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Quite Contrary: Slippages in Meaning in a Chelsea Perfume Vase

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

In 1760, London's Chelsea Porcelain Factory produced an opulent perfume vase with a reserve painting after François Boucher's *Jupiter in the Guise of Diana and Callisto* (1759) amongst a background of painted life-size flora as part of their Gold Anchor Wares. Considering the visually sapphic scene, non-native flowers, and inspiration from the Continental porcelain factories of Meissen and Sèvres, this thesis provides a potential queer reading of the Callisto Vase that places it among broader themes of luxury, Continental influence, the classics, and botanical colonialism that permeated Georgian England. While other scholars have considered the connection between male homosexuality and eighteenth-century porcelain, this research is one of the first of its kind to explore the female homosexuality within eighteenth-century porcelain.

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Quite Contrary: Slippages of Meaning in a Chelsea Perfume Vase

Introduction

Perhaps no artist better exemplifies the English Rococo than William Hogarth (1697-1764). A painter and a printmaker entrenched in the sociopolitical sphere of eighteenth-century London, he created what he termed “Modern Moral Subjects,” satirical and moralizing series often critiquing the immorality and excess of the aristocracy. In a unique and notable departure from the lavish frivolity and ornamentation of the Continental Rococo, Hogarth transcended this aestheticism and essentially criticized the entirety of what the Rococo was. His sociopolitical awareness of the issues of the time positions his work to act as a frame for a perfume vase (Figure 1) produced by London’s Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory in 1760.¹ The Callisto Vase – as I shall refer to it here – in particular features themes that mirror and subvert those found in William Hogarth’s *The Toilette* and *A Taste in High Life*.

One of his most renowned “Modern Moral Subjects,” the *Marriage A-la-Mode* series, created between 1743 and 1745 follows the consequences of a loveless arranged marriage between the nouveau riche daughter of a merchant and the son of an impoverished nobleman. In the fourth installment of the series, *The Toilette* (Figure 2), Hogarth presents a scene of domestic discord and moral degradation amongst the young wife and her numerous guests and attendants. Through style, individuals, and objects exemplifying Continental contamination and luxurious excess, Hogarth utilizes various themes prevalent in eighteenth-century London such as queerness, classical mythology, and colonialism to further his satirical goal. Set within an opulent dressing room, the scene reflects the French fashion of hosting guests within the *toilette*,

¹ The Metropolitan Museum dates these vases to 1761. However, it is more likely that they were produced in 1760 and part of the factory’s auction of Gold Anchor Wares in 1761 of porcelain from the year prior. While there is no listing in the 1761 auction catalogue (or any of the available catalogues from the Gold Anchor period) that is specific enough to attribute to this vase, I will be using the 1760 date moving forward in the thesis.

indulging in foreign luxury goods like porcelain cups served by a black manservant, amid depictions of sexual deviancy in classical myth mirroring the guests' own.

Hogarth has been described as a “self-consciously English artist” by David Bindman and his staunch nationalism errs on the side of blatant xenophobia.² His disdain for the Continent defines the countess and her guests with a sense of otherness – the reason why, according to Hogarth and among other things, they have fallen into such moral decay. The French titles of both the series and this individual plate emphasize this foreignness. Hogarth is using the Continent by both stylistic influence and individuals from to further his mockery.

Regarding homosexuality, Hogarth strategically engages with preexisting contemporary archetypes and specific individuals associated with queerness and gender ambiguity to satirize the moral decay of the countess' guests: the man in the blue coat, the flautist, and the castrato. However, in satirizing these individuals, Hogarth also acknowledges their existence, giving them a platform as a well-known artist. This painting, though fictional, documents (albeit exaggerated) examples of what contemporary queerness may have looked like in eighteenth-century Europe. Hogarth's standalone painting *A Taste in High Life* (Figure 3), created in 1742, serves as a forerunner to *The Toilette*. This work notably depicts a man and a woman huddled around and admiring a porcelain cup and saucer. Hogarth uses the man's lavish dress and effeminate characterization, much like the man in the blue coat in *The Toilette*, as a symbol for male homosexuality. They both operate as a precursor to the social stereotype of the Macaroni – an elite male characterized by his extravagant sense of fashion and often associated with homosexuality.³ As homosexuality transitioned from an action to an identity, distinct character

² David Bindman, *Hogarth and His Times: Serious Comedy* (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, in association with the Parnassus Foundation, 1997), 45.

³ Amelia Rauser, “Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004): 101–17.

types emerged characterized by a lack of masculinity and perceived heterosexual prowess, such as excessive interest in porcelain. And visually, it is through works like Hogarth's, that this archetype becomes codified as queer.

The flautist, potentially depicting Frederick the Great of Prussia, adds another layer to Hogarth's encoded queerness through the inclusion of a Continental figure. Bernd Krysmanski has theorized that the flautist's aquiline nose suggests Frederick, a man historically associated with homosexuality.⁴ Furthermore, the act of playing the flute has been associated with the act of fellatio, creating a visual gag. Hogarth's choice to position the flautist, along with the castrato – another figure from the Continent that Hogarth uses to satirize queerness – in front of a reproduction of Michelangelo's drawing of the rape of Ganymede adds another layer to the encoded queerness. Michelangelo, famed artist-genius of the Renaissance, is another figure commonly associated with same-sex desire. The original drawing was created as a gift for the young nobleman Tomasso de' Cavalieri, depicting Jupiter abducting Ganymede in a scene laden with signs of homosexual desire. This representation, both literally and figuratively, is grounded in queerness and serves as the backdrop for the queer-coded men in *The Toilette*, rooting it in an art historical tradition of queerness.

Furthermore, the inclusion of a reproduction of Correggio's *Jupiter and Io*, a painted plate of Leda and the swan, and a figure of a humanoid with a deer head (a reference to Diana and Actaeon) alongside the *Rape of Ganymede* serves multiple purposes. Firstly, they speak to the enduring popularity of the classics in eighteenth-century England, a trend fostered by Grand Tour trips to Italy. Secondly, they define the capitalistic luxury of the countess, with the Actaeon figure and Jupiter and Leda plate are amongst other decorative tchotchkes still retaining their lot

⁴ Bernd Krysmanski, "Does Hogarth Depict Old Fritz Truthfully with a Crooked Beak?: The Pictures Familiar to Us from Pesne to Menzel Don't Show This," 2022, <https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/8019/>.

numbers from auction. Lastly, the themes of infidelity and cuckoldry in the mythological stories mirror that in the relationship of the countess and her husband.

Hogarth's keen observation of society extends to the imperial narratives of the eighteenth-century, something he would have been particularly privy to working in the beating heart of the nation in London. Through the inclusion of foreign imports, such as the black manservant and porcelain cups, Hogarth creates a colonial index of the "four" continents, reflecting the duchess' mercantile heritage and her place among the upper echelons of society. The presence of the manservant, portrayed in a caricature-like manner, highlights the commodification of individuals and objects within the imperial context. Additionally, the use of porcelain cups reflects European consumerist fascination with Asian goods and the colonial trade networks. The mystical allure of China and its porcelain wares was the driving force to the Americas and the act of serving drinking chocolate in these cups underscores European involvement in the Americas and the appropriation of indigenous commodities to suit European sensibilities.⁵ Through these various elements, Hogarth creates a layered material depiction of colonialism and imperialism of the geographical expanse of the British Empire in the eighteenth century.

These two works by William Hogarth, particularly *The Toilette*, serve as a nexus point for exploring themes of the same themes of luxury, Continental influence, queerness, the classics, and colonialism mentioned previously in porcelain and the women's dressing room present in the Callisto Vase. Now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art alongside a matching counterpart (Figure 4),⁶ the Callisto Vase bears a quatrefoil with the scene of Jupiter and Callisto from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* modeled after an engraving by René Gaillard (Figure 5) of François Boucher's

⁵ Chi-ming Yang, "Silver, Blackness, and Fugitive Value, 'from China to Peru,'" *The Eighteenth Century (Lubbock)* 59, no. 2 (2018): 141–66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2018.0008>.

