

May 2018

An Enigmatic Bodegón: Discovering a Possible Identity of Murillo's Two Women at a Window

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AN ENIGMATIC *BODEGÓN*: DISCOVERING A POSSIBLE IDENTITY OF
MURILLO'S *TWO WOMEN AT A WINDOW*

by

April Bina

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in Art History

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2018

ABSTRACT

AN ENIGMATIC *BODEGÓN*: DISCOVERING A POSSIBLE IDENTITY OF MURILLO'S *TWO WOMEN AT A WINDOW*

by

April Bina

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018
Under the Supervision of Professor Tanya Tiffany

For decades, the identity of the two women depicted in Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* has been unknown. Theories range from innocent flirtatious girls, to domestic servants, to prostitutes; I argue for the latter. Little has been done by scholars to prove that the two women are in fact representations of amorous women. In this thesis, I examine a plethora of sources including early modern moralist texts, current scholarship, and contemporaneous seventeenth century visuals. I argue that these two women are representations of Spanish prostitutes, sexually charged literary characters, or both, based largely on patronage, Netherlandish connections, and costume. For the first time, an in-depth analysis of *Two Women at a Window* will help to prove my argument.

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"*La mujer ventanera, uva de la calle*" (A woman at a window, a grape of the street.) – Early modern Spanish proverb.

Next to Diego Velázquez, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo is perhaps the most renowned Spanish painter of the early modern period. Murillo was born at the end of December 1617 to Gaspar Esteban, a successful barber surgeon, and María Pérez Murillo, who came from a long line of artists and craftsmen. This familial connection ultimately paved the way for Murillo's education, both artistic and academic. This education granted Murillo access to academic writings and works of literature that would subsequently influence his art.

Scholars, until recently, have focused on Murillo's religious works, which constitute the majority of his artistic productions. His paintings depicting the Madonna, the Christ Child, and numerous saints decorated the walls of religious institutions throughout Seville – San Francisco el Grande, Seville Cathedral, Santa María la Blanca, and the Hospital de la Caridad to name only a few.¹ The seventeenth century viewer, whether educated or not, would understand the content of these religious work of art. Specific biblical figures would be easily recognizable by their common attributes and physical appearance. This clear understanding of religious imagery is not always applicable, however, to secular works (scenes of everyday life), particularly secular works by Murillo.

In addition to his images of religious figures, Murillo also created a small number (in comparison to his religious commissions) of genre scenes or *bodegones*. The term

¹ This information was extrapolated from the entirety of Royal Academy of Arts' *Bartolome Esteban Murillo, 1617-1682: 1617-1682*. (London: Weidenfeld Nicolson Illustrated, 1983).

bodegones references Spanish genre paintings from the early modern period including everyday occurrences and still-lives. Unlike his religious creations, Murillo's *bodegones* left the seventeenth century and modern-day viewer with many questions. Some questions that the viewer may ask regarding Murillo's genre paintings include: Who are the individuals within the painting? Where are they located? And what are the figures doing? In many of Murillo's *bodegones*, questions such as those just mentioned may come to mind. However, there is one painting by Murillo that is even more mysterious, leaving the viewer, seventeenth century and modern, with countless questions: *Two Women at a Window* (fig. 1).

Visual Analysis of *Two Women at a Window*

In Murillo's *Two Women at a Window*, a young woman is seen in the center of the composition, accompanied by a seemingly older woman situated behind a window shutter. A *trompe l'oeil* illusion draws the viewer into the composition, with the edge of the frame acting as the windowsill.² The background that surrounds the women resembles a Caravaggio painting with an inky blackness and dramatic chiaroscuro that makes the location of the women a mystery. The younger of the two women rests her head on her closed hand and looks directly at the viewer, creating a sense of intimacy. The corner of her lips rises only slightly with an intrigued expression. Her rosy cheeks and plump lips show her youth and beauty. She wears an off-white chemise that has fallen dangerously low,

² *Trompe l'oeil* refers to elements of a two-dimensional painting that appear to be in the viewer's own plane. In *Two Women at a Window*, the *trompe l'oeil* element is the edge of the frame that acts as the ledge they are leaning on.

intentionally or not, off her shoulders, which scholars have interpreted as a state of undress and a suggestion of immoral activity. The chemise has a dark band along the top and is tied in the front with a small red bow. Her sleeves are rolled up, revealing her forearms. She has dark brown hair that is contrasted with her pale skin, and a bright red flower sits behind her ear.

The older woman directly confronts the viewer, peeking from behind the shutter and lifting her veil to shield the lower portion of her face. The corner of the older woman's mouth, though barely visible, is turned up in a smile: her cheek rises as she slightly squints her eyes and gives the impression of laughter. Although her clothing is largely occluded by the wooden shutter and her veil, she appears to wear a white shirt similar to the younger woman's.

The women's expressions give no indication as to their occupation or to what is happening around them (outside of the viewer's sight). Both of their gazes invite the viewer in and encourage them to ask several questions. Who are the intended recipients of the women's gaze: we the viewer, Murillo the painter, or something or someone within the painting's realm? This also leads to the question of where the women are located. The women may be looking out to the street or a central courtyard, indicating that they are on the first level.³ However, they may just as well be on a second or third story looking across a street or alley to others near a window. This uncertainty of location only adds to the mystery of *Two Women at a Window*.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the most likely identities of the women in

³ Scholarship on seventeenth century architecture in Seville is scarce. Therefore, positively identifying the location of the women in *Two Women at a Window* is difficult.

Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* and its significance in seventeenth century Spain. I begin with the exploration of patronage and use early modern literary sources as well as art historical scholarship including Jonathan Brown, Xanthe Brooke and Peter Cherry, and Xavier F. Salomon. These sources will show the changes in scholarly interest in relation to Murillo's *bodegones*, specifically the context of *Two Women at a Window*. Additionally, using examples of contemporaneous paintings will help to support my proposed theories of who these two women are.

State of the Question

Past scholarship on Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* is limited. Jonathan Brown, a leading scholar on seventeenth century Spanish art, was the first art historian to explore eroticism in Murillo's paintings at any great length in his 1982 article "Murillo, Pintor de Temas Eróticos: Una Faceta Inadvertida de su Obra." (Murillo, Painter of Erotic Themes: An Unnoticed Facet of his Work)⁴ In his article, Brown examines the unnoticed erotic origins of Murillo's genre painting and locates those origins in contemporaneous paintings from Italy and the Netherlands, works including *A Street Scene* (fig. 2) by Michael Sweerts and *La gitana* (fig. 3) by Frans Hals. Brown directly associates Murillo's *bodegones*, including *Two Women at a Window*, with the explicitly erotic themes in these Netherlandish paintings. Brown states that the two women in *Two Women at a Window* are most likely prostitutes and uses Netherlandish examples to support this. In addition to this, Brown briefly brings attention to the discrepancies regarding the two women's ages, that is, are

⁴ Jonathan Brown, "Murillo, Pintor de Temas Eróticos: Una Faceta Inadvertida de su Obra." *Goya*, no. 69-171 (1982): 35-43.

they similar in age or not, siding with scholars who see the women as similar in age.

Enrique Valdivieso drew from Brown's arguments in his article "A Propósito de las Interpretaciones Eróticas en Pinturas de Murillo de Asunto Popular," (A Purpose of the Erotic Interpretations in Murillo's Paintings of Popular Affair) published in 2002. In his discussion, Valdivieso agrees with Brown in that the women in *Two Women at a Window* represent more than an "innocent amorous flirtation" and do in fact reflect Brown's proposed erotic theme of the painting. Valdivieso proposes:

...that the theme of the courtesan is interpreted both in the Netherlands and in Seville, but with radically opposite forms. The Protestant mentality gives ample permissiveness to nakedness, while Catholic moral rigor, monitored by the Inquisition in the Hispanic environment, prevented the pictorial description of any part of the body that could have erotic intentionality.⁵

Valdivieso examines *Two Women at a Window* more closely than Jonathan Brown did twenty years prior. Unlike Brown, Valdivieso believes the two women in the painting are of different ages. He interprets the one behind the shutter to be far older than the woman leaning on the windowsill. Valdivieso argues that women from a higher societal class should not have looked out of a window because it was deemed improper. According to Valdivieso, the only women who would have looked out of a window were prostitutes. Therefore, according to Brown and Valdivieso, we are left with reading *Two Women at a Window* as a scene of prostitution.⁶

⁵ Enrique, Valdivieso, "A Propósito de las Interpretaciones Eróticas en Pinturas de Murillo de Asunto Popular." *Archico Español de Arte* 75, no. 300 (2002): 356.

