

A Morality Story

The Story of Sorgheloos, 1541



The story of Sorgheloos, five centuries old, resonates easily with twenty-first-century viewers. It concerns a reckless young man whose pursuit of Wealth and Ease leads to his ultimate downfall. Anyone who follows newspaper headlines can compare the plight of sixteenth-century Sorgheloos with the heady success and calamitous fall of twenty-first-century telecom entrepreneurs who put all their trust in quick, easy money.

In 1550, Antwerp was the richest and busiest city in Europe, a center of international trade and finance. Five hundred ships entered or departed from its harbor daily. The currency of Antwerp was the most common form of international exchange.

As industry, banking, and monetary speculation increased at a spectacular rate, some of Antwerp's citizens allowed their new-found wealth and good fortune to go to their heads. Tension increased between the commercial revolution and the teachings of Christianity. Greed and wastefulness became major topics for moralists. Writers of verses and plays criticized irresponsible young men who failed to practice moderation, diligence, and thrift and ended up ill, destitute, and miserable.

Printmakers responded with illustrations of the popular moralizing story of Sorgheloos whose spendthrift behavior led him on a downhill slide from which he never recovered.

Activity:

Use the six *Sorgheloos* prints to discuss how artists tell stories.

Creating a Narrative Sequence

Selecting a Format

Selecting a Point of view

Describing the Setting

Describing the Characters

Describing the Action

Creating a narrative sequence

The story of *Sorgheloos* is broken up into six episodes, like six individual chapters of a book. Each section has a unique setting, and each section introduces a different moral issue.

The Format

The format of the six prints remains identical throughout.

- The six prints are meant to be viewed one right next to the other without any break between images.
- The size of the image is exactly the same for all six prints.
- Each print is framed on its right and left sides by a border that describes *half* of a column. The half column on the right side of each print abuts the half column on the left side of the following print. This creates a framework of five complete columns into which the six prints are placed.
- The inscription below each image is divided into two sections. Each section is eleven lines long. When all the prints are joined together, the inscriptions form a broad border of text across the bottom.

The Point of View

- **The Images**
The story of *Sorgheloos* is a harsh cautionary tale presented as a series of six vignettes. Each episode allows us to consider the consequences of *Sorgheloos*' reckless behavior.
- **The Inscription** tells *Sorgheloos*' story from two points of view.
On the left side of each print: *Sorgheloos* is the narrator. He proudly describes his pleasure-seeking approach to life, and then bemoans its consequences.

On the right side of each print: An anonymous moralist criticizes *Sorgheloos*' irresponsible behavior, and warns the viewer to beware of following his example.

The Setting

The story starts with a hunt through lush forested countryside and moves on to an inn, a dance floor, a tavern, and a poor kitchen. As the story progresses (and as *Sorgheloos*' fortunes decline) pillars, arches, rich ornamental carvings, ornate draperies, and tablecloths give way to cracked walls and bare tables.

Some of the details of the setting, such as the cat and the dog, the straw, the fish, and the bellows in the last print allude to symbols that were well known to the public through popular proverbs.

The Characters

The story of Sorgheloos has six named characters. Each character has a Dutch name that describes his or her main character traits. In each print, each of the main characters is identified by name, written on a small scroll placed near the figure.

Name	Meaning	
<i>Sorgheloos</i>	Carefree, careless, irresponsible	An antihero who starts out as an attractive adventurer and ends up as a spendthrift wastrel.
<i>Weelde</i>	Wealth, luxury, riches	A wealthy lady
<i>Gemack</i>	Ease	Sorgheloos' page
<i>Aermode</i>	Want	An old woman
<i>Pover</i>	Poverty	A ragtag male beggar
<i>Lichte Fortune</i>	Fickle Fortune	A well-dressed wanderer

The Action

Each print focuses on a single action, which invites commentary on a moral issue. From left to right, the actions are:

- Print 1 Sorgheloos sets out on a hunt with his companions Riches (Weelde) and Ease (Gemack).
- Print 2 The three companions spend their money on a lavish meal at an inn.
- Print 3 The three companions dance.
- Print 4 The three companions gamble and are joined by Poverty, Want, and Fickle Fortune.
- Print 5 Unable to pay his debts, Sorgheloos is driven out of the tavern. Ease and Riches abandon Sorgheloos.
- Print 6 Sorgheloos, Poverty and Want arrive at a Poor Kitchen and scrape up food for a meager meal.

