UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

Date: April 23, 2007

I, Maureen E. Buri, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

Masters of Arts

in:

Art History

It is entitled:

Crimes of Passion: Rape and Abduction in Flemish Mythological Painting, 1600-1650

This work and its defense approved by:

Chair: Diane Mankin

Kristi Nelson

Kim Paice
Crimes of Passion: Rape and Abduction in Flemish Mythological Painting, 1600-1650

A thesis submitted to the
Division of Research and Advanced Studies
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Art History
of the School of Art
of the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning

2007

by Maureen E. Buri
B.A., Xavier University, Cincinnati, 1999

Committee Chair: Dr. Diane Mankin
Abstract

Flemish representations of mythological rapes produced in Counter Reformation Catholic Europe were highly sought after by patrons in the first half of the seventeenth century. These images served three primary functions in seventeenth-century Flanders, to give instruction on the virtues of marriage, to validate the political assertions of aristocratic patrons, and to provide erotic stimulation. In my thesis I will explore and analyze paintings of mythological rape and abduction by a number of Flemish Baroque masters. This thesis will examine the popularity of visual representations of mythological abduction, in particular, the Rape of Europa, as explored by such artists as Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Cornelis Schut (1597-1655), and Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678), it will examine three monumental mythological rape and abduction paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, and the interpretation of these images as reflections of the artist’s political views, and will review the sensual, sexual, and allegorical implications of portrayals of rape, and their appeal to wealthy Flemish patrons in relation to Early Modern attitudes about rape and sexuality. Because most of the variations of the subject and format were already established by the master painters working in the first half of the century, this study is limited to images produced before 1650.
Acknowledgements

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Tim, whose love, support, and encouragement kept me going the last two years. Thank you for giving me the courage and the space to partake in this feat. Your endless patience pulled me through the rough spots and helped me to see this to the end. My accomplishments are your accomplishments as we are truly each other’s biggest fans. This is also for my parents who always tried to convince me of my potential. Thank you for encouraging my strengths and never allowing me to wallow in my weaknesses.

Vital throughout the development of this thesis, I thank my mentor and advisor, Dr. Diane Mankin. Your constructive criticism and rigorous editing have been instrumental in the writing of this thesis and your humor and encouragement made it bearable. I also thank Dr. Kristi A. Nelson and Dr. Kimberly Paice for serving on my thesis committee.

I would also like to thank the staff of College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning Library for their dedication and assistance to the students of the Art History Graduate program.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensuality and Salvation in Flemish Portrayals of <em>The Rape of Europa</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Politics of Rape: Peter Paul Rubens’s Political Allegories in Mythological Rape Paintings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality in Early Modern Southern Netherlands: The Popularity of Erotic Mythological Imagery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index of Illustrations

Figure 1: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of Europa; after Titian*, 1630, oil on canvas, 181 x 200 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

Figure 2: Berlin Painter, *The Abduction of Europa*, 490 B.C., terra-cotta bell krater, 13 inches in height, Museo Archeologico, Traquinia, Italy

Figure 3: Artist Unknown, *Europa and the Bull from the House of Fatal Love, Pompeii*, 15 B.C.-15 A.D., buon fresco, dimensions unknown, The National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Italy

Figure 4: Titian, *The Rape of Europa*, 1559-62, oil on canvas, 185 x 205 cm, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA

Figure 5: Cornelius Schut, *The Rape of Europa*, 1630, dimensions and medium unknown, Washington DC, Private Collection

Figure 6: Fernando Gallego, *The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine*, undated, tempera on panel, 125 x 109 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

Figure 7: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, 1645-52, marble, 11 feet, 6 inches in height, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, Italy

Figure 8: Jacob Jordaens, *The Rape of Europa*, 1615, oil on canvas, 173 x 235 cm, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany

Figure 9: Jacob Jordaens, *The Rape of Europa*, 1643, oil on canvas, 172 x 190 cm, Museé des Beaux-Arts, Lille, France

Figure 10: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 1612, oil on canvas, 187 x 214.5 cm, current location unknown, formerly Bildergalerie, Potsdam-Sanssouci, Germany

Figure 11: Peter Paul Rubens, *Samson and Delilah*, 1609, oil on wood, 185 x 205 cm, National Gallery, London, England

Figure 12: Peter Paul Rubens, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1609-10, oil on wood, 198 x 218 cm, Museo de la Real Academia de San Fernando, Madrid, Spain

Figure 13: Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, 1568-71, oil on canvas, 188.9 x 145.1 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England

Figure 14: Peter Paul Rubens, *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, 1617, oil on canvas, 224 x 211 cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany
Figure 15: Jacob Jordaens, *A Scene of Abduction*, date unknown, black chalk on brown paper, 304 x 214mm, Museé du Louvre, Paris, France

Figure 16: Peter Paul, *The Battle of the Amazons*, 1600, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Bildgalerie, Sanssouci-Potsdam, Germany

Figure 17: Peter Paul Rubens, *Rape of the Sabine Women*, 1635-37, oil on wood, 170 x 236cm, National Gallery, London, England

Figure 18a: Detail of figure 18, *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, 1635

Figure 18b: Detail of figure 10, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 1612

Figure 19: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Temple of Janus*, oil sketch for the *Entry of Ferdinand*, 1634, oil on panel, 70 x 68.8cm, Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia

Figure 20: Peter Paul Rubens, *Massacre of the Innocents*, 1635-37, oil on panel, 198 x 302cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany

Figure 21a: Presumed original fragments of *I modi*, 1525, engraving, 215 x 245mm, British Museum, London, England

Figure 21b: Attributed to Marcantonio Raimondi, *Posture I*, 1525, engraving, dimensions unknown, Albertina, Vienna, Austria

Figure 22: Abraham Janssen, *Hercules and Omphale*, 1607, oil on canvas, 149 x 189cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

Figure 23: Peter Paul Rubens, *Boreas and Orithyia*, 1615, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Vienna Academy, Austria

Figure 24: Bernard Sullivan, *Boreas and Orithyia*, 1557, woodcut print on paper, dimensions and location unknown

Figure 25: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, 1554-55, Oil on panel, 72 x 110 cm, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium
Introduction

History painting of the Baroque era featured subjects of religious, historical, and mythological significance;¹ perhaps the most intriguing were those which portrayed mythical images of rape and abduction. Flemish representations of mythological rapes produced in Counter Reformation Catholic Europe were sought after by patrons in the first half of the seventeenth century. These images served three primary functions in seventeenth-century Flanders, to give instruction on the virtues of marriage, to validate the political assertions of aristocratic patrons, and to provide erotic stimulation. In my thesis I will explore rape and abduction images by a number of Flemish masters. I will examine the sensual, sexual, metaphorical, and allegorical implications of rape images, and their societal relationship to patrons of the time. I will look at why some stories were more popular than others, in particular, the Rape of Europa, as explored by such artists as Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Cornelis Schut (1597-1655), and Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Because most of the variations of the subject and format were already established by the master painters working in the first half of the century, I will limit my study to images produced before 1650.

When scholars have explored the subject of mythological rape in works from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, they often find that within the context of the period, the images were used as allegories to justify arranged marriages or the forceful seizure of political power.² Depictions of “heroic” rapes, where the rapist was a Greek or Roman god or hero, were also thought to hearten those forced into marriage, to reassure them that even though happiness is not guaranteed, at least their sacrifice was noble. Scholars have rarely examined the role served by

¹ Flemish history painting illustrates stories from Greek mythology, scenes derived from Roman history, or moral and political allegories inspired by classical philosophy, as well as themes from the old and new testaments. Hans Vlieghe, Flemish Art and Architecture 1585-1700 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.
² See publications by Margaret Carroll, Jane Nash, Erwin Panofsky, and Diane Wolfthal.
such images as deliberate erotica, meant to not only enflame the passions of “mortal” viewers, but also to absolve the Catholic conscience with the intermingling of religious and mythological allegory. The theatrical emotional expressiveness of the Baroque was a perfect vehicle for such cross-cultural communication.

   Feminist art historians who examine the historical iconography of rape in visual art condemn the representation of women abducted by force and criticize those who attempt to sanitize the violent sex crime in their interpretations.\(^3\) Based on my research, I have found a lack of Early Modern\(^4\) Flemish scholarship on the subject from a feminist and socio-political point of view. Unfortunately, many historians have either overlooked or undervalued the work of Flemish Baroque painters when discussing the topic of violent sexual crime in visual imagery. In *Images of Rape*, Diane Wolfthal conducted a thorough investigation of images of rape and violence in western art before 1600, yet failed to effectively extend her research beyond the Italian Renaissance.\(^5\) Other scholars merely focused on a single representation of rape as rendered by one or two artists as seen in publications by Erwin Panofsky and Jane Nash in their interpretations of Titian’s *Rape of Europa*.\(^6\) Since many of the themes were borrowed from the Renaissance, perhaps it was felt these seventeenth-century paintings were meant to portray meanings similar to their predecessors. I intend to explore how the seventeenth-century viewer interpreted these images of rape and abduction as opposed to our contemporary interpretation of the act of rape as forced sexual intercourse with an unconsenting partner. I hope to gain a

---

4 Early Modern generally refers to a historical era roughly between 1500 and 1750.
stronger understanding regarding the prevalence and popularity of these mythological stories of abductions and sexual violence in the first half of the seventeenth-century.

Although none of the images of mythological rape and abduction created by Flemish painters of this period show the forced act of sexual intercourse in their representations, the act is implied through various iconographical and allegorical means. Motifs, such as a slung leg or the grasping of a horn, suggest sexual intercourse and were commonly used by artists to communicate such themes of lust and sensuality to their viewers. Scholars and historians continue to use the terms ‘rape’ and ‘abduction’ interchangeably when examining and discussing paintings which represent themes of mythological rape. In this thesis, I will continue this tradition of using the terms interchangeably although the actual act of rape, as it is understood in contemporary terms, is not portrayed.

Two representative art historians who have looked at themes of rape and violence in Flemish Baroque painting, Svetlana Alpers and Margaret Carroll, examine the metaphorical value of mythological rape depictions in justifying arranged marriages or seizure of power. Alpers, a Renaissance and Baroque scholar, explored The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus (1618) by Peter Paul Rubens and interpreted the abduction of the two sisters as an allegory for the salvation of the soul through marriage, suggested by the uplifted gaze of one of the female subjects and the extension of her arms toward the heavens. She went on to propose the positioning of the female forms was indicative of a dance rather than a confrontation, discounting the violent struggle of the main female subjects. Carroll, in her review of the same painting, interpreted the confrontation as an allegory of power and marriage, emphasizing how

---

7 These motifs will be further explored in chapters two and three.
8 See Panofsky, Nash, Wolfthal, Carroll or McGrath.
Baroque nation states valued domination over weaker states and created strong mergers of power through marriages of the noble classes. Rubens was the dominant Flemish artists of the time, but many other Flemish painters were composing similar scenes for their patrons, and few of these images have been explored by contemporary art historians.

In my first chapter I will examine portrayals of the mythological tale, the Rape of Europa. The abduction of the young Europa on the back of the white bull is perhaps one of the most familiar rape/abduction stories, and was a frequent subject in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history painting. This story can be traced back to ancient Greece and can often be found painted in Roman homes. Rape of Europa scenes commissioned to honor weddings during the Italian Renaissance were meant to construct marital relations as a form of justifiable sexual violence. Early seventeenth-century Flemish painters, such as Jacob Jordaens and Cornelis Schut were inspired by the portrayals of the Rape of Europa frequently done by such masters as Titian (1485-1576) and Paulo Veronese (1528-88). I will look at the various depictions of this story in early seventeenth-century Flemish art, and attempt to decipher the reason so many patrons admired and requested this subject. I will also argue that historians have continually sanitized the rape of Europa as a harmless allegory for the joyful sacrifice of marriage, many overlooking the erotic and violent allure of such imagery.

My second chapter will examine three monumental mythological rape and abduction paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, and the interpretation of these images as reflections of the artist’s political views. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the Southern Netherlands was under the control of Spain, which was still at war with the Northern Provinces. This war and political upheaval resulted in the economic downfall of Flanders. Rubens was a well respected artist and advisor to Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Isabella and was involved in

10 Diane Wolfthal, 15.
countless truce negotiations between Spain and the Northern Provinces. His experiences led him to incorporate many of his own morals and political ideologies within his mythological paintings. I will look at the political aspects of the myths portrayed in the paintings and what role the rapes of these mortal women played in ancient society. I will then examine the seventeenth-century political meanings Rubens applied to these ancient myths. Many male mythological subjects resort to violence to dominate their female victims, physically and mentally. While Rubens’s images serve as visual narratives of the political unrest, they also, like representations of the rape of Europa, serve as a form of visual erotica for the male spectator.

