



Stijn Bussels, *Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power: The Triumphal Entry of Prince Philip of Spain into Antwerp* (Ludus: Medieval and Early Renaissance Theatre and Drama 11; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012, 258 pp., ISBN 978 90 420 3471 6).

Even by the high standards of the genre, the triumphal entry held by the town of Antwerp in early September 1549 in honour of Prince Philip, the son and heir of Emperor Charles V and future King Philip II, was a particularly lavish affair. The humanist and town secretary, Cornelius Grapheus, provided the programme and edited the commemorative volume. For the production of the illustrations and quite possibly for many of the actual designs, he could count on the undisputed talents of Pieter Coecke van Aelst. Underwritten by the resources of Europe's leading centre of trade, nothing was left to chance when Antwerp welcomed her future ruler for the first time.

The triumphal entry of a prince into a city was something of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Men of letters collaborated with leading artists to create an event that would visualize as well as negotiate power relationships and impress the visiting prince and his entourage. Even after the participants had returned to their daily lives and the ephemeral decorations had been taken down, those that had witnessed the proceedings, inhabitants of other parts as well as future generations could feast their eyes on commemorative publications. Held at turning points of the political life, these entries have long interested historians, historians of art and of literature alike. Many in the past did so out of an antiquarian interest. In the 1980s, the entries were often analysed from a structural perspective in terms of top down propaganda. More recent studies gravitate towards their performative nature.

The book under review – that has grown out of a doctoral dissertation at the University of Ghent – draws on the strengths of all these traditions, while adding a refreshing sense for rhetorical techniques. The chapters correspond broadly to the different approaches to the subject. After presenting the theme of study and introducing the sources, the book traces the progress of the triumphal entry through the winding streets of the city. It identifies the iconographical themes, locates their sources and clarifies their meaning. The third chapter makes a number of comparisons through time and space. It winds back to earlier princely entries, draws parallels with some that were still to come and opens vistas on practices in neighbouring countries. Finally, the

influence of humanism comes to the fore by considering the triumphal entry as a rhetorical device.

Stijn Bussels has delivered a carefully construed study of Prince Philip's entry into Antwerp. Among its merits are the convincing demonstration that the ceremony broke with established practices by opting for a visual discourse that was in its entirety beholden to Antiquity. In the same vein it offers valuable insights on the impact of humanism on the format of the event, its imagery and on the growing importance of the genre of emblems. The idea may not be new in itself. Others have already pointed out that the medieval practice of an *adventus* drawing on biblical themes shifted in the course of the sixteenth century to a ritual inspired by the triumphal entries of Antiquity. Such analyses have, however, mainly dwelt on stylistic aspects of the ephemeral architecture. Bussels' approach goes considerably further by reconstructing the underlying humanistic model of that significant shift and this certainly constitutes one of the great strengths of the book. The work presents the first truly profound analysis of the genre of the renaissance triumph in the Low Countries, both in terms of form and of content. Giving special attention to how the innovative imagery functioned, the author argues convincingly that the original associative interpretation of the representations evolved to an emblematic reading in which the rapport between text (mottoes, proverbs and classic citations) and image became inseparable.

No doubt the most original part of the book dissects the programme of the princely entry as an exercise in classical rhetoric. The author typifies the joyous entry as a form of *sermo corporis* in which the humanist organisers of the event adhered to the directives of the classical manuals of Cicero and Quintilian. They modelled the decorations and festive devices according to particular characteristics, omens, emotions and forms of 'praising the body' that recalled the arguments or *loci* of classical rhetoric. The succession of ephemeral constructions along the processional route developed its political themes according to the *dispositio*. Thus the visual eloquence of the *tableaux vivants* and triumphal arches transformed the city into a memory theatre that encouraged the internalisation of the political virtues and principles of harmonious rule. The persuasiveness of Bussels' approach and the wealth of secondary literature on which it is based, set out beacons for future studies on the topic. At the same time they highlight that this is very much the author's own turf.

Regrettably the same mastery of the available literature does not always prevail in the more historical sections. The text hardly enters into a dialogue with – to name some examples – the more recent works of Peter Arnade, Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Margit Thøfner. To a lesser degree the same can be said for Mark A. Meadow's article on Philip's entry into Antwerp. Largely ignoring performative interpretations, Bussels' historical analysis of the triumphal entry basically reiterates the propaganda theses put forward by Hugo Soly back in 1984. It therefore remains unclear whether or not the author sees the festivities merely as the confirmation and glorification of a hierarchical order or that he believes that they were a means of forming or negotiating relations of power. Thus one of

the central questions of the work goes unanswered. By confronting the 'official' account by Grapheus with less known, factual descriptions in contemporary chronicles and archival documents, the book initially suggests the existence of alternative interpretations and agendas. Only the latter report, for example, on the considerable disputes over precedence between participants and organizers; disputes that issue a warning against any static interpretation of the proceedings. Initially the book sets out to measure the differences in contribution as well as the response of the public. This goal recedes more and more to the background, however, as the chapters progress. The iconographic and theatrical narrative of the joyous entry thereby resumes its traditional position as a predominantly passive, dramaturgical instrument for political submission, rather than as a productive act. One last remark is in order here. In the course of the text the usual worthies of the genre – such as Norbert Elias, Frances Yates, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu – make their entry on the stage. None of these appearances, however, seem to result in truly novel insights, making them – to stick to the theatrical metaphor – a kind of cameo appearance, rather than that of a *dramatis personae*.

Interpreting a *Gesamtkunstwerk* is always a delicate undertaking. While the artefact or event was designed to convey multiple meanings to a diverse audience, the scholar tends to read it in terms of his or her own specialism. Thus *Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power* is at its most convincing when it deals with the middle noun of its title.

Luc Duerloo and Steven Thiry, Universiteit Antwerpen