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"WE ARE THE RECKLESS, WE ARE THE WILD YOUTH: DECADENCE AND DEBAUCHERY IN THE ART OF THE UTRECHT CARAVAGGIISTI"

An honors paper submitted to the Department of Art and Art History of the University of Mary Washington in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Katie Brooke Frazier
April 2015

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“We are the Reckless, We are the Wild Youth: Decadence and Debauchery in the Art of the Utrecht Caravaggisti.”

By: Katie Frazier
Devious prostitutes, cunning card cheats, drunken Bacchic revelers and rough and rowdy tavern musicians veiled in Caravaggesque light and shadow. The subjects of seventeenth-century Dutch genre by the Utrecht Caravaggisti simultaneously delight and caution the viewer, allowing one to live vicariously through these images. Dutch society in the seventeenth century was a devout, God-fearing culture that exercised the right to indulge and seek pleasure in the epicuristic activities reflected in these paintings. Through the moralizing art of the Utrecht Caravaggisti, one could both be amused and entertained yet also reminded of the dangers of hedonistic actions.

The three premier Utrecht Caravaggisti: Hendrick ter Bruggen (1588-1629), Gerrit van Honthorst (1592-1656) and Dirck van Baburen (1595-1624) all traveled to Italy as part of their artistic training and were influenced by the tenebristic style and subject matter of Italian Baroque artist Caravaggio. These artists were steeped in the knowledge of Netherlandish proverbs and the favored subjects of their Northern contemporaries when they journeyed to Rome and saw the work of Caravaggio, and upon their return they produced art that incorporated the style of Caravaggio infused with a Dutch moralizing intent. Their art featuring the “low life genre” is characterized by deep, sobering Caravaggesque color and tenebrism combined with the Dutch devotion to proverbs, making the art of the Caravaggisti as powerful at the art of Caravaggio yet more palatable for a broader audience.

The lack of information surrounding the lives of the Utrecht Caravaggisti raises some questions to not only who and what they encountered in their travels to Rome but also to their character. The subject matter of Caravaggio and the Utrecht Caravaggisti suggest that Caravaggio’s Dutch followers would have delved into the clandestine
taverns and brothels to find their subjects. Painter and writer Karel van Mander encouraged the Dutch artists to journey to Rome, yet there is an underlying warning note:

I would strongly urge you to travel,
had I not the fear that you would go astray,
for Rome is the city, which above all places,
could make an artist’s journey fruitful,
being the capital of the school’s of Pictura,
but also the one place where spendthrifts
and prodigal sons squander their possession;
Be reluctant to permit a youth to make the journey.1

Van Mander describes the shady and shifty environment of Caravaggio’s Rome that the Caravaggisti would have encountered. He also advised artists to follow the “moral example that art and honorable living should always go together.”2

Like the subjects depicted in Caravaggio’s paintings, the subjects of the paintings of the Utrecht Caravaggisti are the bold, brash and stark outliers of society, the prostitutes, gamblers and drinkers, those who pursue a life of excess and vice. The Utrecht Caravaggisti borrowed the subject painting from Caravaggio, however they infused their works with meaning that could be understood and enjoyed by a Netherlandish audience who were familiar with proverbs and adages. Both Caravaggio as well as the Utrecht Caravaggisti could have encountered the types of people they depict


in their paintings patronizing the clandestine taverns and taking part in illicit activities. There were no prints of Caravaggio’s work in the early seventeenth century so it was imperative for the Caravaggisti to make the journey to Rome to see the works of Caravaggio in person.

There is very little surviving information about the Italian sojourns of the Caravaggisti and their lives in general. No art from their pre-Roman workshop and apprenticeship periods exist, so the only paintings by the Caravaggisti reflect a strong Caravaggesque influence from their travels to Italy. It is safe to assume that ter Brugghen, Honthorst and Baburen would have known each other in Rome however there are no documents that prove that. Their art all contains similar elements and they would have been in the same artistic circles in the Netherlands and certainly in Rome. In the case of Honthorst and ter Brugghen, both may have also trained under the same master, Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651)\(^3\). In Rome, there would have been artistic circles dedicated to a particular artist or style of painting as well as communities that would have appealed to Dutch travelers in Italy. Several of the Caravaggisti were commissioned to do work for some of the most influential Roman patrons such as Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani and Cardinal Scipione Borghese, both patrons of Caravaggio. When ter Brugghen, the first of the Caravaggisti to travel to Rome, returns to Utrecht, he immediately produces art that has a distinct Caravaggesque influence. Paintings such as his *Woman Playing a Lute* (1626) and his *Gamblers* (1623) both contain direct references to Caravaggio and it is

obvious that ter Brugghen would have personally seen the works of Caravaggio such as his *Lute Player* (1595-6) and *Cardsharps* (1594-5) while in Rome.

Looking at Dutch art before the Utrecht Caravaggisti and after the Utrecht Caravaggisti return from Rome, there is obviously a considerable change in style and subject matter yet some artists anticipated Caravaggio. Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen (1503-59) completed his *Marriage at Cana* in 1532 (fig.1), roughly a century before the Caravaggisti. This work depicts a nocturnal dinner scene complete with faces both illuminated by candlelight and immersed in shadow. These nocturne scenes did not become popular until around the year 1600 but Vermeyen achieved the dramatic effect even before Caravaggio and the Utrecht Caravaggisti. Candlelight would later factor prominently in the work of Caravaggisti especially in the art of Gerrit van Honthorst. Vermeyen used gold leaf for the flames from the candles, creating a luminosity that would have been enhanced in the patron’s home perhaps surrounded by candlelight. The artist also used perspective in a way that makes the viewer an active part of the scene. The two figures closest to the viewer, the man and woman conversing with their faces turned looking out, make eye contact with the viewer. Intimate scenes such as these would become prominent in the art of the Caravaggisti.

Under the dim, raking light of an anonymous tavern, a game of cards is played. The naïve young man assessing his hand of cards is unaware that his fate has already been determined by the two card cheats at the table with him. The older man in dated clothes with a hole in one of his gloves holds up two fingers and peers over the shoulder of the fresh-faced young man. The younger con artist seems to perceive the signal from

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4 Visit to the Rijksmuseum. 11-23-14
the other card cheat and slyly reaches behind his back to pull out a stronger card to inevitably slight the gullible boy. The dishonest duo will most likely collect their winnings from the melancholy boy and vanish into the noisy streets of Rome to find their next unsuspecting victim. Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps* (1594-5) (fig.2) delivers a moral message to the viewer by the condemnation of gambling, a vice that was particularly rife in seventeenth-century Rome: cheat or be cheated.

In Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps*, the subjects of his painting are the rough and rowdy card cheats about to claim their next victim in a rigged card game. He appropriately portrays them as such with their tattered, dated clothing and the sword hanging from the side of the youngest card cheat, as if he could be anticipating a brawl if the card game goes awry. Caravaggio was familiar with weapons, especially swords and he repeatedly depicted them throughout his paintings. A sword similar to the one shown on the left side of the young card cheat was owned by Caravaggio, as Desmond Macrae states in his article, “There can be little doubt that the type of sword Caravaggio carried and habitually used as a model was a proto-rapier.” The location of the scene occurring in Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps* is unknown, however the presence of the sword suggests that the establishment was frequented by the kinds of people who would engage in illicit card games and carry weapons. If Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps* is set within a tavern, it is most likely one that the artist would have been familiar with as he regularly patronized these kinds of places in Rome.

Caravaggio had gained a notorious reputation in his early Roman period from being charged with vandalism to eventually being wanted for murder. While other artists

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during the seventeenth century disregarded the violent and dirty streets of Rome, Caravaggio embraced them and drew inspiration from them. His muses were not the ageless mythical of his contemporaries, but instead the individuals to whom society has turned a blind eye. Caravaggio could have perhaps been sitting across from the conspiring card cheats and their unlucky victim. Could Caravaggio have once been in the same position as the deceived young card player? Is he perhaps reflecting a self-portrait from his youth? Or is the artist the card cheat? The work is ambiguous in this respect.

The faces of the figures do not reflect the characteristics of the androgynous “type” which is present throughout Caravaggio’s art. The figures in his Cardsharps are unidealized and have distinguishable qualities such as the scruffy beard of the older card cheat and the boyish face of the young man. The formal dress of the young man and his unsuspecting expression denote his status as a member of Rome’s upper class while the two card cheats in their garish outfits with visible holes and tears and unkempt appearances assume the ranks of the lower class.

