



Lady Tickling a Sleeping Soldier

Gerard ter Borch the Younger
(Zwolle 1617 – 1681 Deventer)

ca. 1655

oil on canvas

78.1 x 76.2 cm

GB-104

Currently on view at: The National Museum of
China, Beijing



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Fast asleep in his chair, legs casually crossed and arms wrapped tightly over his belly, Gerard ter Borch the Younger's soldier enjoys a respite from his military responsibilities. His plumed hat has been tossed haphazardly on the floor, and his pistol is wrapped in a cloth and lies on the table beside him. This peaceful interlude is about to end, however, as a trumpeter has arrived with a message, and the woman moves to wake the officer by tickling him with a piece of straw. The trumpeter scratches his head, seemingly perplexed and perhaps concerned that his urgent message has not been met with the decisive response it requires.

The inherently paradoxical motif of the sleeping soldier has a long history in the visual arts. Sleep can render a fierce and vigilant warrior slack and defenseless, but it can also reduce a soldier to an object of ridicule, emblematic of sloth and dereliction of duty, particularly when his slumber has resulted from overindulgence in alcohol or tobacco.^[1] One piquant variation on the theme involved lightly tickling the sleeper to the amusement of his companions. The low comic nature of tickled sleep dovetailed nicely with the typically ribald humor of tavern and guardroom scenes, in which companions anticipate, with a smirk, the sleeper's unpredictable and ungoverned reactions to a playful tickle often accompanied by a quick groping of the genitals. Ter Borch may have been inspired in his choice of subject by the work of Pieter Codde (1599–1678) and Willem Duyster (1598/99–1635) in Amsterdam, and by the Utrecht painter Jacob Duck (1600–67), who regularly included sleeping soldiers in his guardroom scenes and also explored the theme of both male and female sleepers being tickled awake (**fig 1**).^[2] Later in the century (and possibly influenced by Ter Borch's paintings), Jacob Ochtervelt (1634/35–1708) made a minor specialization in scenes centering on sleeping soldiers being subjected to such teasing (**fig 2**).^[3]

Ter Borch's *Lady Tickling a Sleeping Soldier* is an unusually decorous iteration of the theme: settled in his chair, the portly soldier is gently coaxed awake with a light touch from the young woman. The straw-wrapped bottle on the table beside him suggests that his stupor might have been induced by drink; his inert corpulence, with his gun is swaddled in a cloth, casts serious doubt on his ability to quickly leap into action. There is playfulness in the woman's chosen method of waking the soldier, considering that the trumpeter could surely accomplish the task with brisk if brutal efficiency.

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Jacob Duck, *Soldiers Arming Themselves*, mid-1630s, oil on panel, 43 x 57 cm, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The Ude Memorial Fund and Gift of Bruce B. Dayton, inv. 88.2



Fig 2. Jacob Ochtervelt, *The Sleeping Soldier*, ca. 1660–63, oil on panel, 46 x 37.7 cm, Manchester City Art Gallery (Assheton Bennett Collection), inv. 1979.483, © Manchester City Galleries



Fig 3. Gerard ter Borch, *Sleeping Soldier*, ca. 1656–57, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 55 cm, The Taft Museum, Cincinnati, inv. no. 1931.398

Lady Tickling a Sleeping Soldier is closely related to Ter Borch's *Sleeping Soldier* in the Taft Museum in Cincinnati, which has been dated about 1656–57, a year or two later than the present work (fig 3).^[4] The differences between the two paintings are subtle but instructive, as they demonstrate concisely the artist's transformation from a painter of simple guardrooms and domestic scenes (for example, GB-101) into an accomplished purveyor of supremely elegant high-life interiors. Though the figure of the sleeping soldier is much the same in the two pictures (possibly suggesting the use of a single figure drawing for both), the pose, costume and accessories of both the messenger and the woman have been considerably modified. In the present picture, the figures are densely clustered in the center of the composition, but in the Taft painting they are more loosely arranged. Furthermore, in the Leiden Collection picture, Ter Borch eliminated extra space at the bottom of the composition, thereby bringing the figures closer to the picture plane and enhancing the immediacy of the narrative. He also elaborated on certain details in the present work—the feathers adorning the sleeping soldier's hat on the floor at right, and the arrangement of objects on the table—to produce a more overtly luxurious effect.