⁶ I will refer to this vase as the Nymph Vase after the reserve painting of three nymphs also after Boucher.

1759 painting *Jupiter in the Guise of Diana, and the Nymph Callisto* (Figure 6). Reclined together in intimate embrace, the god Jupiter disguised as the goddess Diana and nymph Callisto are placed amid a gilded gold ground covered in intertwined realistic life-sized flowers, creating a visually sapphic scene.

While categorically British according to the Metropolitan Museum, the vase owes its visual and material existence to sources from around the globe. With the inclusion of a painted scene after two French artists amongst certain flowers like the orange lily native to the British colonies in North America on imitation Chinese soft-paste porcelain and styled after wares from the German Meissen Porcelain Factory and the French Sèvres Porcelain Factory, the vase takes upon a greater global aspect. This global hybridity is a direct product of the ebb and flow of London's connection to the rest of Europe and its centrality in the expanding British Empire now under King George III following his 1760 accession to the throne and the introduction of Queen Charlotte from the German duchy of Mecklenburg-Strelitz.⁷

This thesis proposes a potential reading into the Callisto Vase that explores the interplay between queerness and global affairs within eighteenth-century London. While William Hogarth's *The Toilette* and *A Taste in High Life* provides historical presence to male queerness amongst the aristocracy through aesthetics, this thesis similarly provides a novel reading of the Callisto Vase as a luxury object meant for a woman of the upper classes who potentially would have recognized the classical literary references of Ovid and Sappho and made a possible connection between her own identity and that of the vase.

⁷ T. J. Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham, "Art and the British Empire" (Manchester, UK; Manchester University Press, 2007), 10-16.

Literature Review

Oft the subject of critique for its fantastical muchness, the Rococo has gone through periods of condemnation, notably by Denis Diderot, and periods of aesthetic revivals where its lavishness and affinity towards femininity has been romanticized.⁸ Scholarly focus has traditionally centered on the French Rococo, particularly in painting and decorative arts. The English Rococo, on the other hand, has largely been overlooked and reduced to the work of a singular artist: William Hogarth.⁹ In the realm of ceramics wherein this thesis lies, research has predominantly spotlighted Continental factories, particularly France's Sèvres Porcelain Factory but also Germany's Meissen Porcelain Factory.¹⁰ But as the first of its kind in England, the Chelsea Porcelain Factory in London, emerges at the top among scholarship of eighteenth-century British ceramics, with F. Severne Mackenna's collection of survey books on the different periods of Chelsea porcelain produced in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the keystone literature.¹¹ After the turn of the century, however, publication of most literature outside of that published in specified journals like the English Ceramic Circle drops significantly.

Moreover, scholarship concerning the "queering" of eighteenth-century porcelain, both insular and Continental, is extremely rare, particularly when combined with concepts of nationalism and colonialism. Its limited iterations such as Stacey Sloboda's 2009 article "Porcelain Bodies: Gender, Acquisitiveness, and Taste in Eighteenth-Century England" only discuss queerness in the sense of effeminate men with affinities for the delicacy of porcelain like

⁸ Melissa Lee Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics*, Texts & Documents (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 1-5 .

⁹ The major art history survey books such as Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* and Janson's *History of Art* have large sections devoted to French Rococo art while the English Rococo is only evident in a singular section on William Hogarth and his Modern Moral Subjects.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Munger and Elizabeth Sullivan, *European Porcelain in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), 6-9.

¹¹ F. Severne Mackenna, *Chelsea Porcelain; the Gold Anchor Wares (with a Short Account of the Duesbury Period)*. (Leigh-on-Sea, Eng: F. Lewis, 1952).

in Hogarth's *A Taste in High Life*.¹² This underscores the novelty and significance of the Callisto Vase and this thesis as it is potentially the first of its kind to broach eighteenth-century porcelain from a sapphic point of view. Historical queer studies, especially concerning sapphic relationships, suffer from the unfortunate truth of falling to both the hands of historiographic homophobia and misogyny. In art history, historical sapphism – and historical queerness, in general – is seldom addressed, while other disciplines like literature and history have done more work in this area. Minding this gap in the literature, I draw upon existing research on the source material for the Callisto Vase, Boucher's *Jupiter in the Guise of Diana and the Nymph Callisto* (1759), and literature on sapphism in early modern England to construct a framework for understanding how gender ambiguities and queerness manifest themselves in Boucher's image type and subsequently on the vase and contextualizing it using the historical sexuality studies.

Melissa Hyde's chapter, "In the Guise of History: The Jupiter and Callisto Paintings," in her 2005 monograph, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics*, particularly elucidates the gendered nuances Boucher plays with, comparing it with his other renditions of the same subject and those by other artists.¹³ Regarding queerness, Erica Rand's 1994 article "Lesbian Sightings: Scoping for Dykes in Boucher and *Cosmo*" approaches the same subject through a (albeit slightly dated) contemporary queer lens that investigates the "covert invisibility" of sapphism ("lesbianism" in her words).¹⁴ Broadening my scope, female queerness in early modern England is best explored in Valerie Traub's 2002 *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, which emerged as a major contribution to the history of sexuality and addressed the major gap in research. Her discussion of "lesbianism" amid the visual arts is most

¹² Stacey Sloboda, "Porcelain Bodies: Gender, Acquisitiveness, and Taste in Eighteenth-Century England," *Material Cultures 1740-1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, Alla Myzelev and John Potvin, Eds. (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2009), 19-36., January 1, 2009.

¹³ Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*.

¹⁴ Erica Rand, "Lesbian Sightings: Scoping for Dykes in Voucher and *Cosmo*," *Journal of Homosexuality* 27, no. 1-2 (September 15, 1994): 123-40, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v27n01_06.

obviously supportive of my argument, but also is her discussion of poetry, drama, literature, and pornography for situating the Callisto Vase among a greater thread of sapphism in the arts.

Traub's theoretical approach to how queerness among women has been historically silenced despite a proliferation of material speaks to Rand's argument and provides a strong framework for my own argument.¹⁵

The crux of this thesis lies in the queering of the Callisto Vase. As a methodological tool, it would be a futile pursuit to attempt to use queering to find the smoking gun of homosexuality among the Chelsea Factory's sales records or elsewhere, an attempt at recovering a sort of "lost" history of queerness. Rather, I use queering to examine the slippages in the heteronormative art historical narratives that would have traditionally been used to discuss works of art like this. Notably, within this thesis, I refrain from overtly saying "lesbian" to acknowledge the history and existence of potential bisexual, pansexual, or overall queer identities, despite many of the authors of my sources doing so. The novelty of the Callisto Vase provides an opportunity to shed light on an otherwise overlooked area of English Rococo porcelain and its potential queering. This thesis, thus, fills a gap in the scholarly discourse, challenging and proposing a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of intersectionality.

Paint Me Like One of Your French Girls

Directly following Sèvres, the Chelsea Factory frequently reproduced prints after the French artist François Boucher (1703-1770), a founding father of the French Rococo aesthetic. The reserve of the Callisto Vase, in particular, takes from a print completed by the French engraver René Gaillard after Boucher's 1759 version of Jupiter in the guise of Diana and

¹⁵ Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 42 (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Callisto, now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri. The painting, one of multiple that Boucher produced between 1744 and 1769 of the same subject, stands out as perhaps one of his most erotic renditions of the Jupiter and Callisto myth from Book 2 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁶

The original Ovidian myth begins with the nymph Callisto, a companion of Diana and a daughter of Lycaon, King of Arcadia, fresh from the hunt and alone in a wooded, pastoral setting. Her great beauty captures the attention of the infamously unfaithful king of the gods, Jupiter, prompting him to devise a scheme to seduce her while keeping his notoriously jealous wife, Juno, unaware of the encounter. Considering Callisto's vow of chastity, she would have been wary of Jupiter's approach, and so he cunningly assumes the form of his daughter, Diana – her body, attire, and manner. He proceeds to kiss the nymph, then rape her, resulting in a pregnancy that Callisto attempts to conceal from Diana and the other huntresses. However, later as they bathe in the river, they discover her swollen belly, prompting her to be expelled from Diana's followers. She gives birth to a son named Arcas just before Juno, discovering Jupiter's infidelity, transforms Callisto into a bear in a fit of jealous rage. In bear form, she is later encountered by her son, now a hunter, who nearly slays her with a spear. But in an act of pity, Jupiter transforms Arcas into a bear as well and places them among the stars as the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor.¹⁷

Within this short retelling of Ovid's myth, the intense level of drama and subterfuge Jupiter engages in just to seduce Callisto along with the gender ambiguity at play made this

¹⁶ Melissa Hyde notes that Boucher painted dozens of versions of the Diana and Callisto subject throughout his career. While this may be true, the 1976 catalogue raisonné of his works by Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein only includes five known versions. As such, I will only focus on these known versions within this thesis.

