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Foreign Relations:
Figuring Faith and Femininity in the Age of Rubens

By

Jamie Vanessa Lyon

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History of Art

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Elizabeth Honig, Chair
Professor Todd Olson
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Professor Emilie Bergmann

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Abstract

Foreign Relations: Figuring Faith and Femininity in the Age of Rubens

by

Jamie Vanessa Lyon

Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Elizabeth Honig, Chair

The first part of my title, *Foreign Relations*, is meant to conjure up the many valences of this phrase in the life and works of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). On the most obvious level, it points to his part time employment as a multi-linguistic diplomat negotiating peace on behalf of the Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, Isabel Clara Eugenia (1566-1633), the Spanish-born daughter of Philip II. It also evokes Rubens's sustained interaction with and pleasure in Italian art, and specifically, his status in contemporary art writing as a 'Venetian' Baroque painter in all but nationality. Pushing the notions of foreign relations a bit further, the phrase surfaces the ethically tenuous connections between some typically Rubensian subjects, such as nude or eroticized women, and their narrative origins and cultural contexts in biblical texts and Catholic devotional art. This network of intersecting, at times oppositional, historical and artistic factors frames a study in which I approach the body, especially the female body, as a conceit-making rhetorical device or 'figure' for Rubens. I argue that typology (historical prefiguration through types) and interpictoriality (reflexive and reciprocal relations between 'interdependent' works of art) are mutually constructive, sometimes parallel, components of Rubens's artistic process and as such, crucial to interpreting his deeply gendered iconography.

Several of Rubens's most canonical devotional and/or doctrinal compositions are discussed in the dissertation. But whereas these works have served recent scholars as case studies—typically examined to a greater or lesser degree in isolation from rather than in conversation with the painter's massive oeuvre—here they are approached historically and chronologically, as they occur and reoccur over the course of more than thirty years of Rubens's public diplomatic and artistic career. The result is a new understanding of this essentially conservative, self-consciously intellectual and innately tolerant painter as a man whose personal relationships with wise and powerful women were in constant tension with the masculinist mores of the day, but who nonetheless developed an art in which women are supremely meaningful.

For my grandmother,
Dorothy Elizabeth (Betty) Caldwell Lyon
writer, reader, teacher

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PREFACE

The first part of my title, *Foreign Relations*, is meant to conjure up the many valences of this phrase in the life and works of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). On the most obvious level, it points to his part time employment as a multilinguistic diplomat working for peace on behalf of the Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, Isabel Clara Eugenia (1566-1633), the Spanish-born daughter of Philip II. It also evokes Rubens's sustained interaction with and pleasure in Italian art, and specifically, his status in contemporary art writing as as a 'Venetian' Baroque painter in all but nationality. Pushing the notions of foreign relations a bit further, the phrase surfaces the complex tensions between some typically Rubensian subjects, such as nude or eroticized women, and their narrative origins and cultural contexts in biblical texts and Catholic devotional art.

Intriguing in each of these cases is the manner in which Rubens's representation of femininity and his association with powerful and educated women—inescapably 'other' in certain respects to an early modern male—have come to determine his identity as a painter. Rubens lived a relatively long and remarkably productive life; to evaluate his drawings and paintings of women, as such, would be a daunting if not impossible task. Some limitations are therefore in order and here I have imposed three. First, while this study is very much a diachronic one, intent to identify and track changes in Rubens's presentation of certain types of womanhood over the course of roughly thirty years, it ends not with his death but with the conclusion of his public and diplomatic life around 1631 about two years before the installation of the Whitehall commission for Charles I. Second, I have limited my investigation to figuring, faith, and femininity as a network of often but not always intersecting vectors around which to structure an art historical analysis. Thus while most of the art discussed is religious or devotional in nature, some of it is loosely so. While other, supposedly secular, works such as Rubens's famous double portrait with his first wife and the London ceiling program, are reevaluated here in light of their religious and doctrinal overtones, as images whose meanings are importantly constituted and conveyed by conventional understandings of sex difference and theology.

Third, I have approached the body, especially the female body, primarily as a conceit-making rhetorical device or 'figure' for Rubens. In addition to its helpfully material, even feminine, connotations figure, or to use the more theological term, 'figura,' has a distinctly typological sense. Although Erich Auerbach had literature in mind when he prophetically outlined the practice, figural interpretation can be transposed to the visual such that an interpictorial analysis might similarly propose "a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first."[1] To think of this early modern interplay in historical or historiographically linear terms is challenging, for the Rubensian present is continually assessed by art historians for its relevance to a pregnant past and a foregone future. In Rubens's own age, however, Auerbach's 'two events' might be a character or body in his art and a related character or body in a work or works by an earlier artist, or likewise, his own artistic personhood and that of an artistic predecessor.

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[1] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Willard R. Trask, trans. rpt. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 73.

[2] Marco Boschini, *La carta del navegar pitoresco*, Anna Pallucchini, ed. (Venice: Instituto per la

Rubens's art is often evaluated as an essentially allegorical one where human bodies point to abstract, or hidden, content whose decipherment relies on extrapictorial knowledge. Inasmuch as many of his images, especially those with roots in classical, mythological texts, propose meaning by speaking 'otherwise' (allegory from the Greek *allos* = other + *agoria* = speaking) this is accurate. Because both *figura* and allegory imply the presence of two essentially metaphorical, or different, terms they are at times closely related. Here, however, I will most often use some variation of 'figural' or 'figurative' to suggest a typological, and by implication, a moralizing and ahistorical, impulse in Ruben's art. But while figural juxtaposition and allegorical veiling/revelation are distinct conceptual modes for Rubens, they nonetheless share a dependence on life-sized and 'lifelike' bodies in psychological relation with each other—and often with the viewer as well. Renaissance and Mannerist artists had staged allegories with multiple personifications. Yet Rubens was arguably alone among his peers in his ability to imbue even his embodied abstractions with a psychic presence suggestive of lived experience and human emotion. By continually developing and reusing a visual syntax of gesture and movement Rubens ultimately constructs a truly figural inter and intra-pictorial language that operates not only within a given image but between them.

***

From his first enthusiastic studies of Michelangelo, Rubens's appropriated central Italian fascination with corporeality—and in particular an idealized male physique—is clear. This enduring, even philosophical investment in a sculptural, exaggeratedly muscular masculinity is conspicuous in his works of the first ten to twelve years. But it is the full-bodied female form that arguably takes precedence in his art for the remainder of his career. When viewed across time within the context of his oeuvre, the representation of femininity in some of the artist's most canonical works undergoes a gradual but progressive accumulation of iconographical value and narrative and formal centrality; a shift in the pictorial role of women in Rubens's art from conventional place marker to meaning-making agent.

Beginning with Rubens's early work in Antwerp prior to his Italian sojourn, chapter one investigates his youthful revisionism of Raphael vis-à-vis contemporary biblical commentaries. I then reconsider the Rubens's fulsome engagement of Michelangelo's sexually ambiguous, often hermaphroditic imagery. Rubens's simultaneous attempt to situate himself in the conservative and Aristotelian/Scholastic Catholic culture of early Seicento Rome is then discussed in view of the initial rejection of his first major Italian altarpiece for the *Chiesa Nuova*. Two of Rubens's best-known works, *Samson and Delilah*, and the *Self-Portrait with Isabella Brant in the Honeysuckle Bower,* both from 1609, the artist's first year back in Antwerp, are the subject of chapter two. I propose that these dyadic compositions, in which the newly married Rubens employs binary constructions of sex difference while gesturing to Renaissance mythology and fifteenth-century Flemish painting can be read against each other as dialectical constructions of marriage and fidelity. Moralizing gender, power, and reversal the two works rely on each other to differentiate the virtuously subject wife from the irresistibly powerful prostitute.

In chapter three an analysis of early modern art writing and theoretical literature demonstrates the ease with which Titian's style was used to describe Rubens's artistic identity. Examining widely shared appraisals of Rubens's art as superficial and

confectionary, that is, properly Venetian, I demonstrate that associating the Flemish painter with conventionally feminine and notions such as pacifism, capriciousness, and mutability served to underscore his qualifications as a diplomat negotiator. In chapter four, the evolution of this feminine, or feminized, style is traced through comparisons between his Italian altarpieces and the iconic *Raising of the Cross* (1611) and *Descent from the Cross* (1612-14) the two path-breaking triptychs known as the 'Antwerp Crucifixions.' Following this comparison, I evaluate Rubens's contemporaneous confrontation of what was for him a new doctrinal theme, the 'Assumption' of a dynamic and queenly mediator-Virgin, whose intercessory power was deemed second only to Christ's.

In chapter five, Rubens's massive programmatic commissions for two female sovereigns, Marie de Medici and the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia are placed in dialogue, focusing on his very different use of portraiture and allegory in each case. The arguably unsuccessful Medici cycle (1622-25) provides a foil of sorts for the less-researched Eucharist Tapestries (c. 1626-28), which, unseen by most scholars until the late twentieth-century, have not received the attention of feminist art historians which their conceptual novelties and historically significant female patron deserve. In chapter six, the study concludes with Rubens's allegorical program at the Banqueting House at Whitehall. For Charles I, the cosmopolitan English patron of his last major paintings cycle, Rubens, I suggest, mobilizes the radical trope of female same-sex desire to animate his affectionately embracing allegorical couple known as 'Peace and Plenty.' In his final act of painted diplomacy, a prescriptive construct of good government, Rubens devises a novel, and to many art historians, foreign, figuration of utopian reciprocity activated through the bodies of women alone.

Rubens Abroad

From his early years as a master, Rubens showed an interest in the world beyond his home in Antwerp. Time in Italy gave him the skills of a courtier and invaluable experience as a maker of portraits and history paintings. Later, in Spain, France, and England he combined artistic commissions with political assignments. Rubens's diplomatic endeavors are not the focus of this study. But his appropriation of foreign artistic traditions for patrons in his homeland and his ability to attract monumental projects for foreign courts (both Protestant and Catholic) makes him uniquely cosmopolitan and importantly different from his more parochial seventeenth-century contemporaries Rembrandt, Vermeer, Velàzquez, and even Poussin, who shuttled mainly between his country and Italy.

Moreover, the breezy naturalism and ponderous scale of Rubens's energetic, Italianate manner was decidedly foreign to his native tradition. Where style, influence, and contemporary critical reception are concerned, he was and is something of an artistic anomaly, neither a hybrid nor a follower. The nature of this self-conscious cultural and artistic assimilation is at the heart of a project that reconsiders Rubens's abdication of Northern Mannerism for Romanism and Romanism for Venetian painterliness in an effort all the while to define himself as a Flemish artist subject to Spain. "I have been an alien in a strange land," says Moses's son, the eponymous Goshen, near the middle of Exodus (18:3, KJV). Yet the well-traveled Rubens had famously described himself as a "citizen of the world." The painter was proud of his ability to move seamlessly between the most

powerful European courts as both an artist and a gentleman. He was understandably gratified when the sovereigns of warring empires reached a consensus that among his competitors, he was best equipped to create a properly novel and sophisticated kind of court painting.

As his family life became newly meaningful and the horrors of war resumed, Rubens the diplomat sought a painting style commensurate with his peacemaking. What he came to realize, it seems, is that a rhetorically feminine art was appropriately suited by nature to making love not war. In this sense, Rubens's art was gendered in the crucible of the Venetian painting tradition. Recognized as the heir of Titian (c. 1485-1576) and a creative appropriator of Veronese's (1528-88) artistic concerns, Rubens inherited the courtly and artistic status of Titian and the feminizing burden that went with them. By convention, sensual, richly chromatic, seductively beautiful Venetian painting was also womanly. Titian was known for his painted women as much as his womanizing—yet in the hands of early modern critics even he was made effeminate. Rubens and Titian were infantilized and feminized in turn, for example, in the Venetian critic Marco Boschini's tribute to local painting, *La carta del navegar pitoresco* (1660). As Maria Loh has noted, Boschini gleefully proclaims that Rubens was nursed on the milk of Venetian painting only to further observe that the Flemish painter worshipped Titian "as a lover holds his woman in his heart."[2] Hence, if Venetian painting, that is, Titian, is the mother of Rubens's art, 'she' is also the lover with whom the errant Fleming falls head of heels in love.

To trace the othering and feminization of Rubens by art writers from his time to our own is one aim of this project. Another is to posit his evident willingness to accept and even encourage the collapse of his political and aesthetic aims into a single persona, namely that of a man familiar enough with war so as to become expert in making peace. As an envoy sent to the court of Charles I in the early 1630s, the culmination of his public career and the endpoint of this study, Rubens would indeed negotiate a Truce between England and Spain. Trusted and respected by the Spanish and English sovereigns, and by his 'patroness' the Infanta Isabel, Rubens played an indispensable role in ending the aggressions between these two countries and his own Spanish Netherlands, perpetually caught in the middle of the Wars of Religion. Considering the imminent prospect of a treaty between Catholic Spain and Protestant England, Rubens wrote that he "should be happier over our peace or truce than over anything else in the world."[3]

Rubens's Women

A story was once circulated by the Catholic controversialist Caspar Scioppius who, with the young Peter Paul Rubens, found himself on the road to Tivoli in the company of Philip Rubens, the painter's older brother, and a friend, Daniel, Lhermite, secretary to the Grand-Duke of Tuscany.[4] The Duke's Secretary had chosen to pass the

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[2] Marco Boschini, *La carta del navegar pitoresco*, Anna Pallucchini, ed. (Venice: Instituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1966), 80-81cited in Maria Loh, *Titian Remade: Repetition and the Transformation of Early Modern Italian Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 72.

[3] Rubens to Caspar Gavaerts, London, November 23, 1629, Ruth Magurn, *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1955,) No. 210, 349.

[4] Rubens refers to Scioppius in humorous and affectionate terms in a letter of 1609 and one in 1611, where he states that Scioppius "could be classed among the antiquities of Rome, were he not known as a modern

journey recounting salacious anecdotes from Aretino and Petronius to which the younger Rubens seems to have politely listened. But when at the end of the day the party arrived at an inn with the intention of diligently illustrating the scenes their friend had described Peter Paul, offended by the prospect, protested and deferred.[5] Some fifty years earlier, Giulio Romano, Raphael's artistic heir and an Italian artist Rubens admired, had provided pornographic drawings, masterfully engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi, for Aretino's scandalous sex catalogue, *I Modi*. [6] Yet for his part, the young Fleming was apparently wary of breeching a personal sense of artistic decorum, even among his circle of male friends. [7] Prudishness to others (including perhaps, his own brother) was propriety to him. By temperament and formation, Rubens abroad was not—or not yet—an orthodox Christian with a distinctly erotic sensibility and a love of painting women.

His youthful reticence notwithstanding, for many art historians—those who admire him and those who do not—Rubens's often-enormous canvases and his emotive, actively gesturing life-sized figures have come to embody the sensual, licentious, and theatrical side of Southern Baroque art and culture. For others, Rubens's his oeuvre, especially his allegories, are painted propaganda, telling examples of the ideological constraints placed on artists by seventeenth-century absolutism and Catholic doctrine. In part for the way he unites these two seemingly opposing characterizations, Rubens is rightly ranked as one of the true creators and innovators of Baroque art as we know it. But it is also worthwhile to recall that the painter received his early artistic and religious formation in a sixteenth-century Flanders and Italy almost as thoroughly pervaded by humanistic Renaissance ideals as they had been in the time of Erasmus and Ficino.

Both before and after he became a master of the Guild of St. Luke in 1598, Rubens's teacher was the learned Leiden-born Mannerist painter Otto Van Veen (1556-1629). 'Vaenius,' as the painter-poet was known, had spent much of the 1570s in Italy, and later Bavaria, before moving to Flanders, where he became court painter successively to Ernst of Bavaria and Alessandro Farnese, Governor of the Spanish Netherlands.[8] In 1606, Van Veen was elected Dean of the Flemish religious brotherhood known as 'The Romanists,' an elite coterie of which Rubens himself as well as some of his most important future patrons, such as Nicolaes Rockox, would become members. Other

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author." See Magurn, *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, Rubens to Johann Faber, Antwerp, 1609, No. 20; Rubens to Johann Faber, January 14, 1611, No. 21, 52-54.

[5] The story derives from Caspar Scioppius, *Hyperbolimoeus*, (date) cited in Emile Cammaerts, *Rubens: Painter and Diplomat*, (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1931), 71.

[6] Pietro Aretino was consigned to the Roman Index of Prohibited Books in 1559 for, among other things, his authorship of the collaborative book of erotica known as '*I Modi*' (1527), which paired his own '*sonnetti lussuriosi*' with Giulio Romano's drawings as engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi. On '*I Modi*' see Bette Talvacchia, *Taking positions: On the erotic in Renaissance culture*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999). In the story above, Scioppius likely refers to the *Satyricon* of Petronius Arbiter (d. 66 CE), an unflinching Neronian catalogue of pansexual behavior in which gender inversion—and dildos—play a memorable role. For the *Satyricon* in Renaissance France see, Roger Kuin and Anne Lake, "The Wrath of Priapus: Rémy Belleau's "Jean qui ne peult" and Its Traditions," *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2000): 1-17.

[7] Rubens's Mantuan copies from Giulio Romano's designs (if not his autograph drawings) include *The Triumph of Scipio* and studies of Hylas carried off by the Nymphs. See Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy*, 43.

[8] On Van Veen see Erik Larsen, *Seventeenth-century Flemish Painting* (Freren: Verlag, 1985), 58–60; Van Veen is discussed further here in chapter three.

Deans of the Italophilic society included Rubens's friend and collaborator, Jan Brueghel (1568-1625).[9]

The Romanists were united in their love of all things Catholic and classicizing (time spent in the Eternal City was a prerequisite to membership). They particularly respected the art of Raphael and in accordance with the dictates of their Brotherhood, they professed devotion to saints Peter and Paul.[10] As his credentials suggest, Rubens's teacher was a Northern Mannerist of an Italian humanist bent. But Van Veen's coolly sculptural Raphaelesque bodies seem not to have captivated Rubens's imagination in the way the 'real' Raphael—and the authentic Michelangelo—would. The Florentine painter-poet-architect-sculptor Michelangelo had died a year after the conclusion of the Council of Trent (1545-63). Yet a critical difference between he and other cinquecento Catholic artists, and the painters of Rubens's own day, is the degree to which an all-encompassing range of social and spiritual Tridentine aims were achieved in their lifetime.

When Rubens arrived in Italy in 1600, the High Renaissance was already a memory and the artistic currency of even such wildly novel and idiosyncratic Mannerist masters as Pontormo and Rosso was nearing its end. If Italian religious painting of the late sixteenth-century had tended to the deeply personal and otherworldly, Mannerism's peculiar and hermetic interpretations would grow increasingly controversial in the seicento. The new Church sought painting of a more public, 'universal,' and straightforward tenor; it also sought representation made natural and authentic in a manner that was entirely foreign to the idealizing Mannerists. Rubens thus arrived in Italy at a moment of post-Renaissance pre-Baroque artistic flux—which, as I hope to show, allowed him to develop a unique response to antique and classicizing sources in the service of a new, highly personal manner, ultimately defined by his gendered style.

Having arrived in Rome in his early twenties for the heyday of the Continental Counter-Reformation it is not surprising that Rubens would develop a 'modern' understanding of sex and gender dictated less by the residual *Petrarchismo* and mystical Neoplatonic ambuiguities of Michelangelo's age than the ascendant scholasticism of the post-Tridentine Church. There were important implications in this Aristotelian cultural re/turn for contemporary notions of what it meant to be, and represent, a woman. But one crucial constant remained. For both Plato and Aristotle, the elision of femininity and beauty was necessary to a theory of sex difference. Femaleness and beauty were moralized by the Greek philosophers and their early Christian interlocutors, but to arguably distinctive ends. Where, for example, Neoplatonism embraced female beauty's capacity to reflect an interior moral goodness, Aristotelianism, and the exegetical literalism derived from it, rejected such claims in favor of a view of female beauty as superficial and dangerously deceptive.[11] This early modern outlook was grounded in antithetical masculine/feminine dualities of the sort exemplified in Aristotle's *Physics*. But it had been further developed in patristic and medieval commentaries on the

[9] Louis Wood Ruby, "Sebastiaen Vrancx as Illustrator of Virgil's 'Aeneid," *Master Drawings*, Vol. 28, (Spring, 1990), 61, 68.
[10] Ibid., On the Romanists, see E. Dilis, "La confrerie des Romanistes," *Annales de L'Academie Royale d'Archeologie de Belgique* (1922): 416-30.
[11] See, for example the discussion of Ficino's synthesis of Plato and Christian theology in Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 24.

'original' inequality of Adam and Eve, and was generally endorsed by seventeenth-century Neostoical philosophers and reforming Catholic theologians alike.[12]

The 'Pythagorean' binary structure at the heart of Aristotle's worldview may even be partly responsible for the erstwhile Renaissance fascination with dueling conceits and competing sides.[13] Counter Reformation Italy, too, was a time and place for sophisticated artistic *paragone*. Within elite Italian, and especially Roman, artistic circles the relative supremacy of color and design, painting and sculpture, and Northern and Italian painting were continually contested—even by interested non-artists such as Galileo.[14] Under the moralizing and incontrovertible aegis of Trent, however, the terms of debate had become greatly refined, the range of subjects generally increased, and the punishment for rhetorical or doctrinal missteps, more severe. Galileo would famously discover this in 1633 as a victim of the Roman Inquisition, condemned to life imprisonment for his embrace of Copernicanism. Rubens and Galileo moved in the same scholarly circles while in Rome; the painter maintained ties to the astronomer's Lincean Academy as well as the related group of Northern ex-patriots devoted to the Neostoic philosopher Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), the longtime mentor and teacher of Philip Rubens.[15]

In broader and more socially varied spheres of European society, one of the most popularly debated topics was the proper social, moral, spiritual, and biological status of men and women. Increasingly addressed by female writers, the *querelle des femmes* or so-called 'woman question,' rapidly gained in popularity during Rubens's lifetime, reaching a publishing climax in the second quarter of the seventeenth-century. Yet for Catholic women, whose very humanity was continually debated on the basis of biblical and philosophical commonplaces, the Aristotelian turn associated with Trent only rang new changes on old themes. Although earthly freedoms were being summarily curtailed for living women, an even greater spiritual status was accorded to female saintliness.

On the one hand, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries witnessed the forced cloister of nuns and the literal imposition of bridles on women deemed unruly gossips or 'scolds.' On the other hand, a newfound spiritual fervor arose for 'Holy Women' such as the biblical Mary Magdalene and modern-day religious such as Teresa of Àvila (1515-1582) and Jeanne de Chantal (1571-1642), foundresses of religious Orders in Spain and France, respectively. The astonishing growth of Marian devotion manifested itself in the contemporary fascination with the Immaculate Conception, a doctrine with origins in the middle ages. Visual representations of the doctrine of the Assumption, Mary's effective resurrection and heavenly coronation after an earthly

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[12] The literature on the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the Counter Reformation is extensive, but see, for example, the classic work by H. Outram Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter Reformation* (South Bend: Notre Dame UP, 1970); A.D. Wright, *The Counter Reformation* (New York: St. Martins, 1982); For a still-useful bibliography, see John W. O'Malley, ed. *Catholicism in Early Modern History: A Guide to Research* (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1988).

[13] See for example, Aristotle *Metaphysics*, I.5.986a22 in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 698.

[14] Finding it the more difficult to achieve, the astronomer concluded that "excellence in painting is very much more admirable than in sculpture." See the letter (c. 1612) from Galileo Gallilei to the painter Cigoli, reproduced in *Sources and Documents in the History of Art: Italy and Spain 1600-1750*, Robert Engass and Jonathan Brown, eds. (Englewod Cliffs: NJ: Prentiss-Hall, 1970), 24.

[15] See Irene Baldriga, *L'occhio della lince: I primi lincei tra arte, scienza e collezionismo (1603-1630),* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2002), chapter 2.

death, provided artists with a pictorial model for an unstained Virgin hovering above her terrestrial home. Yet if the assumed Virgin was often portrayed as a dynamic and powerful woman on the rise, visual representations of the Immaculate Mary, or *La Inmaculada*, as she was known in Spain, soon coalesced into the standardized image of a humble, and often youthful, Virgin at prayer in a state of stasis, her downcast eyes foreclosing the viewer's identification or engagement with her. The promulgation of the Immaculate Conception is therefore perhaps the clearest example of the post-Tridentine endorsement of exceptional (and impossible) womanhood over against conventional, essentially flawed, femininity.

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CHAPTER ONE

Rubens's Catholic Tastes: Gender, Figuration, and Italian Art

> [6] And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband who did eat. [7] And the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons.
> (Gen 2:6-7)
>
> [11] And he said to him: And who hath told thee that thou wast naked, but that thou hast eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat? [12] And Adam said: The woman, whom thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me of the tree, and I did eat. [13] And the Lord God said to the woman: Why hast thou done this? And she answered: The serpent deceived me, and I did eat.
> (Gen 2: 11-13) *Douay Rheims Bible*
>
> For it was with a good end in mind—that of acquiring the knowledge of good and evil—that Eve allowed herself to be carried away and eat the forbidden fruit. But Adam was not moved by his desire for knowledge, but simply by greed: he ate it because he heard Eve say it tasted good, which was a worse motive and caused more displeasure. And that is the reason why God did not chase them from Paradise as soon as Eve sinned, but rather after Adam had disobeyed him—in other words, he didn't respond to Eve's action, but Adam's prompted him to give both the punishment they deserved, which was common to all humankind.[1]
>
> ---Moderate Fonte (1555-1592), *The Worth of Women*

After the Fall

Sometime around 1598-99, the young Peter Paul Rubens set out to paint what may have been his most ambitious work to date (Fig. 1).[2] As the template for his composition, he selected Marcantonio Raimondi's sharply subtle engraving of *Adam and Eve* after Raphael (Fig. 2, c. 1515). There were numerous artistic models for the fateful scene from Genesis around this time, particularly in the North. During the first quarter of the century, the master printmakers Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Van Leyden (Figs. 3, 4) had set a high standard for the portrayal of a nude male and female couple whose nakedness was the very marker of sin and shame, and thereby the key to their identification as the first man and woman.[3] But Rubens looked beyond his native tradition, drawing instead on an Italian composition whose creators were more ambivalent about the circumstances of the Fall—about Eve's instigation and Adam's reticence—than Rubens's German and Netherlandish predecessors had been.

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[1] Moderata Fonte (Modesta Pozzo), *The Worth of Women* (1600), Virginia Cox, trans. (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1997), 117.

[2] Scholars are not in agreement on the number of works attributable to Rubens from the period prior to 1600. Of the eight paintings dated by Jaffé to the first Antwerp years, roughly half have also been attributed to Otto van Veen, Rubens's second teacher. Among these, *Adam and Eve* is the largest by far, at 180cm x 158cm, or nearly six by five feet. See Michael Jaffé, *Rubens: Catalogo Completo* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1989), 146, Nos. 1-8. The 'occasional' attribution to Van Veen of (Rubens's) early *Adam and Eve* is noted in Anne T. Woollett and Ariane van Suchtelen, *Rubens and Brueghel, A Working Friendship* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 46.

[3] For a summary of these images within a seventeenth-century Netherlandish context see Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2006), 289-291.

Raphael and Raimondi had made an Adam whose blamelessness in humanity's eternal suffering is debatable: leaning toward Eve, his genitals in full view to her, he might well be offering additional forbidden fruit even as she hesitates to bite into the apple furtively poised near her lips. In this image, the first round of apple-eating may already have commenced and with it the couple's disobedience—such that Adam, the stronger vessel of the two (who should have known better), has now become the tempter.[4] Whether or not it was precisely his fault, most seventeenth-century readers agreed that eating the apple had incited Adamic lust.[5] "And therefore with insinuating smiles/ Her *too believing* husband soon beguiles," as Richard Ames would lament.[6] There was, moreover, serious debate as to whether Eve's limited moral faculties—placed by some on a par with the compromised Adam's newfound libido—provided at least a partial excuse for her failed resolve. "They were deceived by one another," As Thomas Browne would write in 1646:

> and in the greatest disadvantage of Delusion, that is, the stronger by the weaker: For *Eve* presented the Fruit, and *Adam* received it from her. Thus the *Serpent* was cunning enough, to begin the deceit in the weaker, and the weaker of strength, sufficient to consummate the fraud in the stronger.[7]

The English author's equivocating tone represents well the tenor of the times, nearly half a century later, when the relative nature of male and female power and its origins had become a hotly and frequently debated subject. Making one-to-one correspondences of physical and moral qualities was an ever more difficult proposition when even the physically strong could be deceived by the morally weak. Yet Browne's egalitarian exegesis cannot be so easily applied to Rubens's *Adam and Eve*, where Adam castigates his future wife in a manner that emphasizes his moral superiority.

Indeed, while it derives certain compositional elements from the small, black and white engraving, Rubens's enormous canvas is far from a copy of the Raphael/Raimondi print. Chromatically subdued, the painter's palette of rich browns, pale blues, and silvery greens provides an earthy, pastoral background for his red-blooded if mannered figures. Unlike the couple in the Italian engraving, Adam and Eve do not physically touch in Rubens's picture. In the space between them, a detailed landscape recedes into the distance. Leaning and swaying, the two figures, nude but for fig leaves, seem to rely on the support of a nearby tree and hillock, as if such weight-bearing props were required by statuesque bodies made of paint rather than stone. And there are further adjustments, both minor and major, in Rubens's reinterpretation of the earlier image, which includes a landscape and city scene derived from Northern prints.[8]

Among the changes, for example, is Rubens's addition of a Dürer-like rabbit, which while perhaps a symbol of sexual excess, contributes to the fecundity and liveliness of the painter's elegantly lush riverscape of lacy trees and waterfowl—a conspicuous departure from the print's anachronous peaked roofs and church steeples.[9] Rubens has denaturalized both bodies

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[4] For the phrase "stronger vessel" see 1Peter 3:1.
[5] Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 199), 179.
[6] Richard Ames, *The Folly of Love* (1691), quoted in Almond, op cit., 190.
[7] Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, I.I. (1646); See also, Almond, op cit., 195.
[8] For Marcantonio Raimondi's collaboration with Raphael, and specifically, his typical placement of his figures before a Northern landscape in prints of this period, see Lisa Pon, *Raphael, Durer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 121.
[9] Kristin Lohse Belkin, *Rubens* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 31-32.

to some extent. His Eve is more geometrically curvaceous and smooth; her right hip consists of a perfect semicircle, her flesh is smooth and unnaturally uniform in color. The serpentine nature of her posture, legs crossed, is also more evident in the painting; despite the subsequent cropping, her arm curls around the tree suggestively. Of even greater significance in Rubens's painting: the Adam no longer holds the pivotal fruit. Instead, the first father, maturely bearded—just as a twenty-two year old Rubens was at the time—gestures forcefully toward the hiding serpent, the only evidence of which is a dark length of tail coiled about the tree trunk and spiraling out of view. Adam's ears are red and his cheeks are slightly flushed: has he demanded the apple from Eve, is it too late? In either case, rather like the Virgin for whom she is the anti-type, Eve averts her eyes, unable to meet Adam's disappointed gaze. In this respect, she is quite unlike Raphael's Eve, who stares directly across the void at her feckless partner in crime.

From seemingly slight alterations and subtle nuances comes a very different account of the Fall. Rubens has absolved his Adam of guilt, investing him with oratorical authority and the capacity to point out the grave mistake that has been (or will be) made by the woman in his care. In this respect, Rubens's Adam recalls Raphael's Plato of the *School of Athens* (c. 1509-11) the philosopher of ideal forms, whose skyward gesture is said to invoke divinity and the advent of Christian revelation. [10] Rubens projects this verdict of Adamic innocence into present day Antwerp, portraying the first man as a modern-day Fleming with features resembling his own, while the beautiful and beguiling Eve remains a sort of timelessly culpable everywoman. Where the Italian image leaves room to contemplate the particulars of the story and arrive at a conclusion of one's own, Rubens forecloses this possibility, rendering a verdict of Eve's guilt.

While my analysis may seem overdetermined, reading the painting in this way is merely to reveal in it the same polemical charge found in numerous seventeenth-century commentaries on Genesis, to which paintings and prints of the subject should rightly be compared as visual 'primary sources' with similarly didactic means and ends.[11] That Rubens should decide to alter a composition by Raphael in such prescriptive manner demonstrates that, even at the earliest stage of his career, he recognized the rhetorical capacities of religious history painting and saw in it the opportunity to advance a biblical exegesis of his own. His changes are made all the more apparent by virtue of the fact that they decisively revise so familiar a model.

In the young painter's version of the Fall, the moral and theological implications of gender—of Eve's womanly incapacity and Adam's masculine cognition—for the outcome of the story, and indeed, for the fate of mankind, are clearly at issue. However much he admired Raphael's compositional skills, when considering the circumstances of original sin, it was apparently important for Rubens to imagine—and even play on—the Italian artist, conforming his image more readily to post-Tridentine assertions of Adam's unwitting and spectatorial role in a loss of immortality brought on by Eve's sinful act of disobedience.

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[10] On Plato's pose and the textual genesis and philosophical implications of Raphael's program see, Glenn W. Most, "Reading Raphael: 'The School of Athens,' and Its Pre-Text," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23 (Autumn, 1996), 179.

[11] For an indispensable bibliography of the Anglophone tradition, see Almond*, Adam and Eve,* as in No. 5 above, which lists the following works from the first quarter of the century alone: Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations Upon the first book of Moses called Genesis* (London, 1616); Gervase Babington, *Certaine Plaine, brief and comfortable Notes upon everie Chapter of Genesis* (London, 1592); Henry Bullinger, *Looke from Adam* (London, 1624); Samuel Purchas, *Microcosmus: or the historie of man* (London, 1619); John Salkfield, *A Treatise of Paradise* (London, 1617); Edward Vaughan*, Ten Introductions: How to Read , and in Reading How to Understand the Bible* (London, 1594).

This was not, of course, the only way to represent the second chapter of Genesis. Nor were Renaissance artists alone in blurring the distinctions between guilt and innocence. In 1595, for instance, Rubens's mannerist predecessor, Bartolomeus Spranger, also a Fleming, depicts *Adam and Eve* (Fig. 5) as a young couple hopelessly conjoined and jointly seduced—she by the serpent and he by her. In a very different kind of image, a drawing designed for an engraving, Spranger's Dutch contemporary Hendrik Goltzius (Fig. 6) similarly emphasizes the role played by improperly ordered, yet mutual, desires in the downfall of the original moonfaced lovers. Conversely, the solemnity of Rubens's image and his forthright privileging of Adam aligns him with conventional antifeminist arguments espoused by patristic Doctors such as Jerome, Augustine and Ambrose, the latter of whom had stated unequivocally in *De Paradiso*: "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and was in sin."[12] In this sense Rubens's abdication of later Mannerism's sometimes skeptical or farcical ambiguities in exchange for a more unwaveringly instrumental, proto-Baroque, conceptual style is appreciable even in his first large-scale history painting; his one-sided *Adam and Eve* partakes of neither the psychosexual bedroom antics of Spranger nor the unconvincing gravity of Goltzius's lover's folly.

Although early and important, Rubens's *Adam and Eve* is often eclipsed by his remarkable depiction of original sin some thirty years later, this time in a painted copy of a work by Titian rather than Raphael. Provided unlimited access to the Habsburg picture galleries during his extended stay in Spain in 1628-29, Rubens executed a number of close copies of Titian's paintings, including the Venetian artist's *Adam and Eve* (Fig. 7) today in the Prado.[13] Yet Rubens's admiration for Titian is also evident in the fantastical *Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (Fig. 8, c. 1617), painted in collaboration with his friend and fellow Antwerp master, Jan Brueghel the Elder, who was responsible for the painting's astonishingly encyclopedic catalogue of flora and fauna. This collaborative painting, in a more vivid manner than Rubens's first *Adam and Eve*, anticipates his mature approach to the interdependent notions of early ethics, selfhood, and piety as subjects activated by male and female bodies in physical relation.[14] Yet, it is nonetheless interesting, that even in a very early treatment of the theme of the Fall from Grace, Rubens makes a conspicuous appeal to gender construction as a way of shaping faith and doctrine or, put another way, it show his recognition of the reliance of orthodox religious thought on conventional notions of sex difference.

Indeed, for more than a millennium, the story of the Fall of Man had almost single-handedly defined womanhood in the Christian West.[15] While in Rubens's age not all men were perceived as 'Adams,' all women were descended from and related to Eve, the bringer and source of earthly evil. Tertullian was among the first to formulate this conflation: "In sorrows and care you will give birth, woman, and be dependent on your husband. Do you not know that you are Eve?"[16] In this sense, it is not Eve who had become an allegorical figure but womanhood, the universal 'category' that figuratively, and *figurally*, refers to a particular

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[12] Ambrose, *Opere*, CSEL 32.I, Alcuin Blamires, trans., *Women defamed and Women Defended* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 61.

[13] On Rubens's c. 1628-29 copy of Titian's *Adam and Eve*, see Jeremy Wood, *Rubens: Copies and Adaptations from Renaissance and Later Masters: Italian Artists*, Vol. I, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard (London: Harvey Miller, 2010), cat. No. 111, 111-119.

[14] On this collaborative work, see Wollett and Suchtelen, *Rubens and Brueghel*, 64-71.

[15] Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing* (New York: Random House, 1989), 85-86.

[16] Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, *Opera CCSL i*, C. W. Marx, trans., cited in Blamires, *Women Defamed*, 1992, 50.

defining 'historical' actor, through whom its significance was and is reciprocally constructed. To pictorially figure Eve as 'woman,' or 'woman' as Eve, had obvious cultural implications for the understanding of women's intellectual, moral, and physical capacities, not to mention their residual guilt as a 'species' for the supposed crime of a single member. As Aemilia Lanyer groaned in her 'Eve's Apologie in Defence of Women' (1611): "If one weak woman simply did offend/ this sin of yours has no excuse, nor end."[17]

Early modern attitudes toward women ranged from condescension and curiosity to fear and hatred. Increasingly declaimed as a sin by early modern pamphleteers, however, misogyny began to gain ground in public discourse at precisely this stage of Rubens's career, as female authors made a growing number of contributions to the historically male-dominated *querelle des femmes*.[18] But if early modern defenders of women frequently turn to timeworn classical proverbs and literary commonplaces, drawing from the works of Agrippa, Boccaccio, Ariosto and even Seneca, they are no less likely to argue their points by inverting biblical prooftexts and patristic commentaries in order to produce revisionist readings more favorable to women. Polemical exegeses of scriptural, especially Pauline, pronouncements on women from the New Testament and stories of seduction and treachery in the Old Testament appear again and again in early seventeenth-century responses to the woman question, misogynist and protofeminist alike.

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With recourse to a variety of historical, textual, and cultural milieux, it is the purpose of this introduction to reveal the contemporary discourse of gender and sex difference in Rubens's early art and professional practice from his first years as an Antwerp master until and throughout his eight year Italian sojourn. This serves the larger aims of this project in that it follows Rubens as he begins to assemble the vast visual library of classical and modern Italian compositional models on which his art is so often based. It is in dialogue with these earlier works that he will henceforth speak, or figure, his rhetorical messages in such as way as to project their historical significance onto his contemporary meaning. One might think that all early Baroque artists were similarly engaged but quite the opposite is true; in a sense, because its subjects were so often nude—not to mention heretically pre-Christian—most classical or pagan art carried with it the taint of sexual perversity.[19] At a time when the Church deemed subjects from the antique to be perilously lewd, more likely to instruct their beholders in lechery than piety, Rubens steadfastly upheld the sources of humanism as singularly appropriate foundations for religious art.[20]

The period under consideration here comprises roughly the first decade of the painter's career (1598-1608), the majority of which was spent in Italy. The trajectory of this Italian

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[17] Aemelia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (London, 1611), 36. For an excellent introduction to this work, see Randall Martin, ed. *Women Writers in Renaissance England*, 360-365.

[18] One of the earliest studies of the *querelle* as a consciously protofeminist movement is still the best, see Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the 'Querelle des Femmes,'"1400-1789," *Signs*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn, 1982): 4-28; see also by the same author, *Women, History, and Theory, The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984). For a recent historiographical analysis, see Lyndan Warner, *The Ideas of Man and Woman in Renaissance France: Print, Rhetoric, and Law* (Surrey, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 94-119.

[19] On Paleotti's claims that "seul comptait le contenu" (391) and the practical (pastoral) application/imposition of his anti-mannerist theories in his native Bologna, see Roberto Zapperi, "La corporation des peintres et la censure des images à Bologne au temps des Carrache," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, Vol. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1991), 387- 400. See also Pamela Jones, "Art Theory as Ideology: Gabriele Paleotti's Hierarchical Notion of Painting's Universality and Reception," in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, ed. Clare Farago (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 127-140.

[20] Wolfgang Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968), 46-47.

sojourn is well known by Rubens scholars, as are some of the letters, patrons, and paintings discussed. In revisiting Rubens in the context of turn-of-the-seventeenth-century Italy, however, my intention is to think very explicitly about the manner in which womanhood, real and imagined, was met and measured by an unmarried young Fleming for whom the portrayal of femininity was to become a distinguishing theme.

Circa 1600

In 1600, at the age of twenty-three Rubens left Antwerp for Italy in search of gainful employment at an Italian court. Also in that year, Venice, Rubens's first port of call, saw the publication of two of the most influential and widely-read Northern Italian contributions to the *querelle des femmes.* More than coincidence, the contemporaneous appearance of these works attests to a surge of interest among Italian readers in women's responses to literary attacks on their nature by male authors. Lucrezia Marinella's *On the Nobility and Excellence of Women* was a carefully reasoned humanistic rebuttal to *The Defects of Women*, (Padua 1595 and 1599), an anti-feminist work by Gisueppe Passi.[21] Moderata Fonte's all-female dialogue, *The Worth of Women* has been described by Virginia Cox as a more original and in some ways unparalleled polemic where the author, a married mother, launches fiery attacks on the institution of marriage and women's exclusion from education among other sources of social inequality.[22]

Fonte died in childbirth before her book was published. But the posthumous work was dedicated by the author's daughter, Cecelia de' Zorzi, to the teenage Duchess of Urbino, inscribing it further in the tradition of the courtly defense.[23] Cox sees this seemingly arbitrary dedication, as "somewhat speculative" in view of the dedicatee's youth and lacking notoriety. Viewing the dedication as a strategic act of politesse, however, de' Zorzi may also have intended to evoke the stature of an earlier Duchess of Urbino, Elizabetta Gonzaga. Referred to simply as 'the Duchess,' the fictional counterpart of this distant cousin of Baldasare Castiglione presides circumspectly over the discussion and definition of the court lady in Book Three of the *Courtier*.[24] Urbino, the dialogue's purported setting, and Mantua, home to one of the greatest Renaissance art collections, shared an historic association with learned women and the love of music, science, and painting, in particular. The aforementioned Elizabetta Gonzaga, portrayed by Titian in 1538, was the sister-in-law of Isabella d'Este, perhaps the greatest of all Mantuan collectors and a learned humanist who had herself been instrumental in Castiglione's education.[25]

As a newcomer to Italy, Rubens, too, was to seek the favor and patronage of Mantuan nobility. Through the newly appointed Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, the Archduke

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[21] Marinella's book was reprinted in 1601 and 1621. See Lucrezia Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women, and the Defects and Vices of Men*, Ann Dunhill, ed. and trans., introduction by Letizia Panizza (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For a fascinating study of the stylistic and conceptual differences between these works and the extraordinary circumstance of their simultaneous publication, see Steven Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi: An Early Seventeenth-Century Feminist Controversy," Steven Kolsky, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 96 (Oct., 2001): 973-989.

[22] Fonte (Modesta Pozzi), *The Worth of Women*, 13ff.

[23] For the dedicatory letter see, Ibid., 27-28.

[24] Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Charles S. Singleton, trans. (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 199-282.

[25] On the historiographical gendering of Isabella's unconventional collecting habits, see Rose Marie San Juan, "The Court Lady's Dilemma: Isabella d'Este and Art Collecting in the Renaissance," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 14 (1991): 67-78.

Albert, he was introduced to Vincenzo I Gonzaga, created Duke of Mantua in 1587.[26] Although Vincenzo is typically described as Rubens's primary Italian patron, the artist served equally at the pleasure of the Duchess, Eleanora de' Medici. Goddaughter of Pope Pius V, Eleonora was raised in the Pitti palace by a family the breadth and quality of whose artistic patronage was deemed vastly superior at the time to that of the less cosmopolitan Gonzaga. Little known today, Eleonora de' Medici was a celebrated figure in courtly circles until her early death in 1611. So great was her renown, in fact, that the eldest daughter of Francesco I de' Medici and Johanna of Austria was personified as an allegory of fame in a poem by no less than Torquato Tasso.[27]

There is no documentary evidence that Rubens read Fonte and Marinella or the widely dispersed and often reprinted books and pamphlets that followed their lead.[28] But his general interest in and eagerness to procure recent publications makes it possible. Rubens had books brought to him from throughout Europe concerning everything from classical archeology, astronomy, and philosophy to the latest religious controversies. His close relationship with Antwerp's leading publisher, Balthasar Moretus, whose Plantin-Moretus press was the official publisher of the Catholic church—suggests that he kept himself well-apprised of the latest cultural discourses.[29] In Mantua, moreover, Rubens had found himself court portraitist at a Duchy presided over by a Medici noblewoman who would choose to have herself portrayed (also in 1600) by a woman painter, Lavinia Fontana.

A leading Bolognese painter, Fontana was represented—and styled herself—as an elite "bluestocking" painter and was admired as an 'exceptional' woman by contemporaries. In 1578, for example, an associate of Fulvio Orsini's, Alfonso Ciacón, had commissioned a self-portrait from Fontana to hang as a pendant to a similar work by Sophonisba Anguissola as part of a collection of "illustrious men and women" to be memorialized in a print sponsored by Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria.[30] Yet Fontana, whose *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* (Fig. 9) has been read as an historiated—and proto-feminist—portrait of the Duke and Duchess, clearly embodies an earlier generation of post-Tridentine painters.[31] Fontana was heavily influenced by the strident prescriptions of inquisitor-critics such as her countryman, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti. She and other late Cinquecento artists privileged religious orthodoxy over invention, submitting

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[26] An almost immediate shift in courtly aesthetics—pictorial as well as musical and theatrical—at Mantua following the death of the Duke's deeply religious father, Guglielmo has been observed, i.e. "Vincenzo had notions of a Mantuan role in the peninsular greatly disproportionate to the size of its territory and population, and it was undoubtedly an important part of his conception that the Gonzaga should be seen as patrons of the arts on a scale compatible with these ambitions." See Iain Fenlon, "Music and Spectacle at the Gonzaga Court, c. 1580-1600," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 103 (1976 - 1977), 90.

[27] Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and her Patrons in Sixteenth-century Bologna* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 109 and 208, No. 91 for Tasso's "Alla Fama: in lode della sernis. Sig. Eleonora de Medici, principesa di Mantova" (1587).

[28] For a general overview of Rubens's 'possible' library, which was not documented until 1613, when the Plantin House began to record its transactions with Rubens, see Frans Baudoin, "Rubens and his Books," in *Rubens in Contex*t (Leuven: Centrum voor de Vlaamse Kunst van de 16e en de 17e Eeuw and Bai, 2006), 125-136.

[29] Ruth Saunders Magurn, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1957), 12-13. Rubens's correspondence is punctuated with references to controversial and difficult to obtain current titles, see e.g. letters No. 53, 79, 101, 106, 128.

[30] Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 73-76.

[31] This decorous if awkwardly composed painting carries a Latin inscription on the steps of the throne: "The Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem in order that she might test Solomon with difficult questions, and she gave him many great gifts." Ibid., 106.

themselves to a rigid aesthetic asceticism praised as the antidote to Mannerism's sensuality and self-indulgence.

Rubens had indeed arrived in Italy at a transitional moment in art theory, when the grip of Paleotti (d. 1584) and the Milanese Archbishop Charles Borromeo (d. 1585) was fast loosening but a new approach to Catholic art was yet to be codified. With Caravaggio's unflinching naturalism at one end of the spectrum and Domenichino's icy idealism at the other, the conceptual and technical parameters of Counter Reformation painting were very much in flux in 1600. The strictures of the Church and the inimitable legacy of Mannerism had seemingly combined to produce a sort of stylistic and critical vacuum at the start of the new century. In his pioneering study of early seventeenth-century Italian painting, Denis Mahon characterized this turn as 'a-theoretical,' as an artistic moment when neither Lomazzo's peculiar and speculative philosophical art-writing nor Zuccaro's carefully didactic neo-Platonizing was viewed as compelling or useful to contemporary Italian artists and their patrons.[32]

Increasingly, however, the clerical and academic establishment/s were leaning toward, or more accurately, returning to, essentially Aristotelian principles—a common example of which is the resurgence of the trope of 'judicious selection' from many ideals over against representation of a preexisting (and perfect) Platonic Idea. [33] Inasmuch as the Aristotelian turn in philosophy had a profound effect on early modern notions of women and femininity—notions reflected in and constructed by Baroque art—it is important to consider some of the implications of Aristotelianism for Catholic faith and doctrine.

The Triumph of Thomas Aquinas

When approaching even so exalted a classical source as Aristotle, especially following the doctrinaire prescriptions of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), it was advisable for Catholic readers to rely on the approved readings of a Christian interlocutor. There was no more sanctioned translator of 'the Philosopher' than the Dominican scholar and exegete, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). The 'Angelic Doctor,' as Aquinas was known, had devoted his life to the difficult project of conforming classical Aristotelian philosophy to medieval Christian theology. Many of Aquinas's concordist propositions were deeply controversial from the time of his death until the zenith of anti-scholastic Christian humanism in the early sixteenth-century. Ultimately, however, Thomistic theology was officially incorporated into the dogma of the Catholic Church at the close of the Tridentine Council. From that point forward, for the first time, Thomism assumed its place as the font of Catholic teaching and the source of orthodox doctrine and canon law.[34]

In terms of its wide-reaching impact on religious practice and belief, concretely felt by women attempting to pursue an 'active' or public apostolate, the Catholic Church's vindication

[32] Denis Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory* (London: University of London Press, 1947).
[33] For a concise account of this "anti-theoretical" moment, see Rudolph Wittkower, with Joseph Connors and Jennifer Montagu, *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1600-1750* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 14.
[34] Marcia L. Colish, "St. Thomas Aquinas in Historical Perspective: The Modern Period," *Church History*, Vol. 44, (Dec., 1975), 440. As Colish points out, its adoption by not only the Dominicans, as would be expected, but also by the Jesuits provides one explanation for the dominance of Thomism (or 'Thomisms') in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries.

of Thomism in the sixteenth-century was akin to the (re)discovery of Aristotle in the middle ages. In both periods, women's rights were severely curtailed by ecclesiastical and doctrinal reforms. As Sharon Farmer has explained, in 1210, Pope Innocent III, fearful that certain abbesses had assumed de facto clerical status, proscribed them from such activities as preaching and hearing confession. Many Medieval women, well-known mystics and powerfully connected nuns in particular, achieved a significant measure of social and political capital. In response to these inroads, contemporaneous translations of Aristotle's works provided a foundation for more socially conservative eleventh- and twelfth-century ecclesiology by providing biological and 'natural' rationales for the social and cultural disparities based on sex difference. As Farmer observes, "Thomas Aquinas's comments on women are indicative of the degree to which thirteenth-century theologians were receptive to Aristotle's views of women."[35]

Nonetheless, it is Aquinas who argues that "*only as regards nature in the individual* is the female something defective and *manqué*," [italics mine] thereby mitigating, to a slight degree, the Aristotelian explanation of woman as a 'lacking male' deprived of full humanity. To be sure, as individuals, women were weak and derivative. Yet to Aquinas's mind the female sex, as a "species as a whole," could not be viewed as defectively lacking because God Himself had created it for the work of procreation—albeit a procreation in which male semen is the operative element.

"The procreativity of a female is the result either of the debility of the active power, of some unsuitability of the material, or of some change effected by external influences," Aquinas had claimed, Yet "*the active power in the seed of the male tends to produce something like itself, perfect in masculinity*."[36] This deft rhetorical and philosophical move, with which Aquinas simultaneously frames femaleness as a physiological mishap, delegitimizes women's role in generation, and privileges the creative and 'productive' role of the male, had a powerful effect on the conception and self-conception of the early modern (male) artist. Adopting a Thomistic worldview, the male artist might recognize himself as an authorized and superior image-maker having been made (more perfectly than any woman) in the image of God. Rubens's philosophical mentor, the Neo-Stoic Justus Lipsius, had actually doubled this notion back on itself, making *artists* the model for the Creator, when he referred to a perpetually inventive God as being, "like an Image-maker," who "formeth and frameth to himselfe sundrie sortes of portratures in his clay."[37] It is based in part on Aquinas's ideas that the Florentine historian and biographer Giorgio Vasari was able to portray Michelangelo as 'divine,' that is, a co-creator with God of sublimely lifelike forms.[38]

Corporate Good: Rubens and Michelangelo

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[35] Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum*, Vol. 61 (Jul., 1986), 520.

[36] [italics mine] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. XIII (Ia, 92, art. I), Edmund Hill OP, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 35. See also, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, Alcuin Blamires, ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 92-93. For a theologically sensitive overview of Aquinas's approach to Aristotle, and subsequent interpretations of this particular 'woman' question, phrased by Aquinas as "Should woman have been made in that original creation of things?" see Sister Prudence Allen RSM, *The Concept of Woman*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 91-101,127-151.

[37] Lipsius, *De Constantia* (London, 1594), 39.

[38] On this subject see Stephen J. Campbell, "'Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva': Michelangelo, Rosso, and the (Un)Divinity of Art," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84 (Dec., 2002), 597.

Despite the Renaissance privileging of Plato, the Aristotelian trope of male generativity had captivated artists and critics well before Rubens's time. As Michelangelo had once supposedly quipped to a priest friend who suggested he marry: "I have too much of a wife in this art that has always afflicted me, and the works I shall leave behind will be my children, and even if they are nothing, they will live for a long while."[39] Defending his bachelorhood by characterizing himself as the father and sole creator of the child-works destined to assure his legacy, the Florentine painter-poet-sculptor-architect is presumably availing himself of Aristotelian precepts, at least in part, for pragmatic purposes. Such a statement may have been designed to rebut insinuations of his homosexuality rather than to align the painter in any decisive way with Aristotle or Aquinas.

Regardless of the motivation, Michelangelo was, in fact, an artist for whom masculine perfection and male self-sufficiency had a particular power and meaning. For him, masculine body parts formed a vocabulary with which to express complex ontologies. This is, to evoke the grammatical sense of masculinity, so useful to Vasari in his polemical discussions 'il disegno' over against 'la colore,' a binary envisioned as protean male drawing in contrast to effeminate, painterly color.[40] Neither in Raphael, nor Caravaggio nor any of the other Italian artists Rubens was to study and copy would he find a body of work so invested in the articulation of a gendered imaginary for which—as Freud famously put it, 'anatomy is destiny—as in Michelangelo.[41]

As Michael Jaffé has shown, Rubens was in Michelangelo's thrall well before he arrived in Italy. While still in Antwerp, he had produced, on the basis of a 1590 engraving by Laurens then in circulation, a lively pen and ink sketch of Michelangelo's *Haman* (Fig. 10) from the *Last Judgment*, only to redraw the lunging figure 'from life' when he found himself in the Sistine Chapel a few years later, around 1602.[42] Rubens's interest in the Italian master's forceful physiognomies is also demonstrated by a sketch made at Fontainebleau. En route to Venice in 1600, he had stopped at the Renaissance palace, where he gave a free and confident account of an early sculpture of Michelangelo's *Young Hercules* (Fig. 11), executed by the sculptor in Florence and erected in Francois I's *Jardin de l'Etang* around 1543.[43]

The freshness and immediacy of these drawings and sketches exhibit Rubens's double delight in recreating not only mighty and lifelike bodies but 'Michelangelos' of his own. Copying as an objective exercise or for the sake of practice is evidently not the goal here; rather it is as if Rubens has challenged himself to render Michelangelo's solutions on his own terms, as if he has translated them, albeit literally, into his own language. Changes to the anatomy or postures of these Herculean figures are therefore negligible. It is only in the haptic energy of his jittery hatches and surplus muscle bulges that Rubens's accent reveals itself. If the media of the originals were not known, it would be difficult in each case to determine whether Rubens had copied a statue or a fresco. Everything for him becomes a dialectic of matter and form where the

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[39] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Julia Connaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, trans. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 479.

[40] The effect of this gendered episteme on the critical reception of painting in the Renaissance is the subject of the groundbreaking article by Patricia Reilly, "Taming of the Blue, Writing out Color in Italian Renaissance Art," in Norma Broude and Marry Garrard, eds., *The Expanding Discourse, Feminism and Art History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 87-99.

[41] For Michelangelo, see Robert S. Liebert, *Michelangelo, A Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and Images* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983); The phrase "anatomy is destiny" is discussed in Thomas Laqueur, *The Making of Sex* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990), see especially chapter two, 25-62.

[42] Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977), 19-20.

[43] Ibid.,19.

mimetic capture of human vitality must be balanced with the young artist's need to show his art. Accordingly, the creatures populating the painter's multifigure studies after the sculptor are not so much individuated bodies, much less human beings, as lumpen tangles of arms, legs, and masklike faces, their flesh neither more nor less substantial than the passages of blank page and charcoal shadow by which they are defined. This is especially the case in his copies of the *Last Judgment* and *The Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs* (Fig. 12), in which the inadvertent abstraction of tensed and rippling male extremities creates puzzle-like anatomical riddles.

While in Rome, Rubens examined the vaults of the Sistine ceiling repeatedly and at length over the course of 1601-1602. During that time he made large chalk drawings of the prophets, sibyls, and *ignudi*. Although Michael Jaffè surmised that this group might be part of a complete, but now-lost, series of Sistine drawings, it is also quite possible that the existing studies reflect Rubens's particular fascination with the androgynous figures and muscular nudes, and his decision to focus on them alone. [44] Indeed, in 1603, having sensed the relevance of Michelangelo's monumental scale for his own reckoning of the human form, Rubens turned his attention to sculpted forms. As was the case with the masculine-looking sibyls in the Sistine chapel, the representation of gender was often a central communicative component of the classical and classically-derived works Rubens sought out. But nowhere was the gendering of the human form used to such rhetorical and allegorical advantage as in Michelangelo's celebrated sculptures for the Medici tombs in Florence.

The figure of *Night* (1526-34, Fig. 13), Michelangelo's recumbent sculpture in San Lorenzo is one of his most famous and famously androgynous Renaissance sculptures. Androgyny is often confused or elided with hermaphroditism in early modern studies, but the notions, or properly, the notion and the anatomical event, originate in two distinct traditions. As Cary Nederman and Jacqui True have observed, the notion of androgyny has its roots in Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium*. The origins of the related but distinctly different state of hermaphroditism are described in Ovid's metamorphic tale of Hermaphroditus and the Fountain of Salmacis.[45] While in the latter, the intersexed individual is punitively derived from the literal merging of male (Hermes) and female (Aphrodite) forms; for the former, the androgyne, an indecipherable body who partakes of both sexes recalls a Platonic figure that was itself the product of complementary, yet oppositional, parentage. For Renaissance beholders, whose sense of androgyny and hermaphrodism would have derived from medieval conceptions, an important distinction between the two categories is that the androgynous figure seeks to unite the two sexes in a Platonic form that "transcends' gender whereas the more hybridized hermaphroditic figure seeks to maintain, or contain, sexual difference in a single body.[46]

Mainly, owing to the conspicuous presence of bulbous breasts beholders have typically classified *Night* as a woman, and thus as androgynously female. In point of fact, the presence of male genitals is neither confirmed nor denied by Michelangelo's sculpture, whose genitals are obscured by a bird, specifically, an owl, inserted by the sculptor beneath the tent-like crook of Night's arched leg. The owl's position is intriguing in that it usefully prevents the figure from an indecorous display of her/his sex but might also serve as an ersatz or symbolic placeholder. As in the Netherlands, where "vogelen," or birding, was a popular early modern euphemism for having

[44] Ibid., 21.
[45] Cary J. Nederman and Jacqui True, "The Third Sex: The Idea of the Hermaphrodite in Twelfth-Century Europe," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 6 (Apr., 1996), 499.
[46] Ibid.

sex, *uccello* the word for bird, had entered the Italian vernacular as a slang term for the phallus.[47] We cannot know whether Michelangelo wished to suggest the possibility of a hidden, hermaphroditic penis between Night's massive legs. But the possibility that contemporary viewers might have speculated about what was hidden from view should nonetheless be noted. Notwithstanding Michelangelo's deferral of discovery, however, *Night's* notional location on the passive side of male/female ontological binaries, an association signaled by the somnolent figure's reclining posture, would have helped to gender the sculpture feminine in the eyes of her beholders. Vasari makes this connection when he praises the feminine figure as "the very essence of sleep."[48]

For reasons of both composition and placement, and quite unlike the famed *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* (Fig. 14) discovered in Rome less than a century earlier, Michelangelo's *Night* was not possible to take in—or touch—from all vantage points.[49] While he may have sought and secured the viewer's fascination with *Night's* gender and unlikely physicality, eliciting the delightful surprise revelation, the '*non so che'* of Ovidian intersexed-ness was not part of Michelangelo's conceptual gambit. Instead, *Night's* fluid, yet still readable, gender figures her identity in a more allusive manner, suggesting her conformity to Platonic thought.[50] Indeed, Aristophanes' explanation of the androgynous 'third sex' accords well with Michelangelo's sculpture:

> Our original nature was not as it is now, but quite different. For one thing, there were three sexes rather than the two (male and female) we have now. The third sex was a combination of these two […] The reason for having three sexes and of this kind was this: the male was originally the offspring of the sun, the female of the earth, and the one which was half-and-half, the offspring of the moon, because the moon likewise is half sun and half earth. [51]

If *Night's* moon diadem and watchful owl easily associate her with the shadowy and indeterminate lunar world, androgyny identifies her further as a combinatory figure whose anatomical masculine-femininity (or feminine-masculinity) reflects her origins in two dichotomous heavenly bodies.

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[47] The classic source is Eddy de Jongh, "Erotica in vogelper-spectief: de dubbelzinnigheid van een reeks 17de eeuwse genrevoorstelingen," *Simiolus*, Vol. 3 (1968-69): 22-74. But see also Moira Smith, "The Flying Phallus and the Laughing Inquisitor: Penis Theft in the 'Malleus Maleficarum,'" *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Jan. - Apr., 2002), 88.

[48] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Vol. I, George Bull, trans. (London: Penguin, 1965), 369.

[49] In 1447, Michelangelo's predecessor, the sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) was famously present near the time of the excavation of a marble statue of a Hermaphrodite: "which statue was made with marvelous ingenuity [ingegno]. […] It is impossible for the tongue to tell the perfection and the knowledge, art, and skill of that statue. […] In this statue were the greatest refinements. The eye perceived nothing if that hand not found it by touch." Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Commentaries* 3.1, quoted in Elizabeth Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 164. On Ghiberti's role in articulating Renaissance gender aesthetics, See Fredrika Jacobs, "Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: *Femmina, Masculo, Grazia*," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82 (Mar., 2000), 55 ; see also Mary Pardo, as in note 50, below.

[50] Conceptual similarities between the two sculptures have been suggested. See Mary Pardo, "Seduction as Artifice in Titian," in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, James Grantham Turner, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 73. "The statue's [*Night's*] physicality is exaggerated by the tight compression of the pose (this challenges the fluid twist of the ancient *Hermaphrodite's* dream-state, but conveys some of the same dual significance)."

[51] *Plato: Symposium and Phaedras*, trans. Tom Griffith, (New York: Knopf, 2000), [189-192 D], 33-34.

For poets as for artists, the *Symposium* was a preferred source for Neo Platonic exploration. Marsilio Ficino had dedicated the first Renaissance treatise on Love, his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love* (1474) to Cosimo de Medici, coining the phrase 'Platonic Love' in his discussion of male/male homoerotics. [52] More than half a century later, the broadminded Florentine, Agnolo Firenzuola would similarly employ Aristophanes' creation myth to justify 'virtuous' forms of same-sex love in his popular treatise, *On the Beauty of Women* (1541).[53]

Beyond the Platonic spheres of certain Renaissance cities, however, androgyny and hermaphrodism were worrisome, even threatening, manifestations of human vice and divine retribution. In 1512, the so-called Ravenna hermaphrodite (Fig. 15) was described as "having a horn on its head, two wings, one foot similar to that of a bird of prey, at the knee an eye, and partaking of both male and female features."[54] This legendary monstrous birth bears few similarities to the graceful form of its ancient Hellenic precursor, unearthed in Rome some sixty years earlier. Following the Reformation, hermaphrodism as embodied by images such as the Ravenna woodcut nonetheless became a popular, sometimes apocalyptic, symbol of modern monstrosity. The same mythical hermaphrodite was put to polemical use by the zealous French Calvinist surgeon Ambrose Paré (1510?-1590) who, in a treatise *On Monsters and Marvels*, ascribed the birth of so satanic a creature to the same-sex perversions of Michelangelo's own erstwhile patron, Pope Julius II. [55]

While the figure of the hermaphrodite did not always attract such negative moralization from Protestant writers (Spenser and Donne give more favorable accounts), it can be nonetheless be observed that for Catholics after Trent, the hybrid or ambiguous body becomes a symbol of decadence, inconstancy, and the dark side of male generativity. [56] No longer ideal or transcendent, hybrid sexualities were dangerously ambiguous and therefore unnatural. As Aristotle had established and Thomas Aquinas had affirmed, sex difference for Catholics was best understood in mutually exclusive, binary terms: women were emotional and irrational, men were endowed with reason and Stoical reserve. The policing of sexual difference was constitutive of early modern culture in its lived and representational forms. The gendered spaces of public and private and the power dynamics of sex difference were worked out in visual terms using the time-honored heuristics of top/bottom; right/left; active/passive; light/dark, dry/wet,

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[52] James Hall, *Michelangelo and the Reinvention of the Human Body* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2005), 172.

[53] Jacqueline Murray, "Agnolo Firenzuola on Female Sexuality and Women's Equality*," The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 22 (Summer, 1991), 207-208.

[54] The literature on early modern hermaphrodism is vast, but see for example, Kathleen Perry Long, "Sexual Dissonance: Early Modern Scientific Accounts of Hermaphrodites," in *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture,* Peter G. Platt, ed. (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 150. For a very useful survey of the Medieval and Renaissance sources on which early modern authors often based their interpretations of Ovid's myth, see Lauren Silberman, "Mythographic Transformations of Ovid's Hermaphrodite," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 19, (Winter, 1988): 643-652.

[55] Ibid.

[56] A dated but still useful bibliography on hermaphrodism in Donne and Spenser is provided in Lauren Silberman, as in No. 54 above. For hermaphrodism in early modern France, see Kathleen P. Long**,** *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006); see also, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, "Fetishizing Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 80-111.

and sun/moon which traced their origins to medicine, philosophy, and theology. Thus in the mutually constitutive arenas of faith, art, and philosophy, seventeenth-century Catholics—patrons and artists alike—were asked to accept a more rigorously categorical Thomistic Aristotelianism which brooked no equivocation on aesthetics.[57]

As I have already noted, Rubens's first trip to Rome corresponded with this epistemological shift, a second-phase of Counter-Reformation aesthetics that maintained adherents on both sides of a growing divide between post-Mannerist orthodoxy and proto-Baroque (re)invention. While some artists, most notably the Carracci, found success and in combining new styles and old themes, others, most notably Caravaggio, seemed to constantly encounter resistance if not outright hostility for doing so. As a foreign artist whose personal and artistic taste was characterized by an as yet undifferentiated appreciation for Italian art, the young Rubens seems to have chosen sides. He was inclined toward the antique sources and statues to which earlier Renaissance artists were drawn but he was also intrigued by Caravaggio's innovative naturalism and Veronese's elegant theatricality. Like Aquinas, Rubens was eager to reach a concord between pagan and Christian sources. But in this respect he resembled even more St. Augustine, who, living at a similarly determinative moment in the history of the Church, had written:

> […] all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome stories that involve unnecessary effort, which each one of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ's guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful moral instruction […].[58]

As long as a path to 'truth' or a moral conforming to Christian doctrine could be mined from the ancients—Augustine was particularly beholden to Plato and Plotinus—it was acceptable to look to the pre-Christian past for edification.

A telling example of Rubens's navigation of Post-Tridentine orthodoxy and his classical inclinations is his *Borghese Hermaphrodite* (c. 1608, Fig. 16) today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This spare sanguine drawing is one of several copies after the antique likely dating from Rubens's introduction to Cardinal Scipione Borghese, and one of two copies of the Hermaphrodite sculpture discovered in 1608, and today in the Louvre. Yet to contemplate the drawing's carefully delineated limbs is less to share Rubens's delight in remaking a celebrated and provocative work of art than to witness his wariness in the face of so problematic a creature.[59] In addition to employing a deceptively aerial, genital-concealing perspective, Rubens has rendered the fabric of the accompanying stone 'bed' sheet in an expressive though notational

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[57] Consistent with post-Tridentine Inquisitorial practices of surveillance and hearsay, "Aristotle in fact maintained that "hermaphrodites" (a term he would not have used, given its later coining) were truly either male or female (depending upon the predominance of their organs). He insisted that identification of the hermaphrodite's "real" (i.e., male or female) sex was entirely a matter of observation." Nederman and True, "Third Sex," 501.

[58] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, R.P.H. Green, trans. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 175.

[59] The attribution to Rubens of two versions of the Hermaphrodite sculpture today in the Louvre remains controversial. In his review of Marjon van der Meulen, *Rubens Copies after the Antique. Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard.* Part XXIII, 3 vols. (London and New York, 1994) in *Master Drawings*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Autumn, 1996), 309, Christopher White describes the artist's "tentative handling of the legs and neck," ultimately questioning the attribution to Rubens; he accepts as autograph the drawing in the British Museum.

manner, consistent with the style of drapery used for his female figures. Further, if we compare his drawing with the sculpture on which it is thought to be based (Fig. 14), Rubens has substantially distorted the tantalizing *contrapposto* of the original by straightening out the figure's pose and standing him/her on her/his side in order to offer an peculiarly aerial view both from the rear and more or less flush with the picture plane.[60]

How far we have come from Michelangelo's predecessor, the sculptor, Ghiberti, who described what must have been a very similar if not the same, sculpture, as lying "on top of the cloth turned in such a way to show both the male and female characteristics."[61] Rubens's drawing *does* in fact suggest these male characteristics with a pronounced forehead, angular jaw, and slightly knitted brow. And there is also an injection of masculine anatomy in the Hermaphrodite's bulbous bracing arm and well-defined right shoulder. Yet the raised (and partly invented) left arm is smoothly feminine, showing little muscle development or strain. It is the soft swell of the tactically exposed breast, the gathered and fastened hair, and the diminutive feet that seem to establish this Hermaphrodite as 'truly' female; truly at least, according to the Aristotelian standard of 'what you see is what you get.'

If Rubens was graphically ill at ease with the Platonic pansexuality and inchoate genders found in classical statues such as the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, Michelangelo's figure of *Night* was a manifest challenge to his notion of sex difference. Rubens evidently visited Florence for the time as part of the retinue of the Gonzaga dukes when his patrons attended the wedding of Marie de Medici and Henry IV, in 1600. The occasion would likely have provided him the opportunity to visit San Lorenzo in order to see Michelangelo's most famous Florentine commission. Given his access to the Medici tombs, it is interesting nonetheless, that Rubens seems not to have drawn Michelangelo's *Night*—or any other of the tomb figures—from 'life.' While the practice was far from unusual for him, Rubens chose instead to rework an existing study of Michelangelo's *Night* rather than make his own 'original' study.[62] A capable Italian drawing by an anonymous artist serves as the foundation for Rubens's revisionary drawing. The previous artist had begun by removing Michelangelo's massive reclining nude from her architectonic setting on Giuliano Medici's sepulchral pediment. Thus in approaching the nude drawing before him, removed from the context of her hallowed location, Rubens was all the more obliged to face the dreaded sexual ambiguity and genius of Michelangelo's artistic choices in the interest of his humanistic scholarly commitments.

The resulting image diverges more from Michelangelo's original than had Rubens's previous sculptural studies. It also offers a pronounced corrective of the figure's unseemly gender. Where Michelangelo has constructed an impossible female body whose grafted-on,

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[60] Despite the intervening decades, it is still rather astonishing that a copy of the *Hermaphrodite* was executed in Rome for the collection of Philip IV. Diego Velázquez had commissioned a bronze of the *Borghese Hermaphrodite* from Matteo Bonarelli during his stay in Rome from 1649-1650. On the Prado *Hermaphrodite*, see Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez, Painter and Courtier* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1986), 196.

[61] The translation is Elizabeth Holt's, quoted in Jacobs, "Aretino and Michelangelo," 57. As Jacobs points out, there were several known Roman copies—and four figure types—of the *Hermaphrodite*. The Louvre version was famously restored by Gianlorenzo Bernini—who added the much-debated stone mattress—in 1620. See Jacobs, as in No. 49 above, 65. The polemics surrounding Bernini's restoration affirm the controversial nature of the figure; by mid-century the rhetoric seems to have subsided.

[62] As Kristin Belkin remarks, "Art historians have not always recognized that many drawings after sixteenth-century Italian art that unmistakably show Rubens' imprint represent the work of other artists collected and retouched by him." (53). On Rubens's copies see especially, On Rubens's copy of *Night* see Belkin, Rubens, 54-55. See also Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy*, 20; Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, 21-65.

grapefruit breasts and miraculously tapering thighs do little to offset her strapping trapezius muscles, cornice-like brow, and disproportionately large, leonine nose, Rubens literally mollifies these features, softening *Night's* profile by adding flesh to her cheeks and giving her a smaller, more shapely nose. He also lessens the additive appearance of her breasts, replaces a rippling abdomen with a smoother, slightly protruding belly, and makes more delicate and readable the girlish braid that falls over *Night's* right shoulder. As if to further assure himself of *Night's* sex—while simultaneously demonstrating his powers of invention—Rubens proceeds to extend the drawing on all sides by including fully original, *imagined* views of the figure from the rear and side.[63] Intriguingly, the upper-body view at the drawing's left margin presents a more believably female body with a supple neck, sloping shoulders, and fleshier arms. The final product is nearly more Rubens than Michelangelo, a fact that has mainly to do with Rubens's insistence on what he may have viewed as the inescapable demands of anatomical—and philosophical—correctness.

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The gender binaries and dichotomous sex differences Rubens seems to have endorsed, were a radical departure from classical, and by extension, Renaissance, aesthetics of gender. Fredrika Jacobs has argued for a consciously articulated cinquecento predilection for the indefinably graceful beauty of gender ambiguity perceptible in some of the best-known works by Titian and Michelangelo wherein:

> […] the balancing of complementary components is acknowledged as giving way to a veritable medley of *merged*—not simply counterpoised—opposites. As Pietro Arentino and Lodovico Dolce observed, the desired female has a masculine body while the beloved hero possesses feminine features.[64]

But while instructive and compelling, the hermaphroditic sexuality of Titian's *Danae* (1544-46) or Michelangelo's *Venus Reclining with Cupid*, (1532-33) was clearly adversative to Rubens's conception of male—and female—beauty. A figure neither wholly and readably male nor female was beyond his ken. In this regard, the young Rubens would have conformed well the restrictive mentality of his own prohibitive age of inquisitions and indices, an age in which sexual ambiguity had decidedly negative moral implications.

Rubens as Reformer: Painting at the *Chiesa Nuova*

Indeed, it was the conservative cast of Rubens's intellectual outlook at the turn of the century, his fascination with antique visual culture and classical philology and philosophy that placed him among the vanguard of religious painters in Rome. His most high profile Italian commission for the Oratorian pilgrimage church of Santa Maria in Vallicella, popularly known as the *Chiesa*

[63] It has also been suggested that Rubens based the added drawings on a small plaster cast. See, Ludwig Burchard and R.-A. d'Hulst, *Rubens Drawings,* Vol. I (Brussels, 1963), 35. Also noted by Madlyn Kahr, "Delilah*," The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 54 (Sep., 1972), 294, No. 42.

[64] Fredrika Jacobs, "Aretino and Michelangelo," 52.

Nuova, was in every way a coup for a Northern artist, especially one relatively new to the challenging format of the painted altarpiece.[65] The Order's selection of the Gonzaga's court artist therefore acknowledges Rubens's appeal to a particular kind of cutting-edge Catholic patron, one for whom the novelty of massively scaled figures, free and expressive brushwork, and vitally 'natural' personifications would have seemed a most appropriate conduit for the earthy, egalitarian spirituality for which the Oratorians were known.[66]

Rubens's commission for the high altar of one of Rome's most important and artistically progressive congregational churches corresponds with the years in which he and his brother, Philip, were living together in the city and closely involved with the activities of Johann Faber and Gaspar Scioppius. Faber and Scioppius formed an important link between Rubens and the deeply learned humanist-cleric, Cardinal Cesare Baronius. Baronius, who had become the spiritual leader of the Oratorians after the death of their founder, Philip Neri, in 1595, was a man for whom the visual arts held an unmatched status as a tool of spiritual edification.

Second only to Eusebius in his renown as ecclesiastical historian, Baronius was the author of the *Annales ecclesiastici* (1588-1607)*,* a twelve volume history of the Church to 1198. Like that of Philip Neri, his version of reform was founded on the renewal of what he believed to be Primitive, or early Christian, praxis: frequent communion, hymns sung in the vernacular, and the involvement of laymen in the study and discussion of scripture.[67] Baronius advocated an archeological approach to church renovation and decoration, particularly when a martyr's relic or miraculous image was to be the devotional focus. He was also specially devoted to St. Gregory the great, the secondary titular saint of the church of Santa Maria and San Gregorio in Vallicella, as the *Chiesa Nuova* was properly known. The Gregorian connection is important, for it provided an important early Christian parallel for Baronius as a defender of images—and explains the seventh-century saint's striking prominence in Rubens's altarpiece.

The *Chiesa Nuova*, at the time one of Rome's newest large-scale churches, was begun in 1575 by Matteo di Città di Castello, completed by Martino Longhi and Giovan Battista Guerra, and consecrated in 1599.[68] For the church's Congregation of Oratorian Fathers, Rubens was contracted to paint:

> Gregory the Great, the Pope whose name had been added to that of the Madonna in the title of the church, in memory of the earlier foundation and the generosity to the present building of his namesake, Gregory XIII. On one side were to be the Roman martyrs, St. Papianus and the military St. Maurus, for whom reliquary heads in silver stood upon the altar. On the other was to stand St. Flavia Domitilla, niece to the Emperor Domitian, with her fellow martyrs, St Nereus and St. Achilleus, in attendance.[69]

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[65] The painter Barocci was said to have been the particular favorite of St. Philip Neri, the founder of the order. For the circumstances surrounding contemporary patronage of Italian artists, see Ian Verstegen,"Federico Barocci, Federico Borromeo, and the Oratorian Orbit," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 56 (Spring, 2003): 56-87. Caravaggio's commission, *the Entombment* (1604-5), with be discussed in chapter three.

[66] For Neri and the Oratorians, see for example, Louis Ponnelle, and Louis Bordet. *St. Philip Neri and the Roman Society of hisTimes:1515-1595*. Ralph Francis Kerr, trans. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932).

[67] For an excellent study of Baronius' conservative piety and historicism in practice, see Alexandra Herz, "Cardinal Cesare Baronio's Restoration of SS. Nereo ed Achilleo and S. Cesareo de'Appia," *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70 (Dec., 1988): 590-620.

[68] See Wittkower, *Art and Architecture*, Vol. I, 15; See also Paolo Montorsi et. al, *La Chiesa Nuova: La facciata, il Restauro: 1595-1995* (Milano: Gestedil, 1994).

