not only experts at putting on lavish ceremonies and arranging marriages; they were also active art patrons and collectors. Commissioning beautiful objects and expensive works of art was a huge part of these rulers' codes of conduct. The Burgundian dukes preferred visual forms of expression over public speech, emphasizing their physical presence using fashion and aesthetics; according to Arnade "painted depictions of court life helped to underscore this attention to posture."²⁵ Though painting was a well-regarded art form, upper-class patrons preferred portable objects like tapestries, manuscripts, drawings, and prints because of the court's "itinerant lifestyle."²⁶

The types of images discussed in this chapter certainly reflect the patrons' preference for portable objects; of the eleven images, there are nine woodcut prints, one miniature, and one drawing. Small-format artworks such as these were convenient to transport from one residence to another, suiting the mobile nature of the ducal court. The miniature (fig. 19) depicts the marriage of the first Burgundian duke, Philip the Bold, to Margaret of Flanders, and the rest of the images were created during the Habsburgs' ruling period.

²⁴ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 70.

²⁵ Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 18.

²⁶ Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "The Practical Logistics of Art: Thoughts on the Commissioning, Displaying, and Storing of Art at the Burgundian Court," in *In Detail: New Studies of Northern Renaissance Art in Honor of Walter S. Gibson*, edited by Laurinda S. Dixon (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 33.

The marriage of Philip the Bold and Margaret of Flanders “was only the first tentative scene in a play, the rest of whose script had not yet been written or even imagined.”²⁷ Their union marked the beginning of a new era in northern European history. Social tensions were high in the 1360s because of urban uprisings, but there was a temporary period of peace around the time of Philip’s wedding in 1369. The event took place in the particularly rebellious city of Ghent, but Philip made sure to assert his authority with a magnificent display of wealth and power at his wedding feast. Among the guests were Flemish nobles whose loyalty and acceptance were crucial to his future success as the Duke of Burgundy. This was Philip’s first opportunity to show off his “skillful use of pomp and ceremony.”²⁸

It is well known that Philip the Bold was very fond of the arts,²⁹ though it is not certain whether he ordered the creation of the a miniature depicting his wedding (fig. 19). The miniature comes from a manuscript of the *Grandes Chroniques de France* that was made in Paris in the first quarter of the fifteenth century by an anonymous illuminator (probably Flemish). Despite being ruler of the Low Countries, Philip spent most of his time in Paris since he was more concerned with the affairs of France than those of his northern territories.³⁰ Philip was regent of France from 1382 to 1388 during the minority of Charles VI, and again from 1392 to 1402 when Charles’ mental instability made him unfit to rule on his own. It makes sense that Philip would commission a copy of the *Grandes Chroniques de France* as he was the son, brother,

²⁷ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁰ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 19.

and uncle of three kings of France. Further, by requesting the inclusion of an image depicting his wedding, Philip may have wanted to emphasize his place in the important timeline of France while simultaneously commemorating the beginning of a new dynasty in the Netherlands.

In the marriage image, the sumptuously dressed Philip and Margaret stand on either side of a priest (Philip on the left and Margaret on the right), and the trio are surrounded by several witnesses. The presence of the priest and witnesses shows that the union was conducted *in facie ecclesiae*. The priest holds both Philip and Margaret's right hands; though the image does not explicitly show Philip and Margaret joining their right hands, the priest's gesture suggests that he is about to join the couple's hands, which Hall says is a common convention.³¹ All of these visual clues in this image point to a normative and respectable union by late medieval Church standards. This image helps to prove the legitimacy of Philip's marriage by including all the proper ceremonial conventions, and emphasize Philip's grandeur by depicting him and his wife in expensive-looking garments. The miniature's iconography combined with its inclusion in such an important manuscript contribute to Philip's system of pomp and self-glory.

When Mary of Burgundy wed Maximilian of Austria in August of 1477, they became joint rulers of the Low Countries. Maximilian's marriage to Mary was "his greatest stroke of good fortune."³² At the time eighteen-year-old Mary was the most eligible heiress in Europe, and she had many imperial, royal, and noble suitors.³³ After her father's unexpected death, Mary was at risk of losing her inheritance to Louis XI,

³¹ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 42.

³² Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 123.

³³ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 196.

but by marrying seventeen-year-old Maximilian she was able to retain the Burgundian territories of the Netherlands.³⁴ After Mary's untimely death in 1482, these territories passed wholly to the House of Habsburg.³⁵ While the Burgundian rulers certainly tried to control their political images, Maximilian was obsessive about how he was represented. Like the Burgundians, the Habsburg rulers used public ritual and images to emphasize their authority; image consciousness was perhaps even more crucial to the Habsburgs' power because in the face of war and upheaval, they had to re-establish the system that the Burgundians had created.³⁶ When Maximilian first married Mary of Burgundy, he was spurned by the Flemish people, who "saw themselves as guardians of the Burgundian legacy."³⁷ Further troubles arose when Mary died in 1482, leaving Maximilian to act as regent for their young son, the future Duke Philip the Fair, until he came of age in 1494. Maximilian's regency was a tense period, but he was an ambitious ruler despite his failures. His main goal was to expand and revive the Holy Roman Empire, leading him to drain the treasury due to expensive military exploits. Further, he "always remained a foreigner in the Low Countries," never able to win his Netherlandish subjects' loyalty.³⁸

Maximilian was passionately dedicated to the arts, and he also "possessed a sense of the power of publicity unique in his day."³⁹ He combined his reverence for art with this power of publicity to create what can be considered visual propaganda. He

³⁴ Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 123-124.

³⁵ Marti, *Charles le Téméraire*, 50.

³⁶ Van Bruaene, "The Habsburg Theatre State, Court, City and the Performance of Identity in the Early Modern Southern Low Countries," 135.

³⁷ Brown and Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries*, 6.

³⁸ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 210.

³⁹ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, v.

favoured woodcuts because they were less expensive to commission, and they could be mass-produced for wide dissemination. Maximilian's biggest projects were the autobiographical illustrated poems *Theuerdank* and *Weisskunig*, and the monumental multi-panel prints known collectively as the *Triumph*. All of these publications celebrate the important events in Maximilian's life, with emphasis on his Burgundian marriage and on his children's marriages. His preferred artists were engravers from South Germany, including noted humanist Albrecht Dürer.⁴⁰ Maximilian closely supervised the creation of his projects, and he was notorious for requesting numerous changes before being satisfied with the final product.⁴¹

Maximilian liked to frequently remind his public of his marriage to the well-loved Mary of Burgundy, because this marriage marked the beginning of his illustrious political career. Although Maximilian married Bianca Maria Sforza after Mary's death, "his first wife's Valois ancestry is much more evident in his project, representing the precedence of her children and therefore Maximilian's dynastic claims to Burgundy and her other territories."⁴² Maximilian and his Habsburg successors were highly preoccupied with reviving the "Burgundian myth" in order to maintain a peaceful relationship with their subjects; the Habsburgs wanted to give their subjects a sense of continuity so that the Dutch people would be more accepting of the change in rulership.⁴³ Maximilian encouraged a sense of nostalgia for the Burgundian past, and tried to present himself as the Dutch people's link to the former glory of their homeland.

⁴⁰ Gerhard Benecke, *Maximilian I (1459-1519): An Analytical Biography* (London: Routledge, 1982), 16-17.

⁴¹ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 2.

⁴² Carol M. Richardson, "Art and Death," in *Viewing Renaissance Art*, edited by Kim W. Woods, Carol M. Richardson, and Angeliki Lymberopoulou (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 247.

⁴³ Van Bruaene, "The Habsburg Theatre State, Court, City and the Performance of Identity in the Early Modern Southern Low Countries," 135.

The first extant image of Mary and Maximilian's union is a pen drawing representing the couple's wedding in Ghent (fig.20). This drawing was the frontispiece to a book created at Einsiedeln Abbey for a patron at the court of Innsbruck, who intended to give it as a gift to the Doge of Venice; however, the book was never actually sent to Venice, and it remains in Austria to this day. The scene shows Mary and Maximilian marrying *in facie ecclesiae*, with a priest joining their right hands in a similar fashion to the image representing the marriage of Philip the Bold and Margaret of Flanders (fig.20). To further emphasize the political importance of the union, there are two coats of arms at the couple's feet, the left one representing Austria and the one on the right representing Burgundy. These show that this is not only a marriage of two people, but also a marriage of two houses.⁴⁴

The poem *Theuerdank* tells the story of the titular character, a young knight who must set out on a series of harrowing adventures in order to win the hand of the beautiful Lady Ehrenreich. The narrative follows Theuerdank's journey towards marriage; he must earn the privilege to marry a woman who is of higher social standing than himself. Maximilian commissioned this work as a thinly-veiled representation of his youthful exploits and his courtship of Mary of Burgundy.⁴⁵ According to Larry Silver, *Theuerdank* "was intended for a restricted audience, to be presented by the emperor to his principal noble subjects in imitation of luxury manuscripts but produced in multiple copies, using the most modern technical means of printing."⁴⁶ The story includes 118

⁴⁴ Marti, *Charles le Téméraire*, 350-351.

⁴⁵ Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann, *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2012), 49.

⁴⁶ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 7.

large coloured woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair, Hans Schäuflin, Hans Beck, and others.⁴⁷ *Theuerdank* does not contain an actual marriage; it ends with Queen Ehrenreich blessing Theuerdank as he is about to embark on crusade to defend the realm against its enemies.⁴⁸ As Silver says, “Even before the marriage ceremonies have taken place, the queen announces that he should now take royal leadership responsibility for leading a crusade against the infidel.”⁴⁹ The accompanying illustration shows Ehrenreich and the squire Ernholt crowning Theuerdank with a laurel wreath (fig.21). This image can be interpreted as a betrothal ceremony, with the wreath taking the place of a ring to symbolize the promise of future marriage, should Theuerdank prove himself worthy by completing his crusade. Ernholt’s tunic features the wheel of fortune, *rota fortunae*, which was a common medieval symbol of fate.⁵⁰ In Arthurian legend, the wheel of fortune is a symbol of knightly humility. Theuerdank wears the same tunic in other illustrations, emphasizing that he too is a chivalrous yet humble knight.

Der Weisskunig is another of Maximilian’s allegorical autobiographies, which he wrote with the help of a secretary.⁵¹ German printer Leonhard Beck created the illustrations for the book. This time, Maximilian features as the titular “White King,” while Mary is portrayed as the daughter of the King of Feueisen, or “Iron Fire.”⁵² The book contains three illustrations that suit the requirements of my corpus. The first, titled “The Marriage of the Old Weisskunig” (fig.22), represents the wedding of Maximilian’s

⁴⁷ Ireton *Heights of Reflection*, 49.

⁴⁸ Benecke, *Maximilian I (1459-1519)*, 21.

⁴⁹ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 210.

⁵⁰ Royal Collection Trust, “Theuerdank,” accessed 26 August 2013, <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/1050719/theuerdank>.

⁵¹ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, v.

father and mother, Frederick III, Holy Roman Emperor and Eleanor of Portugal. The pope presides over the ceremony in the presence of several courtiers and a group of cardinals. The union also includes the symbolic joining of right hands. The next image shows the “Old White King” and his bride kneeling to receive Holy Communion after their wedding ceremony, which was common practice (fig.23).⁵³ This scene seemingly takes place in a different church and the pope wears a different robe, but the courtiers and cardinals remain in attendance. The altarpiece in fig.23 represents the Pietà, while the one in fig.24 shows a standing Madonna holding the infant Jesus with saints on either side. It is also noteworthy that the books at the altar in fig.23 are closed, whereas those in fig.24 are open. Books traditionally represent knowledge of the Scripture; perhaps the fact that the books are open in the second illustration is meant to suggest that Communion leads to spiritual enlightenment. These two scenes, the wedding and the Communion, together emphasize the religious nature of their marriage. By establishing the legitimacy of his parents’ marriage, Maximilian demonstrates his own legitimacy as heir to the Holy Roman Empire. The third image references Maximilian’s marriage to Mary of Burgundy, showing the White King’s marriage to the daughter of the King of Iron Fire (fig.24). The imagery in this illustration mirrors that of “The Marriage of the Old Weiskunig;” the setting and composition are nearly identical, and the couple in the White King’s marriage scene look very similar to those in the Old White King’s marriage scene. Once again, the couple joins right hands in the traditional marriage gesture, demonstrating the legitimacy of Maximilian and Mary’s union.

⁵³ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 250.

Maximilian's large-scale woodcut project called the *Triumph* comprises two separate series that were commissioned at the same time; namely, the *Triumphal Arch* and the *Triumphal Procession*. These woodcuts celebrate the most important moments from Maximilian's life, and there is an emphasis on dynastic marriages. The *Triumph* was designed largely by Albrecht Dürer, and was cut by seventeen different engravers including Hans Burgkmair, Albrecht Altdorfer, Leonhard Beck, Hans Schäufelein, Wolf Huber, and Hans Springinklee.⁵⁴ The *Arch* is made up of 192 blocks, measuring twelve feet tall by ten feet wide,⁵⁵ while the *Procession* includes 137 blocks and measures fifty-four metres in length.⁵⁶ The *Arch* was initially published in 1515, and then re-published in 1518 after Maximilian requested changes to the central portion. Work on the *Procession* halted in early 1519 after Maximilian's death, but it was eventually published in 1526 by his grandson Ferdinand.⁵⁷ These monumental prints were intended to be plastered onto city walls and palace facades for the northern European public to view and admire.⁵⁸ Seven-hundred first edition prints were made, but extant copies are rare due to the unfavourable conditions in which they were displayed.⁵⁹ Maximilian was very involved in the project; he personally dictated detailed instructions and written captions for the *Procession* to his secretary, Marx Treitzsaurwein, and he ordered his court scholar, Johan Stabius, to oversee its creation.⁶⁰ Dürer apparently "felt little personal enthusiasm for the project" and created merely a few sheets of the *Triumph*

⁵⁴ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, vii.

⁵⁵ Richardson, "Art and Death," 247.

⁵⁶ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, 5.

⁵⁷ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 8.

⁵⁸ Giulia Bartrum, *German Renaissance Prints, 1490–1550* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 51.

⁵⁹ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, vii.

⁶⁰ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, 1.; Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 8-9.

himself.⁶¹ The only prints he seems to have been personally responsible for are the betrothal and wedding scenes, which may indicate that these were the most important scenes.⁶²

The only scene attributed to Dürer in the *Procession* is “The Burgundian Wedding” (fig.1). The image shows an elaborate chariot decorated with mythological flourishes on which Maximilian and Mary stand, dressed in regal attire and crowns, holding a coat of arms between them to represent the union of their two houses. There is no priest, and there are no ceremonial hand gestures involved; the only evidence of a marriage taking place are the caption and the coats of arms. All of the visual elements in this scene reinforce the political nature of Maximilian and Mary’s marriage. Behind the chariot in “The Burgundian Wedding” scene there are figures representing the territories of Austria, then the territories of Burgundy. In all of these scenes, the Austrian regalia are deliberately more prominent than the Burgundian.⁶³ In the *Arch*, the scene “The Marriage of Maximilian to Mary of Burgundy” (fig.25) closely mirrors “The Burgundian Wedding” (fig.1) scene from the *Procession*. Apart from variations in setting, the compositions are nearly identical; both plates show Maximilian and Mary, extravagantly dressed, standing facing each other with the same coat of arms between them. As with the scene from the *Procession*, the scene from the *Arch* also bears no signs of a ceremony. The emphasis is certainly on the political nature of the union.

