

JACOB JORDAENS
THE SATYR AND THE PEASANT FAMILY

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Oil on canvas, H. 1,15 m; L. 1,495 m (with frame: H. 1,52 m; L. 1,855 m). Date: 1616-1618.

Provenance: J. Soloman. Sold by Mrs. Soloman, Christie's London, 14 July 1930 (lot 115), bought by Rosenbaum; Offered in Sweden, 26 February 1968, to Mr Christer Nyström; Private Collection Sweden, sold Auktionsverk, Stockholm, lot 5478, 11th May 1993; Matthiesen Gallery, London, 1993; Sothebys, New York, 15/01/2008; Private Collection; Matthiesen Gallery, London.

Exhibited: The Matthiesen Gallery, *Fifty Paintings 1535-1825*, London, 1993, no. 9, p. 55-59 (essay by Michael Jaffé); Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, *Collectors Exhibition*, Melbourne, 2016.

At first acquaintance Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) appears to be the quintessentially Flemish painter of his century, alive to native tradition in colour, design and choice of subject, the illustrator of Flemish life and of Flemish proverbs. He lived only in Antwerp, and never travelled further than Amsterdam. Indeed, when he moved house, it was just from the Everdijstraat to the Hoogstraat, or in the Hoogstraat from one house to the next in order to join the two. He had only one master, Adam van Noort, who, like Jordaens never went to Italy.

However, unlike van Noort, Jordaens was not to be of merely provincial reputation. Within his lifetime the demand for his work extended far beyond the bound of Flanders: to Uppsala, to London, to Vienna, to Florence and to Turin, as well as to Amsterdam and The Hague. Amongst his pupils, of whom the names of more than a score are registered, one came from Poland, another was recommended from Sweden. His fame was spread abroad by sets of tapestries woven by the Brussels weavers from his cartoons, and by impressions from copperplates engraved after his designs in Antwerp, as well as by paintings. He illustrated stories from Aesop, Homer, Ovid and Livy; as well as the homely saws of Jacob Cats. He depicted the moment in her banquet for Anthony when Cleopatra dissolves her pearl in wine, and he did so with a gusto outdone only by his relish for the moment in the Epiphany Feast when the Twelfth Night King raises his glass to drink. As a narrator he lacked the more profound scholarly instincts of Rubens, and his brand of Christian Stoicism. But he moralised his tales generally without pedantry: the history of Alexander or of Ulysses or of Charlemagne, as well as the Acts of the Apostles and the Parables of the New Testament. He made cheerful incidents in the life of the Holy Family as vividly accessible as the incidents of his own household or of his neighbour's. But his deep feelings for the tragic scenes of the Passion - he was in this a true follower of Caravaggio - transmogrified ordinary types and commonplace objects.





The subject of our painting was among the favourite profane themes of the artist's early career. On several occasions he adapted Aesop, *Fables*, LXXIV, to his purposes: the absurdity of the peasant who, having breathed on his hands to warm them, then blows on his porridge to cool it, excites the visiting satyr's shocked protest. The moral is that one should beware of people who "*blow hot and cold.*"¹ Loosely translated, Aesop's verses read: "*Why, satyr, do you now shun the farmer so ungraciously? Is it because you saw him blow on his hands to warm them, and on his porridge to cool it?*" To which the satyr replies "*I abhor this ambiguity of blowing hot and cold.*"² Jordaens' earliest known treatment was painted on a much smaller scale around 1616-17 (Glasgow, Sir John Stirling Maxwell, Pollok House, Fig. 1).³ That treatment was also important for Jan Liss, who was in Antwerp 1616-19, in his *Game of Morra*,⁴ and also for Jan Steen in Holland.⁵ In 1617 the Dutch Catholic poet and playwright Joost van der Vondel transposed Aesop's fable into rhyming couplets in his *Vorstelijke Warande der dieren* (The Princely Pleasure-Grounds of Animals):

*"One winter a farmer found a satyr wandering in the wood,
The satyr is half man on top, at the bottom a goat,
He decided to shelter him lest he died of cold;
He brought him home and made him good cheer,
When the man blew on his hands to warm them he took note,
Asking him why the peasant replied, 'I am warming my knuckles all stiff
from the wintery cold;'
When the peasant also blew on his hot food, laid out on a rough board,
The satyr, rather confused, wondered at this,
Apprehensive, he flew out of the door in fear of his life,
Because he perceived the peasant could blow both hot and cold.
For as the saying goes, 'The Wise man always shows love and goodwill,
Towards him that holds fire in one hand and water in the other,
In order to avoid his evil sorcery.'"*

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Fig. 1 Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant Family*. Glasgow, Pollok House.

