

Gerard ter Borch II

1617–1681

THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED MEMBER of a gifted and well-to-do artistic family, Gerard ter Borch was born in 1617 in Zwolle. Probably not long after the death of his mother, Anna Bufken, in 1621, Ter Borch began his training with his father, the draftsman Gerard ter Borch the Elder (1584–1662). He was clearly a precocious pupil: an accomplished drawing of a figure seen from behind (Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) is dated 25 September 1625, when he was only eight years old. An inscription on another drawing suggests that he was in Amsterdam by 1632, but in 1633 he was back in Zwolle. The following year he went to Haarlem to study with Pieter Molijn (q.v.) and entered the guild there in 1635. The same year Ter Borch undertook the first of his many trips abroad, traveling to London to work with his uncle, the engraver Robert van Voerst. According to Houbraken, the painter visited Italy, Spain, and France, as well as various parts of the Netherlands and Flanders, in subsequent years.

By 1646 Ter Borch was in Münster, Westphalia, where he painted a number of small works and also his famous group portrait depicting *The Swearing of the Oath of Ratification of the Treaty of Münster* (1648, National Gallery, London, inv. no. 896). Houbraken suggests that it was also in 1648 that Ter Borch traveled with the Conde de Peñaranda to Madrid, where he painted portraits of Philip IV and his court. Other documents place the artist in Amsterdam in November 1648, The Hague in 1649, Kampen in 1650, and Delft on 22 April 1653, when he and Johannes Vermeer (q.v.) were co-witnesses to the signing of an affidavit. On 14 February 1654 he married Geertruyt Matthijs, with whom he settled in Deventer, becoming a citizen on 13 February 1655 and a *gemeensman* [city counselor] in 1666. Although documents indicate he again visited Amsterdam in 1674 and The Hague and Haarlem in 1675, he lived in Deventer until his death on 8 December 1681.

In his earliest works, Ter Borch depicted barrack-room scenes similar to those of Willem Duyster (1598/1599–1635) and Pieter Codde (1599–1678). Most of his later genre scenes, however, focused on the more refined elements of Dutch society. These works are generally small and upright in format and typically depict two or three elegantly clad, full-length figures engaged in an activity such as letter

writing or music making. They are executed with great sensitivity of touch and show an interest in the psychology of the sitters. Ter Borch also painted a large number of small-scale, full-length portraits. His most important student was Caspar Netscher (c. 1635/1636–1684), who learned many of his master's techniques for rendering luxurious textures, and who painted, in addition to his own original compositions, a number of signed copies of Ter Borch's works.

Bibliography

- Houbraken 1753, 3: 32, 34–40.
Smith 1829–1842, 4 (1833): 111–142; 9 (1842): 529.
HdG 1907–1927, 5 (1913): 1–145.
Hannema 1943.
Plietzsch 1944.
Gudlaugsson 1959–1960.
The Hague 1974.
Philadelphia 1984: 152–154.
Kettering 1989.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 31–32.

1937.1.58 (58)

The Suitor's Visit

c. 1658

Oil on canvas, 80 x 75 (31½ x 29⅞)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Technical Notes: The tightly woven, plain-weave fabric support, composed of fine irregularly spun threads, was lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Broad cusping is visible along the left and right edges. A smooth beige ground is striated with white in places, suggesting the presence of a white underlayer.

Thin fluid paint layers are applied freely and blended wet into wet in a series of thin scumbles of liquid, soft-edged colors. Fine details are painted wet over dry. Flesh tones are composed of a gray underpainting, thinly glazed to form shading, more thickly overpainted to create light areas. Microscopic examination reveals a change in the placement of the dog's front legs and an adjustment of the suitor's proper lefthand gesture.

