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Music, Morality, and Mayhem: Anton Möller the Elder's Drawings from Marienburg (1587)

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Abstract

This article examines two drawings by the Prussian artist Anton Möller the Elder (1563–1611), based in Danzig [Gdańsk]. In 1587, Möller spent time in Marienburg [Malbork] near Danzig, fresh from his post-apprenticeship travels. These drawings evidence his tuition in Northern Renaissance styles, subject matter, and disguised symbolism—embodying contemporary Lutheran ideologies of temperance, morality, and the powerful sway of music. While scholarship on Möller's works is well established (mainly in Polish and German sources in brief catalogue-style entries), this article represents an in-depth analysis of the symbolism in his works—primarily missing from modern scholarship, especially in the English language. Möller's *Folk Fair before Marienburg* is entertaining, sensational, and serves as a graphic warning not to fall prey to alcohol's destruction of moral character. Möller directly copies figures from Northern Renaissance artists working in the folk fair genre—I discuss these connections and symbolism. Musicians are given an incendiary role in the scene, spurring revelers on to indulge in base emotions and vices. In stark contrast, Möller's *An Elegant Reception with Christburg* [*Dzierzgoń*] *Castle in the Background*, places music at the center of the scene, depicts "active listening," and provides a visual message on how music can cultivate a pure mind and heart, if one's moral compass is properly attuned.

Keywords: Anton Möller the Elder; temperance; Northern Renaissance; folk fair genre; music; disguised symbolism; Martin Luther; pen-and-ink drawing

1. Introduction

Anton Möller the Elder (1563–1611) was an immensely talented artist who flourished in Danzig in the last decades of the sixteenth century and first decade of the seventeenth century. Möller worked in a variety of media, including paintings on panel, canvas, large-scale ceiling and wall murals, as well as pen-and-ink drawings, engravings, woodcuts, and paintings on paper. In this article, I explore two drawings made by Anton Möller the Elder in Marienburg: *Folk Fair before Marienburg* (Möller the Elder 1587b), an obscene and rowdy scene full of drinking, fighting, and vice; and *An Elegant Reception with Christburg* [*Dzierzgoń*] *Castle in the Background* (Möller the Elder 1587a), a joyous scene in the countryside focused on refined behavior, elegant dancers, and the positive effects of music. In these works, he used music and musical instruments to enhance his chosen message to great comedic, scandalous, or moralizing effect, demonstrating not only his familiarity with music but also his understanding of how music can influence the minds and behaviors of its listeners.

Through a careful examination of these two drawings, I present them as opposing case studies on how Möller used borrowed and individually chosen symbolism to communicate

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contemporary Lutheran ideologies of temperance, morality, and the powerful sway of music as well as his tuition and interest in Northern Renaissance styles and subject matter. In particular, Möller utilized disguised symbolism, a Northern artistic strategy first identified and explained by Erwin Panofsky in reference to Early Netherlandish paintings (Panofsky 1934). Disguised symbolism was (and is) a hidden visual language that could educate, instruct, or warn the viewer against what was considered real dangers in their lives—to their physical bodies, their social and cultural personae, as well as the fate of their eternal souls. Building on Panofsky's layered interpretation of Early Modern Netherlandish art, in the 1970s Eddy de Jongh specifically used the lens of "disguised symbolism" to explore religious and moral commentary in seventeenth-century artworks, finding strong connections between everyday objects (as represented, for instance, in the still-lifes and domestic scenes of the period) and a visual language that would have been understood by well-educated viewers of the works themselves. Furthermore, de Jongh defines the accurate "reading" of an artwork as a culturally-specific action, requiring the visual depictions of individual objects, people, and scenes to adhere to a certain set of definitions in order for the underlying message to be communicated "in their historical context, in relation to other cultural phenomena, and to specific ideas" (Jongh 1999).

For Möller's two works discussed in this article, I argue that the moral symbolism and opposing visual language of these drawings are best understood through contrasting case studies, although I do not suggest that they constitute a pair as conceived by Möller. Instead, *Folk Fair* can be understood as a drawing planned in advance, taking directly from Northern Renaissance artists of the period, full of disguised symbolism in the "peasant" genre. The *Elegant Reception* can be seen as a moralizing response to his *Folk Fair*, perhaps with less advanced planning by Möller regarding the moral and musical symbolism but nevertheless containing a powerful message for those willing to "listen."[1] Music's ability to shape our nature and behavior is an ancient concept, but it was perhaps most effectively communicated in this context by Martin Luther, who in his preface to Georg Rhau's 1538 *Praefatio zu den Symphoniae Iucundae* wrote:

> "For whether you wish to cheer the miserable, or deter the cheerful, encourage the despairing, break the proud, calm the lovers, soothe the haters—and who shall count all those masters of the human heart, the affections and impulses or spirits that drive all virtues or vices?—what could you find more efficacious than music herself?"[2] (Loewe 2013)

I would like to begin, however, by introducing the work of Anton Möller the Elder to a wider audience, including a brief discussion of his early years and his success as an artist after he moved to Danzig.

2. Early Years and Artistic Development

Anton Möller the Elder was born in Königsberg (modern Kaliningrad, Russia) in 1563, the son of a medical doctor in the court of Albrecht I Duke of Prussia. In 1578, he began a seven-year apprenticeship based in Danzig that immersed him in the study of Dutch, Flemish, and German Renaissance masters, drawing, engraving, painting, and portraiture. Möller's works were heavily influenced in theme, composition, and technique by engravings and drawings of Albrecht Dürer, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Pieter van der Borcht the Elder, Hans Sebald Beham, and Hans Holbein as well as other influences from wider print culture (Tylicki 2005). At the end of his apprenticeship, c. 1585, it is believed he travelled across Royal Prussia, Germany, and potentially the Netherlands before returning first to Marienburg in 1587 and then settling in Danzig around 1588 (Tylicki 2005). Claims that Möller travelled in Italy have been debated by past scholars, without a definitive conclusion.