Although Vondel adds the incident of the satyr's flight, not present in Aesop, the moral remains the same - reject the hypocrisy of he who blows hot and cold. Vondel illustrated his book with an image first published by Marcus Gheeraerts in Bruges in the sixteenth century (Fig. 2).

Next in date appears to be the present painting, which is Caravaggesque in the vigorous and distinctively Flemish idiom of Jordaens. If we date it c. 1620 this would be on the basis that Jordaens modelled the mother and the child on his wife and their first born, Elizabeth, who had been baptized on 26 June 1617. The child appears to be aged about three. On



Fig. 2 Wenceslaus Holler after Gheerhaerts.

stylistic grounds the painting might be placed a little earlier.⁶ The mother's profile is repeated in successive compositions and indeed also in *Hermes at Calypso's Table*. The composition is set in the interior of a farmhouse, illuminated from an unseen source at the left, with a subtly rich play of *chiaroscuro* not only on the features and gestures of the figures, human and pagan, but also on the splendidly realized stilllife hung on the wall where the basket and Italianate earthenware vessels are closely observed. The play of light differs from that in the well-known composition of the same subject (Kassel, Schloss Wilhelmshöhe), which was painted almost immediately after the present work (Fig. 3). The slightly larger Kassel



Fig. 3 Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant Family*. Kassel, Staatliche Gemädegalerie.

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painting (172 x 194 cm) sets the scene outdoors on a hill, the figures slightly more sunlit from the front (this is most obvious in the young peasant standing at the back), and also more harshly. The palette in the present composition is close to that used by Caravaggio - blue, buff, white, grey-brown and subdued red - this is especially evident in the less agitated draperies of the mother, the child and the peasant. Jordaens appears to have been directly inspired by Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Rosary* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), which was reputedly brought to Antwerp by Louis Finson, who died there in 1617 (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio, *Madonna of the Rosary*.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.



There are other differences between the present composition and the Kassel variant, which are no less obvious, even in reproduction. In the Kassel picture there is no wall on which to hang a basket and jugs, no kitchen floor on which to scatter garlic cloves, nor is the child's head covered with a white kerchief. Moreover, the white tablecloth is folded in a different manner and the satyr's loins are loosely girt, his brow bound with sprays of foliage. Equally, the colours of the dress of the mother and her bareheaded child are entirely different. Furthermore, in the present painting, and apparent only when standing in front of it or in the infrared photographs, are numerous *pentimenti*: in the crown of the straw hat, in the outlines of the satyr's leg and right arm, in the mother's

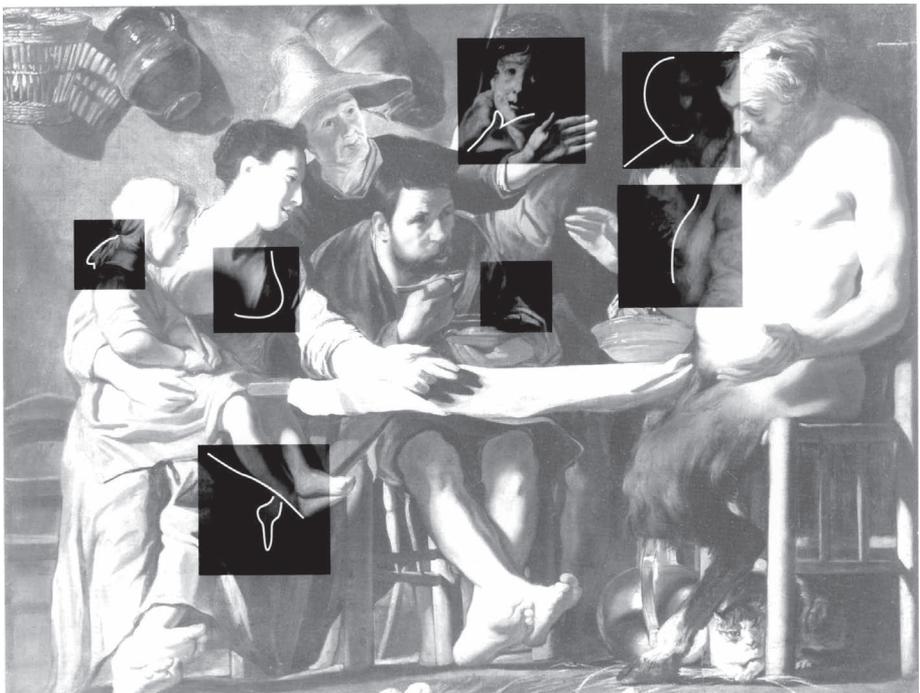


Fig. 5A Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant Family*. Schematic of the pentiments.