¹⁷ Ovid et al., *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Translated by Eminent Persons. Published by Sir Samuel Garth* (London: Martin and Bain, 1794), 90; First published in 1717, this version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* would have likely been one of the English editions available in London at the time of the vase's production and sale.

myth, in particular, a popular subject in eighteenth-century France, as suggested by Christopher Bedford. Among seventeenth and eighteenth-century translated French copies of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, many include engravings of the Jupiter and Callisto myth, specifically, choosing different points within the myth to depict.¹⁸ Today, there are four known versions of paintings of Jupiter in the guise of Diana and Callisto by Boucher: the 1744 version at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow (Figure 7), the 1759 version at the Nelson-Atkins Museum, the 1763 version at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 8), and the 1769 version at the Wallace Collection in London (Figure 9).¹⁹ Collectively, these four versions share several common elements: a pyramidal composition formed by Diana and Callisto, their longing and loving gazes, the presence of two to four putti, a watching eagle, a revealing (both literally and figuratively) nip slip, and a pastoral Arcadian setting. Each also maintains unique differences that illustrate Boucher's stylistic changes throughout his career. Notably, within the two earlier paintings from 1744 and 1759, Diana assumes a dominant position, looking down upon Callisto and maintaining a sense of heteronormativity consistent with the original myth. Conversely, in his later versions, Boucher flips this, placing Callisto in the dominant position that Diana previously held. Additionally, in every version *except* the 1759 version, Diana is in the midst of an action that varies across the paintings: reaching towards Callisto's face (1744), removing Callisto's garments (1769), or both (1763). Among these variations, the 1759 version stands out as an outlier. Boucher captures many of the main elements of the myth and uses the same basic formula used in the other works, but he also created a painting with different energy than the others. It is simultaneously comparatively the most passive and (almost) paradoxically the most

¹⁸ Bedford, Christopher. "High Fidelity? Deception and Seduction, Word and Image in Boucher's Jupiter in the Guise of Diana Seducing Callisto." *Word & Image* 27, no. 1 (March 25, 2011): 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2010.486231>.

¹⁹ The Louvre has a copy from 1767 after another version of Boucher's Diana and Callisto, however, the composition is nearly identical to the version in the Wallace Collection from 1769, and thus, I will not be discussing it further.

erotically charged. Notably, it is in this version that Callisto's nudity is the most pronounced, with her entire left side bare. This passivity, coupled with the overt nudity lends this painting, more than the others, to the traps of the male gaze. It creates an atmosphere of sexual tension between Diana and Callisto, but also between the viewer and the couple.

Specifically looking at the 1759 Nelson-Atkins version and considering the whole of the myth, Boucher's portrayal of the subject captures the moment just *after* Jupiter, disguised as Diana, approached Callisto but *before* he kisses her – the final instance of her blissful ignorance. And therefore, at first glance, his paintings of Jupiter and Callisto essentially appear as depictions of two female-presenting figures entwined in a sensual embrace, creating a visually sapphic picture despite the heterosexual nature of the myth. In the Nelson-Atkins version (and consequently the Callisto Vase), Jupiter appears in Diana's form reclined and covered perpendicularly by Callisto's body in the bottom middle of the picture plane, both nude among a leopard fur and silks of blue, white, and pink and amidst the wooded backdrop described by Ovid. They gaze longingly into each other's eyes as three putti play: two perched in the tree above their heads holding a flaming torch and arrow, while one approaches the couple near Callisto's legs, poised to strike her with an arrow of love. "Diana," as goddess of the moon and the hunt, is recognizable here by her beaded headdress adorned with a lateral silver crescent moon and bow and quiver of arrows discarded on a rock near Callisto alongside the day's catch, a dead bird.²⁰ Her true male form is notably concealed behind Callisto's body, devoid of any clear indications of breasts or female genitalia, in stark contrast to Callisto's nearly full exposure. In essence, there is no question that Callisto is a woman but there is no surety surrounding Diana. However, hints of Jupiter within the disguise persist. Most obviously and most ominously, the

²⁰ Unlike Ovid's account of the myth, I will be using Diana without quotation marks and she/her pronouns to refer to Jupiter in Diana's guise henceforth.

aquiline symbol of Jupiter lurks behind the pink drapery in the branches, its gaze piercing down with spread black feathered wings, red eyes, and sharp talons clutching a lightning bolt, yet another emblem of Jupiter's power. Meanwhile, and more subtly, Diana exhibits a slightly darker complexion than Callisto, a nod to the ancient convention of portraying men with darker skin tones than women.²¹ Diana's gesture towards the quiver of arrows and the dead bird – reminiscent of erect and flaccid penises respectively – alludes to her true identity, adding multiple layers to the subterfuge at play.

Compared to its literary roots, Boucher's Jupiter and Callisto paintings lean into guise of Diana and move away from the violence of the rape and expulsion from the real Diana's companions. Ovid's account, notably unlike what I am doing here, refers to Jupiter in the guise as "Jupiter" and with masculine pronouns. One of the most famous treatments of the subject, Titian's 1559 version, for example, depicts the pivotal moment Diana discovers Callisto's pregnancy, conveying a moral message of chastity while Ruben's 1613 rendition presents a large, muscled Diana with a prominent eagle silhouetting her. Contemporaneously, fellow countryman Charles-Joseph Natoire's 1745 treatment of the myth at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm totally disregards the original Ovid, portraying Jupiter in his true, distinctly male form. Boucher's approach depicting a sensual moment between Diana and Callisto is rather novel, diverging from other artists and the core of the Ovidian myth.

While Ovid's original text downplays the sapphic undertones of Diana and Callisto's encounter, Boucher's versions seem to amplify it, particularly when compared with renditions of other artists. Perhaps no subject matter better exemplifies the corpus of Boucher than the female form, especially a fleshy one. And logically, there is considerable visual value in two nude women over just the one. Similarly, Boucher's *Leda and the Swan* (1742) and *Sylvia Relieving*

²¹ *Making Up the Rococo*, Hyde, 205.

Phyllis from a Bee Sting (1755) adhere to the same trope. However, the choice of Jupiter and Callisto complicates the simplicity of merely having two women as in those myths. Jupiter/Diana oscillates between being both the holder of the male gaze and the very object of it, adding layers of complexity and ambiguity to the gender identity and seduction. Jupiter's transformation into Diana challenges traditional binary gender roles, suggesting a sense of fluidity. In turn, the viewer is expected to have knowledge of the specific Ovidian myth to know that the Diana they are seeing is actually Jupiter in disguise. Otherwise, they – like Callisto – will also be deceived. However, when the viewer does know the myth, they are forced to contend with the discrepancies between what they know and what they see. Diana is not actually Diana, nor even a woman at all, and the scene is intellectually heterosexual. But visually, it *is* Diana operating in a scene of sapphic erotics.

The metamorphosis of artistic mediums mirrors Ovid's tales, transitioning from an ancient myth to an original multichromatic oil painting to a mirrored monochromatic engraving on paper, and finally to an enamel painting on the curved surface of a perfume vase, each step executed by different hands. Although undated, versions of the print engraved by René Gaillard after the 1759 Boucher painting of Diana and Callisto likely were completed soon after. A 1780 French price book of prints, both ancient and modern, records ²² that the Gaillard print was created pendant to William Wynne Ryland's engraving of Jupiter and Leda (Figure 10), also after Boucher and featuring an Ovidian myth that includes two nude women.²³ Boucher's original painting of Jupiter and Leda at the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm was completed in 1742.²⁴

²² Lucien Monod, *Aide-mémoire de l'amateur et du professionnel: le prix des estampes, anciennes et modernes, prix atteints dans les ventes - suites et états, biographies et bibliographies* (A. Morancé, 1780), 1916.

