
REMBRANDT'S
BATHSHEBA READING
KING DAVID'S LETTER

Edited by
Ann Jensen Adams



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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011 4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

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First published 1998

Printed in the United States of America

Typeset in Bembo 11/13, Penta, BV

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bathsheba reading King David's letter / Ann Jensen Adams.

p. cm. (Masterpieces of Western painting)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-45391-7. — ISBN 0-521-45986-9 (pbk.)

1. Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, 1606-1669. Bathsheba with King David's letter. 2. Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, 1606-1669 — Criticism and interpretation. I. Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, 1606-1669. II. Title. III. Series.

ND653.R4A63 1998

759.9492-dc21

97-18154

CIP

ISBN 0-521-45391-7 (hardcover)

0-521-45986-9 (pbk)

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REMBRANDT'S BATHSHEBA AND THE CONVENTIONS OF A SEDUCTIVE THEME

When Rembrandt painted a life-size *Bathsheba* in 1654, there existed a rich visual tradition of this subject, particularly in the countries north of the Alps (Fig. 1). Like the other narratives that Rembrandt chose for paintings with nude women – *Andromeda*, *Susanna* (twice), *Diana and Her Nymphs*, and *Danaë* – *Bathsheba* was one of the most traditional subjects that had the female nude as the focus of the image. In his renditions of these narratives, Rembrandt, for whom emulation was one of the prime forces behind his development, responded intently to the pictorial traditions of the subjects; at the same time, he deviated radically from certain conventions connected with the themes.¹

The large number of representations of Bathsheba in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pictorial arts² were inspired by three brief verses (2 Sam. 11:2–4):

2. And it came to pass in an evening-tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

3. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

4. And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

Rembrandt's painting of 1654 depicts a life-size Bathsheba whose brightly lit nude body completely dominates the canvas. At her feet sits an old woman – her figure enveloped in a deep shadow and cropped on two sides by the frame – who is attending to Bathsheba's right foot. In her right hand Bathsheba holds a letter, of which only the blank back is visible. This conspicuous letter and the old woman, together with the young woman's nudity and beauty, were the motifs that enabled the seventeenth-century viewer to recognize the main figure as Bathsheba. However, in order to identify the young woman in Rembrandt's painting, the viewer needed some knowledge of the pictorial conventions of the theme and the implications of certain motifs. Except for the beauty and nudity – the last justified by the text that describes Bathsheba as bathing ("he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon") – there are in fact no elements in the painting that refer directly to the biblical text: even the figure of David gazing upon her is absent. Neither of its two other identifying signs, the letter and the old woman, appear in the biblical narrative. Over the course of time, however, they had become conventional in visual representations of the story.

THE VISUAL TRADITION

The portrayal of the biblical narrative of David and Bathsheba as a subject in which looking at a bathing woman constitutes the central theme (that is to say, the depiction of Bathsheba in or near a basin as a focus of the composition) had already appeared in late medieval illuminations.³ Along with many other subjects of unchaste or seductive women, the topic became popular in German and Netherlandish prints in the first half of the sixteenth century.⁴ In these images, the figure of David spying on Bathsheba was increasingly reduced to no more than a tiny figure in the background, functioning primarily as an attribute of Bathsheba, in order to identify the subject. However, as the viewer scrutinizes the picture, this little figure also confronts him with the fact that he is like "a David" himself.

Only by careful examination of Maarten van Heemskerck's influential invention from the middle of the sixteenth century, for



· NON MOECHABERIS · IXOB · XX ·

Figure 6. H. J. Muller after Maarten van Heemskerck, *Bathsheba Receiving King David's Message*, engraving, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)

example, can the viewer make out the tiny figure standing on the gallery of his palace (Fig. 6).⁵ This David has to be satisfied with a view of Bathsheba's back seen from an enormous distance. It is the beholder who is granted a full view of her figure seen from quite close by. By showing Bathsheba's legs from the side, while turning the middle and upper part of her torso toward the spectator, the artist guarantees a maximum view of Bathsheba's body. Variations on this position were frequently employed in paintings of the subject. Rembrandt, too, placed Bathsheba's legs parallel to the picture plane while slightly turning the rest of the body – from her stomach to her shoulders – in the direction of the viewer.

Van Heemskerck introduced into his composition a motif that

was still used by Rembrandt: the maid who is attending to Bathsheba's feet. By combining this action with objects such as the ointment jar, jewel box, and mirror – objects that are displayed in the foreground as attributes of vanity, and that, as pictorial motifs, evoke associations with Mary Magdalene and allegorical figures like Superbia, Vanity, and Luxury – Van Heemskerck emphasized that Bathsheba is elaborately preening herself. This would have been considered fitting for an image of a woman who is emphatically presented as adulterous and sinful, for the print is part of a series of the Ten Commandments. The depiction of this episode was selected for the sixth, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

However, in Rembrandt's painting it is not a young maid but an old woman who cares for Bathsheba's feet. An old woman accompanying her, a motif that would play such a striking role in many seventeenth-century depictions of Bathsheba, began to appear in images dating from the end of the sixteenth century. We meet her, for example, in a print dated 1603 by the engraver Johan Bara (Fig. 7).⁶ In this etching, the figure of Bathsheba and the young maid at her feet are clearly inspired by the print after Van Heemskerck, but here Bathsheba turns toward an old crone who is speaking to her and pointing to David standing on the roof of his palace. That such an image of an old crone was perceived as a procuress is confirmed by a description by Frans Badens around the same time as Bara's print: "... a Bersabea, bathing: a letter is brought to her and an old procuress keeps on fawning and whispering in her ear."⁷ The "old procuress," a designation that certainly did not have an innocent meaning in this period – was the stereotype of the bad women who made it their purpose to corrupt young women (and men). We know the image of the old woman as a bawd from many sixteenth-century brothel scenes and depictions of the Prodigal Son carousing.⁸ Increasingly over the course of the sixteenth century she also began to appear in the company of such seductive beauties as the biblical Delilah and Salome or the mythological Danaë. Just as in the narrative of Bathsheba, no old crones are mentioned in these stories. However, her presence underlines the doubtful morals of the women they accompany.



Figure 7. Johan Bara, *Bathsheba at the Bath*, 1603, engraving (2nd state), Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)



Figure 8. Willem Buytewech, *Bathsheba Reading King David's Letter*, 1616, etching, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)

At the same time, the proximity of the old woman emphasizes the beauty of the young woman and literally embodies the transience of earthly beauty.⁹ A few years later this reminder of vanity and transience, visualized by juxtaposing a young and an old woman, was even spelled out by Willem Buytewech in an etching dating from about 1616. In this *Bathsheba* (Fig. 8), a large silver plate embossed with the word *VANITAS* rests behind Bathsheba being addressed by the old woman.¹⁰ The motif of the old woman in depictions of Bathsheba seems to have been particularly popularized by Buytewech's prints. In another etch-



Figure 9. Willem Buytewech, *An Old Woman Brings Bathsheba King David's Letter*, 1615, etching, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)

ing dated 1615 he had also portrayed an old crone speaking to an attentively listening young nude woman (Fig. 9).¹¹ Probably because David is completely absent here, BERSABE is written as identification on the print. As a matter of fact, this picture – which shows only an old woman addressing a young nude sitting in a garden – could just as well represent Vertumnus and Pomona. Precisely from this point onward, the subject of Vertumnus and Pomona became very popular in the northern Netherlands and its pictorial scheme often closely approached that of Bathsheba. Add a tree and a vine, or some fruit on the



Figure 10. Pieter Lastman, *Bathsheba*, 1619, Hermitage, St. Petersburg (photo: Hermitage, St. Petersburg)

ground, and we are looking at Vertumnus, who, in the guise of an old crone, tries to persuade Pomona to love him.¹² This suggests that the general theme of these images – that of a young beauty and an old woman/procuress – itself became a reason for the great popularity of these subjects.

In Rembrandt's painting the old woman has replaced the young maid attending Bathsheba's feet, a figure who, since Van Heemskerck's invention (Fig. 6), had been included in many images of the subject. Rembrandt's teacher Pieter Lastman, like Bara before him, had portrayed both the young maid at Bathsheba's feet and the old crone (Fig. 10). Rembrandt conflated the two servants into the old woman. By including this figure, the contrast between the radiant young beauty and shriveled old age – enhanced by the brilliant light and the deep shadow – remains an important theme.

Also because of this motif, associations with the stereotypical image of the old procuress remained incorporated. To be sure, in Rembrandt's painting such associations are considerably toned

down by her role as a caring attendant, but the addition of the traditional motif of the letter (which, in earlier as well as contemporary painting is invariably handed or discussed by the old woman) could remind the viewer of her function as a procuress.

Praising extensively the invention of a presently unknown *Bathsheba* by Jan Lievens, Philips Angel wrote in 1642 that Lievens, when devising his composition and thinking about the person who came to communicate David's wishes, decided that "the messenger must have been an old woman with a lot of experience in matters of love – that is to say, a procuress, as one calls them – because these are often used for such matters, and that she did not pass on the message simply verbally, but doubtlessly brought a letter (as proof of superior power) which she handed to Bathsheba."¹³ These words once again verify that the image of the old woman was seen as an obvious stereotype of a procuress, and they also indicate how self-evident was the association of the letter: it notifies the viewer of the existence of a lover, whose message is being conveyed.

We already encountered the motif of the letter in the engraving after Van Heemskerck in which the missive is handed to Bathsheba by a male messenger (Fig. 6). However, in Van Mander's description of the *Bathsheba* by Badens cited above, it was the old procuress who passed her the letter. Even more popular became the motif (introduced by Buytewech in his etching of around 1616 [Fig. 8]) of Bathsheba holding the letter in her hand while the old crone addresses her.

That depictions of a young woman and an old attendant with a letter could also be used to represent a courtesan and her procuress/madam is evident from several illustrations in *Le miroir des plus belles courtisannes de ce temps*, a little book published by Crispin van de Passe II in 1630 (Fig. 11). Among the many prints with portraits of these available beauties, the only motif that is occasionally included consists of an old woman who hands a letter or holds up a mirror.¹⁴ The old woman – and also the letter and the mirror – could thus apparently function as self-evident attributes for the courtesan.

