'Willingly We Follow a Gentle Leader . . .': Joyous Entries into Antwerp

Margit Thøfner

This essay explores the ritual circumstances that surrounded the first visit of an early modern European ruler to a subject city. Customarily, this was a carefully choreographed and highly formalised encounter. In the city of Antwerp in the southern or Habsburg Netherlands—which serves the present argument as a highly apposite case study—such visits were known as 'Blijde Intreden' or 'Joyous Entries'.

As I have argued elsewhere and as recently noted by Stijn Bussels, it is still all too common for scholars to assume that rituals such as Joyous Entries were a kind of propaganda, vehicles for promoting 'absolutism' or some equally overweening form of princely authority.1 Such interpretations are not helpful. Instead, these events should be seen as first encounters between two mutually dependent centres of power: the princely court on the one side and the urban community on the other. Sometimes the court had the upper hand, sometimes the city did, but neither was ever without some sort of say in how a Joyous Entry was performed. Even so, it is important to note that Joyous Entries were not courtly spectacles per se. Usually they were funded, organised, and staged from within each host city, most often under direct municipal supervision.2 On the other hand, this supervisory role sometimes involved one or more individuals with experience of life at court, thus complicating the relationship further.3

1 See Margit Thøfner, A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt (Zwolle, 2007), 22–23 and Stijn Bussels, 'Making the Most of Theatre and Painting: The Power of Tableaux Vivants in Joyous Entries from the Southern Netherlands', Art History 33, no. 2 (2010), 236–247.

2 For an account of how all of this worked in practice, see Thøfner, A Common Art, 71–75. For an excellent analysis of the organisational challenges involved in a specific Entry, see Ann Diels, 'Van opdracht tot veiling: Kunstaanbestedingen naar aanleiding van de Blijde Intrede van aartshertog Ernest van Oostenrijk te Antwerpen in 1594', De Zeventiende Eeuw: Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief 19 (2003), 25–54. Finally, a good sense of the costs involved may be gleaned from A. Gielens, 'De Kosten van de Blijde Intrede van den Hertog van Anjou (1582)', Antwerpen's Oudheidkundige Kring 16 (1940), 93–105.

3 For example, Joannes Bochius, a city secretary who supervised several Joyous Entries into Antwerp, was a former employee of Alexander Farnese. See Anna Sarrazin, 'Joannes Bochius (1555–1609)', Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis 27 (1939), 241–267.
Whatever the case, the customary role of the ruler and his or her court was to participate, and the exact manner in which this was done was of considerable importance. As this essay will demonstrate, for the incoming prince, deft ceremonial improvisation—or perhaps ritual adaptation is a better term—was both a means of soliciting and gaining civic support.

In the early modern period, the Habsburg dynasty had a particularly complex relationship with the cities of the Netherlands. Since the early Middle Ages, most of these cities had formed part of complex, international trade routes and, as a consequence, had become populous, affluent, and quasi-independent. That was especially true for the great mercantile city of Antwerp, which, by the mid-sixteenth century, was really a kind of city republic. Accordingly, in 1567, the Florentine Ludovico Guicciardini observed that ‘Antwerp has as her lord and prince the Duke of Brabant, Margrave of the Holy Roman Empire, but with so many and so great privileges, obtained from antiquity onwards, that she governs and rules herself almost in the way of a free city and republic.’

As this comment suggests, in most of the cities of the Low Countries, sovereign authority was contingent, contractual, and constitutionally bounded. This situation, in turn, generated a very particular ritual logic when, by means of a Joyous Entry, a Habsburg prince or princess was formally recognised and sworn in as the ruler of such a city.

In general, under the Habsburgs, the Netherlands were essentially a federal and devolved state; the reigning sovereign had no over-arching status or title. Sovereignty itself was construed as local. For example, in Antwerp and Brussels the Habsburgs were the Dukes of Brabant whilst in Lille and Ghent they ruled as the Counts of Flanders, in Arras as Counts of Artois, and in Valenciennes as Counts of Valenciennes. Moreover, for each city, there was a specific set of rights and privileges, negotiated and re-negotiated in the course of the Middle Ages, sometimes by means of warfare, sometimes by political and economic horse-trading. In effect, the relationship between overlords and their urban subjects was variable, flexible, and unstable. And the Joyous Entry ritual formed a vital part of this relationship: it was the embodiment of the political contract. For at its heart lay a mutual taking of oaths, in which the incoming Habsburg prince promised to recognise and uphold local rights and privileges and, in return, the citizenry and the magistrature vowed due fealty and obedience.