⁶ Valdivieso ignores the fact that just because it was admonished for upper class women to look out of a window, this was not always observed.

Scholarship on *Two Women at a Window* continues with Xanthe Brooke and Peter Cherry's *Murillo: Scenes of Childhood*, published in 2001 to accompany the exhibition of the same name at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London. It provides ample information for each of the thirty-five paintings in the exhibition, including *Two Women at a Window*. The authors trace the title of the painting from its moniker *Las Gallegas* given by Joaquín Ballester (1740-1808), a Spanish painter and printmaker. The term *las gallegas* literally translates to "the Galician girls," and refers to women who came into a large city such as Seville from nonwestern Spain to find work as domestic servants.⁷ This title implies that the two women in Murillo's painting were once thought to be domestic servants from Galicia. *Las Gallegas* remained the popular title until the painting was recorded in Lord Heytesbury's collection in 1828 as *A Spanish Courtesan*. In this short amount of time, the interpretation of *Two Women at a Window* changed significantly from lower-class servants to prostitutes. However, in 1883 the title changed once again to *A Woman and her Dueña*. *Dueña* has multiple meanings when translated into English: owner, landlady, and proprietress.⁸ These terms can change the interpretation of the relationship between the two women in Murillo's painting depending on which was the intentional definition. Brooke and Cherry agree with Brown and Valdivieso in that *Two Women at a Window* is a representation of prostitution or at the very least something erotic or illicit. The authors also bring attention to the theory that the two women may be embodiments of characters from a picaresque novel, *La Celestina*. However, Brooke and Cherry negate this possible interpretation because of the women's ages. *Celestina* is meant to be an old woman and the

⁷ Xanthe Brooke and Peter Cherry. *Murillo: Scenes of Childhood* (London: Merrell Publishers Ltd, 2001).

⁸ The term *dueña* can also be neutral and mean "chaperone."

authors argue that the woman behind the shutter is approximately the same age as the young woman leaning on the sill.⁹

More information on this painting is provided in the newest addition to *Two Women at a Window's* scholarship. *Murillo: The Self Portraits* by Xavier F. Salomon was published in 2017 in conjunction with the exhibition at the Frick Collection. This catalogue includes essays by Xavier F. Salomon, the curator of the Frick Collection, and Letizia Treves among others.¹⁰ The catalogue focuses on the only two known self-portraits by Murillo, one from ca. 1650-55, another from ca. 1670, and a handful of other engraved reproductions printed posthumously. The authors explain their decision to include *Two Women at a Window* in an exhibition on self-portraiture through a discussion of Murillo's stylistic technique and use of *trompe l'oeil*.

Deeply interested in the boundaries between art and reality, Murillo used *trompe l'oeil* solutions in his self-portraits to play with the pictorial space of his compositions. This exceptionally realistic painting, one of Murillo's most famous and mysterious works, is devised as the space of a window. Emerging from the darkness are two young girls who may be prostitutes. The painting may refer to a Spanish proverb: "la mujer ventanera, uva de la calle" (a woman at the window, a grape of the street).¹¹

⁹ Brook and Cherry state that Celestina is an old woman in the novel. Therefore, the authors do not believe that associating the woman in the painting with Celestina is a viable opinion.

¹⁰ María Álvarez-Garcillán, Silvia A. Centeno, Jaime García-Máiquez, Larry Keith, Dorothy Mahon, and Nicole Ryder are the other authors of the catalogue.

¹¹ Wall text accompanying *Two Women at a Window*. This saying has been used previously in relation to *Two Women at a Window* by Brooke and Cherry in *Murillo: Scenes of Childhood*. This phrase means that any woman who looks out of a window to the streets is ripe for picking (for sexual purposes).

In the last sentence in the above quotation, the word “*ventanera*” refers to a woman who enjoys being near windows. This woman would be seen by men on the street as a grape. Because grapes are meant to be plucked and consumed, it is implied that the *ventanera* is willing to be “plucked” and sexually consumed. Additionally, it is important to note that this small snippet intended for the general museum viewer does not necessarily highlight the taboo of painting (supposed) prostitutes in Catholic Spain. Rather, it hints at prostitution as a side thought, focusing on the mystery of the two women as a whole rather than the illicitness of their supposed acts.

As indicated in the preceding quotation, Salomon interprets the woman concealed by the shutter in *Two Women at a Window* to be the same age as the woman leaning on the sill. He argues that the veiled woman is painted in shadow and darker than the illuminated woman, and therefore she only *looks* to be older but is in fact “young and pretty” just like the other woman.¹² Because of the contradicting arguments on the two women’s age, Salomon argues that past scholarship identifying the woman behind the shutter as the younger woman’s *dueña* is no longer relevant because of the apparent similar age of the figures. I find this theory unconvincing for multiple reasons. The veiled woman has dark bags under her eyes, fine lines, and the hint of crow’s feet (fig. 4). Additionally, Murillo hints at protruding veins in the woman’s hand: a clear signifier of age. By contrast, the figure leaning on the sill is represented as youthful through her blushed cheeks, plump lips, and soft complexion. Her hand has no visible veins or dark patches. Because of this, I will consider the two women to be different ages – the one behind the shutter being elderly.

¹² Salomon, *Murillo: The Self-Portraits*, 54. This statement is based purely on Salomon’s own observations, lacking any scholarship to solidify his argument.

This will also allow for several more likely interpretations of the painting in the realm of picaresque literature, a popular literary genre with a wide cast of characters from all walks of life.

Salomon also clearly states that the women are prostitutes due to how they “brazenly reveal themselves...and seem to interact directly with the presumably male viewer.”¹³ Salomon reinforces this interpretation by making connections to Netherlandish paintings, just as Brown and Valdivieso have done, and the Netherlandish artists’ use of *trompe l’oeil* elements. Salomon compares *Two Women at a Window* to Rembrandt’s *Girl at a Window* (fig. 5) from 1645, in which we can see a girl leaning on a sill much like the central women in Murillo’s *Two Women at a Window*. She looks directly at the viewer, and her surroundings are unclear. Her shirt is partially concealed by her arms, but a low neckline is still discernable. Salomon only uses Rembrandt’s painting as a point of reference in the catalogue since there is no scholarship that indicates *Girl at a Window* was in Seville or Madrid and studied by Murillo.

Jonathan Brown, Enrique Valdivieso, Xanthe Brooke and Peter Cherry, and Xavier F. Salomon are the predominate scholars on erotic interpretations of Murillo’s *Two Women at a Window*. However, there are areas within their arguments that require more attention if we wish to know who the women are.

Methodology

What has yet to be said about *Two Women at a Window* in order to provide

¹³ Ibid.

identities for the women lies within scholarship relating to prostitution and the picaresque novel in seventeenth century Spain. Scholarship by Laura Bass and Amanda Wunder, Mary Elizabeth Perry, Janice Tomlinson and Marcia Welles, as well as contemporaneous paintings from Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands will prove useful in trying to discover the women's identities. This thesis will utilize these sources to support my argument that these women are either representations of Spanish prostitutes or sexually charged female characters from Spanish picaresque novel. I argue that the ambiguity surrounding the women in *Two Women at a Window* was purposeful. Murillo wanted the viewers, both contemporary and modern, to create their own associations and fill in the blanks left by the surrounding darkness. From my research, it seems as though Murillo was aiming in the direction of sexual and erotic context rather than young innocence. First and foremost, I will look closely at the connection between the Netherlands and Seville, particularly in how Netherlandish themes found their way to Seville and subsequently to Murillo. I will look at the possible patronage of *Two Women at a Window*, which will solidify the connection of Murillo's painting to Netherlandish traditions. I will use two paintings by Jan Steen, *The Wench* and *Woman at her Toilet*, for this comparison as they show explicit actions of sensuality and prostitution.

Next, I will look at the relationship that *Two Women at a Window* has to the Spanish picaresque novel, in particular the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea (La Celestina)* and *La Lozana Andaluza*. Specific scenes within each novel coincide with the composition of *Two Women at a Window*, which further connects the literature to the painting. To support this connection, I will also use Murillo's *Four Figures on a Step* and the novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* as a case study to show the connection that Murillo's *bodegones* have to the picaresque.