Gambling has been an integral part of Roman culture since antiquity. Altercations, sometimes violent, occurred over dishonest card games in the seedy taverns of ancient Rome which “were frequented more for the facility they offered for heavy gambling, in spite of official prohibition than for their specialties in wine and food.” The same passion for hazardous games is continued into the sixteenth century in the work of Caravaggio. His Cardsharps was first inventoried in 1627 in the estate of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, one of Caravaggio’s most important Roman patrons. Denis Mahon in his article “Fresh Light on Caravaggio’s Earliest Period: His ‘Cardsharps’

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Recovered,” believes that Cardinal del Monte was first enticed by the painting’s “story
telling” aspect when he saw Caravaggio’s work exhibited in Rome:

But when Cardinal del Monte saw, and admired, and acquired the Cardsharps
(accepting as I do the tradition recorded by Bellori) I would suggest that he was
likely to have asked his new protégé if he could lay his hands on any other novel
‘story telling’ paintings of this kind; and the dealer who had taken the Gypsy
Fortune teller off Caravaggio’s hands was induced to cede his purchase for a
certain profit.  

Cardinal del Monte owned several other works from Caravaggio’s early Roman period
including his Lute Player (1595-6), The Concert of Youths/The Musicians (1594-5) and
The Gypsy Fortuneteller (1594-5). It may appear to be a curious choice of subject matter
for a Roman Cardinal to commission and eventually display in his palace. These works
feature the subjects of young boys dressed as teary-eyed musicians, a forlorn lute player
and several scenes that contain moralizing messages about the devious nature of street
people (his Gypsy Fortuneteller and his Cardsharps.) It has been confirmed that del
Monte’s commissions of Caravaggio’s The Concert of Youths and The Lute Player were
displayed in del Monte’s camerino, or the small chamber room, which was “nobly
decorated with paintings made for the sole purpose of providing the setting for small,
intimate musical performances.” After the inventory of Cardinal del Monte’s estate in
1627, Caravaggio’s Cardsharps passed to Cardinal Antonio Barberini, where it remained
in his family for several generations until the year 1812, where it was then acquired by
the Colonna di Sciarra branch of the Barberini family.

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7 Denis Mahon “Fresh Light on Caravaggio’s Earliest Period: His ‘Cardsharps’ Recovered,” The
8 Franca Trinchieri Camiz, “Music and Painting in Cardinal del Monte’s Household,” The Metropolitan
Hendrick ter Brugghen traveled to Italy around the year 1607 after his apprenticeship with Dutch Mannerist artist Abraham Bloemaert. With the lack of records surrounding his travels, it cannot be confirmed that he would have seen Caravaggio’s Cardsharps, however, with the numerous similarities between Caravaggio’s Cardsharps from 1594-95 and his Gamblers from 1623, the resemblance is irrefutable. Ter Brugghen was in Italy until the summer of 1614, four years after Caravaggio’s death. It is unlikely that ter Brugghen could have met Caravaggio, as the Italian artist was evading imprisonment and had fled Rome before his death in 1610. With an incomplete timeline and limited records, one’s only choice is to analyze the shared motifs and style between the paintings.

Ter Brugghen’s Gamblers from 1623 (fig.3) embodies a Caravaggesque subject and style though presents a departure from Caravaggio’s Cardsharps. Scenes of gambling were favored by the Caravaggisti, as works “depicting figures playing cards or backgammon are thought primarily to warn viewers about the evils of gambling.” One of the first contrasts between the work of Caravaggio and the work of ter Brugghen is how the artists represent the identities of the figures. Ter Brugghen incorporates Caravaggesque shading and chiaroscuro, however the faces of the three men in the painting are intentionally obscured. Caravaggio in his Cardsharps deliberately exposes the faces of the figures and does not make an attempt to hide their identities. Ter Brugghen’s purposeful concealing of the faces of the men in his painting is a Dutch element that he brings to his art.

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During the late 1620’s Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn was producing self-portraits that feature his face partially covered in shadow. His *Self-Portrait as a Young Man* dated from 1628-29 features this play of light and shadow on the face. Rembrandt’s early self-portraits prove enigmatic to scholars. H. Perry Chapman in her 1990 article describes self-portraiture as “a necessary process of identity formation.”

In genre paintings such as ter Brugghen’s *Gamblers*, the artist can project any emotion onto the figures and thus create any identity. By obscuring the faces in his painting, ter Brugghen could also be applying the Baroque element of allowing the viewer to become involved in the contemplation of the work. Ter Brugghen’s *Melancholia* dated from 1627-28 and his *Heraclitus* from 1628 were produced at the end of his life that feature this element of obscured facial features. Ter Brugghen’s *Heraclitus* features the “crying philosopher” as he was known, mourning the folly of mankind. Heraclitus rests his right hand against his face which is turned away from the viewer. Scholar Marten Jan Bok analyzes Rembrandt’s early self-portraits alongside the work of ter Brugghen and comes to the conclusion that ter Brugghen may have had a melancholic temperament, “there is also sufficient evidence to support the theory that ter Brugghen consciously applied the notions of the four temperaments, including melancholia, in some of his own works.”

The three hulking figures in ter Brugghen’s *Gamblers* form a pyramidal composition that touches three sides of the picture plane. The gamblers are crowded around a wooden table that extends directly into the viewer’s space, as if the viewer is the

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fourth component in the game. The table can also be found in Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps*. Engravings such as Crispin van de Passe’s *A Backgammon Party With Strolling Players* from 1600 (fig.4) would have been a possible reference for ter Bruggghen. This engraving depicts the inside of an establishment where such games would be played, a brothel perhaps? There are women present at the backgammon table but they appear to be there to service the men rather than take part in their games. In ter Bruggghen’s *Gamblers*, there is a sense of light, though not the dark, cellar-like light of the ambiguous space in Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps*, but instead a pale blue background for the figures. There is no indication of where ter Bruggghen’s gambling scene is taking place. The background behind the figures suggests that the figures could be outside, however besides the milky blue coloring, there is nothing else to establish that. Caravaggio’s use of diagonal light makes his picture seem as though someone has opened a hidden door to the right of the painting and has discovered the clandestine gathering. The composition is striking, unorthodox and bold. Like Caravaggio’s work, ter Bruggghen’s *Gamblers* features a three-part composition, though there is considerably less distance between the viewer and the gamblers. Ter Bruggghen places his viewer at the end of the table, on the verge to bear witness to the brawl about to take place.

As the die is rolled, two players raise their helmeted heads to comment on the move, though there is a confusing element to the picture. A third man is between the two gamblers, pointing to the dice and cards on the table. There is a clash between youth and age and honesty and treachery. Ter Bruggghen depicts one of the gamblers as an old man with a long white beard, peering through spectacles. The old man is scrutinizing his opponent’s move, ignorant of the game and unaware of the trap that has been laid for
him. The two main figures of the old man and the younger cheat almost have a comical air despite the seriousness of the situation about to unfold. They wear the same style of costume as the young card cheat in Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps*. The two men in the foreground wear armor over the voluminous striped shirts and helmets. The earliest account of ter Bruggen mentions him as a soldier\(^\text{13}\) so the artist would have been familiar with armor and military accouterment.

Ter Bruggen achieves his moralizing message not only through his depiction of a dishonest card game, but also through his equating of age to senility.\(^\text{14}\) The older man with the white beard in his *Gamblers* is ignorant of his opponent’s attempt to thwart him due to his poor vision. He wears spectacles that serve to further signify his age. Ter Bruggen uses this same model again in another of his works, *The Mismatched Couple* also known as the *Scene of Mercenary/Venal Love* from 1625-1628 (fig.5). This painting portrays a theme that the Utrecht Caravaggisti all incorporated into their work; the prostitute as a signifier of moral corruption. The smiling young woman in ter Bruggen’s *Mismatched Couple* gazes straight at the viewer as her chemise slips off her shoulders and exposes her breasts to clarify her status as a courtesan. She allows herself to be subjected to the old man’s touch as he places one hand on her waist and the other at the base of her neck. The bespectacled man scrutinizes her, his old age a bold contrast to her youth.

The “Mismatched Couple” was a favored subject that was popularized by sixteenth-century artists such as Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Cranach’s *The


*Courtesan and the Old Man* (1523) (fig.6) shows the devious and immoral intentions of both men and women in these types of relationships. In Cranach’s painting, a courtesan with a deceitful expression on her face, embraces an older, equally-sinister looking old man. Flemish painter Quentin Massys’ (1466-1530) *Ill-Matched Lovers* from 1520-25 (fig.7) was painted contemporaneously with Cranach’s *The Courtesan and the Old Man*. Both paintings serve to warn the viewer of the dangers of courting younger ladies. The works also allude to the nature of the woman as a powerful being. Through her sexuality, she is able to rob men both of their rationality and their money. This can also be seen in an engraving by Albrecht Dürer titled *The Marriage-for-Money Fool* (1495) (fig.8) which was based off the writings of German humanist and satirist Sebastian Brandt. In this crude image, a man is faced with a dilemma. He can either accept a heaping bag of coins from an old woman or choose to procreate with his donkey. Although the woman is a withered hag, the money seems to be enticing the young man. Images such as these warned of the dangers of being a fool and marrying for money, yet also applied humor and levity to the situation.

