



Boy with a Mousetrap by Candlelight

Dominicus van Tol
(Bodegraven? ca. 1635 – 1676 Leiden)

ca. 1664–65
oil on panel
30 x 23.3 cm
DT-100

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In the corner of a dark wine cellar, a boy smiles as he proudly raises a wooden trap to show the viewer the mouse he has just captured. His candle's flame illuminates his excited face and the objects around him while casting shadows onto the floor and walls. The differences in the delicate rendering of brightly lit elements—the boy's face, hair, white collar, and the foreground still life motifs—and the freely brushed shadows simulate the effects of flickering candlelight.

The high quality of this small panel, as well as its charming details and distinctive chiaroscuro effects, explains why it has been traditionally attributed to Gerrit Dou (1613–75), Dominicus van Tol's uncle and teacher. Indeed, the painting has been attributed to Dou, who was known for his virtuoso technique in the rendering of candlelit scenes throughout its recorded history, dating back to 1739, when it appeared in an Amsterdam auction.^[1] Only in 1990, when Ronni Baer rejected the attribution to Dou, was the painting correctly associated with Dominicus van Tol.^[2] In particular, this work closely resembles two other pictures by Van Tol: one with a similar subject, *Children with a Mousetrap* in the Rijksmuseum (**fig 1**) and *Children at a Window Blowing Bubbles* in The Leiden Collection (**fig 2**).^[3] Not only are the facial features and clothing of the boys in these three pictures similar, but also the manner in which Van Tol modeled their forms.

An anonymous biographer from the second half of the eighteenth century noted that Van Tol owed much to Dou's artistry: "In our view, he came most close to his uncle's manner and adhered to it."^[4] Van Tol often adapted Dou's motifs and subjects in his own works—sometimes, as in this instance, coming very close to the style of his master. Here, for example, he placed his scene within an illusionistically painted stone

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Dominicus van Tol, *Children with a Mousetrap*, oil on panel, 31 x 25 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. SK-A-417



Fig 2. Dominicus van Tol, *Children at a Window Blowing Bubbles*, oil on panel, 31 x 25 cm, The Leiden Collection

window, a pictorial device Dou frequently used.^[5] Although Van Tol's painterly technique is generally somewhat broader than that of Dou, in this painting he adopted a refined style to emulate his master. Van Tol's subject also relates to a number of Dou's works, including *Wine Cellar* (fig 3) of ca. 1660. Dou's painting, depicting lovers surreptitiously meeting in a dimly-lit cellar illuminated by a lantern and candle, includes still-life motifs similar to those in *Boy with a Mousetrap by Candlelight*, including a mousetrap, a wooden barrel, a head of cabbage and a milk jug.^[6] Also important for Van Tol's pictorial concept are two paintings by Dou that depict a young boy, with a similarly round face and curly blond hair, holding a mousetrap: *Mousetrap*, ca. 1650,^[7] and another work known today only from a mezzotint by Nicolaas Verkolje (1673–1746).^[8] Van Tol's picture is not dated, yet dendrochronological analysis of the panel and the above mentioned similarity with Dou's *Wine Cellar* point to a plausible date around 1664–65.^[9]

Depictions of a boy with a mousetrap enjoyed great popularity among Dutch painters of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, including Quiringh Gerritsz. van Brekelenkam (1622/29–69/79), Eglon van der Neer (1635/36–1703), Adriaen van der Werff (1659–1722), and Louis de Moni (1698–1771).^[10] At first glance the subject appears to be a portrayal of everyday life, but the motif of the mousetrap could also convey an amorous message. For instance, in Dou's *Wine Cellar*, the flirtatious interaction of the young couple in a dark cellar combined with the presence of wine may indicate that the mousetrap alludes to love's sweet slavery or the entrapment of love, a connotation found in contemporary emblem books and proverbs.^[11] One of Jacob Cat's emblems in *Sinne- en minnebeelden* (1627) illustrates a mouse caught in a trap and warns that those who are greedy in love fall prey to the object of their desire. Daniel Heinsius, in an emblem in his *Emblemata Amatoria* (Leiden, ca. 1621), also compares a man who cannot live without love to a mouse, with no viable choice between a trap and a cat (fig 4).^[12]

Although love's seduction is not explicitly depicted in Van Tol's painting, the intimate atmosphere of the dark cellar and the presence of the wine barrel and the fowl, both of which had strong sexual associations, suggest that the mousetrap alludes to love's captivity.^[13] Even the smiling boy displaying the mousetrap may serve to communicate the dangers of love to innocent youths.