In fact, a *Bathsheba* painted around 1631 by Rembrandt's friend Jan Lievens recalls De Passe's courtesans and their procuresses (Fig. 12).¹⁵ It depicts a fully dressed Bathsheba with an old woman,

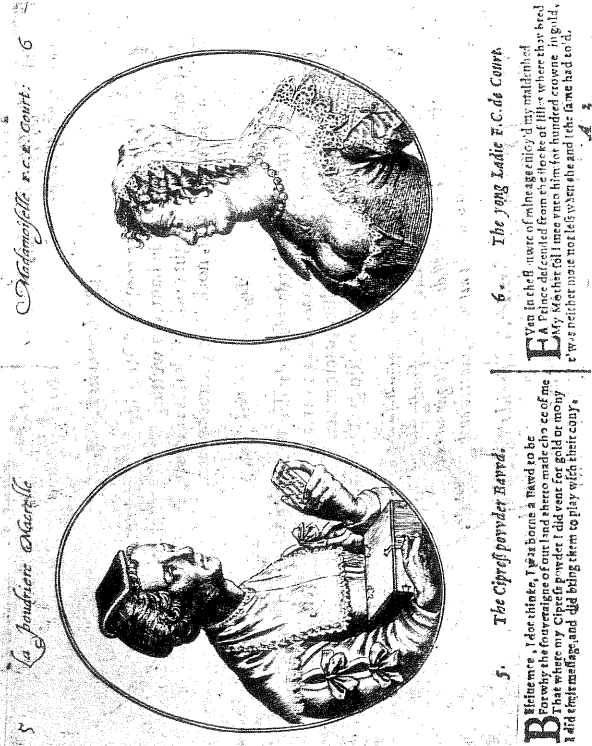


Figure 11. Crispin van de Passe II, in *Le miroir des plus belles courtisannes de ce temps*, Amsterdam [1630], figs. 5 and 6, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)

completely isolated from their surroundings and portrayed as large half-length figures filling the picture plane. Next to Bathsheba leans a mirror, emphasizing thoughts about vanity and transience. Bathsheba seems to be reflecting on the letter she is holding, and in that respect this composition is the only precedent for the emphatic contemplation of Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* of 1654.

Rembrandt situated the letter – by then traditional – in the center of the painting. The bright light reflected by the unfolded sheet gives it unprecedented emphasis. If other painters (except for Lievens in the painting just mentioned) included the letter in the context of a gesture – handed by the old woman, received or read by Bathsheba – here the letter has no function in a narrative action. It still denotes, however, the invitation to make love. In Lievens's painting, the letter and the longing gaze of this courtesan-like Bathsheba merely seem to anticipate the meeting with



Figure 12. J. G. Haid after Jan Lievens, *Bathsheba Receiving David's Letter*, 18th-century mezzotint (photo: from J. Bruyn et al., *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2, p. 273)

her lover. Rembrandt turns our attention instead to Bathsheba's reflecting on the content of the letter.

REMBRANDT'S IMAGES OF BATHSHEBA AND THE NUDE BEFORE 1654

To gain insight into the development of Rembrandt's approach to the theme and its culmination in the painting of 1654, we should first consider more closely his own earlier treatments of the subject. His first composition, dating from about 1632 and today known only from copies and a print by a pupil, is unassuming in every respect (Fig. 13).¹⁶ Nonetheless, Rembrandt appears to have responded to several earlier examples, while the composition is also related to more striking experiments of his own during this period.

Although Rembrandt's later works testify to his intimate knowledge of the *Bathsheba* by his teacher Pieter Lastman (Fig. 10), he chose a much simpler scheme for his first treatment of the subject. Its limitations remind us of the etchings of Buytewech, which doubtless were an important source of inspiration. As in the two etchings by Buytewech (Figs. 8, 9), Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* is only partly disrobed and placed against shrubs. The palace with the almost invisible figure of David (who must have had a telescope at his disposal) seems to have been inspired by yet another etching by Buytewech dating from about 1615.¹⁷ The clothed middle and lower parts of the body that constitutes a massive base for the tapering upper torso, the arched line of her back, and even the position of her bare foot strongly recall a print after a composition of a *Bathsheba* by none other than Raphael,¹⁸ which must have also been the starting point for this etching by Buytewech.

As early as in this first *Bathsheba* composition, Rembrandt conflated the two traditional figures of the young maid and the old crone. A motif that Rembrandt included on his own authority, and did not repeat in any subsequent depictions of Bathsheba (although he elaborated it shortly afterward in his paintings of Flora), is the bunch of little flowers that Bathsheba holds. These flowers are in the middle of the dominant diagonal running from the smooth and fresh face of the young woman to the wrinkled head of the old one, underscoring Bathsheba's blooming youthful



Figure 13. Copy after Rembrandt, *Bathsheba*, ca. 1632, Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts (Br. 492) (photo: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes)

beauty and its brevity. In combination with Bathsheba's unfocused – pensive – stare, this motif, along with the old woman, pointedly invites the viewer to contemplate the consequences of female beauty and its transience.



Figure 14. Rembrandt, *Diana at the Bath*, ca. 1630, etching, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (B. 201) (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)

Bathsheba's head is turned toward the spectator. This pose recalls two, in several aspects related, nude studies that Rembrandt etched around the same time: the *Nude Woman Seated on a Mound* (Fig. 5) and the *Diana* (Fig. 14), both probably dating from 1631. In both prints, doubtlessly executed directly after nude models, the women meet the gaze of the viewer and seem to acknowledge

his presence. In both images Rembrandt also indicates that the women are sitting in the open air (in contrast with his studies of male nudes, as, for example, Fig. 15).¹⁹ These women thus appear to be undressed not because they function as nude models, but because they are bathing in the countryside. By showing a cloak and a chemise with a clearly visible sleeve – not the usual indelible drapery – the artist underlines the provocative reminder that they have put off their dress. That they did so to go bathing in the open air is made explicit in the second etching: this woman, whose position between her chemise and shimmering cloak with embroidered borders anticipates the Bathsheba of 1654, sits with her lower legs in the water. With the addition of a bunch of arrows in a quiver she is transformed into a Diana, thus the associations with illicit spying becoming more pronounced.

When depicting a related theme in a painting – which through its color may produce a much stronger suggestion of seductive lifelikeness especially in the portrayal of young women, as Van Mander asserted²⁰ – Rembrandt chose the subject of Bathsheba, a woman explicitly spied upon. He apparently did not yet dare to depict this woman – so obviously the focus of a voyeur's gaze – completely nude. There is, however, a strong suggestion that she partly undressed herself. Also there is not yet a direct confrontation with the viewer by way of "eye contact," as in both etchings and in the *Old Testament Heroine at Her Toilet*, painted less than a year after he created his first Bathsheba.

The large canvas of the *Old Testament Heroine at Her Toilet*, showing a fully dressed beauty (Fig. 16), must have been produced in response to the *Bathsheba* by Lievens of about 1631 mentioned above (Fig. 12).²¹ Lievens had reduced the theme of Bathsheba to an image of two fully dressed half-length figures; one is reminded of the subject only by the letter in the hand of the young woman and, as we have seen, by the combination of a young and an old woman with letter and/or mirror that could also function as the image of a courtesan. In Rembrandt's painting, the attributes referring to the biblical narrative are even further distant.

Rembrandt depicted a beautiful, richly clad young woman whose hair is being combed by an old crone.²² The motif of the old woman standing behind the young beauty and combing her hair is directly lifted from Lastman's *Bathsheba* (Fig. 10). In isolat-



Figure 15. Rembrandt, *Two Male Nudes and a Mother and Child* ('*Het Roluigentje*'), ca. 1646, etching, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (B. 194, I) (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)



Figure 16. Rembrandt, *Old Testament Heroine at Her Toilet* (? Esther, Judith, Bathsheba), ca. 1632/1633, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (Br. 494) (photo: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)

ing these two figures, Rembrandt was the first to elevate the toilet-making duo – which would become such a popular subject in the next decade – to an autonomous theme for a painting.²³ Around the same time, Lievens painted another picture in which a

only the faces of a young and an old woman are to be seen; by the suggestion of verbal interaction – the old woman watches the girl rather intently – it may represent Bathsheba as well as Ver-tumnus and Pomona.²⁴

Thus, during this period Lievens and Rembrandt launched several related paintings that do not involve precise subjects based on a specific text, but that use from those subjects familiar motifs and the connected associations. In the canvas in Ottawa, Rembrandt created a painting that could be interpreted as a scene from the Bathsheba story: as a Bathsheba who is dressed and whose toilet is being prepared for David. This “Bathsheba” looks at the gazing viewer, for whom she is preening. However, the painting may also be regarded as an attractive scene of a young courtesan at her toilet,²⁵ or as a Vanitas.²⁶ The main figure may even be perceived as the portrayal of other biblical heroines preening themselves for men whom they have to entice with their beauty, like Esther and Judith.²⁷ It is left to the beholder to specify this according to his own preferences.²⁸ Some artists would transpose this theme into their own time, as did numerous genre painters from the 1630s onward;²⁹ others retained historicizing dress so that their paintings still contained biblical associations (as did several painters from Rembrandt’s circle).³⁰ The essence would have been clear to the public for which they were meant: a seductive beauty is preening herself for her lover – and this lover is in fact the beholder, who is like a “David” (or an “Ahasverus,” or “Holofermus”).

Several years later Rembrandt ventured to create a composition with a completely nude Bathsheba who archly looks at the viewer. This painting, dated 1643, may not be entirely by his hand. In my opinion, however, the composition certainly originated in Rembrandt’s imagination and must have been created in his studio (Fig. 17).³¹ The image shows again a young beauty at her toilet: she is the undressed mirror-image of that in Ottawa (Fig. 16). However, her nudity and her position in the open air, with a palace in the background (upon which one might discern with some difficulty a tiny dot that may indicate the presence of David), are more straightforward signs that this woman is Bathsheba.

During the period between the invention of the half-dressed *Bathsheba* of about 1632 and this completely nude one of 1643, Rembrandt experimented several times with subjects in which a



Figure 17. Rembrandt pupil, *Toilet of Bathsheba*, 1643, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Benjamin Altman (Br. 513) (photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 [14.40.651])

nude woman is the central figure. When Rembrandt began to present himself as painter of the nude, with works like *Andromeda* (Fig. 18) and *Susanna* (Fig. 19), he chose subjects with respectable pictorial traditions. For the young and ambitious Rembrandt, those themes were highly suitable to emulate famous artists in depicting the nude, and also afforded him the opportunity to portray violent emotions.³² At the same time such subjects were pre-eminently erotically charged: the beauty of nude *Andromeda* and *Susanna* (like that of *Bathsheba*), kindled the love of the men who saw them.