²³ Patricia Ferguson, email message to author, January 22, 2024.

²⁴ Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, *François Boucher: Volume I: 1720-1747*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1976); The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. dates their Ryland print of Jupiter and Leda to 1758, however. Yet the painting that Gaillard's print is after is signed and dated to 1759. If Gaillard's print was created pendant to Ryland's, the National Gallery's dating is perhaps inaccurate.

Perhaps Ryland was prompted to engrave a painting created over a decade prior by the popularity of Boucher's newest female-on-female painting.²⁵ Moreover, the Callisto Vase was likely created in 1760, indicating that the Gaillard print was completed and had made its way across the English Channel in the short time between the completion of the painting in 1759 and the vase's manufacture.

Boucher's applicability to different materials, spanning from paintings to prints to porcelain – his “morphology” as Ewa Lajer-Burcharth puts it – solidifies his status as a thoroughly ‘modern’ artist.²⁶ His relationship with the Sèvres Porcelain Factory (formerly Vincennes), cultivated during the height of his career during the 1750s under his most significant patrons Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour, laid the groundwork for the development of a new, distinctly French porcelain style to emerge. Typically adapted from a drawing or engraving, Boucher's designs often took the form of either three-dimensional modeled figures or enameled paintings on the reserves of vases, plates, snuffboxes, and various other decorative objects. The Gaillard Diana and Callisto print, for example, is notably featured on the body of a Sèvres vase produced in 1770 (Figure 11).

The first of its kind in England, the Chelsea Factory took to the Continent for inspiration. The Red Anchor period (1752-1756) prominently looked to Meissen for styles of modeling and decoration, much like many of the other Continental porcelain factories up until 1756 and the beginning of the Seven Years War. The stylistic center of European porcelain subsequently moved to France at Sèvres as Chelsea began its Gold Anchor period, later ending in 1769.²⁷ With

²⁵ Likewise, the year following Boucher's 1763 painting of Jupiter and Callisto, the Sèvres Factory created a large bisque porcelain group after his Jupiter and Leda painting.

²⁶ Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa. “Image Matters: The Case of Boucher.” *Studies in the History of Art* 74 (2009): 278.

²⁷ Gold Anchor, Severne, 27; This is the last period under the leadership of Nicholas Sprimont due to health issues before the factory was purchased by William Duesbury of Derby porcelain. Subsequent wares are categorized as “Chelsea-Derby.”

the influence of Sèvres, naturally also came the application of Boucher's pictorial designs on Chelsea wares.

Referring to the Callisto Vase, the overall basic formula remains consistent in the transfer from painting to print to porcelain. Certain elements from the original Boucher painting are lost and others are newly imagined by the Chelsea enameler. The reserve, framed within a gilded egg-and-dart quatrefoil, reverses the Boucher composition, affirming the utilization of the Gaillard print. The characteristic intricate softness of Boucher's coloration and application of paint is absent, a product of skill, medium, and manufacturing process. Diana and Callisto's physiognomies lack the delicate refinement that epitomizes Boucher's female figures. Callisto, for instance, no longer gazes longingly at Diana; instead her pudgier, almost putti-like face stares blankly into the distance. The sapphic embrace, in turn, also comes across as a little gauche. The two putti perched in the branches have vanished. The one near Callisto's legs seems to have lost the arrow of love from his grasp, maintaining the gesture with an empty clasped fist and perhaps explaining the lack of emotion in the couple's expressions. The quiver of arrows at the putti's left more so resembles a cornucopia filled with orange flower spikes and greenery, rather similar to the orange flower just to the right of the picture plane. Additionally, the salmon pink fabric hanging from the tree now blends with the formerly blue drapery beneath the couple, creating a line of color leading to the eagle reference to Jupiter, now less obscured in the shadows with more naturalistic brown feathers and black eyes but also brandishing a more prominent fiery lightning bolt. No longer is Callisto in a sensual and erotically charged scene brought forth by the putti's arrow and Jupiter's seductive tricks, but instead, the passivity of Boucher's original composition is transformed into something entirely unsexy. Both Diana and Callisto have lost the elements that qualified them as objects of sexual desire to each other and to the audience. To a

potential heterosexual male viewer, the Callisto Vase does not have the same arousal-inducing capabilities, despite being formulaically the same. But, to a potential queer woman, the vase still manages to strongly convey the potentiality of intimate love between two women.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Returning to the whole of the vase, stylistically, the florals on the Callisto Vase trace their origin with the German Meissen Porcelain Factory. Prior to the 1750s, Meissen was the only European porcelain factory to engage in large-scale botanical decoration. Notably, a cup and saucer set at the British Museum (Figure 12) from Meissen in the mid-1740s with a pattern of scattered bouquets treats the flowers as the main subject matter and with a relative degree of naturalism. When the Chelsea Porcelain Factory was founded and just beginning their practice after 1744, they looked to the Meissen Factory as the pinnacle of porcelain production for inspiration. This is particularly evident during the Chelsea Raised Anchor and Red Anchor periods where the Meissen botanical wares clearly inspired the basis for the Chelsea Factory's collection of "Sir Hans Sloane Wares." Named after the renowned naturalist Hans Sloane, who began the collections of both the British Museum and the Natural History Museum in London, these wares drew inspiration from the rich botanical specimens Sloane curated. Sloane was a founding member of the Chelsea Physic Garden, London's oldest botanical garden, helping establish this apothecaries' garden as a collection of native, naturalized, and exotic flora for scientific study. Conveniently, the garden was located a short walk – just 0.65 kilometers – along the Thames River from the Chelsea Porcelain Factory's Lawrence Street location. By the eighteenth century, the garden had become a focal point for Europe's botanical illustrators, including the German artist Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708-1770).²⁸ Ehret was the chief illustrator

²⁸ Kevill-Davies, Sally. *Sir Hans Sloane's Plants on Chelsea Porcelain*. London: Elmhirst & Suttie Ltd, 2015, 18.

for the German physician and botanist Dr. Christoph Jakob Trew who stressed the importance of depicting the ‘sexual character’ of the plants in accordance with their binomial classifications after the Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus.²⁹ Ehret and the other illustrator’s intricate botanical prints served as valuable references for the artists at the Chelsea Factory, influencing the detailed depictions of flora on the Hans Sloane wares.

The usage of botanical prints offers a uniquely scientific edge to the Chelsea wares the Meissen wares lack. A Red Anchor Hans Sloane plate at the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 13) features a large and rather fanciful spray of martagon lilies, surrounded by a butterfly, caterpillar, and other insects. The lilies are delicately enameled with special attention paid to the textures and veining of the leaves, petals, and hairs along the stem. However, while there is greater attention to the textures, the saturated magenta color of the stem is more of a product of the enameler’s artistic license to increase the exoticism and make it more appealing to potential buyers.³⁰ The whole of the lily comprises most of the plate’s basin, with parts of the leaves and flowers extending onto the rim. The insects have a light wash of a shadow underneath them, and these elements combined create a sort of trompe l’oeil effect that makes it look as if the lily spray and insects are sitting on top of the plate being served, adding to the novel scientific detail and captivating viewers. In contrast, the Meissen counterparts hold a different aesthetic sensibility. Their flowers, while delicate and not entirely unrealistic, lack the scientific precision of the Chelsea wares and are presented in small, controlled bouquets with large amounts of the white porcelain ground exposed.³¹ While it seems Meissen prioritizes the aesthetic of neat floral

²⁹ *Ehret’s Flowering Plants*, The Victoria and Albert Natural History Illustrators (Exeter: Webb & Bower, 1987), 10-11.

³⁰ Sally Kevill-Davies also theorizes that labeling the wares after Sir Hans Sloane, despite him having no real hand at the Chelsea Factory, similarly increases their prestige; Kevill-Davies. *Sir Hans Sloane’s Plants on Chelsea Porcelain*, 46.