It was in Danzig that Möller played a leading role in establishing a painting workshop that had strong technical and thematic influences on regional artists of the period. Other artists connected to this workshop included Danzig-born Hermann Han (1580–1626/27), as well as Dutch painter and architect Hans Vredemann de Vries (1527–1604), Prussian (with Flemish descent) Isaac van den Blocke (c. 1574–c. 1626) (Szmelter-Fausek and Olszewska-Świetlik 2018), as well as later artists such as Adolf Boys (1612–c. 1680), who carried the style well into the mid-seventeenth century (Jasniewicz-Downes 2005).

From the analysis of materials used for wooden panels, canvas structures, and ingredients in Möller's canvas ground preparations and paints, Bożena Szmelter-Fausek and Justyna Olszewska-Świetlik have determined that not only his style, but also his preparatory techniques and materials were heavily influenced (if not fully based) on Netherlandish, Flemish, and German techniques of the period. Indeed, while Möller painted primarily on wooden panels, he was identified as one of the first to introduce the use of linen canvases to Danzig after its establishment in the Netherlands and alongside major European art centers (Szmelter-Fausek and Olszewska-Świetlik 2018).

In the following years after Möller's return to Danzig around 1588, he became a sought-after portraitist for local patrician families—his intimate, individual portraits are beautifully expressive and detailed, with rich fabrics and life-like realism (See, for instance (Möller the Elder 1598, 1597, 1608)). He was commissioned to create large-scale works for Artus "Arthur's" Court in Danzig (1597), where he painted an emotionally charged *Last Judgement* scene (Miziołek 2005).[3] He was also commissioned to paint a number of biblical scenes on the ceiling of Thor (Toruń) city hall (1608) (Klukowska 1993).[4] For his smaller works on paper for individual clients, Möller's expressive, detailed style showcased his talent and sense of humor, especially in his miniature painted works for *Stammbücher* (*liber amicorum* or friendship/autograph books) popular in reformed religious circles from the late sixteenth century onward (See, for instance (Möller the Elder c. 1606–1609)).

However, before his large-scale works, before the patrician portraits, *Stammbuch* commissions, and his establishment of a Danzig workshop, a young Möller spent time in Marienburg fresh from his post-apprentice travels. It is here that we find Möller utilizing the techniques, subject matter, and visual language likely developed during his apprenticeship, as well as adopting the ideologies of Lutheranism that prevailed in the Hanseatic city of Danzig and the surrounding areas.

3. Moral Degradation, Religious Reformation, and the Power of Music—A Case Study

From the thirteenth century, Marienburg was a medieval Teutonic stronghold near the Hanseatic port of Elbing (Elbląg) on the Baltic Sea. Marienburg's castle, built by knights of the Teutonic Order as a Prussian regional hub, had been used as a Polish royal residence for approximately 130 years by the time of Möller's sojourn (Gloger 1903). He completed several pen and ink drawings while there, some based on observed scenes and others inspired by his experiences. Möller's *Folk Fair before Marienburg* [*Zabawa ludowa pod Malborkiem, Kirmes in Marienburg*], (Figure 1; Möller the Elder 1587b) is a depiction of a village celebration in which the excesses of alcohol and loose morals dramatically and symbolically unfold across the scene. The drawing is initialed "AM" in ligature and dated 14 May 1587 in the top left corner of the drawing. For this work, Möller draws on specific religious and societal imagery of his likely patrician audience, favoring Lutheranism and making strong allusions to the temperance movement and, without its guiding principles, a fall from God's grace.



Figure 1. Anton Möller the Elder, *Folk Fair before Marienburg* [*Zabawa ludowa pod Malborkiem*], 1587. Berlin Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. KdZ 875.

In the drawing, we see a central scene of revelry and dancing, a table with party-goers playing "Nine Men's Morris" or "mills" (Anonymous n.d.),[5] a group of women with an infant at the front of the scene, as well as an enlarged group of key individuals to the right forefront. First, however, we turn our attention to the individuals providing the soundtrack to this wild scene. Almost hidden amongst the revelers, we see two musicians playing bowed string instruments in the central left area near the tavern before the dancers (Figure 2). These "fiddles" have long bodies and are both held in a downwards position. The downward playing position corresponds closely to the design and musical tradition of the Polische Geigen (Polish fiddle) included in Martin Agricola's 1529 *Musica instrumentalis deudsch* (Agricola 1529) and mentioned later by Michael Praetorius in his *Syntagma Musicum* of 1619 (Praetorius 1619).



Figure 2. Möller the Elder, *Folk Fair before Marienburg*, detail of musicians.

The Polish fiddle was played with a "nail" technique that used the front of the nail to stop the string from the side, as confirmed by Agricola's description and more recent archaeological and ethnomusicological research on a sixteenth-century fiddle discovered in Płock. The Płock fiddle, discovered in November 1985, was found about 200 km south of Marienburg in a deep well that had been used as a rubbish pit (Dahlig 1994). Its modern reconstruction by Polish scholars and research into potential playing techniques led scholars and players such as Maria Pomianowska to adopt a nail technique, necessitated by the wide neck, extended height of the strings over the fingerboard, and exaggerated space between strings.[6] Ewa Dahlig (now Dahlig-Turek), in her 2001 book *Ludowe instrumenty skrzypcowe w Polsce* (*Folk Fiddle Instruments in Poland*), makes the convincing argument that the term Polische Geigen refers more to the playing technique (i.e., playing by holding the instrument in a downwards position and pressing the strings on the side with the front of the nail) rather than a specific instrument body shape or design (Dahlig 2001). Seen from behind and mainly obscured, the larger bowed string instrument appears to be of a tenor (intermediate) size but held lower before the player.

