

Jan Haicksz Steen's *Woman at Her Toilet*: “Provocative Innuendos”*

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Jan Haicksz Steen (1626-1679), a Dutch actor, poet and painter, engaged the viewer with various innuendos and double entendres in his paintings about *Woman at Her Toilet*. Decoding the conceits introduces the viewer to Dutch artistic astuteness and popular culture. Steen drew the observer into his picture plane through a series of emblematic vignettes. Although he raised questions about cultural mores, morality, and religiosity, none are judgmental. On the contrary, it is the viewer who might or might not articulate a moral judgment according to personal experiences. For Steen, the imagery, filled with complex conceits, is an artistic visual representation to delight the eyes, tantalize the senses, and maybe even spark the intellect.

Keywords: Dutch bedrooms, innuendos, emblematic meaning, cultural mores, music, and vanity symbolism

Introduction

With dramatic flair, Jan Haicksz Steen (1626-1679)¹ staged *Woman at Her Toilet* through a classical portal, unveiling an intimate Dutch boudoir (see Figure 1).² The oil painting is signed and dated on the marble Corinthian columns of the triumphal arch: on the left column “JSteen” and on the right column the traditional “JS” with the date 1663. The commission for the painting remains a mystery. The original patron is unknown; however, in the early eighteenth century the painting was included in a private collection in Amsterdam and in the second half of that century was part of a private collection in Brussels.³ In 1821, King George IV of England acquired Steen's painting, and today it remains part of The Royal Collection in London.⁴

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¹ See H. Perry Chapman, et al., *Jan Steen. Painter and Storyteller* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1996); Baruch D. Kirschenbaum, *The Religious and Historical Paintings of Jan Steen* (New York: Allenheld and Schram, 1977), for data on Jan Steen's life as a raconteur.

² See Christopher White, *Dutch Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2015/2016), Catalogue Entry 189, 356-359; Desmond Shawe-Taylor and Quentin Buvelot, *Masters of the Everyday: Dutch Artists in the Age of Vermeer* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2015), no. 22; Christopher Lloyd, *Enchanting the Eye: Dutch Paintings of the Golden Age* (London: Royal Collection Enterprises, 2004), 153-156.

³ See White, *Dutch Pictures*, 355, for information on provenance and sales.

⁴ See White, *Dutch Pictures*, 356-357, on acquisition and conservation.



Figure 1. Jan Haicksz Steen, *Woman at Her Toilet*, 1663, oil on panel.
 London: Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017.

Steen engaged the viewer with various innuendos and double entendres, starting with inscribing his name Steen, which means stone, on a marble column and thus carving or etching his name in stone for posterity. Decoding the conceits introduces the viewer to Dutch artistic astuteness and popular culture. Steen drew the observer into his picture plane through a series of emblematic vignettes. Although he raised questions about cultural mores, morality, and religiosity, none are judgmental. On the contrary, it is the viewer who might or might not articulate a moral judgment according to personal experiences. For Steen, the imagery, filled with complex conceits, is an artistic visual representation to delight the eyes, tantalize the senses, and maybe even spark the intellect. The viewer experiences the painting in several ways: enjoyment through the visual display; entertainment in peeling off the layers of meaning; and amusement when thinking he has grasped the *clavis interpretandi* of the imagery. However, it is at that moment, Lessing's pregnant moment,⁵ that the viewer realizes that there may be another double entendre or none at all; that is, the painting is just a painting, where the colored objects are props, the figures are possible actors, and the spatial setting is just a stage design. Thus

⁵ See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *The Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

the imagery is a painted play within a play or a symphony of colors for art's sake.⁶ Then again, the meaning may contain levels of interpretation and may open new visual conceits with emblematic and iconographical associations revealing Dutch popular culture. Or maybe the painted conceits are just the painter's fanciful delights or his jest.⁷ In exploring Steen's skit and in examining these paintings, I noticed several objects that have not been mentioned by other scholars, which led to my wonderment and this short essay.⁸

London Woman at Her Toilet

Dutch scholars have elaborated on the rebus that Steen composed in his paintings, in particular two versions of *Woman at Her Toilet*: that of 1663 at the Royal Collection in London; and *Woman at Her Toilet* of 1655-60 at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam⁹ (see Figures 1 and 2). In both, the comportment of the figures as well as the combination of still-life *vanitas* in the paintings form a play-on-words or pun—a witty *ut pictura poetica* where the imagery encapsulates the name of the object as well as its euphemism or parody. As an actor and poet, Steen was influenced by the rhetorical tradition and the popular emblematic literature.¹⁰

