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Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Louis Vallée
Dutch, died 1653

Silvio with the Wounded Dorinda

165(1)?

oil on canvas
overall: 105.1 x 175.2 cm (41 3/8 x 69 in.)
Inscription: lower right to left of arrow sheaf: Loiy[s] Vallee. / f [1]65[1?]
Gift of Patricia Bauman and the Honorable John Landrum Bryant 2000.114.1

ENTRY

Louis Vallée drew this subject from Giovanni Battista Guarini's late sixteenth-century tragicomedy *Il Pastor Fido*, a pastoral play that glorified arcadian life and had far-ranging effects in art and literature in France, Flanders, and the Netherlands.[1] Its intricate plot focuses on the love between the shepherd Mirtillo and the nymph Amarillis, who, by paternal arrangement, was betrothed to Silvio. The scene Vallée has depicted, however, is the culmination of the subplot, which centers on the nymph Dorinda's love for Silvio, Amarillis' intended. In the play, Silvio shows nothing but disdain for Dorinda and cares only for the hunt. Dorinda, not showing the best judgment, decides to disguise herself with a wolf skin and follow her beloved on the hunt. Silvio, mistaking Dorinda for an animal, inadvertently shoots and wounds her with an arrow. Vallée depicts the moment when Dorinda, having emerged from the bushes where she had been hiding, has fallen into the arms of the aged Linco, who always cared for her as a second father. In Guarini's telling, the distraught Silvio, suddenly realizing he is in love with Dorinda, gives her the arrow so that she can exact revenge by taking his life in return. Happily, as befitting a tragicomedy, Dorinda's wound is only superficial and she spares her beloved Silvio. To the great joy of the assembled company, the

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couple marries that very day.

Vallée emphasizes the emotional drama unfolding between Silvio and the wounded Dorinda, rather than the play's broader narrative sweep, by filling the picture plane of this large canvas with the three protagonists. Dorinda, dressed in a classicizing manner with a red satin skirt, white blouse, and strand of pearls in her hair, reclines sensuously in the arms of Linco, her pale skin amply exposed to reveal the bloody wound in her breast. The wolf skin that served as her ill-fated disguise is beneath and behind her, while Silvio's gold and black quiver of arrows and polished hunting horn lie abandoned next to her recumbent body. With a loving gaze, Silvio leans forward and offers the fateful arrow, its tip still wet with her blood, to Dorinda so that she can exact revenge by plunging it into Silvio's chest. In Guarini's text, Silvio says:

> Behold with bended knees I show thee rev'rence.
>
> O grant me pardon, and deny me life!
>
> Behold my arrows, and my bow I give;
>
> Ah do not wound, but spare these eyes, these hands,
>
> Which were the guilty ministers because
>
> By an unguilty will they were directed.
>
> Here strike my breast, that enemy to love,
>
> Foe to all tenderness, this cruel heart

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Which was so harsh to thee. My breast is open.[2]

Dorinda, whose wound is superficial, wisely rejects Silvio's offer, all the while giving him a sidelong glance as though gauging the sincerity of his intentions. In its emotional and pictorial impact, Vallée's interpretation of the scene is in keeping with the character of the tragicomedy. As Guarini defined it, tragicomedy is "the mingling of tragic and comic pleasure, which does not allow hearers to fall into excessive tragic melancholy or comic relaxation."[3]

The most important visual prototype for Vallée was a painting of the same subject that Herman Saftleven (Dutch, c. 1609 - 1685) executed in 1635 for the influential Il Pastor Fido cycle at the palace at Honselaarsdijk, the hunting lodge of Prince Frederik Hendrik and his wife, Amalia van Solms [fig. 1]. Despite the differences in the scale of the protagonists and in their relationship to the surrounding landscape, the disposition of Vallée's figures is remarkably similar to those in Saftleven's painting, although in reverse. The compositional connections between these works are so strong that one wonders if Vallée had an opportunity to see Saftleven's painting in Amalia's private quarters at Honselaarsdijk.[4]

Silvio with the Wounded Dorinda is one of only a handful of paintings attributed to Vallée, most of which are portraits.[5] The painting's large scale, its idealized figures, and the sensual subject matter are characteristic of mid-seventeenth-century Dutch classicism, particularly as it developed in Leiden, Haarlem, and Amsterdam.[6] The few paintings known by the artist, which date between 1646 and 1653, are stylistically similar to works by Jacob van Loo (1614–1670), Bartholomeus van der Helst (c. 1613–1670), and Abraham van den Tempel (1622/1623–1672). Unfortunately, nothing is known about Vallée's training or where he primarily worked, although documents indicate that he painted for clients in Leiden, Haarlem, and Amsterdam.[7] He lived in the Warmoesstraat in Amsterdam at the time of his death and was buried in that city, but he does not seem to have owned property there.