Van Tol's stylistic and iconographic dependence on Dou's work indicates that he was intimately familiar with the master's paintings when he created this scene. Since Van Tol became a member of the Leiden Guild of Saint Luke in 1664 at the relatively advanced age of 29, it is presumed that he had previously worked as an assistant in the studio of his uncle and would have remained close to him before he left Leiden for Utrecht in 1669.^[14] This close connection to Dou might explain why the picture

a Window Blowing Bubbles, oil on panel, 27 x 21.6 cm, © The Leiden Collection, New York, DT-101

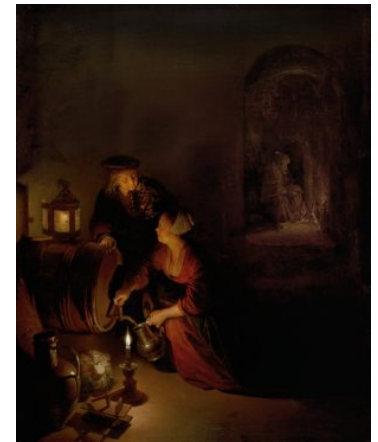


Fig 3. Gerrit Dou, *Wine Cellar—An Allegory of Winter*, ca. 1660, oil on panel, 30.5 x 25.4 cm, Hohenbuchau Collection, on permanent loan to Leichtenstein, The Princely Collections, Vienna

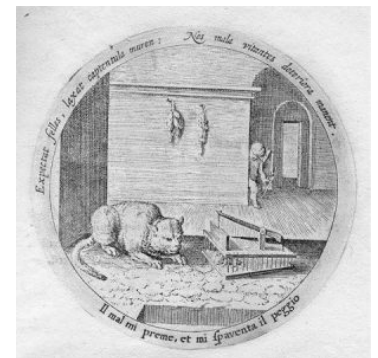


Fig 4. Daniel Heinsius, Emblem from *Emblemata Amatoria*, 1621, engraving, published Leiden, 44



has certain qualities strongly reminiscent of the master's work, as well as its subsequent long-standing attribution to him.^[15]

Although we have no certain knowledge about Dou's studio practice and his collaboration with his pupils, a group of paintings by different hands reflecting the master's style suggest that he had a number of apprentices and students in his studio.^[16] As is the case with the current picture, their pictures were sometimes sold later as authentic works by the master, as noted by the eighteenth-century anonymous biographer mentioned above. When writing about Jan Adriaensz. van Staveren (1614–69), another pupil of Dou, he notes that “art dealers have long been buying up the most and best work [by Van Staveren], together with other paintings by different pupils of Gerard Dou, and selling these as paintings by Dou in foreign countries.”^[17] The attribution of the Leiden Collection picture to Dou was repeatedly authorized by art dealers like Willem Lormier, the most prominent dealer of the eighteenth century. After Lormier's death in 1763, the painting was sold at auction and fetched 1,000 guilders—five times more than what he had originally paid only two decades earlier.^[18]

- Junko Aono, 2017

Endnotes

1. See Willem Martin, “Het leven en de werken van Gerrit Dou” (PhD diss. Universiteit Leiden, 1901), 241–42, no. 352, as by Dou; Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*, ed. and trans. Edward G. Hawke, 8 vols. (London, 1907–28); originally published as *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragenden holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28), 1: 14, no. 223, as by Dou; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 6: 3525, 3534, n. 75, as by Dou.
2. Ronni Baer, “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), no. C81. Because of the lack of a chronological overview of Van Tol’s work—only a few extant works are dated—it remains difficult to assess the newly attributed picture within his oeuvre. *An Officer of the Leiden Civic Guard* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) is dated 1673: Pieter J. J. van Thiel, ed., *All the Paintings of Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: A Completely Illustrated Catalogue* (Amsterdam, 1976), no. SK-C-21. Cf. Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Niewenhuizen, eds., *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 235n1.
3. Pieter J. J. van Thiel, ed., *All the Paintings of Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: A Completely Illustrated Catalogue* (Amsterdam and Maarssen, 1976), no. SK-A-417; Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Niewenhuizen, eds., *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 235–36.
4. Anonymous, *Lijst van schilders, die binnen de Stad Leijden gebooren zijn, off aldaar gewoond en de kunst geoeffend hebben* (Leiden, ca. 1776–85) (Regionaal Archief Leiden, Library, LB254-41a, folio deel), biography of Van Tol: “Naar onze gedachten is hij ’t allernaast bij zijn ooms manier gekomen en heeft zich daarbij gehouden.”
5. For other paintings with Van Tol’s typical window composition, see, for example, *Woman with a Fowl in a Window* (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel) and *An Old Woman Winding Yarn* (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden). Bernhard Schnackenburg, *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister Gesamtkatalog*, 2 vols. (Mainz, 1985), 297, no. GK 259; Annegret Laabs, *The Leiden fijnschilders from Dresden*, ed. Christiaan Vogelaar (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen) (Zwolle, 2000), 119–21.
6. Ronni Baer, “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (PhD diss., New York University, 1990), no. 83; Ronni Baer, *Gerrit Dou 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Dulwich Picture Gallery, London; Mauritshuis, The Hague) (New Haven, 2000), no. 23.
7. Quentin Buvelot, Michel Hilaire, and Olivier Zeder, eds. *Tableaux flamands et hollandais du Musée*

