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JAMES LAWSON

Titian's Diana Pictures: the Passing of an Epoch*

The following analysis of Titian's *poesie*, *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*, disclosing a level of narrative that has gone unremarked till now, also shows how intricate were the artist's thought, imagination and invention.¹

Culpability is a nagging question in any consideration of the story of Diana and Actaeon, as told by Ovid (43BC—17AD) in *The Metamorphoses*. Wandering off from his hunting companions, the mortal, Actaeon, comes upon the goddess Diana and her nymphs, bathing at their secret place in the wood. Diana, in anger at his intrusion, throws water of the sacred pool upon Actaeon who is thereby transformed into a deer, to be pursued and killed by his own hounds. We observe a gruesome death willed by a protagonist upon her victim, and we contemplate a dreadful irony—the hunter hunted. Or, prior to the ironic conclusion, was there a sordid act of voyeuristic invasion, now repaid with summary punishment?²

Blame needs to be brought into some sort of rational relation with tragedy: otherwise, we cannot retreat to the Olympian distance necessary for the easing of our empathetic pain before the sight of suffering and injustice. A victim whose fate is morally unexplained offends our hope for justice. It is so of Desdemona, and this is why Shakespeare's Iago is so distressing to us; we cannot develop a general theory of the motivation

of his crime and consign him to a category of evil-doer, with the result that he inhabits our minds as a singular malignity.

Apportioning blame to Actaeon or to Diana is almost irresistible. Ovid knew that the story confounded us as searchers for an understanding of justice. He wrote: 'But if you seek the truth, you will find the cause of this in fortune's fault and not in any crime of his. For what crime had mere mischance ['error']?'³ Surely Ovid is being oblique and ironic here; a hunter cannot mistake his way, for it is inseparable from his quarry (though, as will be seen, he can misidentify it). At the end of the narrative, Ovid returns to the question, saying, 'common talk wavered this way and that: to some the goddess seemed more cruel than was just; others called her act worthy of her austere virginity; both sides found good reasons for their judgement.'⁴ What Ovid does by this acknowledgement is locate the story beyond the territory where morality is debated, blame or exoneration to be pronounced.

Something more ambiguous and elusive is happening in this story. It seems that there can be a world where occur events more momentous than actions which can be measured in terms of right and wrong. In fact, Ovid presents us with a world that is prior to morality; because it is prior to society. That universe is one full of philosophical possibility. The human being (or goddess), in his (or her) predicament confronts huge



1) «Diana and Actaeon», Duke of Sutherland Collection, on loan to the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.



2) «Diana and Callisto», Duke of Sutherland Collection, on loan to the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.



3) «Danaë», Museo del Prado, Madrid.

realities. They participate in dramas of an immensity that our imaginations can grasp only feebly. And they make tales that implicate the greatest forces of the earth and the heavens.

* * *

Titian (c. 1488-1576) thought deeply about Ovid's story. He painted *Diana and Actaeon* [Fig. 1] and its pendant, *Diana and Callisto* [Fig. 2], for Philip II of Spain. The pictures were substan-

tially finished in 1559, the date of a letter from the painter to the king, asking for instructions about their transportation (though evidence survives showing that Titian continued to make modifications).⁵ They would join a group of four paintings begun some five years earlier, several of which had already been sent to Philip: *Danaë* [Fig. 3], *Venus and Adonis* [Fig. 4], *Perseus and Andromeda* [Fig. 5] and *The Rape of Europa* [Fig. 6].⁶ The last picture was *Jason and Medea*, and *The Death of Actaeon* [Fig. 7] remained in his studio at Titian's death, never sent to Spain.



4) «Venus and Adonis», Museo del Prado, Madrid.



5) «Perseus and Andromeda», by kind permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London.

The six *poesie* or *favole*, as Titian called them, presumably comprised a programme of some sort.⁷ But it is not an obvious one and may have been open-ended. A flexibility in hanging may have been permitted within the programme, for the pictures do not appear have been designed for a specific room or gallery.⁸

However, the two pictures in Edinburgh are pendants.⁹ There is the obvious fact that Diana appears in both: they were

painted in the same campaign, and are populated by nudes who are in consistent scale (one smaller than that of the other pictures in the group); settings are similar, perhaps even continuous, with the result that, colouristically and tonally, the pictures harmonise. In addition, an oddity of perspective appears in both. In *Diana and Callisto*, Titian uses two scales for his figures. The group of Diana is larger than that of Callisto, and the effect of an extended perspective distance between them



6) «The Rape of Europa», Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

results. Actaeon is also on a larger scale than the other figures of the scene in which he appears. The short 'real' distance

between the recoiling principals on the picture plane, compared with their scalar-perspectival separation, helps counter-



7) «Death of Actaeon», National Gallery, London.

act the centrifugal tendency of the composition and keep taut the lines of communication between them. In addition, around the theme of bathing, both pictures are about the revealing of what has been hidden.