Most striking in these early nudes is the naturalistic rendering of the bodies of the terrified figures of *Andromeda* and *Susanna*. This radical deviation from current conventions in depicting the nude must have been a deliberate choice. By bringing them closer



Figure 18. Rembrandt, *Andromeda*, ca. 1630, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen, Mauritshuis, The Hague (Br. 462) (courtesy Mauritshuis, The Hague; photo: © Foundation Johan Maurits van Nassau)

to the viewer's world of experience, and emphasizing the vulnerability of these frightened, unclothed women, he increased the possibility of empathy.³³ Their erotic appeal is heightened by the proportions of their bodies: the narrow, sloping shoulders, the small upper body and the enormously expanding stomach and hips epitomize sexual ideals of that period.³⁴ Their sensual directness is tempered, however, by a focus on their vehement reactions. They do not pose before the viewer, as had the much more stylized nudes of former generations.³⁵

However, in his subsequent paintings of the nude *Danaë* and *Bathsheba*, Rembrandt treated subjects in which the women do not express violent emotions, and in those paintings the nudes are of a less naturalistic type. For the *Bathsheba* of 1643 Rembrandt took as his starting point Lastman's composition of 1619 (Figs. 17, 12).³⁶ In contrast to Lastman's painting, however, the figure of Bathsheba is blazingly spotlighted and stands out sharply against the darkness, while both maids are almost lost in the dark. Rembrandt had already experimented with such focus on a brightly lit nude body surrounded by deep shadow in his paintings of *Andromeda* and *Susanna* (Figs. 18, 19). In those works he used this device to enhance the effect of the women's helplessness and vulnerability amid a threatening atmosphere.³⁷ In this painting of Bathsheba it only emphasizes the body more powerfully since any suggestion of vulnerability is dissipated by the self-confident way in which she looks out of the picture, exhibiting her body openly for the beholder.³⁸

This Bathsheba is fully conscious of the viewer's presence, but – in contrast with the *Susanna at the Bath* of 1636 (Fig. 19) – she does not respond to him as a threatening intruder. However, she also does not stare impassively like the two etched nudes (Figs. 5, 14), nor does she scrutinize the viewer like the *Old Testament Heroine at her Toilet* (Fig. 16). Because of her somewhat tilted head and slight smile, she becomes a “coquette” who knows the power of her enticing beauty. She invites the spectator to admire her nude body, which is situated exactly in the center of the image. For this reason she took off her clothes: behind her lies the rich cloak, embroidered with gold thread along the borders – the same as the *Young Woman at Her Toilet* wears – and she sits on her white chemise, a sleeve of which hangs down between her legs. She has



Figure 19. Rembrandt, *Susanna at the Bath*, 1636, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen, Mauritshuis, The Hague (Br. 505) (courtesy Mauritshuis, The Hague; photo: © Foundation Johan Maurits van Nassau)

not yet received the letter, so the effects of her seductiveness – and its moral consequences – are not indicated. She is an unconcerned seductress of the one who is watching her.

Although this *Bathsheba* is less shocking in its deviance from prevailing traditions than his *Andromeda* and *Susanna*, no Bathsheba had ever been presented so overtly as a provocative object of visual enjoyment. In the case of such a defiant, direct presentation of the nude body, Rembrandt might have felt it necessary to create some emotional distance by a certain degree of stylization. Perhaps this is the reason that her body is more traditional in its proportions and more stylized and taut than that of *Andromeda* or *Susanna* (not to mention the women in the two etchings).

REMBRANDT'S *BATHSHEBA* OF 1654

More than ten years later Rembrandt again returned to the theme of Bathsheba, this time in a life-size nude (Fig. 1).³⁹ Although Cornelis Cornelisz. and Goltzius had depicted life-size nudes around the turn of the century, it was only much later, in the 1640s and especially the 1650s, that a number of painters in the northern Netherlands ventured to do so again. Indeed, it was Rembrandt who had led the way: begun in the second half of the 1630s,⁴⁰ his *Danaë* was for this reason quite exceptional (Fig. 20). In turning to the theme of Bathsheba in a nude of this size,⁴¹ Rembrandt may have been stimulated by the many life-size nudes that had recently been created in Haarlem, Amsterdam, and Utrecht by such artists as Pieter de Grebber, Caesar van Everdingen, Jacob Backer, Bartholomeus van der Helst, Ferdinand Bol, Jacob van Loo, and Jan Gerritsz. and Johannes van Bronckhorst: from the majority of those painters, one or more paintings of Bathsheba are still known (and there would, of course, have been many more).

Except for a *Bathsheba* by De Grebber dated 1644,⁴² all paintings of Bathsheba from this period show the old woman conveying David's message verbally (Jacob van Loo, and a work attributed to Paulus Bor),⁴³ or with a letter. In some cases she hands the letter to Bathsheba (J. G. van Bronckhorst, De Grebber, Hendrik Heerschop), in others Bathsheba has already received the letter

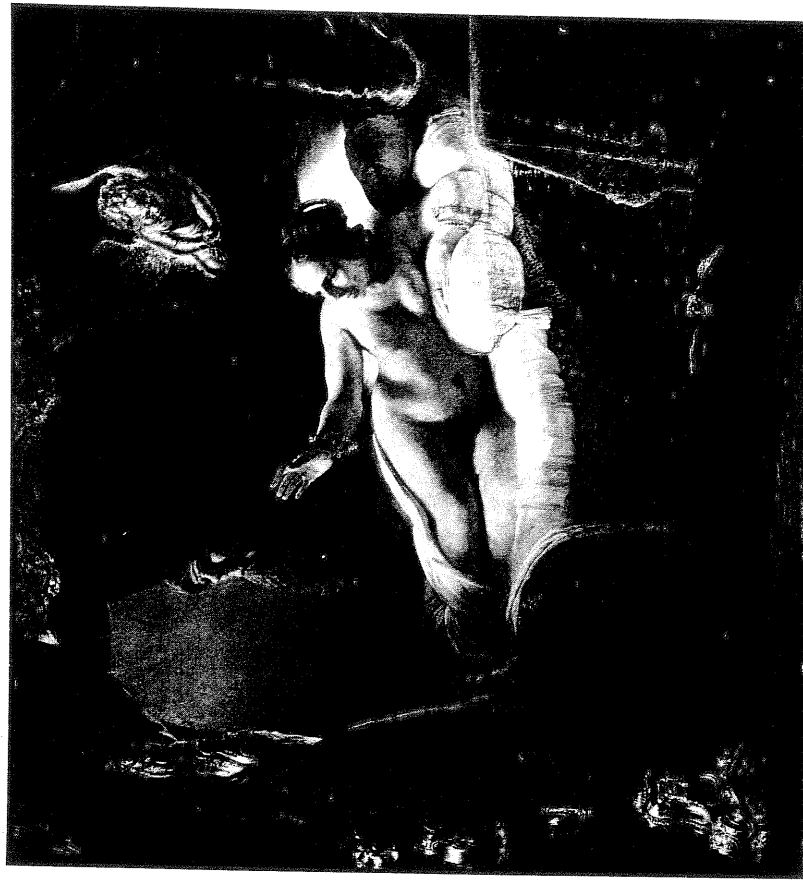


Figure 20. Rembrandt, *Danaë*, ca. 1636/1643, Hermitage, St. Petersburg (Br. 474) (photo: Hermitage, St. Petersburg)

and holds it (Johannes van Bronckhorst, Fig. 21).⁴⁴ All of these images accentuate the interaction between Bathsheba and the old procuress (only in De Grebber's painting is the messenger a young woman), emphasizing David's invitation to commit adultery; these are not primarily scenes of women at their toilet.

In contrast, Rembrandt chose not to depict narrative action. Instead, he elaborated both on his previous inventions as well as on some specific elements from the visual tradition. Like his earlier creations, Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* of 1654 confronts us with a scene of a young woman at her toilet with an old attendant. From the fact that Rembrandt depicted this old woman and her foot-



Figure 21. Johannes van Bronckhorst, *Bathsheba with King David's Letter*, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome (photo: Archivio Fotografico Soprintendenza Beni Artistici Storici di Roma)

caring occupation almost literally over a period of more than twenty years in three paintings (which are for the rest highly different), we may conclude she must have perfectly fit the image of Bathsheba that he wished to present. If he had deemphasized the old woman in his inventions of around 1632 and 1643, however, she is even less conspicuous in this work. Moreover, with exception of the white chemise and the shimmering cloak with gold embroidery that he had already employed several times, Rembrandt omitted all other auxiliary objects and motifs. A pillar is only vaguely visible at the right side and a curtain is stretched behind the figures, parallel to the picture plane.

The result is to now focus all attention on Bathsheba. No other painting constituted her nude figure as such a dominating presence. If in earlier paintings Rembrandt had made the bodies of his nudes stand out sharply against a very dark background

through strong lighting, he pushed the effect to the limit here. Not only is the result enhanced by situating the nude in the immediate foreground, in life size and occupying a large part of the picture space (the fingertips of the left hand almost seem to emerge from the picture and her right foot is very near the imaginary picture plane), but the background has become absolutely impenetrable. Since it is blocked by a flat curtain stretched across the width of the picture, the viewer is not even given the illusion that a space extends behind it. This flat darkness seems to push the figure forward, an effect heightened by the slight inclination of the body toward the viewer. Everything conspires to create an effect of a palpable nearness. The beholder is unable to get around her, literally and figuratively speaking; only the shimmering gold brocade of the cloak offers the gaze of the viewer a chance to occasionally glide away. No painter – certainly not a Dutch one – had dared to create an image like this before.

The viewer inescapably takes David's place: not only is the gazing David absent,⁴⁵ the suggestion that someone may be watching Bathsheba from the background – the king's traditional location – is also radically obstructed by the curtain. The viewer is the only one looking at her and he does so from the same position as the figure of David in an illustration of *Bathsheba* by Christoffel van Sichem after Tobias Stimmer (Fig. 22). This woodcut, which was first published in the famous 1574 Straßburg edition of Flavius Josephus's *History of the Jewish Antiquities* that Rembrandt possessed, has an exceptional composition: David is situated in the foreground and he gazes upon Bathsheba, who is sitting alone on a somewhat lower level in the middle ground. Although the arrangement introduced by Stimmer, with David standing in the foreground, attracted no following, Rembrandt seems to have had it in mind when he devised his composition of 1654.⁴⁶ This is corroborated by the pillar on a high plinth at the right, and the curtain hanging behind Bathsheba. Consciously or unconsciously, Rembrandt was inspired by an invention from the preceding tradition which, more than any other, emphasized David beholding Bathsheba: in Stimmer's composition we follow David's gaze as he watches a Bathsheba who sits quietly meditating, with downcast eyes, leaning on her left arm and her right arm resting relaxed on the right leg.