[69] Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy*, 87. The contract (*Arch. Chiesa Nuova*, I fol. 318) is reproduced on 118-119, No. 14.

The altarpiece was to conform to the standard conventions of a sacred conversation, above which an accommodation would be made for the prized possession of the Oratorians, a holy image of the Madonna which was said to have healing properties. As Michael Jaffé and Justus Müller Hofstede have shown, Rubens made numerous, beautifully detailed preparatory drawings and modelli (see, e.g. Figs. 17, 18) through which the fine-tuned evolution of his two compositions—both the first version of the subject, now in Grenoble (Fig. 19) and the three painted slate panels by which it was replaced (Fig. 20)—can be traced.[70]

But despite the obvious creative energy Rubens invested in the Oratorian's altarpiece, the commission remains the single and most illustrative case of his failure to connect with the didactic and formal desiderata of his ecclesiastical patrons during the Italian years. Along with Federico Borromeo, also a devotee of the Oratory, St. Philip Neri was known as an embodiment of Catholic optimism. His democratic spirituality was grounded in everyday works and deeds motivated by Christian hope. Yet what the young Rubens would experience upon the completion and installation of a dazzling composition full of more color, life and material splendor than anything he had previously produced, was nothing less than wholesale rejection.

The protracted dealings between the painter and the exacting Fathers are politely recounted in Rubens's letters. The enterprise starts cheerfully enough. Before he has even begun to paint, Rubens refers with obvious satisfaction, to his "contract obtained so gloriously, against the pretentions of all the leading painters of Rome."[71] The following year, problems arise when his *de facto* patron, Giacomo Serra, an admirer of Rubens and Commissary General of the Papal States, is waylaid in Venice and, for unrelated reasons, the miraculous image cannot be transferred in a timely manner. By 1608, when the completed canvas fitted with the Madonna Vallecelliania has finally been put in place, (virtually) all obstacles seem to have been overcome from Rubens's standpoint:

> My painting has turned out very well, to the extreme satisfaction of the Fathers and also (which rarely happens) of all the others who first saw it. But the light falls so unfavorably on this altar that one can hardly see or discern the figures, or enjoy the beauty of coloring, and the delicacy of the heads and draperies, which I executed with great care, from nature, and completely successfully, according to the judgment of all.[72]

But the heretofore sticky transactions between painter and patron had also been memorialized (the previous month) by the Congregation of Oratorian Fathers who note in their *Decreti* of January 1608 that: "Having offered to redo the painting for the High Altar, inasmuch as what he

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[70] For a dialogical augmentation to Jaffé's early study (1964) of Rubens's commission for the *Chiesa Nuova*, in which the role of Rubens's Swiss study and its precedents are described, see Justus Müller Hofstede, "Rubens's First Bozzetto for Sta. Maria in Vallicella," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 106 (Oct., 1964): 442-452. Jaffé elaborates on many of Hofstede's points in *Rubens and Italy* (1977), 85-99.

[71] Rubens to Annibale Chieppio, Rome, December 2, 1606, No. 14 in *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 39. See also Nos. 14, 16, 17, 18. The precise circumstances of the commission were established by Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy,* 85-99. See also Hans Vleighe, *Saints*, Vol. II, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard (New York: Phaidon, 1973), 43-58.

[72] Rubens to Annibale Chieppio, Rome, February 2, 1608, Magurn, *Letters*, No. 17.

has done has not pleased," Rubens has summarily agreed to address the concerns of his displeased patrons.[73]

It is impossible to know whether the reason given, namely, that conditions of 'unfavorable light' prevented the proper viewing of Ruben's canvases, was the sole (or actual) motive fore the rejection his initial altarpiece by the Oratorian fathers. Substantial differences between the first and second versions suggest the patrons' concerns may also have been related to Rubens's urbane painterly style and sense—or lack—of decorum.

The portrayal of the altarpiece's male saints (Cf. Figs. 19, 20) is markedly different in the two versions. And most relevant to our purposes, Rubens seems to have spent a disproportionate amount of time imagining and revising the altarpiece's sole full-length female figure, the martyred Roman noblewoman, Domitilla, of whom he made two detailed pen and ink studies now in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 17) and Montpellier (Fig. 21).

The altarpiece underwent several changes with regard to the sightlines, relative visibility, and interrelatedness of the five male saints and their single female companion. In the version today *in situ*, only the stately, nearly frontal figure of St. Maurus meets the worshipper with a direct gaze, his virile, armor-clad body having been turned out and slightly forward of the elderly yet dynamic St. Gregory in an almost protective manner. A formerly naked Papianus is clothed in the revised design. While, once brilliantly attired in Marian ultramarine, lavender and gold, the bare-armed St. Domitilla who looks out from the first canvas has been replaced, in the second, by a less anachronously settecento and decidedly older-looking saint. Reconceived the second time around as a staid Roman princess, Domitilla is crowned with a royal diadem and modestly swathed from head to toe in glacial blue and gray-mauve silks.

This more mature role model looks not to the beholder—who might have mistaken her predecessor's fashionably colorful contemporary dress, cascading curls, and inviting eye-contact as an act of seduction—but instead raises her eyes reverently heavenward. Nor, as she stands safely buttressed by her devoted eunuchs Nereus and Achilleus, the aging male saints made far more prominent in the second version, does the corrected Domitilla's gesture any longer recall the putative modesty of the Medici Venus. In the reworked design by contrast, she, like her four male companions, conspicuously proffers a dry palm frond, the symbol of their shared honor as Christian martyrs. Though subtle in some respects, each of these shifts in gesture, attire, and figural grouping serves to chasten Rubens's female saint, from whom the beholder's connection has also been severed in order that he or she might be soldiered into sacred conversation by a less problematic symbol of virtue and strength.

At precisely this time, as is well known, Rubens was in the process of securing, presumably of his own initiative, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin* (Fig. 22, c. 1601-1605) for the collection of the Duke of Mantua.[74] That the Flemish artist should highly esteem Caravaggio's profoundly dissimilar devotional style attests to both his own developing tastes and the disconnect between what he admired and how he painted. Rubens was clearly intrigued by Caravaggio's preternatural lighting and Lombard color; he seems also to have admired the frank emotionalism of the older artist's fresh-faced pages and earthy saints.[75]

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[73] Quoted in Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy*, 91.

[74] Ibid., 91. After its final exhibition Rome in April of 1607, Caravaggio's painting was entrusted to Rubens's supervision for packing. For correspondence relating to the negotiation and purchase of the painting for the Gonzaga, see also Rooses-Ruelens, (CDR) I: 362ff.

[75] For the positive critical reception of the artist as colorist see Janis C. Bell, "Some Seventeenth-Century Appraisals of Caravaggio's Color," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 14 (1993): 103-129.

Rubens must also have known that Caravaggio's recent rejection by ecclesiastical patrons was but one of many.[76]

For the more censorial Italian reformers, a woman's body, regardless of her social standing or identity, was a suspiciously fungible carrier of meaning. About a decade later, in 1619, Caravaggio's pale and swollen Virgin *in transitus* would be reviled by the papal physician-critic Giulio Mancini for having as a model the corpse of a 'meretrice sozza' (dirty prostitute). [77] Taking into account contemporary ideals of beauty and comportment, Rubens's first Domitilla has far more of the prostitute about her than does Caravaggio's 'sleeping' Mary. "I have many dresses of gold and velvet, and silk worked with precious stones and pearls," sings the 'Courtesan of Ferrara' in a line from a popular verse documented in the Italian popular press throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries.[78] It is telling that in these two legendarily 'unsuccessful' altarpieces such convincingly realized embodiments of female sensuality— full of life on the one hand and unmistakably lifeless on the other—seem to have introduced a dangerous and untenable note of impropriety. It may also be relevant that in both cases the paintings (commissioned for and by male religious communities: the Oratorians and Discalced Carmelites) depict female figures surrounded by men.[79]

In any case, reflective of his courtly formation to date, Rubens's altarpiece for the Oratorians brims with genteel elegance and an ornamental, even secularized, devotional style. His transcendent assembly is in no way as psychologically provocative as the polychromatic and unnervingly surreal altarpieces devised by a previous generation of Italian mannerists. [80] Nor is it as rigorously doctrinal as the chary and didactic devotional works sanctioned by post-Tridentine cleric-theorists such as Rubens's countryman, Johannes Vermeulen (Molanus). Borrowing from Erasmus, the latter in his *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum* (1594) had underscored the artist's moral responsibility in depicting sacred subjects—and women:

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[76] "In 1600 the first versions of his paintings of the *Conversion of Saint Paul* and the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* for the Cerasi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo were rejected, only to be purchased by the Marchese Giacomo Sanesio, and just two years later, in 1602, Caravaggio's altarpiece of *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*, rejected by the clerics at San Luigi dei Francesi, was snapped up by the outstanding connoisseur and collector, Vincenzo Giustiniani." (298), for which see, Keith Christiansen's review of *Caravaggio's 'Death of the Virgin'* by Pamela Askew in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 55 Bd., H. 2 (1992): 297-302.

[77] The phrase appears in Giulio Mancini, *Consideratione sulla pittura* (1619), trans. Catherine Puglisi, *Caravaggio,* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 413, quoted in Todd Olson, "Caravaggio's Coroner: Forensic Medicine in Giulio Mancini's Art Criticism," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 28 (Feb., 2005), 87. On the dating of Caravaggio's painting and the circumstances of its commission and rejection see, N. Randolph Parks, "On Caravaggio's 'Dormition of the Virgin' and Its Setting," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 127 (Jul., 1985): 438- 448; see also Pamela Askew, *Carravaggio's 'Death of the Virgin,'* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990).

[78] Tessa Storey, "Clothing Courtesans: Fabrics, Signals, and Experiences," in *Clothing Culture: 1350-1650*, ed. Catherine Richardson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 96.

[79] Mary Magdalen, a kneeling figure who hides her face, is the only additional female in Caravaggio's painting.

[80] One thinks, in the first case, of the enigmatically fraught emotionalism of the *Deposition/Entombments* of Pontormo and Rosso, and in the second case, of the soberly naturalistic Bolognese tradition (presided over by the aforementioned Paleotti), the chief practitioners of which were the Carracci, as well as Ludovico Cigoli, Prospero and Lavinia Fontana. On Italian Mannerism, see, for example, John Shearman, *Mannerism,* (London: Penguin, 1967); Hessel Miedema, "On Mannerism and Maniera," *Simiolus,* Vol. 10, (1978-1979): 19-45, see also Walter Friedlander, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting*, (New York: Schocken, 1967 (rpt. 1957), esp. 47-68. See also, Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism. The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modem Art* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1965). Friedlander (82-83) concludes his study with a coda on Rubens as the "northern artist who surpassed all Italian artists of this period, even Caravaggio, in quality and strength of perception."

> All the more grievous is the sin of those who introduce shamelessness into subjects that are chaste by nature. Why is it necessary to depict in a church David looking at Bathsheba from a window and luring her into adultery? Or embracing the Shunamite brought to him? Or the daughter of Herodias dancing? The subjects are taken from Holy Scripture, but how much wickedness the artists add in portraying the lewd women![81]

For Molanus it is beside the point that Bathsheba, here equated with Salome, was in no way culpable for David's fateful leers, or that *he* forced *her* into adultery; what matters is that the mere introduction of an unavoidably 'lewd' woman threatens to transform a sacred image into a profane one.[82] Relevant in this regard is the initial presence and subsequent excision of a second female saint usually assumed to be St. Petronilla from Rubens's evolving body of sketches for the altarpiece.[83]

Indeed, in Caravaggio's staging of the Virgin's death, the lone female body amid the circle of apostolic onlookers participates to some extent in the voyeurism of (representations of) both the lecherous David—and the notorious elders who spied on Susanna—as well as Vesalian dissections performed on female cadavers by and before an 'audience' of male doctors.[84] Ever anxious that the uneducated or overly secularized beholder would not receive an image in the manner it was (or should be) intended, Paleotti had longed for Catholic beholders whose eyes had been properly "purged."[85] From the standpoint of his generation of reformers—given the morally perilous progression of looking, nakedness, and sexual desire—the translation of anatomical or scientific accuracy into the vernacular of painterly naturalism was a dangerous undertaking, especially in an ecclesiastical setting. Yet only a few years before the submission of Rubens's failed altarpiece (1604-5), Caravaggio's arresting *Entombment*, which so violently captures the profound impact of one man's death in the life of a Christian community, was installed a side chapel frequently used by the Oratorians for the mass of the dead. When one considers that the pious and orthodox Cesare Baronius mentioned above, is perhaps the most likely source of the altarpiece's design, it is easy to see that Rubens's ebullient figures, who seem to have strolled out of a local theatrical production rather than a dank catacomb, would have conflicted with the patristic sobriety the Cardinal (d.1607) and his followers had envisioned.[86]

But Rubens's missteps with the Oratorians and more resoundingly, his inability to successfully broker the sale of his refused Vallicella canvas to his own devoted patron, Vincenzo Gonzaga, indicate that he may not at first have been entirely in tune with the Roman devotional

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[81] Quoted in David Freedberg, "Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings: *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum*, Book II, Chapter 42," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 34, 241. The reference is to Erasmus's *Institutio Matrimonii Christiani*, *Opera* v, col 719 B-E. Johannes Vermeulen (1533-1585) professor of theology and editor of St. Augustine, was a canon at St. Peter's, Louvain.

[82] For an analysis of the deceits perpetrated on Bathsheba by David, including his violation of her wedlock and subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah, see David Marcus, "David the Deceiver and David the Dupe," *Prooftexts,* Vol. 6 (May, 1986), 164-167.

[83] Justus Müller Hofstede, "Rubens's First Bozzetto for Sta. Maria in Vallicella," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 106 (Oct., 1964), 446-447.

[84] The point is alluded to in Olson, "Caravaggio's Coroner," 89-90.

[85] See Jones, "Art Theory as Ideology,"130-135.

[86] Baronius's involvement was proposed by Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy*, 87. For further bibliography see also Frances Huemer, *Rubens and the Roman Circle* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), 92-94.

climate.[87] While Caravaggio was often able to find eager private buyers for his dismissed and even openly attacked paintings, Rubens was unable to attract a buyer, after the fact, for what remains one of his most accomplished though also inarguably Venetianesque altarpieces. Perhaps it was not only the off-putting reflection of the light on the original canvas but also Rubens's glaring errors of judgment and newly seductive painterly style—what he himself described as the "beauty of coloring, and the delicacy of the heads and draperies" so jarringly applied to what was meant to be a sobering if uplifting visual martyrology, that caught his rigorous Roman patrons off guard.

[87] See Rubens's *Letters,* Nos. 14, 16, 17, 18. It is worth noting that the Gonzaga Duke was not averse to purchasing works of art reckoned unfit by ecclesiastical patrons, for it was under these circumstances that Rubens himself had procured Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin* (rejected by *S. Maria della Scala*) for Mantua. It has been suggested that another of Rubens's 1611 altarpieces, *The Real Presence of the Holy Sacrament*, though initially intended for St. Walburga, was (similarly) rejected for doctrinal reasons and reassigned (and reconfigured) as a portico altarpiece for a chapel under the auspices of the Dominican order. See Cynthia Lawrence, "Before The Raising of the Cross: The Origins of Rubens's Earliest Antwerp Altarpieces," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 81 (Jun., 1999), 280.

CHAPTER TWO

Love and Marriage: Allegorical Desire and the Dyadic Pair

> And Dalila then so dallied with Sampson that she made him lie a sleepe vpon her knees, and whilest he lay downe his head in her lappe, and was a sleepe, she caused a man that she had readie for the purpose to come and shaue off the seuen lockes of the haire of his head, whereby she began to vexe his soule and his strength was quite gone from him: not so much for the losse of his haire, but for the contempt of the ordinaunce of God, whiche was the cause that God departed from him. Then hauing wrought her feate, she after her accustomed maner, cryed vnto him and saide: The Philistines are vpon thee Sampson, the Philistines are vpon thee. And with that hee awoke out of his sleepe, and thinking to escape them nowe as hee had done before, he shooke himselfe: But knowing not that the Lord was departed from him, he had no power or strength left to flie away: and therefore the Princes of the Philistines then tooke him and bound him hand and foote nowe at the last, and put out his eyes, and carried him away bounde in fetters to Azzah, where they made him a slaue to grinde in the prison house. And thus Sampsons inordinate affection towards a wicked woman caused him to loose Gods excellent giftes, and became a slaue vnto them, whom hee should haue ruled. Where wee see howe dangerous a thing it is, for any man or woman to giue place too much to our affections, for if we doe, without doubt we shall be sure to be destroyed, as Sampson was by Dalila, who thus by wicked daliance betraid him to the Philistines for money. *Iudg. 16.4. &c*[1]

The reclining anti-heroine of Rubens's *Samson and Delilah* (Fig. 1), painted around 1609, is often thought to derive from his reworked chalk drawing of Michelangelo's *Night*.[2] As a modernized and moralizing elaboration on the endlessly popular Renaissance topos of the sleeping nymph or reclining Venus, Rubens's Delilah undoubtedly appeals to the same tradition Michelangelo helped establish. Yet compositional changes introduced by Rubens, such as the transformation of the somnolent *Night's* inward and melancholic closure into the falsely tender openness of cunning Delilah, underscore the moral message of the biblical story. Illicit sexual encounters only hasten one's undoing; for men and women alike, coming together can mean coming apart. Thus whereas the 'one-sexed' *Night* is compositionally and narratively sufficient, *Delilah* is only Delilah with Samson in the picture.[3] In this sense it is more appropriate to relate Rubens's *Delilah* to Michelangelo's lost tempera painting of *Leda and the Swan*, (1529-31), now known only from copies and a print (Fig. 2), and of which Rubens painted two similar versions sometime around 1600-1602 (Fig. 3). Michelangelo's overtly erotic pairing of beauty and beast exists as the perfect middle term between Rubens's corrected version of *Night* in a reworked drawing and his *Samson and Delilah*. Here as in the reworked drawing, Rubens has softened, and one might say un-idealized, Leda's features rendering her that much more believably human. Even such subtle additions as the loose tendrils of hair at the nape of Leda's dephallicized neck, and the elongation of her heavy lidded, more almond-shaped eyes, result in a massive yet indubitably *feminine* female form. Leda's bare feet, their soles vulnerably exposed and toes arched, are also echoed in *Delilah*, whose bowed head, high, round breasts and erect nipples find their source in Leda as well. None of which is to ignore, as many have, the inversely compromising positions of the avian Jupiter and the sleeping Samson. It is the latter whose

[1] Thomas Bentley, *The Sixth Lamp of Virginitie, Conteining a Mirror for Maidens and Matrons* (London, 1582), 141.
[2] See for example, Madlyn Kahr, "Delilah*," The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 54 (Sep., 1972), 294.
[3] Although Night's arm does not resemble Delilah's there are formal similarities between her raised arm and that of Rubens's reconstructed *Borghese Hermaphrodite*, whose pose differs markedly from that of the original sculpture.

pitiable obliviousness finds a parallel in the poet Michelangelo's nocturnal prosopopoeia. Vasari quotes the poem as the master's wistful response to one of the many versified tributes to his sculpture for the Medici tombs:

> Dear to me is sleep, and dearer to be of stone while wrongdoing and shame prevail; not to see, not to hear, is a great blessing: so do not awaken me; speak softly.[4]

These fateful lines might be spoken just as easily by the Old Testament strongman as the androgynous Platonic personification. Yet in Samson's case the loss of sight was no blessing. It is, instead, metaphorically punitive, a graphic figuration of his causal, blameworthy—and self-inflicted—spiritual blindness.

In the biblical account, therefore, this monumental male is far from flawless. In fact, the story of Samson and Delilah—unlike the soon-to-be more popular biblical exemplum of Judith and Holofernes, also essentially the tale of a strong man's undoing by a single-minded woman—leaves neither character unindicted. As the epigraph's biblical commentator suggests: if Delilah was sinfully covetous of money, Samson was fatally covetous of her. Despite the moral ambiguity of its hero, however, the story of Samson and Delilah, had long formed a part of a larger series portraying the devious 'Powers of Women (Fig. 4), other examples of which included Phyllis riding a humiliated Aristotle and Hercules tricked into cross-dressing and spinning by an oversexed Omphale.'[5] As a sacred story with secular appeal, Samson and Delilah offered Rubens the perfect context in which to advance a moralized account not only of sex difference but also of sexuality and the inherent, perhaps even inevitable, weakness displayed by men and women continually besieged by their inordinate affections.

Ripe for eroticization, the story already implies the role of irresistible female wiles, greed, and unbridled passion in Samson's earthly downfall—as well as Delilah's seeming triumph. In Judges 16, we read that Samson was "enticed" by the woman Delilah, who has agreed to discover the source of his strength at the behest of a group of Philistines, each of whom has promised to pay her 'eleven hundred pieces of silver.' Madlyn Kahr has mapped the graphic tradition of 'Samson and Delilah' imagery, which has roots in Burgundian manuscripts and was mobilized for both secular and religious ends by early Northern Renaissance master-engravers such as Dürer and Lucas van Leyden as well as the their Italian contemporaries such as Andrea Mantegna (Fig. 5).[6] But while Rubens was certainly familiar with this genre of generally small-scale images, his composition departs from the reigning graphic paradigm in important ways.

The nocturnal setting and cave-like, intimately domestic interior are two novel aspects of the Flemish painting. For just as the Edenic environs of the double portrait with Isabella Brant of the same year (also the subject of this chapter) encourage its conflation with imagery of Adam and Eve, the portrayal of a woman simultaneously in control of her man and confined within the walls of a candle-lit contemporary 'bedroom' easily evokes the dangerous spaces of the brothel. Rubens may have arrived at this solution from the text itself, which opens with Samson's visit to

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[4] Cited in Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists,* Julia Connaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, trans. (Oxford: Oxford UP), 369.

[5] See for example, Philip Galle's six-part engraving "The Might of the Woman" c. 1605, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, illustrated in Ann Tzeutschler Lurie, "Gerard van Honthorst: Samson and Delilah," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Ar*t, Vol. 56 (Nov., 1969), 333.

[6] Kahr, "Delilah*,"* 282-299.

a "harlot" in Gaza, with whom he lays until midnight. In any case, it is the soon-to-be violated comfort of Delilah's luxe lair—conspicuously displaying a 'pagan' statue of *Venus and Cupid* and richly laid with textiles—that suggests her occupation as a lady of the night. The presence of a haglike 'procuress' and ephebic male servant resolve any doubts the viewer might have about Delilah's profession. With this established Rubens is free to depict Delilah in a wanton state of undress, contrasting her plump and luminous décolletage with Samson's sun-kissed and phallic arm. The portrayal of Delilah in this manner is significant for Rubens, who with a mercenary courtesan in mind, (unknowingly) concocts the first version of the bare-breasted woman in a red dress, who will continually reappear in his future works as an symbol of emotive femininity literally spilling over its material constraints.[7]

In the pictorial time of Rubens's image, the scene is captured toward the end rather than in the middle of the action. Samson has "told Delilah all his heart" and she now entreats him to "sleep upon her knees." The textual specificity of this description explains the figural arrangement unanimously adopted by early modern artists, all of whom portray an upright Delilah hovering over a prostrate or reclining Samson. Although Rubens is no exception in this regard, his quasi-nude Samson, whose rippling, almost topographically descriptive back occupies the center of the composition, is, I think, unprecedented.

It has been suggested that Rubens's sleeping behemoth is based on the Roman statue known as the *Farnese Hercules* (Fig. 6), whose mythological subject shared notable biographical and physiological similarities with his Old Testament type.[8] Both Hercules and Samson were emasculated by women, Omphale and Delilah, respectively; both men's solidity and strength is metaphorically symbolized by the pillars which factor in their narratives—positively for Hercules, who erects a pair of columns at the successful conclusion of his tenth labor, and negatively, for the martyred Samson, who uses brute force to bring down the pillars supporting the house of his enemy—killing himself in the process. Though Hercules boasts a longer and more elaborate litany of awe-inspiring feats and near-disasters, Samson, in the words of a nineteenth-century biblical scholar, "is the muscular, intrepid, religious, rollicking Hercules of sacred story."[9] Discovered in 1546, the Farnese Hercules was still something of a novelty when Rubens reached Italy in 1600. For him, the Roman statue's blockish head, lavishly curled beard, pugnacious features and chiefly, his brawny physique, would easily have provided a compelling exemplar for a colossal scriptural personage such as Samson.

It is plausible, moreover, that Rubens might have intended to suggest the latent fortitude, and even the inward mettle, of his wayward, sleeping giant. But the 'leaning' Hercules, as the Farnese sculpture is sometimes called, seems only vaguely related to the prostrate, enervated Samson, who remains asleep in Delilah's lap in a state of "postcoital repletion."[10] The ancient sculpture, conversely, depicts the tired but triumphant Hercules following the completion of his labors: still standing and, miraculously, not yet spent. Any formal consonance between the two figures lies in their similar facial features and the exaggerated musculature and rigor of their

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[7] See, for example, the nursing woman in the side panel of the Antwerp *Raising of the Cross* (1611); the red-dressed woman in the London *Massacre of the Innocents* (1611)*; Juno* in the Munich *Juno and Argus* (1611).

[8] See Jeffrey Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art*,*" *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 64, (Jun., 1982), 236. Rubens made a black chalk drawing of the Farnese Hercules now in the Ambrosiana, Milan as well as several other studies, for which see Julius Held, *Selected Drawings* (London: Phaidon, 1959).

[9] George Dana Boardman, "The Story of Samson," *The Old Testament Student*, Vol. 8 (Nov., 1888), 88.

[10] *Drawn by the Brush: Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens*, Peter C. Sutton and Marjorie Wieseman with Nico van Hout, eds. (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2004).

overlong arms, details that carry through from Rubens's preparatory pen and ink drawings and oil sketches to the final painting.[11]

In the figure of Samson, for iconographical as well as aesthetic reasons, Rubens has clearly settled on a distillation of sheer physicality in the form of muscular definition and the strength it implies—even in a state of rest. In this regard, Rubens's Herculean Samson bears a strong but, I believe, heretofore unacknowledged, resemblance to two studies of the same year known as the 'Kneeling Man' (Museum Boijmans, Rotterdam) and the Louvre 'Crouched Man Lifting a Heavy Object.' (Figs. 7, 8). Scholars have suggested that these sheets were drawn by the artist in his studio 'from life,' in the modern, literal sense, that is, with a live model in view.[12] Yet, as Catherine Lusheck points out in an illuminating study of the rhetorical nature of these two graphic and 'glyphic' works, Rubens was of an ambivalent if not antagonistic mindset where live models were concerned.[13] In the words of a contemporary English art writer, Edward Norgate: "Sir Peter Paul Rubens told me that at his being in Italy diverse of his nation had followed the Academy course for 20 years together to little or no purpose."[14] Toward the achievement of the robust male nude in particular, Rubens seems to have valued the imitation of art more highly than the imitation of life.[15] For him as for Michelangelo, a dynamic figure evocative of male activity, poignantly constrained by artifice yet always implicitly about to spring forth or erupt, such as the *Prophet Ezekiel* (Fig. 9) or the *Torso Belvedere* on which he is based, would have served as a worthy model for a vigorously compressed and forceful male nude.[16] As such, the Boijmans sketch and the Louvre 'Crouching Man,' single figure studies that might just as well have been executed after a model in Rome or Florence—or heightened and reworked based on an extant drawing—crystallize Rubens's interest in what might be termed synecdochal masculinity.

Synecdochal masculinity does not pretend to individuality, as does, for example, Van Dyck's 'Kneeling Man Seen from Behind,' also widely, and it seems, rightly, considered to be based on a studio model (Fig. 10).[17] While healthy, male, and nominally active, the body in Van Dyck's drawing can hardly be described as 'robust' or 'vigorous.' The understated rendition of the figure's exertion in terms of muscular reaction and movement, especially when compared to the Boijmans 'Kneeling Man,' whom he more closely resembles, vividly underscores the 'pumped up' artificiality and visual hyperbole of Rubens's male nudes. Nor could any single body part of Van Dyck's almost unsympathetically human kneeling man encapsulate all that he is.

In Rubens's sheet, the long, strong, arm and the almost architectonic, weight-bearing back are parts that imply or stand for the whole. Anatomy as iconographical attribute is one way to understand Rubens's rhetorical approach. Thus in an imagined figure such as Samson-

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[11] See in particular, Rubens's highly finished oil sketch for *Samson and Delilah*, c. 1609, Cincinnati Art Museum; and the pen and ink wash drawing in a Private Collection, Amsterdam, illustrated *in Drawn by the Brush*, 90-91.
[12] See Catherine Lusheck, "Content in Form: Rubens's Kneeling Man and the Graphic Reformation of the Ideal, Robust Male Nude," *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (2000), 129.
[13]Ibid., 129-131. The author cites the English writer Edward Norgate, whose *Art of Limning,* published c. 1648, some twenty years after its dedication, indicates that "Rubens dismissed this practice, followed by many of his Flemish compatriots as a waste of time and effort for the best artists." (129)
[14] Edward Norgate, MS Haarlem 60000 (London, British Museum), fol. V12, in *Miniatura or the Art of Limining*, ed. And trans., Jeffrey M. Muller and Jim Murrell, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997) quoted in Lushek, op cit., 130.
[15] See Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art," 232-235.
[16] The history of these statues and their fortunes in Renaissance art and thought are deftly elucidated by David Summers, "Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 59 (Sep., 1977): 336-361.
[17] Discussed in another context in Lusheck, "Content in Form,"129, and 132, No. 9.

Hercules, the massively articulated arm becomes a synecdoche not only of the man in question but of manhood itself. Conspicuous in the two chalk studies as well as the painting is the structural presence of Samson's enormous and simian-looking hand, the fists or knuckles of which serve to balance the weighty body like the foot of a tripod. Whether the robust male in question is literally or figuratively in a state of inactivity, his tensed muscles and bulging veins remain a constant; an implicit claim to the figure's innate might. In a culture where paintbrushes were likened to penises, it is not necessary to repair to the commonplaces of psychoanalysis to consider the possibility that in Samson and the kneeling, crouching men, Rubens implies the presence of one male member through the prominence of another.

As Lusheck has noted, in Rubens's oeuvre, some body parts in particular are endowed with an "expressive power," even though, "Rubens did not locate this male potentiality primarily in the genitalia, but in other massive, highly visible sites of the male body, particularly the muscles of the shoulders, legs, arms, and back."[18] How else to read the arm's position as it plunges through Delilah's vermillion folds? Which begs the question: Did Rubens also conceive of femininity in a similarly synecdochal manner? In the most obvious sense this was unnecessary, for the portrayal of women's breasts, the external marker of difference with which the sex as a whole is most frequently associated, was well within the bounds of representational decorum (one thinks, for example, of 'Bosom' an inescapably female Dickensian character whose sufficiently evocative name is used an example in contemporary dictionary definitions of synecdoche).

Here however, Rubens goes one further. In addition to offering his beholders a bared breast sensually framed and delimited by a double-strap of ribbon, he proceeds to transform Delilah's dress, lavished with at least as much tactile descriptiveness and care as Samson's musculature, into a surrogate or symbol of her sex and his sexual entrapment. But whereas Delilah's Petrarchan palette and enticing breasts betray both the secret of her success and the error of her ways, Samson's nudity is proposed by the artist as revelatory and redemptive. Despite a moment of weakness, when stripped down to essentials, stalwart Samson is 'actually' an invincible—and Christ-like—hero. Faced with the ethical dilemma of Samson's suicide, St. Jerome may have been the first to posit this typological connection, arguing, as in a paraphrase by the Elizabethan divine, George Abbot:

> Samson slue more at his death, then he did in all his life time, so Christ although while he liued, he gaue many a wound to Satan, by his miracles and his doctrine, yet it was his death and his suffering, that broke the back of hell and the verie heart of Satan.[19]

With his dangling, perpendicular arm, Rubens's Samson bears a passing resemblance to a deposed or entombed Christ in this respect; one thinks of Titian's Entombment of 1559-60, for example (Fig. 11). But although in the story from Judges, it is Samson who has been broken, Rubens's Herculean back gives little indication of this to the admiring beholder. Conversely, Delilah, pinned on her back by Samson, assumes her rightful position as a beautiful and unredeemed whore. Her dangerous—because superficial—feminine beauty, quite unlike

[18] Ibid., 142.
[19] George Abbot, *An Exposition on the Prophet Ionah contained in certain Expositions* (Oxford, 1600), 133.

Samson's block-like masculine solidity, functions as disguise rather than metaphor.[20] One is hardly surprised that a woman like Delilah has been—and will be —bought for a price.

Rubens's painting was in fact purchased shortly after completion by Antwerp's Burgomaster, Nicolas Rockox. The civic-minded Rockox, like Rubens, an antiquarian and avid collector, became one of the artist's most devoted patrons. In the engaging kunstkammer by Frans Francken (Fig. 12), painted some twenty years after the completion of Samson and Delilah, Rubens's artistic supremacy is made clear by the painting's physical dominance over the collector's otherwise quite impressive assemblage of old masters. Rubens is identified here as the new master for a new age. His Italianate history painting seems deeply at home in a genre scene whose merrymaking men and women come dangerously close to violating the supposed message of *Samson and Delilah*: that unchecked sensual pleasures lead all too quickly to disaster.

That an anomalously Italianate painting some two decades old sets the tone in scene intended to celebrate the patron's good taste says a great deal about Rubens's status not only as one of the greatest Baroque painters, but as one of the first Baroque artists. A subject frequently depicted and popularized by Northerners, *Samson and Delilah* demonstrates the degree to which Rubens was capable of appropriating Central Italian artistic idioms in the service of a cosmopolitan new kind of art for Flanders. The allegorical or metaphysical impulse to which Rubens continually responds anew, is, I think, the most important and fertile aspect of the Baroque.

Thus, as we have seen, the quasi-nude, Christological Hercules offers so persuasive an apology for masculine inviolateness that the beholder is virtually unable to 'read' the robust Samson as the tricked, emasculated whoremonger he truly is. Contrarily, the figure of Delilah, channeled through two of Michelangelo's best known works—the sculpted *Night* and the painted *Leda*—has become less a historically significant individual woman than an allegorical or symbolic vessel devised to contain and perform a certain type of femininity that is itself agentially fluid and confounding. Read backward to the Renaissance, Rubens's irresistible Delilah is Leda, the mother of Helen and a queenly beauty in her own right who according to Ovid, was "deceived by the swan."[21] Read forward to the Counter Reformation, the bare-breasted, white-shouldered seductress might be the iconic fallen woman and reputed prostitute, Mary Magdalene.

But despite the frisson of his images Michelangelo remains safely at a distance from heteronormative intercourse. Nor does his ambiguously gendered duo confront any of the real-world woman questions posed by Rubens's painting. Nowhere in Michelangelo's related images are the powers of actual female actors at stake, or even at issue. In fact, Michelangelo's own peculiar confrontation of the subject, his chalk drawing of *Samson and Delilah* (Fig. 13) probably dating from around the early stages of the Medici chapel sculptures, confirms the ways in which he and Rubens differ in their figuration of morality. For while it seems likely that Michelangelo understood Samson as a powerful victim, a man unjustly brought low by his own lustful appetites, the Italian artist is hard pressed to convey the plausibility of this narrative through the pixie-like figure of Delilah. Seemingly wary of giving the woman on top any real

[20] Leaves from Rubens's 'Pocket Book' display his experimentation with geometrized Herculean forms, most notably iterations of cubed heads and bodies derived from antique marbles. See Jaffé, *Rubens*, pls. 281, 283. See also Lusheck, "Content in Form," 150.

[21] The full passage is "Leda makes Jove my father, deceived by the Swan, false bird she cherished in her trusting bosom." Ovid, *Heroides*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977), 229.

control, Michelangelo concocts an asymmetry of scale reminiscent of his lost Cupid and Venus (again known mainly from a copy, in this case by Pontormo, Fig. 14).

If there is a sexual charge to Michelangelo's Samson, it remains predictably situated in the exposed genitals of his angry but appropriately placid, shorn giant, who has just awakened to find himself powerless. Such a literal representation of Samson's masculinity is, as we have seen, at odds with Rubens's more figurative, more relational, and arguably more rhetorically fulfilling approach. While Rubens's hero is no less muscular or ostensibly potent, his plight is rendered more acceptable, even logical, by Delilah's tangible, or at least material, allure. In this respect, *Samson and Delilah* marks a key shift in Rubens toward naturalism in the philosophical sense, that is, as (painterly) observation of human nature. From this point forward, one sees Rubens activating allegorical signification not merely in the single, stand-alone personification, but through physical and psychological relationships between and among evocative figures. Indeed, as Svetlana Alpers has shown, the dyadic pairing in particular, will remain one of his most vital modes of expression.

But the rather abrupt emergence in Rubens's art of the complementary, if asymmetrical, two-sex model and its conception in the transposable form of the signifying couple is, I think, far from coincidental. In 1609, the same year he painted *Samson and Delilah*, Rubens married his first wife, Isabella Brant, the mother of three subsequent children, and a woman whom he described on the occasion of her early death some years later as "an excellent companion who had no feminine weakness, but was all goodness and honesty."

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Like similar legends of the woman on top *Samson and Delilah* is a cautionary tale—at least from a male perspective. Despite their story's 'unhappy' endings, however, the women whose actions shape these narratives are as central as the men whom the misfortunes befall. Rubens understood this; his struggle in these early encounters with 'bad' women is to find a way to simultaneously demonstrate and curtail their power. The distillation of linear narrative into a kind of psychologized, embodied allegory and the representation of the actors in a more naturalistic style provided an admirably inventive conceptual solution. Contemporary art history, in choosing to ignore the interpictorial/intertextual purchase of female anti-heroines, however immoral or lascivious, has tended to see these defining early works and the altarpieces to follow, principally as evidence of Rubens's unswerving devotion to the ontological supremacy, aesthetic superiority, and communicative possibilities of the male nude. With respect to Rubens's identifiable conceptual concerns and artistic production, however, such one sidedness is misleading. From an iconographical standpoint, the elision of Delilah-Leda is no less significant than that of Samson-Hercules.

If as Lusheck writes: "Rubens's robust males proved the most prominent and memorable figure types to which the artist turned to meet the demands of his increasingly rhetorical and political paintings, especially during the first and second decades of the seventeenth-century," what are we to make of his recurring explorations during these same decades of the expressive and rhetorical potential of female bodies and feminized forms?

In the first place, we must consider Rubens's confrontations with Renaissance femininity alongside his changing appraisals of male ideality as espoused by Italian artists such as Michelangelo, Giulio Romano, and Mantegna. There is no doubt that Rubens went to Italy, in the words of an approving Roger de Piles, "to see the most beautiful works of the ancients and moderns, to meditate upon them, to copy them, and to make his brush commensurate with what

he would find most beautiful there."[22] It is also clear that, while in Italy, Rubens's Michelangelesque essays, which included, in addition to *Night* and *Leda*, the Sistine sibyls, were not restricted to beautiful, ostensibly male bodies and subjects. The commensuration, in de Piles's sense, occurs when Rubens returns to Flanders. It is there that he embarks in earnest on the process of appropriation and allegorization that will become so central to his lifelong practice.

Only upon his return to Antwerp does Rubens seem to struggle with the proper way to incorporate the male nude into an established and locally-prized Flemish vernacular, where the depiction of human bodies—male and female alike—tended to warrant neither less nor more attention than the theater of natural wonders and inanimate objects in which they found themselves. The allure of Michelangelo's muscular male physique, with all the physical ideals and humanistic erudition it implied, was perhaps even more profound for Rubens as he renegotiated his place in Flemish society in the city of his youth and childhood.

Marrying Up

The remainder of this chapter will consider a very different sort of image than Rubens's Old Testament scene, though one equally concerned with the bonds of love and intimacy. Like his *Samson and Delilah* of the same year, the painter's remarkable self-portrait with his first wife, Isabella Brant (Fig. 15), marks his return to a soon to be peaceful Flanders and the beginning of his professional life post-Italy.[23] The canvas is one of the first works produced by Rubens as the newly appointed royal painter to the Archdukes Albert and Isabella. Yet it is clearly devised to convince the viewer of its status as an extra-courtly, even intimate, portrayal of Rubens as a private citizen and man of leisure. Endearingly candid yet carefully contrived, the portrait, as I will argue, is also a manifesto of Rubens's beliefs about marriage and gender at the beginning of his family life and career.

In the seventeenth-century any composition in which a man and woman were the sole subjects would have been instinctively viewed in terms of sex difference. To be female in Rubens's time was to be inferior by nature and biology. There was, in fact, sincere speculation about whether a truly good woman could exist. The Aristotelian designation of the female state "as being, as it were, a deformity" was widely accepted. This notion together with the Greek philosopher's understanding of women as passive, material containers for male form—itself 'the principle of movement'—provided an authoritative source for subsequent centuries of misogynistic thinking and writing.[24] The *querelle des femmes* was a ubiquitous early modern controversy with legal and religious implications as well as artistic and literary ones. Tracts and pamphlets alternately blaming and praising the female sex were published at a furious pace, particularly in England, France, and Italy. As previously noted, there is no explicit written documentation of Rubens's views on the defense of women or the equality of the sexes in social rather than artistic terms. But his extant correspondence does offer the occasional insight.

An early and interesting letter in this regard dates from just after Rubens's return to Antwerp. It is 1609, and a lighthearted thirty-two year old Rubens writes to his former doctor in

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[22] Roger de Piles, *Dissertation sur les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres* (1681) trans. Katie Scott, *The Lives of Rubens*, ed. Jeremy Woods (London: Pallas Athene, 2005), 61.

[23] In 1609 a truce between the Spanish and the Dutch was concluded; the peace would last until 1621 when the terms were not renewed. Rubens's *Adoration of the Magi* was commissioned to adorn the Chamber of States, where the peace was ratified. Belkin, *Rubens*, 99. For the details of the truce see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World, 1606-1661* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 74-95.

[24] Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, Bk I. Ch I 775a.

Rome, the Papal botanist, Johann Faber, with details of his new life. The artist's brother, Philip, is about to be married and as a result the two men find themselves "unable to attend to anything but serving the ladies."[25] Rubens bewails the 'intricate' nature of the forthcoming nuptials before providing the following genial observation:

> In short, my brother has been favored by Venus, the Cupids, Juno, and all the gods: there has fallen to his lot a mistress who is beautiful, learned, gracious, wealthy, and well-born, and alone able to refute the entire Sixth Satire of Juvenal.[26]

Perhaps not surprisingly, 'beautiful' is ranked first in this list of wifely virtues—though this quality is immediately and notably followed by learnedness. And learned a young bride would have to be in order to refute the myriad aspersions cast on the female sex by the narrator of Juvenal's notorious screed.[27]

In citing the Sixth Satire, a caustic and canonical classical litany of womanly vices and misdeeds directed to the naïve husband-to-be, Rubens demonstrates his wit, erudition, and possibly, a contrasting and more liberal view on the education of women. For if Juvenal laments that "she's much worse, the woman who as soon as she's taken her place at dinner is praising Virgil and forgiving Elissa [Dido] on her deathbed, who pits the poets against each other and assesses them […]," Rubens seems to approve of such conduct from the women in his midst.[28] Nothing is known about the intellectual background of Philip's wife-to-be, Maria de Moy, who belonged to an old Antwerp family, but judging from Rubens's comment, it can be assumed that she was educated. A reference to Juvenal—whose anti-feminist vitriol is resuscitated in Bocaccio's counter-effort to *de mulieribus claris*, *Il Corbaccio*—permits Rubens to establish his familiarity with Classical misogynist sources without (necessarily) affirming their content. As the artist would have known, the Sixth Satire was addressed to wary young bachelors of exactly his sort, particularly those who might marry for convenience rather than love. Equating money with control, and well-born women with wantonness, the famed epigrammist warns elsewhere in the same work that "a wealthy woman who marries a greedy man is in effect single."[29]

Juvenal offered cold comfort to a man of Rubens's costly tastes but limited means. Later the same year, the ancient author's admonitions aside, the artist, too, had wed. In canny Isabella Brant, the daughter of prosperous and erudite Jan Brant (perhaps not coincidentally, a niece of Maria de Moy), Rubens seems to have found an intelligent and worthy spouse. Despite the obvious practical advantages of their union, Peter Paul and Isabella appear to have married for love and to have been genuinely happy and well-matched. The Brant family's elite contacts

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[25] Rubens to Johann Faber, Antwerp, 1609, in Ruth Magurn, The *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1957), No. 20.

[26] Ibid. In a similar fashion, Juvenal's narrator provides a list of ideal attributes: "She can be beautiful, graceful, wealthy, fertile," Juvenal, *Satires* [vi. 164] in *Juvenal and Persius*, Susanna Morton Braund, ed. and trans. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004).

[27] On the possibly sarcastic chauvinism of this Satire see for example, Warren S. Smith, Jr. "Husband vs. Wife in Juvenal's Sixth Satire," *The Classical World*, Vol. 73, (Mar., 1980): 323-332; but see also, Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles* (Berlin: Walter DeGruyter, 2009), 89-92.

[28] Juvenal, *Satires* [vi. 434-437], Braund, trans. as in No. 26. For Rubens's recourse to Juvenal's Satires in these early years see, Elizabeth McGrath, 'Not Even a Fly': Rubens and the Mad Emperors," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 133 (Oct., 1991), 699.

[29] Ibid. Juvenal [vi. 139], *op cit*.

proved endlessly useful to Rubens, who received some of his most important commissions during his first ten years in Antwerp, including the Prado *Adoration of the Magi* (1609) and the two monumental altar pieces: *The Raising of the Cross* (c. 1611) and the *Descent from the Cross* (c. 1612), which are discussed in chapter three.

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In 1608, upon receiving news of his mother's rapidly deteriorating health following an asthma attack, Rubens had departed the Duke of Mantua's employ in haste, famously dashing off his last Italian letter 'mounting horseback.'[30] Though his mother, Maria Pipelincks did not live to see her beloved son married to the privileged daughter of one of the most respected humanists in Antwerp, she would no doubt have been gratified that the woman's father was, like her own long deceased husband, a lawyer, and a successful one at that. Rubens's wedding occurred very shortly after he became court painter, an honor that can only have endeared him further to the Brant family. At the time of Isabella Brant's marriage, her father, Jan, served as one of Antwerp's four esteemed Secretaries, the remainder of whom were, improbably enough, Rubens's brother Philip, and Philip's father-in-law, who, as mentioned, was Isabella Brant's uncle.[31] Rubens had thus married into an intimate and rather insular circle of civic-minded intellectuals, in the Brant's case, also one of the richest families in Antwerp. As scholars have noted, the contemporaneous *Self-Portrait with Isabella Brant* of 1609 can safely be seen as a pictorial assertion of the artist's recently established place within the socially and intellectually ambitious orbit of his new family.[32]

The painting is compactly composed, its two full-length figures filling the large canvas to the exclusion of virtually anything else. It is a bourgeois double portrait of aristocratic proportions, larger, at roughly 6 by 4 ½ feet it, than some of Rubens's Italian altarpieces. In it the potent combination of the sitter's monumentality and remarkable self-assurance might be said to verge on social presumption. Yet Rubens has tempered the picture's to-the -manor-born sensibilities by placing his subjects out of doors in an unexpectedly modest and naturalistic arbor of flowering branches. Here beneath the shade of the Honeysuckle on a clear-skied summer day, we find the artist seated on a bench, legs crossed nonchalantly, the fingers of his left hand lightly supporting the hilt of a sword. Rubens's new wife, Isabella Brant, kneels gracefully on the grass at her husband's feet.

Both sitters are splendidly attired in richly-trimmed satins and cut velvets. Rubens has delineated nearly every thread of his own lace and linen falling collar and his wife's impeccably starched cuffs and knife-sharp cart-wheel ruff—costly, locally-made accoutrements for which Flanders was justly famous. The artist's wife displays a fashionable embroidered satin stomacher of the type once worn only by gentry but becoming increasingly common among the moneyed merchant classes.[33] She also wears the same kind of straw hat with a folded brim seen in Rubens and Brueghel's collaborative courtly pastorals of the following decade, where the Archduchess Isabella is often seen similarly attired (Fig. 16).

Although Isabella wears mainly primary colors: a yellowish bodice over a red gown with blue lining or underskirts, Rubens is dressed in complementary hues: a dark green flocked satin doublet and startlingly, eminently a la mode, iridescent orange silk hose. While placed at different levels, the two figures form a pleasingly continuous S-curve that begins at Rubens's

[30] Rubens to Annibale Chieppio, Rome, October 28, 1608. Magurn, *Letters*, No. 19.
[31] Magurn, *Letters*, 438. See also Kristin Lohse Belkin, *Rubens* (New York: Phaidon, 1997), 98.
[32] See, for example, Belkin, *Rubens*, 98-99.
[33] Aileen Ribeiro, "Fashion at Antwerp," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 119, (Sep., 1977), 665.

shoulder and continues through Isabella's bejeweled left arm, which arches loosely at her side. Like the humanistic references in Rubens's letter quoted above, this quietly performative painting projects something of his self-perception—or more precisely, something of the way in which he wished to be perceived: as a learned and tasteful master of art as well as women. In this engaging double portrait Rubens thus strives to embody effortless elegance for the painting is surely an essay in Flemish *sprezzatura*, a là Castiglione. But he is also intent to display the powers of his intellect. In the true humanist spirit this would have meant the intelligent restatement of ancient notions and authorities, of which Juvenal was perhaps the best-known, on the subject at hand, in this case, marriage.

Early Modern Marriage and the Subjection of Women

For early modern Christians marriage was a sacred institution with an incontrovertible scriptural heritage. Biblical prescriptions on marriage, which were widely believed to justify the subjection of women in society at large, found amplification in commentaries by the Fathers of the Church, to which Counter Reformation theologians continually referred. Of a handful of scriptural proof-texts on marriage, one of the most frequently cited was the following passage reputedly addressed to Eve in Genesis: "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16 KJV). It did not escape Early Christian exegetes, moreover, that after the Fall the biblical references to the 'man' and the 'woman' become prescriptions for 'husband' and 'wife.' In patristic exegeses woman's subjugation and the pain experienced in childbirth are regarded as jointly ordained by God in punishment for Eve's 'original sin': that of woman's disobedience. Yet of an innately guilty Eve, progenitor of wifely subjection, St. Augustine had written further: "For we must believe that even before her sin woman had been made to be ruled by her husband and to be submissive and subject to him."[34] The Latin doctor thus adds a tautological level of inequity when he asserts that the dominion of husband over wife was in fact ordained by the natural order of things even before the knowledge of good and evil was discovered.

Arguments against both scriptural and philosophical-scientific rationalizations for female incapacity and servitude were also to be found throughout the middle ages. In the twelfth-century, for example, Abelard, impressed by Heloise's faith and achievements, had come to advocate the 'dignity of women' and their more active participation in the life of the Church.[35] However, a proto-feminist literary tradition as such cannot be said to have cohered until the mid-fifteenth century, when anti-misogynist vernacular discourse found its most prolific protagonist in the Italian-born biographer of the Burgundian court, Christine de Pizan, author of the famous *City of Ladies* and the levelheaded letters penned in response to Jean de Meun's scathingly anti-feminist *Romance of the Rose*.[36]

In addition to such proto-humanist responses to Scholastic misogyny, the advent of the Reformation in 1517 also spelled radical changes for the Christian conception of women's roles within church and the home. The most decisive of these were the dissolution of monasteries and convents and the related sanction of clerical marriage. It is ironic in some respects that this

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[34] St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols., *Ancient Christian Writers*, No. 42 (New York and Ramsey, NJ; Newman Press, 1982), ii, 75.

[35] See for example, J.T. Muckle, "The Letter of Heloise on Religious Life and Abelard's first Reply," *Medieval Studies*, 17 (1955), 255-58.

[36] Christine de Pizan (c.1365-1440) had a literary career of over forty years. Marina Warner provides a useful introduction to Christine's life and works in Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Earl Jeffrey Richards, trans., (New York: Persea Books, 1982).

Protestant emphasis on the salutary effects of marriage was accompanied by the divestment of matrimony's sacramental status by architects of the Reform such as Luther and Calvin. For Catholic theologians, however, the relegation of marriage from sacred act to civil ceremony was a travesty of the divine economy. In response to what they viewed as a heretical reversal of doctrine, the Bishops at Trent reiterated the sacramental nature of matrimony in the Council's twenty-forth session in 1563. But the theological tide following the marriage of Martin Luther, a former Augustinian friar, to Katherine Bora, a former nun, was not to be stemmed.

From this point forward, European views of the proper relationship between husband and wife would be dictated and administered by a growing assortment of confessional attitudes, religious practices, and vernacular translations of the bible—Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist, Zwinglian, and Catholic among others. In tandem with marital relations, the woman question also gained momentum at this time, vigorously propelled—as were the Protestant and Catholic Reformations—by advances in print technology. This reordering of doctrinal priorities and the cultural anxieties provoked by it are reflected in Post-Tridentine literature as well as art.

From Protestant, primarily Anglican, Elizabethan, England, for example, came the entertaining Elizabethan dialogue *A brief and pleasant discourse of duties in Mariage, called the Flower of Friendshippe* (1568) by Edmund Tilney. Tilney's text, composed as a courtly conversation along the lines of Castiglione's *The Courtier*, includes the following remarks from one Lady Isabella—whose name is the Spanish version of 'Elizabeth'—on the matter of 'Obedience':

> I know not, quoth the Lady Isabella, what we are bound to do, but as meet is it, that the husband obey the wife as the wife the husband, or at the least that there be no superioritie betwene them, as the auncient philosophers have defended. For women have soules as wel as men, they have wit as well as men, and more apt for procreation of children then men.[37]

The ardently pro-marriage and pro-creation tone of this secular work is usually ascribed to the courtier-author's desire to see his willfully single sovereign, Elizabeth I, safely wed. The Virgin Queen never did marry, of course, since English law allowed women to rule as princes, whether espoused or no. Elizabeth's reign—and the notorious misogyny of her successor, King James I—appear to have created a fertile ground for defensive and derisive literature about women, however. In line with the growing Italian taste for defense literature, already mentioned, English presses published four widely read feminist tracts between 1589 and 1617.[38] An approach to the topic as *serio ludere*, or serious play, is reflected by contemporary plays and 'advices' printed

[37] Edmund Tilney, *A brief and pleasant discourse of duties in Mariage, called The Flower of Friendship* (London, 1568), 133.

[38] The earliest of these, by Jane Anger, was a stand-alone work like Moderata Fonte's, while the seventeenth-century tracts by Rachel Speght and the (pseudonymous, and possibly male) 'Constantia Munda,' and 'Ester Sowerman.' were, like Marinella's, responses to a recently issued anti-feminist work. A common thread between these, in other respects quite different, works is their response to scriptural commonplaces and theological rationales for women's subjection, such as her disobedience in the Garden of Gethsemane and derivative status from 'Adam's rib.' With the exception of Anger's late sixteenth-century pamphlet, the three aforementioned 'defenses' occasioned by the great 'Swetnam controversy,' a wide-reaching literary debate incited by the 1615 publication of Joseph Swetnam's hotly misogynist *araignment of lewde, idle, froward, and vnconstant women: or the vanitie of them, choose you whether"* the title page of which recommends the work as "*Pleasant for married men, profitable for young men, and hurtfull to none.*"

early in the century: *A pleasant comedie, wherein is merily shewen: the wit of a woman* by Anonymous (1604); Joseph Beaumont's satirical *The Woman Hater* (1607), and the anonymously-penned *Court of good counsell. Wherein is set downe the true rules, how a man should choose a good wife from a bad, and a woman a good husband from a bad* (1607).

Reciprocal concerns, marital power dynamics and sex difference were of continuing interest to early modern gender theorists on both sides. Yet given the popularity of these subjects in contemporary literature, it comes as a surprise that marriage portraits, particularly of untitled—or extra-Biblical—sitters, were far from common in early seventeenth-century art. Rubens's choice to paint a self-portrait with his wife was a purposeful one with the unstated but obvious goal of presenting himself as an exemplarily married gentleman. Yet what might fairly be called the propagandistic potential of the topos of marriage—when grafted to self-portraiture— may also have intrigued a socially ambitious Catholic court painter. Combined, the two subgenres offered Rubens an opportunity to exploit the identity-constructing possibilities of the courtly full-length portrait while offering a nuanced visual discourse on (his own) marriage.

Painting, Man, and Wife

The novelty of Rubens's composition is immediately obvious. The absence of painterly attributes in a portrait of the artist—the canvas, brushes, and palette by which early modern painters are often accompanied—is a crucial departure from previous (male) images where nobility of attitude, attire, and physiognomy mitigate the presence of art-making 'tools.' In Rubens's canvas, the substitution of sword for mahlstick neatly fixes the painter's aspirations to the ranks of nobility from the very outset of his career. It also underscores his confidence in pictorial self-fashioning as a means of social advancement—not unlike marriage. In this sense, Isabella too, as a wife who defines her husband's status, functions in the painting as a kind of symbol or attribute.

From a formal and compositional standpoint, moreover, Isabella's relational, complementary role in Rubens's image calls to mind female subjects from amorous pairings of mythological men and women similarly defined by their differences. Ovid was the preferred source for narratives of this sort. Whether mined from the *Fasti*, the *Heroides*, or the *Metamorphoses*, tales of love, lust, and loss among the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece and Rome provided early modern artists, patrons, and beholders with a safely indirect means of confronting the dynamics of sex and power. Speaking vicariously through the bodies of mythically randy satyrs and gullible nymphs an artist could advise, exalt, judge and condemn. When enjoined to commemorate a marriage, he or she could creatively embody what Augustine had termed 'the proper order of desires' without fear of retaliation or censorship since portrayals of Pagan sources were not mentioned in the stringent Tridentine dictates on sacred painting.[39]

Rubens had produced a small number of mythological-allegorical works of this sort while in Italy. Two of these, *Hercules and Omphale* (Fig. 17) and the *Death of Adonis* (Fig. 18), were likely intended to mark the 1606 marriage of the Mantuan nobleman, Giovanni Vicenzo Imperiale.[40] Francis Huemer, who first suggested this purpose for the Ovidian paintings, saw the purported pendants as a sort of visual marriage counseling offered to the prospective bride and

[39] See *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, H.J. Schroeder, trans. (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 1978), Session XXV, 1563 'On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints and on Sacred Images,' 218-220.

[40] The relationship of thee two works as pendants and the possibility that *Venus and Adonis*, may predate *Hercules and Omphale* by as much as four years, is discussed in Lisa Rosenthal*, Gender, Allegory and Politics in the Art of Rubens* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), 133-134.

groom, who must guard against the natural inclinations of their sexes. "One painting," she writes, "might be a warning to women not to be too domineering (like Spenser's Omphale and Shakespeare's Kate); the other a warning to men to seek peace (love) rather than war."[41] As negative arguments, the two paintings would have thus spoken to bride and groom through a pair of love stories with tragic endings for the male characters in particular. Both of Huemer's interpretations seem to represent the instructive spirit of these somewhat stiff and workmanlike pictures. But it is the first 'warning' and the image from which it derives that Rubens draws on in his own marriage portrait, made just three years later.

Rubens's *Hercules and Omphale* is a dense, carefully worked out painting, suffused—one might almost say inundated—with visual associations and symbolic meaning. In it Rubens appeals to numerous and diverse visual sources, from Roman sarcophagi to his courtly mannerist precursor, the German painter, Bartolomeus Spränger (Fig. 19).[42] A recurring theme in Northern as well as Italian art, *Hercules and Omphale* tells the tale of a woman disastrously in charge. Enlivened by a literal exchange of power through cross-dressing, this Ovidian 'perversion' of gender roles has Omphale, the Lydian queen, arraying the fallen hero in "gauzy tunics" and a "dainty girdle" while she takes on "the heavy club, the lion's skin, and the lesser weapons stored in their quiver."[43] Rubens faithfully incorporates these details in a grotto-like setting packed with didactic classical reliefs, sumptuously suggestive costumes, and even extra-textual characters such as the would-be procuress and the queen's rapt cohort of juvenile woolworkers. From this sometime-comedic caveat on effeminized manhood the demi-God received the epithet 'distaff Hercules' since part of his humiliation lies in being forced to take up the eminently domestic and feminized labor of spinning.

Lisa Rosenthal has described the ways in which Rubens's Hercules—and all 'distaff Hercules'—can be associated with the early modern 'Women on Top' or 'World Upside Down' imagery so much a part of the Northern printmaking tradition.[44] In broadsheets and other inexpensive, heavily circulated prints showing "the inversion of multiple social hierarchies (such as class, age, and profession, as well as gender) alongside the upending of natural ones" art lovers of a humanistic bent would have relished the classical commonplaces used to illustrate the dangers of a dystopic world order.[45] Rubens's mannered distaff Hercules clearly participates in an Ovidian variant of this genre. Yet it is not the book-smart iconography but rather the straightforward inversion of gender conventions that gives this work its satirical and moralizing charge.

The most telling figural relationship in the painting is surely that of the standing woman and the seated man. This reversal of the traditional sexual hierarchy associated with masculine action and feminine passivity, immediately signals the unnaturalness of the male-female relationship. Although classical sources typically show the two figures on the same (ground) level, previous Renaissance artists had also seized on the conceit of inverted poses to signify an imbalance in power. Rubens seems to be using Spränger's version of the subject as his primary source of inspiration, freely borrowing basic architectural elements such as the socle and plinth as well as the general sitting-standing format of the principal characters. Yet the degree to which

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[41] Frances Huemer, "A Dionysiac Connection in an Early Rubens," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 61 (Dec., 1979), 574.
[42] Ibid. On sarcophagi see Huemer, op cit., 565-568; On Spränger and other Northern versions of the subject, see 566.
[43] Ovid, *Fasti,* Bk II [313-320], James Frazer, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).
[44] Rosenthal, *Gender, Poltics, and Allegory*, 127-134.
[45] Ibid.

Rubens heightens the spatial discrepancy between the elevated Omphale—who stands on a block of stone—and the put-upon Hercules, is worth noting, as of course, is the Flemish artist's addition of the notorious ear-tweaking, which adds a humorous infantilizing note even as it renders the hero more pathetic.

More could be said in another context about the interesting points of divergence between Rubens and the Mannerist Spranger, whose works are both psychically darker and more consistently farcical by comparison. To mention just two of Rubens's departures from Spranger's painting: the younger artist renders Omphale frontally, a crucial and sensible change which allows the always-literate artist to reveal, as Huemer notes, 'the divine belly.' With her coyly crossed legs and a strategically placed lion's tail, Rubens's Omphale becomes a convincing rendition of Raphael's *Eve,* also a fitting allusion.

Within a discussion of Rubens's marriage portrait, moreover, *Hercules and Omphale* provides a classical corollary for his choice to communicate sex difference in the most conventionally hieratic of formal terms c. 1606. First, he makes it clear that the woman's superior height in the picture is achieved by artificial means. Second, he situates her on the pictorially inferior or 'sinister' left. Third, by relating Omphale formally to Eve, Rubens encourages the beholder to see her 'real' identity just as he projects the stronger and more heroic sculptural form of the Belvedere torso onto the temporarily emasculated distaff Hercules. Similarly occasioned by matrimony, yet radically different in 'manner' and mode, these two early works, a self-portrait as a married man and a mythological narrative, reveal Rubens's grasp of the transferable pictorial grammar of gender. Regardless of genre, he proceeds to employ masculinity and femininity as superabundant carriers of meaning that equally infect and inflect pictures with an externally derived significance—the complete regulation of which is importantly beyond his control, as he may or may not realize.

Chastising his non-Christian readers, Tertullian, the rancorous desert father, wrote of distaff Hercules:

> you adore that man who ought to make you feel ashamed, this 'club-arrow-hide-bearer,' who exchanged the whole outfit expressed in his name for a woman's attire."[46]

But more than clothing, Rubens's Hercules exchanges status. In this sense Huemer's somewhat benign reading of Omphale as merely a lamentable shrew-type, though the wrong kind of wife to be sure, may stop short of the painting's more vehement polemic. For not only does Rubens suggest Omphale's disobedient and sinful nature, like Eve, "drawn to her destruction," he implies that she, like all teetering and precariously placed idols, will fall.[47] If there is any confusion about the perverse outcome of the humiliation of a strong man at the hands of an unnaturally powerful woman, Rubens effects a visual sex change through the scandalous act of transvestism. Thus in place of Hercules's phallus we encounter only the soft folds of Omphale's tunic, a Galenic (re)inversion that complements the placement of the enormous lion's tail across

[46] Tertullian, *De Pallium*, 4.3 I

[47] Gervase Babington, *Certaine plaine, briefe, and comfortable notes vpon euerie chapter of Genesis,* London (1592), 14.

and between Omphale's legs.[48] What is concealed in Hercules, his manhood, is thus revealed, or translated, to the body of Omphale. Subtly metamorphosed by the clothes they wear, both forms are made monstrous and unnatural, an unstable pairing made possible by pagan world that demands to be set right.

Formal Matters: The Man on Top

The heightened antifeminist flavor of Rubens's *Hercules and Omphale* would seem to provide a negative response to the woman question. If anything, in relation to Spränger, Rubens can be said to up the rhetorical ante, a painted stance that seems somewhat inconsistent with his written one. In the letter describing his brother Philip's forthcoming wedding, Rubens hints at his idea of a woman's proper place in society with a seemingly progressive list of desirable wifely traits, albeit a list couched in the context of a famously misogynistic text. Superficially at least, the double portrait with Isabella is similarly oblique. Yet visual clues in Rubens's painting do in fact suggest his views of the relative positions of man and wife in an ideal marriage such as the one he hopes to have—the question is whether we are to take the portrait's clues at face value.

In comparison with other works from this early period (with the possible exception of the sure-handed Samson and Delilah), the double portrait is impressive in its scale, its technique, and its confidence. The portrait contains many characteristics of the artist's later style such as solidly-formed, sculptural figures positioned very near the picture plane in deceptively uncontrived poses; expressive, painterly brushwork resulting in a mimetic effect that might best be described as naturalistically ideal; and vivid chromaticism even within minor expanses of flesh tones and other 'uniform' surfaces.

With an eye to the compositional conventions of gender used in the Ovidian marriage painting for his patron in Mantua, we can observe that Rubens has placed himself near the top edge of the canvas, literally a head 'above' his young wife (the painting has been cut-down, which explains the bisection of Rubens's high crowned hat—a tool used to further emphasize his superior position). Isabella's face, ringed by the petal-like folds of a starched white ruff, is lower and closer to the beholder. By seating his wife directly on the ground, Rubens successfully invokes the presumed proximity of women and the natural world, a connection said to account for their capricious, inconstant 'nature' and inherent irrationality.[49] In the form of scrolling leaves, Nature is again impressed on the fabric of Isabella's gold and ivory bodice, which shares the same golden range as the Honeysuckle behind her.

Gender conventions also account for Rubens having placed himself on the painting's honorific left side, typically reserved for males.[50] This practice has its origins in religious and devotional art. As we have seen, it is particularly evident in images of Adam and Eve after the Fall where the archetypal husband and wife often dominate the image field in a similar manner—and from which Rubens may have borrowed his verdant, garden-like setting.

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[48] Galen famously believed that the female reproductive organs were an inverted and internalized version of the male genitalia, such that the "uterus = inverted penis, ovaries (testes mulierum) = testes." See Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 33.

[49]The modesty of the earthbound female figure is also evoked in the trope of the humble Madonna, see e.g. Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* (1505-6) and, more generally, Millard Meiss, "The Madonna of Humility," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 18 (Dec., 1936): 435-465; but see especially, on matters of gender, Mirella Levi d'Ancona, "The Doni Madonna by Michelangelo: An Iconographic Study," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 50 (Mar., 1968): 43-50.

[50] Elizabeth Honig, "In Memory: Lady Dacre and Pairing by Hans Eworth," in Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn, eds. *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in Renaissance Culture, 1540-1660* (London: Reaktion, 1990), 67.

All plants and flowers depend on the generous warmth of the sun. If Rubens's radiant face, with a Titianesque blue sky peeking out behind it, acquires something of a solar splendor, this too, may allude to healthful light of the sort equated by Aristotle with masculine heat and energy. Just as Isabella's location partially in shadow—and nearer to the domesticated canopy of the honeysuckle bower at upper right—would conjure in the mind of an attentive beholder notions of feminine darkness and interiority, quasi-anatomical qualities associated with cold-wet women and derived in part from Galen's theory of genital inversion. "Consider first whichever ones you please," the Roman Imperial physician wrote of male and female reproductive organs, "turn outward the woman's, turn inward, so to speak and fold double the man's and you will find them the same in every respect."[51] To Isabella's inactivity, implied to by the closed fan in her left hand, can be contrasted Rubens's vigilance and preparation for action—suggested by the artist's grasp, however, light, of his standing sword.

In portraiture, too, Rubens was not above the strategic, even the redundant, employment of gendered iconographic tropes as a means of imparting 'meaning' to a work of art. This is all the more true when he takes on an ostensibly lesser, non-narrative genre. Much of Rubens's time in Italian courts had been devoted to painting full-length portraits or "various works for various illustrious people" as the Roman Baglione, his first biographer puts it. [52] Among these works were equestrian portraits of Genoese aristocrats and large-scale likenesses of Hispano-Italian noblewomen such as the National Gallery's luminous and imposing Brigida Spinola (Fig. 20, 1606). In Genoa and Mantua Rubens had developed a manner of portrait painting where seemingly inconsequential compositional details such as posture, attire, and prop-like attributes deliver the maximum symbolic effect.[53]

His portraits were much in demand for the rest of his life though like most Baroque artists, he preferred to be thought of as a history painter. After Italy, however, Rubens never failed to approach his preferred genres, such as allegory, with portraiture's lessons in mind: in particular, the capacity of a sensitive likeness to reveal a particular sitter's psychological and emotional state even as it facilitates broader historical, doctrinal, or philosophical insights via interpictorial connections with ancient art and earlier masters. Rubens would employ the 'simple' language of portraiture, especially group portraiture, in some of his most complex and propagandistic allegorical works. As we have discussed it thus far, the marriage portrait with Isabella Brant is not an allegory. In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that the painting should in fact be read figuratively, as a painting in which specific historical people are made to stand in for an abstract idea, or notional cluster, beyond the obvious content of the image.

The Wedding Portrait as an Allegory of Eden

Seen in this way, Rubens's picture consciously calls to mind an earlier double portrait painted by his virtuosic Flemish predecessor, Jan van Eyck. The so-called Arnolfini wedding portrait of 1434 (Fig. 21) was a treasured possession displayed in the Habsburg painting collection at the time Rubens twice visited Spain. In it, according to some scholars, the presumed

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[51] Galen (c. 130-200), *on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (*De Usu Partium*), Margaret Tallmadge, trans., in *Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages: A Medieval Source Documents Reader***,** Martha A. Brożyna, ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 141.

[52] Giovanni Baglione, *Le Vite de' pittori, scultori, et architetti* (1642), Lisa Adams, trans., *The Lives of Rubens*, London: Pallas Athene, 2005, 27.

[53] On allegorical and Petrarchan qualities in Genoese and Mantuan portraits, see Elise Goodman, "Woman's Supremacy over Nature: Van Dyck's 'Portrait of Elena Grimaldi'" *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 15 (1994), 129-143.

inventor of oil painting presents a figurative commentary on the sacrament of marriage couched in the literal form of a double-portrait of two contemporaries who may have been the patrician Italian banker, Giovanni Arnolfini and his intended, Jeanne Cenami.[54] In his minutely-rendered domestic scene, Van Eyck employs the 'disguised symbolism' of his day to full effect, alluding to the mysterious alchemy of what Margaret Carroll has described as "collaborative partnership" through the gendered vernacular of his own time—just as Rubens will do in his.[55]

In some cases the artists borrow from a shared tradition. For example, as Carroll further notes, Giovanni (or according to some, Michele) Arnolfini occupies the left side of the image closest to the door and the outside world, with his wife consigned to the interior at right, nearer to the marriage bed, the source of children.[56] Rubens, too, is found on the left side of his portrait with Isabella on the right. Yet in other respects the painters take a very different approach. Van Eyck, for example, frames marriage in more explicitly religious terms, encouraging the viewer's exegesis via the inclusion of easily recognizable details such as the all-important mirror's ten tiny Passion narratives—which invite a connection between Christ's sacrifice and his indissoluble 'marriage' to the *ecclesia* born out of his side wound. [57] The birth of the Church from Christ's body finds a parallel in the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. The next stage of creation, childbirth, is called to mind by the carved figure of St. Margaret who foretells her utility as patron saint of pregnancy.[58]

Furthermore, in Van Eyck's portrait, the precisely rendered furnishings of a tidily luxurious domestic interior add to an overall impression of worldly refinement and God given wealth. Gleaming brasses, generous bed hangings, and a rich Persian carpet inscribe the couple's status as prosperous foreigners cut from the same socioeconomic cloth. Indeed, since the Arnolfinis stand on the same ground it is difficult to discern which, if either, of the two might be of a higher social rank; both are lavishly dressed, his ostentatious fur-trimmed tunic fittingly complements her intricately ruched and capacious green velvet robe. The balanced rank of the sitters implied in Van Eyck's compositions anticipates an intermediary source for Rubens, Titian's c. 1548 likeness of Emperor Charles V and Empress Isabella, one of the few known Italian Renaissance depictions of a man and wife within the same frame.[59] As Alfred Scharf points out, much more common in the fifteenth and sixteenth-century:

> were the portraits of two persons facing each other on separate panels which were either united in a diptych or hung as companion pictures, the man being placed on the left, the woman on the right: for example, the portraits of about 1460 by Piero della Francesca of Federigo di Montefeltre, Duke of Urbino, and

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[54] In response to earlier interpretations pro and contra Panofsky's pioneering interpretations of this painting, Lucy Freeman Sandler argues for the arrangement of its purported subjects, Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne Cenami, as an allusion to 'canonical' and 'clandestine' marriages in fourteenth-century illuminations contained in an English encyclopedia, the *Omne Bonum*. See her "The Handclasp in the Arnolfini Wedding: A Manuscript Precedent," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 66 (Sep., 1984): 488-49.1

[55] Margaret D. Carroll, *Painting and Politics in Northern Europe: Van Eyck, Brueghel, Rubens, and their Contemporaries* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2008), 20.

[56] Ibid., 102

[57] A connection first observed by Hans Kauffmann, "Jan van Eycks 'Arnolfinihochzeit'," *Geistige Welt* 4 (1950):47-48, as noted by Jan Baptist Bedaux, "The Reality of Symbols: The Question of Disguised Symbolism in Jan van Eyck's "Arnolfini Portrait," *Simiolus*, Vol. 16 (1986),15, No. 41.

[58] Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 203.

[59] But see Lotto's *Marriage of Master Marsilio and Wife*, 1523, Museo del Prado, Madrid and Lucas van Leyden's *Betrothal*, c. 1527, Museé des Beaux Arts, Strassbourg.

> his Duchess, Battista Sforza, now in the Uffizi at Florence. This mode spread throughout Italy and may be found at Milan and Venice as well as at Florence and Ferrara.[60]

As Scharf goes on to observe, the diptych double portrait had its roots in the Netherlandish tradition. Accordingly, Titian's frontal portrait, though half-length, represents an abrupt—and distinctively Venetian—divergence from previous models.[61] In Titian's composition the Emperor and Empress (who had died before the painting was made) sit together at a table, a clock between them, each looking into the distance; behind the soberly dressed couple a curtain parts to reveal a landscape. We can, at least, assume as much, for the original painting perished in an all-consuming 1734 fire at the Spanish royal palace. As luck would have it, Rubens himself painted a copy of the Imperial portrait while he was in Spain (Fig. 22), from which we can judge his familiarity with a format for double or marriage portraiture that was scarcely less common in early seventeenth-century Flanders.[62] Rubens's portrait with Isabella Brant—along with two very similar portraits of seated married couples made by Van Dyck after 1618—are the only extant life-size portraits of a husband and wife on the same canvas painted in Antwerp before 1621.[63]

Perhaps with both fifteenth-century Flemish and sixteenth-century Venetian paintings in mind, Rubens, too, offers the beholder a meeting of social equals. Or so it would have seemed. Although Rubens came from a 'good' family, he was by no means wealthy; in economic terms the formerly cash-strapped artist had married above his station. And while he might have chosen to render Isabella (as) his social equal by situating her directly at his side, as in the aforementioned portraits, he decides instead to tip the scale in his favor. By employing established visual conventions for the representation of scientific, philosophical, and theological notions of female inferiority, the upwardly mobile painter assumes his place as the man on top. If Isabella was theoretically 'higher' in status as a woman of means, Rubens, regardless of his wealth, or lack thereof, ranks higher still simply for being a man. The portrait thus seemingly renders Rubens superior in every way, as a man who effortlessly oversees even a rich and well-born wife; moving up in the picture he also moves up in the world.

Silver Hands

At the risk of destabilizing the reading just offered, I now want to suggest that there is more to the story. I say 'more' because no further insight can undo Rubens's conspicuous and forthright appeals to established pictorial strategies designed to designate women as somehow 'base' by nature. But if Rubens's positioning of himself and his wife within the garden furnishes a subtle commentary on the relative supremacy of male to female and husband to wife, the portrait can be read further as a painted allegory of the sacrament of marriage.

Such symbolic quasi-historical portrayals of the bridal union of husband and wife exist in the pages of illuminated manuscripts from well before the time of Van Eyck. Indeed, depictions

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[60] Alfred Scharf, "Rubens's Portraits of Charles V and Isabella," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 66 (Jun., 1935), 260.

[61] Single marriage portraits of two sitters were not uncommon in Tudor England, however, where Elizabeth Honig has linked their presence to the rhetoric of 'companionate marriage' in a Protestant key. See Honig, "Lady Dacre," as in No. 50.

[62] Ibid., 260. Though Scharf dates Rubens's copy from the first trip to Spain, c. 1604, most subsequent scholars date it to the second trip, c. 1628-29.

[63] *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, Susan J. Barnes, Nora de Poorter, Olivar Millar, and Horst Vey, eds. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), Nos. I.II4, I.II5, 108-109.

of an extra-ecclesial 'handclasp' ceremony—found in early encyclopedias and treatises on canon law—have attracted the interest of legal historians and medievalists alike.[64] These private, essentially common law, weddings were permissible for Catholics until 1563, when a Tridentine decree, in Panofsky's words: "condemned such clandestine weddings which had produced extremely awkward situations in the past if one of the partners subsequently denied the fact that a marriage had taken place."[65] Prior to Trent, when the presence of a priest was not mandated, the grasping of hands was the standard of matrimony.