4 Here quoted after Martin van Gelderen, The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555–1590 (Cambridge, 1992), 24. The original passage may be found in Lodovico Guicciardini, Descrittioni di tutti i Paesi Bassi (Antwerp, 1581), 312.

5 For a more detailed account of this, see Thøfner, A Common Art, 37–46.

6 For an account of this system, see Thøfner, A Common Art, 37–46.
In Antwerp, mutual oaths were taken twice, once outside the city walls and once inside the city, on the Town Hall Square. These two moments sandwiched a grand procession through specially decorated streets, filled with elaborate pageantry and temporary architecture, by means of which the municipality and the citizens voiced their expectations of the new reign. The Joyous Entry was therefore the chief—because most visible—means by which the relationship between princes and cities was invoked, defined, performed, maintained, negotiated, and re-negotiated.7

An important point follows from this: the role of the common citizenry should not be underestimated. There remains a scholarly tendency to see Joyous Entries as essentially elitist, full of learned imagery and rich textual allusions much too complex for ordinary folk.8 This interpretation, however, is rather problematic. First, it runs counter to the high levels of literacy documented for the cities of the Low Countries during the early modern period.9 Besides, men of the middling sort, such as weavers and shearsers, might play active roles in the so-called ‘Chambers of Rhetoric’ which, in turn, often contributed to Joyous Entry pageantry.10 Finally, as Victor Morgan has argued in a different context, even the illiterate amongst the early modern urban populace could display quite high levels of visual sophistication. A seemingly menial task such as shifting barrels or bales of cloth in the marketplace involved identifying complex heraldry. Just finding a specific address demanded a measure of iconographic skill.11 For houses were not identified by number in early modern Europe. Instead, they had names such as ‘Samson’ or ‘The Sign of Fortune’; in Antwerp the best known example is probably that of the Plantin press, operating under ‘The Sign of the Golden Compasses’. In keeping with such considerations, in what follows I have credited all participants with a certain measure of intelligence rather than assuming straightaway that Joyous Entries were really only for the social elites within the urban community.12

7 Thøfner, A Common Art, 51–57.
8 For a reiteration of this view, which is also a summary of earlier versions, see J. Ronnie Mulryne et al., Europa Triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe (Aldershot, 2004), vol. I, 95–96.
9 See Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, ‘Education and Literacy in the Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands’, Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies 16, no. 1 (1995), 6–12.
10 See, for example, Anne-Laure van Bruaene, ‘Brotherhood and Sisterhood in the Chambers of Rhetoric in the Southern Low Countries’, Sixteenth Century Journal 36, no. 1, 11–35. On the role of Chambers of Rhetoric in Joyous Entry ceremonial, see Thøfner, A Common Art, 72–75.
11 Victor Morgan, ‘The Construction of Civic Memory in early modern Norwich’, in Marius Kwint et al., eds., Material Memories (Oxford, 1999), 183–197.
12 For a further elaboration of this argument, see Thøfner, A Common Art, 93–113.
**Figure 1** Monogrammist MHVH, The Duke of Anjou before the Triumphal Arch on the Sint-Jansbrug mounted for his Joyous Entry, c. 1582, oil on panel. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
In addition, it should be noted that my frame for re-examining Joyous Entries into Antwerp is, in part, derived from recent anthropological work. For example, Daniel Seabra Lopes has argued that ritual should be understood as fluid and unstable, both serious and playful, both formal and flexible and ‘logically connected with the movement of social reproduction and transformation’. Seabra Lopes also helpfully suggests that ritual ought to be studied primarily as a set of interactions or encounters, and emphatically not as texts. He himself draws on the ternary terminology first defined by Erving Goffman to describe the participants in any given ritual: there are the actors, those who actually perform; the receptors, those who are transformed by the ritual; and finally the spectators, whose role is to witness. Crucially, these roles are interchangeable and overlapping in any given ritual performance.

