

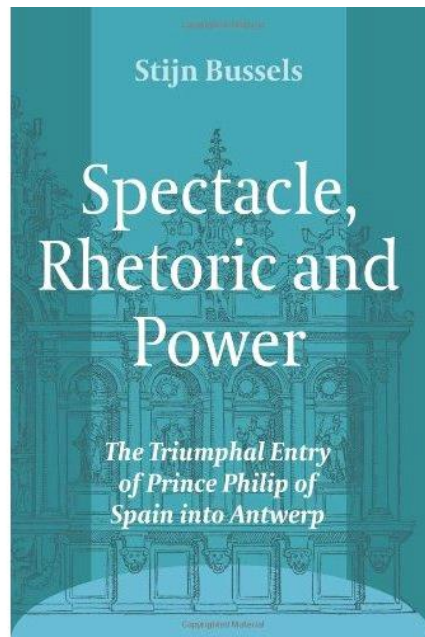
Review
Stijn Bussels:
**Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power: The Triumphal Entry of Prince
Phillip of Spain into Antwerp**

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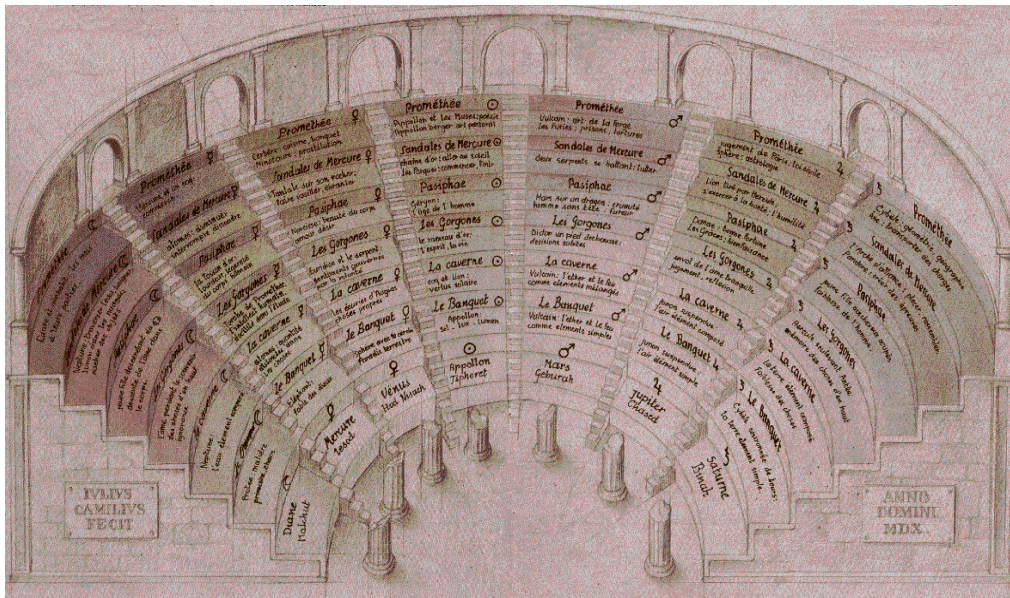
Reviewed by Brent W. deVos



On a rainy September 10th in 1549, something spectacular happened in Antwerp, something literally and very deliberately spectacular. The most prosperous trading city in the Low Countries at the time and its international trading partners staged an elaborate and astronomically costly welcoming ceremony for Prince Phillip of Spain, who was to be presented by his father Charles I of Spain, V of Austria, and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, as successor to the vast Hapsburg dominions.

The celebration began at the edge of town where the citizens of Antwerp had drawn themselves up in colourful battle array. City officials approached the Emperor and the Prince and presented the future Phillip II with the keys of the city. The Hapsburgs were then led through the city in a procession that passed by a series of

gigantic triumphal arches that had been erected for the occasion. Incorporated into these elaborately decorated structures were stages on which actors presented lavish *tableaux vivants* or static dramatic scenes. The following day, in the *Grote Markt* at the center of the city, in front of a massive temporary city hall that had been constructed for the entry, the city fathers pledged their allegiance to their future ruler, who, in turn, vowed to ratify the rights of the city's citizens. This was followed a day later by a medieval-style tournament in the *Grote Markt*, in which the Prince, of course, dominated, showing his knightly prowess. Finally, the events were topped off by an impressive and daring display of fireworks.



L'idea del teatro. Giulio Camillo Delminio. Florence, 1550. (Source: <http://www.spamula.net/blog/i05/>). (p. 202 in book under review)

Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power, the eleventh volume in Rodopi's "Ludus - Medieval and Early Renaissance Theatre and Drama" collection, is about this event. But it is not a mere description of or an aesthetic commentary on the festivities. Such studies exist, but Stijn Bussels sets out to do much more. Bussels proposes to demonstrate that this lavish celebration was not mere pomp and circumstance; that the city of Antwerp was transformed through this event into a giant theatrical venue, a concrete example of the classical notion of *theatrum mundi*, in which the actors (the city government, the nobility, the trading nations, the Hapsburgs) acted out their existing and desired social, economic and political roles. Bussels' goal is to explore "the question of how the organizers, the city fathers of Antwerp, drew on various theatrical genres in an effort to bring about renewal in the existing relations between Hapsburg rulers and themselves" (12). He also seeks to "examine what power relations were at stake and

what strategies were employed by the city fathers to make the desired power relations open for discussion” (12).

