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## "Spreekt, Schilderij";Swijgt, Schilderij" : Some Thoughts on Thomas de Keyser's 1627 Portrait of Constantijn Huygens and His Clerk

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**“Spreekt, Schilderij...Swijgt, Schilderij”: Some Thoughts on Thomas de Keyser’s 1627  
*Portrait of Constantijn Huygens and His Clerk***

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree  
of Bachelors of Arts in the Department of Art History  
from The College of William and Mary

by

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Williamsburg, VA  
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## **Introduction**

Thomas de Keyser's 1627 portrait of Constantijn Huygens has become the canonical image of one of the most powerful intellectuals of the Dutch Golden Age (fig. 1). It is invariably the depiction chosen by scholars writing on Huygens's political role as secretary to Stadholders Frederik Hendrik and Willem II, for it is ostensibly a public image. Huygens's pursuits, however, extended beyond the lofty political position he achieved early in life. He was among the first critics to recognize the talents of the young Leiden artists Rembrandt and Jan Lievens; he wrote hundreds of musical compositions; and, perhaps most valuable to our study of his portrait of 1627, he penned thousands of poems which dealt with everything from expressing his love for his wife Suzanna to his understanding of the state of Dutch politics and society. Given Huygens's varied and complex interests, it is not surprising that his portrait by De Keyser is substantially more complex than most scholars have previously assumed. The artist and patron have clearly created a scene which balances Huygens's public pursuits with his more personal interests. These personal interests come out most notably in Huygens's three poems on the painting, which clearly detail the secretary's response to the work. Indeed, the interests Huygens touches on in a number of poems throughout his life convey the deeply personal interests of a very public man. In addition to Huygens's own words, the timing in which he commissioned the portrait suggests the validity of a more personal reading of Huygens's image.

De Keyser produced his portrait during one of Huygens's many visits to Amsterdam. According to H.G. van Gelder, Huygens was in that city on 22 February 1627 with his brother and sister Geertruyd to finalize a marriage contract with his

beloved Suzanna van Baerle, whom he had affectionately labeled his *Sterre* (“Star”) a few months earlier. De Keyser’s picture was likely begun soon thereafter, sometime in early March 1627.<sup>1</sup> The image initially appears to depict solely the public man at work in his study. A nuanced look at the portrait, however, reveals that details such as the inclusion of a lute, globes, and letters do reference such a social role but are left sufficiently ambiguous so as to make the viewer question the entirety of their meaning. In Dutch art, one object could normally mean various things. A lute might reference either cultivated musical interests or marital concord; globes could reference knowledge of the world or, for Huygens, his love for his “Star”; and a letter could be either public or private correspondence. It depended entirely upon the context.

De Keyser’s image depicts the young secretary seated casually in his study. He appears to slouch a bit in his chair so as to undercut the formality of the portrait. Huygens’s clothing, which characterizes him as a refined man of means, avoids the excess he frequently associated with the social climbers of his day.<sup>2</sup> Huygens, though subtly, refers to his rank and international connections by having himself depicted wearing riding boots with spurs (the spurs signified his rank as a member of the “*ridder*” class, for he had been knighted by King James I in 1622 while he was a part of Sir Dudley Carleton’s diplomatic mission). Unlike Dutch social climbers, Huygens’s boots depicted reality not aspiration. Behind him, his clerk enters through the door along the back wall to hand him a small piece of folded paper. The clerk dutifully doffs his cap and presents his bare paper-holding hand to the glove- and hat-wearing Huygens.

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<sup>1</sup> Gelder, H.E. van. *Ikonografie van Constantijn Huygens en de Zijnen*. ’s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957, 21.

<sup>2</sup> The most notable of Huygens’s satirizing of upwardly mobile members of his society are his moral prints of the early 1620s.

Through these subtle actions, De Keyser cleverly dramatizes the incident and establishes a social hierarchy between the characters. The table before Huygens is draped with a rich Turkish rug and a display of items which epitomize diverse intellectual pursuits. Each object references Huygens in a distinctly personal manner as well, generally referring to notions of love and his upcoming marriage to Suzanna van Baerle.

Portraiture is unique among commissioned paintings as the one instance where the sitter (presumably also the consumer) knows as much about the subject as the artist. It seems valid to presume the sitter helps determine what to include in the image so as to fashion a desirable image of his- or herself. As an erudite young man, it is easy to assume Huygens's involvement in molding his image. Even such a detail as the barely visible marine painting above the overmantel—often attributed to Jan Porcellis—reflects Huygens's taste and interests. He spoke openly of his love for Porcellis in his oft-cited *Autobiography* of circa 1630, considering him the best of the Dutch marine painters.<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of such a personal detail suggests that, while decisively public, the image also held more personal associations.

Nor is the Porcellis painting the only personal allusion in the image. The lute on Huygens's desk may be intended to evoke the patron's upcoming marriage. Moreover, the right edge of the tapestry, visible along the back wall, is pulled back to reveal the entrance to the room. The tapestry, like the Porcellis painting, shows Huygens as a discerning collector and provides evidence of the range of his collection and taste. Being shown as a collector characterized Huygens as a gentleman virtuoso even as it reflected his interests, desires, and personality. In the inclusion of a Porcellis, Huygens presented

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<sup>3</sup> For more information regarding Porcellis and Huygens's interest in the artist, see below on the objects depicted in the picture.

himself as an astute connoisseur, for works by the artist were among the most sought after by collectors of the period. Acknowledging such personal undertones of this overtly public image appears to have preoccupied Huygens shortly after the picture's creation.

On 31 July 1627, Huygens wrote the first of three poems on the De Keyser portrait.<sup>4</sup> The first, in Latin, served as the model for two subsequent Dutch poems written on 2 and 7 August of that year. The titles of the first two poems, "In Effigiem Meam Paulo Ante Nuptias Depictam" and "Op Mijn' Schilderije, Korts voor Mijn' Bruyloft Gemaect"<sup>5</sup>, expressly associate Huygens's image with his recent marriage to Suzanna van Baerle. Nor is anything of that sentiment lost in the poem itself:

Speak, painting, of the great energy of my happiness,  
My innards are gladdened,  
The time is almost here when I will be the winner  
Of my Star's heart,  
And truly from excess joy I'll walk among the stars  
That were in the Heavens,  
And call you harnessed to my happy heart  
For the age that is to come,  
Through this awakened eye and forehead to the front  
To this such heart belonged,  
Say, that for the ages, from that time on  
There was no luck like mine,  
Says the Son (Sun) above, and men below, after this  
Nothing like mine shall be.  
Be silent, painting, and speak little more about me,

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<sup>4</sup> Worp, J.A. *De Gedichten van Constantijn Huygens, naar Zijn Handschrift*. Groningen: J.B. Walters, 1893, 179-80. Worp published a number of multi-volume works on Huygens's poetry and letters as well as a two-volume study on Dutch theater. So as not to confuse volumes of different works sharing the same volume number, I will note simply the year of publication because no two volumes were published in the same year. Worp had erroneously assumed these words to be written in regards to the portrait of Huygens by Jan Lievens, though he only knew of the picture through inventories. After Dr. F. Schmidt-Degener first published this work as a portrait of Constantijn Huygens (*Onze Kunst*, 1915, pp. 113-129), most scholars have accepted that they were written for this portrait, among them H.G. van Gelder and Anne Jensen Adams. Clotilde Briere-Misme, who is credited with the discovery of the Lievens portrait, did not believe the poems related to the picture. To my knowledge, only A.M. Th. Leerintveld has maintained that the poems refer to the Lievens portrait. His meager support for this argument is the assertion that Lievens could have painted the image when Huygens was in Leiden on February 21 and that "The radiance Huygens acquired after his marriage to Susanna (whom he nicknamed 'Sterre') would have made such a portrait impossible." See Leerintveld, A.M.Th. "'Tquam soo wel te Pass': Huygens' Portretbjschriften en de Datering van zijn Portret geschildert door Jan Lievens." *Lieds Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (1989): 183. The Latin poem, along with its related Dutch versions, was first published in the 1672 edition of *Korenbloemen*.

<sup>5</sup> The third is entitled "Noch op de Selve".

For it doesn't all come through.

[Spreeckt, Schilderij, en segt hoe grooten kracht van vreugden  
Mijn ingewand verheugden,  
Ten tijden als ick schier, off heel, verwinner werd  
Van mijner Sterren hert,  
En docht van overvreugd ick trad op all' de Sterren  
Die om den Hemel werren,  
En hiet u tuygen van mijn vrolicke gemoet  
Aen d'eew die komen moet,  
Door dit gewachert oogh en voorhoofd sonder vooren  
Die sulcken hert behooren.  
Segt, dat voor d'eewen, noch van datter eewen zijn  
Geen luck en was als 'tmijn,  
Seght datter boven Sonn, noch onder Maen, naer desen  
Geen mijns gelijk sal wesen.  
Swijgt, Schilderij, en spreeckt veel liever niet van mij,  
'T en komt toch all niet bij.]<sup>6</sup>

After five days' rumination, Huygens articulated the reason for the portrait's inability to express his great happiness at the marriage to Van Baerle in his second Dutch version:

...Ja, ick gheve dat mijn' vreugden,  
Maer mijn aengesicht verheugden,  
Vreugden, daervan in mijn' Ziel  
D'eerste met mijn Sterre viel:  
Noch en waer met dat vermaken  
Mijn gesicht niet nae te maken....<sup>7</sup>

His feelings are to be found in his *Ziel* (soul) and not his face, the painted image being good at depicting the latter but unable to portray the former. Given the particular context of the situation as shown in Huygens's poetry, it is all but assured that the viewers closest to Huygens would have understood the distinctly personal aspects of the image.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 180. Please note, all standard translations of text are cited at the end of the translation. Where no citation is given, the translation is my own. It is perhaps instructive that, along with the heart, Huygens pays close attention to the forehead and eyes in his first Dutch poem. In his sixth chapter of the *Grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, Karel van Mander also pays special attention to the forehead. The forehead is associated with "the air and the weather where sometimes many sad clouds blow, when the heart is weighty with unpleasant sorrow: but all dark mists fall down; with comforting wind and beams of joy the heavens are already swept, pure and blue, to gladden the spirit; and the light of the sun triumphs like a hero who has won in battle" (see Honig, Elizabeth. *The Foundation of the Noble Free Art of Painting*. New Haven, 1985, 39). [*Het voorhoofd is ook welt e vergelijken met de lucht en het weer, waarin soms veel droeve wolken waaien, als het hart bezwaard is met onaangenaam verdriet. Maar alle donkere nevels vallen neer; door troostende wind en srtalen van vreugde wordt de hemel schoon geveegd, zuiver en blauw, om de geest te verblijden, en het licht van de zon triumfeert als een held die heeft gewoonnen in de strijd*] (see Miedema, Hessel. *Der grondt der edel vry schilder-const*. Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1973, 166).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 181.

Huygens found value in celebrating his painted image in written text. In more than a dozen other instances, he wrote poetry describing the portraits for which he sat. If he never again so explicitly acknowledged the differences between body and soul, the act of writing poems seems to implicitly suggest that the painted image failed to capture the entirety of Huygens's being. But it also suggests much more. Karel van Mander had promoted poetry as the verbal equivalent of painting (the seventeenth-century equivalent of Horace's "Ut pictura poesis"). Just as the painter described the present with his pencil, so too did the poet with his words.<sup>8</sup> Van Mander contended:

Now it behooves us well not to omit, but rather to industriously penetrate, to depict well the contents [meaning] of the History, remaining nevertheless in the enjoyment of our freedom and not like Andromeda bound to the rock: because the painter, according to Horace's account, in all that he undertakes or resolves to do, has the same power as the poet.<sup>9</sup>

[Nu is het wel nodig dat we niet overslaan, maar dat we (integendeel) naarstig gaan doorgronden, de inhoud van de figuurstukken goed uit de beelden en nochtans in het genot van onze vrijheid blijven en niet als Andromeda aan de rots gebonden blijven; want de schilders hebben, zoals Horatius ons meedeelt, in alles wat ze ondernemen of zich voornemen, evenveel macht als de dichters.]<sup>10</sup>

More than a mere addendum to the painted image, the poem served to define that which the picture could not: the sitter's inner feeling. The viewer of De Keyser's moderately-sized full-length portrait is confronted, at least initially, with the countenance of a man surrounded by the tools of his profession—in front of him, a table strewn with books, two

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<sup>8</sup> Bueren, Truus van. *'de beste Schilders van het gantsche Nederlandt': Karel van Mander en de Haarlemse schilderkunst.* 's-Gravenhage: Sdu/Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1994, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Honig, 30. Earlier, Van Mander wrote of good masters in his twenty-eighth point on the section entitled *Ordinantie* (Ordering): "Such ones (in a manner of speaking) do not 'counterfit' procurers or advocates, who use many words in their pleading, but copy the great magistrates—kings and powerful potentates—who do not put forth much talk themselves but give their meaning verbally or with the pen in few words." (see Honig, 29) [*Zulken imiteren—bij wijze van spreken—niet de procureurs of advocaten, die veel woorden gebruiken bij het pleiten, maar bootsen de grote majesteiten na: koningen en machtige potentaten, die niet veel praat van zich doen uitgaan maar mondeling of met de pen in weinig woorden hun mening te kennen geven*] (see Miedema, 137)."

<sup>10</sup> Miedema, 141.



globes, a lute, piece of paper, and pen and ink well, while behind him stands his clerk presenting a letter. There is little, if any, overt reference made to Huygens's upcoming marriage. Nor does his staid facial expression betray the *vrolicke* demeanor expressed in his poem of 2 August.

Huygens, as a good Calvinist, placed special emphasis on the written word. This understanding of Huygens's mentality differs considerably from the characterization Svetlana Alpers proposed in the *Art of Describing*. Of Huygens, Alpers wrote:

...in recounting his scientific, technological, or (as Huygens might say) philosophical education done in digression from his father's set program, Huygens binds images to sight and to seeing, specifically to new knowledge made visible by the newly trusted technology of the lens. Huygens testifies, and the society around him confirms, that images were part of a specifically visual, as contrasted with a textual, culture.<sup>11</sup>

And she defends her assertion a couple pages later by saying:

An appeal to religion as a pervasive moral influence in the society's view of itself and the larger world of Nature seems a more fruitful direction to take than to continue to check the art out against the tenets of the faith.<sup>12</sup>

The "specifically visual culture" to which Alpers refers is contradicted by Huygens's poetry on the images for which he sat. Neither image nor word prevails upon the other; rather, his interest in both produces a fruitful tension between the two. Both are necessary, though in varied respects, to understand Huygens, for the image projects the man's physical appearance while the word describes his interior self. A closer look at Huygens's writings will yield evidence that, in fact, the word (not necessarily the Word) held prominence with the visual image.