That this is a helpful way of approaching Joyous Entries is evident from an anonymous painting showing a particular moment during the first visit of François, Duke of Anjou, into Antwerp, held in 1582 (fig. 1 & 2). In itself, this ritual moment represented one extreme of the relationship between Habsburg overlords and their urban subjects. After protracted conflict, the city of Antwerp

---

13 Daniel Sebra Lopes, ‘Retrospective and Prospective Forms of Ritual: Suggestions of Social Transformations in a Portuguese Gypsy Community’, Anthropological Quarterly 83, no. 4 (2010), 721–752.
14 The confusion of ritual with text is the core problem of one otherwise excellent recent article: Tamar Cholcman, ‘The Merchant Voice: International Interests and Strategies in Joyeuses Entrées. The Case of Portuguese, English, and Flemish Merchants in Antwerp (1599) and Lisbon (1619)’, Dutch Crossing 35, no. 1 (March 2011), 39–62.
15 Sebra Lopes, ‘Retrospective and Prospective Forms of Ritual’, 723–724.
had formally repudiated its ruler, then King Philip II of Spain.\(^{16}\) The image represents one moment of the inaugural ceremony held for his chosen successor, a French Valois prince. Here, the Duke of Anjou is certainly the receptor; the whole point of the ceremony is to transform him into a Duke of Brabant, overlord of Antwerp. But, as the painting suggests, he is also an actor. For he is shown having reined in his horse in response to an armed man—identifiable by his sash as the captain of an urban militia guild—kneeling before him in the street. The captain, for his part, is simultaneously a spectator and an actor. Charged with keeping order along the processional route, he has broken rank to perform his very own act of fealty. In this, he also becomes a receptor: his kneeling transforms him into a willing and loyal subject of the Duke of Anjou. The painting has several passages like this; note, for example, the man on the far left who has taken off his hat to greet the new sovereign. By such a gesture he, again, unites all three roles of spectator, actor, and receptor.

From these passages alone it may be concluded that the painting is far from neutral despite its apparently descriptive mode. It was clearly devised by and for somebody who approved of the ceremony and all that it stood for: the repudiation of King Philip and the election and inauguration of the Duke of Anjou in his stead. This is particularly so because a recent analysis of a later Joyous Entry has suggested that common gestures of courtesy, such as kneeling and hat-lifting, were considered particularly affective by all participants, whether princes or citizens.\(^{17}\) More broadly, the painting also demonstrates the usefulness of Goffman’s ternary model for the purposes of the present argument; it both indicates and helps us to attend to the inherent dynamism and flexibility of Joyous Entry rituals. This is extremely important. We clearly need to dispense with the notion of ‘absolutism’ and become much more subtle and careful when we try to understand what happened when an early modern court came to visit a subject city.

This point may be explored further on the basis of a slightly later Joyous Entry into the city of Antwerp, performed on 27 August 1585 for Alexander Farnese, governor-general of the Habsburg Netherlands on behalf of his uncle, King Philip II of Spain. The significance of this Entry is that it reinstated Philip

\(^{16}\) On this crucial ceremony, see Emily Peters, ‘Printing Ritual: The Performance of Community in Christopher Plantin’s La Joyeuse et Magnifique Entrée de Monseigneur Francoys’ d’Anjou’, Renaissance Quarterly 61, no. 2 (2008), 370–431.

\(^{17}\) See Inge van Bamis, Een nieuw begin? Een studie van de remissieverlening tijdens de Blijde Intrede van aartshertogen Albrecht en Isabella (1599) (MA dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2011), 39. (http://www.scriptiebank.be/sites/default/files/575948675a3d8fd/d9a08ea86312cf735.pdf, consulted 10 March 2014).
as the Duke of Brabant after Farnese had reduced the rebellious city of Antwerp to obedience by force, by two long and bitter years of trench warfare.\textsuperscript{18} Taken at face value, this ceremony may seem to contradict Goffman’s model because, at this moment, the Habsburgs definitely held the whip hand. But, even in such a situation the ritual was a complex encounter.