drapery and, most significantly, in the shift of the young peasant's head in the background considerably to the left from a position beside the satyr (detail of infra-red photograph Figs. 5A, B & C). This shift establishes beyond doubt the present painting's priority over the variant at Kassel and its autography without any intervention at this early date by a studio. Thus unconsciously, in this instance at least, Jordaens followed the habit of Caravaggio in working out a composition on the canvas without recourse to pen and wash trials on paper.⁷

Jordaens certainly experimented with such trials in the course of illustrating this, his favorite theme. For example, on the verso of a sheet in the Louvre

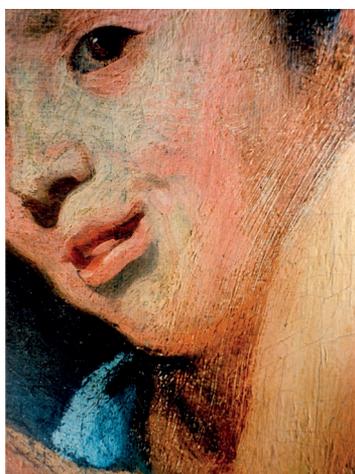


Fig. 5B Jordaens, pentiment in the head of the boy adjacent to the satyr.



Fig. 5C Jordaens, pentiment in the head of the standing youth.

(INV 20028), the recto showing *The Holy Family with St John, his Parents and Angels*⁸ is a more finished study for the *The Satyr and the Peasant Family* (Fig. 6), which is related to two almost identical autograph paintings in Göteborg and Brussels (Fig. 7).⁹ However in the case of the present painting and in the Kassel version, Jordaens took pains to study as closely as he could the pose projected for the single figure of the satyr, in the same manner as in another study, *Male nude seated*,¹⁰ which relates to the principal figure in *The Mocking of Christ* (Williamstown, Mass., the Williams College Museum of Art). In a large study for *The Satyr and the Peasant*



Fig. 6 Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant Family* (detail).
Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Inv. 20028.

Family (Fig. 8),¹¹ to the right of a fully realised study of the satyr's pose there is an abandoned preliminary sketch in the manner of Jordaens's series of early academies. These are divided between the Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum and the Düsseldorf Kunstmuseum. There is a distinctive chip on the band below the rim of the porridge bowl beside the satyr, which is found in neither the Kassel painting, nor the present work. Moreover, the curved handle of the ladle, held by the boy whose head is visible by the satyr's bicep, appears unsupported in the drawing. The magnificently drawn head of the satyr in the drawing is turned in three-



Fig. 7 Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant*.
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.



Fig. 8 Jordaens, *Satyr*.
Formerly with Bernard Houthakker,
Amsterdam.



quarter profile. The lower profile of the satyr's right forearm has been shifted upward to clear the ladle. There are also significant differences in the foliage (absent altogether from the satyr's lap in the present painting) and on the face and body of the satyr; for instance in the furrowed brow and wrinkled folds of the torso. The drawing should, therefore, not be dismissed as a copy after the present painting.¹²

The motif of the peasant with his bowl of porridge, his wife seated beside him with one arm outstretched dandling on her lap the child who wears a kerchief, remained for a decade and a half dear to Jordaens.¹³ As the various renditions advance chronologically so the features of the satyr change subtly. His looks and age change, but so does his mien - he begins



Fig. 9 Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant Family*, formerly with Otto Naumann, New York.

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Fig. 10 Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant*. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.



Fig. 11 Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant*. Moscow, Pushkin Museum, Inv.2615.

to laugh as he gestures towards the peasants. The addition of the satyr's levity to Aesop's fable appears unique to Jordaens. The motifs recur once again in a painting modified further c. 1630-35 and set in an interior (Moscow, Pushkin Museum, Inv.2615, Fig. 11). A small *modello* for this work rearranged the two standing figures and was engraved in reverse (Fig. 12) by Jacob Neefs in Antwerp around 1610. It is lettered: *Jac. Jordaens invent: / cum privilegio. / Jacobus Neefs sculpsit.*¹⁴ The compositional theme of the Satyr and the Peasant family was important to Jordaens, for later in his career he was to adapt it, excising the figure of the satyr, in his peasant scenes such as the *Natura paucis contenta* (Nature is Happy with a Little) tapestry of c. 1644, Hluboká Castle, Czech Republic, or his *Scene of Peasants Eating* in the Gemäldegalerie in Kassel of c. 1650.

Patrick Matthiesen¹⁵



Fig. 12 Engraving by Jacob Neefs after Jordaens, *The Satyr and the Peasant*.