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<sup>11</sup> Alpers, Svetlana. *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983, xxiv.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, xxvi.

To complicate matters further, the artist's image is not nearly as straightforward as it might seem. Just as Huygens wrote three poems on the picture, each of which conveys ideas not explicitly present in the image, so too do the inclusions of objects and attributes within the painted framework add layers of meaning. The contemporary associations of the globes, lute, tapestry, and seascape over the fireplace play with the viewer's notions of public and personal. The finely-painted objects which adorn the composition not only characterize Huygens as "a veritable *homo universalis*"<sup>13</sup>, as one art historian has put it, but also carry strong rhetorical references to his inner self and life experiences by virtue of their being collected items. Huygens's decisions, including the acquisition of paintings and books for his extensive library, lay claim not only to culture and knowledge but reflect his inner self.<sup>14</sup>

As with the objects, the carefully-calibrated space qualifies the relationship between public and personal space. Huygens turns from his desk (presumably performing state business?) upon being interrupted by his clerk, who apparently entered through the door left ajar along the back wall. But what kind of space does the clerk enter—public or private? Any notion of this being a distinctly public realm is undercut by the clever inclusion of a partial fireplace at the right of the image. The fireplace, though essential for heating any room, predominantly references the private domestic interior.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the picture appears to relate to the theater and contemporary stage design in its use of the tapestry as an "omdraeyende doecken" (rotating curtain) and

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<sup>13</sup> Woodall, Joanna. *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Huygens's collection of roughly 2600 texts was sold in The Hague on 15 March 1688. The entire catalog was published by W.P. van Stockum and Son in 1903.

<sup>15</sup> One notable exception to this is Pieter de Hooch's late view of *The Interior of the Burgomasters' Council Chamber in the Amsterdam Town Hall, with Visitors* of c. 1661-70 (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid), which prominently features a fireplace along the center of the back wall.

openness along the left and right sides of the stage, both of which had become popular in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> This only complicates our understanding of the question of public and private space in De Keyser's portrait, as it becomes a staged event in a created setting.

De Keyser's composition, like Huygens's equivocal image, is about revealing and non-revealing. Huygens's image is that of the public man with subtle allusions to his personal concerns. Only through careful attention to his poems on the portrait (assuming one had access to them) are his personal cares, concerns, and desires made entirely clear. The fact that the poems were first published in 1672 suggests that only Huygens's closest intimates (perhaps only his family) would have understood the distinctly personal undertones of the image. Likewise, the compositional method the artist has chosen ensures that only what is absolutely vital is revealed to the viewer, thus ensuring that the image and its meanings remain intertwined. Huygens's desk blocks our sole means of establishing the relationship between this room and the space around it. It is as if De Keyser has deliberately subverted the traditional Dutch motif of the *doorsien* (literally, a "view through") by providing the open door with only the upper portion of a blank wall behind it.<sup>17</sup> To the right can be seen the fragmentary image of a seascape. De Keyser has again provided no more than enough of the image to associate it with both Huygens's outward and inward interests, those of the Dutch state as well as his demeanor as a collector. Beneath the picture, the artist (perhaps at the patron's behest?) has cleverly included the left portion of a fireplace. Its inclusion appears inconsequential at first

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<sup>16</sup> The fact that, from what can be determined, many Dutch stages in the 1620s had only the back wall built up allowed for viewership from three sides of the stage as opposed to one.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the motif of the *doorsien*, see Hollander, Martha. *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002, particularly Chapter One.

glance, the artist painting a fraction of it along the peripheries of the picture as nothing more than a decorative element; however, it also opens the setting to be seen as a quasi-private interior.

That De Keyser's portrait straddles the public / personal divide poses a number of problems in determining his intended audience. We have an ostensibly public image at hand. But given the meager documentation regarding how Huygens's portraits were hung, it would seem that Huygens likely intended it for more private viewership.<sup>18</sup> Nor would this have been uncommon for portraits in the Dutch seventeenth century. Archival documents reveal that family portraits very often hung in relatively private spaces of the home interior.

The question of Huygens's audience is further complicated by the secretary's poetry on the image. While the painting is directly that of a public man apparently intended for predominantly private consumption, Huygens's poems are—at least eventually—works about the private man intended for public dissemination, as he published them late in life. The late publication of the poems in 1672 suggests that early on they may have been intended solely for Huygens, his wife, and those select few with whom they would have shared such words. One has to wonder if Huygens's sentiments toward his private life changed as he entered his mid- to late-seventies, became less involved in the public affairs of the Dutch state, and had time to reflect on his life experiences.

These, I believe, are the themes pertinent to a discussion of Huygens's 1627 portrait by Thomas de Keyser—word / image association, the public / personal man, and

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<sup>18</sup> A letter dated 23 July 1633 from J. Brosterhuisen to Huygens suggests that he had been privy to seeing the portrait by Lievens in Huygens's household. The letter is published in Worp, J.A. *De Briefwisseling van Constantijn Huygens (1608-1687)*. 's-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 191, 411.

revealing / non-revealing within both the portrait itself and a broader historical context. Had Huygens not written his poems on this portrait, these issues would not have arisen in assessing Huygens's intentions for the portrait. The fact that he did, however, provides a unique opportunity to look beyond the painted framework in an attempt to understand what seventeenth-century audiences saw in its subject. Three issues stand out. These include understanding Huygens's portrait in the context of his upcoming marriage to Suzanna van Baerle, his poems on the portrait, and the clear references made to Huygens as a collector within the image. The picture, distinctive among Huygens's portrait commissions, clearly defines the space Huygens occupies and provides a great deal of information regarding his interests and pursuits through the inclusion of the objects on his desk, the tapestry, and the overmantel marine painting by Porcellis.<sup>19</sup> A focused analysis of these issues and the figure of Huygens himself will show that, contrary to traditional accounts, the image at hand was intended not simply to depict the public man but has at its core a number of personal concerns as well.

### **Part I: Unlike Anything which Came Before—The Relationship between Huygens's Portrait and Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century**

De Keyser's portrait is truly unique among Dutch works of the seventeenth century. The closest compositional parallels are found in paintings by Flemish artists like Anthony van Dyck. This fact is not altogether surprising in light of Huygens's high admiration for the works of Flemish artists. In his *Autobiography* of the early 1630s, Huygens counted Van Dyck as a friend and proclaimed Rubens as the "Apelles of our

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<sup>19</sup> In all of his subsequent portrait commissions, Huygens favored the inclusion of a minimum of objects within the image as well as an undefined neutral background.

time”.<sup>20</sup> Huygens was joined by many in his social circle in his admiration for Flemish artists. The Stadholder Frederik Hendrik preferred works by such artists, as the records of his collection can attest.<sup>21</sup> It seems likely that the conception of De Keyser’s portrait was that of a courtly portrait mediated through Flemish conventions to meet the needs of someone so closely associated with the court at The Hague. In the process of this mediation, all overt references to Huygens as a courtier have been downplayed and supplanted by the image of Huygens as a distinctly diplomatic, as opposed to aristocratic, figure. This alteration gets at the heart of Dutch, and particularly Huygens’s, notions of decorum. Within this framework, there was no room for aristocratic pretension.

The works of Anthony van Dyck present the closest comparison for Huygens’s portrait. Chief among these are the portraits of *Lucas van Uffel* of c. 1621-7 (fig. 2), *Cardinal Bentivoglio* of 1622-3 (fig. 3), and *Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, with his Secretary Philip Mainwaring* of c. 1634 (fig. 4). As in the early Huygens portrait, the sitters are each accompanied by attributes relating to their interests and pursuits. The merchant Lucas van Uffel is shown with dividers and a celestial globe. Cardinal Bentivoglio, who in 1621 became a cardinal and additionally began to manage French affairs at the papal court for Cardinal Richelieu, is portrayed holding a letter. This is generally interpreted as a reference to his relationship with both Paris and Rome. Thomas Wentworth, whose feelings toward the Crown tended to vary with the season, sits with his secretary at a desk in front of an expansive landscape. The background

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<sup>20</sup> Worp. J.A. “Constantyn Huygens over de schilders van zijn tijd.” *Oud Holland* 9 (1891): 118.

<sup>21</sup> For more information on the collecting habits of the Stadholder and collectors in The Hague, see Keblusek, Marika and Jori Zijlmans. *Princely Display: The Court of Frederick Hendrik of Orange and Amalia van Solms in The Hague*. Historical Museum, The Hague. Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1997. See also, *Princely Patrons: The Court of Frederick Hendrik of Orange and Amalia van Solms in The Hague*. Historical Museum, The Hague. Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1997.

landscape has been associated with Wentworth's post as Lord Deputy of Ireland and reflects an era when he was in the Crown's good graces.

It is worth noting that the portrait conventions used for at least two of these images (though it could be argued for the image of Lucas van Uffel as well)<sup>22</sup> stem directly from a courtly culture and depict individuals serving in an advisory role. The choice to place the sitter at his desk provided the ideal composition for depicting both public and personal pursuits. The artist could at once infuse the image with notions of the man's political prowess and discuss his peripheral interests in music, science, and the visual arts by filling the surrounding space with appropriate attributes. Might this have been the reason Huygens chose such a format for his 1627 portrait? Like Huygens, both Cardinal Bentivoglio and Wentworth served in important advisory roles for Paul V and Charles I, respectively. Certainly, the relatively loose court structure at The Hague and the highly codified ones in France and England cannot be compared directly. Nevertheless, a man such as Huygens, with his close connections to the English court and interests in a more courtly style of art (Rubens, Huis ten Bosch), was well aware of the compositional advantages provided by such a tradition and able to rework it in a distinctly Dutch idiom.

While the closest compositional parallels are to be found in Van Dyck's portraits, one finds points of similarity between Huygens's portrait and native Dutch works. In his *Still Life* of 1651, the Leiden artist David Bailly has composed a scene of great visual coherence. At the left sits the artist, *mahlstick* in his right hand and portrait of Bailly in his left, with a sumptuously laid still life on the table. The objects on the table and wall

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<sup>22</sup> While van Uffel was not directly involved in Flemish affairs of state, he did nonetheless operate within the Flemish courtly milieu by virtue of his high status within Flemish society.

simultaneously refer to the *vanitas* theme of the image while also the artist's profession as reproducer of nature: plaster models, a skull, candleholder, palette, portraits, overturned *roemer*, wine glass, pearls, pipe, coins, etc. Or, as one art historian so rightly claimed:

...these are materials worked to reveal or...to betray their nature: wood is shaped, paper curled, stone is carved, pearls polished and strung, cloth is draped, hides (as vellum) are treated to provide smooth cover for a book. Several materials betray their multiple natures...metal is imprinted in coins, fashioned into links of chain, sharpened to form a knife blade, turned to a candlestick, or molded into the sprightly putto supporting the glass holder at the far right.<sup>23</sup>

Just as the painter in the image has crafted the portrait of Bailly and the craftsmen the assorted objects of the picture, so too does Bailly lay claim to the role of creator, for he produced *this* image, a fact reinforced by his presence among and proximity to the various objects strewn atop the desk.

Like Bailly and the artist in his image, Huygens lays claim the objects on his desk, though in a slightly altered form. No longer is this the ownership brought about through artistic creation but rather political power and intellectual acumen. While Bailly's image is the world of the artist, the celestial and terrestrial globes, pen and ink well, letters, and books are that of Huygens's, for it was Huygens's profession to serve as scholar, diplomat, and intermediary between foreign officials and the Stadholder.

Nor does it appear as if the choice to stage one's portrait within a study ever took root in the northern Netherlands during the seventeenth century. Such a portrait-type would have been more than suitable for individuals like the moralist Jacob Cats and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Land's Advocate for Holland from 1586 until his execution in 1619. It is curious, then, that Huygens was among a select few Dutchmen to have chosen

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<sup>23</sup> Alpers, 103.



the format for his 1627 portrait, the other famous example being Rembrandt's 1654 etching of Jan Six, which shows the Amsterdam official leaning languidly against an open window while reading (fig. 6). The print as we know it today underwent several stages of alteration before taking its final form, an evolution which proves illuminating in an assessment of the kind of individual for whom this type of portrait apparently appealed. In the first of two drawings, Rembrandt has depicted his subject leaning against what appears to be an open window, a dog placing his fore-paws against Six's leg. The inclusion of the dog has rightly been assumed by scholars as an indication of his status as a young patrician, a key to our understanding of the type.<sup>24</sup> The second preparatory drawing relates far more closely to the final composition. Rembrandt has removed the dog in favor of showing Six reading at the open window. With this change, the artist has removed the overtly aristocratic reference in favor of a more nuanced depiction of the scholar in his study.<sup>25</sup> This change from dog to reading reflects a change in emphasis in characterizing Six as a man. In the former, he was simply the affluent, young "aristocratic" type (no doubt a scare word for any good Dutchmen of the time), while in the latter the outward stare has been removed in favor of an inward gaze at the printed material.

De Keyser was similarly quite noted for his "rather literal translations of court portraiture" from 1624 to 1639, which portray the individual seated at a table in his study.<sup>26</sup> What so strikingly differentiates De Keyser's portrait of Constantijn Huygens

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<sup>24</sup> Freedman, Luba. "Rembrandt's 'Portrait of Jan Six'." *Artibus et Historiae* 6 (1985): 94.

<sup>25</sup> There is something about this choice that rings of a distinctly Dutch sensibility, where boundaries are set up between appropriately conveying one's status within society on the one hand and giving off an inflated sense of self-importance on the other.

<sup>26</sup> Adams, Ann Jensen. *The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7-1667): a Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth Century Amsterdam*. Thesis (PhD), Harvard University, 1985, 96.

from the other portraits of the period is that none so expressly links the sitter with the tradition seen in works by contemporary southern artists such as Van Dyck. A typical example of the type executed by De Keyser during this period can be seen in an image of a *Merchant in His Studio* which recently came up for auction at the Dorotheum in Vienna (fig. 7). The small-scale image shows a young, affluent merchant seated informally at a table in his studio, presumably in the midst of correspondence with business associates. Unlike the Huygens image, the portrait of the young merchant conveys no more than the sitter's professional pursuits, the linen chest in the background providing a possibility as to his source of wealth. Huygens's image, on the other hand, shows a multitude of objects which relate his professional, intellectual, and personal pursuits—the boundaries between which are not often entirely certain.