Nevertheless, whilst the *poesie* for Philip II may be more or less tightly conceived in programmatic terms, the pondered nature of Titian's thinking upon their Ovidian themes also allows each picture to stand on its own. *Diana and Actaeon* was a particularly challenging and rewarding story. And the raw fact is that Titian did not illustrate Ovid's words. There are many discrepancies between the written and the painted narratives. That Titian changed his mind about the story that he was telling, as the presence of *pentimenti* shows, indicates that the poem prompted his invention rather than his obedience to its letter. Indeed, his improvisatory method, exploiting the property of the oil-painted mark whereby it can be undone, favours nuance and is itself essentially poetic rather than prosaic. The very instant that Titian chooses to depict differs markedly from Ovid's narration:

As soon as he entered the grotto bedewed with fountain spray, the naked nymphs smote upon their breasts at sight of the man, and filled the grove with their shrill, sudden cries. Then they thronged around Diana, seeking to

hide her body with their own; but the goddess stood head and shoulders over all the rest. And red as the clouds which flush beneath the sun's slant rays, red as the rosy dawn, were the cheeks of Diana as she stood there in view without her robes. Then, though the band of nymphs pressed close about her, she stood turning aside a little and cast back her gaze; and though she would fain have had her arrows ready, what she had she took up, the water, and flung it in the young man's face.¹⁰

Titian has no shrieking nymphs; instead, a small dog barks. Diana is not shielded by them; as her black companion attempts to cover her, she holds up a white cloth to veil herself. The painter curtails the dramatic role of the nymphs. Brilliantly, he has the principals recoil to the extreme edges of the stage and canvas, and at the same time dominate the action.

The artist has chosen to focus upon the suddenness of the moment and has contrasted Diana and Actaeon in their expressions of surprise. Of course, surprise is a physical action of the present moment but, as a mental action, it is a stage in a process—a shift of awareness. The scene of surprise is *of* the instant at the same time as being *about* the past. Of crucial importance for a reading of the picture is the fact that it is constituted in part of the thoughts of the principal protagonists *prior* to this moment, surprise presupposing a previous state of mind dramatically unlike the present one. In other words, the picture is an action to be observed not just from the point of view of the audience, but also from those of the main actors, whose continuous—yet fractured—experience is the essence of the drama.¹¹

In order to direct the audience to reconstruct the earlier moment, Titian has concentrated on the contradiction of action and experience that signifies Actaeon's surprise. In his orchestration of Actaeon's action through the treatment of draperies, Titian tells of an intrusion quite at odds with Nonnus's account of an act of deliberate spying. Actaeon has arrived in a flurry. A cloth attached to his quiver flies. His own *tunica* continues to move towards the right when he himself has already come to a sudden stop. There is no question of wind causing flutterings of drapery, for it is clear that the air is quite still in the rest of the scene.¹² So much does Titian concentrate upon surprise, so much were the minds of Diana and Actaeon, a moment before, unprepared.

Painting need not be limited to representing only the visual moment, and Titian tells the viewer what Actaeon's *previous* experience was. What the hunter saw was the pink-red curtain that is now being withdrawn by the reclining nymph with the sky-blue or sea-blue drapery and holding a mirror. In other

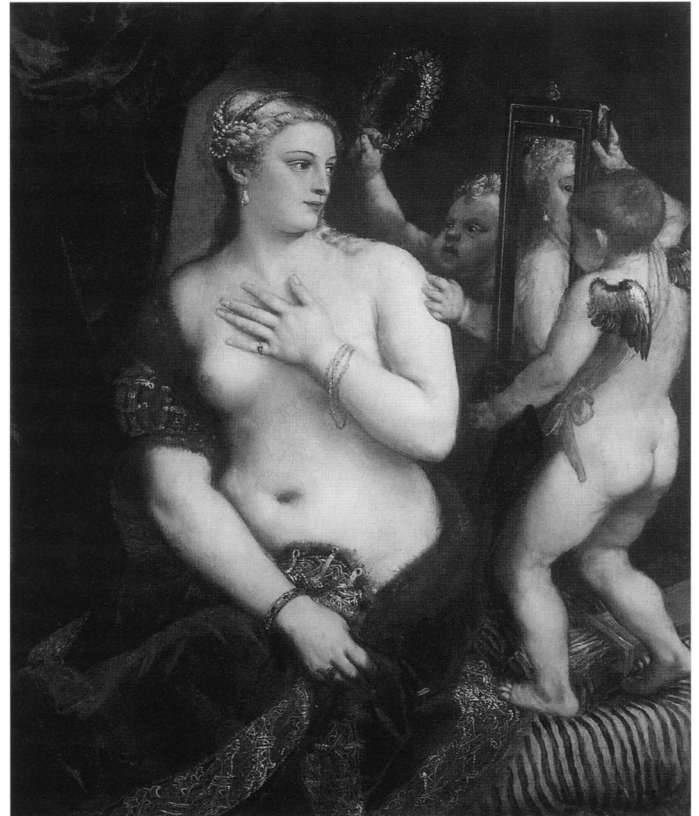
words, the present scene was, a moment before, veiled by a colour and a fabric.¹³ A formalistic art criticism would see the curtain as a prop brought in for the balance of the composition. Indeed, it has a prominent part, in arresting the attention of the observer from far off—like a fanfare—before he or she moves closer to take in the detail of the action. But Titian's curtain is more than a formal device. It has its function in the drama itself.