NOTE: Translations by Christine Armstrong in *The Moralizing Prints of Cornelis Anthoniszoon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 19-34.)

1: *Sorgheloos Sets Out*



Setting

Lush countryside with castle and lake in the background.

Characters

- **SORGHELOOS** (Carefree) on horseback, splendidly dressed in a fine riding coat.
- **WEELDE** (Luxury, Riches) a fine Lady, elegantly dressed, rides behind Sorgheloos.
- **GEMACK** (Ease), Sorgheloos' page, on foot, carries a sword and a spear

Action

Sorgheloos and his companions set out on the Hunt with his two companions and three hounds. As he begins his journey Sorgheloos believes that Luxury and Ease will keep all trouble and care away.

Point of View

The **Hunt** was often used as a metaphor for man's pursuit of various goals in life. But the Hunt was also perceived as a frivolous and expensive habit. As Sorgheloos starts out on his life's journey, he indulges in a decadent activity that will lead to his final undoing.

Left inscription:

Sorgheloos explains why he is fond of his companions, Luxury and Ease.

*I, Careless, set out on the hunt, graceful and merry
With Luxury, my darling, whom I love
Ease my page, is also very elegant
By these two my heart and soul are supported
For I take delight in looking at both of them
Therefore, no trouble can grieve me
If I can only gain the good favor of those two
They drive burdens and sorrow away from me
I don't value earthly goods, though my parents saved them
I want to spend it courting, drinking and paying out
For the goods diminish, the days shorten too.*

Right inscription:

The Moralist advises young men to use money wisely and reject Sorgheloos' bad example.

*You young men of proud posture
Don't be like Careless, but live in moderation
And remember life here will not last long
And God will curse the careless ones
And they won't become men of status
Yes, a moment of joy will be followed by a thousand sighs
But dispense charity to the poor with your money
In that way the righteous fruit will grow out of you
Luxury and Ease won't flee from you when you do this
But your money will increase from then on
So meditate a little about your old age.*

2: *The Meal*



Setting

An elaborate Renaissance inn. Decorative pillars and ornament carved over the arched windows suggest that this is a high-quality establishment. A castle is visible through the window. The dining table is covered with a fancy fringed tablecloth, and a fringed drape hangs in the upper left corner. An arched doorway leads to a second room.

Characters

- Sorgheloos, Luxury, and Ease
- Three servers.
- A customer.

Action

Sorgheloos, Luxury, and Ease are seated at the table, enjoying a meal together. A serving boy pours wine while a maid serves a pie. In the back room, a woman blows air on the fire with a bellows while a customer waits to be served at his table.

Point of View

While sixteenth-century moralists encouraged the newly rich to enjoy “good cheer” with their friends, they warned against throwing money away on excessive entertainment. Sixteenth-century viewers would recognize several cautionary details:

- the animal’s leg bone on the platter (with cloven-hoof and flesh attached) implied immorality and folly
- the bellows, used for blowing air on the fire, was a symbol of empty-headedness.

Left inscription:

Sorgheloos urges his companions to eat and drink and not worry about the cost.

*Hey, let us now pay up and drink
For we're sitting in the house of Wastefulness
Oh Luxury, my love, do be cheerful
There is enough to drink and to eat here
And Ease, my page, leave all burdens behind you
Because in my purse there are still many pounds
And my enterprises are for the benefit of both of you
Because love for both of you has wounded my heart
My body is healthy; stuff your bellies round
At this moment do not weep or worry
If the money runs out I still have credit.*

Right inscription:

The Moralist advises that excess food and drink is wasteful and gains you nothing.

*My young friends all; listen to my tale
Be moderate in your young proud lives
Because living like that is foolishness
One may drink wine and beer
And love Luxury in moderation
But don't lodge in the house of Wastefulness
For intemperance will come to a downfall, as you see here daily
You may also desire Ease
But in gaining it you could consume it
So may you be master of your own will
Because a few worldly goods are soon shat away.*

3: *The Dance*



Setting

A dance floor in the same inn. Arched doorways, an arcade, and balcony break up the space into small areas for dancing, eating, resting, music making, and looking down from a balcony.