In my third chapter I will review the sensual, sexual, and allegorical implications of portrayals of rape, and their appeal to wealthy Flemish patrons in relation to Early Modern attitudes about rape and sexuality. Contemporary analysis of Baroque representations of abduction and rape must consider seventeenth-century views on rape and what effect these views had on the erotic imagery being produced at this time. At the turn of the seventeenth century visual forms of erotica had been circulated throughout Europe despite the condemnation of painted obscenities and profanities by the Council of Trent in 1563. In order to avoid official censorship, Flemish artists attached religious and allegorical meanings to painted mythic erotica, satisfying each patron’s Catholic conscience and his taste for highly sensual images of rape and abduction.

I plan to utilize various methodologies to enhance my examination of Flemish rape and abduction images. A contextual investigation of the accepted attitudes and the cultural norms of the seventeenth century regarding portrayals of rape and their classical roots will facilitate a deeper interpretation of these images and their original relationship to the desires of the patron. To gain a stronger understanding of attitudes and interpretations of Early Modern culture, I will
review traditional formal and iconographical analyses of these images, biographies of the artists, patrons, and their cultural and historical milieu and classical tradition as part of seventeenth-century culture. I will also apply feminist theories to gain perspective on the difference between Baroque and contemporary appreciation and interpretation of the images.

Although images of rape and abduction were prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, minimal scholarship examines these depictions completed by the Flemish masters. A feminist as well as a contextual reading will function as an important tool in understanding from a distance why themes of rape and kidnapping, so offensive to a contemporary audience, could have been so accepted then. My research will show that portrayals of rape and abduction in early seventeenth-century Flanders are worthy of investigation and will serve to continue the ongoing discussion of the depiction of women throughout history.
Chapter One
Sensuality and Salvation in Flemish Portrayals of the Rape of Europa

A soft blue sky gradually darkens with ominous grey clouds as the muscular, yet majestic white bull wades through the water with his prize thrashing across his back. Her legs and arms raised in protest, the young Europa gazes fearfully over her shoulder at her companions, who watch helplessly from shore, unable to assist their abducted mistress. Amoretti fly over head and seem to realize their error in assisting the masked Jupiter in his seduction and abduction of the innocent maiden, as they struggle to keep up with the escape over sea.

This description of Peter Paul Rubens’s 1628 copy of Titian’s sixteenth-century pictorial interpretation (figure 1 and figure 4) of the abduction and rape of Europa, is a typical combination of seemingly contradictory elements for today’s viewer. Scholars studying Early Modern portrayals of rape sanitize the violent and sexual aspects of the subject, while contemporary viewers attempt to unravel the historical significance behind the popular use of these erotic images for religious, moralizing, and marital allegory.

The Greek myth of the rape of Europa is a familiar story that recounts the seduction and abduction of a mortal by a lecherous and lustful god. Beginning with Greek vase painters, visual artists who turned to Greek and Roman myths as sources of inspiration portrayed the popular narrative through the centuries. The iconographical interpretation of the imagery depends upon socio-historical influences and artistic intentions. In this chapter I will explore the visual evolution of “The Rape of Europa,” focusing on the tension between sensuality and morality as well as the allegorical and historical significance of the paintings by the Flemish painters of the first half of seventeenth century, such as Cornelius Schut (1597-1655), Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), and Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). As will be demonstrated later, many Early Modern
painters built upon the stylistic and iconographical context established in sixteenth-century Italian images of the rape and abduction of Europa. Traditionally, these works acted as allegories instructing viewers about the virtues of marriage. This influence is evident in several Flemish portrayals of “The Rape of Europa” in regards to composition, style, and iconographical interpretation.

Other Flemish portrayals of this mythological rape create a new allegorical context, focusing on spiritual concerns present in Counter Reformation Antwerp, using the rape of Europa to signify the eternal salvation of the soul upon the return to the Catholic Church. Mythological paintings of the Counter Reformation often incorporated themes of religion, politics, allegory, Flemish tradition, and sensuality. Regardless of the allegorical adaptations created by artists and patrons of the time, Early Modern Flemish portrayals of rape continued to be a visually erotic exhibition of the female body. Under the guise of religious and cultural allegory, images of rape and abduction, designed with the male viewer in mind, allowed patrons to continue collecting images of erotica while still satisfying their Catholic conscience and yet coyly rejecting the religious opposition to the display of the female nude.

The visual representations of “The Rape of Europa”1 are based upon the mythic tale of the beautiful daughter of King Agenor of Tyre, Europa, who attracted the attention of Jupiter. In the guise of a magnificent white bull, Jupiter approached Europa and her maidens as they played along the seashore. Encouraged by his gentle nature, the young maidens adorned the bull with flowers as Europa climbed upon his back. Jupiter then fled out across the sea, with his prize clinging to his back and horns, taking her to an island where he revealed his true identity and raped Europa under a cypress tree. “The Rape of Europa” provides the introductory narrative for the foundation of the island of Crete. Other versions of the myth tell of a child created from the

---

1 The myth also is told under the titles, “The Abduction of Europa” and “Europa and the Bull.”
union of Jupiter and Europa, who became the continent of Europe, while Europa herself was transformed into the constellation and zodiac sign of Taurus.²

With its origin in Greek mythology, it is not surprising to find visual representations of Europa’s abduction in Greek art and literature. In an Archaic red-figure style painting, the artist known as the Berlin Painter illustrates Europa and the bull on a bell krater, 490 B.C. (figure 2). Shown in profile, Europa gently grasps the tip of Jupiter’s horn. The sinuous black lines which make up the folds of her dress suggest movement as she walks alongside the bull. Greek authors recount the rape and abduction of Europa in their writings: Homer in the *Iliad*, book XVI (eighth century B.C.), Herodotus in *The Histories*, books I and II (490-424 B.C.), Moschos in *Europa* (eleventh century B.C.), and in three texts by Lucian of Samosata (120-180 A.D.), *Charidemus*, *De Syria dea* and *Zeus the Tragedian*.

With the rise of Rome, Roman lyric poets such as Horace and Ovid adapted the myth of Europa into Roman mythological literature. Influenced by both Greek and Roman mythology, artists used the motif of Europa to decorate the walls of Roman homes. Two surviving images depicting the rape of Europa were found in Pompeii. The style II fresco from the ironically named House of Fatal Love shows a bare-chested Europa seated upon the back of the bull/Jupiter (15 B.C. - 15 A.D) (figure 3).³ This depiction is unique with its architectural setting of columns that opens out into a landscape of trees and rocky outcroppings replacing its traditional background of the sea and shoreline. Jupiter, here shown as a brown bull instead of white, bears Europa upon his back and visually connects to the viewer with his gaze of triumphal arrogance. Three of Europa’s maidens gather around to see her off, one of her companions caressing the neck of the bull.

---
³ The original Greek model from which the work derives dates from the end of the fourth century B.C. Stefano de Caro, *The National Archaeological Museum of Naples* (Naples, Italy: Electa Napoli, 1996), 154.
The individual who is widely regarded as the most influential in subsequent visual representations of the rape of Europa is the Roman poet, Publius Ovidius Naso (43 B.C. - A.D. 18), more commonly referred to as Ovid. Considered his most ambitious work, *Metamorphoses* (A.D. 1) records 250 Greek and Roman myths. In Book II of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid recounts virgin-pursued-by-god stories, concluding with the abduction of Europa. Using his narrative as a foundation, artists of the Flemish Early Modern age tied allegorical themes to the “Rape of Europa.” Flemish art historian R.-A. d’Hulst described Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as the painters’ bible of profane themes.

**Common Allegorical Themes Associated with Depictions of the “Rape of Europa”**

In addition to consulting Ovid, the seventeenth-century Flemish painters who portrayed the abduction and rape of Europa based their compositions and much of their allegorical content on paintings of the same theme completed during the Italian Renaissance. In Italy, during the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries, the rape of Europa was a visual tool, used to illustrate patriotic and sacrificial roles for new brides. Diane Wolfthal explains that these images acted as instruction for women on their proper traditional roles as wives, sacrificing themselves for their families as well as their countries. Paintings of Jupiter abducting Europa adorned panels on cassoni (wooden dowry chests) and spalliera paintings (decorative domestic wall paintings) commissioned for upper-class marriages. These rape scenes acted as a constant reminder of the expected virtues of the wife, in particular the submission of self to her husband and country. Wolfthal describes the images of the “Rape of Europa” as allegorical representations of the

---

7 Ibid.
relocation of the bride from her childhood home to the home of her new husband. The marriage of a young girl was essentially considered a transfer of physical property. Women were considered the ‘property’ of the patriarchal head of the family and subject to their will. Through marriage, the woman was transferred from one owner to the next, which reflected her status as mere commodity. The connections constructed between rape and marriage date back to Greek and Roman times, when images of mythological rape idealized the virtues of the submissive wife, her sacrifice for family, and country and her role as peacemaker within the family.\textsuperscript{8}

Considering the dominant revival of classical literature favored by Italian humanists, it is not unusual to find Renaissance artists adopting these ideas into their visual narratives. At the turn of the seventeenth century, many Flemish painters made the pilgrimage to Italy to study the techniques and works of the Italian masters as well as ancient classical sculpture and relief. Many of the themes used in the art of the Italian Renaissance were sources of inspiration for artists in the Southern Netherlands. Naturally, one such theme was the visual portrayal of the rape and abduction of Europa.

**Flemish Portrayals of the “Rape of Europa”**

Perhaps the most recognizable Early Modern Flemish painting of the rape of Europa is Peter Paul Rubens’s 1628 copy of Titian’s *Rape of Europa* (1559-1562) (figures 1 and 4). Philip II of Spain commissioned six canvases depicting scenes from pagan mythology during the last years of Titian’s life.\textsuperscript{9} Rubens must have seen these paintings on his first trip to the Spanish court in 1603, yet did not make a copy of *Rape of Europa* until his return in 1628 as the court

\textsuperscript{8} Marital paintings used a range of mythological rape subjects, including the rape of the Sabine women, the rapes of Io and Proserpina, and the attempted rape of Daphne. The rape of the Sabine Women and Proserpina were also used to emphasize the feminine ideal of “woman as peacemaker,” where the victim appeased the furies between her abductor and her patriarch, placing the good of her family above herself. Wolfthal, 12.

\textsuperscript{9} The collection is commonly referred to as Titian’s *poesie*. 
painter and emissary of the Hapsburg court of the Spanish Netherlands.\(^{10}\) The full-scale copy is faithful to the original which Rubens also used as a source of inspiration for later compositions.\(^{11}\)

Like Titian, Rubens was familiar with the writings of Ovid, often using stories from the *Metamorphoses*, *Fasti*, and *Ars Amatoria* as subjects for his own paintings.\(^{12}\) Titian’s version of *Rape of Europa* is based on Ovid’s account in book II of his *Metamorphoses*. Erwin Panofsky and Arthur Pope both agree that Titian closely followed Ovid’s account, although Jane Nash recognizes some discrepancies in Titian’s depiction.\(^{13}\) Pope suggests that Titian even managed to capture “its comic spirit” although it is difficult to perceive this comedic element in either the visual or literal narrative.\(^{14}\) If anything, the composition created by Titian and its copy by Rubens, both capture the dramatic emotion of Europa’s abduction by the bull. The painting shows Jupiter and his abductee as he races over the sea toward the island of Crete. The central subjects dominate the foreground of the composition, with the foreshortened figure of Europa, head thrust backward, and feet toward the viewer, creating a dramatic diagonal across the back of Jupiter. The painting closely follows Ovid’s account:

The frighted nymph looks backward on the shoar [sic], and hears the tumbling billows round her roar, but still she holds to him fast: one hand is born upon his back; the other grasps a horn: her train of ruffling garments flies behind, swells in the air and hovers in the wind.\(^{15}\)

\(^{10}\) According to the Spanish art historian and painter Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644), Rubens copied every Titian in the collection of the king. The paintings in this group are late works, from the period when the Venetians master’s handling of paint had become looser, with contours less defined. This treatment will influence the later work of Rubens. Kristin Belkin, *Rubens* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), 210-16.

\(^{11}\) The *Rape of Europa* and other paintings copied by Rubens are mentioned in his personal inventory, taken after Rubens’s death in 1640, referred to as “paintings made by Rubens in Spain, Italy and other places after Titian and other famous masters.” Alexander Vergara, *Rubens and his Spanish Patrons* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 98.

\(^{12}\) Rubens’s further use of classical texts for artistic inspiration will be explored in Chapter Two.


\(^{14}\) The comedic element suggested by Pope may reflect his personal bias and not the historical interpretation. His comment is addressed further in Chapter Three. Arthur Pope, *Titian’s Rape of Europa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 15.