Ter Bruggen’s *Mismatched Couple/Scene of Mercenary Love* (1625-28) embodies the theme of the relationship between a young prostitute and the older male client that was prevalent in emblem books during the seventeenth century. An image by an anonymous artist from the *Nieuwen ieucht spieghel* emblem book published in 1617 (fig.9) represents a couple of unequal age. The engraving features an old man with a similar profile as the man in ter Bruggen’s painting. The man distinguished by his hook-like nose and shaggy beard, extends a rose to a young and elaborately dressed lady who is

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http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.52622.html
presumed to be a courtesan. A third figure of a smiling, younger man places the horns of a goat on the head of the older man. The symbol of the goat horns and the fact that the younger man is laughing denotes an air of mockery of the relationship.

Jan Saenredam’s *Marriage For Wealth Officiated by the Devil* from 1600 (fig.10) is an engraving that serves to further indicate the disapproval of a relationship based on wealth. The woman in the engraving is not a prostitute, though she begrudgingly holds the hand of her husband while the devil presides. Albrecht Dürer’s *Der Liebesantrag* or the “Ill-Assorted Couple” (fig.11) from 1495 represents another mismatched couple theme. These types of relationships were motivated by money and are characterized by a younger woman, usually a courtesan, who is often depicted with her hand in the coin purse of a much older man. She is portrayed in Dürer’s engraving with a coin purse in her lap and her other hand outstretched to the man while he reaches his hand into his own money bag most likely to give her a few coins. The social status of the couple is defined by their clothing: her low-cut dress defines her as a courtesan and the man’s fur-lined coat characterizes him as a member of the upper class. Images such as these set the precedent for the work of the Caravaggisti.

Ter Brugghen’s figures have a commanding visual presence. Like his *Gamblers* from 1623, his *Mismatched Couple* confronts the viewer with a scene where the figures occupy almost the entire picture plane of the 71.1 x 83.8 cm work. However, unlike the prevalent “Merry Company” scenes of this time period, which feature prostitutes and their dandies, or young, male clients all engaging in drinking and musical merriment, this work serves a different allegorical and moral function. The old man in the image, shown to the left of the young half-nude woman is a particular type used by the artist to
represent old age and senility. He is depicted with a rich fur cloak and spectacles, which suggest his wealth. His profile is exaggerated to contrast with the young woman’s porcelain-like skin and youth. He has deep bags around his eyes and his spectacles are perched on his hook-like nose, which further clarifies his age. The young prostitute in the center of the image is illuminated against the darkness of the composition. Here ter Bruggen skillfully channels his knowledge of Caravaggio and uses chiaroscuro to effectively depict light and shade on the pale skin of the young woman. Ter Bruggen paints a curious detail, one that is not completely harmonious with the covert scene and theme of the work- a beautifully rendered pearl earring that the young woman wears. This detail further obscures one’s understanding of the image. Who are these people? Why is a prostitute wearing an earring that would have most likely cost more than anything else she owned? Dutch art historian Lotte van de Pol offers a possible explanation for this in her 2010 essay “The Whore, the Bawd and the Artist: The Reality and Imagery of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Prostitution.” She states:

A woman of the lower classes usually possessed only a few garments, generally of coarse material and drab colors, and would never earn enough money to buy the silks and satins she saw worn by rich women in prosperous Amsterdam. A girl embarking on a career as a prostitute needed pretty clothing, and a bawd could provide her with a fine outfit on credit. Indeed, in reality, the bawd tempted the girl into becoming a prostitute by showing her beautiful clothes and dangling before her a life of leisure, gaiety, and dancing, with plenty to eat and drink.\(^\text{16}\)

Van de Pol delves into the clandestine world of Dutch prostitution in the seventeenth century and explains the relationships between the prostitute and the procuress, and sheds light on a theme that will characterize the art of the Utrecht Caravaggisti.

Dutch genre scenes featuring prostitutes and their iconography can be traced back to engravings by Dutch artists such as Crispin van de Passe (1564-1637). Engravings such as his *Students in a Brothel* from his *Academia sive speculum vitae scholasticae* from 1612 (fig.12) present a different view of prostitution. In this image, students are gathered in a low-ceilinged brothel where they play backgammon, enjoy music and fondle the lavishly-dressed prostitutes. Spending time in brothels was considered a casual activity for young men at this time. The Utrecht Caravaggisti retired the fading Mannerist tradition of Dutch art and started to depict prostitutes in a new light. Artists such as ter Brugghen with his *Mismatched Couple/Scene of Mercenary Love* (1625-28) and one of the most important paintings to come from the Caravaggisti, Dirck van Baburen’s *The Procuress* from 1622 (fig.13) both portray the prostitute with a graphic and authoritative presence. Until the sixteenth century, prostitution was seen as a necessary evil. Changes in religious order can account for this. As the Protestant reformation swept through the Netherlands, one of the first changes was the eradication of brothels. Fear of venereal disease incited a hatred of prostitutes. New laws outlawed prostitution and considered it a criminal offense. Van de Pol quotes Jean Delumeau, a historian of French Catholicism, in her article to explain the changes in the religious climate of the Netherlands that led to this view of prostitution:

> It marked a paradigm shift in the way the relationship between God and man was conceived. God no longer forgave sins, He punished them. Never absent from Christian teaching, the vengeful God of the Old Testament became an obsession throughout late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, as the Counter-Reformation took over Catholic countries. Prostitutes were no longer sinners who could be saved, they were malefactors who needed to be punished.\(^{17}\)

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Considered illegal, seventeenth-century Dutch prostitution still flourished. Driven underground, it became a well-organized business and a lucrative job for destitute women. Amsterdam was one of Europe’s largest cities at this time and had an international reputation for prostitution. Since most of the men in Amsterdam worked in the maritime industry and left the country to seek jobs as sailors, the remaining population was predominantly female, the necessary demographic for an illicit prostitution market. Amsterdam’s position as a thriving port city allowed for visiting men from other countries to engage in the forbidden business.

The bordeltjes or brothel scenes prevalent in Dutch seventeenth-century genre painting reveal this well-organized and covert business and reflect upon a self-indulgent society where epicureanism in food, drink, music and sex dominated. Dutch brothel scenes portray young prostitutes either as lazy, drunken and idle women who seek to cheat their clients, or as accomplished musicians partaking in revelry. Emblem books warned people of the dangers of prostitutes, as in an emblem from the 1617 Nieuwen ieucht spieghel. The image is titled Est meretrix dicta quae reddit verbula ficta (fig.14) or “the prostitute renders some words fiction.” This title immediately informs the viewer of the deceitful ways of the prostitute. She is shown nude, reclining on a bed and holding a rope which is tied around the waist of a man being led to her by an older woman, most likely the procuress. The man is richly dressed, with a long sword hanging at his waist, denoting his status. This emblem portrays the prostitute in a negative light and shows her as a dominant female aggressor.

The sensuality in the works of the Utrecht Caravaggisti is direct, however less sexually-charged than the works of Caravaggio such as his Uffizi Bacchus (1597). In this
work, Caravaggio portrays the god of wine wearing a loose classicizing garment which reveals his shoulder. The result is striking, as the powerful arms of Bacchus contrast with his non-muscular chest. The Utrecht Caravaggisti use this same convention of the garment revealing one’s shoulder to classify a prostitute. Joaneath A. Spicer discusses this common motif in her book, *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht During the Golden Age*. She remarks on the depiction of an exposed shoulder in Utrecht painting as being sensuous and warm and how “the viewer is effectively drawn into the painting in much the same way that the appeal to the sense of sight is a surrogate for the other senses in the devotional paintings by the Caravaggisti.”

Dirck van Baburen uses the motif of the exposed shoulder of the prostitute in his paintings and continues a theme that will later inspire the art of the other Utrecht Caravaggisti. Baburen’s *Procuress* from 1622 represents the relationship between the prostitute, her client and the *koppelaarster*, or the procuress. In her article, Lotte van de Pol does not believe that this work is an accurate representation of prostitution in the seventeenth century. It nevertheless appeals to the seventeenth-century Dutch aesthetic of self-indulgence and “Baburen’s intention to emphasize not the negative consequences of the action underway, but rather the sensuous pleasures exhibited.”

Works by the Utrecht Caravaggisti that feature prostitution simultaneously warn the viewer of the dishonest nature of prostitutes and also amuse and delight the viewer.

