“A Hunt for Love”: The Torre de la Parada, & Rubens’ *Rape of Proserpine*

Alexandra Argitis

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By: Alexandra Argitis

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_____Examiner
Dr. Johanne Sloan

_____Thesis Supervisor(s)
Dr. Steven Stowell

_____Thesis Supervisor(s)

Approved by _____
Dr. John Potvin Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____
Dr. Annie Gerin Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts

ABSTRACT

Alexandra Argitis

In examining the meaning of rape in Rubens' painting of Proserpine, I consider its erotic context through a synthesizing of sources and methods to articulate it. The nuances which contribute to a such an interpretation involve various methodological considerations, ranging from a social historical consideration of seventeenth-century views of rape, to an Ovidian and classical source study to reveal sexual ideologies which permeate in Rubens' work. The "love hunt" is a theme which I identify to clarify my erotic interpretation for his painting. This identification demonstrates the ways in which hunting or chasing is made palatable in Rubens' work through the dynamic of his female and male mythological subjects. It is in the codification of Rubens' victims that I identify them as intentionally eroticized.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Peter Paul Rubens' painting *The Rape of Proserpine* (1636-1638) (fig. 1), was commissioned by Philip IV of Spain for his hunting lodge, the Torre de la Parada, located in Monte de El Prado. Rubens' painting of Proserpina's abduction is one of over sixty mythological paintings the artist and his studio created for this site. Analyzing this image provides a perspective into the interpretation of mythological rape imagery in the seventeenth-century context. Proserpina, having many other names — Proserpine, Persephone, and Kore — is known in mythology as the immortal daughter of Jupiter (god of the sky) and Ceres (goddess of agriculture). Throughout this paper, I will primarily refer to the goddess as Proserpina, given it is the name Ovid uses for her in the *Metamorphoses* (8CE), a popular source for this myth. The gods will also be referred to by their Roman names when discussing Roman texts, and their Greek names when referring to the Greek texts (e.g., "Zeus" and "Jupiter").

The scholarship around Rubens' Torre commission has included polarizing perspectives that have prompted my research. For instance, Svetlana Alpers describes Rubens' Torre as having a limited sense of tragedy in his representations of sexual violence, whereas Aneta Georgievska-Shine and Larry Silver disagree. These views will be explored in greater depth in later subsections. Both victims and perpetrators of violence in Rubens' Torre are discussed in the scholarship I have seen, but this thesis will explore the issue of eroticism in relationship to the Torre as a hunting lodge in greater depth.

My thesis contributes to a feminist art-history, which calls for a re-examination of historical rape imagery. Feminist art historians like Diane Wolfthal and Mary D. Garrard who have famously examined images of rape in Medieval or Early Modern European histories within

a feminist context are just a few examples.[1] My research is motivated by questions pertaining to the erotic parameters of Rubens' Torre commission, but more specifically his *Rape of Proserpine*. Therefore, I believe that it is necessary to include criticism from a feminist perspective in the context of Rubens' erotic art.

My interest in discussing Rubens and his painting of Proserpina arises from contemporary questions around the representation of rape, particularly in film. Feminist film history often explores the voyeuristic nature of female representation through theories of the male gaze, which contributes to ethical debates around rape representation in cinema.[2] From Bernardo Bertolucci's "Last Tango in Paris" (1972) to Jennifer Kent's "The Nightingale" (2018), the representation of rape in moving pictures (which has the potential to sensitize or desensitize viewers) has at times caused public outcries about for whom and how rape is represented on screen. Other scholars have written on cinematic rape, and I mention these contemporary debates simply to acknowledge that they inspired the origins of my thesis. Although my thesis is on Rubens' painting of a mythological subject, images of rape have contemporary relevance: the

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[1]Some examples of feminist scholarship like Wolfthal's *Images of Rape* (1999) problematizes Netherlandish rape imagery and "heroic rape" popularized in the contemporary West, Medieval, and Renaissance periods, or Garrard who argues a proto-feminist perspective to the female Baroque artist Artemisia Gentileschi in "Artemesia's Hands" (1989). Other texts, like A. W. Eaton's "Where Ethics and Aesthetics Meet: Titian's Rape of Europa" (2003) deconstructs the female victim through aesthetics and ethics, concluding that art in this case can be inherently good or bad, since we are meant to enjoy the sexual violence depicted. While these examples vary in purpose, they demonstrate the various ways feminist critiques have been used in analyzing (mythological and historical) rape imagery.

[2] Laura Mulvey's paper on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) describes and disseminates the male gaze in cinema. Women have played what she describes as the exhibitionist role before cinema. Being codified with a "to-be-looked-at-ness" nature, their character connotes passive and erotic impact in their representation. Cinema has heightened this through a voyeuristic enhancement of the male gaze, by combining "spectacle with narrative," and making the viewer even more invasive. The role of passive and erotically coded female is a representation that existed before cinema, but that the moving picture enhanced. (808-809)

depiction of (female) bodies and victims is not merely academic topic, but rather it is an issue of current concern.

Rubens completed hundreds of paintings of mythological scenes in his lifetime, a great many of them being scenes of war, hunting and abduction. By exploring *Proserpine* and its depiction of sexual violence (a genre that Rubens was accomplished in), this thesis will ask how might the depiction of rape and the sexual qualities of the image have been considered in its time by the exclusive few who would have seen it?

My thesis will examine various aspects of the painting and the context to determine both its erotic content as well as its purpose in the Torre. In the context of this thesis, when discussing "erotic pleasure", the person experiencing pleasure will be assumed to be male (although female pleasure is a topic that would also merit research).[3] My thesis explores the classical texts that inspired Rubens' program, the social history of rape in Early-Modern Europe and will also include an experimental visual analysis in which "kinesics" is used to analyze the potential eroticizing aspects of the painting. Despite Rubens' fascination with violence, the Torre's violent themes have not been discussed at great length. A key question I consider is the relationship between the paintings' subjects and the walls they covered and their functions: Is there not a

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[3] Stephanie S. Dickey, "Damsels in Distress: gender and emotion in seventeenth-century Netherlandish art," *The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands,* (The Netherlands: Uitgeverji Waanders, 2010), 55: Dickey notes that during the Dutch Republic, there existed an economically diverse art market, and that women as well as men were often the buyers of pictures. She also notes that women would likely spend more time looking at pictures hanging in their homes than their husbands. While Dickey argues that this elicits conversation around how artists (both male and female) would have perfected representations of female beauty and domesticity, what is also worth noting is how female pleasure may have come into play, as women would have 'enjoyed' the paintings more often than men.

relationship between the scenes of chase and abduction and the purpose of the lodge as a space dedicated for hunting?

THE TORRE DE LA PARADA

Philip IV & the Torre's Decorative Program

Appointed king in 1621, Philip IV of Spain (1605-1665), is described in the words of John Colin Dunlop as the most "magnificent and courteous" monarch of Spain; he indulged himself and his royal guests with great spectacles and banquets, and possessed a consistent taste for the epicurean.[4] Aside from these sensual indulgences, Philip obtained the title of *Gran Papelista* (a Spanish term for "a man that is always busy among papers or writings")[5] for his political skill and knowledge.[6]

Before working for Philip IV, Rubens was the court painter for the Infanta Isabella (1566-1633), the sovereign of the Low Countries, or the Spanish Netherlands, and a major intermediary factor between Rubens and the Spanish court.[7] At her request, Isabella would have Philip IV ennoble Rubens in 1624,[8] making Philip his most important patron between 1630 to

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[4] John Colin Dunlop, *Memoirs of Spain during the Reigns of Philip Iv. and Charles Ii., from 1621 to 1700*, (Edinburgh: T. Clark, 1834), 74 : Philip would suspend every sumptuary law during his stay in Madrid regarding entertainment. Dunlop describes that throughout the duration of his residency in Spain, ceaseless events for entertainment would take place: feasts, tournaments, and bull fights, and some which Philip would participate in and win in.
[5] Pietro Giannone, *The Civil History of the Kingdom of Naples*, Translated by James Ogilvie, vol. II, (London: 1723), 693.
[6] Dunlop, *Memoirs of Spain,* 26.
[7] Marie Geraerts, "Rubens's Judgement of Paris for Philip IV. Attitudes to the Nude in Spanish Royal Correspondence," *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands in the Age of Renaissance and Baroque*, edited by Carl Van de Velde, (Massachusetts: Peeters, 2009) 117.
[8] Geraerts, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands* 116.

1640.[9] Rubens and his studio would begin painting for the Torre in 1636.[10]

The Torre de la Parada (the tower of the stopping-place)[11] functioned as a hunting lodge, adorned by a large decorative program. The lodge was a space of leisure, but also a space intended to train the following generations of rulers.[12] Aneta Georgievska-Shine and Larry Silver describe these future rulers as "guardians of their subjects," requiring a moral training which was edified by ancient philosophers, Classical mythology, as well as painted representations of aristocratic scenes, such as those that were included in the Torre's decorative program.[13] The paintings in the Torre were part of a long Spanish history of displaying depictions of hunting scenes in countryside aristocratic villas.[14] The commission involved the works of Rubens, Diego Velázquez, Pieter Snayers, as well as other artists. The general subjects of the program were assigned by category to each of the following artists prominently: Rubens was commissioned to create mythological scenes (including animals and three court hunts), Velásquez created portraits and paintings of the royal court, and Vicente Carducho painted a handful of religious works.[15]

The tower consisted of a main entrance, eleven rooms, and a chapel, all of which were covered in paintings.[16] Rubens and his workshop contributed fifty animal and hunting scenes, and sixty-three mythological narratives.[17] However, not much forethought seems to have been given to the decorative layout of the program. As Svetlana Alpers discusses, the placement of the

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[9] Geraerts, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands* 117.
[10] Svetlana Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* (New York: Phaidon, 1971) 29.
[11] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 25.
[12] Aneta Georgievska-Shine and Larry Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, (Ashgate: England, 2014), 225. According to Georgievska-Shine and Larry Silver, the lodge served to train the next generation of rulers, imparted moral lessons through Ovidian myths, ancient philosophy, as well as portraits both aristocratic and of dwarves or jesters.
[13] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 225.
[14] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 225.
[15] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 107.
[16] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 107.
[17] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 42.

mythological paintings seems to have no discernable arrangement, as paintings of similar themes and subjects were not hung together.[18] For instance, the character Proserpina is seen in both Rubens' *Rape of Proserpine,* and in *Orpheus leads Eurydice from Hades* (fig. 2). Although the two stories represent Proserpina's abduction and position as queen of the Underworld, the paintings were not hung in proximity of each other.[19]

The tower's use declined over time, and by 1700 it was left in a great state of neglect.[20] In 1710, Austrian troops pillaged the tower, resulting in several of the paintings being either damaged or lost (likely looted).[21] During the eighteenth century, the Torre was destroyed in a fire, and the remaining paintings were scattered to private and public collections such as the Museo del Prado in Spain.[22] The pillaging and the fire has made the analysis of the Torre more complicated, as it is difficult to establish where all of the artworks were originally located. [23] However, several of Rubens' mythological works have survived, and his painting of Proserpina is one of many that can still be visited at the Museo del Prado.