\(^{15}\) Ovid, “Metamorphoses” translated by John Dryden.
While Panofsky recognizes the suggestion of fear evident in the positioning of Europa’s body, he also proposed this position best displays her “charms.” This statement reveals another ideological layer of representations of rape and abduction, the idea that these images were seen as portrayals of female subjugation and male erotica.

Considering the patronage, we can assume this painting was not meant as a visual instruction to a new bride on her duties as a virtuous and chaste wife. The series Philip II of Spain commissioned from Titian, which included the *Rape of Europa*, may have served a dual purpose. The painting suggests transition -- first, as Europa leaves her known world for the unknown, and second, as Nash suggests, a spiritual transition from her earthly life toward her union with a god. The mythological abduction of Europa then became a Christian allegory for man’s eternal salvation. Jupiter’s desire for Europa could thus be translated into Christ’s love for humankind, as the god “rescues” her from damnation. Nash further explains how Titian used this mythological connection to Catholic salvation in his painting, pushing the figures of Jupiter carrying Europa upward across the composition, just as “Christ lifted people’s souls to heaven.” The shift of focus from Europa as a sign of chastity and purity, to Jupiter in disguise, points to the white bull as a symbol of Christ’s purity. As Europa is carried off, her posture, according to Nash, indicates the excitement of her mystical union, showing the climatic transformation of physical pleasure into spiritual ecstasy. This dual purpose would have served the king well as he sought to reconcile his devout Catholic conscience with his carnal nature. The sensual image of Europa may have satisfied the king’s interests in erotic imagery

---

17 Nash, 62.
18 Ibid.
19 Nash, 60.
while also suggesting a moral metamorphosis of the soul’s heavenly salvation, a theme that is repeated in portrayals of rape in Early Modern Flemish mythological paintings.

The adoption and adaptation of pagan themes into the tradition of the church continually occurred since its origination in AD 110. However, with the ban of illicit sexual imagery established by the Council of Trent (1545-1563), it was surprising that the use of classical mythological imagery and its heathen gods would not have been strictly forbidden. As seventeenth-century humanist scholars considered the imagery of classical literature and art that dominated the art of the sixteenth century, they could not completely abandon ideals and morals [and sensual pleasures] that were inspired by Greek and Roman literature, despite the rules of the Church.20 The popularity of mythological themes that continued throughout the Counter-Reformation period spurred the adaptation of the roles and stories of classical gods and goddesses to fit within moral and religious confines. Artists employed the license of allegorical visual representation to communicate ideas or desires which were otherwise considered culturally unspeakable. Although the physicality of human sexuality was being explored in scientific circles, man’s lustful desires were not discussed in polite society. Two of the most influential artistic centers for producing sexual imagery for private consumption in the late sixteenth century were the Netherlands and Italy.21 R.-A. d’Hulst further justifies this evolution of myth as religious allegory claiming that “gods and goddesses could by their action inspire love of good and hatred of evil, provided their deeds were symbolically interpreted, and thus allegory became a moral antidote to mythology.”22 Images of rape and abduction were not

20 d’Hulst, 53
22 d’Hulst, 53.
produced for religious environments, but were instead commissioned by many of the elite of the Southern Netherlands, adorning the walls of guilds and luxurious upper-class homes.\textsuperscript{23}

Themes of mortal salvation are echoed in Cornelis Schut’s (1597-1655) \textit{The Rape of Europa} (1630s) (figure 5). A popular painter of mythological and allegorical subjects, Schut’s interpretations of the themes of the Counter Reformation were very much in demand in and around Antwerp in the early seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{24} His work was particularly favored by the Jesuits who were known for integrating “heathen” literature into their practice of Christian instruction. The Jesuit program of education used classical mythology as a flexible tool of allegory.\textsuperscript{25} Schut’s expressive use of color and the strong contrast between the illuminated figures in the foreground and the dark background created a dramatic effect, similar to paintings by Titian.

Allegorical themes from the Counter Reformation are easily recognizable in this portrayal of abduction; equally, the sexual content is just as explicit. In Schut’s \textit{Rape of Europa}, the radiant heavenly glow and majestic positioning of Europa upon the back of the bull suggests a spiritual awakening of the soul while providing a sensual presentation of the female body. As in many paintings of this subject, the bull gazes directly at the viewer, addressing the voyeur and drawing them into the composition. Rather than vaulting her body backward in desperation as seen in Rubens’s representation, Europa ceremoniously sits upon her abductor, firmly grasping one of the horns as her hair and yards of brightly colored fabric billow around her. Emphasized by the dark background, an unearthly glow emanates from Europa, suggesting her religious and sexual rapture and the welcoming of her spiritual salvation.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{23} d’Hulst, 52.
\textsuperscript{24} Hans Vlieghe, \textit{Flemish Art and Architecture, 1585-1700} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 89.
\textsuperscript{25} d’Hulst, 53.
\end{flushright}
Like Titian’s *Europa*, the scene shows the bull and the maiden as they set off across the water. However, instead of fearfully looking back over her shoulder at her companions on shore, her gaze is focused skyward, unaware that her maidens have waded out into the water after her. Europa’s out-stretched arm rises above her head, and her tilted head with its heavenly gaze is reminiscent of figures portrayed in the “presence” of the Holy Spirit. In the lower left, one of her companions reaches out, seeming to grasp at Europa’s foot. Her gesture is not one of rescue or assistance but perhaps reflects the urge to obtain salvation as Europa has done; to be pulled from the depths of human suffering into the heavenly realm of salvation and purity. The pure white bull is crowned with flowers, a clear parallel to the purity of Christ and his crown of thorns. The arch of white fabric above Europa, as well as the gold satin that swells around her arms is suggestive of thin gold halos used in medieval religious paintings. The two cupid figures at the top right, one of whom seems to hold the arching white fabric, were commonly used both as messengers of love as well as messengers of God. Even the brushwork in the background of the composition is distinguished by sweeping vertical strokes which lead the eye heavenward, emphasizing Europa’s gesture of salvation.

The sensuality of this painting is heightened by both subject matter and expressive use of color. Schut has united exaggerated Mannerist tendencies with High Baroque emotionalism to create a visually seductive image. Like many images of rape, the act of sexual intercourse is not shown, yet it is symbolically suggested in the violent seizure of a woman for sexual purposes. The impending union is also implied by Europa’s tender yet firm grasp on Jupiter’s horn; obvious is its phallic allusion explicitly mentioned in the account by Ovid. In Schut’s *Rape of Europa*, no violence is depicted, nor does Europa express any pain, fear, or revulsion, which

---

26 The spiritual significance of this pose can also been seen in Ruben’s *Assumption of the Virgin* (1620).

27 Wolfthal, 28.
contrasts with the representation of Europa by Rubens, where her panic and fear is evident. The erotic appeal of this type of rape imagery is the artist’s portrayal of a chaste and innocent maiden as the prize in a game of seduction. Through the combination of her unearthly glow and her open arms, Europa displays her “charms” more overtly than Titian’s portrayal, yet her virginity is temporarily “protected” with the thin fabric around her waist.

In Schut’s painting, the sensuous figure of Europa dominates the composition. Shown as an innocent and chaste woman, viewers may enjoy her nudity, much like medieval paintings of female martyrs, whose exposed bodies represented their sensuality as much as their faith. In The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine (undated) (figure 6) the Spanish Early Renaissance painter, Fernando Gallego, accentuated the vulnerability of Catherine of Alexandria, who was condemned to death by the Emperor Maximinus, by displaying her naked and fully exposed to her executioners as well as the viewer. While exposing her vulnerability, her nudity emphasizes her spiritual strength. She is protected through her faith. The exhibition of a mortal, naked and willing before a god, illustrates the ultimate spiritual experience.

Influenced by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the disarray of hair and clothing in portrayals of rape in Early Modern paintings emphasized sexual desirability and availability, creating an aphrodisiac for both rapist and viewer. This evocative mix of sensuality and spirituality is perhaps best recognized in the Italian Baroque altarpiece, *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* (1645-1652) (figure 7) by Gianlorenzo Bernini, combining mysticism with erotic implications while still satisfying Catholic tastes. Saint Theresa, the sixteenth-century Carmelite nun described her mystical experience with a heavenly entity in remarkably sexual terms:

> In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times…

---

28 Wolfthal, 21.
29 Ibid.
When he drew it out...he left me completely afire with a great love for God...so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it.  

Considering the orgasmic description and the sculptural illustration of Theresa with her head tilted back and closed eyes, she is portrayed experiencing a sexual as well as spiritual climax. Bernini emphasized the physical aspects of a climax to illustrate the spiritual experience recorded by Saint Theresa. Like Bernini, Schut transforms a seemingly sexual encounter and emphasized the religious affiliation by showing the subject as a willing participant, as if they were welcoming the sexualized religious experience. The element of willful acceptance is absent in Titian/Rubens’s narration of *Rape of Europa*; instead the focus is on the pursuit and subsequent domination of the female.

The visual narrative of the rape of Europa is a recurring theme in the oeuvre of Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Jordaens’s first paintings featuring this theme were conceived early in his career, between 1615 and 1616, soon after his induction as a free master with the Antwerp painters’ guild, the Guild of St. Luke. Both *The Rape of Europa* of 1615 (figure 8) and another version completed between 1615 and 1616 possess characteristics of Jordaens’s early work, specifically his habit of filling the composition with a foreground frieze of simplified genre-like figures, rather than idealized portrayals of beauty or strength as commonly seen in representations of mythological themes. The expressive handling of the female form in Jordaens’s *Rape of Europa* (1615) reflects his tendency for robust, healthy, and powerful forms. Pushing the figures to the foreground creates a bas-relief effect which is enhanced by its perspective view from below. In his early *Rape of Europa* (1615), the abducted maiden is again shown atop the bull with swathes of fabric above her head; both god and maiden are

---

31 Jordaens was registered in 1615 in the Guild of St. Luke in Antwerp as a watercolorist. D’Hulst, 44.  
32 d’Hulst, 44.
adorned with flowers. Interestingly, the main characters of the myth do not dominate the composition, unlike Rubens and Schut where the singular figures of Europa and the bull fill the picture plane. Instead, Jordaens has pushed them into the left background, yet still indicating their importance by clearing the majority of the space around them.

Unlike other Flemish illustrations of the myth, the 1615 painting depicts the moments before Jupiter flees over the sea, before the abduction. Jordaens seems to include elements of Ovid’s account, yet he rearranges their order in his portrayal of the abduction. Europa has been seduced by Jupiter’s docile nature and has climbed upon his back, while her companions gather around her. Ovid describes the billowing fabric about Europa’s head as the pair makes their way across the sea; however, Jordaens includes this element before their departure. This composition is representative of the marital allegories of the late Renaissance; with the sensual elements equally as evident. The overall mood of the composition is enlivened as Europa’s maidens appear joyful at the prospect of Europa’s departure. They gather in the foreground, some fully clothed and some modestly draped with swaths of satin. Europa’s companions twitter amongst themselves, oblivious to the expression of indifference and boredom on the face of their mistress. Supporting the composition as an allegory of marriage is the buzz of anticipation which is evident in the painting. The maidens fuss around their mistress, seemingly more seduced by the beautiful and tender nature of the bull than Europa, who appears to have accepted her fate even before it has been revealed as she sits upon the bull’s back. She turns her gaze away from the frivolity of her maidens, and her hunched back suggests that she recognizes her submissive role as wife and her personal sacrifice through marriage. While other figures of Europa express panic or revelation, Jordaens’ Europa portrays indifference.
The excess of feminine flesh alludes to the sexual aspect of the painting. The female figures are shown in various poses, affording the viewer almost complete 360 degree scrutiny of the nude female figure. Europa is elevated above all the other nudes, allowing a full view of her bare chest and fleshy curves. The disarray of clothing enhances the implication of erotica, again creating an aphrodisiac for the viewer. Another stimulus is the way Jordaens connects the nude forms to each other; gentle touches and caresses of hand to bare skin between the maidens titillate the senses, perhaps suggesting a visual orgy of willing virgins.