If there is any doubt as to the metaphorical weight of the handclasp in his picture, Rubens, the painter, ensures that Rubens, the sitter, draws it to our attention. He does this by using both old and new compositional strategies. First, having boldly evacuated the center of the canvas of action of physical presence, Rubens anticipates the upward progression of the viewer's eye from the dark folds of the fabricated gap to the two faces, and thence to the disembodied hand that seems to float between them. It has already been noted that the fingers of this hand rest on the hilt of a genteel sword, which Rubens, who was not a member of the nobility, may have received as a gift from the Archdukes.[66] But the inclusion of the sword serves another, equally important, purpose. For it allows Rubens a place to rest the fingers of his hand, which have been made to point, index finger extended, to the arrangement of the newly-weds' hands. Here we encounter neither the wife's bare finger offered in anticipation of a ring as in some Italian depictions of the betrothal of Mary and Joseph (see e.g. Fig. 23) nor the unexplained and still controversial right-left grasp in the Arnolfini picture, believed by some scholars to represent a secret or clandestine marriage of the unsanctioned type mentioned above.[67]

In fact, where certain compositional elements are concerned, Rubens's marriage portrait comes closest to a work such as Robert Campin's *Marriage of the Virgin* (Fig. 24). In this highly unusual painting of around 1420, the hands of the bride and groom are united and wrapped by the 'priest/rabbi' in his stole. Like Rubens, Campin implies something about a husband's status through the spatial elevation of the male figure. His Joseph thus rises above even the Virgin herself. The resemblance ends here, however, for one of the most impressive aspects of Campin's stunningly illusionist painting is the typological argument suggested by contrasting styles of elaborate church architecture. Rubens, by contrast, avoids the narratively and temporally restrictive church wedding *in situ* before a priest. Though his image is avowedly a marriage portrait after-the-fact, its iconographical key remains the husband and wife's right-hand to right-hand clasp, or *iunctio dextarum.* It is a testament to his powers of invention that Rubens's portrait gracefully surmounts the age-old formal problem of depicting a right-handed handshake. With the exception of Campin, previous artists had typically resorted to the less-than romantic placement of two facing figures standing in profile with their right arms extending toward each other. In an emblem of "Fidelity" by Alciati (Fig. 25), to which Rubens's composition has been formally linked, a man and woman, seated opposite each other, clasp right

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[64] Freeman, "The Handclasp," 489. See also Anthony Melnikas, *The Corpus of the Miniatures in the Manuscripts of the Decretum Gratiani,* Vols. XVI-XVIII (Rome: Studia Gratiana, 1975).

[65] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 202.

[66] Velázquez's teacher, Francisco Pacheco, includes the following anecdote in his *Arte de Pintura* (1649), written in 1630: "after returning to his country he built a grand home in which he now lives […] the Infanta, in the presence of her husband, fitted a sword around his waist, and she put a very rich gold chain around his neck, calling him the honor of his homeland," translated by Alejandro Vergara, *Rubens and his Spanish Patrons* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 189.

[67] Peter Schabacker, "De Matrimonio ad Morganaticam Contracto: Jan Van Eyck's 'Arnolfini' Portrait Reconsidered," *Art Quarterly*, Vol. 25 (1972): 375- 98.

hands in a manner that would have suggested matrimony to early modern viewers. [68] It is this exchange, still commonly practiced at the time in Catholic wedding ceremonies, which alerts the beholder to the painting's overall theme and reason for being.[69] Van Eyck, too, had depended on gesture to convey something of the nature of matrimony, though with far less interpretive clarity, which may have been his goal from the start. Inspired perhaps by the enigmatically quotidian ethos of this Pre-Reformation vision of a prosperous couple, Rubens, a Habsburg painter in the wake of Trent, boldly rings changes on a sacramental subject, secularizing the marriage portrait in the name of personal self-fashioning.

It is of course possible that the handclasp in Rubens's painting is simply intended to identify it as the likeness of a husband and wife rather than the portrait of an ideal marriage. Seen in this light, the presentation of Rubens's 'underhandedness' might be conversely interpreted as either Isabella's 'covert' status as the holder of the reins or, as another show of effortless domination by the man in charge. Here again, however, there may be subtle visual pointers to another, more nuanced interpretation. First of all, one might read a measure of power and competence in both sitters' demeanor and expressions. A final comparison with the Arnolfini portrait is useful here, for it aptly demonstrates the communicative power of the gaze.

"When looking at a portrait," wrote Aloïs Riegl in his highly original study of Dutch Group Portraiture, "a modern viewer in particular always tends to concentrate primarily on the eyes and then, after that, on the mouths."[70] Yet to focus on the eyes of van Eyck's sitters is a difficult and uncomfortable task, which surely accounts for some of the peculiar remoteness of their portrait. Oddly, in a painting deeply concerned with optics and qualities of sight, Van Eyck does not permit his sitters to engage the beholder visually. In this sense he clearly fails to achieve what Riegl calls the "ultimate goal" of the portraitist, namely "to express the character of the sitters, as revealed by the way they gaze observantly out of the painting."[71] Stranger still, given the subject matter, is the absence of eye contact between Van Eyck's newly betrothed couple. But while it may first appear that both bride and groom avert their eyes, casting independent gazes beyond the picture plane to nowhere in particular (rather like Titian's imperial couple), this is not exactly true. In fact it is only the husband/Giovanni who looks 'nowhere.' Although the wife/Jeanne's eyes have a soft, dreamlike intensity, her sight line is easily traced to the open palm of her future husband, who raises his hand in what Panofsky calls '*fides levanta*,' the oath-taking position known to have been assumed in late Medieval marriage ceremonies. Van Eyck thus appears to be drawing the viewer's attention from the couple's handclasp to the husband's free hand—an oddly similar yet opposite progression from the one I am suggesting Rubens intends in his portrait.

Regarding the (un)communicative power of the Arnolfini gazes, one can only suppose that Van Eyck had his reasons, for he was entirely capable of painting portraits of solitary sitters who meet the eye's of their beholders, as the penetrating stare of his *Man in a Red Turban* of the previous year ably demonstrates. For Rubens, however, the 'Rieglian' observant outward gaze

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[68] For the association with Alciato's emblem (1551) see Rosenthal, *Gender, Politics, and Allegory*, 286, No. 20. See also Hans Vlieghe, *Portraits of Identified Sitters Painted in Antwerp*, Vol. 2 Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard (London: Harvey Miller, 1987), cat. No. 138, 162-164.

[69] In his later analysis of the Arnolfini picture Panofsky describes the gesture of joining hands as *fides manualis*. See Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 202. See also Sandler, "The Handclasp," 489, n. 2.

[70] Aloïs Riegl, *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (1902), Evelyn M. Kain and David Britt, trans., Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999, 132.

[71] Ibid. Riegl's comments are made in the context of Netherlandish group portraits of the 1530s, which also—or more accurately, given the earlier date of Van Eyck's painting, *still*—fail to meet the author's criterion.

was clearly a desideratum. Equally characteristic of the 1609 likeness and subsequent portraits of Isabella Brant (Figs. 26, 27) is a steady, intelligent stare, the intensity of which is consistently offset by lips gently pursed as if she hopes to conceal, if not a laugh, then some intimate pleasantry to which only her husband-portraitist is privy. This inside joke, if that is indeed what it is, may go unshared with the beholder, but he or she is nevertheless made keenly aware of Isabella's lively and complex personality—communicated in the way she 'sees' things. Indeed, even if one is unwilling to accept my *mondo reverso* reading of Isabella's upper hand as a jesting gesture revealing at least a degree of dominance, it would be difficult to discount the powerful presence of 'Rubens's' Isabella. Completely inescapable is the bright-eyed, dead-on gaze with which she meets the beholder and by implication, her husband, the artist. Viewing the image as a furtive endorsement of inverted, or at least, more balanced, gender roles, one might want to read both satisfaction in the young Mrs. Rubens's slight smile and bemusement in Rubens's painted acknowledgment of the sway his beloved will have over him for many years to come.

The knowing portrayal of genuine affection and like-mindedness is one of the most appealing qualities of Rubens's double portrait. But this is surely a second or even third order meaning. For more than anything else, the painting is engineered to firmly establish Rubens's place in society in general and in one prominent Antwerp household in particular. Could this explain the almost subliminal nature of its ambivalence? Perhaps the answer is yes, if as some have suggested, the intended recipient of the painting was Isabella's father.[72] Jan Brant, like Philip Rubens, moved in the fraternal, cult-like circles of Justus Lipsius, whose neo-Aristotelian views on women were decidedly misogynistic. Yet referring again in the letter quoted above to his brother's felicitous betrothal to Maria de Moy, Rubens joked that he would not dare to follow Philip's example since "he has made such a good choice that it seems inimitable."[73] Well aware of his father-in-law's Lipsian tendencies, perhaps the artist wished to show that he too, would be the kind of husband who recognized an exceptional woman when he saw one but would nonetheless put their house—and their sexes—in proper order. Admittedly, there is nothing in Rubens's letters to affirm this proposition. Yet ultimately, Rubens's decision to marry into a branch of the same family as his respected and successful brother does smack a bit of imitation; one even wonders if Rubens, seeking the greatest rhetorical effect, had already decided to ask for Isabella's hand at the time of the letter's writing.

Until Death

His epistolary reticence notwithstanding, Rubens's choice appears to have been the right one. This is attested by the most oft-quoted of his extant letters, the famously tender exposition of his bereavement following Isabella's sudden death, possibly from plague, in 1626. In this response to a letter of consolation from his frequent correspondent, Pierre DuPuy, Rubens again relies on generalizing gender conventions to shape even a heartfelt description of his wife. Recourse to the threadbare trope of female exceptionality allows for the exaltation of Isabella as an anomalous and unnatural female—by Grace better than other women—while keeping Rubens's performative chauvinism intact. Despite its familiarity, the letter is worth citing at length. In it Rubens combines private and unselfconscious grief with a showy but mesmerizing array of philosophical and classical commonplaces relevant for our purposes for the female signifiers—abstract and otherwise—through which he chooses to articulate his arguably un-masculine *emotions*:

[72] Rosenthal, *Gender, Politics, and Allegory,* 204.
[73] Rubens to Johann Faber, Antwerp, April 10, 1609, Magurn, *Letters,* No. 20.

> I have no pretentions about ever attaining a stoic equanimity; I do not believe that human feelings so closely in accord with their object are unbecoming to man's nature, or that one can be equally indifferent to all things in this world. *Sed aliqua esse quae potius sunt extra vitia quam cum virtutibus*. [There are certain things which are rather outside the vices than with the virtues; Tacitus, *Historiae* I.49] Truly I have lost an excellent companion, whom one could love—indeed had to love, with good reason—as having none of the faults of her sex. She had no capricious moods, and no feminine weakness, but was all goodness and honesty. And because of her virtues she was loved in her lifetime and mourned by all at her death. Such a loss seems to me worthy of deep feeling, and since the true remedy for all ills is Forgetfulness, daughter of Time, I must without doubt look to her for help. […] I should think a journey would be advisable, to take me away from the many things which necessarily renew my sorrow, *ut illa sola domo moreret vacua stratisque relictis incubat* [Just as she [Dido] mourns alone in the empty house, and broods over the abandoned couch][74]

Like the double portrait, which purports to represent a man effortlessly in control, there is a kind of slippage here between sign and signifier, or more precisely, representational tension between what the artist seems to be saying and the manner in which he says it.

Scholars have frequently cited this letter as evidence of Rubens's break with Lipsian Neostoicism, a set of essentially ascetical Senecan attitudes, popularized in the works of Justus Lipsius, and which had been much in vogue in Rubens's social ambit for much of the seventeenth-century.[75] Yet Neostoicism, which partakes in Aristotelian Physics, was as a result, formulated in gendered terms. This is made evident in the seemingly inescapable language Rubens uses to renounce, perhaps unwittingly, (masculine) 'stoic equanimity' in favor of (feminine) 'human feelings' which he esteems not 'unbecoming to man's nature.' Nor does Rubens find it unbecoming to perform a bit of literary cross-dressing by assuming the role of a grieving and abandoned Dido, pathetically left alone in an empty house to mourn her beloved.[76] Was Rubens's mind casting back to his own premarital reference to Juvenal's Dido—as a grieving anti-heroine stupidly invoked by over-educated women?

The reader must stay attentive, for Rubens's posture is changeable. As if to counter any intimation of proto-feminist proclivities, he immediately follows a surprisingly anti-Stoical (though arguably, properly Neostoicial) and tacit, embrace of emotionality with a stock account of his wife. He remembers Isabella as admirably unwomanly given her lack of 'feminine weakness' and 'capricious moods.' The widower Rubens then makes yet another about-face by describing Isabella as, if not an equal, than an "excellent companion," a phrase harkening to Protestant formulations of reciprocal "companionate" marriage found in the English contributions to the woman question mentioned in chapter one.

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[74] Rubens to Pierre DuPuy, July 15, 1626, Magurn, *Letters*, No. 84. Latin translations by R. S. Magurn.
[75] But compare Mark Morford*, Stoics and Neostoics, Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 192-194.
[76] Alpers refers to the second Dido citation as evocative of "the facility with which Rubens exchanges the poses and roles of men and women[…]," Alpers, *Making Rubens*, 149-150.

Most striking in these Rubensian portrayals of femininity in word and image is the push-pull of abstract and individual. I have already characterized these poles as corollaries of the things Rubens thinks he ought to believe about the female sex at large and the way he actually feels about a specific woman. Faced early in his career with the task of representing his beloved wife—in and of herself a categorical error—Rubens mobilizes many elements of the conventional visual language of sex difference. Yet he does so only to complicate a composition that verges in its formal didacticism on the symbolic or allegorical, by including a persuasively human and self-possessed, individual woman. If there is a discordant note in Rubens's visualization of the feminine ideal as embodied by a subservient spouse it is his apparent desire to have things both ways. What he found—and what he lost—was a woman who was less a docile baby-maker than a partner and companion whose goodness and honesty compelled him 'with good reason' to love her passionately and with feeling.

Following his own logic, it might be observed that Rubens loved a woman in a feminine way—and mourned her with womanly grief. But at what cost to the coherence of his Lipsian reserve and moral superiority? Of Isabella's qualities most admired by Rubens—and the others who knew her—it was her goodness or 'virtue' that stood apart. For this reason it is intriguing to find the early part of the painter's eulogy structured by the opaquely equivocal quote from Tacitus: "There are certain things which are rather outside the vices than with the virtues," which is to say, the detachment the Stoics hold dear is not all that it might be when it comes down to the experience of real love and loss.

Tacitus, writing in this part of the *Historiae,* of the downfall—and grisly execution—of the Roman Emperor Galba, devises the rhetorical formulation to describe the deposed Emperor as a man of average, clearly unexceptional, moral fiber:

> His family could boast an ancient nobility, his wealth was great. His character was of an average kind, *rather free from vices, than distinguished by virtues.* He was not regardless of fame, nor yet vainly fond of it. Other men's money he did not covet, with his own he was parsimonious, with that of the State avaricious.[77]

Why should Rubens turn to a biographical passage of this sort? It is of course impossible to track the movements of the mind.[78] For the widowed father, attempting as he writes to shore up his emotions, the story of Galba was surely the story of a merciless death. The Emperor's was a death ordained by "the necessity of Fate" with which Rubens's letter to Depuy begins, careful to identify that insurmountable force with God (Supreme Power), lest there be any question of his Catholic belief.[79]

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[77] [italics mine] Tacitus, *Histories* [i. 49], Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, trans. (Sitwell, KS: Digireads, 2005), 21. Rubens's recollection of the Latin is "*Sed aliqua esse quae potius sunt extra vitia quam cum virtutibus*." Rubens to Pierre DuPuy, July 15, 1626, Magurn, *Letters,* No. 84,

[78] It is notable, however, that Rubens was to take up the portrayal of the Twelve Caesars (including Galba) in the 1620s, for which see Michael Jaffé, "Rubens's Roman Emperors," *The Burlington Magazine,* Vol. 113 (Jun., 1971): 297-303. For Rubens's studies of Galba see the essay by Caterina Limetani Virdis, in *Rubens dall'Italia all'Europa*, Caterina Limentani Verdis and Francesca Bottacin, eds. (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1992).

[79] On the complex portrayal of Galba's character and the emphasis on the circumstances of his death, see, for example Rhiannon Ash*, Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1999) 75-83.

Separated by time, linguistics, and a Rubens's formidable classical education, one can only wonder what drew Rubens's thoughts—as he began to recall for a friend the virtues of his deceased wife—to a passage which comes so unnervingly close to describing the rich and successful father of two, a servant of the 'state,' happily married at the time for seventeen years. Perhaps these noncommittal words from the great Roman historian, no stranger to Seneca himself, epitomize the way Rubens, in an appraisal that was both self-aggrandizing (artist as emperor) and self-deprecating (prince of painters not entirely invulnerable to worldly vice), would have preferred to see himself remembered.[80]

That such a devastating loss would turn the painter's thoughts to his own mortality is, moreover, understandable; like many seventeenth-century humanists he would likely have sought consolation in philosophy—and history—willing his mind from the particularity of his own experience to a time or place in ancient Rome where others before him experienced the horrors of war and the pain of an unforeseen death. Hence, perhaps, Tacitus' account of life after Galba. Perhaps. In the grief-stricken tangle of citations that characterizes the letter to Pierre Dupuy a final further literary coincidence may be observed. For while it seems likely Rubens would have quoted Tacitus from memory, it is of course possible that he even would repair to his library either before or after the letter was written. Doing so, the artist would have discovered what may well have been the first link in the associative chain leading from the compromised Galba to the uncompromised Isabella.

Just a few passages beyond the account of the murdered emperor's mediocrity in the *Histories,* this line appears: "Following an ancient custom, the tribe of the Lingones had made a present of silver hands to the legions as a symbol of hospitality."[81] The emblematic gestalt of this of this gift, as Rubens surely would have recalled—and the translator explains—is that of "two right hands locked in friendship."[82] Roman coins since Galba's time had represented two linked right hands as a sign of "fides exercitum" or faith in the military. But as P.G. Hamberg has explained, the clasped hands of *fides* also came to be associated with *Concordia* in imperial coins (Fig. 28) which often portrayed a female bust on the obverse. Ultimately, under the Empire, the silver hands paired with virtuous female personifications acquired valences of consensus and *adoptio*, while maintaining the primary denotation of faithfulness, all of which seem to capture the allegorical flavor and touching prescience of Rubens's double portrait with his wife. [83]

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[80] A more darkly suggestive reading of the letter results if one considers an observation made just four years earlier in a new edition of a Jacobean commentary on Tacitus: "In Galba thou mayest learn that a good prince governed by evil ministers is as dangerous as if he were evil himself," [Henry Savile]*The End of Nero and the Beginning of Galba. Four Books of the Histories of Cornelius Tacitus. The Life of Agricola* (London, 1622 [1591]), unpaginated prefatory material quoted in J.H.M. Salmon, "Stoicism and Roman Example: Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1989), 210. On Savile see David Womersely, "Sir Henry Savile's Translation of Tacitus and the Political Interpretation of Elizabethan Texts," *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 42, (Aug., 1991): 313-342.

[81] Tacitus, *Histories* [i. 54] W. Hamilton Fyfe, ed. and trans. (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2006), 37.

[82] Ibid., No. 107.

[83] P.G. Hamberg, *Studies in Roman and Imperial Art* (Upsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1945), 18-23, as cited in Myles Anthony McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006),146.

CHAPTER THREE

Rome Once Removed: Painting Devotion in Antwerp

> The Flemish and the Dutch masters are always languid unless they are profane. Leonardo is only to be seen in the Cena; Titian only in the Assumption; but Rubens only in the Battle of the Amazons, and Vandyck only at court. Altar-pieces, when wanted, of course either of them will supply as readily as anything else. Virgins in blue, or St Johns in red, as many as you please. Martyrdoms also, by all means: Rubens especially delights in these. St. Peter head downwards, is interesting anatomically, writhings of impenitent thieves, and bishops having their tongues pulled out, display our powers to advantage, also. Theological instruction if required "Christ armed with thunder, to destroy the world, spares it at the intercession of St. Francis." Last Judgments even, quite Michelangelesque, rich in twistings of limbs, with spiteful biting and scratching; and fine aerial effects in smoke in the pit.
> In all this, however, there is not a vestige of religious feeling or reverence. […] Mary of Nazareth must be painted if an order come for her; but (says polite Sir Peter), Catherine of Medicis, or Mary, her bodice being fuller, and better embroidered, would, if we might offer a suggestion, probably give greater satisfaction.
>
> ---John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, (1905)[1]

The city to which Rubens returned in December of 1608, and in which he married the following September, was also poised for a new beginning. After two years of negotiations, the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-21) concluded between Spain and the United Provinces promised the people of the Spanish Netherlands an end to the violence, famine, and fighting that had ravaged their land, with only six months of ceasefire, since 1572.[2] As Rubens wrote to his physician friend Johann Faber in April of 1609, "The peace, or rather the truce for many years will without doubt be ratified, and during this period it is believed that our country will flourish again."[3] This hopeful prediction seems to have been borne out especially among patrons of art and architecture, for almost immediately upon his arrival in Flanders, Rubens would be greeted with promising and highly visible large-scale commissions. "Having returned to his native land erudite in painting," writes the Roman biographer and theoretician Giovan Pietro Bellori, "with his works he increased the opinion of him that was already circulating in Flanders, whence little by little his name spread in all parts."[4]

Nor had the painter's return gone unnoticed by his country's most exalted patrons. Also in 1609, undoubtedly gratified that his reputation had preceded him, Rubens accepted a prestigious appointment as royal painter. But while officially attached to the Brussels court of his country's Habsburg co-sovereigns, the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, he was in fact an artist

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[1] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. V (London: George Allen, 1905), 328.
[2] Geoffrey Parker, "Why Did the Dutch Revolt Last Eighty Years?" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 26, (1976), 53. As the author notes: "The Dutch Revolt lasted longer than any other uprising in modern European history—from the iconoclastic fury in August 1566 to the Peace of Munster in January 1648; and it involved more continuous fighting than any other war of modern times."
[3] Rubens to Johann Faber, April 10, 1609, Ruth Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1957), No. 20. Although the Twelve Years Truce is often referred to as a Peace, it was, strictly speaking a temporary agreement, recognized as such at the time, as Rubens's qualification indicates.
[4] Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, Alice Sedgwick Wohl, trans. notes by Hellmut Wohl; introduction by Tomaso Montanari (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005), 194.

not-in residence, having received special dispensation to reside in the city where he had received his training. As Roger de Piles described the situation many years later: afraid that Rubens would return to Italy, his benefactors "made him many gifts and, by granting him a pension and all manner of other proper means, sought to attach him to their persons."[5] In addition to his close connections with the city's humanist intellectuals, Rubens likely had the painting market in mind when he chose Antwerp, which remained the country's artistic and mercantile center.

Some of Rubens's first religious commissions after his homecoming reflect the porous boundaries between devotion to Church and devotion to state, or in this case, devotion to the urbanely cosmopolitan identity of which the cities like Brussels and Antwerp were justifiably proud. The subject of Rubens's *Samson and Delilah* discussed in the previous chapter, derives from the Old Testament and was thus theoretically a sacred subject. Yet Rubens had approached the narrative and its morally ambiguous actors with secular allegory firmly in mind, creating a painting that would take pride of place in an epicurean merchant's household rather than the side chapel of a Catholic church. Likewise he had employed the nativity story of the *Adoration* (Fig. 1), also of 1609, with its requisite entourage of richly appareled wise men—or kings—and their exotic retinues in order to figure, and allegorize, the topos of righteous gift-giving. But while it represents a well-beloved, though very economical, passage in the nativity story as related in Matthew (2:11), this painting, too, was intended for a civic setting. The Adoration was commissioned for Antwerp's town hall. The painting's non-ecclesiastical destination may have afforded Rubens the freedom to verge from his text with the addition of a pair of quasi-nude male figures of whom no mention is made in the bible. More likely, perhaps, is the possibility that Rubens saw the enormous public commission as a chance to show his fellow citizens just how much he had learned in Rome. This impulse to mark his nativity as Italianate explains the presence at the hour of Christ's birth of two hulking porters presumably heavy-laden with "gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Yet straining and struggling in the foreground, Rubens's Michelangelesque bodies cannot but distract the eye from Mary, the painting's sole female, and even from the tiny glowing body of the infant Jesus, whom the artist has consigned to a location well left of center.

In contrast to these pivotal works, the majority of Rubens's first major commissions in Antwerp were devotional altarpieces, an artistic genre in which he was theretofore untested in his homeland. In Italy, Rubens had painted several altarpieces whose subjects—Crucifixions, Passion narratives, and Entombments—were largely Christological. As a result his Italian devotional works tend to be more attuned to the male body, both formally and rhetorically they are Christocentric in tenor. Women do play secondary roles in these works. But as in Rubens's most important Italian altarpiece, the painted panels for an Oratorian church of Santa Maria in Valicella (*Chiesa Nuova*), which had ultimately required only a relatively small iconic image of the Virgin and the a single female saint, Rubens's religious women to date might be classified as conventional types rather than individuals with convincing pretensions to historicity. Pretty but generic, they seem designed mainly to occupy and fulfill the expectations of a chauvinistic binary conception of sex difference reliant on feminine passivity to shore up masculinely heroic deeds.

Rubens's religious commissions in Italy had been plentiful. He was nonetheless little experienced with devotional subjects where the Virgin was narratively privileged or doctrinally

[5] Roger de Piles, *Dissertation sur les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres,* 1681, Katie Scott, trans. (London: Pallas Athene, 2005), 67.

exalted as an agential figure. While abroad he had not painted a single biographically 'Marian" altarpiece, that is, an image in which an episode from Mary's life formed the central subject matter. That a painter's interest in central Italian art might result in a disinterest in women's corporeality and female sainthood is not altogether surprising given the dismissive and misogynistic flavor of the Tridentine decrees. Even in the mannered *Annunciation* (Fig. 2) of around 1609-10, what appears to have been Rubens's first Marian painting for one of Antwerp's religious orders (the Jesuit-derived Oratory of the Literati) the golden-haired, warm-blooded angel Gabriel, swathed in billowing tangerine silk, is far more convincing and appealing than the marmoreal and anatomically ponderous Mary.[6] It is consistent with his artistic output and social circle from the Italian period that Rubens's rhetorical representation of masculine authority, whether through the powerful dynamism of the male body or the patriarchal authority of the Fathers of the Church—is a defining feature of his first Northern altarpieces. [7]

The painter's most grandiose representation of the powerfully-built male figure is the monumental altarpiece known as the *Raising of the Cross* (Fig. 3). This desirable commission for Antwerp's oldest church, St Walburga (Walpurgis) was secured by Cornelis van der Geest, like *Samson and Delilah's* patron, Nocolaes Rockox, a private citizen of taste and means. The spice merchant Van der Geest was to become a good friend and mentor to Rubens. At the time of the commission he was a churchwarden of St. Walburga, and was present when Rubens signed the contract for the enormous altarpiece in 1610.[8]

In 1611, even before he had finished the *Raising of the Cross*, Rubens was commissioned by the clerics of another Antwerp church, to paint another scene from Christ's Passion, the *Descent from the Cross* (Fig. 4). More will be said below about these important, and importantly different, projects known as the Antwerp Crucifixions. But within the context of the crucial commissions dating from Rubens's first two years in Antwerp, a further projecy should also be mentioned. In 1611, Rubens's Raphaelesque essay on the *The Real Presence in the Holy Sacrament* (Fig. 5) was executed for a chapel in Antwerp's Dominican church dedicated to the

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[6] The painting is today in the Kunsthistorisches, Vienna. For an explanation of Rubens's color selection see, Michael Jaffé, "Rubens and Optics: Some Fresh Evidence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 34 (1971): 362-366.

[7] While in Rome Rubens, along with his brother, Philip, and their friend Johannes Woverius, was part of a close-knit group of scholars devoted to the works of the Neostoical teacher and writer Justus Lipsius. Lipsius died in Louvain in 1606 while Rubens and Philip were in Italy, but Rubens's portrait of the three young Flemings in the 'company' of their dead mentor, the so-called *Four Philosophers, c.* 1612-14 (Pitti Palace) testifies to the importance of this period to the painter; particularly in view of the death of Philip Rubens in March of 1611. On the *Four Philosophers* and the related "Friendship Portrait" c. 1604-6, see Simone Zurawski, "Reflections on the Pitti Friendship Portrait of Rubens: In Praise of Lipsius and in Remembrance of Erasmus," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Winter, 1992): 727-753. But for an enlightening examination of Lipsius as a dog-lover (and the presence of dogs in his portraits) see Jan Papy, "Lipsius and His Dogs: Humanist Tradition, Iconography and Rubens's 'Four Philosophers'," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 62 (1999), 190-195.

[8] See John Rupert Martin, ed. *Rubens: The Antwerp Altarpieces* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 38. Van der Geest's picture gallery—in which paintings by Rubens are shown—is the subject of a *kunstkammer* painting by Wilhem Van Haecht, c. 1628 (Antwerp, Rubens-House). On Van Haecht's painting see, S. Speth-Holterhoff, *Les peintres flamands de cabinetsd 'amateurs au XVIIe siecle*, (Brussels, 1957), 98. See also, Madlyn Millner Kahr "Velázquez and Las Meninas," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Jun., 1975), 233-234. Rubens dedicated the 1638 engraving of the *Elevation of the Cross* made by Jan Witdoeck to the recently deceased van der Geest "the best of men and the closest of friends, to him in whom from his youth he found a patron, and who all his life was an admirer of painting […]." Max Rooses, *Rubens*, Harold Child, trans. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd.,) 127-135. See also Martin, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 93.

Sodality of the Holy Name. Rubens has deftly infused his image with a hushed solemnity befitting the meeting of a millennia's worth of clerics, theologians, and—most significantly, given the prominence of books in the image—writers, all mystically assembled to affirm the efficacy of Transubstantiation. Yet it is an oddly compacted painting. By way of explanation for its crowded composition, Cynthia Lawrence has offered a paradigm-shifting analysis of the seemingly interchangeable elements of Rubens's pictorial grammar of saints and doctrinal themes in his early Antwerp altarpieces. She proposes that Rubens's original (and spatially continuous) design for the *Real Presence*, today a single or 'portico' style altarpiece, may have intended it as a central panel to be centered by wings portraying two male and two female saints occupying the same space.[9]

If this was so, however, the resulting, all-male, altarpiece suffered a similar fate as Rubens's rejected *Chiesa Nuova* canvas—the revised version of which was more conservative in its presentation of female saints. Whether or not Rubens had initially intended pairs of local saints to bracket the celebration of the Sacrament, his ultimate single-panel solution is of a more patristic, and patriarchal, nature. In a pared down composition echoing Raphael's Vatican *Disputá* the painter specifically underscores centuries-old Catholic apostolic genealogical tradition by representing the adoration of the Eucharist by the Latin doctors Gregory, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome.

Although the altarpiece was corporately commissioned by the Dominican confraternity, it may have been donated by the aforementioned Cornelis van der Geest, also the patron of the *Raising of the Cross*, who has been associated with its members.[10] But if the *Raising of the Cross* and the *Real Presence* maintain the masculine ethos that had accompanied Rubens to Antwerp, his subsequent works introduce a new, and as I will argue, more female-centric, or feminized, kind of religious painting. This is not to make a claim that Rubens made an intentional or conscious decision to paint more heroic female figures or to take up the cause of 'real' women in a polemical or rhetorical manner akin to the male apologists in the ongoing *querelle des femmes*. It is, however, to locate a change in the content of Rubens's paintings that corresponds, I think, to a newfound access to the actions, thoughts, and feelings of women—and children—that his homosocial life as a bachelor had not previously allowed.

I want to suggest here that more than the inclusion of additional female figures in his biblical and extracanonical religious subjects—which is itself significant—Rubens's works from this first decade of his return to the Spanish Netherlands find new ways to make women conceptually and iconographically vital. In order to recognize this new approach to the portrayal of femininity in Antwerp, it becomes necessary to revisit and compare his Northern works with some of his prior religious paintings in Italy. Only then is it possible to turn to the fourth major altarpiece commission dating from Rubens's almost inconceivably productive period of 1611-14, his explicitly mariological *Assumption* (Fig. 6) for the city's Jesuit church. In Antwerp, conceiving the Virgin Mary as a powerful woman rather than (or at least in addition to her status as) an icon, presented new challenges to Rubens. His responses to the 'problem' of the virtuous woman on top are the subject of the final portion of this chapter.

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[9] Cynthia Lawrence, "Before 'The Raising of the Cross': The Origins of Rubens's Earliest Antwerp Altarpieces," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 81 (Jun., 1999), 270-277.
[10] Ibid., 268, see n. 17.

Daughters of Jerusalem

The discernable impact of Rubens's Italian years—his obvious goal in the *Raising of the Cross* to identify himself with the Romanizing aesthetic of an older generation of Flemish painters and in the *Descent from the Cross* to show the extent to which he had absorbed and even refined the lessons of the classical tradition, has rendered these artificially conjoined twins art historically irresistible. "They are greatly admired, almost without exception, and this is rare for Rubens," wrote the nineteenth-century French painter and novelist-critic Eugéne Fromentin (1820-1876) of Rubens's two depictions of Calvary.[11] By Fromentin's time, following the destruction of St. Walburga, where the *Descent* was originally installed, the two altarpieces had been situated together in the transept of Antwerp's Cathedral. Long accessible to tourists, artists, and amateurs from Delacroix to Joshua Reynolds, the two works have come to characterize Rubens not only as a religious painter but as an artist *tout court*.[12] "Between them," an appreciative Kenneth Clark declared, "they established for the next century, the range of pathos as it could be expressed through the nude body."[13] For Clark, however, the nude in this context is importantly male; it is also by implication the body of Christ.

Rubens had previously portrayed various scenes from the life of Jesus for his Italian patrons. His altarpieces c. 1605 for the Jesuit Church in Mantua had included, in addition to the *Presentation at the Temple*, the *Adoration of the Trinity* and the *Baptism of Christ.* One of his earliest important Italian commissions was the tripartite altarpiece for the chapel of St. Helena at *Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*, not incidentally the same Roman pilgrimage church restored by the former cardinal, Archduke Albert. There, Rubens had flanked the central panel's *St. Helena and the Discovery of the True Cross*, with *The Mocking of Christ* and what is likely his first version of the *Elevation of the Cross*.[14] Although the original is lost, Rubens's vision of the *Elevation* as a bustling scene of physical action undertaken by a large cast of characters can be discerned in a painted copy from the period (Fig. 7). To these awkward and much-derided commissions mainly dating from Rubens's first five years as a master of the Guild of St. Luke, should be added the strangely subdued Borghese *Entombment* (Fig. 8), a sacred subject which, like the Santa Croce *Elevation*, was vastly surpassed by Rubens's subsequent portrayals in the following decade.

Above all, in these incipient works, Rubens is unable to get his doctrinal points across. This was truly a detriment for a painter of religious imagery working in Post-Tridentine Rome where widely circulated prescriptive treatises such as Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582) were still having a noticeable effect on substance and style.[15] Rudolph Wittkower has usefully summarized the artistic "recommendations" made by the first wave of

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[11] Eugène Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time,* Andrew Boyle, trans. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1913), 56-71. See also Martin, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 81. A highly successful painter and art critic in his time, Fromentin conceived his last book, a study of Netherlandish painting, during a month-long visit to Holland and Belgium. *Mâitres de L'Autrefois* (1876) was written shortly before his death the same year. See also Martin, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 80.

[12] The altarpieces have been displayed together in Antwerp Cathedral since May of 1816. Max Rooses, See *The Raising of the Cross and the Descent from the Cross* (1903), in Martin, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 111.

[13] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 347.

[14] Kristin Lohse Belkin, *Rubens*, (London: Phaidon, 1998), 65. The altar was dedicated to St. Helena, discoverer of the 'True Cross.' The surviving panels for the side altars are now in the municipal hospital of Grasse, France.

[15] On Paleotti (1522-1597), see Paulo Prodi, *Il cardinale Gabriele Paleotti*, (Roma: Edizioni Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1959-67). See also Ilaria Bianchi, *La politica delle immagini nell'età della Controriforma: Gabriele Paleotti teorico e committente*, (Bologna: Compositori, 2008), 62-67.

Post-Tridentine cleric-theorists under three doctrinal themes: "(i) clarity, simplicity, and intelligibility, (ii) realistic interpretation, and (iii) emotional stimulus to piety."[16] Given these criteria, one can see that Rubens's first religious works in Italy would have aligned him less with those stalwarts of Counter Reformation sobriety, the Carracci, and more with the increasingly-despised Mannerist tradition, of which Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* was viewed by many as the ultimate perpetrator.[17] With its narrative superfluities, 'ahistorical' iconography and indecorous sensuality, high *maniera* flew in the face of the reformed style of Catholic painting, an imperative of which was to eschew "seductive charm" and avoid appearing "disorderly or unbecoming and confusedly arranged."[18]

From the perspective of the Counter-Reformation, Rubens's disorderly artifice was symptomatic of a larger problem. For although formally his Italian altarpieces suffer from unsure draftsmanship and a surfeit of extraneous decoration and archeological detail, their narrative confusion tends to result from the upstaging of the painter's saintly protagonists by a cast of supporting actors who shamelessly steal the show. Many of these secondary figures—as, for example, the salaciously bare-breasted golden-haired Magdalene in the painting known as the Borghese *Entombment* of c. 1601-2 (see Fig. 8) or the emotive knot of tenderly linked Marys collapsed between the swarthy executioners raising the cross in the *Elevation* (see Fig. 7) from the same time—happen to be women. Women, who by their very nature, are distracting. It could be thus be argued, as had Justus Lipsius (and the bishops of Trent) that the mere existence—or appearance—of a woman introduces an element of disorder and disruption in an otherwise ethically constant and rational, male environment—and that Rubens's saintly women exploit this notion. Not merely present, they are active in both a physical and psychological sense—their plaintive expressions and theatrical gestures demand and divide the beholder's attention.

The emotional responses of Rubens's Holy Women are not entirely without scriptural parallels. Female witnesses at Christ's passion are mentioned in all four Gospels (typically the women are identified as Mary, Mary Magdalene, and/or Mary the mother of James and/or Mary Cleophas). But although the female witnesses are listed—of inestimable exegetical consequence to feminist biblical scholars—there is very little description of their attitudes or reactions to the harrowing events related by the four gospel authors. The Lucan narrative of the "Road to Golgotha" (23: 27-30) offers a slight variation, namely, Jesus' direct address to the women "at a distance" who have come to minister to him at the hour of his death:

> And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.
> But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.
> For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the paps which never gave suck.

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[16] Rudolph Wittkower with Joseph Connors and Jennifer Montagu, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600-1800*, Vol I (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1999), 1.

[17] On the response to clerical criticism of Michelangelo by his follower, Bronzino, see Stephen J. Campbell, "Counter Reformation Polemic and Mannerist Counter-Aesthetics: Bronzino's, Martyrdom of St. Lawrence in San Lorenzo," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 46 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 98-119.

[18] *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, H. J. Schroeder, trans., (St. Louis and London,1978) Session XXV, 1563, 220; See also, Holt, *Documentary History*, 65.

Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. Rubens's weeping and lamenting women, like those of many other artists of the time, are likely to originate in this passage.

As is often pointed out, however, by Rubens's time, the extra-textual imagery of Marian swooning (*lo spasimo*) so popular in *Lamentations, Entombments,* and *Crucifixions* from well before the great *Deposition* (1434-36) of Rogier Van Der Weyden (Fig. 9), was frowned upon by Catholic reformers. Early in the sixteenth-century, the Spanish Dominican, Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, had advanced his argument (given in response to an exploratory query on the subject by Julius II) in these terms:

> […] in truth the Blessed Virgin did not swoon in this way either, for she was "full of grace" (Luke 1). It is necessary to deny such a bodily defect in her because it would have impeded this plentitude and perfection of grace. It is plain that grief which would have made her 'beside herself,' would have impeded her use of reason at that moment when it was the time for her to meditate most intensely and intelligently on the passion.... It was more pleasing to God that Mary should have shared in the passion of her Son not only in her feelings but also in her mind since that is the nobler part of man in which grace and merit reside [19]

It is noteworthy that Cajetan should seek to strengthen Mary's status with a suggestively gendered appeal to her use of 'masculine' reason and in the employment of her noblest part, the mind. But how was an artist to render this interior shift from heart to head? In line with Cajetan, whose theories were embraced by Tridentine bishops, Mary's emotional capacity to withstand the grievous blow of her son's execution was to be represented in simultaneously literal and figurative terms: her upstanding body was to convey not only physical fortitude, but the intelligent operation of mental processes unimpeded by emotional frailty. The woman described by the conciliar bishops not as Mary but "the Virgin Mother of God" was henceforth to be shown as a female saint of physical, ergo moral, steadfastness.

The novice Rubens ignores this proviso in the Grasse *Elevation* for Santa Croce, perhaps recognizing that the elimination of the fainting Mary would require a new visual language for such intense maternal empathy, pity, and grief. The figures of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene had become standard symbols of a profound if temporary undoing by physical emotion that should, according to convention, only be displayed by weakened and histrionic females, or—and this supports the claim—by the youthfully beardless and effeminate disciple Christ loved, St. John. Following Cardinal Cajetan Mary could no longer faint, but she could, and did, look on in prophetic yet horrified despair, her loss and humanity's amplified in the mournful attitudes of the other Marys. In the Borghese *Entombment*, for example, the two women, the Virgin gazing heavenward, and the Magdalene weeping, effectively frame the sweet-

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[19] Quoted from Cajetan's *Opuscula: Quaestiones et Quodlibetá* (1529) in Harvey E. Hamburgh, "The Problem of *Lo Spasimo* of the Virgin in Cinquecento Paintings of the Descent from the Cross," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 12 (Winter, 1981), 46. As Hamburgh points out, *pace* Steinberg, despite Cajetan's prescriptions, numerous swooning virgins appear in cinquecento devotional art. See Leo Steinberg, "Pontormo's Capponi Chapel," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 56 (Sep., 1974): 385-399.

faced St. John, here a kind of Marian extra, placed formally and metaphorically on the women's side.

About Jesus' emotional claims on the beholders of these Italian altarpieces, by contrast, little can be said. In the Grasse painting, the partially crucified Christ looks balefully out at the viewer as if in disguise, his face partially obscured by a heavy beard, his lower body improbably floating free while a soldier (the Centurion?) one-handedly draws his shroud-entangled legs toward the cross beam. The dead Christ of the *Entombment* whose torso supported by a surly-looking Joseph of Arimathea, is no less awkwardly composed: his distorted, neckless body is slouched to one side and his face is rendered as an expressionless mask again largely engulfed by beard and shadow. Thus, though bodies gendered male do much of the heavy lifting in Rubens's Italian altarpieces, the emotional, and devotional, weight of the images is borne by its feminine figures.

The Women at the Tomb

Returning to Antwerp in 1608, Rubens had soon found himself commissioned to design two very different kinds of altarpieces. The *Raising of the Cross* and the *Descent from the Cross* represent a turning point in Rubens's career for several reasons. First, not only do they treat what were conventionally understood as the most solemn and liturgically relevant scenes in the life of Christ, they do so on a massive scale, using new figural vocabularies. Second, as triptychs, the altarpieces return to a traditionally Flemish format; Rubens's Italian altarpieces, by contrast, were conceived and displayed as spatially proximate but unattached, single-sided panels.[20] Third, the passion narratives were solicited by prestigious churches on the eve of Antwerp's recuperation—at a time when a city devastated by the iconoclasms of the previous century was finally able to finance commissions for a new style of Catholic art befitting its auspicious location on the frontiers of Protestant heresy.

The Antwerp Crucifixions represent the Italianate Rubens in two quite disparate devotional modes. In the central panel (Fig. 10) of the first and debatably more Catholic, image, Christ's soteriological enactment is made valiant and central, conforming to the post-Tridentine approbation of heroic sainthood. This is to say, Christ's ignoble death "even upon a cross" is presented not as passive submission but as an impossibly courageous and salvific *act.* However much he has accepted his cup and his fate, Christ, the model martyr, does not go gently. As has often been observed, the physical elevation of the short-armed wooden cross to which Christ's suspended body had been very recently nailed seems to require superhuman levels of strength and exertion from the nine able-bodied men in charge. Burnished by sun and sweat, the ponderously contracted muscles and limbs of these huge, largely faceless men twist about the cross like the branches of a gnarled tree. By comparison Rubens's paler, smoother, supine Christ, his fingers tightly curled in agony, can do little more than cast his flashing eyes heavenward. Even so, his crucified body remains energetic and strong.

That the indomitable male physique is in some ways the painting's pictorial conceit is not without reason in an altarpiece created in the aftermath of renowned Catholic martyrdoms in Protestant lands. Throughout the Elizabethan persecution of Catholics, the Spanish Netherlands had served as a refuge for recusants and the families of English martyrs—many of whom were

[20] Belkin, *Rubens*, 104.

women.[21] During the last two decades of the previous century, moreover, Antwerp's churches continually commissioned graphic depictions of martyrdoms, just as the city's presses issued the latest martyrologies such as Molanus's posthumous (and all Flemish) *Natalis Sanctorum Beligii* (1595).[22] Painfully aware that Catholic believers continued to undergo death for their faith, Rubens's beholders are enjoined to 'act as'—rather than 'feel for' the heroic Christ, who, far from surrendering, fights to his own death. A Jesuit print series entitled *Ecclesiae Militantis Triumphi* (1585)—comprised of graphic images of early Christian martyrs, often in the company of an allegorical personification of death—similarly represents the *Rex Gloriose Martyrum* as a muscular and lively crucified Christ; significantly, the series was intended to accompany intrepid members of the Society into Protestant lands.[23]

Accordingly, in the *Raising of the Cross* what might have been Christ's pathetic (or pathos-inducing) nature—his inability to grasp the futility of his struggle—is in effect denied by an unassailable vitality that projects his ultimate victory over death and the grave. While Jesus' searching gaze and parted lips have been described as visual shorthand for his desperation, the mouthing of words in a heavenward direction may also constitute the God-man's primary act of intercession. Looking to the heavens not for deliverance but for the pardon of a murderous and unjust humanity, the Son of God pleads: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (LK 23: 32 KJV) Viewed in this way, Rubens's Crucifixion emphasizes Christ's unique capacity to grant the Catholic faithful divine forgiveness and the promise of resurrection through his body by means of the Eucharist.

This triumphant martyr-king, as the manifestation of Godly manhood, is thus a figure of ēthos rather than pathos. In the *Raising of the Cross* Rubens is careful to maintain the gendered dichotomy between religious *pathos* as passive, responsive, emotive, and therefore feminine, spirituality—and an ethical masculinity envisioned as a stoical, agential, and exemplary call to action. This contrast of pathos and ēthos, an Aristotelian one, is implied in the *Poetics*, when for example, the author wishes to juxtapose 'pathetic' tragedies where pity and fear are induced in the beholder with those in which a good or moral character is represented as a behavioral model for the audience.'[24] Offered as a doctrinally persuasive figure, Rubens's Christ is not, I would argue, *pathetic* insomuch as his body and behavior are intended to encourage (ethical) acts of bravery rather than overwhelming emotional responses of pity and loss. In the Antwerp Crucifixion, where a dying man is represented as a victorious hero—and where a convincingly naturalistic body is rendered in an impossibly intact state—Rubens, like Aristotle, favors a rhetorical approach, finding the "best available means of persuasion" for the poetics of the narrative at hand.[25]

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[21] Recusant history is a wide-ranging field, but on this region and time see the still very useful, and geographically specific, C. S. Durrant, *A Link Between Flemish Mystics and English Martyrs* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1925), see especially 183-236.

[22] See on this subject the unsurpassed survey by David Freedberg, "The Representation of Martyrdoms during The Early Counter-Reformation in Antwerp," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 118 (Mar., 1976), 137.

[23] See Kristin Noreen, "Ecclesiae militantis triumphi: Jesuit Iconography and the Counter- Reformation," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 29 (Autumn, 1998), 700.

[24] See, for example, Christopher Gill, "The Ēthos/Pathos Distinction in Rhetorical and Literary Criticism," *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 34 (1984): 149-166. As Gill points out, Aristotle's poetics of ethos is explicated more fully in *De Rhetorica* from which the 'proofs' for tragic theory seem to be derived; see 150-151, 154.

[25] Ar. *Rh*. I 2, 1355. Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 1329.

But neither Fromentin's "manly and tender" Christ, nor his vision of the "moral beauty of a picturesque conception" is recognizable in the scene from Calvary that follows the *Raising of the Cross*. [26] The soft-bodied Christ of the *Descent*, whose bloodied, puce-gray semblance has taken on an almost indeterminate sexuality, represents a key shift in Rubens's equivalence of perfected masculinity with physical force and transcendent might. This Christ is in some ways a return to the vacuous Jesus of the Italian altarpieces; he is there but not there, hardly a God and less a body than an occasion for the presentation of the faith and fears of those who surround him. In Rubens's panel, the resurrection of this small unassuming body is truly inconceivable. Nor does the artist wish the beholder to think otherwise—to repair, in other words, to the consoling always-already of Christ's future glory. Even Rosso and Pontormo—and all who crowned the dead Christ with a halo—had found ways to suggest the redemptive events to come. By contrast Rubens has created a *Descent* of pure loss and abjection.

Their very different narrative moments may explain, to at least some degree, jarring discrepancies in the altarpieces' emotional register and depiction of human anatomy. But with regard to the "profound transformation that had come over the manner of Rubens in the transition between one work and the other," it is also possible to observe some interesting changes in the use and articulation of gender in a broader compositional and didactic sense.[27] The most obvious and significant of these changes is Rubens's decision to integrate women more fully and prominently in the narrative action of the *Descent* than he had in that of the *Raising of the Cross*.

Consider, for example, that women are sequestered in a single wing of the continuous crucifixion scene in the *Raising of the Cross* (Fig. 11). The central panel shows the elevation of the crucified Christ, and the right wing, largely occupied by the mounted Roman soldier, is entirely populated by men—and animals. Here the soldiers and executioners, charged with the liveliest actions and reactions, are some of the most insistently 'robust' male nudes Rubens will produce. The masculine corporeality of these faceless do-ers, who heave and grunt and strain under the imponderable burden—more spiritual than physical—of their divine victim, has elicited a variety of critical responses. Reminded of the *Raft of the Medusa,* and implicitly, of Theodore Gericault's fascination with what was for him, the uniquely signifying substantiality of male bodies, the French painter Eugene Delacroix finds Rubens's triptych "full of Michelangelo."[28] Closer to our own time, Hans Evers has perceived Rubens's division of the events at Golgotha in more straightforwardly gendered terms, such that the left wing "is a purely feminine world, comprising three ages, and it forms a counterpoint to the exclusively masculine world of the central picture." [29]

Of course, the left wing is not purely feminine in a purely female sense, the young, voluminously robed St. John is included at the Virgin's side. But Evers's oversight is understandable. Especially in view of Rubens's deftly segregated picture world, where gender rather than sex determines one's status and place. Yet masculinity and femininity are measured on a continuum according to which the coldest male is deemed stronger and more vital than the

[26]Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time*, 56-71 in Martin, *Rubens*, 80.
[27] Rooses, "The Raising of the Cross," 111.
[28] *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, ed., Hubert Wellington, trans. Lucy Norton, (London: Phaidon, 1951), 134-135, in Martin, *Rubens*, 75.
[29] Hans Evers, cited in Martin, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 115-116.

hottest female.[30] Rubens is consistent with this hierarchy when, even within an otherwise female pictorial space, he grants St. John the honorific dominant left-side placement vis-à-vis the Virgin. That the 'female' panel is surprisingly also the triptych's privileged left wing is explained by the lamenting female subjects' superior moral standing to the right wing's thieves and murderous Romans.

Although St. John is not a woman, his presence in the feminine realm is explained by his provocative historical and scriptural designation as 'the disciple Christ loved,' and as the apostle who reclined on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper (John 13: 23-26). In St. John's account of the Passion, Mary and John (also the gospel's 'author') are commended to each other by Jesus shortly before his death:

> Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.
> When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!
> Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home (John 19: 25-27; KJV)

At Jesus' request John becomes a stand-in for Christ, a kind of son-in-law, to the mother of God. Like the Virgin Mary, the reputedly chaste disciple embodies untainted humanity, tenderness, and compassion, in addition to a preferential or 'chosen' status among Christ's followers mandated by the Gospel of John. As a reflection of Christ's intimate relationship with John, medieval illuminators and sculptors in the North, paralleling contemporary mystics, had developed an artistic tradition depicting Jesus and St. John in an affectionate gesture of hand-clasping which draws on marriage imagery (Fig. 12).[31] In this context, St. John, who figures as the 'bride of Christ' or *Ecclesia*, is depicted as a beardless, rosy cheeked youth, with long, golden hair, not dissimilar to Rubens's attentive Evangelist in the *Raising of the Cross*.

In the *Descent*, however, Rubens dissolves the boundaries between Evers's male and female 'worlds.' Not only is this accomplished by returning the Marys to their implied proximity to the cross with the male witnesses, but also by deemphasizing Christ's corporeal—and heroically masculine—substantiality. How light is the burden where even the rather slight, inescapably elegant St. John is able to bear the weight of his beloved Master. Resplendent in red, John, the faithful follower of the older, wiser Jesus. While the figure of Christ is theoretically the picture's focal point, it is to John rather than to the Virgin that the soulless body is made to descend.

Taking a visual cue from the composition's forcefully downward right to left diagonal structure, anchored in the lower corner by the pyramidal grouping of the Holy Women, one can easily imagine the next sequence of events. Once John has stepped down he will receive the lifeless body of Christ in a pious inversion/invocation of the Last Supper; where once he reclined on the breast of the living Jesus to take the bread and wine he had blessed John will now uphold

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[30] Zirka Filipczak, *Hot Dry Men, Cold Wet Women: The Theory of Humors and Western European art, 1575-1700* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1997).

[31] See for example, Carolyn S. Jirousek, "Christ and St. John the Evangelist as a Model of Medieval Mysticism," *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art,* Vol. 6 (2001): 6-27.

the dead Christ at the site of the Mass.[32] Rubens thus articulates the trope of 'Christ-bearer' in the central panel of a triptych before which Holy Communion will be celebrated, whose panels provide a further elaboration of this theme.[33] Christopher, the eponymous Christ-bearer himself, his meaty shoulder straddled by a diminutive, crimson-clad baby Jesus, fills nearly the entirety of the altarpiece's left exterior wing. There the mighty saint advances with seeming difficulty from the pitchy darkness, leaning heavily on a club-like staff, which affirms his already striking similarity to the Farnese Hercules.[34] With this image of the *Corpus Christi*—in contrast to the imponderable weight suggested in the *Raising of the Cross* but consistent with the *Descent's* central conceit—Rubens conveys in painterly metaphysics, the bearable lightness of Jesus.

A visual dematerialization of Christ's body might be expected given the acknowledged departure of spirit from flesh. But from the post-Tridentine perspective there were clear theological reasons to depict the dead Christ in a manner that emphasized resurrection rather than realism. Writing less than a decade after Delacroix and presumably sensitive to the doctrinal implications of Rubens's panel, the French critic Théophile Sylvestre went so far as to question the painter's orthodoxy:

> Although admirable in execution, prodigious in color, Rubens's *Descent from the Cross* has nothing Christian about it. Do you see this head hanging down, these slack and heavy limbs, this real death? This is not the God-Man who will sleep for three days but a Hercules dead forever. And that robust matron, draped in the fashion of the mourners whose resignation and faith were to quench the sobbing of mankind! How much better Le Sueur felt the poetry of Christianity![35]

There are implicit comparisons between the two Christs here. In sum, nothing about the persuasively vigorous and indomitable 'God-Man' of the *Raising of the Cross* prepares the beholder for the putrid, amorphous cadaver we find in the story's next scene. Sylvestre upholds the enduring conflation of virility and vitality, and paradoxically, the care with which classical topoi must be handled in religious contexts. If Jesus' Herculean physique in the *Raising of the Cross* aptly conveyed his divine status, the 'real' and authentically bloodless Christ of the *Descent* borders on the pagan, even the heretical. For Sylvestre, Rubens's visual apostasy further manifests itself in his portrayal of the Virgin as a 'robust matron' who resembles less a grieving mother than a theatrical stand in paid to act for an audience.

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[32] Max Rooses observed this intimation of the close relationship between Christ and St. John at the Last Supper. See Rooses, "The Descent from the Cross," in Martin, *Rubens*, 107.

[33] In the colorful words of the first critic to identify the altarpiece's iconographical continuity: "No sooner had the senior dean replied that they wanted the Descent from the Cross which carried the Lamb of the World, than the inspired artist felt himself exalted by divine zeal and said 'Very well, sir, then I share bring together in the painting and in the wings everything that relates to the carrying of the Saviour.'" J.C. Weyerman, *De levensbeschryvingen der Nederlandsche Konst-schilders en Konst-schildressen* (The Lives of the Netherlandish Painters,1729), trans. John Rupert Martin, in Martin, *Rubens*, 63.

[34] Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy* (Phaidon: Oxford UP, 1977), 20-21. Rubens produced a pen drawing (London, British Museum) of the two figures and a detailed modello (Munich, Altepinakotek) for the panel; see Martin, *Rubens*, 47. These studies are undoubtedly based on a painting of the subject (c. 1598-99) by Rubens's recently deceased friend, Adam Elsheimer (St. Petersburg, Hermitage), see Belkin, *Rubens*, 119.

[35] Théophile Sylvestre in Charles Blanc, *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles: Écoles Flamandes* (1868), trans., John Rupert Martin, in Martin, *Rubens*, 79.

Significantly, as in Delacroix and Evers, there is a gendered aesthetic at work in Sylvestre's cutting critique, which differs remarkably little in substance from the ecstatic panegyrics of Fromentin. The latter, writing from a Paris poised between Romanticism and 'decadence,' compares Rubens's Christ in the *Descent* to "some beautiful flower, plucked and withered." [36] According to the iconographical schema seemingly shared by all these critics, however, the muscular and robust male body effectively conveys the Christian message of heroic suffering and resurrection, whereas—or just as—the exhausted, inert and violated male anatomy is always in danger of becoming feminized even when the victim is known to have faced torture and assassination with manly stoical fortitude. In Sylvestre's case, Christ's formal inefficacy seems inversely proportionate to the Virgin's unseemly gravitas. Taking into account the graphic decorum of his wounds and his tender vulnerability, Rubens's dead Christ is, in fact, more akin to the Man of Sorrows in 'high gothic' *Lamentations,* those earthy yet dignified devotional works exemplifying, in Panofsky's words, "that which the Italians most admired in Early Flemish painting: pictorial brilliance and sentiment."[37]

Assumptions

Despite its highly affective and forlorn, tenor, the *Descent from the Cross* has emerged as the 'classical' altarpiece so often considered as a stylistic response to the majestically 'Baroque' *Raising of the Cross* of the previous year.[38] In relation to this Wolfflinian binary of sentimental/heroic, a third stylistic factor can hardly be imagined. Yet although it is rarely considered in discussion of the 'Antwerp Crucifixions,' another major project occupied Rubens at this time. Concurrent with the aforementioned altarpieces, he had been at work on at least two ideas for a very dissimilar devotional theme, a large-scale *Assumption of the Virgin* for the high altar of Antwerp's venerable Cathedral *Church of Our Lady*. [39]

Overshadowed by the "youthful exuberance" and disciplined classicism of the passion altarpieces, Rubens's intervening commission for Antwerp cathedral is often overlooked by historians.[40] Yet on April 22, 1611, the Cathedral canons duly received from Rubens two sketches for 'The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin' as they had requested. The previous month, Rubens's last teacher, Otto van Veen, had also presented designs for the altar and it is telling that as early as his first years back in Antwerp, Rubens possessed sufficient skill and confidence to usurp his respected mannerist master and secure the project for himself.[41] One reason that the 'Assumption' commissioned in 1611 has received relatively little attention within the context of Rubens's early works is that the altarpiece itself was not set up in the cathedral until 1626.[42] More important than the installation date, however, is the fact that during the ensuing fifteen years between his first thoughts and final execution of that particular commission, Rubens returned to the subjects of the Assumption and Coronation numerous times and in varying formats.

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[36]Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time*, 56-71 in Martin, *Rubens*, 87.
[37] Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Vol. I (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 258.
[38] Martin, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 48.
[39] See Lawrence, op cit., and see also the essay by Frans Baudoin, "Altars and Altarpieces before 1620," in John Rupert Martin, ed. *Rubens Before 1620* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972), 64-75.
[40] An exception is the pithy study by Baudoin, "Altars and Altarpieces before 1620," op cit.
[41] Ibid., 64-65
[42] Rubens's return to the project after some eight years is documented in the agreement signed with the Cathedral's Dean, Johannes Del Rio, in 1619. Ibid, 70.

The Antwerp cathedral *Assumption* (Fig. 6) was importantly preceded by the Vienna *Assumption* c. 1611-14 (Fig. 13), which hung originally in the Mary Chapel of the Jesuit Church of Antwerp. There are multiple studies and richly inventive *modelli* associated with these paintings—as well perhaps for Rubens's *Assumption* of c. 1618 (Fig. 14) for the high-altar of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle (Kapellekerk), the Dominican church in Brussels (a painting today in Düsseldorf).[43] And there is also, Paulus Pontius' magnificent engraving (Fig. 15, 1624) based on Rubens's heavily reworked but highly finished large-scale drawing of the *Assumption* made in the 1620s.[44] Some thirty-five contemporary sketches and drawings of the *Assumption* by (or after) Rubens have been located in auction catalogues alone.[45]

Thus the 1611 Antwerp cathedral commission, while unfinished for so many years, appears to have inspired Rubens's artistic—and probably devotional—attachment to what would become one of his most repeated Marian subjects. In turning here to one of those intervening *Assumptions*—the painting for the Jesuit church—I am less interested in its place in the complicated evolution of the imagery over successive decades than in the patron's expectations of the artist and the subject and how Rubens chose to meet these demands from a conceptual standpoint. As a commission for a religious order with which Rubens had subsequent dealings throughout his lifetime and among whom he counted many friends, the Jesuit *Assumption* may also offer insights into Rubens's personal, social, and spiritual affinities at the time. The altarpiece can certainly be associated with Rubens's entrée into the orbit of the 'Society' as the order is known, and with his probable knowledge of the practices of Ignatian spirituality. Rubens was, in fact, a member of the Jesuit Grand Sodality of the Annunciation in the period during which plans for the construction of the costly Jesuit church were being overseen by his friend—and sometime collaborator—the Jesuit mathematician François Aguilon (d. 1617).[46] To paint for and pray with the Jesuits was to adopt their fervor for (Catholic humanist) education, to share their faith in the power of images and their special devotion to Mary. As well, in at least in some quarters, to uphold a healthy condescension toward earthly women, whom the Virgin resembles in body alone.[47]

The story of Mary's bodily assumption into Heaven after her death—which had crucial implications for her intercessory abilities as a woman literally uncorrupted by sin—is not found in the canonical literature. For the narrative details, early medieval commentators and, through them, artists had primarily relied on sixth and seventh-century Coptic and Syriac accounts of Mary's *dormition*, or falling asleep, where her final moments in Jerusalem in the company of the mystically gathered apostles, and in some cases, Mary Magdalene, are recorded.[48] It is from such

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[43] Ibid., 80-81. The Kapellekerk painting was sold to Wilhelm von Pfalz-Neuberf in 1700 and subsequently moved to Düsseldorf. Important *modelli* and drawings include those in the Hermitage, British Royal Collection, and the Albertina.

[44] See Anne-Marie Logan, "Rubens' Design for Pontius' Engraving of the "Assumption of the Virgin," *Master Drawings*, Vol. 37(Autumn, 1999): 231-237.

[45] See David Freedberg, *Rubens: The Life of Christ after the Passion*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, Pt. VII (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 168. See also, Logan, op cit., no.4.

[46] The best known example of Rubens's association with Aguilon are the frontispiece and six illustrations contributed by the artist to Aguilon's *Optica Aguilonii* (1613), for a summary of which see Michael Jaffé, "Rubens and Optics: Some Fresh Evidence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 34 (1971): 362-366.

[47] On the nature of late sixteenth-century Jesuit praxis and spirituality see John W. O'Malley, *The Early Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), 362-376.

[48] Sixty Dormition legends in nine languages are known from the period prior to the tenth century. See

texts, and the *Golden Legend*, which draws on them, that the pictorial conceits of Mary's pleasantly posthumous 'odor of sanctity' and rose-strewn shroud emerge. Indeed, the flavor of many of the Dormition apocrypha is not only adulatory and hyperbolic but highly sensual, drawing in a number of instances, on the erotic, nuptial language of the biblical *Song of Songs*. Thus, for example, an passage from the Dormition account the sixth-century writer, Pseudo-Evodius:

> You are exalted above heaven, more esteemed than the earth, because God resided in your holy womb. Blessed are you, O beautiful dove, my bride without blemish. Arise and come beside me, because my time has drawn near, when I will eat my bread with you and drink the sweet-smelling wine in my garden my holy paradise.[49]

Metaphorical imagery of this sort was especially well-suited to the allegorical purposes of seventeenth-century devotional images and books. In rare cases, the two genres were combined in a work by the same author-artist. Otto van Veen, for example, had recently published his ingenious *Emblemata Horatiana* (1607) as well as his more secular *Amorum Emblemata* (1609). The Catholic humanist Van Veen (Vaenius) was considered an innovator of the genre of emblem literature; his books underwent numerous translations and a plagiarized version of the Horatian emblems was even (re) dedicated to the French Queen Anne of Austria in 1646 as a sort of moral code and princely mirror.[50] It is all the more surprising in this respect that van Veen's proposed Assumption mentioned in the cathedral's meeting minutes as a 'Sponsam de Libano provacantem ad coronam,'—clearly referring to the bride of Christ in the Song of Songs—was declined in favor of the designs of a less practiced Catholic painter.[51]

The learned van Veen would remain active in the Spanish Netherlands until his death in 1629. One can therefore only assume that Rubens's *style* was deemed more appealing by his patrons than his teacher's. And further, that those patrons in search of new painters, such as the canons of Antwerp cathedral, had likely made a point to view Rubens's only local (Marian) altarpiece prior to making their decision. The artist's rejected canvas for the *Chiesa Nuova*, the *Madonna and Child Adored by Saints*, had accompanied Rubens on his return to Antwerp where in 1610 it had been placed over the grave of his mother in the Premonstratensian church of St.

Stephen J. Shoemaker, "'Let Us Go and Burn Her Body': The Image of the Jews in the Early Dormition Traditions," *Church History,* Vol. 68 (Dec., 1999),777. For an invaluable history of the Dormition texts, see also by the same author, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).

[49] Quoted in Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), 56. See also Stephen Shoemaker, "The Sahidic Coptic Homily of the Virgin Attributed to Evodius of Rome: An Edition from Morgan MSS 596 & 598 with Translation," *Analecta Bollandiana*, Vol. 117 (1999): 241-83.

[50] Said plagiarist was Marin le Roi de Gomberville, who gave the book the title: *Doctrine des Moeurs, tiree de la philosophie des Stoiques*, See, Inemie Gerards-Nelissen, "Otto van Veen's *Emblemata Horatiana*," *Simiolus*, Vol. 5, (1971), 20. For the *Amorum Emblemata* see Steven Orgel, Otto van Veen, *Amorum Emblemata*, (Antwerp, 1608), reprint, (New York, 1979).

[51] The apposite passage is found in chapter 4 vs. 8 of the *Song of Songs* (KJV): "Come with me from Lebanon my bride, my spouse." See also on this point, David Freedberg, "A Source for Rubens's Modello of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin: A Case Study in the Response to Images," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 120 (Jul., 1978), 436, no. 45.The archival record of the meeting was published by L. Philippen, "Le Culte de Notre Dame 'op 't Stocxken' à Anvers 1474-1580," *Annales de l'Academie Royale d'Archeologie de Bruxelles*, Vol. 72 (1924), 324, cited in Baudoin, "Altarpieces," 64.

Michael's Abbey.[52] The painting would have been unlike anything else in the church. It is easy to imagine that the Italian altarpiece's classical architecture and monumental, vivacious saints—whose elegant gestures and life-like expressions infuse the panel with all the splendid vitality of a sacred conversation in *media res*—would have proclaimed the advent of a new, more immediate, kind of religious art.

Yet, an *Assumption* was neither the staging of a *sacra conversazione* nor the illustration of a biblical passage. It was instead, an extracanonical sacred subject, a doctrinal image with a devotional aim. The doctrine of the Assumption jointly affirming Mary's inherent nobility and perfect maternity just as it promulgates her unique intercessory role for souls "detained" in purgatory.

Shortly after its founding in 1540, the Society of Jesus had taken the Virgin as their patron saint thereby setting the standard for Marian piety in a wide array of liturgical, doctrinal, and artistic forms. The first 'Marian Congregation' at the Jesuit's Collegio Romano was initiated by a young Fleming, Jan Leunis, in 1563.[53] In 1585, the Jesuit Franciscus Costerus had helped establish Antwerp's first lay confraternity, or sodality, devoted to the veneration of the Virgin Mary; by 1609 the group, whose membership was limited to married men, numbered 174.[54] The construction of the Jesuit church of Antwerp, across from which the Marian sodalities later held their meetings, (and to which Rubens would ultimately contribute a cycle of thirty-nine ceiling panels) would not be completed until 1622.[55] It has been suggested, and generally accepted, however, that the Vienna *Assumption* dates from a much earlier period, perhaps even as early as 1611, when Rubens was first given a similar, if not identical, commission for the high altar of Antwerp Cathedral.[56]

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In what remains the most intuitively insightful discussion of the theme, Jacob Burckhardt, refers to the 'Assunta' as "one of the very great tasks" of Rubens's life. Yet the Swiss art historian is also quick to note a certain awkwardness in the artist's approach.[57] He writes:

> Where Rubens becomes inadequate in all these pictures is in the figure of the Madonna, not within the limits of the style we have once accepted as his, but in relation to the imaginative implications of the problem and to the rest of great art.[58]

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[52] *F. Sweertius, Monumenta Sepulchraralia et inscriptions publicae privataeq. Ducatus Brnantiae* (Antwerp, 1613), 143-144; quoted in Baudoin, *Altarpieces*, 49.

[53] John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), 197.

[54] Due to the sodality's rapid growth and popularity, a separate group consisting of bachelors was founded in 1608, among whose members was Anthony Van Dyck. See Carolyn Diskant Muir, "Art and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Antwerp: van Dyck's "Mystic Marriage of the Blessed Hermann-Joseph," *Simiolus*, Vol. 28 (2000 -2001), 57.

[55] The iconographically fascinating altarpieces representing *The Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola* and *The Miracles of St. Francis Xavier*, which also hung in the Jesuit church, are also thought to predate its construction by at least seven years. On these paintings as well as the ceiling program, see John Rupert Martin, *The Ceiling Paintings for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, Corpus Rubeninanum I (London: Phaidon, 1968), 36ff.

[56] Baudoin, "Altarpieces", 68. It has also been suggested that the altarpiece now in Vienna was, in fact, intended for the high altar of Antwerp cathedral. See Freedberg, "A Source for Rubens's Modello," 432.

[57] Jacob Burckhardt, *Rubens* (1898) reprint (London: Phaidon, 1950), 92.

[58] Ibid., 94.

It is a harsh appraisal from one the early historians most familiar with the scope of Rubens's works, and one shaped, as it implies, by comparisons with the great Italian Assumptions not only of the cinquecento but by Rubens's contemporaries such as Guido Reni (whose version Rubens did not see). Given that the apocryphal texts had been largely subsumed by the seventeenth-century in the pictorial tradition of devotional painting it is logical that Rubens would look to earlier (Italian) artists when facing an extracanonical sacred a subject. Moreover, while previous Flemish painters had some experience portraying the Coronation of the Virgin, usually shown ascending to the Trinity (see, e.g. Fig 16), imagery of Mary's resurrection and earthly appearance to the apostles as she rises heavenward was far more common in Italy than in Flanders.[59]

As a result, Rubens was essentially charged with creating a new subgenre, or at the very least with translating an Italian theme into the modern Flemish artistic vernacular. At this stage of his career his religious paintings had included muscle-bound extras, an emasculated Christ, and sexually-appealing female saints, but never the apotheosis of a virtuous woman. He had not yet painted a scene, in other words, depicting the good woman on top.

It may be the *Assumption's* novelty in this respect—and its questionable rhetorical success—that catches Burckhardt unawares. For as he goes on to state, by following the "infatuation shared by the Italians," who also "miss" the opportunity to use body language to their advantage, Rubens insistently "shows the Madonna sitting on the clouds, while the moment absolutely required a standing or floating figure."[60] It is an odd pronouncement. Especially since the (Italian) artist who most profoundly embraces Burckhardt's idea is also the author of the most famous 'Assunta' of all, namely Titian (Fig. 17). In Titian's great altarpiece for the Franciscan church in Venice, a solemnly awestruck and properly mature Mary stands lightly on a cloud, her billowing garments caught up by a sudden gust of wind in something akin to a chaste version of the famous film still of Marilyn Monroe. Titian's levitating Virgin seems drawn almost magnetically toward the drastically foreshortened God the Father directly over her head, where an angel awaits her imminent arrival with a crown. In this way the Venetian artist presents a figure who is both appropriately humble—we note her shocked gaze and exclamatory gesture—and newly empowered, as her unflappable stance and hyphenated centeredness between heaven and earth make clear.[61]

Titian was not the last Northern Italian artist to depict the Virgin Mary in this staidly regal manner. Subsequent painters from Veronese and Tintoretto to El Greco—who also studied in Venice—would follow his example with similarly upright Marys of their own. But in the Rome that Rubens had known, the tradition moved in other directions. In 1601, Annibale Carracci (Fig. 18) had created a weighty and vigorous Virgin of a more uncertain posture, at once idealized and majestically human as she bursts out of the tomb and into the heavens

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[59] Burckhardt makes this point in *Rubens*, 92. For the early Flemish tradition see, for example, Dorien Tamis, "The Genesis of Albert Cornelis's 'Coronation of the Virgin' in Bruges," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 142 (Nov., 2000): 672-680.

[60] Burckhardt, op cit., 94.

[61] On Titian's *Assunta*, see for example David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997); Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969), Vol I, cat. 14; Peter Humphrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven; Yale UP, 1993), 301-304.

supported and propelled by sweet-faced cherubim and seraphim ensconced in her robes. Just a year earlier, the Jesuits in Rome had commissioned Federico Zuccari (Fig. 19) to paint a very different type of *Assumption* on the dome of the Angel Chapel in the Gesù, their mother church. Perched on a dense cloudbank, Zuccari's Virgin completes the pyramid positioned below the traditional presentation of the Trinity, with God the Father and God the Son seated beneath a radiantly nimbed Paraclete in the form of a dove.[62]

Given that Rubens had such varied and well-known modern precedents to choose from it is surprising that his Virgin Mary resembles none of them. In addition to her peculiar posture not so much seated as embedded in a diagonal swath of cloud, Rubens's Mary cranes her neck so far beyond the picture that her expression is scarcely readable. From what we can see, however, the mother of Jesus is young, almost girlish, with loose, golden curls and soft features, far from the sixty or seventy years Mary was thought to have reached when she died.[63] Perhaps most unexpectedly, she is garbed entirely in silvery white rather than her usually saturated tones of rose, blue and on occasion, green.

There are possible explanations for some of these decisions. Mary's drastically extrapictorial gaze, for example, is related to the architectonic iconography of the altar's original frame. Like those Rubens designed for other altarpieces, such as the *Raising of the Cross*, the elaborate carved framework originally incorporated three-dimensional forms of God the Father or the Resurrected Christ, with which the painted figures below were placed in 'conversation.'[64] An engraving based on a similarly conceived program (Fig. 20) for the high altar of Antwerp Cathedral (the site, as mentioned, of Rubens's *Assumption* installed in 1626) demonstrates the relationships between the painted figure of Mary, the sculpted figure of Christ above her, and the Titianesque bust-length God the Father framed by the curved pediment crowning the elaborate structure. Thus the sightline of the ascending Mary in our painting would likely have terminated in a similar representation of God the Father—and possibly Christ—a formal conceit that explains to some extent her location at the very periphery of the altarpiece's arch, as if she is only moments from disappearing out of sight and into the heavens.[65]

The rationale for the Virgin's unusually pale and monochromatic attire is harder to surmise. Given Rubens's knowledge and appreciation of Raphael, it is tempting to suggest as the source of her gleaming garments, the Italian artist's transfigured Christ (Fig. 21), of which Rubens had made impressive studies around 1605.[66] By this interpretation the risen Mary would have evoked the risen Christ, conventionally portrayed by artists as described in New Testament accounts, such as Mark:

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[62] On Zuccari's Angel Chapel frescoes at the Gesù, see Golda Balass, "Five Hierarchies of Intercessors for Salvation: The Decoration of the Angels' Chapel in the Gesù," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 24 (2003), 183-187.

[63] Voragine (1229-1298), the author of the Golden Legend, quoting Ephiphanius and other authorities, places Mary's age at the time of her death at either sixty or seventy-two. See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, Vol II, William Granger Ryan, trans. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 77.

[64] The altar in the Mary Chapel (Hautappelkapel) later constructed based on a design by Rubens is reproduced in S. Leurs, "Barokkerken te Antwerpen," *Ars Belgica*, Vol. 3 (Antwerp, 1935), pl xvii, no. 24.

[65] A further example of this integrated altar design for an *Assumption*, perhaps the earliest (c. 1616), is found in the *Kappellekerk* of Brussels, though the painting originally intended for this altar is no longer in situ. See Baudoin, "Altarpieces," 80-81.

[66] See, e.g. Rubens's three studies of Raphael's *Transfiguration*, all in ink and body color, in the Louvre.

> And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. (MK 9:2-3 KJV)

In visual terms, the transformation, or transfiguration, of Jesus into the Christ is consequently made manifest by a change of clothes.

Accordingly, in Rubens's painting it seems the Blessed Virgin Mary undergoes a similar metamorphosis in order that she may depart the sensual, terrestrial world of color and mortality to be crowned Immaculately Pure Queen of Heaven. As St. Augustine has it: "The bane of corruption ought not to overtake her who suffered no corruption of her integrity when she gave birth to so great a son."[67] It is a sensible, though somewhat radical, visual parallel to make. And yet the impact of this highly original artistic choice somehow falls flat—despite her scale and effulgence, the calm, rising Mary pales by comparison with the earthy disciples, whose emotive gesticulations run the gamut. What is more, the supremacy of Mary's virginal beauty and tenderness is threatened by the trio of pretty girls on the ground, each of whom struggles valiantly to keep her wits about her as she witnesses the apostles' astonished interjections while simultaneously gathering the fragrant rose buds that have miraculously issued from a dusty tomb. There is, as it were, nothing about this icily bland and detached Mary to deflect our attention from the joyful instantaneity and recognizably human chaos below.

Raphael avoids this psychological disconnect by representing Christ as a mysterious and compelling body resplendently isolated in his own space; though he is framed by Moses and Elijah, Jesus stands alone, untouchable and surrounded rather than supported by celestial cloud and light. Like Titian, whose 'Assunta' may predate the *Transfiguration,* Raphael inscribes Christ's divine progress through the *pathosformel* of fluttering drapery.[68] But Rubens chooses instead to suggest Mary's heavenly destination by sinking her into a cumulus pastiche of frolicking cherubim and seraphim, effectively grounding a figure that ought rightly to soar or float. And there are other indications that the artist has struggled to find a new kinetic vocabulary through which to communicate Mary's unique virtues and capabilities as *mediatrix*.[69] The arrangement of the Virgin's arms, for instance, seems both an indication of her supposedly upward passage through space and an appropriation of the judging Christs of Jan Van Eyck (Fig 22) and Michelangelo (Fig. 23). Though her gesture more closely approximates the former, Rubens's solidly built Mary shares her sedentary pose, and even the arrangement of draped folds on her lap, with the latter.

Yet in view of the altarpiece's Jesuit origins, one might expect to see the Assumption's doctrinal content brought more aggressively, and transparently, to the fore. In a pioneering consideration of this possibility, David Freedberg has drawn parallels between contemporary Jesuit catechetical literature and yet another Rubens *Assumption*, the Leningrad *modello* (Fig. 24)—which is notable for both its unique inclusion of Christ at Mary's side, and for a lower-tier

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[67] Augustine as quoted in Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 84.

[68] See Aby Warburg*, The Revival of Pagan Antiquity*, David Britt, trans. with an introduction by Kurt W. Forster (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), 89. In his essay "Sandro Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Spring," Warburg coined this term (translated by Britt as 'emotive formula') to express what he describes as "accessory forms—those of garments and of hair" represented in motion.