In the London painting, Steen, the Dutch comical and cryptic storyteller, begins his theatrical narrative with two gateways: one external, with a classical repertoire, and another internal, with a Dutch domestic setting. The external design comprises a classical triumphal arch honoring the pleasure of illicit love. The ornamentation of the arch advances the poetical interlude: large Corinthian columns resting on Serlian bases containing reliefs of cartouches sustaining architraves with decorative rosette motifs. Between the columns a large garland of flowers—daisies, marigolds, roses—leaves, and ribbons drapes the arch.¹¹ At top center of the ornament, between two partially visible cartouches, the head of a blind winged Eros is crowned with ivy and flowers.¹² This love

⁶ See Karel Porteman, "From First Sight to Insight: The Emblem in the Low Countries," in *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands. A Yearbook* (Rekkem: Stichting Ons Erfdeel, 1993), 213-214, for the historical origin and development of the emblem in Dutch art functioning as didactic method on moral codes about human behavior; and Eddy de Jongh, *Questions of Meaning: Theme and Motif in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Painting*, trans. and ed. Michael Hoyle (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2000), on Dutch paintings as a visual experience and not as an emblematic conceit.

⁷ See Wayne Frantias, "Wily Women? On Sexual Imagery in Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century," in *The Revolt of Riches: Culture and History of the Low Countries, 1500-1700*, ed. Theo Hermans and Reinier Salverda (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 220-235.

⁸ See Eddy de Jongh, "Pearls of Virtue and Pearls of Vice," *Simiolus* 8 (1975/1976): 69-97; Eddy de Jongh et al., *Tot lering en vermaak* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1976); White, *Dutch Pictures*, 359, for an updated iconographical bibliography.

⁹ See On the provenance: Rijksmuseum Inventory on the bequest of Isaac de De Bruijn-van der Leeuw and Johanna Geertruida van der Leeuw, Muri, Switzerland. On the literature: Karel Braun, *Alle tot nu toe bekende schilderijen van Jan Steen* (Rotterdam: Lekturama, 1980/83), Catalogue Entry 109, 30; Chapman, et al., *Jan Steen*, 162.

¹⁰ See S. J. Gudlaugsson, *De Komedianten bij Jan Steen en zijn tijdgenooten*, trans. James Brockway (Soest: Davaco, 1975); Mariët Westermann, "Steen's Comic Fictions," in Chapman, *Jan Steen*, 60.

¹¹ For the symbolism of a marigold as a face that follows a true lover, see Joshua Bruyn and J. J. Emmens, "De zonnebloem als embleem in een schilderijlijst," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 4 (1956): 3-9.

¹² See Lloyd suggested that the blind winged cherub is a "weeping cherub." See *Enchanting the Eye*, 153-156. A weeping cherub is a religious motif of an angel crying in a Crucifixion or Pieta setting, for example, Albrecht Dürer's *Weeping Angel* of 1521, sketch on paper for the Great Crucifixion Series, in a German Private Collection or Annibale Carracci's *Pieta with Saint Francis and Mary Magdalene* of 1607 at the Louvre. Hence the weeping cherub is associated with death as frequently represented in sepulchral sculpture, while in pagan motifs or classical and emblematic literature, a blind winged cherub is associated with Eros. Venus is the mother of twin lovers—Eros, profane love, and Anteros, sacred love. Because of his mischievous behavior, Venus and Anteros punish Eros, causing him to cry. See Andrea Alciato, Emblem 72, *Amor virtutis, alium Cupidinem superans* (Anteros, Love of Virtue, conquering the other Love), in *Emblematum libelus* (Paris: Chrestien Wechel, 1534); for the image, see <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/emblem.php?id=FALa072>. Familiar with the Dutch emblematic literature, Steen was aware of the Italian emblematic literature translated into Dutch, e.g., Andrea Alciato's various editions of *Emblemata* (Padua: Petro Paolo Tozzi, 1621) and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (Rome, 1603), translated into Dutch in 1644 and 1699. See Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of, Uytbeeldinge des verstands*, trans. Cornelis Danckerts (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2011, reprint). In his painting Steen recalled also the sculpture of Hendrick de Iser (1565-1621), *Bust of the Crying Child* of 1615, now in the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum.

image forms the keystone of the triumphal arch. Below, on the threshold of the entrance, on the second step, a still-life *vanitas*¹³ conceit is formed with a lute with broken pegs and a broken string, resting over an open musical book with score notations and a skull crowned with wilted ivy, grape, and acorn leaves and accompanied by a half-hidden acorn.