Rubens' studio had roughly a year to complete the commission and was paid only 22,000 *livres* – a small income for the number of paintings created at the time.[24] As a result, the overall quality of the commission is considered poor and greatly rushed.[25] This is also due to the fact

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[18] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 109: Alpers makes this analysis based on the inventory of the Torre. The cataloging here is based on Alpers assessment of the inventory uncovered, where mythological paintings of similar narratives of both story and theme (love, death, etc...) were scattered throughout. The example provided by Alpers is *Orpheus Leads Eurydice from Hades* and *Orpheus Playing the Lyre* are hung on different floors.
[19] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,*109, 304: Orpheus and Eurydice were exhibited in the second room on the first floor while Proserpina was hung in the fourth room.
[20] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 42.
[21] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 42.
[22] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 2-3.
[23] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 43.
[24] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 31.
[25] Julius S. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue*, vol. I, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 251.

that Rubens did not execute each painting himself, as several of the paintings assigned to his assistants do not appear to have been retouched by him.[26] Despite the poor quality of some paintings and gaps in our knowledge about its historical arrangement, Rubens' paintings were nonetheless an impressive feat which would have transformed several rooms of the Torre into mythological environments. Rubens' interpretation of the mythological stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* renders the stories with masterly depictions of dramatic expressions of the passions.[27]

The main room of the Torre included the celebration of the King's own hunting escapades,[28] but themes of the hunt (mythological and contemporary), decorated several walls and rooms of the tower. According to Nico van Hout, it was Rubens' hunting scenes, and particularly what he describes as his "trial of strength between humans and animals" that he argues as most characteristic of Rubens' artmaking.[29] Some of Rubens hunting scenes derive from classical texts. An example is found with *Diana and Her Nymphs Hunting* (fig. 3), a virgin goddess who hunts a mortal named Actaeon after he stumbles upon her bathing, therefore sentencing him to death by turning him into a deer for her dogs to chase down. In addition, the activity of hunting, popular at the time, was seen as an analogy for warfare, and offering a vision of war.[30] The Sala de los Reinos, also in the Torre, depicted the military victories of Spain, which reinforced the relationship between war and hunting.[31] Why then include paintings of rape

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[26] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 35.
[27] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 146.
[28] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 105.
[29] Nico Van Hout, "Violence," *Rubens and His Legacy,* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2015), 29.: Rubens depicted hunting scenes of European game and animals, but also of exotic animals such as lions, hippos, tigers, leopards and crocodiles. Rubens became the first artist since antiquity to represent a hippopotamus.
[30]Suzanne J. Walker, "Composing the passions in Rubens's Hunting Scenes," *The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands,* (The Netherlands: Uitgeverji Waanders, 2010), 113.
[31] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 105.

mythology? This question will be addressed through this thesis by looking at Rubens' *Rape of Proserpine,* and the classical texts that inspired it.

OVID'S VERSUS RUBENS' *METAMORPHOSES*

Publius Ovidius Naso: Ovid & His *Metamorphoses*

Ovid was the primary source for Rubens' mythological works for the Torre. As Rubens was an avid reader of Ovid, and used works like the *Metamorphoses* to create the Torre commission, examining the literary sources will aid in grasping the erotic nature of images like *Proserpine*. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* consists of two-hundred and fifty stories about the interactions and relationships between the gods and humans. Metamorphoses*,* meaning "transformation" is thematically focused on stories in which characters transform, and often undergo physical alterations. As a collection of poems, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is compelling because the interactions demonstrate unpredictable treacheries against humanity.

The focus on women in the stories of the *Metamorphoses* makes it a distinctive classical text; in fact, several stories recount the tragedies of female protagonists rather than acts of male-heroism and brings into question female agency.[32] Some scholars have asked what was Ovid's intention by incorporating stories focusing on women; did he have a proto-feminist attitude? Among Ovid's female protagonists, there are several accounts of their pursuit, abduction, and rape. Although rape is not described in depth, the children which the victims often produce

[32]Patricia B. Salzman-Mitchell, "Gaze, Image, and Reading in the Metamorphoses," *A web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image and Gender in Ovid's Metamorphoses,* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 21: "...I also allow agency to female characters, because *Metamorphoses* lets women act and become central actors in the stories, even when their achievements are restricted."

afterwards indicate that a sexual violation occurred. Do these accounts and the language Ovid used to write about them reveal an empathetic perspective towards the victims?

Scholars such as Leo C. Curran discuss the language used in the *Metamorphoses*, and the potential empathy Ovid showed toward the female victims. His article "Rape and Rape Victims in the Metamorphoses" argues that Ovid treats rape with a level of empathy by portraying the events with terror.[33] Ovid's description of Proserpina's abduction is not described in depth, in fact Curran states that it occurs with "breathtaking speed," and that the lack of description conveys in its own respect a sense of horror, but violence is described at greater length in other stories of rape.[34] Curran argues that Ovid understands rape and the male fantasy at its most savage through his description of the male rapists as completely annihilating their victims, and rendering them disposable.[35] He argues that Ovid makes the rapist a grotesque caricature of masculinity through their deeds.[36] Curran examines the motif of flight and pursuit in Ovid as being "the heart of the experience" that demonstrates both the fear and dehumanization of the woman, as well as the appetite of the rapist.[37]

Chase is in addition identified as a poetic device for Ovid to put the reader in the victim's perspective, as many have experienced the terror that comes with flight and chase.[38] Curran's argument that Ovid empathized with women is disputed by scholars like Amy Richlin, and will be re-examined later in this thesis.[39] Although Curran's views are contested, his description of

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[33] Leo C. Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the Metamorphoses," *Arethusa* 11, no. 1/2 (1978): 232. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26308161.
[34] Curran, *Arethusa*, 218.
[35]Curran, *Arethusa,* 218-219.
[36] Curran, *Arethusa,* 218.
[37] Curran, *Arethusa*, 233.
[38] Curran, *Arethusa*, 233.
[39] Amy Richlin's arguments are further discussed on page 38.

the dynamic between rape victims and rapists is of note. Curran argues that Ovid uses a "predator motif," in which the rapists possess a predatory appetite, to suggest how the victim is hunted like an animal, and which shows the women reduced to that nature.[40] This motif identified by Curran is an idea I will return to later to understand Rubens in his context. This literary account of Ovid, even though it is debated by scholars, will help to assess Rubens' version of the myth of Proserpina, and to interpret the intention of this artwork.

Peter Paul Rubens: Humanism & The 'Homer of Paintings'

Classical mythological narratives have a long history of being adapted into European art of the Early Modern period, in which they served as allegories for various contemporary concerns, as is the case in the Torre commission. However, the ability to produce great mythological paintings, especially during the Early Modern period, was associated strongly with Italian artists. This began to change in the context of the Baroque period, when Northern-European artists created formidable renderings of classical themes. Although denigrated by their Southern neighbors as landscape artists and "classically challenged,"[41] the excellence of Northern-European depictions of classical themes, evident in Rubens' renderings of mythological stories, is now rightly recognized in the canon of art history.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) was a Flemish artist who is considered to have "stylistically hybridized"[42] paintings in part through his combination of Italian and Northern European styles. Rubens painted classical stories which demonstrate a deep study of

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[40] Curran, *Arethusa*, 233-234.
[41] Eric Jan Sluijter, "How Rembrandt Surpassed the Ancients, Italians and Rubens As the Master of 'the Passions of the Soul'", *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review,* (2014) 129 (2): 64-65. https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.9541.
[42] Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Rubens: A Double Life,* (Chicago: Allison & Busby, 1993), 1.

contemporary and ancient histories.[43] Rubens was a Philomath of ancient literature, and held a particular fondness for classical texts such as Ovid.[44] Rubens was considered the "Homer of Paintings" by both painters and historians;[45] famously, Eugène Delacroix described Rubens as, "... that Homer of painting, the father of warmth and enthusiasm in art, in the art where he puts all the others in the shade, not perhaps because of his perfection in any one direction, but because of that hidden force — that life and spirit — which he put into everything he did."[46]

Rubens was greatly influenced by humanists in Antwerp, and was recognized for his dedication to his paintings of classical themes.[47] Humanists, who promoted the study of classical culture,[48] regarded highly the relationship between painting (*pictura*) and poetry (*poesis*), and the poetic nature of painting; this belief shaped Rubens' life and work.[49] Rubens' close network included humanists, such as his own antiquarian brother, Philip Rubens (1574-1611), and the intellectual philologist (as well as mentor), Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), whose works such as *De Constantia* (1583) tried to accommodate stoicism for Christian audiences.[50] Rubens, influenced by the perspective of Christian humanists, aimed to transcribe ancient lessons of the past as

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[43] Lescourret, *Rubens: A Double Life,* 1.
[44] David Jaffé et al., "The Catalogue: Reworking of Rome," *Rubens: A Master in the Making*, (London: National Gallery Company, 2005), 89: Rubens would attend a prestigious Latin school where he would acquaint and immerse himself in the classics, which then developed into an infatuation with the ancient world.
[45] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 173.
[46]Eugène Delacroix, *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, edited by Hubert Wellington, translated by Lucy Norton, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 212. October 20th, 1853.
[47]Aneta Georgievska-Shine, "Introduction: Rubens and The Ancient Myths," *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth*, *1610-1620, Visual and Poetic Memory,* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2009), 19.
[48]Paul Oskar Kristeller, "HUMANISM." *Minerva* 16, no. 4 (1978): 586. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41820353: Humanism was a movement which began in Italy during the fourteenth century and permeated through Europe well into the sixteenth century, which is simply based in the imitation and study of classical antiquity.
[49] Georgievska-Shine, *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth,* 19.
[50] Georgievska-Shine, *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth,* 18.

Christian moral exemplars.[51] This can be seen in works such as *The Finding of Erichthonius* (1616) (fig. 4), which Georgievska-Shine suggests explores the relationship between poetry and theology through the hybrid infant rendered in this piece.[52] In essence, Rubens contributes to what Georgievska-Shine describes as, " a discovery of the sacred in the images of the profane."[53] According to said scholarship, Rubens represented classical mythology as a means of moral storytelling.

Rubens also imitated much of Titian's art, an esteemed master of *poesie*.[54] Rubens, who is believed to have considered himself a 'nouveau Titian,' approached the classical nude, however, in a manner that has been considered as even more erotic than Titian.[55] Given the so-called promotion of Christian ideals, the erotic figures included in Rubens' classical paintings for the Torre are in tension with the Christian humanist beliefs of the period. Rubens' love for all things Ovidian continued into his later years and is evident in the Torre commission, one of his last major projects before his death. Despite being part of a network of Christian humanists, the erotic qualities of Rubens' art are evident in the mythological narratives of the Torre, as seen in the large-scale painting *The Rape of Proserpine*.

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[51] Georgievska-Shine, *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth*, 22-23.
[52] Georgievska-Shine, *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth*, 22-23.
[53] Georgievska-Shine, "Erichthonius, or the Serious Joke of Fables," *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth,* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2009), 171.
[54] Geraerts, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands*116.
[55] Geraerts, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands*116.

THE RAPE OF PROSEPRINE

Visual & Formal Analysis

While Rubens drew from the text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, he was familiar with Ovidian illustrations and prints even before his Torre commission.[56] Publications such as the Lyons edition from 1557 and Bernard Salomon's woodcuts from its 1587 Leipzig edition are some examples which Rubens would have come across.[57] Several reproductions of Proserpina in these illustrated *Metamorphoses* can be seen in several editions printed between 1557-1591. Most of these illustrations align more with Ovid's interpretation of the story than Rubens' painting does. For instance, the water-nymph Cyane is present during the abduction, as seen in *Pluto Bears off Proserpina* from the Lyon 1557 edition (fig.5), a figure which does not appear in Rubens' painting. However, the edition from 1591 of Proserpina (fig. 6) includes the female deities Venus, Athena, and Diana, who are not described in Ovid's text. These deities do however appear in another version of the story known as *De raptu Proserpinae* by the author Claudian who will be discussed below.

