



**Résumé:** Cet article qui se concentre sur les points communs entre l'oeuvre de Bruegel et celle de Monet, produites avec une intervalle de 308 ans, se propose de montrer que la première traduit une attitude impressionniste tandis que la seconde, une attitude expressionniste sociale, pour montrer qu'à part la technique picturale, il n'existe guère de différence entre l'oeuvre moderne et l'oeuvre classique.

**Mots-clés :** Bruegel, Monet, Chasseurs dans la neige, Boulevard des Capucines, impressionnisme, expressionnisme sociale.

**Abstract:** This article puts forward the similarities of two masterpieces that have three hundred and eight years of time between their creation dates. It is intended to call attention to the issues that emphasize the impressionist attitude of Bruegel and the social expressionist attitude of Monet and by moving on from these similarities it is aimed to deepen on the idea stating that there is no difference between the classical and the modern except the technical details.

**Key words:** Bruegel, Monet, Hunters in the Snow, Capucine Boulevard, Impressionism, Social Expressionism

### Introduction

Comparing works of art is extremely exciting as you get involved in the background<sup>1</sup> of the artists and associate their work with the period in which they have lived. Such a study was instrumental in comparing the following two paintings.

One of the artists whose work I have chosen to review in this article is Pieter Bruegel (1525-1569), and the other is Claude Monet (1840-1926). Bruegel's painting "Hunters in the Snow" (oil on wood, 117x162 cm) depicts a winter scene of January 1565, and the work of Monet is painted in the winter of 1873 and is named "Capucine Boulevard" (oil on canvas, 79.4 x 59.1 cm). Before going into any assessment, A short information shall be given on those two paintings: Bruegel's composition is the first of a series presenting the months of the year. As a Flemish artist of 16th century, Bruegel was mainly concerned with current life as the subject matter of his realistic works. Monet's work<sup>2</sup> is also a portrait of winter, but of the city life in the nineteenth century.

## 1. Hunters in the Snow

Bruegel's "Hunters in the Snow" is composed diagonally, starting at the bottom left corner working its way up to the top right corner. Some other observers may easily view this scene, starting from the bottom right corner and developing towards the vague and faraway image of possibly a church tower to the top left corner. Therefore, we can talk about a double diagonal<sup>3</sup> disposition in Bruegel's painting. In the period of Renaissance, this unusual diagonal composition was pronounced in mannerism breaking the style of Renaissance with new and more vital concepts. We can say that mannerism, more than the style itself, was an attitude against classical concepts. It was produced in a time when Renaissance in Florence and Rome was at its peak. In Bruegel's case, the diagonal course is the depth within his work-a landscape in this context; but not just an ordinary Landscape.<sup>4</sup>

Diagonal course of the painting is, in fact, the basic line of the whole series of events that the viewer may observe, and also complementary to what can be seen at a glance. The diagonal line helps to view the painting in a corridor, starting with the hunters and dogs, and ending with the mountain peak.

Basically, it is this diagonal corridor working its way from bottom left to top right that has been the main reason of comparing this painting with that of Monet's. The impressions and thoughts we get from these two paintings are almost the same; our knowledge of the painting comes from these sensory impressions and sometimes carries our thoughts to a complete conflict. We need to underline one aspect in both paintings: the strength with which both paintings stick to the viewer's mind. The diagonal course in both paintings is of importance firstly in Bruegel's works, since it is a famous painting of much earlier times. Monet's "Capucine Boulevard" which is a later work, instantly brings "Hunters in the Snow" to mind. Both were the result of the artists' impressions with some resemblance in such elements of dark and light patterns tending towards shadows or intensity of colors in an appreciation of their full richness. Thus it may be said that, Bruegel's work is an early example of impressionism.

Both paintings have a bird's eye view of the landscape and start at a high point where the artist himself is assumed to be standing. However, when our thoughts were put into line, it appeared that this was a great responsibility; the paintings held mixed feelings each of which leading to another thought - just as each thought was leading to an impression. On a diagonal setting, different aspects could draw the attention of the viewer. It was interesting that technically Bruegel's painting had more diversified points of attention for the viewer although he was far from the 19<sup>th</sup> century impressionism. In both paintings, the diagonal<sup>5</sup> composition is the emphasis of thoughts.