The possibility is offered to reconstruct what may be called emotional vision. Actaeon saw a colour that turned out to be merely a veil. Until then, though, what he saw invaded his mind, so that sensation and thought became entwined—became *fantasia*. At the stage of the narrative at which Actaeon saw the colour pink-red, he was drawn forward by it. His pursuit was in a state of arousal of perhaps curiosity, certainly appetite.

A close consideration of Actaeon's thought and action before the moment of revelation makes clear the need for a hinge to create a dramatic shift. Thus the role of the nymph who draws back the curtain becomes crucially significant. She does not merely occupy the scene as an extra to the action; she has a performing part. She has used the curtain to lure and deceive Actaeon.

X-rays have revealed that Titian made an important change to the nymph's pose. Previously, she looked not at Diana, but at Actaeon.¹⁴ Now, as the person revealing the scene deliberately, she must be looking, not in surprise and shock, and fear of Diana's wrath, but in order to gauge the goddess's reaction to Actaeon's intrusion. She herself, veiled and languid, is not posed for shock. The intensity of her gaze upon Diana is made the more forceful by the fact that she is the only female figure who looks directly at the virgin goddess. She is to be identified metaphorically with the pink-red curtain, the emotional marker of Actaeon's quest. Titian's story is here about the interchangeability of a sense and an object of desire.

At this point, it is necessary to insist that Titian made another modification to Ovid's narrative. The poem has it that it is noon-time, and Actaeon has abandoned the day's hunting to explore the woods. But in Titian's picture it is clearly not noon. Titian takes up Ovid's simile for Diana's anger, in the colouring of the dawn. By means of the curtain, he suggests that it is either dawn or dusk, for the colour is that of the sky at the beginning or end of the day. However, the more plausible interpretation is that Actaeon sees here the evening light rather than the dawn, for it fits the chronological frame of Ovid's tale. Let us think that Actaeon has forgotten himself in his journey through the woods. For all that a red light fills his vision, he has failed to recognise it as an evening sky and is oblivious of the peril that is consistent with the passage of the



8) «Venus at her Toilet», National Gallery of Art, Washington.

day; dusk giving place, in due order, to night and to Diana's reign as goddess of the Moon. Actaeon has stayed too long in the wood and night now falls. Soon, the last rays of the sun will cease and the pale moon will take possession of the scene.

Most prominent among evening stars is Venus. She would be a suitable prompter of Actaeon's desire. And there is an impelling reason to think that it is she whom Titian has insinuated into the very heart of the action of *Diana and Actaeon*. There was always an unsatisfactory looseness in a reading of the picture which considered the nymphs, occupying prominently the central part of the picture plane, as merely registering various degrees of surprise at the turn of events. Now, it can be suggested, the reclining nymph takes a crucial role in the plot of the drama.

To the reclining figure who withdraws the curtain Titian has given the mirror, a familiar attribute of Venus.¹⁵ In her blue

drapery he evokes the sea, Venus's place of birth. The ewer that stands by her is like the one that the standing nymph fills from the cistern in the *Concert Champêtre* by Giorgione and Titian in the Louvre [Fig. 9]. The nymphs in this latter picture are clearly venereal spirits conjured by and inspiring the gentlemen in music-making. For Actaeon, Venus (the evening star) is the prelude to moonrise (the appearance of Diana). In her action of raising a white cloth, Diana is like the moon disappearing behind a scudding cloud. She becomes the moon against the night sky, represented by her black maid forming a crescent of draperies on the far side of Actaeon.

When identified as Venus—or perhaps a nymph possessed by Venus—the reclining figure's gaze across the greater part of the width of the picture towards Diana, together with her action in withdrawing the curtain, takes on enhanced significance. She exists and acts in opposition to Diana's principle of virginity. Now, Venus is to be recognised as the mover of the action, the perpetrator of a deception and of a revelation. An instant before, Diana did not see her, for, as Venus, she was on the other side of the curtain. With a mirror and with her hair loose, she was about her toilet. That is how she appeared to Actaeon. It becomes clear that Diana raises her white cloth not just to cover herself before Actaeon but also to protect herself from the gaze of Venus (or the Venus-inspired nymph).¹⁶

At the moment shown, one person becomes visible to Actaeon as another disappears. Enflamed by Venus and seduced by a vision of cool waters, he has been pursuing a desire now revealed to be his nemesis.

* * *

Actaeon is to be thought of as seeing both visually and mentally. Painting treats visible reality and at the same time may offer metaphor to the viewer. Mythological subjects need just this possibility of simultaneous meaning—as narrative singularity and metaphorical generality. So, in the story, Actaeon is a hunter whose instruments are his dogs and his arrows, both swifter and more deadly than himself. In terms of metaphor, he is a hunter of love or knowledge and his instrument is vision, and swifter yet. His eye, a moment before, saw red; his mind saw by the day's half-light something highly desirable. But Titian, and Ovid, point to an ambiguity in the hunter; does he pursue or is he lured: is he active in pursuit of an aim or passive in being drawn by a temptation? What was desirable has turned out to be forbidden. Desire has turned into horror.