Rubens also painted an earlier version of *The Abduction of Proserpina* (1615-1620) (fig. 7).[58] The preserved sketch is what remains, as the painting was destroyed in a fire in 1861.[59] This earlier sketch was copied in a print by Pieter Soutman (1620-1625) (fig. 8). Rembrandt would later become aware of Rubens' early version through the Soutman print, and his own painting of *The Rape of Proserpina* (1631-1632) (fig. 9) is a poignant representation of Claudian's account

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[56] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue,* 254.
[57] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 82-83.
[58] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 157: last owned by the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim.
[59] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 157.

of the story.[60] It is Rubens' later version, however, painted for the Torre, which I will be analyzing. Since the Torre is concentrated with mythological paintings, this context is part of what makes this painting a fascinating case study for examining images of sexual violence.

The Rape of Proserpine hung in the fourth room of the Torre de la Parada, along with six other documented paintings. The works ranged in subjects, including: a painting of Juno and Jupiter (lost in the sack of 1710), Psyche and Cupid, a satyr, Polyphemus, as well as deer, dogs and two window pieces of different birds.[61] Representations of gods, creatures, and animals all existed in the same space.[62] A range of human emotions can be seen in *The Rape of Proserpine,* one of only a handful of paintings done by Rubens himself for the commission;[63] several of the paintings were assigned to his assistants, and appear not to have been retouched by Rubens' hand.[64] Measuring one-hundred and seven inches wide, and seventy-one inches tall, this imposing canvas provides a vibrant and pastel vision of a tragic abduction story. The gods represented from left to right are Venus, Diana, and Minerva, while Proserpina is grappled in the center by Pluto. Venus, who was involved in the organization of the abduction, is seen directing her putti to drive the chariots forward. Diana and Minerva are attempting to save Proserpina from Pluto, whose face reads as possessive and crazed.

Rubens paints Proserpina in an exacerbated pose with her body being carried off by Pluto. Proserpina is supine, with her arms extended and her back arched; her body language

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[60]Amy Gohlany, "Rembrandt's Abduction of Proserpina," *Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University: Dutch Art of the Golden Age,* vol. 3 (Pennsylvania: University Park, 1988), 33: Rembrandt's efforts were with the intention to surpass Rubens' original version.
[61] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 304-305.
[62] Georgievska-shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 232: These animal portraits were part of fifty separate paintings of animals that hung over doors or windows of every room in the Torre, which were called *sobreporta* or *sobreventa*.
[63] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue,* 293.
[64] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 35.

reads as terrified and defeated. With a fearful expression, she gazes at the putto above her, which holds the reins of Pluto's chariot; meanwhile the putto below carries a horse whip. These chubby infantile allegories of love – who are being directed by Venus, the goddess of love – are literally driving the chariot, while also representing metaphorically the stirring movements of the heart. The putti personify the love (lust) which hastens Pluto; they also foreshadow Proserpina's future as Pluto's queen and lover.

Pluto's rage and entitlement contrasts with the depiction of Proserpina. He is shown as possessing the regal and unruly privilege of a chthonic god who can overpower a frail young maiden.[65] Color is also used to enhance the sexual contrast of this "unnatural marriage."[66] Proserpina's crimson drapery contrasts against her milky skin, which according to Georgievska-Shine and Silver, recalls Renaissance erotic poetry, as red and white were associated with love.[67] However, the violent nature of the subject is suggested by the falling drapery that reveals her fleshy torso, as well as the flower basket that spills beside her, symbolizing her loss of innocence and maidenhood.[68]

Rubens' classical sensibilities are apparent when this image is compared to a Roman sarcophagus frieze (fig. 10), which shares a similar narrative style by telling its story from left-to-right.[69] Scholars such as Julius S. Held suggested Rubens drew from this frieze in his recreation.[70] However, the classical rhythm of Rubens' painting is interrupted by Proserpina's

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[65] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain,* 17.
[66] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain,* 17.
[67] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain,* 17.
[68] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain,* 17.
[69] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens,* 293.
[70] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens,* 293.

gestures. Her arms, particularly her extended right arm, which seems almost separate from her body, disrupts the composition's rhythm, and introduces a heightened sense of despair.[71]

However, although Held suggests that this frieze was Rubens' inspiration, I argue that there is another ancient sarcophagus that possesses a greater resemblance to Rubens' painting of Proserpina: the *Sarcophagus with the Rape of Proserpine* (fig.11). Two of its most striking characteristics are: the representation of Proserpina – who is shown with her body and both of her arms greatly extended – and the putto above Proserpina. Having not seen other representations of Proserpina with putti included, I find this piece to be an even closer comparison to Rubens' painting. Having formerly been in San Silvestro, a Roman church, the sarcophagus could have possibly been seen by Rubens during his studies in Rome.[72] I have found, however, no evidence that suggests direct inspiration from this frieze.

While there are similarities to classical art (in composition) there are also differences. For example, the non-classical element of the broken composition (caused by Proserpina's arm) is a result of the heightened passions of the subjects. Scholars such as Svetlana Alpers have suggested that in Classical art, the representation of human expression tended to be unified. However, Rubens' painting appears non-classical because of the degree of individual and contrasting expressions. Rubens' subjects' emotions are more individualized and particularized through a heightened sense of the human passions (gesture, faces, poses, etc…).[73] Rubens' lightened use of colors and loose brushwork also further emphasizes non-classical elements.[74]

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[71] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 158.
[72] This information comes from the wall text accompanying the object in the Uffizi Gallery Florence, within the section entitled *Roman Art*. Inventory 1914, n. 86, Uffizi Gallery, Florence: "The frieze was in San Silvestro during the 16th century, until it was moved to the Palazzo Michelozzi in Via Maggio, Florence, in 1743; acquired by the Uffizi in 1787."
[73] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 172.
[74] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 172.

Scholars have mixed interpretations of Rubens' paintings; some argue that his representations of vivid sexual violence are imbued with a complex moral interpretation of the subject. Others have argued that the violence is simply a device to depict love at its most heightened moment of arousal, being the abduction itself.[75] To understand the choices Rubens has made about expressions, passions, etc., it is important to consider his textual sources.

PROSERPINA

> *... Here Proserpine*
> *Was playing in a glade and picking flowers,*
> *Pansies and lilies, with a child's delight,*
> *Filing her basket and her lap to gather*
> *More than the other girls, when, in a trice,*
> *Dis saw her, loved her, carried her away —*
> *Love leapt in such a hurry! Terrified,*
> *In tears, the goddess called her mother, called*
> *Her comrades too, but oftenest her mother;*
> *And, as she'd torn the shoulder of her dress,*
> *The folds slipped down and out the flowers fell,*
> *And she, in innocent simplicity,*
> *Grieved in her girlish heart for their loss too.*[76]

It is this passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where the rape of Proserpina is most famously recounted and is described as a swift and terrifying event. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* describes the abduction and the events that followed. While Proserpina is flower-picking on her favorite island of eternal spring — Enna of Sicily[77] — Pluto (Jupiter's brother and Proserpina's uncle) emerges from the Underworld on his dark chariot, swiftly captures her and returns to the Underworld.

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[75] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 163.
[76] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by A.D. Melville, (Oxford University Press: New York, Baltimore, 2020), 109.
[77] S. W. Williams, "The Anthesphoria of Ancient Greece," *The Ladies' repository: a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion,* Vol. 7, Iss. 5 (University of Michigan: Humanities Text Initiative, 1871), 369. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/acg2248.2-07.005/387.

Unbeknownst to her mother, Ceres, the act of this abduction had been arranged by Proserpina's father, Jupiter. While in the Underworld, Proserpina is tricked into eating a pomegranate growing there. Although Proserpina is granted time above ground to reunite with her mother for half of the year, eating the pomegranate makes her physically bound to the Underworld, and therefore she must return for the other half. As a result of Ceres' loss, nature becomes barren and produces no harvest.

This separation between mother and daughter was the Ancient Greek calendric explanation for the changing of seasons: Persephone (Proserpina) and Demeter (Ceres) were reunited during the summer months, and separated in the winter, during which time Persephone returned to Hades (Pluto) in the Underworld.[78] Demeter and Persephone held great importance in Ancient Greek religion and culture, resulting in agricultural festivals such as the *Thesmophoria*. Conducted almost exclusively by women, it was a fall festival which consisted of throwing sacrificial pigs into a pit of snakes to then retrieve their remains three days later, mixing them with seed grain and placing them on an altar.[79] This was believed to be a reenactment of Persephone's descent into Hades, a ritual to ensure the germination of grain during the following winter months.[80]

The *Anthesphoria*, a festival of flowers celebrated during the spring in honor of Persephone's return to her mother (which was combined with the celebration of other female deities), was considered one of the most beautiful festivals in ancient Greek culture.[81] The mimetic dance associated with the *Anthesphoria* involved choreography characterized by

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[78] Robert Garland, "The Public Sphere," *Daily life of the Ancient Greeks*, second edition, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2008) 207.
[79] Garland, *Daily life of the Ancient Greeks*, 267.
[80] Garland, *Daily life of the Ancient Greeks*, 267.
[81] Williams, *The Ladies' repository,* 369.

whirling movements which stop suddenly to imitate being stuck to one another which were meant to mimic the movement of Persephone's abduction.[82] In the Greek myth, Persephone's yearly journeys between her husband and mother were understood as literal journeys, but also metaphysically journeys between life and death. Hades, symbolic of death, was one of the great mysteries in the ancient nations of Greece and Rome.[83] Persephone and the *Anthesphoria* represents a triumph over death, the seed in soil which appears lost to us when buried, but blooms with the spring, and bears fruit in the fall.[84] Hades' violation of Persephone is also symbolized through the act of flower picking,[85] an association between virginity and 'flower hood.' Persephone's abduction is a manifold death, as it represents not only her descent into the Underworld, but also connotes her defilement and loss of innocence, a type of social death or defilement.

Female violation occurs in several mythological stories. The abduction and transformation of Chloris, for instance, the goddess of flowers, was celebrated by ancient Romans during the festival *Floralia*.[86] The nymph Chloris (meaning green) was said to have been raped by Zephyrus, the West Wind; subsequently, she was reborn as Flora to be the goddess of flowers. This story was likewise understood as an allegory for the new growth of spring blooming into a multitude of flowers.[87] Flowers in classical mythologies such as Persephone's are not only symbols of youthful innocence, but also foreshadow the loss of that innocence.[88]

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[82] Lillian B. Lawler, "'The Lily' in the Dance," *The American Journal of Philology* 65, no. 1 (1944): 80. https://doi.org/10.2307/291142.
[83] Williams, *The Ladies' repository,* 369.
[84]Williams, *The Ladies' repository,* 370.
[85] Diane Purkiss, "Thinking of Gender," *The Cambridge Companion to Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 78. doi:10.1017/CCOL9780521884174.005
[86] Purkiss, *The Cambridge Companion,* 79.
[87] Purkiss, *The Cambridge Companion,* 78.
[88] Purkiss, *The Cambridge Companion,* 79.

This can be seen in the spilling of Proserpina's flower basket that Rubens' integrates into *The Rape of Proserpine*. These symbols can likewise be found in other accounts of Proserpina's story. I examine other literary texts and versions of Proserpina to highlight the themes and similarities that arise in these retellings of the story, to better understand Rubens' visualization of the myth.

