CHOOSING THE RIGHT PATH: RELIGIOUS AND MORAL INSTRUCTION IN THE ART OF CARAVAGGIO AND THE UTRECHT CARAVAGGISTI 1595-1630

By

MATTHEW EUGENE PESZEK

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2008
© 2008 Matthew Eugene Peszek
To my parents, Jim and Carol Peszek
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Jim and Carol for all their encouragement and support, my committee members, Dr. Robert Westin and Dr. Elizabeth Ross for all their advice, the UF in Rome Program for giving me the opportunity to spend six weeks in “Caravaggio’s neighborhood” and for making me more familiar with the “Eternal City,” the Ringling Museum Library staff for their willingness to help me with research and for letting me handle rare seventeenth-century emblem books, the Augustinian Friars of S. Anna dei Palafronieri in the Vatican for their eager willingness to talk to me even though they had to prepare for a wedding, the Franciscans of St. Peter’s, the Jesuits of S. Ignazio, and Father Jorge Olaechea of S. Paolo alla Regola for their advice in helping me determine the next step in my life, all the priests of Rome I met, particularly the Barnabites of S. Carlo ai Catinari and the Clerks Regular of the Mother of God of S. Maria in Campitelli for their willingness to help break language barriers to encourage me and help me in any way they could whether it be in Italian, French, German, English, or hand gestures, the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter for allowing me to see how these altars would have been used liturgically, and my friends, who kept up my spirits during the stressful times.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LIFE UNDER CALVINIST RULE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 THE CITY OF UTRECHT</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE ART OF</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARAVAGGIO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 WORKS OF THE UTRECHT CARAVAGGLISHI IN THE CHURCHES OF ROME</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 SOCIAL VICE IN THE WORKS OF THE UTRECHT CARAVAGGISTERI</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the seventeenth century, Caravaggio challenged the artistic establishment in Rome with numerous innovations regarding stylistics and iconography in both genre and religious works. Most notably, Caravaggio is credited with bringing motifs of virtue and vice to art in Italy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. These had been a more traditional northern theme from the Netherlands. Even after Caravaggio’s death in 1610, the motifs he introduced in Italy continued to be produced and carried over into the northern countries until about the 1630s.

This study will focus on the art of Caravaggio and a group of Dutch artists from the city of Utrecht who went to Rome in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Utrecht Caravaggisti eventually returned to Utrecht with the new caravaggesque iconography of social vices. This paper will attempt to show that the influence of Caravaggio played a major role in helping create a new iconography of virtue, or lack thereof, in the art of the Netherlands which brought religion and morals into people’s lives. The artistic revolution of Caravaggio caused the world to see art in an entirely different light and caused the Utrecht Caravaggisti to use this vision as a way to present pedagogical depictions of virtue and vice.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Dutch art has long been associated with scenes of domesticity, landscapes, still life and genre works featuring daily life. The depiction of social vices such as cavorting with prostitutes and gambling with elements of cheating also plays a prominent role in Dutch art. Often, one gets the idea these paintings of sumptuous still life, city views, church interiors, domestic scenes, and ships in distress on the rocks seemingly reflect quotidian life in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. The purpose of this study is to show the use of illicit imagery functions as a means of transmitting morals to the viewer by giving examples of how one should not behave. The manner though in which these morals were transmitted changes throughout the seventeenth century as will be seen in the art of Caravaggio and the Utrecht Caravaggisti.

I propose that after the Revolt of the Netherlands against Spain, while a seemingly intolerant atmosphere was created by the Calvinists towards Catholicism, art production continued nearly unregulated within the private realm. In the North, while ecclesiastical stances varied widely on the production and use of art, there were no official regulations for what could and could not be produced. Unlike the Catholic controlled areas of Europe such as Italy, Spain, and the Spanish Netherlands, there was no council such as the Council of Trent to moderate and control art production. In the Netherlands, a more informal type of social and artistic control occurred. A culture of shame was formed in churches in order to try and curb bad behavior, and by extension, illicit images.

Instead of trying to totally purge these illicit images from both the public and private sphere, the Calvinists used these images to “instruct and delight” the viewers into practicing and living Calvinist ideals and virtues. Thus, while the large amount of works produced during the seventeenth century can be construed as illicit and inappropriate, they ultimately had one goal.
The main goal of these works was to first and foremost educate the viewer into avoiding these illicit activities. However, the way these works helped teach the viewers morals changed over the course of the seventeenth century.

For the purpose of this paper, the period will cover the very end of the sixteenth century until 1630 in the city of Utrecht with a visit to Rome due to the important relationship the two cities had with one another. I put forward the idea that in the late sixteenth century, the paintings in the city of Utrecht followed more classicizing and overt biblical elements in terms of subject matter and iconography supported by numerous texts from antiquity, the Bible, and writings from the Protestant reformers. After the work of Caravaggio becomes known in the North by the Utrecht Caravaggisti, they return to the city of Utrecht and start to follow Caravaggio’s model in the depiction of social vices and transmission of morals. Thus, the works of Caravaggio help change the communication of morals by means of classical and biblical sources to sources seemingly taken from off of the streets of Rome. This was done in order to reach a larger audience and also to appeal to the changing taste of the patrons of the works.

The first chapter will discuss life under the Calvinists throughout the Netherlands. This will help give an idea of the Calvinist social policies and moral code that would be in effect and enforced, or attempted to be enforced, during the course of the seventeenth century. While some of the policies and activities mentioned in this chapter occurred during the mid seventeenth century it is still important since it will help set up a framework for how the depiction of morals will be dealt with later in the century.

The second chapter will give a background of the city of Utrecht regarding its ties to Catholicism. This will be relevant in understanding the city’s artistic importance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. It is also in this chapter that works depicting social
vices from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century will be discussed. This chapter will illustrate how the early depictions of social vice in the city will differ from the social vices after the return of the Utrecht Caravaggisti in the 1610s. This will also show how the taste of the patrons changed over the course of time.

The third chapter will deal with the early genre works of Caravaggio and will put the genre works into the context of seventeenth century Rome. A discussion on the Council of Trent’s position on art production will be discussed in this chapter as well and will be applied to both the genre works of Caravaggio and his later religious paintings.

The fourth chapter will deal with the religious works of the Utrecht Caravaggisti in the churches of Rome. This chapter will help show how the influence of Caravaggio’s religious and genre paintings helped in the transmission of morals which will be a model that the Utrecht Caravaggisti will pick up on in their explicit religious works.

The fifth chapter will talk about the genre works made by the Utrecht Caravaggisti after their return to Utrecht. Works from Gerrit van Honthorst, Dirck van Baburen, and Hendrick Terbrugghen will be the focus of this chapter. A discussion regarding the iconography and their relation to moralizing aspects will be paid particular attention to.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will discuss how the use of illicit subjects, while vulnerable to the ire of Calvinist preachers and moralists, was absolutely pivotal to seventeenth-century Dutch art and its nature to moralize. Unlike the Catholic Church’s attempt to bring people back to the fold through displays of bombastic and theatrical religious art, the Dutch sought to help foster and encourage society’s behaviors in accordance to the ruling Calvinists’ strict view of life and morality. In order to accomplish this goal, the Dutch made use of illicit imagery which, while it could be argued, did not help foster Calvinist ideals, was meant to make people depicted in the
paintings look like fools in order to show the activities of the foolish and immoral in the
seventeenth century. While the focus on maintaining morals was originally derived mainly from
biblical and mythological subjects in the early sixteenth century, after the return of the Utrecht
Caravaggisti and the influence of Caravaggio, the subjects were taken from daily life and were
meant to help people relate to the foolishness of those depicted. This supports Eddy de Jongh’s
argument that the works both instruct and delight the viewers. As a result, paintings featuring
illicit subjects helped create a culture that was educated and mindful of their behaviors and
which helped teach and illustrate the morals the Calvinist preachers espoused in their sermons.
Thus, these works were more than merely eyefuls of sins of the flesh and other earthly pleasures.
Instead, these paintings were pedagogical tools that were meant to help the viewers maintain the
morals of the fledging Dutch Republic.

Scholars have debated the nature of Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century over the
past thirty years.¹ Currently, studies in Dutch art have had, according to Mariët Westermann, a
“retrospective character.”² This is due to the fact that recent publications have not only been of a
historiographical nature regarding past receptions of Dutch art but also shows a resurgence of the
debate over realism and seeming realism with the publication of Eddy de Jongh’s most important
studies translated into English.³ This thesis is written following Eddy de Jongh’s idea that Dutch
paintings were meant to “instruct and delight.” Eddy de Jongh believes in the idea these
paintings hold deeper meaning beneath their “naturalistic” representations of reality.⁴ There are

¹ See Haverkamp, 510-519; Westermann, 2002a, 351-572, for more detailed information on the current status of
research in Dutch art and for a better chronology of its development.
² Westermann, 2002a, 366.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Franits, 1994, 130.
also those scholars who side with the American art historian, Svetlana Alpers. Her controversial 1983 book, *The Art of Describing*, criticizes the idea works hold deeper meaning since she argues the interpretative framework is derived from the system of interpreting Italian works of art geared more towards classical mythology, which Dutch art is not. Alpers and her followers argue that Dutch art doesn’t disguise meaning beneath the surface as Eddy de Jongh and his supporters believes but shows only what the eye can take in.\(^5\) I follow de Jongh’s view that these works hold a deeper meaning beneath their surface since contemporary literature of the time alludes to that idea. For example, Franciscus Ridderus writes in 1663 that “one must not judge paintings by the figures they contain but by the art that is in them, and . . . the witty connotations.”\(^6\) To me, this statement says that while the content might be questionable, one must look at the deeper underlying connotations the painting is trying to communicate since a painting is, according to Erasmus, able to speak to the viewer and influence one’s behavior.\(^7\)

This topic is a valid subject since it helps contribute to our understanding of the culture and moral mindset of the seventeenth-century Netherlands. In discussing the role of depictions of illicit subjects, we are able to acquire an understanding of what the Dutch felt were important facets and staples to their society. However, instead of praising these vices, Dutch preachers often vehemently condemned them. By condemning these behaviors, the preachers and moralists used these situations as a chance for education and tried to teach people moral values through the use of ridicule and jest. Even though many preachers and writers were against using humor to instruct since they felt it could downplay the moral lesson\(^8\) some writers were in favor

---

\(^5\) Alpers, 24.

\(^6\) de Jongh, 1996, 39.

\(^7\) Freedberg, 1971, 241.

\(^8\) Westermann, 2002b, 47.
of limited humor. For example, Stephano Guazzo’s *Civil Conversazione* was published in Dutch in Alkmaar in 1603 and he says one should “delight [the] audience with ‘witty and clever entertainment.’”\(^9\) Jacob Cats even says moderate humor is permissible but warns not to overdo it.\(^10\) As will be shown, “witty and clever entertainment” will be a standard in these works but will also teach pedagogical lessons.

This topic is also important since it helps us not only understand the mindset of the seventeenth-century Dutch but it also helps us understand our own mindset in the twenty-first century. Even though we live in a more secular world not dominated by church and religion as was the seventeenth century, it is possible to find links between their world and our contemporary one. For example, it is very common to see billboards advertising cigarettes and alcohol. Often these ads show people having fun but there are always health warnings attached at the bottom. While these billboards obviously want business, there is a sense one should not be engaging in the behavior. Even though the moralizing aspect has been lost to health warnings, a similar idea can be found in Dutch paintings as well. Most importantly, studying these depictions of social vices helps link us to a past civilization. Admittedly, while it is impossible to fully understand early modern Dutch culture, works such as the ones discussed in this study will attempt to make sense of a culture seemingly at odds with itself. This idea follows the thoughts of Simon Schama from *The Embarrassment of Riches*:

> Illuminating an interior world as much as illustrating an exterior one . . . [moving] back and forth between morals and matter, between the durable and ephemeral, the concrete and the imaginary . . . the paradoxes crowd in so thickly that the culture [Dutch] seems almost to be designed as a contrapuntal agreement.\(^11\)

---

\(^9\) Dekker, 15.

\(^10\) Ibid.

I think Schama’s quote correctly illustrates the difficulty of interpreting these works since they seemingly contradict the values espoused in sermons. On one hand, the Dutch wanted to live a life of austerity and constancy. On the other hand, based on many treatises regarding morals and the many exhortations by preachers on the moral lives of their flock, many seemingly indulged themselves in earthly pleasures. Therefore, I think one must be careful when viewing these works as just a depiction of daily life.

Before delving into the discussion of the social vices, it is important to gain an understanding of how Dutch art was received and interpreted in the past. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholarship on Dutch art focused on stylistics and early studies often focused on a particular city with specialties such as landscapes, architectural views, etc, and this was then broken down into the leading artistic figures, their workshops, pupils, and followers.12 It was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that our modern mindset of Dutch art was formed. It was in these early centuries that many criticisms were leveled against the seventeenth century. For example, in the eighteenth century, Dutch viewers saw the “Dutch Golden Age” as a period of decline since Gerard Lairesse wrote in his Groot Schilderboek of 1707:

One hardly sees a lovely salon or a splendid room, however sumptuous it may be, that is not hung with beggars, brothels, pubs, smokers, minstrels, dirty children on the potty-chair, and even filthier and more awful things.13

This quote is important since it gives an idea of the criticisms directed towards Dutch art of the seventeenth century. To Gerard Lairesse, art of the Golden Age was filled with inappropriate subjects that did nothing to bring pride to the Dutch. The criticism of Dutch art as nothing but depictions of the lower and uneducated classes reveling in uncouth behavior was

12 Grijzenhout, 1999a, 2.

13 L. de Vries, 35.
further railed against by other writers in the eighteenth century. For example, in 1747 Horace Walpole said that the depicted figures are nothing but “drudging mimics of nature’s most uncomely coarseness.” Thus, the general view of Dutch art in the eighteenth century was one of displeasure due to the realism, the rejection of classicism, and the large amount of human vice. To an eighteenth century viewer, the abundance of vice would have been seen as uncultured and inappropriate. This view will change in the later eighteenth century when Dutch art will become highly esteemed and prized due to its realism and simplicity.

This view will carry over into the nineteenth century when the development of Art History as a serious academic discipline will help expand the idea the Dutch Golden Age was a high point in the history of art. Initially, in the nineteenth century, art historical research on Dutch art was done mainly by antiquarians and connoisseurs. Rather than focusing on interpretation, early studies were focused on an effort to distinguish artists, identify their works, and gather information about their lives. This methodology follows the same processes that were used in the mid to late eighteenth century. As the discipline of Art History developed, work was undertaken by mainly German and Austrians who began to focus on stylistics and the relationship of styles between one another. During this time, art historians also sought to dispel the myths about the artist’s personal lives and to quote Carl Vosmaer in 1863, “to clear up the fables our precursors handed down to us, and to unearth new material so that our successors can write a history that is both true and complete.” This quote shows an attempt to approach art history seriously, objectively, and free from romantic notions. Vosmaer is also interesting since

---

14 Grijzenhout, 1999b, 17.
15 Ibid., 28.
16 Boomgard, 166.
17 Ibid., 169.
he was one of the first to put forward the idea Dutch art was not as simplistic as previously thought. This view is supported several years later in 1874 by J. van Vloten, the writer of one of the first surveys of Dutch art, who wrote:

They had in mind no coarse reality, no crude, physical notion of people and things, which remained on the surface without penetrating inner life, the soul itself. No, like the finest, most sublime Italian painters . . . The Dutch knew how to make their often humble subjects speak with a taste, a feeling, a poetry, that raises them to the highest rank of art.18

This quote is interesting since it sets the framework for the idea that there was a deeper idea present in Dutch art and not just a simple depiction of daily life. However, Vosmaer’s and Vloten’s view that there was more to Dutch art than meets the eye and more than just a simple imitation of nature was not common for the nineteenth century. Most of their contemporaries from that time held the idea the realism of the work was a true to life reflection of seventeenth-century society and most characteristic of Dutch art. Relatively little attention was taken into what the painting was actually trying to say to the viewer. Thus, Vosmaer and van Vloten’s views were ahead of their time since it would be about 100 years later when their views will start to be looked at more in depth through the lens of iconology put forward by Erwin Panofsky in the 1950s and expanded on by Eddy de Jongh in the mid 1970s.

Before Panofsky and de Jongh’s work, art historians such as Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin began to look at the “internal history of art.” Whereas previously, scholars had focused on artistic attributions and dates, Wölfflin and Riegl sought to look at the development of style to create an “art history without names.” This new way of examining art now required a careful and methodical viewing of the work. As a result, the use of more objective terminology such as “linear” and “tactile” was used to explain the development instead of the subjective terminology

18 Ibid.
used previously by critics and non art historians.¹⁹ This new methodology helped solidify art history as a serious academic discipline. The approach that both Riegl and Wölfflin developed and used would become a dominant form of art historical inquiry and analysis for a large part of the twentieth century and is still used today in the twenty first century albeit on a smaller scale.

In addition to Riegl and Wölfflin who were concerned with the stylistic analysis and classification of art, there was another movement around the same time in the early twentieth century. Frederick Schmidt-Degener put forward the idea the paintings were not just simple images of reality but were images of reality which reflected the needs and wants of the patron who wanted the painting to have special significance to them.²⁰ Schmidt-Degener’s idea will start a shift toward understanding the meaning of the works. This thought process will eventually lead to the development of the field of Iconology in the 1950s by Erwin Panofsky. Iconology will become the predominant mode of interpretation in the 1950s and 1960s and will be defined more clearly by Panofsky’s three levels of meaning.²¹ In the early twentieth century though, the stylistic investigation of the work was still considered the best method for analysis, and the iconographic aspects of the works were seen as inferior in comparison to the stylistic analysis.²²

While there are numerous approaches to interpreting Dutch art, in writing this paper from a socio-cultural standpoint, I will focus thematically on the depictions of social vices in Dutch art of the early seventeenth century in both religious and secular paintings. I intend to discuss how they served as a means of educating their viewers to avoid the behaviors of those depicted in the

¹⁹ Ibid., 179.
²⁰ Ibid., 181.
²¹ de Jongh, 1999, 206.
²² Ibid., 182.
painting. Works depicting social vice were very popular at this time but it is important to remember:

all of the fortune-tellers, gamblers, and cheats, the innocent youths and those who exploit them, belong to one extended iconographic family. The paintings partake of the same themes woven into contemporary literature, ranging from popular lyrics, poems and . . . novellas . . . to written and improvised plays. They speak vividly also, in the visual idiom of their time, of social problems and moral issues that were issues of daily concern.23

I think Gail Feigenbaum sums up the nature of Dutch genre paintings correctly in this quote since while the composition of these themes might differ they all follow a tradition derived from contemporary literature and often make reference to daily life at the time. Although not in a true to life fashion as one might have seen it on the streets, the paintings do speak of these social vices and often try to address the problems these vices caused through their depiction. It is in this sense that one can get an understanding of the meaning of these works were to communicate.