³¹ Munger, Jeffrey, and Elizabeth Sullivan. *European Porcelain in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018, 258.

arrangements, the Chelsea Factory embraces the botanical accuracy (to an extent) and eclectic vegetal pictorial choice, lending its wares to a uniquely Chelsea allure.

Bringing in the Callisto Vase as a third comparison point, the looseness and sensuality of the flowers that characterized the Hans Sloane wares of the Raised and Red Anchor periods, is combined with the ornateness of later Meissen wares and the French Rococo aesthetics of the Sèvres Porcelain Factory during the Chelsea Gold Anchor period. The flowers on the Callisto Vase maintain the scientific naturalism of botanical illustrations found on the Hans Sloane wares. Yet these floral designs lose the unnaturalness of scientific sterility characterized by the genre of botanical illustration and reclaim their wild nature, appearing as an untamed and organic garden of mixed flowers. However, botanical wares of the Sèvres Manufactory, like the cup and saucer set at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 14), are more wild than that of Meissen. Yet the Sèvres vases' depictions of flowers are still gathered in a bouquet, making the Chelsea Factory's approach a novel one. However, instead of the sterility of the plain white porcelain, the Gold Anchor botanical wares often appear on a gilded gold ground,³² as in both the Callisto and Nymph Vases. F. Mackenna Severne notes that the gold ground evolved between 1758 and 1770, being used sparingly for flower painted wares and exotic ornithological wares.³³ Interestingly, the Meissen Factory experimented with gilded gold grounds beginning in 1750 – a decade before the Callisto Vase – as evidenced by pieces like the coffee cup and saucer at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 15). However, while both Meissen and Chelsea utilized gold grounds, the floral applications slightly differed. Meissen, consistent with their earlier botanical wares, tended

³² One such example is a beaker at the British Museum (1923,1218.8.CR), but other examples of flowers on a rich gold ground are in the collection of Sherborne Castle and Dorset.

³³ Mackenna, F. Severne. *Chelsea Porcelain; the Gold Anchor Wares (with a Short Account of the Duesbury Period)*. Leigh-on-Sea, Eng: F. Lewis, 1952, 15.

towards smaller scattered floral patterns, whereas Chelsea's Gold Anchor floral wares embraced a more organic intertwined arrangement of highly naturalistic flowers.

The twofold innovation of the Chelsea Factory's approach to flowers on the Callisto Vase – the scientific naturalism and their untamed nature – simultaneously reflects the colonial ideals of the British Empire and sites for sapphic agency. Departing from the concept of the flowers as mere decoration as with the Meissen and Sèvres wares, the Chelsea Factory's botanical wares of the Raised, Red, and Gold Anchor periods act more as indexical markers for greater concepts. These floral designs mirror the Enlightenment ideals of empirical observation while also romanticizing the natural world. Specifically, examining three of the vase's eighteen different flower varieties – the tulip, orange lily, and violet – provides insights into themes of environmental change, colonialism, and sexuality.

Offering an example of visual and historical precedents that parallel the Callisto Vase, across the North Sea and over a century prior, the Dutch artist Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder painted a still life painting in 1618 of a vase brimming with thirty flower species arranged in a window frame (Figure 16) now at the Hague.³⁴ Bosschaert's treatment of the flowers with a degree of detail that rivaled the real thing, much like the commitment to botanical accuracy in the Chelsea botanical wares, invites a deeper analysis. This emphasis on precision lends itself to treatment of the flowers as active witnesses and victims to the growing Dutch Golden Age economy and horticultural industry. The tulip, of which Bosschaert's painting features multiple varieties, is commonly held to have been introduced to Europe in the mid-sixteenth century by the Flemish ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. And by the seventeenth century, the

³⁴ Taylor, Paul. *Dutch Flower Painting, 1600-1720*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, 138.

Netherlands became so obsessed with the tulip, it spurred a frenzied market bubble known as tulipomania that cemented the flower in Dutch cultural heritage.³⁵

Applying this model to the Callisto Vase, the variegated dark pink and white tulip (Figure 17) adorning the reverse of the vase, of course, holds foreign origins, but the specific striped variety holds a greater environmental history. The distinctive striping effect or ‘breaks’ on the petals are a result of the Tulip Breaking Virus (TPV), transmitted by aphids. The virus first emerged with the initial decades of the tulip’s introduction to Europe, marking one of the earliest documented instances of a plant virus. The Tulip Breaking Virus weakened the flower and because of a lack of scientific understanding, was difficult for Dutch tulip gardeners to control. Consequently, tulips displaying this striking pattern became exceedingly rare, coveted by collectors for their unique combination of aesthetic allure and scarcity.³⁶ While the Dutch saw their tulip obsession in the seventeenth century, the English obsession with tulips blossomed in the mid-eighteenth century, reaching its peak in the nineteenth century.³⁷ The tulip depicted on the Callisto Vase, thus, emerges against the backdrop of a burgeoning English tulip craze, coinciding with the establishment of florists’ societies dedicated to the cultivation and selective breeding of tulips. This period was marked by intentional efforts to induce breaks in tulips through TBV infection, reflecting anthropogenic intervention purely for aesthetic ends. Thus, while the tulip’s inclusion on the vase undoubtedly adds to its visual appeal – the entire reason I believe it was included – it also serves as a marker of the beginning of a new wave of Enlightenment interventions that altered nature, even to the detriment of the plant itself. The variegated dark pink and white tulip, therefore, becomes a symbol of the complex relationship between human agency, aesthetics, and the environment.

³⁵ Pavord, Anna. *The Tulip*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999, 137.

³⁶ Pavord, Anna. *The Tulip*, 11.

³⁷ Pavord, Anna. *The Tulip*, 204.

Adjacent to the tulip on the vase, the orange lily (Figure 18) features six vibrant orange petals slightly curved upward and speckled with dark spots surrounding brown stamen at the center of the flower. The orange petals, dark spots, and vague lily shape resemble that of multiple species of flower that are ambiguously and collectively known as “tiger lilies.” Drawing from the Chelsea Factory’s history of referencing botanical prints for their wares, the flower on the vase evokes similarities to *Lilium superbum*, commonly known as the turk’s cap lily, as depicted in prints by Georg Dionysius Ehret.³⁸ A plant study completed by Ehret in the 1740s at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 19) provides potential insights into the origins of the flower. He notes on the print in Latin that the lily was sketched from the garden of a friend of Ehret’s, a Mr. Peter Collison, in the American colony of Pennsylvania.³⁹ The turk’s cap lilies on the print and the flower on the Callisto Vase share multiple of the same features. However, while the turk’s cap lily typically features downturned flower heads and strongly recurved petals, the lily on the Callisto Vase differs, with its petals upturned and splayed and less dramatically recurved.⁴⁰ In the eighteenth century, the ornamental hybrid lilies of today that could resemble the one on the vase did not exist. The orange lily on the Callisto Vase operates, however, as an artistic hybrid – a cross between the turk’s cap lily and a variety of upturned lily or daylily. Much like the exaggerated magenta color of the martagon lily’s stem on the Hans Sloane plate, the Chelsea Factory has also taken artistic license to depict this flower. The effect, here, is more subtle, though, unnoticeable to non-botanists and hidden among the vase’s ornateness on the back. Interestingly, however, the front of the Callisto Vase has another martagon lily (Figure 20) on the

³⁸ While I have researched to the fullest of my ability as an art historian and discussed with experts in the botanical field, accurately identifying flower species from artistic renditions – especially those available during the eighteenth century – is precarious at best. The identification of this orange lily, in particular, is shaky and should be taken as such.

³⁹ Kevill-Davies. *Sir Hans Sloane’s Plants on Chelsea Porcelain*, 153.

⁴⁰ “*Lilium Superbum* L. | Plants of the World Online | Kew Science,” Plants of the World Online, accessed April 19, 2024, <http://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:537809-1>.

obverse below the reserve and an accurate turk's cap lily (Figure 21) on the reverse of the Nymph Vase, both with a downturned flower heads and recurved petals. The Chelsea artists, therefore, knew how to accurately portray different kinds of lilies, making this an intentional aesthetic choice.