Examining the musicians themselves, they are dressed in very basic vests or coats secured at the waist and reaching their knees. They wear hats that are circled with fruits, flowers, or other plants protruding at unkempt angles. Möller depicts a similar hat with plants in another engraving of two itinerant workers or wanderers from just under a year later on 14 February 1588 (Möller the Elder 1588). Like the Marienburg musicians, the older man has grass, flowers, or other plants in his hat, but he also has flies hovering around him. His disheveled appearance, the hole in the knee of his clothing, and implied dirtiness confirm his itinerant status and his place at the lower end of contemporary social hierarchies. Möller used the same visual language in both his drawings of the *Old Wanderer* and the *Folk Fair before Marienburg*, reinforcing longstanding negative connections between rural or agricultural communities and the moral standing of their "low-brow" dance music. In the first case study drawing it can be argued (unsurprisingly) that the pair of musicians play popular music for dancing and drinking. Within the considered visual narrative of vice and morality carefully crafted by Möller, small details such as the musicians' clothing appear to be specifically chosen to visually communicate their local countryside origins, reinforcing the negatively-associated appearance of the musicians with the type of music played, as well as the music's implied emotional and moral effects on the listeners.

Coupled with the dangers of alcohol consumption, the powerful role of music to corrupt its listeners towards vice is on full display in this festive rural scene. The dancers closest to the musicians look happily engaged in a lively dance with an upbeat tempo. Scanning across the drawing from left to right, however, the scene quickly becomes out of control. Dancing turns to drunken rambles and violence; at the far right, a man and woman are hitting each other with sticks. There is a large, central mêlée below, and people are trampled to the ground in unbridled violence. The progression of emotion in this group as it flows across the page, from dancing to fighting, highlights the influence of a vital but invisible influence on the behavior of the revelers: music.

Möller did not shy away from the message he wished to impart; instead, the message was made abundantly, if not repugnantly, clear: from small details such as lost shoes and broken bottles, to more overt and gratuitous depictions of vice, indulgence, religious conflict, and a world turned upside down. In the front of the raucous scene, we see a mother, her child, and women sitting together (Figure 3). At first, the scene may look innocent enough—women enjoying the company of a child—but I would argue that this is not the case. The mother and baby pairing recalls the imagery of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus, or at least alludes to the wholesomeness and innocence of a mother-infant bond. In the group, a second woman offers the baby an apple, an overt reference to the fall of

Adam and Eve and the first original sin. The baby can be seen enticed by the apple, pushing his mother's breast away. At his tender age, he is already corrupted from wholesome purity and attracted to vice, as are so many others in this drawing—a visual representation of Luther's views on Adamic "hereditary sin:" that we are all born guilty (Bayer 2008). Between them, the outstretched apple replaces a third woman's breast, further reinforcing the opposing symbolism of the breast and apple.



Figure 3. Möller the Elder, *Folk Fair before Marienburg*, detail of women and infant.

This third, central woman has roses in her hair and roses very prominently set as decoration on the front of her bodice. Her eyes are lowered, and she has a slight, peaceful smile. I believe that this central female figure was meant to represent the Blessed Virgin Mary, as the crown of roses has a strong connection to the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the praying of the rosary.[7] On either side of the proposed symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we can see an older woman and a man. His hair is disheveled as he faces the central Mary figure, begging or in some desperate, wistful state. The rose as a symbol also gives context to the people at either side: just as the lily represented the purity of the Virgin, the rose represented her charity, as referenced by the twelfth-century abbot and venerated Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), who wrote: "…oh Mary, violet of humility, lily of chastity, rose of charity…"(Gibson 1977)[8]. Saint Bernard, co-founder of the Knights Templar, also continued this symbolism by contrasting Eve with the thorn.

In his positioning of a woman offering an apple to an innocent in front of the ever-present charity and purity of Mary, Möller could be encapsulating the message of his work—evil triumphing over good; however, there is always a choice and the option to return to the path of salvation. If we accept the interpretation that Möller depicted a symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary, this elderly pair could represent the Catholic practice of praying to the Virgin in a divine context—a custom strongly opposed by Martin Luther in his later life.

Looking closer at their intimate scene, I propose that Möller included a clue that pointed to the left woman's profession as a sex worker. The bells surrounding the woman's waist to the left in Möller's depiction could represent sex work, and the crimped nature of

the bells can be seen closest to the closure at her side. Bells have been identified with sex workers in the medieval and Early Modern periods. In medieval Bologna, for instance, sex workers were obliged by law to wear bells to be instantly recognized and heard, not unlike lepers, before they were seen. In fifteenth-century Florence, women were required to wear bells in their hair to signify their status as sex workers (McCarthy 2015; Kajdańska 2020). While bells were also a fashionable addition to clothing and belts dangling on cords from a girdle, bells also represented the fool and folly in the sixteenth century. It is not necessary to choose among these interpretations, as symbolism hidden in everyday objects of the period allowed for a multi-faceted reading of these images based on scripture, literary references, and cultural and personal knowledge.