---

23 Feigenbaum, 150.
CHAPTER 2
LIFE UNDER CALVINIST RULE

Before the creation of the Dutch Republic in 1581, there was a backlash against the Catholic Church regarding its various abuses such as the sale of indulgences and the perceived deviation from the Gospels. While the Calvinists differed from the Catholics, and even other Protestant sects, one of the largest problems Protestant groups had with the Catholic Church was their supposed practice of “idolatry.” To the Catholics, the use of images and sculptures in a liturgical setting aided in the devotion and veneration of a particular saint or feast. John Calvin and his followers were disturbed by the “idolatry” since “if God was an imminent visitor because the Last Days were approaching, He would be particularly angry to see His people still tolerating idols in His holy places.”¹ While Martin Luther and his followers were indifferent towards the use of art as a pedagogical tool, and to a certain extent, promoted art as an educational means, the Calvinists felt it was their sacred duty to follow God’s will through their interpretation of the Bible. It was this reason which they used to justify the Iconoclasm of the 1560s in the Netherlands. In these systematic, yet, sporadic acts, groups of men went through the churches and pulled down all the decorations they could reach from the altars and walls. These acts not only spelled insult to the Catholic faith and Church but also to the Spanish Empire, who controlled the Low Countries at this time. These annoyances to the Spanish Empire were further irritated since an idea of religious tolerance to Protestant groups was spreading throughout the Dutch cities at this time. This was seen as out of the question by the Spanish since they were known for their strict adherence to Catholicism and Catholic doctrine. This idea of tolerance for “heretic” groups will eventually let the Northern Netherlands become known as a haven for

¹ MacCulloch, 558.
persecuted groups of Lutherans, Anabaptists, Calvinists, and libertines. These problems to the Spanish Empire will prompt Philip IV of Spain to send the Duke of Alva to end the rebellion and restore Catholic orthodoxy. However, the conflict between the Duke of Alva and the Dutch, led by William of Orange will continue from 1567 until Alva’s departure from the Southern Netherlands in 1572.

On July 25, 1590, the States General of the seventeen Dutch Provinces declared that “the sovereign institution of this country . . . has no overlord except the deputies of the Provincial Estates themselves.” This created a separation between the Northern and Southern Netherlands. While the Southern Netherlands was still under the rule of the Spanish Hapsburgs with Catholicism as the official religion, the persecutions the Duke of Alva had initiated on a large scale ended. As a result, many Protestants of various sects were allowed to go to the Northern Netherlands where Protestantism had managed to gain footholds in many of the cities in the Provinces, although pockets of Catholicism still had influence.

Even though the United Provinces were initially joined against the war with Spain, religion was still a contentious issue. Eventually, the Reformed Church acquired the most power and followed a policy of relative tolerance throughout the Northern Netherlands. The policy of toleration was enacted by the Union of Utrecht in 1579 which states in Article Thirteen that “nobody shall be persecuted or examined for religious reasons.” This newfound “Freedom of Conscience” allowed people to practice whatever religion they wanted in private, or in some cases, no religion at all. Thus, Article Thirteen of the Union of Utrecht allows for a sense of religious freedom which will lead the Dutch Republic to become a veritable mixing pot of beliefs.

---

2 Maltby, 117.
3 Darby, 25.
4 Po-Chia Hsia, 2002, 2.
and confessions. This will help the Netherlands become more diverse in terms of faith.\textsuperscript{5} While it is commonly thought the Northern Netherlands was an exclusively Calvinist country, that is not correct. Article Thirteen allowed for the existence of sizeable groups of non-Calvinists with the largest groups comprising Catholics, Mennonites, Anabaptists, Remonstrants, Lutherans, Jews, skeptics, mystics, “libertines,” and dissenters, who might actually outnumber the local Calvinist population in some areas.\textsuperscript{6} However, this idea of religious tolerance gives a utopian vision of a society. In reality, this idealistic view of religious toleration was not extended and applicable to all groups.

On the contrary, the religious toleration was mainly extended and applicable to Protestant denominations.\textsuperscript{7} In the Northern Netherlands, Calvinism, despite being the most powerful of the Protestant sects, was the minority in regards to the size and number of actual adherents. In reality Catholics composed the largest but received the brunt of discrimination. While Protestant groups and other dissidents were tolerated under the idea of “Freedom of Conscience,” Catholicism was outlawed and Catholics became second class citizens.\textsuperscript{8} This was demonstrated since a number of anti-Catholic legislation was passed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of varying degrees of severity and discrimination. For example, Catholics could not worship freely and could not hold public offices. Even though these rules and legislative acts were often only enforced sporadically and unevenly throughout the Provinces, it still reflected the serious disfavor Catholicism had among the Protestants.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{5} Spaans, 130.
\textsuperscript{6} Kaplan, 60.
\textsuperscript{7} Darby, 27.
\textsuperscript{8} van Nierop, 40.
\textsuperscript{9} Po-Chia Hsia, 2.
Even though Catholicism was officially outlawed by the Reformed Church, the religious authorities and the secular authorities were often at odds with one another. During the seventeenth century, it was a fairly common practice for the secular authorities to either ignore the activities of Catholics or else take bribes in exchange for worship.\textsuperscript{10} This idea of the conflict between religious and secular authorities is also shown in the conflict over the division of power between the two types of authority. While the Reformed Church wanted to have religion and society closely regulated with a rigid theological order in place, the secular authorities of the cities usually, but not always, supported a milder form of Protestantism with less emphasis on religious dogma and a publicly protected Church with no strict regulations on society.\textsuperscript{11} These opinions often caused rifts between the two parties and will be a fairly regular occurrence throughout the seventeenth century.

While it is commonly thought the Reformed Church was the established Church in the Netherlands that is not correct since it was not the official state Church and no one was required to join or attend its services.\textsuperscript{12} Judith Pollman has shown that a majority of the population in the Northern Netherlands were not official members of the Reformed Church, or with any Church for that matter. For example, in 1587, only about 10\% or less of the population belonged to the Reformed Church.\textsuperscript{13} Pollman has also shown that between the years 1572-1620, only about 20\% of the total population of the Northern Netherlands was counted as full members of the Reformed Church.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, one must be careful in labeling the Netherlands as either

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{10}] Po-Chia Hsia, 1998, 85.
\item[\textsuperscript{11}] Israel, 369.
\item[\textsuperscript{12}] Kaplan, 61.
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] Pollman, 1993, 181.
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Po-Chia Hsia, 5.
\end{itemize}}
exclusively clandestine Catholic or Calvinist since people were free to attend the services of either denomination and were not bound to adhere to the rules of one particular faith. Instead, it is possible that many people only attended the sermons for moral edification and spiritual support with little or no regard for the doctrinal agenda put forward. If an individual wanted to join a particular church then a catechumen would need to have religious instruction, make a public profession of the faith, and live a lifestyle in accordance with the doctrines of the faith and precepts of the congregation to which they belonged. As might be expected, there was usually a reluctance to join as an official member of a church whether it be Catholic, Reformed, or any other denomination. This was due to the simple fact there were no perks for joining a particular church. For example, it was not typically required for one to be a member of a particular faith to be baptized, married or buried in a church headed by Catholics or Reformed. Thus, someone who was not a member of either church could hear sermons for their own spiritual edification and also receive the Sacraments from the church without becoming members and being required to live a certain lifestyle. While many were baptized in the Reformed Church, that did not make them official members since they would have had to make a public profession of the faith as well. Even though this view gives an idea that Calvinism was far reaching in the cities and towns, in the Netherlands, Calvinism was enforced sporadically. In other areas where Calvinism was more strongly favored such as in Switzerland, there was more emphasis on social control. For example, church services were held every day and four times a day on Sundays with punishments ensuing for late arrival, swearing, and going to inns and taverns. It is the author’s

15 Spaans, 38.
17 Pollman, 2002, 55.
18 Brusendorff and Hennington, 107.
opinion that this type of environment would have created an atmosphere of constant behavioral monitoring and this would have influenced artists since they would need to make sure their art conformed to the standards of the Calvinists.

History has often made the Catholics and Calvinists, and even other smaller denominations, to be entirely separate entities, and while theologically, they are different, they were all similar in terms of morality. All the denominations emphasized adherence to the Ten Commandments, and the moral teachings of Jesus, and they all condemned frivolous lifestyles. Both Catholics and Calvinists railed against drunkenness, premarital sex, and the customs associated with the popular activity known as Kweesten, or Night Courting. This was a common practice among youth in the seventeenth century where a young man spent the night in his girlfriend’s bedroom with the implied idea there would be no sex. Instead, they were to spend the night getting to know one another. Even though it was implied there was to be no sex, sex often did occur during this activity and while this was a relatively tolerated idea, the church authorities of all groups condemned this practice since it often lead to premarital sex and pregnancy. While these denominations usually hated one another, constantly denounced each other, and tried to take adherents away from the opposing confession, most people were not affiliated with any of the churches, and even those who were considered members of the churches seemed to favor a “common concept of Christianity that was theologically neutral. This form of Christianity was moralistic rather than dogmatic . . . [and] stressed unity and decent behavior.” Therefore, I think it is interesting that while the common view was that Catholics

---

19 Kingdon, 4.

20 Tracy, 571.

21 Muizelaar and Philips, 13.

22 Pollman, 2002, 55
and Calvinists hated one another, it seems that the majority of people simply wanted religious unity and wanted to focus on living moral lives. To them, arguments over theological doctrine were secondary to living in harmony with one another.

Theoretically, living under the Calvinist rule could be expected to have been a challenge to all but the most disciplined and ascetic. In general, Calvinist sermons often dealt with opposition to extravagance and self-indulgence. Frequently, these sermons advocated a life of sobriety, simplicity, and quiet reserve. Sermons also usually spoke of the dangers of engaging in various social vices such as wearing jewelry on women, going to the theater, dancing, smoking tobacco, gambling, drinking coffee and alcohol, and celebrating the festivals of St. Nicholas and Twelfth Night due to their Catholic associations and the frequent result of drunkenness and immodesty.23 Dancing was especially frowned upon by the Calvinist authorities since “frivolous dancing parties,” were seen as sins of the flesh and to the devout Calvinist, “the dance hall was the anti-church.”24 Preachers such as Willem Teellinck often railed against bright and flashy clothing as well since it showed one’s frivolity and idleness.25 Authorities also often tried to ban mundane activities that could be considered rather innocent. Therefore, gambling, dice, tric-trac, and ball playing came under attack since it showed idleness, went against the Bible and the Calvinist ideal of industriousness as a way of avoiding the sin of Sloth.26 Parlor games were also denounced such as the game, La Main Chaude (The Black Hand or Hot Cockles). In this game, a man put his head up a woman’s skirt, put his right hand behind his back, and then guessed who was touching his hand and spanking his bottom. The very idea of having a young man put his

---

23 See van Wagenberg-ter Hoeven, 65-96, for more information on the criticisms of the celebration.
24 van Deursen, 87.
26 Haak, 76.
head under a woman’s skirt and then have someone spank his bottom threw the Calvinist ideals of reserve and modesty out the window. As a result, this game was vehemently denounced by Calvinist preachers, including one who said that “a whore’s lap is the devil’s boat.”\textsuperscript{27} Another popular parlor game was \textit{Vrouwtje kom ten hoof} (Lady, Come into the Garden). The controversial aspect of this game involved both male and female players removing articles of clothing. According to Arnold Houbraken, this game was particularly popular among the youth in the city of Dordrecht.\textsuperscript{28} Gambling was another social vice that was vehemently condemned by Catholics and Calvinists and other smaller sects since it could lead to bloodshed, broken families, domestic abuse, and verbal blasphemies due to losing money. Not only was gambling a social evil that was prevalent in the lower classes of society but it was also common in the upper echelons of society. In order to help their congregations avoid these evils, Calvinist preachers would often make use of puns and proverbs in their sermons to help their flock understand the moral lessons. In using these popular puns and proverbs, it was the hope of the preachers that their congregants would be able to apply these sayings to their daily lives and reject participation in activities which would be considered a fast track to Hell.\textsuperscript{29}

While all of these rules regarding the curbing of social vice gives one the idea the Dutch Republic was a moral paradise free of vice and other social ills, that is an idealistic view and human nature does not allow for a society to be free from vice. In the early modern period, moral corruption in varying degrees of severity was present at all levels of society and often makes a frequent appearance in art. Even though art was technically frowned upon by many Calvinist preachers, it was still created in vast numbers. Since the Catholic Church was

\textsuperscript{27} C. Brown, 1984, 211.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 53.
outlawed and went underground, the main patron of art prior to the Reformation was no longer the Catholic Church. The new patron of this period was not the Reformed Church but wealthy private citizens and art lovers.\textsuperscript{30} This new type of patronage will allow for more freedom for the artist to engage with different types of genre, including the depiction of social vices.

However, this does not mean to say that no religious art was created anymore. Research has shown that Catholics and Protestants tended to differ on the types of paintings they had in their homes based on their religious confessions. According to John Loughman and Michael Montias, Catholics tended to prefer New Testament scenes with an emphasis on Christ’s Passion, while Protestants preferred more Old Testament stories and stories dealing with the public life and ministry of Christ.\textsuperscript{31} In a talk given at St. Augustine’s Catholic Church in Gainesville, Florida on February 26, 2008, Father Nicholas Glisson, Ph.D presented a lecture on the “History of Liturgical Architecture.” In this talk, Father Glisson made the point that Protestant churches in the early modern period took on a more didactic approach with an emphasis on teaching to help their congregations live moral lives.\textsuperscript{32} It is the author’s thought that even though the Reformed Church did not commission art, the sermons were often didactic in nature. As a result, this carried over to the commissioned art by the patrons since it would have fallen in line with the new emphasis on the teaching role of the Reformed Church.

While Calvinists are usually seen as vehemently anti-art, this is not entirely true. Even though the teachings of John Calvin permeated all aspects of both secular and spiritual life and often stressed an austere and moderate life, at the same time, he also gave permission to enjoy

\textsuperscript{30} Baudouin, 16.

\textsuperscript{31} Loughman and Montias, 48.

\textsuperscript{32} Talk given at St. Augustine Catholic Church in Gainesville, Florida on February 26, 2008 by Father Nicholas Glisson, Ph.D
the beauty of God’s creation.\textsuperscript{33} Calvin’s insistence on moderate and prudent living carried over to all aspects of life since he believed “exaggerated luxury, whether it consisted of jewels, paint, or simply loud and costly fabrics, was conducive to impurity.”\textsuperscript{34} While John Calvin condemned the decoration of churches with images of holy figures, he was not opposed to works of a secular nature. In his \textit{Institution of the Christian Religion} from 1566, Calvin writes:

> Since there is no point in portraying God in a physical likeness, how much less should an image or idol of God be worshipped. It therefore follows that a painter should only represent what he has seen with his own eyes. And as the majesty of God is too exalted for human view, it should not be corrupted by phantoms, which have nothing in common with it. As to those who paint or engrave, there are stories to be represented, portraits, images of animals, townscape, and landscapes.\textsuperscript{35}

This quote is important since it explains that there is no reason to portray God’s likeness since his likeness is unknown. It also gives an idea of Calvin’s view that he was not totally against art but was against art that tried to depict God. This permissiveness of allowing things that “can be seen” is supported by Calvin’s insistence that one should be able to enjoy God’s creation since:

> If we consider for what end He created food, we shall find that he consulted not only for our necessity, but also for our enjoyment and delight. Thus, in clothing, the end was, in addition to necessity, comeliness, and honour; and in herbs, fruits, and trees, beside their various uses, gracefulness of appearance and sweetness of smell.\textsuperscript{36}

In this quote, Calvin explains his reason why painting should be enjoyed since there are other joys that God created for the benefit of mankind. Also, in his \textit{Institution of the Christian Religion}, Calvin writes that works such as biblical and mythological stories were permissible

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Larsen, 49.
\item Ibid., 50.
\item C. Brown, 1986, 24-25.
\item Larsen, 50-51.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
since “history could profit by some promulgation or the learning one could take from it [works depicting appropriate subject matter].” To Calvin, religious and mythological works were acceptable as long they were didactic in nature and God himself was not shown since it was impossible to show a likeness of God. While Calvin lent some support to the didactic uses of art, he was sure to say that while painting and sculpture may “adorn our homes, the palaces of our cities, or their museums…their secular and earthly character prohibits forever the access to the sanctuary.” Thus, Calvin was only opposed to art in churches, but supported painting as a pedagogical tool, since it could be used as an educational lesson outside of the church.

Even though Calvin was not wholly against painting, he was not the sole authority figure in the Reformed Church. Unlike Catholicism, which has one central authority, there is no central authority in the Reformed Church. Instead, preachers usually worked in relatively autonomous congregations. This allowed the preachers to differ in their opinions on art and other matters regarding the rules and ascetic practices of the congregation. There were those preachers who were totally against art, those who took a view more in line with Calvin, and there were also those who took more liberal views. Preachers though, were not the sole authority in the congregation they headed. In the Reformed Church, there were church councils made up of the pastor and a group of lay elders. The lay elders would have been elderly or prominent congregants who were elected annually and who would be seen as exemplary models of piety for the congregation. Not only did these consistories help in establishing set rules for the behaviors for the congregation to follow, but they also helped in maintaining social discipline among the community at large. Also, often, these consistories worked as large network that would help

37 Lowenthal, 1986, 34.
38 Larsen, 56.
39 Spaans, 122.
monitor the behaviors of the locals in a particular area. Jonathan Israel explains the role of consistories and social control since:

Backed by the neighbourhood watches, and supplied with additional information from the house-visits of the preachers and their assistants, the ‘sick comforters’, the consistories kept up a relentless pressure, at all levels, against immodesty, promiscuity, rowdiness, drunkenness, dishonest bankruptcies, and, not least, the low-cut dresses worn by a few fashionable ladies in courtly circles. The consistories were not unaware that many, or most, cases of adultery and fornication went undetected. They nevertheless believed that where instances came to light it was vital to investigate, and bring pressure to bear . . . [It’s] major objective being to break up irregular liaisons, mobilizing social pressure to reduce offending individuals to penitence and willingness to reform.40

As this quote suggests, the result of this setup can be understood why there were differences in opinion regarding the uses of art since each congregation would have a different group dynamic. While the individual congregations might agree on general aspects of morality and doctrine that were universal to the Reformed Church, the preachers and council members might differ on other personal matters such as art and what kind of art was acceptable and unacceptable and what kind of behavior was and was not permissible. Punishments for rule breakers usually focused on social stigma and community shunning. For example, people were often banished from the Lord’s Supper and denied communion since “public exposure as unchaste, was not only harmful to one’s reputation and social standing, but damaged one’s spiritual status.”41 Thus, one congregation might take a more strict interpretation of Calvinism and reject art outright while other congregations might take a more moderate approach and see the pedagogical value in art. Of course, consistories differed with one another on these types of decisions and were often subjective choices. Thus, there was no full proscription of painting among the Calvinists as one might be inclined to think.