⁶¹ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, vii.

⁶² Richardson, “Art and Death,” 247-248.; Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 9.

⁶³ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 200.

Marriage was central in Maximilian's plan to glorify himself and the House of Habsburg. Maximilian began his political career through marriage, and he continued to build his dynasty through marriage.⁶⁴ His personal motto was as follows:

*Alli bella gerant
Tu, felix Austra, nube.
(Let others wage wars,
You, happy Austria, marry!)*⁶⁵

Maximilian increased his political influence by contracting opportunistic marriage alliances for his children and grandchildren.⁶⁶ In 1489 he began negotiations for a double marriage between his two children, Philip and Margaret, to the Spanish *infante* and *infanta*, Juan and Juana.⁶⁷ The *Arch* includes an image of Philip's betrothal (fig.26), but not Margaret's; perhaps this is because Philip's line of descent was considered more dynastically important than Margaret's. In the image of Philip's betrothal, just as in the matrimonial scenes involving Maximilian and Mary, the couple stand with a coat of arms between them. Maximilian stands on the left, supervising the union in place of a priest, emphasizing the political and dynastic implications of the union over its religious meaning. Philip and Juana married in the Netherlands in 1495, when he was eighteen and she seventeen, "thus mirroring the romantic match of Philip's parents, Maximilian and Mary, two decades before."⁶⁸ An image from the *Procession* titled "The Spanish Wedding" shows the marriage of Philip and Juana (fig.27). This union made Spain part of the Habsburg realm, thus increasing the Habsburgs' European

⁶⁴ Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 123.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 134.

⁶⁶ Benecke, *Maximilian I*, ix.

⁶⁷ Benecke, *Maximilian I*, 26; Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 135.

⁶⁸ Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 126.

influence.⁶⁹ In the image, Philip and Juana are placed upon a chariot on which scenes of war are depicted, symbolizing both Philip's military prowess and the peacemaking function of marriage. On top of the chariot, Philip sits on an ornate throne, while Juana stands obediently by his side carrying a Spanish flag, emphasizing Spain's subservience to the Holy Roman Empire.

A third image from the *Arch* shows "The Double Wedding at the First Congress of Vienna, 22 July 1515" (fig.28). One reason for the First Congress of Vienna was to give the participants a chance to arrange politically advantageous marriage pacts.

Maximilian met with kings Ladislaus II of Hungary to marry Maximilian's granddaughter Mary (aged nine) to Ladislaus' son Louis (also aged nine). At the same time, Ladislaus' daughter Anne (aged twelve) was betrothed to one of Maximilian's grandsons, whose exact identity was to be confirmed at a later date; Anne eventually married Ferdinand I in 1521. The woodcut would more accurately be titled "The Wedding and Betrothal at the First Congress of Vienna," since only one wedding actually took place at the Congress. In the woodcut, the figures from left to right are identified as Maximilian, Mary, Louis, Ladislaus, Anne, and Ladislaus' brother Sigismund I of Poland.⁷⁰ Ferdinand is not depicted because in 1515 he had not yet been officially selected to marry Anne. Maximilian conducts the wedding ceremony between Mary and Louis, seemingly grasping Mary's wrist in preparation to join the young couple's hands. Mary and Louis were both nine years old at the time of their marriage, which was perfectly legal at the time. It was not unusual for royal or noble children to be

⁶⁹ Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, 12.

⁷⁰ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 202.

betrothed or married at a very young age, but this is the only image in this thesis to show children under ten years old being wed. As mentioned in Chapter Two, it was more common in general for Dutch couples to marry in their late teens or early twenties. Mary and Louis' marriage case is different because of the international politics involved, and because of Maximilian's ambitious dynastic schemes. In Blockmans' words, "The results of Maximilian's [marriage] negotiations shaped the history of most of Europe for the next three centuries."⁷¹

In his 1512 autobiography, Maximilian wrote:

Whoever prepares no memorial for himself during his lifetime has none after his death and is forgotten along with the sound of the bell that tolls his passing. Thus the money I spend for the perpetuation of my memory is not lost; in fact, in such a matter to be sparing money is to suppress my future memory.⁷²

At the Hofkirche in Innsbruck, Austria, there is a lavishly decorated tomb dedicated to the memory of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I; though he was never actually interred there. Maximilian had been planning his death monument since 1502, intending it to be built in the Saint George Chapel at Wiener Neustadt in Vienna.⁷³ When he died in 1519,⁷⁴ the project was still incomplete. The builders also faced a major complication; the sarcophagus and its surrounding statues were too large to fit in the Saint George Chapel. Maximilian's grandson Ferdinand I of Austria invented an ambitious solution. He built the Hofkirche to honour his grandfather and to house the elaborate cenotaph. Ferdinand also supervised the completion of the central monument, Maximilian's sarcophagus.⁷⁵ Around 1561, Ferdinand hired Prague's imperial court

⁷¹ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 211.

⁷² Appelbaum, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, v.

⁷³ Richardson, "Art and Death," 241.

⁷⁴ Benecke, *Maximilian I*, 25.

⁷⁵ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 226.

painter, Florian Abel, to design twenty-four bas reliefs for the sides of the cenotaph, each depicting a key event in Maximilian's life. The reliefs were based on woodcuts from the *Triumphal Arch*, and executed by Flemish sculptor Alexander Colyn. The very first of these reliefs portrays Maximilian's 1477 wedding to Mary of Burgundy (fig.29). The inclusion of this scene, and the fact that it is presented first out of the twenty-four reliefs, acknowledges the crucial part that marriage had played in the foundation of Maximilian's political career. Of the twenty-four reliefs, there are four representing weddings: in addition to Maximilian and Mary's wedding, there is one showing Maximilian's marriage to Bianca Maria Sforza, another of Philip the Fair's marriage to Juana of Castile, and lastly the double wedding at the Congress of Vienna. Unfortunately, I could not find any images of these three additional wedding scenes. Maximilian undoubtedly appreciated the impact of a well-arranged marriage; his rise to power began when he wed Mary, and he continued to build his dynasty by orchestrating auspicious marriages for family members.

According to Larry Silver, marriage marked the "passage to full royal adulthood" for members of the European monarchy.⁷⁶ Monarchs and other political leaders, such as the Burgundians and Habsburgs, more commonly used marriage as an expression of authority rather than as a statement of love. Political and financial motives dominated the marriage schemes of the Burgundian and Habsburg dukes.⁷⁷ Marriage determined the destiny of a political realm, because children born of a legitimate marriage perpetuated the ruling family's patrimony.⁷⁸ These things were true in all of Europe, not

⁷⁶ Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, 210.

⁷⁷ Vaughan, *Philip the Bold*, 81.

⁷⁸ Cranmer, "Marriage and Sanctity in the Lives of Late Medieval Married Saints," 20.

only the Netherlands; what makes the Netherlands unique is the strong relationship between marriage, ritual, and image. The Burgundian and Habsburg rulers routinely used strategic marriage matches, ceremonial behaviour, and art production to strengthen their position in the Low Countries. The images discussed in this chapter represent an intersection of the Burgundians and Habsburgs' favourite political tools.

REPRESENTATIONS OF HISTORICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL MARRIAGE RITUALS

A common characteristic of Early Netherlandish artwork is symbolic emphasis on time and space. Historical and mythological episodes occupy the same physical and temporal plane as scenes depicting contemporary life; they all feature typical northern settings, figures dressed in fashionable Dutch costume, high realism, and iconography imbued with Christian meaning. The commonplace sight of a Flemish bell tower or a Burgundian hennin was intended to break down the barrier between the pictorial space and the viewer, allowing the viewer to feel more connected to scenes illustrating the distant past, biblical stories, or fantastical lore. In Blockmans and Prevenier's words:

These images gave the onlooker or the patron who had commissioned the painting a wondrously comforting feeling of recognition, by conjuring a world in which grand and often miraculous events out of the past were realistically located in a familiar landscape or townscape.¹

These same schemata apply to images of matrimonial rituals, which tend to depict historical and mythological betrothals and weddings placed in contemporary contexts. Most of these images not only incorporate late medieval Dutch clothing and backdrops; they also show figures demonstrating the ritual gestures that were standard in late medieval Dutch betrothal or wedding ceremonies. Most of the artworks discussed in this chapter depict *in facie ecclesiae* unions, even if the subjects are pre-Christian people

¹ Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands*, 3.

or characters. The two main functions of images depicting historical and mythological marriage rituals were to emphasize political power, and to didactically reinforce proper Christian behaviour. There are four broad categories of images included in this chapter: historical-political, mythological, saintly, and scriptural. The “historical-political” category refers to images depicting the unions of non-contemporary political leaders who actually existed, or who were believed to have existed. “Mythological” unions are those involving fictional figures from classical Greek and Roman legends. The “saintly” section includes portrayals of saints’ betrothals and weddings, whether mystical or earthly. Lastly, the “scriptural” category encompasses images of non-saintly unions that are described in Christian texts.

In the previous chapter I established that the Burgundians and Habsburgs used public ceremony and images both to enhance their political authority, and to communicate notions of ideal social conduct to their Dutch subjects. In the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands, both ritual and image made frequent use of historical and mythological themes.² By incorporating symbolic references to these popular, recognizable motifs in their public ceremonies, the dukes could endear themselves to their subjects in what Brown calls a “wider symbolic union.”³ The dukes used pre-existing northern symbolism and values in their ritual behaviour to establish a bond with the people of the Netherlands. Similarly, the dukes also commissioned artwork – including images of matrimonial rituals – that incorporated historical and mythological imagery and iconography that northern audiences would have been familiar with.

² Amade, *Realms of Ritual*, 29.

³ Brown and Small, *Court and Civic Society in the Burgundian Low Countries, c. 1420-1530*, 30.

Several of the artworks in this chapter depict the betrothals and weddings of long-dead political figures. The images in this section have similar functions to those discussed in Chapter Three; they can reinforce authority, dynastic legitimacy, and ritual behaviour, but they also emphasize the crucial part that nostalgia and public memory played in the formation of Burgundian and Habsburg identity. Most of these images are manuscript illuminations; historical manuscripts were considered to be the most important type of secular illuminated manuscripts in the Low Countries. According to the chronicler David Aubert, Duke Philip the Good had epic legends and histories read to him aloud every day. Philip commissioned large numbers of illuminated manuscripts, many historical in nature, and he closely monitored their creation. In Roger Sherman Loomis' words, "Philip the Good must be remembered as one of the greatest bibliophiles of all time. His library was acclaimed supreme in Europe."⁴

One historical-political miniature juxtaposes marriage and death; it is a split-image depicting the marriage of Henry V of England and Catherine of Valois on the left side, and the murder of Duke John the Fearless on the right (fig.30). The image was created between 1470 and 1480 by a collective of Flemish miniaturists known as the Ghent Associates. It is part of the third volume of a copy of Jean de Wavrin's *Les Chroniques d'Angleterre*, probably belonging to Count Engelbert II of Nassau, a prominent member of the ducal court and knight of the Golden Fleece.⁵ Engelbert spent much of his lifetime serving the Dukes of Burgundy; he enjoyed close ties with Charles the Bold, Mary of Burgundy, Maximilian, and Philip the Fair. As a member of the

⁴ Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Alandis Hibbard Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1966), 125-126.

⁵ "The Hague, KB, 133 A7," Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts, accessed 25 August, 2013, <http://manuscripts.kb.nl/search/manuscript/extended/page/19/language/French/afterdate/1400/beforedate/1500>.

dukes' inner circle, Engelbert would have shared their enthusiasm for ritual behaviour and art patronage. The manuscript tells the history of England through a Burgundian perspective, highlighting the virtues of past dukes of Burgundy. If Engelbert indeed commissioned this manuscript, it would have been in his interest to honour the current duke's fallen ancestors. During the Hundred Years War, Charles the Bold's grandfather John the Fearless and duke Louis I of Orléans, leader of the Armagnacs, were involved in a conflict for power within the Queen of France's regency council. John hired assassins to murder Louis in 1407, which caused further unrest between the Burgundians and Armagnacs. In 1419 John proposed an alliance with Charles, Dauphin of France, thus threatening the Armagnacs' influence at the French court. John and Charles agreed to meet on the bridge of Montereau on September 10th, 1419 to seal their alliance. John attended the meeting despite hearing rumours of a possible attempt on his life. After bowing to the Dauphin, one of Charles' entourage delivered an axe blow to John's face — as depicted in the *Chroniques* miniature — while others stabbed him repeatedly. Though accused of the murder, Charles VII denied any involvement.⁶ Shortly thereafter, the new duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, allied himself with England against France, now their common enemy. Philip pledged his support for the Treaty of Troyes (1420), which arranged for the marriage of Charles VI's daughter Catherine to Henry V of England, and disinherited Catherine's brother the dauphin Charles.⁷ The miniature directly associates the marriage of Henry V with the murder of John the Fearless, perhaps suggesting that John's demise created the conditions for the

⁶ Richard Vaughan, *John the Fearless: The Growth of Burgundian Power* (London: Longman, 1979), 37-42.

⁷ C.T. Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War, c.1300-c.1450* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 34.

Treaty of Troyes, or perhaps it is a show of revenge; the Burgundians suffered the death of their leader, but later rejoiced at the French dauphin's failure to secure England for himself. In any case, this image certainly emphasizes the political role of marriage.

Whereas John the Fearless was still part of living memory by the time his murder was depicted in *Les Chroniques d'Angleterre*, the rest of the historical figures discussed in this chapter were dead for centuries before being immortalized in Early Netherlandish art. One such figure is Girart de Roussillon, a popularly romanticized character with real historical origins. Girart was a ninth century Burgundian chief who fought alongside Lothair I against Charles the Bald. His wife Berthe is said to have bravely defended the city of Vienne against Charles in 870.⁸ Girart and Berthe became the subjects of Carolingian romance epics and medieval *chansons de geste*; but as these tales became more popular, the historical facts were so distorted that it is now impossible to distinguish fact from fiction. In his prose epic *Histoire de Girart de Roussillon*, Jehan Wauquelin claims that he wants to set the record straight about Girart's life and accomplishments, writing: "For this reason chronicles are written / that one might preserve the merits and feats and lives / of all those who have died worthy to be remembered, / their deeds have been collected and deposited in history."⁹ But what he really did was rework the story to suit the tastes of a noble mid-fifteenth century audience; after all, his patron was Philip the Good.¹⁰ The text is a thinly-veiled glorification of Philip's centralizing policies, created to legitimize the duke's political

⁸ Hugh Chisholm, ed. "Girart De Roussillon." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, Volume 2. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911.