- 1– See Laura Cruz, Willem Frijhoff, *Myth in History, History in Myth: Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the Society for Netherlandic History*, New York June 5-6, 2006, Brill, Boston, 2009, p. 182.
- 2– See Kimberlee Cloutier Blazzard, "The Wise Man has two tongues: Images of the Satyr and the Peasant in Jordaens and Steen", in *Myth in History, History in Myth*, Brill, Boston 2009, p. 87 & ff.
- 3– Oil on canvas, 67.2 x 51 cm: exhibited *Jacob Jordaens*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1968-9, cat. no. 6. The painting was damaged by fire in 1908. Two variants of this composition but on panel were on the London art market (Christie's 2 August 1965 and with Antikkompaniet, Stockholm 1917-18).
- 4– Hans Vogel, *Katalog der Staatlichen Gemäldegalerie zu Kassel*, Kassel, 1958, no. 186.
- 5– See Steen's *Satyr and Peasant Family* in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, datable c. 1650 and K. Cloutier Blazzard, *op. cit.*, Brill, Boston 2009, pp. 101-104 as well as a second version of this theme by Steen in the Museum Bredius, The Hague.
- 6– Both Gregory Martin and Joost van der Auwera tend to date the painting a little earlier 1617-18. R-A D'Hulst confirmed the attribution but did not set a date in a Ms. communication dated 26 March 1994 and subsequently in an oral communication to Michael Simpson. The painting's style and the number of pentiments would appear to indicate that this painting must precede both the Kassel and Pushkin paintings.
- 7– N. Easthaugh, *A Survey by infra-red reflectography digital image processing of Jacob Jordaens. The Satyr and the Peasant Family*, August 1993, Ref: 93231.1. The following report presents the results of a survey of the painting depicting *The Satyr and the Peasant Family* by Jacob Jordaens using infrared reflectography/digital image processing (IRR/DIP). A key to the positions of the seven IRR/DIP images taken during the survey and a summary of the findings are shown in figure 2A and B. There are a number of changes evident in this painting, most of which are apparent from careful visual examination. Some however are revealed more clearly by the IRR/DIP technique used for this report and in particular we may note the additional figure revealed to the left of the satyr (Fig 2A and B). Other alterations which became especially clear under IRR/DIP are that of the leg of the child on the left and the re-positioning of the hand of the woman in the hat. The appearance of most of the other *pentimenti*, such as that down the right arm of the satyr under the head of the boy or the breast of the woman on the left are clearly the result of a technique which involves the basic design being laid in with a light-coloured and impasto over which darker colours are then applied. In fact there are a number of other minor alterations not readily visible by IRR/DIP (such as in the blue skirt of the woman holding the child on the left), which are like this.
- 8– R.-A. D'Hulst, *Jordaens's Drawings*, Brussels, 1974, no. A 38.
- 9– D'Hulst, *op. cit.*, no. A 54, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Inv. 6179.
- 10– D'Hulst, *op. cit.*, no. A 72.
- 11– Black chalk, heightened with white, 405 x 260 mm, sold at Sotheby's Mak van Waay on 25 April 1983, lot 83, as "Studio of Jordaens" to Houthakker.
- 12– e.g. D'Hulst, *op. cit.*, no. A 12.
- 13– There are many copies and studio variants. A studio version of the Brussels picture was sold at Christie's, Amsterdam 24/25 March 2016 lot 27; a workshop variant version of the Pushkin painting which may be the self-same as that published by Held in 1940 in *Parnassus*, vol. 12, no 3 "Unknown Paintings by Jordaens in America," pp. 26-29, was sold at Lempertz, 19 November 1994, lot 1381. A further workshop variant of the theme in an interior was sold last at Sotheby's London, 10 December 2015, lot 119, reproduced also in D'Hulst, *Jacob Jordaens*, London 1982, p. 94, fig. 59. A drawing attributed to Jordaens was with Otto Naumann in New York and represents a transitional stage between the composition discussed here and that in Kassel (Fig. 9), while a painting in Munich in the Alte Pinakothek usually dated to 1621 but surely several years later introduces additional figures and a cow into an interior, but also changes the physiognomy of the satyr (Fig. 10).
- 14– *Kunsthalle Bremen. Erwerbungen der letzten Jahren*, Bremen, 1961, p. 58, no. 23, illus. p. 14 (Fig. 12).
- 15– This text has already been published in Patrick Matthiesen, *Jacques Jordaens. Homer, Hesiod & Aesop: Myth, Fable & Basic Instincts*, London, 2018, p. 58-71. Patrick Matthiesen republished and updated a text by the late Professor Michael Jaffé (see The Matthiesen Gallery, *Fifty Paintings 1535-1825*, London, 1993, no. 9, p. 55-59).