The Amsterdam painter Jacob Backer (1608–1651) apparently influenced Vallée, as he did Van den Tempel, and it is possible that Vallée studied with this older master. Backer's mature history paintings, such as his *Cimon and Iphigeni*a, c. 1640 [fig. 2], were greatly admired and avidly collected by Amsterdam patricians. The close similarities in the sensual poses of Vallée's Dorinda and Backer's Iphigenia indicate that Vallée knew this work.[8] Similarities also exist in the rhythms of folds

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and in the highlights modeling the drapery. Not surprisingly, *Silvio with the Wounded Dorinda* was formerly attributed to Backer.[9] Wouter Kloek, who was able to interpret the badly abraded signature below the arrow sheaf and connect it to known signatures by the artist, has correctly and definitively attributed this painting to Vallée.[10]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Herman Saftleven, *Silvio and Dorinda*, 1635, oil on canvas, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. Photo: bpk, Berlin / Staatliche Museen, Berlin / Jörg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY

fig. 2 Jacob Backer, *Cimon and Iphigenia*, c. 1640, oil on canvas, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig

NOTES

[1] W. W. Greg, *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama* (London, 1906), 196–200. See also Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Totowa, NJ, 1983), 107–113; Peter van der Ploeg and Carola Vermeeren, *Princely Patrons: The Collection of Frederick Henry of Orange and Amalia of Solms in The Hague* (The Hague, 1997), 216–225.

[2] *The Faithful Shepherd: A Translation of Guarini's "Il Pastor Fido,"* trans. Thomas Sheridan, ed. Robert Hogan and Edward A. Nickerson (Newark, DE, 1989), 143.

[3] As quoted in the introduction to *The Faithful Shepherd: A Translation of Guarini's "Il Pastor Fido,"* trans. Thomas Sheridan, ed. Robert Hogan and Edward A. Nickerson (Newark, DE, 1989).

[4] It raises the question, for example, as to whether Louis Vallée was related to Simon de la Vallée, a French architect who worked for Prince Frederik Hendrik between 1633 and 1637, a connection that could have provided the painter with access to the palace of Honselaarsdijk. Maarten Wurfbain, in a letter to Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., May 8, 2003, suggested that, like

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Saftleven's *Il Pastor Fido* cycle, Vallée's painting may have been intended for an architectural setting. Its dimensions are roughly those of the Golden Section, a ratio often used for paintings in architectural settings.

[5] See Maarten Wurfbain, *M. L. Wurfbain Fine Art B.V., IV* (Oegstgeest, 1992), 185. He attributes *Portrait of a Child* to Louis Vallée.

[6] For Dutch classicism of this period see Albert Blankert, *Dutch Classicism in Seventeenth-Century Painting* (Rotterdam, 1999).

[7] See Maarten Wurfbain, *M. L. Wurfbain Fine Art B.V., IV* (Oegstgeest, 1992), 186–187.

[8] See Peter van den Brink, "De schilder en Tekenaar Jacob Adriaensz. Backer," in Peter van den Brink and Jaap van der Veen, *Jacob Backer (1608/9–1651)* (Zwolle, 2008), 54–55. In this same exhibition catalog is a drawing of a young man holding an arrow (no. 43) from the Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt (inv. no. 15227) that depicts, in reverse, the young man who posed for Silvio in Vallée's painting. The similarities in pose and facial features raise the question as to whether this drawing is by Vallée rather than by Backer, to whom it has been traditionally attributed.

[9] This painting was offered to the National Gallery of Art as a work by Jacob Backer. It had previously been attributed to Jacob van Loo; see Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau, 1983), 6:3731, 3983, no. 2373.

[10] When Wouter Kloek examined the painting in 1996 the signature had been interpreted as reading "Loiy.. V..../f. [1]65[1?]." Kloek connected these letters with Vallée's signature illustrated in "Louis Vallée: The Man with Only Three Paintings to His Credit," in Clifford Duits, ed., *Duits Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1964): 16.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is on a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, which has been lined. The tacking margins are extant, but the painting has been reduced in size along the left edge, where approximately 1.5 cm of the pictorial surface has been folded over to serve as part of the tacking edge. The support is covered by a thin red ground layer; the paint is fluid and layered with extensive glazes. The artist used the ground as a base tonality in the flesh colors, sky, and landscape. The X-radiographs show a change in Dorinda's proper right foot, and examination with infrared reflectography at 1.5 – 2.0 microns[1] indicates that the artist originally painted Silvio's proper left ring finger outstretched and touching the arrow.

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The painting is in fairly good condition, though there is a pattern of wrinkles through the paint probably caused by a past lining procedure. The X-radiographs show a tear through the left side of Dorinda's chest, as well as one through the shepherd's head. In addition to paint losses associated with the tears, small losses exist in the upper right corner, scattered in the drapery just below Silvio's shoulder, in his proper right hand, and along the edges of the composition. Examination with ultraviolet light reveals a fair amount of inpainting covering abrasion in the sky; the shepherd's head; Dorinda's face, shoulder, chest, and drapery; and Silvio's face and drapery. The signature and date are abraded.

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Kodak 310-21X PtSi camera.

PROVENANCE

(Alex Wengraf, London), by 1983;[1] purchased 1990 by by Patricia Bauman and the Honorable John Landrum Bryant, Washington, D.C.; gift 2000 to NGA.

[1] The painting was with Wengraf when it was published in Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrand-Schüler*, 6 vols., Landau,1983: 6:3731, no. 2373, image 3983, as by Jacob van Loo.

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To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Louis Vallée/*Silvio with the Wounded Dorinda*/165(1)?," *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, http://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/80803 (accessed December 20, 2016).

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