[69] The term has earlier origins in the *Speculum humanae salvationis* (1475), where Mary is portrayed beside Christ interceding for humanity. See Balass, "Five Hierarchies of Intercessors," 182-184.

arrangement of apostles and holy women nearly identical to our painting in Vienna. Describing his texts as 'sources,' Freedberg sets out to reveal compositional concordances between the *modello* and illustrations by Hieronymous Wierix for Jerome Nadal's *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, (the revised edition of which was published in Antwerp in 1607, well after Nadal's death).[70] For a print entitled *Suscitatur Virgo Mater et Filio* (Reception of the Virgin into Heaven, Fig. 25),Wierix engraved a scene where a kneeling Mary presents herself as mother and bride, disciple and queen, to a King of Kings who tenderly takes her hand. In his analysis of the print's relationship to Nadal's prescriptive meditational text, Freedberg finds that Nadal's annotations are "deliberately calculated to help the reader realize the emotional qualities which the image is likely (or supposed) to arouse."[71] Readers of Nadal would therefore have a sort of road map or legend for a painting such as Rubens's.

"What is striking about the *modello*," writes Freedberg, "is its iconographic originality."[72] In fact, however, this originality—the presence of Christ, the absence of the sarcophagus—exists only within the context of Rubens's own *Assumptions*, as the author himself goes on to prove. That the Leningrad *modello* does not seem to have resulted in a finished altarpiece becomes more intriguing when one considers that it represents the most orthodox, and if Freedberg is correct, the most textually anchored of Rubens's essays in this theme. Yet curiously, this most Jesuit of Rubens's *Assumptions* did not end up in the Jesuit church. Instead, Rubens produced an image for the Society with no real antecedent or model. Even taking into consideration the altar's programmatically relevant architectural framework and the notion that the painted Mary was in reality ascending to sculpted figures of God and Christ outside the pictorial field, Rubens's Mary is something of an anomaly.

But how can this be?

By way of conclusion, I shall offer an admittedly speculative explanation for what, upon closer inspection, is the strangeness of Rubens's ascending Blessed Virgin. This explanation stems chiefly from the artist's evolving notion of gender but also from his equally evolving notion of himself as a painter.

In the Vienna *Assumption* we have been discussing and for which the Leningrand *modello* may or may not be a preparatory sketch, it seems clear that Rubens is interested in doing something new with the story of Mary's assumption and crowning. Sympathetic to Raphael's color and clarity, and aware of the Venetian pictorial tradition as well as the antithetical approaches of his Italian contemporaries, Rubens considered the doctrinal implications of the Assumption as outlined in the kinds of sanctioned Latin 'educational literature' he might have encountered at a meeting of his Marian Sodality. In Nadal he would have read of the Virgin "coming forth with the most radiant garment of immortality, adorned with glory," and thought perhaps how this might be better represented in oils on panel than in a black and white print.[73] He then may have turned to the *Golden Legend*, a trusted compendium of vitae written by a contemporary of Thomas Aquinas. There he would have encountered a militant adjudicator Mary who confronts the devil face to face saying:

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[70] See Thomas Buser, "Jerome Nadal and Early Jesuit Art in Rome," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 58 (Sep., 1976): 424-433. And see also Jerome Nadal. *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels*. Frederick A. Homann, trans. (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's UP, 2003).

[71] Freedberg, "A Source for Rubens' *Modello*," 435.

[72] Ibid., 432.

[73] "Egreditur ipsa fulgentissima veste immortalitatis ac gloria ornata," quoted and translated in Ibid., 435.

> Wicked spirit, what rashness led you to presume to harm my devoted follower? You will not go unpunished for this, and I now impose this sentence upon you. Go down to hell, and never again dare to do injury to anyone who invokes me with devotion![74]

He might next have enjoyed or recalled a musical performance of Marian liturgical music designated for the Feast of the Assumption, such as the 'Vox Patris Caelestis' of the English Composer William Mundy, originally written for the Catholic court of Mary Tudor. In Mundy's votive antiphon, "an elaborate network of tropes on the Song of Songs,"[75] portions of which include parts of the *Tota pulchra es,* clear voices sang:

> You are all beautiful, my love, and there is no flaw in you: your lips are a dripping honeycomb, honey and milk are under your tongue, and the scent of your perfumes is above all spices: the winter has passed, the rain has ended and gone; the flowers have appeared, the flowering vines have given their scent, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. Come, hasten, my love, come from Lebanon, come, you shall be crowned.[76]

Rubens's 'great task,' to use Burckhardt's phrase, was then to find a spiritually expressive female figure capable of containing these various personae (regal queen, condemning judge, beguiling bride) of the Blessed Virgin.

I have purposely used the word contain to describe the manner in which I believe Rubens continued to think about the women he painted at this time—as vessels or containers into which he could deposit the abstract notions and qualities necessary to convey the narrative and its message for the pious beholder. His employment of women was changing nonetheless. Toward achieving a balance of ēthos and pathos, he had begun to integrate female figures more fully in his religious narratives; the three nameless and interchangeable young women in the *Assumption* infuse the image with a necessary element of empathy and tenderness in much the same way the Marys at the cross had done in his Crucifixions. But in this sense the women are as much dogmatically prescriptive symbols, or living annotations, as they are specific, historical people. However paradoxical or even improbable the Virgin Mary was as a woman—"a virgin not sterile, but fertile; married to a man, but made fruitful by God; bearing a son, but knowing not a man"—she was under no circumstances to be understood as an *allegory* of virtue.[77] It is Mary's humanity, albeit an unblemished one, that makes her powerful. Even so, she was, for Rubens, not yet a representable individual with a mind and being of her own.

Knowing what Mary accomplished, however, Rubens evidently looked to Raphael, whose visual shorthand for resurrection, Christ's snow-white raiment, he boldly adapted to a

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[74] Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 86.
[75] Kerry McCarthy, William Mundy's *Vox Patris Caelestis* and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary," *Music & Letters* Vol. 85 (Aug., 2004), 356.
[76] Ibid., 367. As the author points out, the antiphon *Tota pulchra es* draws heavily on the Song of Songs which in turn forms the basis of much of the liturgy of the Assumption.
[77] St. Peter Canisius, *De Maria Virgine incomparabili* (1577), quoted in Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 23.

virginal female figure.[78] Considering next the Mary's place in the spiritual hierarchy, as just judge second only to her son, he drew upon the model of Christ in the Last Judgment. By fusing these two pictorial traditions he arrived at the figure we now know. But as much as we might wish to see this highly original conflation of Mary and Jesus as radical or proto-feminist, Rubens's unusual vision of the Virgin should, I think, be understood not as a feminized Christ but as a masculinized Mary.

As Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, twelfth and thirteenth-century theologians and religious referred to Jesus at times as 'mother' investing him thereby with conventional female qualities and devoting themselves to him as a compassionate and nurturing care-giver. For Bynum, texts such as the *Monologion* of Anselm of Canterbury, where the author describes both St. Paul and Jesus as "mothers by affection, fathers by authority; mothers by kindness, fathers by protection, mothers by compassion," can be read as evidence of the period's feminization of religious language and imagery.[79] Yet what Rubens does in this early *Assumption* is something else. His Mary is not Jesus as Mother but Mother as Son. By imbuing what is really no more than a Marian cipher—we can read her gestures more easily than her facial expression—with Christological valences, the artist retreats once again to the one-sex model of Michelangelo, a representational episteme in which, as Thomas Laqueur puts it, "woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category."[80]

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In proposing this reading of an altarpiece that has received relatively little scholarly attention I want to mark the work as an important moment in Rubens's thinking about gender. Rubens had married in 1609 and had recently become the father of a baby girl, Clara Serena, when he painted the ascending Mary. One might therefore expect the trope of maternity to have signified for him in visibly new and personal ways. It would have been logical, for example—as he so often would with his second wife—to attach the familiar features of a mother he loved to the figure of one of his painted women. Later in his career, this becomes a means for Rubens to breathe life into characters with which he may—or may not—have felt a great deal of native sympathy or connection. But surely this is not the approach he takes with the Blessed Virgin, since the woman we look up to can only be considered another of his pretty stock females from these early years; a less lively Domitilla or a more ebullient Magdalene, take your pick, she lacks the inner life and individuality of Rubens's portraits and drawings of his first wife.

The painting is nonetheless a pivotal one in Rubens's changing visualization of femininity for it registers the fleeting moments of his ambivalence about (representing) virtuous, de-eroticized, female power. Tellingly perhaps, he would not achieve his most dynamic and impressive Marys in future *Assumptions* nor his most actively powerful and dignified women in the guise of Mary. But the conceptual challenges presented by the idea of the Assumption seem nonetheless to have been instrumental in the development of Rubens's idea and ideals of femininity. He may even have found consolation in the words of Aristotle, who assures his readers in the *Poetics*: "goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman and a

[78] It is of interest that Bellori names Raphael as the 'main' (and only) modern artist with which Rubens makes "comparisons' in his now lost *Notebook*, partial transcriptions of which exist in a sketchbook by Van Dyck. See Bellori, *Lives of the Modern Painters*, 205.
[79] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 1982), 114, 129, 135.
[80] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990), 62.

slave."[81] Having recognized the respects in which his beautifully banal Mother of God had failed to achieve the grandeur and gravity befitting her, Rubens subsequently sought new ways to make the female form matter.

[81] Ar. *Poetics* 15: 1454a, McKeon, *Basic Works*, 1469.

CHAPTER FOUR

The New Titian: Color, the Critics, and Venetian Painting

> Do you not see how much more grace a woman has who paints (if at all) so sparingly and so little that whoever sees her is uncertain whether she is painted or not; than another woman so plastered with it that she seems to have put a mask on her face and dares not to laugh so as not to cause it to crack, and never changes color except in the morning when she dresses; […]And how much more attractive is one (not ugly, I mean) who is plainly seen to have nothing on her face, it being neither too white, nor too red, but has her own natural color, a bit pale, and tinged at times with an open blush from shame or some other cause, with her hair unadorned and in disarray, with gestures simple and natural, without showing effort or care to be beautiful. Such is that careless purity which is so pleasing to the eyes and minds of men who are ever fearful of being deceived by art.
>
> ---Baldesar Castiglione,
> *The Book of the Courtier* (1528)[1]

> As a public figure, painter to kings, clerics and merchants, whose pictorial inventions manifest a remarkable intellectual, even scholarly prowess, and more blatantly, renowned as a pictorial celebrator of fleshy women, Rubens might seem to exemplify the artist as male in the tradition. The difference between Rubens (female) and Poussin (male) is, after all, just two versions of the male view.
>
> Svetlana Alpers, *The Making of Rubens* (1995)[2]

In this chapter, I hope to shed further light on seventeenth-century constructions of Rubens as a Flemish practitioner of Venetian colorism. More specifically, I want to consider the possibility that his fuller and more intentional assumption of the mantle of cinquecento Venetian painting was both the catalyst for and result of two of his largest and most ambitious commissions of the 1620's: the elaborate allegorical cycles for the dowager queen, Marie de Medici and the Archduchess Isabel Clara Eugenia. Specific imagery from these cycles will be examined for the insights it provides into Rubens's changing conceptual language of femininity in Chapter Five, where I focus on his figurative portraits of these noble female patrons as subjects. Here, in a discussion of his critical reception by contemporaries, I wish mainly to consider the various ways in which seventeenth-century critics mobilized a dichotomously gendered rhetoric of painting such that Rubens was ultimately reassigned from the ranks of the

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[1] Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Charles S. Singleton, trans. (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 65-66.
[2] Svetlana Alpers, *The Making of Rubens* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 101.

[3] See the introduction to Svetlana Alpers, *The Making of Rubens* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), and *The Loaded Brush: Oil Sketches from Rubens to Tiepolo*, exh. cat. (New York: Columbia UP, 1967), see esp. the introduction.

boldly indecorous, foreign-born naturalist painters considered as *Caravaggisti* to the company of the less cerebral and less graphically capable, albeit virtuosic, Venetian colorists.

Critical appraisals made in Rubens's own century register not only a change in his art but the advent of a new kind of connoisseurship driven by the shifting artistic concerns of the authors themselves, many of whom were collectors as well as painters and writers. In the wake of Caravaggio's art-world shake-up and the Carraccis' seemingly unshakable supremacy Rubens provided an aesthetic third way, though his rare combination of skill and intellect was not always admitted by the critics. In reality, Rubens's rigorously humanistic approach to the study and interpretation of textual sources was powerfully augmented by his familiarity with ancient as well as modern art. This foundational knowledge, largely derived from Italian examples, was the conceptual basis for the meaning-making centrality of the human body in Rubens's works which, coupled with his ability to conjure imposing, lively, and believably natural figures with seemingly minimal effort or preparation, made him a very different kind of Flemish painter.

Rubens's adoption of typically Venetian artistic practices further assured his critical alignment with the Northern Italian tradition. Like Tintoretto, who effectively established the oil sketch as a standard step in studio practice, Rubens increasingly preferred to plan his works first in paint rather than pencil.[3] But while he did not invent the oil sketch—for him a free and direct first thought worked out in rapid, often notational, brushstrokes, visibly evolving compositions, and unblended pigments—Rubens may be said to have perfected it by elevating the briskly executed painted panel to a valued work of art in itself. More than 450 of Rubens's oil sketches survive, many of which were avidly acquired by collectors shortly after his death.[4] Capricious by definition, the oil sketch was mainly to take the place of a preparatory drawing for Rubens. His well-known (and, coming in 1614, relatively early) description of a large and elaborate oil sketch as a '*dissegno colorito'* suggests that he was fully aware of the qualitative rhetorical implications of sketching in paint versus drawing on paper—and eager to assert the uniquely comprehensive nature of his composite solution.[5]

Though a central component of his conceptual practice, however, the often small scale panels containing the seminal details and structure of Rubens's intended works were also understood by contemporaries as spontaneous eruptions of his passionate artistic spirit. Perhaps more importantly, in the absence of preparatory drawings, completed paintings could be approached—both negatively and positively—as oil sketches writ-large; as unrehearsed works achieved in a fit of frenzy. Such "*Commotions* of the mind," as Rubens's creative process was described by William Sanderson, an observer of the painter's artistic practices:

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[3] On the history of the oil sketch see Rudolph Wittkower et al., *Masters of the Loaded Brush: Oil Sketches from Rubens to Tiepolo*, exh. cat. (New York: Columbia UP, 1967), see esp. the introduction.

[4] Marjorie E. Weiseman and Peter C. Sutton, eds. *Drawn by the Brush: Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 17. See also Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980); Peter Paul Rubens, *A Touch of Brilliance, oil sketches and related works from the State Hermitage Museum and the Courtauld Institute Gallery*, exh. cat. Courtauld Institute (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 10, 11, 17.

[5] The three preparatory panels to which Rubens refers are known as *St Bavo about to receive the monastic habit at Ghent* (c. 1611, London, National Gallery). See Linda Bauer and George Bauer, "Artists' Inventories and the Language of the Oil Sketch," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 141 (Sep., 1999), 520. See also Gregory Martin, "Rubens's 'Dissegno Colorito' for Bishop Maes Reconsidered," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 110 (Aug., 1968): 434-437; Peter Paul Rubens, *A Touch of Brilliance, oil sketches and related works from the State Hermitage Museum and the Courtauld Institute Gallery*, exh. cat. Courtauld Institute (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 10, 11, 17.

> are not to be cooled by slow performance: discreet *diligence,* brings forth *Excellence: Care,* and *Exercise,* are the chiefest precepts of *Art.* But, *diligence* is not to stagger, and stay at unnecessary Experiments; and therefore I have observed in excellent Pieces a willing neglect, which hath added singular grace unto it.[6]

Sanderson's reference to 'willing neglect' or *negligence* is in this case positive. The singular grace to which he refers is undoubtedly the principal quality of Castiglione's necessarily nonchalant *sprezzatura*, wherein "whatever is done or said appear[s] to be without effort and almost without any thought about it."[7] Castiglione's interlocutors find "much grace" in this notion and the dissimulating courtly behavior he praises, as much a philosophy as a personal style, had far-reaching implications for early modern art as well as life.

Despite their separation by more than a century, both Castiglione and Sanderson equate grace with effortlessness and effortlessness with the willful abnegation of forethought; thus in rhetorical terms, the unchecked, anti-intellectual artfulness they extol is potentially feminized. Seemingly aware of this possibility, Sanderson counters what might be construed as the effeminate lassitude, passivity or 'cooled performance' of Rubens—who he earlier describes positioned with his "arms-across" to compose a picture—with an image of the artist's mental vigor and speed. For his part, Castiglione attempts to mitigate the gendering of (grammatically feminine) *sprezzatura* by opposing its "simplicity and nonchalance" to womanly artifice. This cursedly cosmetic artificiality, or "bane of affectation," is best exemplified for the sixteenth-century author by the female sex's habitual "embellishing of the face with so much care and sometimes pain" toward the vain pursuit of outward beauty.[8] Paradoxically, making an effort thus becomes as ungraceful as it is feminine.

As Castiglione's speaker makes clear in the subsequent commentary with which this chapter begins, the line between women painting and painting women would appear to be a faint one; if a woman (a pretty one, I mean) was always a sort of painted decoration, might not a decorative painter also be construed as a sort of woman? However well-thought out Rubens's oil sketches were in actuality, their medium, theoretically the same viscous hues used by women to adorn their faces, relegated them to a status below that of the rationally designed preparatory drawing.[9] Rubens's theoretical, even scientific, knowledge of color—evidenced by the illustrations he had provided for his Jesuit friend François Aguilon's *Optics* (1613)—was belied by the *sprezzatura* of his seemingly intuitive naturalism. It was Aguilon, after all, who had first isolated as 'primary' the colors red, yellow, and blue designating a further range of 'compound'

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[6] William Sanderson, *Graphice. The use of the pen and pensil. Or, the most excellent art of painting: in two parts* (London: 1658), 34. Although Sanderson's ekphrases of Titian and Palma 'borrow' liberally from previously published letters by Sir Henry Wotton, one surmises his eye-witness account of Rubens draws if not on his own experience than on the authentic experience of a trust-worthy contemporary; Sanderson's qualitative appraisals of the nature of painting seem most often to be his own. See the still-useful article by Frederick Hard, "Ideas from Bacon and Wotton in William Sanderson's 'Graphice,'" *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 36 (Apr., 1939): 227-234.

[7] Castiglione, *Courtier*, 43.

[8] Castiglione, *Courtier*, 65; see also Thomas Puttfarken, *Titian & Tragic Painting: Aristotle's Poetics and the Rise of the Modern Artist* (New Haven: Yale UP, 205), chapter eight.

[9] For an illuminating study of the terms and stakes of the cosmetic debates and their relationship to early modern painting see Patricia Phillippy, *Painting Women: Cosmetics, Canvases, and Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2006), esp. the Introduction and chap. 1.

or 'composite' hues derived from mixing the others.[10] Despite the empirically-minded company he kept—and his possible collaboration with the cleric-mathematician, Aguilon—Rubens was associated with a Venetian tradition which, owing to its privileging of 'superficial' or fake color, was philosophically aligned with supposedly feminine 'traits' and affinities.[11] His conspicuously painterly mode, where often, upon close inspection, even the pinkest flesh is expertly underlaid with patches of green, orange, and/or plummy purple, was accordingly, if counter-intuitively, 'gendered' unscientific, improbable, and accordingly Venetian.

In what follows, I hope to show that a critical and connoisseurial designation as Northern Italian in style was freighted with a range of moral and philosophical associations based on contemporary writers' rhetorical deployment of 'Venetian painting' as a euphemism for womanish art. While this may seem self-evident, few of Rubens's recent interpreters have considered at any length the vital and determinative role of feminizing rhetoric in early modern constructions of Rubens as an artist and diplomat. Purportedly formal or technical criticisms of Rubens were, however, often framed in implicitly gendered terms. Seventeenth-century views of Rubens's art as erratic and derivatively pleasing but flawed—and of Rubens himself as arrogant and self-aggrandizing—tend to conflict with modern-day images of the inveterate worldling, a manly, Janus-like figure who begins as a neo-Stoic stalwart and ends as the ardently passionate, even randy, husband of an adoring teenage bride.

Rubens continues to occupy a role in modern art history as a crucially masculinist painter whose 'appreciation' of women manifests itself in the obvious pleasure he takes in rendering their often nude bodies by means of a painterly mode deemed particularly conducive to such irresistibly tactile and erotic subject/objects. The perfect correspondence of the painter's talents and his subject matter has often been noted. Taking a provocatively different tack, Svetlana Alpers has challenged this notion of Rubens, arguing that we should grasp the "androgynous possibilities" offered by his representation of flesh.[12] To her Rubens is a painter not of "beautiful surface" but of "all too human stuff" who pictorially asserts the material human condition common to men and women alike.[13] For early modern subscribers to an Aristotelian outlook, however, form and matter; masculine and feminine; structure and surface, though related, were less commensurable and equivalent than Alpers's more expansive interpretation might suggest.

Indeed, notwithstanding an occasional (and traditionally effeminate) St. Sebastian or his intriguingly multiple, exceptionally sexualized renditions of the fleshy and insatiable man-beast Silenus, art historians have been right to note Rubens's more obvious—while not exclusive—fixation, to use Alpers's word, on the naked female form. Along these lines, Rubens's identity was decisively shaped by Burckhardt's vision of him as consummate creator of a bewitching bevy of female nudes who "by the mere beauty of the skin blended with light and chiaroscuro,

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[10] On Aguilon see August Ziggelaar, S.J. *Francois de Aguilon, S.J. (1576-1617) Scientist and Architect* (Roma: Bibliotheca Instituti Historici S.I., 1983). See also Alan Shapiro, "Artists' Colors and Newton's Colors," *Isis*, Vol. 85 (Dec., 1994), 606-608.

[11] Julius Held, "Rubens and Aguilonius: New Points of Contact," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 61 (Jun., 1979), 257-264.

[12] Alpers, *The Making of Rubens* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995),138.

[13] Ibid., 129. The thematic focal point of Alpers's brilliant exploration of Rubens's pictorial self-gendering is the figure of Silenus, a sexually indiscriminate art-maker whose hedonistic ways were attested to by perpetual drunkenness, a pregnant-looking belly, and the softness of flesh associated with female bodies. While Alpers equates Silenus's 'abandon' with his body type she does not address the (early) modern moralizing of excess, as in over-indulgence or uncontrolled appetite, as a feminine vice or trait. To my mind, Silenus is less androgynous than effeminized or sodomitical, especially if, as Alpers implies, Rubens shows him being 'penetrated' from behind by a male celebrant (110).

captivate the judgment before we can even realize the poetry of the subject and the beauty of the form."[14] As we will see, Burckhardt's belief that the painterly flesh—the 'mere beauty of the skin'—of a painted nude is at once sufficient to seduce the beholder and define the artist, is in fact a mild recalibration of a descriptive formula that was well in place for Rubensian painting even before the arrival of Rubens.

The Mythical Rubens: Feminist Art History and the Early Mythologies

Despite a legacy of post-Tridentine decrees and commentaries admonishing Catholic painters to cease production of "lascivious" images, early seventeenth-century Catholics and Protestants alike had developed an open and unabashed enthusiasm for the female nude.[15] Uncensored in their day, the enigmatic and sensual 'Venuses' of Michelangelo, Giorgione, and Titian had prepared the way for a species of naturalistic, eroticized allegory that made all too palpable the struggles between men and their passions. During his first decade in Antwerp, tales from the ancients inspired Rubens to create some of his most provocative images, many of which represent women and men undone by one another, whether by means of physical force or cunning and guile. No longer merely a beautiful and irresistibly attractive object, the nude female body was constructed by Rubens in these vibrant and energetic paintings as an index of desire, a sometimes violent and potentially destructive force. In works such as *Juno and Argus* (Fig. 5), *Ixion Deceived by Juno* (Fig. 6), *The Daughters of Cecrops Discovering Erichthonius* (Fig. 7), and *Perseus and Andromeda* (Fig. 8), Rubens's imposingly foregrounded nudes fill the frame, inviting the beholder to judge from an intimate vantage point, the painter's skillful juxtapositions of voluptuous, pearl-skinned beauties and tawny, muscle-bound demi-gods. The verboten thrill of Rubens' nude figures was surely heightened by their monumentality; contemporary in tone and though canonical in subject, the mythologies invited a new level of identification and/or empathy from the beholder.

By their sheer dimensions (the largest, *Juno and Argus,* measures some 8 by 9 feet), these pictures also encouraged comparisons with the vast frescoes of the Italian masters. Evaliina Juntunen has argued that these and other chronologically proximate mythological works are for Rubens, elevated and infinitely clever exercises in visualizing art theory. That is, with their self-conscious engagement of already canonical pictures by Michelangelo, Titian, and Leonardo, many of the classical subjects demonstrate Rubens's erudition as well as his status as the long awaited artistic embodiment of Northern color and technique and cerebral Southern design.[16] Taking a different approach to nearly the same group of early mythological paintings, Aneta Georgievska-Shine situates these works in Rubens's broader humanist project; she concentrates on image-text relations with very little discussion of gender or sexuality as a unifying theme or focal point for the painter, even in scenes of rape, lactation, and bondage. Yet in the wake of feminist studies and paradigm-shifting art historical analyses of the male gaze, darker purposes have also been ascribed to the recurring theme of distractingly unadorned female bodies in many of the painter's early Antwerp works. Some scholars have read Rubens's female nudes as destabilizing totems or always already fallen idols, whose hermeneutic slipperiness testifies to

[14] Jacob Burckhardt, *Rubens* (New York: Phaidon, 1950), 40.

[15] On this subject in a Northern context see Karolien De Clippel, Katharina Van Cautern and Katlijne Van der Stighelen, eds. *The Nude and the Norm in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); See especially the essay by Karoline De Clippel, "Altering, Hiding and Resisting. The Rubensian Nude in the Face of Censorship," 201.

[16] Evaliina Juntunen, *Peter Paul Rubens' bildimplizierte Kumsttheorie in ausgewählten mythologischen Historien,1611-1618* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2005).

the early modern obsession with sex difference and the constructed nature of gender and femininity.[17]

It has been argued, for example, that an analogical conceit of the project of imperial statecraft as sexual conquest is at the heart of a painting like *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (see Fig. 1) where the bodies of two nude women are juxtaposed with those of their clothed male captors. In a now-classic reading of this work, Margaret Carroll presents Rubens as an antifeminist for whom the foundation myths of civilization-via-rape provided an evocative metaphor of contemporary dynastic politics and the violence of military conquest in the name of political absolutism.[18] Carroll memorably describes Rubens's painting as a "celebratory depiction of sexual violence and of the forcible subjugation of women by men." She further argues that the extraordinarily 'equivocal' mythological painting may thus serve as an allegory of the marriages of the princes Louis XIII of France and Philip IV of Spain to Anne of Austria and Elisabeth of Bourbon, respectively, in 1615, roughly the same time the work is believed to have been executed.[19]

Carroll's boldly feminist interpretation is persuasive. As a product of the peaceful era during which Flanders enjoyed a brief reprieve from the very real wartime rapes, massacres, and famine-inducing sieges endured by the ravaged Netherlands a decade earlier, the imperiled full-bodied nudes of Rubens's exciting and/but inescapably eroticized Leucippus composition are potentially disconcerting. So, too, is the possibility that the artist seamlessly equated abduction and sexual violation with marriage and nation-building. Indeed, Carroll's is a much-needed response to previous art historians' diminishment or disavowal of rape as a real-world crime; inasmuch as Rubens portrays the 'heroes' Castor and Pollux as undertaking "a joint sexual conquest in which each is allotted his prize," Carroll rightly views the painter as complicit in positing violent acts as a titillating, and naturalized, form of coupling and reproduction.[20]

Yet a slightly later mythological painting from this period can be seen to represent a very different interpretation of women's agency and the tragic costs of male-female violence. Rubens's *Battle of the Amazons* (see Fig. 2; c. 1617-19) presents a shockingly graphic vision of warfare—including severed limbs, bloated and bleeding corpses, and what one scholar views as the intimation of a decidedly unheroic "necrophilic rape."[21] Departing from classical texts and antique depictions of the Amazons' courageous struggle and tragic demise, Rubens conceives the scene in a highly personal, even revisionist, manner.[22] As with the *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, he borrows and alters imagery from Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* for certain equine and figural groups. He also draws on the famous and famously demanding commemorative war

[17] Lisa Rosenthal, *Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 9-10.
[18] Alpers presents a more critical synthesis of Carroll's interpretation (with which she [also] seems to take issue) in her brief discussion of Rubens's historiography vis-à-vis gender, op cit., 152.
[19] Margaret Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence," in *Painting and Politics in Northern Europe: Van Eyck, Bruegel, Rubens and their Contemporaries* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2008), 88.
[20] Ibid., 95.
[21] Sabine Poeschel, "Rubens' "Battle of the Amazons" as a War-Picture. The Modernisation of a Myth," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 223 (2001), 102.
[22] Rubens's familiarity with ancient sculpture depicting the Amazons is demonstrated by a prior drawing of a frieze depicting the subject in the Arundel collection as well as his presumed knowledge of the crowded treatment of the theme (once attributed to a young Rubens) by his teacher, Otto van Veen. Ibid., 97.

mural made by Titian for the Doge's palace in Venice, the *Battle of Spoleto*, commonly but probably erroneously, known as the *Battle of Cadore* (Fig. 3).[23]

Though destroyed in 1577, Titian's painting was known through prints and Italian painted copies. Rubens's recourse to this work is especially notable for the way it feminizes the Venetian composition, literally transforming the Renaissance artist's male soldiers into Baroque warrior women. That Rubens's painting should be read not only as an anti-glorification of war but also as a tribute to the deeds of powerful women is substantiated by his dedication of a large and impressive engraving of the image. Published in the newly volatile political climate of 1623, the print version of the Amazonian battle (Fig. 4) was respectfully inscribed to Aletheia Talbot (1584-1654), one of England's wealthiest women and Countess of Arundel.[24] A known recusant, the Countess and her husband, the renowned collector and antiquarian, Thomas Howard Earl of Arundel, were Pro-Spanish Catholic apologists and key players in Jacobean political affairs.[25] Lady Arundel and her husband had spent a year in Italy in the company of the classicizing English architect, Inigo Jones, in 1613-14 where they developed a passionate interest in Italian art. Some years later in 1641, at the outset of the Civil War, the Countess left England reputedly to accompany Marie de Medici on what was said to be her return to the continent after her own exile.[26]

In a recent reading of the *Battle of the Amazons* Sabine Poeschel presents a challenge to Carroll's characterization of Rubens c. 1615, as an artist who exploited allegory in order to deflect the beholder's attention from the horrors of lived experience to more palatably abstract representations of divinely ordained gender roles.[27] Rubens's dedication of the print does, I think, provide evidence of his (at a minimum, public) admiration for a Catholic noblewoman to whom an exhortation to Amazonian courage in the face of hostile Protestant opponents might have had a poignant topical significance. Yet unlike the painting, the print dates from the post-Truce year of 1623, by which point Rubens's grief over war's inevitability seems to have deepened.

In both the *Daughters of Leucippus* and the *Battle of the Amazons*, however, it is clear that the artist ascribes special iconographical weight, special pathos, to the female body under duress. The imperiled woman, if 'alive,' may look to the viewer for help and receive instead a lecherous stare; her plight may induce pity, invite identification, or merely fascinate for what she reveals in her vulnerable state. Likewise her captors/antagonists/saviors might be variously interpreted as one sees fit. Whether the painter's sensibility should be viewed as prurient or sympathetic is for now, an open question. The fact remains in either case that Rubens's conspicuous delight in painting forms into existence with free brushwork and bright color and his affinity for the silken flesh and fecundity of the ideal female form—as he imagined it—should not prevent us from seeking to discover further and more sophisticated reasons for his appropriation of Venetian style. There are, moreover, other ways to interpret Rubens's growing

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[23] Both paintings are known only from copies and sketches; see i.e. the respective drawings in the Louvre. On Titian's painting see Erica Tietze-Conrat, "Titian's 'Battle of Cadore'" *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 27 (Sep., 1945), 205-208.

[24] Ibid.

[25] In 1620, Rubens would portray the Countess in the work known as *Aletheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel, with attendants and Sir Dudley Carleton* (Washington, National Gallery). Carleton was the English ambassador to the Venitian Republic from 1610-1615.

[26] Philipp P. Fehl, Keith Aldrich, Maria Raina Fehl, "Franciscus Junius and the Defense of Art," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 2 (1981), 16-19.

[27] Carroll, "Erotics of Absolutism," 100.

attentiveness to women in the works painted after the Truce had expired, when peace was again, something to be imagined rather than experienced.

There are also good reasons to think that Rubens's counterparts in the world of politics played upon his developing reputation as a conjuror of the beautiful surface. Testimony of a less than approving conflation of Rubens the painter and Rubens the diplomat is provided by no less than the French ambassador to the Spanish Netherlands, Nicolas de Baugy. In a letter written to his secretary of state in 1624, the ambassador complains:

> The painter Rubens is in town. The Infanta has commanded him to paint the portrait of the Prince of Poland, a matter in which I fancy he will succeed better than in the negotiations for a truce, to which he can only give superficial color and shade, without body or solid foundation.[28]

Richly apposite is de Baugy's dismissal of Rubens's important efforts as merely 'superficial,' the weak and immaterial output of a famous manipulator of color and shadow, if not smoke and mirrors. One might also surmise that the Frenchman's painterly conceit seeks to capitalize on Rubens's effeminate 'subjection' to the Infanta Isabel as a female patron who was also his ruler.

In fact, Rubens was 'commanded' to paint by several rich and influential women during the 1620s. As the Arundel dedication implies, he may have cultivated a conventionally feminine style to better appeal to these wealthy and powerful female patrons, who may themselves have counted on the soft nuances of his brushwork to mollify the less ladylike messages of their behavior and propagandistic commissions. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries in which Rubens flourished saw an unprecedented expansion of female rule.[29] Any historically sensitive interpretation of Rubens's real and pictorial dealings with the female sex must therefore recognize his links to well-connected and politically-influential royal and noble women whom he appears to have greatly respected. It must also admit the increasingly radical nature of Rubens's pacifism, a response to the incessant violence of Habsburg foreign relations far more closely aligned with his irenic benefactor, the Infanta Isabel, than with the warmongering stance of the King of Spain and his art-loving favorite, the Conde-Duque Olivares.[30]

Becoming Titian

The gendered rhetoric of sixteenth-century, mainly Italian, Renaissance art writing has received attentive and insightful analyses by Patricia Reilly, Elizabeth Cropper, Fredrika Jacobs, Rona Goffen, and Philip Sohm. Yet for the most part, these scholars have focused on the implications of art writing's gendered appraisals for (the perception of) women as subjects and artists. As a male artist from Flanders, Rubens would nonetheless have fallen on the traditionally feminized side of an existing inter-nationalistic dichotomy of painting—a categorization which he aggressively, though temporarily, challenged with the conspicuous Romanism of his earliest post-Italian works. Relevant therefore to any exploration of 'Rubens's femininity' is the

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[28] De Baugy to d'Ocquerre, Brussels, September 13, 1624, cited in Max Rooses, *Rubens*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1904), 395.

[29] A trend begun in the late sixteenth-century with the contemporaneous rule of three female sovereigns: Elizabeth I; Mary Stuart; and Catherine de' Medici. See *Women Who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Europe,* Annette Dixon, ed. exh. cat. (London: Merrell, 2002),19.

[30] Rubens's letters are punctuated with frequent references to the "torpors and weariness" of being constantly at war as well as his frustration with Spain's bellicose policies, see e.g. Ruth Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1957), nos. 79, 107,111,126, 131, 178 *inter alia*.

successive gendering of his artistic identity as a Northern painter during the determinative period between the early Baroque in Italy and the emergence of the 'Rococo' in France. For this historiographical-critical context it will be useful to move beyond Vasari and his school in order to trace further the seventeenth-century reception of Rubens's art as the distinctive product of a Flemish artist painting in a Venetian mode.[31]

Titian, with whose works he had become directly familiar during his stays in Italy from 1600-1608, and Spain in 1603, and again in 1628-29, is an appreciable and routinely cited influence on Rubens. In addition to his appropriation/absorption of certain aspects of Titian's painterly style and his conspicuous reinterpretation of numerous of the earlier artist's subjects, Rubens recognized Titian as a unique model of the autonomous and socially elevated aristocratic court painter. Both men counted multiple foreign sovereigns as patrons while maintaining active workshops in their own countries; both men were held in particular esteem by Habsburg rulers; and perhaps most significantly within the hierarchical ambit of early modern court culture, both men were knighted for their achievements as courtier-painters. It might also be mentioned that just as Rubens served the Infanta Isabel, Titian had served Isabel's great aunt, Mary of Hungary (1505-1558), a discerning patron of art, whose art collection was the hereditary source of numerous masterpieces in the Habsburg collections and from whom Philip II is said to have learned much of what he knew about art.[32] It is intriguing that works by Titian and Rubens were avidly acquired by the rulers of England and Spain, two geographically peripheral courts in the early stages of developing a stable and internationally recognized native painting tradition of their own.[33] Worldly and cosmopolitan artists, Titian and Rubens were favored by these rival expansionist superpowers, for which the Tuscan chauvinism of some Italian critics, while recognized, was far from definitive.

Moreover, the two men were soon linked by Rubens's appreciative contemporaries in an international genealogy of painterly or *colorito* painters.[34] Titian, following Giorgione, had

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[31] For an invaluable study of the role of color in seventeenth-century debates see the pioneering book by Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color; Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Style*, Emily McVarish, trans. (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 1993). See also Patricia Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," in *Expanding Discourse,* Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds. (New York: Icon, 1992); Philip Sohm, "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 48 (1995): 759-808; Fredrika Jacobs, "Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: Femmina, Masculo, Grazia," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Mar., 2000): 51-67; See also Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), 32-33.

[32] In addition to the lessons of connoisseurship he received from his aunt, Philip received several of the gems of the Habsburg painting collections, among them Rogier Van der Weyden's Prado *Deposition* (1434) and the painting by Jan Van Eyck (National Gallery, London) known as the *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait* (1434) as well as Titian's much-described equestrian portrait of Mary's brother, Charles V (1556, Prado), to whom she had introduced the Venetian painter. Many pieces in this collection were inherited by Mary of Hungary from her aunt, Margaret of Austria (1480-1520). On Mary's collection and connoisseurship, see the inventories and accompanying essay by Bob C. van den Boogert in Vol. 3 of Juan Luis González García, ed. *Los inventarios de Carlos V y la familia imperial* (Madrid: Fernando Villaverde Ediciones, 2010).

[33] In both Spain and England, sixteenth-century portraiture forms an important exception, although, here too, it must be noted that Flemings and Portuguese such as Juan de Flandes, Antonio Moro, de Heere, and Pourbus formed part of the 'native' tradition in both countries. In the seventeenth-century, of course, both Titian and Rubens become part of the connoisseurial and stylistic fabric of the native traditions forming under Velázquez and Ribera in Habsburg Spain (and its territories) and Van Dyck and his English followers in England.

[34] Surprisingly, yet perhaps understandably, there is currently no comparative book-length study of the three painters, on the former two see *Titian and Rubens: Power, Politics, and Style*, (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1998). See also Svetlana Alpers, *The Vexations of Art* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006).

pioneered this changeable and enigmatic style. As David Rosand has explained, as a manner or mode of loose gestural painting with an "open pictorial structure, [and] a fabric of individuated brush strokes, *il colorito alla veneziana* defines itself by its process."[35] This constructive process of coloring, which describes more than the selection of hues and painted pigments, was viewed as a means of creating visual/material forms in a direct, unmediated, way. By the end of the seventeenth-century, *colorito* was defined as the quick, what is today thought of as 'impressionistic,' application of paint in order to represent the natural play of light and shadow on surfaces by means of *macchie*, or 'sketchy brush work.'[36]

This was not always Titian's style. Only in the Venetian painter's works from the 1530s, do the slick surfaces and jeweled tones of his crystalline bacchanals (c. 1518) give way to a more somber and limited range of colors laid—and sometimes aggressively inflicted—on the canvas in thick patches of impasto and calligraphic drizzles.[37] The cool precision of what might be considered Titian's more 'Raphaelesque' paintings is not characteristic of his works in the Spanish collections, such as the *poesie*. These rough and roughly painted canvases owe their characteristic *colorito* in part to a defining shift in the artist's descriptive technique from the tightly evocative to the loosely evoked. Palma Giovane, one of Titian's pupils, once described his master's later, multi-step process of revising and altering a canvas over long periods of time until he reached a point of stasis: Of "condiments in the shape of last retouches," Palma notes, Titian was fond:

> Now and then he would model the light into half tint with a rub of his finger; or with a touch of his thumb he would dab a spot of dark pigment into some corner to strengthen it; or throw a reddish stroke—a tear of blood, so to speak—to break the parts superficially. In fact, when finishing, he painted much more with his fingers than with his brush.[38]

Titian's legendary finger-painting reinforced another aspect of Venetian practice which lent itself to a gendered interpretation by early modern writers. The painter's conscious and conspicuous delight in tactility reinforced the notion of the male artist as a painterly Pygmalion who coaxes and caresses his sensual female subjects into life, literally making beauty by hand.

In this sense the presence of the painter, his intimate and inimitable relationship to the canvas, and by extension, to its subject, was inscribed in each painted 'blemish' or 'stain'—words also connotatively associated with the *macchie* of *colorito*—and by extension, with the ejaculatory sexual excitement of a male maker.[39] For the connoisseur, a canvas by Titian's hand was thus the importantly divisible sum of its innumerable signature strokes, an idiosyncratic

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[35] David Rosand, "Titian and the Eloquence of the Brush," *Artibus et Historiae,* Vol. 2 (1981), 86.

[36] Filippo Baldinucci includes a lengthy and multivalent definition of 'macchia' in his art dictionary of 1681, *Vocabolario Toscano dell' arte del disegno*. See Philip Sohm, "Maniera and the Absent Hand: Avoiding the Etymology of Style," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 36 (Autumn, 1999), 121. For a discussion of other terms used to describe the painterly style in the seventeenth-century see also by the same author: *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeeth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 150-152.

[37] On these "darker, more dramatic, more violent" paintings see Puttfarken, *Titian and Tragic Painting*, 183 ff.

[38] Palma's description appears in the preface to Boschini's *Ricche Minere* cited in J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *Titian: His Life and Times* (London: John Murray, 1877), 219-220.

[39] On the "developing science of the trace" (of the brushstroke), see Paula Carabell, "Finito and Non-Finito in Titian's Last Paintings," *RES,* No. 28 (Autumn, 1995), 82-83.

mass of virtually metonymic parts—and all the more authentically immediate as a result. Writing in his dialogical *Disegno* (1549) Anton Francesco Doni had compared Titian to Apelles, in this case for his unstinting honesty and care in recording physiognomic details such as swarthy skin, wrinkles, and other perceived imperfections, an approach for which Titian's coarse canvases and sketchy style were well suited.[40] Titian's individualistic style assures the beholder that a king would receive from him no less unequivocal a portrait than a poet or a tailor; in this sense his parallel to Apelles as the chosen portraitist of Alexander the Great was also apt. Titian was known to have been on close terms with both Philip II and his father, Charles V, from whom he received numerous gifts and favors and at whose side he was reportedly permitted to remain when the Emperor traveled to various courts with his ambassadors.[41] This rare access and familiarity is projected in the canny informality of Titian's royal portraits, which seem to effortlessly record, as only a privileged eye-witness could, a precise but fleeting moment destined to signify or encapsulate his patron's legacies.

Similarly, Rubens refers in letters to his 'daily intercourse' with Charles V's great-grandson, Philip IV, whom he came to know "thoroughly" during his second visit to Spain.[42] In a well-known laudatory *silva* praising the vivacity and incomparable naturalism of Rubens's (now lost) equestrian portrait of Philip IV, the Spanish Golden Age playwright, Lope de Vega (1562-1635), welcomes the advent of Rubens as 'el nuevo Ticiano.' [43] A great admirer of Rubens, Lope refers to the Flemish painter elsewhere in his poetic and dramatic works, principally for his capacity to create a 'new style' of modern art and in so doing, to present himself to discerning Spanish amateurs as an alternative to Italy and to Titian.[44]

But while Titian was the favorite and most voraciously acquired source of Venetian colorism and bravura painting in Spain, the Habsburg collection also included important pictures by Veronese and Tintoretto. Philip II had tried to convince all three members of the Venetian triumvirate either to come to Spain or send the canvases necessary to complete the High Altar of the Basilica church of the Escorial. When none could be persuaded, Philip settled on Juan Fernández de Navarette, (c. 1528-1579) the Castilian known as 'El Mudo,' who was among the first native-born artists to combine soberly graphic Spanish pictorial formulae with the *sfumato* softness of Titianesque brushwork.[45]

Rubens's own appreciation of Titian cannot, indeed, be overstated. Upon his return to Spain in 1628, he made a point to copy as many of Titian's paintings as he could, including *The*

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[40] Luba Freedman, *Titian's Portraits through Aretino's Lens* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1995) 83. See also, John Gage, "A Locus Classicus of Colour Theory: The Fortunes of Apelles," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 44 (1981), 15-16.

[41] Carlo Ridolfi, *The Life of Titian***,** Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella et al, trans. and eds. (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996), 98.

[42] Rubens to Jan Caspar Gevaerts, Madrid, December 29, 1628, Magurn, *Letters*, No. 181.

[43] "En un caballo le miro tan vivo, tan fuerte, tan fogoso, tan altivo, que al tiempo que las manos levantaba, por no romper el lienzo no bufaba," Lope de Vega, Obras sueltas, I, 256-59, 'Al Quadro y retrato de su Majestad que hizo Pedro Pablo de Rubens, Pintor excelentissimo,' cited in Frederick de Armas, "Lope de Vega and Titian," *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 30 (Autumn, 1978), 341. But see also Gareth Alban Davies: "'Pintura': Background and Sketch of a Spanish Seventeenth-Century Court Genre," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 38 (1975), 292.

[44] "alternativa contemporánea a Italia y a Tiziano"; For example, Rubens is mentioned in Lope's play *Amor, Servir, y Esperar*. See Javier Portús, "La recepción en España del 'arte nuevo' del Rubens," in *Arte y diplomacia de la monarquía hispánica en el siglo XVII*, José Luis Colomer, ed. (Madrid: Fernando Villaverde, 2003), 462.

[45] Rosemarie Mulcahy, "The High Altar-Piece of the Basilica of San Lorenzo de el Escorial: An Unpublished Document," The Burlington Magazine, Vol. 122, No. 924 (Mar., 1980), 191.

Fall of Man and four of Philip II's celebrated Ovidian subjects known as the *Poesie.*[46] Placed next to Titian's originals, Rubens's Spanish copies reveal the Baroque painter's ability to duplicate the freshness and intensity of Titian's later, looser, technique while maintaining an indefinably Rubensian quality of finish and coloring. Much would have appealed to Rubens about a series of unsolicited mythological paintings intended for a royal patron who appreciated their maker's innovative style and individuality. Rubens's last major commission, some sixty canvases based on scenes from the works of Ovid and proudly displayed in Philip IV's hunting lodge, the *Torre de la Parada*, is a fitting homage to Titian's celebrated if numerically modest mythological series.[47]

Rubens's influence on Spanish *colorito* painting was both direct—in the sense that his work was displayed in a conversational, even dialectical, manner with works of his Venetian predecessor—and indirect, in that the Fleming's conspicuous admiration for Titian seems to have had an immediate impact on the young Velázquez. That the seed cultivated by the masterful Spaniard was planted early by Rubens, is suggested by the eighteenth-century Andalusian painter-theorist Antonio Palomino in his account of Velázquez's second trip to Italy:

> [H]e went to Venice, which he was very fond of because so many great artists had worked there. He saw many great works of Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese, who were the artists that he had tried to follow and imitate since he was first in Venice in 1629.[48]

It seems likely that Rubens had played a part in helping Velázquez make good on Philip IV's "oft-repeated promise" of a trip to Italy, for which the Spaniard departed for the first time soon after Rubens left Madrid for the second time, also in 1629. As Palomino writes of this initial journey, Velázquez "fell in love with Venice, but because of the uncertain situation there (caused by the wars then going on), he decided to go to Rome."[49] It is tempting to imagine that Rubens, full of enthusiasm for the works he had been copying, encouraged the younger man to begin his studies among the very Venetian paintings that would captivate Velázquez for the rest of his career.

Painting Veronese

If Rubens's artistic debt to Titian has become an almost defining feature of his art, his life-long engagement of the works of Veronese is less well defined. Veronese's lightness of touch and unabashed fascination with the material qualities of beautiful fabrics, costly metals, and period costumes—interests often regarded as superficial—should not detract from the intellectual rigor and cleverness of his elegant and sumptuous paintings. Nor should conceptual parallels between his art—frequently programmatic and figurative—and the art of Rubens be

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[46] On the *Poesie*, see for example, W. R. Rearick, "Titian's Later Mythologies," *Artibus et Historiae,* no. 33 (1996): 23-67; Aneta Georgievska-Shine, "Titian, 'Europa', and the Seal of the "Poesie," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 28 (2007): 177-185.

[47] See Svetlana Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, Pt. 9 (London and New York: Phaidon, 1971).

[48] According to Palomino, Francisco Pacheco, Velázquez's father-in-law, believed that Rubens had copied "all" the Titians in the royal collections; See Antonio Palomino de Castro, El *museo pictórico y escala óptica. Parte III El parnaso español pintoresco laureado* (Madrid, 1724), M. Aguilar, trans. reprinted in Holt, *A Documentary History of Art*, Vol. II, 191.

[49] Ibid., 186.

overlooked. Both artists were recognized in their time as consummately inventive composers, both were acclaimed as portraitists. And both were esteemed for their tasteful and textually faithful approach to allegory, a pictorial genre eminently suited to the rhetoric of power and politics.

In view of the mid-to late Seicento interest in the originality and, crucially, the visual representation of personified abstractions, it is no surprise that Veronese, rather than Titian, was the accepted Venetian master of the opulently patrician, multi-figural allegory. Whether in the form of vertiginous *di sotto in sú* ceiling programs, frieze-like Biblical scenes, or mythologizing Palladian frescoes, Veronese decorously sets the stage for an intricate chain of interactions that seems miraculously stilled for the viewer's delectation and decipherment. The use of theatrical metaphors is especially apt for Veronese, a collaborator of the prolific interpreter of the Vitruvian integrated auditorium-stage, the architect, Andrea Palladio (1508-1580).[50] Veronese and Palladio worked together on some of the cinquecento's most widely seen and described allegorical programs. Veronese's paintings adorn the ceiling of Palladio's coffered *Sala del Collegio* in the Venetian *Palazzo Ducale* (Fig. 9) and his frescoes provide the learned, at times, witty, interior counterpoint to the soberly elegant villa complex at Maser commissioned from the artist and architect by the former ambassador to England (1548-1550), Daniele Barbaro.

Although Vicenza's *Teatro Olimpico*—the crowning glory of Palladio's studies of Vitruvian stagecraft—was completed after his death, it closely approximates the studies and plans undertaken for much of his career. Toward the quest for Aristotelian unity, the proscenium stage is unthinkable in a Palladian theater, where, by contrast, the action takes place before a permanently installed triumphal screen (Fig. 10).[51] Veronese's shallow staging—often before a balustrade and in stark contrast to the more deeply recessing, perspectival stage sets of Sebastiano Serlio—is one of his recurring and most distinctively classical spatial devices. The painter's tendency is thus to populate the soaring architecture of his pictorial realms with an ebbing and flowing frieze of figures pressed close to the picture plane where their refined gestures and the details of their shimmering costumes are best perceived. Rosand refers to this natively Venetian format—of which Titian's *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* is a key example—as the 'tableau tradition.'[52] Tableau staging facilitates the scanning of the eye across a canvas rather than into its illusionistic depths; as a result Veronese's compositions emphasize gesture and relationality among the participants rather than between the characters and the wider (and extra-pictorial) world. Although Rubens sometimes sought to create less insular and self-contained visual realms, his mature works are not generally composed as deep spaces orchestrated though conspicuous and precise perspectival formulae. Veronese's way of conceiving actors in illusionistic set-like spaces was especially suitable for Rubens's own triumphal ephemera and *istorie*, where prominent architectural forms often provide a further element of iconographical and/or allegorical meaning.[53]

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[50] On Palladio's theater in Vicenza see, for example, Licisco Magagnato, "The Genesis of the Teatro Olimpico, "*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 14 (1951): 209-2; also by the same author with Lionello Puppi et al., *Il Teatro Olimpico* (Venezia: Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura, 1993).

[51] David Rosand, "Theater and Structure in the Art of Paolo Veronese," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 55 (Jun., 1973), 222.

[52] Ibid., 219, 225.

[53] See e.g. the decorations for the *Pompa Introitus of Ferdinand* (c. 1634) the *Eucharist Tapestries* (c. 1625), and many of the canvases of the Medici Cycle (c. 1622-25).

For example, Rubens had appropriated just this kind of arrangement for an outer wing of the *Descent from the Cross*.[54] In that painted panel, his *Visitation* (Fig. 11) partakes of the same spatial sandwiching used by Veronese (Fig. 12) to protectively contain the pregnant Mary and Elizabeth between a delicate iron railing surmounting a Venetian brick bridge in the foreground and a highflying architectural backdrop.[55] Veronese's architectural anachronism is echoed in Rubens's Antwerpian Mary, a blatantly seventeenth-century Northern wife trailed by a Raphaelesque figure balancing a basket on her head, before a grandly classical portico.

In Rubens's panel the smooth projection of the Doric columns above the placid Mary may be a conceit borrowed (and naturalized) from the Lombard painter Parmigianino's so-called *Madonna of the Long Neck* (Fig. 13). In that painting, as Elizabeth Cropper has convincingly argued, the inclusion of a slender and 'headless' Iconic column at the Madonna's side alludes to her harmonious female proportions and Diana-like chastity, an analogy derived from Vitruvius.[56] While Rubens's column belongs to the more austere Doric order, it nicely echoes or figures the elegantly substantial and upright figure of the resigned-looking young Mary. The inspired inclusion of a peacock in the receding space beneath the archway lends the expectant mother an appropriately Junoesque resonance. Jupiter's consort often appears in works by Veronese; Rubens had rendered the avian attributes of the goddess of childbirth in spectacular detail three years earlier in his *Juno and Argus* (1611). In the context of the *Visitation*, however, the peacock's cave-like dwelling is best understood as an allegory of resurrection, a commonplace rooted in St. Augustine's belief in the incorruptibility of the culinarily coveted bird's flesh.[57]

But as these examples demonstrate, despite its theatrical origins, Veronese's Palladian staging tends to eschew dramatic pathos. However natural and uncontrived, his is generally an art of serene self-restraint, light on revelatory acts and grand gestures. This could never be said of Rubens. Narratively driven by sudden entries and reluctant exits, telling gazes and the quintessential reversals and revelations of Aristotelian drama, Rubens is content to leave his subjects in suspense in order that his beholders can complete the meaning in their viewing acts. Thus in the case of the Antwerp *Visitation*, the viewer immediately grasps the significance of the momentous exchange between the solemn Mary and the sympathetic Elizabeth, doubled by the husbands in the rear and allegorized as mystically 'fruit bearing' by the woman entering at left.

In the Veronese, by contrast, Elizabeth's vaguely worried, sideways glance coupled with Mary's obscured pregnancy and oblique gaze lend a topos often viewed as 'joyous' a peculiarly ominous quality. Instead of peacocks, a man looks blankly out from beneath Veronese's arch, presumably unaware of the events transpiring over his head, while two women at the left margin seem equally unaffected by the protagonists' miraculous discovery. Veronese's painting contains other oddities as well, such as the railing's (intentionally distracting?) bisection of the cousins'

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[54] Veronese's *Visitation* (c. 1578) in the Barber Museum, Birmingham, was made as an altarpiece for the church of Giacomo, Murano (now destroyed). It was acquired by Sir James Wright in 1767. See Richard Cocke, *Paolo Veronese, Piety and Display in an Age of Religious Reform* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 202-203. The undeniable correspondence between the two paintings indicates that Rubens was familiar with the original, perhaps through a print, though it seems more likely that he would have seen and sketched it during his first Venetian visit in 1600.

[55] The connection was first observed, with regard to the railing and arch, by Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), 38.

[56] Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 58 (Sep., 1976), 382. Rubens made two known copies of works by Parmigianino, one of which, *Cupid Sharpening his Bow* (Schleissheim, Schloss) after Parmigianino's work of c. 1532, is signed and dated 1614, the year the final panels of the Harquebusier's *Decent from the Cross* were installed.

[57] Even after a year! See St. Augustine, *City of God*, XXI: 4, Gerald Walsh et al., trans., intro. by Etienne Gilson (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 496.

bonding handclasp and the inexplicable young woman whose disembodied face hovers awkwardly between Mary and Elizabeth, echoing the discomfiting stare of the man below.

Clearly alive to Veronese's compelling strangeness, Rubens reconfigures the mute tableau of the earlier painting—whose actors are forever frozen in the moment—with a mystical drama whose denouement is momentarily stilled. If to extract the full sense of the image, Rubens's beholders are responsible for knowing the story, they are nonetheless led to its anagogical meaning by a manageable trail of visual, symbolic, and most importantly, psychological, clues. For all their Palladian sets and acrobatic extras, Veronese's pictures are deeply localized and inwardly circumspect; at once resolutely contemporary and timelessly Venetian. One might say Rubens's works are emotively centrifugal where Veronese's are psychically centripetal; like actors in character, Rubens's figures seem somehow conscious of their availability to the beholder, to whom their passions and deeds are addressed.

Yet differences in composition and emotional pitch may not indicate the artists' differing attitudes on the representation of human and divine relations so much as the standardization of a more transparently and outwardly performative grammar of gestures, actions, and reactions in Rubens's time. The proper and necessary rendering of expressive "movements of the body" was discussed by Alberti and successive art writers as a component of pictorial representation. [58] But an Italian from Palladio's Vicenza, Giovanni Bonifacio, published the first manual of gesture, *L'arte de Cenni*, only in 1616.[59] Just as Titian's career predated the Golden Age of allegorical figuration, Veronese's art prefigures rather than participates in the programmatic theatrical grandeur subsequently achieved by Ben Jonson, Inigo Jones, and Calderón.[60]

Rubens's 'gestural' aesthetic heralds the advent of the Baroque spectacles that were to make an art of performing allegory in a representational world importantly dominated by conventionally female personifications. In the final decade of Rubens's career, the consonance of his theatrical and relational compositions with seventeenth-century spaces of performance was recognized by both James I and his son, Charles Stuart. In 1629, Rubens was selected by Charles I, as the painter of series of medallions to be installed in the Whitehall palace ceiling, an ardently Palladian project developed by Inigo Jones, the wildly creative architect *cum* masque designer, who, like Rubens, had seen the great allegorical ceiling canvases of Veronese in their original Venetian settings.

Rubens and Italian Criticism after Caravaggio

Veronese (like Tintoretto) was a somewhat unlikely, yet highly individualistic, member of the vanguard of an earlier generation of painters poised between the Italian high Renaissance

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[58] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, Cecil Grayson, trans. (London: Penguin, 1991), 76-77.

[59] Rubens's career largely spans the gap between the seventeenth-century's earliest major taxonomical works to codify and advance gesture as a universal language: Giovanni Bonifacio, *L'Arte de' Cenni con la quale formandosi favella visibile, si tratta della muta eloquenza, che non e altro che un facondo silentio* (Vicenza, 1616) and John Bulwer, Chirologia*: or the Naturall Language of the Hand. Composed of the Speaking Motions, and Discoursing Gestures thereof. Whereunto is added Chironomia: or the Art of Manuall Rhetoricke et*c. (London, 1644). The most famous (and most artistically relevant) treatment of gestures associated with the passions was not published until late in the century, i.e. Charles Le Brun, *Conference de Monsieur Le Brun ... Sur l'expression generale & particuliere Enrichie de figures gravies par B. Picart* (Amsterdam and Paris 1698).

[60] This may explain in part Veronese's frequent recourse to what in his era were the more established metaphors of instrumental music, through which he alluded to harmonies inconceivable to him in physical or corporeal terms alone. See for example, the allegorical figures depicted with instruments at the Villa Barbaro and, of course, the artist's self-portrait in the company of three other 'musicians': Titian, Tintoretto, and Bassano, in the Louvre *Banquet at Cana*.

and the early Baroque. He was not, however, a living and breathing 'modern' painter while Rubens was in Italy. When Rubens abruptly left Rome in 1608, as we have seen, Italy's artistic vanguard had yet to be determined. There were, however, some clear contenders. First among painters whose unconventional style and innovative technique was recognized—and hotly debated—was a man just six years Rubens's senior, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610). Caravaggio's first documented commission, the *Calling of St. Matthew* and the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* for the Contarelli Chapel in the Roman church of San Luigi dei Francesi dates from around the year Rubens arrived in Italy c. 1599-1600. By 1606, Caravaggio had fled Rome under suspicion of murder. By 1610, he was dead. In the interim, Rubens had watched as his own patron, the Duke of Mantua, Vicenzo Gonzaga I, had purchased the Italian artist's rejected and much-derided *Death of the Virgin* (1605-06), even as he refused to acquire a work by his own court artist, Rubens himself. Thus Rubens's interest in Caravaggio, however ambivalent, was undoubtedly sincere.

On another point of the naturalist spectrum of early baroque painting, though far from the opposite end, were the Carracci. The brothers Agostino (1557-1602), Annibale (1560-1609), and their cousing, Lodovico (1555-1619), opened the Accademia degli Incamminati (Academy of the Progressives) in 1580, establishing Bologna as a center of the newest developments in naturalistic—yet orthodox—drawing and painting. Perhaps not coincidentally near the time of Caravaggio's death arose the critical reign of the Carracci. The painters, Annibale, in particular, were widely and enthusiastically hailed—first by Giovanni Battista Agucchi (1570-1632), and subsequently by Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1615-1696) and Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616-1693)—as artists by whom a rare mastery of color and design was demonstrated in equal measure. Agucchi's *Trattato della pittura,* written around of 1607-15 but published in 1646, praises the Carracci in exactly this fashion. First, however, the Bolognese Agucchi expresses disgust with the "dark shadows of the early barbarianism" (presumably a reference to Caravaggio) and an equally unacceptable new style "based more on appearance than substance." Practitioners of this sensual manner, he writes,

> [W]ere satisfied to feed the eyes of the people with the loveliness of the colors and rich vestments. Using things taken from here and there, painting forms that were gross in outline, rarely well joined together, and straying into other notable errors […][61]

Although likely aimed at contemporary Venetian painters, Agucchi's backhanded praise of lovely, seductive color—itself a kind of enticing, fancy dress—and his condemnation of poor draftsmanship echoes the gendered stock phrases most often used discussing Titian and Veronese in the previous century.

Rubens's Italian works would very likely have been known to Agguchi, who counted the painter Domenichino among the members of his Roman household. Even so, the as-yet-undetermined style of the young Fleming may not have garnerd the learned Agucchi's attention. This is regrettably typical of Rubens's early critical fortunes. He was not to have a Flemish

[61] Diverse figure da Annibale Carracci intagliate in rame da Simone Guilino…(Rome, 1646) reprinted in *Sources and Documents in the History of Art: Italy and Spain, 1600-1750*, Robert Engass and Jonathan Brown, eds. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 29. Fragments of the *Trattato* are reprinted in Denis Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art* (London: Oxford UP, 1947) Appendix 1, 241-58. See also the synthetic comments of Jeffrey M. Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 64 (Jun., 1982), 234.

biographer in his lifetime and evaluations of his work prior to his death in 1640 are scarce. Even Vicente Carducho, the Spanish Habsburgs' respected Italian-born court painter and theorist mentions Rubens only in passing in his *Dialogos de la Pintura*, published in 1633, just five years after Rubens's triumphant visit to Spain.[62]

In fact, the most detailed and analytically sophisticated appraisals of Rubens's art originate not from his immediate contemporaries but from those writing in the second half of the seventeenth-century, when the critical discourse of painting connoisseurship can be said to have reached its apogee, having extended beyond Italy to France.[63] However, Rubens's name does appear briefly in some of the earlier seventeenth-century Italian sources. There one finds that the Flemish painter's choice to assert his artistic identity through 'furious' brushwork and silken layers of raw pigment was well recognized by writers and critics of his own time as aligning him with a certain manner of painting derived from the innovative Northern Italian tradition though, initially at least, not necessarily discussed under the heading of Venetianism.

An early example of this attitude is found in a letter written in the decade following Caravaggio's death, by Vincenzo Giustiniani (1594-1637), the polymath Roman connoisseur and one of Caravaggio's most ardent patrons.[64] Giustiniani included Rubens among a short list of second-generation non-Italian Caravaggesque painters (including Ribera, Honthorst, and Heemskerk) whom he highly valued for their knowledge of "how to handle colors almost from instinct" and paint "directly from natural objects."[65] As Giustiniani notes at the conclusion of his description of naturalistic painting, most of the best modern painters of this type "were Flemish but were active in Rome and had a good sense of color."[66] In other words, despite their Northern roots, the painters mentioned developed a following among Italian collectors and used color in an appropriate manner that remained pleasing and realistic without lapsing into stereotypical Netherlandish decorativeness or preciosity. In this sense, as a painter who supposedly worked from direct observation, Rubens, in Giustiniani's view, possessed Caravaggio's aptitude for imitating what he saw before him but lacked the Italian painter's imaginative use of color in the service of dramatic optical effects not normally visible to the observer.[67] Giustiniani's relatively fair-minded inclusion of Flemish realism and deft coloring within the spheres of Roman painting is one indication of a brief hiatus of the regionalistic Venetian *colore/*Tuscan-*disegno* debate animated and furthered by Vasari some seventy-five years earlier.

Though of a much younger generation than Rubens and Giustiniani, the Modena-based Francesco Scannelli was among the first seventeenth-century critics to strike a qualitative

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[62] Vicente Carducho, *Dialogos de la Pintura* (1633), D.G. Cruzada Villaamil, ed. (Madrid: Imprenta Galliano, 1865), 66, 350.

[63] Rubens is favorably mentioned by the Dutch art theorist Samuel von Hoogstraten, in relation to 'inventive' composers and the Venetian colorists, in his *Introduction to the Academy of Painting, or The Visible World* (1678); see Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World: Samuel Van Hoogstraten's Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, Beverly Jackson and Lynne Richards, trans. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2008), 55, 142, 264. On Van Hoogstraten's artistic concerns and relevance to the development of Dutch Painting, see Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel Van Hoogstraten* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1995).

[64] The letter is discussed by Janis Bell, "Some Seventeenth-Century Appraisals of Caravaggio's Coloring," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 14(1993), 123-125.

[65] Vincenzo Giustiniani, *Lettere Memorabili dell' Ab. Michele Giustiniani*, Rome, 1675, reprinted in *Raccolta dilettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura*..., G. Bottari and S. Ticozzi, eds. 8 vols., (Milan, 1822-25), VI, 121-29; and with an English translation in *Sources and Documents in the History of Art: Italy and Spain, 1600-1750*, Robert Engass and Jonathan Brown, eds. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970),19.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Bell, "Some Seventeenth-Century Appraisals of Caravaggio's Coloring," 123.

balance between inspired *colorito* and rational draftsmanship. Writing in his *Il Microcosmo della pittura*, published in 1657, Scannelli purports to praise three 'Schools' of painting equally while in fact providing a hierarchical schema that proceeds from the first foundations of "scholarly" Tuscan painting to the second School of animated Venetian realism and further, to the synthetic ideal of the third and best, Lombard, School. Scannelli's protagonist is thus neither Michelangelo nor Titian but Antonio Allegri, best known as Correggio (1489-1534), a category-defying Emilian. To Scannelli's mind, preparatory drawings were a hindrance to Correggio's divinely inspired spontaneity and invention (the singularity of which is shown to spectacular effect in the numinous naturalism of his eroticized *Jupiter and Io* (Fig. 14). Although Correggio executed numerous sketches and studies, in the end, according to Scannelli, he wisely put aside his drawings in order "to find fulfillment through pigment and in the highest type of art."[68]

Scannelli contrasts Correggio with classicizing Baroque painters such as Guido Reni, whose workmanlike manner prevents him from achieving the painterly *sprezzatura* crucial to (the enjoyment of) great art. A nationalist through and through, Scannelli's principal interest is Italian painters. Yet in his biography (the first) of Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, known as Guercino (1591-1666), he briefly refers to Rubens in a way that suggests he and other contemporary art writers perceived a definitive change in Rubens's handling of color within the context of his long and successful career. Under a section dealing with "investigations of the reasons why [painters] today have changed their styles to the lighter manner," Scannelli cites "more general and adequate reasons" for Guido Reni's and Peter Paul Rubens's "second manner."[69] Including Rubens in an all Italian (indeed, mostly Bolognese) litany comprising Guercino, Francesco Albani, Pietro da Cortona, and Reni, Scanelli writes: "All of these men, who are the most capable and famous masters of our time, have afterwards, during the period of their greatest acclaim, changed over in their manner of working to the lighter colors."[70]

From both chromatic and dramatic standpoints, the pure timbre and gentled clarity of Guercino (1591-1666), and especially the less painterly Reni is admittedly quite different in flavor from the high-keyed tonality of Rubens's dynamic actors. But it is nonetheless worth recalling that among the Bolognese artists, Reni and Albani (as wells as the unmentioned Domenichino) had studied together in the Bologna studio of Denis Calvaert (1540-1619), an Antwerp-born painter who moved to Italy in 1562, founded his own art accademy and lived and died in the home of the *accademia carracessca* with the exception of a brief stint in Rome. That these 'Lombard' artists so famed for the refined classicism and chaste sweetness of their imagery had received their earliest technical formation under the direction of a Fleming further complicates the stylistic classification of these early Baroque artists as strictly Northern, Italian or even Northern Italian. Like Calvaert's art, Scannelli's remarks about style-switching hold special meaning in view of his knowledge and appreciation of traditionally Bolognese pictorial concerns—light, color, effortlessness—and the plight of non-Roman artists in a city where the parochial demands of enormously rich and influential patrons frequently trumped a painter's personal artistic inclinations and aesthetic philosophy.

Thus, in noting what was for him a regrettable stylistic turn from darkly evocative and expressive imagery to paler, prettier palettes, more brightly and uniformly lit, Scannelli

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[68] Francesco Scannelli, *Il Microcosmo della pittura, overo trattato diviso in due libri. Nel prima spettante alla theorico si discorre delle grandezze d'essa Pittura…nel second.s'additano l'opere diverse pis famose…* (Cesena, 1657) cited in Engass and Brown, op cit., 47.
[69] Ibid., 99.
[70] Ibid.

documents a concerted artistic retreat from (in particular) Caravaggio's intense, artificially dramatic tenebrism and unmodulated chromatic leaps. In some cases, as well, Scannelli simply wishes to assert his own renegade dislike of, what was to him the bloodless antique beauty of which Reni and Guercino, in contrast to their Northern Italian precursor, Correggio, had become the most famous purveyors.[71] But likewise for Rubens, his so-called second manner was one in which the more visceral drama of Caravaggesque color and lighting appears to have been intentionally replaced by softer contours and cheerfully harmonious colorism of the type associated less with the inky, saturated hues of Caravaggio than the sunny coral, gleaming gold, and cerulean blue of Bellini and Titian and their followers.

Good Venetian Color: Seventeenth-Century Critics and Rubens's Second Manner

In 1642, Rubens's first biography was published in Rome, by Giovanni Baglione, just two years after the artist's death. In contrast to the Italian author's rather formulaic *Vita*, a German biography of Rubens published in 1675 by Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) is far more personal and journalistic in tone. The painter Sandrart had lived in Italy and was well-acquainted with seventeenth-century Roman, Venetian and Northern art. Trained as an engraver, he had supervised the production of the *Galleria Giustiniani*, an impressive two-volume set of prints devoted to Vicenzo Giustiniani's cosmopolitan sculpture collection.[72] Sandrart had witnessed Rubens's interaction with mutual acquaintances in a circle of active and successful Dutch painters (including his teacher, Gerit von Honthorst and Abraham Bloemart) during the Flemish painter's visits to Utrecht and Amsterdam around 1627. Writing with an air of retrospective judiciousness, Sandrart observes that Rubens had "diligently contemplated the praiseworthy statues of antiquity, as well as the works of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael of Urbino and others, always bearing in mind that the aforementioned Venetian manner suited him better." [73]

But the invocation of the Venetian manner implied more than a certain approach to the valorization of color, the manipulation of oil paint, or the rendering of natural-looking figures evenhandedly bathed in light. Throughout the seventeenth-century, the works of Titian and his one-time pupil, Veronese were also associated with certain kinds of subjects and themes to which their "refined" and "graceful" style was thought to be especially conducive. First among these was the female body. Whether grandly encased in fashionable silks or veiled in diaphanous gauze, the female figure was continually linked to the highest achievements of Venetian style by its critics as well as its defenders.

Following Vasari, however, Venetian artists had to endure a critical caesura of almost a century. It would be up to Carlo Ridolfi, known as the 'Venetian Vasari,' to give Northern Italian artists their due. Ridolfi, a student of one of Veronese's disciples, includes a lengthy and punctilious biography of Veronese in his *Le maraviglie Dell' arte* (1648) where, in fact, he challenges the Vasarian view of Venetian painters by confirming Veronese's extraordinary interest in drawing and copying the works of Parmigianino among others.[74] A backward-looking

[71] Ibid, 97.
[72] Elizabeth Cropper, review: "Caravaggio and the Giustiniani, Rome and Berlin," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 143 (Jul., 2001), 450.
[73] Sandrart, *Life of Rubens*, in Wood, *Lives of Rubens*, 36.
[74] Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedroco, *Veronese: Catalogo Completo dei Dipinti* (Florence: Cantini, 1991), 9.

and nostalgic critic-painter, Ridolfi greatly respected both Titian and Tintoretto.[75] Suavely uniting the two poles of artistic excellence, he praises the well-traveled Veronese for his careful study of Raphael and Michelangelo and for his: "Masterful invention, for the chaste refinement of his subjects, for the pleasing nature of his faces, for the variety of his expressions, for his indefinable charm, and for the infinitely seductive acts that are put into his works […][76] In art writing following the publication of Ridolfi's laborious documentation of Veronese's works, patronage, and highly successful career, the artist is typically cast as Titian's well-behaved protégé—in stark contrast to Tintoretto, for whom, according to Ridolfi, Titian formed an abiding hatred.[77] Critical discussions of Veronese as a derivative painter are underscored by their location in the biographical and critical literature literally 'after' a discussion of Titian, on whose description they often depend—a literary technique that continues in treatments of Van Dyck chiefly as a student, or follower, of Rubens.

For example, in Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy's *Sentiments*, a series of brief 'judgments' published by the author's devoted follower Roger De Piles in 1668, a brief entry for Veronese is virtually appended to the longer description of Titian. Dufresnoy, Nicolas Poussin's former roommate in Rome begins his entry for the older painter as follows:

> Titian was one of the greatest colorists that the world has ever had. He drew with far more facility and practice than Giorgione. His women and children were admirable in color and design, they were delicate in manner, refined, and noble with a certain agreeable nonchalance in their hairstyles and draperies and the composition that are his alone. The figures of men are not so well drawn; there are likewise some of his draperies that are a bit sad and of little merit. [78]

Dufresnoy's views on Titian's one-time pupil continue along the same lines. Veronese's women, he begins:

> [H]ad a very graceful appearance, with a great diversity of gleaming draperies and an incredible vividness and ease; nevertheless his composition is crude, and his drawing is not at all correct; but the color and all that depends on it is

[75] On Ridolfi's counter-Vasarian stance and publications see the introduction to Carlo Ridolfi, *The Life of Titian***,** Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella et al, trans. and eds. (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996).

[76] "Maestose inventione, per la venusta de soggetti, per la piaceuolezza de' volti, per la varieta de sembianti, per le vaghezze, e per gli infiniti allettamenti, che framise nelle opera sue […]" Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie Dell' arte* (Venice, 1648), 332.

[77] For recent discussions of the sometimes rabidly competitive nature of their relationships see *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice,* exh. cat Frederick Ilchman et al, eds. (Boston: Museum of Fine arts, 2009).

[78] "Titien a été l'un des plus grands Coloristes qui aient été au monde. Il a dessiné avec beaucoup plus de facilité et de pratique que le Georgion. Il y a des femmes et des enfants de lui admirable de dessin et de couleur, le goût en étant délicat, mignon, noble, avec une certain négligence agréable de coiffures, des draperies, et d'accomodements qui lui sont particuliers. Pour des figures d'hommes, il ne les a pas des mieux dessinées; il ya a même quelques draperies de lui qui sont un peu triste et de petite maniére […]," Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy, *De arte graphica* (Paris, 1668), Christopher Allen, Yasmin Annabel Haskell et al, eds. (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 2005), 405 [translation mine]. Cf. the English translation with remarks by John Dryden published as *The Art of Painting* (London, 1695), 218-219.

> so admirable in his paintings that it astonishes from the outset, and makes one forget the other parts that are lacking.[79]

The French author's rather uncharitable comments would seem to align him with the school of the (mature) classicist, Poussin, where reasoned and careful drawing was valued above all else. In fact Dufresnoy was a great advocate of color whose emphasis, as Elizabeth Holt has noted, prepared the way for the royal championing of Rubens's art over Poussin's.[80] In this respect Dufresnoy's account of Rubens, which maintains a special piquancy in John Dryden's translation of 1694, suavely imparts the feminized flavor of his previous appraisals of Titian and Veronese without criticizing the Flemish painter quite so harshly for committing similar errors:

> And though we cannot but observe in all his Paintings, somewhat of great and noble; yet it must be confess'd, that generally speaking, he design'd not correctly: But for all the other parts of Painting, he was as absolute a Master of them, and possess'd them all as throughly as any of his Predecessors in that noble Art. His principal Studies were made in *Lombardy,* after the Works of *Titian, Paul Veronese* and *Tintoret;* whose Cream he has skimm'd (if you will allow the Phrase) and extracted from their several Beauties many general Maxims and infallible Rules, which he always follow'd.[81]

The author's recourse to the sensual metaphors of cooking and food—echoing the 'condiments' associated by Palma Giovane with Titian's painting—is notable and further emphasizes the selective manner in which Rubens had taken 'all the other parts' of painting besides drawing, i.e. the best of Northern Italian coloring, for his own. Following Venetian 'rules' he manages to cloak his supposedly substandard design with the superficial appearance of greatness and nobility—becoming in the process a worthy disciple of his cinquecento Italian predecessors.

Written a generation after Rubens's death, Dufresnoy's glancing rhetoric, moving deftly between coded and gendered categories of praise and blame, was a sign of things to come. In the last forty years of the seventeenth-century, when the theoretical discourse of colore/disegno recommenced in earnest, the gendering as feminine of color, bodies, ornamentation, and pigment, that is, the material substance of paint, was well-established. Taken together, Dufresnoy's assessment of Rubens's infallible adherence to Venetian standards and Sandrart's characterization of Rubens's natural affinity for the 'Venetian manner' *over against* Tuscan style mark the beginning of a critical trajectory. This gendered definition of Rubens would conclude in the twentieth-century with Kenneth Clark's classic claim that "Rubens did for the female nude what Michelangelo had done for the male."[82] Instrumental to this art historical understanding of Rubens as a painter who specialized in the representation of women is, as I have suggested, his conscious adoption of a Venetian painterly style and technique which was itself gendered feminine in the art-theoretical discourse of the day.

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[79] "Paul Veronese a été très gracieux dans ses airs des femmes, avec une grande diversité de draperies luisantes et une vivacité et facilite incroyables; toutefois sa compositions est barbare, et son dessin n'est point correct; mais le coloris et tout ce qui en dépend est si admirable dans ses tableaux, qu'il surprend d'abord, et fait oublier les autres parties qui y manquent." Ibid., Appendix I, 405 .

