





Lazarus and the Rich Man or “In Luxury Beware”

Jan Steen
(Leiden 1626 – 1679 Leiden)

ca. 1677
oil on canvas
80.3 x 64.8 cm
inscription and signature in dark paint, on
stonework, lower center: “In weelde
ziet toe JSteen” (“JS” in ligature)
JS-106

How to cite

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“In weelde siet toe” (In Luxury Beware), the proverb that inspired Jan Steen’s painting, is literally set in stone on the bench in the foreground. Sitting on this bench is an enticing Bacchanalian reveler, who, with grape vines encircling her head, strums her cittern while gazing out evocatively at the viewer, as though inviting him to take part in the merrymaking. The big boozier behind her, wearing a red hat crowned with a cock’s feather, smilingly raises a glass of wine in one hand while clutching a jug close to his side with his other. The festive music provided by the woman, the bagpiper and the flute player could not have created a very harmonious sound, but one senses that the quality of the music was not their principle concern.^[1] Despite the woman’s come-hither look, the slashes on the large man’s blue pants and on the bagpipe player’s sleeves are consistent with sixteenth-century fashions, which reminds the viewer that the scene is not taken from contemporary life, but is an allegorical depiction of the proverb. In a similar fashion, the actions of the children—one of whom offers a morsel of cake to a barking dog while another holds up a bunch of grapes—relate thematically to the proverb “Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus,” (Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus would freeze). The proverb means that love cannot flourish without food and drink.

The key to understanding the full thematic implications of the painting, however, is not to be found in the foreground figures but on the terrace in the right background, where Steen depicted the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:18–21). Here Steen has followed a narrative model used by artists in the circle of Pieter Aertsen (1508–75) and Joachim Beuckelaer (1533–74). In paintings by these artists, the true meaning of a scene is only revealed upon discovering the significance of seemingly subordinate passages in the backgrounds of their paintings, a compositional structure known as the paradoxical encomium, or ironic eulogy.^[2] The origin of this rhetorical trope lies in literature, and was extensively used by Desiderius Erasmus in his *Lof der zotheid* (“In Praise of Folly”), published in 1511. Jan Steen often drew inspiration from Erasmus and the works of Aertsen and Beuckelaer, but he seldom applied the principles of the paradoxical encomium as thoroughly as he did in this painting.^[3]

In the background of Steen’s painting the rich man sits at a table in the company of a young woman and a young man, while a waiter pours him a glass of wine. Lazarus lies before the table with his right hand raised and his left hand holding a begging bowl while a greyhound licks his sores. A maidservant, pointedly crossing her arms, feeds a white poodle standing on its hind legs to beg for this gift.^[4] The pains taken by the girl to train a dog are in stark contrast to her un pitying attitude toward Lazarus. This motif relates to the story’s moral lesson about caring for those less fortunate than oneself, for after Lazarus died he went to heaven, whereas the rich man ended up in hell.

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Jan Steen, “*In Luxury Beware*”, 1663, canvas, 105 x 145 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 791



Fig 2. Cornelis Bega, *Young Woman Playing a Lute*, 1662, canvas, 35 x 32.1 cm, Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. 871, © Foto: Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz Fotograf/in: Jörg P. Anders

When the rich man saw Lazarus sitting in Abraham's lap, he asked if Lazarus could bring him a sip of water, but this request was refused. His entreaty to send Lazarus to warn members of his family about the consequences of their behavior was also refused.

In the seventeenth century, the story of Lazarus and the rich man was connected with the necessity of doing good works, as is seen in two group portraits painted in 1624 by Werner van den Valckert (1585–1627), *Regents and Regentesses of the Leper House in Amsterdam*. In his depiction of the male regents Van der Valckert portrayed Lazarus sitting in Abraham's lap.^[5] This painting also includes a depiction of one of the acts of mercy: clothing the poor. The doctrine of doing good works held that it was possible to improve one's chances of entering heaven by performing good deeds. This theme was generally treated with extreme caution in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic since, according to the doctrine of predestination to which the Calvinists adhered, it was impossible to bring about any change whatsoever in God's preordained plan. This issue was clearly known to the regents of the Leper House, hence it is surprising that Van den Valckert referred so overtly to the Lazarus story in this work. Nevertheless Lazarus and lepers were at that time almost synonymous. For Catholics like Jan Steen, however, the doctrine of good works remained important, and it is probable that Steen painted *Lazarus and the Rich Man* for a Catholic patron.