The decoration hanging from her girdle may further reinforce her portrayed sexual debauchery—I propose that this decorative element was actually a stylized (and removed) "chastity belt," its image used even in the sixteenth century as a sarcastic joke by German artists (Baldung Grien c. 1540).[9] Here, while the proportions and shape are not exact, we see the two sections connected by a round clasp—the top elongated shape has a toothed central section, and the lower section has a pronounced central vertical slit. Modern scholarship has established that the wearing of an actual chastity belt was just about a complete myth of the Victorian age, but its image in the sixteenth century was still meant to symbolize the sexually available woman and a man's insecurities about becoming a cuckold. In Möller's image, she has (what I interpret as) a chastity belt that is on full display, a further symbol of her sexual availability and a life of sin.

In the forefront of his drawing, Möller inundates the viewer with symbols of female "sexual deviance" and vice. While Panofsky connected empty or discarded women's shoes as a sign of fidelity and a woman's place in the home (Panofsky 1934), Möller's placement of these shoes in an outside, non-domestic domestic environment more convincingly symbolized a woman's loosening of sexual mores and female adultery (Nastyuk 2017) or as a reminder for women that their place is in the home (Franits 2017). A dog nearby appears to be barking at the shoes, a symbolic contrast to the discarded shoes as a representation of fidelity. Hidden in plain view just above the shoes, we see a black spade or a leaf, in the center of the width of the work. In this heavily laden work of moral symbolism, it is likely to be the ace of spades. While the solitary ace of spades would take up a range of both positive and negative connotations in the centuries to come, at the end of the sixteenth century, it was seen as bad luck, a moralizing reminder in the style of the "vanitas" genre of the futility of earthly pursuits and the need to repent for one's sins. Seen on the folds of the dress of the woman holding her baby, the suit of spades was also associated with the landed gentry (as well as the military), hinting at her identity in this scene as the wife of the landowner, represented in the far right foreground of the painting. Perhaps we can also understand this spade to represent a warning, to not gamble with the fate of one's soul for transient earthly pleasures.

I propose that the theme of vice and sex work also continues to the central couple (Figure 3). Instead of a bride and groom or a happy couple being depicted, here the intention appears to be much more sinister, reinforcing a theme of a world turned on its head, of lust and vice. The man smiles with an intense gaze fixated on his dancing companion and with a strong grip on the woman's hand, who also wears a girdle with bells. The woman looks away, potentially in silent shame, fear, or a feigned coquettishness.

Throughout the scene, Möller connected themes of excess and sinful behavior to drinking alcohol. Indeed, the reformed religious Lutheran virtues of temperance can be understood through their absence: the empty, discarded tankards, the broken spirit bottles surrounding an expensive (unlocked) spirit chest in the bottom left corner. The gratuitous central image makes no qualms about what will befall those who let themselves

be tempted by alcohol. A man vomits on the ground, while a pig looks to eat what has been expelled. Möller reinforces the connection that Martin Luther made between pigs and unsavory behavior, especially around drinking and gluttony (Stewart 2014). Alison G. Stewart highlights a similar sentiment held by German Theologian Sebastian Franck (1499–1542), who wrote in his 1528 treatise *On the Horrible Vice of Drunkenness* (*Von dem greulichen Laster der Trunkenheit*), that only pigs eat what the drunkard leaves in his pants (Stewart 2014).

To the right of the image in the forefront, a man, assumedly the landowner of the village, reacts aggressively to a traveler on a Polish section of the St. James Way (Santiago de Compostela) pilgrimage route (Figure 4). The traveler wears a capotain (pilgrim's) hat with a seashell, the symbol of St. James. He holds a wallet or money purse out, perhaps asking for a donation to support his pilgrimage, but the nobleman grabs the traveler's sleeve aggressively. Below them, the dog growls menacingly at the traveler's rosary, and an elderly man looks on in shock. It is unlikely that this featured character was a patrician élite of Marienburg, Danzig or other local town: his rough and uncouth expression, hose (stockings) with multiple stitched repairs that most of the "peasants" didn't have in this work—suggesting he may have been considered by Möller to be only just above the heathen mess: landed gentry in name only, without wealth or sophistication. The landowner holds a partially-drunk beer (perhaps not his first), which may have been the reason for his hostile behavior. Möller's visual message here communicates that alcohol was dangerous to upholding one's moral character; charity has disappeared, and the pilgrim is only met with threatening behavior.

Above the landowner and traveler, two allegories of transformation add further commentary to the scene. The female shape of the tree's trunk calls to mind the allegory of Daphne, who was saved from the infatuated clutches of Apollo by being turned into a laurel tree, while a spider in the tree's branches suggests the allegory of Arachne, who was turned into a spider by Athena for her arrogance and boastfulness. Behind the nobleman, a curious bulbous weapon or walking staff of a younger man also wearing a capotain hat points upward to between the "legs" of Daphne, taking on a phallic, corporeal nature representing Apollo's desire to sexually overpower her, further reinforcing the allegory. These additions could allude to not only maintaining religious and moral resistance against the indulgences of Catholicism, but also to be wary of alcohol, as it created a misplaced arrogance that clouded the judgment of the nobleman in his antagonism of a religious pilgrim.