[80] *A Documentary History of Art*, Vol. II, Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 164. On Dufresnoy, see the introduction by Allen and Haskell as in No. 7.

[81] Dufresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, 225.

[82] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 205.

Something Wanting in his Nature: Rubens and Bellori

Unlike the French classicist painter, Nicolas Poussin, who was adopted, or assumed, into the Italian (read Roman) tradition, Rubens remained an outsider looking in on Italian art. Rubens owes his critical status as artist importantly foreign to central Italian art largely to one writer. Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696) was the authoritative Roman classicist-critic and biographer who served at one time as the artistic advisor and librarian of Christina of Sweden and, from 1670, as Commissioner of Antiquities of Rome.

A close friend and admirer of Nicolas Poussin, whose art he viewed as appropriately faithful and decorous in its translation of the (lost) pictorial vocabulary of the Roman Imperial age, Bellori provides an invaluable, though not always accurate, late seventeenth-century documentation of many of Rubens's major works. Bellori was an Italian classicist for whom a French painter served as the consummate modern interpreter of Roman antiquity.[83] By the century's end, as is well documented, the controversy over the practical aims and aesthetic ends of Rubens *versus* Poussin was at the heart of the ethical-stylistic debates which were to consume the newly formed French Academy for much of the eighteenth-century.[84] In a passage from his lengthy and in fact, rather ambivalent, *Life* of Rubens (1672) which lays the ground work for the terms of the subsequent French disputes, Bellori faults Rubens for having:

> failed to achieve the beautiful forms of nature for want of good draftsmanship, because of which, and because of something wanting in his nature that would not suffer correction, he was kept from graceful beauty in the *aria delle teste* and from grace in outlines, which he distorted with his style.[85]

Bellori's negative appraisal not only reappropriates the quality of grace for the *disegno* faction it portrays Rubens as ungracefully haughty and arrogant, an obstinate Fleming unable to 'suffer correction.' Bellori also pointedly parrots Vasari/Michelangelo's polite derision of Titian for never learning to "draw well" which should be kept in mind when considering his more positive-sounding and commonly cited observation that Rubens "brought the good color of Venice to Flanders, which was the basis of his fame[…]."[86]

The Italian critic might almost have written 'the basis of his infamy' for elsewhere in his account he attests (with similarly veiled disapproval) to the adverse effect of Northern Italian models on Rubens's art. Not only was Rubens inclined to paint his at times anatomically impossible figures in anachronously modern dress; his vivacious nudes were un-artfully covered. Bellori claims that Rubens had "studied" in Venice, where he:

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[83] Although, as is well-known, the France of Poussin's youth and early career was steeped in antique, especially Roman, culture, for which See Todd P. Olson, *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), 26, 29.

[84] On Rubens's centrality to de Piles in this regard, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Making of Rubens* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 65-88.

[85] Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* Alice Sedgwick Wohl, trans., notes by Hellmut Wohl; introduction by Tomaso Montanari (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005), 206. For a recent discussion of Bellori's rhetorical style and theoretical inconsistencies (with particular attention to the biographies of Caravaggio and the Carracci), see Hans Raben, "Bellori's Art: The Taste and Distaste of a Seventeenth-Century Art Critic in Rome," *Simiolus*, Vol. 32 (2006),126-146.

[86] Ibid., 205.

> looked always at Titian, Paolo Veronese, and Tintoretto, observing the chiaroscuro and the masses of hues. He colored from nature and was intense in his mixtures, making light radiate through contrast with forms in shadow so that he was admirable in contrasts of shadow and light. He maintained such unity and resoluteness that his figures seem executed in one dash of the brush and infused with one breath, as can be recognized in the Luxembourg gallery, which is completely harmonious and has the most stupendous effects of color and is the most beautiful and glorious product of his brush.[87]

Here, too, Bellori's summation appears complimentary until one considers that for him 'figures executed in one dash of the brush' were inferior to the carefully delineated forms of a Romanist such as Poussin. In a series of isolated observations Bellori thus manages to taint an ostensibly positive estimation of Rubens as a stupendously free colorist in the Venetian manner with a negative valence drawn from the established central Italian critique of Titian's style and practice as lacking intellectual force and good design. As Poussin himself had succinctly put it, not without an allusion to the innately erotic ergo gendered nature of tint and shade: "the colors in painting are, as it were, blandishments to lure the eyes." [88]

In contrast, moreover, with his jubilant introduction to the *Life* of Poussin, which he begins by situating the French expatriate in the context of a time and place when "the fine arts of *disegno* were flowering most in Italy and in Rome,"[89] Bellori's prefatory comments on Rubens identify his art as exceptional among the evils of "mechanical and lowly" painting that were "corrupting" Flanders at the time of his birth.[90] Later in the same account, as we have seen, Bellori identifies the *Medici Cycle* as the best example of the art of coloring. Yet of the same artist he will remark elsewhere that however much his subjects were based on antique statues and sources, Rubens was prone to "distort them to such an extent that he left no form or trace by which to recognize them."[91] Bellori was an even harsher critic of the dramatically naturalistic paintings of Caravaggio in this regard. In an important sense, the classical tradition and Roman antiquity is placed at odds with both Caravaggio, who was similarly accused by Bellori and his colleagues of an incomplete knowledge of ancient models, and with Rubens's so-called 'second manner': the warmer palette, uniform lighting, and painterliness associated at the time with the blandishing *colorito* and easy naturalism of the Venetian style.[92]

Everything that Depends on Color

In the critical discourse of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Northern Italian tradition was gendered feminine in part because it was thought to embrace above all the 'female'

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[87] Ibid. Bellori himself owned portraits attributed to Titian and Tintoretto, for which see Donatella Livia Sparti, "Giovan Pietro Bellori and Annibale Carracci's Self-Portraits. From the "Vite" to the Artist's Funerary Monument," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, Vol. 45 (2001), 60.

[88] Nicolas Poussin, *Correspondance* (Archives de l'art français, N.S., V), Paris, 1911, in *A Documentary History of Art*, Vol. II, Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., (Princeton: Princeton, 1982), 142; Excerpts from these letters of Poussin also appear in Bellori's *Vite* (1672).

[89] Bellori, *Lives*, 309.

[90] Ibid., 193.

[91] Ibid.

[92] On Bellori's incorrect opinion that Caravaggio seemed "to imitate art without knowing what it is about" see, for example, Avigdor W. G. Posèq, "Caravaggio and the Antique," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 11 (1990), 147.

qualities of (additive or accidental) color'; (intemperate or excessive) opulence and materiality; and (anti-intellectual or simplistic) naturalism. That Venetian painting is not only suitable 'for women' as de Francisco de Hollanda/Michelangelo had remarked of Flemish painting, but evocative of conventionally feminine qualities such as softness and refinement, was stated outright well before Bellori's time by Ludovico Dolce in his *Aretino* (1557). There, having praised the careful imitation of the tones of the flesh and the details of fine fashion, the native-born apologist for Venetian painting observes: "I think myself that the delicate body ought to take precedence over the muscular one."[93] Where Dolce praises the privileging of certain types of effeminate subjects, the Frenchman Paul de Fréart, writing in his 'diary' of the sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini, likely composed around 1640-43, returns again to a notion of Venetian practice and its products as variable and erratic in a distinctly feminine way:

> I forgot to mention that he [Bernini] said that Paolo Veronese and Titian sometimes took their brushes and executed things they had not planned, letting themselves be carried away by a kind of frenzy of painting; that was the cause of the marked differences among their works; those of them which had been carefully handled were incomparable while others sometimes were only color without composition of thought.[94]

Still later in the century, even Roger de Piles, the great proponent of sensual *Rubenisme* against the sober ideals of the classicizing *Poussinistes,* notes rather incredulously in his 'Reflections,' first published in 1699:

> Though Rubens lived seven years in Italy; though he made a considerable collection of medals, statues, and engraved stones; though he examined, understood, and extolled the beauty of the antique […] yet, through education, and the nature of his country, he fell into a Flemish character and sometimes made an ill choice, offending against the regularity of design."[95]

Like Bellori, de Piles blames Rubens's shortcomings on the artistic and cultural deficiencies of his homeland. But if Rubens had learned bad design in Antwerp, he made up for it with his mastery of pigment and paint. Thus elsewhere in the same pages, the same writer—closely paraphrasing Dufresnoy's account of Veronese—remarks: "Everything that depends on coloring is admirable in Rubens."[96]

The French critic thus employs Flemishness, rather than Venezianità, as a cipher for ill-conceived design. He leaves himself room to exalt Rubens's art in Italian terms on another occasion. For these and more recent art-writers Rubens's actual style as was not easily separated from the nation whose painters were equated with certain stylistic tendencies. Even beyond such biases, however, Rubens's psychological approach to portraiture, his eroticizing mythologies, his

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[93] *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, Mark Roskill, ed. and trans., (New York: Renaissance Society of America, 2000), 155, 153, 143. On this passage see also Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), 98-99.

[94] Paul de Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou, *Journal de voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France*, cited in Holt, *A Documentary History of Art,* 139.

[95] Roger de Piles, "Reflections on the Works of Sir Peter Paul Rubens," from *The Art of Painting* (London, 1706), in *The Lives of Rubens* with an introduction by Jeremy Wood (London: Pallas Athene, 2005), 89-90.

[96] Ibid., 91.

site-specific programmatic commissions and noble patronage, and his ostensible naturalism—achieved by a lively, because *non-finito,* layering of, at times, counter-intuitive, color—are all vital proof of the artist's turn to Venice, though few can agree on when such a turn took place.[97]

* * *

It is one thing to count Rubens as chief among the Baroque painters for whom Venice provided an artistic tradition worthy of emulation. It is another thing to suggest that the turn to Venetian models implied not only formal commitments but philosophical/ethical ones, and above all, commitments directly tied to an understanding of gender and femininity. Yet even a cursory survey of Rubens's works from around the middle of the second decade forward reveals the almost simultaneous onset of a more painterly, *colorito* style coupled with an exponentially greater number of female bodies, whether saints, nymphs, or the sometimes unidentifiable personifications and courtly personages of the kind animating the *Medici Cycle.* With notable exceptions, these conspicuous women are splendidly attired, naturally graceful and full-bodied though not necessarily heavily ornamented, or even clothed, and never, I would argue, merely decorative in the sense of being visually delectable yet iconographically irrelevant.

In short, the numerical presence of women seems to increase along with Rubens's investment in the pictorial (physiological and ethical) qualities associated by critics with femininity and, by extension, with Venetian painting. As Rubens becomes a more sympathetic and inventive painter of women and for women, he also paints more of them. Following this logic, it is possible to characterize his reconception of the 'Powers of Women' in, at times, a positive manner that privileges femininity's unique capacity to allegorize both artistic expression and moral goodness, or grace, in a prescriptive, actively tropological sense. Here again it is the female form's (inescapable) ability both to contain and generalize abstract meaning that distinguishes universalizing femininity from particularizing masculinity in visual terms.

As I have tried to show in the previous chapters, paintings such as *Samson and Delilah* (1609), the *Adoration of the Magi* (1609) and the *Raising of the Cross* (1610-11) all completed in the first years following Rubens's return to Antwerp from Italy, point to the possibility that the Flemish painter still saw himself and may have wished to be seen as a Romanist inheritor of Michelangelo and Caravaggio, whose works he had studied so attentively. With the advent of the second Antwerp altarpiece, however, this assertion is more difficult to make. The radical but as yet unexplained stylistic rift between these two highly visible works created for Flemish patrons identifies the *Descent from the Cross* (1611-14) as the harbinger of a new way of seeing, painting, and relating for Rubens—a kind of empathetic shift I have associated with the death of his beloved brother, the pregnancy of his wife Isabella, and the arrival of their first child, Clara Serena. It is, I think, no accident that one of the wings of the *Descent* represents a stately Flemish Mary whose imminent maternity is made central in the most elegant manner; nor that the model for this image is found in a work by Veronese, the consummate 'Venetian' painter of similarly stately, anachronously allegorical women.

So much in fact was Rubens's second manner associated with Venetian painting that one repeatedly encounters characterizations of his art, both its defects and achievements, in language borrowed from descriptions of Titian, Tintoretto, and especially Veronese. In less overt ways,

[97] Whereas scholars have long identified citations from Tintoretto in Rubens's early religious works and the Flemish painter's debt to Veronese for the *di sotto in sú* perspective of the ceiling panels designed for the Jesuit church in Antwerp (1618-20), his enthusiasm for Titian is often forestalled until his second journey to Spain (1628-29).

terms such as ‘color’ and its associated cognates and connotations—ornament, surface, materiality, sensuality, impulsiveness—helped critics gender Rubens’s style as ‘Venetian’ in the euphemistic sense in which the word was adjectivally employed. This critical feminization is, I believe, a development Rubens himself may have accepted, and even encouraged for the ways in which it evinced his devotion to femininely gendered notions of peace and prosperity over against the inherently masculine barbarity of war.

CHAPTER FIVE

Recycling Sovereignty: Portraiture as Propaganda in the Programs for Isabel Clara Eugenia and Marie de Medici

> Hence the ruler ought to have moral virtue in perfection, for his function, taken absolutely, demands a master artificer, and rational principle is such an artificer; the subjects, on the other hand, require only that measure of virtue that is proper to them. Clearly, then, the moral virtue belongs to all of them; but the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying. [1]
>
> --Aristotle, *Politics* I: 13 (1267a)

> Nature often makes a woman shrewd, hard work makes her learned, upbringing makes her pious, and experience makes her wise. What, therefore, prevents women from playing a full part in public affairs? If one is born free, why should she obey? If one is heiress to a kingdom, why should she not reign? Divine law, the history of nations, ancient institutions, and examples drawn from Holy Writ all support such arguments.[2]
>
> --John Case, *Sphaera civitatis* (Oxford, 1588)

During his first ten years in Antwerp Rubens was largely occupied with the creation and execution of devotional paintings, religious and secular allegories, and large-scale altarpieces. But the focus of his artistic production took a very different turn in the following decade. For much of the 1620s Rubens busied himself with two major pictorial programs commissioned by Catholic Europe's two illustrious sovereign widows: Marie de Medici (1573-1642), queen mother of France and the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia (1566-1633), regent and later governor of the Spanish Netherlands. Although the learned Spanish Infanta, who had long assisted her father, Philip II, in the oversight of his vast empire, was perhaps the better educated of the two, both women were instilled from an early age with a sophisticated understanding of the arts.[3] Isabel had passed her first thirty-three years in Spain among the legendary Habsburg picture galleries at the Pardo, the Alcázar, and the Escorial.[4] Whereas Marie, who descended from one of Italy's great art collecting dynasties, was raised along with her sister, Eleonora, in the Pitti palace. Just as Philip had provided Isabel with a highly personal model of geographically wide ranging

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[1] *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 1144.
[2] Quoted in Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 61.
[3] In 1584, Matteo Zane, the Venetian envoy to Spain recorded that Isabel spent several hours each day assisting her father in his study with his massive correspondence. L. Klingenstein, with an introduction by Edward Armstrong, *The Great Infanta Isabel: Sovereign of the Netherlands* (London: Methuen and Company, 1910), xiv.
[4] Compared to her French and English contemporaries, Elizabeth I and Marie de Medici, Isabel has received far less scholarly attention as a major seventeenth-century Spanish patron; for a recent biography see Ruth Betegón Díez, *Isabel Clara Eugenia: Infanta de España y soberana de Flandes* (Barcelona: Plaza Janes, 2004). Klingenstein, op cit., remains a better source of information relating to Isabel's art patronage. For the Archdukes' art collection both before and after Albert's death (1621), see Christopher White, "Rubens and the Archdukes," in *Albert and Isabella: Essays*, Werner Thomas and Luc Duerloo, eds. (Leuven: Brepols, 1998),121-128. See also, *El Arte en la Corte de los Archiduques Alberto de Austria e Isabel Clara Eugenia: Un Reino Imaginado*, exh. cat. Palacio Real (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 2000).

connoisseurship, Marie could look to her grandmother, Eleonora of Toledo, whose patronage of Bronzino and purchase of the Pitti established the Spanish-born noblewoman as an important figure in Mannerist circles.[5] For her part, Marie studied precious stones and mathematics and, judging from a youthful sketch inscribed with her name, seems to have practiced drawing as well.[6]

By all accounts, the two women were possessed of very different personalities. If Marie was quick to anger and naturally combative—"imperious, vindictive, and violent," in the words of a nineteenth-century French historian—Isabel, the Serene Infanta, was consistently good-natured, kindly, and endowed with both stereotypical Spanish gravity and a lively wit.[7] As foreign-born rulers confronted with the volatile political circumstances of the Thirty Years War—Marie faced a constant barrage of Huguenot and ultra-Catholic criticism from within France, Isabel tirelessly strove to pacify her country's external Protestant aggressors—the two wielded power and influence in radically different ways. They were also intermittent friends and political allies who shared a fervent—though far from unquestioning—commitment to the Catholic Church and the tenets of absolute monarchy.

Marie had assumed the regency of France following the assassination of her husband, Henri IV, in 1610, and Isabel had ruled as co-sovereign of the Spanish Netherlands with her cousin and husband, the Archduke Albert, from 1599 until Albert's death in 1621, after which she became the country's governor. Widows empowered to rule their subjects and (theoretically) to negotiate foreign and domestic relations, both women recognized the need to cultivate a public image as ideal sovereigns despite—or because of—the conventionally understood (in)capacities of their sex. Painted likenesses and allegories were central to the formation of a visual culture projecting the two contemporaries as paragons of virtue whose deeds were anticipated and validated by historically heroic female predecessors duly commemorated by earlier artists and authors. Rubens, as the women's preferred portraitist and painter, played the leading role in realizing in visual terms the distinctive aims of Isabel and Marie's identity construction.

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The principal concern of this chapter is Rubens's varied and quite dissimilar allegorization of femininity in relation to these two exceptional royal women. For all their psychological and cultural differences, Marie and Isabel turned to the visual arts for similarly apologetic purposes and with a similarly new intensity following the deaths of their husbands. Widowed by men who died before the relentlessness and scope of the Thirty Years' War could be imagined, both women assumed tactical and political decision-making responsibilities on a scale their sovereign spouses had never faced. Although certain aspects of Marie's commission will be discussed, her far better-known and researched pictorial program will be considered here primarily as an important precursor to Isabel's Eucharist Tapestries. Inasmuch as the French commission was executed in Antwerp, and completed during a period in which Rubens and the Infanta Isabel are known to have been in close communication over matters both artistic and diplomatic, it is highly likely that Isabel would have seen and/or discussed the nature of the

[5] On Eleonora's patronage of Bronzino, see, for example Janet Cox-Rearick, *Bronzino's Chapel for Eleonora di Toledo in the Palazzo Vecchio* (Berkeley and London: University of California UP, 1993).

[6] For Marie de Medici's education and patronage, see Geraldine A. Johnson, "Imagining Images of Powerful Women: Maria de' Medici's Patronage of Art and Architecture," in *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, Cynthia Lawrence, ed. (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997), 126-127, nos. 1, 2.

[7] Emile de Bonnechose with H. W. Dulcken, ed., *A Popular History of France* (London: Ward, Lock & Co, n.d.), 201.

French Queen mother's panegyric canvases. It might even be proposed that as a propagandistic image series solicited from and devised by her personal court painter, the Medici cycle may have served as provocative food for thought, if not a cautionary tale, for the Governor of the Spanish Netherlands.

Though similar in number and scale, the projects are indeed different in many respects. In both cases, however, Rubens wisely draws on earlier programmatic models. Both Veronese's mythological frescoes at the Palladian Villa Masur and the personified Venice's sociable female cohort in the *Palazzo Ducale* seem a probable source of inspiration for the Medici cycle.[8] While for the Spanish commission, the opulent triumphs depicted in Habsburg tapestries executed in Flemish workshops during the previous century appear to have influenced Rubens's allegorical imagery.[9] Not more than two years prior to the Medici commission—but to no avail—Rubens had openly expressed his desire to garner the prestigious ceiling program at James I's newly built Palladian banqueting house in London. It is entirely possible that the fruits of the ensuing years, these two monumental programs for rival sovereigns, were instrumental in delivering the Whitehall project (ultimately undertaken by James's son Charles, the husband of Marie's daughter, Henriette Marie) into Rubens's eager hands. For all these reasons the commissions by Marie de Medici and the Archduchess Isabel are sufficient to rank the two women among Rubens's most original and important patrons.

Indeed, by lightly disguising a variously costumed Marie as the leading lady in her own elaborate drama while depicting Isabel as a living saint on a par with the doctors of the Church Rubens's characterization significantly departs from established modes of representing female rulership in France and Spain. For example, when Marie's predecessor, Catherine de Medici was allegorized as the devoted widow, Artemisia, the original narrative was presented more or less intact—the Hellenizing queen's historical circumstances were to be read as paralleling or prefiguring Catherine's grief and subsequent assumption of power—nor were the regent's features or personal history superimposed on her antique stand-in. Conversely, in Spain, where personifications and allegorical imagery were comparatively rare in court painting, naturalistic portraiture was the primary means of honoring royal women, who were typically portrayed alone or with a sibling or servant rather than as sitters among a larger family.[10] And neither did Spanish patrons, despite their longstanding taste for Northern painting, generally embrace the Flemish convention of portraying life-like donors in the presence of theophanies or sacred conversations.[11]

Although Isabel's commission seems to have come almost immediately after the completion of Marie's cycle, Rubens approached it quite differently. Moving from secularized mythology to doctrinal allegory afforded him a new pictorial vocabulary just as the textile format and Spanish conventual setting invited fresh responses to the representational challenge of female power and sacred history. Marie and Isabel were politically enmeshed sovereign widows and allies for whom Rubens seems to have acted as a conduit and intermediary. As chronologically proximate allegorical commissions whose patrons are intriguingly connected, the

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[8] Veronese's paintings are discussed in chapter four.

[9] For relevant bibliography on the Habsburg tapestry collections, see for example, Iain Buchanan, "Designers, Weavers and Entrepreneurs: Sixteenth-Century Flemish Tapestries in the *Patrimonio Nacional*," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 134 (Jun., 1992), 380-384.

[10] On early modern portraiture in Spain see, for example, Javier Portus, et al, *The Spanish Portrait: From El Greco to Picasso*, exh, cat. (London: Scala, 2004).

[11] There are of course anomalous exceptions by foreign artists, e.g. El Greco's Toledo *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586-88) and Titian's *Gloria* (1550-51), Prado.

Medici cycle and the Eucharist tapestries thus invite comparison as well as contrast. Here I will examine the historical and conceptual machinery animating the two massive and complex programs with a rather narrow focus, namely, the portraiture and portrayal of the patron as an artistic response to the exigencies of early modern 'public relations' unique to female rulers. In viewing the cycles as works with similar rhetorical purposes, I will also address the (art) historical commonplace that, with Rubens's help, Isabel Clara Eugenia ably succeeded in politics where Marie de Medici spectacularly failed. Thus, if there is a single question at the heart of this chapter it might be phrased in this way: How much was Rubens himself responsible for elite Europe's lasting respect for a childless Spanish Infanta on the one hand and on the other, its antagonism, indeed revulsion, for her Italian counterpart, whose brief marriage to one of the best-loved of early modern monarchs would produce queens of the two most powerful European courts and a future King of France?

A Task for Two Cities

Toward these necessarily broad comparative aims, I will not undertake a detailed analysis of specific, reiterative, at times redundant, iconographical details structuring Rubens's compound commissions for Marie and Isabel. Marie's cycle has long elicited illuminating scholarship in this vein, beginning in earnest with the invaluable archival discoveries of the French art historian Jacques Thuillier[12] and continuing more recently in the fruitful analyses of the cycle by feminist scholars such as Margaret Carroll, Sarah Cohen, and Elizabeth McGrath.[13] Moreover, because the Medici paintings remained in situ in Paris at the Luxembourg Palace until they were gradually moved to the Louvre at the end of the eighteenth-century (prior to which they were attentively studied by Bellori, De Piles, and Watteau among others),[14] their availability has greatly facilitated an experience of the paintings as a theoretically coherent program and their subsequent re-interpretation vis-à-vis Rubens's letters and relatively ample documentary evidence.[15]

By contrast, Isabel's tapestries, cloistered in Madrid, were largely unseen by art writers until the twentieth-century. The Spanish scholar Elias Tormo received a papal dispensation to enter the royal convent only in 1913, the result of which was his illustrated four volume monograph on the *Descalzas Reales,* which provided a much needed art historical context for the commission.[16] A generation later, Charles Scribner's dissertation and book and Nora de Porter's deftly thorough iconographical analysis for the *Corpus Rubenianum* inspired a relatively small

[12] Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de Medici*, Paolo Lecaldano, ed. Robert Eric Wolf, trans. (New York: Harry Abrams, 1970).

[13] Margaret Carroll, "Womanliness as Masquerade," in *Painting and Politics in Northern Europe: Van Eyck, Bruegel, Rubens and their Contemporaries* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2008), 102-161; Sarah Cohen, Sarah Cohen, "Rubens's France: Gender and Personification in the Marie de Médicis Cycle," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 85 (Sep., 2003): 490-522; Elizabeth McGrath, "Tact and Topical Reference in Rubens's 'Medici Cycle,'" *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 3 (Oct., 1980), 11-17.

[14] For the granting of public access to the Medici cycle in the Luxembourg palace during the eighteenth-century, see Andrew L. McClellan, "The Musée du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor During the Terror," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70 (Jun., 1988), 300.

[16] Elias Tormo, *En las Descalzas reales. Estudios históricos, iconográficos y artísticos*. 4 vols. (Madrid:, 1917-1957). See also by the same author *Los Tapices: la apotheosis eucharistica de Rubens* (Madrid: 1944). See also, Fernando Checa, "Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales: Origenes de su colección artística" *Reales Sitios*, Vol. 102 (1989): 21-30.

number of investigations.[17] More recently, although iconographical concerns continue to trump other historical and theoretical lines of inquiry, the tapestries have been included in technical analyses and discussions of opulent early modern textiles within the context of material and display culture.[18]

In studies that acknowledge Marie's seeming involvement in and control over the commission, Feminist scholars have recognized the Medici cycle as, among other things, a further development—and pointedly progressive revision—of previous strategies of narrative or historiated self-fashioning realized by Marie's aforementioned Italian predecessor, Catherine de Medici and the artist Antoine Caron.[19] Although Isabel's Eucharist series likewise draws on a tradition of Habsburg female patronage—and takes the game of self-aggrandizement through self-presentation to a new level of sophistication—it has received less consideration in this context. Nor has Rubens's daring personification of Isabel been sufficiently explored by feminist art historians, a situation I hope to redress at least partially below.

Staging Success: Themes and Settings

For Marie, Rubens was called to envision a contemporary queen in a secular, largely mythological, setting while for Isabel—and presumably, in consultation with her—he decided to portray a living ruler as a medieval saint, typologically personifying one historical subject in the habit and, ostensibly, with the attributes of another. Both programs contain multiple linked or interdependent images: 24 in Marie's case, 20 in Isabel's. Marie's quasi-biographical cycle is set not only in the churches of modern-day Florence and the countryside and seaports of France but also in a sunny empyrean land co-inhabited by ancient gods and goddesses, genii, animals, and allegorical personifications of various virtues and vices. Isabel's tapestries unfold in a less particularized and locatable reality where even landscape, ground, and sky are in some cases fragmentary and *non finito* and the idea of both staged proscenium and real world architecture is provided by an elaborately illusionistic framework of columns and architraves. Fittingly, the tapestries' temporally amorphous, temple-like setting is largely populated by canonized men and women from across time. These saintly figures are placed in the company of personified doctrinal notions, historical rulers and personages, docile animals, and a seemingly innumerable band of industrious *putti*.

Both programs advance their (multiple) meanings through the slippages of time and topicality inherent in allegorical imagery, but the operative role of the royal heroine in this process is altered decisively from one cycle and patron to the next. In the French canvases, Marie is cast variously as herself, Juno, Bellona, and Justice, to name her most securely identifiable incarnations. In the Madrid tapestries, however, the Infanta Isabel is arguably never 'merely'

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[17] See Nora de Poorter, *The Eucharist Series* Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*,* Vol 2 (New York: Phaidon,1978); see also Charles Scribner III, *The Triumph of the Eucharist Tapestries Designed by Rubens* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan UP, 1982).

[18] See especially *Rubenstextiel/Rubens' Textiles*, Guy Delmarcel et al., exh. cat (Antwerp: L. Denys, 1997); Guy Delmarcel, *Flemish Tapestry from the 15th to the 18th Century* (Tielt, BE: Lanoo, 1999), 220, 240. Thomas P. Campbell et al., *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007), 105, 229.

[19] This connection is made most recently by Margaret Carroll, *Painting and Politics*, 102, no. 5 where the author provides a useful bibliography in particular of Sheila ffolliott's many pioneering studies of Catherine de Medici's patronage and her *Artemesia Tapestries*. See also, Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances, Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 24-58; For Catherine's centrality as patron and subject of the *Valois Tapestries* (today in on deposit in the Pitti Palace from the Uffizi, Florence) see Pascal-François Bertrand, "A New Method of Interpreting the Valois Tapestries, through a History of Catherine de Médicis," *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Fall-Winter 2006-2007): 27-52.

Isabel but is always also St. Clare of Assisi, the namesake with whom, like Elizabeth of Hungary, she was often associated throughout her life.[20] Rubens had painted large half-length likenesses of both women prior to executing the programs (Figs. 1, 2) and in both cycles he brings to bear his acumen as a naturalistic portraitist. The two women maintain their individual physiognomies throughout the series although markers of Marie's age—gray hair, added weight, colorless cheeks—seem to shift in a way that is not always consistent with what would have been her 'actual' age at the time of the depicted events.

Indeed, in the Medici cycle, Marie's ubiquity, made apparent by Rubens's consistent presentation of her face: its vacant gaze, arched brows, fine nose and pasty, fleshy squarishness, is at times disarming. Making his or her way to the far end of Marie's lengthy Luxembourg palace gallery, for example, a strolling visitor would have been confronted by one of the larger canvases, the sprawling *Death of Henri IV and the Proclamation of the Regency* (Fig. 3). Reading left to right across this picture's horizontal format, the eye is drawn to an aged Marie who, made virtually shapeless in her black cocoon of widow's weeds, sits immobile on the throne, her hands softly arched over her chest in a gesture of humility. When one turned the corner to proceed down the long wall, however, a very different Marie would have appeared in the iconic *Triumph at Juliers* (Fig. 4). Here the dowager queen, outfitted in an elaborately plumed helmet and spotless white gown embroidered with golden *fleur-de-lys* boldly doubles Rubens's spirited equestrian portrait of the Duke of Lerma where, as in the Spanish painting, the painter has minutely dramatized a military action in the background, in this case the surrender at recently conquered Juliers.

From a vital and aggressive warrior queen Marie is then transformed into the seated figure of Justice for the *Felicity of the Regency* (Fig. 5). Her right hand raising the scale of justice, her left hand resting a scepter on the globe, this Junoesque queen is perhaps the most Veronesian of Rubens's personifications. Redistributing the same attributes and amplifying the female cast, Rubens presents a novel interpretation of the Italian artist's three-figure allegory in the *Palazzo Ducale* (Fig. 6) while maintaining the insular tone of feminized sociality. Then, in the very next painting, *The Coming of Age of Louis XIII* (Fig. 7), Marie is returned to her humble status as grieving dowager. Again she gestures to a now decorously covered breast; but while she reaches for/gestures to the rudder of the ship of state, her young son now grasps the scepter she herself had wielded in the previous picture in what can only seem an awkward if not inappropriate transfer of power. The scene's wistful rather than celebratory attitude owes something to the unhappily resigned expressions of the muscular female rowers, who struggle against monstrous dolphins and choppy seas, even as the Regent herself seems to set her jaw in silent protest.

After a series of further 'biographical' scenes from the history of France/Marie: the *Escape from Blois*, and the *Full Reconciliation* among them, the beholder is met again, at the place of honor at the end of the gallery with the stately *Queen Triumphant* (Fig. 8). Though advanced as the outcome of Marie's earlier exploits, the image now presents a more youthful and confident-looking woman, still easily recognizable as Marie, clad in exuberant swathes of blue, gold, and crimson with the defiant exception of her pearly arms, shoulder, and militantly exposed right breast. The very picture of a robust Amazonian Bellona, this monumental Marie tramples on gleaming spoils of war, crowned by a pair of laurel-bearing horae.

Isabel, by contrast, is presented in the multiple crowd scenes of the *Eucharist Tapestries* (Fig. 9) only once, There, in a striking departure from the opulent dress in which she had been

[20] See e.g. Rubens's *San Ildefonso Altarpiece*, 1631-32, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches.

portrayed for much of her life, she wears somber monochromatic garb and displays a self-possessed though subdued expression. In the tapestries, the Infanta is dressed in the nondescript robes of a Poor Clare nun, the habit she had taken upon entering the third order of Franciscans in 1622, immediately following the death of her husband. Never in the tapestries is the Spanish Infanta presented so sumptuously or diversely as the French queen mother; nor is she re/imagined as anything but a saintly, though long deceased, historical woman.

Admittedly, the very different display contexts for the two series offer a possible or partial explanation for these almost polar opposite assertions of femininity: As a single component of her personal, self-constructed courtly realm at the Luxembourg palace, Marie's canvases helped shape and advance her ideology for public consumption by domestic and foreign allies and enemies alike.[21] The Medici Cycle was thus an integral part of a single-mindedly programmatic architectural and artistic image-world designed to advance an ideal vision of Marie and by Marie as Queen Mother par excellence. The cycle was an epic framing of her divinely ordained status as Henri's successor in all but name.

Isabel's tapestries by contrast were designed to be displayed to a 'public' audience of courtly insiders no more than a few times each year, on certain solemn liturgical occasions and always, at least initially it seems, in the small church and cloister attached to the royal convent of the Spanish Poor Clares. The tapestries were therefore meant to be integrated into the fabric of a preexisting institution whose art collection and display culture represented the eclectic tastes of several generations of Spanish (as well as Austrian) noblewomen and the relatives who provided their dowries. Nor were the Eucharist tapestries, possessed of an overtly doctrinal subject, openly presented as an embodiment of the politics and personal beliefs of their patron.

Rubens was also considerably less familiar with the *Descalzas Reales* than the Luxembourg Palace. In fact, it is entirely possible that at the time of the commission he had never viewed the intended setting of the Tapestries (it is not known if he visited the convent during his first Spanish stay at the Valladolid court in 1603-04). Although the designs for both patrons were executed at Rubens's studio, Marie was apparently eager to discuss the details of her commission on site and in person with the painter who had first made a name for himself in the Gonzaga court of her late sister Eleonora de' Medici, Duchess of Mantua (1567-1611). The Eucharist Tapestries are not mentioned in any of Rubens's extant letters, nor does a contract exist for them, though it has been suggested that Rubens and the Infanta could have discussed the project as he painted her portrait in 1625. As will become clear, the possibility that the two would have discussed the commission in the brief but jubilant period just after the Spanish victory at Breda, may explain the Tapestries' exuberant and, one might even say, festively Venetian spirit.

Paintings for the Palace: Rubens in Paris

Marie de Medici had invited Rubens to Paris shortly after the expiration of the Truce between Spain and the Provinces of Holland. Peace had prevailed from 1609 until 1621, but by the following year the renewal of hostilities between the English, Dutch, and Spanish seemed increasing likely. Isabel had shrewdly recognized the diplomatic utility of embedding her impeccably well-mannered and articulate painter in a foreign court; once in place Rubens seems to have communicated the Infanta's wishes to the relevant parties while keeping her abreast of the state of affairs between Marie and her son. In a long letter to the Infanta composed during his return to Paris three years later, in 1625, to install the completed Medici cycle, Rubens describes

[21] On this point, see for example, McGrath, "Tact and Topical Reference," 8.

numerous cloak and dagger dealings in a kingdom that "lies at present in the hands of the Queen Mother and Cardinal Richelieu."[22] With his characteristically self-aggrandizing humility, he writes to the Infanta: "I beg permission of your Highness to state my opinion plainly, since Your Highness has already on other occasions done me the honor of consulting me on this same subject," an indication of the informality of their relationship and Rubens's already established advisory role in affairs of state. [23]

Rubens's visits to the French court in the 1620s are well-documented throughout his letters. Yet during these years nothing in the written record attests to any level of kinship or friendship between the artist and Marie de Medici, a patron who may be said to have solidified his reputation in Europe. Of the twenty-four canvas cycle finished and displayed in Marie's Luxembourg Palace in 1625, Rubens noted somewhat defensively to his friend and liaison to the court, the French humanist Pieresc: "I am certain the Queen Mother is very well satisfied with my work, as she has many times told me with her own lips, and has also repeated it to everyone." Yet he was only to complain later in the same letter: "In short, I am tired of this Court, and unless they give me prompt satisfaction, comparable to the punctuality I have shown in the service of the Queen Mother, it may be (this is said in confidence, *entre nous*) that I will not readily return."[24]

Rubens did not return to France for four years, and then, only briefly. On his way home following a nine-month stay in Spain in 1629, he spent a day in Paris at the Luxembourg palace. It was the last time he would experience that city under Marie's governance. The utopian society and felicitous familial relations prescribed by the Medici cycle had failed to manifest themselves in Richelieu's France. In fact, just six years after the festive unveiling of the Medici Cycle during the Paris wedding of Marie's daughter Henriette-Marie to England's Charles I on 1625, Marie herself was exiled from France. Definitively vanquished by her former devotee, Cardinal Richelieu, the beleaguered queen fled Paris with her son Gaston d'Orleans, known as 'Monsieur,' seeking asylum in the Spanish Netherlands under the official protection of Philip IV.

By this time it was clear to Rubens that Marie was in trouble and in need, ironically, of the kind of diplomatic assistance only her former painter could provide. His letter of August, 1631, to the Spanish king's favorite, the Conde Duque Olivares, is worth quoting at length for the evidence it provides of Rubens's loyalty to Marie and all she stood for as a Catholic queen:

> Great is the news from France. The Queen Mother has come to throw herself in the arms of Her Highness [the Infanta Isabel], cast out by the violence of Cardinal Richelieu. He has no regard for the fact that he is her creature and that she not only raised him from the dirt but placed him in the eminent position from which he now hurls against her the thunderbolts of his ingratitude. If this were only a question of the interests of a private person, I should be in doubt what to do; but considering that the great princes have to base their reasons of state upon their reputation and the good opinion of the world, I do not see how, in this regard, one could desire more than this: that the mother and mother-in-

[22] Rubens to the Infanta Isabel, Paris, March 15, 1626, *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, Ruth Magurn, trans. (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1957), 103, 105.
[23] Ibid., 105. Presumably as a result of the negotiations with the Dutch in 1624.
[24] Rubens to Claude Fabri Pieresc, Paris, May 13, 1625, ibid., 109-110.

> law of so many kings should come, with such confidence, to place her person under the arbitration of his His Catholic Majesty […][25]

These are prefatory words for the meat of Rubens's letter, which was a petition on Isabel's behalf for military and financial assistance from the Spanish crown in support of the fugitive French Queen and her son. Sadly for Marie, the unsympathetic Philip IV refused to help his own mother-in-law, fearing, perhaps rightly, reprisals from Louis XIII and his ever more bellicose Cardinal. Forcibly severed from her daughters—queens at the time of England and Spain—Marie de Medici quietly ended her days as a destitute and peregrinating houseguest. By a peculiar twist of fate, the Queen Mother of France would die in Cologne in the same house that Rubens himself had spent a portion of his childhood before his family returned to Antwerp.[26] This tragic turn of events in the life of a one-time sovereign underscores the fateful historical interconnectedness of Rubens, Marie and Isabel; of the two royal women and the man they helped elevate to the status of prince of painters and painter of princes.

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Yet even in an age when Machiavellian statecraft was losing adherents and female rule would reach its zenith in Europe, the image of the 'Prince' was only tentatively and occasionally appropriated by a female ruler.[27] Addressing the troops at Tilbury in the Armada year of 1588, Elizabeth I had audaciously usurped her father's Princely status in the best-known articulation of her gender-bending self-fashioning: "I may have the body of a weak and feeble woman," the militarily-attired queen is said to have declared, "but I have the heart and stomach of a king." Elizabeth was described by Lionel Sharpe, an eye-witness recorder of the speech, as having entered the military camps as "Armed Pallas."[28] Indeed, visual imagery of the English 'Virgin' queen both before and after this clever formulation of masculinized femininity can be said to grapple with just these representational and ontological gender troubles, increasingly tending to the allegorical in a way that English royal portraiture of previous generations had not.[29] Although the lengthy reign of the Tudor queen (1558-1603) intersected but briefly with the ascendancy of Isabel Clara Eugenia and Marie de Medici, the younger women—as well as their portraitists—would have been well aware of their Protestant counterpart's personal symbolism and the ways in which Elizabeth's unmarried status and successful military campaigns, in particular, had been imagined and received by contemporaries.[30]

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[25] Rubens to the Count Duke Olivares, Mons, August 1, 131, Ibid., 372.

[26] *Marie de Médicis: un gouvernement par les arts*, Paola Bassani Pacht, et al., eds. exh. cat. (Paris: Somogy, 2003), 94.

[27] *Women who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Art*, exh. cat. Annette Dixon, ed. (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 200), 27-34.

[28] As transcribed by Lionel Sharpe and published in 1634; cited in *Elizabeth I, her Life in Letters*, Felix Prior, ed. (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 2003), 99.

[29] The bibliography on Elizabethan portraiture continues to grow, but among more recent studies, see for example, Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender and Representation* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2006); Jean Wilson, "Queen Elizabeth I as Urania," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* Vol. 69 (2006): 151-173; Daniel Fischlin, "Political Allegory, Absolutist Ideology, and the 'Rainbow Portrait' of Queen Elizabeth I," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 50 (Spring, 1997): 175-206; *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England*, Karen Hearn, ed. (London: Tate Publishing, 1995).

[30] In fact, for several years around 1570-80, when the succession was of particular concern, Elizabeth I and the then unmarried Infanta Isabel were simultaneously advanced as queens of France—a diplomatic feat contingent on a strategic marriage with the Duke of Anjou. On this subject see, for example, Rivkah Zim, "Dialogue and Discretion:

A comparison of Rubens's equestrian portrait of Marie, *The Triumph at Juliers*, with a contemporaneous English engraving, *Truth Presents the Queen with a Lance* (Fig. 10) by Thomas Cecil is instructive in this regard. Cecil's decidedly Baroque posthumous tribute to Elizabeth is interestingly dated around 1625, the same year the Medici canvases were completed. In a manner suggestive of his familiarity with the French cycle, Cecil portrays the English queen in a militant mode that seems to conflate imagery from Rubens's Minervan Marie, specifically, the trampled bits of armor, with Rubens's depiction of the queen on horseback.

Femininity is simultaneously effaced and emphasized in the engraving. As in Rubens's rendition of Marie at the site of the surrender at Juliers (Jülich), Elizabeth's breasts remain covered but her anatomical femaleness is nonetheless invoked and revealed by a seminude allegorical twin figured as a personification of enlightenment. In this seventeenth-century image of Elizabeth—who like Marie rides femininely side-saddle—the queen's plumed helmet, modestly encasing cuirass, shield, and ample skirt give her a martial, even androgynous, mien more in accordance Minervan battle-savvy than hands-on Amazonian might.

With her triumphant victory against the Spanish Armada transpiring on the rough seascape in the distance, a youthful Elizabeth receives a mighty lance from a bare-breasted woman who emerges from a cave. Bearing a book labeled 'truth' the quasi-nude personification reminds the viewer that Elizabeth waged a successful battle against religious heresy, embodied by the dragon beneath the queen's steed. Deceptively topical, the print underscores historically English (Elizabeth can be read as St. George) and importantly Protestant, vigilance in response to the impending coronation of a French Catholic queen.[31] Like Marie de Medici, Henriette-Marie was a loyal Catholic; along with the Franciscan monks who accompanied her to England she introduced the spirit of Catholic renewal associated with the Neo-NeoPlatonic *preciositè* of her Mother's court.[32]

Indeed, to recognize the Medici cycle's episteme as predominantly mythological or political is not to ignore the fact that Marie was elsewhere clearly interested in framing herself as a supremely pious ruler and a convinced Catholic.[33] After Henry's murder in 1610, for instance, Marie had had a private pavilion built inside the (ostensibly) enclosed convent of the *Incarnation*, to which she, like many aristocratic female donors, was a frequent extended visitor.[34] Marie had even presented the adamantly Protestant James I with a jeweled copy of François de Sales' (1567-1622) courtly bestseller the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, first

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Thomas Sackville, Catherine de Medici and the Anjou Marriage Proposal, 1571," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 40 (Jun., 1997): 287-310.

[31] See Dixon et al, *Women who Ruled,* where this image is reproduced as Cat. No. 3. See also Margery Corbett and Michael Norton, *Engravings in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964), 33.

[32] See Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainment* (Cambridge, York, Cambridge UP, 1989).

[33] See Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1982); See also, Ronald Forsyth Millen and Robert Erich Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de' Medici* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989).

[34] Barbara B. Diefendorf, "Contradictions of the Century of Saints: Aristocratic Patronage and the Convents of Counter-Reformation Paris," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 24 (Summer, 2001), 482. See also by the same author: *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).On the feminization of the French Counter Reformation see the now-classic study by Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes, Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen's UP, 1990).

published in 1613.[35] The exceedingly popular "bouquet" of religious maxims written by the broadminded spiritual director was a key text in the formulation of a seventeenth-century French piety. Pragmatically rigorous, ardently charitable—and unapologetically feminized—Salesian devotion and pedagogy urged the worldliest of believers to cease living "as if they believe themselves created only to build houses, plant trees, pile up wealth and do frivolous things." [36] For the *gens de qualité* who were not themselves nuns or clerics, good works were imperative as a way of being in the world but not of it.[37]

As if in response to such spiritual requirements, Marie countered the completion and decoration of her own lavish 'house'—the palace and grounds modeled on her childhood home with its sprawling Boboli gardens—by aiding the construction of convents for Paris' growing population of nuns. A prodigious underwriter, she helped establish the houses of the Carmelites (1603); the Discalced Carmelites (1613); the Discalced Augustinians (1617), the Daughters of Calvary (1625) and the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (1628).[38] Sponsored by wealthy women and shaped by the controversial Parisian followers of Teresa of Ávila, Vincent de Paul, and determined innovators such as Jeanne de Chantal (co-founder with de Sales of the *Order of the Visitation*), French Counter Reformation spirituality was distinctive in its worldly emphasis on the Catholic 'apostolate' of action and education.

It was also distinctive in the agency it selectively accorded pious women who chose or were forced to live outside the institutional confines of marriage and cloister.[39] As a wealthy and influential widow willing to resist her enemies, defend her political and religious beliefs, and cultivate networks of like-minded followers, Marie de Medici was perhaps surprisingly representative of the kinds of subversive Catholic women who would change the face of French Catholicism under Louis XIII and his son. Learned aristocrats and ascetical religious women alike were to constitute the antithetical but equally proto-feminist (and female) circles of Jansenist Port Royal and, often at the other end of the spectrum, the salonières and *précieuses*, as certain refined and 'over' educated women of the mid-seventeenth-century were known.[40]

Yet although the Medici cycle has been examined for its Marian and devotional subtexts, it cannot, I think, be said to figure Marie as Mary in any but a secondary or even tertiary sense.[41] Given Marie's antagonistic and unstable relationship with her son, the King, for example, the queen's ideal maternity was not easily or believably elided with the Virgin's function as tender

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[35] Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, with an introduction by John K Ryan, ed. and trans., (New York: Doubleday, 1989, 19.

[36] Ibid., 55.

[37] Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 76.

[38] Johnson, "Imagining Images" (as in no. 5), 134.

[39] On the exemplarity in this regard of the thirteenth-century French princess Isabelle, sister of Louis IX (Saint. Louis), as proposed by the French Jesuit Nicolas Caussin (1581-1653), see Thomas Worcester, "'Neither Married nor Cloistered': Blessed Isabelle in Catholic Reformation France," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 30 (Summer, 1999), 453.

[40] On gender and the Jansenist controversy see Daniela Kostroun, "A Formula for Disobedience: Jansenism, Gender, and the Feminist Paradox," *The Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 75 (September 2003): 483-522. On the literary and historiographical roots of the notion of the *précieuse* over against *preciosité* see, for example, the invigorating essay by Domna C. Stanton, "The Fiction of Préciosité and the Fear of Women," *Yale French Studies*, No. 62 (1981), 107-134. For the distinctive nature of these facets of French Catholicism in this period see also, for example, Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France, 1580–1730* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), 366-394.

[41] For the presence of Marian imagery see Geraldine A. Johnson, "Pictures Fit for a Queen: Peter Paul Rubens and the Maria de' Medici Cycle," in *Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 2005),101-19. See also Robert W. Berger, "Rubens and Caravaggio: A Source for a Painting from the Medici Cycle," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 54 (Dec., 1972): 473-477.

caretaker and perfect mother. Nor was Marie linked in the minds of the people and the ideological language of the court with saintly namesakes or defenders of the Catholic faith in as potent and clear-cut a manner as her Spanish counterpart and friend, Isabel Clara Eugenia.

Keeping in mind Marie's desired reputation as a *dévote*—and the public-private expression of her religious piety in religious foundations—it seems strange that Rubens did not argue for, or introduce, her portrayal through more transparently religious imagery. In fact, neither the overt secularism of the Medici cycle nor its classicizing mythologies can be attributed to Rubens; for it seems Marie had cast herself as Juno and Henri IV as Jupiter from the start. The *memoire Baluze*, a manuscript which likely dates from 1622, discovered only in the last century by Jacques Thuillier, provides detailed prescriptions of the desired content of nineteen of the eventual Medici paintings.[42] Although the extent to which Marie de Medici herself was responsible for devising the imagery of her presumed self-fashioning has yet to be determined, it is clear that some combination of Marie and, possibly Cardinal Richelieu, and perhaps others, was primarily responsible for the conceptual underpinnings and mythological imaginary of the Medici Cycle.

During the 1620s, Richelieu, for his part, was increasingly challenged by Catholic reformers such as Cardinal Berulle for the worldliness of what was clearly a political agenda. By contrast, at the time Marie returned to Paris to negotiate the rule of France with her son and his Cardinal her reputation as a good Catholic was essentially beyond reproach. Marie's far-sighted match-making with the heirs to the crowns of England and Spain was rightly understood as a Catholic expansionist tactic, particularly in the case of the English. Where her reputation had suffered, however, was in the related but for women, decidedly exclusive, realm of politics. The death of Henri IV had created a power vacuum that Marie had sought to fill less as the queen mother in charge of guiding and guarding the future king than as de facto French queen. The complex range of personae Marie seems to have chosen for the Medici cycle, is best understood as a failed experiment in political self-fashioning that was to have an almost immeasurable effect on French art. To the extent that Marie was once and for all exiled shortly after its completion, the cycle did not succeed in advancing her cause. This outcome may be attributed to the queen's naïve attempt to be all things to all people as well as her inability to translate a Medicean sense of heritable grandeur and authority into the Salic dialect of the Bourbon court.

Marie de Medici: Queen and Mother

If, as the Baluze manuscript implies, Marie is primarily responsible for the Medici Cycle's autobiographical triumphalism, she deserves recognition for her mastery of the tropes of sovereignty and the commonplaces of classical mythology. Tainted by personal humiliation and political defeat, Marie's story was not as easily glorified as those of her male—and even female—predecessors in France. Granting Marie what is surely deserved sympathy for having emigrated from Florence only to brave the immediate scandal of the much older Henri IV's recent marital annulment and the death of his longtime mistress (and admitting the possibility

[42] The MS is transcribed in Jacques Thuillier, "La 'Galerie de Médicis' de Rubens et sa genèse: Un document inédit," *Revue de l'Art*, Vol. 4 (1969): 52-62. Given that the Baluze manuscript is undated, questions remain as to whether it prescribes or describes the content of Rubens's first *bozzetti,* which date from shortly after the signing of a contract in February of 1622 and in which the content of nineteen paintings was already specified. The contract is reproduced in Thuiller and Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de Medici*, 95-96.

that her *raison d'etat* was loyal rather than misguided and indecisive), Marie' narrative tends more to the tragic than the triumphant.

Widowed in 1610, after the assassination of the Catholic-convert Henry IV, Marie ruled her adopted country as regent until her son, Louis XIII, had come of age in 1614. After that time, however, powerful forces at court had influenced the young king against the interests, and Italian favorites, of his mother.[43] The king's Grand Royal Falconer, Charles d'Albert de Luynes, and ultimately the notorious Bishop cum Cardinal, Armand-Jean du Plessis Richelieu made life progressively difficult for Marie and her retinue of *dévots*, as her loyal Catholic followers were known.[44] In 1617, as a reprisal for an altercation with his mother, the vengeful sixteen-year old Louis had sentenced to death three of Marie's most trusted supporters and dearest friends. Claude Barbin, the French general financial controller, was publically executed; Concino Concini, the maréshal D'Ancre was assassinated in the courtyard of the Louvre, and Concini's wife, the queen's beloved Florentine confidante, Leonora Galigaï, subsequently accused of sorcery, was beheaded and burnt at the stake.[45]

Shortly after these dramatic events, Marie had gone into exile at the royal palace at Blois, where she was kept virtually imprisoned until 1619. When Rubens arrived in France three years later, however, Marie had returned to Paris as a member of the Royal Council, having reached a tentative accord with Louis XIII and with the inconstant Richelieu still very much her 'right hand man.'[46] For the allegorical paintings devised to provide the various factions of the French court with a properly celebratory, palatable, or recuperative, notion of the mother of the same distrusting king who had banished her from Paris, Rubens wisely agreed to manipulate the well-known yet usefully polysemous myths of the Greek and Roman Gods.

Throughout the Medici cycle the widowed Marie is thus continually repackaged and personified as a youthful and beautiful Juno, easily recognized due to her repeated pairing with Jupiter/Henri IV as well, in many cases, as the presence of her proprietary peacocks. Notwithstanding her divinity, Jupiter's vengeful and prototypically shrewish consort was far from impassive in a Senecan sense. "Jealous Juno," to use her most common epithet, is repeatedly characterized by Ovid as "spiteful" "furious" and one who equates the utter obliteration of a foe with her ability to "properly wield her scepter as Queen of the Gods."[47] Acknowledging the emotive and passionate nature of the classical Gods was increasingly common in early seventeenth-century literature and history. In fact, the visual panegyric Marie envisioned as an encomiastic record of her 'heroic deeds' partakes in an emerging rhetorical turn in France wherein the ethics of (Lipsian) neo-Stoic detachment were gradually giving way to the persuasive morality of properly ordered and expressed individual passions and the actions they

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[43] For the framing of anti-Italian sentiment directed at Concini and Galigaï in contemporary plays and pamphlets, see Samuel Kinser, "D'aubigné and the Murder of Concini: 'Complaintes du sang du grand Henry,'" *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 62 (Oct., 1965): 662-695.

[44] The *dévots* were far from monolithic; some of their number were more anti-Richelieu than pro-Marie. See Mack P. Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 207-210.

[45] On these events in the context of the Medici cycle see, for example, Juliusz A. Chrościcki, "The Recovered Modello of P.P. Rubens' *Disembarkation at Marseilles*. The Problem of Control and Censorship in the Cycle *Life of Maria de Medici*," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 26 (2005), 224.

[46] For a useful summary of these events see J. Russell Major, "The Revolt of 1620: A Study of Ties of Fidelity," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 14 (Spring,1986): 391-408. For Richelieu's activities on behalf of Marie during these years prior to the bestowal of his much-coveted cardinal's hat see, Joseph Bergin, *The Rise of Richelieu* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 214-259.

[47] See for example, the story of Semele (3.255-295) in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, David Raeburn, trans., with an intro. by David Feeney (London: Penguin, 2004).

inspired. Upholding both the sometimes questionable means and ultimately virtuous ends of classical exemplars rather than purporting to illustrate recorded events and other "documentary proofs," French royal panegyrics of the early seventeenth-century newly encouraged veneration of heroic human—and/or Parnassian—endeavors, no matter how excessive or passionate they might seem. [48]

What may have been Juno's unseemly vindictiveness was therefore part and parcel of her status—and implicitly, Marie's—as omniscient ruler, divine consort to an unfaithful husband, and powerful arbiter of justice in her own right. Marie's less than saintly behavior was thus echoed and reinforced by euhemeristic narratives in which Juno's (human) weaknesses were emphasized. As the French tastemaker and connoisseur of the passions Jean-Louis Guez (1595-1654) de Balzac opined of the 1620s:

> Since the death of Justus Lipsius and of Monsieur du Vair, the Privy Seal, we are allowed to speak openly about Zeno and Chrysippus and to say that the opinions expressed by those enemies of common sense were sometimes stranger than the strangest fables of fiction.[49]

As it happens, Henri began and ended his marriage to Marie in the throes of passion for another woman.[50] Some historians have ventured to argue that the escalating tensions between France and the Habsburgs in 1609-10, can be directly tied to the fifty-four year old Henri's embarrassing pursuit of his juvenile love-object, the sixteen-year old Marie de Montmorency. The French King had recently allowed the girl to marry his son, if only to keep her close to him in Paris. When the newlyweds unexpectedly fled to the Spanish Netherlands, where the princess was taken under the stiflingly pious but kindly wing of the Infanta Isabel, Henri came close to declaring war with the sole purpose, some said, of returning his longed for lover to France.[51] Whatever the case, the popular notion of Marie as a queen unable to maintain the attentions of her husband would have been familiar to any who confronted Rubens's canvases, or marveled at the apt but ironic conflation of loveless Catholic widow-queen and belligerent goddess of matrimony.

This is not to say, of course, that Rubens's paintings are not astoundingly original in their interpretation, animation, and choreography of what is essentially a detailed if lightly blocked list of characters and settings. This point, which has been convincingly demonstrated by scholars, is equally true whether one reads the Cycle in terms of politics, panegyric, or as an elaborate telescoping of Medicean emblem traditions into a French cultural milieu, as Millen and Wolf have proposed. Because the cycle was commissioned by a female patron at a crucial time in Rubens's career—it is often viewed as a defining work in his oeuvre both for its physical scale

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[48] Mark Bannister, "Heroic Hierarchies: Classical Models for Panegyrics in Seventeenth-Century France," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, Vol. 8 (Summer, 2001), 43.

[49] Quoted in Ibid., 42. Guez de Balzac was not, however, an admirer of the Queen Mother, as his notorious letters to Cardinal Richelieu of c. 1627-28 attest; in 1631 he published *le Prince*, a panegyric to Louis XIII, for which see Pierre Watter, "Jean Louis Guez de Balzac's *le Prince*: A Revaluation," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 20 (Jul. - Dec., 1957): 215-247.

[50] For the representation of Henry's prolonged relationship with his mistress, Gabrielle d'Estrées, who died in 1599, see Katherine B. Crawford, "The Politics of Promiscuity: Masculinity and Heroic Representation at the Court of Henry IV," *French Historical Studies*, Vol.26 (2003): 225-252.

[51] For a useful counter argument and survey of the historiographical tendencies in this regard, see Edmund Dickerman, "Henry IV and the Juliers-Cleves Crisis: The Psychohistorical Aspects," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 8 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 626-653.

and allegorical ambition—the Medici Cycle warrants consideration for its role in securing Rubens's position as the chosen painter of Catholic sovereigns of both sexes. As Deborah Marrow has pointed out, it was supremely challenging to define Marie's status as an embattled ruler in Absolutist France. The death of her husband and the maturity of her son left the Queen Mother in an uncertain position. Although a woman's succession to the throne was legally forbidden in France, tremendous power and influence nevertheless customarily 'devolved' on female regents as mothers and king-makers, whose unique role was understood and advanced in literal as well as figurative terms.[52]

Given the events of the 1630s, one could argue that the overall effect of the Medici cycle was to weaken rather than strengthen Marie's position, projecting her as at best a vain and power-hungry pretender and at worst a genuine threat to the monarchy and by extension the France's well-being. In other words, that this loss of political purchase was a direct result of Marie's failure (or Rubens's) to properly mobilize in visual terms the accomplishments the queen mother's contemporaries would have deemed most meaningful within the context of her background, regency, and reign. An early indication of the mixed reception of the Medici cycle's message is found in the letters of Rubens to his friend Peiresc. Referring to the aforementioned *Felicity of the Regency*, Rubens describes the figure of Marie not (specifically) as an allegory of Justice but, intriguingly, as a kind of portrait of "Her Majesty, who sits upon a shining throne and holds a scale in her hands, keeping the world in equilibrium by her prudence and equity." Writing of one of the few canvases whose content was not spelled out in the Baluze manuscript, Rubens goes on to say that the painting has "evoked much pleasure" observing that "if the other subjects had been entrusted entirely to us, they would have passed, as far as the Court is concerned, *without any scandal or murmur*."[53]

We know very little about such purportedly disparaging gossip, though Rubens adds in a marginal note in the letter cited above that Richelieu had not initially grasped the intended message of the *Felicity* and was "annoyed to see that the *new subjects* were taken amiss."[54] The comments represent Rubens at his rhetorical best. For if the painter's bare-breasted allegory of Marie as Justice had created a scandal, the fault—and the original composition—were entirely his. More curious still is Rubens's claim in a prior passage that the image "does not touch upon the *raison d'etat* of this reign, or apply to any individual." One might surmise by this contention that the painting was read by its early beholders in just that way, as Rubens, were he being honest, might have admitted was his intention. It would in any case be fascinating to know in exactly what manner the enthroned Marie was taken amiss—whether for her indecorous nudity, the presumption of her righteous rule, or for the implication that she had directed her country, in the manner of her prudent and pacific husband, toward peace and away from war.

Vowing Hispano-Flemish Triumph: Habsburg Female Piety and the Tapestry Tradition

For its erstwhile visibility and size, the Medici Cycle is inevitably viewed as one of Rubens's chief interventions in a transnational Baroque visual culture. In a similar vein, much has been written about Rubens's patronage by Philip IV and other sophisticated Spanish amateurs such as the Duke of Lerma and the Marques de Leganés, a cousin of the Conde-Duque,

[52] Ibid. The naturalization of this paradox and its normalcy in contemporary eyes is discussed by Fanny Cosandey, "*Puissance maternelle et pouvoir politique. La régence des reines mères*," *Clio,* Vol. 21 (2005), 69.
[53] Rubens to Pieresc, Paris, May 13, 1625, Magurn, *Letters,* No. 62. [italics mine]
[54] Ibid.

whom Rubens referred to as "one of the greatest connoisseurs of this age."[55] Yet Rubens's patronage by Spanish royal women has received far less attention. In fact, Rubens's astonishing and rather sudden rise in stature during his second visit to Madrid might be seen as part of a trend initiated not by the king of Spain, but by the country's Queen, Isabella de Bourbon (1604-1644). As the result of years of her mother's careful planning and negotiating Philip IV had married Isabella, the daughter of Marie de Medici and Henry IV, in1615. In the same year, in accordance with the associated treaty between France and Spain, Philip's sister, Anne of Austria, married Isabella's brother, Louis XIII.[56] In 1623, after eight years in her adopted court, the Paris-born nineteen-year old Queen of Spain had arranged for a massive collection of all-Flemish seventeenth-century paintings to be sent to her from Brussels.[57] The nearly thirty pictures were originally intended for the queen's apartments (*torre de la reyna*) on an upper floor of one of the palace's towers.

By the time of Rubens's visit, however, the Queen's collection of Flemish paintings seems to have been transferred downstairs to the King's more spacious supper room or, *quarto bajo*, where it was made the heart of an almost unimaginably distinguished collection of predominantly seventeenth-century Flemish and cinquecento Venetian art.[58] That Queen Isabella's avant-garde display of contemporary Flemish painting en masse was literally subsumed by her husband's much-remarked upon trans-national gallery, exemplifies the modern historiographical reluctance to grant the status of Flemish painting, even Rubens's in Spain, as an art importantly patronized by women.

This scholarly disinclination may also explain the relative dearth of research on Rubens's most loyal and, one imagines, most appreciative patron, the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia. As co-sovereign then governor of the Spanish Netherlands, the Spanish Archduchess was Rubens's partner in peacemaking for more than a decade. Like Marie de Medici, the Infanta seems to have developed a greater confidence in the propagandistic potential of the image in general, and the pictorial program in particular, after the death of her husband. Isabel's sixty-seven years were divided almost exactly between Spain and the Spanish Netherlands. Marrying at age thirty-two, quite late in life by early modern standards, she was surely saddened never to see her Spanish homeland again, once she left to wed Albert in 1598. Philip IV, it is said, denied Isabel's request to return to the convent her aunt Juana had founded, in order to live out her widowhood among religious, as had her father and grandfather—and many female Habsburg relatives—before her.

If Marie de Medici patronized convents, Isabel had sought to die in one. The Infanta was loved and respected by her subjects for her enthusiastic participation in their Flemish traditions.

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[55] Magurn, *Letters*, No. 145, also quoted by Mary Crawford Volk, "New Light on a Seventeenth-Century Collector: The Marquis of Leganés," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 62 (Jun., 1980), 256, 261. At the time of his death in 1655, the Marquis owned nineteen paintings by Rubens, along with some eleven works by Titian. For Rubens's Spanish commissions see also Alexander (Alejandro) Vergara, *Rubens and his Spanish Patrons* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999); Svetlana Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada. Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard,* Pt. 9 (London: Phaidon, 1971).

[56] For the possibility that Rubens commemorated/allegorized this immensely important example of early modern diplomacy via dynastic marriage, see the now-classic essay by Margaret Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence," reprinted and revised in *Painting and Politics in Northern Europe* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 96-101.

[57] Volk, "The King's Summer Apartments," 520.

[58] In addition to Rubens's *Diana as Huntress* (Prado), and *Ceres and Pan* (Prado) the room included allegories of the senses by Jan Brueghel and a garland painting by Rubens and Frans Snyders; for the illuminating inventories of the picture galleries in the palace made in 1626 and 1636, the former by Cassiano dal Pozzo, see Volk, op cit., Appendices I & II, 526.

But her view of widowhood was deeply Spanish and deeply Habsburg. Unlike Marie, Isabel did not seek to mirror or replace her deceased husband; rather, she looked to her female predecessors as examples, weaving herself into a web of female *pietas austriaca* with its heart in Madrid.

There is no extant contract for the commission of the Eucharist tapestries, nor are the precise dates of production known; it is fairly certain, however, that the first tapestries had arrived in Madrid in a shipment sent by 'chariot' about a month before Rubens himself entered the city, in August of 1628.[59] It is also generally accepted that the tapestries were conceived by the Infanta Isabel as an ex voto, or votive offering, in gratitude for the hard won Spanish victory at the Dutch city of Breda in June of 1625.[60] The veteran Genoese general, Ambrogio Spinola, had laid siege on the Protestant town, known as the gateway to Holland, some nine months earlier, successfully subduing its subjects with the threat of starvation but minimal bloodshed. The capture of Breda was a watershed in the Thirty Years' War. It was viewed as a miraculous turning point in Spain's fortunes against its Calvinist enemies in the Netherlands as well as their supporters in England and Huguenot France. Varying degrees of Protestant animosity toward the Eucharistic doctrine of transubstantiation remained at the center of the religious wars. It is not surprising therefore that the grounding topos of Isabel's tapestry commission is the Catholic Triumph in general and the Triumph of the Holy Sacrament in particular, themes which Rubens advances and allegorizes in the canonical language of Petrarchan procession (Fig. 11), Old Testament typology (Fig. 12), *sacra conversazione* (Fig.13); and dynastic donor portraiture (Fig. 14).

More unexpected perhaps given the incessantly described and commemorated military victory at Breda—for which the tapestries are ostensibly a thank-offering—is their lack of martial imagery and topographical references.[61] (That Spanish clerics deemed military subjects appropriate to religious settings is demonstrated by the liturgical display of the sixteenth-century tapestries known as the *Capture of Tunis*—about which more will be said). Asked to memorialize the triumph at Breda some seven years later, for example, Philip IV's court painter Velázquez, too an almost antithetical approach in his *Surrender of Breda* (Fig. 15). The Spanish painter's oddly ambivalent tribute to the 'Hollanders'' providential downfall at Breda downplays the conquest while remaining attentive to the features of the battlefield. Velázquez also famously portrays the courtly Spinola and the defeated but genteel general, Justin of Nassau, enacting the fictitious exchange of keys to the defeated city.

In Velázquez's painting, the dual protagonists are bracketed on either side by a subdued and masterfully individualized entourage of emphatically at-ease soldiers and officers (not to mention the artist himself at the far right margin) who look on in admiration. Behind this pantomime of surrender—although the victory was Spain's, the key exchange did not occur—the rolling countryside of Breda is conveyed with painterly cartographic precision. Contrary to Rubens, who was deeply familiar with Breda's environs from previous diplomatic endeavors,

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[59] Chifflet notes that in July of 1628 Isabelle had sent two "*chariots qu'elle facit passer en Espagne chargez de tapisseries, de toilles et de chartes géographiqes et de quelques peintures*." Ibid., 36. The current curator of the *Descalzas Reales* has recently discovered an archival document suggesting that the tapestries arrived in Madrid in successive shipments between 1628-1633, rather than all at once in 1628 as had previously been believed. See Ana García Sanz, "*Nuevas aproximaciones en la serie El Triunfo de la Eucaristía*," in *El Arte en la Corte*, as in No. 3 above, 111.

[60] This opinion is most recently expressed in the placards accompanying six oil sketches (modelli) made by Rubens for the Eucharist Tapestries and housed in the Museo del Prado, Madrid.

[61] For contemporary literary accounts and visual representation of the Siege of Breda, see Simon Vosters, *La Rendicion de Breda en el Arte de España* (London: Tamesis, 1973), 8-48.

Velázquez had never been to the Netherlands; his canny mimesis was made possible by the Infanta's commission shortly after the siege's conclusion, of a large-scale series of commemorative historiated maps by the meticulous French printmaker and social critic, Jacques Callot.[62]

With its all-male cast of characters and sublimely attentive, almost fetishistic, depiction of the trappings of soldiers and men at war—their rumpled boots and riveted armor, their plumed hats and brawny horses—Velázquez leaves little room for the Infanta's presence in his rendition of Breda.[63] Where Isabel's commission is concerned, the same might be said of Rubens's friend and patron, Spinola, who is conspicuously absent in the tapestries instigated by the greatest military triumph of a distinguished career.

Rubens's tapestries make no similar pretense to historical verity. With the exception of a group of remarkably precise woven portraits, there is, in fact, little to evoke particularities of time and place in the illusionistic spaces of the textiles. Several living figures are represented in the tapestries' pendant panels showing the kneeling and deferring personages of the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies in adoration of the Eucharist (Figs. 14, 16). *Secular* in this case refers to Habsburg royalty, in particular, the Emperor Ferdinand II (r. 1616-1637), King Philip IV, Queen Isabel of Bourbon and a woman in a Franciscan habit who is, I believe, rightly recognized by Nora de Poorter as the 'Infanta of the Descalzas,' Archduke Albert's sister and Isabel's dear friend and correspondent, Sor Margarita de la Cruz.[64] Opposite this hopeful convergence of Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs, a curious assemblage which may represent Isabel's sympathetic attitude toward the political goals of her influential Northern relatives, Rubens positioned the leaders of the Church.

The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is composed of the Pope, who has placed his Tiara behind him on a cushion, an unknown cardinal, clutching his tasseled hat to his breast—a member of the Order of Preachers who aptly exclaims as he raises his arms in awe—as well as several additional clerics or religious placed in charge of a triple cross and Bishop's crosier. Their gazes guided by hovering cherubs, the men looks upward, mirroring their secular peers in stunned adoration of the Blessed Sacrament elegantly housed in a gilded monstrance. Although Rubens ultimately made several changes in the gestures and arrangement of these figures in these narrow panels, their essential schematic relationship is seemingly suggested (in reverse) by the well-known Chicago oil sketch (Fig. 17), which may have been designed based on the Infanta's recollection of the convent church's interior.

From the vantage point of their patron, these performatively pious kneeling and standing figures are one of the cleverest, most nostalgically evocative aspects of Rubens's tapestries. As has often been noted, the presentation of the noble and clerical personages largely in profile, their attention directed to a mystical vision that is both available yet unavailable to the beholder, derives from Leone and Pompeo Leoni's fifteen majestic gilded bronze portraits for the *Capilla Major* of the Basilica of the Escorial (Fig. 18). Rubens had appropriated this formula much earlier in his career for the vast altarpiece known as the Gonzaga *Trinity* (Fig. 19), commissioned for the Jesuit church in Mantua. There, too, the Austrian branch of the Habsburgs is represented in the figure of Eleonora of Austria (1534-91), Eleonora de Medici's mother-in-law and the daughter of Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I.

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[63] The Infanta's role may, however, be implied by the presence of her standard, the blue and white flag of St. Andrew.

[64] de Poorter, *Eucharist Series*, cat. no. 5, 275-76.

The Leonis' naturalistic staging of the royal *priant* would have been intimately familiar to Isabel. For it is a fascinating feature of the Basilica of the Escorial that the presbytery is directly accessible from the royal apartments adjacent to the high altar and once occupied by the Infanta and her father. Both Princess and king were thus able to privately observe the resplendent ceremony of the high mass through windows in their private rooms; it must therefore have been especially meaningful to Isabel to worship in the 'company' of the founder of the *Descalzas Reales*, her aunt, Princess Juana of Portugal, whose gilded bronze likeness accompanies that of Philip and his three deceased wives.

But despite the noteworthy absence of martial imagery, Isabel's appeal to dynastic precedents set by her Habsburg predecessors on both the Austrian and the Spanish side is made most evident by her choice to commission a tapestry series linked, at least notionally, to a major military victory. Drawing on Burgundian models of courtly splendor, tapestry had become a central and importantly portable component of Habsburg display culture during the reign of Emperor Charles V, himself born in Ghent. In 1531, on the occasion of the installation of Charles's younger sister, Mary of Hungary, as Governess of the Netherlands, Charles's collection received the first textile series to depict contemporary events, in this case the Habsburg victory over the French in the *Battle of Pavia* (today in the *Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte*, Naples).

Although these tapestries were officially a gift from the city of Brussels to the Emperor, they seem to have been quickly incorporated into the vast and refined art collections of the new female ruler. At Mary's death in 1558, Don Carlos, the Infanta Isabel's ill-fated half-brother, had inherited the *Pavia* series, later given as a gift to the Marquis of Pescara.[65] Yet the lion's share of Mary's tapestry collection—including some twenty multipartite series—was bequeathed to her grand-niece, the aforementioned, Infanta Juana. In 1556, the widowed Princess of Portugal had commandeered the use of a former banker's palace near the Alcázar to house her newly established order of royal Poor Clares. It is likely that the inherited tapestry collection accompanied Juana to her new apartments in the convent, where it would have remained until her death in 1571.

Among the jewels of Juana's immensely valuable textile group was the violent visual battle chronicle known as the *Conquest of Tunis* (see, for example, Fig. 20), a twelve panel program designed by the court artist, Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen. The design and production of the *Tunis* series, a monumental commemoration of the defeat of the 'infidel' Barbarrossa by imperial forces in 1532, was likely overseen at least in part by Mary of Hungary. Upon completion, the tapestries passed to Charles V, who saw them as a necessary justification of the gratuitous violence perpetrated by his troops well after the North African battle was won.[66] Like the *Pavia* series, the *Conquest of Tunis* represents an important conceptual shift among Habsburg tapestry designers from moralizing personification allegories such as the famed *Los Honores* program, to a more narrative or journalistic approach (Vermeyen had witnessed the events in Tunis) in which Habsburg glory is constructed at the expense of a conquered 'infidel' rival.[67] Yet, as David Kunzle has pointed out, neither Charles's bloody (as many as 30,000 Moors were slain) and

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[65] For the *Pavia* series and relevant bibliography concerning Mary of Hungary's tapestry collection see Iain Buchanan, "The 'Battle of Pavia' and the Tapestry Collection of Don Carlos: New Documentation," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 144 (Jun., 2002), 346, and 347, nos. 26, 27. See also, Juan Luis González Garcıa, ed. *Los inventarios de Carlos V y la Familia Imperial*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Fernando Villaverde Ediciones, 2010),Vol. III.

[66] See Hendrik J. Horn, *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, painter of Charles V and his Conquest of Tunis: Paintings, Etchings, Drawings, Cartoons and Tapestries*, 2 vols., (Doorn-spijk: Davaco, 1989), 111-115.

[67] Buchanan, "The Battle of Pavia," 346.

arguably fruitless battle nor Vermeyen's at times subversively critical depiction of war were received by contemporaries as unequivocal victories.[68]

Even so, the *editio princeps* of the series, and a somewhat smaller version commissioned by Mary of Hungary, accompanied Habsburg rulers on as many as seventeen important occasions throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—including the marriages of Philip II to Mary Tudor in 1554 and Louis XIII and Anne of Austria in 1615.[69] During Isabel's childhood in late sixteenth-century Castille, the tapestries were a prominent feature of Habsburg courtly ceremonial celebrated in the *Descalzas* on Good Friday and at Corpus Christi. It is for this reason that Juana of Portugal, as the convent's foundress, was anxious that the lavish triumphalist tapestries remain a part of the ceremonial of the newly established convent, many of whose members claimed Habsburg ancestry. Hence, according to Juan Carillo, whose *Relacion Historica de la Real Fundacion del Monasterio fe las Descalças de S. Clara* […] (1616) provides much useful information about the daily activities at the convent, Juana bequeathed the tapestries to her brother Philip II on the condition that he lend them to the royal Poor Clares for liturgical display in their convent on feast days.[70]

The Infanta Isabel had spent extended portions of her childhood at the *Descalzas,* which had served as a *palacio de ausencia* for the royal family when the monarch was away from Madrid. Thus for her, a Hispano-Flemish legacy of art custody and patronage among Habsburg royal women, the esteem in which Vermeyen's tapestries were held by previous generations of her family—as well, perhaps, as their sometimes questionable instrumental uses in Habsburg ceremonial—seem to have suggested the need for a magnificent textile series tailored to the special charism of the royal Poor Clares and custom fitted to the spaces of their church. The commission would have seemed especially appropriate inasmuch as Isabel's Triumph at Breda, like Philip's victory at Lepanto and Charles' Tunisian conquest was viewed by Catholic theologians in eschatological or anagogical terms, as both a sign of Godly favor and an indication of progress toward the fulfillment of the heavenly kingdom on earth through combat against heresy. Just as her father and grandfather before her had commissioned works of art from foreign artists to mark their military achievements as Habsburg defenders of the faith, so too, would Isabel.

The Isabelline Image

Within the context of dynastic patronage, it is interesting to note that Isabel's nephew, King Philip IV, followed suit with his own military aggrandizement only after her death. Even then, however, the idea for a *salón* devoted to Herculean fortitude and propagandistic war imagery was that of the king's favorite, Olivares, aided, it seems, by Velázquez.[71] The decoration of the 'Hall of Realms,' a grand theater and gallery in Philip's summer pleasure lodge, the *Buen Retiro*, was completed in Spring in 1635. In it Velázquez's *Surrender of Breda* was displayed as one of twelve detailed 'historical' narratives representing victories won by Philip IV's armies "in every quarter of his worldwide empire."[72]

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[68] David Kunzle, *From Criminal to Courtier: The Soldier in Netherlandish Art, 1550-1672* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 67.
[69] Ibid., 69 (Kunzle erroneously gives the date of the latter marriage as 1612).
[70] de Poorter, *Eucharist Series*, 48.
[71] Velázquez's early allegorical triumph, the lost *Expulsion of the Moors* (1627), is exceptional in this respect, although it pays tribute to a 'triumph of the faith' accomplished during the reign of Philip III, rather than the painting's patron, Philip IV.
[72] For the construction of the Hall of Realms see Jonathan Brown and John H. Elliott, *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980), 150ff.