Lazarus and the Rich Man has a number of connections to other works by Steen. For example, in a painting of a dissolute household, dated 1663, Steen inscribed the proverb "In weelde siet toe" on a piece of slate at the lower right (**fig 1**). Instead of illustrating this proverb with a biblical subject, as he did in the Leiden Collection painting, Steen here introduced a number of pictorial motifs that allude to other proverbs warning about insatiable desires stemming from excessive luxury, among them worldliness, avarice, gluttony, and lasciviousness.^[6] In 1667 Steen portrayed the story of Lazarus and the rich man in a lavish but not overcrowded scene.^[7] The motif of the rich man in the background of the painting appears in reverse in *The Banquet of Anthony and Cleopatra* of 1667 in Göttingen.^[8] The motif of the poodle standing on its hind legs appears a number of times in Steen's paintings, in, among others, a work in Nivaa and a painting in Cape Town.^[9] The one quite distinctive figure in this painting is the lady playing the cittern, which does not otherwise appear in Steen's works. As Mary Ann Scott has rightly observed, Steen derived this figure from Cornelis Bega's (1631–64) *Young Woman Playing the Lute* of 1662 in Berlin (**fig 2**).^[10] Steen must have remembered that painting when he moved from Haarlem to Leiden.

The Leiden Collection painting is stylistically similar to other works from the last



years of Steen's career, including *Merry Company on a Terrace* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York), *Family of Jan Steen* (The Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest), and *Garden Party of the Paets Family*, dated 1677, and must date from the same period.^[11]

- Wouter Kloek, 2017

Endnotes

1. In Steen's *Adoration of the Golden Calf* in Raleigh (see H. Perry Chapman, Wouter Th. Kloek, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Steen, Painter and Storyteller*, ed. Guido Jansen [Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum] [New Haven, 1996], no. 47), the drum, triangle, and tambourine sound simultaneously, whereas the panpipe lies abandoned.
2. On the paradoxical encomium, see Rosalie L. Colie, *Pradoxia epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton, 1966); and Reindert Falkenburg, "'Alter Einoutus': Over de aard en herkomst van Pieter Aertsens stilleven-conceptie," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40 (1989): 41–66, esp. 56–59.
3. Having attended the Latin School, Jan Steen knew the work of Erasmus, whose textbooks continued to be used in schools until well into the eighteenth century. Ironically, Steen's *Village School*, now in Edinburgh, shows the portrait of Erasmus lying on the ground in a corner of the painting; see H. Perry Chapman, Wouter Th. Kloek, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Steen, Painter and Storyteller*, ed. Guido Jansen (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (New Haven, 1996), 232, no. 41. Presumably Steen also knew the *Adagia*, Erasmus's collection of proverbs. Even more so than Adriaen van de Venne, his immediate precursor as a painter of proverbs, Steen must have been influenced by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525–69), whose work was certainly connected with Erasmus's *Adagia*; see Walter Gibson, *Figures of Speech: Picturing Proverbs in Renaissance Netherlands* (Berkeley, 2010), esp. 8–11.
4. In general the motif of the trained dog was used in the seventeenth century to indicate inquisitiveness, or an eagerness to learn ("leer-sucht"). On this subject, see Jan Baptist Bedaux, *The Reality of Symbols: Studies in the Iconology of Netherlandish Art 1400–1800* (The Hague, 1990), 109–69.
5. On these two works by Van den Valckert, see Korthals Altes in Jonathan Bikker et al., *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 2007), 1: 370–71, nos. 282 and 283.
6. For the Vienna painting, see: H. Perry Chapman, Wouter Th. Kloek, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Steen, Painter and Storyteller*, ed. Guido Jansen (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (New Haven, 1996), no. 21.
7. In that painting the anecdotal prevails (a boy urinating in the jug intended for Lazarus, for instance, and a girl coaxing a dog to stand on its hind legs, the latter motif not really appropriate to this context), yet its refined and detailed execution makes it a true masterpiece.
8. Karel Braun, *Alle schilderijen van Jan Steen* (Rotterdam, 1980), no. 283.
9. Karel Braun, *Alle schilderijen van Jan Steen* (Rotterdam, 1980), nos. 161 and 260 (fig. in reverse). For the latter painting, see Hans Fransen, *The Michaelis Collection: The Old Town House, Cape Town; Catalogue of the Collection of Paintings and Drawings* (Zwolle, 1996), 143–44, no. 63, color ill. XLII.
10. Mary Ann Scott, "Cornelis Bega (1631/2–1664) as Painter and Draughtsman" (PhD diss. University of