Actaeon's visual experience is now in crisis. First, there is the over-turning of an anticipation. Then, the experience itself



9) Giorgione / Titian, «Concert Champêtre», Louvre, Paris.

is split in two. With the withdrawal of the curtain, everything implicit in the red-pink sensation is reversed and becomes the grey light of the moon. Diana appears where Venus was an instant before. Then too, Diana—assuredly lovely as spectacle in the flesh—occupies a place where ardour will, joltingly, be cooled.¹⁷ It is indeed a chilling scene in which, hanging from the trees, are the pelts of deer that she has killed. So, death and flesh combine. Also combined are appearance—the sickly scene of terror, wrath, sterility and death that has replaced the seductive one that Actaeon was seeing—and disappearance—the petrification of the nymph, perhaps being transformed into a caryatid—cold, dry and chaste—who looks so fixedly at Actaeon from behind the pillar.

It may be that Actaeon first saw Diana as a reflection in the pool and maybe she is still looking down at his reflection. It would certainly be suitable if, deviating from Ovid's stage directions once again, simultaneously Diana destroyed her image and put her curse upon Actaeon, by kicking water into his face.¹⁸ Actaeon had had the refreshing vision of Venus, or a nymph, at her toilet—the water cool and gently turbulent—replaced by the reflection of the moon in the still waters of Diana's pool and then shattered into the icy spray that strikes him. Sightlines for such a passage of action are possible.



10) «Sacred and Profane Love», Galleria Borghese, Rome, Archivio Fotografico Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Romano.

Titian's mind was directed to angles of reflection elsewhere in the picture. A streak of white pigment in the mirror of "Venus" is intended to be a reflection of the water spewing from the spout into the pond below. That Actaeon was looking at a reflection in water is also suggested by his hand gestures. His experience is bifurcated. With his raised left hand, he attempts to block his own view of something regrettable or horrific. His lowered right hand seems to perform the same action. It could indicate his attempt to cease looking at a reflection on the water. The scene that confronts Actaeon now is, again, of flesh and death. His raised left hand perhaps has something of the valedictory about it, but more explicitly it expresses his recoil from what he sees at the top of the pillar, the skull of a deer. Just as, a moment ago, Actaeon's vision gave way to thought and anticipation—*fantasia*—so now his vision is prelude to his thought, within the experience of this dreadful reversal, and the culmination of thought—its total victory over time and circumstance—which is prophecy.

With his eye, he sees a skull. If no other faculty were involved, the experience would be—devoid of all ramification—in the present. But by the power of intellect—a faculty going through dramatic and mythic evolution at this very instant—he sees what it signifies, the animal's death. If he pursue's the thought, Actaeon will see death in general. And if he thinks of death in general, he cannot but see his own death in the skull of the deer. Foresight—a fearful thing—instead of anticipation and appetite, becomes an ineradicable element of his mental life when he discovers contradiction in sensation and time. Diana's curse within the story is his transformation into the deer. Within the meta-story, she brings him to a knowledge of his death. Actaeon experiences metamorphosis at the

same time as his world is revealed to be a thing of flux. Desire can turn to terror in an instant, where Love and Strife are the prevailing and contending principles,

Once, Actaeon hunted with his hounds and *teloi*, and now he does so with his vision, and now again with his inner eye of intellect. It is with the eye of intellect that he can recognise himself in the deer's skull: its image represents to him his own death. The experience has become of a sort of mirror in which reflection of the philosophical, rather than purely visual kind, happens. Perhaps reflection is seeing death in one's mind's eye. It was certainly an idea that Ovid had. He told the story of Tiresias, the blind seer—the man with only his mind's eye—being asked by Liriope if her son, Narcissus, was destined for a long life. Tiresias replied that, so long as he should not come to know himself, Narcissus would indeed live long.¹⁹ If Actaeon looked into the pool to see the reflection of the object of his mistaken desire—Diana—he would have reenacted something of Narcissus's story, one consistent with the detail of the nymph hiding behind the pillar like Echo. In addition, though, Actaeon is the representative, in becoming a seer, of humankind. But he, like we, only sees self-reflectively, and his self-reflection makes his knowledge a thing of fearfulness—makes a coward of him. This is the third mirror that Actaeon has seen. In the first, he saw Venus at her toilet. In the second—the glassy surface of the secret pool—he saw the reflection of the moon—Diana—and knew that night had fallen and that he was abroad beyond his time. The final mirror—the image to which he must assimilate—tells of his death.