Rubens and Isabel had seen enough battles to know that such earthly triumphs were as fleeting as the reversals of war were common. As a wager of just war, the Infanta was frequently submitted to very real tests of Christian charity, which even she may have failed at times. Rubens describes the perilous situation of Spanish naval forces near Dunkirk in a letter from 1626, a time during which he was likely engaged in the design and/or early production of the tapestries:

> It is criminal cruelty on the part of the Hollanders to refuse to give quarter in these waters; for I can testify that, in spite of the thoroughly good treatment which the Most Serene Infanta has shown their prisoners, they, on the contrary, have mercilessly thrown into the sea all of ours who have fallen into their hands. The result is that Her Highness, after having vainly persevered for a long time in her merciful treatment, has finally been forced to take reprisals and pay them in their own coin.

However merciful Isabel had wished to be, she felt compelled by the circumstances of war to exact her pound of flesh. This pragmatic, even hard-hearted, side of the Infanta is not always acknowledged by scholars. Yet Isabel's ability to make personal sacrifices and difficult decisions was recognized by domestic and foreign admirers alike as part of her exceptionality. A close observer of Isabel's conduct, Guido Bentivoglio, the diplomat and papal nuncio to Brussels, had noted Isabel's "masculine courage." Spinola's 'Master de Campe General,' the Irish military historian, Gerrat Barry, attests to her impeccable and widespread reputation in the prefatory remarks to his English translation of the *Obsidio Bredana.* Written by the Jesuit Hermann Hugo and first published in Latin in 1626, this detailed and surprisingly evenhanded treatise is the most extensive and chronologically proximate account of the circumstances of the siege. In it, the Irish Catholic Captain Barry describes Isabel as a "pearl of the world," whose "very enemies approve of her just, deserved and undeniable praises, being such indeed, as hardly any mortal can set them forth as they deserve."[73]

Indeed, as Isabel's enemies in Protestant England knew, she was a woman of action, zealously committed to her cause, a fact she demonstrated from the first years of her joint reign by leaving the safety of her palace in Brussels to inspire and review the troops near Ghent. Riding from camp to camp, the Infanta encouraged the troops with speeches; in a vow that would be repeated at Breda, she also pledged to pawn her jewels to provide pay and rations for the soldiers if it would secure a victory. Echoing the portrayal of Elizabeth I as Pallas, Isabel's impression was described by the admiring Bentivoglio as that of "a second Agrippina."[74] According to a vivid anecdote from this period—meant to underscore the Infanta's remarkable grace under the pressures of war as well as her 'unfeminine' disregard for personal appearance—Isabel vowed to wear the same linens until the victory at Ostend was assured. Though ultimately successful, Spinola's *three year* siege of that city was a costly one during which Isabel spent much time in the camps. After victory at Ostend was declared, as a reputed homage to her sartorial abstinence, the peculiarly pleasing yellow-gray hue of fabric—and horses—was popularly known as "couleur Isabelle" or, Isabelline.[75] This intriguing Spanish woman, so

[73] Hermann Hugo, *The Siege of Breda,* Gerrat Barry, trans. (Louvain, 1627), unpaginated epistle dedicatory.
[74] Bentivoglio, quoted in Klingenstein, *The Great Infanta*, 106.
[75] Klingenstein, *The Great Infanta*, 129. But see, for example, a description recorded in 1701 of a diplomatic gift of a "*Cheval de couleur isabelle*" in Maureen Cassidy-Geiger and Jochen Vötsch, "Documents of Court Gifts

capable of tempering sumptuousness with sacrifice and ostentation with humility, was the woman Rubens came to know and represent and of whom he once wrote "our Princess shows neither hate nor excessive love, but is benevolent to all."[76]

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As his letters to and about Isabel endearingly reveal, Rubens was not merely a loyal functionary or socially ambitious courtier to the widowed Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, rather he was her champion, her proxy in foreign courts, and at times, effectively, her publicist. As recently as Burckhardt's time, the little-seen *Eucharist Tapestries* were widely thought to have been commissioned by Philip IV rather than Isabel.[77] Yet while no iconographical guide such as Marie's *Baluze* manuscript exists for the *Eucharist Tapestries,* a high level of collaboration between Rubens and his patron seems inevitable. In the first place, the artist lacked the Infanta's intimate knowledge of the Clarisian convent for which the tapestries were intended and perhaps more importantly, Isabel seems to have envisioned her own place in the providential outcome of Breda—and Breda's place in the anagogical drama of Spanish foreign policy—in very specific, and personal, terms which only she could articulate.

Rubens and Isabel undoubtedly discussed the many differences and few similarities between her commission and the self-congratulatory series he had just completed for Marie. Between two such art-savvy and like-minded amateurs, conversations about the tapestries' subjects, their appearance and underlying message must have been fascinating; one can only assume that the future project was envisioned vis-à-vis Rubens's oeuvre to date. As Isabel would have known, Rubens had designed multipartite tapestry programs before, most recently the rather sedately archeological *Achilles* series (1625), which was likely commissioned by Louis XIII. Earlier in his career, for the ceiling panels of the Jesuit Church of Antwerp (1618), he had also explored the possibilities of a typological format in which images from the Old Testament and New Testament are placed in visual dialogue. During his first visit to Spain, moreover, he had studied Titian's monumental portrait-allegory of the Habsburg adoration of the Trinity, the *Gloria,* as well as the Venetian artist's figurative interpretations of Spain's victory at Lepanto. And finally, after his lengthy stay in Rome, Rubens remained keenly aware of the Italian, specifically, the Raphaelesque, pictorial vernacular of Triumph in both its secular and sacred aspects.

Rubens's intended audience in Madrid, an elite international cohort of courtiers, kings, *privados*, noblewomen, and royal nuns, would pass hours among the tapestries during the lengthy religious ceremonies for which Spain was known. Several among this worldly and often covetous coterie shared the artist's exposure to fine art; in many cases, they were also possessed of a detailed knowledge of military affairs and diplomatic undertakings at home and abroad. How then to construct a series of images in which Catholic faith is figured not as a ruthless and mindlessly destructive army but rather as a shining beacon of absolute truth and benevolence in a time of barbarism and uncertainty? And further, how to subtly associate the particular piety at the core of this inwardly devout yet far from idle Catholicism with the actions and political strategies of a living female ruler?

Clearly, a solution was not to be found in updating the visual strategies of Vermeyen's graphically naturalistic *Tunis* tapestries, where the heartlessly disinterested gambling, rampant

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Collected by Johann von Besser (1654-1729), *Studies in the Decorative Arts,* Vol. 15 (Fall–Winter 2007–2008), Appendix, 137.

[76] Rubens to Pierre Dupuy, Antwerp, 1626. Magurn, *Letters*, No 89.

[77] For earlier literature expressing this opinion, see de Porter, *Eucharist Series*, 19.

pillaging, and gratuitous victimization perpetrated by imperial soldiers might be mistaken for the same amoral godlessness Habsburg forces had sought to conquer. Nor, despite their ongoing and decisive roles in the victory, were the specific tactics of Spinola, the vigilant commander, and Isabel, the strategizing governor, to be represented. Instead, Rubens chose to allegorize a Catholic military victory over Protestant rebels in metaphorical, though never entirely abstract, sacramental and metaphysical terms. Yet although a dominant, and one might say, optimistically major, key of mystical transcendence replaces dissonant battle narratives and particularized scenes of military conquest, Rubens never ceases to proclaim the absolute truth and efficacy of transubstantiation in an ideological and instrumental visual language.

Pious 'Captaine': Isabel's Image-Making after Breda

The Eucharist series combines portraits of living and deceased Hapsburg rulers with representations of Old Testament stories, otherworldly abstractions, and allegorical chariots. Yet due to what had become in Rubens's works a typical preponderance of infant putti and female figures, the territory in which these genres 'take place' remains in many ways a mystical/mythical, feminized realm. In a historically fluctuating picture world where time is folded between future and past, the earthy accoutrements of contemporary warfare, however restrained or denatured, would seem somehow out of place. As an alternative to the masculinized repertoire of war imagery Rubens turns to Petrarchan allegories of secular love as this Platonic theme had been Christianized by Titian and Van Veen.

Petrarch's versified triumphs include Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, and Time, and Divinity. Depictions of the *Trionfi* date to the mid-fourteenth-century, though a didactic manuscript called the *Chemin de Paradis* (1461) originating at the Brussels court of Isabelle of Portugal, serves as an early example of courtly Burgundian appropriations of the Florentine poet for devotional art.[78] Rubens's teacher Van Veen had produced a painted *Triumph of the Church* (c. 1615-20); around the same time, the Antwerp artist Frans Francken (1581-1642) seems to have turned to Petrarch for a lively and original picture known as the *Misdeeds of Love*.[79] As both Titian and Van Veen had realized, the motif of rolling wheels efficaciously communicates Christianity's inexorable progress as well as the duty of the Church to crush any heretics who might frustrate its way to paradise.[80] The usefulness of the motif was not lost on Rubens, who duly represents Calvin and Luther as victims of the Church's unyielding orthodoxy (Fig. 21).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Pope Urban VIII (Barberini), who had been elected in 1623, viewed the result of the siege as divinely ordained; clearly Isabel had served as a divine instrument for the victory over the Dutch. "The right hand of the omnipotent is glorified in you," he wrote to the Infanta shortly after the capture of the rebel stronghold, "Triumphing with joye for the noble victory of conquered Breda." But Spain's unlikely capture of an Orangist outpost was more than a military success. Extolling the exceptional prowess of his spiritual daughter,

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[78] Relationships between the earliest fifteenth-century Italian Triumphs and their largely unacknowledged Flemish or Burgundian equivalents, such as the cartoons for Jean Germain's *Chemin de Paradis* (c. 1461) have not yet received much attention; in another venue, I hope to address these interesting correspondences as a species of Rubens's archaizing tendencies and continued interest in Flemish 'primitive' art.

[79] On Van Veen's *Triumph of the Church* (1615-20) Christoph Geissmar, "The Geometrical Order of the World: Otto Van Veen's Physicae et theologicae conclusions," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 56 (1993), 175-177; On the painting by Francken (and a useful summary of *Trionfi* imagery), see Edith Wyss, 'Triumph of Love' by Frans Francken the Younger; From Allegory to Narrative," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 19 (1998): 43-60.

[80] De Poorter, *Eucharist Tapestry Series*, 323-324.

Urban interpreted the conflict in anagogical terms, as a microcosmic battle of virtue and vice prefiguring the Parousia, or second coming:

> We speak of your Nobilitie, who having surpassed the praises of a woman's virtu, prosperously turned the forces of the Austriacall power, for the defence of the orthodox faith. The band of the heavenlie armie fought in your campes; and the constancie of warlike fortitude, hath taught noble nations, inhabiting by the spectacle of so singular a siege, no hould in earth to be fortified with so strong helpes, and defences, which the power of a camp armed with celestiall helpes, doth not vanquish. You have combated with an enimie conteining of perils, and with a cunning artificer of unheard of terror, […]But the wicked hath fallen into the ditch which they digged, and our Lord hath raigned.[81]

Not unlike his Cardinal Bentivoglio, the Pope constructs an image of Isabel as a virtuous woman warrior, a sovereign whose constancy and fortitude render her a worthy Christian soldier in a near literal sense.

To compare the time spent by Elizabeth I, Marie de Medici, and the Infanta Isabel on the battle grounds among their respective soldiers—the instances when the women placed themselves squarely in the midst of appalling conditions and ongoing and dangerous warfare—is to realize that Isabel Clara Eugenia, who rode to the troops at Ostend and Breda, Fleurus and Bergen-op-Zoom, building battle ships at Dunkirk alongside her General Spinola, was the truest Minerva of the three. It is all the more curious then that Rubens was never to portray her in a single portrait—say, in an equestrian image such as Marie's—as the military heroine and well-regarded horsewoman she was. In contrast to Marie, the Infanta is singly portrayed neither riding to the hunt nor surveying the battlefields. She appears in the Eucharist Tapestries only in the guise of a humbly-attired, earthbound nun, her coarse gray-brown robes cinctured by the three-knotted Franciscan ropes of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

It might be argued that Rubens portrayed Isabel in this manner simply because she had conspicuously adopted the habit of a tertiary Poor Clare in 1621, immediately upon the death of 'mi primo' as she fondly referred to her husband, the Archduke Albert. The Infanta's ties to the Franciscan order were intimate and longstanding; unlike many of her Austrian royal counterparts—even those in Madrid—who maintained Jesuit confessors, Isabel was served in this capacity by the Castilian Andrés de Soto, the Commissioner General of Franciscans in the Netherlands, Germany, England and Ireland.[82] De Soto died in 1625, around the time Isabel likely commissioned the tapestries, and it is interesting to contemplate what if any role he might have played in the development of their imagery. A member of the more strident and ascetical 'Observant' Franciscans, de Soto was known as a paragon of abstinence and self-discipline who refused to enter the physical spaces of Isabel's worldly court—despite its conservative reputation and, following Albert's death, its stultifyingly formal Spanish etiquette. As Cordula van Wyhe has shown, when de Soto died Isabel blatantly ignored the friar minor's previous request for a simple marker for his grave. She opted instead for an ornate marble tablet on which she commissioned a dedicatory inscription describing herself as "Sanctissima Atque Optima

[81] The Pope's letter was printed in Hugo, *Siege of Breda*, 147.

[82] For the reciprocal and mutually self-fashioning relationship of the Infanta and her Spanish confessor see Cordula van Wyhe, "Court and Convent: The Infanta Isabella and her Franciscan Confessor Andes de Soto," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* , Vol. 35 (2004): 411-445.

Principum," or "the most holy and best of leaders."[83] This final act of defiance seems particularly indicative of Isabel's willingness to forego obedience, and even propriety, toward her expert strategies of what might be thought of as associative, or relational, identity-construction.[84]

In the year of de Soto's death Rubens's 'official portrait' of the Infanta also appeared. This sober depiction of the middle-aged Isabel as an imposing and dignified Poor Clare was to define and describe her for the rest of her life—as it arguably still does today (Fig 22). Although the Infanta had officially professed her vows to the Third Order in 1622, she did not commission the somber three-quarter length portrayal in what had become her only form of attire until three years later. Rubens had painted several portraits of the Archduchess prior to this one; comparing the sedate Franciscan Isabel to the younger, more hopeful looking figure in the earlier images charts the impact of her dwindling hopes of peace and the realization that children and dynastic continuity were not to be her lot in life.[85] The widowed Governor's pursed lips and tightly set jaw, features intensified in this painted likeness executed in her fifty-ninth year, suggest an attitude of reserve and self-containment echoed by the elegant framing of her hands around a black Franciscan veil that is also tethered to her girdle. Yet the kindly authoritative and perceptive eyes found in Rubens's earlier portraits remain, their ability to convey Isabel's foresight, undoubtedly enhanced by the mystical radiance she now seems to exude.

One cannot help but contrast the genteel piety and spiritual intensity with which Rubens imbues this pampered, though at times self-sacrificing, elite woman to the combative pose and fierce, take-no-prisoners gaze of Madre Jeronima de la Fuente, an even older Franciscan nun (66) whose intimidating portrait was painted by Velázquez in 1620 (Fig. 23).[86] Madre Jeronima's likeness, one of two full-length versions painted by the youthful Velázquez while still in Seville, commemorates the appearance of the nun before she was dispatched on a mission to the Philippines. Little is known of the motivation for Isabel's somewhat similar commission, which shares with its Spanish predecessor a dark, indeterminate background, imparting its solitary subject with an iconic presence.

Based in large part on Herman Hugo's claim that while in Antwerp Isabel was "drawn by the pencil of Rubens" it is generally accepted that the portrait was painted shortly after the conclusion of the siege of Breda, while Isabel was en route to Brussels having visited the surrendered town. But a close reading of the full passage in Hugo links the sitting not to the oil portrait of the Infanta but to the print engraved after it (Fig. 24). "Being graven with an instrument in brasse," Hugo writes, "she saw herself crowned with a garland of oake, in an imperiall table. Worthie to be pictured after that noble triumphe, nor by another hand than by that of Apelles."[87]

The publication of Hugo's Latin text in 1626 thus provides a terminus ante quem for the print. It may also indicate the speed with which the Infanta progressed in securing the completion

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[83] Ibid, 442.

[84] Isabel also demonstrated conspicuous—and arguably, strategic—humility in other public contexts, however, as when the impressive new canal being built in the late 1620s was to be named the 'Fossa Eugenia.' Isabel rejected the dedication and changed the name to the 'Fossa Mariana or Notre Dame' in honor of the Virgin Mary. Rubens describes the circumstances in a letter, see Rubens to Pierre Dupuy, May 13, 1627, in Magurn, *Letters,* 180, no. 108.

[85] On the portraits see, Hans Vlieghe, *Portraits: Identified Sitters painted in Antwerp, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, Part XIX (London: Phaidon, 1987); see also Michael Jaffé, "Rubens's Portraits of the Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 139 (Mar., 1997), 194-195; Jaffé incorrectly identifies Isabel as the "niece" of Philip II.

[86] On this painting see Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), 32-34;

[87] Hugo, *Siege of Breda*, 153.

and distribution of what Alejandro Vergara has termed her "official image."[88] If this is so the timing would have been especially right for Isabel to visually reify her popular (and papally-affirmed) reputation as a chastely heroic defender of the faith, possessed of a special, characteristically Habsburg, devotion to the Eucharist. As the Jesuit Hugo relates, Isabel, having "resolved her selfe to goe in person to the cittie that was wonne, and to visit the soldiers that had overcome" spent several days actively re-Catholicizing formerly Calvinist Breda.[89]

The Infanta had in fact made something of a triumphal entry into the city, passing through its gates with a 'triple discharging of canons' and accompanied, since Antwerp, by an escort of nearly all her assembled horsemen and several squadrons of footmen. Received thus, Isabel forbade the lighting of bonfires until she had attended recaptured Breda's first Catholic mass. The following day, an emissary from Spain, the Cardinal of Cueva arrived to celebrate the Eucharist with Isabel, her ladies in waiting, "and all the people being present." Only then did she make a tour of the church, which had fallen victim to numerous acts of iconoclasm, in order to "behould (if any were left) of the oulde monuments of religion."[90] The mass celebrated and her survey complete, the Infanta departed the church and gave permission for an "innumerable number of lanterns and fires" to be lit in the town, providing a spectacle that was "seen to burne even from Holland."[91]

As a member of the Society of Jesus, the witness to these events, Hermann Hugo, is careful to note that during her visit Isabel was the source of generous gifts to the city's imperiled Franciscan Capuchins, Jesuits, and an abbey of Carmelite nuns. "It was the common voice of all," he writes:

> that the Infanta by her perpetual prayers and those of her court and of other places by there continual prayers in the fortie houre prayers to be made in all the Churches, and by powring out her almes amongst the miserable, wonne Breda, and not with weapons.[92]

The belief that Isabel had, in other words, peaceably won the capture of Breda by the power of prayer and acts of charity cast her in venerable light; elevated beyond the stature of a ruler divinely appointed according to tradition, she is rendered by Hugo as a Christian heroine whose petitions received God's favor as a result of her intimate relationship with Him.

A further passage explicitly typologizes Isabel through a scriptural exemplum. Hugo boldly implies a comparison of pious Isabel to Judith, the Old Testament widow who vanquished the enemy General Holofernes, decapitating him as he slept:

> For to whom shall we refer this benefit received, but to her so well knowen pietie, to whom we may rightly proclaime that saying*: One woman hath wrought confusion in the house of Nabuchodonosor* [Nebuchadnezzar]. Isabella therefore came into the cittie as a restorer of the ancient religion; into the campes to bestow in those days, the gifts and guerdons of a Captaine. She ordained the Anniversarie Masse, in honor of the dreadful Sacrament (who

[88] Vergara, *Rubens and his Spanish Patrons*, 43.
[89] Hugo, *Siege of Breda*, 146.
[90] Ibid., 147
[91] Ibid., 148.
[92] Ibid.,

began first in the eve of the rendring of Breda, and the garrison went out on the octave).[93]

Here the author's use of a passage from the deuterocanonical book of Judith, an 'apocryphal' text not recognized by the Protestants, supplies a vision of Isabel as a restorer of the ancient, in this case, Catholic, faith. Like Judith, the Infanta courageously entered the masculine domain of an army camp. Unlike Judith, however, she relied on prayer rather than her femininity to defeat the enemy. She remains, as a result, a 'Captaine' whose weaponless warfare successfully overturned the house of Orange.

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An important key to the origins of the Eucharist Tapestries is contained in the passage quoted above, which advances the notion that the first day of the octave of Corpus Christi corresponded with the surrender of Breda—and, that the garrison of Dutch soldiers went out of Breda on the last night of the Eucharistic festival. In 1625, Corpus Christi, which is celebrated the first Thursday following Trinity Sunday, fell on the 29th of May. That year the truce of Breda was indeed signed eight days later on the 5th of June. This fortuitous correspondence, which Isabel seems to have shrewdly used to her advantage in planning her visit, helped to seal the association of the surrender of a Protestant town with the reinstitution of a centuries-old Catholic feast honoring the mystical body of Christ.

In addition to commissioning Rubens's engraving and the portrait on which it was based, Isabel pursued other strategies of pious self-promotion in the wake of Breda. As early as the summer of 1625 (in other words, very shortly after the siege was concluded) she solicited from the master printmaker, Jacques Callot (1592/3-1635), a large-scale, six-sheet map depicting the topography and siegeworks at Breda.[94] As Callot did not visit Breda (if at all) until 1627, he was to depend heavily on Hugo's elaborately illustrated history, the allegorical frontispiece of which was, not coincidentally, designed by Rubens (Fig. 25). Hugo's *Obsidio Bredana* was translated into Spanish in 1627. Completed by 1628, Callot's painstakingly panoramic etchings, accompanied by a description of Breda's events written by Alonso Ladrón de Guevara—and translated into four languages—were subsequently sent by the Infanta to the major European courts.[95] The map thus formed part of a multilingual and visually sophisticated, multi-genre, propaganda campaign orchestrated by Isabel on an international scale. The Infanta's desire to align herself with the outcome of the siege is underscored by the prominent place Callot allocates to her entry into Breda (Fig. 26). In the map's 'final,' i.e. lower right, corner scene, a mounted Spinola watches from a high hill as the heavily escorted archducal carriage conducts its pious passenger, attired in her Franciscan habit, into the lands of the conquered Protestant enemy.

Doctoring the Church: Isabel and the Defenders of the Eucharist

In order to take the full measure of Isabel's deliberate self-fashioning in conjunction with her military victory in the North, however, it is necessary to return to the moment early in June when she first learned that Breda, held by the Dutch since 1590, would again fall under Spanish dominion. Isabel received the joyous news from the nobleman-engineer, Giovanni de

[93] Ibid., 149. The citation is from Judith 14:18.
[94] Simone Zurawksi, "New Sources for Jacques Callot's Map of the Siege of Breda," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70 (Dec., 1988), 623.
[95] Ibid.

Medici—through whom she may also have been introduced to Callot.[96] She then made an immediate decision to visit the troops, arriving in Breda on June 12, 1625 in time to personally mandate the exceedingly generous payment of a month's wages to her men for services rendered. According to her custom, Isabel complemented this charitable gesture with a public show of faith by making herself a highly visible presence at the city's first Catholic mass.

Hugo provides an enthusiastic commentary on Isabel's Eucharistic devotion in this, the conclusion, of his history. As elsewhere in the text, he also subtly reveals the philosophical tensions between Isabel, the peace-minded Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, and the King of Spain, her nephew, an impatient, untested, and hawkish young ruler who demonstrated little concern for the well-being of his long-suffering Flemish subjects. Even as the aforesaid Giovanni de Medici greeted Isabel with news of the victory, Hugo asserts, pamphleteers were ceaselessly lambasting her policies while critical letters from the doubtful Philip IV continued to arrive at her doorstep. According to Hugo, Philip's faith in the loyal Ambrogio Spinola had wavered to such an extent that "Isabella was admonished, that she should consider againe and againe, whether it were not more to the purpose, to recall Spinola from so long and doubtful a siege […]."[97] In the very next paragraph, as if to demonstrate his benefactor's response to Philip's antagonism and infuriating lack of support, Hugo records Isabel's "resolve" to go to Breda, in effect, to uphold the success of her own tactics over against those of the Spanish king.

Within days of the peaceful conclusion of the siege, therefore, it appears that the Infanta had determined to make Breda her Lepanto in a distinctly Isabelline maner. Procuring the services of a respected cleric-theologian, a talented draftsman, and the greatest allegorist of the age, she sought to validate her reputation as irenic military strategist and defender of the faith. With Rubens's help, Isabel would repackage a real-world military victory as a mystical allegory of Catholic triumph in which her dual citizenship and legacy as the peacemaking Spanish sovereign of Flanders was asserted by combining elements of the distinctively 'Hispano' and familiarly Flemish rhetoric of Habsburg Sacramental devotion. If Hugo's treatise and Callot's map conveyed Breda's momentous circumstances to Isabel's European counterparts under the pretense of eye-witness cartographic immediacy and objective historical narrative, the Eucharist Tapestries interpreted her triumph at Breda in a figurative manner, converting the letter to the spirit with an expressive force and dynamism, and an intensity of color and compositional complexity, unprecedented even in Rubens's own works to date.

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Following Nora de Poorter, the twenty extant panels of the Eucharist Tapestries can be loosely grouped according to their themes and iconography, i.e the *Adoration of the Eucharist* (5); *King David Playing the Harp* (1); the Large Tapestries (11)—which include the *Old Testament Prefigurations* (4); the *Triumphs* (3); the *Defenders of the Eucharist* (1); and the *Four Evangelists* (1); and the remaining scenes of the *Eucharist Overcoming Pagan Sacrifice* (1) and *Victory of Truth over Heresy* (1). A further group comprises *Allegorical Personifications* (3).[98]

The panel in which Isabel's portrait appears, and the focus of the remainder of this chapter, is the group of 'saints' and Churchmen known as the *Defenders of the Eucharist*. Rubens made smaller scale preparatory oil sketches, *modelli* and *bozzetti*, as well as large painted cartoons from which he diverged to varying degrees in the final tapestry designs. In the case of

[96] Ibid., 623, no. 10. In 1612, the Nancy-born Callot had moved to Florence, where, as Zurawski points out, he designed festivals for the Medici.
[97] Ibid., 146.
[98] For an exhaustive iconographical survey of the content of these images see de Poorter, *Eucharist Series*, 188-212.

the *Defenders*, however, his cartoon is highly finished and differs little from the textile version; because it offers a greater level of clarity, the Ringling Museum's painted cartoon (Fig. 27) will be discussed as Rubens's portrait of Isabel.

Rubens's assemblage of Eucharistic champions, or defenders, is composed as a *sacra conversazione,* resembling in many respects the bipartite theophanies of Raphael's *Ecstasy of St. Cecilia* (Fig. 28) and *Disputá* (Fig. 29), where doctrinally relevant saints gather before, or more precisely, below, a mystical manifestation to which they respond often according to their perceived psychologies or natures. As de Poorter observes, the quartet of the Latin doctors, along with the four Evangelists, have also been a frequent feature of 'illustrated' processional Triumphs in the Petrarchan mode, among which Rubens's tapestries should be counted.[99] But the old-fashioned genre and familiar dramatis personae belie the radical nature of Rubens's saintly scene. Indeed, his first innovation is signaled by the asymmetrical arrangement of the Latin doctors, or Fathers of the Church. The Fathers are unevenly distributed, with Pope Gregory the Great and the mitred Bishops Augustine and Ambrose on the privileged 'gospel' side and the traditionally if anachronously dressed (there was no rank of cardinal in the fourth-century) Jerome, immersed in a book on the 'epistle' side. Yet the asymmetrical placement of the four doctors is formally balanced by the introduction of three additional figures, whose inclusion among such illustrious ranks assures that the viewer recognize their status as on a par with the Fathers where the subject of the Eucharist is concerned. Thus the gesturing Thomas Aquinas, the lone female saint, Clare/Clara Eugenia, and the long unrecognized figure clad in white, who is likely the Premonstratensian St. Norbert, seem intended as embodiments of Medieval scholasticism and monastic piety, themselves the seeds of Tridentine orthodoxy planted in the teachings of the early Church.[100]

The canonical theologians of 'patristic' early Christianity, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and their later successor, Gregory, were each recognized by commentators as fervent advocates of the doctrine of the 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist. With the confluence in the previous century of printing technologies and the Reformers' investment in vernacular translations and humanistic study of classical Christian texts, patristic literature was more widely read and accessible than ever before in Rubens's time. Patristic works were put to rhetorical and confessional ends by both sides such that "Protestants wished to interpret the fathers in their doctrinal sense, multiplying their own precursors, while Catholics sought to demonstrate the 'perpetuity' of their beliefs and the apostolic origin of 'unwritten traditions.'"[101] Rubens's inclusion of the four foundational ecclesiastics follows this general Catholic approach, implying the fathers' (inescapably anachronous) approbation of the 'traditional' ceremonial display of the body of Christ, or Corpus Christi, as a de-monstration of the paradoxically real and sacramental-mystical nature of the host.

In fact the practice of displaying the host in an elaborate monstrance dates from some six hundred years after Gregory's death when it was first recorded in the Low Countries, near Liége. That the ostensory tradition originated in the southern Netherlands was undoubtedly significant

[99] Ibid., 362.
[100] De Poorter*, Eucharist Tapestries*, 361, no. 15 describes this panel as part of the Triumphal 'cortege,' reading the figures as "proceeding across a landscape." That it is equally possible to view the saints as turning inward and/or moving forward is a further testament to Rubens's compositional sophistication.
[101] William P. Haaguard, "Renaissance Patristic Scholarship and Theology in Sixteenth-Century England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal,* Vol. 10 (Autumn, 1979), 40.

for patron and painter alike, as was the fact that the incorporation of the practice into Corpus Christi processions is credited to a woman.

In 1209, an Augustinian nun, Juliana of Mont-Cornillon (also known as Juliana of Liége) had a vision of the dark side of the moon. Juliana interpreted the experience allegorically as a sign that the ceremonial veneration of the Sacrament should be added to the liturgical calendar and related her vision to Jacques Pantaleon, the Archdeacon of Liége. The Feast of Corpus Christi was first celebrated in 1246 and was extended throughout the Church by Pantaleon, then Pope Urban IV, in 1264.[102] The first monstrance used at Corpus Christi is thought to be that of the church of St. Quentin, Hasselt (a municipality added to the Bishopric of Liége by the early fourteenth-century), for which it was executed in 1286.[103]

A charismatic spiritual leader, Juliana of Liége (d. 1258) was at the heart of a twelfth and thirteenth-century mystical movement in which women, especially high-born women, were pivotal figures in the establishment of new religious practices and communities.[104] But although women's mysticism can be said to have reached its apex in Northern Europe—especially in Belgium, France, and Germany—an Italian counterpart to Juliana can be recognized in the more familiar Clare of Assisi (1194-1253), the Umbrian foundress of the Franciscan Order and legendary protectress of the Holy Sacrament.

One of the most colorful and lasting stories associated with the headstrong Clare, daughter of a nobleman and devoted adherent to Francis' radical call to poverty and simplicity, is the story of her fierce custody of the Sacrament. In 1234, her convent at San Damiano came under attack by the army of Frederick II, whose troops scaled the walls to terrorize the nuns by night. Clare, it is said, rose from her bed and took the ciborium containing the Blessed Sacrament from its place in an adjacent room before rushing to an open window where soldiers could be seen ascending from below. In the face of the enemy, Clare brandished the sacred vessel and the soldiers, astonished by the sight, fell back to the ground and retreated. For this reason—though again, anachronously given the use of ostensories—Clare is sometimes portrayed by early modern artists with a monstrance as her attribute (see, e.g. Fig. 30).[105]

The radical acts and providential visions of these Holy women were undoubtedly of special resonance for the Infanta, who was baptized Isabel for the notoriously zealous Isabel the Catholic, her father's great grandmother; Clara for the saint's day on which she was born; and Eugenia, owing to a vow her mother had made to Saint Eugen, should she have a healthy child.[106] Just as her namesake Clare had defeated the enemy by upholding the veneration of the Holy Sacrament, and Julianna, a native of her adopted country, had instituted the Feast in its honor, Isabel further defended the Eucharist, and with her tapestries, glorified its celebration at Corpus Christi.

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[102] Thomas J. Mathiesen, "The Office of the New Feast of Corpus Christi" in the Regimen Animarum at Brigham Young University," *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 2 (Winter, 1983), 21. See also Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).
[103] See C.C. Oman, "A Fragment of an Early Flemish Monstrance*," The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 56 (Jan., 1930), 41.
[104] See *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liége and Their Impact*, Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds., (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999); For the Beguine roots of Brabantine female mysticism see Judith Oliver, "'Gothic' Women and Merovingian Desert Mothers*," Gesta*, Vol. 32 (1993): 124-134.
[105] P. Robinson, (1908), "St. Clare of Assisi," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia (*New York: Robert Appleton Company), Retrieved August 21, 2011 from New Advent: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04004a.htm.
[106] Klingenstein, *The Great Infanta,* 8.

Centuries before Isabel's time, devotion to the Eucharist was recognized as a feature of *pietas Austriaca*, or the ostentatious politico-religious expression of Hispano-Austrian Habsburg Catholicism.[107] It was the first Habsburg Holy Emperor, Rudolf I (1273-1313), who, following the recent precedents set by Clare and Julianna, had concretized the liturgical use of the displayed Host and the royal reverence for the Sacrament. As the story is told, while still a Count, Rudolf had given one of his own horses to a priest he found walking on foot with the viaticum on a muddy and rutted road. As he was speedily en route to provide last rites to a dying peasant, the priest accepted the horse and the would-be Emperor dismounted in order that the Host might receive the honor that was its due.[108] Rubens, in collaboration with the landscape painter Jan Wildens, had himself painted this subject (Fig. 31)—which he composed as a genre-like, even ludic, triumphal procession with a greatly reduced cast—sometime between 1625-1636, when it is first documented in the Spanish Alcázar. Philip IV was apparently very attached to the painting, which hung in his bedroom until the time of his death some thirty years later.[109]

Rubens included neither the Emperor Rudolf nor Julianna of Liege in his trio of Eucharistic defenders, however. Though once a Prioress, Julianna was not a canonized saint. (In fact her mystical leanings and eventual expulsion from the Augustinian order might have placed her a little too close to the likes of the divisive English nuns of Isabel's time who had made their way to the Spanish Netherlands to establish novel female orders and Latin schools for girls.)[110] In Rubens's designs, the Flemish roots of Eucharistic devotion are represented by the less controversial figure of the well-beloved Saint Norbert (c. 1080-1134). A gifted preacher dubbed by St. Bernard "a celestial flute" and the founder of the order of Premonstratensians, Norbert had arrived in Antwerp in 1123 expressly charged with staunching the heretical teachings being spread by an anti-clerical mystic called Tankelin.

The Victorian art historian Mrs. Jameson refers to Tankelin as "a sort of atheist and socialist of those times" who was known for his compelling sermons against the efficacy of the Eucharist.[111] Norbert, it was said, addressed Tankelin's rancor with gentle exhortations that his followers contritely return to the more salutary orthodox path. During his brief tenure in Antwerp, Norbert founded the Abbey of St. Michael (where Rubens's mother would later be buried) and was declared by the townspeople an apostle of the Blessed Sacrament, to which he was specially devoted. Most relevant to our purposes, Norbert, who is traditionally attired in 'angelic' white vestments, had long been recognized by Flemish Catholics as a beneficent pastor who triumphed over error in a peaceful manner; for his successes in Antwerp and elsewhere, Norbert was created archbishop of Magdeburg before the end of his short but eventful life. His place among the most-beloved early Medieval saints of the Netherlands and Low Countries is established in a tablet placed under an altarpiece in Antwerp's church of Our Lady which reads:

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[107] See Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca*, William D. Bowman and Anna Marie Leitgeb, trans. (Bloomington, IN: Purdue, 2004), 13-23.

[108] John B. Knipping, *Iconography of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands* (Leiden ad Nieuwkoop: A. W. Sitjhoff and B. de Graaf, 1974), 305.

[109] See Vergara, *Rubens and his Spanish Patrons*, 116. See also Coreth, op cit., 13-15.

[110] One thinks in particular of Mary Ward (1585-1645), the would-be female Jesuit and founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with whom the Infanta shared a cordial and supportive correspondence. See my unpublished M.A. thesis, "Toward a Historiography of Mary Ward: Situating a Reforming Catholic Nun in Early Modern Studies," Iliff School of Theology (2004), 28.

[111] Mrs. (Anna) Jameson, *Legends of the Monastic Orders as Represented in the Fine Arts* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1850), 223.

"What Amandus had prepared, What Eligius had planted, Willibrord had irrigated, Tankelin had devastated, Norbert has restored."[112]

Although he is less familiar to many readers and beholders today, Norbert's hagiography was well-known in the seventeenth-century; he appears, for example, in the *Triunfos Divinos* of the Spanish playwright, Lope de Vega (1625), an poetic exultation of transubstantiation with many formal similarities to Rubens's tapestry series—and likely a shared Petrarchan source.[113] Coupled with his renowned Eucharistic devotion, Norbert's historic role as 'restorer' of the old faith in Flanders made him an obvious spiritual parallel and historical precursor of the Infanta Isabel. The Infanta too, was a one-time outsider who was similarly described by Herman Hugo as a "restorer" of Catholic belief and practice. In addition, it was surely viewed as a happy coincidence that Norbert's feast day fell on the sixth of June, the day after the siege of Breda was officially concluded.

A less obvious and more provocative counterpart to Isabel—and even to the Eucharistic defender Clare of Assisi with whom she is conflated—is the 'angelic doctor,' Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). After Trent, as we have seen, Saint Thomas was generally espoused as a 'fifth' doctor of the Church. In addition to explicating the doctrine of Transubstantiation in the *Summa Theologica,* the *Summa contra Gentiles* and elsewhere, Thomas is credited with the authorship of the Office of Corpus Christi. [114] That he is a Dominican saint, and thus a follower of the Spaniard Dominic Guzman, further endeared Thomas to the Spanish Habsburgs. His Triumph (Fig. 32) is a central feature of the complex *trecento* allegorical fresco program by Andrea Bonaiuto in the so-called Spanish chapel at the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. This immense chapter house was Hispanized by association when, after his marriage in 1539 to Eleonora of Toledo, daughter of the Spanish viceroy to Naples, Cosimo de Medici assigned it to his Castilian wife and her retinue. In the Florence program Thomas's hieratical enthronement is juxtaposed with lively scenes representing the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant in an elaborate engagement of literary, theological, and visual sources that rivals as well as anticipates Rubens's tapestries for its conceptual breadth and inventive figurations.[115]

Yet it was St. Clare, rather than St. Thomas, who was the founder of the religious order for which Isabel's tapestries were intended. Rubens accordingly presents the learned Aquinas in a fairly standard and even humble manner, as a man of the book, whose heavenward gesture echoes that of the figure closest to the monstrance in Raphael's *Disputà*. In the large-scale painted cartoon for the tapestries to which we have been referring, the slightly pained looking Thomas is positioned just ahead of the Infanta, yet also in the less honored space to her left. In compositional if not theological terms the two form part of a triad, the third member of which is the hovering Paraclete who appears overhead in the form of a blazing dove. Thomas's raised arm and pointed finger, like the finial of Isabel/Clare's monstrance, thus delimit the pyramid of

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[112] The original Latin and the above translation are provided by Gregory G. Rybrook, "St. Norbert and the Tankelin Heresy," *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Jul., 1924), 251. For Norbert's spiritual influence on the order, see François Petit, *Spirituality of the Premonstratensians: The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,* Victor Szczurek, trans., edited with a foreword by Carol Neel. (Collegeville, MN: Trappist Press, 2011).

[113] De Poorter, *Eucharist Series*, 364.

[114] Thomas is referred to as the author of the Office of Corpus Christi in the acts of the Dominican chapter; see Joseph Polzer, "Andrea di Bonaiuto's Via Veritatis and Dominican Thought in Late Medieval Italy," in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77 (Jun., 1995), pp. 262-289

[115] In his icnographical analysis, Polzer, op cit, refers to the allegorical triumph as the *Via Veritatis*. On the Spanish chapel, see also J. Gardner, "Andrea di Bonaiuto and the Chapterhouse Frescoes in Santa Maria Novella," *Art History*, (1979): 107-38.

radiant light bestowed by the Holy Spirit in their midst. As in her painted and printed Clarisian portrait, Isabel emits a faint but discernible nimbus in this image, a glowing aureole which Thomas—as well as the other male saints—notably lack.

As a rhetorical device employed to establish the subjects' ecclesial standing or doctrinal importance as well as to draw the viewer in, the play of glances among these Eucharistic defenders is peculiar. Isabel/Clare, whose centeredness already assures her recognition as a crucial personage, is one of only two figures to confront the viewer with a direct gaze. The other is the dark-bearded Augustine, whose identity can be deduced from his youth relative to his teacher Ambrose, and the heart appended to his miter. Augustine looks at the beholder rather than at the iconographical centerpiece, which is clearly the monstrance in the process of being displayed both internally to the gathered saints, and externally, to those gathered for the liturgies and, during them, the celebration of the Eucharist. By contrast, Ambrose, his exquisitely embroidered cope is aptly decorated with a scene of Christ's Resurrection, is viewed only from the back, though his posture and *profil perdu* assure us that he is entranced by all that he sees before him. Likewise, the vital, strong-featured Gregory is transfixed by the luminous Sacrament, the reflected catchlights of which glisten in his pupils. The rather bland-looking Norbert, too, stares at the monstrance, while Jerome, as if about to cite himself, pauses on a page in his big book, his stance and pose also recalling his portrayal in Raphael's dispute.

Faced with the Infanta's frontal presentation, the spectator has no choice but to meet her somber brown eyes and to consider the identity conveyed by her placid yet particularized features, so smoothly superimposed on the figure of the noble Saint Clare of Assisi. Isabel's brightly lit face and intelligently serene expression contrast with that of the sullen-looking Augustine—who, being nearly excised from the scene, seems to glower at the viewer from the shadows at left. In fact, from the standpoint of Transubstantiation, the Bishop of Hippo was a controversial figure in Eucharistic theology from the Middle Ages through the Council of Trent and beyond. For his emphasis of the "nonidentity of the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ," Augustine was frequently cited as a patristic counterproof by Medieval skeptics and Protestant reformers alike.[116] For example, the title page of *The Fortres of the Fathers and Ruine of the Romish Masse*, an anonymous anti-Catholic text which likely dates from the last quarter of the sixteenth-century, includes two quotations from Augustine. The first, "You shalt not eate this bodie that you see nor drink that Bloude which they shalte shede which shall crusifie me" is taken from the Latin Doctor's commentary on Psalm 99; the second, **"**Why preparest thou thi touth and thy belly? Believe and thoue hast eaten," derives from his Homily 25 on John 6.[117] As J. R. Brink observes, both citations are standard commonplaces in Calvinist arguments against the doctrine of Transubstantiation.

By contrast, it was Ambrose, Augustine's mentor, who was upheld by the proponents of a dogma of Real Presence.[118] Could it be that Rubens and the Infanta, who were surely cognizant of Augustine's historically questionable stance on the ontology of the Eucharistic species, have relegated Augustine to the margins of the composition precisely in order to underscore the theologian's diminished role as a true defender of the Holy Sacrament? If the placement and interaction of the figures can be read as a commentary on the degree of their importance and

[116] James F. McCue, "The Doctrine of Transubstantiation from Berengar through Trent: The Point at Issue," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 61 (Jul., 1968), 386.
[117] J. R. Brink, "'Fortres of Fathers': An Unpublished Sixteenth-Century Manuscript Relating to Patristic Writing on the Eucharist, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 10 (Spring, 1979), pp. 83-88
[118] Ibid., 387.

participation in the defense of the Eucharist and the orthodox celebration of Corpus Christi, positioning Isabel not only in the presence of the Fathers but in a place of honor—at the right hand of St. Thomas Aquinas and in a direct line of descent from the Holy Spirit—makes a strong argument that she be seen not only as a pious woman ruler but as a latter day Eucharistic saint.

Beyond Madrid: Patronage, Prints, and Posterity

In 1672, when Giovan Pietro Bellori trained his considerable powers of ekphrasis on Rubens's Eucharist tapestries, their provenance as a commission sent to Spain by the female Governor of the Spanish Netherlands had already been lost or ignored. Bellori's account, the earliest description of the tapestries, is rendered somewhat less valuable in that he had never actually seen the textiles or the cartoons upon which they were based. He seems to have relied on an abridged series of engravings by Schelte à Bolswert (published by Nicolaes Lauwers) between 1648 and 1652.[119] Neither his remove, nor his lack of accurate information, stops Bellori from situating the Spanish commission in his repeatedly flawed chronology of Rubens's works. While in the service of King Philip, Bellori writes accordingly, Rubens "made the pictures and cartoons for a set of tapestries woven in Flanders, with sacred subjects, namely, the Triumphs of the new Law of the Church, Idolatry Overthrown, and the Truth of the Gospel."[120]

It is curious that the Italian critic fails to note (or notice) the tapestries' Eucharistic theme. Even our panel, known today as 'The Defenders of the Eucharist,' is folded into Bellori's overly general, even misleading heading: 'The Truth of the Gospel.' His description of the scene is worth quoting in full both for what he gets right and what he gets wrong:

> [T]he Doctors of the Church follow: Saint Ambrose with the crosier, wearing bishop's robes, Pope Saint Gregory with the miter and cross, and between them St. Augustine is seen from the back, also in Bishop's robes, and with the Episcopal miter. Saint Thomas Aquinas is next, carrying a book and holding up a finger in a gesture of debate, and Saint Clare, who is the Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, accompanies him, holding the sacramental custodia. Next comes Saint Bonaventura, a portrait of the Cardinal-Infante with the red biretta, and lastly Saint Jerome, also in cardinal's robes and hat […]

The fact that he was working from black and white engravings explains to some extent Bellori's misidentification of so many of those partaking in the sacred conversation/revelation that has been our subject. To begin, he boldly but wrongly labels the bishops, designating Augustine, rather than Ambrose, as the figure whose back is turned to us. [121] He then wildly speculates on the identity of the white-robed figure recognized by de Poorter as St. Norbert, assigning him the role of 'Saint Bonaventura' with the features of Isabel's successor in the Spanish Netherlands, the Cardinal Infante Ferdinand of Austria. A contemporary of Saint Thomas, Bonaventure (1218-

[119] Giovan Pietro Bellori, 'Life of Peter Paul Rubens,' in *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, Alice Sedgwick Wohl, trans. with notes by Hellmut Wohl, introduction by Tomaso Montanari (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005), 209, no. 65.

[120] Ibid., 199.

[121] A more cautious De Poorter writes: "Apart from dress, the Doctors of the Church have no distinguishing attributes." This is not entirely the case for, as I have noted, a small three-dimensional heart, a common symbol or attribute of Augustine's status as the Doctor of Charity, is affixed to his golden miter; moreover, inasmuch as Augustine (354-430) studied in Milan with the older Ambrose (340-397), it stands to reason that Rubens would have portrayed the latter as a gray eminence who is appreciably older than his feisty student.

1274) was second only to Saint Francis in the early development and administration of the Franciscans; it would not have been entirely surprising to find him the subject of an image destined for a convent of Franciscan women. More peculiar is Bellori's notion that Rubens has collapsed Bonaventure and the military hero Ferdinand I, who, though officially a Cardinal, was never ordained a priest, and was not to become ruler of the Spanish Netherlands until his aunt Isabel died in 1633.

Bellori nonetheless misrecognizes the Cardinal Infante in a way that is clearly impossible where Isabel is concerned. Not only is the Archduchess understood as Isabel Clara Eugenia, she *"is"* Saint Clare. Familiar as he was with the works of Van Dyck, who, like Rubens, had painted carefully observed portraits of the same Cardinal Infante,[122] it seems unlikely that Bellori would have imagined the jowly middle-aged Norbert as in any way resembling the fair-haired, mustachioed, and indubitably gallant, Ferdinand. Bellori's syntax is revealing in this respect. Where he suggests that the saint with the "red" biretta is also a 'portrait' of someone else, he employs a different turn of phrase for what is apparently to him an effectively coalesced image of Isabel/Clare. In this sense, Bellori has accepted Rubens/Isabel's proposition, namely, that the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia was not merely an admirer of Clare or someone like Clare; she *was* in fact the Hispano-Flemish Clare, and had taken her place as a holy woman.

I do not mean to imply that Bellori believed that the two women were in fact a single historical personage. But I do think a subtler form of rhetorical persuasion was at play; an outcome which, while it is forever preserved in Bellori's *Vita* of Rubens, can nonetheless only be fully understood as the fruit of Isabel's wholly successful public relations campaign. In other words, less than fifty years after the Eucharist tapestries reached Spain, when the international art world maintained an interest in Rubens even though it had forgotten his most loyal patron, the Archduchess Isabel could be recognized by her portrait. For Bellori in Rome she was the St. Clare of Flanders, easily known, even in middle-age, for her striking features and habitual Franciscan robes. This strategically static image of the widowed Spanish Infanta was in many ways the inverse of Rubens's portraits for Marie de Medici's allegorical program: where Marie was ever-changing, ever metamorphosing into another kind of heroic amazon, vengeful goddess, or virtuous woman, Isabel remained always the same. Or so it had seemed.

Of the two sovereigns, in fact, the Spanish Archduchess was the one who surveyed the battlefield, who meted out justice to her people and their enemies, and perhaps most crucially, who submitted herself to the will of a king who understood all too well her value as a prudent, experienced, and virtuous ruler deeply beloved by his and her own foreign subjects. Isabel did these and other things, playing numerous roles on both domestic and foreign stages, yet Rubens did not portray her thus. At her request, the painter represented his patron, the Infanta of Spain and Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, as a *figura* of herself. The Isabel of the Eucharist series is a Christian antitype of Judith for whom Clare is the prototype, a woman who is everywhere yet nowhere, a ruler who is at once unostentatious and conspicuously demonstrative; a transparent embodiment of orthodox faith and its unimpeachable protector and custodian

[122] See, e.g., Rubens's Equestrian portrait of the *Cardinal Infante at the Battle of Nordlingen*, c. 1636, Museo del Prado; Anthony Van Dyck, *The Cardinal Infante*, 1634, Museo del Prado. Velázquez had also painted the young Cardinal in hunting attire around this time, see the full-length portrait of *The Cardinal Infante Ferdinand* (c. 1632-336), Museo del Prado.

CHAPTER SIX

Desire Unmasq'd: Rubens, Ripa, Donne and the Lesbian Baroque at Whitehall

> I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good. (Ps.122 KJV)

In 1629, Rubens returned to Antwerp following a productive stay of nearly nine months in Spain largely spent among the galleries and picture collections of Philip IV's Habsburg court. Once again in his studio in Flanders, the artist found himself at the height of his career and in a prime position to receive, at long last, assurance of the prestigious English commission he had held in his sights for at least eight years.

From 1621 dates the famous letter to William Trumbull, the Jacobean agent in Brussels, in which Rubens simultaneously attempts to placate Trumbull's superior, the ever-disgruntled Lord Ambassador Dudley Carleton and secure the decoration of the "hall in the New Palace" in London. Inigo Jones's elegantly Palladian addition to the royal apartments was completed in 1622, the following year. But well before this date Rubens had apparently gained some degree of familiarity with the scale and format of the proposed site and the style of art its royal patrons, James I and his son, Charles, Prince of Wales, would seek for it. Hence his immodest but seemingly accurate claim that "my talent is such that no undertaking, however vast in size or diversified in subject, has ever surpassed my courage."[1] Rubens's indomitable self-confidence at this still relatively untested point in his career is doubly impressive given that it predates the massive and compositionally complex programmatic commissions of the 1620s discussed in the previous chapter: the Medici cycle at the Luxembourg Palace (c. 1625-26) and the Eucharist tapestries (c. 1626-28) in Madrid.

The program Rubens executed for the ceiling of Inigo Jones's Italianate masterpiece, the Whitehall Palace Banqueting House (Fig. 1, 1619-1622), represents the culmination of his propagandistic courtly allegories. It is the last, and numerically the smallest, of his multipartite programs. In comparison with the twenty-four independent canvases comprising the Medici cycle and the twenty panels of the Eucharist tapestries—or, in ecclesiastical terms, in contrast to the thirty-nine ceiling paintings Rubens had designed for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp (ca. 1620)—the nine-part Whitehall ceiling is considerably streamlined. It is interesting to note that James I appears in all three of the major panels, roughly one third of the images designed to celebrate his reign. At Whitehall he is always portrayed as himself and never overtly allegorized as a mythological figure, though Rubens follows contemporaries in drawing parallels between his reign and that of the wise King Solomon of the Old Testament.

Elizabeth's Stuart successor was an ardent and articulate proponent of the divine right of monarchs. It is not surprising therefore that as an allegorical paean to Absolutism, the London program displays certain conceptual and philosophical affinities with the cycles for the Catholic

[1] Rubens to William Trumbull, Antwerp, 13 September, 1621, in Ruth Saunders Magurn, ed. and trans. *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1957), no. 46.

sovereigns Marie and Isabel.[2] However, as a decorated ceiling—and in terms of artistic sources and style—the Whitehall program has more in common with the ceiling of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp (now lost), which was characterized by Rubens's vertiginous renditions of dynamically clad saints and pared down biblical narratives *di sotto in sú*.[3] (see, for example, Fig. 2) In this respect, the Whitehall ceiling marks Rubens's return to the compartmentalized pictorial mechanics of the Italian cinquecento, and specifically to the artistic idiom of the Venetian, or Veronesian, painted ceiling, at which he had yet to try his hand in a secular or civic setting.

Rubens had employed a stultifying admixture of French history and classical mythology in the visual panegyric for and of Marie de Medici, while for the sacramental *ex voto* proposed by the Infanta Isabel he drew artfully and strategically, on Petrarchan imagery, historical theology, and Hispano-Flemish sacred ceremonial. The interpretive challenge of these programs, for political reasons in the former case and metaphysical ones in the latter, is deepened by their disorienting, serial-repetitive, structure. In the Medici cycle, the rectangular gallery setting and imposing tableau format would have demanded a linear, movement between its discrete yet teleological subjects. Whereas, temporarily suspended from the walls of a convent church in Madrid, the liturgical display of the Eucharist tapestries facilitated a disjunctive processional/eschatological reading both forward and backward in space and time. In yet another manifestation of Rubens's imaginative approach to site specificity, the Whitehall ceiling pictures similarly encourage, one might even say, condition, the cultivation of a particular state of body and mind by virtue of their spatial relationship to the beholder.

To experience the majesty of the Stuart monarchs in the palace they had built was to look up. Just as the Church of England's east-facing altars orient the parishioner, the raising of the head and eyes, perhaps more than any early modern gesture designed to communicate the rank or position of one being in relation to another, dictates the attitude of the courtly subject. "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens," sang the Psalmist in the recently translated Authorized (King James) Version of the Old Testament (1611). And further: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us." (Psalm 123:1-2; KJV) To look up was to look to one's earthly betters, and beyond, to one's God. Fittingly, then, on entering the soberly proportioned Banqueting house at Whitehall, with its elegantly whitewashed ionic columns, and light-filled gallery, the visitor's attention was

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[2] While he was not the first to articulate the political doctrine of the divine right of kings, James I pointedly availed himself of the concept in his own works, and by extension, in those of the Anglican 'divines' who served him, among whom Lancelot Andrewes is perhaps the best known. On Jacobean appeals to divine right see Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, "The Ecclesiastical Policy of King James I," *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 24 (Apr., 1985): 169-207; and Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I: the *Basilikon Doron* and *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* in the Scottish Context and the English Transformation," in Linda Levy Peck, ed., *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 36-54. The canonical works on this subject are J.N. Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1914); C.H. McIlwain, ed. *The Political Works of James I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918).

[3] Rubens's paintings for the Jesuit church in Antwerp, destroyed in a fire ca. 1717, are known to us from extant oil sketches and contemporary views of the church interior made prior to its destruction. On the appearance of the ceiling paintings and their typological iconography see John Rupert Martin, *The ceiling paintings for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp* Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard Pt. I (London: Phaidon, 1968); On the arrangement and interpretation of the cycle vis-à-vis Jesuit viewing habits see Anna C. Knaap, "Seeing in sequence: Rubens and the Jesuit Church in Antwerp," Ph.D. Diss. New York University, 2007.

immediately turned to Rubens's ceiling and thence to the deceased King James whose heavenly glory is depicted there.

In the *Basilikon Doron*, the princely conduct book composed by the King of Scotland for his then-successor, Prince Henry, James had conceived of his end in similar terms:

> For a good King (after a happy and famous reign) dieth in peace, lamented by his subjects and admired by his neighbors; and leaving a reverent reknowne behind him on earth, obtaineth the crown of eternal felicitie in heaven.[4]

Yet to seventeenth-century English courtiers unaccustomed to decorated ceilings and to a lesser extent, allegorical painting, Rubens's visual paraphrase of the king's ideal death—and resurrection—would have seemed a novelty of the first order.[5] Even for well-traveled lovers of Italian art—of whom Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel was Charles I's most qualified rival in matters of connoisseurship—the presence of an artistic program so conspicuously foreign in conception, would have been striking, if not shocking, as much for its skyward location as its heady illusionism.[6] An early and informatively specific reaction to the Whitehall decorations is provided by Richard Symonds, a self-exiled Englishman who spent 1649-1651 in Italy studying art in the company of the French master, Nicolas Poussin. Rubens appears in Symonds's notes prior to the English writer's valorization of 'quadri rapportati,' which happens to be Poussin's preferred manner of ceiling painting.

As Symonds relates, this frontal or tableau format derived from easel painting is used in the Farnese ceiling by Annibale Carracci, of which Poussin is a great admirer. (Fig. 3) Against this superlative standard of quasi-naturalistic ceiling decoration, Rubens is paired with Pietro Cortona, the painter of the 'licentiously' illusionistic and nonsensical 'roof of Cardinal Barberinis hall.' (Fig. 4) In his description of Rubens's apotheosis of King James, Symonds refers to both the subject and its rendering:

> Speaking of paintings upon Roofes in Scorcio [foreshortening], those of King James in ye banqueting howse to be caryed up to heaven is not Decoro because

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[4] [James I] *Basilikon Doron*, *or His Majesties Instructions to his dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince* (London: John Norton, 1603); The work was published several times before and after James acceded to the English throne in 1603. On the publication history of the King's written works, see Maria Wakely and Graham Rees, "Folios Fit for a King: James I, John Bill, and the King's Printers, 1616-1620," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 68 (2005), 471.

[5] In fact, Rubens was largely responsible for the few English ceiling paintings commissioned in the early seventeenth-century, notably, the canvases commissioned around 1625 by the Duke of Buckingham for York House, one of which is listed in a 1635 inventory as "a great piece for the ceiling of my Lords Closett," hanging near " My Lord Duke on Horseback" by "Reuben" [sic]. See Randall Davies, "An Inventory of the Duke of Buckingham's Pictures, etc., at York House in 1635," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 10, No. 48 (Mar., 1907), 379. During his relatively unproductive employ by the Caroline court (1626-1638) Orazio Gentilleschi, of whom Buckingham was a primary patron, was also responsible for (now lost) ceilings at York House, and for ceiling paintings for Henrietta Maria at Greenwich Palace. See Jeremy Wood, "Orazio Gentileschi and Some Netherlandish Artists in London: The Patronage of the Duke of Buckingham, Charles I and Henrietta Maria," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, Vol. 28 (2000 - 2001), 108-112.

[6] Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel had traveled to Italy with Inigo Jones as his guide and mentor in 1613 (16); Howard was later to employ Franciscus Junius, author of *De Pictura Veterum* (1637)—which was dedicated to Charles I—as his librarian. On Howard's patronage of Junius see Philipp P. Fehl, Keith Aldrich, Maria Raina Fehl, "Franciscus Junius and the Defense of Art," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1981), pp. 9-55.

> higher they cannot paint II Dio Padre, just as he that guilt his stable was askt what he would doe with his best room.[7]

As Mary Beal has explained in a welcome translation of the author's 'Italo-Inglese,' Symonds, following Poussin, takes issue with the 'irrational' *di sotto in sú* depiction of a floating King James from below, in such a monumental manner that God cannot be fitted into the airspace overhead. By 'gilding the stable' in this way Rubens pulls out all the stops for a mortal thereby disavowing the tactful and decorous inclusion of a better, higher, sovereign. While Beal views this criticism in entirely aesthetic terms, Symonds seems also to have taken issue with Rubens's effective substitution of James for God.

God was impervious to judgment, but not even a king was exempt from the people's wrath. James' son, Rubens's patron, Charles I, would ultimately face charges of 'treason, tyranny, and murder' for his alleged appropriation of powers beyond his reach.[8] In the 1648 trial held shortly before his execution on January 27, 1649, Charles was indicted by the High Court of Justice for "a wicked design to erect and uphold in himself an unlimited and tyrannical power to rule according to his will," that is, for acting as a kind of demigod or godless sovereign.[9] To a post-regicide, civil war-time royalist like Symonds, the pictorial removal of God the Father from Whitehall may thus have exemplified Charles's (mis)management of the royal image, serving as a bitter reminder of the late ruler's failure to acknowledge that kings, too, must have checks placed on their power. Symond's criticism is important, in that it identifies a kind of doctrinal-aesthetic discomfiture that seems equally concerned with form and content. His contrast of judicious Poussin and 'irrational' Rubens provides an early example of the critical framing of the stylistic differences between the two artists in gendered terms.

But although Symonds implies that the absence of the figure of God is unusual in an apotheosis, from at least the time of Vasari's *Apotheosis of Cosimo I* (1563-68) a propagandistic painted ceiling in Florence, this was clearly not the case.[10] In a canvas that must have been executed after Symonds's note taking, Poussin himself had limited a soberly planar 'Apotheosis' or 'Ascension' of St. Paul' (1649-50, Fig. 5) to the serene yet substantial figure of the saint and his angelic handlers. Within this image's austere economy, the divine presence is at best intimated by a faint peach-gold radiance nearly obscured by a dense mass of dark clouds. Had Rubens wished to elide his Jacobean ceiling painting with the dogma of 'Assumptions' or 'Coronations,' he would likely have included God the Father, or even the Trinity in James's midst, as Symonds suggests. Titian had done just that in his 'Gloria' (Fig. 6) for Charles V, the composition of which might be described as a hybrid theophany/dynastic apotheosis where both the living (Philip II and his family) and the dead (Charles V and Isabella) are assumed into heaven before the Triune God. That Rubens, who was known by his English contemporaries as a

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[7] Mary Beal, "Richard Symonds in Italy: His Meeting with Nicolas Poussin," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 126, 2 (Mar., 1984), 139. Beal includes a transcription of Symonds's unpublished "'Discourses' with Nicolas Poussin and Giovanni Angelo Canini," from Ms. Egerton 1636 in the British Library, in an appendix, see pp. 144. Notably, Poussin himself had painted a vaguely illusionistic ceiling for Cardinal Richelieu at the Louvre (1640-42). It is interesting to realize that the French Academy was beginning a fierce debate over the proper approach to ceiling painting at precisely this time, for which see Carl Goldstein, "Studies in Seventeenth Century French Art Theory and Ceiling Painting," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 47 (Jun., 1965), 241-242.

[8] Sean Kelsey "The Death of Charles I," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45 (Dec., 2002), 727.

[9] R. W. K. Hinton, "Was Charles I a Tyrant?" *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 18 (Jan., 1956), 69.

[10] See Vasari's ceiling in the *Salone dei Cinquecento* at the *Palazzo Vecchio*, to which the structure and content of Jones's Whitehall soffit bear a general resemblance.

devoutly Catholic painter, moved in a more overtly secular and secularizing direction in his allegorization of James is of note, for like Symonds, he too was a committed royalist, albeit in a Habsburgian vein. There are, however, religious overtones in Rubens's program, and while these have been considered in general terms, mainly in relation to James' figuration as a new Solomon, further, more subtle scriptural allusions can also be discovered.[11] The textual underpinnings of the focus of this chapter, the painting known as *The Peaceful Reign of King James*, which first greets the beholder as he or she enters the Banquet House, will be discussed in the sections that follow.

For now, the important point is that Rubens was likely chosen for the commission at Whitehall not merely for his capacity to paint a variety of large-scale images, but for his ability to translate the Northern Italian aesthetic, so loved by Charles, into English terms. Thus if the Whitehall ceiling is the most derivatively Italianate of all Rubens's works, it is self-consciously so. For in taking on the mode of Veronese in particular, Rubens speaks neither Spanish, Flemish, nor English, but Venetian, the artistic lingua franca of his former and present patrons, the same warring sovereigns, Philip IV, Isabel Clara Eugenia, and Charles I, between whom he had only recently negotiated peace.

Failing James: Rewriting the Jacobean Legacy

In his previous allegorical cycles, each rhetorically tricky in its own way, paying tribute to an exceptional or heroic—and importantly living—Catholic female sovereign had required Rubens to think differently about femininity. In both cases, and with varying degrees of success, he resolved the philosophical and moral difficulty presented by the existence of a particular 'good' woman by tactically conflating her identity with abstract female personifications and legendary women of ages past, while doing so in the artistic vernaculars of France and the Spanish Netherlands, respectively. The commemorative project at Whitehall, the pictured apotheosis of a controversial and far from beloved Catholic-tolerant Protestant king deceased at the time for nearly a decade, imposed an entirely different set of demands.

In contrast to the hawkish Queen Elizabeth I, King James 'the peacemaker' was to be honored for his avoidance of war, and for what was essentially, his inaction. As Malcolm Smuts has noted, "[i]t is of crucial importance that James's reign was an era of peace that followed nearly twenty years of war. For the question of how long Britain should remain at peace shaped any number of other areas of court life."[12] Thus, unlike the dubiously heroic Marie, with her incessant comings and goings, or the steadfast and saintly Isabel, whose involvement in the siege of Breda was affirmed in and by the votive origins of the Eucharist tapestries, the King of Scotland and England was to be honored for his role as a bringer of tranquility and harmonious, if rigidly orchestrated, relations between subject and ruler.

Accordingly, for Rubens the task was to portray a new kind of man on top, an exemplary ruler in the past tense, whose benevolent and mostly uneventful two decades could be distilled into a three-act play with the happiest of endings. James I had made peace with Spain, united the kingdoms of Britain, and patronized the theater in grand fashion; he had authorized and overseen the translation of the bible toward the production of a version acceptable to all his Christian subjects, and he had penned sensible-sounding arguments for theocratic kingship. He had also married a Catholic-leaning consort at a time of fierce anti-papal sentiment and established an

[11] See, for example, Fiona Donovan, *Rubens and England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 104.
[12] Malcolm Smuts, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Change at the Court of James I," in *The Mental World*, 110.

almost exclusively male court.[13] But if sexuality, theatricality, and the primacy of the written word are commonplaces in Jacobean biography—which seldom fails to mention the possibility of James's homosexuality, and the certainty of his misogyny—these vectors are far less frequently considered by art historians.

On the matter of sexuality, most relevant to our purposes, the Stuart king was in fact elliptically derided by contemporaries as a sodomite in political pamphlets, poetry, and prose. So many modern historians have accepted this 'deviant' depiction of King James that it is now "a staple of traditional historiography, which in turn describe[s] James as alternatively homosexual or bisexual, and use[s] his sexuality as an index to his supposed weakness of character."[14] While homophobic readings of James's character should be taken with hermeneutical suspicion, historians influenced by queer theory have made important and telling discoveries about the impact of James's 'putative homosexuality' on his reputation and (self) representation.

In the middle years of his reign, accusations of sodomy were often leveled at the king in view of his close relations with his favorites, above all George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, to whom he refers in one of their many letters as "my sweet child and wife."[15] In the words of a contemporary:

> the love the King showed was as amorously conveyed as if he had mistaken their sex and thought them ladies; which I have seen Somerset and Buckingham about to resemble in the effeminateness of their dressings; though in... wanton gestures they exceeded any part of woman-kind....[16]

With the love of men, however effeminate, was paradoxically associated the hatred of women. Thus the king's thinly veiled animosity toward his female predecessor, who had been frequently represented in popular and courtly culture as a Warrior Queen or Amazon, also helped seal the reputation of the homosocial Jacobean inner sanctum as equally anti-woman and anti-war.[17] Moreover, to King James is attributed what may be the most notoriously misogynist quip of the seventeenth-century. "But can she spin?" was reportedly the king's response when introduced to an English "maiden" widely acclaimed for the breadth of her learned linguistic skills.[18] The king's comment is a testament to the lasting currency of the distaff—also encountered in Chapter One's discussion of *Hercules and Omphale*—as that most domesticating and derisively feminine of attributes. That James avails himself of this timeworn masculinist trope points to his

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[13] The religious disposition of Anne of Denmark remains controversial, but see Martin J. Havran, "The Character and Principles of an English King: The Case of Charles I," *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 69 (Apr., 1983), 202-203; Albert J. Loomie, "King James I's Catholic Consort," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 34 (Aug., 1971): 303-316.

[14] On the historical "freighting of James's putative homosexuality," see Curtis Perry, "The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 53 (Winter, 2000), 1055.

[15] David M. Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 175.

[16] Cited by Caroline Bingham, "Seventeenth-Century Attitudes toward Deviant Sex," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 1 (Spring, 1971), 461.

[17] On James' anti-Elizabethan policies and rejection of literary and dramatic images of viragos, amazons, and other powerful women, see Julie Crawford, "Fletcher's 'The Tragedie of Bonduca' and the Anxieties of the Masculine Government of James I," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 39 (Spring, 1999): 357-381.

[18] Quoted in Ibid., 364.

unwillingness to himself be cast as a 'distaff Hercules.' It also encapsulates his dismissively Juvenalian attitude toward educated women at court.

In view of an extant if posthumous image of King James framed in libelously gendered terms, the representational quandary Rubens faced is therefore rather obvious: in characterizing an unapologetically misogynist king as a passive engenderer of peace and prosperity he might also run the risk of feminizing—which is to say, further weakening and disempowering—a reputedly effeminate man. Yet given the numerous and vital presence of female figures in the Whitehall program, this is exactly the chance Rubens took—and with such successful results that James's scandalous sexuality and antifeminism have remained almost exclusively the province of literary critics and historians. In this concluding chapter, I therefore want to consider the representational uses of femininity to define and embody certain kinds of masculine power. In particular, I want to examine Rubens's employment of a 'tropological 'female figural group to suggest the active making and reproduction of peace, in vivid contrast to the far more static, even impotent public image of the English king who was styled 'pacificus rex.'

Ceiling Meaning

At the heart of Rubens's conceptual strategy for Whitehall, as I see it, is a representation of female same-sex desire embodied by *Peace Embracing Plenty*, the female couple found in the larger ensemble that makes up *The Peaceful Reign of King James* (Fig. 7). Although it first seems ironic that Rubens would create an image of *donna con donna* for a court in which issues of *uomo con uomo* were a longstanding source of cultural anxiety, I believe the female couple in fact serves to defuse these concerns. If not the inverse of James's suspected form of catamitical favoritism, images of essentialized, classicized female-female desire pointed to a distinctly different set of mores and values. In a world where no generic term or notion existed for a kind of same-sex desire similarly shared and experienced by men and women, depictions of intimacy or even overt displays of affection between women would have evoked a distinctly different set of values than the depiction or intimation of similar 'behaviors' among men. As pastoral and Arcadian art and literature of the period often demonstrate,[19] an idyllic Utopia of women chastely desiring women—a continuation in many respects of the feminized 'Dianic' realm of Renaissance Italy identified by Patricia Simons—was especially appealing to humanistically educated segments of a war-weary Caroline audience.[20]

Having partaken in the rewards of the great truce (1609-21) between Spain, England, and the Netherlands, only to witness its dismantling, Rubens spent the latter part of his career developing a pictorial vernacular not only of peace but of peacemaking, that is, of the re/generation and recuperation of a more pleasant and prosperous age. As we have seen, he had long placed sex difference and sexual dynamics in the service of allegorical meaning. However, for him femininity could connote strength as well as vulnerability and virtue as easily as vice—a fact demonstrated in equal measure at Whitehall by the sweet faced and supple-fleshed Victories, by the fearsome, haggish, female furies, and by the fierce athleticism of triumphal Athena, their nemesis. Mighty Mars and heroic Hercules play their parts in the London program as well—

[19] One thinks for example of Battista Guarini's exceedingly popular *Il Pastor Fido* (1590) in which a kissing contest between the nymphs would later provide the central conceit of Van Dyck's *Amaryllis and Mirtillo* (c. 1631-32). I hope to treat the relationship between this painting and Rubens's Whitehall Peace and Plenty in a future study.

[20] As the author has noted: "Diana, the very goddess of chastity and leader of an all-woman band, could in imaginative and visual terms be a sign for donna con donna relations of a decidedly embodied kind." See Patricia Simons, Lesbian (In)Visibility in Italian Renaissance Culture: Diana and Other Cases of *donna con donna*," *The Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 27 (1994), 109.

though Rubens's relentless God of war seems to incite violence in the kingdom as willingly as he tramples the discord he finds there. At Whitehall as in much of Rubens's imagery from the 1620s forward, the scales are therefore tipped in favor of the virtuous women whose feminine sociability evokes an ideal counterculture of gentility, beauty, and, not unimportantly, abundance both in number and figural form.

In Marie de Medici and chiefly, in the Infanta Isabel, Rubens had come to know women rulers who made the decision to fight the end of hostilities in Europe; to lay sieges, to seek allies, to negotiate with men and enemies in a manner both consistent with and diametrically opposed to the 'natural' gifts of the female sex. As a diplomat Rubens had acted, and would continue to act, as Isabel's proxy. But as a painter commissioned by Charles I, he would assume his designated role as Titian's heir and the seventeenth-century's greatest colorist; to the English he was a Flemish Venetian, the man who painted beautiful women. Thus although unprecedented even among court artists, Rubens's calculated collapse of diplomacy and painterly painting into a gendered heuristic of peacemaking, something he practiced as well as embodied, seems almost inevitable.

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The program for the Whitehall ceiling *in toto* is complex, though I do not think its images are directly interdependent in a clear or, at least, linear manner. This possibility is supported in part by the multiple vantage points from which the paintings are properly viewed, as Julius Held demonstrated in his revelatory correction of a re-installation of the ceiling done in the early or mid-eighteenth-century. Taking his cue from the oil study for the Whitehall program known as the 'Glynde' sketch (Fig. 8), Held surmised that the rectangular *Peaceful Reign* and the central oval of the *Apotheosis of the King* (Fig. 9) were meant to be seen in that order as the visitor makes his or her way from the entrance to the great hall. The *Union of the Crowns* (Fig. 10) and its respective allegorical ovals—hung 'upside down' in relation to the other four paintings—would have been best viewed by Charles, as the occupant of the 'Chair of State' as well as the guest as he or she departed the great hall.[21]

From a compositional standpoint, the configuration of the two female personifications reveals an important though not entirely novel departure for Rubens. Often, as we have seen, the artist's allegories communicate elaborate, combinatory iconographic meanings using the interaction and emotional involvement of 'heterosexual' figures and embodied abstractions, however mythical they might be. In both mythological and historical subjects—as, for example, *Samson and Delilah*—Rubens's male and female figures are routinely played off each other in erotic terms. In some cases the central male and female figures are portrayed as equally powerful moral or ethical adversaries, while in others, they are gendered more traditionally as virile aggressor and passive sexual object.[22] In other, often more personal, contexts, Rubens allowed for an intellectual pairing of conventional masculinity and exceptional femininity. He was especially fond of the mythological gods Hermes and Athena—and of their partnered two-headed form, the Hermathena. Yet it is notable that in contrast to certain Renaissance images, Rubens's version of the two Greek gods stops short of merging their differently-sexed bodies into a hermaphroditic form. Portrayed as a literal meeting of the minds, his Athena and Hermes are represented only from the neck-up, positioned head-to-head, Janus-like, the better to survey

[21] Julius S. Held, "Rubens's Glynde Sketch and the Installation of the Whitehall Ceiling," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 112 (May, 1970): 274-282. The current arrangement of the nine ceiling paintings follows Held's suggestion.
[22] Both Alpers and Rosenthal explore Rubens's eroticized figural pairings. See e.g. Alpers, *Making Rubens*, 141-151; Rosenthal, *Gender and Politics*, 70-79.

the realms before them (see e.g. Fig. 11). As Elizabeth McGrath has observed, in view of his contributions to the visual tradition of the hermathena, Rubens was subsequently associated with the emblematic pairing of the two Gods in their capacity as patrons of artists. [23]

Yet the union of *Peace* and *Plenty* in the Whitehall program is virtuous match-making of a different sort. In the preparatory Yale oil sketch and the allegorical ceiling program for which it was created, Rubens prominently employs two full-length, indisputably female characters in a tender, if not passionate, pairing formally akin to his male/female dyads. While Rubens has depicted women in physical and even sensual proximity prior to this point, as for example, in several scenes from the *Medici Cycle* and *Three Nymphs with a Cornucopia* (Fig. 12), the composition of homosocial female groups becomes far more widespread from the time of Whitehall. Of Rubens's earlier works, *Jupiter and Callisto* (Fig. 13, c. 1618) provides the most (superficially) similar corollary to *Peace Embracing Plenty*. However, by portraying the love of two 'biological' women—as opposed to the nefarious seduction of a nymph by a male God in the false form of a woman—Rubens has progressed to a far more daring conceit.

Indeed, it would be hard to determine whether the iconographical primacy art historians have attributed to a female couple locked in a tender embrace has more to do with the unspoken imperative to explain, or explain away, the novel pairing—or with the women's actual centrality to the scene's meaning, which has yet to be firmly established. The fact remains that although they occupy only a portion of the canvas, *Peace* and *Plenty* have long been assigned a key allegorical role, as personifications whose identities crucially epitomize (the reign of) King James, with whom they are associated through the proximate king's sweeping gesture. Since 1967, when Susan Shapiro proposed that the two women recall or represent the virtues of 'righteousness and peace' who have 'kissed each other' in Psalm 85 (KJV), most scholars have accepted this likelihood.[24] Tracing the possible influence of the Caroline poetics of Archbishop William Laud and John Donne on the tenor and content of Whitehall's program—as well as its roots in sixteenth-century Flemish allegorical tradition—I will argue that Rubens's pictorial idea instead derives from contemporary Arcadian poetics, and a more thematically appropriate and site-specific Psalm.

Charity, Good Government, and the Allegorical Language of Virtue

The Yale *Peace Embracing Plenty* (Fig. 14) is one of five sketches linked with Rubens's 1629 commission. The panel served as a study for the animated larger, multifigural composition known as *The Peaceful Reign of King James I* destined for Jones's carved and gilded soffit for the Whitehall ceiling. Here I concentrate on the oil sketch rather than the finished ceiling painting for one reason. In Rubens's preparatory excursus— viewed in isolation from the more populated Whitehall tableau—the relational, sensual quality of the women's allegorical enactment is all the more apparent. That Rubens portrayed the figures in a manner very close to the outcome and with obvious attentiveness and energy indicates a high level of engagement on his part.

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[23] Elizabeth McGrath, "Rubens's Musathena," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 50 (1987), 244.
[24] See Psalm 85:9-10 (KJV) "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land/Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Shapiro's theory (proposed in the exh. cat. New York, p. 67) is accepted, for example, in Julius S. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens. A Critical Catalogue* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 196, as well as, Peter C. Sutton and Marjorie E. Wieseman with Nico van Hout, *Drawn by the Brush: Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens* (New Haven and London; Yale University Press, 2004), 225.

