

Aemulatio

Imitation, emulation and invention in
Netherlandish art from 1500 to 1800
Essays in honor of Eric Jan Sluijter

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Rembrandt's *Callisto Bathing*: Unusual But Not Unique

AMY GOLAHNY

Rembrandt's 1654 painting of a woman lifting her chemise as she wades in a calm pool has been recently and most convincingly interpreted as a portrayal of the nymph Callisto alone, on the basis of the rich clothing that suits Diana's handmaid, the rustic setting, and the figure's extreme modesty (fig. 1, color plate 22).¹ However, neither the ramifications of this identification nor the imagery related to it have been developed. This brief essay brings associated works into the discussion, in order to examine the visual tradition for this subject and its broader implications within the oeuvre of Rembrandt (1606 -1669). In so doing, this discussion amplifies and deepens Rembrandt's engagement with Italian art. Despite his famous refusal to travel south of the Alps, he consistently demonstrated in his work a keen awareness of Italian art, not only from the Renaissance but also of his own time.

A close reading of the Ovidian text supports the identification of Rembrandt's painting as a depiction of a solitary Callisto bathing in a rustic setting. As first attendant to Diana, Callisto is the most beautiful of all the goddess' nymphs, who are to remain virgins or be cast out of her entourage. Jupiter, seeing Callisto alone in the woods and smitten by her beauty, knew of her loyalty to Diana, and thus seduced her in the form of the goddess. Callisto resisted Jupiter's advances and was miserably conflicted and shamed after he raped her.² For nine months Callisto refused to bathe with the nymphs, but finally they tore off her clothes to reveal her pregnancy and she was banished from Diana's entourage. After Callisto gave birth to the boy Arcas, the jealous Juno turned her into a bear. Arcas became a hunter and took aim at the bear who was his mother, whereupon Jupiter intervened and turned both mother and son into constellations, *ursa major* and *ursa minor*.

Rembrandt's painting is not a depiction of a moment in the Ovidian

¹ Rembrandt, *Callisto Bathing*, 1654, oil on oak, 61.8 x 47 cm, The National Gallery, London.

text, but an imaginative addition to it. I suggest that it presents the pregnant Callisto bathing privately, so that the other nymphs do not see her condition. This contrasts with the *Rembrandt Corpus*, where it is proposed that the moment represented follows Callisto's banishment from Diana's entourage, and after she has given birth to her son.³ After having given birth, Callisto had no need for such timidity, or for such richly brocaded clothes.

As Callisto alone, Rembrandt's painting has been considered a unique rendering of this subject. Evidence suggests at least two earlier representations. A lost painting by Guido Reni (1591-1642) is known from a poem by Giambattista Marino, and a Dutch 1622 inventory lists another 'Callisto Bathing' without naming the artist. In his *La Galeria* of 1620, Marino describes Reni's painting of a sad Callisto, who has a hidden wound from Jupiter's molestation:⁴

Do not languish, little Virgin
 Discovering at the sacred spring
 The deceit of the celestial adulterer,
 Who stripped your clothes off by force;
 Who shows you the beautiful appearance [of Diana]
 in the pool, in the wood, and in the Sky
 With human form, and with brutal veil,
 And with immortal light [you are] always more beautiful
 And Nymph, then Bear, and Star.

Marino's sympathy for Callisto proceeds from Reni's image, which apparently showed a thoughtfully expressive woman in a landscape. Callisto is the innocent victim of Jupiter's subterfuge and violence. As Callisto realizes the depth of Jupiter's deceit, she also becomes aware of the transformations that await her, into bear and star. Marino's poem counsels Callisto: 'Do not be sad, for you will become immortal in the heavens'. Although this is small consolation for Callisto at the time she mourns her lost virginity, it provides the glorious conclusion to her story.

Rembrandt would surely have known Marino's collection of poems on paintings and sculptures. One of Marino's poems was on Rubens' (1577-1640) *Hero and Leander*, a version of which Rembrandt himself owned between 1637-1644; significantly, of all Marino's poems, it was the one on Hero and Leander that was translated into Dutch by Joost van den Vondel, perhaps a reflection of the fame of Rubens' painting in Amsterdam. By 1651, the painting - presumably that from Rembrandt's own collection - was owned by Pieter Six, and again the subject of a poem, this one by

Jan Vos. The painting thus was owned by two of the most discerning collectors in Amsterdam, and received three poetic accolades.⁵