Although the background has probably darkened over time, the painting is in relatively good condition, with small abraded losses in the thinly applied darks. The suitor's proper right arm was extensively retouched and the musician's necklace reinforced. No conservation work has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: Charles Auguste Louis Joseph, Duc de Morny [d. 1865], Paris; (sale, Paris, 31 May 1865, no. 82); José Salamanca y Mayol [Marquès de Salamanca, d. 1866], Madrid; (sale, Paris, 3–6 June 1867, no. 126); Baron Adolfe de Rothschild [d. 1900], Paris; by inheritance to Baron Maurice de Rothschild [d. 1957], Paris; (Duveen Brothers, New York, in 1922); sold July 1922 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 28 December 1934 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: New York 1939, no. 369.

NO DUTCH ARTIST captured as did Gerard ter Borch the elegance and grace of wealthy burghers, nor did any express with such subtlety psychological interactions between figures. Both of these aspects of his artistic genius are combined in this work, one of his most refined, yet provocative masterpieces.

Ter Borch's scene is situated in the diffuse light of a high-ceilinged room whose walls are decorated with a gilded leather wallcovering remarkable for the intricacy of its design. With the setting helping to establish the mood, the encounter taking place at the doorway seems the height of gentility. A debonair young man, having just entered the room, bows slightly, hat in hand, as he responds to the alluring gaze of the young woman who has come forward to greet him. She apparently has just risen from her green velvet seat where she has been playing a duet with the woman strumming on her theorbo: her music book and bass viol can be seen lying on the table. Behind the women stands a man who, in the dimness of the interior light, warms himself before the hearth as he turns to peer at the visitor.

Ter Borch painted this work in Deventer in the latter part of the 1650s, shortly after he had married a woman from that quiet, aristocratic city and decided to become one of its citizens. While his whereabouts just prior to his move in 1654 are not known, he very likely spent much time in Zwolle with other members of his artistic family, his father Gerard ter Borch the Elder (1583–1662), his half-sister, Gesina (1631–1690), and his half-brothers Harmen (1637–1677) and Moses (1645–1667). There he would have been part of the intellectual, literary, and artistic discussions that were clearly integral to Ter Borch family life. His father, who was an accomplished topographic draftsman, was also a poet and author of a songbook that Ter Borch helped illustrate.¹ The amorous verses and accompanying drawings show an appreciation for the intricacies of love that parallel those of contemporary playwrights, in particular Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Bredero (1585–1618) and Jan Hermanszoon Krul (1601/1602–1646).² By the

mid-1650s Gesina had embarked on her own artistic and literary career with her album *De Papiere Lauwekens*, which is filled with arcadian images of love's pleasures and disappointments. As with her father's songbook, Gesina's poetry and pictorial images in this and other albums belong to that important Dutch literary genre that both celebrates the delights of love and warns against the dangers of becoming ensnared in ill-advised attachments.³

It is against this background of family interest in art, music, and emblematic literature about love and its complexities that one must consider the nature of the narrative that unfolds in *The Suitor's Visit*. Under the veneer of gentility is a scene that is alive with sexual innuendo. The gazes of the couple at the door are at once enticing and yearning, a private communication that does not go unnoticed by the gentleman standing before the hearth. More explicitly sexual, however, is the nature of their gestures. The young woman clasps her hands in a manner that could be construed as an invitation for intercourse, as the thumb of her right hand protrudes between the index finger and second finger of her other hand in a most unconventional, and expressive, manner. His gesture in response appears to be an assent, for as he bows he forms a circle between the thumb and index figure of his left hand.

The outcome of the woman's ploy—for her central position in the composition and the dog's inquisitive gaze clearly indicate she is the initiator of the intrigue—is not spelled out by Ter Borch. Undoubtedly, however, a viewer within Ter Borch's circle of acquaintances would have recognized that his composition had remarkable parallels with an image found in Jan Krul's influential *Eerlycke Tytkorting* [*Honorable Pastimes*], published in Haarlem in 1634, which contains emblems devoted to the delights and travails of love.⁴ The related print (fig. 1) accompanies an emblem entitled “De Overdaed en Doet Geen Baet,” which roughly translates “The Excess That Brings No Profit.” The thrust of the emblem is a warning that encouragement by a woman is not always to be trusted. Whereas a suitor might feel that love and commitment would follow, all too often the lover is rejected and then belittled. Krul writes (*Eerlycke Tytkorting*, 16) of the lover's lament, “If you never intend to have me, why so much courtship?/ It would honor you best to send me straight away.” The similarities between the painting and the print seem to imply that the outcome of this match will likewise be disappointment.