40 Israel, 685.
41 Ibid.
While these works might have had a didactic purpose, many Calvinist preachers were still vehemently opposed to art since they thought the art could encourage lust and then followed the idea “a carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Romans 8:7). For example, the Calvinist minister, Dirck Raphaelsz Camphuyzen condemned the visual arts and said “painting is the mother of all foolish vanities . . . [and] . . . is the wag in this world’s foolish farce.” Camphuyzen denounced art further and called it the “seductress of sight,” “eye temptation,” “the food of evil lust and villainous idiocy,” “venom for the eye,” and “the art of deception,” which thrusts “the heat of lust into the depths of the heart.” Preachers and moralist writers also thought that art featuring social vices, particularly of a sexual nature, would, as the Dutch Humanist, Dirck Coornhert thought, cause “fiery unchasteness, burning desires and hot sensuality.” As a result, this would, as Gerard de Lairesse wrote, “put a young and chaste virgin to blush.” To many moralists and preachers, the main concern was that these works of featuring social vice would not help people reject the sinful activities but would serve as a temptation since they would be tempted to join in. In Jacob Cats’ *Houwelick* from 1625, Cats advises his reader to “avoid lewd pictures painted in the service of luxuria . . . And . . . let art . . . not move you at all, for even in art lies evil.” Thus, there was a fear the plan to educate would backfire since works of social vice would invite participation rather than warn against it.

---

42 Halewood, 7.
43 Sluijter, 11-12.
44 de Jongh, 1996, 44.
45 de Jongh, 2000, 54.
46 Ibid., 55.
On the other hand, while preachers such as Dirck Raphaelsz Camphuyzen were virulently opposed to the arts, there were also moderate preachers who supported the arts to a certain extent. For example, another Protestant preacher, Franciscus Ridderus wrote in his *Nuttige Tijd-korter Reizende en andere Luiden* of 1663 that “one must not judge paintings by the figures they contain but by the art that is in them, and . . . the witty connotations.”48 In this quote, Ridderus takes the moderate approach to art and sees the didactic value in using painting to help reach and teach the members of his congregation. This paper will follow Ridderus’ view when dealing with the depicted works since it is the author’s opinion that these works did function as pedagogical tools to the viewer, who would been middle class and wealthy burghers of the cities.

48 de Jongh, 1996, 39
CHAPTER 3
THE CITY OF UTRECHT

The city of Utrecht stands out among the other cities of the Northern Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church was weakened in the Northern Netherlands due to years of anti-clericalism and the spread of Protestantism. As a result, the cities of the northern Netherlands became more susceptible to Protestant leanings. This caused Philip II of Spain to write to the Pope, “I cannot see how our religion [Catholicism] can be maintained in these states.”¹ Philip’s apprehension and uncertainty about the future of Catholicism in the Netherlands was supported by the fact that out of a population of about 3 million people, there were only Bishoprics at Arras, Cambrai, Tournai, Liege, and Utrecht. Of the five Bishoprics in the Low Countries, only Utrecht lies in the Northern Netherlands. This is possibly attributed to the fact that Utrecht was the largest city in the Northern Netherlands at the time. Thus, Utrecht would have been an ideal location to administer the smaller towns. The other bishoprics were in the Spanish-held South.² Due to the presence of only one Bishopric in the whole Northern Netherlands, that left the cities more vulnerable to Calvinist teachings than their southern counterparts. This is shown in the northernmost provinces of Zeeland and Friesland where Protestantism was the strongest, as opposed to cities of Utrecht and the Southern Netherlands, where Catholicism still maintained a foothold.

As might be expected, with only one Bishopric to cover the entire Northern Netherlands, it is not surprising there were problems with territorial administration and clerical obedience. Due to the large area to administer, it would not have been possible to monitor all of the clergy to

¹ Israel, 74.
² Ibid.
make sure they were adhering to clerical vows and avoiding liturgical and doctrinal errors. There are numerous reports from this area that reflect the lack of clerical discipline, particularly in regards to the vow of clerical celibacy and abstinence. According to Jonathan Israel, 25% of the clergy in the Northern Provinces kept concubines. Other criticism leveled against the Bishopric of Utrecht dealt mainly with poor clerical training and rampant absenteeism that was widespread throughout the whole church hierarchy. For example, the Bishop of Utrecht, Georges van Egmond (1535-1559) was known for his worldliness and the Bishop of Tournai, Charles de Croy (1525-1564) celebrated his first Mass in 1540 and then was usually absent from his ecclesiastical duties due to a lack of interest on his part. These issues with clerical life and the lack of enforcement of the rules caused major problems for the Church which helped fuel criticism leveled against it. Part of this is due to the fact that the Bishop of Utrecht reflected the elite and worldly pre-Reformation bishop who often came from a wealthy and established family, had a keen interest in art, and who often commissioned numerous works for the churches in his diocese and himself. Due to the worldliness of the Bishop of Utrecht and his successors, this allowed the Bishopric of Utrecht to remain an important artistic center from the late sixteenth century until the early seventeenth century.

Prior to the Reformation, the city of Utrecht was the oldest city in the fledging Dutch Republic and the nobility had played an important role in building its identity as a traditional city. This influenced the type of art that would be commissioned during this time. Unlike what may be previously expected, most of the Utrecht nobility lived within the city, although a few noble families lived or smaller estates or in smaller towns around Utrecht such as Amersfoort.

---

3 Ibid., 76.
4 Ibid., 75-76.
Wijk bij Duurstede, and Rhenen. 5 Often, these noble families had ownership of large tracts of land, held government offices, and were appointed as members to the Cathedral Chapter. 6 For example, until the late sixteenth century, it was customary for one of the city’s two burgomasters to come from the nobility and this helped promote, as Alison McNeil Kettering says, “an aristocratic consciousness among the magistrates.” 7 This could also create an elitist sense of art which will show in the art of the late sixteenth century in Utrecht. Even after Catholicism was officially outlawed in 1580, unlike other cities in the Northern Netherlands, which had allowed for more social mobility among the classes, Utrecht remained a fairly conservative city which kept its traditions alive even though the Bishop had been removed. 8 This was due to the presence of the nobility and their efforts to keep their privileged positions. The ability to maintain its noble and traditional character helped determine the artistic style that would be characteristic of Utrecht art of the late sixteenth century.

In the late sixteenth century, artists who had previously enjoyed a rich source of commissions from the clergy quickly realized commissions from the Catholic Church were going to be few and far between. 9 However, art was still commissioned for Catholic churches albeit in a secretive fashion. 10 As a result of the loss of the Catholic Church as the main patron of the arts, future commissions came from members of the nobility and elite members of urban society. While the Church commissioned religious works for the sacred interior and in aiding the liturgy,

5 Meierink and Bakker, 74.
6 J. de Vries, 56.
7 McNeil-Kettering, 14.
8 Ibid., 15.
9 Bok, 90.
the nobles and elite members of society commissioned different types of works. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the elite of Utrecht society preferred not so much religious works but usually pastoral and mythological scenes featuring the endeavors of the pagan gods. These brightly colored mannerist scenes reached the height of popularity in the 1590s. These works, which were often produced for wealthy merchants and regents, often feature excessive nudity with frolicking deities. These were often seen as feasts for the eye and frequently came under fire by strict Calvinists.11 While this new emphasis on pastorals, mythology, and biblical themes found preponderance during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, these works were also meant to be pedagogical. Let us now examine the works of Joachim Wtewael as a forerunner to the Utrecht Caravaggisti, who presents morals in a different manner. Unlike the Utrecht Caravaggisti who will focus on transmitting morals through the use of depicting daily life, Joachim Wtewael transmits morals through the use of biblical and mythological scenes without much reference to daily life.

It is thought that Joachim Wtewael was born around 1566 in the city of Utrecht. He was a member of the Utrecht middle class since members of his family included an antiquarian, a lawyer, a canon at St. Peter’s in Utrecht, a notary, and a burgomaster.12 It is not known for certain whether or not Wtewael was a Catholic or Calvinist. Anne Lowenthal says it is likely Wtewael was baptized a Catholic since Utrecht was a Catholic stronghold and then remained Catholic until about 1595 when he became a sympathizer to Calvinist ideals.13 It is thought Wtewael sided with the Calvinists since he supported the Contra-Remonstrants in the Utrecht city council and also supported the Stadholder, Maurice of Nassau, who was also a supporter of

---

11 Israel, 557.
12 Lowenthal, 1986, 27.
13 Ibid., 34.
the Contra-Remonstrants. Unlike the more liberal minded Remonstrants, who favored religious tolerance to non-Calvinists, the Contra-Remonstrants were in favor of strict Calvinism and rejected the idea of tolerance towards non-Calvinists, particularly Catholics. Also, in an anonymous letter to the jurist, Hugo Grotius, Wtewael is said to be “very partial to the Calvinist religion.” Wtewael’s artwork also reflects Calvinist ideals since he follows John Calvin’s rule that it is permissible to depict biblical history as long as God is not shown. It was also permissible to paint mythology since it could help educate. However, it is possible his artwork reflects more the artistic style and subject matter popular at the time than Calvin’s views. Although, based on his Calvinist leaning and support for Contra-Remonstrants, there is a chance he tried to follow Calvin’s views in art.

The first work of Joachim Wtewael under discussion is Lot and His Daughters from 1595 and which is located in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This work is interesting since it shows what Lowenthal calls a “moral dilemma.” The idea of the “moral dilemma” will play an important role in the future works of Wtewael and also in the works of the Utrecht Caravaggisti. The work illustrates the story of Lot and his Daughters from the Book of Genesis (19:23-36). In the story, Lot is warned by angels to leave the city of Sodom before its destruction, along with city of Gomorrah, by God for its sinfulness. In the story, Lot is warned not to look back at the destruction but to flee to the hills. Wtewael shows two episodes from the biblical story. In the distance, one sees the city of Sodom burning on the right. This refers to Genesis 19:24-26 where “the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire . . . out of Heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.”

14 Ibid., 33.
15 Ibid.
While Wtewael portrays the sinful cities burning, he neglected to include Lot’s wife who was turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God’s order and looking back on the destruction.

The focal point of the work is on Lot and his two daughters. This depiction focuses on Genesis 19:30-38 but the painting differs from the biblical account. The biblical account says Lot and his daughters lived in a cave. In this work, Wtewael shows the trio just outside of a makeshift shelter that could be either the mouth of a cave or the hollowed out trunk of a tree. The viewer is witnessing the moment before incest which will occur shortly between the father and his two daughters. The work shows the nearly nude daughters next to their father. One daughter reclines against him while he raises a tazza of wine and caresses her breast while the other daughter proffers up grapes. On the ground around the trio are a plethora of fruits such as grapes, melons, and various types of cheeses. These objects are interesting since they can give the idea of overt sexuality. For example, the walking staff with the two bottle gourds attached connotes the phallus and the ripe fruit can connote sexuality and the anticipation of the sexual moment. However, some objects create an ambiguity that can be interpreted as either moral or immoral and this refers to the “moral dilemma” Lowenthal addresses. As a result of the ambiguity concerning the actual symbolism of these objects, the overall interpretation of the picture is complicated.

For example, the wine and bread can be interpreted as a symbol of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist which relates to Lot since he was seen as a prototype of Christ.\textsuperscript{16} However, the wine in the context of Lot’s story can be referencing the wine with the vice of drunkenness since wine was associated with not only intoxication but also lust and pleasure.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Lowenthal, 1988, 15.
\item[17] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
The grapes also can have an ambiguous meaning. For example, Eddy de Jongh says the manner in which the grapes are held could refer to the precariousness of a maiden’s virginity since the slightest touch can smudge the purity of her virtue.\textsuperscript{18} De Jongh also says the bunch of grapes could suggest virginity when they are held by the stem since the stem stands for marriage and a man and woman should only hold grapes by the stem to show their moderation and control in regards to sex in marriage.\textsuperscript{19} When one looks at the daughter holding the grapes, she is not holding the grapes by the stem but is holding the bunch in her whole hand. This could refer to immorality and the excessive consumption of wine which could lead to a lack of judgment and regretful actions. Another ambiguous symbol in the work that can have either positive or negative connotations is the various cheeses on the far left side of the composition. Like the wine, which could have both sacred and profane connotations, the cheese could also have sacred and profane meanings. The cheeses might hold sacred meaning since Tertullian, the early Christian writer of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century, says the Incarnation of Christ was likened to the curd formation in cheese making.\textsuperscript{20} Previously, cheese in Dutch art was thought to refer to an important economic commodity to the Dutch Republic. However, in the sixteenth and much of the seventeenth century, cheese was seen as a rather indigestible food due to the odor it gave off as it decayed.\textsuperscript{21} The cheeses could also represent putrefaction since the work shows stacked cheeses in different stages of decay. The top cheese has become green and this could refer to the proverb Roemer Visscher would use in his \textit{Sinnepoppen} (1614) which states, “Soon ripe, soon

\textsuperscript{18} de Jongh, 1974, 174.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Lowenthal, 1988, 15.

\textsuperscript{21} Bruyn, 202-203.
rotten.” Even though this proverb was put into print in 1614 and this work dates from 1597-1604, it is possible Wtewael might have been familiar with the actual saying or a similar one. The saying “soon ripe, soon rotten,” relates to the situation at hand since it refers to the imminent sexual contact that will soon become foul due to the rancid nature of incest. All of these objects around the trio present complications for the overall meaning of the work since the objects can all be presented as representing a sacred or profane nature based on the given context.

When one looks at the composition of the figures, one gets the idea the incest took place at one time with each daughter taking a turn with their father. In the written biblical account, the incest occurs on successive nights with one daughter sleeping with their father each night. However, this is probably artistic license on Wtewael’s part or possibly an iconographic convention since it would not be possible to show two successive nights on one canvas without breaking up the story. While it is easy to say the work is filled with incestuous sexual indulgence, the biblical story itself holds no erotic tones. Thus, this helps label the work as a pedagogical tool. However, this work actively exploits nudity and sexual intimacy with the slung leg referring to sexual union. Thus, Wtewael might have been trying to gain the viewer’s attention by making almost excessive use of sexuality in order to get the viewer’s attention and teach a possible moral. Engaging the viewer in a morally ambiguous and compromising position heightens the work’s relevance in transmitting a moral.

In biblical exegesis, Lot is an interesting figure since he is a man who goes from good to bad and bad to good. For example, Lot is good since he agrees to leave with Abraham but then becomes bad when becomes selfish in choosing to split with Abraham and settle in Sodom.

---

22 Ibid. 207.

23 Lowenthal, 1986, 92.
When the angels visited, he was bad since he hesitated in following the angel’s orders to leave Sodom but then obeyed them. 24 This ambivalence fits the work since it relates to the “moral dilemma” Lowenthal stresses and by the ambivalent meanings of the various objects. One on hand, Lot is a moral man since he is chosen by God to be saved from the destruction of Sodom and follows God and the angel’s order to leave the city without looking back. However, he becomes intoxicated and has sexual intercourse with his two daughters which cancels out his moral virtue. The daughters are also in their own “moral dilemma” as well. On one hand, they thought they were the only survivors and they said to one another in Genesis 19:31-33, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father.” To the daughters, they felt it was their duty to repopulate the earth and were totally ignorant to the fact only two cities were destroyed and not all of the cities on earth. Due to their ignorance, they both decide to sleep with their father and engage in an act they knew was wrong but which would ultimately help repopulate the earth.

To John Calvin and other commentators, this biblical story provides a perfect pedagogical tool since it is filled with ambivalence that could be used to contemplate and debate upon. Since Wtewael seems to have sympathized with the Calvinists, he follows this idea of allowing ambiguity to provide intellectual and moral debate. Wtewael portrays the incest of Lot and his daughters as an ambivalent act that exudes powerful sexuality with not only the positions and gestures of the figures but also the various objects holds ambiguous meanings since several of the items could have sacred or profane connotations. Calvin and Wtewael used this scene to show that while Lot was indeed sinful, due to his drunkenness and obliviousness to the gravity of

---

24 Lowenthal, 1988, 14.
the sin, he could be redeemed since he did not commit incest out of pure lust. The daughters can even be exonerated from their fault since they were ignorant and thought they were doing a service for the good of mankind to try and repopulate the Earth, despite knowing incest was wrong. To the pure-minded viewer, this is as an example of why one should practice temperance and abstain from drink, since it blurs the senses and judgment and makes one more prone to sin. If wine had not been involved, the incest would not have happened since they would have better judgment. Thus, this work is a successful example of how Wtewael uses the idea of ambiguity to play upon the passions and conscience of the viewer in order to help them contemplate morals. It is this type of work, which holds a certain degree of ambiguity that the Utrecht Caravaggisti will pick up on in order to use social vice as a moralizing tool.

The *Wedding of Peleus and Thetis* from 1602 in Braunschweig is another work that follows the same kind of model as *Lot and his Daughters*. *The Wedding* also makes use of ambiguities in order to help the viewer contemplate the possible meaning while engaging the senses. This work is taken from the mythological story of Peleus, who marries the Nereid, Thetis, and who invites all the Olympian gods to the wedding except Eris, the goddess of Discord. Eris is shown just to the left of the center of the table flying in just above Jupiter and Diana. The upper left area of the work shows a personification of Fame blowing her trumpet and beside her is the Judgment of Paris. The left foreground shows Vulcan taking a break from his forge and Neptune on a cloud. Just to the right of the center in the foreground is the woodland god, Pan, who is reclining and listening to the music being played by a nymph while Ceres stands beside him and holds a cornucopia. On the right side, Saturn is eating one of his children

---


26 Lowenthal, 1988, 16.
and Hercules stands in his traditional lion skin and holds a club. Hercules looks down just in front of him on Mars and Venus, who are embracing while a bacchante pours them some wine. The god of wine, Bacchus is entering with his drunken retinue just behind the bacchante while Apollo is riding in is his chariot while Iris sits on a rainbow. To add to the already packed scene, Wtewael decided to add in numerous nymphs and putti which add to the crowd of over one hundred different figures in different poses.\(^{27}\)

This whole work is a warning against discord and disparity since “whenever discord and disparity overtake the natural powers, or become powerful, then not only moderation is forgotten, but the whole comes undone and melts away…[and as a result,] dissolution can undermine lands, towns, cities, and each individual body.”\(^{28}\) While this work is filled with nude bodies, hedonism, drunkenness, and sex, all of which might give the viewer the chance to focus more on the bodily and physical aspects of the work, the depiction of the Judgment of Paris in a smaller area of the canvas helps show viewers the dangers of indulgence, dissension, and poor judgment.\(^{29}\) This type of work would have been made for a wealthy and elite collector who was educated since a commoner would have had the education to decipher all the figures. These two works both represent a type of art that will go into a decline after the Utrecht Caravaggisti return and make art more populist and democratic as opposed to Wtewael’s elitist and aristocratic style.

Both of the works by Joachim Wtewael show an important step in how morals were transmitted to the viewers in the city of Utrecht. During the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century, before the Utrecht Caravaggisti returned to the city, depictions of social vices were

\(^{27}\) Lowenthal, 1986, 100.

\(^{28}\) Ibid. 57.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
shown albeit in a different fashion. In order to try and follow Calvin’s idea that one could enjoy
the simple pleasures of life but remain mindful to avoid frivolity, these works display a “variable
morality” that helps characterize the Dutch mindset at this time. For example, while the Dutch
prized money, domestic wealth, lavish feasts, and creative endeavors in art, they were still
encouraged to live a life of austerity, sobriety, piety, and to avoid frivolity.  

As a result, Joachim Wtewael paints works that create “moral dilemmas” since they place figures in
ambivalent situations and can be read in numerous ways. Jacob Cats will follow this line of
thinking in the later seventeenth century and say “it is not rare that one and the same thing should
be regarded as sometimes good, sometimes bad.”