The second painting, explicitly titled *Callisto Bathing*, belonged to Joan Huydecoper I. As a young man of 23, he had already amassed a significant painting collection, which was inventoried in 1622, after the untimely death of his first wife, and he went on to purchase works by Rembrandt and other foremost artists. The 5 most highly valued paintings of the 14 listed were a large untitled Moeyaert, f 350; Veronese's *Europa*, f 250; and unattributed paintings of *The Flood*, f 145, *Adam and Eve*, f 134; and *Callisto Bathing*, f 130.⁶ Whoever made Huydecoper's *Callisto Bathing*, that artist fits into a select frame of references: Marino and Reni. It is tempting, but speculative, to posit that the painting owned by Huydecoper might be a version by Reni, whose works were in Dutch collections.

Grand paintings by Reni were in the Dutch Republic by at least circa 1615. Michiel Wyntgis, an immigrant from Deventer who lived in Middelburgh, owned a large *Judith* that appears in his inventory of 1618, and of which many copies are known.⁷ Samuel Godijn, a merchant who had a significant art collection in Amsterdam, owned two grand pendants by Reni, now untraced, *Sophonisba and Massinisa* and *Sophonisba Drinking Poison*, according to his inventory of 1633. Jacomo Noirot's 1638 inventory included a Reni painting of two wrestling cupids. A Reni *Susanna and the Elders* belonged to Gerard Reynst. The 1673 inventory of Maria Anna Lenarts included two Reni paintings, one of wrestling cupids and another of *Susanna and the Elders*, both possibly versions of those in the Noirot and Reynst collections.⁸

These two references to lost paintings of Callisto, one by Reni described by Marino and the other unnamed, indicate works well within Rembrandt's circle. Rembrandt certainly would have been aware that Marino's poem would enhance the value of his own Rubens painting of *Hero and Leander*. Huydecoper can be considered a patron of Rembrandt as he bought a painting by the artist in 1628.⁹ It stands to reason that Rembrandt would have been familiar with his art collection. The Veronese *Europa* in Huydecoper's collection was presumably a version of that in the Palazzo Ducale, Venice, and seems to have furnished Rembrandt with an appealing model for the woman bending over, spilling wine from a goblet, in his *Belshazzar's Feast* of 1636.¹⁰ If Rembrandt viewed Huydecoper's collection by the mid-1630s, he may have revisited it later, or simply recalled its *Callisto Bathing*, as a visual prompt for his own 1654 portrayal of the nymph.

As bathing nudes of 1654, with robes placed aside, the *Callisto Bathing* and *Bathsheba Contemplating David's Letter* are crafted with the loaded



2
Rembrandt, *Bathsheba*, 1654,
oil on canvas, 142 x 142 cm,
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

impasto of a limited palette, and present the range of Rembrandt's brushwork, from freshly applied pigment in long strokes to layered and textured paint (fig. 2). These paintings complement one another in pictorial organization: Bathsheba, seated in profile, is planar and motionless, Callisto, wading in water, walks forward on a diagonal. Long recognized as a guide both formal and thematic for Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* is François Perrier's (1584/1590-1650/57) print after a small marble relief in Rome (then in the Della Valle collection, and now in Palazzo Altemps) (fig. 3). Perrier's nude was published in his *Icones et Segmenta* in 1645, with the inscription from Apuleius that identifies the veiled woman as Psyche: 'The girl who is to be a bride wipes away her tears with her wedding veil' (Apuleius 4).¹¹ The story of Psyche, a woman exploited by men, resonates thematically with the circumstances of Bathsheba and Callisto.

Psyche's narrative parallels the circumstances of both Bathsheba and Callisto in that she is forced to associate with a male against her better judgment or will. Psyche's complicated life appears in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, a compilation of metamorphoses of various characters. Leading to

the happy ending of Cupid's union with Psyche among the gods is a series of near-death experiences for poor Psyche, each of which is emotionally fraught with tests of her own character and her love for Cupid. Instigating her trials is Venus, who is jealous of Psyche's beauty and of Cupid's love for her. The line identifying the Perrier relief as Psyche refers to her impending marriage to an evil serpent on a remote mountain, a consequence of her father's consultation with an oracle. Psyche unhappily prepares for her marriage as for a funeral. Apuleius' book appeared in Latin editions throughout Europe, and was translated into English, Spanish, Italian, German, and French in the sixteenth century. Two slightly different Dutch translations appeared in 1608 and 1636.¹²