But the changes to the woman are literally and figuratively the most revealing. Whereas the girl in the present painting wears her *jak* modestly fastened, and shrouds her head with a kerchief (a similar outfit is seen in *The Message Refused* in Munich, of about 1655–58^[5]), the young woman in the Taft picture displays a beguiling dishabille. Rather than falling in simple vertical folds, her white satin gown pools around her feet, emphasizing the gleaming fabric. By altering her pose so that she reaches to tickle her dozing companion with her left (rather than her right) hand, Ter Borch eliminated that physical and visual barrier, opening the way for flirtatious engagement with both the soldier within the painting and the keen viewer without. Similarly, by deleting the messenger's enormous hat, shifting the position of his trumpet, and adjusting his pose to accentuate the sweeping line of his figure, which terminates in one elegantly turned-out toe, Ter Borch transformed the figure from an awkward emissary to a bemused co-conspirator.

Lady Tickling a Sleeping Soldier is in a relatively good state of preservation, although dark areas, such as the sleeping soldier's hair, are somewhat abraded.^[6] Although the painting has been in the past attributed



Fig 4. W. Chevalier after Gerard Terburg, "The Trumpeter" engraving from Allan Cunningham, *The Cabinet Gallery of Pictures by the First Masters of the English and Foreign Schools* (London, G. and W. Nicol [etc.], 1836), Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

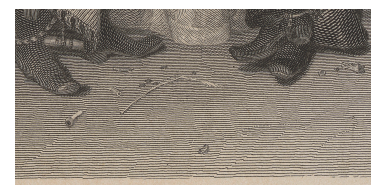


Fig 5. Detail of the clay pipes in W. Chevalier's engraving "The Trumpeter"

to Caspar Netscher (c. 1639–84),^[7] and was acquired as such by the Leiden Collection, details of the still life and of the costumes of the soldier and the messenger are sensitively handled and characteristic of Ter Borch's hand. When Nancy Krieg restored the painting in 2005, the decision was made (based on William Chevalier's engraving (**fig 4**) to add the thin strand of hay to the woman's right hand, which had presumably been removed inadvertently during an earlier restoration.

The existence of several virtually identical versions of the composition makes it difficult to clarify the early provenance of *Lady Tickling a Sleeping Soldier*, particularly as the abbreviated nature of most early sale catalogue descriptions render them ambiguous at best.^[8] William Chevalier's engraving, published in 1836, most closely resembles the present version in compositional details, including the fragments of clay pipe stems on the floor (**fig 5**), as well as in its broader proportions, making it possible to identify this painting as the one then in the collection of Richard Artis. Version 2 (see Versions section), which is signed jointly by Ter Borch and Netscher, is very close to the present painting, but with a few notable differences: there are more complex folds in the woman's white satin skirt, a planked wooden floor, and more slimly proportioned figures, all typical of the sort of adjustments Netscher made when adapting his master's work.^[9]