Painted almost thirty years later, Jordaens explores this myth again in *The Rape of Europa* (1643) (figure 9). He places his subject in an idyllic landscape, as seen in many of his Arcadian mythological scenes constructed at this point in his career. Even more than in his earlier painting of Europa and the bull, Jordaens does not immediately draw attention to the main characters of the myth, located in the left foreground. In the earlier work, Europa is silhouetted against the sky, elevated above her companions. In this later version, the presence of Europa is minimized as it is difficult to distinguish her from the rest of the crowd. Composed like a genre scene, Europa is surrounded not only by her companions but by the entirety of her father’s cattle herd as they pass along the shoreline. Jupiter is virtually indistinguishable amongst the royal herd, yet he has already succeeded in luring the naive Europa to climb upon his back as he lies on the earth and continues his seduction, licking her feet. It is assumed that this image is a moralist interpretation of Ovid’s tale; however, Jordaens creates an uncoordinated theatrical and artificial effect, suggesting an idealized genre scene enhanced by voluptuous female forms. The heroine is portrayed as a nude “coquettish” maiden, more charming than moralizing.\(^{33}\) Her surrounding companions watch, and with the exception of two who drape a bright red cloth over her shoulders, Europa’s servants are involved in their own activities and do not involve

\(^{33}\) d'Hulst, 212.
themselves in Europa’s abduction. Above the scene, Cupid is accompanied by symbols of Jupiter, as he rides astride an eagle and grasps the symbolic lightening bolts of the deity.

The voluptuous female has been visually and physically attractive to the male viewer for centuries, and Jordaens follows this tradition, providing his audience with ample perspectives of the female figure. In this later version, Jordaens offers the viewer even more flesh than in his previous depictions, again affording multiple perspectives of the female body. In *The Rape of Europa* (1643) the pyramidal configuration of female flesh, shown reaching, sitting, crouching, or reclining integrated within an idyllic landscape is similarly seen in other examples of his later mythological or allegorical paintings, such as *Venus Asleep* (1645-50) and *Allegory of Fruitfulness* (1650). The languorous female forms lack resilience as muscle tone gives way to fat, representing Jordaen’s new idea of physical beauty.34 Interestingly, the lounging figures are equally balanced by the cattle on the opposite side of the composition. However, there is no mistaking where the eye is meant to be directed as the majority of the cattle turn their heads toward the exhibition of femininity.

**Conclusion**

Early Modern Flemish portrayals of the rape of Europa traditionally contain allegorical messages concerning the virtues of marriage. In Counter-Reformation Europe the popularity of the rape of Europa was heightened by the adaptation of the theme to fit within religious and moral confines, satisfying the Catholic conscience of the male viewer. The application of Christian virtue to the seduction of an innocent young woman presents a visual link between spirituality and sensuality, providing an image of willing feminine flesh while piously justifying it through religious allegory. While these paintings can be appreciated for their allegorical

---

34 d’Hulst, 216.
ideology, their analysis should not be limited to iconographic and mythological interpretation. Contemporary analysis continues to decode the historical significance behind the use and meaning of these erotic images, and scholars have begun to recognize that they are also celebratory depictions of sexual violence designed for a male audience.

The melding of religion, moralizing allegory, and erotica in these works has not been openly acknowledged or explored in art historical interpretations. Visual representations of the rape of Europa are often moralized or sanitized by art historians who focus on the “happy ending” of the narrative instead of its beginning as an unwilling abduction. This emphasis on the resulting marriage versus the deplorable act against an individual is still evident into modern times with books such as *Veiled Images*, where Jane Nash implies that even though Europa was caught in a distressing situation, once Jupiter revealed his true form, the princess would realize her good fortune. Erwin Panofsky considers Europa’s abduction by Jupiter a benefit, an event which brought about the birth of two children. He ignores the violent sexual aspects of these portrayals, as well as the fear and suffering experienced by the female subjects. These scholars rationalize the forced abduction of a woman stating that she should be satisfied with her kidnapper and the positive results of the abduction and rape. Unfortunately, many victims of rape are expected to cope in a similar manner. Further, the twentieth century discussion of the mythic character of Europa is yet another example of the historical lack of consideration of women, specifically their physical subjugation and negation of identity. Visually, Europa was meant to represent “every woman.” She was the marriageable ideal, submissive, and spiritual yet seductive and sexual.

---

35 Nash, 38.
36 Panofsky, 164.
Depictions of the rape and abduction of Europa were certainly not the only images of sexual violence painted in the Southern Netherlands in the early seventeenth century. Although the rape of Europa was a popular theme among artists and patrons, paintings portraying the rapes of Proserpina, the daughters of Leucippus, the Sabine women, and Lucretia also depict a union of antique wisdom and the Christian values of the Counter Reformation. Even as these ancient tales were allied with new symbolism, they still continued to act as a sexual stimulus for their male viewers.
Chapter Two
The Politics of Rape:
Peter Paul Rubens’s Political Allegories in Mythological Rape Paintings

Roman myths, just as those of Ancient Greece, continued to provide artists with a treasure trove of profane themes, narrating tales of seduction, abduction, and rape. Many of these rapes mask a political agenda or outcome. For Peter Paul Rubens, historical mythologies were not simply a cache of stories to illustrate without personal interpretation; he incorporated many of his own morals and political ideologies within these paintings. The mythological subject of these narratives provided Rubens with an effective vehicle to communicate his intentions.

The Rape of Lucretia

Rubens's painting *The Rape of Lucretia* (1612) (figure 10) is perhaps one of the artists’ most intimate and visibly violent scenes of rape.¹ Completed following his return from Italy and his appointment as court painter to Archdukes Albert and Isabella in 1609, Rubens created a complicated scene of sensual violence and lust. The dramatic tension in this interior scene is emphasized by dark shadows where the vicious personification of Fury lurks behind the rapist who, with a furrowed sinister brow, wields a sword and lunges at his victim. The startled yet defensive figure of Lucretia attempts to ward off the forced sexual advances of her attacker, yet it is evident that her struggles will be in vain as she is physically no match for his strength.

This Roman tale begins with a member of the Roman royal family, Collatinus, boasting of the virtues of his young wife, Lucretia. Among those who witness Collatinus singing the praises of his wife is Sextus Tarquinius. Either overcome with love (according to the account by

¹ Burchard dated the painting around 1612 while Hans Vlieghe dates it earlier at 1610-11. Exact dating on the painting cannot be carried out since its disappearance during the Second World War. The last known location was the Bildergalerie, Potsdam-Sanssouci. Elizabeth McGrath, *Corpus Rubenianum: Rubens, Subjects from History*, v.2, Text and Illustrations (Harvey Miller Publishers: London, 1997), 225-26.
Ovid) or aroused by her chastity and beauty (according to Livy)\(^2\), Sextus returns to the house of Collatinus and during the night enters Lucretia’s bed chamber, armed. After his attempts to woe Lucretia fail, he demands his way with her.\(^3\) Although Lucretia protests his forceful advances, she eventually yields when Sextus promises death upon her as well as her Negro servant. Sextus threatens to place their dead naked bodies together, suggesting an adulterous act, thus threatening her virtuous reputation. After the rape, Lucretia summons her father, Lucretius, and her husband; each man accompanied by trusted companions, Publius Valerius and Lucius Junius Brutus. She relays the actions of Sextus Tarquinius and calls on the men to avenge her,

> If you are men and care for your children, avenge me, free yourselves and show the tyrants [the Tarquins] what manner of men you are and what manner of woman of yours they have outraged.\(^4\)

After her plea, Lucretia kills herself with the sword of her ravisher. Led by Collatinus and Brutus, Rome rallies and drives the occupying Tarquins from Rome, restoring the glory of the Roman Republic.

> Lucretia sacrifices herself in suicide rather than permit her tale to give the women of Rome a bad name, to be looked upon with shame, or grant them license to behave dishonorably using her actions as an excuse. However, according to Roman law, Lucretia technically consented to her attacker, regardless of the threat of blackmail, and by definition this makes her an adulteress, not a victim of rape. As an adulteress, her punishment would have been death; therefore her decision to commit suicide was honorable as she would have been executed either

---

\(^2\) Livy explains that Sextus Tarquinius was incensed with libidinous desire to “defloure” Lucretia, while Ovid insists that he was simply smitten with love. Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4.

\(^3\) According to classical authors, such as Ovid, prior to his assault upon Lucretia, Tarquin attempted to woe his victim with pleas and bribes before resorting to threats and violence. McGrath, v.2, 227.

way.\textsuperscript{5} The sword by which she dies is not an instrument of private suicide; rather it was a means of arousing her house to revenge and preserve her name among women.\textsuperscript{6} Lucretia’s death can be considered a political sacrifice for she rallies the Romans to avenge not only her honor but also the honor of Rome by reclaiming the republic from the occupying Tarquins.

A night scene of forced passion and violence, the painting recalls in its style and theme two other erotic works by Rubens from the same period, \textit{Samson and Delilah} (1609) (figure 11) and \textit{Susanna and the Elders} (1609-10) (figure 12).\textsuperscript{7} Elements of the \textit{Lucretia} painting are clearly influenced by Titian’s \textit{Tarquin and Lucretia} (1568-1571) (figure 13) which Rubens would have seen during his previous travels to Spain in 1603. Unlike Titian, Rubens includes fewer details of the narrative. In Titian’s painting, the slave whom Tarquin has promised to kill hides in the shadows and peeks around the drapery as a nervous yet curious voyeur. Rubens leaves out the slave, and instead, composed a seductive environment of Baroque “opulence for his naked heroine” with the vibrant red drapery and rich embroidered tapestries.\textsuperscript{8}

Visually, Rubens does not immediately draw attention to the historical implications of the tale. He, instead, emphasizes the \textit{amor sforzato}, or forced love, the physical conflict between the lust and chastity of the main subjects and the emotional conflict within the rapist.\textsuperscript{9} On either side of Tarquin, Rubens includes the contrasting personifications of love and lust. The dark form of Fury lurking in the shadows to the left visually overpowers the small cupid who hangs over Tarquin’s other shoulder, illuminating the scene with his torch. The contrasting malicious force of Fury pressing at the back of Tarquin changes his love, perhaps originally incited by the cupid, from lust to perversion. This conflict is further illustrated both by Lucretia’s pressed knees and

\textsuperscript{5} Bryson, 164.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{7} McGrath, v.2, 226.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
her defensive resistance, as she attempts to protect her virtue and put off her lunging aggressor. Emotional anger and fury incited by lust and envy are often the fuels for rape and the desire to decimate beauty and virtue.

This painting dances on the edge of erotica under the guise of political allegory. Rubens’s reference to classical mythic sources in his illustrations of the human condition perhaps received more attention when the message was presented in the nude. The dark dramatic setting of the composition is offset by the overt presentation of Lucretia’s nude body and the brilliant red sash which both covers and draws attention to the very essence of her virtue. The positioning of her body allows the spectator to enjoy a full frontal exposure, while the dynamic movements of the assault are composed to titillate and arouse desire. The proportions of Lucretia’s twisted body highlight her fleshy legs and torso while the position of her head makes it appear smaller, deemphasizes her individuality, presenting her as property available for possession. Her nakedness suggests her vulnerability and her innocence while allowing the viewer to delight in the beauty of the female form.10

Based on his background in classical education, Rubens was aware of the outcome of the tale. The political uprising ensued as a result of Lucretia’s call for revenge. Her entreaty was not just a personal plea but a political one. As a woman, it was not in her power to avenge her honor; she demands revenge against her attacker from her husband, father, and countrymen. This political significance would not have been lost on Rubens. It is assumed that The Rape of Lucretia remained in his possession until 1620, before its sale to the Lunden family in

---

10 The state of undress of the subjects raises questions regarding their figural representation. In many depictions of the rape of Lucretia, Tarquin is most always shown in full attire contrasting the chaste Lucretia in a state of total nudity. Donaldson, 13.
Antwerp.\textsuperscript{11} Since Rubens was recently named court painter, perhaps the display of the Lucretia painting in his studio served not only as an example of his talents but also as a suggestion or even an exhortation to his clientele, whether noble or member of the wealthy Flemish ruling class, to defend and preserve the honor of their native Flanders. Rather than simply acquiescing to the will of Spain, the Southern Netherlands should stand with pride and protect their safety and livelihood, regardless of the economic and political consequences. The political call of Lucretia to the citizens of the Southern Netherlands is not a physical call to arms against the Spanish occupation since Rubens wished to be a loyal subject; instead, she can be viewed as a symbol of national pride as the Southern Netherlands should be viewed as a valuable portion of the Spanish empire worthy of having its honor upheld. The signing of the Twelve Year Truce in 1609 declared peace between Spain and the Northern Provinces for the first time in decades. The truce strengthened the internal cohesion of the Southern Netherlands.\textsuperscript{12} The Flemish cities, previously caught in the middle of the fray, were experiencing the economic benefits of this truce. Rubens uses Lucretia to call for the reestablishment and preservation of honor to the Southern Netherlands. As intended by her suicide, Rubens uses the female sacrifice to communicate to other European nations that Flemish decline is the result of war and that as a small nation they deserved peace and could rise again.