After his training in Utrecht under painter Paulus Moreelse, Dirck van Baburen

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19 Ibid., 244
traveled to Italy around the year 1615, where he was first recorded in Parma. Baburen was known for his decoration of the church of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome in 1617 and for his work under important Roman patrons. Baburen was in Italy during the same time as another Utrecht Caravaggist, Gerrit van Honthorst. Honthorst worked under the patrons Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani and Scipione Borghese, the patrons of Caravaggio, Hendrick ter Brugghen and Baburen. It safe to assume that Honthorst and Baburen would have been aware of each other’s presence in the Italian Caravaggesque circles and most certainly upon their return to Utrecht. In Utrecht, Baburen was associated with some of the most influential painters and writers of the seventeenth century including Hendrick Goltzius and Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem.

In his Procureess, Baburen fuses a Dutch moralizing theme with the low-life genre subjects of Caravaggio. The result is a striking picture precariously hinging on the border between reality and a Baroque diorama. The three figures in Baburen’s Procureess fill the entire picture plane with their lively gathering and extend the space out to the viewer, inviting them to partake in their forbidden proposition. The huddled figures form a tight composition that parallels the early works of Caravaggio. The prostitute, her client and the procuress all envelop each other like a sacreligious holy Trinity. Baburen channels the boldness of Caravaggio yet still applies the Dutch aesthetic by including a moralizing parable. Caravaggio supposedly used a prostitute as his model to portray St. Catherine in 1597 and again in 1607, where a dead courtesan deemed “a certain filthy whore” was used to depict the lifeless Madonna in his Death of the Virgin according to seventeenth-

21 Ibid.
century writer Giulio Mancini. Baburen’s painting can be interpreted as a scene of the “Prodigal Son.” This parable was used throughout seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting as it served to remind people of the moral consequence of accumulating worldly pleasures. Whether or not Baburen’s Procuress is actually a version of the “Prodigal Son” parable is open to interpretation, however the artist’s moral intent is obvious. The composition is Caravagesque in its composition and tonal color palette which is a reference to the paintings of Caravaggio’s early Roman period.

The title character of the painting, the procuress, is known by many names and has been a figure present in art and literature since antiquity. Known as the koppelaarster in Dutch she serves as a female mediator of prostitution. The Procuress is responsible for keeping the brothel and for facilitating the monetary transactions between the prostitutes and their clients.\(^2^3\) She is traditionally rendered as an ugly and scheming old woman typically wearing a turban. Her portrayal originates from long-held beliefs of old women being evil. There is a special consideration given to them by the Utrecht Caravaggisti. In Baburen’s Procuress, the Bawd is shown as an old and degenerate woman who with her outstretched hand, demands compensation for the girl’s proposition. She is dressed in a drab cloak and a turban wrapped tightly around her head. The young girls would owe great debts to the procuress who would in turn, provide them with clothing and a room in the brothel. Lotte van de Pol’s scholarship on this aspect of seventeenth-century Dutch life has proved invaluable to our understanding of prostitution, which is still very much a part of Dutch society today. The procuress is depicted throughout seventeenth-century art of the Utrecht Caravaggisti as a direct contrast to the fair and richly-dressed courtesans.

and their clients. Baburen’s artistic and literary sources for the representation of the procuress would have been numerous, however upon his travels to Italy, there is a chance that he may have been inspired by one of the great masters of the Renaissance—Michelangelo.

The head of the crooked procuress in Baburen’s painting bears an irrefutable resemblance to the Cumaean Sybil (fig. 15), one of the prophetesses painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1508-1512) by Michelangelo (1475-1564). While in Rome from 1612-1620, Baburen would have likely visited the Sistine Chapel and saw the work of the great master or would have seen prints and drawings of the Sistine Chapel. The question that remains is why would Baburen use the symbol of the Cumaean Sybil as the reference for his procuress? The Cumaean Sybil is one of the more powerful and insightful of the Sybils of antiquity. Legends of the Cumaean Sybil are mentioned in Virgil’s Aeneid and Ovid’s Metamorphoses. In Book XIV of Metamorphoses, Apollo encounters the Cumaean Sybil and offers to grant her one wish for her virginity. She then takes a handful of sand and asks to live as long as there are grains of sand, however she later refuses the love of the god and her body deteriorates, as she had not asked for eternal youth:

But now the blessefull tyme of youth is altogether fled,
And irksome age with trembling pace is stolne uppon my head,
Which long I must endure. For now already as you see
Seven hundred yeares are come and gone and that the number bee
Full matched of the granes of dust, three hundred harvestes mo,
I must three hundred vintages see more before I go.
The day will come that length of tyme shall make my body small,
And little my withered limbes shall leave or naught at all.
And none shall think that ever God was tane in love with mee.\(^{25}\)


In his 1951 article, Lawrence Gowing mentions the connection between the
Cumaean Sybil of Michelangelo and its influence on Baburen’s *Procuress* however he
goes no further than identifying the similarities, “in Baburen’s *Procuress*, a figure
derived in Rome from Michelangelo’s *Cumaean Sybil.*”26 Michelangelo paints his
Cumaean Sybil significantly larger and more powerful than the other Sybils. Perhaps the
connection to her role in the literature of antiquity can suggest why Baburen chose her to
base his procuress. The Cumaean Sybil, wise and intuitive, sought eternal youth, though
was denied and her body withered away. Her avaricious pursuit of immortality can be
compared with the seventeenth-century Dutch procuress. She no longer attracts clients
and is shown with her hand outstretched, demanding money, as if compensation for her
ugliness.

While in Rome, Baburen also could have drawn inspiration for his procuress from
Caravaggio as well as the wealth of examples of ancient sculpture in Italy. The figure of
the maid in Caravaggio’s 1599 work, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (fig.16) bears the
same weathered face and furrowed brow as Baburen’s aged procuress. In 1623, Baburen
paints a similar turbaned old woman in his *St. Sebastian Tended by Irene* (fig.17).
Although there are no surviving drawings by ter Bruggen, his knowledge of painting
people of old age was vast. Italians collected Roman sculpture such as the veristic style
civic busts which commemorated Roman patricians. The subjects were depicted
realistically with special attention to natural signs of age including wrinkles and sagging
skin. Age was considered an indicator of wisdom and power, “because the Romans
considered facial features to be the best conveyors of personality, age and wisdom gained

through long, hard years of life experience were accentuated in portraiture in order to project the qualities they valued most highly.”

The marble first-century B.C. Portrait Bust of a Man (fig.18) from the Early Imperial Period in Rome evokes these qualities. The unknown man’s face is deeply wrinkled and he has a grimacing and stern gaze. The verism of this type of Roman sculpture would have inspired the Utrecht Caravaggisti.

Gerrit van Honthorst’s Procuress/The Matchmaker (fig.19) dated to 1625 embodies a voyeuristic aspect that can be seen throughout his paintings of prostitutes and brothel scenes. Honthorst’s use of deep tenebrism draws the viewer into his paintings, creating a clandestine shadow world where illicit activities transpire. Known as “Gherardo delle Notti” by the Italians, Honthorst was distinguished for his Caravaggesque use of shadow and for his nocturne scenes. The three figures in Honthorst’s Procuress are crowded around a table, conversing while submerged in shadow, the only light being the single candle burning in the darkness. The viewer seems to be a part of the scene, though observes the figures from the outside, looking in.

Seventeenth-century Dutch art scholar Eric Jan Sluijter in his essay on how the Caravaggisti portray prostitution states “viewers of such paintings were inevitably placed in the same voyeuristic position as the men in the pictures themselves, protagonists who usually undergo punishment for their actions.”

The only figure who is turned towards the viewer is the young smiling prostitute, whose gaze is focused on the man in front of her. She holds a lute, an instrument that women were commonly taught to play and

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thought to be “part of the stock-in-trade of the young women supplied by procuresses.”

The man is silhouetted against the dark foreground; only the edges of his body and his plumed hat are illuminated by the candle. His hand is outstretched as he propositions her while the greedy procuress looks on. Honthorst’s procuress appears sinister, as half of her face is concealed by shadow. She exemplifies the “withered hags, their countenances shriveled by lust and avarice- an exemplary counterpoint to the beauty of the whores proffering their service.”

She points directly at the prostitute, urging the transaction to move forward.