In essence, Farnese’s Joyous Entry into Antwerp was not an inaugural ceremony but rather a victory parade. However, the surrender of Antwerp had not been unconditional. One of the conditions for capitulation was that the city should retain all its rights and privileges as they had been before 1566, that is, before the first outbursts of warfare in the Low Countries.\textsuperscript{19} As follows quite logically from this, Farnese had been induced to perform a Joyous Entry to make clear to all and sundry that the rights and privileges of the city were still in force. In other words, already from the negotiations preceding it, it is clear that this Joyous Entry was a collaboration between court and city.

Not much is known about Farnese’s Entry. Yet what is known suggests that it is worth studying because it deviates in significant ways from both earlier and later ceremonies.\textsuperscript{20} First, Farnese was not welcomed at the designated point of entry by the urban militia guilds, as was customary.\textsuperscript{21} Nor did they serve as his guard of honour throughout the procession. Instead, he came with his own retinue.\textsuperscript{22} A whole urban grouping which usually performed as actors in Joyous Entries had now been reduced to spectators. This deviation from custom would have been a clear sign to the locals that the Habsburgs were in ascendance.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} For a fuller account of this Entry, see Thøfner, \textit{A Common Art}, 149–157.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Léon van der Essen, \textit{Alexandre Farnèse, Prince de Parme, Gouverneur Général des Pays-Bas (1545–1592)} (Brussels, 1933–1937), vol. 4, 112–138.
\item \textsuperscript{20} The account given here is based on the following primary sources: an account by Joannes Clingermans preserved in the Tongerlo archives and transcribed in A. Erens, ‘Literarische Archivalia voor Antwerpen’, \textit{Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis} 24 (1933), 241–281; Joannes Bochius, \textit{Panegyrici in Antverpiam sibi et regi obsidione restitutam. Per magnum illum atque invictum Alexandram Farnesium…} (Antwerp, 1587); that of Emmanuel van Meteren, transcribed in Bert Meijer, ‘The Re-emergence of a Sculptor: Eight Lifesize Bronzes by Jacques Jonghelinck’, \textit{Oud Holland} 93 (1979), 116–135; a short but important manuscript account written by one of Farnese’s courtiers: \textit{Liber relationum gestorum Ducis A. Farnesii} (MS II 1155, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels), f. 186v; and, finally, that given in Michael Aytzinger, \textit{De Leone Belgico, eiusq[ue] topographica atq[ue] historica descriptione liber} (Cologne, 1985), 690.
\item \textsuperscript{21} On the customary format of a Joyous Entry into Antwerp, see Thøfner, \textit{A Common Art}, 51–57.
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Liber Relationum}, f. 186v.
\end{itemize}
On the other hand, it is quite clear that Farnese entered into Antwerp through the customary gate—the Emperor’s Gate—and there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that this act, in itself, carried constitutional significance (fig. 3). Elsewhere in the Low Countries, most notably in Ghent in Flanders, the shared ancestors of both King Philip and Alexander Farnese had been known to demolish city gates to punish rebellious cities. Conversely, the rebuilding of such gates seems to have stood for renewed civic self-determination. In the city of Brussels, just to the south of Antwerp, the city gates were so closely associated with urban rights and privileges that the most important of these were displayed on plaques on the gates. Moreover, in the case of Antwerp, the Emperor’s Gate was closely linked to an earlier Joyous Entry, that performed in 1549 by the then Infante Philip together with his father, the Emperor Charles V. On that occasion, the Habsburgs had readily accepted and confirmed the rights and privileges of the city of Antwerp, as was customary. Now Farnese, himself a grandson of Charles V, re-enacted that poignant moment. Here then, the city as a whole becomes a receptor, transformed yet again into a loyal Habsburg polity.

Immediately after he had entered through the Emperor’s Gate, Farnese was greeted by an entirely traditional form of pageantry. A young woman personifying Antwerp came to greet him and, in the name of the city, presented him with the keys to its gates. In this context, the city remained an actor within the encounter, as embodied in one young female inhabitant. Now, usually this kind of pageantry suggested that the relationship between the incoming prince and the subject city was a kind of mystic marriage, that is to say, that it was akin to a sacrament and predicated upon mutual love rather than force. Moreover, in early modern Europe, marriage was the least unequal of unequal relations and, crucially, it was not legally valid without the freely given consent of both parties. So, by staging this highly traditional pageant, the