As is shown in *Lot and his Daughters* and
the *Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*, both works tantalize the viewer in their depiction of overt
intimacy and sensuality not only by the poses of the characters but also by the attributes they
hold and with the objects they may be surrounded with. For example, the wine, grapes, and
cheese in *Lot and his Daughters* can have Eucharistic and Christian meanings but can also have
more profane references such as associations with lust and intoxication. This ambiguity on the
part of the artist to leave works open for interpretation continued throughout the seventeenth
century and was common in works meant for a private home since they tried to engage the
viewer in the ways God reveals “the complexities of life choices.”

It is also thought that the
ambiguity of these paintings was necessary as marketing tools since works were often sold on
the open market and the paintings needed to appeal to a wide range of patrons who would have
had different tastes. Thus, a patron who bought a work such as one by Wtewael may not have

---

30 Ibid., 61.
31 Ibid., 59.
32 Wheelock Jr, 14.
33 Becker, 158.
the interest of interpreting its morals in mind but instead, might buy it for the physical and erotic aspects of the painting. This line of thinking is in line with Wayne Franits’ view that the contemporary reception of paintings often reflected the tastes of the individual buyer where the buyer would have been able to see what he wanted to see and not look for a specific program.34 This type of painting would have been popular in the city of Utrecht since it had not only a sizable Calvinist community but a sizable Catholic community as well. However, it is through the works of Caravaggio that a new method of transmitting morals to the viewers will appear. This will be brought back to Utrecht by the Dutch followers of Caravaggio such as Honthorst, Baburen, and Terbrugghen and by the early 1620s will spread to Amersfoort, Delft, and Haarlem.35

34 Franits, 1997, 119.
CHAPTER 4
THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE ART OF CARAVAGGIO

When we take a look at seventeenth century art in Rome, we get a similar but different view from the Catholic Church. Due to the upheaval caused by the Reformation, the Catholic Church called the Council of Trent. The Council lasted for eighteen years and was broken up into twenty-five different sessions dealing mainly with doctrinal and clerical issues but also dealing with art. In short, the goal of the Council, according to Pietro Bertano, the Bishop of Fano in 1547, was not to “help those already lost to the Church [Protestants] . . . [but] at least help those in danger of becoming lost.”¹ In general, the Council tried to “apply itself to restore ecclesiastical discipline, which has entirely collapsed, and to amend the depraved conduct of the clergy and Christian people.”² A detailed history and analysis of the Council of Trent and its decrees is not possible here but there is much literature on the subject and a few helpful sources can be found in the footnote.³ The focus will be on the role the Council of Trent had on the visual arts. The Council of Trent not only dealt with the visual arts and how they were to be presented but also dealt with the arts in general such as the written word.⁴ Since the Council of Trent dealt mainly with the reforms of the Catholic Church and focused on theological doctrines, it is not surprising art does not play a large role in the Council. However, along with the collapse of clerical discipline and lack of morals among the laity, there were concerns paintings could mislead people and help contribute to the lack of religious understanding. For example, there was concern works could present mixed messages to people since the paintings could be

¹ Davidson, 1987, 9.
² Ibid., 23.
³ For more information on the Council of Trent see Davidson, 1987; Black; Janelle, and The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, 1978.
⁴ See Black, for more detailed information.
vulnerable to doctrinal errors, blatantly wrong theological points, and inappropriate imagery that might arouse not the pious nature of a person but the lustful nature.\(^5\) This concern over the role of art merited a Decree made during the twenty-fifth session of the Council. The role of art is treated briefly in December 1563 in which the Decree, “On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of the Saints, and on Sacred Images” states:

Moreover, let the bishops diligently teach that by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of the faith . . . If any abuses shall have found their way into these holy and salutary observances, the holy council desires earnestly that they be completely removed so that no representation of false doctrines and such as might be the occasion of grave error to the uneducated be exhibited…and all lasciviousness avoided, so that images shall not be painted or adorned with a seductive charm…Finally, such zeal and charm should be exhibited by the bishops with regard to these things that nothing may appear disorderly or unbecoming and confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing disrespectful, since holiness becometh the house of God.\(^6\)

This quote sets up the framework that art was to take and what kind of art is appropriate and what the key goal of it should be. One of the key players who set out to enforce the decrees of the Council was Pope Clement VIII, who demanded decorum in art and a strict adherence to moral character and virtue in accordance to the Council of Trent. Not only did Clement VIII enforce decorum in art but he also embarked on social programs meant to clean up the city of Rome. For example, he banned prostitutes from the Borgo near the Vatican, created a new Index of Prohibited Books to deal with heresy and doctrinal errors in the written word,\(^7\) and banned swimming nude in the Tiber lest it cause desire among passerby.\(^8\) However, while prostitutes were banned from the Borgo near the Vatican, it was realized prostitution was too widespread

\(^5\) Jones, 28.
\(^7\) B. Brown, 277.
\(^8\) Varriano, 192.
and could not be stopped so prostitutes were forced into the Ortaccio near the Via Ripetta.\footnote{Davidson, 1994, 94.} For the purpose of this paper, Clement VIII was a vehement enemy of the profane in sacred art and was known to hate images of Mary Magdalene, St. Lawrence, and St. Sebastian due to the often controversial poses and lack of clothing on them, even though they are shown in pious submission to the Will of God.\footnote{Ibid., 194.} This same enmity also applied to scantily clad Crucifixes and candlesticks whose shapes were seen as “suggestive.”\footnote{Ibid.} However, bare flesh was not always an indicator of lasciviousness. Franco Mormando points out that Federico Borromeo would always reject the “inclusion of nude figures, unless strictly demanded by the subject of the painting.” Bare flesh was not necessarily condemned since it could relate to theological ideas such as pre-lapsian innocence, poverty, humility, and the total submission to God’s Will.\footnote{Mormando, 117.} Clement VIII’s insistence on keeping morality in the Church was put into practice on June 14, 1592 when he went through the churches of Rome and removed what he considered immodest and profane imagery from the altars.\footnote{Ibid.} This act illustrates one of the two drawbacks to the Council of Trent’s decree regarding the visual arts. While the decree made it clear no “lascivious” works were to be displayed in a church, there was no set definition as to what was considered “lascivious.”

As a result of this ambiguity, there was no universal way to determine if a work of art was considered appropriate or not. Thus, there could be no set agreement among members of the clergy over what was considered tasteful. While there were differences over what was appropriate and inappropriate there were general ideas regarding what imagery was permissible.

---

\footnote{Davidson, 1994, 94.}
\footnote{Ibid., 194.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Mormando, 117.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
For example, depicting female breasts, while an obvious culprit that could be a distraction in a church, was seen as permissible in depictions of the Virgin and Child and personifications of allegories.\textsuperscript{14} This made the decision of determining what was “lascivious” subjective and open to interpretation of the clergyman or religious order. Often, this meant the judgment was based on the clergyman’s own character, personality, and taste. An example of this subjectivism is the fact that Cardinals Gabriel Paoletti and Charles Borromeo would examine works with pagan imagery and censor the work if it was not relevant to the story but would let it go if the imagery was needed in order to teach the viewer Catholic doctrine.\textsuperscript{15} Another example is the acceptance of some of Caravaggio’s works in the churches of Rome. Several of his religious works were accepted and others were rejected due to issues of decorum and this was determined by the religious order that commissioned the work. For example, the \textit{Madonna of Loreto} was accepted by the Augustinian Canons of S. Agostino but his \textit{Death of the Virgin} was rejected by the Carmelite Friars of S. Maria della Scala.

While the issue over appropriate and inappropriate art differed among the clergy and religious orders that was only one of the problems with the Decree dealing with the visual arts. The second drawback to Trent’s Decree on art that I see is drawn from David Freedberg’s observation that while various writers of the Counter Reformation will give examples on what is and isn’t permissible in art, they only apply it to religious and history paintings. The writers usually do not deal with genre or still life.\textsuperscript{16} For example, still life can have hidden sexual symbolism under the guise of religion. In my opinion, that left many loopholes which artists

\textsuperscript{14} Hart and Stevenson, 81.

\textsuperscript{15} Findlen, 57.

\textsuperscript{16} Freedberg, 1993, 142.
could have used to get around the rules. This absence regarding what is suitable for genre will actually be applied by Caravaggio in his early years in Rome.

However, while the definition of “lascivious” was vague with no way to ascertain a universal standard for art in the Catholic Church, there were many Catholic reformers who wrote against the perceived “obscenity” in art. These writers, who were usually clergymen, wrote against the use of “lasciviousness” in art and how to avoid it. In order to avoid inappropriate depictions, manuals were issued that were meant to help artists follow the rules set out by Trent. For example, Cardinal Vicario, Girolamo Rusticucci issued *Per gli altari e pitture*. This treatise was designed to set regulations for art such as the requirement for artists to submit cartoons to religious authorities for approval before proceeding. Those who did not submit preliminary sketches would face fines and other penalties.\textsuperscript{17} Cardinal Gabriel Paoletti was another reformer who reestablished the idea that another Index of Prohibited Books should be set up. Unlike the *Index of Prohibited Books* under Pope Clement VIII which dealt with heretical works, this new Index of Cardinal Paoletti would deal with imagery that was forbidden in art. However, this idea was never carried out. Ultimately, it was decided to keep things relatively simple by only censoring works that ran counter to the Catholic faith and promoted heresy, false doctrine, and had questionable content.\textsuperscript{18}

Even though there were attempts at trying to create a set system of what was and wasn’t permissible, the thoughts of the Catholic reformers usually follow the same line of Protestant preachers in regards to profane art. Ambrosius Catharinus takes a similar stance to the Calvinist preacher, Dirck Raphaelsz Camphuyzen since Catharinus says “[pictures] had the effect of

\textsuperscript{17} B. Brown, 277

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 278.
arousing not devotion but every lust of the corrupt flesh.” Pirro Ligorio said that images of Venus were “filthy, obscene things,” in the 1570s and Johannes Molanus wrote “what is disgraceful to name is freely painted and presented to the eyes. These subjects stand forth in public, in the taverns and marketplace, and are willy-nilly thrust on our view.” In an 1971 article on Johannus Molanus’ *De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris*, David Freedberg makes an interesting point since he uses this literary work to show how many of the written works put out by reformers follow a similar model. For example, Freedberg says these works often make use of the author’s personal experiences to form the foundation of their discourses. The writers then makes their criticisms based on their own ideas that indecent images causes a complete distortion of doctrine and makes people forget about the devotional and pious aspects the work was trying to evoke. This type of literary work differs from the Protestant writings since the Protestants believed the works themselves took away from the devotional nature of worship and not just what was being depicted.

While there are numerous examples of Catholic reformers condemning the use of inappropriate art for worship, even though they were not in favor of “lascivious” art they were in favor of use of art for worship since the Decree called for art to educate the faithful. Men such as Johannus Molanus supported the use of art to teach the Catholic faith as long it was theologically correct and did not make excessive use of the profane to get its point across. Thus, while the goal of avoiding lasciviousness was paramount, the ultimate goal of the Decree was to help educate the faithful, and it was therefore important to get rid of details that might be

19 Ibid., 284.
20 Findlen, 65.
distracting to the overall didactic message of the work.22 This view is supported by Cardinal Baronius who was a strong supporter of Counter Reformation spirituality. Cardinal Baronius believed images not only strengthened one’s faith in God but also served as a witness to history, since these works strove to depict Christian history as it was perceived to have happened, albeit in a grand and bombastic fashion.23 While the Catholics and Protestants agreed that art was meant to educate, the Catholics seem to have taken a stricter stance since officially, paintings were not meant to entertain but educate.24 This important point runs contrary to Eddy de Jongh’s assertion that Dutch works were meant to “delight and educate.” In my opinion, I think the Protestants in the North followed a similar model. Dutch Protestants also sought to educate their viewers but wanted the works to amuse since it allowed for a larger and less educated group to understand the doctrines and morals they were trying to put forward.

Of course, the Counter Reformation is usually thought to have been enacted in Italy and that is true. Since the dynamics of the patron-painter relationship differed significantly after the Reformation in the North, it makes sense the Council of Trent did not have much influence in the Netherlands. However, I think John B. Knipping is correct when he said the Counter Reformation took on a different shape and form in different parts of Europe. In general, Knipping says Italy was preoccupied with ostentatious displays, Spain showing extreme piety among the devout, and the Low Countries focusing on more realistic depictions of real life.25 This is interesting since in the Netherlands there was more focus on realistic depictions of life in order to help connect to the viewers and teach morals from a Calvinist viewpoint. Even though

22 Mayor, 101-105.
23 von Hennenberg, 137.
24 Janelle, 204.
25 Knipping, 2:2.
the Reformed Church was not a patron of the arts and the Decree of Trent from 1563 did not hold a lot of weight in the Netherlands, I think it is interesting that despite being theologically different, Catholics and Protestants approached art in much the same way. While Protestants differed among themselves on the didactic use of art, the Catholics and Protestants both agreed there was no place in art for profane and inappropriate subjects. This idea, though, is relative. Unfortunately, both Catholics and Protestants were both ambiguous regarding what is appropriate and inappropriate. Due to the vagueness of the terms used, the decision to label something as inappropriate was left up to the viewer and religious authorities. This allowed artists much leeway in what they could depict and how they could depict it.

Most important for this paper though is the fact both Catholics and Protestants wanted art to be educational for their viewers. However, while Catholics wanted the art to be educational for the purpose of teaching Catholic doctrine and inspiring piety, there was to be no humor whatsoever. On the other hand, the Calvinists in the North, if they supported art, were not using art to expound solid Calvinist doctrine but tried to expound Calvinist virtues by means of trying to depict social vice in such a way that persuades people to avoid illicit activities such as drinking, gambling, and cavorting with prostitutes. In order to get these ideas of living a virtuous life across, they sought to appeal to viewers by the use of humor and appealing to the more base senses by emphasizing the sinful nature of man.26 It is the author’s opinion that Erasmus’ *Institutio Matrimonii Christiani* from 1526 fits this idea of paintings being used as pedagogical tools since “a picture, silent though it is, can speak, and its influence gradually creeps over the mind.”27 I think this passage is important since Erasmus is showing the

---

26 Worcester, 89.

27 Freedberg, 1971, 241
importance of paintings and the effect they can have on a viewer. This follows the line of thinking that if the imagery is good, it will influence the mind positively, while bad imagery will have a bad influence. Even though the paintings literally are “silent” they do speak and I think it is through showing social vices that the moral meanings in the paintings will speak to the viewers and gradually and ideally help them lead edifying lives.

It was in this context that the painter, Caravaggio would make an appearance in the city of Rome and create a style that will be picked up by many followers, particularly, those from the Netherlands. When Caravaggio first arrived in Rome at the close of the sixteenth century, he had very little money and was in the center of a Catholic renewal with preachers celebrating peace and the triumph of the Church over heresy throughout the city. However, Rome was far from a peaceful city. Instead, it was a violent and dirty city filled with mercenary soldiers mixing with the city’s poor, “charlatans, adventurers, swindlers, beggars, gypsies, and vagabonds.”28 The wide variety of low life characters provided Caravaggio with many different types of subjects during his early years, particularly those showing cheating and fortune telling. Caravaggio’s depictions of these rugged types appealed to the upper class patrons who often had a fondness for low life scenes featuring the people they would have seen on the streets of Rome on a daily basis.29 Let us first turn our attention to two works by Caravaggio that were made soon after his arrival in the city when he was the epitome of a “starving artist” since he had little money and no major patron at this time.

*The Cardsharps* from 1594 in the Kimbell Museum of Art is one of the early works which best exemplifies the social situation in Rome in the late sixteenth century. Despite efforts of a

---

28 Langdon, 44.

29 Ibid., 50.
renewed morality and spirituality, social vice was still rampant in the city of Rome and gambling was one of the main modes of recreation. Gambling was understood to be so widespread among the populace that “not to engage in it would have been considered exceptional.”30 At this time, there was a large transitory population made up of mercenaries and gamblers, particularly, card playing was a quick and easy diversion.31 Certainly, Caravaggio would have seen mercenaries playing cards in the many taverns and side streets of Rome and probably engaged in the activity himself. It is also possible that Caravaggio adopted several of the behaviors of these mercenaries due to their prevalence in the 1590s. These mercenaries were rough-and-tumble types who were known to bear arms within the city walls, wandered throughout the streets and alleys of Rome in groups looking for fights, and often spent time in brothels and taverns drinking, gambling, and cavorting with prostitutes. Their behaviors mirror Caravaggio’s behavior since the artist also had a rough lifestyle. Police records show he was arrested in 1605 for bearing a sword without a permit and assaulted a waiter who ‘smarted off’ to him. He also had a group of friends who were also painters but were just as rough and tumble as the mercenaries, and who were known to have a penchant for women and social vice with a tendency towards violence. Thus, this work looks like it could have been taken from one of Caravaggio’s trips to the local tavern in his neighborhood in and around Piazza Navona.

This work is now located in the Kimball Museum of Art in Fort Worth, Texas and was only recently rediscovered in 1987 when it was found in Zurich, Switzerland and bought by the Kimball.32 Prior to its current home in the Kimball, it was originally bought from a picture seller named Valentino, who apparently sold his wares next to S. Luigi dei Francesi, by Cardinal

30 Feigenbaum, 154.
31 Ibid.
32 Mahon, 12.
Francesco Maria del Monte in the late sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{33} It is not surprising that Cardinal Del Monte would have been familiar with Caravaggio’s works since he lived in Caravaggio’s neighborhood with two residences, the Palazzo Firenze and the Palazzo Madama next door to S. Luigi dei Francesi.\textsuperscript{34} Cardinal Del Monte can be seen as Caravaggio’s first important patron since he had a taste for this new genre of painting that featured the common people of the Roman streets. This work was first listed in Cardinal Del Monte’s collection in an inventory taken after his death in 1627, where it was then purchased by Cardinal Antonio Barberini. The work stayed in his collection until his death in 1671. The painting was then bequeathed to his nephew, Don Maffeo Barberini.\textsuperscript{35}

The work features three half-length figures set against a light neutral background. The three figures are at a table playing cards while a backgammon board hangs precariously over the table’s edge. Two of the figures are obviously in cahoots with one another and are in the process of taking advantage of a young man whose attention is focused on his cards. The bearded figure behind the dupe looks conspicuously at the victim’s cards and makes a hand signal to the figure whose back is turned to us. The young companion is about to pull a card out from behind his back. The costumes of the figures are interesting since they help in the interpretation of this work. Some scholars such as Anitra Nettleton believe the cheaters are not in contemporary dress since the doublet on the young cheater relates to a characteristic of sixteenth century costume and also the fact that, with the exception of a few religious works, most surviving works of Caravaggio do not feature contemporary dress.\textsuperscript{36} Howard Hibbard though, believes these

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\numericitem{33} Moir, 15.
\numericitem{34} Puglisi, 85.
\numericitem{35} See Mahon, 11-25, for a more detailed chronology of the work.
\numericitem{36} Nettleton, 60.
\end{thebibliography}
garments or similar ones might have actually been owned by Caravaggio, since Bellori writes that Caravaggio only wore the finest material and would wear it until it was falling off, Hibbard admits though it might not ever be possible to know how contemporary these clothes are.\textsuperscript{37}

While it might be expected Caravaggio would have depicted his figures in contemporary clothing, the clothing these men are wearing is not contemporaneous with the time. Instead, these pieces of clothing would have been seen as out of style and out of date to a contemporary viewer on the street.\textsuperscript{38} One would have looked out of place if seen wearing clothing like that and would have drawn many stares. Not only would the bright and garish clothing of the cheaters connote an out-of-date flamboyant style, but the clothing would have been considered more appropriate for carnival performers and fools. This is due to the fact their clothing would have made them stand out thus making it more difficult for them to cheat and to be cheated by someone like that would show one’s extreme ignorance. The clothing of the young dupe, while expensive, is not as flamboyant but would still be considered out of style and suitable for clowns and fools. His expensive clothing could label him as the Prodigal Son which makes this work a depiction of the Parable. Thus, Caravaggio could be making a moralizing reference since he decided to place his cheaters and their young victim in fools clothing in order to help bring attention to the folly of cheating and the foolishness of playing cards. Other aspects that lead to a possible moralizing interpretation is the backgammon board hanging over the edge of the table. Backgammon was a very popular game during Caravaggio’s time and was played in both the North and South as a form of gambling. Backgammon was often used as a moralizing tool and moralists were quick to point out the game provoked violence. The fact the board hangs over the

\textsuperscript{37} Hibbard, 23.