That Huygens and Six were among the few Dutchmen of the seventeenth century to have chosen to sit as a scholar in his study suggests the idiosyncratic nature of the composition.<sup>27</sup> The brilliance of the work by De Keyser and select other Dutch works lies in their unconventional development of the picture space. That the mediated court portrait never took hold in the Dutch Republic also suggests that, unlike their southern peers, the Dutch may have felt a certain aversion to the form due to its courtly connotations. Certainly, social status was a necessary prerequisite for one to commission such a portrait. But it was not sufficient. In addition to one's social status, a certain mentality was required—for Six, one which *desired* to be seen as an aristocrat or, in

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<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that none of the Stadholders for whom Huygens served ever had themselves portrayed in this manner. This occurrence, however, might well be explained by the fact that, even in the South, the form seemed a favorite of those individuals below the highest ranking member of society—his advisors.

Huygens's case, one which was created by unparalleled political success at the early age of 31. This, in turn, seemingly provided the logic for such a commission.

## Part II: The Impact of Dress and Gesture on Huygens's Personal Characterization

This city's *magnifique*, but what a grubby folk!  
In Brabant we're all quite exquisite  
In dress and bearing—in the Spanish mode—  
Like lesser kings, gods visible on earth.  
Oh, imperial Antwerp, great and rich!  
...  
Ah, had I been less the banqueter,  
I'd been there less the scandalous bankrupt too.  
All was well. Why seventy pair of sleeves I had  
Which my *crediteurs* demanded I return...<sup>28</sup>

So spoke Jerolimo Rodrigo, Gerbrand Bredero's famous character, at the beginning of his *Spanish Brabanter* of 1617. Not only did Bredero's character previously have the enormous (and undoubtedly inflated) number of "seventy pair of sleeves", but his current wardrobe included such courtly refinements as a "red-plumed bonnet", sword, and "feathers" (presumably placed in the bonnet).<sup>29</sup> Bredero's play was widely successful in its day, due not only to its superb writing and plot but also the author's keen sense of popular perceptions about a distinctly Dutch culture which scoffed at the eccentricities of its southern (Catholic) neighbor.

Gerard de Lairese seconded Bredero's sentiments somewhat later in the century.

In his *Groot Schilderboek*, the multi-talented author and artist suggests the following:

...additions not only bestow dignity and luster to the piece, but moreover will elucidate the person's distinction and virtue; taking care that the sitter who is the subject of the piece, takust up the most space, either through a lively swagger or by the inclusion of one or more

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<sup>28</sup> Bredero, G.A. *Spanish Brabanter*. Trans. David Brumble. Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1982, 47.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

appropriate additions. In doing this, one will attain great accomplishment.<sup>30</sup>

[...Welke [bywerk] niet alleen strekken tot deftigheid en cieraad des stuks, maar daar en boven tot verlichting van des Persoons luister en deugd; acht meemende, dat de Persoon, welke het voorwerp des Stuks is, het meeste deel beslaa, 't zy door een spartelende zweir, of door het by voegen van 't een of 't ander daar toe eigen bywerk. Met zulks te doen, zal men een groote welstand voortbrengen.]

For both Bredero and Lairese, one's choice in clothing served as a means by which the individual's personality, demeanor, and even moral rectitude could be characterized. While Bredero's over-the-top mockery of Jerolimo provides the reader a relatively simple perspective as to how clothing could affect these issues, the realities of clothing oneself could be very different. As I will show, many Dutchmen—Huygens included—were faced with competing aims when it came to choosing the appropriate clothing. A man such as Huygens was constrained to convey his high social status without appearing Jerolimo-esque. He could neither wear the garb of the middling sort so often found in contemporary Dutch genre scenes nor could he clothe himself as radiantly as foreign courtiers so frequently did.

An assessment of Huygens's choice of dress depends predominantly on an understanding of the contemporary associations of its constituent elements: the heavy wool *kazak*, matching breeches, gloved right hand, ruffled collar, riding boots with spurs, and hat.<sup>31</sup> Each of these articles of clothing is related directly to the culture of horsemanship and riding, activities which elite Dutchmen had undertaken with increasing relish throughout the seventeenth century. The meanings of these accoutrements did not, however, remain static through the Dutch seventeenth century. Nor did they necessarily

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in De Winkel, Marieke. *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2006, 281, footnote 2.

<sup>31</sup> The *kazak* was especially well adapted for riding gear due to its hanging sleeves and long side vents. For more information, see De Winkel, especially pages 107-112.

hold the same connotations for portrait sitters from the same period. The fan, not present in our painting but nonetheless useful to make our point, was not as innocuous an inclusion as one might assume.

David Smith has noted the multitude of meanings fans held for early-modern people:

From the sixteenth century onward, however, fans primarily became the possessions of wealthy and fashionable ladies. First in Renaissance Italy and increasingly throughout Europe as a whole, they attained the status of luxury objects, which were made ever more varied in form and elegant and expensive in their materials and ornamentation... Their functions also expanded... Significantly, there were also wedding fans. The latter already make their appearance into Renaissance Venice, and while I can find no evidence that they enjoyed the same popularity as wedding gloves in the seventeenth century, their existence does indicate that a sense of metaphor underlay their fashionableness.<sup>32</sup>

In art, fans were apparently often associated most closely with the final use mentioned, married ladies.<sup>33</sup> While visual evidence appears to confirm Smith's theory (fans are so frequently found in pendant marriage portraits), the relatively few contemporary comments made regarding their associations imply a somewhat different meaning. In Huygens's *'t Kostelick Mal* ("Costly Folly") of 1622, the fan receives a brief treatment as a sign of pride and vanity. In it, Huygens wrote the following comment on a fashionable lady:

And [the poor] could live for over a year, On the frivolous cost of your ribbon and your feathered fan.<sup>34</sup>

[En over 't jaer sou teeren, Op den versnoepten cost van uw' lint en uw' veeren.]

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, David R. *Masks of Wedlock: Seventeenth Century Marriage Portraiture*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research P, 1982, 82.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>34</sup> The English antiquarian Randle Holme provided similar sentiments in his 1688 *Academy of Armory and Blazon*, noting that a feathered fan was "more comely and civil for old Persons then the former, which is stuf with nothing but vanity."

Huygens's perspective on the connotations of the fan remained constant throughout his life, as an English epigram from 1671 indicates:

Who ever heard a thing so strange?  
A Maid, a Ladij and a Man  
In two hours at the new Exchange  
Bought an Ear-iron and a Fan.<sup>35</sup>

That a fan could be interpreted so paradoxically as both a symbol of marriage and a vain gesture by its beholder suggests the many layers of meaning dress held (and continues to hold) within society. Moreover, the import seventeenth-century Dutchmen placed on decorous dress and presentation permeates both their literary and visual works of art.

Rarely do we find an individual more interested in appropriate self-presentation than Huygens. In both literature and paint, Huygens preoccupies himself with these issues, a fact that is particularly evident in the mid-1620s. During this period, Huygens wrote his afore-mentioned "Costly Folly", a series of moral prints, and sat for three portraits within a four year period.<sup>36</sup> His series of moral prints are perhaps the most intriguing path of entrance into his early sensibilities. One of Huygens's main themes in writing these poems was his satirizing of the upwardly mobile classes within Dutch society. Two examples from the series will suffice in conveying this point. In August of 1623, Huygens wrote a relatively lengthy poem entitled "Een' Rycke Vryster" ("A Rich Spinster"). Two lines of the poem read as follows:

Haer wapen is een Koey in klaverveld ter weiden,  
Die overgeten schijnt, en vande melck will scheiden<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Davidson, Peter and Adriaan Van Der Weel. *A Selection of the Poems of Sir Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687)*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1996, 196.

<sup>36</sup> The portraits include Michiel van Mierevelt's lost work of 1623 (known through a print of 1625 by Willem Delff), Jan Lievens's three-quarter length portrait of 1626/7 (Douai, Musee de la Chartreuse), and Thomas de Keyser's famous work of 1627.

<sup>37</sup> Worp, 1893, 5.

Huygens saw the suitors' interests not due to the spinster's charm and feminine beauty but rather given her wealth; though, as Huygens recognizes several lines earlier, to them she is "nemmer oud" ("never old"). In a work of the same year entitled "Een Boer" ("A Peasant"), Huygens scoffs at a passing gentleman for having powder in his hair and an effeminate lock hanging down his shoulder.<sup>38</sup> Such ostentatiously aristocratic types were lampooned by Huygens not simply because they lacked his notions of masculinity but because (like Jerolimo in Bredero's play) they derived their success by leaching off others.

Nor was Huygens alone in his criticisms of such individuals. Indeed, judging by the biting words penned by John Milton some fifteen years later, the theme appears to have been a relatively common one among Huygens's contemporaries. In his *Of Reformation* of mid-1641, Milton wrote the following:

And it is still *Episcopacy* that before all our eyes worsens and slugs the most learned, and seeming religious of our *Ministers*, who no sooner advanc'd to it but like a Seething-Pot set to cool, sensibly exhale and reak out the greatest part of that Zeal, and those Gifts which were formerly in them, settling in a skinny congealment of ease and sloth at the top: and if they keep their Learning by some potent sway of Nature, 'tis a rare Chance; but their *Devotion* most commonly comes to that queazy temper of Lukewarmness, that gives a Vomit to God himself.<sup>39</sup>

Milton's vitriolic speech was directed at learned bishops in general but appears to have been particularly reserved for Archbishop Laud, a commoner who made his way up the religious ranks.

Huygens's poems and Milton's contemporary polemics have a great effect on our understanding of the secretary's intentions in clothing himself as he did. Huygens's perception of himself is clearly that of a self-made man, regardless of his family's prior

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 31-4. Huygens speaks through his peasant to convey his mockery of Holland's aristocratic types. At one point, the peasant exclaims, "Why, he looks just like a woman!"

<sup>39</sup> Milton, John. *A complete collection of the historical, political, and miscellaneous works of John Milton*. London: printed for A. Miller, 1738, 5.

connections with the Dutch government (his father Christiaan had served as secretary to the Stadholder until his death in 1624). No doubt, however, Huygens's familial connections freed him from the kind of criticism Milton leveled at social climbers in England. Each of his garments has been carefully chosen to produce the impression of a refined gentleman, for he has clothed himself in the guise of a member of the riding class. The wool *kazak*, studded with costly golden buttons and braiding, identifies Huygens not only as a man of means but also with the worldly pursuits so frequently associated with individuals of such enormous wealth. For this, a further comparison with Jan Six, Huygens's somewhat younger statesman, proves appropriate.

Jan Six, like Huygens, engaged in the leisurely pursuits of the gentleman virtuoso. Each of these pursuits involved some degree of acquisition, whether it was the acquisition of knowledge or material objects. For figures like Six and Huygens, a demonstration of "knowledge" as we think of it today could take on a variety of forms: owning various tracts from a wide range of authors, proficiency in a number of languages, understanding the natural world. Even the way one dressed became useful in conveying an "enlightened" sensibility. The first of these types of knowledge—the books in one's library—was often the best way to determine a person's understanding of knowledge. While Huygens and his learned contemporaries considered library ownership a necessity for the cultivated man, selecting appropriate texts and digesting the information contained within was equally important. This notion of education is stated clearly in a poem entitled "On the Library from an Unlearned Man" from 7 February 1644:

...It is here full in all corners,  
Everywhere I look there are books,  
But not over two or three,  
Good and *read* books....



[...’T is hier voll in alle hoecken:  
‘Ksie all Boecken waer ick sie,  
Maer niet over twee of drie  
Goede en *uitgelesen* Boecken....]⁴⁰

The libraries of Six and Huygens are among the most cultivated and intriguing in the Netherlands at the time. Six’s library contained no fewer than thirteen volumes of the works of Homer in various languages as well as at least four copies of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Courtier* in both French and Italian.<sup>41</sup> Huygens’s library was arguably even more extensive and eclectic than Six’s, given his status as a significant Dutch scholar of the period. Thousands of theological, legal, and “miscellaneous” texts in Dutch, French, Italian, English, German, and Latin could be found in the secretary’s library.<sup>42</sup> The difference between Six and Huygens is one of emphasis; Huygens might be termed a scholar-gentleman while Six a gentleman-scholar.

While Huygens’s library featured predominantly the erudite texts of a scholar, Six’s included a number of texts pertaining to the gentlemanly activities of Holland’s upper class. Chief among these were treatises on riding and horsemanship. These texts included those written by Jean-Jacques Wallhausen, Hermann Hugo, and Federigo Grisone. That Six purchased so many works on the subject suggests a certain affinity for the activity, one which required large tracts of land. For the Dutch, and indeed their counterparts in England, ownership of a country estate, like riding horses, had become an indicator of worldly success. Six—ever-aware of his image as the gentleman-scholar—acquired Elsbroeck, his own mansion near Hillegom in 1651.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Worp 1893, 287.

<sup>41</sup> Lambert van de Bos’s 1662 translation of the text into Dutch was additionally dedicated to Six. De Winkel, 97 and 120.

<sup>42</sup> *Catalogus*, 1903.

<sup>43</sup> *Catalogus der Bibliotheek van Constantyn Huygens Verkocht op de Groote Zaal van het Hof te ’s-Gravenhage 1688*. ’s-Gravenhage: W.P. van Stockum & Zoon, 1903, 113.

Huygens, too, built his Hofwijck (“Away from Court”) in the regions surrounding Voorburg in 1642, though his conception of the mansion seems somewhat different from that of some of his contemporaries. Simon Schama has described individuals like Huygens and Six who purchased or built these country houses in the middle part of the century as simply “commodity fetishists”.<sup>44</sup> Under this model, the country estate becomes nothing more than a manifestation of the conspicuous consumption which served to differentiate the elite from their lower-status contemporaries. While this may have been true for some elites,<sup>45</sup> the generalization can hardly be made across the board. It over-simplifies the myriad interests in which one could choose to buy or build such an estate.