"CARRYING OFF": A LITERARY EXAMINATION

De Raptu Proserpinae

Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae* is a lengthier, more violent version of the myth, written four hundred years after Ovid. Proserpina's capture is preceded by a description of Pluto yearning for a spouse. Venus coordinates with Jupiter in this 'hell raising' by coordinating Pluto's successful ascent from the Underworld and capture of Proserpina. The goddesses Diana, Minerva (Athena) and Venus are present during the abduction in Claudian's version while they are absent in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The emotion of the story is amplified through Claudian's narrations of Proserpina's severing from her home,

> …Proserpina was snatched away in the chariot and appealed to the goddesses…He was like a lion who when it has gained hold of a heifer which is the glory of the stall and herd, and dug at the bared entrails with his claws and exhausted his savagery on all its limbs, stands foul with clotted gore … Meanwhile Proserpina was being carried off in the swift chariot, her hair streaming in the wind, beating her arms in lamentation, and breaking forth in vain complaints to the clouds…[89]

Proserpina's abduction also includes her voice, one which is not often incorporated:

> What sin have I attempted, of what fault am I guilty of that I'm thrust down in exile to the monstrous maw of Erebus? O how fortunate were all the girls that other abductors have carried off! At least they enjoy the common light of day. But

[89] Claudian, *De Raptu Proserpinae*, translated by Claire Gruzelier, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 40, 41.

> to me is denied both my virginity and the heavens, my chastity is stolen along with the light, leaving the earth beyond me, I am led as a captive to serve the tyrant of Styx.[90]

Claudian's lengthy poem includes much more detail during the event of the abduction. She mourns for the loss of her virginity and for being denied the heavens, mourning for her home above and for her girlhood. In both Ovid and Claudian, she is shown clearly mourning the loss of her youth. As Ovid and Claudian are the two main sources known which Rubens used, what can we take away from what Rubens' painting may or may not have represented?

The differences noted can be first spotted is the use of characters, as in this aspect, Rubens depends more on Claudian to represent the female figures (Diana, Venus, and Minerva) who are not present during the abduction in Ovid's iteration. However, apart from the integration of the female deities, it lacks other Claudian aspects. Claudian's version is lengthier than Ovid's account of the abduction, and its length also includes a deeper description of setting, physical attributes, and a more acute attention to the heightened emotions of the characters involved. Rubens' painting focuses entirely on the foreground and its subjects who are loosely draped. Rubens' painting is set apart, however, in his inclusion of the putti, which neither poem directly mentions.[91]

The putti's function is more allegorical than literal, as they are not true characters represented in Proserpina's abduction. Regardless, I identify them as an integral aspect to Rubens' interpretation of the myth. As mentioned above, the putti drive Pluto's chariot; Proserpina in her distress, looks upward, examining the putto above her. This, I interpret, as a sign to reassure the male viewer's fantasy that Proserpina will develop affections for Pluto in the

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[90] Claudian, *De Raptu Proserpinae,* 41.
[91] The putti, as aforementioned, is however rendered in the second sarcophagus frieze I located on page 16.

future. While the putti play an active part in the desire which stirs Pluto and his decisions to abduct her, it may also insinuate a stirring in Proserpina.

This insinuation is the love which she will eventually return to Pluto, an example of what has been called "precipitate love," in which an abductee eventually falls in love with their abductor (like Stockholm syndrome). Rubens was aware of this concept, and it is a topic which I will expand on further below. Ultimately, the version by Rubens possesses a more positive perspective than the tragic poetic account by Claudian, by diminishing the rape through this literal figuration of love (the putti).

Although Rubens took from Claudian and Ovid, I will be shifting to an examination of older classical versions of the myth. While Rubens was not taking inspiration from these sources when he painted *Proserpine*, examining alternate ancient accounts of Proserpina helps to demonstrate some common themes that were evoked consistently throughout the literary accounts of the story, which align with themes in Rubens' painted version. Hesiod's *Theogony* (730-700 BC) notes the abduction, but only to document the event rather than to tell a poetic story:

> And he came to the bed of Demeter looking abundant in
> nourishment, and she bore the white-armed Perse-
> phone, who Aidoneus stole from her mother, Zeus
> the resourceful granting her to him.[92]

The *Homeric Hymns*, (attributed to Homer, however the author is unknown) is yet another collection of poems which provides a lengthy retelling of Persephone and her mother,

> Earth with its wide roads gaped
> and then over the Nysian field the lord and All-receiver,
> the many-named son of Kronos, riding his immortal horses, sprang upon her.
> Against her will he took her and on his golden chariot
> carried her away. She wailed, and she raised a shrill cry,

[92] Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, translated by M.L. West, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30.

> calling upon father Kronides, the supreme Lord.
> None of the immortals or of mortal men heard
> her voice, not even the olive trees bearing splendid fruit.[93]

The Homeric Hymns carries the familiar description of Persephone being carried, and her cries unheard (either there was no one to help, or no one to defy her fate).

Upon examining the passages, even though the story-telling changes, what is consistent in all written variations is the act of carrying off. Whether Proserpina is gifted or stolen, she is taken unwillingly, and her abductor is described as ravisher or lover. In the act of her abduction, Proserpina groans, shrills, and wails, out of fear and mourning. There is a clearly articulated power dynamic, a young virgin against a god of death who is helpless but fated to be queened. This destiny testifies to the lack of power which Proserpina inherently possesses and to her frailty in comparison to the arresting swiftness of the deathly king. Rubens' depiction shares with these accounts the act of abduction and implication of rape. As Proserpina is carried away, so is her innocence often highlighted. In Rubens' painting, the integration of putti is seemingly unique, and speaks to the transition between virgin girl to married woman.

A Celebration of Violence or Unprecedented Humanization

Moving away from the texts, we return to Rubens' painting and the violence Proserpina experiences, which has polarized scholars. For instance, Svetlana Alpers' book, *Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* which greatly details the commission, is an essential source in my thesis. In her text, Alpers affirms that Rubens maintained up until his death the ability to interpret classical texts with skillful depictions of the passions: "What is persuasive and moving about the Torre series is the masterly way in which it deals with passions common to all men and women

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[93] Anonymous, *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, third edition, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2020), 2.

— jealousy, pride, anger, sorrow, and many moods and varieties of love."[94] Nonetheless, Alpers questions Rubens depictions of tragedy in the Torre paintings:

> The consistent turning of scenes of death and violence into love scenes can be understood, on the other hand, as a sign of Ruben's limited interest in, or even limited sense of, the tragic side of human life. He could have avoided the simple celebration of violence and death he found in the illustrated Ovid's and could have developed such scenes to bring out the sense of human loss, which is so significantly lacking in the book illustrations.[95]

Although praising his ability to represent passions, Alpers criticizes Rubens' efforts to depict tragedy in his reinterpretations of the *Metamorphoses*. This argument connects to my previous discussion of Rubens' putti, which I argued were a diminutive tool to remove some sense of tragedy in his *Proserpine* for the male viewer by replacing rape with a relationship of love between Proserpina and Pluto.

Alpers' interpretation of Rubens' work contrasts with Georgievska-Shine and Silver's, in their book *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, in which they argue that Rubens' depiction of humanity is complex:

> …despite the cultural conditioning of both the artist and his audience to the allegorical utility of images of sexual violence of men against women, there are too many instances in this series of *fabulae* where Rubens seems to challenge these assumptions by an unprecedented humanization of his protagonists—both the desiring males as predators or as slaves of their drives, rather than as masters of their actions, and their female objects of desire…[96]

Georgievska-Shine and Silver argue that Rubens challenges the "cultural conditioning" of sexual violence by making his gods humanly complex. They propose that Rubens' shows male figures as slaves of their emotions, who have no mastery over their actions, and depicting women

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[94] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 146.
[95] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 160.
[96] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 21.

as objects of desire. They argue that his paintings demonstrate not a limited sense of tragedy, but rather that by humanizing the gods, they show the potential sensitivity that Rubens possessed.[97]

This humanization extends to the perpetrator of the rape. In *Proserpine*, Georgievska-Shine and Silver argue, the predator (Pluto) is shown as a slave to his desire (Eros). This is depicted clearly since it is not Pluto who drives his chariot and whips his horses, but rather the putti; therefore, love parades over and masters the characters and the events. The putti can therefore be interpreted here as active allegories for both Proserpina and Pluto's positions. The "triumph of love"[98] permeates through the Torre program, as Eros is shown as the omnipotent presence that governs affairs between the divine and mortal beings.[99] Georgievska-Shine and Silver argue that Rubens' paintings show the dominion of Eros, and that characters in the paintings often experience pain because of the desire for pleasure.[100]

Scholars agree about Rubens' ability to capture the passions, despite disagreeing on the tragic elements of the paintings. Alpers' argument suggests that his representation of tragedy and violence is unconvincing, whereas Georgievska-Shine and Silver argue that he humanizes the characters. As I will argue below, I find Alpers' argument more convincing, because the humanization of the predators in Rubens paintings does not necessarily make them any less erotic. While the painting depicts human passions, I will argue that it is nonetheless frivolous, boisterously pastel, and sensational.

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[97] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 21.
[98] Athanassaki, Lucia, "The Triumph of Love and Elegy in Ovid's Amores 1, 2," *Materiali e Discussioni per l'analisi Dei Testi Classici*, no. 28 (1992): 140. https://doi.org/10.2307/40236002: the triumph of love is to be understood here through Ovid, and the triumph of love and love poetry that existed in works such as his *Ars* and Amores. Triumph of love is only realized in poetry and was considered alien at this time, as triumphs at this time are associated with Augustan triumphs, accomplished through war.
[99] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 16.
[100] Georgievska-Shine and Silver, *Rubens, Velazquez, and the King of Spain*, 16.

The violence is present, but the painting seems to glorify the violence through a consideration of what Margaret D. Carroll describes as the battle of the sexes.[101] This battle was one that fascinated Rubens, who represented it often in his works.[102] An underlying sense of impunity towards the predators exists in the painting as well as for the princes and kings who would indulge in these paintings. It is therefore informative to examine in greater depth the cultural context, which Georgievska-Shine and Silver suggest that Rubens allegedly challenged.

EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN VIEWS OF RAPE

Seventeenth Century Political Absolutism & Princely Patronage

Political absolutism triumphed across Europe between 1610 and 1659.[103] Theories of sovereignty were greatly circulated by Spanish writers, and several believed in the full authoritarian right of the king to make, break, and change laws in accordance with the government.[104] This autocratic power extended to the king as being a representative of God, acting according to both divine and earthly laws.[105] An example of Spain's political absolutism can be seen during Philip IV's reign. Philip enthusiastically collected mythological subjects with nude figures,[106] and the artists he sought after were particularly reputable for painting flesh and bodies.[107]

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[101] Margaret D. Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence," *Representations*, no. 25 (1989): 5. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928464.
[102] Nico van Hout, Rubens *and His Legacy,* 26.
[103] R. Mousnier, *The Decline of Spain and the Thirty Years War, 1609-48/59*: *The New Cambridge Modern History*, edited by J. P. Cooper, 4:104. The New Cambridge Modern History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521076180.004.
[104] R. Mousnier, *The Decline of Spain and the Thirty Years War,* 104.
[105] R. Mousnier, *The Decline of Spain and the Thirty Years War,* 113.
[106] Geraertes, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands,* 118.
[107] Geraertes, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands,* 118.