Finally, I will examine the fashion of the women in *Two Women at a Window* to further support the theory that they are representations of indecorous figures. In early modern paintings, the most prominent feature of the prostitute is the veil. Several images by Italian artist Girolamo Forabosco and two works by Netherlandish painters, Lambert Doomer's *Venetian Courtesan*, and Anthony van Dyck's *Portrait of Margaret Lemon*, will offer parallels to the fashioning in *Two Women at a Window*. Laura Bass and Amanda Wunder's scholarship on women's fashion in early modern Spain helps shed light on the eroticism in *Two Women at a Window*.

The veil is one of a few signifiers that prostitutes in early modern Seville wore to distinguish themselves as sex workers. In order to support the theory that prostitutes had distinguishing features to their wardrobe, I will also clarify who the women in *Two Women at a Window* are not. In other words, I will identify their possible class and status by ruling out others. To do this I will examine paintings of urban Spanish street scenes including *Vista de Sevilla*, c. 1660, *La Plaza Mayor de Lima*, 1680, and *Carrera de San Jerónimo from the Paseo del Prado*, 1600-30. In addition, *bodegones* by Velázquez and others by Murillo will be compared with the urban street scenes to help suggest that there is a differentiation in the color and material of the veil and the type of women who wore them.

A final subcategory of fashion that I will look at is the application of makeup, as I propose that the women in *Two Women at a Window* may be wearing it. Looking at who wore makeup and its connotations, through scholarship and seventeenth century visuals, I believe, will support this theory.

Possible Patronage and Netherlandish Connections

The strategic location of Netherlandish port cities such as Haarlem and Amsterdam increased the wealth of the merchant class living within and near these cities. This wealth and trade, in turn, caused the economy and art market to boom in the Netherlands. Subsequently, through direct trade with Spain, there was a great circulation of art between Netherlands and Spain, particularly Seville as it was Spain's predominate port city. Most importantly was the spread of Dutch and Flemish genre paintings to Seville. This relationship allowed the Spanish to adapt the genre for their own culture (the *bodegón*.)

Artists in the Dutch Republic and Flanders produced paintings of everyday life (genre scenes) well before Seville began to actively seek out this genre of painting. While the patronage of *Two Women at a Window* is unknown, theories can be made based on the painting's subject matter's strong connection to Netherlandish examples. Scholars have traced the earliest known provenance to Pedro Francisco Luján y Góngora, Duke of Almodóvar del Rio in the early 1820s.¹⁴ Brown's argument laid out in his 1982 article that shows Netherlandish parallels to Murillo's *bodegones* had influenced scholars suggestions of a Netherlandish patron.¹⁵

Associating Murillo's painting to Netherlandish culture is as deep as many scholars will go. Salomon is one exception to these theories of patronage. In *Murillo: The Self-Portraits*, Salomon suggests that there is a possibility that Murillo's son, Gaspar, may have

¹⁴ According to the National Gallery's website. After the Duke of Almodovar, the provenance is traced from his heirs, William A'Court in 1823, William Henry Ashe, 2nd baron Heytesbury, William Frederick Ashe, 3rd baron Heytesbury, Peter A. B. Widener, Elkins Park, Peter A. B. Widener, and Joseph E. Widener. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1185.html#provenance>

¹⁵ The article I am referring to is Brown's *Murillo, Pintor de Temas Eróticos: Una Faceta Inadvertida de su Obra*.

been the recipient of the painting. It seems more likely, however, that the intended original owner of *Two Women at a Window* was someone with Netherlandish connections. Based on this information, I can only infer that *Two Women at a Window* was created for a Netherlandish merchant or Spanish merchant who was familiar with the popular Netherlandish genre scenes. Due to the high amount of trade between Spanish territories, many of these paintings would make their way to the court at Madrid after first arriving at Seville. Painters, including Murillo, would voyage to the capital to view what was being produced in other countries, particularly Italy and the Netherlands. Murillo traveled to Madrid only once in his lifetime to study the paintings displayed in the court city.¹⁶ However, this one trip was enough for Murillo to acquire the knowledge he needed to produce his own versions of everyday genre scenes and secular works.

Among Sevillian patrons, *Two Women at a Window* would have appealed to collectors familiar with Netherlandish art and with a particular interest in genre painting. This patron would have had visual access to art coming from the Netherlands and arriving in Seville. There is one man in particular who fits this potential profile better than any other: Don Nicolás Omazur.¹⁷ Omazur was brought up in a Flemish merchant family and continued his family's silk trade. He moved to Seville in the late 1660's for the silk trade, and while he was there, struck a friendship with the Sevillian painter. There is some discrepancy when it comes to the dates of when the two met; the first documentation of

¹⁶ There are rumors that Murillo signed to travel to the Americas when he was just beginning in his career. However, there is no proof to corroborate this and most scholars agree that he never left Spain.

¹⁷ The potential profile for the patron of *Two Women at a Window* is a man with Netherlandish connections, most likely through trade, and an academic education. He would either be originally from the Netherlands or have direct familial ties to the location.

Omazur in Seville was not until 1669, but it is possible that Omazur came to Seville and met Murillo well before this date.¹⁸ Shortly after Omazur's arrival in Seville, he shifted his occupation to art trade. This change in Omazur's career "allegedly stepped up the sale rates of Sevillian painting."¹⁹

While it is not known if Omazur owned *Two Women at a Window*, he nevertheless represents a type of person that would have commissioned it. In Omazur's 1690 personal inventory, there is a painting that resembles *Two Women at a Window*, though it is recorded as a copy of Murillo's. It is listed as '*un lienso mediano pintado Una mosa y Una Vieja asomandose en una ventana sin moldura y es copia del dho Murillo*'.²⁰ ('A medium-sized painted canvas without a frame, A young girl and an old one appearing at a window and is a copy of Murillo.') That the general composition of *Two Women at a Window* was copied suggests that it was locally, if not widely known. Omazur also owned other copies of Murillo's paintings, however these copies are based on religious works and not genre scenes. Based on his inventory, Omazur owned copies of a crucified Christ and a small painting of Mary with two angels.²¹ Omazur also owned original works by Murillo including a self-portrait of him and a pendant pair of his wife and four seasons represented through landscapes that are now lost.²²

¹⁸ Duncan Kinkead. "The Picture Collection of Don Nicolás Omazur." *The Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 995 (1986): 141

¹⁹ Tijana Zakula. "The Indecorous Appeal of Beggar Boys: Murillo, de Lairesse and Gainsborough." *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 35, no. ¾ (2011): 167

²⁰ This is from a copy of Omazur's inventory provided by Duncan Kinkead. Another inventory of Omazur's paintings was created by his son almost a decade later and has significant changes. For the purpose of my thesis, I will only use the inventory made by Omazur himself as it is more reliable than one made by a second party.

²¹ Kinkead. "The Picture Collection of Don Nicolás Omazur," 141.

²² *Ibid*, 136.

According to Duncan Kinkead, Omazur owned paintings by Anthony van Dyck, Peter Paul Rubens, and David Teniers. This strong affiliation with Netherlandish artists further supports the theory that a man with Netherlandish affiliations commissioned *Two Women at a Window*. But these seemingly innocent scenes often, if not always, held a hidden meaning. From the time of Pieter Brueghel in the sixteenth century, painting proverbs and life lessons on morality within their genres was extremely common. This is ever more apparent in genre scenes by Jan Steen.

Jan Steen's Eroticism

While Omazur did not own any paintings by Steen, he did own several genre scenes with erotic content. Duncan Kinkead mentions a painting by Adriaen Brouwer with "some ruffians" that Omazur owned. Brouwer, like Steen, painted several genre scenes with erotic undertones. Kinkead also uses a tavern scene by David Teniers as an example of Omazur's genre collection. While the exact image by Teniers is not known, tavern scenes often depict unruly drunk figures with items on the floor that have erotic symbolism. The artist most often associated with the Netherlandish genre painting is Jan Steen. Steen was one of the most famous Dutch genre painters of the seventeenth century, producing work at the same time as Murillo. Nearly every genre painting by Steen warns against personal vices in favor of seeking out virtue. While the lessons are meant to be positive and moralistic, he visually teaches them in a humorous way.