23 Bochius, Panegyrici, 67; Liber Relationum, f. 186v.
24 See, for example, Peter Arnade, Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent (Ithaca and London, 1996), 116, 133–135 and 206.
25 See [editors unknown], Clés et défense d’une ville: Bruxelles et son histoire / Sleuten en verdediging van een stad: Brussel en haar geschiedenis (exhibition catalogue, Brussels, 1984), 39 and 51.
26 On this Entry, see Stijn Bussels, Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power: The Triumphal Entry of Philip II of Spain into Antwerp (Amsterdam and New York, 2012).
27 Bochius, Panegyrici, 67.
28 For a more detailed discussion of this tradition, see Thøfner, A Common Art, 55–56.
29 See Margaret R. Sommerville, Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in early-modern Society (London and New York, 1995), 174–178, 181–188. See also Irven M. Resnick, "Marriage
surrendering city of Antwerp clearly insisted on its political status, on its right to remain a ritual actor within the Joyous Entry, even if the urban militia guilds had been stripped of this right. In turn, this gesture quite literally transformed Farnese into a receptor. By the gift of the key, Antwerp had turned him into her overlord.

When Farnese encountered this pageant he did something quite unexpected. Normally, an incoming prince would return the keys to ‘Antwerpia’, to the young woman embodying the city, thus acknowledging her continuously active role in the relationship. However, Farnese did not. Instead, he attached the keys to the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece which he was wearing, having recently been made a knight of the Order by his grateful master, King Philip II. This was an extremely shrewd move. On one level, Farnese bound Antwerp to himself and, in the process, turned the tables: now he again became the ritual actor and the city the receptor. But the means of binding was crucial. The Golden Fleece was an ancient chivalric order, first instituted

---

30 Aytzinger, De Leone Belgico, 690.
in 1430 by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy. It was closely associated with the Habsburg dynasty but also with general notions of virtue, courtesy, and chivalry.\textsuperscript{31} That is to say, vanquished Antwerp was to be bound to its victor by a chain of chivalry, not simply outright force. This deft intervention in the customary ritual staged a new version of the relationship between court and city. Victorious Farnese certainly had the upper hand but it was as a knightly champion, not simply as a conqueror. Even at this tense moment, when the Habsburgs had forcibly reasserted their rights over Antwerp, the Joyous Entry ceremonial remained a flexible means for articulating and negotiating the relationship between ruler and the ruled. It was never about ‘absolutism’ but rather a mutual recognition and re-negotiation of civic and courtly powers.

Fourteen years later, on 10 December 1599, the city of Antwerp staged a sumptuous Joyous Entry with a very different ritual logic.\textsuperscript{32} This time the incoming princes were the Infanta Isabel of Spain in her capacity as the new sovereign of the Habsburg Netherlands and her husband and cousin, the Archduke Albert of Austria, who was to be her co-ruler. It is worth noting that this Entry took place under substantially different political circumstances than those pertaining to Farnese’s Entry. Isabel had been nominated the heir to the Habsburg Netherlands by her father, King Philip II. She and her husband were thus to be welcomed as legitimate rulers, not as conquerors.\textsuperscript{33} To quite a considerable extent, Isabel and Albert actually depended on cities such as Antwerp to transform them into legitimate sovereigns. In many ways, at this event, the city had the upper hand.

Albert and Isabel aimed to make their Entry into Antwerp on 8 December, the Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{34} By arriving near the city on 7 December, they had hoped to put a neat piece of ritual improvisation into play. For, as is well known, the Spanish Habsburgs were particularly devoted to the Immaculate Virgin; Albert actually used her image as one