* * *

It is a war of principles that has brought about Actaeon's death and knowledge of death. Venus, intent upon bringing about the violation of Diana, is the agent of the tragedy. It is she who, directly or indirectly, has deceived Actaeon. Titian has taken from Ovid's equivocation on the matter of culpability the idea that Actaeon—everyman—is unwitting, at least in his intrusion upon Diana. And, indeed, Diana for her part could not react otherwise to the invasion of her privacy. She too has had a bifurcated experience; Venus revealed her identity an instant before Actaeon entered the scene, and Diana is shown in the process of turning her attention from the one to the other. Titian has been attentive to the reciprocal attention of Diana and Venus, or the nymph of Venus. Now, let it be said, Diana cannot be a little bit compromised in her virginity, but must defend it before gods or her reputation for it before mortals with absolute force. She needs to behave without the least equivocation because her principal antagonist is not Actaeon—a mere mortal—but Venus, defeat at whose hands

would be an altogether more serious matter. Perhaps Diana was looking in admiration at what she thought was one of her nymphs but who was in fact metamorphosing under the influence of Venus into an object of desire. Alternatively, while still a nymph, Venus held up the mirror for Diana who, now that it is withdrawn, sees, where a moment ago she saw herself, Venus. It would be a vision to deny and a scrutiny to resist, by the raising of a cloth or clouds.

Gargaphia is Diana's secret place. She has gone there with her nymphs to bathe after the exertions of the hunt. As an exclusive sanctum, it is indistinguishable from her virginity itself. Thus, to breach one is to breach the other. Ovid describes the place not literally, but metaphorically, as a site of extreme sexual intimacy:

There was a vale in that region, thick grown with pine and cypress with their sharp needles. 'Twas called Gargaphie, the sacred haunt of high-girt Diana. In its most secret nook there was a well-shaded grotto, wrought by no artist's hand. But Nature by her own cunning had imitated art; for she had shaped a native arch of the living rock and soft tufa. A sparkling spring with its slender stream babbled on one side and widened into a pool girt with grassy banks.²⁰

This was the scene that was to remain unseen by human eye. Diana transformed Actaeon into a dumb animal so that no report of what had been seen could exist. Such a tale—Actaeon's trophy—would have been of a victory for Venus.

The identification of Venus and the specification of her part in the drama of *Diana and Actaeon* help clarify the programme that connects the picture with its pendant, *Diana and Callisto*, in which Callisto's fertility is contrasted with Diana's sterility—the condition of an inhabitant of the shaded and infertile places on the floor of the forest. The world into which Callisto comes is sterile. Her story follows on in Ovid directly from that of Phaeton. Phoebus's son had prevailed upon his father to be allowed to drive the chariot of the sun through the skies. However, unable to control the forces under his command, he allowed the sun to deviate from its course and left the world a scorched desert. Jupiter brought an end to the immediate chaos by killing Phaeton and then went about returning the world to a fertile condition. In this, his ally was Venus. His many amours with nymphs and dryads are to be understood as episodes in his campaign to repair the cauterised and infertile world.

The project is summed up in a passage that serves as prologue to the story of Callisto: 'Yet Arcadia, above all, is his more earnest care. He restores her springs and rivers, which hardly dare as yet to flow; he gives grass again to the ground,

leaves to the trees and bids the damaged forests ['silvas'] grow green again.'²¹ Jupiter then sees Callisto, a nymph of Diana, resting from the hunt in '...the forest that all years had left unfelled', that is, at a time before the grove, the copice or the clearing.²² Jupiter disguises himself as Diana in order to approach Callisto, and then he rapes her. Now pregnant, 'she loathed the forest and the woods that knew her secret.'²³ Ovid makes clear that the territories of Jupiter and Diana are antithetical. When her pregnancy is revealed to Diana, Callisto is cast out. The metamorphosis is from virginity to fecundity; from a spirit of the woods to a spirit of the field or meadow. That changed spirit would invest the lives of the shepherdesses who would come to occupy the pasture land; in the meantime though, Juno, shamed and angered by her husband's infidelity, transforms Callisto into a bear, destined to wander in wild places, in terror of the savage creatures that roam there.

As with *Diana and Actaeon*, Titian takes Ovid's tale of Callisto only as his starting point. For example, he transfers to it a sub-theme that originated in his thinking about *Diana and Actaeon*. Whilst most of Diana's nymphs have their hair dressed and plaited, Callisto's hangs loose, showing in the implication of *voluptas* her moral kinship with Venus.²⁴ She also occupies a place on the picture plane corresponding with that of the nymph identified as Venus or the Venus-inspired nymph in the companion picture.