Gerrit van Honthorst is considered the most successful and influential of the three Utrecht Caravaggisti. Coming from a family of distinguished painters, the young Gerrit trained under his father Herman van Honthorst, one of the founding members of the Utrecht Guild of St. Luke. After his primary training, he then trained under Mannerist master Abraham Bloemaert. He made his sojourn to Italy around the year 1616, where he immediately was revered by Italian patrons for his use of deep Caravaggesque tenebrism in his nocturnal scenes. In many of his paintings the only light source is a brightly burning candle. Honthorst’s genre scenes such as *The Matchmaker/Procuress* from 1625 feature this element of a candle as the light source in his paintings. Caravaggio never used candles in his paintings and most of the time, the light source is unidentified. Honthorst did not implement Caravaggio’s cellar-like diagonal light in his paintings. In his religious works, brilliant candlelight bathes the faces of his figures as they behold the miracle of the Christ child as in *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1622). He also makes

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use of the candle in his depictions of the allegory of avarice. Dutch artists were interested in allegories, especially the vices and the five sense, and they represented them throughout their art. Honthorst’s paintings of the allegory of avarice, symbolized by an old woman, recall a visual tradition hundreds of years prior.

Honthorst features many representations of old women throughout his art. His *Old Woman Masking a Candle* (date unknown) (fig. 20) features a woman in a turban who is shielding a candle flame. Perhaps this is a reference to youth and longevity associated with a flickering candle? Other works of old women such as his *Old Woman Examining a Coin by a Lantern/Allegory of Sight or Avarice* (1623) (fig. 21) serve an allegorical and moral function. Dutch artists were aware of how the allegory of avarice would be portrayed by sources such as Jan Saenredam’s engraving of *Avarice* from 1600 (fig. 22). This image features a man clutching his money bags with the Latin inscription: *Perdita Avarities, corralis obruta, vivo Magnas inter opes (heu mihi) semper inops* or “The miser, hoarding his treasure, lives amid riches, yet is always destitute.”

Gerrit van Honthorst’s teacher, Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651) and his son Cornelius Bloemaert (1603-1692) both produced engravings, drawings and paintings of old women in their workshops. Cornelius Bloemaert’s *Avaritia* from 1625 (fig. 23) represents the subject as old and miserly, greedily presiding over her money.

The Dutch represent old women more often than men as allegories of avarice in their art. Utrecht Caravaggisti art featuring older women as allegories of avarice would have been inspired by works such as Dürer’s 1507 *Allegory of Avarice* (fig. 24). The subject of this painting is an emaciated and grinning old woman holding a large bag of

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coins. Her grey hair is long and stringy, a dark tuft of hair sprouts from her underarm and her breasts sag dramatically, emphasizing her age. The woman’s face is patterned by wrinkles and she smiles a toothless grin, clutching her precious money with an ambiguous expression. Italian artist Giorgione produced a contemporaneous allegory of avarice titled *Col Tempo* (With Age) (fig.25) dated between 1500-10. The woman in this painting shares the same characteristics of sagging breasts, loose hair and the vague facial expression. She points to herself and makes direct eye contact with the viewer, asking for an emphatic reaction.

Concert scenes by the Utrecht Caravaggisti involving the company of prostitutes represent the Dutch love of music and merriment. These boisterous images are a contrast to the paintings of musicians by Caravaggio and serve a similar function- to be displayed in a social setting and inspire musical pleasure. Caravaggio’s *Concert of Youths* (fig.26) from 1595 features a group of young boys playing music together. The iconography in this painting alludes to a theme of love and intense longing. There is also an underlying homoerotic aspect in these works. The *Concert of Youths* as well as Caravaggio’s *Lute Player* (1596-97) (fig.27) were both commissioned by Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte and displayed in his camerino to facilitate music-making. Caravaggio’s concert scenes are still and passive in contrast to the lively works of the Caravaggisti, where the music and alcohol flow freely.

Honthorst’s *Concert* from 1623 (fig.28) is a composition where multiple figures engage in musical revelry. This large work was first listed in the 1632 inventory of

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Frederick Hendrick, who succeeded Prince Maurits as the Prince of Orange in 1625.34 There are several theories surrounding the original patronage of Honthorst’s *Concert*: it may have been purchased by Maurits or given as a diplomatic gift to either him or Frederick Hendrick by Frederick I, King of Bohemia. Arthur Wheelock, Curator of Northern Baroque paintings at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. states:

> *The Concert* was much more than a decorative element in a courtly setting. It also had an underlying political message: harmony in society, as well as in music, exists when the guidance of its leader is followed. This adage would have been appropriate for either the Prince of Orange or King Frederick I of Bohemia.35

Honthorst reflects the ideal of the lavish court lifestyle in his 1623 *Concert*, however there are elements in the work that allude to the mischievous nature of these scenes. The smiling man in the center of the work does not appear to be interested in the music and instead presses a finger to his lips and holds his drink aloft.

In Honthorst’s *Concert*, the role of music takes on a political role as Arthur Wheelock stated in his quote: there has to be harmony amongst all of the participants in a musical concert just as there has to be an equal contribution to society. There are score books on the table in front of the musicians, each detailing a different style of music for the participants to follow. Like each person playing a different instrument, there is a role for each person in society, however there must be an order. The musician with his back turned to the viewer is the leader of the concert and he is shown with his viola da gamba bow instructing the young lutinist and singer. There are several instruments portrayed; the viola da gamba, the violin, the cittern and the lute, all musical instruments that would

35 Ibid.
have required sufficient skill to play.\textsuperscript{36} The pages of the books appear to be worn and well-used from countless concerts. Music by Dutch composers had not flourished in the seventeenth century as it did in centuries prior. The score books that the musicians read could contain older music, which would explain the rough quality of the books if the music they are reading is by Dutch composers. There is a book partly hanging over the side of the table, however it is unclear who is reading the book. The leader of the concert has a book in front of him and the lutinist and singer both share a book so could the book be for the viewer? This element can also be found in Caravaggio’s \textit{Lute Player}. It is turned towards the viewer though the writing on the pages is illegible. There appears to be music notes, but the particular notes are not discernable. A shadow falls over the page, could this be the viewer’s shadow? Honthorst takes the viewer’s role in the concert into account and presents a composition that attests to how harmony can be achieved.

In Book III of \textit{The Republic}, Plato associates instruction in music with reason and discernment, “education in music and poetry is of such sovereign importance: rhythm and attunement sink especially deep into the innermost soul and take the strongest hold there.”\textsuperscript{37} In seventeenth-century Dutch society, music was a pastime enjoyed by everyone and the use of musical instruments is prevalent in genre painting. Scholar Edwin Buijsen remarks on the proliferation of music in Dutch art, “at least ten percent of all 17th-century paintings, music makes its appearance in one way or another.”\textsuperscript{38} There were no new musical innovations by Dutch composers as the Calvinist religion did not approve of

\textsuperscript{36} Discussion with Dr. April Greenan, Associate Professor of Music at the University of Mary Washington. 11-11-14
musical accompaniment in church services.\textsuperscript{39} Music in art still flourished and its strength was found in the simple delight for singing by people of all classes, “in an appetite for music that was fed and stilled not so much by composers as by poets. And it was the same people who were consumed by a desire for paintings and who bought them for their homes.”\textsuperscript{40}

In the paintings by Honthorst that focus on music in the brothel setting, the artist includes smiling prostitutes and richly dressed dandies, that serve to embody sensuous pleasure and amuse the viewer. The viewer is delighted by their beautiful costumes, cheerful countenances and range of musical instruments. Instead of depicting the prostitute as lazy and devious, Honthorst’s prostitutes are accomplished musicians who seek to entertain. They are frequently pictured with musical instruments and do not appear to have an ill intent to deceive their clients. Honthorst’s \textit{Allegory of Lust} (fig.29) from 1628 presents an image which does not immediately allude to the dangers of venal love. The prostitute and her client both smile and look out towards the viewer. The young woman is similar in dress and in appearance to the courtesan in Honthorst’s \textit{Procuress} who is pictured in the same low-cut dress and plumed hat. The neckline of her dress reveals her breasts and her jewelry, apparently a double-stranded pearl necklace. She rests both her hands on the body of a lute, which according to Wayne Franits, suggests the shape and sexuality of the female body.\textsuperscript{41} The grinning male client points towards the viewer, although his gesture does not imply warning.


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

The subject of Honthorst’s *Violin Player* (1626) (fig.30) is another cheerfully smiling courtesan showcasing her musical talent. She holds a violin, an instrument thought to be unsuited for people of culture and often played exclusively by prostitutes.\(^{42}\) Versions of violins were used in folk music and were “used principally for dances, balls, ballets, masquerades, serenades, aubades, festivities, and all joyous pastimes, having been adjudged more appropriately to these kinds of pastime than any other instrument”\(^{43}\) according to French theoretician Pierre Trichet in 1630. Until the end of the seventeenth century, the violin was predominantly used by lower classes such as the prostitutes in Honthorst’s paintings. The figure of the courtesan in Honthorst’s *Violin Player* confronts the viewer with a pleasant expression. Her richly colored garment exposes her right shoulder, a convention used by the Caravaggisti to indicate a prostitute, though the image is not overly sexual. Instead, the viewer admires her sumptuous clothing with its variety of colors and textures from the airy lace of her dress to the bright feathers in her hat. Her greatest asset is her skill with the violin, “an instrument capable of such passion and such rich and powerful sounds.”\(^{44}\) Her status as a prostitute was considered as a profession reserved for degenerate women, however these women capitalized on their success as musicians.