\textsuperscript{31} For a helpful overview of the history of this Order, see H. Fillitz, ed., \textit{Tresors de la Toison d’Or} (exhibition catalogue, Brussels, 1987), 22–40.
\textsuperscript{32} For a detailed account of this Entry, see Thøfner, \textit{A Common Art}, 206–222.
\textsuperscript{33} On the political complexities surrounding the transfer of power to Albert and Isabel, see Henri Lonchay, ‘Philippe II et le mariage des archiducs Albert et Isabelle’, \textit{Académie royale de Belgique, Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques et de la Classe des Beaux-Arts} 6 (1910), 364–388.
\textsuperscript{34} This is noted in the anonymous manuscript transcribed by E. Geudens, ‘Blijde Inkomst der Aartshertogen Albertus en Isabella te Antwerpen in 1599’, \textit{Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis bijzonderlijk van het aloude Hertogdom Brabant} 10 (1911), 120–140, here 121–122.
of his two battle standards.\textsuperscript{35} For him and his wife, it would have been a highly significant and auspicious day to perform a Joyous Entry. However, the municipality of Antwerp thought otherwise. They would not honour this traditional Habsburg devotion. Pleading that they were not yet ready, Antwerp’s officials succeeded in delaying the Entry for two further days.\textsuperscript{36} Again, right from the beginning, the Joyous Entry was a negotiation between court and city, and part of that negotiation focused around ritual improvisation and adaptation.

In this context, it is particularly striking that the Infanta Isabel seemed to make special efforts to please her new subjects. For example, when she finally emerged for the beginning of the Entry, she was wearing ‘violet velvet, richly adorned and embroidered’ according to an anonymous if evidently local chronicler.\textsuperscript{37} This left the chronicler wondering ‘whether it was by coincidence or that she wanted to please [those of] the city, who were wearing such a colour’ too.\textsuperscript{38} As is borne out by the official festival book, published by the city of Antwerp to commemorate the occasion, the entire magistrature, its secretaries, scribes, and other assorted civic servants were indeed all wearing violet for the occasion.\textsuperscript{39} So the anonymous chronicler was left wondering whether the Infanta’s choice of dress was mere chance or an elaborate compliment, showing that she, too, was of the city, joined to it by a shared uniform even before her formal inauguration. This, in turn, is surely another instance of deft ceremonial improvisation, of a Habsburg sovereign demonstrating her skillful understanding of existing ritual forms.

This time, the incoming princes were greeted entirely according to custom, that is, outside the city walls by the civic militia guilds. Then they had to swear their first inaugural oath. Helpfully, an illustration survives of this moment (fig. 4). Again, this image comes from the official festival book, published under the auspices of the municipality of Antwerp to commemorate the Entry. Of course, as such, it needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. The image shows not

\textsuperscript{35} This is evident from Jacques Francart and Erycius Puteanus, \textit{Pompa Funebri Optimi Potentissimiq\[ue\] Principis Alberti \ldots} (Brussels, 1623), plate XXXI. For a broader discussion of the Habsburg engagement with this particular devotion, including that of Philip III, the Infanta Isabel’s brother, see Suzanne L. Stratton, \textit{The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art} (Cambridge, 1994), especially 35–39 and 67–87.

\textsuperscript{36} The contretemps between court and city is described in some detail in Geudens, ‘Blijde Inkomst’, 121–122.

\textsuperscript{37} ‘in fiolet fluweel, ryckelyck geciert ende geborduert’. Geudens, ‘Blijde Inkomst’, 125.

\textsuperscript{38} ‘tsy by gevalle oft dat sy de stadt, dye succke coleur was gebruyckende, daermede heft willen believe’. Geudens, ‘Blijde Inkomst’, 125.

\textsuperscript{39} See Joannes Bochius, \textit{Historica narratio profectionis et inauguratio\textit{n}is Serenissimorum Belgii Principum Alberti et Isabellae, Austriae Archiducuin \ldots} (Antwerp, 1602), 175–176.
what happened but rather what the municipality thought should have happened. Even so, it is a valuable source for understanding the ritual logic of Joyous Entries. First, the image emphasises the importance of the spectators, the witnesses to the ritual action. Throngs of male citizens, most of them on horseback, surround the central pavilion. The Antwerp militia guilds are also out in force, visible in the right foreground. Together, this assemblage articulates civic power very strongly: it is as if the spectators are both more important and more powerful than the actual ritual actors. Interestingly, Isabel and Albert are figured first and foremost as reactors: they are shown within a pavilion, in the act of taking the oath, of being transformed by the ritual into legitimate rulers. By their very participation they are also actors but, crucially, they are not in control of how the ceremony is staged.