- Fabre de Montpellier* (Exh. cat. Paris, Netherlands Institute; Montpellier, Fabre Museum) (Paris, 1998), 47–51, no. 13; Ronni Baer, “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (PhD diss., New York University, 1990), no. 55.
8. Junko Aono, “Reproducing the Golden Age: Copies after Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *Oud Holland* 121 (2008): 19–20, figs. 17, 18; idem, “De Gouden Eeuw in druk: Reproductieprenten van Nicolaas Verkolje,” in *Nicolaas Verkolje 1673–1746: De fluwelen hand*, ed. Paul Knolle and Everhard Korthals Altes (Exh. cat. Enschede, Rijksmuseum Twenthe) (Zwolle, 2011), 46. The location of Dou’s original is unknown: Annegret Laabs, *The Leiden fijnschilders from Dresden*, ed. Christiaan Vogelaar (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen) (Zwolle, 2000), 127.
 9. According to dendrochronological analysis done by Peter Klein, the creation of the painting is possible as of 1654, but more plausible as of 1664.
 10. The picture by Van Brekelenkam in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (inv. no. SK-A-62), that by Van der Neer in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne (inv. no. Dep-566), that by Van der Werff in the National Gallery, London (inv. no. 3049), and that by De Moni in an unknown location (photograph at the RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History), artwork no. 224516).
 11. Ronni Baer, “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1990), no. 83; idem, *Gerrit Dou 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Dulwich Picture Gallery, London; Mauritshuis, The Hague) (New Haven, 2000), 110.
 12. Jacob Cats, *Sinne- en minnebeelden* (1627; reprint, The Hague, 1996), 1:102, no. 12; Daniel Heinsius, *Emblemata amatoria* (Leiden, ca. 1621), 44. Heinsius’s engraving shows a mousetrap in a cellar accompanied by a cupid in the background. For an illustration of this emblem, and for further iconographic interpretations of the mousetrap, see Eddy de Jongh, *Tot Lering en Vermaak: Betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen in de zeventiende eeuw* (exh. cat., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1976), 284–87.
 13. In seventeenth-century genre paintings, the innocence of children was sometimes used to convey moralistic messages for adult viewers, or even to act as a foil to the foolish behavior of adults. Like in other pictures with the same theme, made by Eglon van der Neer or Adriaen van der Werff, the young boy holding a mousetrap was not the object of sexual attention, but plays a role as a messenger. Some have interpreted his role less innocently by comparing him to a putto: Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Niewenhuizen, eds., *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 228. For sexual connotations of birds depicted in genre paintings, see Eddy de Jongh, “Erotica in volgeperspectief: De dubbelzinnigheid van een reeks 17de eeuwse genrevoorstellingen,” *Simiolus* 3 (1968–1969): 23–27, 35–41; Eric Jan Sluijter, *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle, 2000), 278–81.