\textsuperscript{38} Gregori, 217.
edge of the table could symbolize the precarious nature of fate since it may or may not go over
the edge.\textsuperscript{39} This could relate to the chance of violence breaking out. However, the cards give an
even more telling interpretation to the work.

The card game these rogues are playing is Primero, which is an early forerunner to Poker. This game was extremely popular in the city of Rome but also played in other places such as Lombardy, Naples, Venice, France, and Spain. Each place had its own variations on the general rules but Rome was the place where the game had “its liberty, its reputation, its decorum, its full numbers and figures, and all its parts.”\textsuperscript{40} While no official rulebooks survive, scholars have been able to piece together the general rules from literary sources. The general rule of the game stipulates that 2-5 players could be used but 2-3 was the preferred manner of play. This explains the two younger players and the third accomplice. Cards above 7 are removed and each card has a value and the hand with the highest number of points of the same color won. The main goal of the game was to get the highest score of 55. The face cards are worth 10 points, cards from 2-5 are 10 points plus their value (for example, 2-12, 3-13, etc), aces are worth 16 points, and cards from 6-7 are triple their value. The club card the young cheat is about to pull is meant to trump whatever card the dupe puts down on the table.

The significance of the cards has been investigated and it is important to the interpretation of this work. Barry Wind’s short article on the card symbolism in \textit{Paragone} from 1989 explains that the cards in play foretell the outcome of the game which the viewer will not get to see but be able to infer. The cheater has an eight of hearts, although Hibbard says it is a five of hearts, and an unknown club card behind his back which he is about to pull. In Cartomancy, or card

\textsuperscript{39} Wind, 16.

\textsuperscript{40} Feigenbaum, 156.
divination, the Club suit “announces success, advantage, fortune, and money.”41 This explains the cheat’s reason for pulling the club. The eight of hearts is associated with good luck and is therefore kept behind the cheat’s back. To get rid of it would be to get rid of good luck on your side. However, in the *Cardsharps*, if we follow the rules of Primero and Barry Wind is correct that it is indeed an eight of hearts, it cannot be used since cards above 7 are removed. Therefore, it can be inferred the eight of hearts is not meant to be part of the cheating but is used as a good luck charm. However, even though the cheat holds cards that are in his favor, there is the potential for trouble. The four of diamonds on the table symbolizes foreboding and bad business.42 When taken all together, this work could be read as a type of warning on the precariousness of fate. The young cheat keeps an eight of hearts behind his back in the hope that luck will be with him while getting ready to pull the club which will announce fortune and money. However, the presence of the four of diamonds on the table, the dagger hanging from the cheat’s outfit, and the hanging backgammon board all allude to the possibility of violence if the ploy doesn’t work. It is also possible this work could allude to double-crossing as well since the cheater can become the cheated. It is sometimes thought the cheat’s accomplice is a member of the Romani, commonly known in the early modern period as gypsies. Contemporary literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often portrays the Romani as people who could not be trusted.43 This follows the “tradition of ‘anatomies’ of rogues and beggars . . . who were admired as much as condemned for their *furberia*, or craftiness.”44 If indeed, the middle

41 Wind, 16.

42 Georges de la Tour, 148.

43 See Olson, 69-81; Moffitt, 129-156, regarding the social construction of the negative perceptions of the Romani in the early modern period.

44 Langdon, 44.
aged man is a member of the group, he could be planning to help cheat the dupe and then cheat his younger accomplice and take the money for himself. This idea would follow early modern ideas on the perceived mistrustful nature of the Romani and the notion the “Roman streets were...a kind of theater where only the cunning survived.” However, this assertion cannot be known for sure and can only be hypothesized but which could help understanding the debate on the appeal and moral values of the painting.

Helen Langdon takes a slightly different approach to this work and why it appealed to Cardinal Del Monte. Langdon thinks this work can be seen as an intellectual piece where aristocratic and scholarly collectors would have debated its aesthetic qualities. It can also be seen as a work that warns of the tricks of the trade that were common in the streets of Rome but which also shows the cleverness of the cheaters and the ability of the painter to successfully show the cheating. For example, the hole in the accomplice’s glove was a common ploy used to help one feel and distinguish marked cards. This reflects the tricks of the trade and the ability to pay close attention to nature such as the hole in the glove to feel marked cards. This mix of cleverness and painterly ability probably appealed to Del Monte and led him to offer Caravaggio a place in his palace. The fact this lowlife work was purchased by Cardinal Del Monte opens up the possibility of an elite type of “fan club” and also gives a glimpse into his personal life. It is well known that Del Monte was a major patron of the arts and had an interest in esoteric knowledge. Thus, knowledge of the card symbolism probably would not have been unknown to him and he probably would have been at least somewhat familiar with Cartomancy. He probably would have had many opportunities to learn about it on the streets due to the many street vendors

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 50.
and fortune tellers in the area. It was also well known that despite being a social ill, card playing among the clergy, ranging from the simple parish priest to the cardinals, was not uncommon. Gail Feigenbaum explains that Cardinals such as Del Monte, Pietro Aldobrandini, and Odoardo Farnese often played cards together, possibly in the same room as the *Cardsharps*. This would give an opportunity for learned men to come together to discuss the moral and aesthetic qualities of the painting. The idea this work was part of an intellectual collection is also related to Aristotle’s *Poetics* where it is stated that if a work of a low subject such as gambling was done in a high manner, it could gain legitimacy and appeal to a sophisticated collector such as Cardinal Del Monte. Thus, this work could have appealed to Del Monte for reasons including fascination with the activities of the common people, the esoteric knowledge of the cards, the ambiguity of the whether the plan will be a success or failure, and the realistic depiction of a popular game.

Another work painted during Caravaggio’s early years which focuses on moralizing through social vice is the Capitoline *Fortune Teller* from 1596. This work was also bought by Cardinal Del Monte, presumably from the same picture seller near S. Luigi dei Francesi, and supposedly hung in the same room as the *Cardsharps*. Even though this theme had been known in the North since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Caravaggio can be considered the first Italian artist to introduce the theme of an attractive fortune teller ripping off an enamored youth in Italy. While the theme of using a figure thought to represent a gypsy in Italian art was

---

47 Feigenbaum, 154.
48 Ibid., 155.
49 Ibid., 168.
50 Ibid., 169.
fairly rare before Caravaggio, in other media from the early modern period such as songs, plays, and novellas, they make frequent appearances.  

The work features two half-length figures against a neutral background, which could possibly allude to the side of a building in the city of Rome, engaged in fortune telling. The young man is dressed in expensive, yet, out of style, carnival-like clothing which refers to his foolishness. The young man is holding his hand out as an attractive girl, who is commonly thought to represent a gypsy, lightly touches his palm for a reading. Unlike the dupes and cheats, the fortune teller is in contemporaneous clothing of the time which featured a heavy robe wrapped under one arm and fastened over the opposite shoulder. This clothing was commonly worn by women of Romani descent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and this leads to the idea the depicted girl is a gypsy. However, unbeknownst to him, she is deftly removing his ring while they both maintain steady flirtatious glances. Caravaggio once again shows his attention to detail with the deft sleight of hand the fortune teller uses to remove the youth’s ring. As she runs her three fingers over the youth’s hand, her middle finger ever so slightly removes the ring from his finger. This reflects the tricks of the trade and shows his fascination with nature and attention to detail. This work differs from the Cardsharps since even though both young men are obviously unwilling victims, the youth in the Fortune Teller “is a willing dupe, defrauded no less by his vanity in wanting to know the future and by his gullibility and erotic responsiveness . . . by the gypsy’s guile.” Both of the Cardsharps and Fortune Teller are interesting works since they feature two low life scenes with figures engaging in real life vices such as gambling in a tavern and having a palm read in a side street. At the time, palm reading

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Moir. 56.
and other forms of divination were illegal due to their unchristian nature. These two genre scenes were very popular since they fed on the popularity of questionable activities and allowed different types of variations as would be seen in the work of the Caravaggisti.⁵⁴

Even though Caravaggio placed these figures engaged in realistic activities and settings, the figures and settings were possibly inspired by the Commedia dell’Arte and street theater, which was often performed at fairs and got its inspiration from daily life and mirrored human nature for didactic purposes.⁵⁵ Both of these works deal with the common theme of deception and this relates to a staple theme of the Commedia dell’Arte which often made use of an unwise character getting duped either in love or money.⁵⁶ In order to create a moral, these works could be depictions of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15:11-32. If one follows these interpretations, the youth can be seen as the prodigal son who spends his money on fine clothing and other frivolous activities such as wine, women, and gambling. It is possible Caravaggio depicted the Parable of the Prodigal Son in contemporary times while wearing out-of-style clothing to single him out to let the viewer know of his foolishness. Overall, even though these two genre scenes depict cheating by means of deception, they are not particularly realistic even though Hibbard said it is as if Caravaggio took people “off the street or out of the tavern.”⁵⁷ Instead, Alfred Moir says the two genre scenes “have no past, an existential present, and an undaunting future” with “action in Caravaggio’s paintings [showing] the inevitable pause between viewer and challenge . . . as if a director had commanded his actors to hold it.”⁵⁸ Thus, while the works show two activities that

---

⁵⁴ Feigenbaum, 178.
⁵⁵ Gregori, 215.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 217.
⁵⁷ Hibbard, 27.
⁵⁸ Moir, 55.
were considered illegal in seventeenth century Rome, the participants are shown to be fools. This could serve as a warning to those who engage in these activities that they might end up like the dupes in the painting if they continue in their practices.

While the two genre works of Caravaggio are unique since they depict common social vices with a moralizing nature, the later religious works of Caravaggio also are interesting. At the time of Caravaggio’s arrival, the Catholic Church was commissioning many works of art to decorate the churches. While the major churches such as St. Peter’s Basilica kept a conservative view towards art, the religious orders throughout the city had no single preference for art and orders such as the Oratorians, Franciscans, and Carmelites sought art that was simple, human, and naturalistic.\textsuperscript{59} This will suit Caravaggio since he followed the mantra that “truth lay in the rendering of the tangible world.”\textsuperscript{60} However, Caravaggio could also take things too far with his naturalistic renderings. While controversial at the time, the religious works go about moralizing to the viewers by using common people to help illustrate theological doctrine. The following works will help inspire the Utrecht Caravaggisti during their time in Rome. Today, only one of Caravaggio’s three religious works discussed here is still in its original location although other religious works are still in the original locations albeit sometimes in a copied manner such as the \textit{Entombment} currently in Chiesa Nuova. These works are interesting since they help illustrate the problem with the Council of Trent’s stance on art and what was allowed in a church and what was not.

Caravaggio’s \textit{Madonna of Loreto} is today the only one of the three religious works discussed still in its original location. The \textit{Madonna of Loreto} is currently located in S.

\textsuperscript{59} Salerno, 17.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 19.
Agostino, which is considered to be, as Howard Hibbard puts it, in the “heart of ‘Caravaggio Country’ just off Piazza Navona.” This church was given to the Augustinians in 1286 and has remained in their possession ever since. This work was commissioned by the wife of Ermes Cavalletti on September 4, 1603, when she paid 500 scudi for a chapel decoration on the first left aisle of the church. The work was installed in its current place in 1604. Caravaggio had acquired this commission since the patron and other members of the Cavalletti family were members of the Archconfraternity of Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini. Prior to Ermes’ death on July 21, 1602, he had made a pilgrimage with other members of the Archconfraternity to the Virgin’s House in Loreto. This pilgrimage obviously had an effect on Ermes since he stipulated in his will that a chapel be bought and dedicated to the Madonna of Loreto in S. Agostino. This contract was signed by his wife and the Augustinian Fathers of the church after his death on September 4, 1603 when Caravaggio was contracted for the decoration. It is believed this work is inspired from his pilgrimage to the Virgin’s house in Loreto since it features the Virgin and Child standing in a doorway with light streaming in from the side while two pilgrims, a middle-aged man, and an older woman approach from the right and kneel in reverence before them. This work caused quite a stir when it was first unveiled since Baglioni says “the populace made a great clamor over the disparaging treatment of certain elements which should have been handled with more respect” and Francesco Scannelli writes that:

---

61 Hibbard, 184.  
62 Blunt, 6.  
63 Moir, 120.  
64 Spike, 149.  
65 Ibid.  
66 Spear, 189.  

whoever looks at this painting must confess that the spirit of the pilgrims is well rendered, and shows their firm faith as they pray to the image in their pure simplicity of their hearts. On the other hand, it is evident that the painting lacks proper decorum, grace, and devotion; this in fact has already been observed by the best intellectuals and greatest masters.  

This quote reflects the fascination of the work with the populace since it does show adherence to the Council of Trent but lacks the manner acceptable to what the Council decreed. The lack of “proper decorum, grace, and devotion,” with which Baglioni and Scannelli had problems is regarding the almost disrespectful treatment given to the Virgin and the seeming lack of respect expected of a work placed in a church. For example, the pose of the man shows his rear end and muddy feet facing the altar. This is similar to Caravaggio’s *Crucifixion of St. Peter* from 1600 in the Cerasi Chapel in S. Maria del Popolo with the pose of one of the crucifiers in a similar position. When one looks at the *Madonna di Loreto* in this fashion, it is understandable why it would be controversial. However, when looks at it deeper, it becomes apparent Caravaggio was following the Decree of Trent which called for educating the masses in faith and doctrine except he used his own personal style in getting the message across. While the work was criticized for its lack of decorum and respect for its place in a church, particularly in regards to the bare feet, it is appropriate for the nature of the work. Since Ermes Cavalletti went on pilgrimage to the Holy House in Loreto, he would have been like many pilgrims and probably took off his shoes as a sign of humility and respect to the Virgin and Child. It could also be referencing the Papal Jubilee of 1600 in Rome where an estimated 1.2 million pilgrims visited the city and that could mean the man and woman were pilgrims who came from afar to the Eternal City.  

---

67 Spike, 149.

68 Moir, 120.
referencing the Papal Jubilee of 1600. Either way, the barefoot pilgrim is following the tradition of approaching a holy place discalced and the dirty feet could be a sign of a long journey and devotion. However, it is possible the depiction of the pilgrims is making reference to the large number of paupers and beggars in the city around 1601 which were “so numerous that it is impossible to go anywhere in the city without being surrounded by them.”69 Thus, this once again shows Caravaggio’s devotion to attention to nature and the street life of Rome.

Another reason this work was controversial at the time is that the Virgin Mary was identified to possibly be Lena. Lena seems to have been a prostitute and also Caravaggio’s girlfriend. A criminal complaint by a notary named Pasqualone in July of 1605, states that Caravaggio had apparently attacked him on the side of the head for carrying on with her. Whether or not it was just talking or other activities is not clear but she is mentioned as “Lena, who is to be found standing in Piazza Navona . . . is Caravaggio’s woman.”70 While the idea of the Virgin and Child standing in the doorway of the Holy House could relate to the idea of Cavalletti’s pilgrimage, to the average Roman viewer at the time; based on Lena’s possible occupation as a prostitute, and the fact she is seen standing in a doorway, which would look like many of the doorways in the cities of Rome with cracked stucco, holding a child, makes reference to her occupation as a possible prostitute. This idea gains more validity since it is known that Lena was a young woman at the time and was known in this area by the local residents who would have recognized her and maybe her child of whom the father is unknown.71 However, despite the controversy of using Lena as a model for the Virgin Mary and depicting pilgrims in a realistic and dirty fashion, Caravaggio used this imagery to help teach the

---

69 Puglisi, 190.
70 Hibbard, 191.
71 Spike, 149.
uneducated populace simple doctrines of faith and humility. While the work was controversial, it was very popular with viewers since it brought a simple yet profound religious experience to the people. The painting also portrays the Virgin and Child as a mother and child duo commonly seen in Rome that are “approachable, compassionate, and responsive to the devotion of the faithful.”

This is demonstrated by the way both the Virgin and Child are intently looking down and focusing on the pilgrims in the painting and also in the viewer’s space since viewers would be looking up to the Virgin and Child. This work is important since it brought faith and religious experience to people and this followed Henry IV’s instructions to St. Francis de Sales to write a spiritual guide “in which religion should be shown in all its native beauty, stripped of all superstition and scruple, practical for all classes.” Here, Caravaggio has created a painting stripped of superstition and understandable to all social classes. I think Alfred Moir sums up this work nicely when he writes “its chief message is one of hope of all Christians, however humble, whose faith is sufficient.”

When viewers saw this work and the piety of the pilgrims dressed in tattered and dirty clothes, the viewers would have understood the importance of humility and the fact the Virgin and Child will look favorably on those whose faith is simple but strong as seen in the poses and countenance of the pilgrims.

The *Madonna of the Snake*, also known as *Madonna dei Palafrenieri* is also a work which follows the Decree of Trent but also has its share of controversy. Originally, this work was commissioned by the papal stable grooms (palafrenieri) for their altar in New St. Peter’s. It was commissioned in autumn 1605 and finished April 1606 for 75 scudi. The work did not stay in St. Peter’s for long but was moved to the nearby church of S. Anna dei Palafrenieri. It was in this

---

72 Moir, 120.

73 Maxwell-Scott, 196.

74 Moir, 120.
church for two months before it was sold to Cardinal Scipione Borghese for 100 scudi where it remains today in the Borghese Gallery. It is commonly thought this work was rejected by the Fabbrica di San Pietro due to the lack of decorum, but Catherine Puglisi puts forward the idea there might have been a dispute between the palafrenieri and the Fabbrica over the rights to the altar which is why it was moved to S. Anna dei Palafrenieri. It is also possible the work was sold from S. Anna due to either the tempting offer of Cardinal Borghese or also maybe because the palafrenieri reconsidered the acceptance of a rejected work by the Fabbrica and wanted to get rid of it in order to save face. Unfortunately, today the church is relatively unimportant since “the Palafrenieri sold the only painting of importance that they ever owned.”75 The true reason why it ended up in the Borghese may never be known but it is possible the Fabbrica di San Pietro saw this as not following the Decree regarding decorum. Regardless of the reason for rejection, the work helps teach doctrines of the faith to help turn people away from heresy.