The viewer is invited into the boudoir through the depiction of an open door, in whose keyhole a key hangs, suggesting how the visitor accessed the elegant and lighted Dutch bedroom.¹⁴ Axially placed below the arch keystone decoration with the blind winged Eros, an elaborate brass chandelier reflects light from the bedroom's windows. The spent chandelier candles allude to daylight.

The dominant feature is in the background of this domestic setting: a large bed, framed in blue silk curtains and with a blue silk canopy decorated with fanciful folds and fringes. The open bed-curtains reveal the interior of the alcove where a curled-up lapdog, resting between two pillows, awakens to observe his mistress attending to her morning toilet. Seated on the unmade bed, a partially undressed woman cordially gazes at the onlooker.¹⁵ Her head is covered with a linen coif. Her attire reveals an unlaced satin-pink jacket lined with white fur and a bodice exposing her soft breasts.¹⁶ She wears a necklace composed of a string of leather or metal beads, whose circular dangling medallion hangs between her cleavage, accentuating the voluptuousness of her breast line.¹⁷ Seductively, she pulls her skirt towards her lap, revealing her undergarment and exposing her legs. While crossing her legs, she slowly attempts to pull off one of her blue stockings. The other lies on her lap.¹⁸ Since she just awakened, there are no signs of constraint from wearing them.

¹³ The art historical term derived from the biblical verse in Ecclesiastes 1:14 by King Solomon: "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity." The Hebrew term *hebel* for vanity, which translates as "vapor" or "mist," metaphorically signifies a fleeting moment in time or in life. The popularity of vanity paintings in Dutch art developed in particular in Leiden, Steen's native city. He was a Catholic residing in an important Calvinist city that proselytized for a human moral code of abstention from pleasures and advocated against human weakness and vices. See Susan D. Kuretsky, "Rembrandt at the Threshold," in *Rembrandt, Rubens and the Art of Their Time: Recent Perspectives*, eds. Roland E. Fleischer and Susan C. Scott (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 61-105.

¹⁴ Perhaps also suggesting the identification of the onlooker. Steen, the painter, has opened the door to the viewer to see this masterpiece. He humorously alluded to the painter having the key to unlock the meaning of the painting or the desires of the onlooker through his imagery. See the connection with Roemer Visscher's *Sinnepoppen*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Willem Jansz, 1614), Book II, emblem 56, on the key, "Vertroude trouwelijck" [The Trust Entrusted]. It is also interesting to observe Steen's artistic *paragone* about materials composed at the threshold of the painting where a wooden door with a metal key is depicted at the same horizontal level of the inscription in stone of his signature and date of the work.

¹⁵ Her seductive smile recalls a similar protagonist in Steen's painting *Women Offering an Oyster*. See Liana De Girolami Cheney, "The Offering of Oyster in Dutch Genre Paintings," *Artibus et Historiae* (Spring 1987), 135-158 (trans. and pub. in Russian 2013), where I was the first to note the importance of pepper and salt in eating an oyster as well as to discuss the emblematic iconography of the painting.

¹⁶ See Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 219-221, referring to the woman's erotic pose and attire; Marjorie Elizabeth Wiseman and H. Perry Chapman, *Vermeer's Women. Secrets and Silence* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 2012), Catalogue Entry 24.

¹⁷ In his brothel scenes, Steen used this type of necklace to embellish the prostitute's breast line, e.g., *The Word Upside Down*, 1663 at the Kunsthistorisches Museum; *Bad Company* of 1665 at the Louvre; and the *Drunken Woman* of 1658 at the Frans Halls Museum in Haarlem. See Deric Regin, *Traders, Artists, Burghers: A Cultural History of Amsterdam in the 17th Century* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976), 14-34. This suggestive necklace is similar to a Christian rosary. Steen's allusion is provocative and perhaps, at the same time, moralistic.