⁹ Gerhild Scholz Williams, "How to Make Friends: Burgundian Politics in Two Early Modern Prose Texts (*Hug Schapler* and *Girart de Roussillon*)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 20 (Summer 1989): 281.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

ambitions. In Gerhild Scholz Williams' words, "Girart is cast as the worthy forebear to a worthy successor, Philip the Good."¹¹ One miniature from this manuscript portrays the marriage of Girart and Berthe (fig.31). In the image symmetrical rounded arches perfectly frame the couple, who join right hands in front of a priest and witnesses, making this an *in facie ecclesiae* union. All the figures involved wear fashionable fifteenth century Burgundian dress.¹² This wedding scene adds to the propaganda found in the text; it establishes Philip the Good's "ancestral authority" by portraying his predecessor's heroism and dynastic legitimacy.¹³ The fact that a wedding is represented at all suggests that marriage was considered a major part of political influence. In the long tradition of epics and songs about them, Girart and Berthe are characterized as a "power couple," each with complementary virtues. Philip the Good and Isabella of Portugal were also very much a power couple. They were well-matched, and Isabella was well capable of ruling the Burgundian realm while her husband was away. The couple in the *Histoire* miniature even resemble Philip and Isabella; perhaps this was an intentional visual link to further equate Philip and Isabella's deeds and personal attributes with those of Girart de Roussillon and his wife Berthe.

Philip and Isabella's son Charles was also known to encourage comparisons between himself and historical heroes, including King Arthur. To English aristocrat John Paston, the Burgundian court with its marvelous spectacles and pageantry was reminiscent of Camelot. Paston was part of the procession that accompanied Margaret of

¹¹ Ibid, 284.

¹² Web Gallery of Art, "Roman de Girart de Roussillon," accessed 26 August 2013, http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/zgothic/miniatur/1402-450/02n_1403.html

¹³ Williams, "How to Make Friends," 291.

York to Bruges for her wedding to duke Charles the Bold on June 18th, 1468.¹⁴ While there, Paston wrote about the impressive splendours of Charles' court. In Paston's words: "As for the dwykys coort, as of lords, ladys and gentylwomen, squwyers and gentylnen...I hert never of non lyek to it, save king Artour's cort."¹⁵ The same year Charles and Margaret wed, Willem Vrelant completed sixty illustrations for Jean Wauquelin's *Chroniques de Hainault*, including one miniature depicting the wedding of Arthur and Guinevere, or "Genoivre" as she is called in the text (fig.32). Arthurian romances were popular in the Low Countries long before Burgundian rule; by the end of the thirteenth century at least ten stories had been translated into Flemish. Very few Arthurian manuscripts of Netherlandish origin were illustrated until the fifteenth century, after which time the rapidly expanding art market created a much larger demand for luxury illuminated manuscripts.¹⁶ Arthurian legend was accepted as truth, particularly following the publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. Jean Wauquelin drew heavily on Monmouth's *History* while preparing the Arthurian section of the *Chroniques de Hainault*, claiming that Hainault was once part of King Arthur's realm. The text was completed in 1449 and illustrated nearly twenty years later by famed Bruges miniaturist Willem Vrelant.¹⁷ Of the seven Arthurian miniatures, all but the wedding scene depict war themes; the wedding scene comes first, followed by the meeting of the Saxons and Arthur's troops, Arthur fighting the provost of Gaul, jousting at Arthur's coronation, Arthur fighting the giant of Mont Saint Michel,

¹⁴ James Gairdner, ed. *The Paston Letters, A.D. 1422-1509, Volume I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 239.

¹⁵ Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 30.

¹⁶ Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, 122-124.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 125-127.

Arthur and Lucius Tiberius orating to their respective armies, and the defeat of the Romans. The fact that the marriage miniature is presented first may indicate that it is the most important of the seven. The symmetrical composition features rich blue, red, and green hues, detailed architecture, and a crowded layout typical of Vrelant's work. Arthur and Guinevere join right hands as per traditional Dutch custom, while a priest drapes his stole over their joined hands; this is an *in facie ecclesiae* marriage. I speculate that this miniature depicts Charles the Bold and Margaret of York as Arthur and Guinevere, and that this miniature was made to commemorate their 1468 marriage.

Alexander the Great was a popular subject in Burgundian historical manuscripts. Both Philip the Good and Charles the Bold had particular admiration for Alexander, whom they "wished to follow and imitate," and these dukes commissioned entire illuminated books solely on the topic of Alexander's life.¹⁸ This thesis includes two miniatures that depict the union of Alexander and his first wife, Roxana, a subject famously portrayed in a lost painting by ancient Greek artist Echion, also known as Aetion.¹⁹ The first miniature comes from Picard writer and translator Jehan Wauquelin's *Facts and Conquests of Alexander the Great*, illustrated by a Flemish workshop in Mons and made for Philip the Good (fig.33). The text describes how Alexander hanged the men who murdered Darius III, and how he married Darius' daughter to strengthen the new alliance between the Persians and Macedonians.²⁰ The text incorrectly identifies Roxana as the daughter of Persian king Darius III, whom Alexander wed to strengthen

¹⁸ Vaughan, *Valois Burgundy*, 189.

¹⁹ Hugh Chisholm, ed, "Roxana," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, Volume 23 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

²⁰ "La pendaison des meurtriers de Darius - Le mariage d'Alexandre avec Roxane, la fille de Darius," Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Miniatures Flamandes*, accessed 11 October 2012, http://expositions.bnf.fr/flamands/grand/fla_459.htm.

his alliance with the Iranian nobility; she was in fact the daughter of the Bactrian king Oxyartes.²¹ Jehan Wauquelin confuses Roxana with Alexander's second wife, Stateira II, who was indeed a daughter of Darius III.²² The miniature of Alexander and Roxana's marriage depicts an *in facie ecclesiae* union, the couple joining right hands with the aid of a priest in front of several witnesses. The clothing and architectural details resemble contemporary Flemish styles, but with minor variations that were probably intended to give the scene an air of antiquity.

The second miniature of Alexander and Roxana derives from *Historiae Alexandri Magni* (fig.34), originally written by Quintus Curtius Rufus and illustrated by Flemish illuminator the Vienna Master of Mary of Burgundy, active in Ghent in the late 15th century.²³ The text in this manuscript was translated by Vasque de Lucène from the original Latin, at the request of Charles the Bold. Loyset Liédet was hired to oversee the illustrations, many of which were executed by members of his workshop, including the Vienna Master of Mary of Burgundy.²⁴ The miniature depicting the betrothal shows Alexander choosing Roxana from a congregation of thirty noble-born virgins, all wearing tall, gauzy Burgundian-style headdresses. Unlike the previous miniature discussed, this image depicts a betrothal rather than a marriage. Though the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the current owner of this manuscript, describes the scene as a marriage, the image does not include a priest nor the typical matrimonial hand gestures. Instead of grasping right hands, Alexander takes Roxana's right hand with his

²¹ Chisholm, "Roxana."

²² Elizabeth Donnelly Carney, *Women and Monarchy in Macedonia* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 108.

²³ "Vienna Master of Mary of Burgundy," The J. Paul Getty Museum, accessed 25 August 2013, <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=21276>

²⁴ "Le mariage d'Alexandre et de Roxane," Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Miniatures Flamandes*, accessed 11 October 2012, http://expositions.bnf.fr/flamands/grand/fla_198.htm.

left. In the actual manuscript, the caption above the image describes the interaction as an “espousal,” which indicates a betrothal, not a marriage.²⁵ This makes sense in the context of Burgundian marriage customs, because if the scene truly did depict a wedding it would have been considered clandestine by northern standards. In reality, this miniature depicts a perfectly legitimate betrothal ceremony with several witnesses.

It is interesting that although classical themes are relatively rare in Early Netherlandish art, eight of the images discussed in this chapter depict the betrothals and weddings of figures from ancient Greek and Roman legends. Most of these images were made during the reign of Charles the Bold; this may have something to do with Charles’ well-known interest in mythology.²⁶ He was also obsessed with the proper performance of courtly rituals.²⁷ Charles’ political image was meticulously crafted, inspired by the heroism of legendary rulers and perfected with chivalric pretense.²⁸ Three of these images come from editions of Raoul Lefèvre’s *Recoeil des Histoires de Troyes*. The first two, “The Betrothal of Alcmene and Amphitryon” (fig.35) and “The Marriage of Hercules and Deianira” (fig.36), were both illustrated by an anonymous follower of Loyset Liédet and belong to a manuscript currently housed in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek. The earliest available information identifies Philip of Cleves, Lord of Ravenstein as one of the manuscript’s early owners, and it is possible that he commissioned it. Philip was an army commander in the Low Countries and close friend of Maximilian I.²⁹ In Greek mythology, after accidentally killing his uncle Electryon,

²⁵ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁷ Arnade, *Realms of Ritual* 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹ “The Hague, KB, 78D 48,” Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts, accessed 26 August, 2013. <http://manuscripts.kb.nl/show/manuscript/78+D+48>

Amphitryon flees to Thebes with his betrothed, Electryon's daughter Alcmena. Alcmena tells Amphitryon that she will only marry him if he conquers the Taphians, who had previously killed all but one of her brothers. Amphitryon accepts the challenge, but proves unsuccessful until the princess Comaetho gives him a lock of hair that makes him immortal and allows him to win against the Taphians. Amphitryon thus returns to Thebes and marries Alcmena.³⁰ The Koninklijke Bibliotheek miniature presents a simple, symmetrical scene in which a priest grasps Alcmena's right hand and Amphitryon's left, while Amphitryon raises his right hand in a typical betrothal gesture, very similar to that in *The Arnolfini Portrait* (fig. 7).³¹ The Koninklijke Bibliotheek identifies this as a wedding ceremony, but it more closely resembles a proper betrothal by Dutch standards. Further, the text above the image uses the word "espousa," referring to betrothal instead of marriage. On a side note, the scene features a contemporary setting, clothing, and rituals; it is a modernized and Christianized version of the ancient Greek legend. The second matrimonial image from this manuscript shows the betrothal of Hercules and Deianira (fig. 38), which, like the previous image, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek has misidentified as a marriage. In Greek mythology, Deianira is Hercules' second wife, who inadvertently poisons him with the centaur Nessus' blood.³² The miniature depicts a continuous narrative, beginning with the betrothal, then the couple journeying by sea, then Nessus giving Deianira the poisoned blood, and finally Hercules killing Nessus. The betrothal scene mirrors that of Alcmena and Amphitryon in that the

³⁰ Hugh Chisholm, ed., "Amphitryon," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, Volume 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

³¹ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 77..

³² Hugh Chisholm, ed., "Hercules," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, Volume 13 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

couple joins right and left hands while the bridegroom raises his right hand in a characteristic northern betrothal gesture. As in the previous image, the characters in this miniature wear variations of contemporary northern clothing and the hand gestures follow Burgundian convention.

The next mythology-themed artwork is a miniature from a slightly later copy of *Recueil des Histoires de Troye* commissioned by Flemish courtier Louis de Gruuthuse, whose arms are represented several times throughout the manuscript. The matrimonial miniature represents the betrothal of Jupiter and Juno, illustrated by the Master of the Chronicles of England (fig.37).³³ The Bibliothèque Nationale de France identifies the subject as a marriage, but once again the hand gestures suggest a betrothal instead; Juno joins her right hand to Jupiter's left, while Jupiter raises his right hand in an oath-taking action. It is possible the image was meant to be ambiguous, blurring the line between betrothal and marriage. The man performing the ceremony is not dressed like Christian priest, but the ritual itself mirrors an *in facie ecclesiae* northern betrothal; in addition to the customary hand gestures, the scene takes place in front of a temple (albeit not a Christian church) and there are witnesses. The setting and costumes resemble Burgundian aesthetics, but not quite, giving the scene an exotic air. Appropriately, in Roman mythology Juno is the goddess of marriage.³⁴

As intercessors between the earthly and divine worlds, saints made ordinary medieval Christians feel closer to God. Saints remained popular subjects in northern

³³"Mariage de Jupiter avec sa soeur Junon devant le temple de Cybèle," Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Miniatures Flamandes*, accessed 11 October 2012, http://expositions.bnf.fr/flamands/grand/fla_233.htm.

³⁴ Hugh Chisholm, ed, "Juno," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, Volume 15 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

literature and art until the early sixteenth century.³⁵ Married saints were particularly effective role models for average Christians who wanted to continue living chastely in the service of God, despite their married state.³⁶ Married saints proved that sanctity and marriage were not necessarily mutually exclusive; in Cranmer's words, some saints "engaged in sexual relations, and maintained their religious devotion."³⁷ Others suffered or died to keep their chastity.³⁸ This chapter includes two miniatures from the mid-fifteenth century that depict the earthly marriages of female saints, Waudru (fig.38) and Godeliève (fig.5). The legends of these two saints as told by their representations in Early Netherlandish art reflect the social expectations that dictated female behaviour and marriage rituals in the late medieval Low Countries.

Waudru was a seventh century Belgian saint who left her marriage and four children in order to live a spiritual life. She was the wife of Madelgaire, Count of Hainault, who later became a monk. As a nun, Waudru founded her own convent, and her numerous followers established the city of Mons around it. She was canonized for her devotion, piety, and her miraculous healing powers. Her husband and four children were also canonized.³⁹ There is a miniature depicting her marriage in a copy of *Chroniques de Hainault*, a historical narrative about the Counts of Hainault (fig.38). The manuscript was probably commissioned by Philip the Good, but it was completed the year after his death and thus became the property of Philip's son Charles the Bold.⁴⁰

³⁵ Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40.

³⁶ Cranmer, "Marriage and Sanctity in the Lives of Late Medieval Married Saints," 77-78.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, i.

³⁸ Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 28.

³⁹ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 76.

⁴⁰ Marti, *Splendeurs de la Cour de Bourgogne*, 315.

Philip acquired the county of Hainault in 1433, so this manuscript may have been commissioned as a way of merging the history and ideals of Hainault with those of the Burgundian Netherlands. The miniature depicting Saint Waudru's marriage shows an *in facie ecclesiae* union, celebrated on a church porch before a bishop and with several witnesses separated by gender, some of them saints.