Jan Steen was a master at displaying either outspoken or veiled acts of sexuality in his paintings. Symbols that signify the erotic are seen time and again in nearly all of his genre paintings: some of the symbolism of these signs is obvious, but others less so such as

the foot warmer. The foot warmer was typically used as a symbol of amorous thought and arousal in Netherlandish genre paintings.²³ Steen uses the foot warmer in several of his genre paintings including *As the Old Sing, So Pipe the Young* (fig. 6) and *Twelfth Night* (fig. 7). Works by Jan Steen and other Netherlandish artists are rich in unruly scenes and play on words, such as the innuendos of the Dutch word for stocking [*kous*] often associated with female genitalia.²⁴ Similarly, mussel and oyster are often explained by scholars as being signs of an aphrodisiac.²⁵ In the case of stockings, Steen enjoyed coupling this already sexually charged item with the equally erotic space of the bedroom. Stockings, oysters, foot warmers, and cats among others come together to form metaphors and visual witticisms. In *The Wench* (fig. 8) c. 1660-1662, Steen shows a prostitute who puts her naked leg on display for the male customer and an elderly madam lurks behind the couple. The prostitute's low-cut dress, cleavage, and voluptuous red drapery surrounding the bed all indicate a very ostentatious scene of flirtatious goings-on.

Another relevant example that shows explicit eroticism that is adapted by artists like Murillo is Steen's *Woman at her Toilet*, 1665-1670 (fig. 9), which shows a woman seated on her bed, one stocking is already removed as she slips off the one from her right leg and her skirt rides dangerously high, revealing part of her upper leg. The imprints that her garters made are visible above her calf, creating an extremely visceral and tactile scene. Showing the softness of the flesh only increased the sensuality of the male viewer for

²³ Liana De Girolami Cheney, "The Oyster in Dutch Genre: Moral or Erotic Symbolism." *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 15 (1987): 135.

Symbolism." *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 15 (1987): 135.

²⁴ Nanette Salomon, "Shifting Priorities: gender and Genre in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 64.

²⁵ Girolami Cheney, 135.

whom this painting was most likely made. As stated by Klaske Muizelaar and Derek Phillips, there was “a strong cultural taboo against women exposing their legs... [as they] had a sort of mesmeric power if accidentally exposed.”²⁶ The low neckline of her dress, the dog sleeping in the bed (a symbol of the physical senses in Dutch paintings) as well as her removed shoes all hold erotic subtext. Shoes are interpreted as erotic symbols due to their association with the foot, which has “phallic connotations” in early modern Dutch culture.²⁷

This explicit humor and sensuality so often seen in Steen’s works cannot be seen in Murillo’s *Two Women at a Window*, instead it is subtle. In early modern Spain, a painting of a woman showing herself undressing, taking off her stocking whilst sitting on her bed within her private chamber would have been an even more indecorous visual than in northern Europe. Nevertheless, the inherent similarities of erotic themes between Steen’s paintings and Murillo’s *bodegones* strongly suggest a knowledge of Netherlandish culture.

Another painting by Murillo that relates even more closely to Steen’s eroticism and humor is his *bodegón*, *Four Figures on a Step* (fig. 10). Scholars often study *Two Women at a Window* and *Four Figures on a Step* together because of their striking similarities: *trompe l’oeil* framing devices, a dark background with illuminated realistic figures, and potentially erotic subtext. From the left in *Four Figures on a Step*, a young man in “modish costume” rests his right arm on his right knee that is raised.²⁸ He wears bright white stockings and clean black shoes. His cropped pants and shirt look to be made of expensive material and have no signs of wear. He has well-kept long curly hair and a tan hat adorned with a large

²⁶ Klaske Muizelaar and Derek Phillips. *Picturing Men and Women in the Dutch Golden Age: Paintings and People in Historical Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 130.

²⁷ Salomon. *Shifting Priorities*, 64.

²⁸ Brooke and Cherry. *Scenes of Childhood*, 102.

red bow. Every aspect of his dress and relaxed demeanor indicates a high social standing. To his left, a young woman places her hand on the young man's left shoulder. She wears a veil similar to the older woman in *Two Women at a Window*. Unlike the older woman who conceals her face, the young woman in *Four Figures on a Step* lifts her veil to reveal a smirk. Her shirt reflects the light, suggesting a costly fabric. To the far right is dark-haired older woman with a contrasting white veil. She has pristine white sleeves and a blue bodice. Perhaps the most sticking feature are her thick-rimmed spectacles. On her lap lays the head of a young boy, his face hidden from the viewer as he lies down with his back turned toward the darkened interior. The young boy is by far the most poorly dressed in the composition and seems to have no place with the others.

A tear in the young boy's pants reveals his bare backside and may, as Jonathan Brown argued, suggest a sexual, pedophilic context for the painting. Significantly, the tear was not always visible. The hole was painted over at two separate times due to its immodest nature.²⁹ Before this hole reappeared after its restoration, viewers often interpreted the paintings as a family group.

²⁹ Kimbell art Museum, description. "The 1984 cleaning of *Four Figures on a Step* led to the discovery that in a previous restoration the appearance of the painting had been altered in two significant ways. The composition had been extended with a canvas strip, of approximately four inches (10 cm), along the left side. This addition made the composition appear more symmetrical by completing the figure of the young man. The other major change was the overpainting of the ragged hole in the seat of the child's trousers, which had been applied to conceal his bare bottom. Restoration included the removal of these two alterations, which restored Murillo's original conception and sparked an ongoing discussion about the meaning and interpretation of the genre scene. Views vary widely between reading *Four Figures on a Step* as a scene of procurement and one of charity.

The Spanish Picaresque Novel

With a strong connection to Netherlandish genres paintings, Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* and *Four Figures on a Step* also exhibit parallels to popular Spanish literature. Several scholars have associated Murillo's *bodegones* with picaresque novels including *La Celestina*, *La Lozana Andaluza*, and *Lazarillo de Tormes*. As stated by Bruno Damiani, the picaresque genre follows a general guideline of a main character "born or plunged into a dishonorable environment...struggles in a life of vagabondage" but reaches maturity with "social success."³⁰ The protagonist of the novel will interact with other people from different ranks of the social strata to better himself or herself.³¹ Indeed, part of the appeal of picaresque literature is the always-present diverse cast of upper, lower, and middle-class citizens. In *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the protagonist, Lázaro begins at the lowest tier of society as a peasant child. After he is abandoned by his parents, he begins an apprenticeship with a blind man. Lázaro moves his way up in society through several different apprenticeships. At the end of the novella, Lázaro reaches a high social position through marriage.

In discussing *Four Figures on a Step*, Janice Tomlinson and Marcia Welles have related Murillo's imagery to *Lazarillo de Tormes*.³² Tomlinson and Welles argue that the figures in *Four Figures on a Step* lack "thematic unity" with their obviously different social

³⁰ Bruno M. Damiani, "La Lozana Andaluza as Precursor to the Spanish Picaresque" in *The Picaresque: A Symposium on the Rogue's Tale*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994).

³¹ J.A. Garrido Ardila, *A Concise Introduction to the History of the Spanish Novel*, in *A History of the Spanish Novel*. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 6.

³² The reason I am using *Four Figures on a Step* within the state of the question is due to the amazing similarities between this painting and *Two Women at a Window*. Using the former painting opens up the great possibility that *Two Women at a Window* may contain the same context. I believe that there is a possibility that *Two Women at a Window* and *Four Figures on a Step* were made for the same patron, perhaps a pendant pair in representing different novels that the patron liked.

standings based on costume.³³

While Murillo's *Four Figures on a Step* has a strong affiliation to *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *La Celestina* and *La Lozana* are the two most popular picaresque novels that offer strong connections to Murillo's *Two Women at a Window*. In the following sections I will examine these two picaresque novels in conjunction with Murillo's *Two Women at a Window*. Specific characters and scenes in each novel will, I hope, create a visual/literary connection.

La Celestina

La Celestina is a tragicomedy – a play or novel that has aspects of both a tragedy and a comedy – written entirely in dialogue and was commonly adapted for Spanish theater troupes in the seventeenth century. *La Celestina* was first published in 1499 by an anonymous writer with the title *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*.³⁴ Current scholars believe that the book was later found by Spanish author Fernando de Rojas. He added on to what was already written and gave the novel a new name in 1502 fitting the more somber parts he added, *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*.³⁵

In the story, Celestina is an old procuress, brothel owner and former prostitute, witch, and “go-between” for her clients. In the beginning of the novel, Celestina is hired by a young knight named Calisto. The knight stumbles upon a beautiful and wealthy young woman named Melibea and is instantly infatuated. However, Melibea rejects Calisto's

³³ Janice Tomlinson and Marcia Welles, “Picturing the Picaresque: Lazarillo and Murillo's *Four Figures on a Step*” in *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement. Hispanic Issues* 12. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1996.

³⁴ Comedy of Calisto and Melibea. Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea.

³⁵ Over time the title would continue to evolve, and it did not take long for one of the main characters, Celestina, to become the eventual title as it is known today.

advances, and so he hires Celestina to make Melibea fall in love with him. In keeping with the picaresque equation, characters of higher social standing (Calisto) interact and depend on characters of a lower standing (Celestina) in order to reach their desired future.