¹⁸ See Eddy de Jongh, "Realisme en schijnrealisme in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw," in H.R. Hoetink et al., *Rembrandt en zijn tijd* (Brussels: Palais des Beaux Arts, 1971), 167-169 and 173-175, on the stocking as a symbol of female genitals; de Jongh, *Tot lering en vermaak*, 259. Scholars have connected taking off or putting on stockings with Roemer Visscher's warning about hurried actions like pulling hard on a stocking causing it to tear, suggesting a link with impulsive human behavior, which might lead to regrets. See Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Book III, emblem 4, on stockings, "Al fafjens foetjens" [While softly, sweetly]. See White, *Dutch Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen*, 359, citing Bart Conelis's translation.

The woman's slow action is intentional, since her concentration focuses in gazing at, alluring, and seductively pleasing the voyeur. Steen humorously repeated the same action on the part of the lapdog, which also carefully observes his mistress's action.¹⁹ Steen's articulated erotic tension is in the distribution of emblematic objects scattered throughout the room such as the slippers,²⁰ the chamber pot,²¹ the candle holder with a spent candle on the night table, an open jewelry box with strings of pearl and gold necklaces, and a small jug of wine.²²

Steen is a master not only in staging an elegant theatrical setting but also in orchestrating a symphony of harmonious colors in the painting: pastel blues, pinks, and yellows as well as complimentary reds, oranges, and browns. His classical architectural construction extends to an accurate geometrical design throughout the composition: the cuadrlicated mat on the floor, square floor tiles, and the square fold of the silk-draped canopy; rectangular ceiling beams repeat the shape of the open door and the bed; and the Turkish carpet draping the square table displays cruciform patterns along its edges.²³ Steen meticulously places numerous objects throughout the room that both ornament and illustrate its function. As in other vignettes, he juxtaposes the ordinary with the emblematic; the popular with the uncommon; the jest with the sober; and the erotic with the moral, thus engaging the onlooker's five senses in decoding the meaning of or gaining the most enjoyment from his artistic creation.

An observation about the vignette on the threshold of the picture, where a still-life *vanitas* conceit is formed: a lute with broken pegs and broken strings rests on a skull crowned with wilted ivy and grape leaves. Intermingled with them is a withered acorn vine whose lone acorn rests on the skull next to the lute. While the skull casts a shadow on the threshold step, the lute partially shades an opened musical book that shows handwritten musical notations but lacks a musical key.²⁴

The broken and missing elements in the musical still-life warn the visitor who wishes to step into the premises, associating a woman of low morals with playing the lute.²⁵ Emblematically and symbolically, the lute in the ancient, Renaissance, and Dutch traditions is associated with harmony and love, but in Steen's composition its deficient condition precludes its being played. The visible musical notations cannot be played

¹⁹ In a parallel action of a dancing woman and her dancing dog, Steen referred to Jacob Cats's motto, "Gelijck de Juffer danst, soo danst haer hondeke" [As the Young Lady dances, so dances her dog], in *Spiegel van den Ouden ende Nieuven Tijd*, 3 vols. (Dordrecht: Hendrick van Esch, 1635), 2:12, where a dancing dog imitates his mistress dancing.

²⁰ Perhaps Steen connected the scattered slippers to the unchaste and licentious profession of a prostitute, as noted in Visscher's *Sinnepoppen*, Book I, emblem 37, on shoes, "Das hoort meer tom dans" [More is needed for a dance than red shoes].

²¹ See n. 18. Extensive literature and symbolic interpretation on Dutch wordplay has focused on the objects in the room, e.g., stocking in Old Dutch *kous* meant fornication, and the Dutch word for chamber pot, *piespot*, connected with *kous*, as *pieskous* referred to a slang word for prostitute.

²² See Eddy de Jongh, "Grape Symbolism in the Paintings of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Simiolus* 7 (1974), 174-177; de Jongh, "Pearls of Virtue," 81-84.

²³ Eastern oriental carpets labeled "Crivelli style," in particular one found at Sivrihisar Mosque of the 14th or 15th centuries, where the borders are decorated with locked keys or crosses. For the image: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/311944711671649409>; Onno Ydema, *Carpets and their Datings in Netherlandish Paintings, 1540-1700* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1991); Donald King and David Sylvester, eds., *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15th to the 17th Century* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1983).

²⁴ Several scholars have tried to identify the musical score, without success; see Linda Phyllis Austern, "'For Love's a Good Musician': Performance, Audition, and Erotic Disorders in Early Modern Europe," *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 3/4, Special Issue: "Music as Heard" (Autumn-Winter, 1988): 614-653, in particular, 644-646. Perhaps the score is part of a popular love song composed by Jan Jansz. Starter in *Friesche Lusthof* (1621), or a song from a Psalm. See also, Jan W. J. Burgers, *The Lute in the Dutch Golden Age: Musical Culture in the Netherlands 1580-1680* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Press, 2013).