However, in the religious climate of the Counter-Reformation, nude images of the kind Rubens and Titian painted, were considered to be lascivious and dangerous for eliciting lustful thoughts.[108] In 1628, the priest of the court would preach "fire and brimstone" against nude representation, particularly attacking the richest members of society.[109] It was forbidden for artists to paint the nude in Spain, let alone have it imported to Spain.[110] Despite these laws and Inquisitions, the fact that Philip IV collected these paintings illustrates how his actions and the actions of the royal Spanish power could bypass them.[111] Despite the religious atmosphere in Spain, Margaret D. Carroll discusses Rubens' paintings as a product of a broader seventeenth-century European culture, following the tradition of princely patronage at the time.[112]

With the rise of sixteenth-century political absolutist theory, it was claimed by some that Monarchs were like the king-god Jupiter, which put them above human law.[113] Political thinking at this time also argued that politics should be ruled primarily by force.[114] Such a claim can be seen in the works of scholars like Guillaume Budé (1467-1540), who describes princes as above

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[108] Geraerts, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands,* 118-119: In 1628, the priest of the court Hortensio Felix Paravicino would preach 'fire and brimstone' against such representations as a distraction for Christians, the more skillfully the flesh was rendered, the more dangerous the image.

[109] Geraerts, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands,* 118: Hortensio Felix Paravicino in particular, targeted nobles and kings in this matter.

[110]Geraerts, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands,* 119. Rule XI of the Inquisition's Index which was applied but concretized more fervently in 1640 forbid the possession of nude paintings, the creation of nude paintings, as well as having any nude painting be imported to Spain. Having a painting imported to Spain would result in a year of exile, while possessing or painting them would mean excommunication.

[111] Geraertes, *Classical Mythology in the Netherlands,* 118-119: However, the hunting lodge was also considered a villa that would have been suitable to exhibit mythological figures.

[112] Carroll, *Representations,* 6.

[113] Carroll, *Representations,* 5.

[114] Felix Gilbert, "The Crisis in the Assumptions about Political Thinking," *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History In Sixteenth Century Florence,* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), 129. https://hdl-handle-net.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/2027/heb32023.0001.001. PDF.

law and who likened them to Jupiter. Princes were therefore not bound to human law.[115]A painting program that promoted such god-like sovereignty was Federigo Gonzaga's Palazzo del Tè in Mantua (1530). Gonzaga, whose character has been described as Machiavellian,[116] had the program filled with stimulating imagery of both political and personal content. Several lascivious paintings decorate the Palazzo del Tè with an explicit rendering of sexual violence, such as *Jupiter Seducing Olympias* by Giulio Romano (1526-1528) (fig 12).

Carroll argues that the Palazzo del Tè program imbues the prince with a godly autonomy, and that the decorative program justifies the power of the prince over unconsenting subjects.[117] This can be seen in rooms such as his Sala del'Aquile, where three *stuccho* reliefs representing scenes of abduction are meant to allegorize the gods' dominion over their respective regions; like the gods, Gonzaga's enjoyed political and personal power over his subjects, as did his fellow princely rulers.[118] One of these reliefs is a depiction of *The Rape of Proserpina* (fig. 13), along with *Jupiter taking Europa* and *Neptune taking Amymone*.[119] The use of force was after all considered a legitimate and decisive factor of political determination, which as according to Carroll, extended to the representation of mythological violence enacted onto unconsenting subjects.[120]

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[115]Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism," 5: Guillaume Budé (Budaeus), Annotations in pandectas (Paris, 1508), in Operum, vol. 3 (Basel, 1557; reprint ed., Westmead, Eng., 1966), 68: Budé endorsed Aristotle's fifth type of monarchy, which discusses the ruler as having the same absolute dominion as that of the father in the home, being an ideal model.

[116] Anthony Bertram, "Italy," *The life of Sir Peter-Paul Rubens*, (London: Peter Davis LTD., 1928), 20.

[117] Carroll, *Representations,* 6.

[118] Carroll, *Representations,* 6: A fourth relief of Jupiter enthroned conferring with the gods is included, further emphasizing the thematization of dominion and the enforcements of the rights that all the gods respectfully enjoyed, reflecting that of the neighboring princes.

[119] Carroll, *Representations,* 6.

[120] Carroll, *Representations,* 6.

Rubens would have been familiar with these spaces, since Vincenzo de Gonzaga, (1562-1612), a later Duke of Mantua, took Rubens into his service as a court painter in Rubens' youth.[121] The Palazzo del Tè and the works of Giulio Romano which covered the Palazzo was famous beyond Mantua, and was considered by Jacob Burckhardt as one of Rubens' most important predecessors.[122] Like Romano, this genre of an animated narrative-style would be explored by Rubens later in his life with commissions such as the Torre.

Alpers discusses the evidence of Rubens' attraction to some of the mythological scenes from the Palazzo del Tè, although she notes that in the Torre, there were comparatively fewer representations of mythological hunting scenes or animals scenes than there were at the Palazzo del Tè.[123] While Alpers argues that several compositions and figures were directly inspired by Romano's work, Rubens had a lack of concern with hunting and hunters while Romano did.[124] I disagree with this statement in part, as will be discussed below, as the act of hunting animal or beast can be considered as similar to the pursuit and abduction of women.

In addition, force was believed to be a critical factor of politics, and the use of violence was not only permitted, but also valorized.[125] Early sixteenth-century experiences of war prompted both theoreticians and rulers to believe that violence was a 'decisive factor.'[126] Robert Sheringham (1602-1678), a seventeenth-century royalist argued,

> ...the Monarchy is absolute, simple, pure, independent, without profanation of outward mixture, the King alone without further influence from the two Houses

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[121] Bertram, *The life of Sir Peter-Paul Rubens,* 24.
[122] Jacob Burckhardt, *Recollections of Rubens*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1949), 4.
[123] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 110.
[124] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 111.
[125] Carroll, *Representations*, 6.
[126] Gilbert, *Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence,* 129.

> having full power and authority to do out all acts of Justice… his power is authoritative and may not be resisted.[127]

Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540), a Florentine historian who opposed Medicean absolutism,[128] regardless stated, "Every government is nothing but violence over subjects, sometimes moderated by a form of honesty."[129] I argue that the effects of political absolutism influenced the images in the Torre, through the pictures of male gods subjugating unconsenting victims. I argue that the representation of the violent subjugation of female victims in the Torre function, similarly, as playing into the parameters of absolutist power.

Conversely, Georgievska-Shine and Silver suggest that Rubens' paintings for the Torre challenge the "cultural conditioning" of princely absolutism, and that his commission did not justify princely exploits, but rather viewed them negatively.[130] They argue that the paintings show great emotion and evoke both a sense of horror, as well as empathy for the gods who were not in control of their passions.

I, however, do not believe that this interpretation is nuanced enough. Rubens' indeed shows the abduction as violent, but violence as a device which eroticizes and desensitizes the events of rape. I will attempt to support this argument by considering how the image of *Proserpine* relates to the rest of the Torre program, and to other hunting imagery, which (sub)consciously behaves as an extension of political and social views of rape and (sexual) violence.

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[127]Edward Vallance, "Royalist Absolutism in the 1650's: The Case of Robert Sheringham," *Monarchism and Absolutism in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Cesare Cuttica and Glen Burgess, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 43-44.
[128] Gilbert, *Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence,* 137.
[129] Gilbert, *Politics and History In Sixteenth-Century Florence,* 137: To Guicciardini, distinguishing tyranny from monarchy is seemingly meaningless as force is an integral aspect to political regimes.
[130] Alpers, *The Decoration of the Torre de la Parada,* 105.

Rape and Sexual Offence in Early Modern Netherlands

The rich mythological illustrations produced by artists such as Rubens, and the demand for it by an affluent clientele is product of a larger cultural sensibility.[131] Surrounded by walls furnished with violence and mythological nudity, what might these walls say about seventeenth-century culture, and what sexual habits and desires were considered acceptable among the patrons and intended viewers?

As stated by Peggy Reeves Sanday,

> …the variation in the incidence of rape cross-culturally demonstrates that culture is a powerful force in channeling the human sex drive … rape is an expression of a social ideology of male dominance … rape is the playing out of a socio-cultural script in which the expression of personhood for males is directed by interpersonal violence and an ideology of toughness.[132]

Reeves determines that to understand the sexual attitudes of society, scholars must turn to social and cultural products.[133] The sister arts of poetry and painting can reveal the sexual attitudes of the seventeenth-century culture I examine. Rubens' paintings for the Torre, which show scenes of violence, chase, and pursuit, reflect broader social and cultural ideas around sexual misconduct. The evidence behind this can be better understood by examining, for example, the laws surrounding rape in this period.

I turn to criminal cases of domestic violence, specifically towards women, to better understand possible attitudes toward rape during the seventeenth century, using evidence from Manon van der Heijden's paper on rape trials from seventeenth-century Holland. While Rubens lived in Antwerp for most of his life, and his commission was destined for Spain, this source

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[131] Dickey, *The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands*, 55.
[132] Peggy Reeves Sanday, "The bases for male dominance," *Female Power and Male Dominance*, (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1981), 85.
[133] Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance*, 84.

nonetheless provides evidence about ideas regarding rape that may be relevant to Rubens, since it provides specific examples of trails that occurred in cities in Holland, a neighbouring Netherlandish province.

The legal trials discussed in Heijden's paper reflect broader social issues as a result of the different perspectives circulating about rape at this time. Trials of domestic violence focused more on proving a woman's innocence or sexual honor, than on proving that a man had committed a crime.[134] The severity of a conviction was often determined in relation to a woman's age, virginity and especially her marital status.[135] The legal definition of rape began to change during the mid-seventeenth century, which evolved to consider it a sexual offense. Before this, rape was rather a property offense or a violent offense, a theft against male property which made women objects of a crime more often than victims of it.[136] However, despite these new legal considerations, still what was at stake was the victim's resistance and innocence.[137] A perpetrator could have been severely punished for abduction and rape, but the victim's family members played a dominant part in criminal cases of abduction.[138] Only in 1656 was a marriage law implemented that made the 'seduction' of young women punishable.[139] However, the rape of specifically unmarried women were often given more severe sentences such as banishment, as virginity was a crucial factor in the severity of sentencings.[140]

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[134] Manon van der Heijden, "Women as Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seventeenth Century Holland: Criminal Cases of Rape, Incest, and Maltreatment in Rotterdam and Delft," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 3 (2000): 624.
[135] Heijden, *Journal of Social History,* 624.
[136] Heijden, *Journal of Social History,* 624.
[137] Heijden, *Journal of Social History,* 624.
[138] Heijden, *Journal of Social History*, 624: Dutch laws of the mid to late sixteenth-century were likely intended to protect family interests in cases of illicit marriage or abduction.
[139] Heijden, *Journal of Social History,* 624.
[140] Heijden, *Journal of Social History*, 625.

In addition to these legal conceptions of rape, seventeenth-century moralists believed that pubescent or menstruating girls were equally responsible for their sexual assault, due to the opinion that women had an insatiable sexual appetite.[141] It is therefore important to consider Rubens' painting in relationship to the fact that it was created within a culture that overlooked victims of sexual assault. While the 'seduction' of unmarried women was criminalized (established after Rubens lifetime), these laws were created alongside misogynistic moralist views which regarded pubescent women as sexually devious in nature. Ultimately, cases in which rape is involved often shifted attention from the rapist to gage the honor of the victim by gaging their (dis)interest in the crime.

The trials discussed by Heijden also reveal that there is no documentation of the harm or violence caused to assaulted women; rather the trials only mention sexual intercourse or 'dishonorable touching.'[142] These legal and social perspectives may have influenced the depiction and interpretation of images like Rubens' *Proserpine*. Such social and legal perspectives on the definition of rape, I argue, contribute to the depiction of sexual violence in art productions, such as the Torre commission.