Saint Godeliève, patroness of Flanders,⁴¹ is “the only married female martyr recognized as a saint by a medieval pope.”⁴² She was born in the mid-eleventh century and died around 1070. Her biography was written around 1084 by a Flemish-born monk named Drogo of Sint-Winoksbergen.⁴³ According to Drogo, Godeliève grew up with several advantages; apart from belonging to the nobility, she was apparently humble, virtuous, and intelligent. When she reached her teens, Godeliève was sought after by many men. Bertolf of Gistel offered her parents a sizeable bride gift, such that they promised him Godeliève's hand in marriage. Drogo claims that after they wed Bertolf became possessed by the devil. This, combined with the evil influence of his mother, caused Bertolf to treat his new wife very poorly. Drogo is careful to mention that Godeliève “spent her nights alone,” to convey that she remained a virgin in marriage.⁴⁴ But simply being a married virgin is not enough to merit sanctity; she had to prove her spiritual perfection by suffering to maintain her virginity in the service of God. Bertolf and his mother schemed to break his wife's will by confining and starving her, but Godeliève's devotion remained strong and she shared what little food she was given

⁴¹ “The Life and Miracles of Saint Godeliève,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed 15 September 2013, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/437029>

⁴² Bruce L Venarde, “Introduction,” in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York: Garland Press, 1999), 359.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Drogo of Sint-Winoksbergen, “The Life of Godlieve,” trans. Bruce L. Venarde, in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York: Garland Press, 1999). 360-373.

with the local poor. Godeliève fled home to her parents, but she was sent back to live with her husband, who began plotting to murder her. Bertolf arranged for two servants to strangle and drown her, making her death appear natural and diverting suspicion from him. Many miracles are associated with the site of her death, most involving the sick or injured being cured of their ailments.⁴⁵

Godeliève is represented in a few Early Netherlandish artworks, including a polyptych altarpiece that may have once decorated the Guild of the Load Bearers' chapel in the Church of Our Lady in Bruges.⁴⁶ The artwork tells Godeliève's story in a continuous narrative; her *in facie ecclesiae* marriage to Bertolf is the focus of the painting, occupying the middle of the centre panel (fig.5). Marriage is a central feature of Godeliève's hagiography, and this is visually emphasized in the altarpiece. In the words of Bruce L. Venarde, Godeliève "is a martyr to arranged marriage and the failures of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities to solve the problems it posed."⁴⁷ Although Godeliève lived in the eleventh century, by the end of the fifteenth — when this painting was created — ecclesiastical and secular authorities were still facing the problem of parental authority versus free choice in matrimonial unions. Godeliève certainly provided Flemish people with a local saint to venerate, but her story also raises questions about marital consent that remained relevant in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. Viewers of the Godeliève altarpiece would have been simultaneously reminded of the historical, spiritual, and matrimonial significance of the Saint Godeliève legend. For Waudru and Godeliève, marriage was a challenge they had to overcome to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "The Life and Miracles of Saint Godeliève."

⁴⁷ Venarde, "Introduction," 359.

prove their sainthood, pursuing spiritual lives at great cost.⁴⁸ Here earthly marriage is presented in a negative light, inferior to the heavenly state of sainthood and spiritual unions.

Whereas Waudru and Godeliève were married to earthly husbands, some female saints entered into mystical marriages, meaning that they “wed” Christ and abstained from all sexual relations. These unions provided lay women with an ideal example of feminine spirituality. Some medieval theologians considered sex requisite in their definition of a true marriage, but mystical marriages were valid under consent theory, which posited that consent alone made a marriage.⁴⁹ Even still, mystical marriage was eliminated during the Reformation with the decline of Marian devotion and the cult of saints, and also due to the “Protestant reformers’ depreciation of the practice of chastity.”⁵⁰ One of the most prominent examples of saintly mystical marriage is Saint Catherine of Alexandria, whose spiritual union with the infant Jesus was the basis for the notion of nuns being married to Christ.⁵¹ She frequently appears in the popular Flemish artistic tradition of *Virgo inter virgines*, in which the Mother and Child along with noted female virgin saints lounge in a quiet *hortus conclusus* setting peppered with bridal metaphors. The garden enclosed doubles as a symbol of love and virginity. As the “Queen of Virgins” Mary is always the focus of these scenes but Catherine is often a close second, commonly depicted receiving a wedding ring from Christ to signify her eternal virginity.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Resnick, “Marriage in Medieval Culture,” 359.

⁵⁰ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 297.

⁵¹ Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 37.

⁵² Wise, “Robert Campin’s “Betrothal of the Virgin”,” 56.

The images in this thesis include four examples of *Virgo inter virgines* artworks, all of them paintings created in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. The earliest is *Virgin of the Rose Garden* by the anonymous Master of the Saint Lucy Legend (fig. 39). The painting was possibly commissioned by Flemish courtier Louis de Gruuthuse for the convent of Poor Clares in Bruges.⁵³ This subject would have certainly been appropriate for a convent, as it would have provided the nuns with exemplars for their own spiritual unions with Christ. The scene shows the Virgin and Christ Child surrounded by four female martyr saints: Catherine, Barbara, Ursula, and Cecilia. A cityscape based on fifteenth century Bruges occupies the background.⁵⁴ With his right hand, the Child begins to place a ring on Catherine's right hand; a sword can be seen directly behind Catherine's hand, reminding the viewer of her martyrdom and her unfaltering devotion to Christ. With his left hand, the Child holds Barbara's right, while Barbara offers Christ a white lily to symbolize virginal purity.

A second *Virgo inter virgines* painting by the Master of the Saint Lucy Legend (fig.4) depicts a very similar but more crowded scene than *Virgin of the Rose Garden*. Saints Catherine, Mary Magdalene, Barbara, Ursula, Cunera, Apollonia, Lucy, Agnes, Agatha, Margaret, and an unidentified female saint surround the Virgin and Child in a paradisiacal garden, with Bruges once again visible in the background. The four central figures are positioned in a manner identical to the previous work, but their clothing is slightly different. As in the previous painting, Christ bestows Catherine with a ring to

⁵³ "Virgin of the Rose Garden," Detroit Institute of Arts, accessed 16 September 2013, <http://www.dia.org/object-info/e878a74b-c16e-4597-bcd9-82b257252a58.aspx>

⁵⁴ A.M. Roberts, "Master of the Legend of St. Lucy," *Grove Art Online*, accessed 16 September 2013, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/subscriber/article/grove/art/T055065pg227?q=st+lucy&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit.

signify their mystical marriage. Barbara offers Christ a flower, this time a red rose to symbolize the blood of Christian martyrs, a reference to the several female martyr saints depicted in the painting. In the foreground, Agnes holds a ring with her left hand to represent her mystical marriage with Christ, embodied by the lamb on her lap. This painting was originally displayed in the Church of Our Lady in Bruges, specifically in a rhetoric chamber called *De drie Sanctinnen*, translated as “The Three Female Saints.” This refers to Saints Catherine, Mary Magdalene, and Barbara, the three most central saints in the painting, who were each extremely popular in fifteenth century Bruges.⁵⁵ Although Catherine, Mary Magdalene, and Barbara are clearly the most important saints depicted, the presence of the other martyrs highlights the painting’s theme of feminine devotion. Unlike female saints and nuns, married laywomen could not commit themselves to Christ by mystical marriage, but bridal metaphors such as those in the painting encouraged all women to honour and obey Christ as they would a husband.

Saint Catherine’s mystical marriage is also depicted in two paintings by Hans Memling: *Triptych with Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist* (fig.40), and *Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara* (fig.2), both made around 1479. The former was commissioned as an altarpiece for Sint-Janshospitaal in Bruges where it still resides, and the latter was commissioned by an anonymous donor. The main subject of the first painting is Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of Sint-Janshospitaal, so Catherine plays a relatively minor role here. This representation of Catherine’s mystical marriage was likely meant to remind the Sint-

⁵⁵ “Description détaillée: Maître de la Légende de sainte Lucie, *Virgo inter virgines*,” Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, accessed 17 September 2013, http://www.opac-fabritius.be/fr/F_database.htm

Janshospitaal nuns of the faithfulness and devotion they were expected to practice as brides of Christ. The second painting was adapted from the centre panel of the Saint John altarpiece by the donor who is depicted in black on the left side of the composition. The painting's original function and location of display are also unknown. Unlike the previous Memling painting, this work conforms to the *Virgo inter virgines* theme and thusly emphasizes the roles of the female saints depicted. The pastoral setting also evokes a more feminine atmosphere than that of the other Memling work. The main subject of this scene is Catherine's mystical marriage to the infant Christ. The gazes of the Virgin and the donor direct the viewer's eyes to Catherine's left hand, on which the Child places a small ring. Saint Barbara's presence extends the matrimonial metaphor: she is shown with her attribute, the tower in which her father confined her to keep suitors away.⁵⁶

Gerard David's *The Virgin and Child with Saints and Donor* (fig.41) is another *Virgo inter virgines* artwork set in an enclosed garden with Bruges in the background. This piece was completed around 1510 and was probably displayed at the altar of Saint Catherine in the chapel of Saint Anthony Abbot at Saint Donatian's Cathedral in Bruges. It was commissioned by Richard de Visch van der Capelle, a senior cleric of Saint Donatian, who is depicted kneeling on the left side in the foreground; his coat of arms is also represented on the greyhound's collar. The painting features the popular trio of

⁵⁶ "Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed 20 November 2, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/14.40.634>.

Saints Catherine, Barbara, and Mary Magdalene. As in previous works, Catherine receives a ring from Christ to symbolize their mystical union.⁵⁷

The final category of images in this chapter is Scriptural matrimonial rituals. This category comprises six images, three of which represent the marriage of Sarah and Tobias, and the other three the marriage of Adam and Eve. Five are miniatures and one is a tapestry, likely because such images best lend themselves to accompanying text. The three images depicting the marriage of Sarah and Tobias all come from three different manuscript copies of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, a very popular text of didactic theology written in the early fourteenth century by an anonymous Dominican author.⁵⁸ There are roughly four hundred extant copies of the *Speculum* from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and many of these were made in the Southern Netherlands.⁵⁹ Most copies are illustrated because, as written in the Prologue, those who could not read had to learn through pictures. The *Devotio Moderna* increased the *Speculum*'s popularity in the Netherlands because the text facilitated the *Devotio* movement's ideals of private study and contemplation. The *Speculum* uses typology to juxtapose events of the New Testament with those of the Old Testament, which is evident in many of the miniatures. The text and images were well-standardized, meaning that the three images in this sub-category are all very similar in composition.⁶⁰ In the words of Adrian Wilson and Joyce Lancaster Wilson, "While the artists of the *Speculum* created manuscript miniatures that

⁵⁷ "The Virgin and Child with Saints and Donor," The National Gallery, accessed 20 November 2012, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/gerard-david-the-virgin-and-child-with-saints-and-donor>

⁵⁸ Bert Cardon, *Manuscripts of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis in the Southern Netherlands (c.1410-c.1470): A Contribution to the Study of the 15th Century Book Illumination and of the Function and Meaning of Historical Symbolism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 41.

⁵⁹ Cardon, *Manuscripts of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis in the Southern Netherlands (c.1410-c.1470)*, ix.

⁶⁰ Adrian Wilson and Joyce Lancaster Wilson, *A Medieval Mirror: Speculum Humanae Salvationis 1324-1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 10-24.

are very different in style from one copy to the other, they are fairly consistent in the iconography and the symbolism suited to the subjects.”⁶¹

Sarah and Tobias’ marriage is described in Chapter VI, juxtaposed with the marriage of Mary and Joseph.⁶² The original story comes from Chapter VII of the Book of Tobias in the Vulgate: Tobias, a blind Israelite, and Sarah, a young Median whose seven late husbands were all killed by the demon of lust before the marriages could be consummated, are brought together by the archangel Raphael; Raphael restores Tobias’ sight, guides him to Media, and instructs him to marry Sarah. According to Hall, the passage describing Sarah and Tobias’ marriage “greatly influenced the evolution of European marriage rites,” because it describes the joining of right hands as crucial part of the ceremony.⁶³ The marriage of Sarah and Tobias was essentially the prototype for *in facie ecclesiae* unions, and the joining of right hands became associated with the exchange of consent.⁶⁴

The earliest of the Sarah and Tobias images in the corpus comes from a 1455 copy of the *Speculum*, lavishly illustrated by the workshop of Willem Vrelant in Bruges (fig.42). The manuscript text is in French, translated from Latin by Jean Miélot at the request of Philip the Good; the preface includes a miniature in which Miélot is shown presenting the book to his ducal patron.⁶⁵ In the same picture, Miélot points to two female figures, representing the Synagogue and the Church. The figure of the Synagogue is grotesque; she is blindfolded, with a crown sliding off her head, holding a

⁶¹ Ibid, 29.

⁶² Ibid, 152.

⁶³ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 18.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁶⁵ “Le Miroir de l’Humaine Salvation,” University of Glasgow Special Collections, accessed 15 October 2013, http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts/search/detail_c.cfm?ID=34374

broken lance and the Tables of the Law. The figure of the Church is glorified in comparison, crowned and haloed, holding a golden Chalice and Host.⁶⁶ This symbolic imagery sets the tone for the rest of the book; it communicates the superiority of the Christian New Testament over the Jewish Old Testament, and introduces the concept of duality. Much of the manuscript is dedicated to illustrations that use split compositions to compare events from the Old Testament with events from the New Testament. Folio 9 recto shows the marriage of Mary and Joseph on the left, while the right side depicts the marriage of Sarah and Tobias. Both scenes are similar in arrangement; they are symmetrical, and feature interior church or synagogal settings.⁶⁷ The visual mirroring helps to convey that these two events are related, and that the marriage of Sarah and Tobias prefigures Mary and Joseph's union. The left side is more finely rendered than the right; perhaps the two sides were simply completed by different artists, or perhaps was intentional to visually emphasize the preeminence of the Virgin's marriage over Sarah and Tobias'. Further, in the left scene there is a small, pale, child-like figure clutching at Mary's side; this is a recurring motif in marriage of the Virgin images, thought to represent the Holy Spirit or Mary's spiritual union with God.⁶⁸ This type of mystical iconography is noticeably absent from the right-hand frame, further elevating the Virgin's marriage above that of Sarah and Tobias, which looks unremarkable in comparison. Folio 1 of the same manuscript depicts the marriage of Adam and Eve;⁶⁹ I could not locate an image of this particular miniature, but I will discuss other works

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ It is probable that the setting for Sarah and Tobias' union is meant to be a synagogue, but with the Mary and Joseph scene it is more difficult to tell; that it would be a synagogue makes more historical sense, but since the scene includes the anachronistic presence of a bishop, it is possible that the setting is meant to be a Christian church instead of a synagogue.

⁶⁸ I will discuss this motif further in Chapter Five.

⁶⁹ Along with the fall of Lucifer, the creation of Eve, and the temptation of Eve.

portraying Adam and Eve later on in this chapter. Out of this manuscript's sixty-three folios, there are three marriage scenes. Taken at face value this does not seem like a significant proportion, but it is meaningful that images matrimony appear thrice in a collection of scenes that are presented as key events in Scripture. The author of the *Speculum* clearly believed that marriage had a crucial role in advancing the Christian narrative.