\textbf{The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus}

Another early Rubens painting of mythological rape that can be analyzed with erotic and political implications is \textit{The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus} (1617) (figure 14). This unique abduction scene illustrates the moment Hilaria and Phoebe, the betrothed daughters of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} Copies made indicate that the painting was in Rubens’s studio in the 1620s. The painting is not included in the inventory at the time of the artist’s death, indicating it was in the Lunden collection before 1640. McGrath, v.2, 227.
\end{flushright}
Leucippus, were seized by the twin sons of Leda, Castor and Pollux. Rubens arranged the central figures of this mythical scene in a compact grouping, pushing them to the front of the canvas, leaving little room for the eye to wander to the generic landscape in the background.

Seeming to have focused more of his attentions on compositional organization than elements of historical accuracy, this painting was often mistaken by historians as a depiction of the rape of the Sabine women.\footnote{The painting was first identified as the Rape of the Leucippedes by Wilhelm Heinse in his writing, \textit{Teutscher Merkur} (1777). The identification was often mistaken for a Sabine abduction because the rape of the Sabine Women was a more commonly-depicted story and because Rubens did not use the standard iconographical features of the figures of Castor and Pollux, who are usually shown with white horses, as youthful, clean and identical in dress and appearance. In Rubens’s painting, they are shown at about the same age but differ in costume and according to Heinse, in class as well. Elizabeth McGrath, \textit{Corpus Rubenianum: Rubens, Subjects from History}, v.1, Text and Illustrations (Harvey Miller Publishers: London, 1997), 122-124.} McGrath argues that the text most convincingly relevant to Rubens’s characterization of Castor and Pollux comes from Ovid’s \textit{Fasti} (V.699-700), “They snatched and bore off Phoebe and her sister - those brothers, Leda’s children, the horseman and the boxer.”\footnote{McGrath, v.1, 128.} Rubens illustrates the generic elements of masculinity and power in his depiction of the sons of Leda, but still differentiates them. Pollux is shown as a manly bare-chested boxer standing and wearing the simple boots of a foot soldier, hauling one of the startled nude sisters up by her underarm. His brother, the powerful and noble Castor, atop his horse and clad in full Roman armor, effortlessly controls his prancing steed as he drags the other sister overtrop his horse. Rubens gives the brothers identifiable symbolic elements; whereas the visual identification of the abductees is left to question.

This painting is a testament to Rubens’s interest in themes of antiquity. Classically educated, Rubens avidly studied ancient Greek and Roman texts as well as sculpture. His renderings of the human form were often based on his drawings after classical statuary and Renaissance sculpture and painting compiled during his Italian residency. It is imperative to note \textit{The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus} is a rare subject of choice, even for an artist such as
Rubens, who depicted many unusual classical subjects and was so interested in the representation of the female nude and violent passions. This unusual subject of monumental art appears to be the only known painting of this subject.\textsuperscript{15} Drawings of this subject by followers of Rubens, specifically Anthony van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens, are based on Rubens’s composition. Jordaens’s linear \textit{Scene of Abduction} (figure 15) clearly mimics the positioning of the figure of Hilaria being seized by Castor.

Considered masterful in his depictions of the female form, Rubens had illustrated bodies similar to the convoluted forms of Phoebe and Hilaria in the assertively violent \textit{The Battle of the Amazons} (1600) (figure 16).\textsuperscript{16} Although some interpretations of the painting attempt to anesthetize the emotion of the composition suggesting the faces of the abductors appear calm, the terror and panic of the abductees is apparent in their resistance. As in all of the scenes of rape and abduction examined to this point, this painting does not specifically show forced intercourse, yet the slung leg motif of Hilaria implies the impending act of sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{17}

Rubens again illustrates the idea of \textit{amor sforzato}, or forced love, with the abduction of the sisters. The “rewards” of forced sexual violence have been defended by Ovid, with this rape specifically, in his \textit{Art of Love}. He uses the tale of Phoebe and Hilaria to cite an example for how a lover might conquer his lust with the use of force:

\begin{quote}
And if she doesn’t give [her kisses] freely, just take them anyway, ungiven. Maybe at first she’ll fight and call you a ‘wicked rouge’; but her wish in fighting is really to be won….After a kiss any failure in the fulfillment of desire - well really, that’s not modesty’ it’s just bad manners! Invoke violence if you like; this is a violence which girls appreciate… Violence is what Phoebe suffered, violence was done to her sister and each ravished girl was happy with her ravisher.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Ancient illustrations of the abduction of the daughters of Leucippus have been found on Roman sarcophagi and carved relief. McGrath, v.1, 125.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus} differs from other representations of mythological rape because it does not emphasize the carrying off of women as an act of violence, inciting terror.
\textsuperscript{17} Wolfthal, 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Ovid’s \textit{Art of Love}, translated by Elizabeth McGrath from the 1601 Frankfurt edition of Ovid’s \textit{Ars amatoria} I664-678 - I679-80. McGrath, v.1, 129.
Rubens would have been familiar with these lines as a classically educated bourgeois male, and having observed Titian’s use of Ovid as a source for images of profane and mythical seduction at the court of King Philip III of Spain. Based on the authority of the previous verses, Elizabeth McGrath states that this particular rape would have been used by Rubens as a universal image of love. She supports this by citing the inclusion of traditional references to love and passion, specifically the single *amoretti* grasping the reigns of Castor’s spirited stallion.

In Svetlana Alpers’ evaluation of *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* she characterized the abduction of the sisters as a violent yet passionate confrontation between “lusting men and beautiful generously endowed women.”\(^{19}\) She suggests that Rubens offers an unexpected grace to this scene of sexual violence in the positioning of his figures, which she likens to a dance.\(^{20}\) The balanced diamond composition does lend a harmonious circular movement; however, if this composition should be read as a choreographed dance, why do the bodies of the women appear awkward and heavy as they twist and push away from the arms of their abductors? Alpers concluded that Rubens arranged his figures in this graceful manner to illustrate the fulfillment of marriage not the horrors of rape.

Rather than following traditional analysis of this image of rape as an allegory of marriage and religious salvation, as suggested by McGrath and Alpers, I intend to follow the analysis based on Margaret Carroll’s foundational argument that the rape painting can be read as an allegory of power and property by the aristocracy. In her essay, “The Erotics of Absolutism” Carroll considers *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* within the context of the incorporation of large-scale mythological rape scenes in the decoration of the palaces of the sixteenth- and

---


\(^{20}\) Alpers, 286.
seventeenth-century nobility.\textsuperscript{21} Her premise is based on the fact that historically since ancient
times, women have been viewed as mere possessions. Therefore, the illustration of rape and
abduction can be read as the forceful seizure of property by a dominating male force, often a
member of the ruling class or the oppressor. Throughout Europe, rape imagery was embraced by
the aristocracy as a means of establishing their sovereignty in private and public life.\textsuperscript{22} The
illustration of forceful sexual subjugation was viewed as a parallel to politically dominating
one’s subjects. Many images of mythological rape and abduction were commissioned by the
ruling princes of Europe; Philip II of Spain commissioned Titian to create a number of rape
painting based on Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} to decorate the walls of the palace in Madrid\textsuperscript{23} and
Francesco de’Medici displayed the marble figural grouping by Giovanni da Bologna, \textit{The Rape
of a Sabine} in the Loggia dei Lanzi in a prominent Florentine piazza.\textsuperscript{24}

Unfortunately the information regarding the commissioning of the \textit{Rape of the Daughters
of Leucippus} is unavailable, which leads only to speculation about what inspired Rubens to
compose this nontraditional abduction scene. It is plausible that Rubens painted this scene of
abduction to commemorate the marital alliance between France and Spain in 1615, since images
of Castor and Pollux were traditional to the French monarchy.\textsuperscript{25} A treaty signed by the two
countries in 1612 agreed to the double marriage of Louis XIII of France to the sister of Philip IV
of Spain, Anne, while Philip wed Louis’s younger sister, Elisabeth. These events would have
been known by Rubens in his position as court painter to Archduke Albert and Archduchess
Isabella, who worked to strengthen ties between Spain and France with the hopes of benefiting

\textsuperscript{21} Margaret Carroll, “The Erotics of Absolutism”, \textit{The Expanding Discourse}. Edited by Norma Broude and Mary D.
\textsuperscript{22} Carroll, 145.
\textsuperscript{23} The Catholic Philip II was as fond of images of erotica as he was devout. Panofsky, 23.
\textsuperscript{24} The intended purpose of this rape scene was a victory monument to the success of the Medici subjugation of
Florentine territories and citizens. Carroll, 142.
\textsuperscript{25} McGrath, v.2, 226.
the Southern Netherlands. *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* can successfully be read as the expression of the function of aristocratic marriages as a political maneuver to further the power and prosperity of each nation.

**The Rape of the Sabine Women**

Rubens’s most politicized scene of abduction is the *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1635-37) (figure 17). In the wildly chaotic composition, a legion of Roman soldiers forcefully abducts the struggling Sabine women. Caught off guard, the young women cling to each other, attempt to fight off their aggressors, and plead to the heavens for mercy. Lurking in the shadows, elevated in his position as the founder of Rome, Romulus observes the anarchic scene he orchestrated.

The traditional Roman tale recounting the rape of the Sabine women was the subject of a painting composed by Peter Paul Rubens in 1635 and completed two years later. Set against a classical backdrop, yet adorned in Early Modern fashions, Rubens’s female subjects are enveloped in chaos. The abduction and rape of the Sabine women is part of the story of the establishment of ancient Rome. Retold by classical scholars such as Livy and Plutarch, the predominantly male population of Rome needed more women to ensure the continuation of the newly formed civilization. Romulus, as one of the founders of ancient Rome, ordered emissaries to be sent to the neighboring peoples, inviting them to offer their daughters to Rome in marriage. Undeterred when their offers of marriage were rebuffed, the Romans invited their Sabine neighbors to a specially devised festival of equestrian games, the *Consualia*, held to honor

---

26 The version discussed within the following text is currently in the collection in the London National Gallery. The painting is oil on oak panel, 169.9 x 236.2 cm.
Neptune.\textsuperscript{27} During the ceremonies, Romulus raised his cloak as the prearranged signal for the Roman soldiers to seize and carry off the marriageable women as the male Sabines fled.\textsuperscript{28} The Sabine legend is often aligned with allegories of marriage and the duty of the woman to sacrifice herself for her family and country. Considered essential to the establishment of Rome, the Sabine women were revered as the mothers of the first Romans. Like the rape of Europa, these representations served as visual exemplars of the ideal traits expected of a new wife, namely purity, innocence and submission.

Some scholars argue that the rape of the Sabine women was a political not sexual act. The Rubens painting depicts the Roman concept of \textit{raptus}, which means “to be carried off by force.” Differing from the modern definition of rape, it was viewed as a crime of property; \textit{raptus} was the term used for thefts of all nature.\textsuperscript{29} Since the primary motive of the act was to ensure the future repopulation of Rome, the explicit depiction in artworks of the violent abduction (implying but not illustrating the later forced sexual violation) is often accepted by scholars and historians as a necessary component in doing justice to the story and its political moral. Art historian Norman Bryson further states that in the context of the time, the rape of the Sabine women was hardly a crime at all because it was approved and devised by the head of state, namely Romulus. The rape of the Sabine women “culminates in marriage and the procreation of legitimate offspring, its sexual aspect is fully within the [Roman] law regulating sexual conduct.”\textsuperscript{30} The marital outcome of the event is full and honorable marriage; therefore, the end, according to Bryson and many other scholars of seventeenth-century art and culture,

\textsuperscript{27} The \textit{Consualia}, honoring Neptune the horseman, explains the inclusion of horses. According to McGrath, the horsemen depicted in the painting are returning from a mock equestrian battle as they ride into the foreground. McGrath, v.2 187.
\textsuperscript{28} Romulus ordered that no married woman was to be taken. Bryson, 156.
\textsuperscript{29} Roman law did not view \textit{raptus} as a crime against a woman. Wolfthal, 9.
\textsuperscript{30} Byron suggests that because the act was devised and sanctioned by Romulus, that act is lawfully justified. Bryson, 157.
justifies the initial act within that moral context of ancient times. This rationalization disregards the physical and sexual violation of the women involved, as well as the rights of the Sabine men who refused the initial marriage offer. The premeditation of the acts, which today makes the crimes of rape and theft even worse, is also not addressed. Unfortunately for them, the Sabine women were considered property, and the crime of *raptus* was not viewed as a personal violation committed against them, but rather against the *pater familias*, the eldest male member of the family who holds “ownership” over the women in his care. The hierarchy of patriarchal order in Christian society has its historical foundation in the Old Testament and the Garden of Eden, recognized as the first moment of woman’s subjugation to man. This tradition established in ancient Roman society and recognized in early Christian doctrine had remained virtually unchanged up to the Baroque period. For this reason, it was historically acceptable to ignore the woman’s role as victim in the act of rape and instead focus on the crime against her superior. In addition, rulers could justifiably violate the rights of the *pater familias*, if deemed for the good of their people.