Returning to Ehret, his friend Peter Collison wrote on his copy of the drawing that the lily was "sent from Pensilvania [to England] by John Bartram ⁴¹ in spring 1736."⁴² Pennsylvania was founded as an English colony under royal deed from King Charles II of England in 1681. And by technicality, the turk's cap lily, native to the land many of the colonies occupied, could be argued as a newly accepted "British" flower. The land is now British "owned," and under this same colonial line of thinking, so would be the flora that grows upon it. The lily, akin to the tribes of indigenous peoples of Pennsylvania, notably the Lenape, falls victim to British colonization, being uprooted and displaced both literally and metaphorically.

The striking appearances of both the tulip and the lily undoubtedly contributed to their inclusion on the Callisto Vase, their exotic charm complementing the vase's ornate Rococo design. While I fully believe their inclusion goes no deeper than visually interesting surface ornamentation, they both carry with them darker histories of human intervention in the natural world. Through an ecocritical lens, these floral representations are treated as ecological victims. The tulip, with its vibrant and intricate patterning, symbolizes humanity's sinful lust for beauty. The intentional appropriation of the Tulip Breaking Virus created an artificial manipulation of the tulip for aesthetics at the expense of compromising the flower's integrity. Similarly, the turk's cap lily, embodies the complex dynamics of colonial expansion and indigenous displacement. Its inclusion on the vase reflects the British Empire's appropriation of foreign flora and fauna,

⁴¹ John Bertram was an American-born botanist and naturalist known for founding the Bartram Botanic Garden and Nursery near Philadelphia in the early eighteenth century.

⁴² Kevill-Davies. *Sir Hans Sloane's Plants on Chelsea Porcelain*, 155.

resulting in the disruption of the local ecosystems and the marginalization of indigenous communities. While the tulip and the lily initially appear as mere decorative elements, they carry with them these narratives of human interaction with the natural world, operating as ecological victims of Enlightenment-era human agency. These unexpected interventions into some of the flowers on the vase potentially present themselves as perhaps queer, in a sense. Specifically, the artistic hybridization of the orange lily challenges traditional notions of heteronormative plant reproductive practices.

Querying Queerness

Lastly, the treatment of the flowers on the Callisto Vase as more than decoration, accounting for the entirety of their visual and intellectual effect, can be linked to sexuality. Taking a micro-perspective and following my previous model, the violet flower positioned at the top right of the quatrefoil acts as a semiotic signaling device for female homosexuality. Violets were first associated with female same-sex sexuality through the poetry of the ancient Greek poet Sappho, who lived on the island of Lesbos in the seventh century BCE. This association between violets and queer identity underscores the broader phenomenon of using arbitrarily associated symbols, as delineated in Peircean taxonomy of signs, to communicate aspects of one's identity to others within the queer community that is being used to this day. One of her poems, though in fragments like the majority of her work, describes the usages of violets in a flower crown for her lover:

I replied to her thus: 'Go and fare well and remember me, for you know how we eared for you. If not, why then I want to remind you . . . and the good times we had. You put on many wreaths of violets and roses and (crocuses?) together by my side, and round your tender neck you put many

woven garlands made from flowers and . . . with much flowery perfume, fit for a queen, you anointed yourself . . . and on soft beds . . . you would satisfy your longing (for?) tender . . .⁴³

The poem also describes roses and crocuses – both flowers on the Callisto Vase – within the same crown. Other works by Sappho also include references to clover, yet another flower included on the vase.

Emma Donoghue has argued that eighteenth-century English translations of Sappho's poetry, in comparison to French translations, are notably less chaste and more explicitly reference the poet's same-sex attraction. In particular, it is actually Ovid's fifteenth epistle that contains much of the information on Sappho's life story that early modern writers would have referred to.⁴⁴ And therefore, because of Ovid's popularity in the eighteenth century and the comparative lack of censorship regarding Sappho's sexuality in England, it may be possible that whoever owned the Callisto Vase may have made the visual and intellectual connection between the visually sapphic scene of Diana and Callisto and the violet. While it is improbable that the Chelsea enameler intentionally included the violet as a queer signaling device, its coincidental placement on the front of the vase near the reserve placed it in an ample spot for it to be noticed by a woman educated in classical literature who could have made the connection.

Taking a more holistic perspective, these flowers, especially with their realistic sizing and intertwined positioning, visually and olfactorily evoke a vase filled with a lush bouquet, reminiscent of those found in a woman's pleasure garden. The mere idea of a visual of a garden of flowers, the juxtaposition of the Callisto Vase's flowers and its central scene create a series of mimetic moments: it recreates the ambiance of an English pleasure garden like the nearby Ranelagh Gardens; it hints at themes of sapphic love; and it alludes to the pastoral idyllic

⁴³ Sappho, *The Poetry of Sappho*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson, accessed June 12, 2023, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/sappho-fragments/1982/pb_LCL142.117.xml?readMode=recto.

⁴⁴ Donoghue, Emma. *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801*. London: Scarlet Press, 1993, 243-245.

landscapes of Virgil's *Arcadia*. According to Ovid, Callisto was the daughter of the King of Arcadia, Lycaon. During the seventeenth century, the genre of landscape paintings recreating the pastoral simplicity of Virgil's *Arcadia* boomed in England with works by artists like Thomas Gainsborough. By the eighteenth century, the physical recreation of these Arcadian landscapes materialized at sites like Kew and Buckinghamshire under landscape architects like 'Capability' Brown.⁴⁵ Similarly, the proximity of the Chelsea Porcelain Factory to the Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens, but also the Chelsea Physic Garden, emphasizes the potential influence of these rises in antiquarian iconography and ideals on wares like the Callisto and Nymph Vases. The intertwining botanical motifs that the Chelsea Factory pioneered reflects the broader English fascination with the pastoral idyll and the classical allure of Arcadian landscapes spurred by the Grand Tour during the eighteenth century.

Mary Delany (1700-1788), celebrated for her botanical paper mosaics and lifelike drawings of flowers, was also an accomplished landscape designer with a penchant for gardens that subtly embraced sapphic undertones. In one of her garden designs, she incorporated a particularly round hill mound with an ovular opening at the base, inspired by Sir Francis Dashwood's Venus Temple at Wycombe. Delany's rendition, however, featured dark shrubbery and an entrance described as "fleshy." Her subsequent designs followed this sensual theme, including a portico for a close "friend" adorned with shells – a nod to female intimacy with salty-smelling, vaginal shaped decorations.⁴⁶ These garden designs by Mary Delany illustrate that there is intense possibility for sapphic agency within the natural world of gardens,

⁴⁵ Ruff, Allan R. *Arcadian Visions: Pastoral Influences on Poetry, Painting and the Design of Landscape*. Oxford: Windgather Press, an imprint of Oxbow Books, 2015, 104.

⁴⁶ Moore, Lisa L. "Queer Gardens: Mary Delany's Flowers and Friendships." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 1 (2005): 49–70.

challenging societal norms through subtle yet deliberate symbolism. Similarly, the untamed nature of the flowers on the Callisto Vase, in a way, allude to this very idea.

The significance of the sapphic undertones in the Callisto Vase are emphasized when considering the socio-cultural context of sexuality in early modern England. During this period, the rise in the “open secret” of relationships between women, like that of Mary Delany and her “friend,” is described as a “renaissance” by scholars like Valerie Traub. Beginning in the sixteenth century, the resurgence of classical texts that featured themes of female homosexuality like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Sappho’s poetry coupled with the increased literacy among women allowed for greater recognition of other possibilities outside of the standard heterosexuality.⁴⁷ However, this newfound visibility also brought about heightened cultural sanctions and persecution. Despite being subjected to social stigma and suspicion, female-female relationships were relatively tolerated by English law, traditionally seen as chaste such as the sharing of beds and exclusive “friendships,” compared to male homosexual relations, as they did not fall under the category of sodomy.⁴⁸ Notable instances of persecution, like that of English colonists Sarah White Norman and Mary Hammon highlight the challenges faced by sapphic women during this period.⁴⁹ The Callisto Vase, situated within the female realm, likely owned by a woman, becomes a poignant historical document reflecting the complexities of navigating being in a same-sex relationship or harboring homosexual feelings during the early modern period in England. Its subtle depiction of sapphic love speaks to the “open secret” of such relationships during a time of societal repression that essentially required heterosexual marriage for the economic and social survival of the woman.