A second Sarah and Tobias marriage miniature (fig.43) can be found in a fragmentary manuscript dating from around 1460 to 1470, copied and illustrated in ink on parchment, probably by a Flemish school. The matrimonial scene shows a bishop with a mitre blessing the union between Sarah and Tobias in front of many witnesses, including the archangel Raphael on the right side. On the left side there is a demon standing over a pile of heads belonging to Sarah's seven previous husbands.⁷⁰ It is unusual that the figure performing the ceremony is a bishop, since Sarah and Tobias were Jewish. The presence of this figure probably serves to make the scene more appealing to Christian viewers, who might have been averse to non-Christian imagery. This type of symbolic anachronism is usually reserved for images representing Mary and Joseph's union. It is also unusual that this marriage scene is not presented in typological fashion alongside an image of Mary and Joseph; rather, it stands alone. Without Mary and Joseph outshining them, Sarah and Tobias seem more important in their own right.

⁷⁰ "Speculum humanae salvationis (fragments)," Bodleian Library Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, accessed 18 September 2013, [http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/view/all/what/MS.+Douce+f.+4/where/Flemish+\(%3F\)?os=0&pgs=50&sort=Shelfmark%252Csort_order](http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/view/all/what/MS.+Douce+f.+4/where/Flemish+(%3F)?os=0&pgs=50&sort=Shelfmark%252Csort_order)

The most recent Sarah and Tobias image dates from the late fifteenth century, copied and illustrated by a Flemish workshop (fig.44). Like the image from the 1455 *Speculum*, it is paired with an image of the marriage of Mary and Joseph (fig.45) in order to highlight the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The image of Sarah and Tobias' wedding is plain in comparison to Mary and Joseph's; the former has a flat, symmetrical composition with few figures, while the latter uses two-point perspective and includes several figures. As in figure 42, perhaps this visual difference is meant to imply that Mary and Joseph's union carries more religious and historical significance than that of Sarah and Tobias. I will further address the importance of Mary and Joseph's marriage in Chapter Five.

Chroniclers present at Charles the Bold's lavish wedding in 1468 describe nine tableaux presented in the streets of Bruges along the bride's processional route; the first of these tableaux was of Adam and Eve's marriage in the Garden of Eden.⁷¹ According to Michael Camille, Adam and Eve are "the most frequently depicted couple in medieval art."⁷² Their marriage was considered to have been the very first in history, thus serving as a model for all future unions. According to Genesis 2:24, when God ordained Adam and Eve's marriage he dictated that "for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and they shall be two in one flesh."⁷³ The notion that God created the institution of marriage informed medieval Christian values surrounding

⁷¹ Vaughan, *Valois Burgundy*, 178.

⁷² Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 14.

⁷³ Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, xxvi.

marriage; it led to the inclusion of marriage in the seven sacraments, and reinforced the right of ecclesiastical authorities to dictate marriage law.⁷⁴

A mid-fifteenth century south Netherlandish tapestry fragment, possibly made for King Juan II of Spain, once told the story of the seven sacraments by pairing images of each sacrament with images of biblical events (fig.46).⁷⁵ By establishing their biblical origins, this tapestry would have reinforced the religious and historical significance of the seven sacraments. The surviving fragment depicts the sacraments of marriage and extreme unction at the bottom, paired with the marriage of Adam and Eve and the anointing of King David, each directly above the corresponding sacrament. Adam and Eve are shown wearing simple white gowns while God the Father, wearing a splendid gold robe, grasps each of their right hands in a joining gesture. Eve wears a veil over her hair and lowers her eyes, both symbolic of modesty. There is nothing in the image to foreshadow the Fall; rather, this scene presents the ceremony as an ideal matrimonial union. There are no witnesses, but this is to be expected since Adam and Eve were supposed to have been the very first humans. Below, the sacrament of marriage is represented; God is replaced by a priest, who performs a blessing over the luxuriously-clad couple's joined right hands. There are also witnesses present, as required by canon law. The image of Adam and Eve's union shows the viewer the origins of marriage, while the image representing the sacrament provides the viewer with an instructive portrayal of how a fifteenth century marriage ceremony should be conducted.

⁷⁴ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 13.

⁷⁵ "Scenes from the Story of the Seven Sacraments, God the Father Uniting Adam and Eve, and David Being Anointed King at Hebron," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed 18 September 2013, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/463037?img=0>.

A *Bible moralisée* created by an anonymous miniaturist around 1464 in Bruges for Anthony of Burgundy⁷⁶ includes an image depicting the institution of marriage in the Garden of Eden (fig.47);⁷⁷ it is a small vignette inside a larger miniature that tells the story of creation day-by-day. It is noteworthy that the marriage of Adam and Eve is used to summarize the events of the sixth day; the creation of man seems a more momentous occurrence and thus worthier of depiction. Perhaps this is simply indicative of the importance of marriage in the late medieval Netherlands, or perhaps this marriage image has a didactic purpose. Unlike the previous image of Adam and Eve's union, this picture elicits a sense of uneasiness. Both Adam's perturbed gaze and God's accusatory fingers direct the viewer's attention to Eve, who appears somewhat forlorn. God grasps Eve's right arm, which comes across as a stern gesture in combination with the other negative body language. The image seems less like a celebration of the institution of marriage and more like a condemnation of Eve and all disobedient women by extension. The couple's nudity, combined with the fact that they gesture to hide their nakedness in shame, links marriage with sex and sin. Ironically, Anthony of Burgundy was born of the adulterous union between Philip the Good and his mistress Jeanne de Presle. Anthony himself was also known for his "sinful" sexual behaviour, including promiscuity and adultery.

Another miniature depicting the marriage of Adam and Eve comes from a 1483 copy of Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, illustrated by the Master of the

⁷⁶ Anthony, also known as "the bastard of Burgundy," was the son of Philip the Good and one of his mistresses, Jeanne de Presle. He was raised in the Burgundian court alongside Philip's legitimate children. As an adult he was a prominent member of the court, a well-decorated military hero, and a diplomat. He was also an enthusiastic collector of fine illuminated manuscripts.

⁷⁷ "The Hague, KB, 76 E 7," Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts, accessed 26 August, 2013, <http://manuscripts.kb.nl/show/manuscript/76+E+7>

Flemish Boethius (fig.48). The text of *Antiquities of the Jews* describes the history of the Jewish people, focusing on biblical events. This manuscript was commissioned by Louis de Gruuthuse, who had previously commissioned a copy of the same book, but decorated by the Master of the Soane Josephus, in 1480 as a gift for Edward IV.⁷⁸ The marriage scene in the 1483 copy is one of the first miniatures in the book, since the text begins with the creation of Adam and Eve. God holds both Adam and Eve's right wrists in a joining motion, conforming to the established late-medieval northern standards. At first glance the scene appears paradisiacal and pleasant, but closer inspection of the witnesses present at this wedding ceremony proves otherwise. The symmetrical composition can be divided in two halves, the left side belonging to Adam and the right belonging to Eve; whereas the creatures on the left side have positive connotations, such as the unicorn and merman knight, many of those on the right side are blatantly negative, such as the vain mermaid and the dragon and serpent, both associated with the devil. Additionally, the sky above Adam is clear, while it is dark and cloudy on Eve's side. This image certainly includes elements that foreshadow the Fall, thus subverting any positive impression the viewer may have of it. As in the previous image, Adam and Eve are naked and shameful. Although Adam and Eve's was the first marriage, it was an imperfect one; in contrast, Mary and Joseph's union was considered to be the perfect marriage, as I will discuss further in the next chapter.

In Duby's words, "[matrimonial] rituals belong to the sphere of both the secular and the sacred....Marriage is therefore situated at the meeting point of two orders, the

⁷⁸ "La mort d'Absalom," Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Miniatures Flamandes*, accessed 15 October 2013, http://expositions.bnf.fr/flamands/grand/fla_322.htm

natural and the supernatural.”⁷⁹ The images in this chapter straddle the border between fact and fancy, but they reveal a great deal about the combined function of history, mythology, and marriage in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. To their intended audiences, these artworks would have evoked feelings of patriotism, nostalgia, and spirituality; at the same time, they also create surreal scenarios by presenting contemporary Dutch notions about marriage in historical or mythological contexts. The images in this chapter emphasize the fluidity of time and space, but the marriage rites depicted in them remain static in that they all conform to the rigid *in facie ecclesiae* standards of the late medieval Netherlands.

⁷⁹ Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, 3.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BETROTHAL OR MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN

After Mary of Burgundy's untimely death at twenty-five in 1482, commemoration of the young duchess became connected with worship of the Seven Sorrows; both of these devotional practices bonded Dutch people through a sense of peace, sentimentality, and territorial unity. Mary of Burgundy's tragic end may have been responsible for creating a renewed Dutch interest in Marian devotion in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.¹ The duchess Mary was compared to the Virgin, not only because of her alleged piety and modesty, but also because she was essentially the "mother of the world-encompassing Habsburg Empire."² Interestingly, only one of the twelve images in this chapter was probably commissioned by a member of the ducal household. Whereas ducal patronage is very prominent in all the previous image categories of this thesis, there is little to suggest that the dukes of Burgundy or other political figures had a substantial interest in commissioning artwork that depicts the union of Mary and Joseph. The primary patrons for this subject matter are ecclesiastical figures or institutions.

By the end of the twelfth century, the Catholic Church solidified its definition of marriage to denote a monogamous, indissoluble, and sacramental union. The Church endeavoured to protect the institution of marriage from deviant sexual behaviour, which

¹ Van Bruaene, "The Habsburg Theatre State, Court, City and the Performance of Identity in the Early Modern Southern Low Countries," 138.

² Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 55.

was frequently associated with women. An icon of female sin, Eve was condemned, while the Virgin Mary was venerated as an unattainable ideal of womanhood.³ In Early Netherlandish art, Mary is most commonly pictured as a loving mother,⁴ although there are also some images depicting her as a bride. The images in this chapter emphasize the important role of matrimonial ritual in Mary and Joseph's union; they distinguish mutual consent as the defining feature of the holy couple's marriage.

Representations of the betrothal or marriage of the Virgin constitute nearly one-fifth of the corpus.⁵ Unsurprisingly, most of the images in this chapter depict *in facie ecclesiae* unions, and they also reflect late medieval Dutch marriage customs. In Hall's words, the "regional difference in the characteristic marriage gesture is exemplified by the way artists represented the marriage of the Virgin."⁶ Images of the Virgin were consistently popular throughout Christendom in the medieval period, so they are useful for identifying both geographical and chronological trends in iconography and representation. Despite the fact that the story of the Virgin's marriage comes from apocryphal texts, Early Netherlandish depictions of the subject emphasize the legitimacy of Mary and Joseph's marriage and present it as the paradigm of matrimony; a special kind of union that none could emulate. But there is also a sense of tension in these images caused by the visual realism that is so intrinsic to Early Netherlandish art; this realism would have made medieval Christian viewers feel intimately connected to the scene, but at the same time distanced by the untouchable divinity of the figures

³ Ibid, 4-5.

⁴ Ibid, 20.

⁵ This is probably because the Virgin Mary was such a popular subject in Early Netherlandish art that there are bound to be numerous examples of any theme depicting her.

⁶ Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 42.

represented. Similar to the artworks discussed in the last chapter, representations of the Virgin tend to be placed in contemporary settings. Moreover, the Virgin is rarely shown with a halo, making her appear somewhat more accessible to the viewer. In seven of the twelve images in this chapter the Virgin wears her characteristic blue, signifying her divinity, faithfulness, and purity. In six of the images Joseph wears red, possibly to symbolize the blood of the Passion. Most of the images in this chapter rely heavily on architectural details to convey the bridge between Old and New Testament; but these structural elements may also symbolize Mary's virginity, since she "became pregnant of Christ while remaining a virgin; the gates of her body remain closed."⁷ The fact that the Virgin was married at all played a part in elevating the institution of marriage in medieval Europe, making it worthy of being called a sacrament. Canonists and theologians also "adjusted the theory of marriage to accommodate the spiritual marriage of Mary and Joseph."⁸

In the medieval imagination, the marriage of Mary and Joseph was the most perfect marriage; but their atypical relationship also complicated the debate between theologians like Peter Lombard who felt that consent alone made a marriage valid, and those who argued that consummation was necessary to make a marriage complete.⁹ Consummation was considered a normal part of married life, but the defining features of a consummated marital union were antithetical to Mary's eternal virginity. According to Brooke,

⁷ Wendy Landewé, "The Image of the Castle: The Castle as a Motif in Medieval Marriage Ideology," in *Château et Représentations. Études de Castellologie Médiévale*, edited by Peter Ettel, Anne-Marie Flambard Héricher, and Tom McNeill (Université de Caen: Centre de Recherches Archéologiques Médiévales, 2010), 166.

⁸ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 13-14.

⁹ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 131.

It was the universal doctrine of the medieval Church that the Blessed Virgin Mary was always a virgin — that she had never consummated her marriage to Joseph; and it was widely held that the marriage of Joseph and Mary was perfect, the most perfect marriage of all — and that it could not be incomplete.¹⁰

For many theologians and canonists, virginity was far superior to marriage, though many denounced the practice of remaining a virgin while married. The Church's official opinion was that consent was more essential than coitus in marital unions, because as James A. Brundage notes "it was necessary to uphold [Mary and Joseph's] union as a true marriage, but at the same time it was also necessary to deny that intercourse took place between the parties."¹¹ With commonplace marriages, it was easier to prove public consent (in the form of marriage vows) than to prove consummation, which is another reason why many canon law places more emphasis on consent than consummation.¹² For Mary and Joseph, consent was considered to be a sufficient condition for marriage. One problem that some theologians found with this argument was that it blurred the line between betrothal and marriage.¹³ The early Christian author Tertullian for one argued that Mary could not have been married because, for him, marriage always involved sexual union.¹⁴ But it was unthinkable for the late medieval Church to officially declare that Mary and Joseph had not been married, and equally unthinkable to suggest that the holy couple had sex. Ecclesiastical authorities came to the general consensus that Mary and Joseph's marriage was a "special kind of marriage, not in all respects to be imitated by ordinary mortals."¹⁵

¹⁰ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 131.

¹¹ Brundage, "Concubinage and Marriage in Medieval Canon Law," 7.

¹² Resnick, "Marriage in Medieval Culture," 359.

¹³ Cranmer, "Marriage and Sanctity in the Lives of Late Medieval Married Saints," 21-22.

¹⁴ Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 318.

¹⁵ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, 127.