An inscription written by Möller himself on the back of the drawing gives the name of the recipient or patron of the drawing, as well as a second recipient just two years later. The dedication notes:

> In German: "I, Antonius Müller have ( ) the honorable Johann Kretzmer/This too long difficult memory has been cast aside ( )/The 14th of May Ann. 1587, in Marienburg"
>
> In Latin: "The painter was happy to paint things/I accepted the small task as a friend. After the death of Johann Kretzmer, the same Antonius Mollerus author/for the sake of friendship and perpetual memory, sent to M. Alexandro Glasero/November 6, 1589./Don't let the cobbler go above the edge [of the shoe]" ("cobbler, keep to your last").[10] (Tylicki 2005)

The first dedicatee, Johann Kretzmer, has not yet been identified; it can be confirmed by death date (c. 1587–1589) that he was not Johann Kretschmar (1558–1624), pastor at Weßnig in Torgau and compiler of almanacs (Herbst 2023). After Kretzmer's death, Möller gave the drawing to Alexander Glaser (1534–1594), a Lutheran pastor at the Church of St. Barbara in Danzig who was also a bibliophile, music lover, and created the famous

1588 sundial clock (gnomon) in Danzig that displayed equal, unequal hours, Polish, and Italian hours (Januszajtis 2021). Möller notes that Glaser too was a friend, and adds at the end a shortened form of the Latin proverb "ne supra crepidam sutor iudicaret" ("let the cobbler not judge above the shoe"), from Pliny the Elder's first century publication *Naturalis Historia* (Pliny the Elder 1906). The proverb, urging others not pass judgment above their experience or expertise, was also included by Erasmus of Rotterdam in his 1534 *Adagia*, a book of Greek and Latin proverbs and indexed under arrogance (Erasmus of Rotterdam 1558). It is possible that this was encouragement for Glaser to harden himself against negative comments from "ignorant" critics, or it could have been a warning to Glaser himself.



Figure 4. Möller the Elder, *Folk Fair before Marienburg*, detail of lord and religious pilgrim.

While drawing on the overall themes of the folk or "peasant" festival genre, Möller took inspiration for his work from Northern Renaissance artists, often directly copying dancing couples from artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Hans Sebald Beham, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and Pieter van der Borcht the Elder.[11] For Möller's dancers closest to the musicians (Figure 1), where the woman is seen holding hands with her dance partner (facing away), he directly copied the positions of Dürer's *Peasant Couple Dancing* of 1514 (Dürer 1514)

(Figure 5) and Sebald Beham's seventh engraving in a series of twelve in the *The Peasant Wedding or the Twelve Months: 7 Jacob Hewmon* (Beham 1546).



Figure 5. Albrecht Dürer, *Peasant Couple Dancing*, 1514. Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 33.79.1.

Möller also directly copied dancers who have been identified in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Wedding Dance* painting of 1566, but were likely also taken by Bruegel the Elder from earlier artists. Much of the positioning of Möller's dancers appears to come from Hans Sebald Beham's engravings, including one couple where the man twirls the woman under her raised arm (this position was included in dancing scenes by many Northern Renaissance artists), as well as another copied couple in a drunken embrace who seem to have forgotten the dancing altogether. Several couples across the scene dance with the man leading the woman forward with her raised hand, copying figures in Hans Sebald Beham's *Large Village Fair* (Beumkes 2022; Beham 1535).

Stepping back from just the dancing scene, Möller must have also been familiar with van der Borcht's 1559 engraving of a *Folk Fair* (*Boerenkermis*, Figure 6) (Borcht the Elder 1559), an engraving after Pieter Bruegel the Elder) perhaps from his apprenticeship years and travels. Möller copies the deplorable scenes of excess, replacing van der Borcht's central images of a woman urinating in public and a child seen defecating from behind with Marienburg's central image of a man vomiting—an image of excess also taken perhaps from Sebald Beham's *Large Village Fair* (Beham 1535). Möller also almost exactly copies van der Borcht's poultry copulating at the front of his engraving, a symbol of animalistic lust (to the far left in Figure 1).



Figure 6. Pieter van der Borcht the Elder, *Folk Fair* [*Boerenkermis*], 1559. Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2000.437.

What is also remarkable regarding Möller's depiction of musical instruments in the *Folk Fair before Marienburg* is that, although he took inspiration from or directly copied many visual elements from works created by Northern Renaissance artists working in the folk festival genre, he specifically chose to represent only bowed string instruments in his drawing. In the Northern Renaissance works Möller imitated, musicians on bagpipes or pipe and drum almost exclusively provided the music in these exuberant and celebratory dance scenes. Contemporary folk celebration works do exist with fiddle players, such as Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder's (c. 1520–c. 1590) *A Fête at Bermondsey* or *A Marriage Feast at Bermondsey* (Gheeraerts the Elder c. 1571), where a similar pairing of large and small fiddles played on the arm delights the central group of dancers. It must be noted, however, that the scene at Bermondsey was a very tame affair in comparison to Möller's wild free-for-all.

A copy in the vein of Möller's folk fair exists that was once attributed to Anton Möller the Elder himself; however, it has been reattributed to his son, Anton Möller the Younger (1592–1632), and will not be discussed in detail in this article (Möller the Younger 1617). The work, dated three decades later c. 1617 after his father's death in 1611, takes Möller the Elder's flashpoint idea to the extreme—riotous excess has incensed the central character, and through his rapid movement, we are witnessing the split-second before his sword is unsheathed and potentially used to disastrous effect. I would argue, however, that the son's copy focuses more on the more superficial imagery of drinking and aggression and does not appear to use the multi-layered symbolism found in Anton Möller the Elder's drawing.