The two mountain peaks on both sides in Bruegel's painting can be considered as the beginning and ending points of his work. The space, construction, however, allows another distinction of the composition; and that is what is seen within the frame and the continuation of the particular landscape outside the frame. Is this painting offering more than what is seen within the frame? This question is felt more strongly in Bruegel's painting since the composition represents a whole lifestyle of the little village, thus including much more than the concept of Monet's composition. In this diagonal phenomena, the eye can catch various movements: The hunters and the dogs, the people setting a fire, the birds perched upon the trees, the two women walking

towards the bridge, a man on the bridge, a crowd of people ice skating and birds flying over the crowd up to the sky. The happy life of the village people is presented with many activities totally referring to current events.

Although the hunters and their dogs seem to be the highest point of the painting and the main starting point of the whole composition, the actual standpoint is outside the frame where the artist himself stands, thus exerting his power and existence in the painting. At this stage, perhaps a different aspect of the painter himself is confronted once again, with an unusual ability showing itself at an early age. As to the ending point of the painting, it can never be told whether there is still another spectacular high mountain peak next to the imposing one on the top right corner. The space construction leaving such imagination to the viewer brings about a new process -a curiosity as to what's beyond the limits of the composition. Whatever observed on the canvas itself is actually virtual. However, such determinations play an important role in deciphering the mystery of the painting beyond the frame. The whole landscape seen within the painting is covered with snow and ice. It is felt as indeed in the month of January. Naked trees help both the diagonal view and the perspective.

In Bruegel's painting his light effects combined with the natural conditions of the season-perhaps too subservient to nature are witnessed. The sky and the areas covered with ice and are enslaved to the same color. Thus, the painting reaches an atmospheric space dimension, indistinct and immeasurable. Impressions of human figures as small black dots are driven away from a misleading accentuation with two hurrying figures at the bottom right corner. It can be claimed that the artist, here, once again creates a contrast. Although the hunters and the dogs are much nearer to the viewer ought to appear clearly, the viewer is forced to be more selective with the two figures at the far end, and perceives them more clearly. This is important. Bruegel's incongruity is apparent with this unexpected distortion of a logical sequence. It can easily be seen that the painting is painted by an artist from northern countries as the northern geography presents itself with the architecture e.g., the steep roofs. However, when looked very carefully, instantaneous moments of figures and actions are discovered and a desire to observe them more closely is immediately developed. There are so many fleeting moments in the painting that create a desire, or rather appetites to discover all.

Such impressions of the artist hastily conceived, increase the natural aspect of the painting. It must be mentioned that the artist is adapted to the natural factors in the composition because the figures shown as black spots are sacrificed to natural light and are impersonal. That is, the light of a winter day according to Bruegel affects the painting in this manner, thus a painting confined to a fragment of life as seen by the artist. This painting belonging to the Renaissance years, however, overflowing the Renaissance logic, has allowed us to indulge in such a comparison.

The painting is both inclined to certainty and uncertainty. It is a slice of life from a Dutch village: A group of people hunting for provision. Birds fighting against the cruel winter conditions searching for food. And another group of people trying to entertain themselves skating. It is a naturalistic painting and through this naturalism it is furnished with realistic details of Bruegel. The artist demonstrates a section of a villager lifestyle of his period. People spotted in their daily activities present certain ways of living to the viewers. This situation reinforces the social realism. There is a difference between

those who earn a life through hunting and those who skate on ice; and that difference is ought to be.

A bird's eye view of the hunters over the village, and the neighboring village that extends on the left hand side emphasizes a local distinction. It is obvious that the painting is not theatrical. It represents the cruel reality. Other than this winter picture, Bruegel painted pictures relating to the other months of the same year; therefore, it may be said that this picture is a component of a wholesome perception. When it comes to the footprints of the hunting dogs, they strongly support the impressionistic approach. This shows that some other dogs and people have passed by at an earlier time as a time planning requirement. The angle of light can be understood within a portion of time from the dogs which are shown as black spots and from the two human figures -even whose cladding is perceived- looking down the reef.