Many owners valued the country estate as more than just a visceral commodity fetish; the names they provided their estates attest to this fact. Huygens chose Hofwijck (“Away from Court”) for his house while his close friend and fellow moralist Jacob Cats settled upon Zorghvliet (“Fly from Care”) as the title of his own residence. The names themselves suggest that ownership of country houses should not be seen as merely indicators of economic prosperity. These were the places of intellectual retreat and rejuvenation for Holland’s men-of-affairs, a fact that is no doubt reinforced by the decisions which informed Huygens’s conception of Hofwijck. Designed by the classicizing Jacob van Campen, Hofwijck is at its heart informed by Vitruvian ideals of proportion. Indeed, Vitruvius devoted his sixth book on architecture to a discussion of

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<sup>44</sup> Schama, Simon. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Knopf, 1987, 297.

<sup>45</sup> Joan Huydecoper’s Goudestein (“Golden Stone”) is perhaps the mansion which could be most associated with Schama’s assertion. Beyond its name, Huydecoper commissioned Jan van der Heyden to immortalize his estate in paint in 1674. This action reinforced the associations with the value of a commodity already present in the name.

town and country houses, paying particular attention to proportion, plan, and a building's suitability for different ranks of society.<sup>46</sup> Huygens's familiarity with and interest in Vitruvius is confirmed not only by his choice of Van Campen as architect but in letters dated 7 and 8 March 1635 to the scholar Daniel Heinsius and the historian Abraham de Wicquefort requesting editions of Vitruvius by Fra Giocondo (1511), Cesare Cesariano (1521), Gianbatista Caporali (1536), Daniele Barbaro (1556), a Vitruvian dictionary by Bernardino Baldi (1612), and relevant Latin verses by Alberti.<sup>47</sup> Through these authors, it seems clear that Huygens followed Vitruvius in his use of the human body as the model for Hofwijck: the house is the head, the front yard and upper garden that which is above the waist, the road representing the waist, and the lower garden that which is below the waist.<sup>48</sup>

In the seventeenth century, clothing, no less than acquisitions such as a country house, or library, signaled not only the person's economic status but their personality as well. As Marieke de Winkel so eloquently observes, "It [dress] can also help to determine the message the sitter or artist wished to express."<sup>49</sup> Just as Huygens built his Hofwijck in classical manner to represent his intimate understanding of Vitruvian architectural ideals, so too does his garb as a *rentier* convey ideals of power, prestige, and monetary and political success. While the richly-adorned *kazak* informs us of Huygens's high status, the most potent references to Huygens's high social status can be found in the glove he wears on his right hand as well as his spurred boots.

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<sup>46</sup> For more information, see Frank Granger's translation of Vitruvius's classic text.

<sup>47</sup> Worp, 1912, 53 and 84. For more information on the import of Vitruvian ideals in Huygens's esthetics, see K.A. Ottenheim, "Huygens en de Klassicistische Architectuurtheorie" in *Domus: Het Huis van Constantijn Huygens in Den Haag*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1999: 87-109.

<sup>48</sup> De Vries, Willemien B. "The Country Estate Immortalized: Constantijn Huygens' Hofwijck." *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture XII*. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990, 83.

<sup>49</sup> De Winkel, 11.

The significance of gloves, like fans, underwent a number of changes as the century progressed and a wider group of people obtained great wealth. The democratization of the glove in Dutch portraiture ultimately caused its exclusion from aristocratic and courtly portraits around mid-century.<sup>50</sup> However, earlier in the century, “part of their [the glove’s] function is to display their owners’ wealth and status.”<sup>51</sup> And along with status generally comes authority.<sup>52</sup> Given that Huygens’s portrait was commissioned in the mid-1620s, it seems unlikely that the meaning of the glove as an aristocratic symbol had been entirely lost by this time.<sup>53</sup> Such a notion is confirmed by Huygens’s riding boots. As Julius Held has noted, the inclusion of Huygens’s boots and spurs not only depicts the sitter as a member of the “ridder” class but more specifically tells the reader that Huygens was knighted by James I during his 1622 diplomatic mission under Sir Dudley Carleton.<sup>54</sup>

In decorum of the period, gesture, even more than costume, conveyed rank. Huygens’s clerk has removed the glove from his hand and doffed his hat in deference to his social superior. Huygens’s centrality in the composition underscores his prominence in the picture. As seemingly intuitive as this idea might be, Lairesse found it nonetheless useful to discuss in his *Groot Schilderboek*. He notes that people of the greatest rank

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, 74.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>53</sup> That the glove retained its high status at least until the middle of the 1630s is confirmed by Rembrandt’s *Portrait of Maerten Soolmans* of 1634. Soolmans, so exquisitely dressed, proffers a glove to his wife Oopjen Coppit who is portrayed in the pendant image.

<sup>54</sup> Held, Julius S. “Constantijn Huygens and Susanna van Baerle: A Hitherto Unknown Portrait.” *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991), 656. In wearing riding boots, Huygens was treading a fine line between depicting his high status as sitter and giving off far too aristocratic associations. Not intending to push the aristocratic associations to an unacceptable degree, Huygens limited their manifestations to details such as the glove (which was a standard inclusion in portraiture of the period) and his riding boots.

were to be placed in the most prominent position (*voornaamste plaats*) up front.<sup>55</sup> Huygens's relaxed posture additionally helps to undercut the aristocratic pretensions of the image. While formal rigidity was associated with established courtly culture, Huygens's informality resonates with a distinctly Dutch sensibility of decorum.

Huygens's characterization as a gentleman would have been readily understood by his peers, since he follows the recommendations of Baldassare Castiglione's *Courtier*:

Evade (like a sharp and dangerous rock) all affectation and artfulness, but employ in all matters a certain 'looseness' as painters use to call it, in such a way that great exertion is concealed so that it seems that everything that is done or said as if it was done without any effort and if without thinking. I think grace principally originates from this, since everybody knows very well of the difficulty to bring about all matters that are extraordinary and well-done, and to do them with lightness cannot but cause great wonder.<sup>56</sup>

Castiglione's association between the "looseness" of painting and how one presents himself is telling. The Dutch picked up on such notions; its effects can be seen in a number of portraits of the period. Interestingly, the vast majority of these works were images of the private man, likely intended for a very limited audience.

Isaac Massa, an affluent merchant with commercial interests as far as Russia, sat three times for the Haarlem portraitist Frans Hals. Two of the three works reference the sitter's distaste for social climbers. In an image of the early 1620s which includes his wife Beatrix van der Laen, Hals and Massa have set up an opposition between foreground and background scene (fig. 8). The foreground, which depicts Massa and Van der Laen, shows the couple as a morally upright young couple while the background depicts an ornately-attired pair who apparently lacks moral virtue (they walk in a Garden of Love

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<sup>55</sup> De Lairese, Gerard. *Groot Schilderboek*. Haarlem: J. Marshoorn, 1969, 44. [*Dit gedaan zynde, zo vergaderduwe zinnen by een om het voorgenomene to onderzoeken, en gevoegelykst het zelve te vertoonem, benevens welke personaadien, en wie de beste en voornaamste plaats moeten hebben.*]

<sup>56</sup> Quoted from the Dutch version of 1662 in De Winkel, 122-3.

with a fountain surmounted by nothing other than a statue of Eros!). And the manner in which Massa comports himself is quite similar to the way in which Huygens conforms to the curvature of the chair in De Keyser's contemporary image. The second picture, which shows Massa leaning back in his chair, epitomizes the theme at hand. Hals has provided the viewer an image of a man who, with effortless skill, has precariously balanced himself between being wholly on the ground and toppling over. Massa's decision to sit for Hals three times (the only artist for whom he is known to have sat) suggests as well that the sitter understood these connotations. Hals's work is characterized by a looseness in brushwork where broad patches of color are built up to model the image. In patronizing Hals's work and sitting informally, Massa appears to share Huygens's sensibility of decorum. The ideal man did not strive to convey his status but rather comported himself informally and performed actions with effortless ease.

In addition to underplaying the aristocratic undertones of the portrait, Huygens spontaneously turns to his secretary and opens his mouth as if to speak. This action places the image within the type known as the *sprekende beeld*, or "speaking image". The "speaking image" was a long-standing convention in the north by this period. Indeed, the theme can be found in northern art as far back as the sixteenth century.<sup>57</sup> By the seventeenth century, it was Rembrandt who employed the "speaking image" to greatest effect. The artist broke with his predecessors who allowed multiple figures to engage simultaneously in conversation. By allowing only one figure to speak, Rembrandt gave greater visual coherence to his compositions. The art historian Julius

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<sup>57</sup> Julius Held has found analogies between the work of Rembrandt and engravings after Hans Holbein for a 1538 edition of the Old Testament. See Julius Held, *Rembrandt Studies*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991, 181.

Held has sought to ascertain from where Rembrandt's unique interpretation of the theme had come. He considers Rembrandt's sources:

Rembrandt's inspiration, if we may call it so, to treat verbal exchanges in the manner here described, may have come from a very different area: the theater. We know that the artist was very interested in the performances in the Amsterdam *schouwburg*. Already in the 1630s he made many drawings of actors in their costumes. Elsewhere...I have tried to show that the idea of the knife falling from Abraham's hand in the Leningrad canvas of the *Sacrifice of Isaac* may have its origin in a staging device in Theodore Beza's play *Abraham Sacrifiant*, and that Huygens, who as a pupil had himself acted in it, may have suggested the dramatic motif to the young artist.<sup>58</sup>

Held's suggestion that Huygens may have informed Rembrandt of Beza's play is corroborated by some evidence of the late 1620s when Huygens first met Rembrandt and Lievens in their Leiden studio.

There can be little doubt that Huygens's 1628 visit to Leiden generated much artistic discussion. He wrote the following in his *Autobiography* of three years later:

For when it comes to what we usually call history painting, this masterly, admirable artist [Lievens] will not easily equal Rembrandt's powers of evocation.<sup>59</sup>

[In historiis enim, ut vulgo loquimur, summus utique et mirandus artifex vividam Rembrantii inventionem non facile assequetur.]<sup>60</sup>

For Huygens, Rembrandt's "powers of evocation" could be seen in their entirety in his *Judas Returning the Pieces of Silver* of 1629 (fig. 9). He claimed the figure of Judas was "in the whole body rolled into wildness".<sup>61</sup> Huygens was clearly interested in the effects of gesture in art during this period. A few years later, Rembrandt wrote to Huygens that he had endowed his figures in the *Passion* series with "the greatest and most natural

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>59</sup> Rand, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Worp, J.A. "Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap." *Oud Holland* 18 (1897): 78.

<sup>61</sup> Worp 1891, 126. [*corpus omne miseranda atrocitate conuolutum*]

movement”, an idea he knew would resonate with the secretary.<sup>62</sup> The art historian Gary Schwartz has additionally proposed the improvable but not wholly implausible notion that an informal competition was set up between Lievens and Rembrandt to see who could develop the best composition for the *Raising of Lazarus*, a subject which preoccupied the young artists in the late 1620s and into the 1630s.<sup>63</sup> Given the high degree of artistic discussion which appears to have taken place between the young secretary and artists in 1628, it is worth considering that Huygens proposed the theme of the “speaking image” to the young Rembrandt during his visit to Leiden. At the very least, both Huygens and Rembrandt recognized simultaneously the narrative coherence provided when only one figure speaks in an image.

As Julius Held noted, Huygens may have informed Rembrandt of the falling-knife motif in his *Sacrifice of Isaac* from 1635 and was enamored by the theatricality of the artist’s early *Judas*. Huygens’s intimate knowledge of the theater would have enabled him to settle upon the notion of the “speaking image” for his own painting of 1627, as the device is inextricably tied to theatrical performance. The fact that Huygens requested this motif seems assured when one considers that in no previous image does De Keyser use the motif of the “speaking image”, which suggests that the composition came at the patron’s, not the artist’s, behest.<sup>64</sup> Having only recently sat for De Keyser, the portrait

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<sup>62</sup> The exact meaning of the phrase “die meeste ende naetuerelste beweegelijkheid” has been much-debated.

<sup>63</sup> Schwartz, Gary. *The Rembrandt Book*. New York: Abrams, 2006, 86. Schwartz and earlier critics contend that Rembrandt may have falsified a date of 1631 on one of his drawings so as to make it appear that he was the originator of the composition. Martin Royalton-Kisch, however, has rightly contended that “This statement... implicitly accuses Rembrandt of a distortion along the lines of those perpetrated by some German Expressionists almost three hundred years later.” (“Rembrandt’s Drawing of *The Entombment of Christ* over *The Raising of Lazarus*.” *Master Drawings* 29 (1991): 271)

<sup>64</sup> Ann Jensen Adams erroneously presumed that the composition of each image was determined by the artist and not the sitter. On page 96, She cites a “chronological clarity” with which De Keyser’s settings shift from “ambition to socially advance himself, preoccupation with his career, ownership of a home, and



likely remained close to Huygens's heart during his visit to Leiden a year later. Huygens may have suggested a new manner of conceiving the "speaking image" to the young artist considering works before 1628 lack the narrative coherence present in works produced after that date.<sup>65</sup> While it remains impossible to determine exactly how Rembrandt came to develop his particular brand of the "speaking image", the idea clearly attracted both the artist and his early critic given their status as sophisticated individuals attune to the distinctly theatrical aspects of painting.

### **Part III: Staged Space in Huygens's 1627 Portrait**

Thomas de Keyser's portrait of Huygens shows a complex spatial arrangement which assists in developing the personage of Huygens and, ultimately, appears to relate to the contemporary Dutch theater. De Keyser has given equal prominence to Huygens and the objects strewn about the room. Additionally, the tapestry along the back wall—rarely mentioned in critical evaluations of the portrait—gives the image its underlying theatrical nature. The lute, globes, letters, and background marine painting reinforce such associations. De Keyser has carefully calculated how these objects function within the painted framework. Indeed, Huygens and De Keyser have developed the secretary's image through space and the objects which occupy it. The space has become Huygens's stage and the objects the theatrical props. Such associations are generally made with

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raising a family." Adams fails to realize that Huygens's portrait commissions underwent the same evolution: images from the 1620s referenced his professional ambition; those of the 1630s conveyed his familial interests; and finally those of the 1660s, 70s, and 80s portrayed Huygens as a wizened statesman. Given the degree to which Huygens moderated the development of his own image, it would seem unlikely that he ceded creative control to De Keyser in 1627.