-Marjorie E. Wieseman

Endnotes

1. On the theme of sleep in Dutch genre painting, see Nanette Salomon, "Dreamers, Idlers, and Other Dozers: Aspects of Sleep in Dutch Art" (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1984). Specifically on sleeping soldiers in the work of Ter Borch and others, see David Kunzle, *From Criminal to Courtier: The Soldier in Netherlandish Art, 1550–1672* (Leiden and Boston, 2002), 603–4.
2. See Nanette Salomon, *Jacob Duck and the Gentrification of Dutch Genre Painting* (Doornspijk, 1998), especially nos. 31, 73, 78A–C, 91 and 92. Ter Borch painted at least two other scenes incorporating sleeping soldiers; see Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–60), 2:98, 158–61, nos. 79 and 146.
3. Susan Donohue Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt (1634–1682)* (Oxford, 1979), especially nos. 11, 14, 15, 99, 100, and 100A.
4. On this painting see Walter Liedtke, in *The Taft Museum: Its History and Collections*, ed. Edward J. Sullivan, 2 vols. (New York, 1995), 1:170–71.
5. Oil on panel, 46 x 46.5 cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv. 206. Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–60), 2:137–38, no. 124.
6. See the examination report prepared by Jevon Thistlewood, 27 April 2012; additional information on the painting's restoration is provided in a research memo prepared by Lara Yeager-Crasselt, December 2011. These reports are kept at The Leiden Gallery.
7. The painting was attributed to Netscher in Nanette Salomon, "Dreamers, Idlers, and Other Dozers: Aspects of Sleep in Dutch Art" (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1984), and in the sales catalogues of 2001 and 2004 (see Provenance).
8. In addition to the paintings listed in the Versions section, paintings of similar description appeared in the following sales, which may or may not be identical to the present painting or one of the versions listed:
 - Sale, Belville, Christie's, London, 13–14 June 1825, no. 71 ("An officer asleep; his wife waking him, as a trumpeter awaits his orders," bought in for £70.7).
 - Sale, Stanley, London, 22 April 1830, no. 71 ("A Trumpeter, and a lady waking an officer," for £55.13).
 - Sale, H. Williams, Christie's, London, 2 July 1836, no. 111 ("The Trumpeter: a lady in a crimson corset is tickling the face of a sleeping soldier in a cuirass; the trumpeter standing by"; for £19.19 to Talbot).
9. See Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 53–55 and 169–70, no. 5; and eadem, "The Craeyvanger Portraits in Context—Shedding Light on Caspar Netscher's Early Career," *Oud Holland* 127 (2014):

31–47.

Provenance

- Sale, [Ramsay Richard] Reinagle, Christie's, London, 30 June 1827, no. 64 ("The Wife of an Officer waking him, and a Trumpeter waiting for Orders; highly finished," for £89.50 to Richard Artis).
- Richard Artis (1782–1860), London.
- (Possibly) Mr. Brown, London, 1830.¹
- (Possibly sale, Phillips, London, 18–20 July 1835, no. 128 [for £64.10]); Ellis (possibly Wynn Ellis [1790–1875]), London (his sale, Christie's, London, 26 May 1836, no. 102 [bought in at 61 Gns.]). 2²
- Lt. Col. Francis Edwin Salvin Bowlby, M. C. (b. 1904), Gilston Park, Hertford, by 1933 (his sale, Sotheby's, London, 27 March 1963, no. 91 [for £5,000 to Goyen]). 3³
- [Alfred Brod, London, 1963–65].
- Private collection.
- (Sale, Sotheby's, New York, 25 January 2001, no. 204, as by Caspar Netscher, unsold; sale, Sotheby's, New York, 5 June 2002, no. 40, as by Caspar Netscher, bought in).
- [Johnny van Haeften, Ltd., London, 2004].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2004, as by Caspar Netscher.

Provenance Notes

1. John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. (London, 1829–42), 4:131, no. 43; Gudlaugsson (Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. [The Hague, 1959–60], 2:134, no.121a) identifies this with our Version 2.

2. Both sales identify the painting as that described by Smith as his no. 43: John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. (London, 1829–42), 4:131, no. 43.

3. According to a handwritten annotation in the copy of Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*, 8 vols. (London, 1907–27), translated from *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28), held at the Library of the National Gallery, London (5:31).