Murillo's two women in *Two Women at a Window* hold several similarities to the characters or specific scenes in *La Celestina*. The veiled figure in *Two Women at a Window* may depict the old procuress, Celestina, as she watches over one of her prostitutes, either Areúsa or Elicia, gazing out the window at her next client. Another possibility is that Celestina is with the young Melibea, looking out the window to see Calisto in her garden.³⁶ If this is the case, Celestina may be using her veil to hide her laughter in response to the situation. She is aware of Melibea's rejection and knows that this new love is because of her clever spell.

La Lozana

An equally plausible theory is that *Two Women at a Window* is a representation of another picaresque novel, *La Lozana Andaluza*. This book was published in 1582 by Francisco Delicado, a Spanish writer, while he was living in Italy. One theory as to why he wrote and published *La Lozana Andaluza* in Italy rather than Spain is Italy's greater tolerance towards literature and works of art with erotic themes.³⁷ The female rogue in this novel, Lozana, comes from a family of ill repute; her father was a pimp and her mother a

³⁶ Melibea's private garden is where Calisto first saw Melibea. The garden is also where the two had many of their romantic trysts.

³⁷ Italy's tolerance towards these themes is part of the reason why paintings of Venetian prostitutes and courtesans exist there but not in Spain.

woman of “dubious conduct.”³⁸ As is customary in the picaresque, Lozana experiences several personal trials before she can better herself.

One scene in the novel creates a direct connection to *Two Women at a Window*. Early in the novel, Lozana is looking out of a window gazing at a handsome man traveling with an organ grinder. She calls her aunt over and begs to be introduced to him. The older woman in *Two Women at a Window* would be Lozana’s aunt, and Lozana herself leans on the sill infatuated with this unknown man. Lozana’s becoming features include “her beauty, intelligence, and fecund imagination,” and these traits are what “permit her to survive” in her “vagabondage” life and her journey to freedom.³⁹ However, it is also because of her beauty and charm that she “lost her flower of innocence” before her mother died. Once again, this particular scene may be the moment captured in *Two Women at a Window*.

Early Modern Fashion

Whether the women in *Two Women at a Window* are Spanish prostitutes, representations of picaresque female rogues, or both, their fashion can help support this argument. More specifically, the veil, the color red, and the possible wearing of makeup are signifiers of their trade.

In her 1985 article “Deviant Insiders,” Mary Elizabeth Perry explores the world of legalized prostitution in early modern Seville.⁴⁰ She discusses the beginning of prostitution in the city and the great care that went into regulating brothels. Perry argues that, based on

³⁸ Bruno Damiani. 57.

³⁹ Damiani. 57.

⁴⁰ Mary Elizabeth Perry. “Deviant Insiders: Legalized Prostitutes and a Consciousness of Women in Early Modern Seville,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 27(1), 1985.

archival evidence written by men, “the legal brothel served to control this [women’s] sexuality.” In this case, Perry is referring to the sexuality of the Spanish woman. Perry begins by discussing *Las Siete Partidas* (The Seven Parts) written by Alfonso X of Castile. This was one of the first written law codes enforcing a distinction between “bad women” (prostitutes) and “good women” (honest, godly women).⁴¹ This publication is important because of Spain’s strict social and gendered stratification.

In 1990, Perry published *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* where she uses *Two Women at a Window* as a frontispiece. Perry highlights the importance of prostitutes signifying themselves by dress and how they did so, starting in the fourteenth century and continuing to the sixteenth century. Perry argues that there were several carefully regulated and legalized brothels in Seville and other major cities in Spain. These legalized institutions were utilized by men from all walks of life. As Perry and other scholars argue, brothels were said to save reputable men from even worse sins, such as “homosexuality, incest, adultery, and propositioning honest women,” according to church doctrine.⁴² Additionally, according to early modern social mores, taking on a prostitute for a single night was far better than corrupting an honorable woman of society.⁴³ Prostitutes were considered a “necessary evil” to the church officials in order to keep society regulated.⁴⁴ Perry does not directly cite *Two Women at a Window* in her writing, however her arguments can apply to the image. Murillo paints the women with certain distinguishing

⁴¹ Ibid, 141.

⁴² Ibid, 141.

⁴³ Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 137.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 47.

attributes, the older woman's veil, and the red flower and bow on the younger woman. These attributes along with their direct gazes may be signals for a potential customer.

With many prostitutes working in Seville, I argue that they would need a clear identification of their profession. Seville's sumptuary laws enforcing this separation began in the fourteenth century with Alfonso XI.⁴⁵ The king outlawed courtesans "from wearing trailing skirts, gowns trimmed with gold or silver, or any kind of adornment [and it also] directed these women to wear yellow headdresses."⁴⁶ This law was kept in place for decades, and was added upon with Ferdinand and Isabella, stating that "prostitutes could not wear fur-trimmed gowns or those made of sheer silk."⁴⁷ Laws indicating what prostitutes could and could not wear continued into the seventeenth century, largely remaining the same as they were in the fifteenth century. These signs of occupation, the red bow, flower, and white veil, would have been easily accessible to prostitutes. There are no sources that explicitly state whether these signifiers would have been appropriate for prostitutes. Therefore, I am left to my own conjectures based on other seventeenth century depictions of prostitutes. I believe that the red bow, the red flower, and the veil in *Two Women at a Window* indicate that the women in the painting are prostitutes. I also argue that the color of the attributes has significance in identifying the women as such.

Michel Pastoureau traces the significance of the color throughout history in *Red: The History of a Color*. The chapter "Hatred of Red," focuses on how red was used as a segregation of social class in early modern Europe, which offers an interesting connection to *Two Women at a Window* as a possible use of identification for prostitutes. In

⁴⁵ Ibid, 47.

⁴⁶ Perry. "Deviant Insiders,"141.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Pastoureau's section "Love, Glory, and Beauty," he describes red as the color of love, both mystical and carnal.⁴⁸ This leads into the author's discussion of prostitution's association with the color. Prostitutes near the end of the Middle Ages were forced to wear a piece of clothing "in a garish color."⁴⁹ Pastoureau uses examples of prostitutes in Rhenish Germany who wore red mixed with yellow while prostitutes in northern Italy wore red accompanied by black.⁵⁰ In early modern Spain, the color of an individual's clothing was of great importance. Some colors were forbidden to certain social classes or categories, while others were mandated. In both cases, red is always associated with either significant importance or immoral activities and professions. For the former, having deep crimson red garments in Spain and other European countries implied great wealth and power. Conversely, the majority of the populations in Spain and throughout Europe did not have access to the dyes required to create a deep red. Therefore, small pieces of fabric in a subdued shade of red would be used as distinguishing features in seas of monochromatic costume. The color was often imposed upon those who practiced professions or occupations that relegated them to the margins of the social order, including gypsies and prostitutes.⁵¹ Pastoureau argues that the color red's association with immoral women goes back to biblical times. The whore of Babylon is described within the Bible as wearing

⁴⁸ Michel Pastoureau. *Red: The History of a Color* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 83.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ While Murillo uses red to signify sensuality in his *bodegones*, it is important to mention that he also utilized the color in religious works of art for a very different purpose. In the case of religious works, red is often meant to signify the blood that Christ shed for humanity's sins, sacrifice, and fire, a metaphor for the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ Murillo's depictions of St. John the Baptist, both child and adult, are often shown wearing red robes. Similarly, his paintings of religious women are seen in red dresses and veils.

“purple and scarlet” and rides “a monstrous red beast.”⁵² I argue that Spain’s fervent Catholic faith suggests the people’s knowledge of red representing carnal sin. Therefore, the red flower and bow Murillo paints in *Two Women at a Window* may represent something lascivious as it has for centuries.

Another Netherlandish painting that references prostitution and offers similarities to *Two Women at a Window* is Anthony van Dyck’s *Portrait of Margaret Lemon* (fig. 11).⁵³ Painted around 1637, this painting shows an intimate portrait of van Dyck’s mistress and famous courtesan.⁵⁴ Margaret is shown in three-quarter view, her head turns towards the viewer and provides direct eye contact with him or her, as do Murillo’s women in *Two Women at a Window*. Margaret’s expression shows the inner workings of her mind; that is, her stare, like that of Murillo’s two women, is active and alive. Like the younger woman leaning on the sill in *Two Women at a Window*, Margaret’s plump, red tinted lips show just a hint of a smile. Margaret’s hair is also adorned with a red flower, which matches the young woman in Murillo’s painting. Margaret’s dress reveals the top of her shoulder, her right hand delicately touching the silk fabric, perhaps even pulling it down to reveal more skin, which would be an appropriate gesture for the mistress of the artist or a courtesan. The attention to detail and texture is prevalent here just as it is in all of Murillo’s paintings. This naturalism adds to the enigmatic nature of such portraits, almost as a portal into the figure’s world.