Maryland, 1984), 87–88. With regard to Steen's familiarity with Bega's figure studies, see also 94–95. Bega often made counterproofs of his drawings. As stated by Scott (pp. 144 and 163, n. 42), based in part on information from Lyckle de Vries (unpublished correspondence), the frequent occurrence of figures in reverse in the work of Jan Steen might be connected with the frequent use of counterproofs by the Haarlem draughtsmen of that time.

11. Karel Braun, *Alle schilderijen van Jan Steen* (Rotterdam, 1980), no. 1980, no. 373; H. Perry Chapman, Wouter Th. Kloek, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Steen, Painter and Storyteller*, ed. Guido Jansen (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (New Haven, 1996), no. 49

Provenance

- C. Hoogendijk, Amsterdam, by 1899 (his sale, Muller's, Amsterdam, 14 May 1912, no. 76).^[1]
- [Goudstikker, The Hague, 1920, no. 108].
- Onnes Collection, Nijenrode (his sale, Fredrik Muller, Amsterdam, 10 July 1923, no. 40 [6,500 guilders]).
- Preyer Collection, The Hague, before 1934.
- G. J. Willink Collection, Winterswijk, before 1934; [D. Katz, Dieren, 1934–37].
- A. Bronkhorst Collection, The Hague, 1937.
- [Schaeffer Galleries, New York, by 15 Sept 1937 (\$9,000.); D. Katz, Dieren, by 21 May 1938; Miedl/Goudstikker, Amsterdam, by 14 August 1940].
- Adolf Hitler, by 17 October 1940, Linz, no. 1107; Collecting Point Munich, 7 July 1945, no. 4414.
- [Restituted to Katz, 11 December 1947].
- H. Wetzlar Collection, Amsterdam.
- [Bourghouts, Utrecht].
- (Sale, Paris, Galerie Charpentier, 6 June 1958, no. 40 [Julius Weitzner, London and New York, by 1959]).
- Bob Jones University Art Museum, Greenville, S.C., 1959 [acquired from Weitzner for \$15,000].
- John Koch (1902–78), New York, by 1963.^[2]
- Saul P. Steinberg Collection, New York, until 2000 [Richard L. Feigen & Co., New York, 2000].
- Private collection, Barrington, Ill., until 2006 [Johnny van Haeften, London, 2006].
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Provenance Notes

1. Cornelis Hoogendijk was a remarkable collector both of Old Masters and of works by contemporary artists, such as Paul Cézanne, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Vincent van Gogh. His collection, including the modern works, was on loan to the Rijksmuseum until his death in 1911. After the museum was presented with quite a few Old Masters from his estate, all the rest was put on sale. See Herbert Henkels, "Cézanne en Van Gogh in het Rijksmuseum voor moderne Kunst in Amsterdam: De collectie van Cornelis Hoogendijk (1866–1911)," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 41 (1993): 155–295. The loan of *Lazarus and the Rich Man* to the Rijksmuseum is mentioned on 217, its sale in 1921 on 246.
2. The following photographs in the National Gallery of Art Library Image Collections show John Koch (1909–1978) with the artwork in his home in 1969: Photographs, M/C, Lida Moser Archive — DLI 1103600072; Photographs, M/C, Lida Moser Archive — DLI 1103600074. © Lida Moser Archive, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington, DC. The Leiden Collection thanks Molli Kuenstner, Image Specialist for Northern and Central European Art, Department of Library Image Collections, for these images.