²⁵ See Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Book III, emblem 1, on a woman playing the lute, "Wat ist anders asl fray?" [What is different if the woman is pretty or attractive?], alluding to a woman's frivolity and loose virtue.

because they lack key and clarification. The impaired condition of the lute resembles the wilted state of the vine; although now green, it will decay because it is severed from its natural growth, as indicated in some wilted branches and leaves: *tempus fugit*.²⁶ Hence these still-life objects allude to disharmony, ending, and misguided love, a possible warning to the onlooker who stands at the gate of pleasure.

The human skull refers to a *memento mori*, a remembrance on human mortality, and is paradoxically crowned with a lifeless acorn vine and an acorn. The acorn, like the grapevine, is a traditional symbol of fertility associated in ancient times with Dionysus, the Greek fertility god. But in this milieu both denote the opposite: sterility. Steen cleverly has created sexual puns on the dysfunctional nature of the lute—an allusion to the shape of a woman's body and her pudendum—and of the acorn—a reference to a man's sexual organ, *glans penis*. In ancient and Renaissance Latin medical texts, an acorn was etymologically referred to as *glans penis* because the shape of its head resembled the head of a male penis.²⁷ Another sexual innuendo is associated to the skull and the withered acorn, both of whose functions or performances have failed in time.²⁸

The paradox allusion is also found at the threshold steps where two small Dutch tiles are hidden in the border walls, next to the column bases. The right tile depicts a building and garden with a distant view of a harbor; the left tile depicts a Cupid-like figure granting something to a standing Dutch soldier.²⁹ The combined imagery of Steen's tiles may recall an emblem from Otto van Veen's *Amorum Emblemata, figuris aeneis incisa*, Emblem 99, *Hospitum verendum* [A Hospice to Sidestep].³⁰ The *pictura* of the van Veen's emblem shows a Cupid inviting a soldier to enter a tavern, while the motto and epigram *Hospitum verendum* derive from a sonnet of the Roman playwright Titus Maccius Plautus (205-184 BCE). The sonnet line, "To lodge with Cupid is an insane evil," alludes to the impending doom of the tavern.³¹ Hence blind winged Eros has been mischievous again.

Amsterdam Woman at Her Toilet

In the second (Amsterdam) version of *Woman at Her Toilet* (see Figure 2), Steen's signature appears in one of the chair's legs. The interior setting repeats some emblematic objects from the London version, but here they are depicted in a mundane and a squalid manner. Steen removed the classical decor and focused on the sordid quality of a prostitute's boudoir.³² The chromatic coloration in the painting is somber; the interior space is confined and includes but a few still-life objects, e.g., an alcove-bed draped with dark green curtains, an old

²⁶ See n. 22.

²⁷ See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book 37, 149, explains that the etymology of the *balanites* stone refers to the shape of an acorn, cited also in C.J. Duffin, et al., *A History of Geology and Medicine* (Exeter: University of Exeter Medical School, 2013), 56; in German or Dutch the medical term *eichel* or *eikel* refers to the head of a penis so called *glans penis* or acorn. See Hugo Lang, et al., *Lang's German-English Dictionary of Terms Used in Medicine and the Allied Sciences* (Philadelphia: Blakiston's Sons & Co., 1914), 107. In literature, see Valerie Wayne, ed., *Shakespeare's Cymbeline* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), 228, line 16: "full-acorned" refers to the ancient *glans penis* or acorn.

²⁸ In Visscher's *Sinnepoppen*, Book II, emblem 10, on the acorn, "Slecht en recht" [Bad and Straight], the acorn is compared to persons who act in haste and are self-indulgent and licentious.

²⁹ The decoration of Dutch tiles on the border of walls was common in Dutch paintings. See Piotr Oczko, "The Scriptures on Tiles: Dutch Tiles as an Example of the Biblical Culture of Everyday in the Republic," *Werkwinkel* 10, no. 2 (2015): 67-88, on the use of Dutch tiles to express the culture and morality in daily Dutch life.

³⁰ See Otto van Veen (1556-1629), an artist, emblematiser, and humanist from Antwerp, published *Amorum Emblemata, figuris aeneis incisa* (Antwerp: Henrici Swingenij, 1608), 197.