Although Mary and Joseph did not physically consummate their union, procreation still occurred within their spiritual union, thus obliquely fulfilling the necessity of consummation.¹⁶ In Elliott D. Wise's words, "[t]he Virgin's betrothal to St. Joseph lays the foundation for Christ's Incarnation."¹⁷ Lay folk were encouraged to emulate Mary and Joseph's sacramental bond and fidelity, but not their chastity. Twelfth century University of Paris professor Simon of Tournai offered a satisfying explanation of Mary and Joseph's marriage: he established that according to contemporary canon law marriage was built on mutual consent, mimicking the relationship between God and the soul and on the unification of the flesh, evoking the Incarnation; however, he argues that Mary and Joseph were not married according to twelfth century canon law, rather they were legally married according to the Law of Moses in the first century BCE, thus making their marriage legitimate by the standards of the period and location in which they lived.¹⁸

Robert Campin's *The Betrothal of the Virgin* (fig.6) features an interesting juxtaposition between time and space to set the scene of Mary and Joseph's union. Though identified by the Museo del Prado as a betrothal, the gestures more closely resemble a northern marriage rite. The painting was originally part of a triptych or polyptych which formed the altarpiece in the newly-built Bethlehem abbey of Colettine-Clarissan nuns in Ghent, also known as the Poor Clares.¹⁹ The back of the panel features grisaille figures representing Saint James the Elder and Saint Clare of Assisi, an homage

¹⁶ Cranmer, "Marriage and Sanctity in the Lives of Late Medieval Married Saints," 22.

¹⁷ Wise, "Robert Campin's 'Betrothal of the Virgin,'" 41.

¹⁸ Resnick, "Marriage in Medieval Culture," 369-370.

¹⁹ Wise, "Robert Campin's 'Betrothal of the Virgin,'" 50, 3. The other panels have been lost.

to the artwork's patrons.²⁰ During mass the nuns kept out of sight behind a grille and curtain, but as Elliott D. Wise says, "the gaze of the nuns would still have absorbed the symbolism of the Prado panel, albeit in brief, revelatory moments."²¹ In Campin's painting the Virgin promises herself to the ascetically-clad Joseph on her right. The small figure in white on her left may represent God's call to Mary, but alternatively it could signify Mary's heavenly union with God. If the white-robed figure represents Mary's spiritual bridegroom, this scene would likely have resonated with the Poor Clares, who were consecrated as *sponsae Christi*, or "brides of Christ."²² The Collettine-Clarissan nuns could look at the painting and imagine themselves in Mary's place, meditating on the implication of their own spiritual unions with Christ.²³ The nuns' connection with the painting would have been particularly meaningful during the Eucharist; by ingesting the body of Christ, the nuns consummated their mystical marriage. This painting was not only important to the nuns, but also the diverse congregation that worshipped at the Bethlehem abbey; in Wise's words, "all levels of Flemish society — from the illiterate poor to the most erudite nobility — would have frequented the church at Bethlehem convent."²⁴

Campin's painting features an unusual composition; whereas images depicting the betrothal or marriage of the Virgin tend to be relatively symmetrical and static, this work relies on a continuous sense of movement and asymmetry to convey the transition

²⁰ "The Betrothal of the Virgin," Museo Nacional del Prado, On-line gallery, accessed 6 September 2012, <http://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/online-gallery/online-gallery/obra/the-betrothal-of-the-virgin/>

²¹ Wise, "Robert Campin's "Betrothal of the Virgin,"" 50-54.

²² *Ibid*, 56.

²³ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 87.

from Old to New Testament.²⁵ The left side of the painting, set in the Romanesque Temple of Solomon, tells the story of Joseph's blossoming staff, signifying that he is to wed the Virgin Mary; the right side shows Joseph fulfilling this destiny.²⁶ A Jewish priest dressed as a bishop performs the betrothal ceremony at the door of a partially-constructed Gothic cathedral, which appears to be slowly overtaking the Jewish temple thus visually signifying the "coming triumph of the Christian *Ecclesia* over the Jewish *Synagoga*."²⁷ The carpenter Joseph is responsible for helping to spiritually construct a new era of belief and devotion, initiated by his union with the Virgin.²⁸

The panel known as *The Flowering of Joseph's Rod and the Betrothal of the Virgin* (fig.49), created by an anonymous follower of Rogier van der Weyden, echoes some of the symbolic elements in Campin's *The Betrothal of the Virgin*. It was made sometime during the fifteenth century for the Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal, Cathedral of Our Lady, in Antwerp, where it remains to this day. Like other Early Netherlandish representations of the betrothal of the Virgin, the painting's composition relies on space and movement to express the transition from Old to New Testament. The composition is split in two by architectural elements; the left side shows the inside of a cathedral, while the right side depicts the exterior porch of the building. Though the building looks like a Gothic cathedral, there are Jewish elements in its decoration, including representations of Moses and scenes from the Old Testament. On the left, like in the Campin painting, we see the story of Joseph's flowering rod. On the right side, Mary and Joseph join right

²⁵ Ibid, 126-127.

²⁶ "The Betrothal of the Virgin,"

²⁷ Wise, "Robert Campin's "Betrothal of the Virgin"," 11.

²⁸ Ibid, 8.

hands in front of a bishop and several witnesses, including figures dressed in Burgundian courtly fashions and also several nuns. The cathedral structure may have been inspired by the real appearance of Antwerp's Cathedral of Our Lady, and the townscape in the background may have been meant to represent the city of Antwerp, if not some other Dutch urban centre. These elements were intended to make the viewer feel like they are witnessing the Virgin's marriage for themselves, creating a sense of awe and lessening the distance between the realms of the earthly and the holy.

There are very few works surviving by Haarlem painter the Master of the Tiburtine Sibyl, who was trained in the workshop of Dirk Bouts; but among his extant works is a painting of the Virgin's marriage (fig.50).²⁹ The Master places Mary's nuptials at the forefront of a narrative image that tells the story of the Virgin's birth and childhood. The image depicts five episodes, all culminating in the marriage of Mary and Joseph: in the upper left, Joachim is expelled from the Temple of Sepphoris for being childless; in the distance an angel tells Joachim that he will have a daughter; in the upper right Joachim embraces Anne at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem; in the lower left Mary is born; and in the lower right the young Virgin visits a temple.³⁰ The marriage scene is clearly the most important, occupying the entire foreground. Mary and Joseph wear their characteristic blue and red as they join right hands beneath a bishop's stole. Most of the figures appear to wear contemporary late-fifteenth century Dutch dress, and the architectural details resemble the Gothic style but with some whimsical alterations to

²⁹ James E. Snyder, "The Early Haarlem School of Painting: I. Ouwater and the Master of the Tiburtine Sybil," *The Art Bulletin* 42 (March 1960): 53.

³⁰ "The Marriage of the Virgin, with the Expulsion of Saint Joachim from the Temple, the Angel Appearing to Saint Joachim, the Meeting at the Golden Gate, the Birth of the Virgin, and the Presentation of the Virgin," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 20 September 2013, <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/102110.html?mulR=6039%7C5>.

convey the sense that this event occurred in a distant time and place. The structural elements and the continuous narrative are reminiscent of Campin's *Betrothal of the Virgin*. The panel is relatively large and certainly would have been expensive. The painting would probably not have been used for private worship because of its size. Further, the highly spiritual subject matter makes ecclesiastical patronage more likely than courtly patronage, so I speculate that this piece was displayed in a church setting, probably in a chapel or side-altar since it is not monumental enough to have been a central altarpiece.

The next image comes from a book of hours titled *Hours of the Virgin: Matins*, made in the northern Netherlands in the mid-fifteenth century by an anonymous miniaturist (fig.51).³¹ The picture resembles a standard northern-style marriage ritual, with the joining of right hands and the blessing of a priest; though in this case dressed as a Jewish high priest instead of as a Christian bishop. The witnesses also wear vaguely Middle Eastern garb to emphasize the biblical setting. As in the Campin painting, Joseph carries his blossoming staff to remind the viewer of how he came to wed the Virgin. An illustrated book such as this would have probably belonged to a middle- or upper-class person who may have used it for private religious reflection, though there is no concrete evidence to prove this.

The only sculpture included in the corpus represents the marriage of the Virgin (fig.52). It measures nearly half a metre tall, carved in walnut wood and finished with paint and gilding. It was made in Brussels around 1450 by an unknown artist. The

³¹ "The Hague, KB, 135 E 40," Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts, accessed 20 September 2013, <http://manuscripts.kb.nl/show/manuscript/135+E+40>.

work's original provenance is unknown, but it was certainly once part of an altarpiece depicting scenes from the life of the Virgin and infancy of Christ, likely displayed in a church's side-altar.³² The Victoria and Albert Museum, the sculpture's current repository, have identified the subject as either the marriage or betrothal of the Virgin, but the figures' gestures are more suggestive of a marriage than a betrothal; Mary and Joseph are shown joining right hands while the high priest Zechariah, here dressed as a bishop, places a small stole over their hands as was common in northern *in facie ecclesiae* marriages. The piece also includes two witnesses identified as Mary's parents, Saint Joachim on the left and Saint Anne on the right.³³

Three of the images in this chapter are miniatures from copies of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. The earliest is from a Dutch-language version titled *Spiegel der Menscheliker Behoudenesse*, made in western Flanders around 1410, probably for an urban burgher (fig.53).³⁴ This image features noticeably awkward rendering, no colour, and less fine detail than the other *Speculum* miniatures discussed. This is certainly the type of manuscript that a middle class urbanite would own, as opposed to the more lavishly illustrated ones commissioned by ducal patrons. The marriage scene includes a bishop and the joining of right hands, but there are no witnesses in this rather sparse, symmetrical composition. There is no spatial context, but the figures' clothing resembles the fashion of fifteenth century Flanders. The other two *Speculum* images were

³² "The Marriage of the Virgin," Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed 20 September 2013 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O71623/the-marriage-of-the-virgin-relief-unknown/>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "SPIEGEL van der Menschen Behoudenisse; a metrical translation in Dutch of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. xvth cent. On vellum, with numerous small illuminations. [Imperf.] Quarto. [11,575.]" The British Library Archives and Manuscripts, accessed 20 September 2013, [http://searcharchives.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?dscnt=0&frbg=&scp.scps=scope%3A%28BL%29&tab=local&dstmp=1379663787036&srt=rank&ct=search&mode=Basic&dum=true&indx=1&vl\(freeText0\)=Add+11575&fn=search&vid=IAMS_VU2](http://searcharchives.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?dscnt=0&frbg=&scp.scps=scope%3A%28BL%29&tab=local&dstmp=1379663787036&srt=rank&ct=search&mode=Basic&dum=true&indx=1&vl(freeText0)=Add+11575&fn=search&vid=IAMS_VU2).

previously mentioned in the last chapter; one miniature represents both the marriage of Mary and Joseph and the marriage of Sarah and Tobias in a split-image (fig.42), and the other depicts the marriage of the Virgin on the same page as a miniature of the marriage of Sarah and Tobias (fig.45). I have already noted that both of these Mary and Joseph images are rendered more carefully and elaborately than the Sarah and Tobias images, suggesting that the marriage of the Virgin was considered the more important scene.

A late-fifteenth century painting of the Virgin's marriage by the Master of the View of Saint-Gudule (fig.3) replicates the pattern that has been well-established in this chapter so far; it includes the proper hand gestures, a priest and witnesses, and it takes place in front of a church. The holy couple and their witnesses wear very fashionable contemporary Flemish dress, but the Star of David decorating the church's rose window identifies it as Temple of Solomon, thus placing the image in an ambiguous spatial-temporal setting. This is also one of the rare marriage images in which the Virgin and Joseph have halos, further distancing the scene from the viewer. The panel is quite small but likely expensive, having been made by a master painter. The size and probable cost of the painting suggest that it was commissioned by a relatively wealthy person for private devotional purposes.

This thesis includes three images of the marriage or betrothal of the Virgin made in the sixteenth century, at a time when the Protestant Reformation threatened both Catholic identity and certain aspects of the institution of marriage. Despite the religious tension happening in northern Europe at the time, sixteenth-century depictions of the Virgin's union with Joseph are very similar to those produced in the fifteenth century. In

Jan Mertens van Dornicke's representation, Mary and Joseph join right hands and exchange vows in front of a fancifully-clad Jewish priest and several witnesses (fig. 54).³⁵ Once again, Mary wears blue and Joseph wears red. Like in the Campin painting, Jan Mertens van Dornicke uses architecture to suggest the transition between *Synagoga* and *Ecclesia*; the rounded Temple of Solomon in the background is overshadowed by the cathedral-like building in the foreground. Jan Mertens van Dornicke is often linked to the Antwerp Mannerists, whose work was highly religious and inspired by the intricate style of earlier Flemish painters like Jan Van Eyck and Robert Campin. This painting was almost certainly made in Antwerp, where Van Dornicke was master of the painter's guild.³⁶ The painting is neither remarkably small nor large, making it difficult to speculate on possible usage. It certainly could have been used for private devotion, in a chapel or side-altar, or perhaps it decorated the painters' guildhall in Antwerp. In any case, if this piece has a patron, they would have undoubtedly been wealthy in order to afford such a richly-painted panel.

The *Colibrant Triptych* (fig.55), also known as the *Triptych of the Marriage of the Virgin*, was completed in 1517 by Goosen van der Weyden, grandson of Rogier van der Weyden. It was painted for a chapel in the Sint-Gummaruskerk at Lier, where it is still on display.³⁷ The centre panel of the work features Mary and Joseph, in blue and red respectively, joining their right hands under a priest's stole while several fashionable "witnesses" socialize in the background, seemingly unaware of the holy union taking

³⁵ "The Marriage of the Virgin," Saint Louis Art Museum, accessed 20 September 2013, <http://www.slam.org/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=browse¤trecord=1&page=search&profile=objects&searchdesc=Marriage...&quicksearch=Marriage&newvalues=1&newstyle=single&newcurrentrecord=1>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Edited by Roy Ashok, "The Triptych of *Saint Catherine and the Philosophers* attributed to Goossen van der Weyden in Southampton City Art Gallery," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 24 (2003): 65.

place in the foreground. This image's symmetrical composition is similar to that of Jan Mertens' painting. It seems that images representing the marriage of the Virgin tend to have stable symmetrical layouts, whereas images of the Virgin's betrothal tend to have more dynamic compositions with a lot of movement; however, it is difficult to form a solid conclusion with a sample of only twelve works, and it is also often unclear whether an artwork represents the betrothal or marriage of the Virgin, despite what title a museum assigns to it. Regardless of whether a betrothal or marriage is represented, images showing Mary's union with Joseph are always formal, and always conform to the standards of *in facie ecclesiae* ceremonies.