Characters

- Sorgheloos, Luxury, and Ease
- Three musicians
- A dancing couple
- A Fool in a Foolscape
- Four onlookers on the balcony

Action

Aroused by food and drink, Sorgheloos dances with Luxury to the tune of fiddle, pipe, and drum while Ease holds up Luxury's gown. A Fool in a foolscape peeks out at the dancers from behind a pillar. At a table beyond the dance floor the three companions enjoy another meal.

Point of View

During the sixteenth century, dancing was denounced in church sermons and popular writings as an activity devised by the Devil to stir up immodesty and lewdness. The curtained bed in the upper left corner suggests that other pleasurable activities are offered at this inn.

Left inscription:

Sorgheloos urges his companions to enjoy the pleasure of dancing, whatever the cost or consequence.

*Hey, piper, play. The meal is finished
We have to dance and prance a while now
For I'll pay you a good reward
Luxury and I, Careless, the two of us
Will lift a leg to divert the burdens
So that Ease, my page, may see some pleasure
So strike up a tune among the fools here
Even if I wouldn't keep a penny in my purse
For disaster in the purse follows success with women
So let us dance and court and find pleasure
Even if happiness turns into unhappiness.*

Right inscription:

The Moralist reminds the viewer that dancing should be performed graciously according to the rules of good behavior.

*You young flowers, whether boy or girl
Take example from the life of Careless here
And remember the word the Bible tells us
People sat to eat and they rose up proudly
To dance and play; do not follow them though
But be extremely grateful for his gift
You must make good cheer honorably
And graciously come together
And dance with good measure, not simply waste all
So remember my lesson and my good rules
It's better to take an example than to be an example.*

4: Gambling



Setting

A gambling table in a tavern or gaming house. Cards, money, and dice are spread across the table. The window in the upper left corner opens up to a view of the town where two figures are gambling on the ground.

Characters

- Sorgheloos, Luxury, and Ease
- AERMODE (Want), an old woman in a kerchief
- POVER (Poverty) a male beggar in tatters
- LICHTE FORTUNE (Fickle Fortune) a well-dressed wanderer wearing a canister on his back

Action

Sorgheloos turns to gambling with cards, money, and dice. Two beggars, *Poverty* and *Want* appear with *Fickle Fortune* as Sorgheloos' luck goes bad. In a final attempt to remain in *Luxury*'s favor, he offers her his purse. Outside the window, Sorgheloos continues his gambling.

Point of View

In the sixteenth century, men and women of all classes enjoyed gaming and gambling. FICKLE FORTUNE, with his leather cap, weapons, and slit clothing is probably a military man. He uses the canister on his back to carry the wafers or crullers (doughnuts) that he peddles from town to town. It was customary in the sixteenth century to “gamble with the crullerman” for his wares. Therefore, it seems that Fickle Fortune represents a soldier/peddler/gambler who fails to provide for a secure future.

Left inscription:

Sorgheloos bemoans his change of luck.

*Oh cruel Fortune, how hard you are on me
that all of my inheritance has disappeared
My heart suffers severely inside me
For Luxury my love wants to desert me
With Ease my page, they are proud in their
hearts
For Poverty and Want start to draw me in
Instead of good, evil is sent to me
Because I cannot make any more payments
Oh, my money, my pledges, all my beautiful
coats
I lost them all with a throw of the dice
But what do I care, if can but dance with Luxury
in my shirt.*

Right inscription:

The Moralist advises turning aside from gambling to follow the Scripture.

*You young spirits, be pleasingly moderate
In your life, that will not last long
Don't gamble so rashly for nobles or ducats
Pay attention to Careless, who is pictured here
And lead a pure life.
As Christians should do with a fervent heart
Don't take the Word in your mouths, but live
according to the Scripture
You shouldn't learn evil, soon enough it will
come
Accept marriage with joyful hearts
So your heart is not stolen by any lovers
For they know soon what is hidden there.*

5: *Sorgheloos Cast Out*



Setting

The door of the tavern. A chair has been turned upside down on the floor, and an animal's leg with cloven hoof lies on the bare table.