The subtlety of Ter Borch's narrative is matched by the gracefulness of his figures and the delicacy



Fig. 1. Jan Krul, "De Overdaed en Doet Geen Baet," from *Eerlycke Tytkorting*, Amsterdam, 1634

and refinement of his touch.⁵ No artist could convey as effectively as he the shimmering surface of a long white satin skirt or the undulating rhythms of a translucent lace cuff. His brushstrokes, while small, are quite loose and rapidly applied with the result that the surface has an animated quality. Such an effect is particularly felt in the figures' expressions, which do not appear frozen or posed but show an inner life. Ter Borch's effectiveness in his representation of the human psychology in his genre paintings may well stem from his experiences as a portrait painter. Even the poses are sometimes similar. For example, the way in which the suitor holds his wide-brimmed hat while greeting the young woman has parallels in a portrait Ter Borch created in 1656.⁶

Ter Borch drew upon his surroundings for creating such a sense of immediacy in his composition. The objects in this work, including the tapestry on the table, the chair, the theorbo, the hearth, and the leather wallcovering, reappear in different contexts in a number of other paintings from the mid-1650s.⁷ The model for the suitor has also been identified. He is Caspar Netscher, a student of Ter Borch's in Deventer in the mid-1650s.⁸ Indeed, Netscher made a copy of this painting before he set sail for Rome in 1659, a date that establishes a *terminus post quem* for this work.⁹

Notes

1. Snoep 1968/1969, 77–134.
2. See The Hague 1974, 211.
3. The entire contents of the Ter Borch family bequest are in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam. For an assessment of this collection of drawings, albums, and sketchbooks, see Kettering 1989.
4. The contents of this emblem book were reprinted in Krul's *De Pampiere Wereld* (Amsterdam, 1644), 295. Gudlaugsson 1959–1960, 1: 116–117; 2: 148, was the first to draw attention to the relationship between Ter Borch's composition and the print from Krul's emblem, which he cited in its republished form in *De Pampiere Wereld*.
5. Since Ter Borch was in London in 1635 studying with his uncle Robert van Voerst, an engraver who made prints for Anthony van Dyck's *Iconographie*, he may well have learned at that time something of the sense of grace Van Dyck incorporated into his figures and compositions. Although there is no record of Ter Borch actually meeting the great Flemish master, Van Dyck did return to England in the spring of that year after having spent a number of months in Antwerp and Brussels working for the Flemish court.
6. See The Hague 1974, 136, cat. 36a.
7. Gudlaugsson 1959–1960, 2: 148, has carefully indicated all of the instances in which these objects reappear in Ter Borch's work. The table carpet, for example, is also seen in *The Letter Writer* (Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. no. 797), the chair in *The Visit* (Bührle Foundation, Zurich; Gudlaugsson 1959–1960, 2: no. 149), the mantelpiece in *A Young Woman at Her Toilet* (Wallace Collection, London, inv. no. P235), and *A Lute Player with a Boy* (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, inv. no. 349).
8. Gudlaugsson 1959–1960, 1: 116. The identification is based upon Wallerant Vaillant's mezzotint after a lost Netscher *Self-Portrait*, reproduced in Gudlaugsson 1959–1960, 2: pl. xiv, no. 3. Netscher also appears as a model in two other paintings, *An Officer Dictating a Letter* (National Gallery, London, inv. no. 5847) and *Officer Writing a Letter* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, inv. no. E24.3.21).
9. For information about Netscher's signed copy on wood, see Gudlaugsson 1959–1960, 2: 148, cat. 139a. Unfortunately, the identities of the other models are not known. Gudlaugsson 1959–1960, 2: cat. 139b, also notes the existence of a copy on copper of the head of the standing woman that he has tentatively ascribed to Egdon van der Neer (1643–1703). A partial copy of *The Suitor's Visit* was sold at Sotheby Parke Bernet, London, 7 April 1982, no. 145.