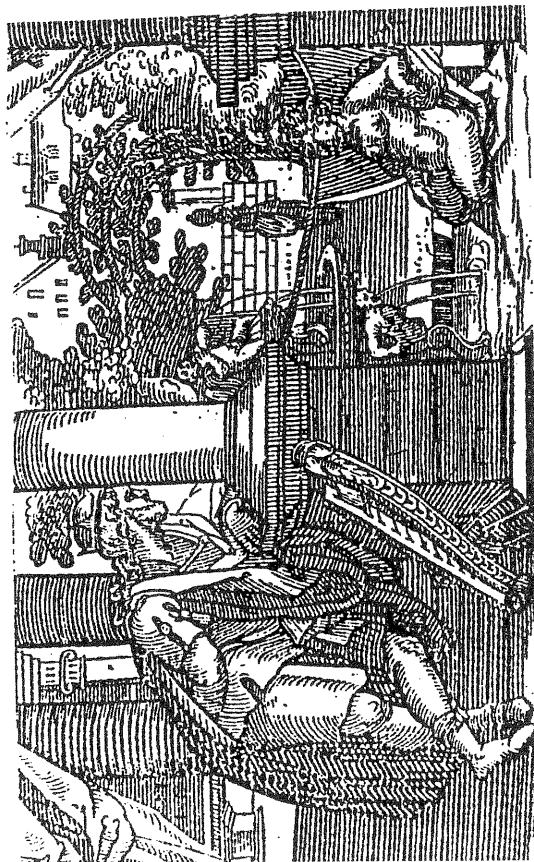


Figure 22. Christoffel van Sichem after Tobias Stimmer, *Bathsheba*, woodcut, in Flavius Josephus, *History of the Jewish Antiquities*, Straßburg, 1574

Some of his earlier nude studies – particularly the etching of the *Nude Woman Seated on a Mound* of about 1631 (Fig. 5) – played a role in his elaboration of Bathsheba's pose.⁴⁷ The immobile seated pose of the heavy nude, the turn of the torso, and the position of the left arm, unmistakably bring this etching to mind. In his *Bathsheba* of about 1632 Rembrandt had already employed the motif of the leg crossed over the knee – in fact an extremely natural and relaxed attitude for someone receiving a pedicure (but which had not been used for a *Bathsheba* by other artists). However, Bathsheba's inclined head with the lowered eyes, and especially the left hand on which she leans, remind us of the figure of Roxane preparing to be crowned by Alexander in a print by Jacopo Caraglio after Raphael.⁴⁸ Finally, the print by François Perrier after a Roman bas-relief so often cited in the Rembrandt literature, may have inspired the placing of the figures rigorously parallel to the picture plane and against a flat, closed-off background (Fig. 23).⁴⁹ Each element in his composition of 1654 – especially Bathsheba's demeanor – seems to have been designed to avoid any suggestion of movement and physical tension so that



Figure 23. François Perrier, "Antique Relief," engraving, in *Icones et segmenta*, Rome, 1645, plate 50, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (photo: © Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam)

nothing might disrupt the viewer's quiet contemplation of her body. All of the motifs that may have inspired Rembrandt – from earlier works of his own as well as from depictions by others – seem to have been used, probably unconsciously, to attain this goal.

If we compare the body of the 1654 *Bathsheba* with Rembrandt's earlier nudes and with the contemporary large-scale nudes painted by other artists in Haarlem and Amsterdam, we may conclude that Rembrandt has found a middle course between the naturalistically rendered sexually attractive type that he had depicted with so much conviction in his youthful work⁵⁰ – completely deviating from older conventions – and the stylized ideal based on classical examples pursued by many of his colleagues. Something similar is also true for Bathsheba's face. Although it suggests so much individuality that scholars frequently think – in my opinion erroneously – that Hendrickje was the model,⁵¹ the face conforms to an ideal type, elements of which

Rembrandt employed in works created over a long period of time.⁵²

In this ambitious life-size nude — unique in the later phase of his career — Rembrandt seems to have done everything in his power to create the epitome of beauty and to confront the viewer with a sense of intensely tangible corporeality. With the elimination of any intimation of movement, nothing impedes the eye as it contemplatively surveys the nude body. That it was Bathsheba whom Rembrandt rendered in this manner reveals that he must have been conscious of the specific implications of this subject as a pictorial theme in which moral and erotic concerns were indissolubly linked.

ATHSHEBA AND THE SENSE OF SIGHT, THE EPICTION OF BEAUTY, AND MORALITY

That there was a relation between various popular subjects and seventeenth-century preoccupations with seductive female beauty and arousal by sight becomes immediately clear when we realize that as soon as depictions of nude women were produced with some frequency in Holland several of the themes that became most popular were about men being excited by gazing at beautiful women. These include not only the subject of Rembrandt's painting, the bathing Bathsheba seen by David, but also the bathing Susanna spied upon by the Elders (the two most popular subjects from the Old Testament in the northern Netherlands), and the bathing Diana and her nymphs seen by Actaeon (the most popular mythological subject in Holland).⁵³ Seventeenth-century treatments of all three subjects locate the viewer in the same position and watching the same enticing beauty as the men in the stories depicted — men who were aroused by looking and were afterward severely punished. For the informed beholder of the time, these images would have been all the more attractive because they involved the titillating tension between looking at and enjoying nude beauty, and at the same time being reminded that this very act is illicit.⁵⁴

Rembrandt chose precisely these themes for the majority of his relatively few paintings that included nude women. The other subjects of female nudes that he painted, Andromeda and Danaë,

are similarly about paragons of female beauty whose sight immediately incited a fierce love in men.

The belief that of all the sense, sight has the most immediate and powerful effect on the mind — particularly in the excitement of desire and lust — appears already in texts from antiquity. From the late sixteenth century through the whole of the seventeenth, however, this idea — especially the dangers of viewing naked women — was almost obsessively repeated in many variations in the Netherlands.⁵⁵ In this context the story of David and Bathsheba seems to have been one of the most obvious examples. In fact, the Church Father Saint Jerome had already quoted the story in this context in the fourth century: "David was chosen as a man after God's heart . . . but as he walked upon his housetop he was fascinated by Bathsheba's nakedness and added murder to adultery. Notice for a moment that even in one's own house the eyes are never safe from danger."⁵⁶

It is not surprising, therefore, that Jacob Cats refers to David and Bathsheba in his book *Houwelijck* (Marriage) — a seventeenth-century best seller — when he extensively discusses the dangers of looking at unclothed women. Cats sternly warns women that it is almost impossible to express how seriously the minds of young men may become deranged and how their lust will be kindled when they see naked breasts. He then cites with gusto several examples, among them David and Bathsheba: "Oh! Even David succumbed to sin, not only by being aroused, but really making love. And behold! it was a beautiful woman washing herself who fired this evil lust."⁵⁷ Also Doctor Johan van Beverwijck cited David and Bathsheba in his *Schat der gesontheyt* (The Treasure of Health) of 1636, a medical handbook that was almost as popular as the works of Cats. In a chapter about the disease of foolish love — an illness contracted primarily through the eyes — he writes that physical beauty is able to hit the heart with lightning speed, causing festering wounds in the mind, as happened to David when he beheld Bathsheba.⁵⁸ Needless to say, moralizing preachers also liked to refer to this biblical story: "Therefore (oh Christian soul!), if you want to stay pure, avert your eyes of all beautiful women. Her noble beauty will cause your doom; it has seduced many a sincere heart into adultery."⁵⁹

Notions about the powerful effects of what is seen were con-

sidered to hold true for pictures as well. The thought that images of female beauty are equally able to arouse lechery in the viewer were also rooted in antiquity. Again, it was especially in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth century that the dangers of viewing paintings with female nudes appear to have been a vehemently discussed issue.⁶⁰ Although portrayals of Venus and Danaë were singled out in texts from antiquity (and quoted again in many later passages that were directly inspired by them),⁶¹ it was depictions of the bathing Bathsheba to which Erasmus referred in a text that, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, initiated a wave of censorship of "arousing" pictures. In his *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio* he wrote about the sinfulness of rendering biblical subjects in a shameless manner. Asking why it was necessary to depict, for example, David and Bathsheba, he wondered how much wickedness the artist added in such an image.⁶²

When in the following century the strictly religious Dirk Raëlsz. Camphuyzen, following in the footsteps of his friend Johannes Gvertz. Geesteranus – both extremists in their opinions about the dangers of painting – violently attacks the art of painting as being a "seductress of sight," the "foolish mother of all vanity," and "food for evil lust," he also cites the depiction of Bathsheba (bracketed together with Susanna).⁶³ In a fierce indignation that is sometimes quite witty, Camphuyzen thinks it a disgrace that there were presently so many Bathshebas around in paintings when the original who made David's senses run wild was already bad enough. Who wants to see a portrayal of precisely what one has to avoid, he exclaims (quite naively, we would say now). For Camphuyzen it is firmly established that such paintings – just like depictions of Susanna – function only as "a cancer for common decency and venom for the eyes." The depiction is for him as baneful as reality: since the eye is deceived by the beautiful sham of painting, one wants to do and to have what one sees in a painting, he states. Such paintings only openly display how depraved are the people who make and possess them. He also opines that to justify such subjects by explaining the moralizing conclusions to be drawn from the stories is only a pointless verbal excuse, since the image – by its very nature – has already accomplished its pernicious work.⁶⁴

Even the much less extreme Jacob Cats who, as just mentioned,

wrote extensively about the dangers of the eyes, warns against "lascivious" paintings because they produce lewd desire. As to be expected, the depictions of Bathsheba – this time bracketed together with Lot and his daughters – are mentioned as only serving lechery.⁶⁵ Doctor Van Beverwijk repeated Cats's lines approvingly and gravely cautioned against "amorous and frivolous paintings that easily lead to lasciviousness."⁶⁶ The fact that Van Beverwijk himself owned a painting of a nude Susanna (a copy after Rubens) demonstrates, however, that such admonishments were not deemed germane to men of judgment like himself.⁶⁷

These passages are only a selection from among many such statements about the dangers of looking at nude women in general, and nude women in pictures in particular. The story of David and Bathsheba – like that of Susanna and the Elders and Diana and Actaeon⁶⁸ – functioned as one of the most obvious moralizing examples about the dangers of sight and its sinful effects, while its depiction was considered by many to number preeminently among the "lust-arousing" subjects with female nudes, and was one of the most severely criticized. From the wide currency of such utterances, and because they were vented in different cultural circles, we may conclude that painters as well as their public would have been very conscious of such opinions and that their erotic impact must have been considered a fundamental aspect of paintings like Rembrandt's *Susanna* and *Bathsheba*.

We know of such concepts primarily from the negative comments of moralists. However, from the middle of the seventeenth century onward, poets like Joost van den Vondel and Jan Vos playfully employed the same ideas in laudatory poems about paintings of Susanna, Venus, or Danaë. While the collectors of such paintings did not write about their motives, they would, of course, have had no such scruples in owning them – notwithstanding the severe criticisms of moralists. Indeed, that such paintings were visualizations of narratives which could be read as moral exempla about beholding beautiful bathing women who aroused the senses of male voyeurs (and could be justified on that basis), and which as depictions were thought to have precisely that effect, would have been all the more reason for their appeal.

Moreover, the rendering of consummate female beauty – which boasted a long and prestigious tradition, beginning with



Figure 24. Joos van Winghe, *Apelles Painting Campaspe*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

Apelles, the greatest painter from antiquity (Fig. 24) – was considered one of the highest goals of the art of painting. This will have been of great importance for both the painter and the connoisseur. Every ambitious painter aspired to be “an Apelles,” whose name epitomized not only the highest art in general, but also the depiction of beauty, the grace and lifelikeness of the female nude in particular, notably of the nude Venus – beauty and

seductiveness personified.⁶⁹ If this was considered a paradigmatic subject for painting, one had to accept the obvious consequence: the enticement of the beholder’s senses.

In fact, depicting Bathsheba, this “biblical Venus,” could even be considered a greater challenge than rendering the mythical Venus – and several painters in Amsterdam and Haarlem around the middle of the seventeenth century, among them Rembrandt, seem to have competed with each other in doing so. More than any other woman, Bathsheba had to be the summit of physical beauty: it was, after all, David, the Old Testament example of piety and strength, who lost the control over his senses when he saw her, and not just a fabled pagan who was seduced by the sight of Venus or Diana, or a foolish Elder who went crazy over Susanna.

