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Ekaterina Koposova April 7, 2017

Peter Paul Rubens' *Union of Earth and Water*: the Artist and the Allegories of Peace

by

Ekaterina Koposova

Dr. Walter Melion
Adviser

Department of Art History

Dr. Walter Melion

Adviser

Dr. Kevin Corrigan

Committee Member

Dr. Linda Merrill

Committee Member

Dr. Eric Varner

Committee Member

2017

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Ekaterina Koposova

Dr. Walter Melion

Adviser

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Abstract

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Peter Paul Rubens' *Union of Earth and Water* (ca. 1618) expresses the artist's political beliefs by means of a complex, intertextual allegory. I place this work among what I define as Rubens' peace images — visions of a political utopia conveyed to the viewer by means of divine allegory — while recognizing that the influence of Joyous Entries on this work highlights its status as a specific political allegory concerned with Antwerp.

Following Terence's apothem "sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus," Rubens created images of the union of the three gods that were meant to represent the joy and bounty that a peace in Europe would bring. These images are a mix of practical political concerns and philosophical ideas founded on an intimate knowledge of Greek and Roman myths, literature, and art. In my thesis, I show how the symbolic elements and composition of the *Union of Earth and Water* justify a reading of this painting as an allegory of peace.

Beyond the elements that constitute Rubens' peace images, the *Union of Earth and Water* features visual motifs borrowed from Joyous Entries — events that were organized in European cities to celebrate the arrivals of important personages and are notable for the presence of water deities that establish a symbolic connection between land, rivers, the sea, and good rulership. Water deities play an important role in the *Union of Earth and Water*. I trace the painting's connection to the iconography of Joyous Entries, working closely with two commemorative fête books by Joannes Bochius.

Beyond the painting's meaning as an allegory of the Netherlands or an image of peace, the *Union of Earth and Water* can also be read as a reflection on the Empedoclean view of the universe. My analysis shows how this painting puts forward an allegorical vision of a political utopia within a divinely ordered universe.

The thesis brings together the politics of seventeenth-century Europe and contemporary artistic production, as well as the literature and art of Antiquity, to reach a more holistic understanding of the *Union of Earth and Water* as one of Rubens' major political allegories informed by his hopes for the Netherlands.

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Introduction

Peter Paul Rubens' *Union of Earth and Water* (ca. 1618, fig. 1), a monumental oil painting currently in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum, expresses Rubens' primary political concerns: the division of the Netherlands, North and South, and, specifically, the Dutch blockade of the Scheldt river, which deprived Antwerp of maritime trade. More than a political allegory focused solely on the Netherlands, however, this picture also alludes to the theme of peace, and, in this respect, connects to Rubens' earlier and later works on this subject. Beyond the painting's meaning as an allegory of the Netherlands or an image of peace, the *Union of Earth and Water* can also be read as a reflection on the Empedoclean view of the universe.

This paper will place the *Union of Earth and Water* in its political, historical, and artistic context as well as within Rubens' oeuvre. Such a contextualization will allow for an interpretation of this painting as both an expression of Rubens' politics and a complex, intertextual allegory. In particular, my examination of this painting will be centered on several interconnected points. The first of these is the influence of ancient Roman art and pageant decorations on Rubens' *Union of Earth and Water* and its political message and symbolism. Next, Rubens' amalgamation of the figures of Peace, Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus will prove crucial to the meaning of the image, with special reference to Terence's popular apothegm "Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus." Finally, my analysis of the painting will comprise the four elements as well as the forces of Love and Strife, showing how here as elsewhere they animate an important subset of Rubens' images of peace; these pictures put forward an allegorical vision of political utopia within a divinely ordered universe. I will begin my discussion by exploring Rubens' method of allegorical invention and its emblematic roots. I will then analyze the distinctive iconography and elusive subject-matter of the *Union of Earth and Water* and consider

its immediate context in the political functions of pageant allegory. Finally, by means of a close reading of Rubens' images of peace, I will explore the multiple identities of his mythological personae cum personifications.

The *Union of Earth and Water*'s first owner was Cardinal Gianfrancesco Guidi di Bagno, who purchased the painting to decorate his residence in Rome.[1] Guidi di Bagno dispatched the painting to Rome in 1622, which must be taken as the likely terminus ante quem.[2] By 1652, the painting had found its way to the collection of Portia Gonzaga and changed hands again when she signed a contract with Domenico Salvetti, prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives and the pope's secretary of codes.[3] Although the terms of the contract allowed for a *retrovendita*, the right to buy back the object sold, when Gonzaga repaid the loan for which the painting had served as collateral, she received a copy (unless Salvetti was able to buy the painting back from her at a later date, which there are reasons to doubt).[4] At Salvetti's death, the *Union of Earth and Water* entered the collection of Mario Chigi, who bequeathed it to Cardinal Flavio Chigi.[5] The painting remained in the Chigi collection until approximately 1798-1800, when it was purchased by the Russian Tsar Paul I.[6] A sketch Rubens executed for the painting is currently in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum (fig. 2). Even now, there is no consensus on the work's

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[1] E. McGrath, G. Martin, F. Healy, B. Schepers, C. Van de Velde, K. De Clippel, *Mythological Subjects 1: Achilles to the Graces*, Vol 1, in Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, Part XI (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 50, 54-5.

[2] McGrath et al., *Mythological Subjects*, 55.

[3] Sarah McPhee, *Bernini's Beloved: A Portrait of Constanza Piccolomini* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 89, 87.

[4] McPhee, *Bernini's Beloved*, 89.

[5] Ibid., 230-31.