⁵² Pastoureau, 83-84

⁵³ It is not known what images by Anthony van Dyck were accessible to Murillo while he was in Madrid. A painting similar to *Portrait of Margaret Lemon* may have been on display if this particular one was not.

⁵⁴ Frick Website. https://www.frick.org/exhibitions/van_dyck/92, all the information we have on Margaret Lemon is based on rumors and word of mouth accounts. Most scholars agree that she was Anthony van Dyck’s mistress and a fair number of scholars consider her to be a courtesan.

Girolamo Forabosco, Lambert Doomer, and Anthony van Dyck depict courtesans with similar signifiers (the veil, red flower, and red bow). In the images by Forabosco, women are often shown from the waist up, staring at the viewer just like Murillo's women. Forabosco's women are decorated with flowers, mainly in their hair though occasionally in their hands or near their breasts. *Portrait of a Courtesan* (fig. 12) also by Forabosco shows the woman touching the skin near her breast, a clear sign of sensuality. These images, while different in their painting styles from Murillo, still show several similarities. Most importantly, the direct gaze, the slight smile, exposed shoulder, and the decorative red flower in Margaret's hair are all mirrored in the women in *Two Women at a Window*.

There is one final image, again by a Netherlandish artist, that I believe compliments the theory that Murillo's women are prostitutes: *Portrait of a Venetian Courtesan* (fig. 13) by Lambert Doomer. While Forabosco's women are not depicted with veils, Lambert Doomer's *Portrait of a Venetian Courtesan* from c. 1666 shows the veil's sensual effect. In Doomer's painting we see the courtesan in three-quarter view. Behind her is a backdrop of classical architecture and sculpture with an Italianate sky. Once again, there is a direct connection between the viewer and the courtesan through her gaze. She is either lifting her veil to reveal her entire face to her client (the viewer), or to conceal it. Comparing the veil worn in Doomer's painting to another by Murillo will enhance the visual connection of the veil-wearing courtesan.

Veils

In fSeville, the veil was a common adornment for women well before the Reconquista by Christians. Jewish and Muslim women in Seville prior to the Reconquista

wore veils as a way to show their modesty. This modest practice was continued by the *Moriscas* (women of Muslim descent who accepted Christian baptism). While the Christian women in Seville adopted the veil from the *Moriscas*, its use would become somewhat muddled as the seventeenth century progressed. The veil, in some cases, would turn from a sign of religious modesty to a sign of illicit intent as I suggest in *Two Women at a Window*.

Murillo painted another *bodegón* in which the veil's seductive nature is displayed. *Young Girl Lifting her Veil* (fig. 14) c. 1670-75 shows a young girl, decidedly younger than the woman leaning on the windowsill in *Two Women at a Window*. Her shirt falls even lower off her shoulder, revealing the crevasse between her breast and arm. She wears a similar blouse, minus the stripe of darker fabric that is also tied in the front with a small red bow. The very top of a bright red skirt is just visible, the same as *Two Women at a Window*. The young girl either lifts her white veil to reveal her face, or she is putting it back to cover one half of her face.

This type of concealment, covering only one eye, called the *tapada de medio ojo*, was considered "spectacularly seductive," especially risqué in the seventeenth century, and extremely disruptive to Seville's society.⁵⁵ The *tapada*, or covered woman, refers to a Spanish woman who covered herself in a veil or mantle (a head covering made of thin fabric) while in the public sphere. The *tapada* was so controversial that Spanish historian Antonio Leon Pinelo wrote a two-volume book on the nature of the veil in 1641 called *Velos antiguos i modernos en los rostros de las mugeres, sus conveniencias i danos* (Ancient and Modern Veils on the faces of women: their conveniences and damages). For León Pinelo,

⁵⁵ Laura Bass and Amanda Wunder, "The Veiled Ladies of the Early Modern Spanish World: Seduction and Scandal in Seville, Madrid, and Lima." *Hispanic Review* 77, no. 1 (2009): 97-144.

this one-eyed fashion was “a lascivious custom, and not necessary, and should be forbidden and prohibited everywhere.”⁵⁶ The eyes, according to Pinelo, were the best features of a woman’s face, and so displaying only the best aspect of her was to “incite, beckon, and attract” as it made the women “seem what they are not.”⁵⁷ Carmen Peraita argues that “[The *tapada*] enabled behavior that was distinct from that demanded of class and gender...It introduced confusion, offering a less legible social panorama.”⁵⁸ Society in Spain in the seventeenth century was carefully stratified but “the use of veils, cloaks, mantles and thin silk wraps allowed a person ‘of status, quality, and condition’ momentarily to suspend all and any signs of identity.”⁵⁹

Images that show the seduction of the *tapada* discussed by Bass, Wunder, and Peraita include seventeenth century Spanish street scenes. Street scenes of Spanish cities allow us to see what was typically worn by all members of society. *Vista de Sevilla* (fig. 15), painted around the same time as *Two Women at a Window*, shows the bustling city on the banks of the Guadalquivir River. Boats and ships arrive and exit the city most likely with trade goods from nearby countries. The women in this painting are always seen in pairs or larger groups.⁶⁰ I would like to bring attention to the costuming of these women and the difference from what is shown in *Two Women at a Window* and other *bodegones*. Every

⁵⁶ Antonio Leon Pinelo, *Velos antiguos i modernos en los rostros de las mugeres, sus conveniencias i danos*.

⁵⁷ Tomlinson and Welles, 75.

⁵⁸ Carmen Peraita. “Like a Portable House: The Culture of *Tapado* and the Politics of Anonymity in Urban Spaces of the Seventeenth Century.” In *Spanish Fashion at the Courts of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Jose Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo, (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispanica, 2014), 294.

⁵⁹ Peraita, 294.

⁶⁰ It was deemed improper for a woman of a respectable nature to be out in the city by herself in the seventeenth century. She would almost be accompanied by servants, friends, or a male relative.

woman in *Vista de Seville* is shown wearing a black veil, dark dress, and large skirt or *guardainfante*.⁶¹ Similarly dressed women can be seen in the urban street scene of the anonymous *La Plaza Mayor de Lima* (fig. 16) from 1680.⁶² Once again the women are seen in pairs and groups wearing dark dresses with black veils. The square is enclosed on three sides and a fountain stands at the center of the plaza. Black and red carriages move around La Plaza Mayor through dozens of figures. The lower left corner of *La Plaza Mayor de Lima* shows two *tapadas*, one with a portion of her face visible and another entirely cloaked. Through the meticulous brushwork of the artist, we can see that the fabric of the veil is sheer and fine. No doubt these black veils were costlier than the white linen veils worn by workers and the lower class. Artists often took liberty with urban scenes to create enjoyable representations of the city. However, they still give the viewer an accurate sense of early modern fashion.

Carrera de San Jerónimo from the Paseo del Prado (fig. 17) attributed to Jan van Kessel III shows a crowded city square, this time however in Madrid. A plethora of people from all social classes gather near a parade of carriages. Both men and women wear more vibrant colors than in *La Plaza Mayor de Lima* and *Vista de Sevilla*. Regardless of the color scheme, many of the women are adorned with veils. It appears that the wealthier women wear long black veils while lower class women wear white veils. Three women surrounding a table of what appears to be fruit they are selling wear white veils. Another woman standing behind two women in black veils holds a child. Her disconnect with the

⁶¹ For more on the *guardainfante*, see Amanda Wunder's "Women's Fashions and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Spain: The Rise and Fall of the *Guardainfante*."

⁶² I am using Lima, Peru as a case study because of the city's strong association with Spain. "New Spain," as parts of South America were called under Habsburg rule, had similar laws and cultures to Spain.

other women and her white veil suggest that she is a servant. Women holding baskets of goods to sell don white veils as well. This separation of social class through veil color is further supported by the images of domestic women by Velázquez.