<sup>65</sup> One of the earliest works to employ this technique is an image in Melbourne presumably depicting Peter and Paul, where only one of the two speaks. The other, whose back is turned to us, sits inactively listening to the speaker. Previous works, as in the Rijksmuseum's *Tobit and Anna* of 1626, ascribe activity to both characters. While it is only Tobit who speaks, Anna is allowed a number of expressive gestures, the most notable of which is her shocked facial expression.

regards to the courtly societies of England and France, though they nonetheless hold true for Huygens's experiences in The Hague as well. The following commentary on seventeenth-century France might just as well be written of Huygens's life at The Hague:

In this context—where an emerging leisured class relied above all on self-presentation to distinguish itself...life itself became theater....The measures individuals took to promote their place in society paralleled those used by actors to prepare a role for the stage. One's image, projected through manner of speech, dress, and embellishments of the home and other physical surroundings, was a critically important indicator of social worth....[T]hey were the props of social life...<sup>66</sup>

The theatrical was an important influence on Dutch art from its most bawdy to most refined.<sup>67</sup> And Huygens, in particular, relished the theatricality of Dutch art. Classical examples of Huygens's interests were the early works by Rembrandt (notably his *Judas*). In a subsequent example, the famous *Blinding of Samson*, Rembrandt has produced one of his most expressive and theatrical works (fig. 10). Interestingly, this was a work intended as a gift for Huygens.<sup>68</sup> Upon giving it to Huygens, Rembrandt described how best to hang the picture:

My lord should hang the piece in a strong light so that one can stand some distance from it, so that it will be most suitably placed.

[*Mynheer hangt dit stuck op een starck licht en dat men daer wijt kan afstaen, soo salt best vouchen.*]<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Flack and Flohr, in Norman, Larry F. *The Theatrical Baroque*. Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, U of Chicago, 2001, 32. French theatrical design was additionally coming into vogue during precisely this period.

<sup>67</sup> Ellenbogen, in *Ibid*, 25. Such morphing of physical characteristics to convey the essence of an individual was a popular theme in the Dutch art. One famous example of how theatrical elements could be used to depict a bawdy subject is the series of prints executed by Jan Jorisz. van Vliet portraying rather grotesque-looking beggars. Their outward physical appearance was intended as a visual cue to their internal moral iniquity.

<sup>68</sup> The argument that Rembrandt had this picture in mind comes from a letter he wrote to Huygens dated 12 January 1639. In closing the letter, Rembrandt offers Huygens (probably due to the artist's tardiness in completing the *Passion* series for the Stadholder) a picture "10 feet long and 8 feet high" [*10 voeten lanck ende 8 voeten hooch*] (see Worp 1913, 425). Of all the extant pictures produced by Rembrandt during this period, the *Blinding of Samson* is the only one to meet the dimensions given. Its theatricality and similarity to the works of Rubens would as well have appealed to a man like Huygens.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Valentiner, Wilhelm R. "The New Rembrandt at Frankfurt." *The Burlington Magazine* 9 (1906): 168.

The artist's intention that the picture be placed suitably within Huygens's interior suggests that he desired the viewer to fully grasp the unfolding drama as Samson's eyes are brutally gouged from his head. The viewer must, therefore, be sufficiently distanced from the enormous canvas and the image appropriately lit. Nor was Rembrandt's interest in and understanding of how the lighting affects the viewer's understanding of the drama limited by the manner of display. They were present in his conception of the image as well. Samson's face is harshly illuminated by a strong patch of light coming from outside the cave while the other figures remain in shadow. This subtle play of light and shadow compels the viewer to first confront the writhing Samson as his eyes are plucked from his head before noticing the perpetrators, almost all of whom fade into the shadows.

Huygens no doubt understood how the theater could be used to one's advantage in art; the 1627 portrait for which he sat conveys his intimate knowledge of the contemporary theater. Huygens's gestures are distinctly theatrical in their attempts to convey speech; but the theatrical associations can be found in the spatial setting of the image as well. The most notable of such elements on Huygens's own "stage" is the tapestry which has been pulled back to reveal the entrance into the room. Such pulling away is selective; the viewer sees only what the artist and patron allow—the partially open door by which Huygens's clerk has entered the room. The opening along the back of a room was a particularly popular motif in Dutch art, known as the *doorsien*, or "view through". Karel van Mander discussed its merit in his *Groot Schilderboek* of 1604:

Even so the eyes, which, in their eager sweep over all the beauties in Pictura's courts, seek many places in which to amuse themselves, wherever it pleases their desire to lead them, hungering to see more above and below, tasting all manner of delicious nectars: for the Charities delight in variety used with artfulness. There one can do as the merchant does, who neatly stacks his goods for display on high

shelves, to the side and below; likewise one includes in a history some onlookers, on hills, in trees, or on stone steps.<sup>70</sup>

The beauty of the *doorsien*, therefore, existed in its ability to let the eye wander around the composition and find new areas to penetrate and understand. While van Mander suggests using the *doorsien* predominantly for history painting, artists in other genres, Nicholas Maes and Pieter de Hooch chief among them, began to recognize its usefulness as well.

While Huygens and De Keyser have employed the same visual vocabulary as Maes and De Hooch, their ultimate goal is quite different. Rather than providing additional information as to what is occurring in the room as the later artists did, De Keyser's opening displays only a blank wall. Nor can the viewer work out the layout of the room, for the globes and table block the lower half of the door, where the viewer might gain some perspective as to where this room sits in relation to others. In providing no more than a blank wall, both sitter and artist have deliberately subverted the traditional motif and brought our searching eye back into the main drama which unfolds before our eyes.<sup>71</sup>

The tapestry, which has been pulled away to reveal the door, functions to limit our eyes' ability to search beyond the parameters of the room. Indeed, by 1615 the "omdraeyende doecken" (rotating curtains) had become a standard feature in Dutch

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<sup>70</sup> Translation in Hollander, 17.

<sup>71</sup> For an artist whom Gregory Martin considered "superficial" and an "unimaginative but talented painter" interested in depicting everything with the utmost precision (*National Gallery London Dutch Paintings*. Munich: Knorr & Hirth Verlag GmbH, 1971, 15), any ambiguity present in the image must be considered intentional and likely at the sitter's behest. Another area of ambiguity, to be discussed in detail later, can be seen in the folded letter Huygens receives from his clerk.

theater.<sup>72</sup> Rotating curtains allowed the whole stage to be used at once because scene change was predicated upon changing the curtain as opposed to a new setting on the stage itself. In earlier performances, such as those written around the turn of the century by Jacob Duym, multiple scenes coexisted on the same stage. In order to change setting, the actors physically moved from one scene to the next.<sup>73</sup> Given the unfortunately little documentation remaining regarding the setup of stages and theaters, it becomes difficult to understand the exact relationship between the painting and contemporary theater. Despite the dearth, the meager documentation (both textual and graphic) which does exist suggests that some tentative conclusions can be drawn. Huygens's intimate knowledge of the theater from his youthful performances does, indeed, seem to bear itself out in his conception of the portrait. For one thing, Huygens appears to have understood the contemporary changes being brought about in the theater, as the tapestry is the pictorial equivalent of the rotating curtain. Rather than break the image into a number of distinct elements, the tapestry along the back wall assimilates the people and objects spread out before it into one unified scene.

How and from where Dutch theater-goers would have viewed the performance is a matter of some debate. It is unknown for sure whether the stage would have been bounded by walls on both the sides and back or only the back. The clearest documentation for how contemporary stages were built comes to us from Johannes de Witt, a resident of Utrecht who made a trip to London in the closing years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While there, De Witt made a small drawing of the Swan Theatre from the

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<sup>72</sup> See Worp, J.A. *Geschiedenis van het Drama en van het Toneel in Nederland*, 2 vols. Rotterdam: Fa. Langerveld, 1908, particularly 56-62. Samuel Coster's *Tiisken van der Schilden* (1615) appears to have been among the first plays to use rotating curtains.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

inside.<sup>74</sup> De Witt's drawing shows that the stage was open on three sides with seating around the stage. A 1618 print by Claes Jansz. Visscher of Samuel Coster's stage for his *Tiisken van der Schilden* similarly shows a stage with two open sides, which likely contained seats as well.<sup>75</sup> It is equally likely that no curtains were placed on either side of the stage, for they would have obstructed the viewers' lines of vision. Huygens's painting shares its closest similarities with Coster's stage. That the second decade was something of a transitional period in Dutch stage design is likely confirmed not only in the use of rotating curtains but in an engraving by Visscher dating to roughly a decade before his print of Coster's stage. In his print on a performance of a play by P.C. Hooft on 5 May 1609, Visscher has shown the stage with both side and back walls. The stage projects no further than the three-walled structure which sits atop it, thus relegating the spectators to the area directly in front of the performance.<sup>76</sup>

Huygens's portrait shows similar concerns to the stages designed in the second decade of the century. A comparison with some of De Keyser's other portraits will show distinct differences in the conception of Huygens's portrait and that of contemporary sitters. The vast majority of De Keyser's portraits of the period provide a corner of the room, which states for the viewer that the actions take place within a room bounded by four walls. De Keyser's afore-mentioned *Merchant in His Studio* serves as a good example of the typical manner in which the artist defined space for his full-length portraits of men seated at a table. The artist has deliberately bounded the sitter by the

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<sup>74</sup> The drawing has been reproduced in K. Th. Gaedertz, *Zur Kenntniss der altenglischen Bühne* (1888).

<sup>75</sup> This assertion seems to be confirmed by the introductory dialogue between the *rederijker* and an old man watching the performance (who is also an actor). The former encourages people to come forward while an old man who can't see well (presumably due to his great distance from the stage or oblique angle) responds that he has a place where one can nestle up next to him.

<sup>76</sup> For a reproduction, see *Hollstein* 21.

corner of the room at the far left of the image. Because one side wall is provided, the viewer can presume that the room is terminated by a similar wall at right. De Keyser's image of Huygens operates somewhat differently. Huygens remains unbounded by side walls; both the left and right extremes of the image convey that the back wall continues beyond the pictured space. The artfulness with which De Keyser has done this can be seen along the right side of the painting. He has brought the back wall forward, as if to provide a corner of the room (as he did elsewhere), only to turn it back out so that the room continues beyond the picture's own boundaries. The artist's intention is made explicit by the partially-cropped paintings and fireplace at right and cropped left border of the tapestry at the left of the image. It seems likely, therefore, that the consciously different spatial organization in Huygens's image might be considered in relation to contemporary theater design.

In another similarity to the contemporary theater, Huygens's tapestry reproduces his family's coat-of-arms in the middle of the top border. Little has been made of this seemingly trivial inclusion. Neil MacLaren is among the few scholars to discuss the coat-of-arms. He rightly notes that the coat-of-arms has been carelessly painted, as De Keyser has painted one pale instead of two in the quarters for Huygens and two lions instead of one in that of Bacx.<sup>77</sup> Given Huygens's demeanor, it seems unlikely that he would allow such an inaccuracy to go unfixed, at least if the primary intention of this inclusion was to accurately suggest his genteel birth. The addition of a coat-of-arms might instead reference the tradition of including such details as valuable components of stage design. Two extant engravings (dating from 1539 and 1561) of stages include such

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<sup>77</sup> MacLaren, Neil. *Dutch School: London National Gallery*. London: Publication Dept., The National Gallery London, 1960, 202.

coats-of-arms.<sup>78</sup> The placement of the coats-of-arms in both the print from 1561 and De Keyser's own image is remarkably consistent, as both exist in the space directly above the main part of the stage (we might view the horizontal border of the tapestry as the demarcation between curtain and balcony). Such evidence is admittedly inconclusive, though there does seem to be a distinct relationship between Huygens's portrait and the scant documentary evidence at hand. Such a relationship implicitly positions the viewer as spectator of the staged performance.

While the viewer is allowed to view Huygens at work, the curtain opening onto a non-descript doorway serves as an omnipresent reminder that Huygens's audience sees only what is revealed to them. As viewers, we are left in limbo wondering if the stage presented to us is a public or private setting. Huygens sits at a table seemingly performing state business. His clerk comes in with a letter which has previously been interpreted, too narrowly, as public correspondence. Under such an interpretation of the letter, the inclusion of a fireplace is somewhat anachronistic. By the seventeenth century, the fireplace had gained distinctly domestic, and ultimately feminine, associations.<sup>79</sup> It was not merely the place of food production but the locus of interior warmth as well. In houses which could afford to maintain a constant fire, the fireplace was tended by females, particularly servants of the house.<sup>80</sup> A contemporary English ballad expresses this in lyrical form:

...when that I rise early in the morn,  
Before that I my head with dressing adorn,  
I sweep and cleane the house as need doth require,

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<sup>78</sup> Brink, Dr. J. ten. *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*. Amsterdam, 1897, 232.

<sup>79</sup> For more information on the development of the fireplace in Europe, see Sarti, Raffaella. *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500-1800*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002, particularly 92-96.

<sup>80</sup> Schama, 458. The association of the hearth with the domestic and feminine has a long history in Western thought. Tacitus had expressed this notion as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. when he wrote of those living in Germania that the "care of hearth and home and fields is left to the women" (*Germania*, sct. 15 [98]).



Or, if that it be cold, I make a fire.<sup>81</sup>

Huygens's fireplace is far more elegantly-adorned than the standard simple brick or stone fireplaces of the common person. His includes a carved wood molding with a luscious green velvet skirt set on carved stone caryatids. Much more than an addition which simply confuses our notions of public and private space, such a fireplace was truly an “embellishment of the home” which served as a “critically important indicator of social worth” and ultimately contributed to the theatrical nature of the image.