Exhibition History

- London, Alfred Brod Gallery, “Annual Autumn Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Paintings of the 17th Century,” 17 October–16 November 1963, no. 91 [lent by Alfred Brod Gallery].
- Düsseldorf, Galerie Alfred Brod, “Fünfzig Gemälde alter Meister: Ausstellung im Künstlerverein Malkasten,” 19–31 October 1963 [lent by Alfred Brod Gallery].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, January 2011–August 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, “Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Smith, John. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*. 9 vols. London, 1829–42, 4:131, no. 43 (as “in the possession of Mr. Brown, 1830”).
- Cunningham, Allan. *Cabinet Gallery of Pictures by the First Masters of English and Foreign Schools*. 2 vols. London, 1836, 2:43–45, no. 17.
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*. 8 vols. London, 1907–27. Translated from *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*. 10 vols. Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28, 5:31–32, no. 77.
- Brod, Alfred. *Annual Autumn Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Paintings of the 17th Century*. London, 1963, no. 6.

- Brod, Alfred. *Fünfzig Gemälde alter Meister: Ausstellung im Künstlerverein Malkasten Düsseldorf*. Düsseldorf, 1963, 80–83.
- Salomon, Nanette. “Dreamers, Idlers, and Other Dozers: Aspects of Sleep in Dutch Art.” Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1984, 105–7, no. 106 (as by Caspar Netscher).
- Kunzle, David. *From Criminal to Courtier: The Soldier in Netherlandish Art, 1550–1672*. Leiden and Boston, 2002, 604.
- Wieseman, Marjorie E. *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*. Doornspijk, 2002, 170, no. 5a.
- Wieseman, Marjorie E. “The Craeyvanger Portraits in Context—Shedding Light on Casper Netscher’s Early Career.” *Oud Holland* 127, no. 1 (2014): 39, 47, n. 25.

Versions

Engraved

1. Chevalier after Gerard ter Borch, *Lady Tickling a Sleeping Soldier*, 1834, engraving (published in A. Cunningham, *Cabinet Gallery of Pictures by the First Masters of English and Foreign Schools* [London, 1836], 2:87, no. 17). Described as being in the collection of Mr. Artis. The proportions of the print are closer to this painting than to Version 2.

Versions and Copies

1. Gerard ter Borch, *Sleeping Soldier*, ca. 1656–57, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 55 cm, The Taft Museum, Cincinnati, inv. no. 1931.398.
2. Gerard ter Borch and Caspar Netscher, *Sleeping Soldier*, ca. 1658, oil on panel, 68.5 x 58 cm, formerly Louis and Mildred Kaplan Collection, New York, 1950. Jointly signed by Ter Borch and Netscher on the letter held by the woman.
3. After Gerard ter Borch, *Sleeping Soldier*, oil on canvas, 71 x 60 cm, formerly Friedrich, Basel. As possibly by Netscher. Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–60), 2:134–35, no. 121d; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 170, no. 5c.
4. After Gerard ter Borch, *Sleeping Soldier*, oil on canvas, 70.4 x 60.2 cm, sale, Christie’s, New York, 3 June 1998, no. 94 (as “Manner of Gerard ter Borch”).
5. Workshop of Gerard ter Borch, *A Letter to a Sleeping Soldier*, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 60.4 cm, Kadriorg Art Museum (Art Museum of Estonia), Tallinn, inv. no. VM 12. Sturla J.

Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–60), 2:134, no. 121c, as copy with variations of Cincinnati painting; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 170, no. 5b.

Versions Notes

Technical Summary

The support is a single piece of medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with tacking margins removed, which has been lined. Cusping along all four edges indicates the support's dimensions have not been significantly altered. There are no wax collection seals, stencils, import stamps, or labels along the lining or stretcher reverse.

A ground has been thinly and evenly applied. Although there is no indication of the ground color, the painting has the distinct feel of one executed on a dark-colored ground. The paint has been applied with no noticeable brushstrokes, but in certain fabrics, short hatched strokes have been used to depict texture.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 720 nanometers, although compositional lines may be located along the door along the right side of the composition. No compositional changes are noted in the images, in the X-radiograph, or as pentimenti.

The painting was cleaned, lined, and restored in 2005 and remains in a good state of preservation.^[1]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Entry based on 2012 examination report by Jevon Thistlewood, paintings conservator, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.