The social and political implications of the visual representation of the abduction of the Sabine women can be applied to images from seventeenth-century Antwerp. Often discussed as an allegory of marriage, the rape of the Sabine women is equally as effective in its role as political allegory. The Sabine legend was seen as a seminal act in establishing the Roman family and the future of the empire. Just as in the images of the rape of Europa, the Sabine

---

31 Erwin Panofsky states a similar view regarding the conjugal outcome of the rape of Europa.
32 Davis, 143. The Greeks and Romans had a patriarchal order that is evident in the mythological stories, which developed separately from the Jewish traditions.
33 Similar to the Rape of Europa, images depicting the Rape of the Sabine women were used to adorn wedding banners, marriage chests, and the apartments of Roman noblewomen. Wolfthal, 8.
34 Ibid.
women are expected to sacrifice themselves for marital and ultimately political objectives. At the turn of the seventeenth century, many smaller and less powerful European countries were expected to sacrifice economic privileges and individual autonomy to strengthen and secure the success of the occupying forces. Many of these countries had little or no chance to mount an armed resistance that was any more effective than the vain struggles of the Sabine women. Much like the Sabine society, the Southern Netherlands was forced to sacrifice prosperity to aid their sovereign Spain. While the Northern Netherlands continued to oppose Hapsburg/Spanish domination, the Southern Netherlands leaders and citizens often had no option other than to support Spanish policies, though they were conscious of the lack of concern Spain demonstrated for their well-being. With the end of the Twelve Year Truce (1609-1921) between the Northern Provinces and Spain in 1621, the economy of the Southern Netherlands was harmed by the Dutch Republic naval blockade of the River Scheldt, paralyzing trade and causing the economic decline of Antwerp and other cities of Belgium.

With the economic decline of the city, Rubens described the desperate conditions of Antwerp:

Here we remain inactive in a state midway between peace and war but feeling all the hardships and violence resulting from war, without any of the benefits of peace. Our city is going step by step to ruin and lives only upon its savings; there remains not the slightest bit of trade to support it. The Spanish imagine they are weakening the enemy by restricting commercial license, but they are wrong for the loss falls upon the king’s own subjects.

Rubens was actively involved with negotiations to secure peace in the Netherlands beginning in 1620, and was enlisted as a political emissary by the Infanta Isabella of Spain, Archduchess of the Southern Netherlands to aid in secret negotiations between the Southern and Northern

---

35 The Roman tradition of carrying the bride over the threshold is one of many reminders in Roman marriage ceremonies of the Sabine abduction. Bryson, 156.
36 Excerpt from a letter to Pierre Dupuy from Rubens, May 1627. Belkin, 202-03.
provinces. After the suspension of the Twelve Year Truce; he devoted much of his time and energy toward negotiation between Spain and England, making political trips to England (1629-30), Spain (1628) and the Northern Netherlands.

Despite his years of hard work, Europe was no closer to peace, and his beloved Southern Netherlands was no closer to receiving the positive attention it needed. Frustrated, Rubens removed himself from the political spectrum in the early 1630s. A benefit of his withdrawal from official public life was that he had more freedom to express his political ideas through his paintings. The continuing struggle and hope for peace in the Netherlands, which eluded him in his diplomatic endeavors, is depicted repeatedly in many of his paintings from this time, until his death in 1640.37

In his painting, *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1635-37) Rubens pushed the chaotic action to the foreground of the composition, creating a pile of tangled struggling human figures. The sweeping brushwork, common in later work of Rubens, blends the forms, making it difficult to distinguish individual subjects. Rubens reused the strong forward lunge of Tarquin’s body from *The Rape of Lucretia* with all of its intended force for a Roman soldier in the London Sabine painting (figures 18a and 18b). The dynamic strength of the male figure as he tears a young Sabine woman from the arms of her mother creates a similar effect, by creating the dramatic tension contrasting the strength, violence, and determination of the aggressor next to the victim’s helplessness, terror, and panic. In the background of his composition, Rubens incorporated fanciful elements of Roman architecture; the triumphal arch with its Corinthian capitals and festoons refer to the festival decorations.

37 Unimpeded by the restrictions of political ties, Rubens was free to devise a unique allegorical language to persuasively convey his ideas. Belkin, 257.
In both the ancient tale and visual representation by Rubens, the Sabine women are not sexually assaulted on the spot, yet they are clearly physically assaulted and abducted against their will. He directs the principle attention to the plight and emotion of the Sabine women, which is made more pathetic by the grim and unfeeling actions of Romulus and his men. Rubens used the Roman legend as a visual narrative to describe the forceful political struggle between Spain and the weaker Southern Netherlands. The ancient Romans exerted physical and sexual force against the Sabine women, who were caught in the middle of the political struggle between the more powerful Romans, versus the weaker Sabine clan. This situation parallels the position of the Southern Netherlands in the conflict between the Northern provinces and Spain. In repeated efforts to maintain their independence, the Dutch authorities closed the once prosperous trade routes and ports used by the Flemish trading ships. These closures injured their fellow Netherlandish neighbors and furthered angered the Spanish authorities. The forced ties to Spain now separated the Southern Netherlands from their Northern kin, just as the Sabine Women were separated from their tribe.

*The Rape of the Sabine Women* was begun at the same time the new governor of the Southern Provinces, the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand, brother of Philip IV of Spain, was to have a Joyous Entry into Antwerp. Perhaps the Sabine easel painting was an intentional thematic and stylistic companion to the arches and stages designed by Rubens for the Entry, which depicted the current plight of Antwerp and severe problems of the country. The architectural style seen in the preparatory sketch for *The Temple of Janus* (figure 19) resembles the elaborate and decorative Baroque architecture in the background of the 1635-37 painting; these buildings bear little resemblance to the early Tuscan or Doric style which would have been prevalent in the
surrounding architecture at the time of the founding of Rome.\textsuperscript{38} A more traditional entry for the Cardinal-Infante would have strictly been an occasion for the people to celebrate and express hope for the future of their country. Rubens’s designs for the decorative archways were conventional in their depiction of the military achievements and virtuous characteristics of their new leader. However, his designs also symbolically illustrated the true situation of the Southern Netherlands. The decreased trade in the city of Antwerp was indicated by the departure of Mercury, the god of commerce.\textsuperscript{39} Before the columned archway in the modello of The Temple of Janus, similar to the triumphal arch in the background of the Sabine Women, Rubens used allegorical characters to exemplify the alternate effects of war and peace. On one side of the stage, Rubens depicted the personification of Peace with the horn of plenty at her feet while Security and Tranquility issue blessings of peace. These were contrasted by the figures of Discord and Fury causing havoc on the opposite side of the stage. The inhumanities of war on the women and children are further illustrated in the figure of the Roman soldier pulling a terrified mother away from her young child.\textsuperscript{40} Similar figures are seen in the Sabine composition as the Roman soldiers seize the young women. While some of the figures fight against their abductors, other reach out to their fathers who are helpless to assist. In both illustrations, Rubens emphasizes the struggles of the demoralized against the strength of oppressive tyrants.

The allegorical personifications in the settings for the Joyous Entry, inspired by classical mythology, have parallels to other late easel paintings by Rubens, specifically The Horrors of War (1635-37) and the biblically-inspired Massacre of the Innocents (1637-38) (figure 20).

\textsuperscript{39} Belkin, 263.
\textsuperscript{40} Ruben’s iconographical cast of gods and personification in The Temple of Janus were based on Roman coins. Their identifications are supplied by the artist in the remaining oil sketches of the stage. Belkin, 264.
After his encounter with the Titian mythologies in Spain in 1628-29, his mythological narratives appear to focus on the emotional content of the ancient classical and religious stories, giving them contemporary relevance and illustrating the human condition. Images of women and children as the innocent victims of war become central images in Rubens’s later work. In *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, women in seventeenth-century costume plead with Roman soldiers in ancient armor and loincloths. This blending of costume makes the message universal, and more relevant to the serious problems of his time. Rubens also employed this technique in his *Massacre of the Innocents*. Here the central female figure, the personification of Europe, is visually isolated from the chaotic violence which surrounds her, becoming the symbol of the suffering of the entire continent. In *Rape of the Sabine Women*, Rubens places a similarly clothed female personification in the center of the pandemonium as a propagandist tool to illustrate the political power struggles occurring not only in the Southern Netherlands but throughout Europe.

**Conclusion**

In many of his mythological paintings, Rubens incorporated interpretive allegorical manipulation to address the greater political issues of his age. His images use vulnerable struggling women, either nude or with disheveled clothing to deliver powerful, even titillating and erotically charged political messages, calling for peace and justice. These large scale images of mythological abduction promoted not only his personal political views but were used as persuasive forms of expression. Seizing on the power in the exploitation of the inequalities of

---

41 Belkin, 278
42 Belkin, 294. This feminine personification of Europe is also present in *The Horrors of War* (1637-38) and is described as “the unfortunate Europe who, for so many years now, has suffered plunder, outrage and misery” in a letter to Justus Sustermans, who commissioned the painting. Belkin, 288-89.
women in a patriarchal society, Rubens used the erotic qualities of a nude female being seized against her will to emphasize the need for peace and promote national pride.

While Rubens monumental paintings of mythological abduction and rape demonstrate his allegorical use of the female nude as political propagandist, they also speak to Early Modern Flemish ideas concerning ideas of female sexuality. The female form was not something to be individualized, rather it was assigned purpose and meaning. Just as Rubens characteristically defined the identities of his male subjects in *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, the identities of the women are left undefined, leaving them as sexualized objects to be observed and assigned purpose and intention. This follows the seventeenth-century cultural notion that women were essentially property to be objectified and traded to suit patriarchal needs. To rightfully interpret Early Modern Flemish images of mythological rape and abduction, one must explore the social practices and ideologies concerning sexuality and sexual violence of the period.
Chapter Three
Sexuality in Early Modern Southern Netherlands:
The Popularity of Erotic Mythological Imagery

Exploring the allegorical assumptions of mythological rape and abduction imagery of the seventeenth-century Southern Netherlands sheds light on only a fraction of the meaning behind such themes. An investigation of the social practice and ideologies concerning sexuality and sexual violence of this period will broaden the understanding of what this imagery represents to both original and contemporary audiences. To further the discussion of rape imagery, an examination of the art historical discussion and interpretative methods used to sanitize the visual themes of rape and abduction will be conducted.

Crime and Punishment: Rape in the Seventeenth Century

Contemporary analysis of Early Modern representations of abduction and rape must consider seventeen-century views on rape. Despite the emergence of recent research regarding crime history, social history, and women’s history, the socio-historical study of rape has not been extensive.¹ As discussed in previous chapters, the crime of rape in the ancient classical world was categorized as a crime of theft of property against the property owner, usually a woman’s husband or father. Continuing into Medieval doctrine, rape laws were written to protect the property of wealthy male citizens more than to protect a woman’s rights, considering the issue of consent irrelevant. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, rape came to be seen as a crime against the person, not a crime of property; rape and abduction were now viewed as separate offenses. Even with these developments, women continued to be victimized in the sentencing of the offense. Early Modern physicians insisted that sexual pleasure was necessary for conception;

¹Historians of Early Modern crime and society have focused their attentions to other crimes affecting women, such as infanticide and witchcraft. Nazife Bashar, “Rape in England between 1550 and 1700”, Sexual Dynamics of History (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1983), 28.
therefore if a rape were followed by a pregnancy, the law denied the charge of rape because the woman had, by definition, enjoyed the encounter. ² The declaration of rape was difficult to prove and the charge was often decreased to ‘seduction.’ The charge of seduction encompassed a wide spectrum of abductive sexual occurrences including acts committed freely by two independent adults, and acts committed under duress or consent given by pressure through blackmail or lying or force. ³ Often the accusation of rape was charged against a man to explain illegitimate pregnancies. To prevent infanticide or abortion and to encourage the mother to keep her child by guaranteeing assistance from the father, a French edict in 1556 required a statement for each illegitimate birth made under oath by the victim. ⁴ Typically the resulting conviction ignored the violent aspect of the incident, leaving only the prosecution of the seduction.

If accused and convicted of the crime of rape the punishment was severe; classed with the crimes of theft and murder, the penalty for a convicted rapist was death. ⁵ Even attempted rape was considered serious enough to justify the penalty of death. Interestingly, if a woman killed her assailant during the attempt of forced sexual intercourse, English law deemed the murder justifiable and the woman would be pardoned: “if a Woman kill him that assaileth her to ravish her: This is justifiable by the Woman, without any pardon.” ⁶ Even though seventeenth-century law considered the act of rape a serious crime, one which was punishable by death, visual imagery of this grievous act continued to remain popular among the Flemish elite.