RUBENS MYTHOLOGICAL HUNT: OVID'S ARS AMATORIA

Man versus Nature: Hercules & Philip IV

The Torre served a multifunctional purpose, one of both leisure and moral learning, and included paintings divided into categories of mythology and contemporary scenes. While both depict scenes of hunting, mythological and contemporary narratives of the hunt are normally discussed

[141] Heijden, *Journal of Social History,* 629.
[142] Heijden, *Journal of Social History* 625.

by scholars as separate. However, I find the mythological paintings as well as the contemporary hunting scenes to be thematically similar and it is important to consider them together. For instance, Pieter Snayers painting of *Philip IV Killing a Boar* (1636-1638) (fig. 14) falls into the category of contemporary hunting imagery and represents Philip IV in the act of grappling a boar. Philip, as we know, was an avid hunter, and chasing down boar on horseback was actually a favorite sport of his.[143] This painting of Philip hunting boar was one of two done by Pieter Snayers, that hung over a fireplace in the main room of the Torre (the *Galleria del Ray*).[144] Snayers' representation of Philip's man-handling confrontation in this sport can be compared with Rubens' painting of *Hercules and Cerberus* (fig. 15), of which only a sketch remains.[145] Rubens painted several images of Hercules, and it is assumed the Torre contained a series of the labors of Hercules.[146]

Although these two paintings are by different artists, they both show a demonstration of Herculean strength and of men straddling beasts. In one case it is the king and in the other, the mythological hero. The fact that both paintings are in the same hunting lodge might have encouraged viewers to draw a comparison between the two central figures. The figures straddling beasts might indicate a successful power over nature, and showing Philip as a champion over nature might correlate him to the great feats of the ancient Greek hero. Although these scenes show male characters in feats of hunting (figures wrestling with beasts), I argue that the scenes

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[143] Alpers, *Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 123.
[144] Alpers, *Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 122.
[145] Alpers, *Decoration of the Torre de la Parada*, 275: According to Alpers, the whereabouts of the painting is unknown, likely lost (p. 218). An inventory from 1700 lists a narrow painting of Hercules having been in the sixth room of the first-floor inventory from 1700 (p. 305) as well as a painting with Cerberus in the second room (p. 345), likely to have been *Hercules and Cerberus* and *Hercules and the Bull*.
[146] Alpers, Decoration *of the Torre de la Parada*, 274-275: However, of Rubens' paintings of Hercules, only some are associated with the Torre with certainty, and several others have been suggested to be a part of the program.

of abduction in this commission can also be thought of as hunting scenes. If we compare the image of *Hercules* to *Proserpine*, we can draw a connection visually between the two works which both show a man straddling something, showing a visual similarity between scenes of hunt and abduction.

Notably, the Western and ancient philosophical tradition closely associated women with the realm of Nature and men with the realm of civilization. This tradition is a gendered dualism which assumes and represents men as beings of dominance and reason, and women as beings of pleasure and nature.[147] Lisa Rosenthal, for instance, discusses allegorical representations by Rubens which render masculinity to possess associations of civilization and reason while femininity assumes characteristics of fruitfulness, pleasure as well as moral danger and sexual stirring.[148] These characteristics contribute to an allegorical and philosophical framework which assumes that the female sphere of nature should be largely controlled by men. This framework also makes nature and feminine passive and confirms masculine domination.[149] This framework is also reflected in Rubens' commission for the Torre, as seen in both the mythological and contemporary narratives scenes of Hercules and Philip.

While Philip IV does not share the same exposed musculature as Hercules or Pluto, nature succumbing to the forces of man is clear. These beasts, whether wild or mythological, consistently lose to the strength of man in these paintings. While there are not many works of Philip straddling an animal like that of his boar, there are various contemporary hunting scenes,

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[147] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 20.
[148] Lisa Rosenthal, "Rubens, Allegory, and Art-Historical Method," *Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens*, (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2005), 10:
Rosenthal discusses femininity as allegorically represented as tropes for fruitfulness and pleasure that will also be simultaneously associated with moral danger and sexual provocation, while masculinity is allegorically dichotomized as both valor and philosophical truth as well as war-like and emblems of civilization.
[149] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* 20-23.

as well as various mythological figures in the act of overtaking creatures or people. Another painting of Hercules, such as *Hercules and the Bull* (fig. 16), represents him aggressively pinning down a bull by its horns with a powerful grip. Apart from Hercules, other mythological narratives render men and gods in the act of straddling, particular those of abduction. In *Proserpine*, Pluto resembles the stature of Hercules, whose hands carry her with ease as they grasp her body. Other abductions share the same grappling style, such as *The Battle of Lapiths and the Centaurs* (fig. 17) where the central female of the painting is struggling between the gripping arms and hands of her abductor as well her rescuer.

Here I ask, why do the men in hunting scenes present the same power and posture as those in rape images? The scholarship I have seen often discusses the mythological narratives apart from hunting scenes, and I have yet to see scholarship that points out the similarities between them. I claim these visual similarities evoke a deeper ideology that had existed for centuries (from the ancient to the early modern period), that replaces deer, boar, or lion with vulnerable and youthful maidens. While scenes of abduction have sometimes been called "a triumph of love" (as noted above), I would rather call these abductions in this case a "love hunt." This can be supported by looking at Ovid's text, which develops the idea of "love as a hunt."

Ars Amatoria and Precipitate Love

Ovid conceptualized hunting as an allegory for love, which I have not seen discussed in depth in studies on Rubens' Torre paintings. As examined above, scholars have had contrasting views about Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* and the pursuit of women that permeates the text. As aforementioned, scholars such as Curran have pointed out Ovid's use of writing devices to create empathy for female characters. But does our perspective of Ovid's potentially empathetic language shift when we look at his other texts, such as his *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*)*?* This

empathetic interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* is challenged by the gaudy and womanizing voice of the poet who narrates Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*; this poem describes love as a gender war in which man is hunter and woman is prey.

This text is a collection of poems narrated by a gaudy poet, who provides answers on love, how to retrieve love, and how to view it altogether. *The Art of Love* includes chapters entitled: "The Loves," "The Art of Beauty", "The Art of Love", and "The Remedies of Love." The chapter on "The Art of Love" reads as an instructional guide for men in how to pursue women and love in their life.[150] The way that love is discussed in this poem is not as a mutual emotion or mutual affection, but rather as self-serving lustful acts of desire and individuality. In further examining "The Art of Love," love and the pursuit of it is consistently allegorized as predatory. For instance, the narrator states:

> First: be a confident soul and spread your nets with assurance.
> Women can always be caught; that's the first rule of the game.
> Sooner would birds in the spring be silent, or locusts in August,
> Sooner hounds would run away when the fierce rabbit pursue,
> Than would a woman, well-wooed, refuse to succumb to a lover;
> She'll make you think she means No! While she is planning her
> Yes!
> Love on the sly delights men; it is equally pleasing to women.
> Men are poor at pretense; women can hide their desire.
> It's convention, no more, that men play the part of pursuer.
> Women don't run after us; mousetraps don't run after mice.[151]

Ovid allegorizes love as the hunter and the hunted, an act of war which a soldier seizes,

> What's the right age for love? — the same as that of a soldier …Often success in war comes with an enemy's slumber — Rush in, then, and strike down all the unarmed of the town…This is a task that tries soldier and lover alike. Mars is a

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[150] Elizabeth McGrath, "Ovid and the Art of Love," *Rubens Subjects from History*, edited by Arnout Balis, vol. II, (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 117: McGrath argues that his *Art of Love* got Ovid into trouble for its offensive eroticism from the beginning and is likely part of the reason Ovid was sent into exile.

[151] Ovid, "The Art of Love," *Ars Amatoria*, translated by Rolfie Humphries, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 113.

doubtful god, and Venus never too certain.[152]

The male audience is called to be a persistent hunter, and one with little to no boundaries of how he should attain his desires. The term precipitate love derives from Ovid's *Art of Love*, and is defined as an act of lust which overcomes a man to abduct a victim who will eventually come to reciprocate love for her abductor.[153] In addition, Ovid accounts for the resistance of women by saying that it is merely a ruse, and that they enjoy being desired, chased, and inevitably captured. Ovid's view on love here is non-consensual, invasive, and insinuates that a woman's refusal or flight is associated with eroticism. The language in the *Ars Amatoria* challenges the supposedly proto-feminist qualities of the *Metamorphoses*, as Curran had argued in his discussion of the chase. Perhaps it is not the empathy for the victim that Ovid elicits; rather, perhaps the very act of flight was considered erotic.

Amy Richlin in her chapter on "Reading Ovid's Rape" contests arguments such as Curran's about Ovid's empathy. She discusses specifically the description of female disarray in flight and fear, and argues that to assume that these descriptions stir empathy blurs the very intention, which was to make them more sexually attractive.[154] In fact, the performance of rape in Ancient Rome during theatrical recitals of Ovid was quite comedic, and considered to be the climax or the punchline of a comedy.[155] Ovid then has arguably no more empathy for his victims than an audience would have for a pantomime on a stage; the performance of rape is no more than a pornographic scene of exhilaration, a cathartic thrill.[156] Pleasure and violence are adjacent

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[152] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria,* 30, 31.
[153] Eric Jan Sluijter, "Rembrandt and the Depiction of the Passions in the 1620s and 1630s," *Rembrandt and the Female Nude.* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 110.
[154]Amy Richlin, "Reading Ovid's Rape," *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992), 168.
[155] Richlin, Pornography *and Representation,* 170.
[156] Richlin, Pornography *and Representation,* 176.

in Ovid's writing, where the violence exists as a rape and the fear of that rape was seen as something beautiful.[157]

Ovid's proto-feminist edge flatlines when examining *Ars Amatoria*, with its egregious opinions about love and pursuit. The conversion from abduction to love is evoked visually in Rubens' *Proserpine*, which diminishes the tragic aspects of sexual violence. Rubens and his contemporaries in fact, believed precipitate love to be appropriate.[158] The literary similarities between love and hunting therefore were translated into the paintings of the Torre.
Since *Ars Amatoria* is another source which Rubens may have used for the Torre,[159] and allegorizes love as hunts and as war, it makes sense for paintings of hunting and abducting to also have visual similarities.

KINESICS: THE GESTURAL IN RUBENS FEMALE VICTIMS

Stirring Emotions: Rubens' Fleshy Women

As shown in the previous section, the mythological body rendered as the muscular male hunter is represented in all their strength and power. I transition now to the examination of the female body and ask: how does the female 'body' react in the context of the hunt? I will analyze bodily and gestural representation of the woman to show how she is eroticized.

Contemporary sources emphasized how figures in art could stir emotions. For instance, Samuel Driksz Van Hoogstraten (1627-1678), wrote in *The Visible World* that:

> It is not enough for a picture to be beautiful; it must have in it a certain moving quality (beweeglijkheid) that has power over those who see it; as Horace sings

[157] Richlin, Pornography *and Representation,* 165.
[158] McGrath, *Rubens Subjects from History,* 117.
[159] Alpers, Decoration *of the Torre de la Parada*, 187: Rubens depiction of *Bacchus and Ariadne* is an account which is briefly mentioned in the *Metamorphoses* but is better accounted in Ovid's *Fasti* as well as his *Ars Amatoria*, demonstrating Rubens versed knowledge of Ovid's writing.

> about poetry: 'A beautiful poem will not easily move me, but kindness can transport heart and soul. One smiles, or weeps, the viewer follows the trail: so, if you want me to cry, you must cry first.'[160]

This excerpt quotes the Roman poet Horace and echoes the humanist beliefs of the parallel between painting and poetry. Intellectuals such as Hoogstraten included this excerpt by Horace to argue that successful art represents emotion well enough to make the viewer feel emotions.[161] People of Rubens' time wanted paintings of figures to stir emotions—hence why I am looking at the figure of the female body. What does the female body stir in the context of Rubens' Torre paintings? In this section, I aim to establish how Proserpina, although a victim, is codified as erotic through her physical appearance.