The work shows a scene taking place in front of a dark background that could be in a room or outside. The Virgin Mary is holding up a nude Christ and both are stepping on the head of a snake while St. Anne watches from further back in the shadows of the composition. The Fabrica di San Pietro found the work inappropriate and it was removed due to the way Caravaggio portrayed the Virgin. It is possible Lena was used as the model again. The work was seen as indecent since the Virgin is not shown wearing a matron’s veil, mantle or robes but is in contemporary dress with her skirt up. Her position also clearly gives a view of her cleavage. Also, the fact Christ is shown nude, while not in itself controversial, is questionable due to his age. Usually, Christ is shown nude as a baby or a toddler in art. However, in this work, Christ is shown as nude boy about five or six years of age.

75 Blunt, 15.
While the work was removed due to the lack of decorum, the work does in fact help teach Catholic doctrine to the viewers. The serpent is supposed to represent heresy and this could refer to the idea of the snake misleading Eve just before the Fall of Man just as heresy misleads others from the truth. This work not only references Genesis 3:15 where God tells the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you bruise his heel.”\textsuperscript{76} This is referring to Christ the Redeemer who will defeat the serpent while Mary assists in its destruction. In a Papal Bull promulgated by Pope Pius V in 1569, this idea was elaborated on where the Virgin and Child crush the serpent together. This action thereby solidifies Mary’s role as a co-redemptorix for mankind.

Caravaggio has taken both the biblical account and the Papal Bull to heart and shows both the Virgin and Child stamping out the threat of heresy from the Catholic Church. Caravaggio has managed to bring two theological ideas together and depicts them in a way that is understandable to the lay viewer without using complex compositions to illustrate a theological concept. Caravaggio has kept his composition simple in order to get this idea across without distraction. That follows Trent’s Decree to keep art educational and without excessive distractions. The painting features no extraneous details but only three figures and a serpent.

While the Virgin and Child’s presence can be understood from a theological standpoint, St. Anne’s presence is not as clear. It is known though that St. Anne was the patron saint of the palafrenieri and this helps explain her presence in the work. However, it is possible the palafrenieri were not pleased with her appearance since she is seen as an old woman wearing common street clothes. On further examination, she holds a striking resemblance to the old woman in the \textit{Madonna of Loreto}. John Spike takes a view that helps explain St. Anne’s

\textsuperscript{76} Puglisi, 193.
presence since he says that St. Anne’s presence in this work is supposed to be set apart from the Virgin and Child in order to show a contrast. While the Virgin and Christ are the new Adam and Eve crushing the serpent and breaking Original Sin and death, St. Anne is supposed to represent “humanity of the pre-Incarnation generations conceived under the reign of Death.”77 This makes St. Anne’s presence as an old woman clearer since she represents the common people who have been saved by Christ and the Virgin through their destruction of the serpent and heresy. Thus, while the work was seen as indecent, Caravaggio has followed the Decree of Trent and taught people that through the destruction of heresy through Christ and the Virgin Mary, all could be saved as evidenced by St. Anne.

Caravaggio’s most controversial work is his *Death of the Virgin* from 1605 and which is now in the Louvre. This work was commissioned by Laerzio Cherubini in June 1601. Cherubini was a close friend and neighbor to Cardinal Vincenzo Giustiniani who was also a prominent patron of Caravaggio and who also had numerous Caravaggios in his collection. The work was originally destined for the Cherubini family chapel, which is the second chapel on the left, in S. Maria della Scala but this work was never installed in the church. S. Maria della Scala was started in 1593 for the Casa Pia, which was founded in 1563 by Pius IV to care for reformed prostitutes and was given to the Discalced Carmelites in 1597.78 Instead, when the work was presented to the Carmelites of the church, it was rejected outright and never installed due to the lack of decorum and controversial nature of the work. The rejected work was replaced with another *Death of the Virgin* by Saraceni. However, Caravaggio’s painting did not go to waste since Peter Paul Rubens bought it for the Duke of Mantua in 1607. In 1627/28, the work ended

---

77 Spike, 171.

78 Blunt, 110.
up in the collection of Charles I of England and after his execution, the work ended up in the collection of a banker named Jabach. The work then came to the collection of Louis XIV and then in 1793 came to the Louvré where it has remained ever since.79

The work features a theme in art known as the “Death of the Virgin,” although it is also known as the “Dormition of the Virgin.” This theme deals with the end of Mary’s life before her bodily Assumption out of the tomb and into Heaven. Traditionally, it was typical to portray the “Death” of the Virgin sleeping or in the process of about to either fall asleep or to die peacefully with dignity. Caravaggio has broken away from this tradition. The Virgin is portrayed dead with her feet and arm hanging off the bed. Mary Magdalene sits in front of the Virgin and covers her face as she weeps. Apostles surround the Virgin with those closest to her weeping openly and focusing on her while the apostles nearer to the back talk to one another and move around. Following the fashion of the Madonna of Loreto and Madonna of the Snake, the room in the Death of the Virgin focuses only on the death and leaves out other extraneous and distracting details that might take away from the moment. However, the large red curtain gives an idea of theatricality and unveiling a scene where the figures are frozen in poses. This supports Moir’s assertion that the works of Caravaggio, while realistic, have a staged effect and the red curtain supports this since one gets the idea they are given a glimpse into a theater scene.

Unlike the Madonna of Loreto which is still in its location in S. Agostino, and the Madonna of the Snake which hung in St. Peter’s Basilica for two days before its removal to S. Anna dei Palafrenieri, the Carmelite Fathers had found this work inappropriate and refused to install it in their church. Instead of portraying the death of the Virgin as dignified, Caravaggio portrays her dying a common human death with little recognition of her divine status. There is

79 Moir, 128.
only a faint halo and no liturgical vestments or preparatory instruments to tend the body.

Caravaggio has therefore downplayed her divine status to the absolute minimum. Thus, aside from the barely visible halo, one gets the idea this is showing the death of a commoner since she is also wearing contemporary clothing. Not only is the Virgin portrayed as dead but she is shown with dirty bare feet and a bloated body. Mancini says the model for the dead Virgin was a dead prostitute from the Ortaccio of Rome since “how much wrong the moderns do, if they decide to depict the Virgin, Our Lady . . . like some filthy whore from the slums.” It is possible Caravaggio deliberately showed a dead prostitute to scare the reformed women in the church from returning to their former lives.

However, while the work was derided for its controversial depiction of a holy scene, Caravaggio manages to help bring a complex religious scene down to the level of the common people and depicts a scene which they could relate to. By depicting the Virgin as a commoner, Caravaggio was evoking emotion on the part of the viewer to follow the Apostles’ lead and be saddened by the death of the Mother of Christ. However, while the scene is sad, the hope and knowledge of her Assumption into Heaven brings joy to those who believe and this is related to the very church the work was commissioned for. This idea of elevation to the heavenly realm is referred not only to the “Madonna of the Step or Stair” as in the church’s name but also due to the curtain being raised. Pamela Askew says this work suggests “the Virgin’s own capacity to elevate and raise the souls, hopes, and prayers of humanity to heaven.” I think Askew is right when she says the Virgin serves as a metaphorical “step” since it is through her Assumption that

---

80 Spear, 11.
81 Askew, 129.
the prayers of mankind can be taken to heaven and she can intercede on our behalf to her Son.

This is elaborated on by the idea that:

[Caravaggio] has, in the *Death of the Virgin*, made it embrace precisely those elements that symbolically cast light upon the significance of the mortal life of the Virgin: the mystery inherent in all aspects of her relationship to Christ, the importance she commands within the structure of the Church, and the hope that she offers mankind within the Christian economy of salvation. Whether or not Caravaggio personally embraced a belief in salvation, either for humanity or himself, is not relevant to the purposes to which his art was directed. It can only be said that his invention of image was not less highly informed for being more closely related, physically and rhetorically, to actual and unadorned experience.82

Askew’s quote reflects the idea that Caravaggio paid close attention to real life but whom also made sure to create a spiritual and ephemeral experience out of the situation. Caravaggio was indeed unique to the Roman art scene in the early seventeenth century. Throughout his career, he rejected the ideals of the High Renaissance and instead opted to appeal to the common people. His early genre works featuring scenes of gambling and fortune telling with the victims getting fleeced for their money probably struck a chord with the viewers since it mirrored life in the streets albeit in a staged sense. Caravaggio took popular pastimes and often merged a moral into the scene that not only made fun of those who were getting cheated but also served as a warning to the viewer of the risks one faced when engaging in those activities. Caravaggio’s religious works function in a similar but more serious manner. Instead of focusing on social vices, Caravaggio took a populist approach and incorporated common street folk in his work in order to help teach morals and theological lessons to the viewer. While this approach caused controversy among the clergy due to their insistence on following proper decorum, Caravaggio’s religious works do follow Trent’s Decree that art educate the viewers. Caravaggio’s works brought complex theological concepts down to the level of the people. These theological

82 Ibid., 132.
concepts incorporate recognizable figures that help evoke and inspire emotions such as simple yet profound piety, sorrow, hope, adoration, and thankfulness.

These are the types of works the Utrecht Caravaggisti will see during their time in Rome and which they will use in the creation of some of their works for the churches of Rome. Caravaggio will play a significant role in how the Utrecht Caravaggisti portrayed their subjects, both in religious works and genre works. Let us now turn to the works of Utrecht Caravaggisti in Rome.
CHAPTER 5
WORKS OF THE UTRECHT CARAVAGGISTI IN THE CHURCHES OF ROME

During the early seventeenth century, many Dutch painters came down from the Netherlands through one of three main routes.¹ Utrecht is an interesting city since more artists from Utrecht went to Rome than any other city in the Dutch Republic at the time.² The Dutch who came to be known as the Utrecht Caravaggisti were a group of artists from the city of Utrecht who came to Rome in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Most of them stayed in the city until about 1615, when they all returned back to their native Utrecht. Upon their return, they brought what they learned from Caravaggio and his Italian followers back to the Netherlands. While it is thought the Dutch artists focused mainly on genre scenes, the Utrecht Caravaggisti did receive commissions from Roman patrons for chapels in churches and some of these works can still be seen today in their original locations. Before we turn to their genre works, let us take a brief look at some of the Roman commissions done by the Utrecht artists, Gerrit van Honthorst and Dirck van Baburen.

Gerrit van Honthorst was born November 5, 1592 to a Catholic family in Utrecht with artistic connections. His grandfather was the Dean of the Utrecht Guild of St. Luke in 1579, and his father was also a member of the Guild as well. However, Gerrit did not study with his father but with Abraham Bloemaert. Bloemaert is interesting since he is the teacher of other Utrecht Caravaggisti such as Hendrick Terbrugghen and Dirck van Baburen. Relatively little is known of Honthorst’s early years in Utrecht, but it is known that he probably went to the St. Jerome Latin School. This school was run by Calvinists, and it is where he would have been taught the Bible, Greek, and Latin literature. His classical education will influence his later works in their

¹ Orr, 100.
² Ibid.
classicizing elements in the 1630s, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. It is not certain when he arrived in Rome, but Judson originally said he left for Rome around 1610-12 and says later that Honthorst possibly left Utrecht by 1613 and was definitely in Rome by 1616.

Honthorst stayed in Rome until 1620 when he returned to Utrecht and stayed there until 1627. He then moved to London to work for the court of Charles I of England. After the execution of Charles I, Honthorst returned to the Netherlands where he spent time in the Hague. He then returned to Utrecht in 1652 and remained there until his death in 1656. When Honthorst was in Rome, he picked up the patronage of Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani, who was the younger brother of one of Caravaggio’s main patrons, Cardinal Vincenzo Giustiniani. Vincenzo Giustiniani even extended the invitation for Honthorst to stay with him at the Palazzo Giustiniani right across from the Palazzo Madama where Caravaggio stayed and which is also near S. Luigi dei Francesi. Honthorst had the benefit of living in Caravaggio’s area, and it is therefore no surprise he would have seen Caravaggio’s works. While Honthorst will be influenced by Caravaggio’s depiction of social vices, it is interesting to note that almost all of his Roman work is of religious subjects, while still paying tribute to Caravaggio. This is most seen in his work, the Beheading of St. John the Baptist in S. Maria della Scala.

Unlike Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin, which was commissioned for a chapel in this church but never installed due to lack of decorum; Honthorst’s work remains in the church to this day, in the first chapel to the right of the nave entrance. Documents show that Honthorst received two payments amounting to the rather low amount of 73 scudi for the work in the

---

3 Judson and Ekkart. 1.
4 Ibid., 6.
5 Spear, 110.
6 Ibid.
months of March and May.\textsuperscript{7} The painting is the main altarpiece in the chapel and shows John
the Baptist with his hands clasped in prayer as an executioner is about to strike the fatal blow
with the sword. To the left of the composition are two women, a young and old one. Salome is
identified as the young woman since she holds the golden platter that will hold John’s head. The
old woman standing next to her holds a torch, which serves as one of the two sources of
illumination, and which not only illuminates the scene but creates drama and tension by the
flicker of light dancing across the figures. To the right of John the Baptist in the composition is
the executioner who has a lantern at his feet and is about to strike the fatal blow. Honthorst has
rendered the executioner realistically since he is shown taking a deep breath before swinging the
sword. Barely discernible in the background are two figures who are witnessing the execution.
The upper left corner of the composition shows an angel coming into the light with a Palm of
Martyrdom. The two women are interesting figures since they are similar to figures of
prostitutes and procuresses that will figure into Honthorst’s genre works. It is the author’s
opinion the two women in the painting speak directly to the main congregants of the church,
namely former prostitutes. Since Salome and the older women refer to the prostitute-procuress
system, which would have been a common memory for the reformed women, Honthorst is
showing prostitution in a bad light, since he likens prostitutes to those responsible for the death
of John the Baptist. This suggests to the viewer that prostitutes have a wicked and evil nature,
which brings shame to their occupation and likens Salome to a prostitute since she was able to
extract a favor from Herod after doing a sultry dance. This work relates to the laity as a whole
since Honthorst portrays prostitutes in a bad light and warns viewers to stay away from them
since it shows a rejection of Christ.

\textsuperscript{7} Borsook, 271.
Unlike Caravaggio’s *Death of the Virgin* which was rejected outright, Honthorst’s work was accepted. Both works of the artists both dealt with prostitutes but Honthorst’s painting falls more in line with decorum. While Caravaggio models the Virgin after a dead prostitute with no hint of grandeur, Honthorst keeps his prostitutes modest. During Honthorst’s time, low cut dresses were often seen as the clothing of prostitutes in the Northern Netherlands but unlike his later genre works where cleavage and bare breasts of prostitutes will become common, there is no cleavage on Salome in this work. She is completely covered with no hint of a prominent bust. Only her face and youth give a hint of her beauty and attractiveness.

Honthorst clearly got his inspiration for this work from Caravaggio’s later works since he makes use of architectural space to create a setting for the scene. This is seen in Caravaggio’s *Seven Acts of Mercy* and *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*. Honthorst follows Caravaggio’s idea of bringing the art down to the level of the lay viewer since the setting takes place outdoors in an area that could have been common to a Roman street and the ladies are dressed in contemporary dress. The work also functions as a pedagogical tool that caters not only to reformed prostitutes as a warning not to return to their former lives but also to the general populace on the perceived evil nature of prostitutes.

Honthorst’s final work religious work under discussion is *The Mocking of Christ* in S. Maria della Concezione. The painting is located in the first chapel on the right of the entrance on the left wall which is the same chapel as Guido Reni’s St. Michael the Archangel from 1632 on the Altar. S. Maria della Concezione was built for the Capuchins under Cardinal Antonio Barberini, who was the brother of Pope Urban VIII, in 1626 and was consecrated in 1636. The

---

8 Manuth, 48.
9 Currently on exhibit in “Fiamminghi e Altri Maestri” in the Palazzo Ruspoli (July 1-September 10, 2008).
10 Blunt, 85.
painting shows three men in flamboyantly colored fools clothing which is anachronistic since the clothing is more suited to the sixteenth century and not the first century AD. The mockers are making faces and pointing at Christ on the right side of the composition who has a pained look while soldiers behind the mockers are shrouded in darkness. This work can also be interpreted as a pedagogical tool, since it shows the laity that the dandy lifestyle is not compatible with true Christian living; it is meant to show that those who live that lifestyle are no better than the Romans who mocked Christ. A “moral dilemma” might also be present in this work as well. The dandies are dressed extravagantly and look like they are successful in life while Christ is dressed in simple and plain clothing. The “moral dilemma” shows two lifestyles. On one hand, the dandy lifestyle reflects pleasure, extravagance, and “the good life,” while Christ’s simple clothing reflects a life of prayer and obedience. These two lifestyles reflect the easy transitory nature of the dandy mode of living but which ends in death and emptiness in contrast to the hard life of Christ which will end in eternal life and paradise. Thus, the viewers are given a choice whether to follow the dandies in their mocking of Christ or to join Christ for the hopes of eternal life.

Dirck van Baburen was another Utrecht artist who had commissions in the church of S. Pietro in Montorio. He was born in or near the city of Utrecht in the mid 1590s and headed for Rome around 1612. He returned to Utrecht in 1620 and shared a studio with Hendrick Terbrugghen but died four years later in 1624. Baburen was given a commission for the Chapel of the Pieta in S. Pietro in Montorio. S. Pietro in Montorio is a medieval church that was given to the Franciscans by Sixtus IV in 1472 and which was rebuilt with the help of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. As a result of this financial help, the church is still under the protection of the
Spanish sovereigns. The Chapel of the Pieta is interesting since Baburen seems to have shared the decoration of the chapel with a friend of his, David de Haen, who did the lunettes but it was Baburen who did the main altarpiece.

Baburen’s *Entombment* is similar in its modeling to Caravaggio’s *Entombment* which was in Chiesa Nuova but is now located in the Vatican Pinacoteca. Christ’s dirty and gangrenous feet are hanging very close to the altar and he looks truly dead. Christ’s left arm is limp and his middle finger points down which leads the viewer’s eye to instruments of the Passion lying on the ground and the tabernacle in the viewer’s space. The significance of the hand pointing to the tabernacle is important for educating the populace since the painting is showing the entombment of Christ and the tabernacle is seen as a repository for the Body of Christ. Thus, depositing the physical body of Christ in the tomb was analogous to depositing the bread and wine into the tabernacle. As a result of the use of simple gestures such as a pointing finger, Baburen has followed Caravaggio’s idea to keep things simple and made the theological lesson simple and understandable to the uneducated viewers.