Patrons of Early Modern Erotica

⁴ Davis, 50.
⁵ Bashar, 32.
⁶ Ibid.
As previously observed, Early Modern artists glorified and aestheticized mythological rape and abduction in their paintings, all but encouraging the brutal act in their depictions. The male subjects were often illustrated as gods or heroic warriors of classical civilization whose acts of sexual violence are celebrated and glorified by Renaissance and Baroque artists. But for whom were these paintings created? Even without painstakingly researching records of patronage, it can generally be assumed that these images of female rape and abduction were made for men.\(^7\) As Diane Wolfthal convincingly argues in *Images of Rape*, not only were these images commissioned by men, but they were also most certainly conceived with the male viewer in mind. It is further suggested that painted erotic images were kept out of sight, and not intended for a woman’s gaze. Images of nudity in the Spanish royal collection, which included Titian’s *Rape of Europa* (1559-62), were supposedly covered prior to the arrival of the Queen when she visited the King’s apartments.\(^8\)

It can be assumed that societal hierarchy was a determining factor for the commissioning of painted erotic imagery. Only members of the nobility and growing bourgeoisie had the money, education, and predilection to requisition painted erotic mythic imagery. As Margaret Carroll illustrated in her essay on Rubens’s *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (1617), princely patrons throughout Europe commissioned such works, validating their political authority.\(^9\) However, other forms of erotica were available to the masses in the form of sonnets, jests and prints. Erotic literature was printed as early as 1525 in England and printers produced collections of erotica for purchase well into the seventeenth century.\(^10\) Much of this literature is similar to

---

\(^7\) Wolfthal, 24.
\(^9\) See Chapter Two for further discussion of this topic. Margaret Carroll, “The Erotics of Absolutism,” *The Expanding Discourse*.
contemporary collections of dirty jokes and pornographic imagery, as they included sexual innuendo as the prime source of their humor. Perhaps one of the most well known examples of printed erotica was the Italian collection of sonnets and engravings, *I modi*. Designed by Mannerist painter, Giulio Romano (1499-1546) and engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi (1480-1525) in 1524, these images illustrated sixteen sexual positions and were widely circulated among the elite of Roman society (figure 21a and 21b). Outraged, Pope Clement VII attempted to eliminate all traces of the imagery; however, a second edition was later published with accompanying sonnets by journalist Pietro Aretino (1492-1556). Giulio’s *I modi*, even suppressed as they were in the mid-sixteenth century, still inspired other artists, such as Agostino Carracci, to produce series of drawings depicting consenting couples engaged in sexual activity.\(^\text{11}\) The popularity of consensual erotica can be understood in modern terms considering the magnitude of pornographic media available to audiences; however, the depiction of erotic images on a monumental scale was rare in sixteenth-century Flanders.

At the beginning of the century emotional and mannered figures, reflecting the expressive Italian style, became popular in Flemish secular paintings. Many of these paintings portrayed dramatic narrative with life-size classical figures. Hans Vlieghe suggests that *Hercules and Omphale* (1607) (figure 22) by Abraham Janssen (1575-1632) is the earliest known example in seventeenth-century Flemish painting of a strong emotional and erotic depiction of classical subject matter on a monumental scale.\(^\text{12}\) Obvious in its erotic undertones, Janssen illustrates evocative themes of love and lust, sensuality, and the lure of gender reversal. The classical tale recounts the year long enslavement of Hercules by the Queen of Lydia, Omphale, where each adopted the custom of wearing each other’s clothes. Eventually becoming lovers, Hercules

\(^{11}\) Frantz, 123.

\(^{12}\) Vlieghe, 21.
became accustomed to wearing a women’s sash and girdle while Omphale took to donning his characteristic lion skin and wooden club.

Janssen depicts the moment when Pan discovers the lovers. In Ovid’s *Fasti*, Pan finds them in a dark cave; however, in this depiction the couple lounges in a lushly upholstered interior setting. Pan mistakes Hercules for Omphale because of their exchange of clothing. He is then literally “kicked” out of the lovers’ bed by the indignant Hercules. Motifs of erotic sexuality resonate throughout this composition. The luminous female figure is almost fully exposed save a transparent gold scarf and the muscular arm of Hercules draped across her legs. As in the *Rape of Lucretia*, the coverings both shield and attract the eye to Omphale’s genitalia. Her fleshy white leg swung over his darker more muscular appendage offers the implication of sexual intercourse. The *amoretti* at the foot of the bed mirror the pose as they look to the main subjects of the painting for further guidance. Although this painting does not illustrate forced sexual intercourse, it reveals a change of taste in the Antwerp public toward humanistic rather than moralizing religious themes. Unique in this erotized image is the idea of role reversal, both in the physical change of clothing and the reversal of power where Hercules is enslaved and subjugated by Omphale.

**The Thrill of the Hunt**

The portrayal of female domination over their male counterparts is rare. Most Flemish mythological paintings illustrate a woman being physically overpowered by a man. Historically, the patriarchal subjugation of women has been justified by classical law and upheld through religious discourse. However, these images of sexual violence go beyond the subjugation of the

---

13 This swung leg motif is also discussed in Chapter 2, in the portrayal of the rape of the daughters of Leucippus by Rubens.
“weaker sex” and arouse the sensation of domination through chase and force. As the voyeur of an erotic mythological image, the viewer imagines himself as the abductor, identifying himself with the god or the heroic warrior assailant. Laura Mulvey suggests that this not only aroused sexual desire but feelings of omnipotence.\(^{14}\) Aristocratic patrons, when commissioning an erotic theme from antiquity, often preferred one in which the woman was unwilling, linking violent pursuit to sexuality and to domination.

This popular theme can be traced back to ancient Greek ideology which viewed sexual relations as a kind of hunt. The representation of a god or heroic warrior running after a woman became symbolic for sexual desire.\(^{15}\) In ancient Greek and Roman mythology, sexuality was often represented by the imagery of predation, warfare, flight, and pursuit. This pattern of pursuit does not imply hostilities between the sexes; rather it is suggestive of human sexual instincts, both male aggression and female submission.\(^{16}\) Flemish examples of mythological rape heightened by the thrill of pursuit include Schut’s *Rape of Europa* (figure 5) and certainly Rubens’s *Rape of the Sabine Women* (figure 18) and *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (figure 15). In all three paintings, the women are physically pursued or hunted by their male abductors. Schut and Rubens chose to illustrate the dramatic moment of capture and physical domination to entice and excite the male viewer, making them feel like they are part of the action. Relating the pursuit of a woman to the hunt of a wild animal is congruent when considering seventeenth-century conceptions of female sexuality. This conception continues to hold an element of truth for many today in their perceptions of feminine sensuality. In his analysis of Titian’s *Rape of Europa* (figure 4), author Arthur Pope comments on the artist’s ability to capture the “comedic

\(^{15}\) Wolfthal, 13.
spirit” of the abduction. The humorous element of the abduction Pope identifies with is the same element which sexually excites male viewers, a woman’s dramatic and fearful reaction to a situation to which she has no control. The tendency to perceive comedy and stimulation in the visual distress of an abducted female and her eventual domination evidently continued to be widespread, even in academia in the 1960s. Though Pope was writing nearly fifty years ago, the prevalence of pornographic magazines and films demonstrates continuation to the present day.

In seventeenth-century texts focused on human sexuality, the woman, more specifically, the female womb was often referred to in animalistic terms. Sexual intercourse was the diagnosis to control the unpredictable temperaments of the “animal.” When the female womb was not amply “fed” by sexual intercourse or reproduction, it was likely to wander about her body, overpowering her speech and senses. Young women were often married off at a young age in the hopes that consummation of the marriage would inevitably control their lustful nature. In the context of seventeenth-century dogma, sexual intercourse was used as a form of female subjugation and control.

In some depictions of rape and abduction, the victim is illustrated as fearful or in a state of shock. Fear was believed to make a woman more attractive. Ovid champions this idea in his *Art of Love*, “Maybe at first she’ll fight and call you a ‘wicked rouge’; but her wish in fighting is really to be won.” Perhaps the fear illustrated in such imagery suggests that mortal women in Greek myth are meant to represent the human condition, one’s true powerlessness before

18 Davis, 124. See also Crawford, *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science*. Medical authors identifying women as sexual beings also recommended intercourse as a remedy for certain female diseases like ‘mother fits’, and ‘greensickness.’
19 Crawford, 85.
20 Ibid.
21 Ovid’s *Art of Love*, translated by Elizabeth McGrath from the 1601 Frankfurt edition of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* I665-666. McGrath, v.1, 129.
God/gods, and man’s own mortality. 22 Although women are presented as naturally passive, terrified victims, they are simultaneously portrayed as sexualized beings, further exposed in large-scale paintings as fully rendered nude figures. Due to their size and vivid coloring, these painted works provide their audience with a type of identification and visual pleasure not possible in the print medium. 23 Rubens’s painting of another abduction, Boreas and Orithyia (1615) in Vienna (figure 23) illustrates a more intimately passionate and focused dramatic scene than an earlier woodblock print of the same theme (1547) (figure 24); this painting is perhaps one of Rubens’s more passive representations of mythological rape. Similar to Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus, this rape subject was far from being one of the most popular in Renaissance art.

Another mythical abduction highlighted by Ovid in Book VII of his Metamorphosis, the winged god of the North Wind, Boreas, is smitten with love for the beautiful Orithyia. Unlike most ancient gods, he attempts to win her with words of love rather than forcibly kidnapping and raping her. However, this gentle approach does not work and Boreas snatches Orithyia from the banks of the river Ilissos near Athens. 24 In portraying the North Wind, creator of snow and hail, Rubens adds a playful element to Boreas’s abduction of a mortal by including amoretti in the background playing with snowballs. Rubens pushes the figures to the foreground, emphasizing the dramatic seizure of Orithyia; her figure fills the picture plane, overshadowing the dramatic action of the abduction, allowing the viewer full view of her arched nude form. 25 The passions and physical struggles are certainly underplayed in the Vienna painting as compared to other

22 Lefkowitz, 40.
25 Alpers, 289.
Rubens rape scenes but not so much as in Bernard Sullivan’s earlier woodblock print from the Lyons 1557 edition of *La Métamorphoses d’Ovide Figurée*.26 Here the figures, while central to the composition, are set back in the composition. The surrounding clouds and the powerful winds emphasized by the fabric whipping around the couple distract the viewer from the main figures.

Alpers and other scholars find Rubens’s abduction scene difficult to analyze as he has provided few iconographical clues with which to interpret any allegorical meaning. She concludes that this painting is merely a representation of the attributes of Boreas, as a cold and powerful god of the North wind.27 If this painting merely emphasizes the characteristics of Boreas, why include the abduction of Orithyia? The abduction of a mortal woman was seen as an attribute of power and by depicting it, Rubens accentuates the vigorous and authoritative nature of the north wind according to the patriarchal model. Although difficult to interpret allegorically, *Boreas and Orithyia* is a primary example of how seventeenth-century rape imagery objectified the nude and vulnerable female form, visually arousing the viewer with a portrayal of chase and abduction.

**Moralizing Motifs and Acceptable Erotica**

With no obvious allegorical ties to religious themes, images like *Boreas and Orithyia* were not commissioned for moralizing purposes. Many mythological scenes were meant for buildings, guildhalls and luxurious upper-class homes. Netherlandish painters transformed allegory into native pictorial motifs based on Renaissance humanistic language, which served as

26 Although not a common theme for large-scale painting, the abduction of Orithyia appeared several times in illustrations of Ovid. Alpers, 291. *La Métamorphoses d’Ovide Figurée* was published in Antwerp in 1591 and given Rubens classical education would have been familiar with the text and its illustrations. Morford, 698.

27 Alpers, 290.
an alternate voice to the religious and political rhetoric of the time. Influenced by a native allegorical language, Jacob Jordaens employed it in his later painting of the rape of Europa (1643) (figure 9) in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, where he counterbalanced the languid female figures with the royal herd of cattle. In the mid-century there was a voluminous genre of cow paintings which were symbolically celebratory of Dutch agriculture. According to Mariët Westermann, viewers would have recognized the bull and cow as emblematic of Dutch prosperity due to the financial success of the cattle-breeding and dairy industries. The political and economic significance would not have been lost on Jordaens as he devotes almost half of his composition to the creatures. Jordaens Rape of Europa (1643) exemplifies the combination of mythological allegory, sex and Netherlandish motifs.