In 1643 Rembrandt had still portrayed the image of Bathsheba as a more or less “active” seductress (Fig. 17). The more passively Bathsheba is represented, however, the more it has to be credible that it was solely her physical beauty that caused David’s fall. Only her striking appearance could answer Adrian Poirter’s question as to how it was possible that David, a man after God’s heart, could fall so far.⁷⁰ If Vondel, in a poem praising a painting of Susanna, complimented the artist in rhetorical exaggeration by exclaiming that beholding this beauty “entices us to trespass the punishing laws”⁷¹ then a painter has to aspire to such an effect all the more when depicting Bathsheba, whom even David could not resist. Unlike Vondel, Jacob Cats considered such an enticing appeal in a negative light, and from this standpoint left no doubt that the better the painter in rendering the lifelikeness of the nude, the stronger the effect on the senses of the beholder: “To paint a Lot or a fall of David carefully causes the senses to go astray, I don’t know how, . . . the higher the painter strives, the more severely he offends and the stronger he hurts; the better he knows how to render life, the worse he disorders all passions.”⁷² The notion that a maximum lifelikeness enhances the empathy of the beholder, is clearly formulated here in relation to erotically charged paintings of the nude.

As we have seen, in the *Bathsheba* of 1654 Rembrandt did everything to paint an almost palpable lifelikeness in a subject that could rank as the prime example of lust-arousing images. That

Rembrandt consciously strove to compete with all other such paintings in exerting a strong effect on the senses of the viewer and wished to surpass all other painters in this respect, becomes all the more plausible when one realizes that his only preceding life-size nude, the *Danaë* (Fig. 20), was precisely a subject that was always quoted as *the* example from antiquity of a depiction that could arouse violent desire in the beholder. This was a subject that in the hands of Correggio and Titian had inspired some of the most sensual paintings of the sixteenth century. Paintings of Danaë could be considered emulations of the painting that Terence described in his comedy entitled the *Eunuch*. From this play, the passage about a Danaë that incited a young man to lascivious behavior became especially well known, since Saint Augustine repeated it in three different places. One finds a number of references to it by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors, Rembrandt's pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten among others.⁷³ In my opinion, images of Bathsheba, like those of Danaë, could be regarded as paintings that emulated each other in representing a theme which, since Erasmus, ranked as preeminent example of an arousing subject. With the life-size nudes of *Danaë* and *Bathsheba*, Rembrandt undoubtedly aspired to posit himself in the line of the great painters of the nude and to surpass his predecessors in the rendering of lifelike female beauty and its sensual effect on the beholder.

Nevertheless, Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* also shows that these were not his only goals. He also strove to incite an emotional response: "It does not suffice that an image is beautiful; there has to be a certain movingness in it, which holds sway over the beholder," wrote his pupil Van Hoogstraten.⁷⁴ Rembrandt had rather vigorously pursued a combination of emotional and erotic effects in his early nudes, especially the *Susanna at the Bath* of 1636;⁷⁵ in the *Bathsheba* of 1643 it was only enticement that he emphasized (Figs. 19, 17). In this late *Bathsheba*, however, he united both these aspects as subtly as possible (Fig. 1).

It is no coincidence that portrayals of Bathsheba led Rembrandt to two such contrasting solutions in the character of the woman and her attitude toward the viewer. The biblical figure of Bath-

sheba is, after all, full of contradictions. In contrast with Susanna (and also Diana), it is impossible to regard this woman – a woman who committed adultery without offering resistance – as an example of chastity. And, as we have seen already, unlike the Elders or Actaeon, David – God's favorite and the most important ancestor of Christ – could not function smoothly as a paragon of repugnant wickedness or foolishness. So the main actors are of a much more complex nature than the protagonists of these other stories with their much simpler contrast between chaste and unchaste.

In the Middle Ages the moral dilemma in the Bathsheba story could be solved by typological explanations, the most current one being that Bathsheba stood for the church, David for Christ, and Uriah for the Devil.⁷⁶ However, from the late Middle Ages onward, when stories from the Old Testament began to be read directly as moral examples, the approach to Bathsheba became distinctly negative; she was the target of blame. As conjugal ethics of the urban bourgeois society were consolidated, absolute chastity and unconditional faithfulness to the husband were elevated to the position of the prime female virtue (and this went hand in hand with the concept of woman as the cause of all sin). Bathsheba thus became an example of the dangerous seductress against whom all men – even King David – stood powerless. She even appeared in the series of popular prints depicting the theme of the "power of women" among the examples of those who used their seductive tricks to bring about the downfall of powerful men. In these subjects, women are presented as the provokers of all lasciviousness of which men are the helpless victims.⁷⁷

As we have seen in the engraving after Maarten van Heemskerck (Fig. 6), the subject could also be used in the sixteenth century as an illustration of the Sixth Commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Bathsheba is blamed for the betrayal of her husband: she is presented as a sinful seductress, one of the many who populate the graphic arts of the sixteenth century. As a matter of fact, the Ninth Commandment, "thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife," would have been very applicable to David and Bathsheba, but then with David as the guilty party. In the same series of prints, however, this was illustrated with the story of

Joseph fleeing the wicked wife of Potiphar, so that the image of the man as the victim of a voluptuous and sinful woman was consistently sustained.

Absolute condemnations of Bathsheba continued to be voiced in the seventeenth century by such strict Calvinist preachers as Godefridus Udemans. In the strongest of terms, Udemans versified that Bathsheba might indeed have been attempting to wash the filth from her body, but the diabolic filth in which she, as an adulteress, had been wallowing could never be washed away.⁷⁸

In this period, however, authors were sometimes voicing a more moderate attitude, one that considered Bathsheba not the only guilty party. For the Calvinist writer Johan de Brune, for example, David did not go scot-free either. He wrote that one ought to avoid such circumstances and should not expose the eyes to such temptations. But it also remained self-evident to him that Bathsheba was an unchaste woman, "an open chest," as he called her.⁷⁹ Jacob Cats, who may be regarded as the mouthpiece of the morals of the well-to-do Dutch burgher, was even more severe in his condemnation of David. Although Cats had put him down as a self-evident victim of beholding female beauty in *Houwelijck*, elsewhere Cats appears to have regarded Bathsheba a victim as well: it was David, after all, who took the initiative and who, yielding to the "vicious assaults of the flesh," confounded Bathsheba.⁸⁰ A kindred opinion was expressed by the popular Antwerp Jesuit Poirters, the "Brabant Cats" as he has been called, who wrote in the same period: "How is it possible that David could fall so deep? He went to his Belvedere, and let his eyes roam, and his eyes played freely with Bathsheba. He besmirched his soul; she washed her body, sitting in the water, his fire was kindled; beholding generated desire, desire consent, consent adultery and adultery manslaughter. A small spark, a big fire. Who would have dared to suspect this from a man after God's heart?"⁸¹

In his inventions of 1643 and 1654, more emphatically than any other painter of his time Rembrandt incorporated two current but different approaches to Bathsheba as a biblical figure, the earlier one representing a more traditional view than the second. In 1643 Rembrandt had convincingly portrayed Bathsheba as a voluptuous seductress of the one who beholds her (Fig. 17). In the

Bathsheba of 1654 there are almost no indications of a similar role (Fig. 1). Only the old woman may have evoked — as we have seen — a slight recollection of moral dubiousness since she is reminiscent of the pictorial stereotype of the procuress, so often the attribute of young women of questionable morals. However, Bathsheba's tilted head and lowered, unfocused eyes generate other associations. Rembrandt used this motif so emphatically for the first time in this work. In the following years he would employ this lowered head and distant gaze for heroines whose reputation was above all suspicion, women like Asenath (in *Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph*), Lucretia (*The Suicide of Lucretia*; Fig. 33), and Rebecca (in the so-called *Jewish Bride*).

As already discussed, Rembrandt gave the traditional letter — a motif he also used here for the first time — more emphasis than it had received in paintings by other artists. He did not, however, include it in such customary narrative actions as being handed over by the old woman, or received or read by Bathsheba. Rembrandt used it instead to focus the viewer's attention on what cannot be visualized: Bathsheba's thoughts, provoked by David's request. Apart from the sensual contemplation of her nude body, the beholder is thus forced to dwell upon Bathsheba's thoughts, since any action or conversation is lacking. Bathsheba's meditating expression and the letter are the only elements that give the onlooker something to go by when contemplating the situation depicted. While he cannot avoid thinking about Bathsheba's response, at the same time he is left to his own devices in trying to interpret the invisible. Rembrandt provides no clue to her feelings. This is exactly the opposite of the effect produced by the now lost *Bathsheba* by Jan Lievens that Philips Angel praised so profusely. Angel noted enthusiastically that by adding a Cupid shooting a fiery arrow, Lievens had made clear that "a hot fire of lust must have been kindled in Bathsheba when she received the request of the king" because "how mighty a king he might be, nobody is obliged to be ready to serve him in sin."⁸²

In Rembrandt's painting the letter indicates that Bathsheba knows she is being watched and that she is conscious of the consequence of her dazzling beauty. The viewer can only conclude that she is pondering the choice she must make: she must choose either to lose her honor (which, as Angel says, she shouldn't sac-

rifice even for the mightiest king; and, indeed, it was the most sinful action a woman could ever undertake, according to seventeenth-century morality,⁸³ or to disobey the king (and her destiny, to be the mother of Solomon). It is a dilemma of the kind that might provide excellent material for an opera aria or a monologue in a tragedy, full of conflicting emotions. When viewing this painting, however, the beholder has to supplement this "interior monologue" according to his own preferences. In his *Bathsheba* of 1654, then, Rembrandt portrayed her not as a self-evidently dishonorable, active seductress but, rather, as the passive victim of her own fateful beauty, to which no man – least of all the viewer – is able to offer effective resistance.

A beautiful painting of Bathsheba by Willem Drost, also dating from 1654, constitutes a striking, and probably deliberate, contrast with that by Rembrandt (Fig. 25). The relation between the two works has often been pointed out, and doubtlessly the pupil wanted to compete with his master.⁸⁴ The result is an antipode to Rembrandt's *Bathsheba*. The two paintings are similar in two respects. Even more starkly than did Rembrandt, Drost isolates Bathsheba against a dark, completely impenetrable background and portrays her with the letter in her hand. In contrast, however, Drost emphatically depicts Bathsheba as a seductive courtesan, through a pictorial scheme that had been in circulation for decades: he conflates the theme of Bathsheba with the popular type of life-size female half-length figure looking enticingly at the viewer, a type that had especially been employed for frivolous shepherdesses or music-making courtesans in the work of such Utrecht painters as Moreelse, Van Honthorst, and Van Bylert,⁸⁵ and which had started a new life in Amsterdam in paintings by Backer, Bol and Flinck, with fresh inspiration from Venetian images of courtesans.⁸⁶ Drost seems to have employed an image by Palma Vecchio,⁸⁷ one that Rembrandt also used several years later for his so-called *Hendrickje in a Doorway*.