3
 François Perrier, *Unhappy Bride* from *Icones et Segmenta*, Rome 1645, etching, 16.4 x 22.8 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. and likely owned by Rembrandt.¹³ Rembrandt's adaptation of Perrier's miserable bride for the pose of Bathsheba with servant was not an arbitrary use of a pose for its own sake. Psyche provided the background for a woman facing an imminent, forced, and unhappy union. Bathsheba



considered the consequences of David's summons and her subsequent adultery, whether or not she could foresee her husband's death in battle and the death of the newborn baby conceived with David. Similarly, there is a resonance between Psyche's travails and her ultimate acceptance by the gods, and Callisto, whose ravishment by Jupiter leads to banishment, near murder by her own son, and finally, elevation to the heavens.

In 1654 Hendrickje was pregnant with Cornelia, and was called before the church authorities.¹⁴ Eric Jan Sluijter has explored the moral and erotic implications of David's lust for Bathsheba, her obedience to him, and the consequences for both.¹⁵ If Rembrandt serves as David in the narrative of Bathsheba, then he may also serve as Jupiter in the narrative of Callisto. Callisto was raped by Jupiter through the god's deception, and against her will and better judgment, just as David commanded Bathsheba and she, also against her better judgment, obeyed David. Callisto was chaste until deceived by Jupiter who ultimately conferred immortality upon her and her son, just as David legitimized his affair with Bathsheba by first killing off her husband and then marrying her. Bathsheba is virtuous and loyal to her husband until David enters the scene, and Callisto is chaste until Jupiter deceives her. Ovid's sympathy for Callisto is apparent in her modesty, sincerity, and thoughtfulness. As David/Jupiter, Rembrandt regards Bathsheba/Callisto with lechery and sympathy, at the same time. He is both the lover of the women he compromises, and portrayer of a single woman in a moment that conveys the larger narrative; in both *Bathsheba* and *Callisto*, he captures a range of emotions, in a single figure, that in the original texts are revealed through time.

Two approaches belong to the discourse on art in the seventeenth century: referring to other's inventions to show wit, and crafting novel inventions to surpass them.¹⁶ That Rembrandt did both has been well established. Rembrandt appropriated from both northern and Italian artists, repeatedly and purposefully, as his own challenge to surpass his predecessors. Indeed, where Rembrandt seems to craft a unique invention, we may well suspect that he was prompted by an earlier image or text. By depicting Callisto bathing alone, Rembrandt followed precedent in the work of Reni, which he would have known from Marino's literary description. And, by recognizing his dialogue with both visual and literary precedents, we may gain a better grasp on the wide and deep range of his associations.