Once they had taken their oath, Isabel and Albert remounted and rode through the customary gate into the city. There they were met by the usual personification of the city. In the words of the anonymous chronicler:

...on behalf of the city, she presented to the aforementioned Lady Infanta a white lily of fine gold enamelled and otherwise adorned according to its nature, having above in the uppermost flower a heart with golden flames springing out from it, to designate the pure and burning fondness with which the municipality and the commonalty of the city wanted to serve her, and it was lovingly received by the aforesaid Lady Infanta and [she] promised to keep it with care.40

This, in effect, is a reversal of the chivalric logic performed in the exact same spot during Farnese’s Entry. Isabel is presented with a flower as a token that the citizens want to serve, as if they were all her champions, her devoted knights. She, in turn, is the receptor, transformed by the gift of the flower into the chosen lady. Moreover, as least as far as the chronicler was concerned, she was happy to play along with this construction.

It therefore comes as something of a surprise to see how this event is depicted in the official festival book (fig. 5). There, the power balance between city and princes is much less straightforward. On one level, it is quite clear that,

---

40 ‘...vander stadts wegen, de voors. vrouwe Infante heft representeert een witte lelie van fyn gout geaimmaelieert ende anderssints vercierd nae deleven, hebbende boven inde opperste bloeme een hert met vuytspringende goude vlammen, designeringe de suyvere ende vierige affective dye de heeren met al de gemeynte waeren dragende tot haeren dienste, ende is byde voors. vrouwe Infante minnelyck ontfangen ende belast dye te bewaeren mette custodie.’ Geudens, ‘Blijde Inkomst’, 130.
'Willingly we follow a gentle leader...'
before Albert and Isabel rode in, the young woman embodying Antwerp was seated high up on an elaborate throne, accompanied by several other young women personifying various civic virtues.41 Yet, in the image, ‘Antwerpia’ is now kneeling before the incoming princes, offering up her lily as if to give it to the Archduke. ‘Antwerpia’ is very much an actor but, within the visual logic of the image, that role has been vitiated, in part by the slightly smaller scale given to her, the kneeling figure in the centre of the image.

The point here is that the image shows something of the complexity of this particular ritual moment. As already noted, traditionally, it was understood as a kind of mystic marriage, a moment when both city and sovereign were both actors and receptors (in Catholic Christian theology, marriage is a sacrament that groom and bride bestow on each other).42 However, that ritual logic could not quite work when the incoming sovereign was female; it is this anomaly which the illustrator had to struggle with and somehow accommodate. Certainly, in the accompanying Latin text, it is made quite clear that the gilded lily was in fact given to the Infanta Isabel.43 But, visually, she could not be the husband of the city. Put differently, either the city could not find a way of commemorating this ritual straightforwardly or the aim was to retain some sense of ambiguity.

That cultivated ambiguity was an essential part of this particular Joyous Entry is perhaps most evident in a pageant staged about halfway through the procession (fig. 6). Superficially, this pageant may seem to stand for aspirations to absolute princely power since it represents the figure of Hercules and to him are chained seventeen young women, representing the seventeen provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands. Interestingly, this seems to be how it was understood by one decidedly anti-Habsburg writer, who quickly after the Joyous Entry published a deeply critical anonymous tract on the ceremony.44 Even so, this critique actually represents a creative, even wilful misunderstanding, another act of ceremonial improvisation. For, in the pageant in question, the act of chaining is not straightforward. The chains run from the waists of the young women to Hercules’s tongue, a tender organ not at all suitable for such

41 See Bochius, Historica Narratio, 185–188.
42 A helpful summary of the sacramentality of marriage in the Roman Catholic tradition may be found in John Witte, From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion and Law in the Western Tradition (Louisville, 1997), 16–41. See also Resnick, ‘Marriage in Medieval Culture’, 353 and 357.
43 Bochius, Historica Narratio, 185–188.
44 [Anonymous], Cort ende warachtich verhael wa[n] de incomste des Eertsharto[ch] Albertus / met de Infante van Spaengien syn Huysvrouwe... ([Antwerp?], 1600), unpaginated.
Figure 6  Anonymous after Joos de Momper, 'Typus Herculis Gallici', engraving. (Bochius, Historica Narratio, 1602.). Plantin-Moretus Library, Antwerp.
There is no need for Herculean arms, nor for an avenging sword
Willingly we follow a gentle leader, and to kindly admonitions
We open our ears. [We are] with him who will have led us [thus].
For you and your spouse's commands, Albert, voluntarily
We stand by, so that we may follow wherever you call [us] and call again.46