As argued by Suzanne J. Walker, Rubens developed a vocabulary for the portrayal of male victims and an evocation of their extreme violence and suffering early on in his career.[162] Describing the characterization of male victims they have, "...soft, slack flesh abounding on an asymmetrical torso...the victim's body is fleshy; the torso lopsided at its core, with limbs that fail to function effectively."[163] I argue that this could also be said about female victims by using the image of *Proserpine* to correlate the characteristics described of victims.

But she is not just shown as a victim, but as a subject with an erotic quality to suggest a double-sided measure in her reading. Here I will discuss such qualities of *Proserpine* and of Rubens style. Rubens' depiction of Proserpina's flesh is both a notable aspect of his style, as well as an aspect which enhanced the voyeuristic experience of his paintings. While Rubens' female

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[160] Thijs Weststeijn, et al., "The Depiction of the Passions," *The Visible World: Samuel van Hoogstraten's Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 184.
[161] Weststeijn, *Samuel van Hoogstraten's Art Theory,*183.
[162] Suzanne J. Walker, "Rubens' Victims: Images of the Assaulted Male Body," *Rubens and the Human Body*, edited by Cordula van Wyhe, (Belgium: Brepols, 2018), 171.
[163] Walker, "Rubens' Victims: Images of the Assaulted Male Body," 157,158: Walker discusses whether this vocabulary when applied to male figures made them feminine or not.

figures reflected ideals of beauty during his time,[164] his fleshy and voluptuous women have also been insulted, for instance by George Forster (1750-1792) who describes them as, “mountains of flesh” and "repulsive.”[165] His classically hefty female bodies harken back to the antique standards of a fuller-figured woman,[166] as well as being contemporaneously indicative of beauty ideals. Already during Rubens' time his painted skin was considered sensuous and almost tangible.[167] The skin of his female figures often contrasts to that of their male abductors in Rubens’ work, whose skin is darker and hairier.[168] Particularly, female flesh carries specific characteristics to suggest a warmth, pinkness, and softness in addition to its seemingly tangible quality that were considered erotic by his own contemporaries.[169] These visual qualities suggest that the viewer is not meant to empathize with the woman, but rather to take pleasure in their appearance.

Women such as Proserpina are examples of the ‘damsel in distress’ trope, a common one in mythological rape imagery. For instance, Stephanie S. Dickey writes that, while denigrated, female vulnerability in art was recognized as erotically stimulating. Despite their supposed weakness, such women were thought to be willing participants that were playing the weak role, and to be capable of manipulating the situation to their own benefit.[170] Therefore, the male

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[164] Gerlinde Gruber, “Lust,” *Rubens and His Legacy,* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2015), 125.
[165] Gruber, *Rubens, and His Legacy,* 125.: Described by the German naturalist and travel writer George Forster.
[166] Gruber, *Rubens, and His Legacy,* 125-126: Count von Cobenzl wrote that his fleshy women can be excused, as Flanders was a region where “the fair sex is generally well nourished.”
[167] Gruber, *Rubens and His Legacy,* 127.
[168] Gruber, *Rubens and His Legacy,*123.
[169] McGrath, *Rubens Subjects from History*, 117.
[170]Stephanie S. Dickey, “Damsels in Distress: gender and emotion in seventeenth-century Netherlandish art,” *The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands,* (The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Waanders, 2010), 58.

viewer must imagine himself either becoming her rescuer, or succumbing to lustful temptations,[171]

> …damsel in distress' derives from an essential socio-sexual dynamic…female vulnerability, when combined with erotically appealing beauty, stimulates the male viewer to experience feelings not only of desire, but also of protectiveness and power … didactic function … conditioning the viewer to choose reasoned and virtuous action over lust … artists vary the balance of physicality and emotion.[172]

With this understanding, I now look more closely at Proserpina's body to see how this vulnerability can be codified.

Damsels in Distress: A Gestural Analysis

Kinesics is a study that analyzes how human beings communicate through their body movements and gestures.[173] Some of the most fundamental studies of kinesics lie in psychiatry, early psychology, and anthropology.[174] Although historically used in anthropology and psychology, I apply kinesics here to art history through the examination of Rubens' *Proserpine* as well as some of his other paintings to evaluate his female victims in erotic terms.

I recognize here the speculative nature of my analysis. While I am using the concepts of kinesics to analyze Rubens' painting, I do not argue that it should have a universal application. I incorporate this methodology to focus solely on Rubens' paintings, and not to say that these

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[171] Dickey, *The Passions in the Arts,* 61.
[172] Dickey, *The Passions in the Arts,* 75.
[173] Ray L. Birdwhistell, "BACKGROUND TO KINESICS: Introduction," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 13, no. 1 (1955): 10. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42581570.
[174] Birdwhistell, *General Semantics*,11-12: Aside from the division of different bodily responses (eye contact, gesture, facial expressions, etc…) kinesiology divides kinesics into three divisions; Pre-kinesics, micro-kinesics, and social kinesics. Pre-kinesics (general psychological bodily communication), micro-kinesics (the isolation and categorization of body motions into structural classes), and social kinesics (the structural constructs of the body as it relates to social interaction).

gestures have a uniform meaning within art history or even outside of it. My application of kinesics to Rubens is an experimental one, which is done to gauge the varying ways in which victims in Rubens' art may be interpreted as having erotic characteristics. My art examination of kinesics is mainly referenced to Kimball Owen Moodie's PhD thesis on body language. Although I acknowledge Moodie's work to be an older source, it possesses a useful application as to how bodies and gestures are interpretable in art. Further research might demonstrate how this theory may be applied to an art historical analysis of this period. Kimball Owen Moodie provides four common spatial orientations in human interactions and reactions in art: Cooperation – discussion; cooperation – intimacy; competition – opposition; and competition - avoidance.[175] These spatial orientations contribute to the interpretations of gestural communication in the relationship between painted characters. I would classify Rubens' *Proserpine* in this case, as "competition-opposition," which comprises of varying characteristics, as I will expand below. My objective in applying kinesics here is to provide another interpretative measure in what I observe as a patterned construction of Rubens' (female) victims.

Returning to *Proserpine*, her gestures, as discussed in the visual analysis, possesses an s-curved posture that rears her torso outward and extends her arms above her head, making her in complete dispossession of her own body. Moodie interprets such gestures of sexual contact using Michael Argyle's *Bodily Communications* (1975);

> ...hands placed in front of the chest denote defense, reaching out movements may indicate a desire for intimacy, open exposure of the lower half of the body can suggest sexual invitation, and restless movement of the legs signal a desire to flee another person's presence.[176]

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[175] Kimball Owen Moodie, "The Interpretation of Two Works Through Art Through Body Language," *Body Language as a Timeless Communication Vehicle in Western Art*. (Montreal: Concordia University, 1979), 57.
[176]Moodie, *Body Language as a Timeless Communication Vehicle in Western Art,* 118.

Proserpina is depicted leaning away from Pluto, which tends to imply dislike.[177] However, Proserpina's hands do not cover, but reach outward, which Moodie suggests as an indicator for desire. Proserpina's lower half is also exposed, another indicator of what Moodie describes as a sexual invitation, and her legs do not, or rather cannot, omit a desire to flee since Rubens shows her suspended. Although Proserpina's body leans away, her leaning is a way to reveal rather than conceal herself. The ambiguity that lies here in Rubens' victims is seen in the rendering that teeters on the line of repulsion and seduction.

The posture of *Proserpine* is familiar in other works from the Torre cycle, such as *The Battle of Lapiths and the Centaurs*, which renders the female subject Hippodamia in the act of carrying off. Hippodamia, who wears a crimson-colored drapery like Proserpina, also has an elongated, exposed, and limp disposition.

This same gesture can be seen beyond the Torre, with works like *The Hermit and the Sleeping Angelica* (fig. 18) (1626-1628), whose slumber — a nature where if violence befell them would be most unsuspecting — comprises attributes that invites the audience to take in her vulnerability, which synchronously makes her passive to both the hermit's gaze, as well as the viewers. The hermit lifts her garment to reveal Angelica's curvaceous posture and outstretched arms, maximizing the viewership of her body, as well as involving us, the viewer, as another hermit in the painting through the shared act of looking. Her vulnerability is accompanied by cluelessness, making the experience of viewing her more pleasurable. Crude and invasive moments such as these can be seen in other paintings such as Rubens' *Sleeping Venus with Cupid Watched by Satyrs* (fig. 19) (1592-1640), where Venus' genitals are completely exposed to the viewer.

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[177]Moodie, *Body Language as a Timeless Communication Vehicle in Western Art*, 87.

This invitation to examine the female form is widely explored in feminist studies of voyeurism.[178] The characteristics of the body and its erotic potential suggests that Rubens makes an intentionally erotic piece. In essence, the bodies of women in scenes of abduction, resemble greatly those shown in sleep and tranquility. Although one is passive (Venus, Angelica) and the other active (Proserpina), the resemblance here is shown through the ways the body is "exposed to the gaze."[179]

These physical markers of limpness and dispossession are characteristics which exist in a seemingly narrative cycle. From sleep to capture, Rubens repeatedly reuses this gestural composition in his representation of female victims to evoke a cruel and tragic cycle of female dispossession and passivity. The physical characteristics of Proserpina's body suggest passivity and submissiveness. It is therefore a paradox that the victim simultaneously protests her capture while also assuming a position of powerlessness. I argue that this stems from the male fantasy of the "damsel in distress," but also the fantasy of the woman who says no, only to later mean yes. This, as previously explained in my thesis, is a fantasy at least as old as Ovid, and contemporized by Rubens in which beliefs about precipitate love still existed. Rubens creates a subject that possesses qualities and reactions which convey attitudes of submission to create erotic overtones in the dispossession that they are experiencing.

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[178] Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," as referenced earlier in the paper in the introduction.

[179] Gruber, *Rubens and His Legacy,*154.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis stemmed from an interest to examine the meaning of rape in Rubens' painting of *Proserpine*, and to consider its erotic nature in its context. My interest was to synthesize sources and methods that could articulate the erotic nature of the painting. The nuances which contribute to a potential interpretation of Rubens' painting involved various methodological considerations. The historical context of the space and patron for which it was intended — Philip IV and Torre de la Parada — established hunting as an important theme that Rubens' paintings for the decorative program engaged with. Contemporary social history on seventeenth-century views of rape, as well its legal definitions provided insight into how viewers might have thought about rape. Likewise, the Spanish political views of absolutism that complicated the parameters of sexual violence and even warranted the violence itself was important to consider in the context of a royal commission. The study of Ovidian and classical sources revealed the sexual ideologies that permeated into contemporary artistic productions, including Rubens' painting. Finally, kinesics provides a way of understanding a visual language which analyzes the gestures of the body, and in this case the vocabulary of female victims. Most importantly, the "love hunt" is a trope I identify to clarify the erotic nature of the painting, as well as the ways in which the allegorization of that hunt or chase is made palatable. As skin becomes fairer and fleshier, bodies floating and graspable, and arms flared yet resistless, it is in these instances, that these pliable bodies are codified with erotic connotations.