Drost's *Bathsheba* looks defiantly at the beholder, the potential David who will "possess" her. This attitude reminds us of the way in which Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* of 1643 turned to the viewer. In fact, Drost's painting may be regarded as the ultimate consequence of the Bathsheba type that Rembrandt then created. In the paint-



Figure 25. Willem Drost, *Bathsheba with King David's Letter*, 1654, Musée du Louvre, Paris (photo: Musée du Louvre)

ing by Drost, the letter situated in the shadow functions only as a means of identification. His Bathsheba does not contemplate the letter and the loss of her honor or the destiny she has to fulfill. The painting presents instead a convincing image of a beautiful woman who is all the more exciting because of her availa-

bility: she is "a Bathsbeba" who will give herself to the one whose desire is aroused by beholding her.

Many Bathsbebas with a letter in hand would follow, ranging in quality from the dullness of Govert Flinck's *Bathsbeba* (in which elements from Rembrandt and Drost were combined)⁸⁸ to the witty way in which Steen pointedly inserted the idea of Bathsbeba into what was by then a popular and independent subject of a contemporary young woman with a letter.⁸⁹ As a subject for a female nude, however, the theme of Bathsbeba reached its unequalled climax in Rembrandt's painting of 1654. That one of the most impressive paintings of a female nude – for many, perhaps the most impressive – is a portrayal of Bathsbeba, tallies perfectly with the nature of this theme, a theme about looking at consummate beauty, seduction of the beholder, and the moral ambivalence this generates. It was Rembrandt who was able to visualize this in its most sublime way.

NOTES

1. See for *Andromeda* and *Susanna*: Eric Jan Sluiter, "Rembrandt's Early Paintings of the Female Nude: *Andromeda* and *Susanna*," in *Rembrandt and His Pupils, papers given at a symposium in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 2–3 October 1993*, ed. Görel Cavalli-Björkman, Stockholm, 1993, pp. 31–54, with further references; for *Diana and Actaeon*: Eric Jan Sluiter, *De 'heydenische fabulen' in de Noordnederlandse schilderkunst, circa 1590–1670*, dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 1986, pp. 90–94, and Werner Busch, "Das keusche und das unkeusche Sehen. Rembrandt's 'Diana, Actaeon und Callisto,'" *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 52 (1989), pp. 257–1277; for *Danaë*: Madlyn Millner Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," *The Art Bulletin*, 60 (1978), pp. 43–55, and especially Stefan Grohé, "Rembrandt's Darstellungen mythologischer Erzählungen zwischen 1631 und 1636," dissertation, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 1993, pp. 195–203.
2. For data about the pictorial tradition as well as for 17th-century texts concerning Bathsbeba, I was able to make fruitful use of a master's thesis by Loes Overbeek, which was finished in 1988 under my supervision: "Bathsbeba in de 16de en 17de-eeuwse Nederlandse schilder-en prentkunst," unpublished, Leiden, 1988.
3. See Elisabeth Kunoth-Leifels, *Über die Darstellungen der "Bathsbeba" im*

Bade": Studien zur Geschichte des Bildthemas 4. bis 17. Jahrhundert, dissertation, Essen, 1962, ch. 3.

4. Kunoth-Leifels 1962, ch. 4 and 5. Many more examples can be mentioned than those given by Kunoth-Leifels (Overbeek 1988, pp. 9–13).
5. Herman Janz. Muller after Maarten van Heemskerck, 1553. Ilja M. Veldman and G. Luijten, *Maarten van Heemskerck (The New Hollstein, Dutch & Flemish Engravings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450–1700)*, Roosendaal, 1993, part I, no. 70, pp. 66–73.
6. F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Engravings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, Amsterdam, 1949–1978, vol. 1, p. 89, no. 3. It is not known who was the inventor of this composition. In an illustration for a *Bible Moralisée* from the end of the 14th century (Kunoth-Leifels 1962, fig. 9), an old woman as a procuress was already depicted in a portrayal of David lying in bed with Bathsbeba. Only at the end of the 16th century was she combined with the bathing Bathsbeba for the first time; the earliest example known to me is a drawing attributed to Hans Bol (Kunoth-Leifels 1962, fig. 42).
7. Karel van Mander, *'t Leven der Vermaerde Doochthughighe Schilders des Ouden, en Nieuwen Tyds*, in *Het Schilder-Boeck*, ed. Hessel Miedema, 1994, fol. 298v, p. 453.
8. See, for example, Konrad Renger, *Lockere Gesellschaft. Zur Ikonographie des Verlorenen Sohnes und von Wirtshauszenen in der Niederländischen Malerei*, Berlin, 1970. In a very emphatic way, we have met already with the stereotypical image of the old crone as being a procuress/bawd in an invention by Jeroen Bosch of the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, in which she literally embodies a brothel (see Petty Bange et al., *Tussen Heks en heilige. Het vrouwbeeld op de drempel van de moderne tijd, 15de/16de eeuw*, exhib. cat., Nijmegen (Nijmeegs Museum Commanderie van Sint-Jan), 1985, p. 52, with ill.). Throughout the entire 17th century we come across numerous brothel scenes with old women as procuresses/bawds: Lotte C. van de Pol has demonstrated that, in reality, the bawds were not old at all; see her "Beeld en Werkelijkheid van de Prostitutie in de Zeventiende Eeuw," in *Soete minne en lelsche boosheit: Seksuele voorstellingen in Nederland, 1300–1850*, ed. G. Hekma and H. Roodenburg, Nijmegen, 1988, pp. 133–134. In comedies we meet with the same stereotype of the old procuress/bawd (which is also voiced in the saying "young a whore, old a procuress," *Woordenboek der nederlandse taal*, ed. M. de Vries et al., The Hague, 1958, p. 5555); see, for example, J. H. Bose, with P. M. M. Kroone, *'Had de mensch niet één vrou niet kunnen leven . . .': Prostitutie in de literatuur van de zeventiende eeuw*, Zutphen, 1985, pp. 75–78.
9. In the same period, Hans von Achen painted a *Bathsbeba* with an old

woman: she holds up a mirror for Bathsheba, so that the connotations of Vanity are very emphatic; this painting is dated ca. 1612–1615 by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The School of Prague: Painting at the Court of Rudolf II*, Chicago, 1988, p. 160, no. 183.

10. Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, *Willem Buytewech*, Amsterdam, 1959, p. 178, dates the print 1615/1616; J. G. van Gelder, "De etsen van Willem Buytewech," *Oud Holland* 48 (1931), pp. 49–72, no. 35, gave it a date shortly after 1617.
11. Haverkamp-Begemann 1959, pp. 172–173 (van Gelder 1931, no. 20).
12. For the development of this theme at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century see: Eric Jan Sluiter, "Vertumnus en Pomona door Hendrick Goltzius (1613) en Jan Tegnagel (1617)," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 39 (1991), pp. 386–400, *passim*. Compare, for example, Saenredam's *Vertumnus and Pomona* engraving of 1605 (Sluiter 1991, fig. 3), where only a twig with apples clarifies that the depicted woman is Pomona and not Bathsheba. For the similarity of these themes later in the century, see Sluiter 1986, pp. 114, 120, 251, 263.
13. Philips Angel, *Lof der schilder-konst*, Leiden (Willem Christiaens), 1642, p. 50.
14. Crispijn van de Passe, *Le miroir des plus belles courtisannes de ce temps*, Amsterdam, 1630, nos. 5/6: "La poudriere Macrelle" (*macrelle* = *maquerelle*, means bawd) holds a letter for "Mademoiselle F.C.E. Court"; nos. 15/16: The old "Anna la vetze" has a letter in her hand for "La belle zavonnare Cour," who is reading a letter; nos. 3/4: "Margo la Macrelle" holds up a mirror for "La belle dans"; and nos. 19/20: "Dority her Chambermaide" (this time a young woman) holds a letter for "Ms. Margory of Richmond" who, while combing her long hair, is looking in a mirror.
15. See Werner Sumowski, *Geniële der Rembrandt-Schiller*, 5 vols., Landau/Pfalz, 1983–1990, vol. 6, no. 1189, p. 3623, ill. p. 3670 (Coll. Mr. and Mrs. Cooney, Studio City, California). Sumowski's dating, ca. 1631, seems to me correct. One gets the clearest impression of the composition from a mezzotint by J. G. Haid, reproduced in J. Bruyn, B. Haak, S. H. Levie, P. J. J. van Thiel, and E. van de Wetering, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, The Hague, 1982–, vol. 2, 1986, p. 273.
16. See J. Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 2 (1986), no. C 45, pp. 591–594. The best copy is in Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, and is dated 1632. According to the Rembrandt Research Project, the lost original must date from 1632 or 1631. See also the etching B 127 by an unknown Rembrandt pupil, attributed respectively to F. Bol, P. C. Verbeeck, and recently quite convincingly to I. Jouderville (lecture by Holm Bevers,

Rembrandt symposium, Amsterdam, January 17, 1992), reproduced in reverse in J. Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 2 (1986), p. 593.

17. Haverkamp-Begemann 1959, p. 172, fig. 6 (Van Gelder 1931, no. 19).
18. The prints after Raphael's compositions for the *Loggia*, engraved by Badalocchio and partly by Lanfranco, were published in 1607 as *Historia del Testamento Vecchio*. Rembrandt certainly knew them; see, for instance, Christian Tümpel, "Studien zur ikonographie der historien Rembrandt's. Deutung und Interpretation der Bildinhalte," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 20 (1969), pp. 163–164.
19. See Holm Bevers, Peter Schatborn, and Barbara Welzel, *Rembrandt: The Master & His Workshop, Drawings & Etchings*, exhib. cat., Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum), New Haven, 1991, vol. 2, p. 182.
20. Karel van Mander, *Den grondt der edel-vry schilder-const*, in *Het Schilder Boek*, Haarlem, 1604, XIII, 16: "The colours in depictions of youthful people – and especially those of women have that effect in a miraculous way – make many hearts swim in a sea of lust."
21. J. Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 2 (1986), A 64, pp. 271–275; Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada; dated 1632/1633 by the authors of the *Corpus*. The connection with the painting by Lievens was also noted there.
22. This painting has been given many titles (see Madlyn Kahr, "Rembrandt's Esther: A Painting and an Etching Newly Interpreted and Dated," *Oud Holland*, 81 [1966], pp. 232–233). Today it is usually called *Bathsheba* or *Esther Before meeting Ahasverus* (the latter subject was extensively defended by Kahr). The authors of the *Corpus* keep it at *A Young Woman at Her Toilet*, although they do assume that a specific biblical subject is represented. They denounce the claims of *Esther*, but add the suggestion that *The Toilet of Judith Before Her Visit to Holofernes* is portrayed.
23. We find an earlier example of a young lady at her toilet in a contemporary interior in a print by Giacomo Franco from 1610, with the inscription *Le cortigiane si fanno condir e a diversi modi la testa*, from the series *Habiti d'Huomini et Donne Venetiane* (see Giovanni Scarabello et al., *Il gioco dell' amore. Le cortigiane di Venezia dal trecento al settecento*, exhib. cat., Milan [Casino Municipale Venezia], 1990, p. 164, fig. 95). It is possible that Rembrandt knew this print. Also, from several illustrations in Crispijn van de Passe's *Le miroir des plus belles courtisannes de ce temps* (see above, note 14), it appears that the combing of hair was considered a fitting motif for the portrayal of a courtesan.
24. Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 3, no. 1188, ill. p. 1827 (formerly Berlin, art dealer Hinrichsen and Lindpaintner); dated by Sumowski ca. 1631. By H. Schneider, *Jan Lievens, sein Leben und seine Werke*, Haarlem, 1932, it was called *Vertumnus en Pomona*; by K. Bauch, "Zum Werk des Jan

Lievens," *Pantheon*, 25 (1967), pp. 160–170, 259–269, *Bathsheba*; Sumowski added *Esther* as a possibility. It is remarkable that in the will of Jacob de Gheyn III from 1641, a painting by Lievens (a bequest to Johan Uytenbogaert) is described as "a beautiful head of a woman with an old crone next to it." Such a description, with no mention of a specific subject – in the will of someone who was an artist himself bequeathing the painting to a connoisseur – seems to me quite telling.