14. For biographic information on Van Tol's life, see Piet Bakker's biography in the current catalogue.
15. It might also explain why the picture was not signed, which is not typical of Van Tol.
16. The paintings classified by Baer under "works of questionable attribution" belong to this group, like *The Kitchen Maid* (Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 1217) and *The Woman at the Clavichord* (sale, Christie's, New York, 25 January 2012, lot no. 49). Ronni Baer, "The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)" (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), nos. B5, B6.
17. *Lijst van schilders, die binnen de Stad Leijden gebooren zijn, off aldaar gewoond en de kunst geoeffend hebben* (Leiden, ca. 1776–85) (Regionaal Archief Leiden, Library, LB254-41a, folio deel), biography of Van Staveren: "De konsthendelaars hebben de meesten en besten, benevens meer anderen van verscheijde leerlingen van Gerard Douw, al overlang opgekogt, en buitenslands voor schilderijen van Douw verkogt."
18. The picture initially cost Lormier 200 guilders in 1744. Whether Lormier ever noticed and intentionally overlooked the hand of another artist in this panel remains unproven: sale, The Hague, 25 February 1744, no. 1 [200 florins to W. Lormier from Block], as by Dou; sale, Willem Lormier, The Hague, 4 July 1763, no. 66 [1,000 florins to Voet], as by Dou.

Provenance

- (Sale, Amsterdam, 21 October 1739, no. 26 [for 300 florins], as by Dou).
- Gerard Block (?) (his sale, The Hague, 25 February 1744, no. 1 [200 florins to W. Lormier; to Frank for 525 florins, 4 June 1756], as by Dou).
- Jan Willem Frank, The Hague [to Lormier, 9 March 1758 (his sale, The Hague, 4 July 1763, no. 66), 1,000 florins to Voet], as by Dou.
- (Sale, Amsterdam, 17 April 1783, no. 70, as by Dou).
- H. A. van den Heuvel (his sale, Utrecht, 27 June 1825, no. 16 [unsold at 1,500 florins], as by Dou); (his sale, Utrecht, 27 April 1827, no. 8 [unsold at 425 florins], as by Dou).
- (Sale, C. Kruseman and J. van der Dussen van Zouteveen, Amsterdam, 16 February 1858, no. 21, as by Dou; or possibly no. 320 [41 florins to Glaser], as by Dou)
- Werner Dahl, Düsseldorf, by 1886 (his sale, Amsterdam, 17 October 1905, no. 39 [6,700 florins to Van Gelder], as by Dou).
- Possibly Collection Lubelling, by 1929.
- Hendrik Cornelis van den Honert (1854–1916), Baarn, by 1946; by descent to Magdalena Christiana van den Honert (1899–1979), Baarn/Hilversum (sale, Sotheby's Mak van Waay, Amsterdam, 22 April 1980, no. 28 [to David Koetser Gallery, Zurich, 1980], as by Dou).
- Private collection, Germany (sale, Koller, Zurich, 10 September 1998, no. 41 [unsold], as by Dou);

[Salomon Lilian B. V., Amsterdam, 2005].

- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

- Düsseldorf, Kunsthalle, “Bilder von älteren Meistern,” 5 September–7 October 1886, no. 80, as by Dou [lent by Werner Dahl].
- The Hague, Mauritshuis, on loan with the permanent collection, 1932–after 1973, as by Dou [lent by Hendrik Cornelis van den Honert].
- Leiden, Museum de Lakenhal, “Gerrit Dou: The Leiden Collection from New York,” 9 March–31 August 2014 [lent by the present owner].
- Williamstown, The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, “An Inner World: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting,” 5 March–17 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Philadelphia, Arthur Ross Gallery, University of Pennsylvania, “An Inner World: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting,” 17 April–25 July 2021, no. 9 [lent by the present owner].

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1901, 241–42, no. 352 (as by Gerrit Dou).

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Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, rectangular, non-Baltic oak,^[1] has bevels on three sides.^[2] The panel is unthinned and uncradled and has no machine tool marks. There is one paper label and four label fragments, but no wax collection seals, import stamps or panel maker’s marks.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by paint that has been thinly and smoothly applied with no use of impasto. Areas of low brushmarking outline the architectural arch, the figure’s drapery folds, and the jug, bowl, and cabbage along the lower right corner.



No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images at 780–1000 nanometers, and no compositional changes are noted aside from the tip of the ring finger of the figure's proper left hand, which appears to have been extended during the paint stage.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2007 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on Peter Klein's two dendrochronology reports. In 2001, Klein speculated the plank was felled after 1645 and creation was possible after 1654. In 2007, Klein speculated the plank was felled after 1652 and creation was possible after 1664. Further investigation is required.
2. All but the right edge as viewed from the reverse.