The final image in this thesis, also chronologically the most recent, is a drawing on paper made between 1526 and 1544 by Flemish artist Dirk Jacobsz Vellert (fig.56). It represents the marriage or betrothal of the Virgin, forming part of a series of at least four roundels depicting episodes from her life.³⁸ Like most of the previous images described in this chapter, the drawing shows an *in facie ecclesiae* marriage, complete with a priest, witnesses, and the joining of right hands. This drawing and its companions in the series were probably meant for use as plates in a bound religious text. Compared to others in the series, this roundel appears unfinished; whereas the others are rendered with shading and dimension, this one is simply a line drawing. Vellert died in 1567, two decades after this drawing was made, suggesting that the project was abandoned for an unknown reason.

³⁸ "Drawing: The Marriage of the Virgin," The British Museum Collection Online, accessed 20 September 2013, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=712825&partId=1.

Although the marriage of Mary and Joseph was apocryphal, allegedly unconsummated, and certainly well-debated, its representation in Early Netherlandish art is surprisingly straightforward. All twelve of the images in this chapter present the Virgin's nuptials as an *in facie ecclesiae* union, blending Judaic and Christian elements to visually demonstrate the transition from Old to New Testament. The marriage scenes in these images are tailored to suit northern *in facie ecclesiae* standards; they subvert Judaic elements to make them more appealing for a Christian audience. These images are represented in a relatively wide variety of media considering the small number of them: there are six paintings, four miniatures, one sculpture, and one drawing. Regardless of the artistic materials used, the theme is depicted quite consistently across all twelve images. This may suggest that the theme of the marriage of the Virgin was a standard subject with certain visual conventions attached to it; but it may also reflect the sweeping tendency of Early Netherlandish art to heavily idealize marriage rituals, no matter the subject.

Conclusion

In the words of Irvn Michael Resnick, “Marriage is, characteristically, one of the avenues by which a society — especially a religious or holy community — attempts to define its boundaries.”¹ The Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands was a state in construction between 1384 and 1555, but by the mid-fifteenth century it became a defined political entity with a distinct culture, socio-economic structure, and set of values. Marriage was an important part of northern identity in the Burgundian and Habsburg periods; it played a major role in diplomacy, dynasty-building, ritual behaviour, religious practice, and the urban economy. Representations of matrimonial rituals in Early Netherlandish art reflect the diverse functions of marriage in the Burgundian and Habsburg Low Countries. Early Netherlandish images of marriage consistently represent idealized matrimonial unions; images of non-ideal marriage rituals — unions that would be considered illicit by canon law or those that do not follow northern custom — are rarely depicted. Despite the enormous political, socio-economic, religious, and cultural changes that happened in the north between 1384 and 1555, images of matrimonial rituals in Early Netherlandish art are uniform and idyllic. Even during the Reformation, when Christian identity was called into question, the sacrament of marriage remained important and its representation in art remained consistent. The formulaic nature of these marriage images likely reflects attempts by ecclesiastical and secular authorities to control the social behaviour of their numerous, angsty Dutch subjects.

¹Resnick, “Marriage in Medieval Culture,” 350.

An ideal late medieval Dutch marriage ceremony was an *in facie ecclesiae* union, involving a church setting, a priest, at least two witnesses, and ritual hand gestures. Betrothals were less standardized though it was customary for *sponsalia de futuro* to be exchanged publicly, ideally at a church door, and banns were required to be posted or read aloud to ensure there were no impediments to the union. Northern matrimonial rituals were generally more strictly regulated than in places like Italy, though “clandestine marriage” was still relatively common in the Netherlands and ecclesiastical authorities fought hard to combat it. Individuals and groups could use images to express their ideas and values about marriage; for example, ecclesiastical patrons tended to commission works featuring the sacramental and spiritual aspects of marriage, while the dukes of Burgundy were most likely to commission images of political and historical marriages that they could use to reinforce their own reputations. Regardless of patronage or provenance, images depicting *in facie ecclesiae* unions are the most common type of image in the corpus, while negative representations of marriage are rarely shown.

Early Netherlandish art has a distinct, independent, and recognizable style; it combines naturalism with elements of Gothic traditions to create a uniquely Dutch aesthetic. The Burgundian and Habsburg dukes provided the conditions for Dutch art to flourish in the late medieval period by supporting local artists and the art market. Commissioning luxury objects and fine art was a large part of ducal prestige. The Burgundians placed a lot of importance on artistic patronage and ceremonial behaviour; both were crucial aspects of courtly ritual and of Burgundization. Thus images of

marriage, particularly images of political marriages, reinforced the dukes' meticulous codes of conduct. Diplomatic marriages could upgrade ducal influence to the international scale, so it is easy to see how matrimony was important in the real-life context; images of these diplomatic marriages served to emphasize the magnitude of the actual event, and were frequently used as political propaganda. The dukes of Burgundy used marriage images to promote their authority and dynastic legitimacy. Further, images of ducal betrothals and weddings, or images commissioned by members of the ducal court, often acknowledge the Church's jurisdiction over marriage law by depicting *in facie ecclesiae* ceremonies; this was important because ecclesiastical approval legitimized the patrimony of the ruling class.

As objects, the fifty-three images discussed in this thesis reflect the diverse functions of artwork in the late medieval Netherlands. The twenty-two miniatures come from a variety of texts, but these can be separated into two main types: books intended for courtly audiences, and books intended for private religious study. Courtly manuscripts typically include images of contemporary political, historical, or mythological marriage rituals, whereas religious manuscripts tend to include images of saintly, spiritual, and scriptural marriage rituals. The seventeen paintings in the corpus would have had various uses, but small paintings with religious subject matter were commonly used for private worship, in line with the tenets of the popular northern *Devotio Moderna* movement. The nine prints discussed were all commissioned by Maximilian I for self-promotion; he preferred prints because they were inexpensive and could be mass-produced for wide exposure. There are too few examples of drawing,

textile, sculpture, and jewellery for me to observe trends in their usage. Considered as a whole, these fifty-three images reveal that members of the ducal court and ecclesiastics were by far the most frequent patrons for images depicting betrothals and weddings. I speculate that this is because art was easily accessible to these wealthy groups, and because the court and Church were both responsible for defining marriage rituals and would thus be interested in spreading their opinions on the subject.

The addition of art historical research brings a new perspective to the study of Dutch history and marriage rituals, and allows for a more complete understanding of these disciplines. As both a historian and art historian, I have the knowledge to not only recognize iconography, but also to understand the historical context behind the iconography. Realizing the function and meaning of a medieval artwork can provide historians with constructive information about the culture that produced it. Although medieval images cannot be considered accurate representations of reality, they do provide evidence about how people lived, what they believed, and what was important to them. Art production and appreciation were major aspects of late medieval Dutch culture, so a thorough comprehension of images is beneficial for anyone exploring the history of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands.

Studying visual representations of matrimonial rituals in Early Netherlandish art illustrates the importance of marriage and the function of images in the history of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. Using an interdisciplinary approach, I have sought to explore the complex relationship between marriage and images in the context of historical change in the Low Countries. I also endeavoured to contribute new ideas to

existing discourses on art history, marriage history, and late medieval Dutch history. I have found that despite variation in their patronage, maker, medium, and practical function, images of marriage in Early Netherlandish art overwhelmingly depict idealized betrothal and wedding ceremonies; but despite their similarities, these images reflect the complex political, socio-economic, religious, and cultural factors that defined late medieval Dutch notions about matrimony. From the delicate betrothal brooch made by an anonymous Flemish craftsman to Rogier van der Weyden's monumental *Altar of the Seven Sacraments*, every artwork investigated in this thesis plays both a reflective and active role in the idealization of northern matrimonial rituals. For certain, marriage and image were "marvelously blended" in the conscientious, decorous, and whimsical realm of the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands.

Appendix A

List of Burgundian and Habsburg Rulers of the Netherlands

House of Valois - Territorial Dukes of Burgundy

- Philip the Bold
 - Born 17 January 1342 in Pontoise, France
 - Died 27 April 1404 in Halle, Brabant
 - Titles:
 - Philip II, Duke of Touraine (1360-1363)
 - Philip II, Duke of Burgundy (1363-1404)
 - Philip I, Count of Charolais (1390-1404)
 - Philip IV, Count Palatine of Burgundy (1384-1404)
 - Philip IV, Count of Artois (1384-1404)
 - Philip II, Count of Flanders (1384-1404)
 - Philip I, Count of Nevers (1384)
 - Philip I, Count of Rethel (1384-1402)

- John the Fearless
 - Born 28 May 1371 in Dijon, Burgundy
 - Died 10 September 1419 in Montereau, France
 - Titles:
 - John I, Count of Nevers (1384-1404)
 - John II, Duke of Burgundy (1404-1410)
 - John I, Count Palatine of Burgundy (1405-1410)
 - John I, Count of Artois (1405-1410)
 - John I, Count of Flanders (1405-1410)
 - John I, Count of Charolais (1404-1405)

- Philip the Good
 - Born 31 July 1396 in Dijon, Burgundy
 - Died 15 June 1467 in Bruges, Flanders
 - Titles:
 - Philip II, Count of Charolais (1405-1432)
 - Philip III, Duke of Burgundy (1419-1467)
 - Philip V, Count of Artois (1419-1467)
 - Philip V, Count Palatine of Burgundy (1419-1467)
 - Philip III, Count of Flanders (1419-1467)
 - Philip IV, Margrave of Namur (1429-1467)
 - Philip II, Duke of Brabant (1430-1467)

- Philip II, Duke of Lothier (1430-1467)
- Philip II, Duke of Limburg (1430-1467)
- Philip I, Count of Hainault (1432-1467)
- Philip I, Count of Holland (1432-1467)
- Philip I, Count of Zeeland (1432-1467)
- Philip I, Duke of Luxembourg (1443-1467)

- Charles the Bold
 - Born 10 November 1433 in Dijon, Burgundy
 - Died 5 January 1477 in Nancy, Lorraine
 - Titles:
 - Charles I, Count of Charolais (1433-1477)
 - Charles I, Duke of Burgundy (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Duke of Brabant (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Duke of Limburg (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Duke of Lothier (1467-1477)
 - Charles II, Duke of Luxembourg (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Margrave of Namur (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Count Palatine of Burgundy (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Count of Artois (1467-1477)
 - Charles II, Count of Flanders (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Count of Hainault (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Count of Holland (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Count of Zeeland (1467-1477)
 - Charles I, Duke of Guelders (1473-1477)
 - Charles I, Count of Zutphen (1473-1477)

House of Valois - Titular Duchess of Burgundy

- Mary of Burgundy
 - Born 13 February 1457 in Brussels, Brabant
 - Died 27 March 1482 in Wijnendale, Flanders
 - Titles:
 - Duchess of Burgundy (1477-1482)
 - Duchess of Brabant (1477-1482)
 - Duchess of Guelders (1477-1482)
 - Duchess of Limburg (1477-1482)
 - Duchess of Lothier (1477-1482)
 - Duchess of Luxembourg (1477-1482)
 - Margravine of Namur (1477-1482)
 - Countess Palatine of Burgundy (1477-1482)
 - Countess of Artois (1477-1482)
 - Countess of Charolais (1477-1482)

- Countess of Flanders (1477-1482)
- Countess of Hainault (1477-1482)
- Countess of Holland (1477-1482)
- Countess of Zeeland (1477-1482)
- Countess of Zutphen (1477-1482)

House of Habsburg - Titular Dukes of Burgundy

- Maximilian I
 - Born 22 March 1459 in Wiener Neustadt, Austria
 - Died 12 January 1519 in Wels, Upper Austria
 - Titles:
 - Duke of Brabant (1477-1482)
 - Duke of Limburg (1477-1482)
 - Duke of Lothier (1477-1482)
 - Duke of Luxembourg (1477-1482)
 - Duke of Guelders (1477-1482)
 - Margrave of Namur (1477-1482)
 - Count of Zutphen (1477-1482)
 - Count of Artois (1477-1482)
 - Count of Flanders (1477-1482)
 - Count of Charolais (1477-1482)
 - Count Palatine of Burgundy (1477-1482)
 - Duke of Burgundy (1477-1482)
 - Regent, Count of Holland (1482-1494)
 - Regent, Duke of Brabant (1482-1494)
 - Regent, Duke of Limburg (1482-1494)
 - King of the Romans (1486-1519)
 - Archduke of Further Austria and Upper Austria (1490-1519)
 - Count of Tyrol (1490-1519)
 - Archduke of Inner Austria (1493-1519)
 - Duke of Styria, Carinthia and Carniola (1493-1519)
 - Holy Roman Emperor (1508-1519)
- Philip the Fair
 - Born 22 July 1478 in Bruges, Belgium
 - Died 25 September 1506 in Burgos, Spain
 - Titles:
 - Philip IV, Duke of Burgundy (1482-1506)
 - Philip III, Duke of Brabant (1482-1506)
 - Philip III, Duke of Limburg (1482-1506)
 - Philip III, Duke of Lothier (1482-1506)
 - Philip II, Duke of Luxembourg (1482-1506)

- Philip V, Margrave of Namur (1482-1506)
 - Philip VI, Count Palatine of Burgundy (1482-1506)
 - Philip VI, Count of Artois (1482-1506)
 - Philip III, Count of Charolais (1482-1506)
 - Philip IV, Count of Flanders (1482-1506)
 - Philip II, Count of Hainault (1482-1506)
 - Philip II, Count of Holland (1482-1506)
 - Philip II, Count of Zeeland (1482-1506)
 - Philip I, Duke of Guelders (1482-1492)
 - Philip I, Count of Zutphen (1482-1492)
 - Philip I, King of Castile (1504-1506)
-
- Charles V
 - Born 24 February 1500 in Ghent, Flanders
 - Died 21 September 1558 in Yuste, Spain
 - Titles:
 - Charles II, Duke of Burgundy (1506-1556)
 - Charles II, Duke of Brabant (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Duke of Limburg (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Duke of Lothier (1506-1555)
 - Charles III, Duke of Luxembourg (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Margrave of Namur (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Count Palatine of Burgundy (1506-1556)
 - Charles II, Count of Artois (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Count of Charolais (1506-1558)
 - Charles III, Count of Flanders (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Count of Hainault (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Count of Holland (1506-1555)
 - Charles II, Count of Zeeland (1506-1555)
 - Charles III, Duke of Guelders (1543-1555)
 - Charles II, Count of Zutphen (1543-1555)
 - Charles I, King of Castile (1516-1556)
 - Charles I, King of Aragon and Sicily (1516-1556)
 - Charles IV, King of Naples (1516-1554)
 - Charles V, King of the Romans (1519-1530)
 - Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor (1530-1558)
 - Charles I, Archduke of Austria (1519-1521)

Appendix C

Figures



fig.1. Albrecht Dürer. "The Burgundian Wedding," in *The Triumphal Procession* (ca. 1516). Woodcut Print. Made in Nuremberg. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



fig.2. Hans Memling. *Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara* (1479-1480). Oil on Wood, 67 x 72.1 cm. Made in Bruges. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Personal Photograph.