25. See above, note 23. In 1654 Rembrandt painted a *Young Woman Before a Mirror* (St. Petersburg, Hermitage), which is possibly identical with a work described in Rembrandt's inventory as "a courtesan preening herself." See Christian Tümpel, *Rembrandt. Mythos und Methode*, Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Paris, 1986, p. 408, no. 151; Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen (with the assistance of S. A. C. Dudok van Heel and P. J. M. de Baar), *The Rembrandt Documents*, New York, 1979, Doc. 1656/12. This makes clear that the image of such a young woman could be perceived as a courtesan. In many inventories we come across descriptions like "a courtesan," "a whore," "a harlot."

26. For related paintings of a few years later which are emphatically *Vanitas* images, see below, note 29.

27. Compare note 22, above.

28. For the combination of old and young women and the many different subjects in which they occur in great number in the 17th century see also (in connection with *Vertumnus and Pomona*): Sluijter 1986, pp. 119–120 (in particular p. 119, n. 5, and p. 120, mss. 1 and 2), 251–252, 260–261, and 263.

29. Many of the motifs discussed became highly popular in numerous genre paintings in which the central figure of a young woman is meant to represent a seductress of men (see Eric Jan Sluijter, "Een volmaakte schilderij is als een spiegel van de natuur": Spiegel en spiegelbeeld in de Nederlandse schilderkunst van de 17de eeuw," *Oog in oog met de spiegel*, ed. N. J. Brederoo et al., Amsterdam, 1988, pp. 146–63, *passim*). Related to the two paintings by Lievens and Rembrandt are, for example, the *Vanitas* of 1633 by Jan Miense Molenaer (an old woman combing the hair of a young "Lady World") and the *Vanitas* by Hendrik Pot (a young beauty holding a letter while an old crone holds up a skull); for both paintings, see E. de Jongh et al., *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, exhib. cat., Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum), 1976, nos. 43 and 52. In these paintings numerous *Vanitas* attributes surround these desirable courtesans. However, a wave of paintings of young women at their toilet followed, particularly by painters from a younger generation, in which thoughts about vanity are more often than not completely implicit. Bathsheba-like implications remain inherent in such images of seductive young

women, which are like sophisticated pinups for the wealthy Dutch burgher. Steen made this very explicit in several paintings of young women in contemporary dress – in one case, even, emphatically a harlot (New York, private collection) – holding a letter on which the name "Bathsheba" is written.

30. See for instance Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 3, nos. 1097, 1086, and 1087 (Salomon Koninck), 1014 (Philips Koninck), which are called *Bathsheba* or *Esther*. In all of these paintings the young women are, as in the works of Rembrandt and Lievens, depicted in the same type of "royal" cloak and sitting in an interior. See also the painting from the Rembrandt school (Bredius 495, Kahr 1966, fig. 5, as *Esther*), in which a similar young woman is sitting only with a letter (and has to be Bathsheba). Compare also a painting attributed to De Poorter, which illustrates *The Dressing of Esther* (see J. Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 2 [1986], p. 274, ill. 8).

31. Gerson was the first to doubt seriously if the painting was by Rembrandt's own hand; he presumed that Rembrandt reworked an earlier painting by one of his pupils (see Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt: The Complete Edition of the Paintings*, 3rd rev. ed., ed. Horst Gerson, New York and London, 1969, p. 600, no. 513). The rejection is followed by, among others, Tümpel 1986, p. 419, A 1, who considered it a painting from the studio. Eisler, on the contrary, sees it as a reworking by Rembrandt himself of an earlier work (see Colin Eisler, "Rembrandt and Bathsheba," in *Essays in Northern European Art Presented to Eglert Harkamp-Begemann on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Anne-Marie Logan, Doornspijk, 1983, p. 86). Amy Golahny considers the reasons for removing it from Rembrandt's oeuvre insufficient (see Amy Golahny, "Rembrandt's Early Bathsheba: The Raphael Connection," *The Art Bulletin*, 65 [1983], pp. 672). I am convinced that at least the invention is by Rembrandt himself.

32. Concerning *Andromeda* and *Susanna*, see Sluijter 1993 (as in note 1), *passim*; and concerning *Diana with Actaeon* and *Callisto*, see Sluijter 1986, pp. 90–94 and 195–197.

33. For an extensive consideration, see Sluijter 1993 (as in note 1), *passim*. See also Simon Schama, "Rembrandt and Women," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 38 (April 1985), pp. 21–47, especially pp. 30–33.

34. See Anne Hollander, *Looking Through Clothes*, New York and London, 1975, pp. 160 and 108, who argues this convincingly, primarily in response to the etching B 198, the nude *Woman Seated on a Mound* (which, in later times, always stirred so much aversion; Fig. 5): "The intention to make these bodies look not only 'realistic' but specifically desirable

is conveyed by their resemblance to the currently modish clothed look for ladies: high waistline, plump but narrow shoulders, huge stomach and lots of rippling texture – in these instances flesh not silk.” It is striking that when Rembrandt painted at this time fully dressed beauties in fantasy costumes, like the *Young Woman at Her Toilet* in Ottawa (compare also Lievens’s *Bathsheba*), their forms are even more exaggerated: if one imagines these women without clothes, their stomachs and hips are much more voluminous than those of the woman in the etching just mentioned!

35. See Sluijter 1993 (as in note 1); and Sluijter 1986, Part I, *passim*, in particular pp. 164–165.

36. This was observed long ago; Eisler 1983, p. 86, rightly added that in several respects, Lastman’s *Susanna* of 1612 in Berlin, of which Rembrandt drew a free copy in red chalk and which was of the greatest importance for his own *Susanna* composition, also played a role in the conception of this *Bathsheba*.

37. See Sluijter 1993 (as in note 1).

38. It seems likely that Rembrandt was inspired by Tintoretto’s famous *Susanna* (Paris, Louvre) – which he may have known from a drawing by Lastman (for whom it was a very important formal source) – especially with regard to the direct and defiant way she turns to the viewer. Go lahny 1983, pp. 673–674, argues extensively the importance of the engraving of *Alexander and Roxane* by Jacopo Caraglio, after Raphael, which certainly played a role in the posture of *Bathsheba*.

39. The only nude he finished in between was a *Susanna* (Berlin), which he had started much earlier. About the complicated genesis of this painting, see Jan Kelch, in Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch and Pieter van Thiel, *Rembrandt: The Master & His Workshop. Paintings*, exhib. cat., Berlin (Altes Museum), Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum), London (The National Gallery), New Haven, 1991, no. 37.

40. Of course, it might be possible that a patron, stimulated by such paintings, asked Rembrandt to depict a life-size nude; he might even have asked specifically for a *Bathsheba*. However, considering the consistent logic that I perceive both in Rembrandt’s development as a painter of nudes and in the subjects he depicted, this seems to me less likely. But even if the direct incentive to paint this *Bathsheba* came from a patron, this would not change my view of the specific way in which Rembrandt approached the subject – vis-à-vis the preceding tradition, the work of contemporaries, and his own work – since I consider the conception as completely originating from his own mind.

41. For the genesis of this painting, see J. Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 3 (1989), A 119.

42. See for this painting (canvas 124 × 170 cm) Christian Tümpel et al., *Het Oude Testament in de Schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw*, exhib. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum), Zwolle, 1991, p. 146, no. 28.
43. Jacob van Loo, Paris, Musée du Louvre, canvas 81.5 × 68 cm (in both cases the old woman points in the direction of the palace in the background). Attributed to Bor, with a false signature of Flinck (see Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck, 1615–1660*, Amsterdam, 1965, p. 228), canvas 124 × 119 cm, Potsdam, Galerie Sanssouci (cat. 1980, p. 95, no. 7601 as Rembrandt school).
44. For the large paintings of father and son Van Bronckhorst (respectively 115 × 90.5 cm in Hefink and 228 × 157 cm in Rome), see the excellent article by Thomas Döring, “Between Caravaggism and Classicism: *Bathsheba* by Jan Gerritsz. and Johannes van Bronckhorst,” *Haagse Naamnam Mercury*, 7 (1988), pp. 51–67, *passim*. Pieter de Grebber, canvas 103 × 85 cm, Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux Arts, cat. 1966, no. 22 (this painting seems to have been much larger). The *Bathsheba* by Hendrik Heerschop is known from an etching dated 1652 (Hollstein, 1949–, no. 1). Several *Bathshebas* with old women and letters are also to be found in the oeuvres of painters from the Poelenburgh school; some are anonymous, and some are by François Verwilt and Jacob van Haensbergen. See also an etching by Moyses van Uytenbroeck (B. 12) with the old crone handing the letter to *Bathsheba*; and an anonymous work which seems to be from the circle of Hendrick Bloemaert (canvas 86 × 66 cm, photo Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorisch Documentatie [RKD], The Hague, as circle A. Bloemaert).
45. Cornelis Cornelisz. (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) and Buytewech (see above, note 11) did this before Rembrandt. Around the middle of the century there are also paintings by De Grebber and Jan Gerritsz. van Bronckhorst (see above, note 44), in which David is absent and only *Bathsheba* and the old woman are left.
46. Woodcut in *Flavii Josephi, des Hochberühmten jüdischen Geschichtsschreibers Historien und Bücher*, Straßburg, 1574, fol. 97r. (Hollstein 1949–, XXVII, p. 35, no. 142). This edition is mentioned in Rembrandt’s inventory of 1657 (see Tümpel 1969, pp. 109–110). For examples of Rembrandt’s use of illustrations from the Strassbourg Flavius Josephus, see Tümpel 1969, p. 126, and Christian Tümpel, “Die Rezeption der jüdischen Altertümer des Flavius Josephus in der Holländischen Historiendarstellungen des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts,” *Wort und Bild in der Niederländischen Kunst und Literatur des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, ed. H. Vekeman and J. Müller Hofstede, Erfstadt, 1984, pp. 185–186. This *Bathsheba* illustration was, as far as I know, referred to for the first time by Overbeek 1988, who also noted a relation with Rembrandt’s painting.