#### **Part IV: Costly Baubles—The Objects in Huygens's Portrait**

The Dutch poet Willem van Focquenbroch (1640-1670) wrote a poem entitled *Gedachten op mijn kamer* (“Thoughts in my room”) in which he expressed a notion quite related to Huygens's conception of the included objects in his portrait:

...To pose as truth, will untruth try  
And knaves will don a saint's perfection:  
A fool would trust what meets the eye....  
...The baubles that I look upon,  
As a diversion once presented,  
Give often cause to ponder on  
The hollow joys of youth, lamented  
When old age comes and spring is gone....<sup>82</sup>

Van Focquenbroch's poem suggests that the letters, globes, lute, and background marine painting likely had no “true” meaning for Huygens and other contemporary viewers. Their inclusion reflects Huygens's interest in nuance and multiplicity of meaning. In dress, gesture, and spatial organization, the patron culled a variety of ideas together to create a vibrant picture of his multi-faceted personality. The complexity of Huygens's program is equally present in the objects found within the room. As Van Focquenbroch

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<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Sarti, 94.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted and translated in Schenkeveld, Maria A. *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1991, 171.

suggests, we should not trust only what meets our eye for fear that we might be deceived by their seeming familiarity. The letters, lute, globes, and background marine painting are not simply finely-painted accessories to exhibit De Keyser's meticulous manner of painting; rather, each presents the viewer with ambiguous "diversions" for his or her contemplation and delectation. Each object exhibits Huygens's public role but also evokes the private man. Consequently, it behooves the attentive viewer to look carefully at each the letters, lute, globes, and background marine painting individually to illuminate each of their meanings.

Each of these objects references Huygens's public aspirations as a man of letters as well as more personal references to his marriage and artistic interests. The two letters are perhaps more intriguing given their greater ambiguity—and interest—than is generally recognized. Most accounts focus solely on the letter Huygens receives from his clerk. Equally important, though often unrecognized, is the letter on the table which Huygens appears about to draft. The presence of both a letter Huygens writes and one he receives captures the essence of letter-writing, for one person composes while the other receives (in this instance, Huygens functions as both parties). Joanna Woodall has articulated the traditional account, claiming that the letter he receives "thematizes his work on behalf of the state".<sup>83</sup> There are, however, few reasons to jump to such a conclusion. De Keyser has quite deliberately prevented the viewer from knowing the contents of the letter by presenting it folded so as to enclose its contents. The blank paper on Huygens's desk supports such a reading. By depicting the moment *before* Huygens has put pen to paper, De Keyser causes the viewer to question with whom Huygens is writing. The viewer might just as well assume Huygens writes to his "Sterre"

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<sup>83</sup> Woodall, 78.

as a public official. Indeed, such ambiguity should be considered deliberate, for the tradition of describing letters and texts in detail was sufficiently strong in the Netherlands by this period (for contemporary examples, see Rembrandt's portraits of *Marten Looten* of 1632 and *The Shipbuilder Jan Rijcksen and His Wife Griet Jans* of a year later).<sup>84</sup>

Only a few previous commentators on De Keyser's portrait of Huygens have noted its likely relationship with Huygens's upcoming marriage and his more personal concerns. Among this small group of scholars, it was Julius Held who most closely associated the image with Huygens's marriage. In an article on Huygens's 1633 portrait with his wife, Held noted the following of De Keyser's portrait:

I consider it likely, though there is no definite evidence, that Huygens had ordered the painting as a gift for his bride, which may account for the elaborate formality—unique in portraits of Huygens—of that work.<sup>85</sup>

Held's contention that the portrait might be related to Huygens's upcoming marriage is bolstered not through the "definite evidence" of documents but through the inclusions of particularly two objects within the painting—the lute and the terrestrial and celestial globes. Both lute and globes had been common inclusions in paintings of learned officials since the sixteenth century. One early example of this phenomenon is Holbein's 1533 *Ambassadors* portrait. Between Jean de Dinteville, French ambassador to England, and Georges de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur, stands a two-shelved cabinet on which are included both terrestrial and celestial globes and a lute.

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<sup>84</sup> The *Marten Looten* depicts an unfolded letter in Looten's left hand. Though most of the letter is illegible, the first line gives the sitter's name followed by *xi. Januyary 1632* and is signed *Rembrandt*. The portrait of the shipbuilder Rijcksen and his wife is even more explicit. Rijcksen, like Huygens, sits at a table with a piece of paper. Unlike Huygens's portrait, Rijcksen's directs the viewer as to the contents of the paper with the inclusion of several sketches of ship's designs.

<sup>85</sup> Held, 655.

The inclusion of these objects within Huygens's own portrait connotes quite particular references to the sitter's childhood education and intellectual pursuits. In his *Autobiography*, Huygens notes that as a young man he was trained in the arts of calligraphy, drawing, and mathematics, tools which his father saw as useful to his ultimate development and success given their applicability to cartography. Some years later in 1631, the adult Huygens was to put this training to good use when he was made councilor in the "Nassause Domeinraad", a body which administered the properties of the Prince of Orange.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the inclusion of the lute references on some level his own preoccupation with musical composition, for he composed over eight hundred pieces of music. Unfortunately for us, only one of his instrumental compositions survives today.<sup>87</sup>

Huygens, like Van Focquenbroch, must have relished the public and personal connotations held by the lutes and globes of De Keyser's image. These objects were more than indicators of high status and education; they evoke a personal association in his upcoming marriage to Suzanna van Baerle. As a prolific composer and poet, Huygens undoubtedly recognized the trope that music-making was a symbol of marital concord. The trope must have been something of a favorite for Huygens. In 1633, Huygens and Suzanna sat for a portrait by Jacob van Campen (fig. 11). Van Campen's portrait successfully conveys the love Huygens so frequently expressed for his wife. Other than the figures of Huygens and his wife, Van Campen has included nothing, save a conspicuously-placed musical score held jointly by the two sitters.

The portrait by Van Campen marks a change in Huygens's patronage from commissions of the ostensibly public man to ones which show a greater concern for

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<sup>86</sup> Zandvliet, Kees. *The Scholarly World of Vermeer*. Zwolle: Waanders, 1996, 63.

<sup>87</sup> See Crawford, Tim. "Allemande Mr. Zuilekom: Constanitjn Huygens's Sole Surviving Musical Composition." *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 37 (1987): 175-181.

depicting him in the role of loving husband and father (the latter was to be espoused more fully in a commission of 1639 which saw Adriaen Hanneman produce a large portrait of Huygens and his five children). That Huygens chose to include a musical score in his 1633 portrait is highly significant. As one art historian has wisely noted, the two thumbs holding the piece of paper is a striking detail intended to convey Huygens's notions of marital harmony.<sup>88</sup> The two are both literally and figuratively "on the same page". Indeed, Huygens appears to have relished this concept, for on 23 February 1648 he wrote a poem entitled "Two Unpaired Hands on a Harpsichord". One must even wonder if Huygens had his painting of 1633 in mind when he penned this poem, for three lines read as follows:

But also, as Man and Wife, each appearing proper;  
The man in darker work, the Wife in lighter manner,  
Or, is it more to say, both in moderate conduct.

[Maer gaen, als Man en Vrouw, elck om den oorbaer uijt;  
De man in swaerder werck, de Vrouw in luchter handel,  
Of, is 't maer wand'len, beid' in schickelicken wandel.]<sup>89</sup>

Most significant, however, is the poem's conclusion: "[Two concordant souls] in a heavenly way will give birth to a joy, a delight, only known by few who carry flesh and bones. It is part of angels' singing."<sup>90</sup> Just as Huygens's first Dutch poem on his 1627 portrait discusses his love for Suzanna, so too do three poems relating to a drawing by Van Campen of Huygens and his "Sterre", though in arguably less explicit terms (in each

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<sup>88</sup> Noske, Frits. "Two Unpaired Hands Holding a Music Sheet: A Recently Discovered Portrait of Constantijn Huygens and Susanna van Baerle." *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 42 (1992): 136.

<sup>89</sup> Worp 1894, 131. Just how to translate "swaerder werck" and "luchter handel" remains difficult; one is, however, tempted to associate them with Van Campen's creation, where Huygens is clothed in a dark mantle while his wife wears a light orange.

<sup>90</sup> Translated in Noske, 135.

of these, Huygens uses “Man en Vrouw” as opposed to the “mijn Sterre” of his earlier poem).<sup>91</sup>

That Huygens had included a celestial globe along with the terrestrial variety suggests a relationship with his conception of Suzanna as his own “Star”. Huygens first gave Suzanna her nick-name in a poem dated 11 September 1626. In an undated poem, likely dating to a few days later, Huygens wrote on her again, this time explicitly comparing her with the comets and the heavens.<sup>92</sup> It was this idea that Huygens used again in the following lines of his poem dated 2 August 1627 (see pages 4-5 for the full poem):

The time is almost here when I will be the winner  
Of my Star’s heart,  
And truly from excess joy I’ll walk among the stars  
That were in the Heavens,  
...  
Says the Son (Sun) above, and men below, after this  
Nothing like mine shall be.

Huygens has beautifully contrasted the exalted celestial realm in which his “Sterre” exists with the world of “men below” (presumably where he, too, lives). It seems likely that these ideas find their pictorial equivalents in the prominent inclusion of the celestial and terrestrial globes in De Keyser’s portrait.

Just as the globes reflected both Huygens’s worldliness and his love for Suzanna, the background overmantel marine painting conveys his intimate knowledge of Dutch affairs and the more personal aspects of artistic preferences and collecting. It is at once a metaphor for the Ship of State and a very tangible object supposedly collected by Huygens for its artistic merits. The painting is stylistically similar to works done by the Dutch marine painter Jan Porcellis, active during this period. While De Keyser has

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<sup>91</sup> For translations of the poems into English, see Noske, 136.

<sup>92</sup> Worp 1893, 166.

provided no more than the broad impression of a ship at sea, one composed of two broad sweeps of beige to stand in for sails, the ship must either be the *kaag* or *wijdschip*. Of the myriad ships employed by Dutchmen in the seventeenth century, only these carried two sails. Both ships were particularly well-suited to navigating inland waterways, often the Zuyder Zee.<sup>93</sup> More importantly, this type, characteristic in Porcellis's oeuvre, is distinctly Dutch and imbues the image with a strong sense of nationalism. Though the ship is being tossed about by the sea, the viewer is nonetheless led to believe that, like the Dutch state, the inhabitants of the vessel will prevail upon the storm.

The small overmantel painting by Porcellis would have held both personal and public associations for a man like Huygens. Firstly, Porcellis's work exemplifies Huygens's specifically Dutch artistic taste. The inclusion of the Porcellis (accompanied on Huygens's other side by a tapestry) bespeaks the secretary's prowess as a collector of the first class. He was intimately familiar with the artists of his time and wrote about the strengths and weaknesses of many of them in his *Autobiography* of circa 1630. Having studied under Hendrik Hondius and admired the work of Jacques de Gheyn (who lived next door),<sup>94</sup> Huygens was well-positioned to pass judgment on artists of his time. Given Huygens's prominent role in Dutch governmental affairs, the picture also held distinctly public connotations. We find in Porcellis's work images that likely resonated strongly with a country whose stability and prosperity depended on the sea. In each of Porcellis's works, the small merchants' vessels appear on the verge of overcoming the mighty ocean

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<sup>93</sup> For more information about the variety of ships employed in the Dutch seventeenth century, see Leo M. Akveld's "Glossary of 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Dutch Ships" in Giltaij, Jeroen. *Praise of Ships and the Sea: Dutch Marine Painters of the Seventeenth Century*. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1996 particularly pages 28 and 33.

<sup>94</sup> Worp 1891, 111. Huygens writes, "*In primis GHEINIUM patrem summa artis veneratione colui.*"

and rarely seem in serious threat of being swallowed by it. Huygens, as secretary to the Stadholder, would have been adept at reading these meanings.

Though no explicit reasons are given by the secretary for his love of Porcellis's work, we must conclude that naturalism generated a great deal of these sentiments. Immediately following his discussion on the artist's merits, Huygens turns to a discussion of landscape painters (they painted the terrestrial equivalent of Porcellis's and Vroom's seas), especially artists as diverse as Poelenburg, Uytenbroek, Van Goyen, Jan Wildens, Esias van de Velde, and Paul Brill. He praises these artists for their ability to portray with naturalism (*natuurlijkheid*) the warmth of the sun and the movement of the breeze.<sup>95</sup> Houbraken writes similar encomiums for Porcellis in his *De groote schouburgh der nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, lauding the artist for his natural depiction of sea storms, storm clouds, and beach scenes.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Samuel van Hoogstraeten praised Porcellis's method of working in his famous discussion of a competition held between the landscape painters François Knibbergen, Jan van Goyen, and Porcellis himself. Of Knibbergen, Hoogstraeten thought little, for the artist placed everything fully-formed onto the canvas. Of Van Goyen, Hoogstraeten was relatively impressed, for he built his images up slowly from the canvas, causing one to see an image before it was really present. But the greatest respect was given to Porcellis, of whom he wrote:

...the spectators almost gave up hope when they saw how slowly he plied his brushes; indeed at first it appeared as though he were purposely wasting time, or did not know how to begin: but this was because he was first forming the whole design of his work in his imagination before he put his brush into the paint. But the outcome showed very well that this is the correct method; for although he worked slowly, he did everything with sureness and knowledge, and by evening he was just as finished with his work as were his competitors;

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>96</sup> Houbraken, Arnold. *De groote schouburgh der nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*. Amsterdam: B.M. Israël, 1976 (reprint of 1753 edition), 213.



and although Knipbergen's picture was bigger, and van Goyen's more full of work, Parselles achieved in his picture a more discriminating naturalness [*keurlijker natuerlijkheyt*], and extraordinary skill that is not encountered in works that are turned out by rote, or in which accidents are looked for and found. In the end this picture was judged by the connoisseurs to be finer than the other two; although neither of these was in itself worthy of rejection.<sup>97</sup>

That Huygens was interested in artists as diverse as Brill, Van Goyen, and Porcellis suggests the wide range of styles he found admirable. Huygens's choice of De Keyser to paint his portrait and the inclusion of a Porcellis in the background shows that, more than simply naturalism, Huygens valued intelligent artists whose productions were composed with the greatest attention to design and composition. Just as Porcellis thought out his composition before putting brush to canvas, so too De Keyser "worked out the composition...with the same meticulous intricacy that he laid brush to panel".<sup>98</sup>

Works by Porcellis, in addition to their naturalistic splendor and careful composition, were the height of artistic fashion when Huygens sat for De Keyser in 1627. With Porcellis, a distinctly "modern" approach to marine painting had begun. Porcellis had separated from his predecessors, becoming, as one art historian has put it, the "founder of the independent seascape in Holland."<sup>99</sup> In the artist's works, the sea in all its wonder and fright had become the subject of the picture. Man's boats were merely props to be tossed around by nature's awesome force. Unlike Porcellis, Dutch marine painters before him tended to produce works with a distinctly narrative focus. Hendrik Vroom, Porcellis's probable teacher, specialized in such narrative seascapes, as the title of his *The Ship 'Mauritius' that Made the Voyage to the East Indies in 1596-7* of circa

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<sup>97</sup> Translated in Walsh, John. "The Dutch Marine Painters Jan and Julius Porcellis—II: Jan's Maturity and 'de jonge Porcellis'." *The Burlington Magazine* 116 (1974): 738.