The concert scenes of ter Brugghen and Baburen embody a more raucous theme and contrast with the elegantly dressed subjects of Honthorst. Paintings such as ter Bruggen’s *A Duet* from 1628 (fig.31) and Baburen’s *Loose Company* (1623) (fig.32) feature the sweaty, drunken and disorderly musicians and their courtesan companions.

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\(^{44}\) Ibid, 29.
Honthorst served as court painter to Frederick I and Elizabeth Stuart of The Hague and his paintings were admired by the king and queen because they reflected their extravagant lifestyle. Ter Bruggen and Baburen’s genre paintings of these lively serve to provide moral commentary on the types of people who attended these musical gatherings. When looking at ter Bruggen’s *A Duet*, one is reminded of the contemporaneous images of these lower-class people by Frans Hals, namely his *Buffoon With a Lute* from 1624-26 (fig.33). Adeline Collage, Art Conservator at the Musée des beaux-arts, remarks on this work by Hals in the Louvre:

> These pictures, which belong to what are known as genre portraits, were often the means of making a moral judgment on the pleasures of the senses and their attendant dangers. Thus this lutist might well be an allegory of hearing or a lesson about the vanity of music, which by definition is ephemeral.45

The title itself suggests that the main subject of the painting, the theatrically dressed young lute player, is of a lower class and his musical pursuit is foolish. According to Dutch Art Historian Hessel Miedema “the narrow and rough world of the seventeenth century took pleasure in unabashedly taunting and ridiculing people.”46

Ter Bruggen’s 1628 *A Duet* features a seated, singing lute player and his courtesan who is equally involved in the music. This woman, who can be defined by her low-cut dress and exposed cleavage, reads along in a songbook. The man, who appears to be the same model ter Bruggen used in his *Democritus* from the same year, gazes off to his right while strumming his lute. Baburen’s *Loose Company* from 1623 represents a group of these outliers of society all engaging in music, drink and proposition. The

characters in the group are; a young prostitute, two men holding musical instruments and a libation jug, and the grinning, toothless procuress, greedily gazing upwards towards one of the men. The presence of the procuress could denote the location of the scene as a brothel, where food and drink would be served. An emblem from the Nieuwen ieucht spieghel (1617) titled “A Festive Meal Can Lead to Lasciviousness” (fig.34) features an interior setting with a concert scene. The couples in the room drink and listen to the man playing the lute while caressing each other.

Such activities as excessive drinking, musical revelry and indulging in the company of prostitutes represent the Dutch pursuit of pleasure that vastly captivated the patrons of the Utrecht Caravaggisti. Scholar Jan de Vries in his article, “Luxury and Calvinism/Luxury and Capitalism: The Supply and Demand for Luxury Goods in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic,” describes the moral dangers of such opulence, “Only a thin line separated the noble patron of the arts from the vain, prideful self-aggrandizer; the refined palette easily slid into gluttony; the admiration of a fine garment easily turned to lust.”47 Many of the Dutch patrons of the Utrecht Caravaggisti are unknown and with little documentation on the provenances of these works it is difficult to ascertain the palates of the patrons. Were these raucous genre paintings such as Baburen’s Procuress used by their patrons to perhaps admonish their dishonest subjects?

The Procuress was first listed in the collection of Maria Thins of Delft, who was the mother-in-law to Dutch Golden Age painter Johannes Vermeer. Scholars such as Lawrence Gowing believe that Maria Thins owned the original Procuress rather than a copy. A copy that is in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam is plausible, however “it was

never very clear that the picture in the Rijksmuseum agreed very closely with the shape and design recorded by Vermeer’s *Concert*, nor was it easy to image that its quality could have been tolerable to such a master.”

Vermeer used Baburen’s painting in the background of his own paintings such as his *The Concert* from 1660-65 (fig.35), where introduces a moralizing commentary on the scene. The presence of Baburen’s work here is seen as an invitation to moderation rather than excess given the placid scene of Vermeer’s young woman playing the harpsichord. It is likely that these paintings would have been used in this way: to provide commentary as well as to initiate and develop conversation.

Dutch genre painting has been defined as images of “‘merry companies’, brothels, peasants drinking, ‘modern pictures’ (that is, domestic scenes)” Genre has undergone may stylistic changes which according to Jane Campbell Hutchison, is in accordance with the changing nature of patronage. These genre scenes of brothels and drinkers produced in the early 1620’s appealed to middle-lower class Flemish immigrants, who favored the subjects for their similarity to what they would have bought back home in Antwerp. Initially priced very low, “ten to fifteen gilders in the early years of the century to an astronomical high of up to 1,000 gilders by its end, these immigrants were eventually priced out of the market as genre painting progressed, attracting wealthier buyers. Dutch genre painting had both a moral and a voyeuristic duality that would have interested patrons, “a large facet of a genre scene's appeal was the

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50 Ibid, 641.
51 Ibid, 640.
opportunity it afforded to gaze into a private interior and to identify with the values expressed by the subject." This is evident in the work of the Utrecht Caravaggisti, especially the concert scenes of Gerrit van Honthorst.

The voyeuristic and moralizing aspects of these works would serve to inspire dialogue and conversation in the patron’s home. The paintings would fit into the overall scheme of what was occurring in the space. Paintings were not simply hung on a wall, they were meant to stimulate the viewer and to sometimes caution and warn them of devious activity but most importantly to amuse and titillate; one of the inherent purposes of art. Paintings featuring music and the concert setting were displayed within a musical context such as Caravaggio’s *Lute Player* and *Concert of Youths* according to scholar Franca Trinchieri Camiz. She discusses Cardinal del Monte’s acquisitions of Caravaggio’s *Lute Player* and his *Concert of Youths* and their role to simultaneously encourage musical contemplation and participation. Caravaggio’s *Lute Player* certainly conveys this through the young musician’s direct eye contact with the viewer and by the violin and bow facing the viewer, persuading musical involvement.

Hendrick ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante With an Ape* (1627) and Gerrit van Honthorst’s *Young Man Squeezing Grapes/Allegory of Taste* (1622) are paintings that would have been displayed in a similar context to art of the ancient Greek symposium. The Greek symposium was essentially an all-male environment where men would communally drink, tell stories and enjoy musical entertainment. These gatherings resulted in experiences that “forged bonds and allowed neighbors to discover each other’s

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opinions on subjects from serious to banal.”

Symposiums occurred in rooms in homes that were reserved specifically for that purpose and the interior was decorated with “architectural and decorative features that that associate the room with aspects of the symposium.”

The decorated cups and wine vessels in the ancient Greek symposium would have facilitated activities relating to drinking and merriment. Sometimes lewd, these images cautioned the participant against extreme drinking and pleasure. Both ter Brugghen and Honthorst’s paintings feature Bacchic subjects indulging in the pursuit of wine. The paintings amuse and arouse the viewer, inviting them to participate in the Bacchic revelry, though simultaneously cautioning the viewer against excessive drinking.

The consumption of alcohol has been a part of Dutch culture since its inception. The water in the Netherlands was so polluted that it was unfit for drinking. Instead, a thin beer with a low alcohol content was the primary beverage for everyday consumption while on days of celebration, wine was the beverage of choice.

Subjects of drinkers were favored not only by the Utrecht Caravaggisti but Dutch artists in general. Genre painting revolved around the peasant drinkers and bawdy tavern revelers brandishing their beer and wine. Bacchic subjects were also popular as they commemorated the Dutch passion for drinking, however served to warn against excess. Engravings of Bacchus by artists such as Hendrick Goltzius, Jan Saenredam and Jacob Matham all would have been familiar to the Caravaggisti. In some images Bacchus is portrayed as a youthful and muscular god while in others he is shown overweight, drunken and unable to handle the contents of his overflowing glass. An engraving titled *Bacchus als god van de wijn* from

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54 Ibid.
55 Visit to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. 11-23-14.
1616 by David Vinckboons after Pieter Serwouters (fig.36) depicts a fleshly-faced Bacchus sitting on a wine barrel while the contents of his wine glass spill forth. The Dutch would have found images such as these humorous yet in their humor, there would be truth.

A laughing woman peers at the viewer; her tight, muscular grip squeezes the last drops of juice from a bunch of ripe grapes. Her flushed cheeks suggest her pleasure for the intoxicating bliss associated with wine. Her dark eyes seem to question the viewer, inviting them to ponder her true identity concealed under a patterned turban and exotic robes of green and red. In her left hand, she holds a golden cup filled with the inebriating liquid, while at her side, a monkey looks on clutching a handful of grapes.

