

*Bettler, Diebe, Unterwelt: Leonaert Bramer illustriert spanische Romane.* Achim Riether, ed.

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The subtitle of this catalogue is an accurate indication of its contents. The Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich houses two series of drawings by the Dutch seventeenth-century artist Leonart Bramer, illustrating the anonymous sixteenth-century picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* and the seventeenth-century *Los Sueños* by Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas. In the foreword, the director of the gallery suggests that the combination of text and illustrations in these cases can be seen as foreshadowing the graphic novel. This is probably going a little too far, but it explains the unusual nature of the catalogue: the texts of the two books are printed in full (in German translation) with reproductions of the drawings inserted at appropriate points. This design works particularly well for *Lazarillo*, where Bramer's seventy-two drawings fit the episodic structure of the work almost perfectly. It is less the case for the *Sueños*, but even here the sixty-one relevant drawings provide a vivid accompaniment to the text, though the tone of Bramer's illustrations brings a touch of humor that is not obviously present in Quevedo's harsh satire.

The editor provides an introduction to the life and works of Bramer, giving particular attention to his drawings and their provenance. It would seem that one of Bramer's specialisms was drawings to illustrate literary works. The *Lazarillo* series is dated at 1646, and it appears that it was about this time Bramer began to produce such drawings. They were not preparatory studies for later engravings to be included in printed editions of the books, but were intended for collectors who wanted illustrations for books they already owned. Rieter argues that the two series of drawings in Munich were intended to illustrate particular editions of these works — in both cases Dutch translations. The Dutch economy was reaching its peak in the middle years of the century, and so this may well have seemed a favorable time to float a new line on the art market. Rieter believes that the drawings were made rapidly, demanding far less time and effort than his paintings. He argues that they were produced for particular patrons or buyers in what were essentially private

transactions, and he also makes tentative but plausible suggestions as to who these original patrons may have been.

Rieter argues that the private nature of the relationship between Bramer and his patrons guaranteed the artist freedom from censure from the authorities or the Reformed Church, thus allowing him a freer hand in the choice and treatment of his subjects than might have been the case with paintings or engravings. It is true that illustrations in published books could bring publisher and illustrator into difficulties, but, in the main, only where sensitive political or religious issues were involved. The content of some of the Munich drawings might well have outraged the more delicate defenders of public decency, but there is little in these collections that would have been particularly shocking by the standards of the time. Paintings produced for a private patron would have been equally free from public censure and, in any case, Bramer seems to have had a history of unorthodox treatments of standard themes, in other media as well as his drawings.

The volume is handsomely produced and the quality of the reproductions is very good. There are brief introductions to *Lazarillo* and the *Sueños* by Hans Paschen, and a standard catalogue of the drawings. This is a fine introduction to a body of work that deserves to be better known.

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