The painting was first recorded in Koch's collection in 1963, when it was included in the exhibition of his collection at the Cosmopolitan Club, New York.

Exhibition History

- Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1907–12 [lent by Hoogendijk].
- The Hague, Collection Goudstikker, Pulchri Studio, November, 1920, no.108.
- The Hague, Kunstzaal Kleykamp, "Tentoonstelling van schilderijen door oud-Hollandsche en Vlaamsche meesters uit de collectie Katz te Dieren," 1934, 21, no. 60 [lent by D. Katz].
- Nijmegen, "'Huize Belvoir,' Tentoonstelling van 16e en 17e eeuwse hollandsche, vlaamsche en italiaansche schilderijen," 15 July–1 September 1936, no. 61 [lent by D. Katz].
- Dieren, D. Katz, "Tentoonstelling van belangrijke 16e en 17e eeuwse Hollandsche Schilderijen," 3 July 1937–15 September 1937, 26, no. 94.
- Los Angeles, Los Angeles Museum of Art, "An Exhibition of Old Masters," 5 April 1938–1 May 1938 [lent by Dr. Hans Schaeffer].
- Stadhuis, Deventer, "Tentoonstelling van oude meesters der 16e en 17e eeuw in het stadhuis te Deventer," November 1948, no. 36.
- New York, Cosmopolitan Club, "The Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John and Dora Koch," 18 January, 1963.
- South Hadley, Mass., Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, "Wine and Spirit: Rituals, Remedies, and Revelry," 2 September–12 December 2010; Rochester, University of Rochester, Memorial Art Gallery, 29 January–10 April 2011 [lent by the present owner].
- Ithaca, Cornell University, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, "An Eye For Detail: Dutch Painting From the Leiden Collection," September 2014–January 2015 [lent by the present owner].

- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, "Rembrandt and his Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection," 4 February–27 August 2023, no. 35 [lent by the present owner].

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- D. Katz Gallery. *Tentoonstelling van 16e en 17e eeuwse Hollandsche, Vlaamsche en Italiaansche Schilderijen*. Exh. cat. Dieren, D. Katz Gallery. Dieren, 1936, 20, no. 61.
- D. Katz Gallery Katz. *Tentoonstelling van belangrijke 16e en 17e eeuwse Hollandsche Schilderijen*. Exh. cat. Dieren, D. Katz Gallery. Dieren, 1937, 26, no. 94.
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Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of fine, plain-weave fabric with tacking margins removed, has been lined. Two layers of paper tape extend into the face of the painting along all four sides. Broad cusping along the upper and lower edges and slight cusping along the vertical edges indicates that the support dimensions have not been significantly altered. Old tack holes visible in the X-radiograph along the right vertical edge indicate the painting was previously secured along the face of the painting. There are three import stamps and six paper labels, but no wax seals or stencils along the lining or stretcher.



A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied. The oil paint has been applied in thin, opaque layers of rich paste blended wet-into-wet with lively brushwork and no use of impasto. Areas such as the blue sky in the upper left corner have been painted more thinly, allowing the light-colored underlayer to show through.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. Compositional changes visible in the images include the chin of the white dog standing on its hind legs along the right side of the composition, which appears to originally have been raised more vertically. The position of the fingers of the small boy in the lower left corner appear to have been shifted, as has the profile of the second figure from the left, gazing at the rich man.

The painting is inscribed and signed in dark paint on the stonework along the lower center, but is undated.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2006 and remains in a good state of preservation.