Hendrick ter Brugghen’s Bacchante With an Ape from 1627 (fig.37) is a result of direct exposure to the work of Italian Baroque artist Caravaggio. This work is a deliberate conflation of the ancient past, as indicated by the classisizing dress of the subject and the reference to Bacchus, the Roman God of the grape harvest and of wine, although it also features contemporary elements such as the bare-breasted, obviously-inebriated woman portraying the deity. Is she a prostitute, perhaps a woman that the artist encountered in the street? Caravaggio’s Uffizi Bacchus (fig.38.) and his Self-Portrait as Bacchus (fig.39) both can be interpreted variously as Allegories of Excess and Taste. Much like Caravaggio’s Self-Portrait as Bacchus (1593-1594), there is a conscious attempt to satirize the classical past.

Both Caravaggio’s Self-Portrait as Bacchus and Hendrick ter Brugghen’s Bacchante With an Ape prove to be a sensory experience for the viewer. In her article, “Moral Choice in Some Paintings by Caravaggio and His Followers,” Linda Freeman
Bauer states “If ter Bruggen’s painting cannot be interpreted satisfactorily as an allegory of Taste, it is nevertheless on the basis of its elements associated with Taste that the picture can be linked with the conception and conditions of Excess.”\textsuperscript{56} One can feel the palpable texture of the white drapes and the fabric bow tied around the waist of the god of wine in Caravaggio’s \textit{Self-Portrait of Bacchus}. Caravaggio demonstrates his skill as a painter here, depicting the tangibility of different objects: the white drapes, the shine of the grapes, the texture of his hair and the particular devotion to representing himself in the prime of his dissipated youth through the attention to musculature and anatomy. However, the face of the young Bacchus is pallid and sickly green. His expression is melancholic and longing, perhaps driven mad by his lustful pursuit. The slowly rotting fruit and the dirt embedded underneath his fingernails alludes to the questionable morality of the subject.

Caravaggio’s \textit{Uffizi Bacchus} dated to 1597 is another work featuring a Bacchic subject. The figure reclines on an antique style sofa and makes direct eye contact with the viewer. The young Bacchus delicately extends a glass of wine to the viewer to partake in the revelry. Ripples in the glass of wine and in the decanter to his right suggest his unsteady hand and the uneasiness of the situation. Perhaps the most disturbing element of the painting is the effeminate figure of Bacchus. Adorned with a crown of grape leaves which are starting to turn brown, he is draped in a classical white garment that immediately denotes his status as the deity. The face of Bacchus is a face that can be found throughout Caravaggio’s art. Is this simply a “type” derived from the artist’s imagination or an actual model that Caravaggio found favorable? Or could it perhaps be a

\textsuperscript{56} Linda Freeman Bauer, “Moral Choice in Some Paintings by Caravaggio and His Followers,” \textit{The Art Bulletin} 73, no. 3 (Sep 1991): 392
self-portrait? Much like the morality of Bacchus, the answer is ambiguous. Caravaggio’s *Uffizi Bacchus* borders on androgyny. His exposed right arm is muscular although his chest is not well-developed. This could suggest the ravaging effects of alcohol in excess on the body. He conceals his tainted message by overtly offering the trembling glass of wine to the viewer, masked under an un-manly appearance. His fleshy face, flushed cheeks and full red lips enhance his feminine air.

Caravaggio’s *Uffizi Bacchus* and ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante* both portray figures that are a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. Ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante* is a female, though without her exposed breasts and lock of hair, it could be potentially difficult to assess. Her arm that clutches the grapes is muscular and she appears physically strong. She looks as if she were a courtesan taken from a Dutch brothel or “Merry Company” scene. Ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante* smiles sweetly yet the theme of the painting presents a hidden warning. The viewer is then faced with a moral choice either to submit to temptation or resist it. The androgyny in the works of the Caravaggisti is directly taken from exposure to the art of Caravaggio in Rome.

Similarities can also be found in Dutch 16th-century engravings such as the engraving of *Bacchus, Ceres en Venus* (1595) by Hendrick Goltzius (Fig.40). This engraving features an overly muscular reclining Venus whose figure brings to mind both the figure of Adam from Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling as well as his figure of Night from the Tomb of Giuliano de’Medici (1520-34). Goltzius’ Venus is actively tempted by the somewhat softer figure of Bacchus who extends a wine glass and covers himself with his bunch of grapes. Venus on the other hand, exposes herself to the viewer and seems to fall under the intoxicating influence of Bacchus.
Ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante* can be interpreted as an Allegory of Taste. The artist would have referenced various allegories from sources by Dutch painter and engraver, Hendrick Goltzius (1588-1617), who completed a series of pen and wash drawings on the five senses dated to 1595-96. The image of “Taste” (fig. 41) features a woman sitting with a man who holds a wine cup, similar to the one depicted in ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante*. She is turned towards the man and offers him a piece of fruit, while he cups her breast with his other hand. Could this be a reference to Bacchus and one of his female followers? It is certainly a reference to the effects of wine and the influence of Bacchus. The bountiful fruit on the table suggests fertility and the wine, a symbol of Bacchus, alludes to the inebriating effects and eventual moral corruption by excessive drinking. Behind the two figures is a small monkey almost hidden in the left-hand corner of the drawing. Like the ape in ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante*, this symbol references uncontrollable desire and lack of judgement or reason, “thus of all creatures, the most manlike, yet innocent of rational restraint, the ape became an exemplar not only of drunkenness, but the untrammeled fulfillment of all those libidinous pleasures and carnal appetites that most commonly run to excess.”


Both Goltzius and one of his most prolific students, Jan Saenredam, completed works from around 1600 which incorporate the theme of Bacchus. Goltzius’ ink and oil drawing titled *Venus Grows Cold Without Bacchus and Ceres* (fig. 42) has a tenebristic
quality that references the art of Caravaggio and Goltzius’ Roman sojourn, although stylistically, it is more closely related to the earlier Mannerist tradition. Saenredam’s version (fig. 43) of the proverb features the theme of Bacchus and his power to entice one into a life of excess. Cupid, the god of lust is present here as well, as he attempts to pluck the grapes from the hand of the reclining, bare-breasted Venus who appears to be in a state of inebriation.

The numerous Caravaggesque elements in ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante With an Ape* suggest ter Brugghen’s fascination with the style and subject matter of Caravaggio. Ter Brugghen’s conscious distortion of classical narrative juxtaposed with a contemporary setting is a direct attempt to imitate the boldness in the art of Caravaggio. From the balance of light and dark to the chiaroscuro on the face of his *Bacchante*, ter Brugghen achieved this through meticulous study of Caravaggio’s work. Like those of Caravaggio, his subjects are stark reminders of vice and overindulgence. With her pale skin and tanned hands, ter Brugghen’s *Bacchante* could have been a field laborer who worked in the sun or a prostitute that the artist saw on the street. Caravaggio’s *Bacchus* may also have been a lower-class hired hand asked to portray the god of wine. Though pure speculation, it is worth noting how these young outliers of society are painted as gods, immortalized in art. These works embody the Utrecht Caravaggisti’s audacious rejection of decorum with their use of the “low-life” genre.

Gerrit van Honthorst, believed to be the most adept of the Utrecht Caravaggisti at using Caravaggesque light, completed his *Young Man Squeezing Grapes/Allegory of Taste* (1622) (fig.44) in the style of Caravaggio. The man depicted in this portrait is most likely Bacchus, although he has an androgynous appearance similar to the Bacchus
paintings by Caravaggio. Honthorst’s Bacchus leans forward into the viewer’s space, much like ter Brugghen’s Bacchante and displays his blood red grapes which he squeezes into an earthenware cup. His left shoulder is exposed and his collarbone is revealed. Caravaggio’s Uffizi Bacchus and Self-Portrait as Bacchus both feature this more feminine element, which is a contrast to his more muscular body. Under his heavily lidded eyes, Honthorst’s Bacchus gazes directly at the viewer and appears to be laughing. The warm color palette, especially with the artist’s use of red, heightens the sensuality of the image. The red of the grapes mirror the flushed cheeks of Bacchus and the scarlet feather in his hat. There is a mix of both classical and contemporary elements such as the plumed hat the young man wears and the classical robe draped around his body.

Honthorst’s Bacchus is lively and smiling, possibly suspended in a state of ecstasy and intoxication. He poses a contrast to the stoic Bacchic portraits of Caravaggio as well as some other works that Honthorst may have seen while in Rome such as Michelangelo’s Bacchus from 1498 (fig.45). Honthorst’s Bacchus looks as if he were taken from a Dutch “Merry Company” scene. The intensified energy of Bacchus is evocative of the later paintings of drinkers by Dutch seventeenth-century artists such as Frans Hals (1580-1666). The realism that the artist devotes to capturing the figure in his drunken condition would have came from Honthorst observing people drinking and engaging in revelry.