Compared to other oil sketches or figure studies for the Whitehall project such as *Mercury and a Yeoman* (Fig. 15)*,* the study for *Peace and Plenty* is wonderfully realized and suggestive. In it, Rubens spares no detail, lavishing painterly care on the exuberant folds of the women's classicized attire and forming intricate twists in their golden hair. Even in this early study the artist has given distinctive features to two women possessed of nearly identical physical traits. They are already sufficiently individualized to suggest the youthfulness of the rose and blue-clad *Plenty*, and the mature single-mindedness of the advancing *Peace*. There is, in fact, an intriguing inscrutability to the exchange of glances between the two women, whose expressions are neither more nor less elaborated than the architectonic backdrop, about which more will be said. As is so often the case with Rubens, bare female flesh—here the soft arch of Peace's muscular shoulder and disproportionately long forearm—is softly articulated in a range of colder hues and glassy highlights. The prominent and strategically placed horn of the fruited cornucopia lends an erotic note, while the pointed parting of *Plenty's* plump fingers recalls the expressive hands of the recumbent Venuses of both Titian and Michelangelo.[25]

It is instructive to read art historians' descriptions of *Peace* and *Plenty*. For if in their interpretations they are unwilling to entertain the possibility that Rubens has captured something not merely 'friendly' but rather passionate, sentimental, or erotic transpiring between the women in the image—reticence revealed by the immediate categorization of the women as abstractions—the representative Rubens scholar, whether male or female, is nonetheless unable to resist describing the action itself in conventionally romantic human terms. As the most recent catalogue entry explains: "The personification of Peace tenderly embraces her counterpart embodying Peace or Abundance."[26] No mention is made of the effect or distinctiveness of this embrace. It is therefore challenging to form an image in one's mind based on a clinical report in which the curator's "personification" and "counterpart" are linked somewhat awkwardly with the phrase "tenderly embraces her."

With typical perspicacity, Kristin Lohse Belkin gives this reading: "There are two lovely young women locked in a warm embrace, symbolizing that Peace […] and Plenty are the benefits of wise rulership."[27] Yet implicit in this description is the assumption that the reader/beholder will mentally transform the "lovely young women locked in a warm embrace" into symbols as effortlessly as does the writer. A further interpretive feat is also expected, for not only are the women to be seen as inanimate 'symbols' of Peace and Plenty but those abstract notions themselves are to symbolize, perhaps reify, 'benefits' of good governance. The fully worked out formula might thus be a circular one: the embrace of Peace and Plenty results in a third condition, 'wise rulership,' that is predicated on but also causal of the union of the two virtues as goods, or benefits. The message advanced through this transmogrative allegorical logic is that James I, a king who avoided war, was the best kind of benefactor (maker of goods) as a result of his accepting and returning conditions of Peace and Plenty in a continually charitable exchange of benefits for and from his loving subjects.

Because there is no existing contract or description of the program's iconography by the artist or his patron, scholars have gleaned the allegorical gist of the canvas from multiple sources. Foremost among these is a printed key plan designed in the eighteenth-century for

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[25] See, for example, Michelangelo/Pontormo's *Venus and Cupid* (1532-34) Accademia, Florence and Titian's *Venus of Urbino,* (1538) Uffizi.

[26] Peter C. Sutton and Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Drawn by the Brush*, exh. cat. (New Haven and New York: Yale UP, 2004). The entry is Sutton's.

[27] Kristin Lohse Belkin, *Rubens*, (London: Phaidon, 1998) 259.

visitors wishing to survey the first fully realized example of Palladian architecture in England.[28] In the key plan (Fig. 16), the contents of each image are clearly spelled out, e.g. "King James the First on the THRONE pointing to PEACE Embracing PLENTY." Accordingly, a scholarly consensus has developed from the combined aids of this Enlightenment cheat-sheet, James's self-declared and publicized reputation for peacemaking,[29] and the familiar, well-established identities of Rubens's favorite mythological characters and their attributes. As Julius Held, who is responsible in large part for establishing the standard iconography, succinctly puts it:

> That the two figures of women at the left represent Peace and Plenty (or Abundance) has never been questioned; nor can there be any doubt about the role of Mercury wielding the caduceus, the traditional symbol of peace.[30]

The allegory's hinge, by this reading, is the joining of two civic virtues in an embrace which happens to be one of the most affectionate and believably sincere to be found among any of Rubens's coupled subjects, male and/or female.

The import and meaning of the coupling is further complicated by the fact that, though commonly linked, neither personification claims a standardized or consistent iconography. Peace and Plenty do not figure among the theological or cardinal virtues, though Peace, like Justice, is a fixture of the rhetoric of good government. In an early use of personifications in James's royal imagery, the 1599 frontispiece of the *Basilikon Doron*, (Fig. 17) the king's sacred word is allegorically framed by triumphant personifications of 'Pax' and 'Amor,' rather than Peace and Plenty. Perhaps Love, poised to freely offer her oversized heart, was deemed less desirable than Abundance once the king of Scotland assumed the throne of England.

Perhaps, too, the two notions, Amor and Abundance, were somewhat interchangeable. For in formal terms, Charity—whose secular name is simply 'love'—"sometimes echoes the classical Abundance, with her horn of plenty, brimming cup, bunches of grapes as well as nurslings."[31] Writing in the 1870s in *Fors Clavigera* even so searching an observer as Ruskin seems to have confused Charity and cornucopian Plenty or Abundance in just this way in his analysis of Giotto's Arena chapel allegory of 'Karitas.' (Fig. 18, c. 1305) In his exegesis of the Trecento fresco and the uses and abuses of symbols in general, the Victorian writer observed:

> His Charity tramples upon bags of gold - has no use for them. She gives only corn and flowers; and God's angel gives her, not even these - but a Heart.

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[28] Donovan, *Rubens and England*, 78. The description is also transcribed in Held, *Oil Sketches*, 193. The bibliography on Jones as a royal architect and designer of Stuart masques is vast, for a concise overview of his Italian influences see Joan Sumner Smith, "The Italian Sources of Inigo Jones's Style," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 94 (Jul., 1952): 200-208. But see also Roy Strong, *Britannia triumphans : Inigo Jones, Rubens and Whitehall Palace* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1981). Although, as Held and others have shown, the author makes a number of highly speculative interpretations of Rubens's ceiling, see also Per Palme, *Triumph of Peace: a Study of the Whitehall Banqueting House*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957).

[29] James I's motto was '*Beati pacifici'* (Blessed are the Peacemakers). Ibid., 104. On the role of peace in James I's self-fashioning and iconography see also Gregory Martin, *The Ceiling Decoration of the Banqueting Hall*, ed. Arnout Balis, 2 vols. Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard (Oostkamp, Bel: Grafikon, 2005)152-153.

[30] Held, *Oil Sketches*, 193.

[31] Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*: *The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Athenaeum, 1985) 284.

> Giotto is quite literal in his meaning, as well as figurative. Your love is to give food and flowers, and to labour for them only.[32]

However, Ruskin has gotten it wrong in this instance, since Charity does not receive a heart, but offers her own. With the dry pronouncement "[y]our love is to give food and flowers, and to labor for them only," he rather skeptically, one might say secularly, reads the image against the theological grain, investing a Christian virtue he knows well with a disappointing and decidedly mundane, even transactional, nature.[33]

Charity becomes for Ruskin a love defined by material gifts disproportionately received and given for the love the figure 'receives' is of less value ("not even these") than the goods she proffers. Notwithstanding Ruskin's misreading of the directionality of Giotto's image—perhaps best understood as demonstrating the abundance that comes to those who give deeply of themselves to God—his larger point seems to be that in an allegory of the relationship between God and God's creatures, reciprocity—however asymmetrical—is the guiding force. From Giotto's time to Rubens's, reciprocity and relationship move increasingly to the forefront of allegorical representation, just as the allegorical mode itself becomes equally applicable to civic and theological virtues.

Indeed, Giotto's isolated personifications heralded even more complicated allegories of faith and virtue, gradually extended by Italian artists from spiritual to civic, though not necessarily secular, contexts. That peace and abundance are among the benefits of wise rule we have known from visual sources since the advent in 1348 of Lorenzetti's inventively genre-crossing fresco cycle, the *Allegory of Good Government* (Fig. 19). With Charity relegated to a diminutive role as a grotesque winged creature buzzing around the head of 'Sienna,' Peace and the novel 'Magnanimity,' take their place among the four cardinal virtues, Peace reclining peacefully, and Magnanimity, seated upright and dispersing gifts from a bowl resting on her knees (Fig. 20).[34]

With its public and engaging combination of civic and theological virtues, Lorenzetti's tableau was quite possibly called to mind when, more than two centuries later, the Flanders-based Hans Vredeman de Vries painted a hopeful allegory (Fig. 21) of the imminent and ideally, good, government of the Spanish king, Philip II, who had subdued the rebellious city of Antwerp in 1585.[35] The painting was designated for that city's town hall. Like Lorenzetti, Vredeman composed a setting in which the personifications interact with historical figures in the same time and place—yet in the Flemish image the pageant-like setting is festively out of doors. Vredeman added a number of 'lesser' virtues to his ensemble, and, undoubtedly keeping the Catholic king in mind, some newly designated vices, such as "Reformation." While the more maleficent

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[32] Quoted in Dana Brand, "A Womb with a View: The 'Reading' Consciousness in Ruskin and Proust,' *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 18, 497.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Warner, *Monuments*., 154-157. On the role of Peace in Lorenzetti's Sienna frescoes, see Joseph Polzer "Ambrogio Lorenzetti's "War and Peace" Murals Revisited: Contributions to the Meaning of the "Good Government Allegory" *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 23 (2002), 71 and 81-91. As Polzer notes, the location of Peace in Lorenzetti's allegory and "her central location and exceptional appearance underscores the universal civic idea, expressed time and again in medieval civic thought and texts, that the aim of good government is the preservation of peace: the *pax*, or *tranquillitas, civium*." Peace's "seductive Venus-like figure" (240) is noted in C. Jean Campbell, "The City's New Clothes: Ambrogio Lorenzetti and the Poetics of Peace," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83 (Jun., 2001):. 240-258.

[35] On this image, see Christopher Petty Heuer, "The city rehearsed: Architecture, rhetoric, and print in the arts of Hans Vredeman de Vries (1526--1609) " Ph.D. Diss. University of California, Berkeley (2003), 88-89.

personifications along the painting's bottom margin find themselves nearly cast out of the festive proceedings, elsewhere numerous and mostly male couples rush together to shake hands as Antwerp's bustling seaside setting unfolds in the distance.

Subtly inserted behind these historical characters, one of Vredeman's characteristically classical architectonic structures frames a picture within the picture. Within the fictively painted, and importantly feminized, realm of this embedded image two diminutive pairs of women embrace and kiss, respectively. For those who would not have grasped the reference, the feigned painting is helpfully inscribed: "PSAL. 85" a reference to the oft-cited passage: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Given the national and notional correspondences, it might be assumed Rubens, inspired by Vredeman, chose the same scriptural topos for Whitehall, similarly opting, as has been argued, to illustrate the Psalm 'literally,' by using female personifications. [36]

While I do think Rubens may have been inspired by Vredeman's allegory in some respects, I do not believe he borrowed the Psalm from this or any other source. I would like to offer another possibility that is more consistent with the learned artist's careful approach to personification and textual sources.[37] There are good reasons to dismiss the possibility that Rubens's women are rightly viewed as Mercy/Righteousness and Truth/Peace. Based on the attributes assigned to these and other 'similar' personifications throughout his allegorical works, it can be argued that Rubens differentiated between Truth and Peace and Righteousness (or Justice) and Plenty. For example, while he sometimes chose to personify Truth in an allegorical pairing, in such cases, the youthful virtue's male counterpart is typically her elderly Saturnine Father, Time.[38] Moreover, as in the Whitehall figure, the identity of Abundance, or Plenty, as Rubens would have it, is nearly always accompanied by her traditional cornucopia, or 'horn of plenty.' A careful reader, Rubens would have noted that the associations described by the Psalmist: to be 'met together' and to 'have kissed' are distinct, if potentially consequential, activities undertaken by two different sets of virtues. A conflation of Mercy, Righteousness, Truth, Peace, and Plenty would, not, I think, appeal to an artist who, in other contexts, had shown a considerable desire to clarify his precisely worked out allegorical iconography.[39]

Perhaps most importantly, in the narrative trajectory of Psalm 85 the kissing has taken place, its conclusion a herald of future, that is, contemporary Flemish, events. Conversely, part of the wonder of the Yale sketch is its capture of the pregnant moment between meeting and kissing, an instant equally well represented in Rubens's larger multi-figural sketch and in the final ceiling panel itself with Plenty open mouthed in clear anticipation of Peace's advancing lips. The consummation of Peace and Plenty's encounter is thus in a state of perpetual

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[36] Ibid., as Heuer notes, Vredeman's allegory is not mentioned in the 1615 inventory of the Town Hall, making it difficult to know if Rubens had seen it in that setting. See also, Jan Van der Stock, *Antwerp, Story of a Metropolis*, ex. cat., (Antwerp, 1993). Regarding Vredeman's influence in England, it is notable that Inigo Jones based a number of his scenic designs for Jacobean and Caroline court masques on architectural prints by the Flemish artist, for which see John Peacock, "Inigo Jones's Stage Architecture and Its Sources," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 64 (Jun., 1982), 208-209.

[37] Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, Vol. I (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), 196.

[38] Images of a personified Truth and Time are found in both the *Medici Cycle* and the *Eucharist Tapestries*.

[39] See Magurn, *Letters*, No. 242 for the well-known letter to Justus Sustermans containing an explanation by Rubens's of one of his allegories from the 1630s, in which he provides a description of the *Horrors of War* (Pitti Palace) which features Mars and a female personification of a devastated Europe. "As for the subject of the picture," he writes, "it is very clear […]."

suspension, its outcome as yet uncertain—even dependent—upon Athena's ability to keep Mars at bay.

A positive outcome seems more assured in Vredeman's allegory, which effectively assures its viewers of the affirmative divine response to the Psalmist's plea: "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" The work's understandably contrite yet optimistic tone is echoed in a further scriptural reference, a painted citation of Luke 2:14: "*Gloria in Supremis Deo/Et in Interna Pax Viventibus/De bona Voluntate*" [Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men]. But despite the fact that Vredeman's Psalm does not appear to provide a textual referent for Rubens's allegory, it would be wrong to ignore conceptual correspondences between his *Peace Embracing Plenty* and Vredeman's earlier, though partial, allegorization of Kingly beneficence in terms of harmonious meetings between women-as-virtues.

One wonders, in this regard, if the affectionate interactions between Vredeman's personified female pairs were envisioned by the Renaissance artist as more decorous and effective symbols of an idyllically peaceful reign than an embracing Philip II and Alexander Farnese would have been (Fig. 22). For while the Spanish King and his trusted nephew, the Duke of Parma and Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, are clearly moving toward a show of niceties, the massive shield of Antwerp functions not only as a symbolic gift but as a physical obstacle to direct contact between the two male bodies. Vredeman, who was likely a Calvinist, may have included the feminized personification of the Psalmic virtues to enhance his image's propagandistic authority—as a grounding scriptural topos or counterpoint to the obviously imagined play of pictorially 'real' and living historical figures. But the representation of the embracing female personifications can also be read as the incarnation of an abstract ideal of peaceful rulership that is vividly activated through the narrative/emblematic device of affectionate women.

Vredeman was not the first to employ this conceit in quasi-secular courtly art. A somewhat earlier example of royal propaganda, this time by a Fleming working in England, provides a further instance of allegorical peacemaking gendered female. In Lucas de Heere's slightly earlier *Allegory of the Tudor Succession* (Fig. 23, c. 1572) past and present rulers including, from left, Philip II and Mary Tudor, Henry VIII, Prince Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth, form an anachronous group portrait framed parenthetically by allegorical personifications. The allegory presents a less than subtle critique of Catholic, Marian rancorousness. Thus while a shield and club-wielding Mars bursts into the Catholic side of the scene to align himself with Mary Tudor and her one-time Spanish consort, ladylike Peace moves to oppose him from the right, blithely trampling the trappings of war to take the hand of the (future) Protestant Queen. At Elizabeth's side, a bare-breasted Plenty follows with an enormous fruit-filled cornucopia. It is not only the presence of the two female figures (whose splendid gold and pink garments are echoed in Rubens's Yale sketch) but their tender and mannered gestures that project the imagined temper of the incoming sovereign's reign and its "nurture of concord and harmony."[40]

[40] The painting was a gift from Elizabeth I to her courtier, Francis Walsingham. Two additional versions of the image were made, c. 1592. The image is reproduced in *Dynasties, Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, ed. Karen Hearn. exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 1995), 81, cat. No. 35. See also no. 29 in the same catalogue, a 1569 painting by The Monogrammist HE (Hans Eworth?): *Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses*. Further compositional parallels might be drawn between the Tudor and Stuart allegories; in both a seated king, with scepter in hand, is framed by a columned space inhabited by allegorical figures including Peace, Plenty, and Mars.

This unusual multifigural allegory contrasts with later and more common single portraits of the queen. Inasmuch as de Heere portrays the queen in distinctly homosocial, if more conventionally feminine, terms, his painting is also at odds with subsequent, historically allusive, images emphasizing Elizabeth's military savvy and 'princely rule,' of which George Gower's *Armada Portrait* of ca. 1588 (Fig. 24) is one example.

Donne and the Likeness of Pleasure

Like Rubens, John Donne (1572-1631) is a figure whose life and works spanned the reigns of Elizabeth, James, and Charles. However, in contrast to the more reserved Rubens, ever solicitous and clearly preoccupied with his social standing, Donne, the son of an iron monger, seems to have devoted his youth to libertinage before taking an Augustinian turn effected by the discovery of the Church of England and his one true love. From 1601, he lived in relative poverty having "wrecked his career by a secret marriage with the young niece of his employer's wife."[41] Donne, who had two Jesuit brothers, was subsequently involved in "Catholic Controversies" during the early years of James's reign. Ultimately siding with the Church of England, he took Holy Orders in 1615, becoming Dean of St. Paul's in 1621. Even following his ordination, however, Donne wrote fiery and conflicted poetry, often religious in nature yet disarmingly passionate in tone, none of which was published until two years after his death.[42]

There are interesting biographical and intellectual correspondences between the formerly Catholic Donne, Anglican convert and priest and Rubens, the Protestant-born diplomat and eventual exponent of Hispano-Flemish Catholic dogma. Yet the two men appear not to have known each other, despite the fact that they shared a number of familiars and acquaintances including Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and of course, King Charles I, for whom Donne occasionally preached and Rubens occasionally painted.[43]

The connoisseurial, erudite and (at least latently) Catholic character of the two men's overlapping social milieu as courtly artists has been well established.[44] More relevant still is their shared affection and respect for ancient sources and modern tastes, of which Donne was no less an arbiter than Rubens. Within the broader spheres of elite Tudor-Stuart literary culture, the presence can be discerned of a classical imaginary—to which both men seem to have subscribed—in which utopian perfection is invoked through feminized pastoral or Arcadian imagery. The 1590s, for example, saw the publication of the various versions of both Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Sidney's *Arcadia*; open-ended political allegories which correspond with London's rapid urbanization and rule by a worrisomely unmarried queen who remained the perpetual object of detestable (often Catholic) foreign suitors.[45] Within an irretrievable realm of 'truly' virginal love and beauty, female same-sex desire expresses a coveted variety of spiritual

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[41] Helen Gardner, ed., *The Metaphysical Poets*, (New York: Penguin, 1972), 309.

[42] On Donne's life and works, see for example, George Williamson, *Six Metaphysical Poets*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1967, 43-93. For a pithy assessment of Donne's dystopian tendencies see Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 62-69.

[43] Many of these relationships were formed in the Jacobean era, for which see Linda Levy Peck, *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Donne, to whom 160 sermons are attributed, preached most often at St. Paul's but also at Lincoln's Inn. For Donne's sermons see, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson, (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1953-62).

41See Jonathan Brown and John Elliott, eds. *The Sale of the Century: Artistic Relations Between Spain and Great Britain, 1604-1655* (New Haven: Yale UP in association with the Museo del Prado, 2002); Fiona Donovan, *Rubens and England*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002); Jeffrey Muller, *Rubens: the Artist as Collector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989).

[45] Lawrence Manley, "Fictions of Settlement: London 1590," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 88 (Spring, 1991): 201-224.

and moral probity necessarily beyond the reach of bellicose and concupiscent men.[46] An idiosyncratic poem from Donne's Elizabethan days—he entered the Inns of Court in 1591—vividly conveys such a poetics of female to female desire.

Donne's 'Sapho to Philaenis,' written circa 1590, was published posthumously in 1633, only shortly after the time Rubens had executed the Whitehall paintings. Not surprisingly, its subject matter has proven thorny for many of his critics. Helen Gardner, Donne's respected Oxford editor, found the poem sufficiently uncharacteristic and objectionable to warrant consignment to the poet's *dubia.* Other critics, reluctant to include a love poem sustained by female personae as part of Donne's otherwise traditional elegies, invented a new Ovidian category for it: the "heroical epistle" (rightly) thought to have been derived by the English poet from the Latin author's 'Heroides.'[47] Yet still other critics, rather than attempting to distance Donne authorially from 'Sapho to Philaenis' have simply dismissed the possibility of his use or appropriation of a female homo-poetics. In the words of a recent biographer:

> In 'Sapho to Philaenis' he wrote what has been welcomed as 'the first female homosexual love poem in English' as if he was a precursor to Katherine Philips in the celebration of 'female friendship.' But in his poem the relationship between the women is not, and never has been, unalterably lesbian.[48]

By qualifying the 'lesbianism' in Donne's poem in terms of the women's past and present male lovers, the author imposes an anachronistic notion of sexual preference on Donne's subjects in an attempt to convince the reader that it "repeats a familiar message to women: every woman needs a man, they are made to fit together."[49] Against this negative, or privative, reading of the poem, however, Janel Mueller persuasively identifies a specifically utopian lesbian trope, asserting that female same-sex desire was not only real and meaningful to Donne but that it appears to have had positive conations for him in certain poetical contexts.[50]

Valerie Traub investigates the origins and manifestations of early modern female same-sex desire in her groundbreaking book, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England.* Tracing period examples of 'pastoral' female homoeroticism to their source in Ovid, Traub focuses, for example, on dramatic treatments of the popular narrative of Diana and

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[46] There are numerous possible sources for such a conceptualization. Beyond the general interest throughout the period in fabricating ideal forms of government and community—derived in large part from the publication of Thomas More's 1516 *Utopia*—one could point to the widespread acceptance of a Platonic 'one sex model': "The notion, so powerful after the eighteenth century, that there was something concrete and specific inside, outside, and through-out the body that defined male as opposed to female, and provided the attraction of opposites, was absent in the Renaissance." See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,1990), 133. Classical tropes of self-sufficient female harmony such as the nine muses, three graces, and the many feminized virtues later personified as 'women' by early modern writers and artists in contrast to the historical association of men with war would also have provided a precedent.

[47] James Holstun, "'Will you Rent our Ancient Love Asunder?': Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell, and Milton," *ELH*, Vol. 54 (Winter, 1987): 835-867.

[48] David L. Edwards, *John Donne: Man of Flesh and Spirit* (Cambridge and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 208.

[49] Ibid, 209.

[50] Janel Mueller, "Troping Utopia: Donne's Brief for Lesbianism," in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, James Grantham Turner, Ed., (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1993): 182-207

Callisto. [51] According to her taxonomy of early modern literary lesbianism, Peace and Plenty—as 'conventionally feminine'—might be viewed as an enactment of a "chaste femme love" which "forms the basis of a community forged through female affections."[52]

But whereas Donne's poem states its lesbian purpose openly and cannot therefore be completely heterosexualized—as Sappho's own fragments often have been[53]—Rubens's *Peace Embracing Plenty* claims neither an unambiguous literary or pictorial source, nor does it pretend to illustrate a historical event. [54] What might be termed the narrative presence of desire in the image has therefore been mainly ignored, despite the fact that the Whitehall couple seems the very inversion of the Donnean 'message' proposed above; Rubens's women, placed lovingly together and decisively apart from the rest of the scene, are emphatically "made to fit together," no man needed.

One explanation for the scholarly ambivalence toward an amorous female coupling in Rubens's art is that there is no methodological exemplar or precedent for exploring the presence of lesbian desire in his oeuvre, even by authors sensitive to the eroticized play of sex and gender in so many of his works.[55] On the literary side of Rubens's age, however, the search for early modern sapphists has been rewarding[56] with the "Matchless Orinda," the aforementioned, Katherine Philips, receiving the lion's share of attention for her "inescapably erotic" woman-centered discourse.[57] More surprisingly, the study of female same-sex desire has also extended beyond the aegis of the woman writer. In recent years a 'lesbian' poem—unexpectedly penned by a canonical male poet of the English Renaissance—has become the focal point of multiple

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[51] Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 229.
[52] Ibid., 231
[53] Ovid was the original perpetrator, fictionalizing an Attic parody of Sappho into a "reconfiguration" in which, with the addition of Phaon, "Sappho is seduced away both from her art and from her female companions by a self-destructive heterosexual obsession and finally commits suicide." Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics*,1550-1714, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 29. See also Stein, *op. cit*., 1-40.
[54] Sappho (late 6th/7th century B.C.E.), was of course, a real poet, famous in her time, who lived on the island of Lesbos. Only one "certainly complete poem" of Sappho's is known to exist today, though multiple fragments were rediscovered in the early years of the twentieth century. 'Longinus,' the first-century author of *On the Sublime* quotes one of her poems "as an example of brilliance in isolating and juxtaposing the symptoms of intense erotic desire." Pamela Gordon, from the introduction to *Sappho, Poems and Fragments*, Stanley Lombardo, Trans., (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002) vii. Much less is known about the poet Philaenis. "[T]he sources of early modern knowledge of her appear to have been *The Greek Anthology* and two lewdly misogynistic epigrams by Martial. The first of Martial's epigrams opens: [That tribade Philaenis sodomizes boys, and with more rage than a husband in his stiffened lust, she works eleven girls roughly every day.]" Andreadis, *Sappho*, 44.
[55] Although literary critical in method and Dutch in focus, Jane Gallop's essay still excites and inspires: "Annie Leclerc Writing a Letter, with Vermeer," in *The Poetics of Gender*, Nancy K. Miller, ed., (New York: Columbia, 1986), 137-156. Art historians, though much less conspicuously, have explored the role of male same-sex desire in the representation and reception of early modern artistic subjects. In Baroque studies, male artists famous for conflicted or unstable emotional lives and delectably 'effeminate' male subjects form the core of this body of work; one thinks above all of Caravaggio and Guido Reni. See, for example, Richard Spear, *The "Divine" Guido* (New Haven an London: Yale UP, 1997), and Leo Bersani, *Carvaggio's Secrets* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997).
[56] Katherine Philips (1631-1664), Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Aphra Behn (1640-1689) and Delarivier Manley (1667?-1724) have received considerable scholarly attention; Traub provides a bibliography of recent studies arranged by subject in her *ELH* review, *op cit*.,
[57] Ibid, 56. "Philips's contribution was to appropriate the cavalier conventions of platonic heterosexual love, with their originally platonic and male homoerotic feeling, and to use those conventions and that discourse to describe her relations with women." 57.

essays and articles investigating the seventeenth-century status of love between women in Tudor and Stuart England.[58]

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Does a Baroquist, encouraged by a sister discipline's discovery of an early modern female homoerotics, dare say more about one of painting's most titillating same-sex encounters; about Rubens's careful depiction of Plenty's thumb as it subtly edges over satin folds to Peace's bared breast? Of the male painter's convincing rendering of Plenty's surprise at her own good fortune, of eyes met and affection reciprocated? Here I think Donne is a welcome interlocutor, for his poem, which speaks fittingly of one woman's difficulty in 'drawing' her lover either to herself or to her poetic work, treats also of pleasures both concealed and revealed by the coming together of female bodies:

> Menn leaue behinde them that which their sin showes
> And are as theefes tract, which rob when it snowes
> But of our dalliance, no more signes there are,
> Then fishes leaue in streames, or birds in aire:
> And betweene vs all sweetness may bee had
> All, all that nature yealds, or art cann adde:
> My two lips, Eyes, thighes differ from thy two
> But soe as thine from one another doe
> And oh noe more: The likenes beeinge such
> Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
> Hand to strange hand, lip to lip none denies
> Why should they brest to brest or thighs to thighs?[59]

The uncanny ekphrastic potential of Donne's poem when paired with Rubens's painting is, I think, noteworthy—and not only for the superficial commonalities. Most importantly, the poem, about the genesis of which practically nothing is known, expresses a kind of gendered internal coherence that seems to reside equally in Rubens's composition.

Significantly, both painting and poem argue for feminine sameness as an ideal. In Rubens's sketch the two buxom women with their fair hair, pink complexions, and dark eyes are nearly mirror images, as alike in appearance as they are in virtue. Similarly, Donne's *Sapho*, the tenth muse herself, confesses: 'Mee in my glasse I call thee,' such that 'Likeness begets such strange self-flatterie/That touchinge my selfe all seemes done to thee.' As Mueller remarks:

> Sapho knows the self-empowering pleasures of narcissism, of auto-eroticism, of mirror-gazing, as means by which an acculturated female invests her body

[58] See Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics*,1550-1714 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); James Holstun, "'Will You Rent our Ancient Love Asunder?': Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell, and Milton," *ELH* Vol. 54 (Winter 1987): 835-867; Elizabeth Harvey, "Ventriloquizing Sappho: Ovid, Donne, and the Erotics of the Feminine Voice," *Criticism*, Vol. 31 (1989):115-138; Mueller, "Troping Utopia," (as in note 8); Stella P. Revard, "The Sapphic Voice in Donne's 'Sapho to Philaenis,' in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, Eds., (Columbia, MO: UP Missouri, 1993):63-76; Stella Infante, "Donne's Incarnate Muse and His Claim to Poetic Control in 'Sapho to Philaenis,' *in Representing Women in Renaissance England*, Claude Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, Eds. (Columbia, MA: UP Missouri, 1997): 93-106.

[59] *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, Vol. II, Gary A. Stringer, Ed. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000) 409.

and her psyche with a sense of worth and gains the confidence to be a subject, not merely an object, of desire.

The poem's oscillating themes of mutual and self-pleasure reverberate in Rubens's image, where the presence of the ambiguously phallic horn of plenty must again be recalled. Peace embraces Plenty in the paintings but Plenty embraces Peace as well. Thus the reciprocity of the women's gesture is emphasized by the parallel, equal-sign arrangement of their circling arms so that 'between [them] all sweetness may be had.' As Sapho declares, of this 'loving madness' there will be no greater reminder; yet neither nature can 'yealde' nor art can 'adde' to the completion of two such attractive likenesses.

Donne's trope of lesbian desire likewise conjures the notion of unadulterated female forms. "Thy body is a naturall Paradise," 'Sapho' proclaims, "In whose self vnmanurd, all pleasure lies/Nor needs perfection, why shouldst thou than/Admitt the tillage of a harsh rough man?" Mueller associates Donne's evocation of womanly "paradisical plenitude" with his poetic exploration of "how utopian erotics and economics might be gendered all female."[60] It is not necessary to recount here the whole of her reading to suggest that Donne's optimistic gendering of utopian economies, in both the structural and fiscal sense of that term, seems to have a pictorial twin in Rubens's Whitehall study. The virtues of material Abundance and political Peace were regarded by Donne and Rubens as benefits of sound political and economic decision-making; virtues whose purity and generative interdependence were only heightened by their conceptualization as somehow outside the world of men.

Glory, Laud, and Honor: Jonson, Ripa, and James

Whitehall itself was no such segregated space. In the great hall, women and men might be separated by gender on occasions of high ceremonial but they also came together to perform as actors in the celebrated 'masques' of Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones.[61] Masque culture is usually mentioned in studies of Rubens's pictorial program if only because the Banqueting House was conceived from its inception as a courtly theater of sorts. English masques—spectacularly staged and costumed dance-dramas—have been described as "the theatrical equivalent of an emblem book."[62] Since they are often approached as written works, it is easy to forget that the masque was viewed in its own time in primarily visual, rather than literary, terms. Hermetically sealed, (Neo) Platonic masques by Jonson were much loved by King James and his consort, Anne of Denmark, though from an ideological standpoint, the later, Caroline, works—particularly the slyly subversive 'anti-masques'—offer greater insight into court politics and culture, as Roy Strong has noted.[63] When Rubens visited London in 1629-30, Jones and Jonson were on the brink of the fractious feud that would end, in 1631, with their parting company.[64] Yet the masques with which Rubens would have been familiar were the earlier products of an

[60] Mueller, *op cit*., 196.
[61] "The great Hall of the Banqueting House served a number of functions, none more important than the ceremonial reception of foreign Ambassadors. For such occasions, railings were placed on either side of the central 'nave'; behind them, and facing the centre, were the invited guests, the ladies of the Court along the left wall, lords and gentlemen along the right wall." Held, "Rubens's Glynde Sketch," 280.
[62] Jerzy Limon, "The Masque of Stuart Culture,' in *The Mental World,* 210.
[63] Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450-1650*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 154.
[64] See D. J. Gordon, "'Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 13 (1949): 152-78.

unparalleled, though quarrelsome, artistic partnership between Jonson the playwright and Jones the architect-designer.[65]

One of the best documented Jacobean works, Jonson's "Masque of Queens" (1609) exists in an autograph manuscript with the author's extensive explanatory notes and blocking.[66] Here, among the list of characters—Fame, Heroic Virtue, Charm, Penthesilea (Queen of the Amazons), Tomyris, Zenobia, *inter alia*—one finds several of the personages Rubens was to depict in his paintings. The cast list of queenly historical and mythological heroines gives a clear sense of the symbolic and aristocratic nature of the genre. One is not surprised to learn that among the participants in this incredibly costly spectacle were the Countesses Arundel,[67] Bedford, Clifford, and Essex in addition, of course, to Queen Anne herself. Jonson provides detailed (retroactive) stage instructions, as for example:

> Here they alighted from their chariots and danced forth their first dance, then a second immediately following it; both right curious and full of subtle and excellent changes, and seemed performed with no less spirits than those they personated.[68]

With such descriptions in mind, one can (almost) imagine the various countesses, attired in the classical costume of famous 'dames' of ages past, dancing to the light melodies of cornets and violins. But even leaving imagination aside, the consonance of Jonson's play and Rubens's paintings, no less populated by spirited goddesses, genii, and 'personated' female virtues, is noteworthy. Rubens's compositions, notable for their complex and vigorous choreography, would have well suited the often classical and otherworldly temper of the masques performed (albeit briefly) on the floor below.[69]

Jonson is refreshingly straightforward in citing his sources for the 'Masque of Queens.' Of interest from an art historical point of view is a stage note describing a "Machina Versatilis" or revolving machine, in this case a throne, which:

> [S]uddenly changed, and in the place of it appeared *Fama bona* as she is described in Iconolog. Di Cesare Ripa, attired in white with white wings, having a collar of gold around her neck and a heart hanging from it.[70]

Clearly, by "Iconolog" Jonson refers to the, at the time relatively new, fully illustrated and now-canonical handbook of allegorical personifications, Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. Although it would not be at all surprising to encounter Ripa in a note from Jones, the neo-Palladian 'designer' and architect, it is interesting to see that Jonson, too, made use of a source so crucial to early modern

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[65] Rubens, who arrived in London in June of 1629 and departed in March of 1630, would have missed the performance of—though perhaps not the preparations for—Jonson's last masque, *Chloridia,* in 1631.
[66] See "The Masque of Queens" in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. Robert M. Adams, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 321-340.
[67] Adams suggests that the participating female 'actors' were given their choice of roles to play in the *Masque of Queens*. In view of Rubens's subsequent dedication of the print version of his *Battle of the Amazons* (1623) to Lady Arundel, one wonders if she may have played Penthesilea in this masque.
[68] Ibid., 339.
[69] Shortly after the installation of Rubens's canvases the performance of masques in the Banquet House was forbidden due to the king's justifiable concerns that the ceiling would be damaged by smoke.
[70] Ibid., 332.

artists. Jonson's precise adherence to Ripa's conception of 'Fame' is indicative, moreover, of the literal-mindedness of the Baroque allegorist in the Protestant English court, an outlook that would be similarly adopted by Rubens.

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Looking up 'Peace' and 'Plenty,' as Rubens undoubtedly did, in Cesare Ripa's 1603 edition of the *Iconologia*, one finds 'Abondanza' or Plenty (Fig. 24) is the book's first illustrated entry. [71] Standing on a flat plain, a garland-crowned woman with a flowing mantle rests her left hand on a large cornucopia. In her right hand are sprigs of grain. She ought to be depicted as pretty and graceful, Ripa tells us, as a good and desirable thing who is the opposite of abominable famine. She is also called 'Copia' and details of her originary relationship to the horn of plenty can be found in Book IX of Ovid's 'Transformationi.'[72] In the Yale oil sketch, we see that Rubens's seated figure closely resembles Ripa's prescribed *Abundance*. The scale of the horn of plenty and the female figure's light grasp of this eponymous attribute are almost identical; the flowing gown and fluttering attached mantle, though not green as Ripa suggests, are also similar.

Peace's origins are more complicated. Based as it is on an Augustan medal, Ripa's first entry (of thirteen) for '*Pace',* would have undoubtedly appealed to Rubens. It reads: "A lady: that in her left hand holds a Cornucopia, full of fruits, flowers, palms, with an olive branch, and in her right hand, a torch, with which she sets ablaze a pile of arms. The Cornucopia signifies abundance, mother and daughter of peace."[73] Additional elaboration is next provided about the significations of the attributes in terms of war and peace. To this explanation, Ripa adds a telling quotation that appears to be taken from Psalm 121(KJV 122): '*Fiat pax in virtute tua, & abundantia in turribus tuis*' [Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces]. The iconographer then concludes with the following: "For an explanation of the Cornucopia, we will use what we have said of the figure of Abundance."[74] Rather incredibly, none of Ripa's thirteen versions of Peace is illustrated, the idea evidently being that the aforementioned portrayals of Plenty or Abundance and her cornucopia might serve the same purpose.

We are thus left with some new possibilities. For one, the likelihood that the textual source behind Rubens's personifications of Peace and Plenty is not the one previously proposed by Shapiro and accepted by subsequent scholars. In contrast to Psalm 85, which may be described as having a more punitive and lamentative quality, the verse Ripa quotes from Psalm 122 sets a more appropriate tone for an homage to the patron's peace-loving, palace-dwelling, father. In addition to the Psalm's pairing of 'peace' and 'prosperity,' lines describing "thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David" correspond well to the prominence of the so-called Solomonic throne in Rubens's Whitehall images. Formal similarities between Rubens's Plenty and Ripa's '*Abondanza'* therefore imply greater reliance by the Flemish painter on the Italian source than is usually allowed.

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[71] Donovan notes that Inigo Jones followed Ripa's emblems very closely in his masque designs, but writes of the Whitehall personifications: "The complex symbolism described by Cartari or Ripa is absent in these images." *Rubens in England.,* 145.

[72] Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, [1603] (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970) 1-2.

[73] Ibid., 375. "*Donna, che nella sinistra mano tiene un Cornucopia, pieno di frutti, fiori, frondi, con un ramo d'ulio, & nella destra una facella, con la quale abbrucci un montone d'Arme. Il Cornucopia significa l'abbondanza, madre, & figliuola della pace."*

[74] Ibid., "*Per dichiaratione del Cornucopia, ne serviremo di quello, che habbiamo ditto nella figura dell'abbondannza*."

An additional argument in favor of Psalm 122 is Peace's lack of attributes. It is well known that Rubens painted out the caduceus he had originally placed in Peace's right hand, later entrusting it to Mercury.[75] Although the caduceus appears several times in Ripa's *Iconologia*, it is only associated with figures of Peace, or '*Pace*,' in two instances, one of them in combination with a horn of plenty.[76] Moreover, there is a third image from the *Iconologia,* which Rubens seems ultimately to have discarded as a model for his allegory. The seated figure of 'Public Felicity,' holds not only a horn of plenty but also, in her right hand, a caduceus—just as Rubens's Peace initially had. Naturally, public felicity is much to be desired, although in this case Ripa ascribes 'virtu' to the caduceus, which adds a slightly different valence to the conceit. In removing the caduceus, Rubens may therefore have sought to avoid confusion of his Psalm-derived allegory with a more consciously civic (or public) one.[77]

Furthermore, in emblematic terms, we now know Peace is just as likely as Plenty to display a Cornucopia. In fact, the two personifications were thought to be so similar in appearance that only one (Abundance) is illustrated by Ripa, while the other (Peace) is described—in a metaphorical heightening of their intimate relationship—as being both mother and daughter of the former. The possibility that Rubens wished to portray the two women as an actual 'mother and daughter' must nonetheless be rejected owing, I think, to what can only have been the intentionally erotic effect of Peace's rather aggressively sexual demeanor and exposed breast placed in 'opposition' to the more receptive, even passive, Plenty. By removing the wand of Hermes, and with it any alternative identities for Peace, Rubens stresses the women's self-contained and co-creative ontological status. That the two are in some ways becoming one is neatly echoed by the sensuous spiraling columns infused with an almost anthropomorphic corporeality, an architectural mirror-effect deployed with wonderful subtlety.

A final bit of evidence for my reading of the *Peaceful Reign of King James* is offered in a sermon by the man who would become the much-maligned Archbishop of Canterbury. Before he himself was executed, like his king and patron, for treason against the state William Laud (1573-1645) served as chaplain to Charles I. But even prior to Charles's accession, while he was still Dean of Gloucester, and 'chaplain in ordinary' to the king, Laud preached a sermon on June 19,' 1621 in the presence of then King James I at Wansted. Hence, in the same year that Rubens began to jockey for the Whitehall commission, Laud, the politician-priest for whom church and state were inseparable, related the allegorical sense of Psalm 122 to the earthly manifestation of holy kingship.[78]

Verses 6 and 7 of the Psalm: 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; let them prosper that love thee; Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy Palaces,' provide the pericope of Laud's sermon. It is a long discourse, Donnean in scope, though far less refined and cerebral than the sermons of Laud's sometime enemy, the ironmonger's son. Although it is not often mentioned, the occasion of Laud's sermon was King James' birthday, to which the preacher skillfully alludes in the following passage:

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[75] Sutton and Wieseman, *Drawn by the Brush*, 224-225. Pentimenti of the caduceus are appreciable in the Yale sketch; the scepter would have extended from Peace's hand across Plenty's shoulder.

[76] Yassu Okayama, *The Ripa Index*, (Doornispijk, Netherlands: Davaco, 1992), 207-209.

[77] Orazio Gentilleschi's Louvre, *Public Felicity* (ca. 1625), a painting commissioned by Marie de Medici and fully based on Ripa's prescription, is interesting in this regard.

[78] On Laud's High Churchmanship and divine right homiletics, see Charles A. Prior, "Ecclesiology and Political Thought in England, 1580–c. 1630," *The Historical Journal,* Vol. 48 (2005): 874ff; Jeffrey R. Collins, "The Restoration Bishops and the Royal Supremacy," *Church History*, Vol. 68, (Sep., 1999), 552-555.

> Again I cannot be so unthankful to God and my text, but that I must fit one circumstance more to *Rogate Pacem*, pray for peace. And it is, Pray for it this day: why this day? Why? Why David brought up the Arke with this Psalme and he would have built the Temple: But God's answer to him was: No: But behold, a sonne is borne unto thee, which shall be a man of peace, for I will give him rest from all his enemies round about, therefore his name is Solomon, and I will send peace and quietness upon Israel in his days. And had not David then great reason to call upon his people, even all sorts to pray for that Peace, which God would give by Solomon? And surely we have a Jerusalem, a State, and a Church to pray for, as well as they. And this day was our Solomon, the very Peace of our Jerusalem borne. And though hee were not borne among us, yet hee was borne to us, and for the good and wel-fare of both State and Church. And can yee do other than *Rogare pacem*, pray for peace in the day, nay, Nativity, the very birthday of both Peace, and the Peace-maker?[79]

Hence, in one figure, or "circumstance," *pray for peace,* Laud is able to fit the whole meaning, with theocratic implications intact, of James's reign as the second Solomon and peacemaker incarnate. Having described the Christological pacifism of the ruler, the preacher proceeds to build him a rhetorical home in the New Jerusalem figured as the palace the king has himself built, the stately edifice that can be none other than the new Whitehall. "Heere" Laud says:

> is his prayer for peace and prosperity for Jerusalem, for the State, for the Church: but whereabouts would he have these excellent blessings seated? Where? Why everywhere, but especially in *Muris* and *Palatis*, about the Wall and the Palace. And they are excellently fitted. He would have them spread all over Jerusalem: But *Loca Dominu*, the places of their exaltation, are these in my text; the Wall and the Palace: For peace that keeps at the wall, and so workes inward to calme the City: But the child of peace, Prosperity, that is borne after in the Palace, [and] comes outward to enrich the very wall.[80]

Here the many themes of the king's ceiling are encapsulated: the establishment, or seating, of benefits occurs in the 'high places' where it is enacted and enriched by the personified figures of Jerusalem's reciprocally constitutive virtues Peace and Prosperity move both toward and against each other, working inward and coming outward to meet in exaltation at a place between wall and palace, city and court, civic and sacred. Seated on his mighty throne, the Solomonic James seeks to protect Peace and Plenty, whom he figuratively shields from the chaos and strife threatened by war, just as mighty Athena literally shields the royal body from these ever near and incendiary forces.

Yet however much he talked of peace, the actual king was no champion of women, nor did he attempt to cultivate or encourage the burgeoning culture of learned protofeminists who have come to exemplify the feminized the literary culture of his reign. Neither did Rubens likely present an embracing female couple as a tacit endorsement of the pleasures of female same-sex

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[79] William Laud, A *sermon preached before his majesty, on Tuesday the nineteenth of June, at Wansted, Anno Dom. 1621* . (12) Unpaginated.
[80] Ibid.

desire as experienced by real, historical women. Yet the couple portrayed by the painter are and were no less erotic for their creator's ostensibly chaste intentions.

Where Peace and Plenty are concerned, it is possible, in fact, to have it both ways. We can acknowledge the sexual charge of woman on woman passion to be found in Rubens's image. We can likewise locate as its metaphorical or iconographical 'meaning' the king's central and custodial role in the loving creation of a pacific, prosperous society; a society whose structure is preordained or prefigured in the city of Jerusalem and, more precisely, in the temple built there by the peace-loving King Solomon. We can understand Rubens as an artist for whom femininity performed and even generated certain kinds of agency and power as long as we also accept that the women he painted, real and imagined, were often presented as exceptional in this regard.

Epilogue

One of the greatest benefits of allegory—that its meanings may be multiplied—has, in recent centuries, become its curse. Walter Benjamin, who appreciated the allegorical mode for exactly this quality, puts it succinctly: "Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else."[81] This is not to say that the preponderance of uncritical terms attached to allegory such as 'ambiguity' and 'ambivalence' should substitute for interpretation: as "a way of eliding a difficulty rather than facing it."[82] I am fascinated by Rubens's women. Probably, like most art historians, I am drawn to my subject partly for personal reasons. But there is more to it: I also want to know whether the introduction of a new conceit or topos to Rubens's allegorical repertoire will transform in any way our understanding of the ways he communicates symbolic meaning; whether by facing the 'difficulty' of an allegorical pairing like *Peace Embracing Plenty*, we can learn more about how art, artists, and gender, perform their roles in early modern culture.

In proposing Donne's lesbian elegy as a literary analogue to the Whitehall pair, I have contended that Rubens's *Peace Embracing Plenty* also intentionally disturbs the heteronormative seventeenth-century gender conventions discussed throughout this project. In Rubens's case, however, it is not the Ovidian tropes of the classical tradition that serve as the origin but rather the allegorical impulse itself. Thus, in a painting that couples women, Rubens formally upsets, or rights, the gendered disequilibrium and with it the orthodox signification of Baroque multifigural allegories typically populated by 'heterosexed' male and female personifications. Viewed as a microcosm of this allegorical upending, the Yale Whitehall study, where a circle of desire casts two women as both object and subject, offers a portrayal even more philosophically audacious and artistically original than the male-female role reversals found elsewhere in Rubens's oeuvre. Indeed, *Peace Embracing Plenty* might be seen as the culmination of a career-long Rubensian development of protean productive femininity, a generative capacity Amazonian in scale and pre-Aristotelian in conception, and from which men are necessarily proscribed.

For what may be the first time in so massive and public an example of religio-political *figura* in the guise of secular allegory, Rubens takes two secular female personifications and performs their significance—as related virtues whose presence jointly graces the halls and palace of a good king—through an amatory coupling. What matters most is that he chooses to eroticize the women's encounter, allowing his arrangement of desiring bodies to create an unbroken circuit of allusive, but far from delimited, meaning. Peace and Plenty's significance is their

[81] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German tragic Drama*, [1927] John Osborne, trans. (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 175.
[82] Gail Day, "Allegory: Between Deconstruction and Dialectics," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 22 (1999), 105.

production of a new trope, or figural turn: two women's novel creation of a superabundant yet incomplete utopia that is forever about to be. What Marina Warner has said of Lady Liberty is equally true of Rubens's embodied female virtues, whose allegory "operates on the premise that signs of Otherness can be recuperated to express an ideal."[83] In the present historical moment, the Rubensian ideal of the powerful female body and the peace-loving, generous government could use a little recuperating too.

[83] Warner, *Monuments*, 277.

Fig. 1. 1 Rubens, *Adam and Eve*, c. 1598-99 (Antwerp, Rubenshuis)

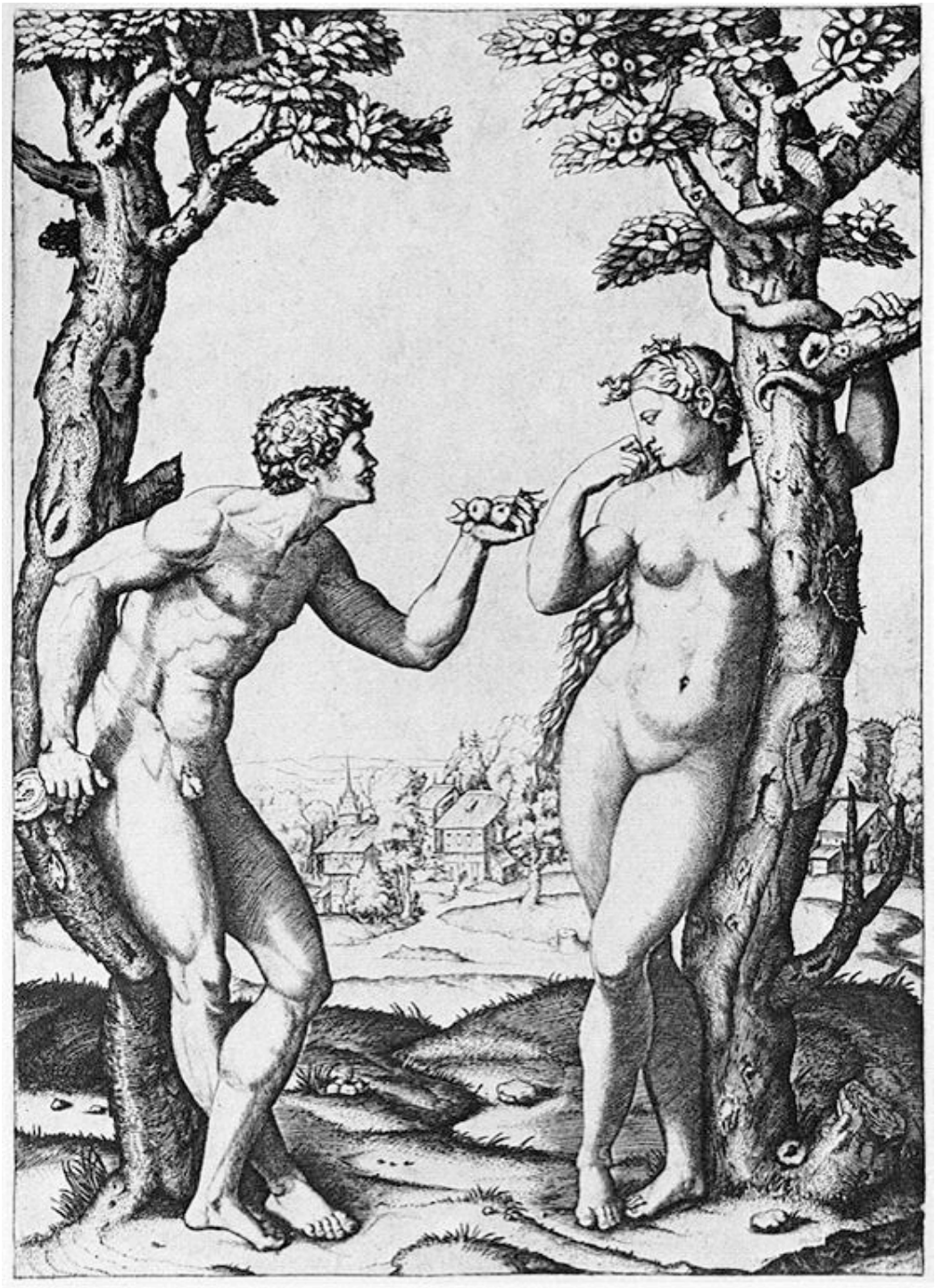

Fig. 1.2
1.1 Raimondi after Raphael, *Adam and Eve*, c. 1515 (Cambridge, Harvard University Art Museums)

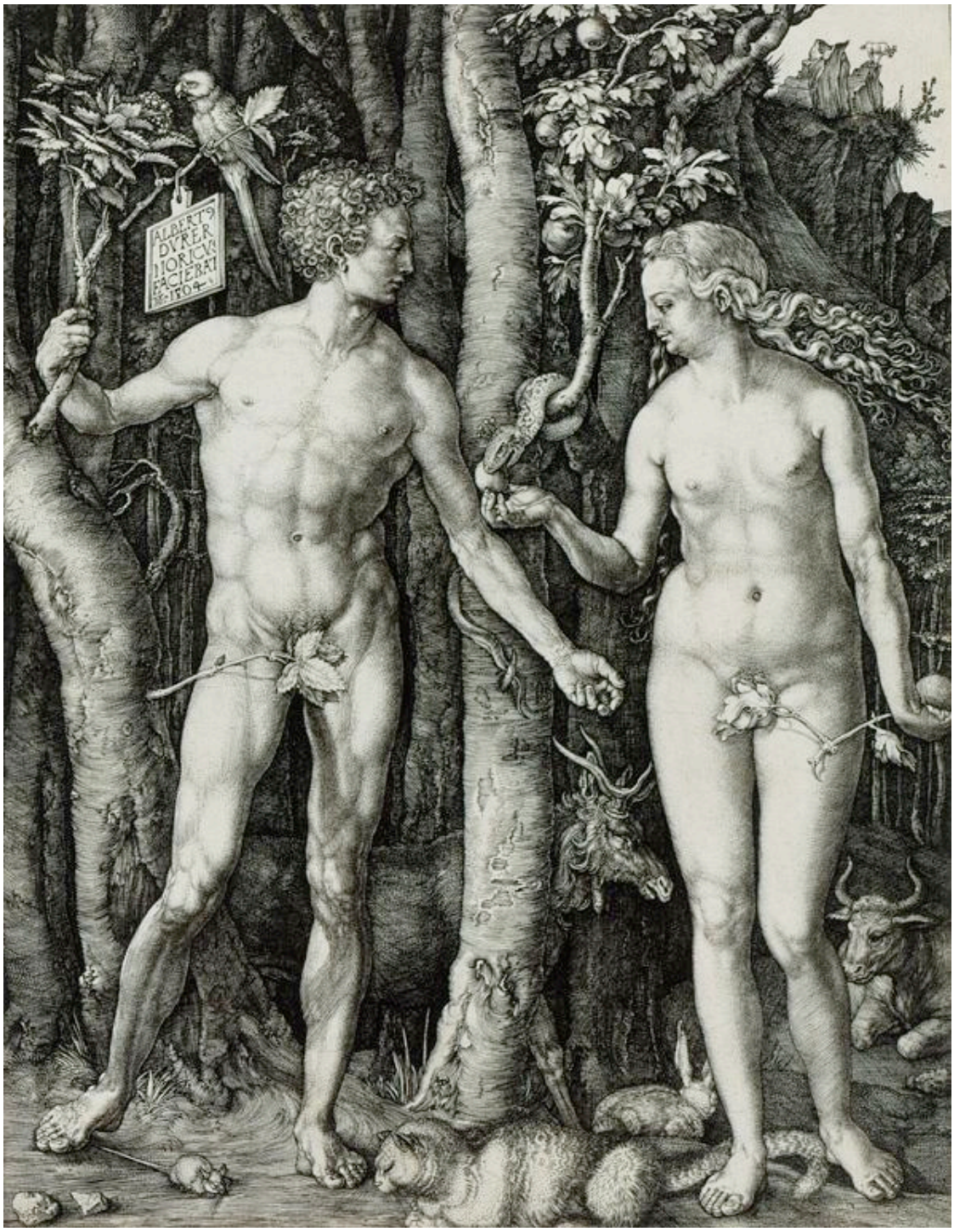

Fig. 1.3
Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1504 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art)

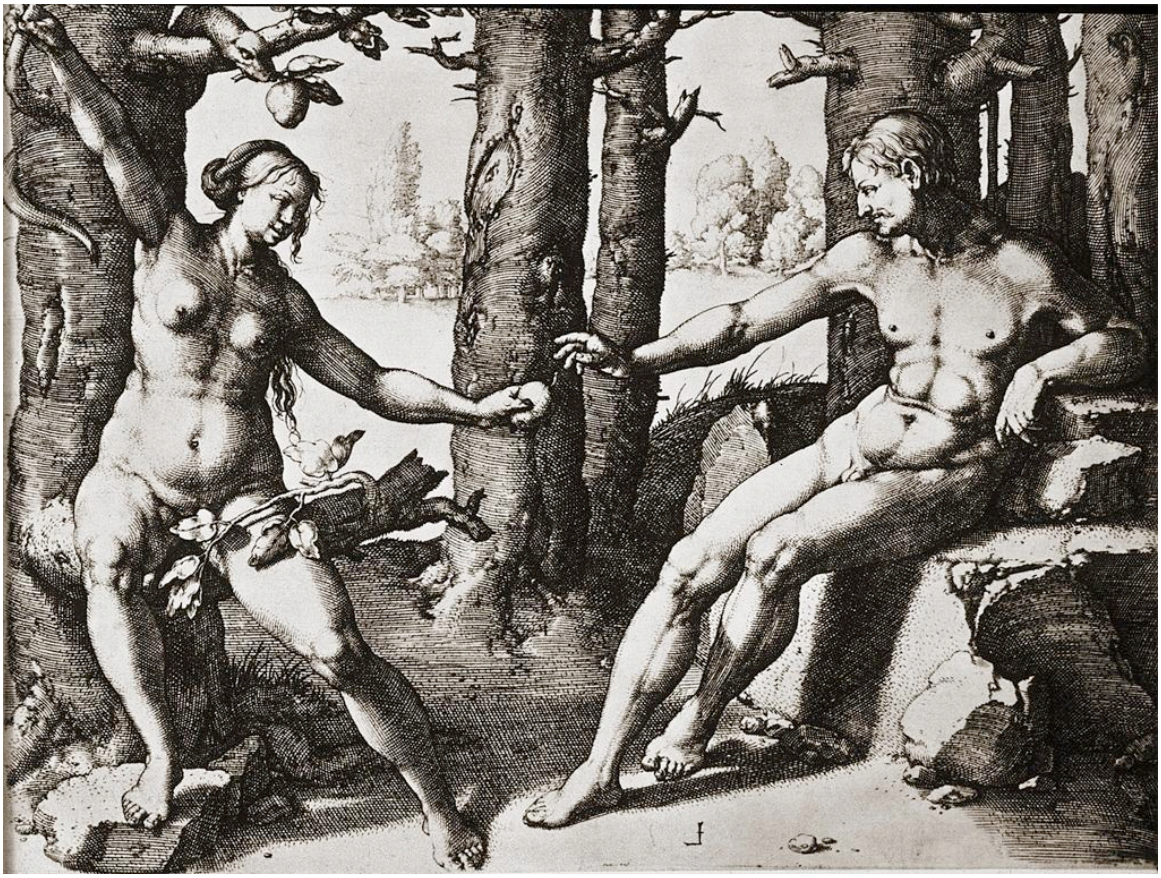

Fig. 1.4

Lucas Van Leyden, *Adam and Eve*, 1530 (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum)

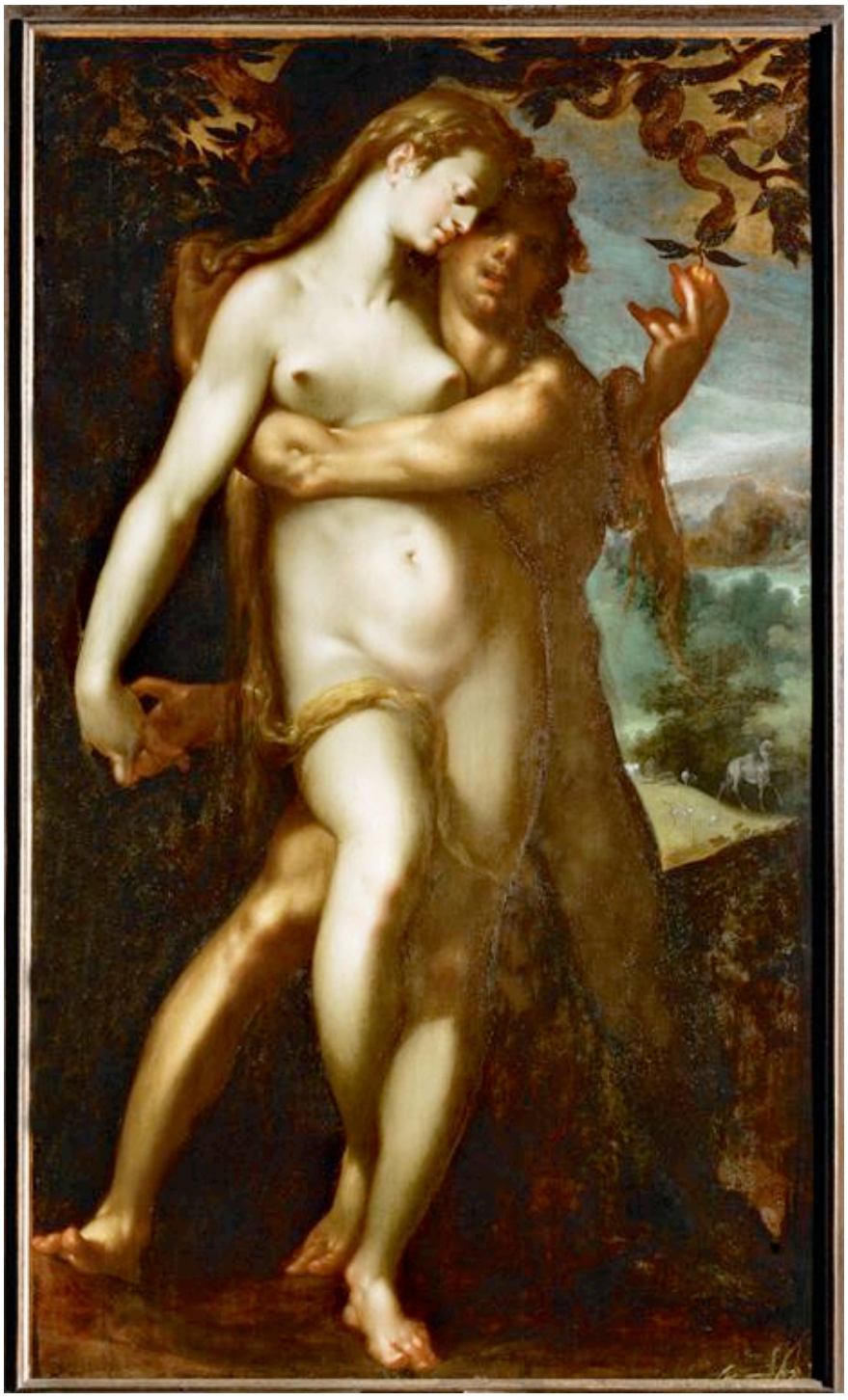

Fig. 1.5

Bartolomeus Spranger, *Adam and Eve,* 1593-95 (Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum)

Fig. 1.6
Hendrik Goltzius, *Adam and Eve*, c. 1597 (London, British Museum)

Fig. 1.7
Titian, *Adam and Ev*e, 1570 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 1.8

Rubens and Jan Brueghel, *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man,* c. 1617
(The Hague: Mauritshuis)

Fig. 1.9
Lavinia Fontana, *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, 1600 (Florence, Palazzo Pitti)

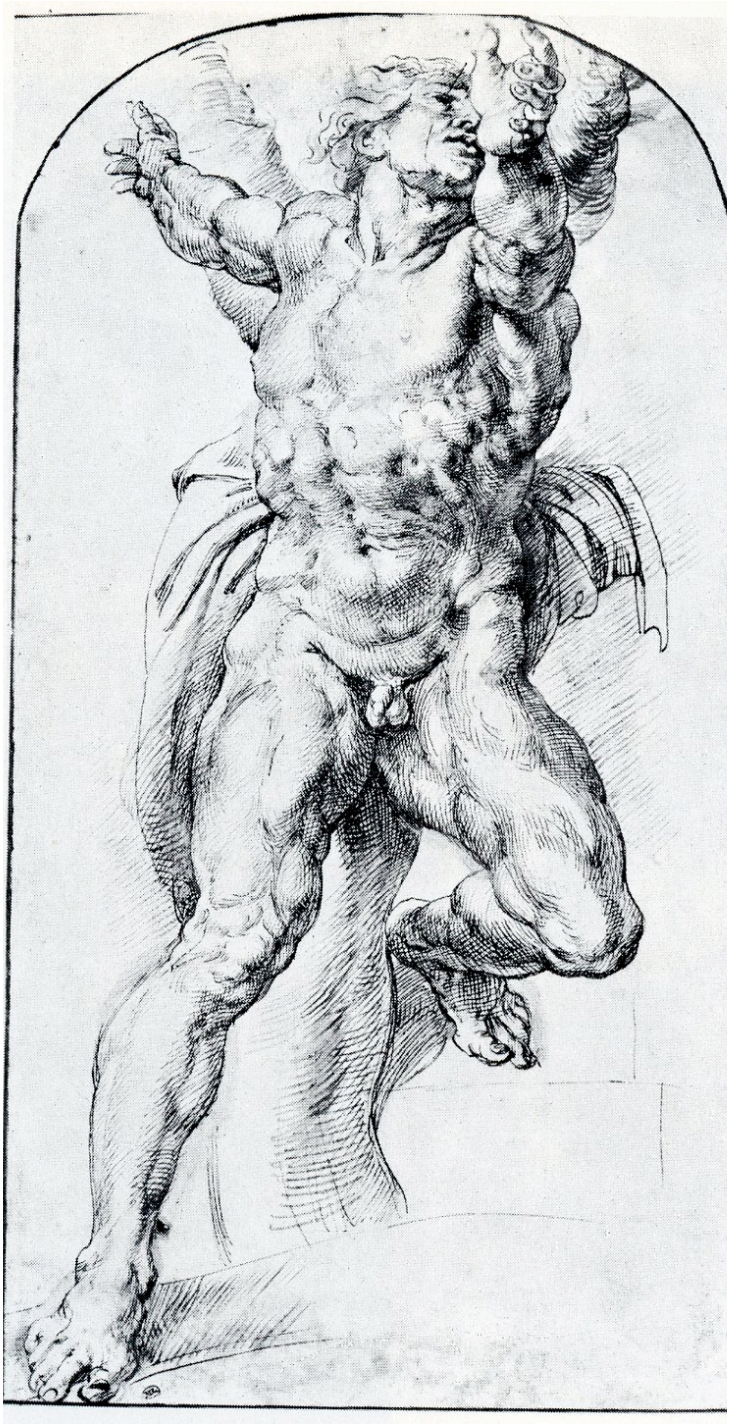

Fig. 1.10

Rubens after an engraving by J. Laurens, c. 1600, ink on paper (Paris, Musee du Louvre)

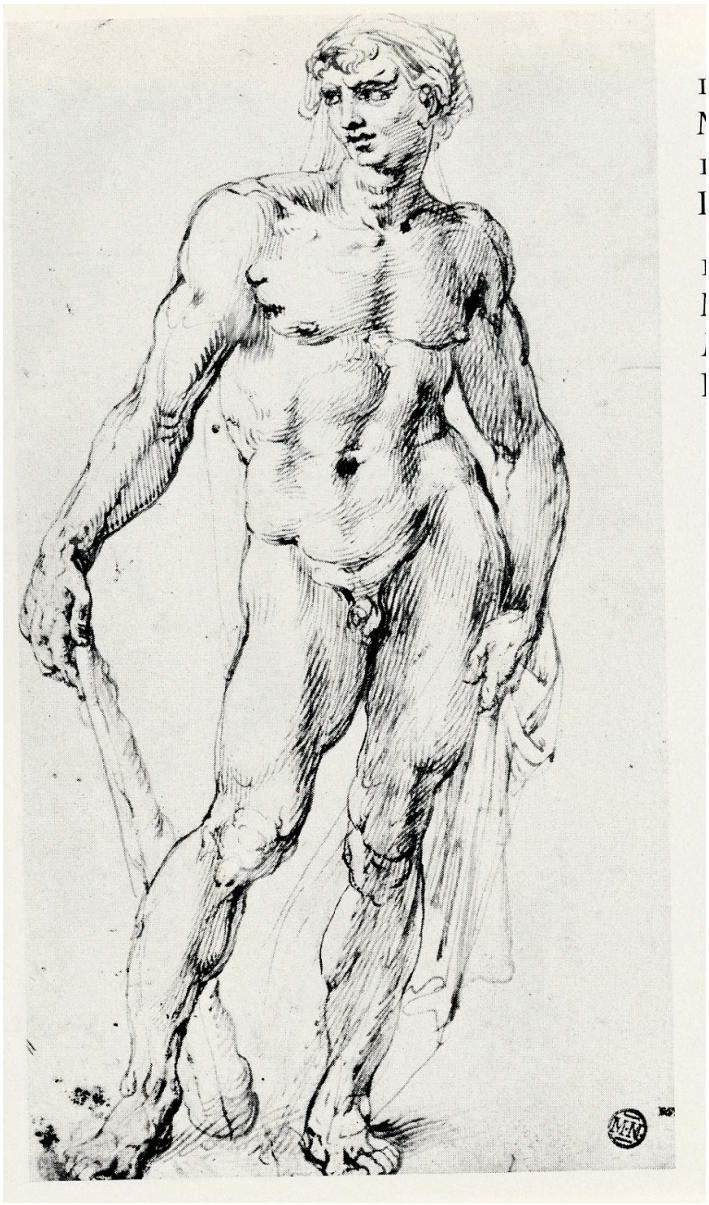

Fig. 1.11

Rubens, *Study after Michelangelo's Young Hercules*, c. 1600, ink on paper (Paris, Museé du Louvre)

Fig. 1.12

Rubens, *Study after Michelangelo's Battle of the Lapiths*, 1600-1603 (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans)

Fig. 1.13
Michelangelo, *Night*, 1526-34 (Florence, Medici Chapel)

Fig, 1.14
Sleeping Hermaphrodite, 2nd Century, (Paris, Louvre)

Fig. 1.15
Anon. artist, *Ravenna Hermaphrodite*, (1512) reprinted in *The Doom, warning all men to the Judgement* (London, 1581)

Fig. 1.16
Rubens, *Borghese Hermaphrodite*, c. 1608 (New York: Metropolitan Museum)

Fig. 1.17
Rubens, *Study for St. Domitilla* (?), c. 1606-1608 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Fig. 1.18
Rubens, *Saint Domitilla and other Saints*, c. 1608 (London, British Museum)

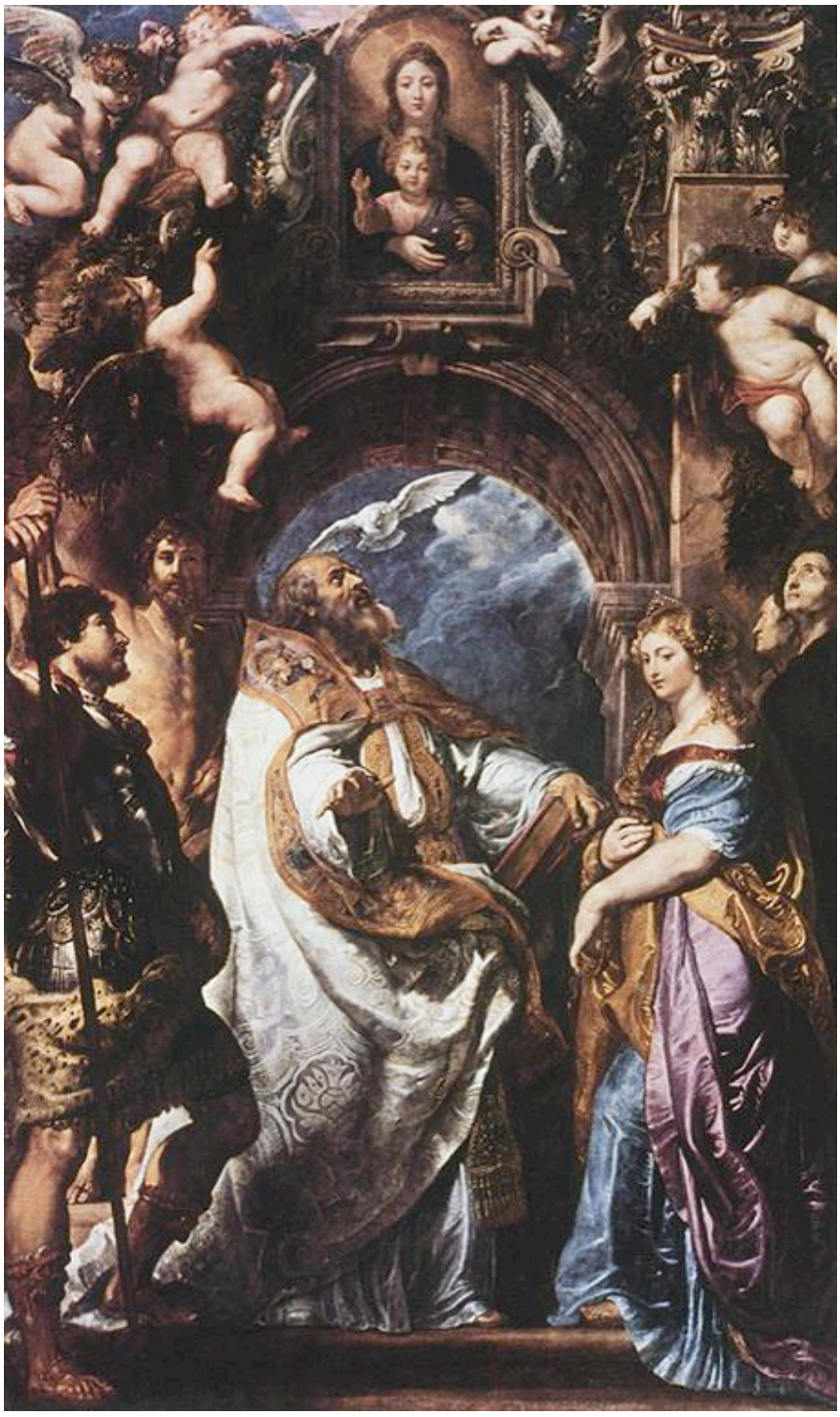

Fig. 1.19
Rubens, *St. Gregory, St. Domitilla, and other Saints Worshiping the Madonna*, c. 1607-08 (Grenoble, Museé de Grenoble)

Fig. 1.20
Rubens, *Chiesa Nuova* Altarpiece, 1608 (Rome, Santa Maria della Vallicella)

Fig. 1.20.1

Rubens, *Saints Domitilla, Nereus and Achilleus, 1608* (Rome, Santa Maria della Vallicella)

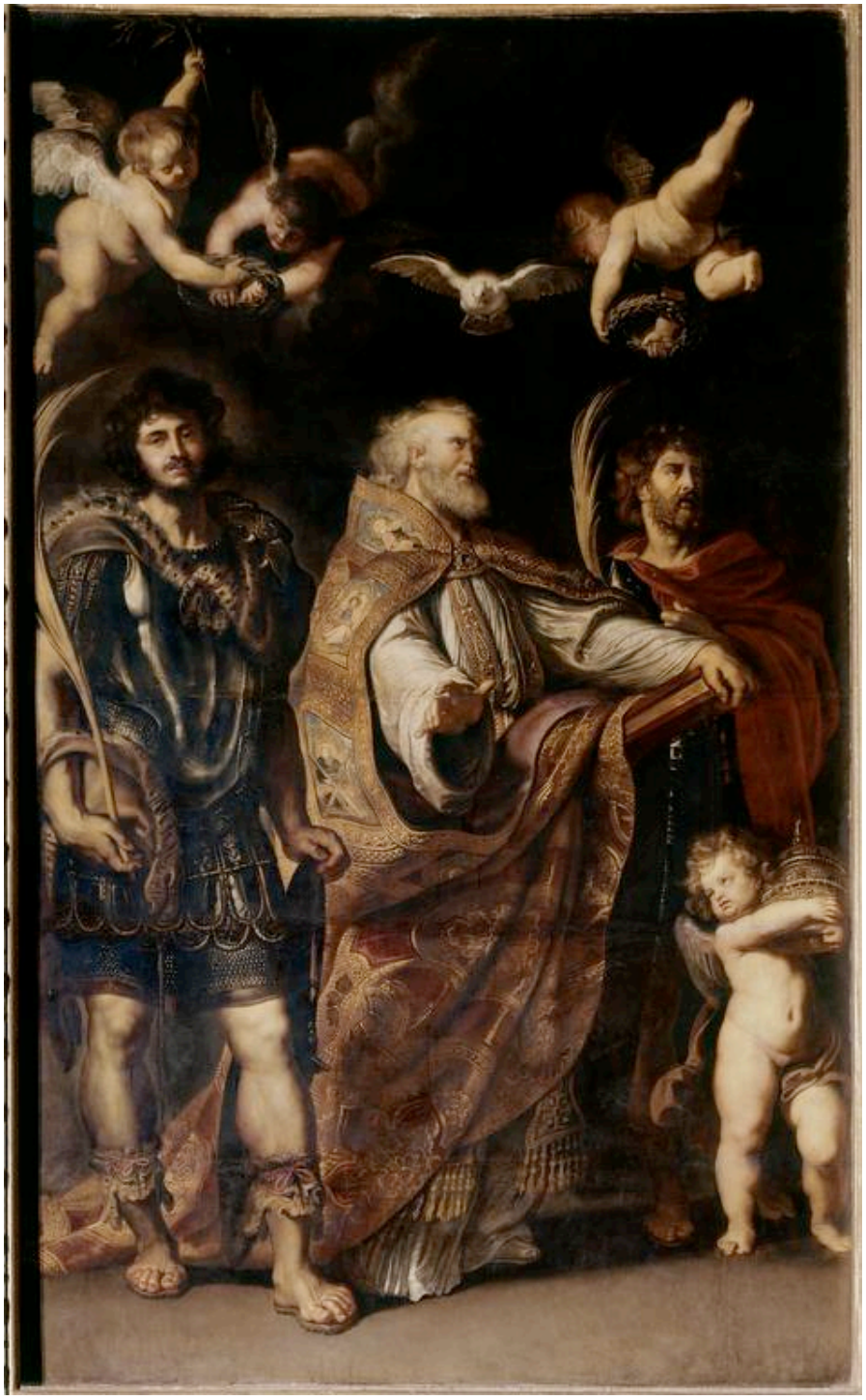

Fig. 1.20.2
Rubens, *St. Gregory with Sts. Maurus and Papianus*, 1608 (Sta. Maria della Valicella, Rome)