⁴⁷ Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, 13.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Borris, *Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance: A Sourcebook of Texts, 1470-1650* (Routledge, 2004): 107.

The myth of Diana and Callisto is supposed to depict a heterosexual relationship, with “Diana” only appearing a guise for the very male god, Jupiter, to seduce Callisto. This portrayal serves to legitimize in a piece of decorative art a scene of explicit same-sex love. However, it also offers a subtle nod to sapphic desire, hidden within the guise of heteronormativity. The Callisto Vase would have likely been in a women’s dressing room, a place that was not entirely private. In Hogarth’s *The Toilette*, the countess’ dressing room is the site for a large social gathering of male and female guests, attendants, and entertainers. The Callisto Vase could have been strategically placed within such a space to navigate societal expectations while allowing for personal indulgence and expression. One interpretation of the vase’s imagery could align with the narrative of Jupiter disguised as Diana, celebrating the virtue of chastity as Callisto was rightfully punished for her failure to uphold her virginity. The inclusion of Jupiter’s eagle with his thunderbolts grasped in his talons hidden in the curtains above the two provides a visual “reminder” of heterosexuality, reinforcing the notion that the scene on the vase is not queer. However, for those accepting of queer identities, the Callisto Vase becomes a clandestine representation of female homosexual love, offering a glimpse into the owner’s potential sexual identity within the confines of societal expectations. Thus, the vase becomes a space where conflicting narratives of sexuality and societal intersect, inviting viewers to bring their own interpretations.

Similarly, the Sèvres vase mentioned previously within this thesis presents another example of a gilded porcelain vase featuring a reserve after the same 1759 Boucher painting of Jupiter in the guise of Diana and Callisto alongside enameled flowers (Figure 22). Produced a decade after the Callisto Vase, the Sèvres Factory diverged from Boucher’s original composition, even more so than the Chelsea Factory. They enlarged the crescent moon on Diana’s headdress

while omitting the reference to Jupiter. The Sèvres Factory's choice of an oval reserve limits the frame of the composition, cropping out the aquiline symbol that exposes Diana's true identity. Comparatively, the Chelsea Factory's choice of a quatrefoil seemingly includes a lobe that specifically showcases the eagle as a reminder of heterosexuality. Additionally, the lack of the eagle and putto at Callisto's legs creates a more intimate setting with no outside voyeurs interrupting the moment of seduction or the viewer's imagination of a sapphic scene. Yet like on the Callisto Vase, the loving look of Callisto that Boucher painted is again replaced by a blank stare off into the distance; their eyes do not meet. The flowers on the back of the vase, unlike the wildness of those on the Callisto Vase, are gathered in a bouquet, creating a more controlled conception of nature.⁵⁰ In comparison to the Callisto Vase, the Sèvres vase seemingly pushes the mythological queerness but retracts the scientific, untamedness of the flowers. The Callisto Vase, however, does the exact opposite. It specifically highlights the eagle of Jupiter, lessening the potential for blatant homosexuality, while celebrating the Enlightenment innovations in science through the flowers.

The women's toilette emerges as a significant space for the subversion of expected female heterosexuality, further exemplified by other toilette objects like a gold box from 1730 from the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 23). Its lid is chased with the classical scene of Bacchus and Ariadne, rendered by Augustin Heckel after Sebastiano Conca, while the bottom features the coat of arms attributed to John Carmichael, the fourth Earl of Hyndford. The box's interior presents a surprise to whoever opens it, housing a miniature portraying Diana and Callisto in a notably more erotic context than that of the Callisto Vase (Figure 24) This juxtaposition hints at the concealment of female homosexuality within seemingly conventional

⁵⁰ The vase notably also includes a variegated tulip in red and yellow that can read in the same way as the Callisto Vase's tulip.

toilette articles. When opened, it presents a façade of heteronormativity to observers with the scene of Bacchus and Ariadne. Yet to its owner facing the box – likely the wife of John Carmichael or perhaps another woman in his life – it reveals a clandestine, almost pornographic image. This scene ambiguously appears as an act of cunnilingus between Diana and Callisto looking at it from a sapphic perspective, as an act of fellatio between Jupiter and Callisto looking at it from the myth’s perspective, or perhaps more respectably as Diana consoling Callisto after she has been banished from the huntresses. The V&A lists this box as a jewelry box meaning it would have likely sat atop a dressing table where its owner housed the objects she adorned herself with to become the object of male desire.⁵¹ This allowed for a façade of heterosexual and chaste conformity to unsuspecting viewers while allowing her to privately explore and indulge in her own sexual desires through the hidden imagery.

The positioning of the Callisto Vase, specifically, in the dressing room underscores the potential of the space for imaginative escapism. The privacy of the dressing room fosters and allows the possibility for aberrant behavior and thought.⁵² The Callisto Vase, visually and holistically, is a temporal anomaly, operating outside the flow of societal time and promoting an escapist narrative. Referring back to Boucher’s choice to depict the scene directly before the rape, freezing the scene at the moment that Callisto is still naively charmed by “Diana” effectively causes the myth loses much of its violent and chaste nature and become considerably more queer. The reserve painting reflects an idyllic place and time far removed from the vase and its owner’s reality, where – at least for a brief moment – two women could be happily together. Additionally, the vase’s eighteen different flower species covering the body all operate with

⁵¹ “Box | Conca, Sebastiano | Heckel, Augustin | V&A Explore The Collections,” accessed May 29, 2024, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O113818/box-heckel-augustin/>.

⁵² Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture*, The Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 39-41.

diverse blooming periods. Botanically speaking, the vase also presents a temporal impossibility, accentuating the ephemerality of flowers in a static object. Within the dressing room, the vase perhaps operated as a stimulus for secret imaginings of queerness outside of the current time.⁵³

Conclusion

In the same way that Hogarth's Modern Moral Subjects are reactions to the sociopolitical landscape of Georgian London, the Chelsea Factory's Callisto Vase is also informed by the very same ideas – concepts of nationalism, colonialism, gender, and sexuality. But where Hogarth mocks, the Chelsea Factory seems to celebrate. Consequently, the Callisto Vase thus perhaps operates as queer in multiple ways. In the sexual sense, referring to the visually sapphic image of Jupiter in the guise of Diana and Callisto, but also in the non-sexual sense, referring to the sense that the Callisto Vase is odd, strange. The vase appears anomalous for what we would expect from the English Rococo during the 1760s – the very Rococo that Hogarth defines – while still encompassing many of the same themes. The Callisto Vase is almost an antithesis of what Hogarth is doing in *The Toilette* but is simultaneously just as much of a spectacle. The Continental ostentatiousness of the vase would have appalled Hogarth and it would be unsurprising to have found a reproduction of it in *The Toilette* amongst the other “untasteful” trinkets the Countess has frivolously bought.