³¹ For the image, see Bol. Cornelius Fl. 60-181-1614, <http://emblems.let.uu.nl/compare.html?left=v1608099&right=f1691677>. Steen could identify with Plautus as a fellow comic actor and poet, hence projecting in his paintings satirical innuendos.

³² See Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Richness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 262-269, on Calvinist and literary documentation on Dutch prostitution.

chair holding a candle holder with a spent candle, a chamber pot with urine, slippers placed on a rough cuadriculated mat, and black and white floor tiles.



Figure 2. Jan Haicksz Steen, *Woman at Her Toilet*, 1665, oil on panel.
Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, SK-A-4052.

The woman seated on the bed is reminiscent of that in London version, but she wears simpler attire and acts with perfunctory gestures. Her desire for rest is indicated by the spent candle on the chair and is anticipated by the already sleeping lapdog, curled up on her bed pillow. The woman is removing her red stocking to reveal on her upper legs the impression of the garter's constraint. Her crossed legs and pulled-up dress show her upper and inner thigh almost to the level of her crotch, reminding the onlooker unkindly of her disreputable occupation or, more kindly, raising thoughts about the human condition and the constraints of choice and life for a woman with limited means.



Figure 3. Jan Haicksz Steen, *Woman Offering an Oyster (Girl Eating Oysters)*, 1658-60, oil on panel.

The Hague: Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, Accession Number 818

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Scholars have debated about the model for these paintings. Margriet van Goyen (1639-69), daughter of the landscape painter Jan van Goyen and Steen's spouse, posed as a model for the Amsterdam painting.³³ If she also posed for the London painting, as she did for other paintings, such as *Woman Offering an Oyster (Girl Eating Oysters)* of 1660 at the Mauritshuis Museum in The Hague (see Figure 3), this might explain the elaborate and elegant décor in the painting as well as the wonderfully seductive scene. Margriet, the model, is seducing the painter, her husband Steen, and in turn Steen, the painter-husband, delights in depicting the seduction. In the London painting, then, Steen's conceits are not just about warnings and sexual indulgence but also about a painter's flirtation with his model, a painter's delight in his studio. Hence the painting is a personal commission.

³³ See White, *Dutch Pictures*, 358.



Figure 4. Jan Haicksz Steen, *Couple in a Bedroom*, 1668-70, oil on panel.

The Hague: Museum Bredius. Public domain: the-athenaeum.org.

Steen amused himself in painting boudoir scenes with risqué depictions and sexual innuendos, as in *Couple in a Bedroom* of 1670, an oil on panel, at the Museum Bredius in The Hague (Figure 4).³⁴ In a bedroom a couple enjoys dancing and merrymaking—foreplay before their sexual union. On the floor are found several domestic objects, such as a jug of beer next to a chamber pot, where a smoking pipe rests. Reclining in the bed, a disheveled and inebriated male, wearing on his head the woman's linen coif, pulls her chemise, eagerly desirous of her entering the bed alcove. In her undergarment, the female prostitute teases her lover while dancing. The chair adjacent to the red canopy-bed holds the man's removed clothing as well as the woman's jacket and red stockings. Unlike the previous painting of boudoir scenes, where the lapdog curls up between the pillows of the bed to sleep, here the dog is on the floor, next to the chair and the scattered red slippers. Steen depicted the dog imitating his mistress in action and in decor: an agitated dog vigorously barks while his mistress in a frenzy dances without stockings and barefooted; the dog's collar with red ribbons

³⁴ See Chapman, et al., *Jan Steen*, 219-221.

matches those red ribbons around the mistress's neckline.³⁵ Once again, Steen played with the viewer's senses and has delighted them with sexual displays.

Conclusion

The last painting on the theme of Dutch boudoirs, *The Couple in a Bedroom*, unveils an earlier moment in the lovemaking, sexual foreplay before consummation, while the two other paintings refer to the aftermath of the love gathering. In the Amsterdam painting, the onlooker observes the end of an evening, while the London painting captures the morning-after bliss. In his *Woman at her Toilet* paintings, Steen created a sexual visual parody, a setting within a stage, a poem within a painting, a comic drama into popular puns, a poetical painting into a visual satire, and has suspended judgment on the onlooker's delight—*ars long, vita brevis*.

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³⁵ See no. 18 and 19.

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