Both of these artists clearly got their inspiration from Caravaggio’s church works. While there is more focus on naturalism in the works of Caravaggio, these works try to follow that model. While Caravaggio’s works were often criticized for being too naturalistic and inappropriate for a church setting, the works of these followers managed to stay in the churches and were not subject to the criticisms. This shows the works of Caravaggio and his penchant for harsh naturalism finally came to be accepted in religious art at this time since he had been dead for about eight years prior to these works, or it can be that these works did not break the rules of decorum, although they often came close. Unlike Caravaggio who seemingly relished being a

---

11 Ibid., 129.
rebello and testing the waters, the Utrecht Caravaggisti followed suit with the naturalism, but kept
up the proper decorum in order to help teach morals, biblical stories, and lessons to the general
populace. While the Utrecht Caravaggisti got their inspiration from the religious works of
Caravaggio to help teach morals, they also brought their newfound influence back to the
Netherlands where they all focused on the creation of genre pictures which follow closely with
the early works of Caravaggio.
CHAPTER 6
SOCIAL VICE IN THE WORK OF THE UTRECHT CARAVAGGIISTI

While the majority of Utrecht Caravaggisti works in Rome were religious in nature, their main contributions focus on the depiction of social vice among the lower classes. While Gerrit van Honthorst, Dirck van Baburen, and Hendrick Terbrugghen went to Rome, they were not the only Dutchmen to go to the Eternal City. Prior to their departures, earlier artists such as Joachim Wtewael had gone to Italy during the years 1586-88 where he was also inspired by the art of the period. What differentiates Wtewael from the Utrecht Caravaggisti is that Wtewael had gone to Italy when there was more focus on classicizing elements and subject matter with a mannerist tone. When the later Utrecht artists such as Honthorst, Baburen, and Terbrugghen went to Italy, Caravaggio’s life was drawing to a close but he was well known in artistic circles for his harsh naturalism. As a result of Caravaggio’s revolutionary approach to art, many imitators followed, most notably, Bartolomeo Manfredi, who would develop what Joachim Sandrart would call in 1675, the “Manfredi Method.” This method included using caravaggesque techniques such as the use of color and shadow, and themes dealing with the idea of gambling.  

1 Wittkower sums up Manfredi’s importance when he writes “He [Manfredi] was one of the few close imitators of Caravaggio and interpreted the master in a rather rough style . . . [since] it was Manfredi possibly more than anyone else who transformed Caravaggio’s manner into proper genre, emphasizing the coarse aspects of the latter’s art to the neglect of his other qualities.”

While Caravaggio’s genre works of cheaters and scheming fortune tellers have a theatrical and staged essence that hearkens back to the Commedia dell’Arte, the works of Bartolomeo Manfredi follow a similar stance but the presentation often features a darker and more tense

1 Dopo Caravaggio: Bartolomeo Manfredi e la Manfrediana Methodus, 13.

2 Wittkower, 44.
version of the story. This allows one to sense an idea of the evil the vices espouse and promote.

Mancini says Manfredi was one of Caravaggio’s close followers and he is recorded in Rome from 1616 to 1619. Manfredi focused mainly on genre scenes that were favored among northern caravaggisti such as the Frenchmen Valentin de Boulogne, Nicolas Tournier and the painters from Utrecht. ³ Also, unlike Caravaggio who dressed his genre figures in out-of-style clothing, Manfredi dresses his figures in contemporary clothing which would have helped the audience relate better.⁴ While Caravaggio’s early genre works held clear moralizing intent, the work of later caravaggisti, particularly Manfredi, tends to make the genre works more secular in nature.⁵ For example, while Caravaggio takes the depiction of cheating and fortune telling to a new level of naturalism, albeit in a staged form, one does not see ardent seriousness in the faces of the characters. In the case of Caravaggio’s Fortune Teller, one sees the nonchalant face of the dupe and the alluring gaze of the female fortune teller. When one looks at Manfredi’s Fortune Teller in the Detroit Institute of Art, one sees a very different scene. Unlike Caravaggio’s work where there are two figures against a light neutral background; Manfredi places four figures against a darker background which helps emphasize the seriousness and less than noble intentions of the street diviner. The two males are presumably the dupes. One of them is getting his palm read while his companion eyes the woman, who is commonly thought to be a gypsy, to make sure she doesn’t try a sleight of the hand. It is possible they are both companions since they are wearing similar clothing and both are wearing hats with bright plumed feathers which symbolize their foolishness. The woman who is reading the palm stares off into space and supposedly divines his palm although it is more likely she is creating a diversion. Further back in the

³ Spear, 128.
⁴ Feigenbaum, 157.
⁵ Spear, 27.
composition is another woman who is presumably the companion of the fortune teller. This companion’s face is almost completely veiled in shadow to hide her identity. She is deftly lifting the youth’s money purse from his pocket while he is engaged with the divination process on his palm. It is obvious that the young man’s companion, who was possibly asked to watch the fortune teller to make sure she didn’t try any tricks, is also duped, since he focuses on the decoy while the real thief makes off with the money. Even though the fortune teller’s companion is ripping off the unknowing victim, the dupe’s companion is also taking the fortune teller to the cleaners since he is stealthily lifting a hen from her bag. This act of stealing from the thieves is making reference to the gypsies’ supposed penchant for thievery since Anton Maria Cospi, in a handbook dedicated to the Duke of Tuscany wrote “the [gypsy] women steal hens, and while they pretend to predict the future from the palm of hands, they steal purses.”

This work makes visible the perceived notions of early modern negative stereotypes of the quick and shifty nature of gypsies found in Rome and the seemingly uncanny ability for them to be one step ahead of their intended victims. This work also differs significantly from Caravaggio’s work. While Caravaggio takes a more lighthearted approach, since the youth is robbed by the flirtatious glance of a young woman and his physical attraction to her, the youth in this work is duped by more devious means, since he is double teamed and robbed of his money through the possibly fake act of the decoy and deft moves of the perpetrator. The darkness of the work also helps add to the devious plot and makes the work more foreboding than Caravaggio. This emphasizes the dangers of engaging in fortune telling and suggests the deceitful nature of the activity and street diviners that were commonly held views in the early modern period.

---

6 Langdon, 51.
Valentin de Boulogne was a student of Manfredi who followed the style of his teacher by emphasizing the rough and coarse nature of the characters and follows the theme Caravaggio started in Italy of showing the lower class of Rome engaging in social vice. Not only was he influenced by the genre works of Caravaggio and Manfredi but he also seems to have lived a life like those he depicted. It is known that he “led an irregular, bohemian life, which reportedly led to his demise in 1632; overheated from tobacco and wine, he plunged into the Fontana del Babuino, took cold, and died.”7 Like his teacher, Boulogne “plunged his gamblers into darkness, evoking a gritty tavern frequented by dangerous types.”8 In Valentin de Boulogne’s *Card Players* in the National Gallery in Washington D.C, one sees a different take on Caravaggio’s *Cardsharps*. This work features five characters dressed in military garb engaged in two different games. The far right character dressed in striped clothing is playing a game of dice with another man who is wearing a red brimless hat and who has his clothing hanging down from his shoulders. The man in the red brimless hat has just tossed the dice and both men are looking down at the result. Due to the seeming lack of clothing on the man in the red hat, it is possible the two men are playing for clothes. This could maybe explain the reason why he has less clothing on than his colleague. The center and left of the work features three figures with two of them engaged in a card game. The figure whose back is turned to us and the figure standing behind the dupe are obviously working together since he looks at his companion and raises two fingers to show what the victim has. Meanwhile, the dupe is completely engaged with his cards and is oblivious to what is going on around him. Upon closer examination, it is not possible to see what the card lying face up on the table is but it is possible it is either a club which would

7 Spear, 180.
8 Feigenbaum, 158.
symbolize success and money or it could be a spade which symbolizes death.\(^9\) However, when one looks at the card in the cheat’s hand, he is about to pull out a heart which would symbolize good fortune. Thus, this work is left ambiguous since the card on the table can either spell out good or bad luck for the cheats. The swords they bear might relate to impending violence and the heart might relate to good luck and the success of the scam. The dice players, on the other hand, can relate to the idea of the backgammon board in Caravaggio’s work since the throw of the dice leaves the outcome up to fate. Assuming, the thrown dice are not loaded or tampered with, the outcome is unknown. This relates to the ambiguity of the card on the table of whether it is a club or spade and whether or not the scam will be a success or a failure. These types of works will influence the Utrecht Caravaggisti but will differ from the works of Manfredi and his followers in certain ways but still maintain a connection to Caravaggio.

When Gerrit van Honthorst returned to Utrecht in 1614, he focused almost exclusively on the creation of caravagesque works which dealt with genre scenes. While Honthorst would mostly stay within the genre field, in his later years, he will actually turn to more classicizing elements when he becomes patronized by royalty. Caravaggio’s influence can be seen in Honthorst’s *Denial of St. Peter* in a Private Collection in England. In this work, Honthorst has followed a prototype created by Caravaggio where a genre scene is taking place next to a religious scene and this is shown in Caravaggio’s *Calling of St. Matthew* in S. Luigi dei Francesi. In Honthorst’s work, there are several gamblers, with the figure whose back is turned to the viewer in cahoots with the figure standing behind the dupe since he is holding up two fingers from behind a cape. The dupe differs from previous depictions since he is not a foppish young man but an older man. Unlike the youth who is in fine clothing, this man is not wearing

\(^9\) Wind, 16.
expensive clothing but is in tattered clothes. Also, unlike previous depictions, the dupe is not engaged in the game but is involved with the scene on the right of the canvas. St. Peter is in the process of denying his association with Christ to two soldiers and a woman who is holding up a candle which St. Peter’s hand blocks. While the denial is taking place, the cheat’s are taking advantage of the situation since the dupe is temporarily distracted.

The lighting in the scene is also very important. Honthorst is known for his use of light and shadow which earned him the nickname “Gherardo delle Notte,” or “Gerrit of the Night.” By placing St. Peter’s hand over the candle to block the light coming to the viewer, one can sense there is a tense situation arising, since he is vehemently denying his association with Christ to the inquisitive soldiers. The candlelight creates an interesting drama between light and shadow which helps create a tense situation, and one can almost sense the danger St. Peter is trying to get out of as the flame dances across the faces of the figures. The candlelight also plays a role in the gambling scene since it plunges the players into darkness with less light falling upon them. As a result of less light on the gamblers, the scene looks more nefarious and more devious since the flicker of the light over the faces of the cheaters creates a sense of drama that is more serious than Caravaggio’s rather lighthearted take on the scene. This scene has been somewhat influenced by Caravaggio’s Calling of St. Matthew since not only is a religious scene taking place next to a genre scene but it looks as if Honthorst decided to make the scene more dramatic by use of the time of day. In Caravaggio’s work, the use of gestures and subtle light which streams in from behind Christ creates a more poignant scene. In the actual church setting, the natural light plays an important role since it merges with painted light and comes in from above and behind Christ and shines on St. Matthew. Unlike Honthorst’s work where tense drama and an effort to renounce Christ is shown, Caravaggio has shown an opening up and willingness to
follow Christ. This idea, along with the physical placement of the work in the church allows more light to stream in and cover the figures sitting at the table. It is possible Honthorst’s work could have an interpretation that runs contrary to Caravaggio’s but still teaches a moral. While Caravaggio’s work could be read as a depiction of one answering their vocation and their willingness to give up the ways of the world, Honthorst’s seems to show a rejection of Christ by showing St. Peter’s rejection of Christ. This rejection of Christ is exemplified by the presence of the gamblers who are engaging in an activity that was criticized by both Catholics and Protestants, and this could show their unwillingness to stand up for Christ and defend him in his time of need.

While Honthorst got his ideas of using shadow from Caravaggio, he differed from Caravaggio in terms of his other genre scenes. For example, two works featuring a Young Man and Woman Singing by Candlelight from 1624 in the Montreal Museum of Art and a work featuring a Young Man and Woman with no date in Braunschweig differs from Caravaggio since he is not known to have made any works similar to this. Both of these works feature a man and woman engaged in revelry. In the first work, a young man dressed in soldiers garb is with a bare breasted young woman. Both are singing from a songbook while a candle is placed before the songbook thus blocking our view. This work could be referring to the revelry in a brothel due to the openly erotic image of a bare breasted woman.  

This work represents an idea that “love teaches singing” which can be equated with “love teaches sex” which relates to the goals of a brothel. The candle could represent burning love and the idea of music and singing has long been associated with sex, or “music making.”

10 Judson and Ekkart, 198.

11 Ibid.
figure’s bodies separated from the songbook, which presumably holds erotic songs, joined together with a candle that can represent the burning love. Thus, this work can show how erotic songs can help love grow and burn stronger which will ultimately lead to sex. This work is not meant to show divine love but physical love in all respects.

The second work shows a similar composition but shows a young man and woman with a burning coal. The eroticism is much more blatant in this work since it shows the man’s desire expressed in his facial features. He is also looking down on his right hand which is placed on the woman’s bare breast. However, the two figures are not portrayed as totally out of control with sexual excitement. Instead, they are shown as clean, attractive, and good-natured despite the placement of his hand. While previous imagery of this type had featured a young boy blowing on a firebrand, Honthorst had made this work more similar to the previous work since it shows both figures engaged in revelry of a more sexual nature. The burning coal is interesting since it is like the candle but unlike the candle which burns slowly, the coal burns quickly and is much hotter than a candle’s flame. The burning coal and candle is analogous to love since the burning coal is often very hot, fiery and short lived just as the infatuation with a prostitute in a brothel is often hot, fiery, and short lived.\footnote{Ibid., 201.} This differs from the love of a candle which is a more moderate type of love that burns slowly and steadily. This is the type of love one should strive for. The symbolism of the burning coal relates to various writings on love by authors such as Jacob Cats, Daniel Heinsius and Otto van Veen who all warn about the danger of carnal love.\footnote{Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht during the Golden Age, 239.} For example, Jacob Cats writes “It shall soil or burn. Friend watch your hands…Thus I am in danger where I place my fingers; Your coal does as a woman, she burns, or she soils.”\footnote{Ibid., 240}
However, while the writers warned of the kind of love Honthorst has depicted, the work gives
the idea the two lovers are enjoying themselves and are not worried about the dangers of lust.
Instead, they are living for the day. While these two works both differ from Caravaggio, they
both deal with social vice and while there is a chance the imagery might indeed titillate the
viewer just as the viewer is implicated in a moral situation like *Lot and His Daughters*, the
subject matter and criticisms attached to these types of images would have helped people realize
the problems these types of behaviors could cause. Thus, the symbolism attached to the coal and
writings by moralists would help attach morals to these works. As a result, that would help take
away some of the eroticism although the physical aspects would still remain.

The final work of Honthorst’s to be discussed in regards to social vice is an enigmatic
work. The work is located in the A.L. Hertz Collection in The Hague and dates from 1623 and is
known as the *Steadfast Philosopher*. It is an interesting work since Caravaggio does not have
any type of work which can be related to this. The work features a clothed man and a woman.
The woman is nearly nude and reaches out to him with an inviting look. However, her advances
are repelled by him and he seemingly just wants to spend his time reading and writing. Clearly,
this work shows the attempted seduction of a man by a woman but it is unknown as to what the
subject matter of this work actually is. In the past, it was thought the subject matter shows either
Phryne and Xenocrates or Joseph and Potiphar’s wife.\(^{15}\) Unfortunately, due to the lack of
specific attributes of the figures, it is not possible to determine the exact subject. I think each of
the titles are possible since each deals with the theme of seduction. The story of Phryne and
Xenocrates is taken from Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. According to the
story, Xenocrates was a philosopher who came upon the courtesan, Phyrne. She came up with a

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 138.
story she was being chased and sought shelter at Xenocrates’ home with the intention of seducing him. Since he had only one bed, he offered her the bed but would not share it with her but after her attempts at seduction failed she got up and left. If one looks at this story, the subject matter can be seen to match. It is possible Phryne is wearing the sheet for modest covering and is trying to tempt Xenocrates into joining her between the sheets but he is rejecting her. It is also thought this story refers to Joseph and Potiphar’s wife. This story is taken from Genesis 39:7-20 where the Captain of the Pharaoh’s Guard, Potiphar, made Joseph the steward of his household. Potiphar’s wife though, fell in love with Joseph and attempted to seduce him. She grabbed his robes and begged him to make love to her but he fled and left his robes behind. Eventually, Potiphar found this out and had Joseph imprisoned. The depiction of this story in the work does not seem to fit as well as the Phryne and Xenocrates story. While Potiphar’s wife fits the idea of reaching out to him and is about to grab his robes, the large amount of books seems more fitting for a philosopher than for a steward of the household although it is possible a steward might need books to keep track of expenses. Regardless of the subject matter, this work is interesting since it deals with seduction but urges the audience to reject lust and focus on work and chastity just as the male subject in this work is doing. Thus, the idea of the sexual invitation and the rejection of sex helps gain the viewer’s attention and gives a lesson that appeal to both intellectual and lay viewers since the story would have been familiar to the elite while the gestures would be easily understood by the lay viewers.

Dirck van Baburen also did works of social vice after he came back to Rome. Prior to his return to Utrecht in 1620, Baburen had spent most of his artistic development in Rome where he had commissions at S. Pietro in Montorio. He lived with a fellow painter, David de Haen, where both were members of the parish of S. Andrea delle Fratte. S. Andrea delle Fratte was and still is
located in the artist quarter of the city where they were also close to S. Maria del Popolo. It is therefore possible Baburen was not only familiar with Caravaggio’s works but was also familiar with Manfredi’s works and maybe even knew him personally although this is not known for sure. Like the other Dutch artists who went to Rome and eventually returned to the Netherlands, Baburen had come back due to family reasons since his father died and his mother needed assistance to complete a land transaction. However, Baburen’s time in Utrecht was not to last long since he died on February 21, 1624 and was buried on February 28 in the Buurkerk in Utrecht. Even though he died young, Baburen managed to take a lot of what he learned from Caravaggio’s style and made it his own back in Utrecht in regards to depictions of social vice.