Bussels rightly begins his study with a discussion of the 16th century sources concerning the entry, principle among these being the eyewitness reports published by Cornelius Grapheus, a humanist scholar and principal organizer of the event, Juan Cristobal Calvete de Estrella, a Spanish courtier who accompanied the Hapsburgs on their tour, and Lodovico Guicciardini, an Italian trader. Also crucial to Bussels’ analysis are the illustrations by Pieter Coecke Van Aelst that were included in Grapheus’ account. Bussels also draws attention to numerous administrative documents from the Antwerp archives.

Having discussed his sources, Bussels initiates his analysis proper of Prince Phillip’s entry by discussing the relationship between the festivities and the mutual oaths of allegiance sworn by the future King and the city authorities. He notes that although the majority of the charter reflected a conservative desire to retain the century-old balance of power in the dukedom of Brabant, there was also a notable departure from tradition in that the states of Brabant now reserved the right to withhold military support from the future Hapsburg monarch if he violated the terms of allegiance. Bussels then shows how the triumphal arches and *tableaux vivants* symbolically reflected this balance between the affirmation of total submission to the Hapsburgs and the explicit right of the subjects to resist the monarch should he engage in tyrannical behaviour. Bussels also demonstrates how the festive structures on the parade route manifested the ideas concerning qualities of the ideal monarch and nature of tyranny expressed by Erasmus, the humanist scholar and tutor to Charles V, in *Institutio principis christiani* (‘Education of a Christian Prince’).

In his third chapter, Bussels compares the program of the entry into Antwerp with similar entries at which Phillip was introduced as the future monarch of Hapsburg dominions, as well as the entry of Henry II into Paris, that same year. The author observes in these comparisons that what distinguished the Antwerp entry was its notable avoidance of the issue of Charles’s war on Lutheranism, and its careful negotiation of a balance between demonstrating both submission and self-assertion. He notes as well that the organizers of Antwerp entry placed great emphasis on the need to maintain a peaceful climate conducive to trade, which would, in turn, be of great benefit the Empire.

In his fourth and final chapter, Bussels shows how the production of Prince Phillip’s entry into Antwerp reflected the prevailing ideologies of Renaissance Humanism concerning rhetoric, or the art of persuasion. Classical authors such as Cicero and Quintilian are considered along with Renaissance authors such as Petrarch, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Rudolf Agricola and Juan Luis Vives. Bussels demonstrates that the triumphal arches and *tableaux vivants* responded to a series of rhetorical questions designed to guide the most important viewer, Prince Phillip, to a set of conclusions about his future role as a monarch.



*Triumph of Death. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, c. 1562. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.
(inv. P1393) (p. 230 in book under review)*

Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power is convincingly argued. Throughout, the author demonstrates an exhaustive knowledge of primary sources, and interacts thoughtfully with the work of other scholars on the subject of Phillip's entry into Antwerp. Bussels also does an excellent job contextualizing the events of 1549, showing how they were the result of what came before and set the stage for the rebellion of the States General three decades later. Bussels includes 38 illustrations, most of them by Coecke Van Aelst, which provide useful and attractive visual references. Most interesting to this reader, however, is the fact that Bussels' entire work, not just the final chapter, is an eloquent guided tour of Renaissance thought concerning power and the art of persuasion, and how this thought translated into concrete architectural, theatrical and pictorial form for Prince Phillip's entry. This is the author's great success.

The book is a translation of an adaptation of the author's doctoral thesis, originally in Dutch. Unfortunately, this process appears to have left its mark. The English prose is often stilted and awkward, and occasionally obscure, as for example in this sentence: "Within aristocratic circles acknowledgement of the monarch was markedly less inclined to attempt to explain the economic logic of supply and demand" (172). From time to time, text fails to make clear when Bussels is paraphrasing a source or expressing his own opinion. There are also occasions when the text does not clearly distinguish between historiography and history, that is, between what was reported by a given source and what actually occurred; an account of an event is simply presented as though it were fact. These moments are few, however, and may have resulted from the process of adaptation and translation. For their part, quotes in Spanish from Calvete

de Estrella's *El felicissimo viaje* unnecessarily maintain the peculiar word divisions and antiquated orthography of the 16th century original, an unhelpful practice that has long been abandoned by Hispanists. The English translations of Calvete de Estrella's work are overly liberal and in some cases problematic.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Bussels' study is solidly, albeit somewhat stiffly, written. This work represents a significant contribution to the study of public processions as theatre, to the understanding of power dynamics in the Low Countries in the mid-16th century, and to our knowledge of the mechanisms by which the then prevailing Humanist thought took concrete form.