There is another nymph in *Diana and Callisto* whose role is mysterious and ambiguous; she too has her hair down. Crouching at Diana's feet, looking up at her, she acts as an intermediary figure between the group of Diana's favourites on the right and the group on the left who expose Callisto's pregnant condition. Here is perhaps the product of a meditation upon an idea that Ovid included in the poem: '...and, were not Diana herself a maid, she could know her [Callisto's] guilt by a thousand signs; it is said that the nymphs knew it.'²⁵ The implication is that the Venus principle had already penetrated the entourage of Diana. The crouching figure is perhaps a fifth-columnist, an agent of Venus—if not Venus herself, for she looks very much like the reclining figure in the pendant picture—who tells Diana what the goddess cannot see or know for herself.²⁶

Once again, the sacred nature of Diana's bathing place means that its invasion by unchasteness—by Venus—is a violation of Diana herself. She seems to be presiding over a diminishing empire. Diana, the embattled goddess, attempting but failing to defend virginity, as a theme of the Edinburgh pictures, emerges further from a comparison with the Vienna version of *Diana and Callisto*. Ovid has imputed an improper amount of knowledge of carnality in the nymphs. The nymph next to Diana that, it is being suggested here, is Venus or an



11) «Diana and Callisto», Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

agent of Venus in the scene in the Edinburgh picture, and the nymph at the extreme left of the composition who seems to perform the double action of exposing Callisto and veiling from Diana's view her own somewhat distended belly, are both absent from the Vienna picture. There, Diana's command of her realm is not brought into question and her imperious gesture runs no risk of being ridiculed by an overlooked detail or incident. As a result, the Vienna picture preaches the ascendancy of chastity.

Diana's is indeed a diminishing hegemony. Titian has filled out Ovid's stories; but, at heart, they are one story and it is that same story that he is telling. Beyond questions of culpability, it is about human evolution in the inhabitation of the world. Clearly, the Golden Age of Hesiod was not, for Ovid, an undifferentiated paradise. There was a catastrophic flood and, as has been seen, a disastrous drought, when the earth ceased to

be fertile. Moreover, traced in the stories of Diana and Actaeon and of Diana and Callisto, there was a continuing war between the fertile places of the world and the sterile mountains and pine forest. The Silver Age would come and there would be the ascendancy of cultivation, and therefore of the fertility of the soil. There would be agriculture; but the wild state was never entirely vanquished and a way of life survived, closer to human beginnings, that is to the age of pasturage in Arcady.²⁷ And Arcady itself was shared between shepherds and the occupants of an even earlier and less benign condition; these last were hunters. Vitruvius, another theorist of social evolution had it that, 'The men of old were born like the wild beasts, in woods, caves, and groves, and lived on savage fare.'²⁸ Predation was necessary where cultivation and animal husbandry were still underdeveloped. Its divine protector was Diana. Titian follows Ovid in telling of the defeat of Diana and of its consequences for human society under the patronage of Venus and Jupiter—the preparation of the world for the shepherd and the cultivator.

* * *

In the Diana pictures, Titian makes scenes of times out of joint. Callisto becomes a creature of an epoch—the future—of which Diana has no notion; Actaeon is up late. Titian meditated upon Ovid's poetry with a poet's freedom. Both were adherents to Horace's rule in *Ars poetica* that 'Pictoribus atque poetis quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas' ('to both painters and poets was ever given equal entitlement to do what they would') and could serve as inspiration for yet another poet to take license. If the story of Actaeon was about a confusion of passion and of time, might not the time or epoch, after Callisto's fashion, be changed? Here with us, in the Age of Iron, there was a story to be told, and Actaeon's fate might be turned upside-down. Nobles and Mechanicals share the world and are equally deformed when cast into a State of Nature. There, Diana and Venus continue in their dispute after their fashion. Titania and Oberon act out their parts in a muddle of chastity and carnality, and metamorphoses are visited upon all who enter the secret place. However, tragedy does not belong in the Age of Iron; its inhabitants unworthy of anything so grand. The goddess who made antlers the sign of the death of the hero, now in her own mutated form, rewards the mortal with the head of an ass, and, let loose in the forest, with all that his unbridled appetite and fantasy could desire.

* I should like to thank Paul Joannides for his many and much-improving editorial suggestions.

¹ Since 1946, the Duke of Sutherland's pictures, *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*, have been on loan to the National Galleries of Scotland. The most important literature on them is referred to in *Italian and Spanish Paintings in the National Galleries of Scotland*, catalogued by Hugh Brigstocke, 2nd Edition (The Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland: Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 178-186 [hereafter, *Brigstocke*]. The most exhaustive iconographical study of *Diana and Actaeon* is that of Marie Tanner ("Chance and Coincidence in Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*", *Art Bulletin*, 1974, vol. 56, pp. 535-550). The present article complements some of her conclusions but diverges in its argument from others. She discusses the story as a treatment of the themes of Fortune and Fate, identifying the architecture of the scene as the House of Fortune described in the *Roman de la Rose* and Diana as the personification of Fortune. She suggests that, in addition to Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses*, the painter used that of the fifth-century poet, Nonnus of Panopolis, in *Dionysiaca*, and that Pietro Bembo and Giordano Bruno illuminate Titian's telling of the story. In her use of a rare text existing only in manuscript, one that is a personalised elaboration of the Ovidian story, and one written after the painting of the picture, her interpretation eventually becomes somewhat attenuated. The interpretation that is offered here intends not to stray so far from the primary text—the picture—and to that extent is less philosophically ambitious. However, being critically focussed, it enquires more closely into Titian's poetic purpose and calls upon evidence whose meaning, but not whose connections with the work itself, can be contested. Erwin Panofsky (*Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic*, London, 1969, pp.154-163), also discusses the iconography of the pictures at some length, paying particularly close attention to the architecture of *Diana and Actaeon*.