In their art, the Utrecht Caravaggisti emulate Caravaggio by twisting tradition and manipulating something familiar by the use of unconventional style. Caravaggio makes Bacchus a drunken and immoral reveler whose pursuit has led to his personal ruin. The Caravaggisti emulate this by portraying the god of wine with questionable morality, and in the case of ter Brughgen, the Bacchante is a prostitute in a classicizing robe.
Caravaggio’s depictions of saints with dirty feet, a prostitute cast as the Magdalene and young boys portraying virtues of love and music shocked and disturbed many viewers. The Caravaggisti embody this boldness and desire to respect tradition and decorum yet seek to turn it on its head. The portrait, once reserved for individuals of status and nobility became an essential part of Dutch genre as merry drinkers and musicians were depicted in this “portrait” style although these images were more like caricatures. This does not end with the Utrecht Caravaggisti. In the mid-17th century Dutch artists continued the unconventionality of Caravaggio and the Utrecht Caravaggisti across all media. A bust of an elderly man with a caricature head (fig. 46) by an unknown artist was completed in 1650 in the southern Netherlands. This work depicts the profile of a peasant man with grotesque features including a bulbous nose and a neck goiter. The work is executed in marble, a highly sophisticated medium reserved for sculpting the figures of rulers and the nobility. Works such as these overturned artistic decorum and were favored by many art collectors.59

The paintings by the Utrecht Caravaggisti of these young outliers existing on the fringes of Dutch society all give the viewer a glimpse into their crooked world. The Utrecht Caravaggisti drew inspiration from the everyday street musicians, the tavern drinkers and the dishonest prostitutes whose ill intentions are disguised under beautiful faces and charming smiles. They channel the boldness of Caravaggio yet filter it through a Dutch aesthetic to make it more palatable for the viewer. Brilliant color, as seen in ter Bruggen’s Bacchante pleases the viewer and is a contrast to the stark and sometimes violent material of Caravaggio. In Hendrick ter Bruggen’s Bacchante With an Ape, the

59 Visit to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. 11-23-14.
young woman smiles sweetly, though the theme of the painting presents a hidden warning: everything in moderation. Even wine can be taken to excess, and the effects of its initial intoxicating bliss can ravage the body just as it has with Caravaggio’s *Uffizi Bacchus*. Look closely and you can see the dirt embedded beneath his fingernails and the ripples in the wine held by a shaking hand. You can practically smell the rotting fruit.

The viewer is then faced with a moral choice either to submit to temptation or resist it.

Their purpose of their art is to inspire and to incite conversation, to delight and to deter.

These images charm, question, humble, caution and involve the viewer and more importantly, sometimes ask one to consider his or her own morality.
Figures

Fig. 1. Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, *Marriage at Cana*, ca. 1532. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum)

Fig. 2. Caravaggio, *Card Sharps*, ca. 1594-95, Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum (Artstor.org)
Fig. 3. Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Gamblers*, ca. 1623, Minneapolis, Minneapolis Institute of the Arts (Artstor.org)

Fig. 4. Crispin van de Passe, *A Backgammon Party With Strolling Players*, ca. 1600 (Google Images)
Fig. 5. Hendrick ter Bruggen, *Mismatched Couple/Scene of Mercenary/Venal Love,* ca. 1625-28, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (Artstor.org)

Fig. 6. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Courtesan and the Old Man,* ca. 1523. Private Collection. (Google Images)
Fig. 7. Quentin Massys, *Ill-Matched Lovers*, ca. 1520-25, Washington, D.C, National Gallery of Art (www.nga.gov)

Fig. 8. Albrecht Dürer, *The Marriage-for-Money Fool*, ca. 1495. (Artstor.org)
Fig. 9. Anonymous artist (Crispin van de Passe?), *La corne d’abondance il porte sur sa teste*, ca. 1617. (Utrecht Emblem Project)

Fig. 10. Jan Saenredam, *Marriage for Wealth Officiated by the Devil*, ca. 1600, Cambridge, Harvard University Art Museum (http://www.harvardartmuseums.org)
Fig. 11. Albrecht Dürer, *The Ill-Assorted Couple*, ca. 1495, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (Artstor.org)

Fig. 12. Crispin van de Passe, *Students in a Brothel*, ca. 1612. (Google Images)
Fig. 13. Dirck van Baburen, *The Procuress*, ca. 1622, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (Artstor.org)

Fig. 14. Anonymous artist, *Est meretrix dicta quæ reddi verbula ficta*, ca. 1617 (Utrecht Emblem Project)
Fig. 15. Michelangelo, *Cumaean Sybil* (From the Sistine Chapel ceiling), ca. 1512, Rome, Sistine Chapel, (Google Images)

Fig. 16. Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, ca. 1599 Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica (Artstor.org)
Fig. 17. Dirck van Baburen, *St. Sebastian Tended by Irene*, ca. 1623. Private Collection. (Google Images)

Fig. 18. Unknown artist, *Bust of an Old Man*, ca. 1st century B.C. New York City, Metropolitan Museum of Art (www.metmuseum.org)
Fig. 19. Gerrit van Honthorst, *The Procureess/ The Matchmaker*, ca. 1625, Utrecht, Centraal Museum (Artstor.org)

Fig. 20. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Old Woman Masking a Candle*, (date unknown) Private Collection. (Google Images)
Fig. 21. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Old Woman Examining a Coin by Lantern/ Allegory of Sight or Avarice*, ca. 1623. Private Collection. (Google Images)

Fig. 22. Jan Saenredam, *Avarice*, ca. 1600, Cambridge, Harvard Art Museum (Google Images)
Fig. 23. Cornelius Bloemaert, Avaritia, ca. 1625, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans (Google Images)

Fig. 24. Albrecht Dürer, Avarice, ca. 1507, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, (Google Images)
Fig. 25. Giorgione, *Col Tempo*, ca. 1508, Venice, Gallerie dell’Accademia (Artstor.org)

Fig. 26. Caravaggio, *Concert of Youths*, ca. 1595, New York City, Metropolitan Museum of Art (Artstor.org)
Fig. 27. Caravaggio, *The Lute Player*, ca. 1595, Hermitage Museum (Artstor.org)

Fig. 28. Gerrit van Honthorst, *The Concert*, ca. 1623, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art (www.nga.gov)
Fig. 29. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Allegory of Lust*, ca. 1628. Private Collection.

Fig. 30. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Violin Player*, ca. 1626. Private Collection. (Google Images)
Fig. 31 Hendrick ter Bruggen, *A Duet*, ca. 1628. Private Collection. (Google Images)

Fig. 32. Dirck van Baburen, *Loose Company*, ca. 1623, Mainz, Landesmuseum (Google Images)
Fig. 33. Frans Hals, *Buffoon With a Lute*, ca. 1626, Paris, Musée du Louvre (Artstor.org)

Fig. 34. Anonymous artist, *A Festive Meal Can Lead to Lasciviousness,* ca. 1617 (Utrecht Emblem Project)
Fig. 35. Johannes Vermeer, *The Concert*, ca. 1660-65, Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Artstor.org)

Fig. 36 David Vinckboons after Pieter Serwouters, *Bacchus als god van de wijn*, ca. 1616. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. (Rijksmuseum)
Fig. 37. Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Bacchante With an Ape*, ca. 1627, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (Artstor.org)

Fig. 38. Caravaggio, *Uffizi Bacchus*, ca. 1598, Florence, Uffizi Gallery, (Artstor.org)
Fig. 39. Caravaggio, *Self-Portrait as Bacchus*, ca. 1593-94, Rome, Galleria Borghese, (Artstor.org)

Fig. 40. Hendrick Goltzius, *Bacchus, Ceres en Venus* ca. 1595, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum)
Fig. 41. Hendrick Goltzius, *Allegory of Taste*, ca. 1595-96, (Google Images)

Fig. 42. Hendrick Goltzius, *Venus Grows Cold Without Bacchus and Ceres*, ca. 1600, (Google Images)
Fig. 43. Jan Saenredam, *Venus Grows Cold Without Ceres and Bacchus*, ca. 1600, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, (www.ridsmuseum.org)

Fig. 44. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Young Man Squeezing Grapes/Allegory of Taste*, ca. 1622, Worcester, Massachusetts, Worchester Art Museum (www.worcesterart.org)
Fig. 45. Michelangelo, *Bacchus*, ca. 1496-8, Florence, Bargello Museum, (Artstor.org)

Fig. 46. Unknown artist, *Bust of an Elderly Man With a Caricature Head*, ca. 1650
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, (Rijksmuseum)
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