White veils are often seen in paintings depicting lower class women. *An Old Woman Cooking Eggs* (fig. 18) and *Kitchen Scene: Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (fig. 19) by Velázquez are illuminating examples. In *An Old Woman Cooking Eggs* we see an elderly woman holding an egg in her left and a spoon in her right. She is preparing to crack the egg and add it to the pot of hot water. She wears a dull brown dress and the fabric appears to be rough. Her white veil is wrinkled and dingy, showing its frequent use. Similarly, in *Kitchen Scene: Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, a woman who is almost identical to the one in *An Old Woman Cooking Eggs*, wears a dark brown dress and wrinkled white veil. It is crucial to mention that the veils discussed in these paintings do not seem to have any erotic connotations. Both of these paintings show an elderly woman working in a kitchen wearing monotone clothing and a white linen veil. This type of veil is similar in color and material to the one worn by the older woman in *Two Women at a Window*.

Murillo painted other *bodegones* showing the same white linen veil. In *Girl with Fruit and Flowers* (fig. 20) the young woman's occupation is clear with her basket of fruits and flowers. She will sell her fruits and flowers for a meager income. This also helps in interpreting the woman's lower social standing.⁶³ Equally important is the subtle sensuality that the veil brings forth in the painting. Brooke and Cherry suggest that the veil worn by the girl in *Girl with Fruit and Flowers* creates a "refined form of sensual engagement... [and

⁶³ Brook and Cherry argue that seeing women selling fruits and flowers would have been a common occurrence with the economic decline in Seville in the mid seventeenth century.

a] charming natural modesty made her all the more alluring.”⁶⁴ The same can be said for Murillo’s *Two Women at a Window*. *Old Woman Mocked by a Boy* and *Old Woman Delousing a Boy* also by Murillo show the white linen veil on seemingly lower-class women. Based on these visuals, I argue that a white linen veil was worn predominantly by women *not* in the upper echelons of Sevillian society.

Looking back at Murillo’s *Two Women at a Window*, the older woman’s veil matches that of one worn by a servant or lower-class woman in Spanish street scenes and bodegones by Velázquez and Murillo. These veils are off-white, faded from frequent use. The material is most likely a cheap linen that servants could afford with their small wages.

Tinctures and Dyes

A final theory that has not been discussed by scholars is the possibility of makeup. Scholars have not interpreted the young woman in *Two Women at a Window* to be wearing makeup, but the possibility should be mentioned. Her lips are plump and rosy, as are her cheeks. While it may simply be a way to show the young age of the woman, it may be caused by rouge coloring. Her cheeks and lips are similar to the many women, prostitutes and courtesans, painted by Forabosco and Doomer. Few scholars have delved into the significance of makeup in the seventeenth century. More significant is that no scholars have described Murillo’s young woman leaning on the sill as wearing makeup. Patricia Phillippy in her book *Painting Women: Cosmetics, Canvases, and Early Modern Culture*, writes on the importance of makeup in the seventeenth century. Phillippy argues that makeup was

⁶⁴ Brook and Cherry, 94.

primarily used by upper class women, or those of a noble or royal standing.⁶⁵ However, based on the images by Forabosco and Doomer, prostitutes also rouged their lips and cheeks to enhance their features. A series of publications (by men) from the Renaissance era to early modern show the hatred of makeup and its deviant connotations.

Leon Battista Alberti, an Italian humanist, philosopher, and architect (among other professions) stated in his treatise on home economics that “[women] wearing makeup invariably compromises her chastity.”⁶⁶ This publication from 1434 no doubt set forth the popularity of anti-makeup treatises that would continue for centuries, such as those written by Thomas Tuke and Miso-Spilus. Tuke publishes his *Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women* in 1616. It is in this treatise that Tuke calls the painted faces of women “heathenish images” that should never “be brought into the houses of God.”⁶⁷

Nearly fifty years after Tuke’s treatise, and at the same time Murillo painted *Two Women at a Window*, an English author only known by his pseudonym Miso-Spilus (Latin for “I hate spots [deformities]),” writes about his distaste for painted women in *In Wonder of Wonders*. The author writes that “these Dyes, Tinctures, and colours dawbed on womens faces, do signifie that the soul is sick within...as branded marks make known a Fugitive, so beautiful colours disclose a Harlot.”⁶⁸ This anti-cosmetic publication deplored any woman from wearing anything on her face that made it unnatural unless she was a prostitute. If we

⁶⁵ Patricia Phillippy, *Painting Women: Cosmetics Canvases, and Early Modern Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 8.

⁶⁶ *Painting Women* 8

⁶⁷ Patricia Phillippy. *Painting Women: Cosmetics, Canvases, and Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2006), 1.

⁶⁸ R. Smith. *A Wonder of Wonders or, A Metamorphosis of fair faces voluntarily transformed into foul visages, Or, an Invective against Black-spotted Faces by a well-willer to modest matrons and virgins*. 1662.

consider Murillo's young woman in *Two Women at a Window* to have on these "dyes and tinctures," it further supports their identity as prostitutes.

The context for the rouged makeup used in Forabosco's paintings of courtesans and other women can be understood by looking again to Smith's *Wonder of Wonders*. Smith states that "the art or craft of painting or tincturing of women's faces is ordinarily used, without any sense of evil in it...and so by long continuance [they] may ignorantly take up and practice that fashion with impunity."⁶⁹ Venetian "Curtizans" according to Smith, were "(the most impudent Harlots of all other...)." ⁷⁰ The younger of Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* could be guilty of this defilement just as Forabosco's courtesans and Doomer's *Venetian Courtesan*.

Conclusion

In Murillo's *Two Women at a Window*, we see two women of different ages staring at the viewer. The younger of the two leans on the windowsill, also acting as a framing device for the composition. She smiles subtly and appears to be in a relaxed state. The older of the two women peeks out from behind the wooden window shutter. She lifts her white veil to shield her mouth as she stifles laughter. The women's direct gaze and their location within a window frame are reminiscent of many Netherlandish genre paintings. Through examining paintings by Netherlandish artist such as Jan Steen, erotic connotations, a common theme in the Netherlands, begin to reveal themselves in Murillo's Spanish

⁶⁹ Phillippy, 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

painting. Additionally, the likelihood of a Netherlandish patron, or someone familiar with Netherlandish art, seems to ground itself.

I have argued that the women in *Two Women at a Window* are representations of everyday Spanish prostitutes or prostitutes/rogue figures from a Spanish picaresque novel. *La Celestina* and *La Lozana Andaluza* offer the most similarities to Murillo's painting. For the argument of *La Celestina*, the young woman may be Melibea accompanied by the elderly Celestina (the woman behind the shutter). For *La Lozana Andaluza*, the elder woman in the painting could be Lozana's Aunt, while Lozana herself is looking out of the window gazing at a handsome man. If Murillo's women are not these characters, then they are most certainly Sevillian prostitutes. Attributes including the red bow and red flower worn by the young woman distinguish her from other women. For centuries, prostitutes were required to wear a form of identification and I believe that these red items represent the woman's occupation. Additionally, the older woman's veil holds equally sensual connotations. A white veil is worn by lower class women throughout Spain. Paintings of servants, like Velazquez's kitchen workers, and Spanish city scenes from the seventeenth century support this claim.

Before this thesis, the possible identities of Murillo's women in *Two Women at a Window* were simply suggestions based on previous interpretations. Scholars provide past titles of the artwork and theories to who the women represent. While some think the figures are innocent girls looking out of a window, other scholars think they are prostitutes or picaresque figures. However, these scholars fail to expand on their arguments and their suggestions remain suggestions. By using a variety of scholarly sources and

contemporaneous seventeenth century visuals, I hope that Murillo's two women can now be understood as Spanish prostitutes or prostitutes from a picaresque novel.

The significance of Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* lies in its erotic subject matter. Murillo is the first Spanish artist of the seventeenth century to paint such images. Not even Velázquez, who is well known for his *bodegones*, ever painted an image with the sexual implications of Murillo's art. Considering Spain's fervent Catholic culture, *Two Women at a Window* is the first painting of the Golden Age that depicts, so unashamedly, Spanish prostitutes or sexually charged picaresque characters. This in and of itself is worth more scholarly investigation. The avenues for further research regarding *Two Women at a Window* are numerous and I have brought up several: Netherlandish connections, picaresque representations, fashion, veiling, and makeup. Digging deeper into even one of these facets may solidify my argument that the figures in Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* are a rare depiction of lascivious women in early modern Spanish paintings.

FIGURES



Figure 1. Bartolome Esteban Murillo, *Two Women at a Window*, c. 1655-1660.



Figure 2. Michael Sweerts, *A Street Scene*, c. 1640.



Figure 3. Frans Hals, *The Gypsy Girl*, c. 1628-30.