Fig. 1.21

Rubens, *Saints Gregory, Domitilla, Maurus and Papianus*, , c. 1606 (Montpellier, Musee du Fabre)

Fig. 1.22
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*, c. 1601-1605 (Paris, Museé de Louvre)

Fig. 2.1
Rubens, *Samson and Delilah*, 1609 (London, National Gallery)

Fig. 2.2
After Michelangelo, 16th C. Italian, Leda and the Swan (Bergamo, Academia Carrara)

Fig. 2.3

Rubens after Michelangelo, *Leda and the Swan*, c. 1600-1602 (Dresden, Gemäldegalerie)

Fig. 2.4
Lucas Van Leyden, *Samson and Delilah*, 1507 (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum)

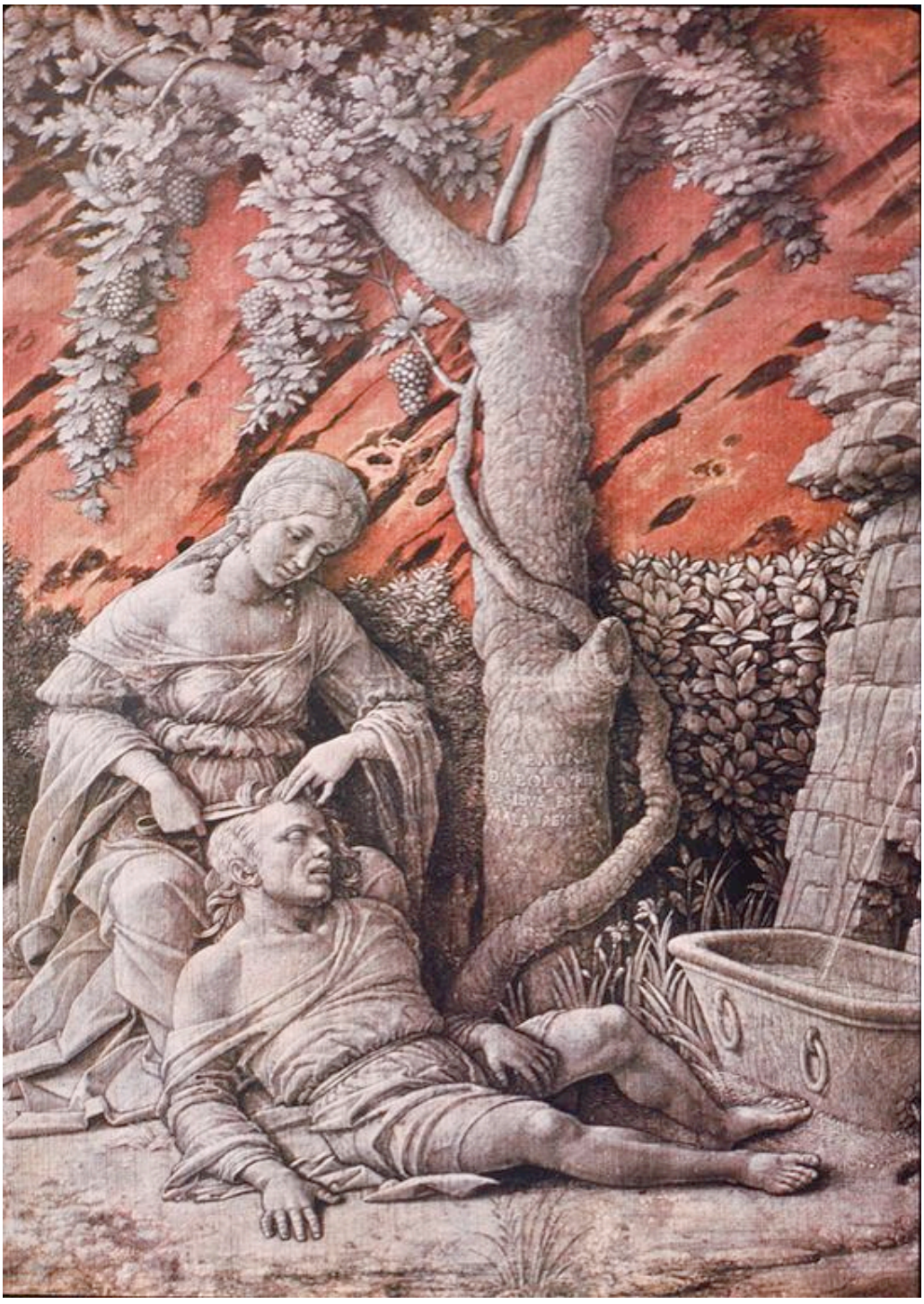

Fig. 2.5
Andrea Mantegna, *Samson and Delilah*, 1500 (London, National Gallery)

Fig. 2.6
Farnese Hercules, 3Rd C. Roman Copy (Naples, Capitoline Museum)

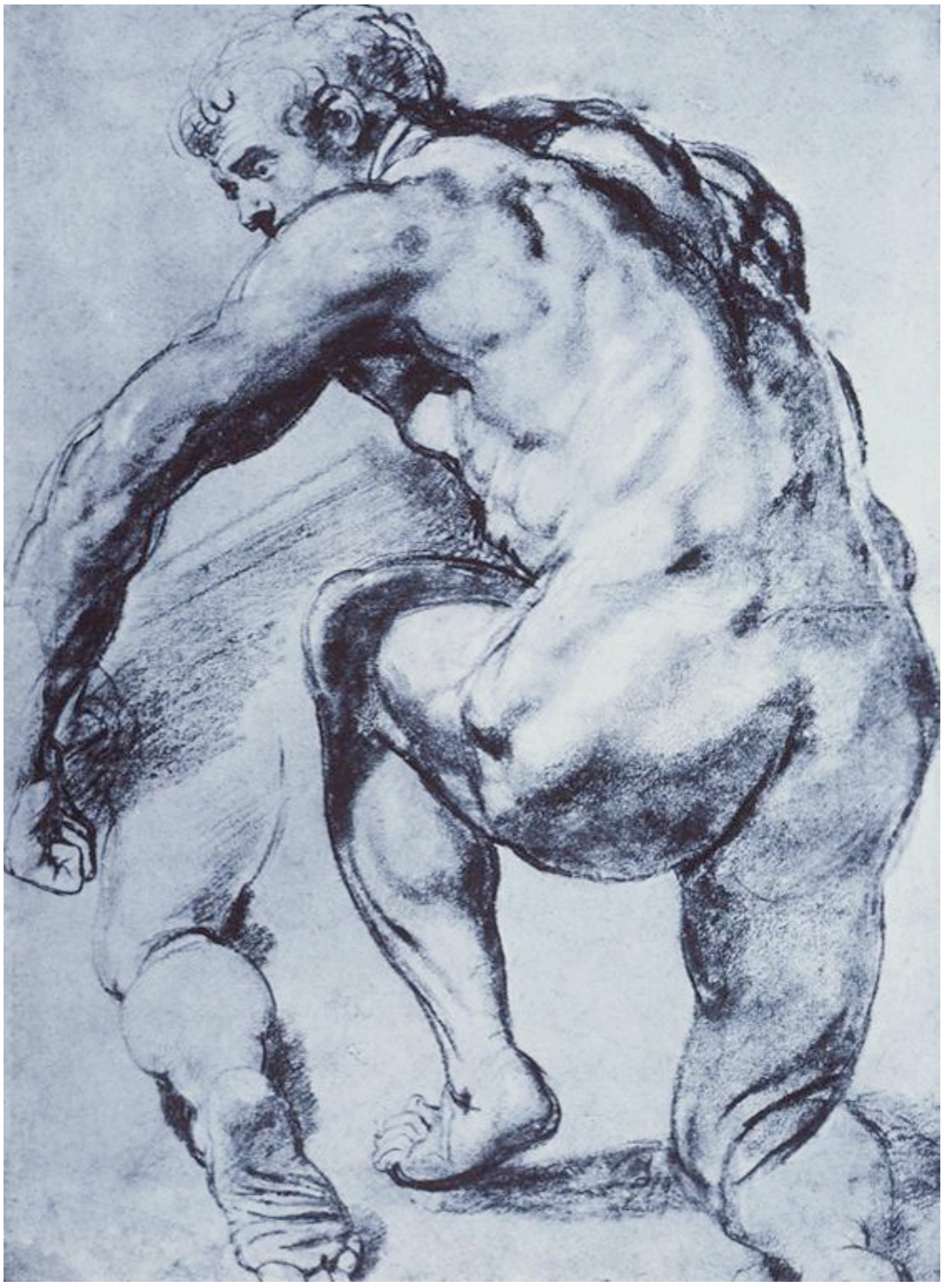

Fig. 2.7
Rubens, *Nude Man Kneeling*, c. 1609 (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans)

Fig. 2.8
Rubens, *Crouching Man Lifting a Heavy Object*, c. 1609 (Paris, Museé du Louvre)

Fig. 2.9
Rubens after Michelangelo, *The Prophet Ezekiel*, c. 1605 (Paris, Museé du Louvre)

Fig. 2.10
Anthony Van Dyck, *Kneeling Man Seen from Behind*, c. 1618? (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans)

Fig. 2.11
Titian, *Entombment*, 1559-1560 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 2.12
Frans Francken, the younger, *Banquet in the House of Nicolaes Rockox*, 1630-35
(Vienna, Liechtenstein Museum)

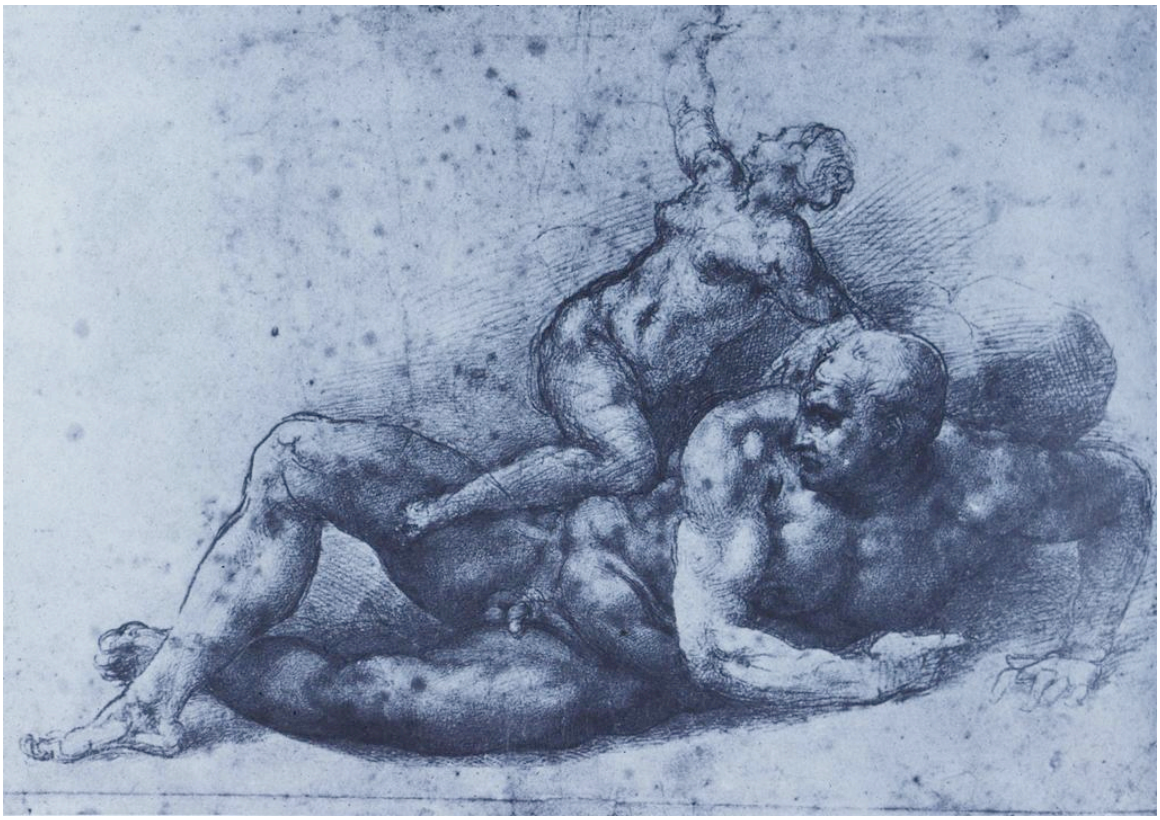

Fig. 2.13
Michelangelo, *Samson and Delilah*, c. 1537-35 (London, British Museum)

Fig. 2.14
Pontormo after Michelangelo, *Cupid and Venus*, 1532-34 (Florence, Galleria del Academia)

Fig. 2.15
Rubens, *Self-Portrait in a Honeysuckle Bower with Isabella Brant*, 1609 (Munich, Alte Pinakothek)

Fig. 2.16
Jan Brueghel, *The Archdukes Go Hunting* (det.), c. 1611-12 (Madrid: Museo del Prado)

Fig. 2.17
Rubens, *Hercules and Omphale*, c. 1606 (Paris, Museé du Louvre)

Fig. 2.18
Rubens, *Death of Adonis*, c. 1606 (Private Collection)

Fig. 2.19
Bartolomeus Spranger, *Hercules and Omphale*, c. 1585 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches)

Fig. 2.20
Rubens, *Marchesa Brigida Spinola*, c. 1606 (Washington DC, National Gallery)

Fig. 2.21
Jan Van Eyck, *Arnolfini 'Wedding' Portrait*, 1434 (London, National Gallery)

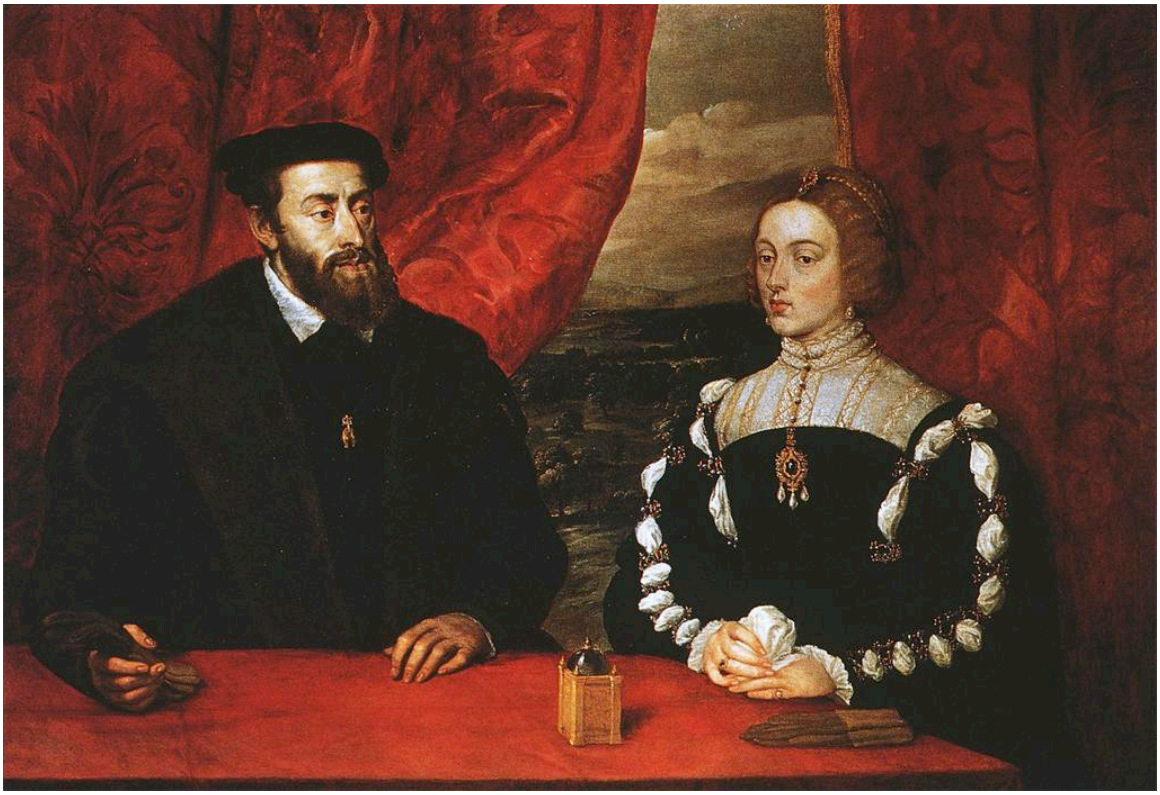

Fig. 2.22
Rubens after Titian, *The Emperor Charles V and the Empress Isabella*, c. 1603-1604
(Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 2.23
Raphael, *Marriage of the Virgin*, c. 1505 (Milan, Pinacoteca da Brera)

Fig. 2.24
Robert Campin, *Marriage of the Virgin*, c. 1440 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 2.25
Andrea Alciati, *In fidem uxuriam* (No. 191), *Emblematum liber* (1531) (Padua: P.P. Tozzi, 1621).

Fig. 2.26
Rubens, *Isabella Brant*, 1620 (Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art)

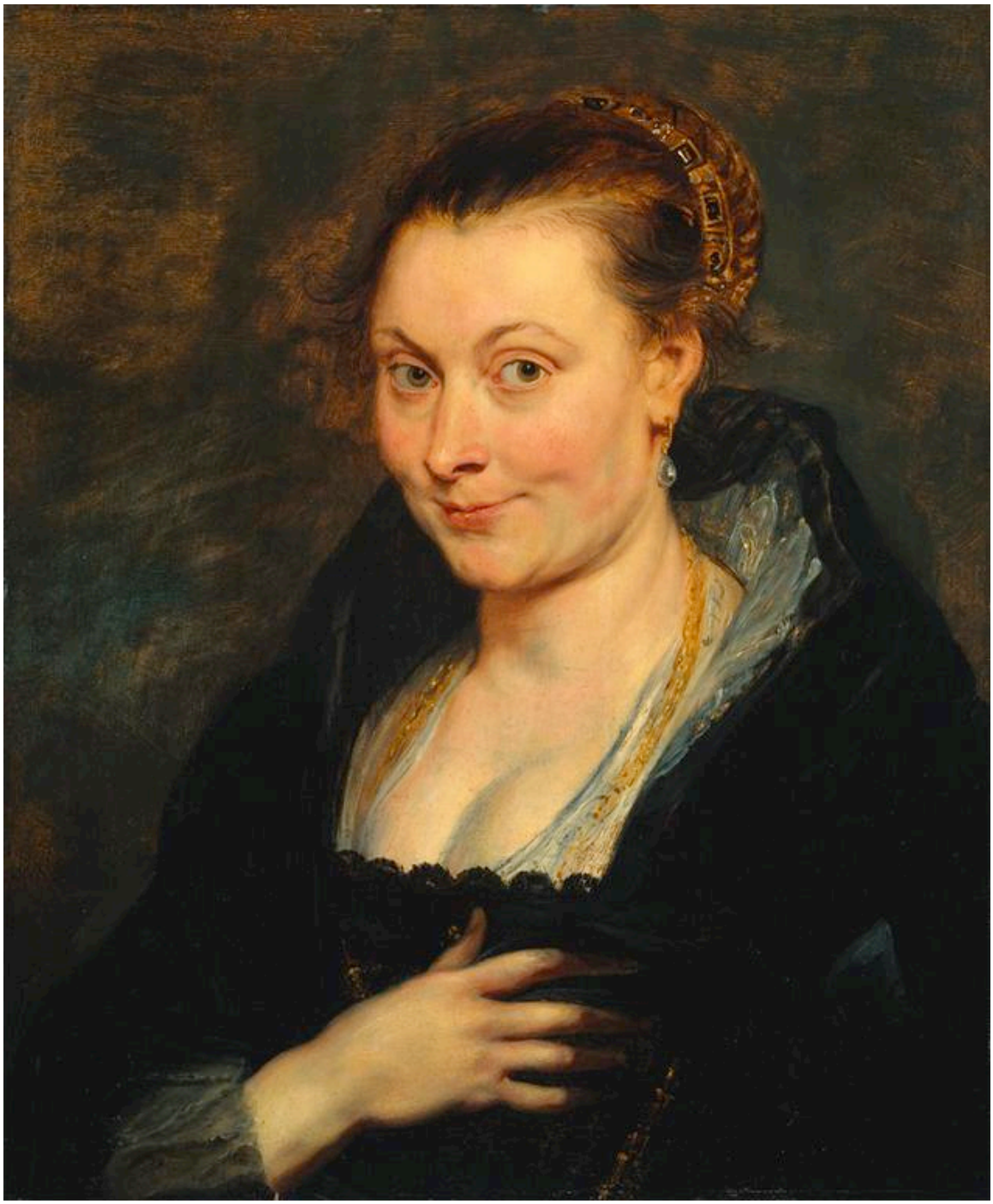

Fig. 2.27
Rubens, *Isabella Brant*, 1621 (London, British Museum)

Fig. 2.28
Silver Denarius of Crispina, Rome 178-182 CE with reverse image of ‘Concordia’ as clasped right hands.

Fig. 3.1
Rubens, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1609 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 3.2
Rubens, *Annunciation*, c. 1609-1610 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches)

Fig. 3.3
Rubens, *Raising of the Cross Triptych*, c. 1610-11 (Antwerp Cathedral)

Fig. 3.4
Rubens, *Descent from the Cross Triptych*, 1612-1614 (Antwerp Cathedral)

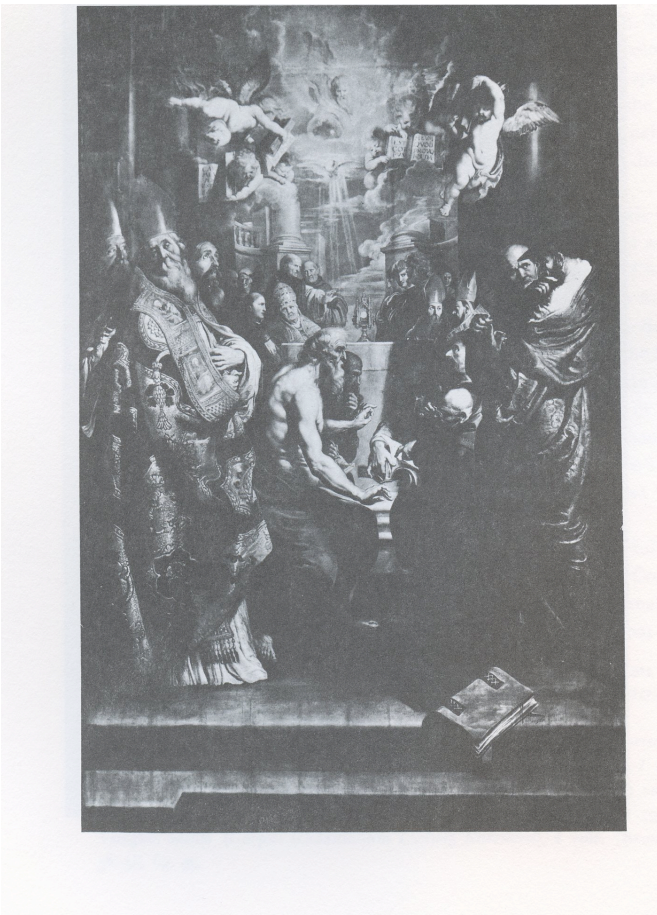

Fig. 3.5
Rubens, *Real Presence of the Holy Sacrament*, 1611 (Antwerp, St. Paul's Church)

Fig. 3.6
Rubens, *Assumption*, c. 1626 (Antwerp Cathedral)

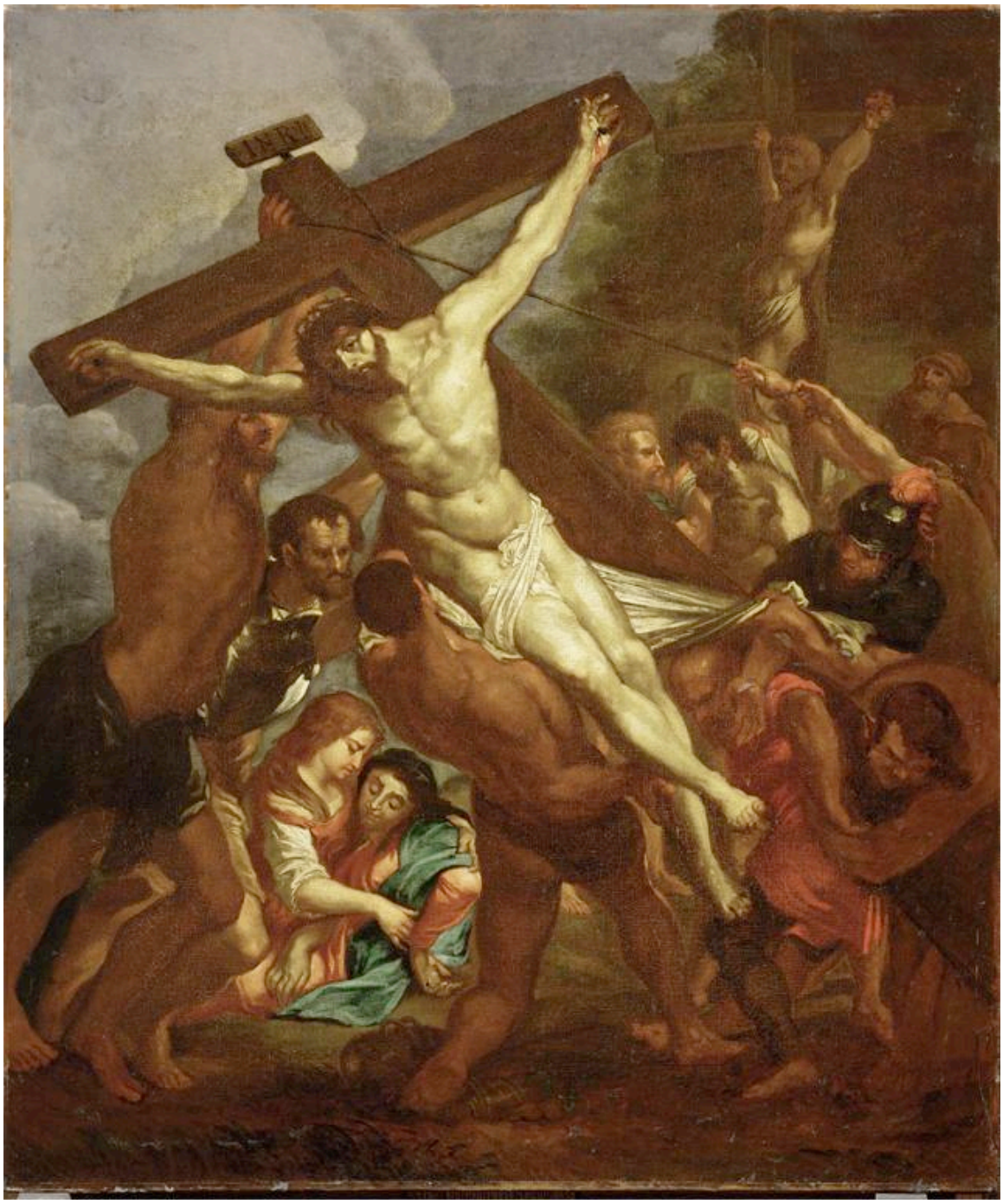

Fig. 3.7
Rubens, *Elevation of the Cross*, c. 1606 (Hôpital du Petit-Paris, Grasse)

Fig. 3.8
Rubens, *Entombment*, c. 1604-1606 (Rome, Galleria Borghese)

Fig. 3.9
Rogier Van der Weyden, *Deposition*, c. 1436 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 3.10
Rubens, *Raising of the Cross*, central panel, 1610-1611 (Antwerp Cathedral)

Fig. 3.11
Rubens, *Raising of the Cross*, interior left wing, 1610-1611 (Antwerp Cathedral)

Fig. 3.12
Christ and St. John the Evangelist, c. 1300, Swabia (Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, J. H. Wade Fund 1928.753)

Fig. 3.13
Rubens, *Assumption*, c. 1613-1614 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches)

Fig. 3.14
Rubens, *Annunciation*, c. 1618 (Dusseldorf, Museum Kunstpalst)

Fig. 3.15
Paulus Pontius reworked by Rubens, *Assumption*, c.1624 (Los Angeles, Getty Museum)

Fig. 3.16
Anon. Artist, *Coronation of the Virgin*, late 15th/early 16th C. (Bruges Cathedral)

Fig. 3.17
Titian, *Assumption*, 1509 (Venice, Church of the Frari)

Fig. 3.18
Annibale Carracci, *Assumption*, 1600 (Rome, Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo)

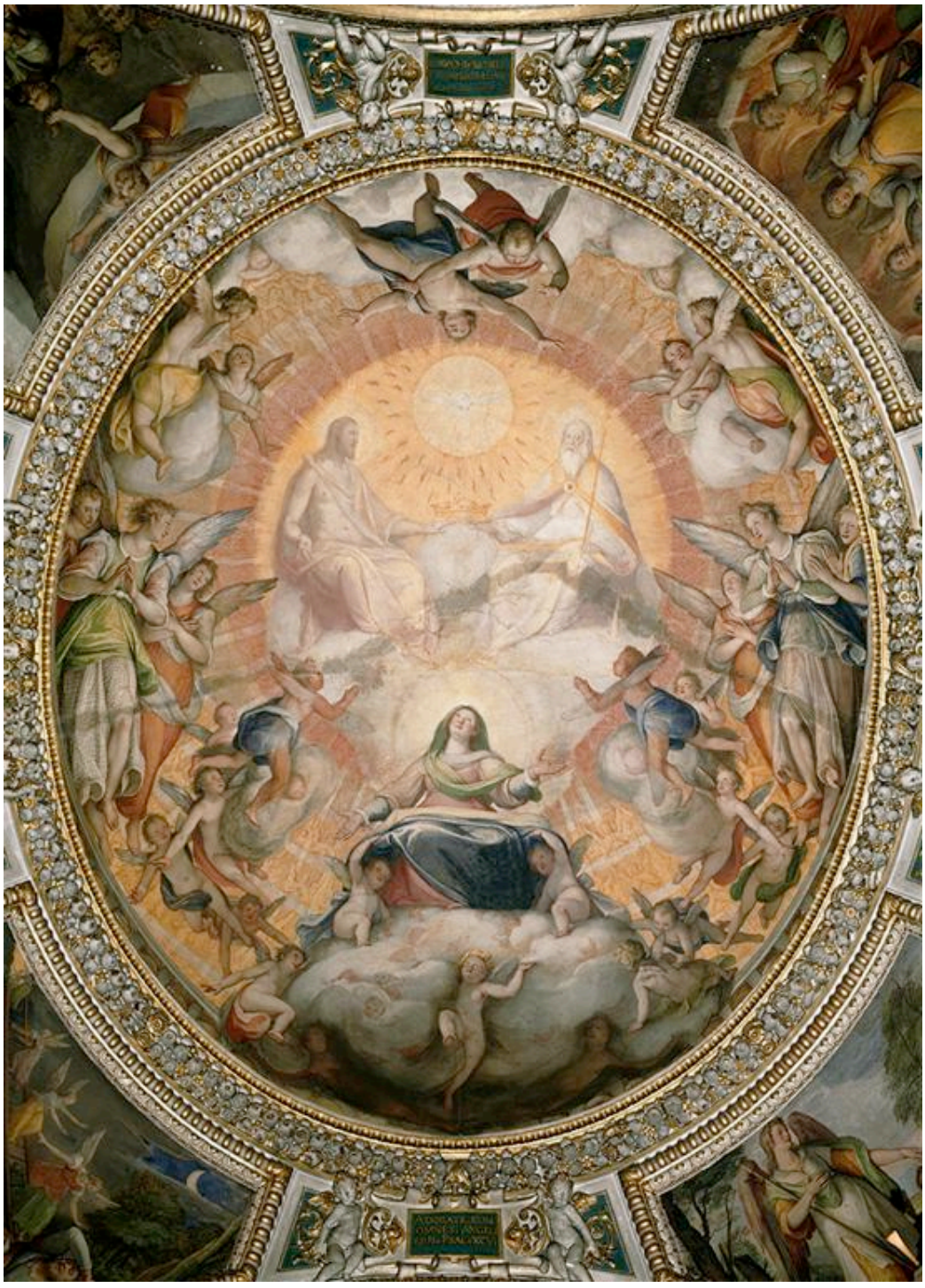

Fig. 3.19
Frederico Zuccari, *Assumption*, 1600 (Rome, Church of the of the *Gesù*)

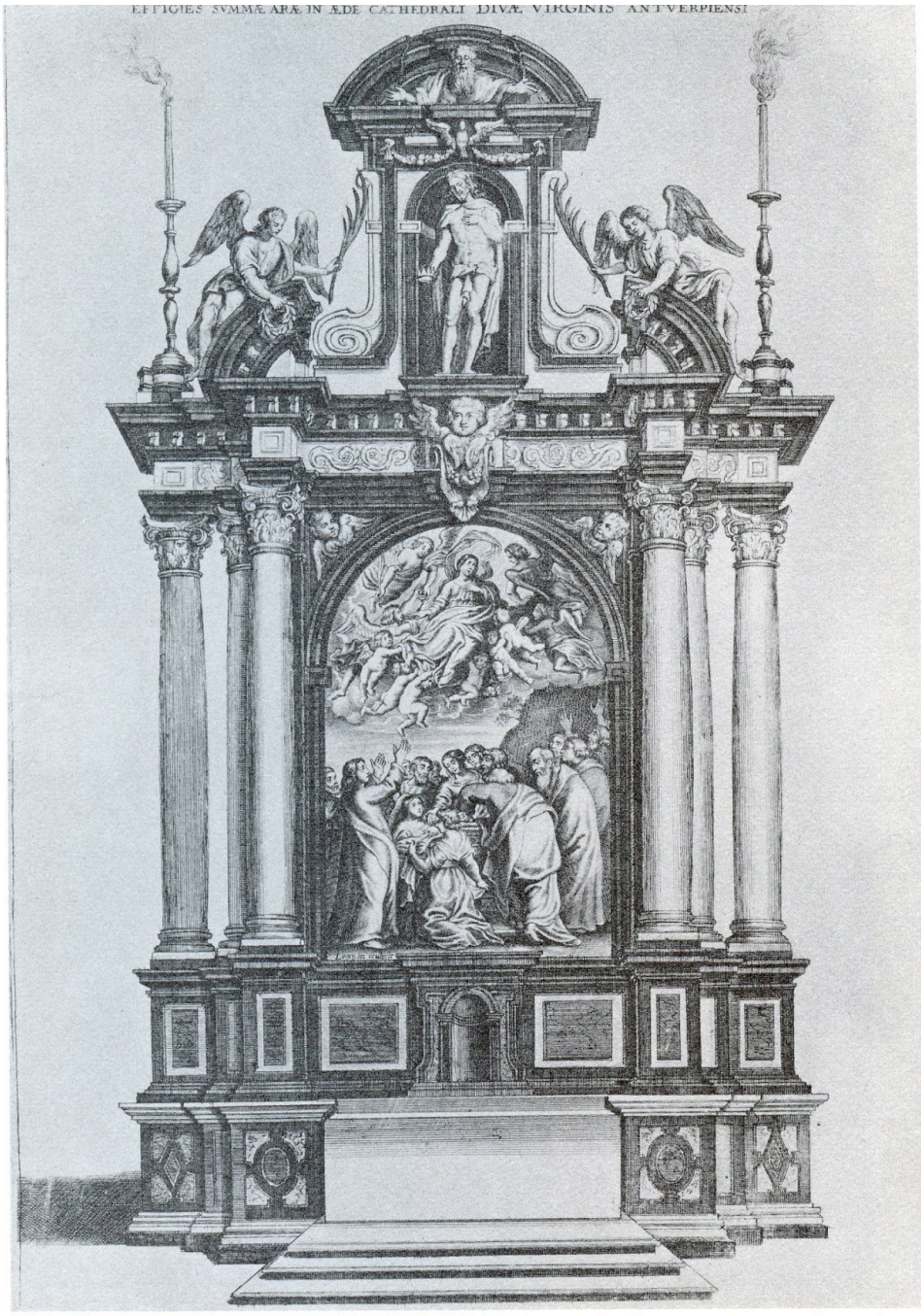

Fig. 3.20
A. Lomelin, *High Altar of Antwerp Cathedral*, n.d. (Brussels, Royal Library of Albert I)

Fig. 3.21
Raphael, *Transfiguration*, 1518 (Vatican, Pinacoteca)

Fig. 3.22
Rogier Van der Weyden, *Altar of the Last Judgment*, 1446-52 (Beaune, Musée de l' Hôtel Dieu)

Fig. 3.23
Michelangelo, *Last Judgment*, 1534-1541 (Vatican, Sistine Chapel)

Fig. 3.24
Rubens, *Modello for* an *Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1611 (Leningrad, Hermitage)

Fig. 3.25
Susciatur Virgo Mater et Filio (Reception of the Virgin into Heaven), Hieronymous Wierix after Bernardo Passeri (From H. Natalis, *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia,* Antwerp 1607)

Fig. 4.1
Rubens, *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, c. 1618 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches)

Fig. 4.2
Rubens, *Battle of the Amazons*, c. 1617-19 (Munich, Alte Pinakothek)

Fig. 4.3
Titian, *Sketch for the Battle of Cadore*, 1537 (Paris, Musée du Louvre)

Fig. 4.4
Lucas Vorsterman after Rubens, *Battle of the Amazons*, 1623 (London, Victoria and Albert Museum)

Fig. 4.5
Rubens, *Juno and Argus*, 1610 (Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum)

Fig. 4.6
Rubens, *Ixion Deceived by Juno, 1612-14* (Paris, Musée du Louvre)

Fig. 4.7
Rubens, *The Daughters of Cecrops Discovering Erichthonius,* 1618
(Vienna, Liechtenstein Museum)

Fig. 4.8
Rubens, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1618 (St. Petersburg, Hermitage)

Fig. 4.9
Veronese, *Triumph of Venice*, c. 1579-82 (Venice, Palazzo Ducale)

Fig. 4.10
Andrea Palladio, *Teatro Olimpico*, Vicenza (interior, angled view of stage and scenae frons from the cavea (audience seating), with portion of perspective sets by Vincenzo Scamozzi, 1580-1583)

Fig. 4.11
Rubens, *Visitation*, left wing, Descent from the Cross Triptych, c. 1611-14 (Antwerp Cathedral)

Fig. 4.12
Veronese, *Visitation*, c. 1577 (Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Art)

Fig. 4.13
Parmigianino, *Madonna of the Long Neck*, 1534-1540 (Florence, Galleria Uffizi)

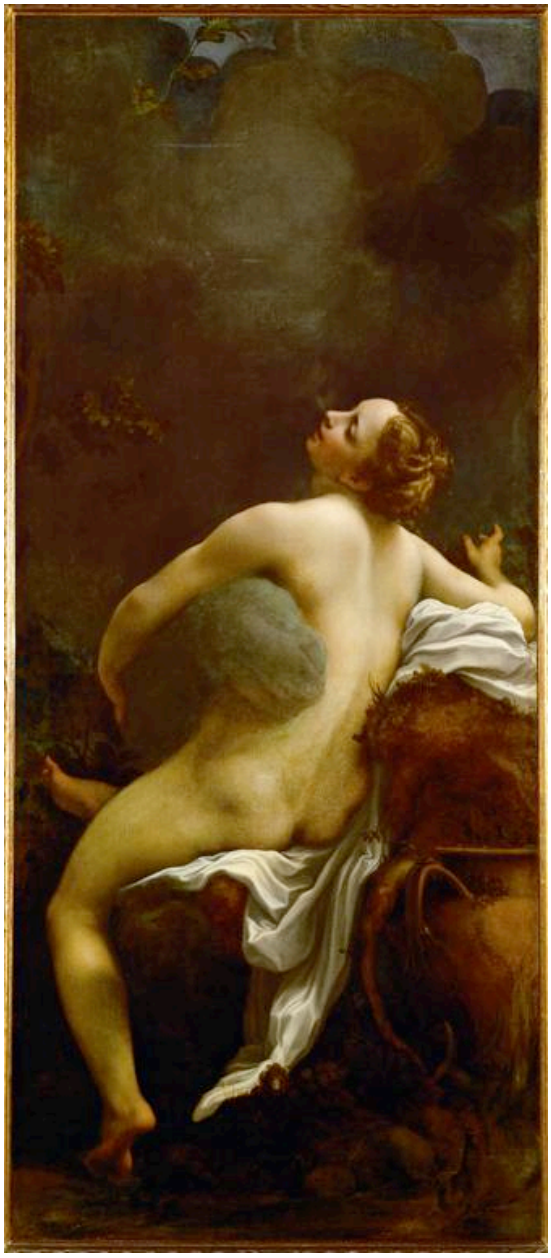

Fig. 4.14
Correggio, *Jupiter and Io*, 1530 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches)

Fig. 5.1
Rubens, *Marie de Medici*, 1622 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 5.2
Rubens and Jan Brueghel, *Infanta Isabel*, c. 1618-21 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 5.3
Death of Henri IV and the Proclamation of the Regency, 1622-25 (Paris, Musée du Louvre)

Fig. 5.4
Rubens, Triumph at Juliers, (Jülich), 1622-25 (Paris, Musée du Louvre)

Fig 5.5
Rubens, *The Felicity of the Regency*, 1622-25 (Paris, Musée du Louvre)

Fig. 5.6
Veronese, *Allegory of Justice,* (Venice, Palazzo Ducale)

Fig. 5.7
Rubens, *The Coming of Age of Louis XIV*, 1622-25(Paris, Musée du Louvre)

Fig. 5.8
Rubens, *The Queen Triumphant*, 1622-25(Paris, Musée du Louvre)

Fig. 5.9
Rubens, *Defenders of the Eucharist*, 1625-28 (Sarasota, Ringling Museum)

Fig. 5.10
Thomas Cecil, *Truth Presents the Queen with a Lance*, 1625 (London, Mansell Collection, Ltd.)

Fig. 5.11
Rubens, *The Triumph of the Church*, 1625-28**,** woven in the workshop of Jan Raes, II Brussels, ca. 1626-33, (Madrid, Descalzas Reales)

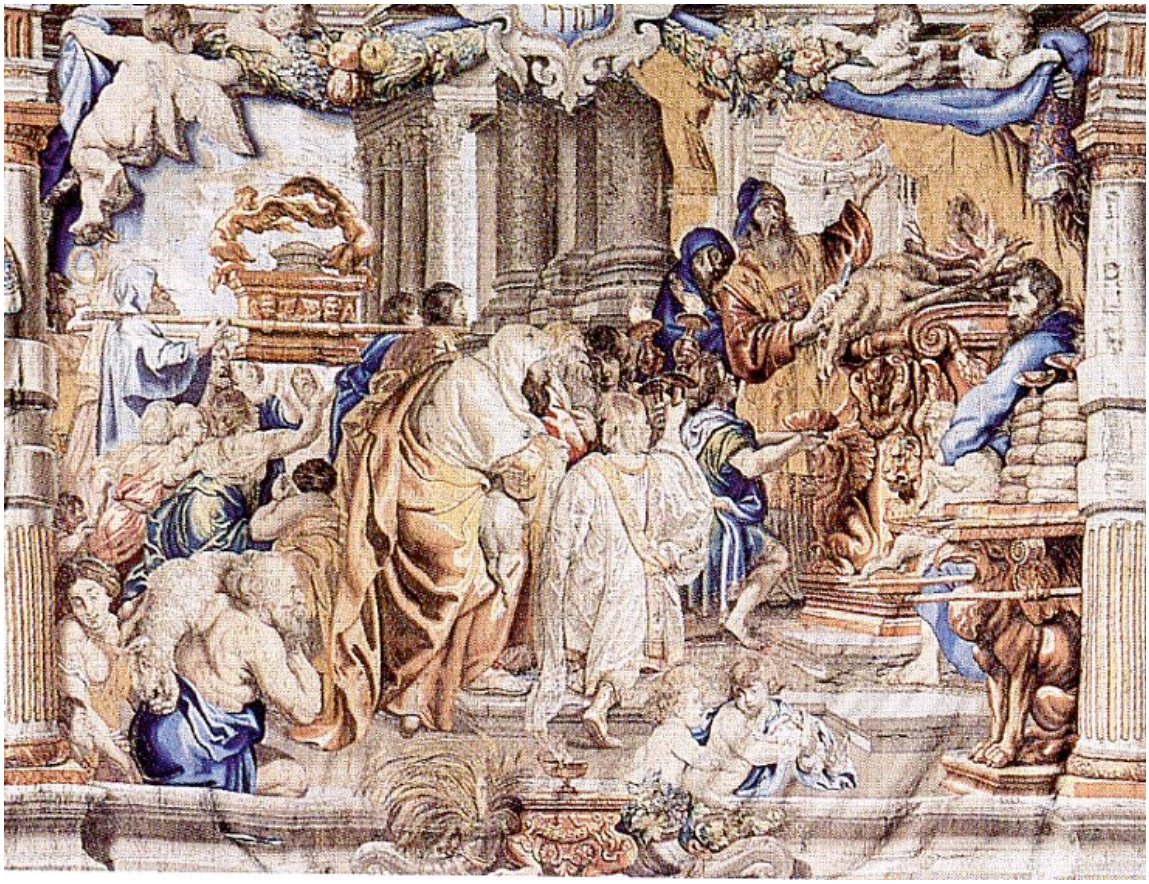

Fig. 5.12
Rubens, *Sacrifice of the Old Covenant*, 1625-1628, woven in the workshop of Jan Raes II, Brussels, ca. 1626-33 (Madrid, Descalzas Reales)

Fig. 5.13
Rubens, *The Four Evangelists*, oil on canvas, c. 1625 (Sarasota, Ringling Museum)

Fig. 5.14
Rubens, *Terrestrial Hierarchy in Adoration*, 1625-1628, woven in the workshop of Jan Raes II, Brussels, ca. 1626-33 (Madrid, Descalzas Reales)

Fig. 5.15
Velázquez, *Surrender of Breda*, 1635 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 5.16
Rubens, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy in Adoration*, 1625-1628, woven in the workshop of Jan Raes II, Brussels, ca. 1626-33 (Madrid, Descalzas Reales

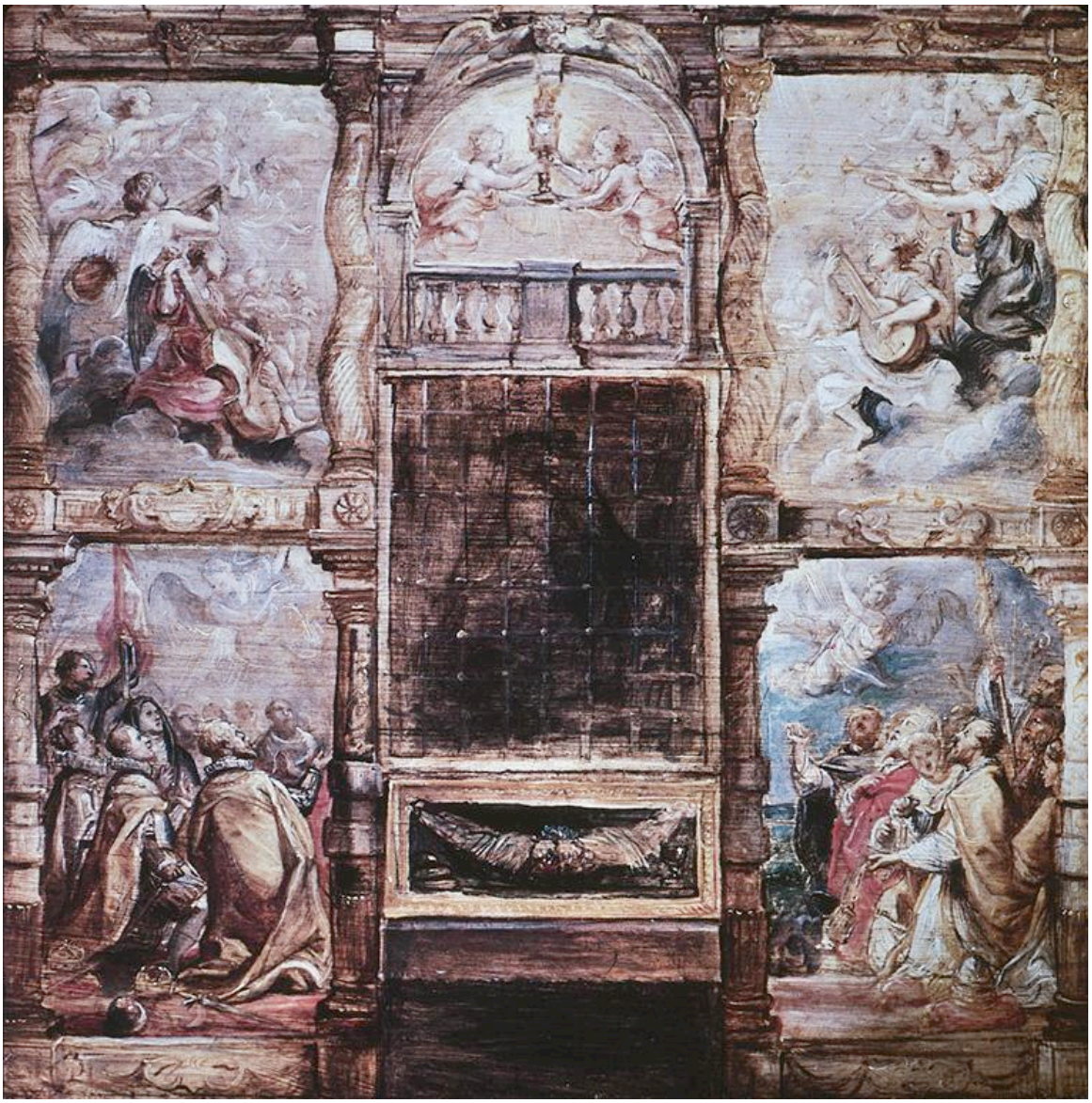

Fig. 5.17
Rubens, *Eucharist Tapestries oil sketch*, c. 1625 (Chicago, Art Institute)

Fig. 5.18
Pompeo Leoni and Leone Leoni, *Philip II and his family in Adoration*, 1587 (El Escorial, Basilica of San Lorenzo)

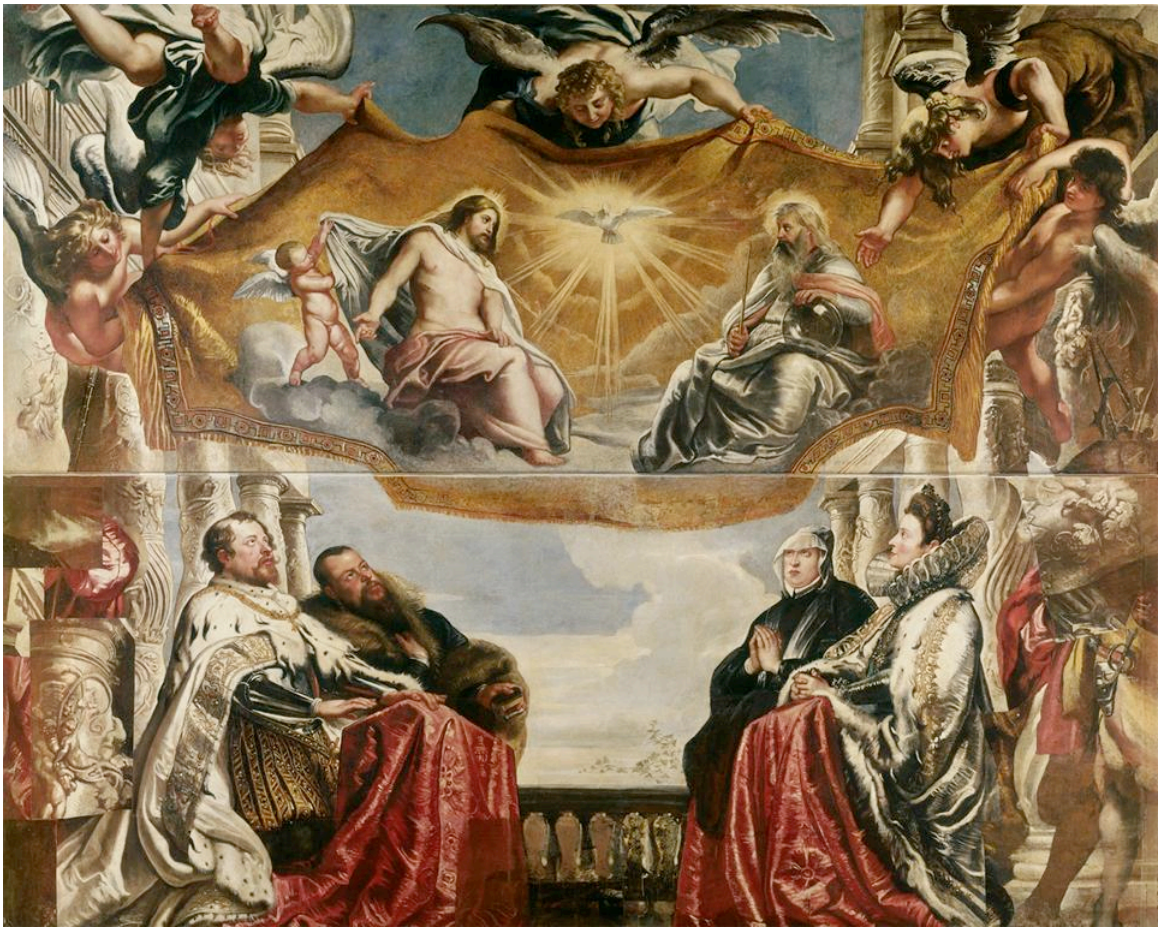

Fig. 5.19
Rubens, *Gonzaga Trinity*, c. 1603-1604 (Mantua, Palazzo Ducale)

Fig. 5.20
Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, detail of women attacked by women, *Capture of Tunis*, (Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional)

Fig. 5.21
Rubens, detail *Triumph of the Church (over heresy)*, 1625-1628, woven in the workshop of Jan Raes II, Brussels, ca. 1626-33 (Madrid, Descalzas Reales)

Fig. 5.22
Rubens, *Isabel Clara Eugenia*, 1625 (Florence, Palazzo Pitti)

Fig. 5.23
Velázquez, *Madre Jeronima de la Fuente*, c. 1622 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 5.24
Paulus Pontius After Rubens, *Isabel Clara Eugenia*, 1625 (London, British Museum)

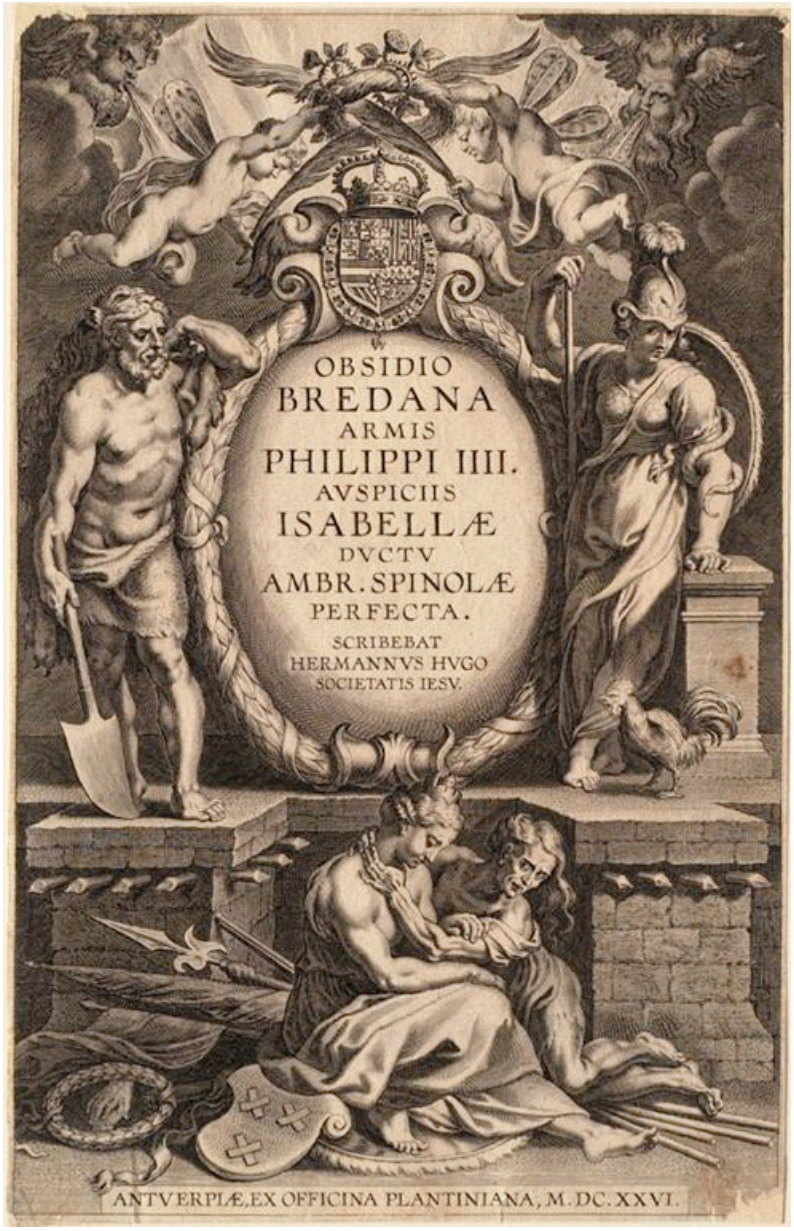

Fig. 5.25
Cornelis Galle After Rubens, frontispiece for *Obsidio Bredana*, 1626 (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional)

Fig. 5.26
Jacques Callot, *Siege de Breda*, c. 1627 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 5.27
Rubens, *Defenders of the Eucharist*, oil on canvas, 1625-1628 (Sarasota, Ringling Museum)

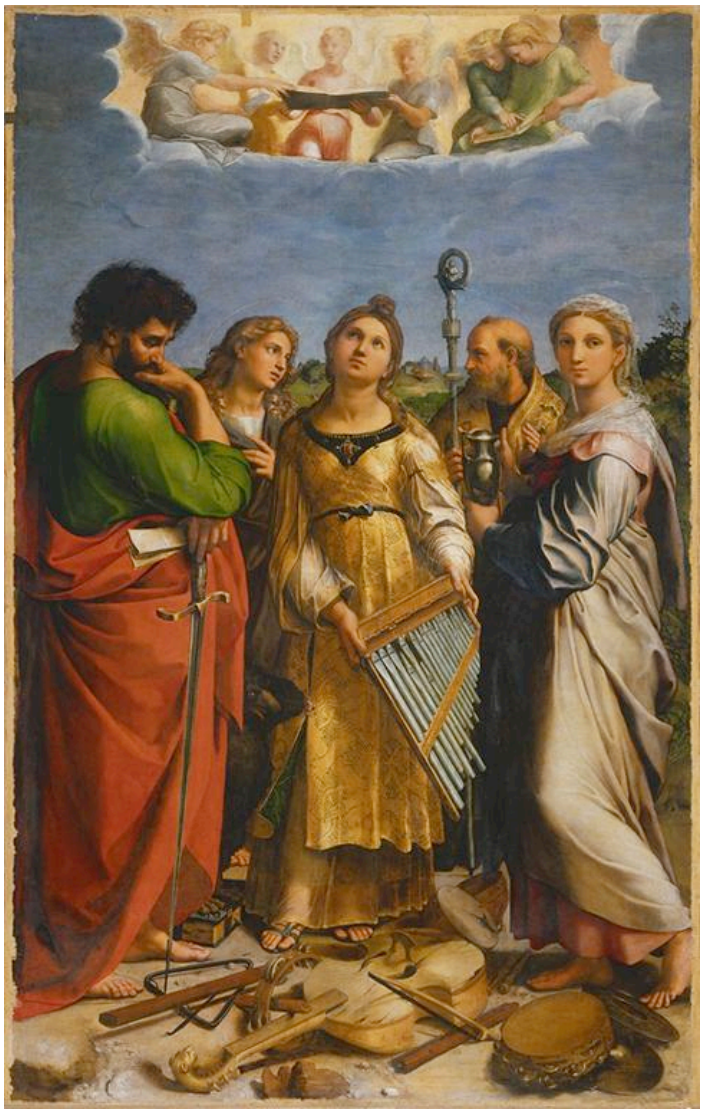

Fig. 5.28
Raphael, *St. Cecilia with Saints Paul, John the Evangelist, Augustine and Mary Magdalene*, 1514 (Bologna, Pincoteca Nazionale)

Fig. 5.29
Raphael, *Disputà*, 1509 (Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura)

Fig. 5.30
Giovanni Luigi Valesio, frontispiece for *Life of Blessed Catherine of Bologna* (with Saints Francis and Clare)1620 (Bologna, Pinoteca Nazionale)

Fig. 5.31
Rubens and Jan Wildens, *Act of Devotion by Rudolf I of Habsburg*, c. 1625-30 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 5.32
Andrea Bonaiuto, *Triumph of Saint Thomas*, 1365-1367 (Florence, Santa Maria Novella)

Fig. 6.1
Rubens, 1629-34 (London, Whitehall Palace Banqueting House)

Fig. 6.2
Rubens, *St, Gregory*, oil sketch for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp, c. 1618 (Buffalo, Albert Knox Gallery)

Fig. 6.3
Annibale Carracci, 1595-97 (Rome, Palazzo Farnese)

Fig. 6.4
Pietro da Cortona, 1633-39, (Rome, Palazzo Barberini)

Fig. 6.5
Nicolas Poussin, *Ascension of St. Paul*, 1649-51 (Paris, Musée du Louvre)

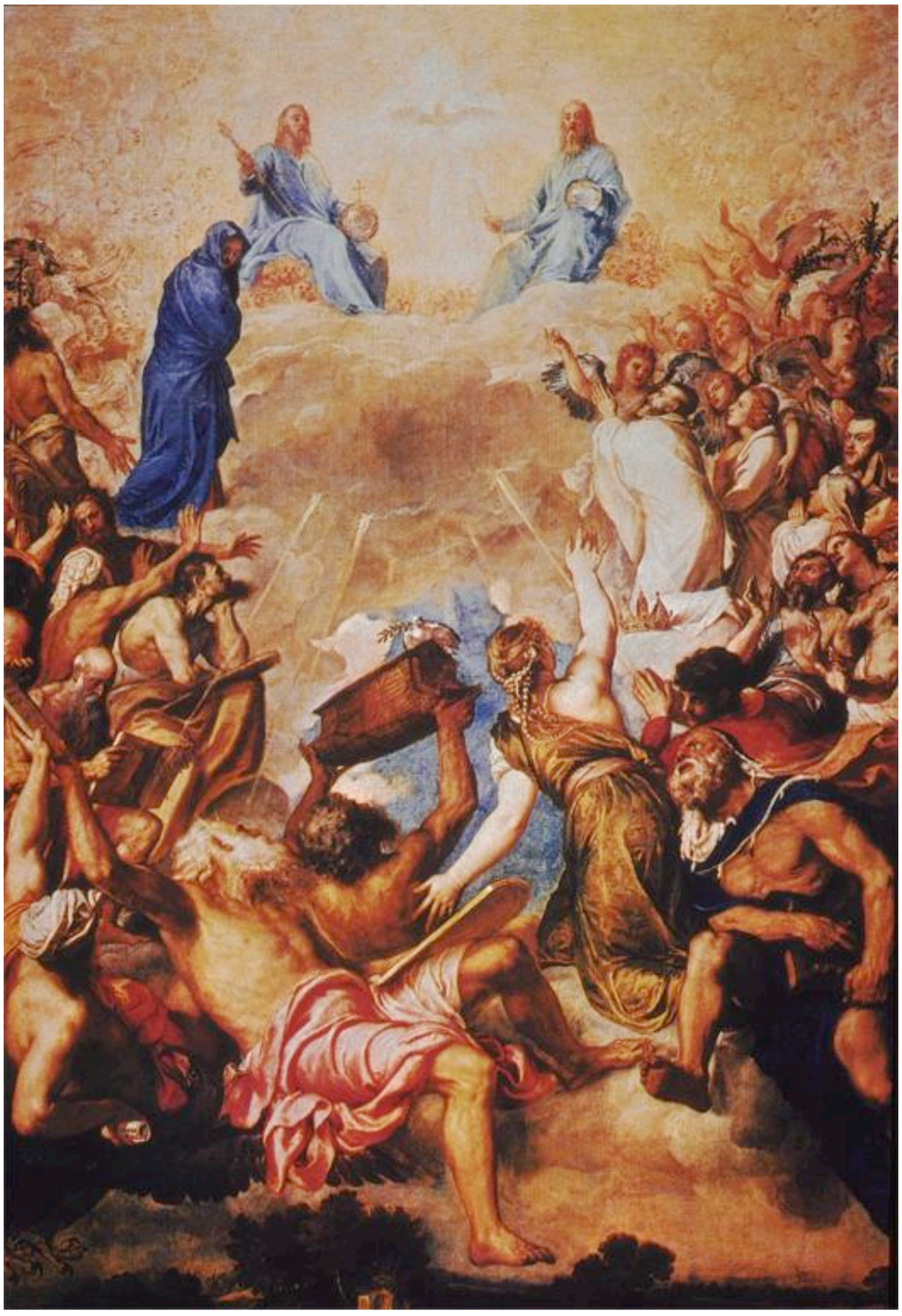

Fig. 6.6
Titian, *Gloria*, 1551-54 (Madrid, Museo del Prado)

Fig. 6.7
Rubens, *Peaceful Reign of King James*, 1629-31 (London, Whitehall Banqueting House)

Fig. 6.8
Rubens, *Glynde Sketch*, c. 1629 (London, Tate Britain)

Fig. 6.9
Rubens, *Apotheosis of the King*, c. 1629-31 (London, Whitehall Banqueting House)

Fig. 6.10
Rubens, *Union of the Crowns*, c. 1629-31 (London, Whitehall Banqueting House)

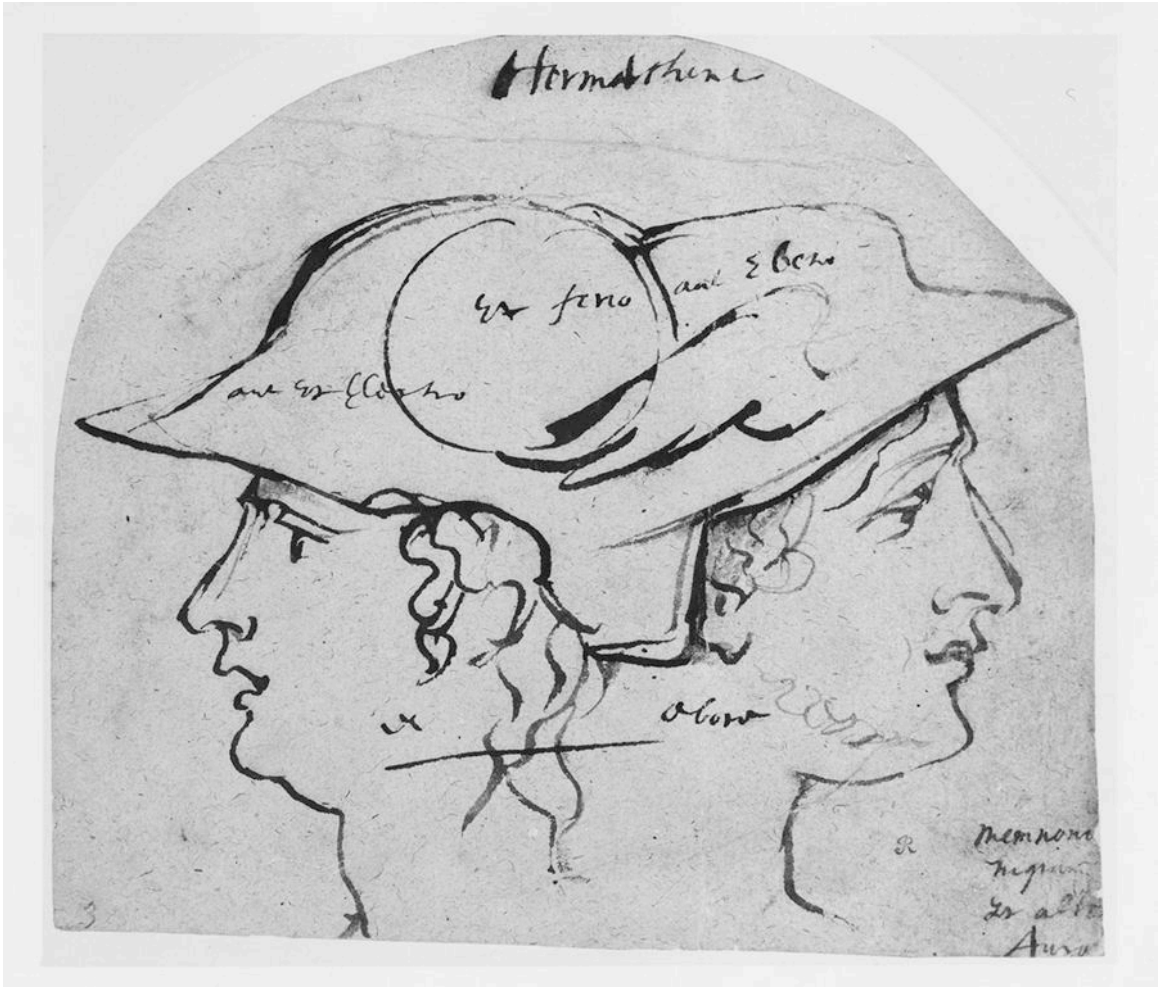

Fig. 6.11
Rubens, *Hermathena*, c. 1608 (London, British Museum)

Fig. 6.12
Rubens, *Three Nymphs with a Cornucopia*, c. 1628-29 (Madrid: Museo del Prado)

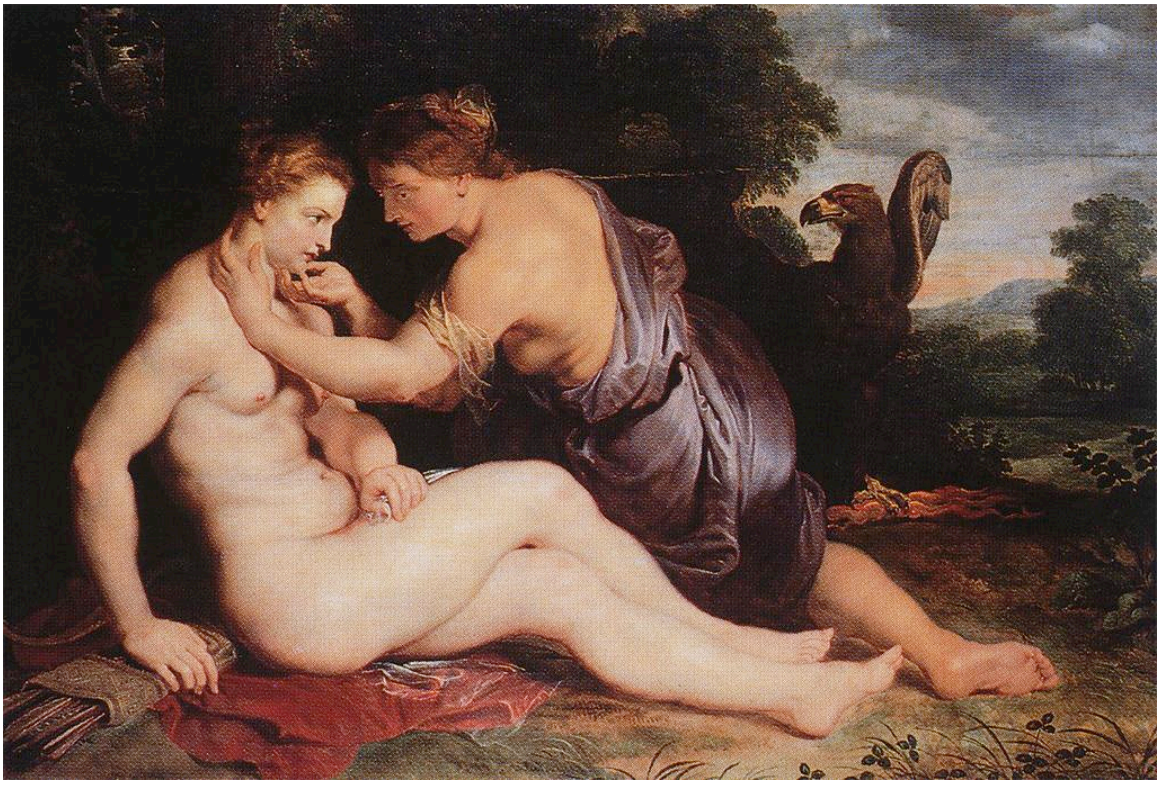

Fig. 6.13
Rubens, *Jupiter and Callisto*, c. 1613 (Kassel, Schlosswilhelmshohe)

Fig. 6.14
Rubens, *Peace Embracing Plenty*, c. 1629, oil on panel (New Haven, Yale Center for British Art)

Fig. 6.15
Rubens, *Mercury and a Yeoman*, c. 1629 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts)

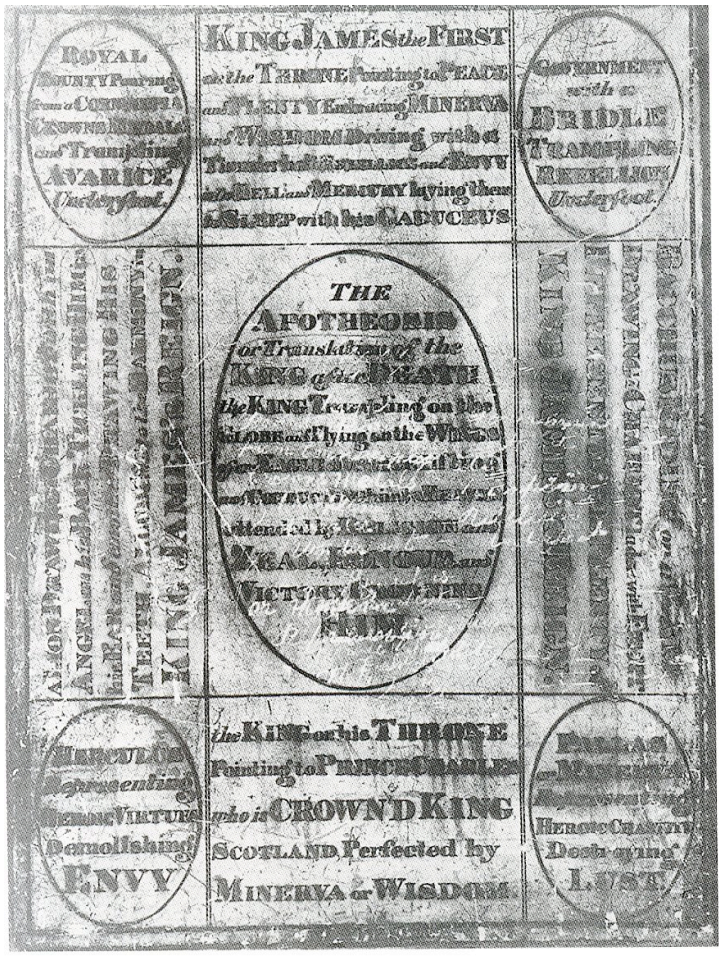

Fig. 6.16
Anon. Key Plan Whitehall Palace Banqueting Hall Ceiling (London, Victoria and Albert Museum)

Fig. 6.17
James I of England, *Basilikon Doron*, frontispiece (Edinburgh, 1599)

Fig. 6.18
Giotto, *Allegory of Charity*, 1305 (Padua, Capella Scrovegni)

Fig. 6.19
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, detail, *Allegory of Good Government*, 1348 (Sienna, Palazzo Pubblico)

Fig. 6.20
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, detail of Peace (L) and Magnanimity (R), *Allegory of Good Government*, 1348 (Sienna, Palazzo Pubblico)

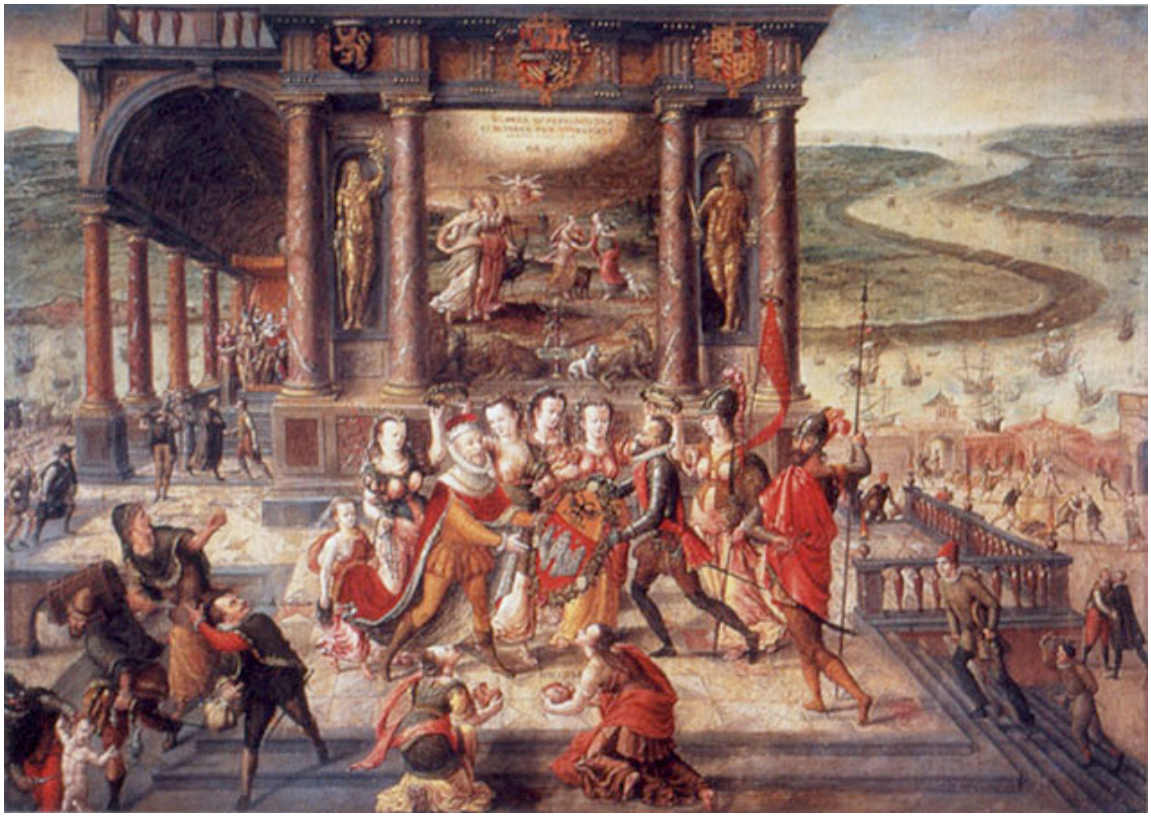

Fig. 6.21
Hans Vredeman de Vries, *Allegory of the Good Government* of Philip II, 1585 (Antwerp)

Fig. 6.22
Hans Vredeman de Vries, Allesandro Farnese and Philip II, det. *Allegory of Good Government of Philip II* (Antwerp)

Fig. 6.23
Lucas de Heere, *Allegory of the Tudor Succession*, 1572 (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art)

Fig. 24
George Gower, *Armada Portrait*, c. 1588 (Woburn Abbey, UK)

Fig. 6.25
Cesare Ripa (Giovanni Campani) *Abondonza* (Plenty), *Iconologia,* (Rome, 1603)

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