² Ovid's account is generally taken to indicate Actaeon's guiltlessness. Panofsky (1969, p. 157), for example, writes unambiguously of 'the unpremeditated, fatal invasion of Diana's privacy' and parallels his innocence with Callisto's (p. 158). Marie Tanner (1974), on the other hand, quotes Nonnus's account, in which Actaeon spies on Diana. Bembo also skews the tale in that direction.

³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, with an English translation by Frank Justus Miller (The Loeb Classical Library), London, New York, 1928, vol. I, Book III, p. 135.

⁴ Ovid, Book III, p.143.

⁵ See, *Tiziano — Le lettere*, Presentazione di Giuseppe Vecellio, Introduzione di Ugo Fasolo, Prefazione di Clemente Gandini, Magnifica Comunità di Cadore Editrice, 1977, Doc. 141 of 19th June 1559, p. 179. The pictures were consigned in 1561 (See Doc. 198 of 22nd December 1574, p. 269).

⁶ *Danaë* had already been sent when Titian first referred, in a letter to Philip, to *Venus and Adonis* (s.d., 1554, *Tiziano — Le lettere*, Doc. 130, p. 165). He referred to *Medea and Jason* in a letter of a similar date (Doc.135, 10th September(?) 1554, p. 171) and to the *Death of Actaeon* ('Atheone lacerato dai cani suoi') in 1559, (Doc. 141, p. 179). *The Rape of Europa* was on the point of being sent to Philip on 26th April, 1562 (Doc. 162, p. 212).

⁷ Charles Hope (*Titian*, London, 1980, p. 127), noting the earlier date for the *Danaë* and its different dimensions, proposes that it was to be removed from the series.

⁸ See Jane Nash, *Veiled Images: Titian's Mythological Paintings for Philip II*, Philadelphia; London and Toronto, 1985, pp. 51-67. Harold E. Wethey (*The Paintings of Titian: The Mythological and Historical Paintings*, London, 1975, vol. III, pp. 78-95) discusses 'The Poesie and the Spanish Royal Palaces'.

⁹ They would also work in relation with other pictures in the series. For example, there is an obvious parallel and contrast between *Diana and Callisto* and *Perseus and Andromeda*. The women are, in different ways, bound. *Diana and Callisto* and the *Rape of Europa* have the role of Jupiter in common. *Danaë* could be hung with either of them on that basis. *Danaë* was the mother of Perseus. *Diana and Actaeon* and *Venus and Adonis* are similar in that they deal with the fate of hunters. *Venus and Adonis* and *Danaë* both deal with light. *Danaë* and *Venus and Adonis* are acknowledged as pendants, showing the female figure from opposite sides, in a letter of 10th September (?) 1554 to Philip (*Tiziano — Le lettere*. Doc. 135, p. 171). Then, *Venus and Adonis* could be a companion picture with *Perseus and Andromeda* in that they both deal with issues of nobility in relation to love. *Danaë* and *The Rape of Europa* could hang together, to show Jupiter's achievements in alliance, on the one hand with Apollo and on the other with Neptune. It is perhaps worth remarking that, but for the *Danaë*, the pictures were conceived during the period of Philip's marriage to Mary Tudor (1554-1558). Philip could be likened to Perseus and to Jupiter in the guise of a bull. This list of parallels and contrasts could no doubt be extended.

¹⁰ Ovid, Book III, p. 137.

¹¹ In case it might seem that the reading of the picture that follows is unusual and without historical foundation, it may be remarked that any number of examples of images designed with the perspective of the protagonist in mind could be cited. For example, Cosimo Roselli's *Crossing of the Red Sea*, in the Sistine Chapel, in which the commander of the Egyptian army, as he drowns, sees Moses and his retinue composed in the manner of an altarpiece. The viewer's meditation upon the subject of salvation and damnation is to take into account the alternative perspective. The donor often has a similarly privileged view, compared with the viewer (if not the donor him/herself). Richard II in the *Wilton Diptych* is an example. Titian himself set up a famous configuration of alternative perspectives in the *Pesaro Altarpiece* in the Frari, Venice, where the left donor sees an axially symmetrical *sacra conversazione*. The artist's invitation to reconstruct the antecedent moment is crucial to the poetry of the pious images of Leonardo, from the *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* on, and of Raphael (eg. *Bridgewater Madonna*) and Michelangelo (eg. *Bruges Madonna*).

¹² The cloth with which a nymph dries Diana's foot falls vertically. As Diana raises her cloth, gravity again is unresisted by wind. It should be noted, however, that draperies in Titian's paintings can fly for a number of reasons. In *Venus and Adonis*, for example, a flying ribbon is attached to Cupid's quiver which hangs from the tree. Titian's purpose here is probably to remind us that Cupid is a spirit of the air.

¹³ The curtain has a very important function to perform within the drama, to say nothing of the picture. X-radiography has shown that it was painted late in the execution of the work (*Brigstocke, loc. cit.*). However, it must have been intended from the beginning. Actaeon's surprise, after all, was a constant.