Figures



fig.3. Master of the View of Saint-Gudule. *The Marriage of the Virgin* (ca. 1470-1490). Painting on Oak, 47.2 x 33 cm. Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels.



fig.4. Master of the Saint Lucy Legend. *Virgin Surrounded by Female Saints* (ca. 1489). Painting on Oak, 108 x 171 cm. Made in Bruges. Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels. Image Courtesy of the California State University WorldImages Kiosk.

Figures



fig.5. Master of the Saint Godeliève Legend. *The Life and Miracles of Saint Godeliève*; Centre Panel (Last Quarter of the 15th Century). Oil on Wood, 125.1 x 160.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Personal Photograph.



fig.6. Robert Campin. *The Betrothal of the Virgin* (ca. 1420). Oil on Wood Panel, 77 x 88 cm. Made in Bruges. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.

Figures



fig.7. Jan Van Eyck. The Arnolfini Portrait (1434). Oil on Oak, 84.5 x 62.5 cm. The National Gallery, London. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.

Figures



fig.8. Rogier Van der Weyden. *Altar of the Seven Sacraments* (ca. 1440-1445). Oil on Oak Panel, 204 x 99 cm (Centre), 122.8 x 65.7 cm (Wings). Made in Tournai. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.10. Vrancke Van der Stockt. *Redemption Triptych* (ca. 1460). Oil on Panel, 195 x 326 cm. Made in Brussels. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.9. Rogier Van der Weyden. *Altar of the Seven Sacraments*; Right Wing. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.11. Vrancke Van der Stockt. *Redemption Triptych*; Detail. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.12. Mansel Master or the Master of Guillebert. "The Espousal of Pietro and Agnolella" (ca. 1440). Miniature. In *Decameron*, by Boccaccio, Translated by Laurent de Premierfait. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 5070, fol. 191r. Image Reproduced with Permission from the University of California Press.



fig.14. Mansel Master or the Master of Guillebert. "The Espousal of Perdicone and Lisa" (ca. 1440). Miniature. In *Decameron*, by Boccaccio, Translated by Laurent de Premierfait. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 5070, fol. 368r. Image Reproduced with Permission from the University of California Press.



fig.13. Mansel Master or the Master of Guillebert. "The Espousal of Teodoro and Violante" (ca. 1440). Miniature. In *Decameron*, by Boccaccio, Translated by Laurent de Premierfait. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 5070, fol. 204r. Image Reproduced with Permission from the University of California Press.



fig.15. Mansel Master or the Master of Guillebert. "Pope Formalizing Alessandro's Clandestine Marriage" (ca. 1440). Miniature. In *Decameron*, by Boccaccio, Translated by Laurent de Premierfait. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS. 5070, fol. 47r. Image Reproduced with Permission from the University of California Press.

Figures



fig.16. Anonymous. Flemish Betrothal Brooch (ca. 1430-40). Gold, Enamel, Pearls, and Jewels, 38mm (Height). Made in Burgundy. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Image Reproduced with Permission from the University of California Press.



fig.18. Anonymous. *A Warning Against Hasty Marriage* (1527). Painting, 55.9 x 74.9 cm. M.Q. Morris Collection, London.



fig.17. Lucas Van Leyden. *The Betrothal* (1513). Oil on Panel, 30 x 32 cm. Made in Strasbourg. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.



fig.19. Anonymous. "The Marriage of Philip the Bold and Margaret of Flanders" (ca. 1400-1425). Miniature on Parchment. In *Grandes Chroniques de France*. Made in Paris. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mss. fr. 2615, fol. 399.

Figures



fig.20. Anonymous. *The Marriage of Maximilian of Austria and Mary of Burgundy* (1479). Coloured Ink on Parchment, 31 x 22.4 cm. Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Allgemeine, 1479 III 17, fol. 1v/2r.



fig.22. Leonhard Beck. "The Marriage of the Old White King" (Printed ca. 1514-1516). Woodcut Print on Paper, 219 x 193 mm. In *Der Weisskunig*. Made in Augsburg. The British Museum, London. Image Courtesy of the British Museum.



fig.21. Leonhard Beck. "Theuerdank Crowned by Ehrenreich" (ca. 1526). Woodcut Print on Paper, 167 x 150 mm. In *Theuerdank*. Made in Augsburg. The British Museum, London. Image Courtesy of the British Museum.



fig.23. Leonhard Beck. "The Old White King and Leonora Receive Holy Communion after their Marriage" (Printed ca. 1514-1516). Woodcut Print on Paper, 220 x 197 mm. In *Der Weisskunig*. Made in Augsburg. The British Museum, London. Image Courtesy of the British Museum.

Figures



fig.24. Leonhard Beck. “The Marriage of the White King and the Daughter of the King of Feuereisen” (Printed ca. 1509-1520). Woodcut Print, 216 x 190 mm. In *Der Weisskunig*. Davidson Galleries, Seattle. Image Reproduced with Permission from Davidson Galleries.



fig.26. Albrecht Dürer. “The Betrothal of Archduke Philip with Juana of Castile” (1515). Woodcut Print. In *The Triumphal Arch* (1515). Made in Nuremberg. The British Museum, London. Image Courtesy of the British Museum



fig.25. Workshop of Albrecht Dürer. “The Marriage of Maximilian to Mary of Burgundy” (ca. 1517-1518). Woodcut Print. In *The Triumphal Arch* (ca. 1517-1518). Made in Nuremberg. The British Museum, London. Image Courtesy of the British Museum.



fig.27. Attributed to Hans Springinklee. “The Spanish Wedding” (1516). Woodcut Print. In *The Triumphal Procession*. Made in Germany. Albertina Museum, Vienna. Image Courtesy of © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



fig.28. Albrecht Dürer. "The Double Wedding at the First Congress of Vienna, 22 July 1515" (1515). Woodcut Print. In *The Triumphal Arch*. Made in Nuremberg. The British Museum, London. Image Courtesy of the British Museum.



fig.29. Florian Abel. *The Marriage of Maximilian I and Mary of Burgundy* (1561). Bas Relief on the Cenotaph Tomb of Maximilian I. Hofkirche, Innsbruck, Austria.



fig.30. Ghent Associates. "The Marriage of Henry V and Catherine of France; the Murder of Jean Sans Peur of Burgundy" (ca. 1470-1480). Miniature on Vellum, 205 x 220 mm. In *Les Chroniques d'Angleterre*, by Jean de Wavrin. Made in Ghent. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 133 A 7 III, fol. 65r. Image Courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek.



fig.31. Master of Girart de Roussillon. "The Marriage of Girart de Roussillon and Berthe" (ca. 1448). Miniature, 400 x 300 mm. In *Histoire de Girart de Roussillon*, by Jehan Wauquelin. Vienna, Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2549, fol. 9v.

Figures



fig.32. Willem Vrelant and Others. "The Wedding of Arthur and Guinevere" (1468). Miniature. In *Chroniques de Hainault* by Jehan Wauquelin. Made in Bruges. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, MS 9243, fol. 39v.



fig.33. Flemish Workshop. "The Marriage of Alexander with Roxana, the Daughter of Darius" (1448-1449). Miniature on Vellum, 43 x 21 cm. In *Facts and Conquests of Alexander the Great*, by Jehan Wauquelin. Made in Mons. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscrits, Français 9342, fol. 121v.

Figures



fig.34. Vienna Master of Mary of Burgundy, "The Betrothal of Alexander and Roxana" (ca.1468-1470). Miniature on Parchment, 435 x 335 mm. In *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, by Quintus Curtius Rufus. Made in Bruges or Ghent. Paris, BNF, Mss, fr. 22,547, fol. 195v.



fig.35. Anonymous Follower of Loyset Liédet, "The Betrothal of Alemene and Amphitryon" (ca. 1450-1475). Miniature on Paper, 75 x 165 mm. In *Recoeil des Histoires de Troyes* by Raoul Lefèvre. Made in the Southern Netherlands. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 78 D 48, fol. 69r. Image Courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek.

Figures



fig.36. Anonymous Follower of Loyset Liédet. “The Betrothal of Hercules and Deianira; Hercules journeying with Deianira; Deianira Receives the Poison from Nessus; Hercules kills Nessus” (ca. 1450-1475). Miniature on Paper, 145 x 160 mm. In *Recueil des Histoires de Troyes*, by Raoul Lefèvre. Made in the Southern Netherlands. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 78 D 48, fol. 119r. Image Courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek.

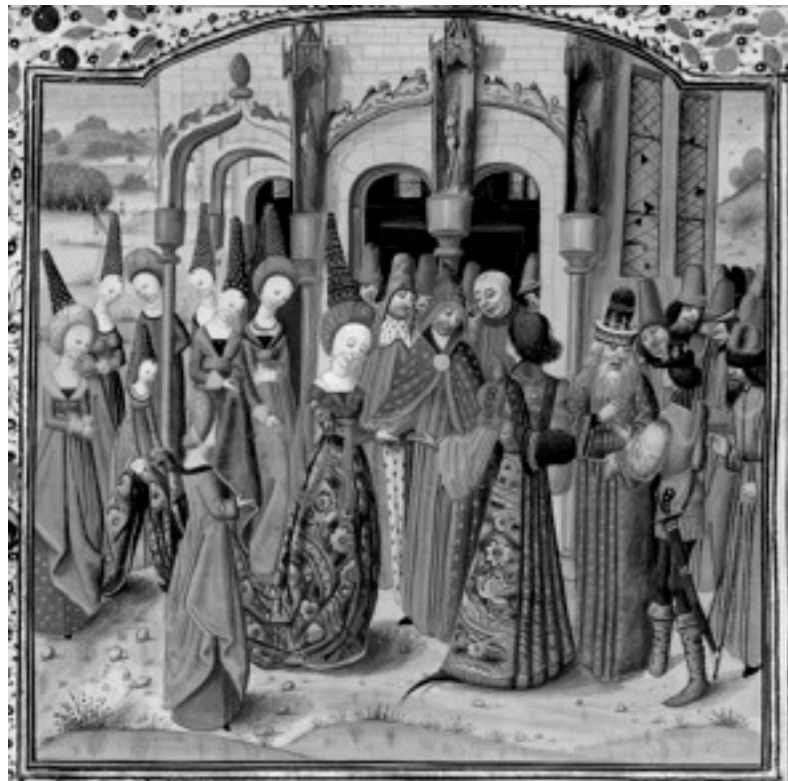


fig.37. Master of the Chronicles of England. “The Marriage of Jupiter with his Sister Juno before the Temple of Cybele” (ca. 1470-1480). Miniature on Parchment, 440 x 320 mm. In *Recueil des Histoires de Troye*, by Raoul Lefèvre. Made in Bruges. Paris, BNF, Mss, fr. 59, fol. 34.

Figures



fig.38. Willem Vrelant and Others. “The Marriage of Saint Waudru” (1468). Miniature. In *Chroniques de Hainault*, by Jehan Wauquelin. Made in Bruges. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, MS 9243, fol. 103r. Image Reproduced with Permission from the University of California Press.



fig.39. Master of the Saint Lucy Legend, *Virgin of the Rose Garden* (ca. 1475-1480). Oil on Oak Panel, 97 x 80.3 cm. Made in Bruges. Detroit Institute of Arts. Image Reproduced with Permission from the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Figures



fig.40. Hans Memling. *Triptych with Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist* (1479). Oil on Wood, 173.6 x 173.7 cm (Centre), 176 x 78.9 cm (Wings). Made in Bruges. Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges.

Figures



fig.41. Gerard David. *The Virgin and Child with Saints and Donor* (ca. 1510). Oil on Oak, 105.8 x 144.4 cm. Made in Bruges. The National Gallery, London. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.42. Workshop of Willem Vrelant. "Marriage of Mary; Marriage of Zara and Tobias" (1455). Miniature on Parchment. In *Miroir de l'humaine Salvation*, by Jehan Miélot. Made in Bruges. Glasgow, University Library, MS Hunter 60, fol. 9.



fig.43. Anonymous. "Bishop with a Mitre Blesses the Union between Sarah and Tobit" (ca.1460-1470). Miniature on Parchment. In *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce f. 4, fol. 003r.



fig.45. Flemish School. "The Marriage of the Virgin" (late 15th century). Miniature on Vellum, 39.5 x 30 cm. In *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 139/1363 fol. 7v. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.44. Flemish School. "The Marriage of Tobias and Sarah" (late 15th century). Miniature on Vellum, 39.5 x 30 cm. In *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 139/1363 fol. 7v. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.46. Anonymous. *Scenes from the Story of the Seven Sacraments, God the Father uniting Adam and Eve, and David being Anointed King at Hebron* (ca. 1435-1450). Wool Warp, Wool, and Silk Wefts, 203.2 x 309.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



fig.47. Anonymous. "The Creation: Beasts of the Field; Adam and Eve: the Institution of Marriage" (ca. 1465). Miniature, 45 x 50 mm. Made in the Southern Netherlands. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 76 E 7, fol. 1r. Image Courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek.



fig.48. Master of the Flemish Boethius. "Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden" (ca. 1483). Miniature on Parchment. In *Antiquities of the Jews*, by Flavius Josephus. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscrits Français 11, fol. 3v.



fig.49. Follower of Rogier van der Weyden. *The Flowering of Joseph's Rod and the Betrothal of the Virgin* (15th Century). Oil on Panel, 105 x 128 cm. Made in Flanders. Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp.



fig.50. Master of the Tiburtine Sibyl, *The Marriage of the Virgin* (1475-1495). Oil on Panel, 144.8 x 102.9 cm. Made in Haarlem. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Image Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



fig.51. Anonymous. "The Marriage of Mary and St. Joseph" (ca. 1455-1460). Miniature, 100 x 65 mm. In *Hours of the Virgin: Matins*. Made in the Northern Netherlands. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 135 E 40, fol. 13v. Image Courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek.



fig.53. Anonymous. "The Marriage of Mary and Joseph" (ca. 1410). Miniature. In *Spiegel der Menscheliker Behoudenesse*. Made in Western Flanders. London, The British Library, Add. 11575, fol. 16.



fig.52. Anonymous. *The Marriage or Betrothal of the Virgin* (ca. 1450). Carved Walnut, Painted and Gilded, 47 x 37.5 cm. Made in Brussels. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figures



fig.54. Jan Mertens the Younger. *The Marriage or Betrothal of the Virgin* (1515-1520). Oil on Panel, 63.5 x 68.9 cm. Made in Antwerp. Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.



fig.55. Goossen Van der Weyden. *Colibrant Triptych* (ca. 1517). Oil on Panel, 176 x 212 cm. Made in Brussels. Sint-Gummaruskerk, Lier. Image Courtesy of Bridgeman Education.

Figures



fig.56. Dirk Jacobsz Vellert. *The Marriage of the Virgin* (1526-1544). Pen and Brown Ink on Paper, 263 x 268 mm, The British Museum, London. Image Courtesy of the British Museum.

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