<sup>98</sup> Adams, 95.

<sup>99</sup> Translation in Walsh, John. "The Dutch Marine Painters Jan and Julius Porcellis—I Jan's Early Career." *The Burlington Magazine* 116 (1974): 653.

1615 attests (fig. 12). Vroom's composition centers around the imposing portrait of the flagship, the artist paying particular attention to accurately describing the rigging and sails as it tosses its way through the ocean. The ship is literally the centerpiece of the canvas. Surrounding the *Mauritius* are two smaller ships along the peripheries which serve both to balance the composition and focus our attention on its main subject. These glaring differences between Porcellis's works, which characteristically portray small merchant ships against a sea of blue, and those of his predecessors are only somewhat betrayed in this late work by their similarities in the approximately 1:2 ratio between land and sky.<sup>100</sup> The "modernism" of Porcellis's less grandiose compositions undoubtedly would have caught Huygens's eye.

More so than most other painters of the Dutch seventeenth century, works by Porcellis enjoyed a run of popularity which ran unbroken from the 1620s through the end of the century. There was something unifying and distinctly Dutch about Porcellis's paintings, a fact that is borne out by the collectors Franciscus de la Boe Sylvius and Hendrick Bugge van Ring. The affluent Leiden collectors Hendrick Bugge van Ring and Franciscus de le Boe Sylvius both owned works by Porcellis.<sup>101</sup> The cosmopolitan Calvinist surgeon Sylvius hung his Porcellis in the large front room on the second floor. Interestingly, Sylvius's interests tended toward more "modern" works by artists like Frans van Mieris and Gerrit Dou (artists who commanded the highest prices for their

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<sup>100</sup> For more information on the development of seascapes, see Goedde, Lawrence. *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art: Convention, Rhetoric, and Interpretation*. University Park: Pennsylvania State P, 1989, particularly 84-93.

<sup>101</sup> Sylvius was an internationally-renown professor of medicine at the University of Leiden. Ring came from a family of brewers in Delft but entered into Leiden high-society through his marriage to Aeltgen Hendricxdr. van Swieten, who also came from a family of brewers. For more information on both men, see Sluijter, Eric Jan. "'All striving to adorne their houses with costly peeces': Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors." *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*. Zwolle: Waanders, 2001, particularly pages 105-6 and 116.

works), the work by Porcellis being the only picture owned by Sylvius from the tonal phase of Dutch land- and seascape. The Catholic Hendrik Bugge van Ring, also a resident of Leiden, was among the most cultivated of seventeenth-century connoisseurs, being able to name the artist of his pictures about ninety percent of the time.<sup>102</sup> That a man as erudite as van Ring chose to include in his collection a work by Porcellis attests to the artist's great fame and lasting import on Dutch marine painting.

Diverse but artistically astute connoisseurs—artists, affluent merchants, adroit entrepreneurs—collected Porcellis's marine paintings. Among the artists who owned works by the painter were Rubens (1), Rembrandt (6), Jan Miense Molenaer (2), and his fellow land- and seascape painters Allaert van Everdingen and Jan van de Cappelle, who owned a remarkable 13 and 16 works by the artist, respectively.<sup>103</sup> Other prominent collectors included Petronella de la Court, wife of the affluent brewer Adam Oortmans, whose collection of over 150 paintings (inventoried in 1707) not only included a Porcellis but, like Sylvius, more fashionable works by the Leiden *fijnschilder* Frans van Mieris and a number by his sons Jan and Willem, not to speak of her well-known dollhouse.<sup>104</sup> Unlike these collectors it is, unfortunately, unknown whether Huygens ever owned a work by the master (for more information regarding Huygens's possible ownership, see

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<sup>102</sup> Of his 237 pictures, only 24 were associated with unnamed masters, many of which were inherited works from the sixteenth century. He could even tell when works were copies rather than by the master himself, as in the case of a work associated with the Delft-born painter Willem van Vliet.

<sup>103</sup> For more information on Rubens's collection, see Denuce, Jean. *De "Antwerpsche Konstkamers": inventarissen van kunstverzamelingen te Antwerpen in de 16e en 17e eeuwen*. Amsterdam: De Spiegel, 1932. Information on Rembrandt's collection is provided by Scheller, R.W. "Rembrandt en de encyclopedische kunstkamer." *Oud Holland* 84 (1969): 81-147. An inventory dated 10 October, 1668 at the Archiefdienst voor Kennemerland in Haarlem includes two pictures by Porcellis in Molenaer's collection. Van Everdingen's collection was sold at auction on 19 April, 1709 and included 13 works by Porcellis. For van de Cappelle, see Bredius, Abraham. "Johannes van de Cappelle." *Oud Holland* 10 (1892): 31-40.

<sup>104</sup> For the full collection, see Bredius, Abraham. *Künstler-Inventare*. Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1917, 868.

Appendix). What remains certain, however, is that purchasing works by Porcellis had become a national phenomenon that crossed cultural and religious grounds.

Huygens need not have owned a Porcellis for him to request its inclusion within his portrait, as its presence indicates that Huygens relished the most fashionable, sought after works on the market. The inclusion of the tapestry along the back wall bears this fact out. Huygens has positioned himself between the two works, making him the fulcrum between the old art (the tapestry) and the new, distinctly Dutch art (the small picture by Porcellis). His interests in both the old and new are made manifest by the inclusion of each in the painting. As secretary to the Stadholder, there is something particularly valuable in Huygens's depiction of himself as one who acknowledges both the past and the present. He is to be seen as a man who understood from where the Netherlands had come, where it currently stood, and ultimately where it intended to go. Moreover, it again lays claim to the Secretary's prominence as a collector, for tapestries were the single most expensive object with which one could decorate a wall.

Huygens's great interest in works from the past is all but made certain in light of the well-founded arguments made by Gary Schwartz and Marten Jan Bok, who show that he was the first owner of two extant and one lost work of the Mariakerk in Utrecht by Pieter Saenredam.<sup>105</sup> The Mariakerk was one of the most historically important churches in the Netherlands given its founding in the eleventh century by the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV. Through an historical fluke, the Catholic canon system was retained after 1581, making the church a constant source of criticism by ardent Calvinists leery of

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<sup>105</sup> Schwartz, Gary, and Marten J. Bok. *Pieter Saenredam: the Painter and His Time*. New York: Abbeville P, 1990, 149ff. The inventory of Huygens's daughter's art collection, which Schwartz has contended likely represents in large part the Secretary's collection passed down to his daughter, shows similar interests in works by somewhat earlier artists, including Pieter Breugel, Jan Breugel the Elder, and Hendrik Vroom.

crypto-Catholic worship. This interest in Holland's past is important in light of Huygens's professional political post as Secretary to the Stadholder.

By virtue of his governmental position, Huygens must have taken great interest in a work which presented a ship on the seas, for such mercantile activity formed the core of the Dutch economy. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that we find marine paintings often hung as public monuments to the prosperity and victory resulting from decisions made by well-to-do Dutchmen. The five admiralty boards, town governments, States General, and Dutch East India Company were all early patrons of seascapes.<sup>106</sup> But given that this painting is hung in what appears to be a more private setting, the Porcellis operates as a visual cue to the import of the individual working within the community to the continued success of Dutch society. This fact is reinforced by Porcellis's depiction of small working vessels as opposed to the capital fleets of Vroom and the sea painters of the previous generation.<sup>107</sup> There is perhaps no better example than Porcellis's famous *Shipwreck off the Coast* of 1631 (fig. 13). One can see in the foreground of the image a cross-section of Dutch society coming out to help the storm-stricken sailors. While the three small fishing boats (similar to those depicted in Huygens's portrait) have run aground, their owners are rushing to lower the sails and they appear to have weathered the worst of the storm. The large vessel at right being tossed about violently by the waves is apparently in much worse shape and has little hope of staying afloat for long. Its crew is seen diving overboard in hopes of making it ashore.

Just as the sea produced a boon in the Dutch economy, so could it cause immense destruction, as the large vessel in Porcellis's late work attests. It remained throughout the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>107</sup> Walsh, 737.

greater part of the seventeenth century an enigma filled with all sorts of fantastic creatures which were only slowly coming to be understood. Moreover, as the occurrence of the St. Elizabeth's Day flood of 1421 showed, the sea could unleash itself on the fledgling state with little warning and unbridled fury. But even in the absence of such catastrophes, the sea proved to be an awe-inspiring neighbor. On 3 February 1598, a fifty-four-foot sperm whale found its way into the sandy shallows along the fishing village of Berckhey. The spectacle the event created is almost comical to modern readers; it attracted the attention of the chronicler Petrus Christianszoon Bor (who made sketches and notes to be incorporated into his patriotic history), learned doctors and divines from Leiden (who poked and prodded it, standing in awe of its prodigious size), and, of course, the common folk (who were more than obliged to be part of the Kermis-like spectacle). Each of these groups is captured in Jacob Matham's famous engraving of 1598 after Hendrik Goltzius' drawing of the scene, which foretells Porcellis's Mauritshuis painting. That the sea and its inhabitants were by no means completely understood is proven by the bizarre ear-like appendage protruding from the whale's side.<sup>108</sup> Huygens's personal interest in the sea is confirmed by a poem extolling *Schevering*, a seaside town not far from The Hague, on 14 August 1624:

Al waer 't oock Schepering, de name betaemde mij,  
 Soo pass ick op het nett en 'tsiltige getij;  
 Ghij weet het, leckren Haeg die zess gevoerde Vissen  
 Voor drij gedragene vermuylen kont en missen.  
 Noch is mijn Wagen ruym mijn' Pincken dubbel waerd;  
 Mijn' Pachters prijsen oock sijn zeilen bijder aerd  
 Voor d'oude waterkonst die 'tgoud soo verr gaet halen:  
 'Tis waer noch vinn, noch veer en kan hem onderhalen,  
 Noch Aeols hollen aem, noch Titans helle tredt,  
 Hij loopt het all verbij, maer hunluy alltijd met.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the events of February 1598, see Schama, 130-133.

<sup>109</sup> Worp 1893, 66-7.

It is perhaps instructive that, in his poem, Huygens pays careful attention to the myriad ways in which the sea benefited the Dutch economically. He talks of tenants (*pachters*), who were undoubtedly charged for use of land and boats. In return, they were to benefit marginally by obtaining some portion of the profits from the sale of the fruits of their labor, which Huygens notes in his comment that *d'oude waterkonst* (referring to the “art of fishing”) brings *goud* (gold, money). Huygens’s interest in the economic importance of the fish trade, particularly the sale of herring, is not without warrant. In her *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* Julia Berger Hochstrasser notes that

...considerable numbers of people were directly involved with the business of catching fish. By the 1660s, Pieter de la Court claimed that the North Sea fisheries were estimated to employ over 1,000 busses of fishing-smacks with capacities of 48-60 tons apiece. This meant work for a significant share of the Dutch population: by his calculations, the fishing industry with its ancillary trades then employed about 450,000 persons, compared with about 200,000 engaged in agriculture and about 650,000 engaged in other industries.<sup>110</sup>

That so many Dutchmen were involved in one seafaring mercantile activity conveys the nationalistic pride the Dutch felt in the sea and the blessings it had bestowed upon them. Nor were they unwilling to push the limits of their success. The famous Dordrecht physician Jan van Beverwyck noted in his *Schat der Gesontheyt* that “herring is caught much near England by our herring boats.”<sup>111</sup> It is remarkable to note the candor with which van Beverwyck makes this comment; while the Dutch were fishing off the English coast, neither van Beverwyck nor his Dutch contemporaries apparently saw the fish as being anything but Dutch (these actions and Dutch control of trade would, however, sufficiently rankle English nerves by mid-century). While Porcellis’s boats are

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<sup>110</sup> Hochstrasser, Julia Berger. *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007, 38.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 39.

not those of fishermen, they are nonetheless a part of the same culture of trade and wealth derived from the sea and brought to port in Dutch cities.

In their painting, Huygens and De Keyser have truly created what one art historian has dubbed “a masterpiece of psychological interaction and of iconographic complexity”.<sup>112</sup> The great variety of objects, textures, and colors creates an image of visual splendor, one where the viewer’s eye settles not on one item but is drawn into and around the picture, all the while gleaning more information about its sitter. De Keyser’s image follows closely the advice of the scientist, educator, and writer Jan Comenius in his *Great Didactic* of 1649:

We will now speak of the mode in which objects must be presented to the senses, if the impression is to be distinct. This can be readily understood if we consider the processes of actual vision. If the object is to be clearly seen it is necessary: (1) that it be placed before the eyes; (2) not far off, but at a reasonable distance; (3) not on one side, but straight before the eyes; (4) and so that the front of the object be not turned away from, but directed towards, the observer; (5) that the eyes first take in the object as a whole; (6) and then proceed to distinguish the parts; (7) inspecting these in order from the beginning to the end; (8) that attention be paid to each and every part; (9) until they are all grasped by means of their essential attributes. If these requisites be properly observed, *vision* [my italics] takes place successfully; but if one be neglected its success is only partial.<sup>113</sup>

Comenius’s model works perfectly for visual apprehension of the painting’s meaning. But, as Huygens’s poems attest, vision cannot be considered the sole means of understanding the sitter. We have, until now, given short shrift to Huygens’s poetry, its discussion only informing our visual perception of the objects in front of us. Poetry, however, served an equally important role in defining that which could not be depicted in the image and elucidating Huygens’s perception of the relationship between text and image.

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<sup>112</sup> Adams, 97.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Alpers, 95.