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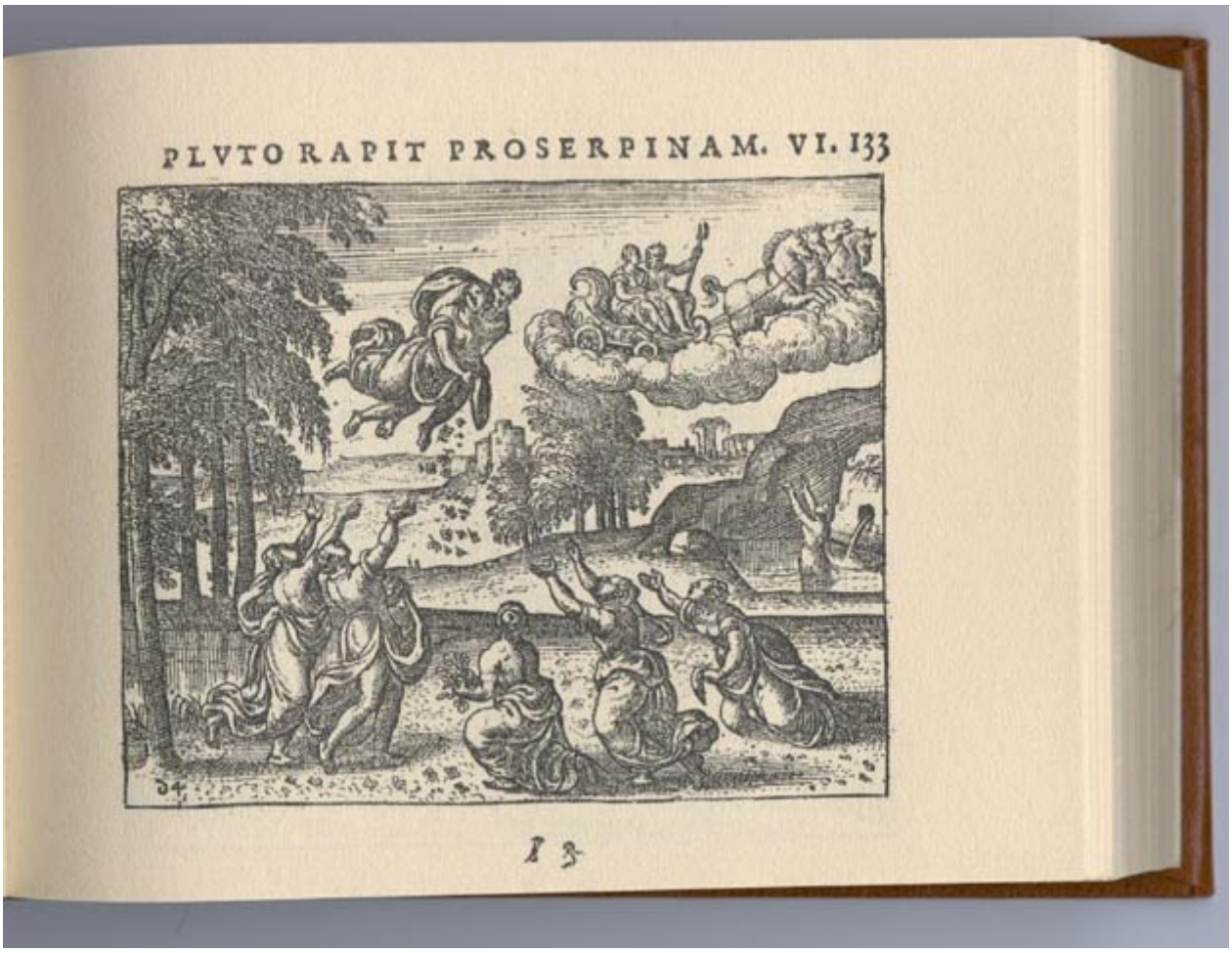

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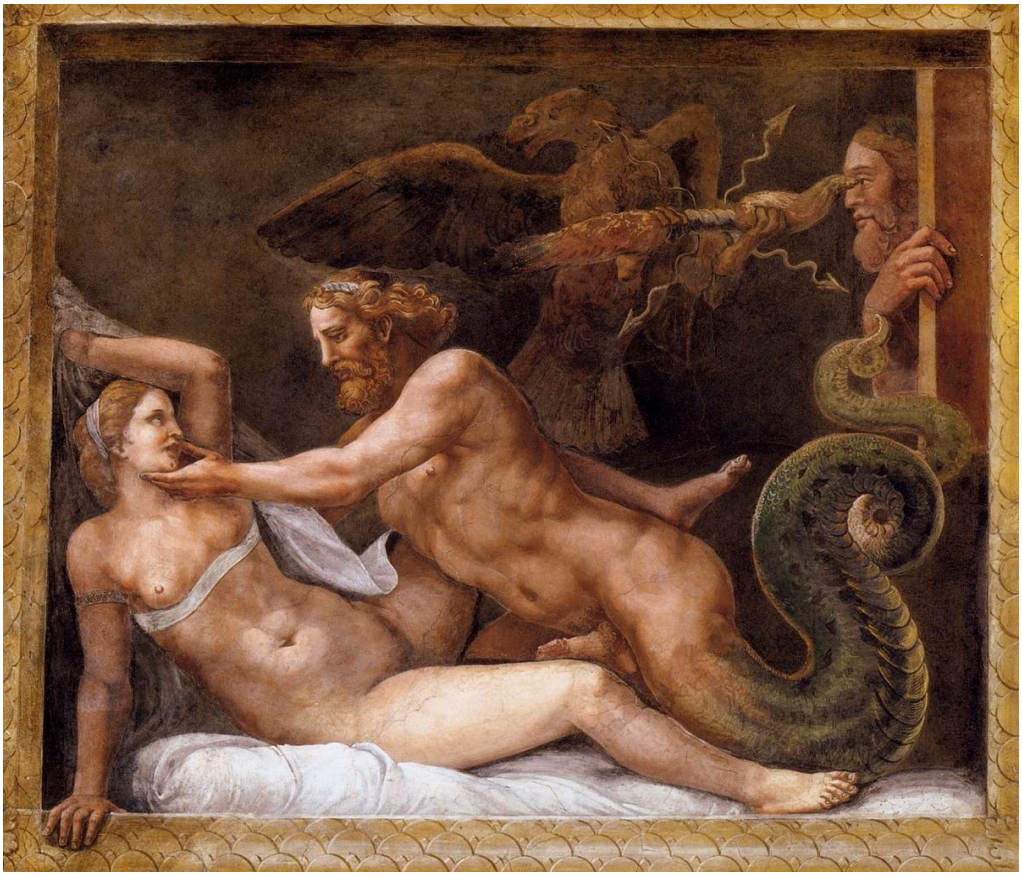

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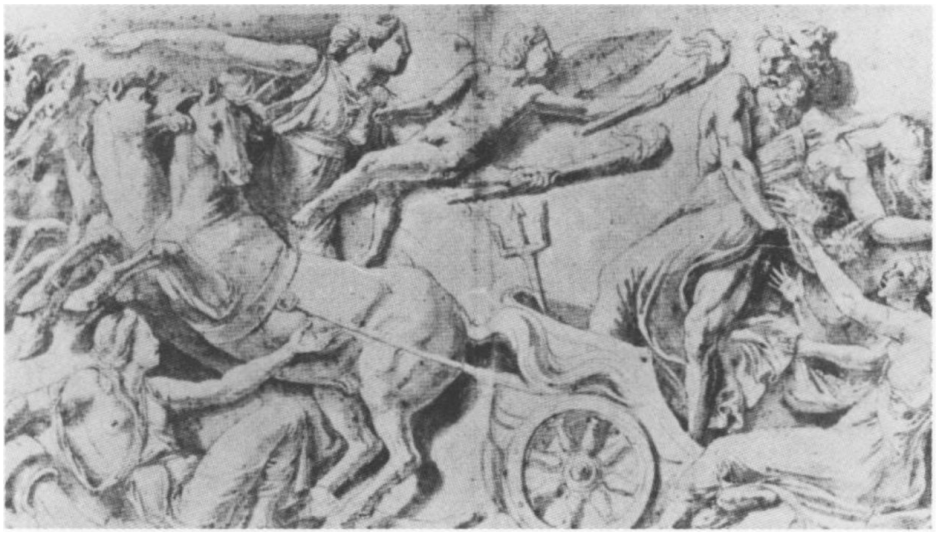

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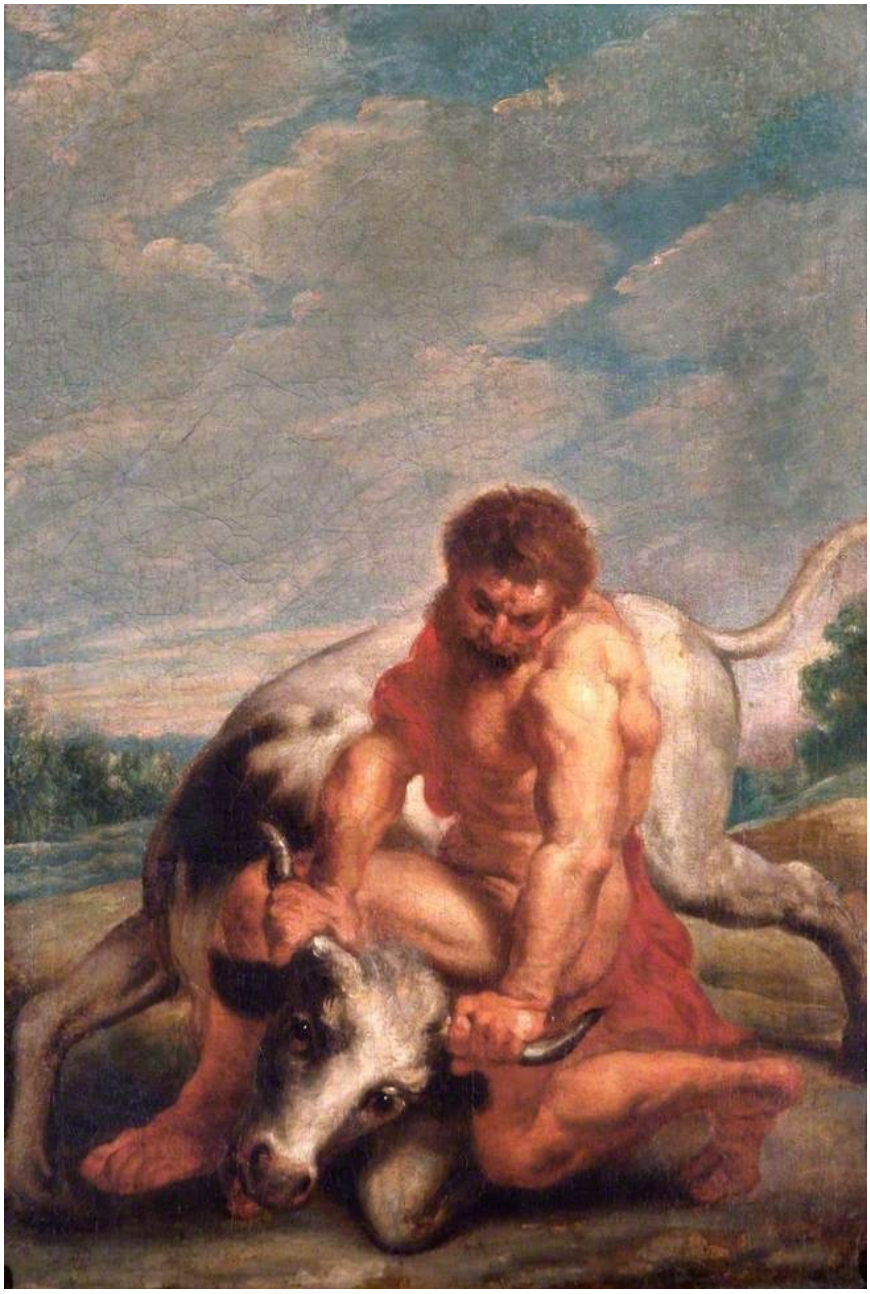

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