47. See also Jan Kelch, in Brown et al., 1991, p. 245.

48. Golahny 1983, argued the importance of this print for the *Bathsheba* of 1643 (see above, note 38); however, also in the *Bathsheba* of 1654 one may discern elements inspired by this print.

49. As will be clear from this discussion, all motifs in the postures of Bathsheba and the maid which have some similarity with this print can be traced back to earlier works of Rembrandt (and often to older conventions in the depiction of Bathsheba); they do not seem to be borrowed from this print in particular. However, knowledge of this print may have bolstered the quite extraordinary conception of space.

50. See above, note 34.

51. Gary Schwartz even suggested a connection between this painting and the fact that Hendrickje, being accused of "whoring," was summoned before the church council in the same year; see his *Rembrandt, Zijn Leven, Zijn Schilderijen. Een Nieuwe Biografie, Met Alle Beschikbare Schilderijen in Clair Afgebeeld*, Maarsen, 1984, pp. 292–293.

52. Already in his *Susanna* of 1647 (before Hendrickje entered his household) Rembrandt had developed elements of this elongated face, with high eyebrows sloping downward, heavy eyelids above dark eyes, the outer corners of which point down a little, a long nose, slightly protruding upper lip and a long, soft jawline; we meet with the same face in the *Flora* of ca. 1654–1655, and Asenath also has similar features (in *Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph*, 1656); much later, even Lucretia and Rebecca (the so-called *Jewish Bride*) have many features in common. A very different facial type is represented by the *Bathing Woman* (National Gallery, London) and the *Courtesan Standing in a Doorway* (Berlin), which were also always called Hendrickje – and more justifiably so. For depictions of this woman, see especially David Bomford, Christopher Brown, and Ashok Roy, *Rembrandt. Art in the Making*, exhib. cat., London (National Gallery), 1988, no. 13, pp. 106–108, and no. 11, p. 96. It is a mystery to me how this much rounder face, with full cheeks, a very different jawline, shorter nose, etc., could ever be perceived as being from the same woman.

53. For this aspect of several mythological subjects, see Sluijter 1986, pp. 277–280. A subject which is also about looking at nude beauty, and which became a favorite only in Holland, is that of *Cimon and Epligenia* from Boccaccio's *Decamerion*; see Nicole Spaans in *Het Gedroomde Land. Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw*, ed. Peter van den Brink, exhib. cat., Utrecht (Centraal Museum), Zwolle, 1993, pp. 211–215 and 248–251.

54. See Sluijter 1986, for example, pp. 280–286.

55. See, for example, Sluijter 1986, pp. 275–277; and Eric Jan Sluijter, "Ve-

nus, *Visus en Pictura*," in *Goltzius-Studies: Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617)*, ed. R. L. Falkenburg, J. P. Filedt Kok, and H. Leeftang, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 42/43 (1991–1992), Zwolle, 1993, p. 355.

56. Quoted by Susan L. Smith, "To Women's Wiles I Fell: The Power of Women Topos and the Development of Medieval Secular Art," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1978, pp. 29–30.

57. Jacob Cats, *Honnelyck, dat is de gantsche gelegentheit des editen-staets*, Middelburg, 1625 (ed. 1712), p. 393. The example of Actaeon follows: "Actaeon was transformed into a stag. . . . A hero, a courageous man, a prince of lofty mind, has only to see a naked woman, and he immediately becomes a beast."

58. Johan van Beverwijck, *Schat der gesontheyt, in Alle de urenken*, Amsterdam, 1636 (ed. 1652), p. 49.

59. J. C. Mayvogel, *Gulden-Spiegel, ofte Opverkinge tot christelijke deugden*, Amsterdam, 1684, p. 103 (quoted by Judith van Gent, "De tijd van de koningen en profeten," in Tümpel et al. 1991, pp. 93–94).

60. See, for example, Sluijter 1986, pp. 270–275; and Sluijter 1993 (as in note 55), pp. 356–358.

61. See about *Danaë* below, note 73.

62. Quoted by Erwin Panofsky, "Erasmus and the Visual Arts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32 (1969), p. 210 (*Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Clericus, Leiden, 1703–1706, V, col. 719, C–E); see also David Freedberg, "Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 34 (1971), p. 241.

63. Dirk Rafäelsz Camphuyzen's poem "Tegen 't Geestigdom der Schilder-Konst, Straf-rymen ofte anders Idolelenchus" (in *Stichtelycke rymen*, Amsterdam, 1647, pp. 218–219) – the most vehement 17th-century attack on painting – is a rhymed translation of "Idolelenchus," written in Latin by his friend Johannes Evertsz. Geesteranus ca. 1620. See also Eric Jan Sluijter, "Didactic and Disguised Meanings? Several Seventeenth-Century Texts on Painting and the Iconological Approach to Northern Dutch Paintings of this Period," in *Art in History/History in Art: Studies in Seventeenth Century Dutch Culture*, ed. David Freedberg and Jan de Vries, Malibu, Calif. (The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities), 1991, pp. 188–190; and in connection with *Susanna*, Sluijter 1993 (as in note 1), p. 38.

64. Camphuyzen 1647, pp. 223–224. For English translation of the quotations paraphrased here, see Sluijter 1991 (as in note 63), pp. 188–190.

65. Cats 1625 (ed. 1712), p. 387.

66. Van Beverwijck 1636 (ed. 1652), p. 47.

67. Gabriel M. C. Pastoors, "Bijbelse historiestukken in particulier bezit," in Tümpel et al. 1991, p. 127.

68. Very striking is a painting of *Bathsheba* by Van Haensbergen (location unknown, photo RKD), with a garden statue of Actaeon as he begins to be transformed into a stag!
69. See Sluijter 1993 (as in note 55), pp. 350, 368–369. If one considers Apelles the exemplary painter, as was traditional in the 16th- and 17th-century texts about painting, one had to accept that female beauty and grace were paradigmatic subjects for painting. Most of the well-known anecdotes concerning Apelles are about paintings of Venus (the story of Campaspe, the shoemaker, the painting he was working on when he died; see Van Mander 1604, *Leven*, fol 76v–82r).
70. See below, note 81.
71. About this poem, see Karel Porteman, "Vondels gedicht 'Op een Italiaensche Schildery van Suzanne,'" *'t Onderzoek leert. Studies over middeleeuwse en 17de-eeuwse literatuur ter nagedachtenis van Prof. Dr. L. Rens*, ed. G. van Eemeren et al., Leuven/Amersfoort, 1986, pp. 301–318, passim. See also Sluijter 1993 (as in note 1), pp. 44–46, where several passages of the poem are cited in connection with the interpretation of Rembrandt's *Susanna* of 1636.
72. See above, note 65.
73. In relation to Goltzius's *Danaë* from 1603, see Sluijter 1993 (as in note 55), p. 378. Grohé (1993), realized the importance of this tradition in his excellent interpretation of Rembrandt's *Danaë*. Saint Augustine referred to the passage from Terence's *Eunuch* (iii, 5) in *De Civitate Dei* ii, 7 and 13, and *Epistolae* 202. Molanus quoted this in his *De Historia Sanctorum Imaginum et Picturatum* (see Freedberg 1971, pp. 242–243). In the 17th century we find, for instance, references in Cats's *Houtwelyck* 1625 (ed. 1712), p. 387; Van Beverwijck 1636 (ed. 1652), p. 47; and Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Inleyding tot de Hooghe Schoole der Schilderkonst: anders de Zichtbare Werelt* . . . , Rotterdam, by François van Hoogstraeten, 1678, p. 94.
74. Van Hoogstraeten 1678, p. 292.
75. See Sluijter 1993 (as in note 1).
76. Kunoth-Leifels 1962, pp. 5–8.
77. For example, see Smith 1978; Thea Vigneau Wilberg-Schuerman, *Hoofse minne en burgerlijke liefde in de prentkunst rond 1500*, Leiden, 1985, ch. 5; and Renée Pigeaud, "De vrouw als verleider. De stedelijke moraal in de 15de eeuw," in Bange et al. 1985, pp. 39–59.
78. Godefridus Udemans, *Afbeeldinge van de verkeerde werelt*, Middelburg, 1660 (quoted by Overbeek 1988, p. 38).
79. Johan de Brune, *Bancket-werk van goede gedagten*, Middelburg, 1657, I, p. 121 (quoted by Overbeek 1988, p. 36).
80. Jacob Cats, *Self-sryt, dat is krachtighe beueginghe van vlees ende gheest*, 1620 (ed. 1712), "Voor-reden" (Introduction).
81. Adrianus Poirters, *Het masquer van de wereldt af-gheetrocken*, Antwerp, 1645, p. 127 (quoted by Overbeek 1988, p. 36).
82. Angel 1642, p. 50.
83. For the concept of women's honor in 17th-century Dutch society, see Lotte C. van de Pol, "Prostitutie en de Amsterdamse burgerij: Eerbegrippen in een vroegmoderne stedelijke samenleving," in *Cultuur en maatschappij in Nederland 1500–1850. Een historisch-antropologisch perspectief*, Meppel/Amsterdam/Heerlen, 1992.
84. See Debra Miller, "A Case of Cross-Inspiration in Rembrandt and Drost," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 28 (1986), pp. 75–82; and Jacques Foucart, *Peintres Rembranesques au Louvre (Les dossiers du département des peintures 35)*, exhib cat., Paris, 1988.
85. See especially Alison M. Kettering, "The Pastoral Courtesan. Single-Figure and Half-Length Representations of Shepherdesses," in *The Dutch Arcadia, Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age*, Montclair, N.J., 1983, ch. 4. Apart from the shepherdesses, there are the many paintings with similar women – most of them as scantily dressed – playing the lute or the guitar.
86. The number of very loosely clad female half-length figures (more or less emphatically rendered as courtesans), is quite striking in this period, for instance, Backer (Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 1, pp. 25, 49); Doomer (Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 1, p. 227); Bol (Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 1, pp. 122, 123, 128, 145); Flinck (Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 2, pp. 647, 648, 649, 674, 683); Van Loo (Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 5, p. 2128).
87. See Miller 1986.
88. Govert Flinck, dated 1659, canvas 116.8 × 88.6 cm, St. Petersburg (Hermitage). See also a moving picture by Cornelis Bisschop, Pasadena, Norton Simon Foundation, formerly attributed to Nicolaes Maes (Sumowski 1983–1990, vol. 3, p. 1962, p. 1989).
89. See above, note 29. In the late 17th century there are many Bathshebas, particularly by Caspar Netscher, in which the borderlines with genre painting are unclear (and in the case of Netscher they also resemble closely his depictions of *Vertumnus* and *Pomona*; see Sluijter 1986, pp. 119–120).