¹⁴ *Brigstocke, loc. cit.*

¹⁵ One need go no further than the list of paintings supplied to Philip of Spain, appended to the letter, of 22nd December 1574, to his secretary of state (*Tiziano — Le lettere*, Doc. 198, pp. 268-70). It includes, 'Venus con amor gli tien il specchio'. *Venus at her Toilet* [Fig. 8] in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, has Venus looking in a mirror.

¹⁶ The identification of the reclining figure as Venus might also account for another odd feature of Titian's picture. The carved stone bath upon which she leans would tilt down under her corporeal weight, for she, of the goddesses of Olympus, comes closest to corporeality (as Paris was pleased to observe).

¹⁷ It is worth noting the colour shift that Actaeon has experienced. The soft pink of the curtain has given warmth to the flesh of the nymph who withdraws it. Now, a paler Diana sits on a cloth of crimson velvet, the colour of coagulated blood. It seems likely that Titian intends a menstrual association here. If so, he has grasped the central unstated idea that Diana embodies. Blood is always present where the huntress is. Her pallor, as the moon, indicates her anaemic condition. The cyclical nature of her manifestation to the world allows her recurrently a temporary victory over her opponent, the venereal principle. Actaeon's sin in pursuing a venereal goal during the period of Diana's ascendancy is clear. Giving some support to this suggestion is Titian's treatment of *Venus and Adonis*. Adonis, perhaps appropriately, abandons Venus, half-reclining upon a garment of dark crimson velvet, for the hunt.

¹⁸ In the form of the reflective surface of the water disturbed is the idea of the broken mirror. In *Sacred and Profane Love* [Fig. 10], in the Borghese, the cupid guddles in the water, and "Sacred Love" no longer sees the image of the heavens in reflection. In *Diana and Actaeon*, the still water at Diana's side of the scene contrasts with the turbulence at the other side.

¹⁹ Ovid, Book III, p. 149.

²⁰ Ovid, Book II, p. 135.

²¹ Ovid, Book II, p. 89.

²² Ovid, *ibid.*

²³ Ovid, Book II, p. 91.

²⁴ The theme of hair dressed or not runs through both pictures. Titian uses the motif tellingly in, for example, *Sacred and Profane Love*, in the Borghese [Fig. 10]. The relative looseness of the iconographic scheme containing all of Philip's *poesie* is indicated by the fact that, as the lover of Adonis, Venus has her hair elaborately dressed.

²⁵ Ovid, Book II, p. 91.

²⁶ The picture is severely rubbed in the area of the crouching figure. And the hand of Diana, above, has been none-too-expertly repainted. This is an odd and perhaps unsatisfactory juxtaposition. To see and point is, in pictorial terms, to do one thing twice. As a result, look and gesture are, each, weak. Clearly, the crouching figure, largely in the shadow, is unnoticed by Diana who looks and gestures towards Callisto. The idea of the unseen, in the form of the crouching

(and speaking or whispering) figure would work better if it acknowledged Ovid's idea that Diana's powers of vision and interpretation are tested where the spectacle is pregnancy. A gesture whereby Diana would indicate denunciation at the same time as a revulsion against the sight of Callisto would be much stronger. The right hand of God in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel—perhaps recalled in Diana's gesture in *Diana and Actaeon* viewed from Actaeon's perspective—would have served well. Titian rhymes Callisto's left hand with Diana's. To have done the same, with due modification of orientation and implication, with the right hands would also have been effective. A bent elbow and a gesture indicating Diana's unwillingness to see are possible to conceive in the confusion of repaintings in the area and would have had the advantages of making the crouching nymph's invisibility more plausible (and—confessedly—consistent with the interpretation of her that is being offered here) and creating a division rather than bridging a gulf between Diana and Callisto. Unfortunately, the early copy of the picture in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna [Fig. 11], has the same gesture as the Edinburgh picture and therefore the decision upon the present gesture has to have been made quite early on. A further point may be added here, one lending some support to the identification of the crouching nymph as a venereal presence. A copy of the picture, probably made by Miguel de la Cruz for Charles I of England and Scotland, and now at Knole in Kent, includes the nymph, painted in markedly warmer flesh tones than the others. The Sutherland picture is a very badly rubbed in the area of the nymph and the original flesh tone is not to be gauged. The painter of the copy saw it in better condition and his nymph, at Knole, without the pallour of the other figures, stands out from the crowd.

²⁷ The Roman writer, Varro, for example, made the distinction. See, *Varro on Farming*, translated, with introduction, commentary, and excursus by Lloyd Storr-Best, London, 1912, p. 15: '...the learned Dicaearchus, who, in the picture he has drawn for us of primitive Greek life, shows that in former ages there was a time when men led a pastoral life, with no knowledge of ploughing, sowing, or pruning, and that they took up agriculture a degree later in point of time.'

²⁸ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, Translated by Morris Hicky Morgan, New York, 1960, Book II, Chapter 1, p. 38.