One would expect the Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory's Callisto Vase to embody British cultural norms and align with the goals of the British Empire, originating from the first porcelain factory in England at the onset of George III's reign. However, upon closer examination, it reveals itself to support our expectations but also as subtle subversion of them, challenging a

⁵³ Freya Gowrley, *Domestic Space in Britain, 1750-1840: Materiality, Sociability and Emotion*, Material Culture of Art and Design (London [England: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 12-13, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501343339>.

clear notion of Britishness. The Callisto Vase exhibits a unique fusion of German, French, Chinese, and American aesthetics and material that echoes the deceptive nature of Jupiter, resulting in a globally influenced object that remained in England until the mid-twentieth century. It eventually found its way to the Metropolitan Museum of Art through the hands of the New York-based judge and decorative arts collector, Irwin Untermyer.⁵⁴ The New York Times wrote of him on September 30, 1977: “Like many other American collectors of his generation, Irwin Untermyer had more than a touch of Anglomania.”⁵⁵ Despite Untermyer’s Anglophilia, this vase – one of over 2,000 pieces in his collection – is likely one of the least stylistically English.⁵⁶

The vase’s global character intertwines with the vase’s metamorphic qualities, offering multiple interpretations depending on the viewer. It serves as both an expression of female same-sex love and a reinforcement of heterosexual morality while also documenting the ecological products of human intervention into the natural world. Containing objects like the two vases and the gold box, the toilette signifies a space behind the façade of performative heterosexuality and society propriety. Hogarth’s *The Toilette* offers a satirical glimpse into this world, depicting the countess engaged in what appears to be an open discussion of an affair while her guests display overt signs of homosexuality and gender ambiguity. While Hogarth’s portrayal is exaggerated, it highlights the tension between societal expectations of the upper classes and individual sexual desire. The toilette, traditionally a space for women to make up themselves to fit societal ideals, paradoxically becomes the very site for the dismantling of those ideals. Here, women can physically shed the roles they are expected as women, but perhaps not entirely the

⁵⁴ Irwin Untermyer and Yvonne Hackenbroch, *Chelsea and Other English Porcelain, Pottery, and Enamel in the Irwin Untermyer Collection*. (Cambridge: Published for the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Harvard University Press, 1957), 85.

⁵⁵ John Russell, “Art: Shows by Untermyer and Women,” *The New York Times*, September 30, 1977.

⁵⁶ Michael Gross, *Rogues’ Gallery: The Secret History of the Moguls and the Money That Made the Metropolitan Museum*, 1st ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 2009), 275.

expectations of themselves as subjects of the British Empire. Regardless, they are momentarily freed from the confines of traditional gender roles and expectations. The toilette thus becomes a space where the boundaries of British heterosexuality can be blurred, allowing for moments of queer indulgence.

So perhaps if this woman – Mary, maybe – were to have had the Callisto Vase in her own dressing room, we can allow ourselves to think: what would she have thought when she saw it? Maybe the vase was placed on the mantle of a fireplace alongside the Nymph Vase. Perhaps Mary would normally walk by the vase during her morning toilette, offering it nothing but a mere second glance. The vase, made from the more fragile soft-paste porcelain, would not be something that was often, if ever, lifted. The only tactile aspect of the vase would have been the lid which would have been removed for the extraction and addition of the fragrant potpourri it contained. And maybe it is then, while refreshing the perfume for her dressing room, that she would allow herself to indulge in potential. The elaborate gilt double handles on the sides of the vase would have been purely decorative with their Rococo flourishes and Mary would have been forced to hold the womanly “waist” of the vase, positioning her in the dominant role of “Diana” holding Callisto.⁵⁷ The comma-shaped ring at the top would have provided the perfect finger hold for the thumb and forefinger. Her fingers would have likely touched through this hole, creating a circle in the hand that connects with the circular-ish shape of the handle, reflecting a delicate touch she could have had with another woman. The fragile nature of the porcelain perhaps would have invoked a sense of anxiety about potentially breaking the vase that mirrored the anxiety of harboring indecent feelings for a member of the same sex.

⁵⁷ Today, the handles of the vase exhibit the most wear and damage, emphasizing their fragility and decorative purpose, and the need to hold the vase by its body.

The very materiality of the Callisto Vase promotes a sense of queerness. Despite being a purely decorative object most of the time, its additional practical function as a perfume vase meant to diffuse scent meant that there was a tactile relationship between the object and this potential woman. Rather than merely thinking about queerness, she physically engaged with it while interacting with the vase. Furthermore, having decorative wares with this sapphic imagery available for purchase, represents a commodity that in some way promotes ideas of queer indulgence.⁵⁸

Mary might have taken a moment to admire the reverse of the vase, rarely seen to her, running her fingers among the flowers and tracing the intertwining leaves and stems. Perhaps, like many aristocratic women of her time, including Marly Delany and Queen Charlotte, she shared an interest in botany. Maybe she – like me – researched and attempted to identify the flowers on the vase, coming across Georg Dionysius Ehret’s published print of the turk’s cap lily. Maybe she noticed it did not look exactly right and that it came all the way from Pennsylvania in the American colonies. Perhaps she knew people who had traveled to the colonies, maybe she had heard of horror stories of the “savage” people there. Did she wonder how such a beautiful flower came from such a wild land?

Did Mary notice and identify the violet on the front of the vase? It is likely she was familiar with the myths of Ovid and perhaps also the poetry of Sappho. Did she connect these literary references with the floral imagery and the reserve scene? Perhaps she had read the myth of Diana and Callisto or Sappho’s poetry within the very confines of her dressing room. And perhaps, in these moments of secluded contemplation, she thought of a close female friend, someone she cherished more than her own husband. The vase, while not encompassing the same

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 6-14.

loving looks as the original Boucher, still carries with it a sense of intimacy. Maybe she wished that was her and her friend. And in such a case, would she imagine herself as “Diana” or as Callisto?⁵⁹

⁵⁹ While this narrative is purely speculative, it reflects the real-life example of a British woman in the early nineteenth century named Anne Lister who famously wrote about her sexual relationships with women in her diaries. Lister was of the upper classes and gender non-conforming, exemplifying a subsequent example of the type of potential woman who owned the Callisto Vase. Contemporarily, BBC One and HBO jointly produced a dramatized series that premiered in 2019 following Lister’s diaries.

Image Appendix



Figure 1.

Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory, Perfume vase with Diana and Callisto (one of a pair), 1761, soft-paste porcelain, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC), (Left: obverse; Right: reverse).



Figure 2.
William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode, The Toilette*, 1743, oil on canvas (The National Gallery, London).



Figure 3.
William Hogarth, *Taste of High Life*, 1742, oil on canvas, (Private Collection).



Figure 4.

Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory, Perfume vase with three nymphs (one of a pair), 1761, soft-paste porcelain, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC).



Figure 5.
René Gaillard, *Jupiter et Callisto*, 1759-1760 (?), engraving, (Louvre, Paris).



Figure 6.
François Boucher, *Jupiter in the Guise of Diana, and the Nymph Callisto*, 1759, oil on canvas, (Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, MO).



Figure 7.

François Boucher, *Jupiter and Callisto*, 1744, oil on canvas, (Pushkin Museum, Moscow).



Figure 8.

François Boucher, *Jupiter in the Guise of Diana, and Callisto*, 1763, oil on canvas, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC).



Figure 9.

François Boucher, *Jupiter and Callisto*, 1769, oil on canvas, (Wallace Collection, London).



Figure 10.

François Boucher, *Jupiter and Leda*, 1758, engraving, (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C).



Figure 11.

Sèvres Porcelain Factory, *vase Bachelier à anses et à couronnes*, 1770, soft-paste porcelain, (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).



Figure 12.

Meissen Porcelain Factory, drinking-cup; saucer, 1745-55, soft-paste porcelain, (British Museum, London).



Figure 13.

Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory, Botanical plate with thistle, 1755, soft-paste porcelain, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC).



Figure 14.

Sèvres Porcelain Factory, Painted by Guillaume Noël, Soucoupe, 1761, soft-paste porcelain, (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)



Figure 15.

Meissen Porcelain Factory, Coffee Cup and Saucer, 1750, soft-paste porcelain, (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).



Figure 16.

Ambrosius Bosschaert de Oude, *Vaas met bloemen in een venster*, 1618, oil on panel, (Mauritshuis, The Hague).



Figure 17.
Detail of Figure 1 with variegated tulip.



Figure 18.
Detail of Figure 1 with orange "tiger lily."



Figure 19.

Georg Dionysius Ehret, *American Turk's-cap lily (Lilium superbum)*, 1740s, watercolor and bodycolor on vellum, (Victorian Albert Museum).



Figure 20.

Detail of Figure 1 with pink lily.



Figure 21.
Detail of Figure 4 with orange “tiger lily.”



Figure 22.
Reverse side of Figure 11.



Figure 23.

Engraved by Augustin Heckel, painted by Sebastiano Conca, Box, 1730, Chased gold with a miniature, (Victoria and Albert Museum).



Figure 24.

Interior of Figure 23.

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