A contrast due to naturalness is also noticeable. The green color of the air reflected in water is in contrast with the whiteness of snow. A ruthless sharpness comes along with the high peaks of the mountains on the right corner. Depicting the harsh northern climate requires no more. One aspect of Bruegel is that he has experienced the life of the people he depicts, creating a realistic work. Needless to say, it makes a difference.

## 2. Capucine Boulevard

“Capucine Boulevard” by Monet depicts a carnival day in a boulevard in wintertime, also composed diagonally starting from the left bottom corner and working its way up to the top right corner. It can be said that both the boulevard and the picture are divided into two by a diagonal juxtaposition order of trees. Both sides of the boulevard are surrounded by buildings, and it can be assumed that the picture was painted from a high terrace or balcony of one of the buildings on the right side of the boulevard.

In general, the subjects and the objects are completely sacrificed to Monet's technique- that is, to colors in all their chromatic richness. In the composition, what's happening where and when is distinctly evaluated-whether it is certain or uncertain. Monet's sensitivity to weather in all its moods of his impressionism shows itself with swift flicks of the brush and a spontaneous technique that has managed to catch various reflections of daylight. The color of the sky and the ground which people stand is nearly the same. It is important to know that different colors- whether definitely or indefinitely- gradually blend with white turning into a dirty gray. Meanwhile, the alignment of purple and its close tones is dominant in the painting. As a result, we can see that all objects are reflected into other objects and dissolving into color.

Whist the horse carriages moving on the left side of the trees and the promenade of people on the right side brings to mind a carnival. We can see human figures as black spots and these spots group up in some places and are scarce in other parts. It is again a snowy winter day which is painted. But this snowy and ruthless winter day is softened by a carnival. The picture is that of those people who know how to soften the ruthless environmental conditions. The cluster of red spots which insinuate a balloon seller is the striking point in the picture and a detail that warms up the whole atmosphere. Although very indefinite, the standpoint of the human figures is conceivable. This carnival day in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century France, can be considered as a documentary of a gathering of various

social classes which involves us in the event. Briefly, there is a class consciousness in the social life which is represented with a random movement of the crowd, group of people riding carriages and those walking and those who are peddlers trying to earn their life on a carnival day. The crowd however, is concentrated on the top right of the painting which shows us the actual focus of attention-the sensuous enjoyment seen immediately in the setting.

What about the light effects in this impressionist painting? It can be said that though the whole scenery is brimming with light, one can observe that the light in the painting brightens up from the bottom right corner. Furthermore, the two figures in the very middle of the crowd shown as dots are the most striking ones catching the eye. That is where the traditional rules of color perspective are abandoned and it is at this point that the two paintings coincide.

### 3. Evaluation

Why is the will to compare these two paintings? With a time lap of 300 years between them, both paintings depict a winter day in a local concern. One of them presents a Dutch village and the other a French boulevard in France. Both describe a static section of time as seen by the artist expressing subjective sensations and both are composed diagonally from bottom left working their way up to the top right corner.

It is clear that both artists had a bird's eye view of the whole landscape within the frame and from the outside. The skaters in Bruegel's painting have great resemblance to those walking on the "Capucine Boulevard". Both groups seem to put their energy in the fun and entertainment, minds and senses open to the stimuli from outside each in their own setting. Bruegel's impressionism is emphasized mostly by human figures and also hunters and the dogs, making him 'futuristic' in his time, in a way bringing his painting closer to that of Monet's.

In both paintings the vision is separated into two by trees, whilst in Bruegel's painting one can feel where the artist stands much more clearly than of Monet's standpoint. The frozen lake gives us an idea of winter entertainment in Bruegel's painting; and in Monet's work we know that it is a specific day of the year when a carnival takes place. Bruegel's painting still seems more definite and easier to understand by his instantaneously conceived details.

### Conclusion

We tried to review two painters' views in depicting winter within their own time. We believe that our attempt for such a comparison, once again, emphasizes the fact that critics should indulge in such work- to be encouraged and also be able show courage in bringing together pieces of artwork pointing out similarities or differences.