This synthesis of classical mythology and Renaissance humanist ideology created a specific allegorical language. This language was discernable through a variety of contemporary handbooks which included instructions for the appearance of the gods as well as their virtues and vices. Cersare Ripa published the Italian mythological handbook, Iconologia, in 1578. In his book on allegorical traditions, Cours de Peinture par Principes (1708), French theorist, Rogier de Piles, named Iconologia the standard manual for visual personification. Along with illustrations, Ripa included commentary separating mythological figures from their original narrative context to include abstract moral meanings. This approach was a valuable tool for artists who wished to integrate mythological imagery with allegorical significance.

---

30 Rosenthal, 7.
31 Morford, 696.
The interest in sexual imagery of the Early Modern Netherlands must certainly be linked to some of the alterations of Christian doctrine as a result of Protestant and Catholic reforms. The condemnation of sexualized imagery can be traced back to the Council of Trent which detailed the evils of nudity and its obscene representation in art. Reacting to Protestant iconoclasm, the Council developed an official text containing the Catholic doctrine on images, which was voted on during the twenty-fifth and final session in December of 1563. Regarding the use of sacred painted images and saintly relics, the text established:

…all superstition shall be removed, all filthy quest for gain eliminated…so that images shall not be painted and adorned with a seductive charm…nothing may appear that is profane, nothing disrespectful, since holiness becometh the house of God.

An entire section of the treatise was dedicated to imagery with obscure and difficult meaning. Obscurity in art, although aesthetically preferred by sixteenth-century mannerist artists, was considered a form of vanity and a sin against the artwork’s essential function. When constructing religious and moralizing images, artists were instructed not to display their talent of artistic representation without reason or meaning but “express the necessary particulars and thereby avoiding misunderstandings or any ambiguous figures.” This loophole enabled artists to portray mythological erotica under the guise of religious and allegorical intent as suggested by the artist or patron as long as the meaning was made clear. The paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569) illustrate this integration of classical themes with contemporary Christian moralization. *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1554-55) (figure 25) depicts man’s fall from grace using the Classical myth of Icarus. Bruegel adds a moralizing element to his message,

---

33 Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, Italian Art 1500-1600; Sources and Documents in the History of Art Series (Edglewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, INC., 1966), 121.
34 Klein, 127.
advising the viewer on the dangers of unrealistic ambitions and to concentrate instead on the humble work of tilling the land.\textsuperscript{35}

At the turn of the century, with the flood of religious imagery commissioned for Catholic churches under the Counter Reformation imperative, sexualized images were condoned/allowed because they could be categorized under the rubric of allegory commissioned by Catholic elite of the Southern Netherlands.\textsuperscript{36} While moralized versions of the \textit{Metamorphosis} were placed on the index of forbidden erotic tales by the Council these narratives still remained a popular source of inspiration for artists and their clients who still called themselves Christians and humanists.\textsuperscript{37}

As discussed in previous chapters, sexual images of rape and abduction took on various allegorical interpretations, ranging from allegories of religious salvation, to marital and political allegories. However, as examined by Nanette Solomon, much of this imagery conveys a strong sense of display, particularly of the nude female form, and evokes an impression of sensual fantasy made ever more tangible with the inclusion of contemporary costume.\textsuperscript{38} Both Rubens and Jordaens repeatedly exhibit their talent for representing the female form in all sorts of poses and viewpoints. Jordaens seemed to be particularly fond of illustrating a voluptuous female backside in many of his allegorical and mythological paintings.\textsuperscript{39} In many of his later mythological paintings, Rubens twisted and turned the nude female form so the viewer could behold and appreciate a 360 degree view of a vibrant and robust young female nude. Many of these paintings highlighted the exploits of Venus, the ancient goddess of sexuality, love, lust and

\textsuperscript{35} Bruegel is also playing with the Netherlandish notion of human folly. Folly turns the world up-side down and Icarus illustrates this idea of pride and unrealistic ambition as he falls headfirst into the sea.
\textsuperscript{36} Klein, 127.
\textsuperscript{37} D’Hulst, 54.
\textsuperscript{38} Salomon, 146.
\textsuperscript{39} See Jordaens’s \textit{Allegory of Fruitfulness} (1617), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, \textit{Homage to Pomona (Allegory of Fruitfulness)} (1623), Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, \textit{Marsyas Ill-treated by the Muses} (1640), Rijksmuseum, The Hauge, and \textit{King Candaules} (1646), National Museum, Stockholm.
fertility. Although Rubens’s mythological paintings tended to reflect issues of the Early
Modern human condition, the reference to classical subjects allowed this condition to be
presented with the added attraction of the female nude.

With the inclusion of the familiar, relating ancient mythological themes to contemporary
religious rhetoric satisfied patron’s interest in erotic imagery while reconciling the Catholic
conscience. Rubens was fond of using this technique of combining contemporary with classical
to make the message relevant to modern audiences. As explored in Chapter Two, in some of
Rubens’s later mythological paintings, the artist reused a female figure clothed in a seventeenth-
century gown and chemise. This deliberate reference to the contemporary wearer created a more
serious and more universal message while still retaining the erotic fantasy.

Conclusion

As Early Modern mythological imagery glorified forced rape and abduction, art historical
interpretation continued to de-emphasize the sexual acts as violations against persons through
published analyses which all but ignored the forced physical violence. Margaret Carroll, in her
interpretive essay on Rubens’s Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus acknowledges the
examination of moralizing allegory in rape imagery in art historical doctrine. However, she
pertinently insists that interpretations which do not recognize the celebratory depiction of sexual
violence and the forced subjugation of women by men are inadequate. In his formalist
description of Titian’s Rape of Europa, later copied by Rubens, Erwin Panofsky recognized
Europa’s fear as suggested by her ungainly pose. Unfortunately he negates this element of fear

---

40 See Rubens’s The Feast of Venus (1630s), Hunt-historisches Museum, Vienna, The Three Graces (mid 1630s), Museo del Prado, Madrid, and The Judgment of Paris (1638-9), Museo del Prado, Madrid.
41 Belkin, 178.
42 Carroll, 139.
felt by a victim of a forced abduction by suggesting that she instead reveals “a kind of rapture befitting a mortal maiden carried away by a god.”43 In his analysis of Titian’s Europa, Panofsky completely ignores the action of the abduction, instead describing the scene as though Europa willfully participated in her little jaunt across the sea on the back of a horny white bull.

While later scholars recognize the significance of the rape or abduction in these paintings, few acknowledge the violent aspect of the scene or take into consideration the socio-political or cultural conditions which may have influenced the painting and its perception by a seventeenth-century audience. While Svetlana Alpers attempted to solve the interpretational puzzle of four specific Rubens mythological abduction scenes, she focuses the majority of her energies on the lack of iconographic clues in the unnatural and unspecified settings. In her discussion of allegorical meaning, Alpers (like Panofsky, Arthur Pope, and Jane Nash) fails to recognize the violent aspect of the abduction, the overt sexual connotation in the display of the nude female form, or the socio-cultural concerns which influenced representation. Without taking these elements into consideration, the interpretations of mythological rape and abduction imagery, particularly those of Early Modern Flemish painters, is inherently incomplete and should not be neglected in the future.

43 Panofsky, 166.
Conclusion

In seventeenth-century Flanders, images of mythological rape and abduction seemed to serve three primary functions, to glorify the virtues of marriage and religious salvation, to provide erotic stimulation, and to validate the political assertions of aristocratic patrons. Visual imagery was of enormous significance at this time, in many contexts, and at different levels of society. Emotional, personal and dramatic, monumental paintings of a mortal woman being abducted by mythological deities and heroes were dramatic transmitters of values held by both artist and patron.

Paintings based on the rapes of the Sabine women, Europa, and the daughters of Leucippus have all been interpreted as marital instruction for new brides and to serve as a constant reminder of the place of the virtuous women in society. The individual violations of their bodies as well as their personal freedoms have been repeatedly ignored or negated in art historical interpretation. While paintings of mythological rape and abduction by Peter Paul Rubens served the noble purpose of communicating many of his own morals and political ideologies, they continued to exploit the overt display of the nude female form as propaganda. And while the allegorical interpretation may vary, all images of rape and abduction display the sensual voluptuous nude or partially nude woman to titillate and excite the viewer. It can be argued that depictions of rape and abduction are indeed double violations of women; first in the act and second in the dehumanization of visual representation.

Allegorical interpretation provides in-depth contextual significance to these images; however, an examination of the socio-political and cultural influences of seventeenth-century Flanders reveals a picture of the patriarchal view of womanhood. Paintings of mythological rape communicate the preference of wealthy patrons for secular erotica of an unwilling woman and
her subsequently forced domination. While depictions of rape and abduction have previously been admired for their aesthetic and iconographical content, scholars have recently shifted from formalist concerns to the study of socio-political conditions and their influence on how paintings were conceived and experienced. Feminist authors like Diane Wolfthal and Margaret Carroll have examined the role of culture and the traditional conventions of visual representation of women and how they continued to diminish the role of women in a patriarchal society.

Painted images of mythological rape may have served a dual purpose, gratifying the suppressed need for erotic imagery and satisfying humanist morals and religious piety, but they are also historical documents recording the continued objectification of the female. As long as scholars go along with seeing depictions of women as legitimately generic and sexualized rather than questioning why societies continue to legitimize such practices, one gains only partial understanding of the images and the cultures that produced them.
Figure 1
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of Europa; after Titian*
1630
Oil on Canvas, 181 x 200 cm
Museo del Prado, Madrid
Figure 2
Berlin Painter, *The Abduction of Europa*
490 B.C.
Terra-cotta bell krater, 13 inches in height
Museo Archeologico, Tarquinia, Italy

Figure 3
Artist Unknown, *Europa and the Bull from the House of Fatal Love, Pompeii*
15 B.C. - 15 A.D.
Buon Fresco, dimensions unknown
The National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Italy
Figure 4
Titian, *The Rape of Europa*
1559-62
Oil on canvas, 185 x 205 cm
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA
Figure 5
Cornelius Schut, *The Rape of Europa*
1630s
Dimensions unknown
Washington DC, Private Collection
Figure 6
Fernando Gallego, *The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine*
Undated
Tempera on panel, 125 x 109cm
Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

Figure 7
Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*
1645-52
Marble, 11ft. 6 in. high
Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, Italy
Figure 8
Jacob Jordaens, *The Rape of Europa*
1615
Oil on canvas, 173 x 235 cm
Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany
Figure 9
Jacob Jordaens, *The Rape of Europa*
1643
Oil on canvas, 173 x 190 cm
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille, France
Figure 10
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of Lucretia*
1612
Oil on Canvas, 187 x 214.5 cm
Current location unknown, formerly Bildergalerie, Potsdam-Sanssouci, Germany
Figure 11
Peter Paul Rubens, *Samson and Delilah*
1609
Oil on wood, 185 x 205 cm
National Gallery, London, England

Figure 12
Peter Paul Rubens, *Susanna and the Elders*
1609-10
Oil on wood, 198 x 218 cm
Museo de la Real Academia de San Fernando, Madrid, Spain
Figure 13
Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia*
1568-71
Oil on canvas, 188.9 x 145.1 cm
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England
Figure 14
Peter Paul Rubens, *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*
1617
Oil on canvas, 224 x 211 cm
Alte Pinakothek, Munich
Figure 15
Jacob Jordaens, *A Scene of Abduction*
date unknown
Black chalk on brown paper, 304 x 214mm
Museé de Louvre, Paris, France

Figure 16
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Battle of the Amazons*
1600
Oil on canvas
Bildgalerie, Sanssouci-Potsdam, Germany
Figure 17
Peter Paul Rubens, *Rape of the Sabine Women*
1635-37
Oil on wood, 170 x 236 cm
National Gallery, London, England
Figure 18a
Detail of figure 18, *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (1635)

Figure 18b
Detail of figure 10, *The Rape of Lucretia* (1612)
Figure 19
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Temple of Janus* Oil sketch for *The Entry of Ferdinand*
1634
Oil on panel, 70 x 68.8cm
Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia

Figure 20
Peter Paul Rubens, *Massacre of the Innocents*
1635-37
Oil on panel, 198 x 302cm
Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany
Figure 21a
Presumed original fragments of *I modi*
1525
Engraving, 215 x 245mm
British Museum, London, England

Figure 21b
Attributed to Marcantonio Raimondi, *Posture I*
1525
Engraving, dimensions unknown
Albertina, Vienna, Austria
Figure 22
Abraham Janssen, *Hercules and Omphale*
1607
Oil on canvas, 149 x 189cm
Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen
Figure 23
Peter Paul Rubens, *Boreas and Orithyia*
1615
Oil of canvas, dimensions unknown
Vienna Academy, Austria
Figure 24
Bernard Sullivan, *Boreas and Orithyia*
1547
Woodcut print, dimensions unknown

Figure 25
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*
1554-55
Oil on panel, 72 x 110 cm
Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium
Bibliography