References

- 1863 Lagrange: 289–306, repro.
 1939 New York: no. 369.
 1941 Berenson and Valentiner: no. 208, repro.
 1944 Plietzsch: 21, 47, no. 57, repro.
 1948–1949 Gudlaugsson, 2: 235–267.
 1959–1960 Gudlaugsson, 1 (1959): 116–119, repro. 119, 296; 2 (1960): 147–148, no. 139.
 1963 Walker: 190, repro.
 1965 NGA: 126, no. 58.
 1965 Haverkamp-Begemann: 38–41, 62–63, fig. 8.
 1968 NGA: 113, no. 58 repro.
 1974 Robinson: 53–54.
 1974 The Hague: 37.
 1975 NGA: 336–337, repro.
 1976 Walker: 284, color repro.



Gerard ter Borch II, *The Suitor's Visit*, 1937.1.58

1984 Wheelock: 30–31, color repro.
 1985 NGA: 387, repro.
 1987 Smith: 423–424, repro.
 1991 Ydema: 188, no. 860.

1991 Roodenburg: 152–189, fig. 7.1.
 1992 NGA: 133, color repro.
 1993 Kettering: 97, repro.

Studio of Gerard ter Borch II

1960.6.10 (1562)

The Music Lesson

c. 1670
 Oil on canvas, 69 x 55.1 (27¹/₈ x 21³/₄)
 Timken Collection

Technical Notes: The support, a fine-weight, tightly and plain-woven fabric, has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Three moderately sized complex tears in the background to the left and right of the man's head have become visible again due to the cleaving and lifting of paint along the tear edges. Thin fluid paint is applied over a thin, smooth white ground with little layering and no appreciable impasto or brushmarking. Losses are few and abrasion is moderate overall. Reglazing over parts of the man's costume may be covering local abrasion. The varnish layer is matte and discolored.

Provenance: (Van Diemen, Berlin and New York, in 1929)¹. William R. Timken [1866–1949], New York; by inheritance to his wife, Lillian S. Timken [d. 1959], New York.

WHILE SHE INTENTLY STARES at her music book, an elegantly attired young lady strums on her bent-necked theorbo to the beat established by her music instructor. The scene is one that must have been familiar in the homes of well-to-do Dutch burghers, for the playing of music was a popular and socially acceptable activity among unmarried young people, particularly women. Numerous depictions of music lessons exist in Dutch art, and, in particular, it was a theme favored by Gerard ter Borch. Not only did the subject provide an opportunity to depict a leisure activity within a domestic setting, but it also was one in which the many symbolic allusions of music, from harmony to love and seduction, could be thematically exploited. It is not by accident, for example, that an ace of hearts lies on the floor in a painting of a similar scene by Ter Borch in the National Gallery, London (fig. 1). Since no card is present in *The Music Lesson*, nor are there other motifs that provide a romantic subtheme to the London



Fig. 1. Gerard ter Borch II, *A Woman Playing a Theorbo to Two Men*, 1667–1668, oil on canvas, London, National Gallery

painting such as the bed, the dog, or the young suiter, it would seem that the artist's intent here was to focus solely upon the woman's intent concentration as she strives to learn the complexities of the music and her instrument.

If the comparison with the London painting suggests that there exists here a different pictorial intent, it also demonstrates that this work contains fewer psychological nuances. More importantly, in terms of its attribution, the comparison points out that elements of the painting, particularly the woman, but also the general disposition of the room and still-life elements on the table, have been taken over entirely from the London composition. While