Taken as a whole, Anton Möller the Elder's drawing of the *Folk Fair* is entertaining, sensational, and scandalous, and serves as a graphic warning. The musicians are subtly depicted but are given an incendiary role, providing an energetic and potentially raucous soundtrack that, when paired with alcohol, spurred revelers on to indulge in base desires and emotions. The transformative and violent effects of music and drinking remind the viewer not fall prey to alcohol's destruction of moral character. By heeding this warning, the intended patrician viewers (i.e., educated, cosmopolitan, and Lutheran) could also find amusement, titillation, and affirmation of their élite status in this scene, safe in the knowledge that *they* are above animalistic behaviors and will not be swayed by the examples of vice and Catholic "idolatry" on display. Connecting Möller's message to Martin Luther's

views on music (Korsch 2021), the work's graphic depictions demonstrate that the rural community, intoxicated by alcohol, rage, and lust, cannot appreciate the beauty of the music but instead use it to rush headlong into their own inherent immorality:

> "...a person who...does not regard it [music] as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs." (Kartawidjaja 2021)

4. Music's Role in Cultivating Balance, Morality, and Measured Restraint—A Counter Case-Study

In stark contrast, Möller's *An Elegant Reception with Christburg Castle in the Background* (Möller the Elder 1587a),[12] places music at the center of the scene, providing a strong message on how music can cultivate a pure mind and heart, if one's moral compass is properly attuned (Figure 7). Unlike the previous drawing, there is no evidence of vice or violence and the "volume" of this work is decidedly lower—a multi-sensory representation in each work that connects visual "noise" to auditory overload. This visual-auditory link to social hierarchy is described by Mark M. Smith, who writes of early modern Londoners as "lovers of noise:" "the Crown, nobles generally, counterpoised themselves against the masses by embracing quietude, not loudness" (Smith 2007).



Figure 7. Anton Möller the Elder, *An Elegant Reception with Christburg Castle in the Background*, 1587. Berlin Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. KdZ 17916.

The leading dancing couple look at each other with contented smiles; they are engaged in a stately dance amongst guests who are following their restrained example of elegance and decorum. The woman looks directly at her dancing partner. She is pleased to be with him, and he has an open and elegant stance. The symbol of a belt with bells—which I have proposed to represent moral corruption and sex work—is nowhere to be found in this image.

Beside the couple, a central table with guests and a tabletop keyboard instrument can be seen, its player viewed from behind. Most intriguingly, the three bowed-string players are brought into the foreground of the drawing, balancing the drawing's composition with the dancers (Figures 8 and 9). The implications of the ensemble arrangement can be viewed as a counter-commentary to the previous example in which the musicians' vernacular music

brought out people's inherent lasciviousness, base emotions, and immorality. Although the musicians play music for dancing, its effects are portrayed as balanced and harmonious, enhancing and elevating the noble mindset and behavior of the listeners.



Figure 8. Anton Möller the Elder, *An Elegant Reception*, detail of musicians.



Figure 9. Anton Möller the Elder, *An Elegant Reception*, detail of table.

Möller chose to depict three different types of bowed string instruments with varying levels of detail and a number of inconsistencies in their rendering. The smallest is a violin-

based instrument played on the arm. The player's left hand has been portrayed high on the fingerboard with what appear to be either rapidly moving fingers indicating an active melodic line, or he is merely gripping the instrument at the midpoint on the neck. The middle musician plays a decorative "festooned" tenor (intermediate) size viol. The largest instrument, still represented in a tenor viol size, more closely resembles the Polish fiddles in Möller's previously-discussed drawing of the raucous celebration. However, as an instrument common to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Royal Prussia, Möller's placement in this scene suggests it was more important what type of music the Polish fiddle was used for and in what context the instrument was played, as itinerant musicians have been identified as musicians at the courts of nobility and royalty from the medieval period onwards (Morawska 2002).

In the late sixteenth century, the violin (or violin-influenced fiddle) and festooned viol were modern, fashionable instruments and bore a strong foreign, cosmopolitan influence. By including these instruments in the drawing, Möller was reinforcing not only a long-established bias and value judgement deeply embedded in artistic and musical culture across Europe but also equally an expected aesthetic of the noble and wealthy Dutch (and other international) merchant communities in Danzig (Bogucka 1984). While adhering to the wider European value attributed to "courtly" or aesthetically refined music, the method of playing Möller's festooned instrument differs from other sixteenth-century depictions. Möller's instrument was a tenor size played vertically, while the large majority of similarly-sized instruments were played across the body, such as Paolo Veronese's famous painting of the *Marriage at Cana* (Veronese 1563), or contemporary English examples, including a tenor-sized festooned instrument played across the body depicted at Gilling Castle in North Yorkshire, England (c. 1575–1585) (Hebbert 2020).

Möller's specific use of shading and contour lines further directs and focuses the eye on the central musical ensemble. Here, the sound of their performance is almost palpable as shaded contour lines on the bush behind the "violin" mimic the shape of the instrument, radiating outward like ripples on the surface of water. I would argue that Möller may have been attempting to subtly represent the sound of music itself, as Martin Luther touched on this very idea in his preface, *Praefatio zu den Symphoniae Iucundae*,

> "First of all, if you examine the thing itself, you will find that music was impressed on or created with every single creature, one and all. For nothing is without sound, or sounding number, so that the very air, which on itself is invisible and impalpable, and imperceptible to all the senses, and least musical of all things, but utterly mute and of no account, yet in motion sounds and can be heard and even touched. . .."[13] (Loewe and Firth 2022, Korsch 2021)

I believe that Möller's potential depiction of sound travelling in space as rippling waves from a center source also hints at his extensive training and artistic experiences travelling in the previous years before this work was made. Before the turn of the sixteenth century, Leonardo da Vinci was credited with the discovery that sound moves in waves, although Leonardo was building upon the work of Vitruvius (first-century Roman architect and engineer), who in his multi-volume *De architectura* discussed the similarity of the movement of water and air:

> "[The] Voice is a flowing breath of air, perceptible to the hearing by contact. It moves in an endless number of circular rounds, like the innumerably increasing circular waves which appear when a stone is thrown into smooth water. . .. In the same manner the voice executes its movements in concentric circles; but while in the case of water the circles move horizontally on a plane surface, the voice

> not only proceeds horizontally, but also ascends vertically by regular stages." (Vitruvius 2006)

Vitruvius' *De architectura* was printed in Venice with new illustrations in 1511 through the efforts of the Italian Franciscan Friar Giovanni Giocondo (c. 1433–1515). Vitruvius' revived work became a source of great influence on Renaissance artists and architects through its focus on architectural styles, principles of perspective and its application in art and architecture, and the method of designing various religious, administrative, and municipal buildings, including various types of theatres and amphitheaters, where he gives a good amount of attention to the flow of sound, creating a pleasing experience for the audience without unnecessary echoes or obstructions (Vitruvius 2006). It is very possible in Möller's apprenticeship or travels that he may have been able to study Vitruvius, including his writing on soundwaves moving like water.

The final instrument, placed and partially hidden on the table next to the musicians, is likely to be a virginal (a plucked instrument like the larger harpsichord), with fewer visible details than the other bowed instruments. Virginals could be placed directly on a table to reflect and amplify the volume of sound, especially important in this outdoor setting. However, we can see that the musicians do not have to fight above the din of wild revelers to be heard; the group is quite reserved, a marked difference from Möller's *Folk Fair*. Here, Möller employs a very specific technique to communicate to the viewer that not only is music present at the event, but that it has garnered the attention of many members of the reception. The concept of "active listening," while challenging to portray, is highlighted in Möller's other works. In one drawing of *The Five Senses* (Figure 10, Möller the Elder n.d.), Möller used a chiaroscuro technique to depict a group embodying the senses around a table. In the back left of the drawing, a man tunes his lute, his eyes closed and his face a portrait of concentration. He gently plucks the highest string as he presses his ear against the instrument, actively searching for the correct pitch.[14] Active listening was portrayed in various works during the sixteenth century, mainly through directed gaze, cupping an ear to hear the correct tuning of their part in an ensemble, or through the beating of tactus, "keeping the beat" for the ensemble with a hand or finger.[15] These examples, however, portray musicians listening to the music because they are participating in its creation.

In Möller's work, there is an important difference: it is not the musicians but the guests who listen specifically to the music, as indicated by their eyes and postures. Behind the musicians to the left, two men sit at a table (Figure 8). They appear to have stopped their conversation and are watching the musicians in a relaxed manner, affirming the presence of sound. Likewise, around the central table, a man dressed in finer clothing and a sash (indicating his noble status) stands to the left of the keyboard player (Figure 9), specifically watching him and, assumedly, actively listening to the music. There could be a bit too much alcohol consumption in the back left corner of the table, where one man empties his tankard, and the group may be receiving a disapproving glare from the man at the far right of the table. Unlike Möller's folk celebration, the guests in his second drawing have not lost control due to reckless drunkenness, and music does not drive revelers to lascivious extremes. In contrast, the music encourages guests to listen, be inspired by its balance and harmony, and, in turn, reflect this balance in the outward display of their moral character.

Jacek Tylicki suggests that Möller's inscription on the reverse may indicate that he was sketching from life, in a field not far from the castle ruin: "The devastated castle of Cristberg, 3 miles from Marienburg, as it looks when one stands half a quarter of the way from it in the field, drawn hastily while plowing the field" (Tylicki 2005).[16] However, I propose that this interpretation could take Möller's words too literally, based on the sketched feel of the drawing in its execution. The "example/counter-example" framework I propose in this article could be more aligned with the specific mindset of Möller during

this period, who may have loosely conceived the *Elegant Reception* as a conceptual response to his symbol-laden *Folk Fair before Marienburg*. The symbolism, thematic elements, the immaculate behavior of the guests, the representation of the power of music within the scene, and the choice of instruments themselves are the polar opposite of his composed folk festival scene, resulting in too "perfect" of a contrast to be entirely spontaneously observed. It is more likely that the place was visited, but the elegant scene was imagined.



Figure 10. Anton Möller the Elder, *The Five Senses* (*and Five ages of Man*?), n.d. Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-T-1916–28.

5. Conclusions

Möller's drawn and painted works on paper intended for private patrons in and around Hanseatic Danzig demonstrate not only his high degree of technicality and artistry but also highlight his (and mirror his local patrons') religious and moral beliefs that placed Lutheran ideologies of temperance and abstinence at the foundation of pious and moral life. The drawing of the folk festival was meant to be shocking, and took much from the genre works of past and contemporary German, Dutch, and Flemish artists. It is not surprising that Möller made the over-stereotyped connections of "alcohol + dance music = moral debauchery"—a sixteenth-century version of the modern "sex, drugs, and rock n' roll."