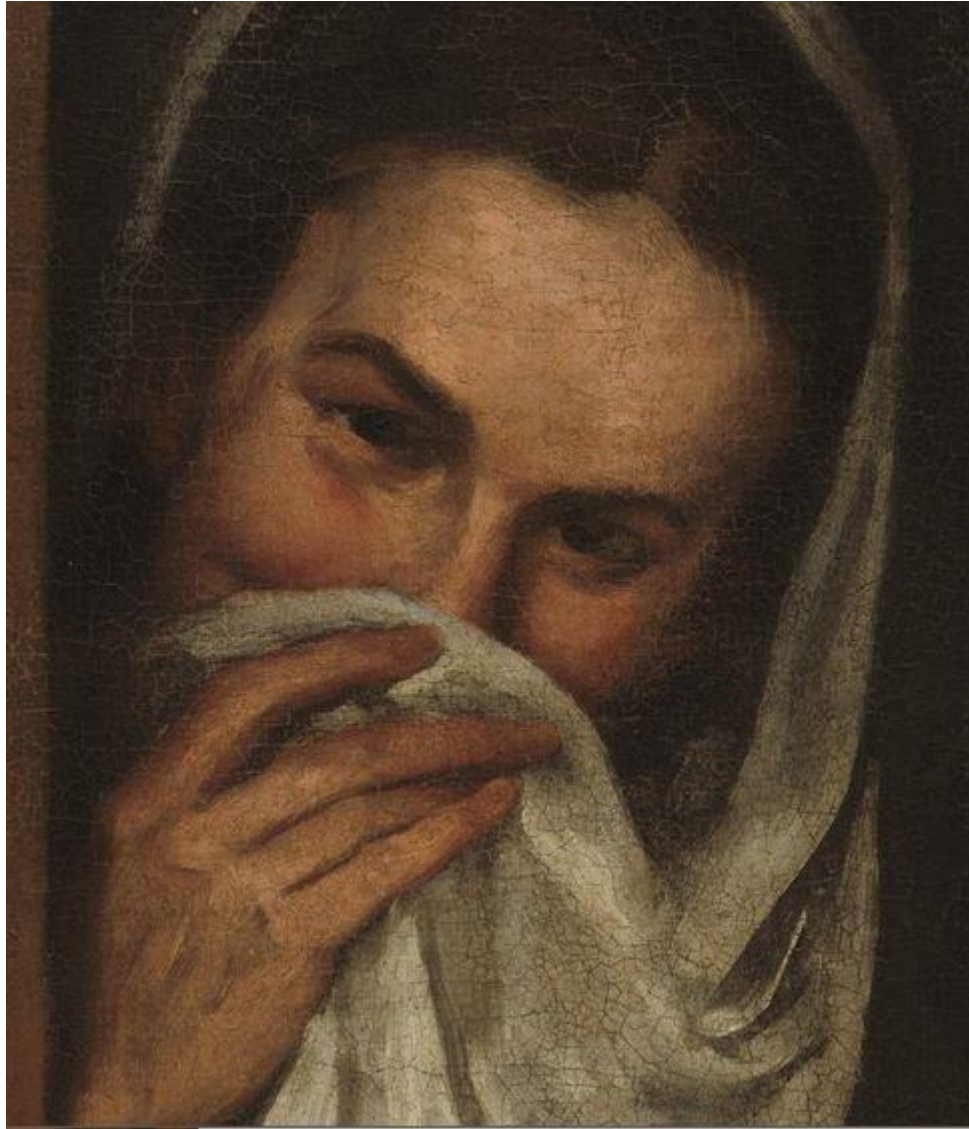


Figure 4. Murillo, detail of *Two Women at a Window*.



Figure 5. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Girl at a Window*, 1645.



Figure 6. Jan Steen, *As the Old Sing, So Pipe the Young*, c. 1668-1670.



Figure 7. Steen, *Twelfth Night*, c. 1660.



Figure 8. Steen, *The Wench*, c. 1660-1662



Figure 9. Steen, *Woman at her Toilet*, c. 1665-1670.



Figure 10. Murillo, *Four Figures on a Step*, c. 1655-1660.

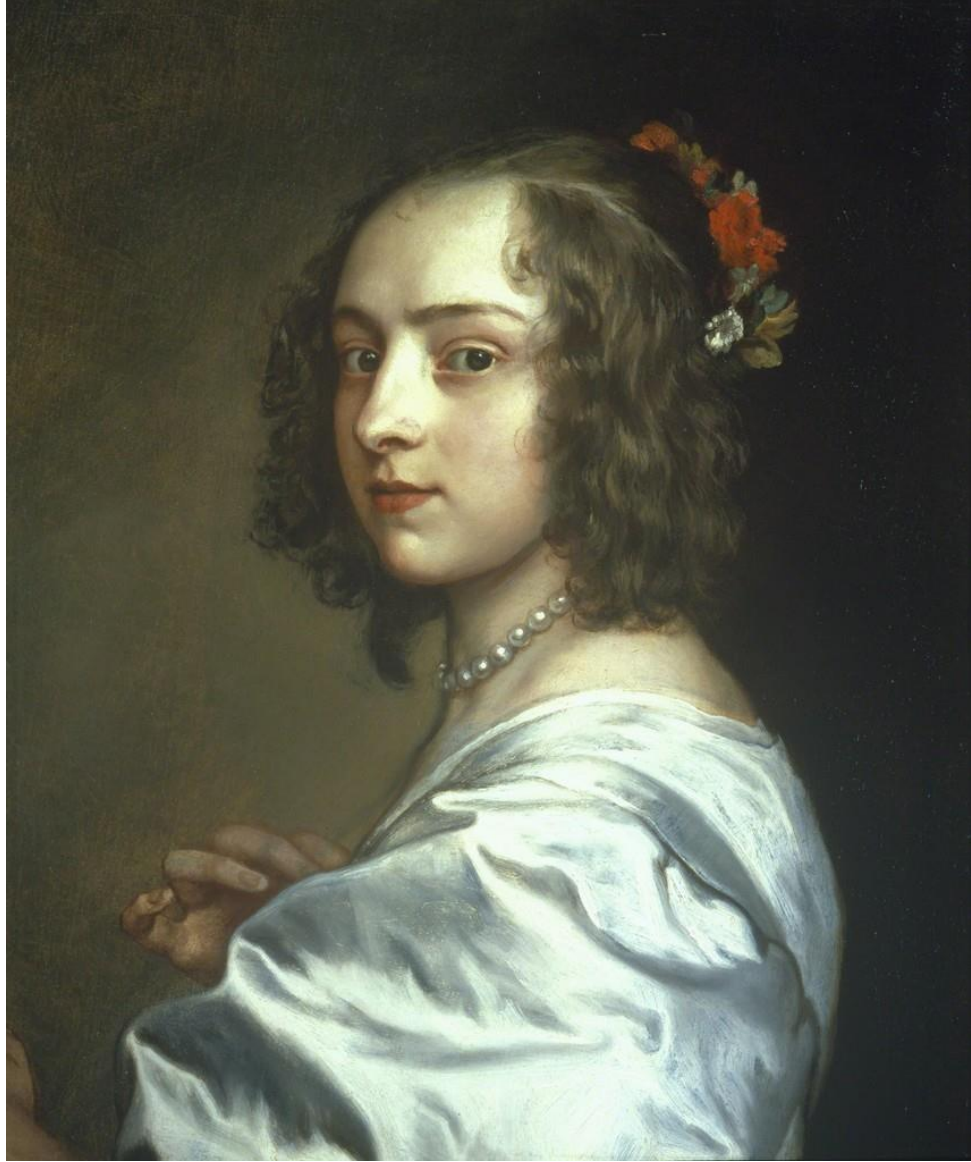


Figure 11. Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Margaret Lemon*, c. 1637.



Figure 12. Girolamo Forabosco, *Portrait of a Courtesan*, seventeenth century.



Figure 13. Lambert Doomer, *Portrait of a Venetian Courtesan*, 1666.



Figure 14. Murillo, *Young Girl Lifting her Veil*, c. 1670-75.



Figure 15. Anonymous, *Vista de Sevilla*, c. 1660.



Figure 16. *La Plaza Mayor de Lima*, 1680.



Figure 17. Attributed to Jan van Kessel III, *Carrera de San Jerónimo from the Paseo del Prado*, 1686.



Figure 18. Diego Velázquez, *An Old Woman Cooking Eggs*, 1618.



Figure 19. Velázquez, *Kitchen Scene: Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1618.



Figure 20. Murillo, *Girl with Fruit and Flowers*, c. 1655-1660.

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