Bruegel, especially with the outstanding difference in this picture, has made a certain point both during his period and today. Whereas Monet, an artist from the early twentieth century, who painted "Capucine Boulevard" had seen "Hunters in the Snow" - although there is no proof for this assertion- and probably was highly influenced by that piece. Presumably Monet saw this painting during his travels in Holland. Both pictures are based

on impressions of their artists -a point much more important for Bruegel to achieve at his time- whereas “Capucine Boulevard” is an example of its period, impressionism. The importance is in the mysterious way his outline follows the pattern led by Bruegel.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> (Vöhringer, 1999: 14-15) Pieter Bruegel specially known for his peasant scenes was called ‘peasant’ Bruegel. Having been Pieter Coeck van Aelst’s student in Anvers before 1550, in 1551 he joined the guilds of painters in Anvers. In 1552 he went on a tour of Italy, covering Rome, Sicily and Napoli via France. Although some say he had never seen Italy, he came into contact with an artist of miniatures named Giulio Clovio and they made some joint paintings. During his return to Holland over the Alps, he worked on some sketches and designs. On returning home, he finished these sketches and designs which were published by Hieronymous Cock. It is known that in 1563, Bruegel wed Cock’s daughter. In 1564 he settled in Brussels to continue and flourish the style he had accomplished in Italy similar to Bosch style.

Claude Monet born in Paris, was brought up by his merchant father in Le Havre. At the age of only fifteen, he was renowned as a caricaturist and due to the insistence of Eugene Bodin, started painting in the open. In 1859, he returned to Paris and attended the Swiss Academy where he met Pissarro. During 1859 and 1860, he was influenced by the exhibitions of work done by Carot, Delacroix and Courbet. After doing his military service in Algeria during 1860-1862, Monet returned to Paris and started to work at the School of Fine Arts. Meeting Sisley and Renoir at school, they together painted in The Fontainebleue Forrest. In 1865, when he had started experimenting with light and color effects, Monet exhibited two of his paintings at an exhibition. Later, in 1869 his works with Renoir on water and reflections in water has led him towards impressionism. During the French-German war, Monet escaped to England where he had the chance to examine the work of Constable and Turner but left England in 1871. He stayed for some time in Holland but eventually returned to Paris and painted his first example of impressionist work: Impression: Sunrise. Although implying that the paintings were only impressions, this epithet was to name the era. He later made a boat become his workshop and continued his works upon the river Seine. After first being refused in 1873 by his friends, they opened together the first impressionist exhibition in 1874 in the photographer Nadar’s studio in the Capucine Street organizing their own show. Although much criticised after this exhibition, Monet became famous around the 1880’s and in 1883 moved to Giverny, where he lived until his death.

<sup>2</sup> (Tucker, 1999: 14) It is interesting that this picture was made in the same period as Impression: Sunrise, after his travels to England and Holland. Both of Monet’s works have something in common, representing transformation of objects into color. We presume that on returning to Paris on his way through Holland, he could have studied the works of Pieter Bruegel. Although there is no proof to assure our presumptions, it would be difficult to think that he did not study the work of such a great artist, especially his legendary winter landscape.

<sup>3</sup> (Der Kunst Brock Haus, 1987: 58-59) This kind of diagonal work of art reminds me much of Tintoretto’s (1518-

1594) work, *The Last Supper* (oil on canvas 365 x 568cm). The scene depicted in a funnel-like construction idealized by the painter does not actually express much reality.

<sup>4</sup> (Der Kunst Brock Haus, 1987: 348) Indeed we can say that another Northern artist Dürer (1471-1528) put much reality into his works of nature-an artist to be recognized with his realistic approach with his studies on nature.

<sup>5</sup> (Tucker, 1999: 36) We see that, for example, in Renaissance work vertical and horizontal constructions are used to give paintings more depth and feeling. In the case of Bruegel, such an attitude in breaking the rules can only be part of mannerism. In a period when Renaissance was very strong in Italy -although Bruegel having been only once or perhaps never been there- seems to have used this method of diagonals as his own choice. This shows us how he has perceived what was not seen by many others in his time.



Claude Monet (1840-1926)  
*Boulevard des Capucines*  
(oil on canvas, 79.4 x 59.1 cm)



Pieter Bruegel (1525-1569)  
*Chasseurs dans la neige*  
(oil on wood, 117x162 cm)