Again, the relationship between rulers and the ruled is staged as mutual and reciprocal: gentle governorship will make loyal subjects. Here, princes and the citizens are cast as both actors and receptors. As if in marriage, they are transformed by mutual, ritual work into a new entity, a stable polity based not on violence but on consent. Yet, because this inscription was in Latin, it could clearly be ignored by those inclined to be critical of Habsburg overlordship. The relative semantic openness of pageants such as the Gallic Hercules meant that the Joyous Entry ceremony catered for—indeed solicited—a wide range of civic views, from delight in the Infanta's violet dress to disgust with Habsburg political aspirations. Perhaps this semantic openness was a consequence of the ritual logic underpinning Joyous Entries: there had to be space for manoeuvre precisely because they were re-negotiations rather than mere affirmations of political power.

The Joyous Entry performed for Albert and Isabel was both lengthy and extremely elaborate; the city of Antwerp had set aside a budget of 50,000 guilders for the event.47 The point of this enormous outlay is perhaps most evident from the final illustration in the official festival book (fig. 7).

This image shows the moment immediately after the final, inaugural oath sworn by Albert and Isabel, when money was distributed to the masses. Only, it is actually almost impossible to see the two newly minted overlords of the city of Antwerp. Far more visual attention is given to the amassed citizens,

45 On the iconography of the Gallic Hercules, see Corrado Vivanti, ‘Henry IV: The Gallic Hercules’, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 30 (1967), 176–197.

46 Non armis opus Herculeis, non vindice ferro est, [...] Sponte ducem sequimur placidum, monitisq[ue] benignis [...] Præbemus patulas quo nos deduxerit aures. [...] Imperiis, Alberte, tuis & coniugus ultrô [...] Adsumus, ut quocumque vocas revocasq[ue] sequamur.’ Bochius, Historica Narratio, 268.

47 Diels, ‘Van opdracht tot veiling’, 27.
both male and female, and to the great town hall and the guild houses which, to this day, grace the central square in Antwerp. So, despite the fact that the new sovereigns are shown throwing money to the citizens, Albert and Isabel are rendered virtually insignificant. Here they are definitely receptors within the ritual logic of the Entry, in so far as they are the individuals whose status is substantially transformed. Ostensibly, throwing coins would also seem to make them actors. Yet, at least within the logic of the image, it is in fact the spectators who are the most important actors now. That is, in part, because this is the moment just after the assembled crowds had acknowledged Albert and Isabel as their overlords by taking the civic oath and then proclaiming ‘Long live the Archdukes’.48 What this image makes absolutely explicit is that, at this moment, it was the city which made its overlord—not the other way around.

Interestingly, Albert and Isabel had requested an important ritual innovation at this point. They explicitly wished the Bishop of Antwerp to be present,

48 ‘Vivent les Archiducs’. Geudens, ‘Blijde Inkomst’, 135. French was probably used to ensure that Albert and Isabel would understand.
‘...for greater reverence’.\textsuperscript{49} That, however, is not at all visible in the illustration in the festival book; as far as the city was concerned, the bishop’s presence was not germane to this transformative moment.\textsuperscript{50}

By now it should be evident that terms like ‘absolutism’ and ‘propaganda’ are not helpful when analysing early modern ritual encounters between princely courts and their subject cities. Such encounters may have been highly formalised, but they were also very unstable, open to all sorts of opportunistic improvisation on behalf of both princes and citizens. So we need to pay careful attention to the acts of negotiation and improvisation which took place during such encounters and also—and this is crucial—their commemoration, in terms of the visual and textual evidence that we have for them. I also hope that I have demonstrated how helpful it is to think with and through the three related and overlapping ritual categories of ‘actors’, ‘receptors’, and ‘spectators’. This analysis allows us to be quite precise about the exact political relationships that were set into play during rituals like Joyous Entries. Here, as elsewhere, we need to observe the maxim that power relationships are hardly ever one-sided.

\textsuperscript{49} ‘...tot meerdere reverentie’. Geudens, ‘Blijde Inkomst, 135.
\textsuperscript{50} It was, however, mentioned in the official festival book: Bochius, \textit{Historica Narratio}, 306.