Likewise, the basic message of the *Elegant Reception* is not innovative in its connection of temperance and restraint to balance and moral fortitude. However, the level of detail and multi-faceted meaning Möller connects to music is very worthy of our attention. His use of different bowed string instruments to communicate a specific moral value system (folk vs. "art" instruments, or local Polish fiddles vs. more international instruments: a viol, a festooned instrument, a violin-type instrument played on the arm, a virginal) differed from earlier and contemporary folk festival genre examples from Western Europe that depicted mainly bagpipes, pipe and tabor (drum), and other loud outside instruments. Fiddle players can of course be found within contemporary folk scenes from Germany, the Netherlands, as well as across Europe, but instead of reinforcing the long-associated string/wind virtue attributions best represented by the diametric allegory of Apollo and Marsyas, Möller may have specifically chosen to represent string and keyboard instruments he knew from his own life in Royal Prussia and the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania:

from noble courts and patrician circles to taverns and festivals. This very specific departure from the "folk fair" genre—from which Möller took so much inspiration—is an example of what Constance Classen terms a "culturally contingent" (Smith et al. 2015) interpretation, understood by Möller's intended patrician audience that the virtue of music did not depend on the instrument used, but rather the fundamental integrity of the listener.

Möller added subtle details in both works that highlight music's essential role in the development of a cultivated moral character and, alternatively, its power in the destruction of a moral compass. Möller's themes of temperance, morality, and music are vividly opposed in the two drawings: sober "active" listeners inspired to behave with decency and decorum versus inebriated revelers spurned on to violence and vice, with music adding fuel to the fire. It was not only that music was present at these celebrations, but that music amplified the emotions, moral character, and in turn, the behavior of the guests, for better or worse.

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Notes

1 Möller's drawings (especially the *Folk Fair before Marienburg*) have often been a focus of past scholars; however, the juxtaposition of these two drawings, examination of their symbolism, and the specific role of music in these works, to my knowledge, have not been explored before. For a detailed bibliography compiled by Jacek Tylicki of writing on these works, please see (Tylicki 2005).

2 "Siue enim velis tristes erigere, siue laetos terrere, desperantes animare, superbos frangere, amantes sedare,odientes mitigare, et quis omnes illos numeret dominos cordis humani, scilicet affectus et impetus seu spiritus,impulsores omnium vel virtutum vel vitiorum? Quid inuenias efficatius quam ipsam Musicam?"

3 Möller's *Last Judgement* at Artus Court in Gdańsk was destroyed in World War II and recreated from pre-war photographs.

4 Möller's work for the ceiling of Toruń city hall (1608) was destroyed by fire less than a century later.

5 A popular strategy game known at least since the Roman times. Called "gry w młynek" in Poland, an example exists on a ceramic floor tile from the seventeenth century.

6 Essentially, it would have been very hard to push the string all the way down to the neck because the distance was too great, requiring the string to be pressed from the side with the hard nail.

7 Of course, the roses could have also just been a decorative hair ornament, as other women have hair ornaments in this drawing.

8 "…o Maria, viola humilitatis, lilium castitatis, rosa charitatis."

9 (Baldung Grien c. 1540) depicts the uselessness of chastity belts to keep a woman faithful and implies the husband's jealousy.

10 "Dem E(h)rbaren gesellen Johanno Kretzmer hab ich Antonius Müller/Dieses Zu lang wierigen gedechtnus herum (?) gerissen/Den 14 Maij Ann. 1587, in Marienburg/De laetis libuit pictori pingere rebus/Munus id exiguum gratus amice cape. Post obitum uero Iohannis Kretzmari idem Antonius Mollerus autor/amiciciae et perpetuae memoriae causa ddbt M. Alexandro Glasero/6 Nouemb: 1589./Ne sutor ultra crepidam." Transcription Tylicki. Translation from German by the author. For a detailed bibliography compiled by Jacek Tylicki of writing on these works, please see (Tylicki 2005).

11 I have used the term "peasant" when the institution uses this term in the object title, favoring the term "folk," "rural," or "agricultural community" in this article. The term peasant has been used by many generations of scholars to signify mainly uneducated, rural agricultural communities that have a penchant for dancing, drinking, fighting, and sinning. Keith Moxey's *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives* (Moxey 1989) or Maximiliaan Martens's *Dancing Peasants at a St. Sebastian's Kermis* (Martens 2018) give us a much more nuanced analysis of "peasant" in the context of analyzing people depicted in Netherlandish kermis celebration scenes. A similar adjustment in this article is to use the phrase "sex worker," instead of "prostitute" or "whore," removing the historically female-associated immoral branding and instead describing their interpreted profession.

12 Signed in ligature AM and dated 1587 along the top of the work.

[13] "Primum, si rem ipsam spectes, inuenies Musicam esse ab initio mundi inditam seu concretam creaturis vniuersis, singulis et omnibus. Nihil enim est sine sono, seu numero sonoro, ita vt et aer ipse per sese inuisibilis et inpalpabilis, omnibusque sensibus inperceptibilis, minimeque omnium musicus, sed plane mutus et nihil reputatus, tamen motus sit sonorous et audibilis, tunc etiam palpabilis. . .."

[14] It could also be that the lute player must listen closely over the din of the crying infant (who represents touch) as a bird bites his penis.

[15] See, for instance, Giorgione, *The Three Ages of Man* (Giorgione 1500), in which tactus is used as an allegory of time. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giorgione,_Three_Ages.jpg (accessed on 17 January 2026). Tactus is further discussed in (Hatter 2011). The title page of *Opusculum Musice mensuralis* by Sebastian of Felsztyn depicts members of a vocal ensemble cupping their ears while a figure in the forefront beats tactus (Felsztyn 1517).

[16] "Das verwustete schlos Cristberg 3 meil. Von Marienburg sie es an Zu schawen/wan man ein halb viertel weges Davon stehet im felde geschrabbeldt/in eile bei dem pfluge in pflug," Transcription Tylicki. Transcription by author and Quinton Binder. For a detailed bibliography compiled by Jacek Tylicki of writing on these works, please see (Tylicki 2005).

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