Characters

- Sorgheloos, Want and Poverty
- Luxury and Ease

Action

SORGHELOOS, unable to pay his debts, has been stripped of his fine coat and is dressed only in a shirt and tattered breeches. WANT threatens him with a pair of tongs, and POVERTY gnaws on his shoulder. LUXURY and EASE walk out the door, turning their backs on Sorgheloos. They abandon their former companion to a life of hardship.

Point of View

- It was common in the sixteenth century for tavern-owners to confiscate the clothes of guests who could not pay. Apparently when Sorgheloos ran out of money, he gambled his clothes away.
- WANT is threatening to hit Sorgheloos and POVERTY is gnawing on his shoulder to illustrate a popular adage: *Poverty bites us; Want strikes us.*
- The animal's leg bone with cloven hoof (suggesting immorality and folly) reappears. It appeared first on the table of the inn when the three companions spent too much money on their meal.

Left inscription:

**Sorgheloos is despondent to find that
Luxury and Ease have abandoned him.**

*Alas! What should I do
Luxury and Ease are deserting me
Desperation completely attacks me inside
For on those two I had put all my hopes
They would not hear me if I called
My generosity towards them is all forgotten
That's because my purse won't open any longer
For Poverty bites me, I'm struck by Want
Oh, if I had anything I would eat it
While recently I knew not what I would like
Now I sleep in the straw with vagrants.*

Right inscription:

**The Moralist reminds the viewer that one
must not put one's trust in faithless friends.**

*Truly, joy ends in sorrow
As Solomon explains very well
So everyone should aim somewhat
To live in moderation and prepare for his end
So that in the hereafter you will not regret your
beginning
Together with Careless, as each one can see
For women's hearts did not seem to him so
capricious
That little in them can be trusted; here
They fill a cap-full with their faithless words
But in the end heavy sorrow follows
Because the heart often doesn't accord with
words.*

6: *Sorgheloos Living in Poverty*



Setting

A “poor kitchen.” The walls are cracked and smoke comes out of a hole above the fireplace. The floor is cluttered with broken furniture, straw, a bellows, and a grill for cooking over the fire. A fish and an animal leg with cloven hoof lie on a bare table. A rich man’s house is visible through the window.

Characters

- Sorgheloos, Want, and Poverty
- A rich man and his wife.

Action

In the upper left corner *Sorgheloos*, carrying *Want* on his shoulders, is shoved by *Poverty* toward the door of a rich man who raises his hand to turn them all away. The three ragged companions end up working in a “poor kitchen.” *Sorgheloos* carries a bundle of straw to add to the fire. *Want* stirs a pot and adds an old shoe to the fire. A few small fish have been placed on the grill for the meal

Point of View

- The small scene outside of the window relates to a popular proverb: *He who cannot support luxury must haul poverty.*
- Sorgheloos carries a bundle of straw because the phrase “to carry straw” meant that one had fallen on hard times. Using straw for fuel implied poverty.
- Fish (smelts and herring) were regarded as meager and unpalatable fare.
- The bellows on the floor (dated 1541) is a symbol of empty headedness and intemperance.

Left inscription:

Sorgheloos pays the price for squandering his wealth.

Oh, how sadly I have incurred Want here
And Poverty keeps pushing me from behind
Friends and relatives start turning away from me
Thus have I brought myself to confusion with
my bad management
The dog and the cat sing in harmony
The cat sits in the cupboard, the dog licks the pot
here
And Want’s cooking can drive you to distraction
With straw, old chairs and wooden shoes we
maintain the fire
Because peat and wood are too expensive for us
Yes, with stinking smelts and a rancid, bad
herring
Must Careless now satisfy himself.

Right inscription:

The Moralist says you can live prudently and happily if you take his advice, offered with the best of intentions.

Everyone take this in graciously now
It is shown here with the spark of love
Because everyone should avoid a life like that
Everyone take this in graciously now
We’re not talking about honest good cheer
Drinking a happy glass with friends and relatives
Everyone take this in graciously now
It is shown here with the spark of love
By one named Jacob Jacobzoon Jonck

The verses in *Sorgheloos* were written by a *rederijker* named Jacob Jacobzoon Jonck. A *rederijker* was an amateur writer who produced poetry, plays, and programs for the public.