Notes

- 1 J. Leja, 'Rembrandt's *Woman Bathing in a Stream*', *Simiolus*, 24 (1996), 321-327. The painting has been called *Hendrickje Bathing* (G. Schwartz, *Rembrandt, his Life, his Paintings*, New York 1985, 295); *Hendrickje Bathing in a River* (C. Tümpel, *Rembrandt*, Antwerp 1993, 265); *A Woman Bathing in a Stream* (D. Bomford et al., *Art in the Making: Rembrandt*, 2nd ed., London 2006, 138; *Bathing Woman* (so called 'Hendrickje'), (E.J. Sluiter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*, Amsterdam 2006, 330); or *Unchastity* (A.W.G. Poseq, 'Rembrandt's Obscene *Woman Bathing*', *Source* 19 (1999), 30-38). In *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings: The Small-Scale History Paintings*, vol. 5, Dordrecht 2010, no. 19, the painting is titled *A Woman Wading in a Pond (Callisto in the Wilderness)* and interpreted to represent Callisto after her banishment from Diana's entourage. I am grateful to Ernst van de Wetering for kindly making this text available to me; it analyses the painting as representing Callisto according to Van Mander, when she is alone in the wilderness following her banishment from Diana's sacred spring, and also, presumably, following the birth of her son.
- 2 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* II: 401 ff. See Iohannes Florianus, *Metamorphosis, Dat is: Die Herscheppinghe oft Veranderinghe (...)*, Antwerp 1615, 27 ff. Ovid explicitly states that nine months passed from Jupiter's rape of Callisto to the time of Diana's suggestion that the nymphs, out hunting, should bathe together, the event resulting in Callisto's banishment. Implicit in the Ovidian text is that poor Callisto did not bathe during these nine months.
- 3 *Corpus*, vol. 5 (n. 1).
- 4 G.B. Marino, *La Galeria*, Venice 1620, 19:
 Calisto di Guido Reni
 Non languir Verginella,
 Scoprendo al fonte sacro
 Spogliata à forza de la propria veste,
 L'inganno de l'adultero celeste;
 Che'l vago simulacro Ti mostra, e nel lauacro,
 E nel bosco, e nel Cielo.
 Con forma humana, e con ferino velo,
 E con luce immortal sempre più bella
 E Ninfa, & Orsa, e Stella.
 I thank Giancarlo Maiorino for emending my translation. Marino's *Galeria* was known in Amsterdam, as Vondel translated its *Hero and Leander* by Rubens, before 1650; see A. Golahny, 'Rubens' *Hero and Leander* and its Poetic Progeny', *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (1990), 20-37. And as Rembrandt owned a version of Rubens' *Hero and Leander*, during the years 1637-1644, he would have been well informed about Marino's collection of poems on art works.
- 5 See Golahny, *ibid.*, and S.S. Dickey, *Rembrandt: Portraits in Print*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2004, 114.
- 6 Schwartz, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 138.
- 7 For Reni's *Judith*, see B.W. Meijer, 'Italian Paintings in 17th Century Holland: Art Market, Art Works and Art Collections', in: M. Seidel (ed.), *L'Europa e l'arte Italiana* (Collana del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, 3), Venice 2000, 377-418; for Michael Wyntgis, see M.J. Bok, 'Art-Lovers and Their Paintings', in: G. Luijten (ed.), *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art 1580-1620*, cat. exh. Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum), Amsterdam 1993, 136-165, esp. 162.
- 8 The Montias Database: Inventories of Amsterdam Art Collections, Frick Art Reference Library, Inventory of Samuel Godijn, inv. no. 1123.0015 and 0016. I thank Richard Spear for confirming that Reni's *Sophonisba* pendants and *Callisto Bathing* are not known. For the Jacomo Noiro document, see The Montias Database, inv. no. 227.0004; for the Reynst collection, see A.-M.S. Logan, *The 'Cabinet' of the Brothers Gerard and Jan Reynst*, Amsterdam/Oxford/New York 1979, 139, cat. 23; for the Lenarts inventory, see The Montias Database, inv. no. 1264.0001.
- 9 Schwartz, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 134.
- 10 K. Clark, *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance*, New York 1966, 107.
- 11 'Puella nuptura, detergit lacrimas ipso flammee. Apul. 4'. See M.D. Carroll, 'Uriah's Gaze', in: A. Jensen Adams (ed.), *Rembrandt's 'Bathsheba Reading King David's Letter'*, Cambridge 1998, 160-175, for a discussion of this inscription that identifies the disconsolate bride as Psyche. A second inscription on the print, from Pliny, concerns the anointing of a virgin's feet in preparation for marriage, and thus confirms the identification.
- 12 Apuleius appeared in two slightly different Dutch translations in the 17th century. The first, made from a French translation, is: Lucius Apuleius, *Van den Gulden Esel*, Amsterdam 1608, 134, 'de nieu gehuwede droogde haer oogen met haer bruylofsche sluyer'. The second translation, *XI Boecken van L. Apuleius Handelende vanden Gulden Esel*, Haarlem 1636, 103: 'de Nieuwe-Gehuwede droochde haer Ooghen met haeren Bruylofschen Sluyer'. In octavo, these editions would have been cheap and popular. Rembrandt's interest in Michiel Coxie's Psyche series, adapted from Raphael designs, is evident in Rembrandt's drawing *Mars and Venus Caught in Vulcan's Net* (Amsterdams Historisch Museum). See A. Golahny, 'Homer, Raphael, Rembrandt: Reading "Vulcan's Net"', in: A. Chong and M. Zell (eds.), *Rethinking Rembrandt*, Boston/Zwolle 2002, 73-89.
- 13 Both Perrier volumes were owned by Filips De Flines; for his library and art collection, see A. Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading*, Amsterdam 2003, 31. Jan Six owned two copies of Perrier's *Statuen* (1637) and one of the *Icones* (1645), as listed in his *Catalogus* of art, Amsterdam 1702, under bound volumes of prints, 18, nos. 22-24.
- 14 Household parallels are discussed by Carroll, *op. cit.* (n. 11).
- 15 Sluiter, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 355.
- 16 M.H. Loh, 'New and Improved: Repetition as Originality in Italian Baroque Practice and Theory', *Art Bulletin* 66 (2004), 477-504.