Baburen’s *Backgammon Players* in the Stichting Wagner-de Wit in The Hague shows influence of Caravaggio since he translates what Caravaggio shows in the *Cardsharps* and how Boulogne treats the subject matter as well. This work is considered one of the first depictions of gambling done by the Utrecht artists after the return. The work shows four figures engaged in a game of backgammon. Two of the three men are playing while another bearded man watches the game while smoking a pipe. Behind the men is an older man who is in the process of finishing off a tankard of alcohol. The work differs from Caravaggio since the backgammon board has become the focus of the work and not a game of cards which has been seen previously. The depiction of possible cheating is more subtle here and the young player holding the chalk for keeping score looks suspiciously at the pieces and the player who has one hand under his arm. The uniforms of the men connote them to be the average mercenary soldier due to their striped outfits and the helmet one of them is wearing. However, they all wear one piece of armor and

---

16 Slatkes, 1965, 7.
17 Ibid.
18 Feigenbaum, 161.
not of the same type either. Feigenbaum points out that “one has donned the helmet, the other
the breastplate, and the third the gorget” and this could mean they were hired and not issued the
same armor and therefore had to scavenge it from dead soldiers.¹⁹ This work can be interpreted
as a warning against social vice since the work makes use of drinking and gambling in one
canvas. The work also groups the two vices together and associates the games with lowlifes who
were known to be a mischievous and dangerous bunch. Also, other themes such as the ages of
man are shown since there is a mix of young, middle-age, and old. Vanitas is also referenced by
the smoker and which is often a subject used by moralist writers in the Netherlands at this time.²⁰

The work also has more of Valentin de Boulogne’s influence as well. Unlike Caravaggio’s
rather theatrical display, one gets the idea this is a plausible situation that one might see in a
tavern in the city of Rome. Thus, Baburen has taken Caravaggio’s theme of soldiers gambling
and Manfredi and Boulogne’s harsh realism and created a unique mix. This makes the work less
theatrical but closer to life to show people engaged in a vice that was seen as evil since it
provoked violence, wasted money, and broke the Bible’s prohibition against games of chance.
This is supported by the fact that after this work was made, a print by Crispin de Passe with
couplets in Dutch says “a cheater and gambler is a foul wretch, he drinks and gambles his money
and beats his wife.”²¹

Baburen’s *Prodigal Son* in the Gemäldegalerie in Mainz shows a mixture of a brothel
scene, a concert, and festive drinking. This work is a double-edged sword since it serves as a
feast for the eyes but at the same time serves as a warning. On one hand, there is a festive scene
where a good time is being had by all. A young cavalier is looking at the viewer with a large

¹⁹ Ibid., 161-162.
²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ Ibid.
smile while he embraces a beautiful young woman who’s white dress is slipping down ever so much as to barely allow a glimpse of her bare breasts. The figure on the left has his back turned to us but looks at the viewer with a wide smile while playing a lute. The figure behind all the other figures is an old woman, probably the younger woman’s procuress, who is pouring a bottle of wine into a glass for the young man to drink.

This work is interesting since it shows a mix of social vices which all relate to lustful sexuality. The young man embracing the half-naked woman is a obvious reference to sexuality and eroticism but the wine also refers to drunkenness and sex since wine hinders judgment and makes one pursue unwise decisions. This was seen in earlier works such as *Lot and His Daughters* by Joachim Wtewael. The lute player also refers to sex and social vice since the lute follows the idea of “to make music together.” Music often lead to dancing which was seen as inappropriate to conservative Catholic and Calvinist leaders since it did not show reserve and the movements of the dance could be provocative and imitate sexual intercourse. The work probably takes place in a brothel and follows a fairly standard representation of a brothel at this time. While prostitution was widespread, unlike other European cities where prostitutes openly plied their trade, brothels were often disguised as taverns or “music halls.” Often, these establishments were not advertised as brothels but were often discrete since the women who worked in them often dressed as respectable women when not in the establishment. It was necessary for these buildings to be discrete since they could face fines and other penalties. Therefore, these buildings were not as they are today in Amsterdam but were inconspicuous. Israel makes the interesting point these brothels were similar to Catholic “hidden churches”

---

22 Israel, 683.
where “many people knew where they were…but were tolerated as long as they stayed seemingly innocuous and caused no disturbance.”

Even though the subject matter creates an atmosphere of liberality and sexuality which invites the viewer to participate, there is another moralizing meaning to this work. This work hearkens back to the biblical story of the Prodigal Son which is taken from Luke 15:11-32 where the younger son of a wealthy man squandered his inheritance on “reckless living.” This “reckless living” can be seen as the wine, women, and revelry in this work. This work is showing the part of the parable before the son realizes his mistake and goes to his father and says “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15:21). In an act of ceaseless love, the father forgives him and exclaims “for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24). There are many depictions of the Prodigal Son in seventeenth-century art and many works feature the prodigal son’s partying ways. Even Hugo Grotius will admit the story of the Prodigal Son to be “the most remarkable parable of all those delivered by our Savior, as being the most passionate and affecting.”

This will change with Rembrandt in the mid to late seventeenth century. Rembrandt’s *Prodigal Son* from 1669 will show a poignant scene of the father embracing his repentant son. The viewer who saw this work would have been acutely aware of the meaning. The painting shows “pride before a fall” since the key figure, who is probably the figure with the woman, is completely unaware of what the future holds, and he takes no consideration into what might come of his behaviors. Instead, he is totally oblivious to the consequences and is only interested in merrymaking. To the viewer, this work refers to the idea that one might forsake

---

23 Ibid.

24 Halewood, 53.
God and indulge themselves in earthly pleasures. Often, these figures are oblivious that earthly pleasures such as wine, women, and music are transitory and do not last forever. The father, who can also be interpreted as God the Father has an infinite amount of love for His children and is always willing to take them back when they are repentant. This was a very popular subject since it emphasized the point that “joy shall be in Heaven our one sinner that repenteth, more than ninety-nine persons, which need no repentance.” (Luke 15:7). It is the author’s opinion that works which show the party lifestyle of the prodigal son had more appeal to the viewer since it alludes to activities enjoyed by many but which is meant to remind them these pleasures are transitory. Thus, this work again engages the viewer in a moral dilemma such as has been seen in the work of Wtewael, Caravaggio, and Honthorst. The work also reminds the viewer of the importance of repentance and forgiveness which could be applied to daily life since John Calvin wrote his *Commentary on Harmony II* that “boundless goodness and inestimable forbearance of God, that no crimes, however aggravated, may deter from the hope of obtaining pardon.”

Hendrick Terbrugghen is the final Utrecht Caravaggisti to be discussed in this study. Hendrick Terbrugghen was born into a wealthy Catholic family in the Province of Overijssel near Deventer in 1588 but was taken to Utrecht as a baby. As a young teenager, he studied under Abraham Bloemaert and then left for Italy in 1603 when he was 15 years old. Terbrugghen spent ten years in Rome and then returned to Utrecht in 1614 where he was admitted to the Utrecht Guild of St. Luke in 1616-17. He remained in Utrecht until his death in 1629 at the age of 42. Terbrugghen differs significantly from his other Utrecht colleagues since unlike Gerrit van Honthorst and Dirck van Baburen, who had commissions in several Roman churches, there are

---

25 Ibid., 52.
26 Ibid.
27 Nicolson, 3.
no currently known works of Terbruggen’s in the churches of Rome. That does not necessarily
mean though that he didn’t do any religious works for churches. Instead, it is possible there
might be a mistaken attribution in a church somewhere. For the purpose of this paper,
Terbruggen is the Utrecht Caravaggisti who seems to focus the most on scenes of seduction and
gambling which he undoubtedly got from Caravaggio.

Terbruggen’s Backgammon Players in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht features a unique
kind of composition that has not been seen in Caravaggio or the other Utrecht Caravaggisti
before. This work features three young men engaged in a game of backgammon. The men are
soldiers due to the standard striped sleeves, helmets, and armor. Unlike Caravaggio’s
Cardsharps, the backgammon players’ face’s, except for one of them, is hidden due to the low
tilt of the helmet over their eyes. The gaze of the three figures is focused on one particular chip
which they are all closely examining. The examination of the chip could indicate cheating and
this can spell violence. This is supported by the fact that the player on the right has his hand on
his sword and looks as if he is about to draw the weapon in anger. The idea of impending
violence was previously seen in Caravaggio’s Cardsharps albeit in a more subtle manner.
Caravaggio’s Cardsharps shows a dagger hanging on the belt of the cheater but he is not
reaching for it, instead, he is reaching for the club card. The idea of violence is more apparent
due to the backgammon board hanging precariously over the table. Since backgammon was
associated with violence and since it is a game of chance there is a possibility the board could
fall over. This could symbolize the eruption of violence since all the orderliness of the pieces is
gone and control is lost which will lead to irrationality. In Terbruggen’s work, the threat of
violence is more apparent due to the hand clutching the sword while an examination is occurring.
This work could not only be seen as a depiction of a game of backgammon possibly gone bad,
which would appeal to a collector who reveled in the lifestyle of the lower class, but it could also serve as an important pedagogical lesson. Since backgammon was routinely condemned by ministers of all confessions, viewers would have been aware of its “evil” and “sinful” associations but would have reveled in the ambiguous nature of the work since it leaves room to wonder what will happen next.

The final work to be discussed is Terbruggen’s *Gamblers* in the Minneapolis Institute of Art. This work follows a similar compositional model like in the *Backgammon Players* since the work features two men facing each other on either side of the table. A curious third figure is behind the two players and is glancing toward the figure on the right. The two players are also soldiers due to the striped sleeves, breastplates, and helmets while the other figure is dressed differently. The third figure is wearing a plumed hat and different clothing from the other two players. The figure is similar to other Terbruggen works which features a young man playing a flute. The painting shows another scene with cheating suspected since the third figure is looking at the figure on the right and points to the dice and coins on the table. The figure on the right reacts to this news and fixes his glasses to better inspect the coins and dice for possible fraud. It is assumed the old man with the glasses is the victim since glasses were commonly seen as a symbol of moral and spiritual blindness. Thus, the victim further solidifies his blindness by refusing to leave the table but stays. While investigating the coins and dice, he is grasping the hilt of his sword in anticipation that he might need to use it. Meanwhile, the younger player looks directly at the older player and points at him and gestures to show that what the dice shows is legitimate. The legitimacy of the roll is questioned since the dice shows a one and a four while the cards on the table show a one and four. It is possible the third figure is a companion or friend

---

28 Feigenbaum, 164.
of the old man and he suspects the dice might be tampered with. As a result, he is informing the older player who now examines the dice closer to see if that claim is true while the younger player tries to convince him otherwise.

The playing cards on the table also give an indication of the impending violence since an ace of spades is clearly seen on the table. The ace of spades usually symbolizes unhappiness and the spade suit as a whole represents anxiety, sorrow, and death. However, one sees that a heart card is underneath the spade suit and this can be seen as good fortune since the heart suit was taken to symbolize good luck. However, the heart is covered by a suit that spells disaster and the ace of spades which is clearly seen on the table emphasizes the idea of trouble brewing. This shows that while there might be a chance of success in the cheating, one is always against the odds and there will always be the possibility of violence and death if cheating is uncovered.

To the viewer who saw this work, they would not only have been reminded of a typical card game taking place in a tavern but the scene would have been close to life. At this time, the Netherlands was at war with Spain and it would have been very common to see soldiers throughout the Netherlands spending time in taverns carousing with women and gambling when not fighting. As has been seen with works by Caravaggio, Honthorst, and Baburen, this work also holds a didactic message as well. On one hand, the work shows the evils of gambling and the social vices that go along with it such as the possibility of being cheated and physical violence that could cost one their life. On the other hand, this work serves as an intellectual type of puzzle since it is not totally apparent whether or not the younger player’s gestures of trying to prove his innocence is going to be bought by the suspicious older player. Also, the presence of the cards and their symbolism creates a type of scene that can go either way. At first glance, bad

---

29 Wind, 16.
luck and violence seems apparent but the presence of the heart suit brings some chance of appeasement since that suit is associated with good luck. Thus, there is a chance the possible con will work but against heavy odds since the spade overshadows the heart. As a result, the interpretation of what will happen next is open to the individual viewer to discuss and debate.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the depictions of social vice in the art of Caravaggio and his followers, particularly in the Netherlands with the Utrecht Caravaggisti. This study has attempted to show that while the Council of Trent and Calvinist preachers in Europe in the seventeenth century tried to curb depictions of various social vices, they ultimately had little control over what was depicted. Instead of trying to block all depictions of social vice in art, the authorities seem to have reluctantly accepted these depictions in the hopes the works would help teach morals to their viewers even though there was always the risk the works would not be read for their moralizing aspects but their more earthly ones. The work of Caravaggio is important to this study since he is considered the first Italian artist to break away from the traditional iconography popular in the High Renaissance and Mannerism which tended to focus on religious works. Caravaggio rejected this and focused more on daily life in the city of Rome. When Caravaggio first arrived in the city, he created several genre works most notably the Cardsharps and Fortune Teller. These paintings were admired by elite patrons such as Cardinal Del Monte and Cardinal Giustiniani due to their realism and reference to Aristotle’s Poetics which said lowlife if done right can be considered high art. While these works both depicted “daily life” on the streets of Rome, to the eyes of Del Monte and Giustiniani, these works not only gave a window to the lifestyle of the rabble of Rome but they also served as pedagogical tools that not only appealed to the more base tastes of the patrons but also taught important lessons such as the evils of gambling and the risks of giving into fortune tellers and other diviners. These genre works, in addition to the religious works of Caravaggio, while controversial due to the nature of their execution and iconography, actually followed the Decree of the Council of Trent regarding the importance of teaching the viewers Catholic doctrine. While Caravaggio differed from other
artists who focused on theatricality and bombastic displays to awe viewers, Caravaggio took a more populist approach and made the lower class a part of the religious experience in the painting. Previously, the lower classes were excluded from religious painting unless needed by the iconography. Caravaggio changed this by incorporating aspects the lower class could relate to and other social vices. For example, placing figures in contemporary clothing and using real people as models. Thus, Caravaggio brought the spirit and essence of Counter Reformation to the people which was no different from what reformers were doing such as S. Filippo Neri with the Oratory and S. Carlo Borromeo with religious revivals.

Caravaggio’s populist view of art and use of incorporating moral and theological lessons in genre and religious works carried over to his followers in various degrees. While Caravaggio’s followers all tried to imitate him by means of his technique, the Utrecht Caravaggisti are the most interesting. The Utrecht Caravaggisti show Caravaggio’s influence in the city of Rome by also taking a populist approach to art in order to help bring a more personal religious experience to the viewer. They accomplished this by incorporating people, who might have been local residents, in a work. This would have helped create a connection between the neighborhood inhabitants and the depiction in the work and bring religion to the people. The Utrecht Caravaggisti will also be inspired by the subject matter Caravaggio had focused on in his early years in Rome. While Caravaggio started the fascination with social vice, Bartolomeo Manfredi would be the one who would discover “the potential of Caravaggio’s style for secular themes and thereby popularized a mode of painting which attracted numerous Northern followers.”¹ This new type of painting will also be an attraction to the Utrecht Caravaggisti and other followers from countries such as France.

¹ Spear, 27.
Even though depictions of social vice were not rare in northern art in previous centuries, the Utrecht Caravaggisti capitalized on the model Caravaggio had put forward with the *Cardsharps* and *Fortune Teller* which often included ambiguity and esoteric knowledge for the patrons to discuss. Their focus on the depiction of social vice exploded upon their return to the city of Utrecht and this created a new type of genre not seen before. Previously, art in the city of Utrecht was dominated by mannerist type works with a focus on biblical and mythological scenes as a forum for explaining morals. This type of art appealed to elite collectors but the Utrecht Caravaggisti changed this dynamic. The Utrecht Caravaggisti brought back the idea of a populist art that proved to be extremely popular with the elite and middle class buyers of art. As a result, in the early seventeenth century, the mannerist and elite style of Joachim Wtewael declined and a new style embodied with the spirit of Caravaggio arose where morals where transmitted to the viewer through events and occurrences that would have been easily recognizable. These morals were often incorporated into scenes of daily life such as gambling or carousing in a tavern and which would have been recognizable to a viewer. Even though the external subject matter of these works often came under fire from ministers of both the Catholic and Calvinist confessions, these paintings helped teach morals to the viewers. Often, they make reference to biblical stories and leave subtle clues that allude to the downfall of the figures in the painting due to their ignorance and insistence on taking part in the festivities. Overall, I think Spear sums up the significance of the Utrecht Caravaggisti nicely when he writes “they [Utrecht Caravaggisti] substantiated the growing inclination toward secularization of religious themes, supported the spread of genre subjects, and made a major contribution to Caravaggesque art by enriching the possibilities of dramatic illumination.”

2 Ibid., 34.
The Utrecht Caravaggisti will also help inspire later artists in the seventeenth century. While the popularity of the Utrecht Caravaggisti will only last for a relatively short amount of time, it will still be made reference to in the works of Johannes Vermeer since his mother-in-law, Maria Thins owned Baburen’s *Procuress* and which makes an appearance in two Vermeer paintings.\(^3\) However, by about 1630, caravaggesque works like those of Honthorst, Baburen, and Terbrugghen will no longer be produced. This was possibly influenced by the installment of Gijsbertus Voetius as Rector of the University of Utrecht in 1636 and who was the leader of strict Calvinism that ended the tolerance for luxurious activities previously enjoyed by the citizenry.\(^4\) Their influence will still be seen though in the works of later seventeenth-century artists such as Jan Miense Molenaer and Jan Steen. These two later artists will take the ideas of Caravaggio and the Utrecht Caravaggisti to make art more personal by including themselves and members of their families in the paintings. While the Utrecht Caravaggisti limited their works to mainly brothel and gambling scenes, Jan Miense Molenaer and Jan Steen will not only incorporate traditional themes such as quack doctors and village feasts but will also include themes such as scenes with children and disorderly households that often make use of popular proverbs even though the use of proverbs in art goes back earlier. These later artists, Jan Steen in particular, will become more of a storyteller and often incorporate himself in his works taking part in the activities or looking at the viewer with a knowing wink while chaos ensues around him. The incorporation of the artist in the work taking part in social vices and looking at the viewer helps bring the idea of teaching morals to the viewer to a new level. Steen and Molenaer will be unique since they become a promoter of buffoonery and vice and create a “world of

---

\(^3\) Slatkes, 1998, 42.

\(^4\) Spicer, 28.
possibilities” in their paintings that holds both humorous and serious lessons.⁵ This shows Caravaggio’s original idea of trying to bring morals to the viewer by making use of quotidian life will still hold true throughout the seventeenth but artists such as Jan Steen and Jan Miense Molenaer will elaborate on this idea by incorporating themselves in the works to help create a deeper bond between them and the viewer. This link between Caravaggio and later seventeenth-century artists still has to be explored further but I think this paper helps creates a jumping off point for further research.

Overall, even though the subject matter of these artworks might have indeed been “venom for the eye” which thrust “the heat of lust into the depths of the heart,” as Dirck Raphaelsz Camphuyzen maintained, these works did hold moralizing messages. Even though their external subject matter might have actually been “eye candy,” the works did advocate what both John Calvin and the Council of Trent required; that they appeal to the viewers and teach morals. The use of social vice appealed to viewers yet also taught morals through biblical references and allusions. Caravaggio and the Utrecht Caravaggisti took this idea and made it their own by painting what they, their friends, and neighbors would have seen on a daily basis. Thus, while these paintings often feature sins of the flesh and other earthly pleasures, these works serve as important pedagogical tools that not only helped people in the seventeenth century develop a sense of morality but also help the modern day viewer understand the moral code of the seventeenth century.

⁵ Chapman, 369-372.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Gregori, Mina. The Age of Caravaggio. New York, 1985,


Maxwell-Scott, Mary Monica. St. Frances de Sales and His Friends. London, 1913.


Matthew Peszek was born in Elmwood Park, Illinois, and raised in Wheaton, Illinois. Matthew attended Indiana University Bloomington where he graduated in 2006 with a bachelors degree in general studies. Matthew then pursued graduate studies in art history graduated at the University of Florida where he earned his Master of Arts in December 2008. Matthew is single and currently lives in Gainesville, Florida but looks to forward to wherever the future leads him. Matthew gets his daily inspiration from not only the many people who give him encouragement and lead by example but also from a passage in Karel van Mander’s *Groot Schilderboeck* from 1604. In one of the final passages, Karel writes:

> My efforts have been my best and I have suffered not a little. Love made me begin, persist, and finish, this work.