## Part V: The Relationship between Text and Image—A Conclusion of Sorts

In addition to his refined sensibilities on art, Huygens was an extraordinary poet whose works grappled with a number of issues facing Dutchmen of his day. Art historians have traditionally used Huygens's poetry to illuminate one or another aspect of Huygens's images. Indeed, I have followed suit throughout this paper. Poetry is, however, a unique art form in and of itself and deserves some discussion in this respect. That Huygens understood this is confirmed by the volumes of his poetry which have no direct relationship with the paintings for which he sat. Any attempt to squeeze Huygens or his poems into "a specifically visual, as contrasted with a textual, culture" seems inappropriate (see page 7). Texts often served more than a perfunctory meaning in Dutch art, giving meaning to narratives which otherwise had none. One famous example, Pieter Codde's *Return of the Hunters* of 1633, has little to do with the act of hunting game. Instead, the term "hunting" refers here to the pursuit of love, for "hunting the hare" and "fowling" were metaphors for making love in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*.<sup>114</sup>

Huygens's poetry could often deal quite explicitly with his understanding of the relationship of textual and visual cultures. Sometime in the early part of 1620, Huygens made a visit to P.C. Hooft and Anna and Tesselschade Visscher, daughters of the late poet Roemer Visscher.<sup>115</sup> Some ten months following the visit, he wrote a poem dedicated to Roemer in commemoration of his passing. Huygens praises Hooft's pen for

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<sup>114</sup> Under the illustration of reason in the 1644 edition, Ripa notes that the partridge is the image of "unbridled lust and limitless lewdness." He goes on to note that "cock partridges were so frenzied in treading their hens and aroused to such heights of lechery, that they often broke the eggs their hens were laying, since when they were laying them it was impossible to go on mating with them." (translations courtesy of Rijksmuseum website).

<sup>115</sup> Worp 1892, 195. For more information on the sisters Visscher, see Schama, particularly 408-10.

molding the secretary's own thoughts, noting in particular the effect it has on canvas.<sup>116</sup> That Hooft's pen (the instrument by which he writes his poem) held such sway on Huygens's artistic interests (as connoted by the *doeck* or "canvas") shows that early in his life Huygens had already understood the influence text and image could have upon one another.

Early in 1621, Huygens wrote another poem on P.C. Hooft. Part of the poem reads as follows:

Wat can hy weerdigh zyn die op stem noch op Dicht  
Ervaren, noch op luyt mach heeten afgericht,  
Veel minder op het puyck van wtgeleesen zeden?  
Dies vinde' ick jn v Dicht (Puyckdichter van ons landt)  
Const, jonst, geneghenthey, maet, rijm en reghel-trant,  
(Vergeeft mij 'tredelyck ontkennen) maer gheen reden.<sup>117</sup>

No longer is Hooft's greatness characterized simply by his pen; Huygens eulogizes Hooft in his ability to capture the *stem*, the "voice", in his poetry. Hooft's interest in the voice allows Huygens to proclaim the poet as *Puyckdichter van ons landt* ("First-rate poet of our country"), for it is in this aspect of Hooft's poetry that the true art (*const*) is captured. Nor was Huygens alone in his belief that all forms of art should capture the *stem*.

Hooft's younger contemporary Vondel settled upon the same notion in a poem from 1641, in which the poet exhorts Rembrandt to depict the voice of the Mennonite preacher Cornelis Anslo. For Vondel, there is an inextricable association between Anslo's voice and personality in the painting. There is, therefore, a direct connection made between the textual culture (Anslo's voice and Vondel's poem) and its more visual counterpart (Rembrandt's painting). Vondel's four-line poem reads as follows:

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<sup>116</sup> The comment "*En ghy beroemde Pen die myn' gedachten maelden / By tyden op den Doeck*" is a troubling one. In 1620, Huygens had only sat for two portraits, the last one in 1612 at the age of 16. The comment may instead refer simply to the molding of Huygens's artistic interests, which were highly refined by this period given his contact with both Hendrik Hondius and the de Gheyn family.

<sup>117</sup> Worp 1892, 197-8.

Ah Rembrandt, paint Cornelis' voice,  
The visible part is the least of him:  
The invisible part can only be known through the ears.  
If you want to see Anslo, you must hear him.

[Ay Rembrandt, maal *Cornelis* stem.  
Het zichtbre deel is 't minst van hem:  
't Onzichtbre kent men slechts door d'ooren.  
Wie Anslot zien wil, moet hem hooren.]<sup>118</sup>

Vondel's request came, in all likelihood, from his dissatisfaction with Rembrandt's etching of the preacher the previous year (fig. 14). Rembrandt had portrayed Anslo sitting at his desk while studying religious texts. Some attempt was made to convey speech, for Anslo's left hand gestures as if to communicate something to an unknown person to his right. This gesture is repeated to much more avail in the final painted version, the inclusion of Anslo's attentive wife assuring the viewer that Anslo is, in fact, speaking (fig. 15).

Speaking and hearing are complimentary activities. Huygens, like Vondel, recognized the importance these held in his society. In a comedic poem written late in Huygens's life entitled *Slechte Henrick* ("Awful Henry"), Huygens mocked Henrick for not using his ears:

In appraising the external beauty of a woman,  
Henry has two good eyes:  
In grasping the interior beauty,  
He has not an ear.

[Om 'tbuijten-schoon van Vrouwen te beoogen,  
Daer toe heeft Henrick twee goed' Oogen:  
Om 'tbinnen-schoon te vatten bij 'tgehoor,  
Daertoe en beeft hij niet een oor.]<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Vondel, Joost van den. *Volledige dichtwerken en oorspronkelijk proza*. Amsterdam: H.J.W. Becht, 1937, vol. IV, 209.

<sup>119</sup> Worp 1898, 135.

Several years earlier, Huygens provided his belief that text, speaking, and hearing were the equals of images, seeing, and being seen in an even more succinct manner. 1669's

*Groot en Klein Verschill* ("Big and Small Difference") reads:

How far is truth from the lye?  
As far as ears stand from the eyes.

[Hoe verr is waerheit van de Logen?  
Soo verr als Ooren staen van d'Ogen.]<sup>120</sup>

Huygens—much like Van Focquenbroch—has questioned "truth", aligning it with the ears while the eyes are allowed only that which is left over (the lye), presumably given the eye's higher propensity to deceive or inarticulately convey an idea. Indeed, in this poem there is a culmination of Huygens's thought process which had begun in the 1620s and found expression in his 1627 portrait commission. If we return to the first and last lines of Huygens's first Dutch poem on the painting, we might make more sense of Huygens's line of reasoning (for the full poem, see pages 4-5):

Speak, painting, of the great energy of my happiness  
My bowels are gladdened,

...

Be silent, painting, and speak little more about me,  
For it doesn't all come through.

[Spreeckt, Schilderij, en segt hoe grooten kracht van vreugden  
Mijn ingewand verheugden,

...

Swijgt, Schilderij, en spreekt veel liever niet van mij,  
'T en komt toch all niet bij.]

A painting could allude to Huygens's personal and public pursuits. In some respects (as with the lute), it could even include references to notions of marital harmony and his upcoming marriage to Suzanna van Baerle; however, given its nature as an image (which privileges the *zichtb're* self, as Vondel might claim), it could not capture Huygens's contemporary emotions as succinctly and passionately as the body of his poem did.

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<sup>120</sup> Worp 1897, 237.

Huygens and his contemporaries recognized the intrinsic power of text as much as their European contemporaries. A “specifically visual culture”, as Alpers contended, would have prevented Huygens and his contemporaries from illuminating fully the non-physical “self”. Huygens, ever-interested in both his external and internal characterization, has employed both visual and textual means to convey the complexity of his personality in the period just before his marriage to “Sterre”.

## Appendix: Some Evidence for Huygens's Ownership of a Porcellis

Huygens was clearly familiar with Porcellis's work by 1627. Just how familiar, however, remains a question. Certainly by 1630 Huygens knew it well enough to pass the judgment that his works were the finest in the tradition of painting seascapes. Nor is there any reason to believe that Huygens became more familiar with the artist between 1627 and 1630-1. Porcellis had moved to Voorburg, a few miles east of The Hague, by 1626.<sup>121</sup> It would seem, then, that Huygens became intimately familiar with the artist during the period 1626-7, if not earlier.

More important is the fact that Huygens was close with a number of other people known to have owned works by Porcellis. Johannes Schade, whom Gary Schwartz proclaims as Huygens's 'cousin', was a canon of the cathedral chapter at the Mariakerk and apparently owned two works by Saenredam.<sup>122</sup> This same Schade additionally owned *een zee* by Jan Porcellis.<sup>123</sup> There are as well at least two other individuals with whom Huygens held intimate contact who owned works by Porcellis. The death inventory of the collection of Lodewijck van Alteren (1608-1657) includes a work described as *I groote see* valued at the relatively high price of 60 guilders. Van Alteren, who held the title *heer van Jaarsveld*, married Alida Oetgens van Waveren in 1637 and was made bailiff of Kennemerland three years later. A letter dated 1 May 1640 from Van Alteren's father-in-law Anthony Oetgens van Waveren, repeated burgomaster of Amsterdam, to Huygens asks whether he had heard that Van Alteren had been made

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<sup>121</sup> Bredius 1921, 174.

<sup>122</sup> Schwartz arrives at this familial relationship through a letter written to Huygens from his brother-in-law David de Wilhem, who describes Johannes's half-brother Jasper as 'onze neef'. Worp 1914, 502-3. Schade's collection of 38 paintings was sold in 1658 after he was declared *non compos mentis* and included two works by Saenredam.

<sup>123</sup> Schade's sale has been published in the 1921 edition of *Oud Holland* as sale 5.

bailiff.<sup>124</sup> The fact that Van Waveren uses the familiar term *schoonzoon* to describe Van Alteren suggests that the secretary was personally acquainted with him.

The personage of Justus Baak provides a similar, if not more immediate, link between Huygens and Porcellis ownership. In an inventory dated 26 June 1685 of Baak's collection, he was listed as having been married to Magdalena van Erp, the two of them owning *een onweer* attributed to Jan Porcellis.<sup>125</sup> Van Erp was the sister of Christina van Erp, who was P.C. Hooft's first wife, before her untimely death in 1610, making Baak and Hooft brothers-in-law.<sup>126</sup> More importantly, however, Baak appears to have been quite familiar with Huygens, as a letter from Hooft dated 28 August 1630 regarding one of the Prince's trips indicates:

Gisteravondt had ik schrijvens aan U.E. in alle yl afgeveirdight op hoope dat het dezen morghen, met een veerschuit voortgeraakende den ingeslooten aan den Heer van Zuilichem, over weg zoude helpen, om wat naeder bescheits van 's Prinssen reize en herwaarts- koomst te moghen krijghen....<sup>127</sup>

That Hooft mentions Huygens (*den Heer van Zuilichem*), proves at least a functioning relationship between Baak and the secretary. However, Huygens and Baak seem to have been more than mere acquaintances, for the latter is mentioned in no fewer than seven letters sent between the poets P.C. Hooft, Caspar van Barlaeus, and Huygens between 1627 and 1634.<sup>128</sup> Additionally, during this period Huygens sent two letters to Baak personally, dated 17 August and 8 October 1630.<sup>129</sup> Huygens's friend held an equally keen interest in the works of Jan's son Julius, owning both a work by Jan (a

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<sup>124</sup> Worp 1914, 24. The letter reads: *Wilt gij uw invloed aanwenden, dat mijn schoolzoon van Jaersfelt gekozen wordt tot baljuw van Kennemerland?*

<sup>125</sup> This document is catalogued in the Getty Provenance Index as document N-292.

<sup>126</sup> Worp 1911, 220, footnote 4. In his letters to Baak, Hooft familiarizes the greeting by addressing him not merely as *Mijn Heer* but *Mijn Heer en Broeder*.

<sup>127</sup> Van Tricht, Hendrik Willem. *De Briefwisseling van Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft*. Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink/Noorduijn, 1977, vol. II, 53.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 220, 232, 290, 295, 298, 446, 452.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 289-290, 296.

thunderstorm) and also *een stilstand watertje* by the younger Porcellis.<sup>130</sup> The fact that both the Porcellises were hung *op de saal*, suggests that they were pendants to one another, the “still water” theme of Julius’s work serving as the counterpoint to Jan’s tempest.<sup>131</sup> This evidence by no means ensures that Huygens owned a Porcellis, for one fails to show up in the list of family paintings auctioned after his daughter’s death in 1725. Given the similar collecting habits of Huygens and his close friends, however, it would seem likely that Huygens, too, owned a Porcellis. Its failure to show up in the inventory of 1725 can be explained in a number of ways. It is possible that a Porcellis, given its high value throughout the seventeenth century, could have left the family’s collection sometime prior to 1725. Just as likely, however, is that a Porcellis could have left the family’s possession at a later date, for some of Huygens’s possessions remained in the family home well into the nineteenth century.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> The high status of these pictures within the collection is guaranteed by the fact that of the 41 works listed in the inventory, they are the only two with an artist’s name mentioned.

<sup>131</sup> For more information regarding the tradition of pendant seascapes, see Goedde, 156-161.

<sup>132</sup> An inventory of 1827 shows that Saenredam’s *View of the South Transept of the Mariakerk, Utrecht from North to South* of 1637 was still in the family’s possession in 1827.



## Illustrations



Fig. 1: Thomas de Keyser, *Portrait of Constantijn Huygens and His Clerk*, 1627. National Gallery of Art, London.



Fig. 2: Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Lucas van Uffel*, c. 1621-7. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 3: Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Cardinal Bentivoglio*, 1622-3. Palazzo Pitti.



Fig. 4: Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Thomas Wentworth and His Secretary Philip Mainwaring*, 1634. Private Collection.



Fig. 5: David Bailley, *Still Life*, 1651. Stedelijk Museum "de Lakenhal", Leiden.



Fig. 6: Rembrandt, *Jan Six*, etching, 1654.



Fig. 7: Thomas de Keyser, *Merchant in His Studio*, 1629. Private Collection.



Fig. 8: Frans Hals, *Portrait of Isaac Massa and Beatrix van der Laen*, c. 1622-5. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 9: Rembrandt, *Judas Returning the Pieces of Silver*, 1629. Private Collection.



Fig. 10: Rembrandt, *Blinding of Samson*, 1636. Stadelches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.



Fig. 11: Jacob van Campen, *Constantijn Huygens and Suzanna van Baerle*, 1633. Mauritshuis, The Hague.



Fig. 12: Hendrik Vroom, *The Ship 'Mauritius' that Made the Voyage to the East Indies in 1596-7*, 1615. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 13: Jan Porcellis, *Shipwreck off the Coast*, 1631. Mauritshuis, The Hague.



Fig. 14: Rembrandt, *Portrait of Cornelis Anslo*, etching, 1641.



Fig. 15: Rembrandt, *Portrait of Cornelis Anslo and His Wife*, 1641. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

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