[6] Ibid., 231; Max Rooses, *L'eouvre de Rubens* (Antwerp: 1890), No. 684, 169; Michael Jaffé, "'The Union of Earth and Water' Revived for the Fitzwilliam," *The Burlington Magazine* 102, no. 691 (1960): 448. Jaffé gives the year 1797 as the date for Paul I's acquisition of the *Union of Earth and Water*. See Michael Jaffé, *Catalogo Completo: Rubens* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1989), 206.

date: the Hermitage claims that the painting was created in 1618, while the Fitzwilliam Museum dates the sketch to 1621.[7]

In ascertaining the date of the *Union of Earth and Water*, we must take into consideration one canvas from the Medici cycle, the *Meeting in Lyon* (fig. 3), that bears important similarities to the painting with which we are concerned.[8] The *Meeting in Lyon* is dated no earlier than 1622.[9] Indeed, the affinities between the two works are remarkable: both feature a divine couple who lean toward each other and join hands as they are married by Hymen, god of marriage. A particularly striking similarity between these works is the two putti placed at the divine couple's feet — one with golden, the other with brown hair. The golden-haired boy hardly changes from one canvas to the other — the turn of his head, his features, and his overall appearance are identical from the neck upward in both paintings. The dark-haired boy, however, changes considerably (he seems older in the *Meeting in Lyon*), but retains his key function of catching the viewer's gaze. If we assume that Rubens did use the same brown-haired child model and that he painted him from nature (a question that will likely remain unanswered), then the difference in his appearance might indicate that time had elapsed between the two paintings.[10] The dark-haired boy may be his son Nicolaas (born in 1618), whose later portraits (fig. 4) show a child

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[7] "Union of Earth and Water (Antwerp and the Scheldt)," The Hermitage State Museum official website, accessed March 9, 2017, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+Paintings/48135/ ;

"The Union of Earth and Water," in Collections Explorer section of The Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge Official Website, accessed March 9, 2017, http://webapps.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explorer/index.php?qu=union%20of%20earth%20and%20water&oid=1853.

[8] In "'The Union of Earth and Water' Revived for the Fitzwilliam," Michael Jaffé mentions that the *Union of Earth and Water* "is strongly reminiscent of similar work in the History of Marie de Médicis" but he does not name the *Meeting in Lyon* explicitly. See footnote 5 in Jaffé, "'The Union of Earth and Water' Revived for the Fitzwilliam," 448.

[9] Michael Jaffé, *Rubens*, 274; Julius S. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 106-7.

[10] See the similarity between the younger child, Nicolaas, in *Portrait of Albert and Nicolaas Rubens* (1626), the pecheis in the *Union of Earth and Water* and the putti *Meeting in Lyon*.

considerably like the putto.[11] Moreover, in both paintings, the figure is given importance by his eye contact with the viewer — in one case, none other than the Queen of France and her court. In this case, we would be looking at a likely date of 1619-20 for the *Union of Earth and Water*, given that we know it was purchased by 1622, that the *Meeting in Lyon* is dated 1622 at the earliest, and that Nicolaas Rubens was born in 1618.[12] This speculative theory would make unlikely a difference of more than a few years between the two paintings, unless we think that Rubens worked from memory or sketches he had previously made of his son, which is possible.[13] Regardless of whether we believe that the changes in the dark-haired child are indicative of the paintings' dates, we may conclude that the two works' outstanding resemblance suggests that they were both completed around the same time.

The names with which the *Union of Earth and Water* has been endowed over its history are as enigmatic as the date of the painting's creation. Initially, like most works of the time, it did not have a title, and was instead described in the catalogues of its owners in sufficient detail to allow for identification. At first known as *Tiber and Abundance* (so named by J. F. M. Michel in his 1771 *Histoire de la Vie de P. P. Rubens*), it would later come to be called *Tiger and Abundance*, likely due to an error in the 1797 written catalogue of the Hermitage collection: in Russian, as in English, the words Tiber ("Tibr") and tiger ("tigr") differ only by a single letter. In the nineteenth century, C. G. Voorhelm and M. Rooses added two more names to the painting's

[11] Ludwig Burchard also believed that the dark-haired child in the *Union of Earth and Water* was Rubens' son Nicolaas. Moreover, he argued that Nicolaas is also represented in the *Meeting in Lyon*. Although Burchard wants to believe that both putti (the dark-haired and the golden-haired) are Rubens' children, this would make it odd that the painter recorded the changes in one child but not the other. Ludwig Burchard, "Anmerkungen Zu Den Rubens-Bildern Der Alten Pinakothek In München," *Kunstchronik* 23, no. 17 (1912): 258.

[12] There is, of course, the problematic difference between the sketches, neither of which show the children's faces (the two putti are absent altogether in the sketch for the *Union of Earth and Water*), which suggests that we can use this odd method of changes in the children only to date the finished paintings.

[13] For example, with 1618 for the *Union of Earth and Water* and 1625 for the *Meeting in Lyon*.

existing ones: *Neptune and Cybele* and the *Union of Earth and Water*.[14] Most of the names the painting has received claim to establish the identities of the two divinities represented on the canvas (Tiber/Neptune, Abundance/Cybele). Eventually, art historians settled on a general name — the *Union of Earth and Water*. As we shall see, the painting can be read as considerably more specific.

Rubens' Emblematic Mode of Creation

Our reading of the *Union of Earth and Water* is tied closely to the assumption that in creating his works Rubens thought emblematically, viz., that he made intricate use of visual symbols and references to ancient texts in order to generate new, unique meanings. Calling this process emblematic rather than iconographic is dictated by the importance of emblems in Rubens' time and his encounter with this art form in the early days of his artistic training as a platform for poetic and pictorial invention. The term "iconography" first appeared in the 1670s — three decades after Rubens' death — and would not acquire its current art historical meaning until the nineteenth century, gaining new prominence with the publication of Erwin Panofsky's work in the 1930s.[15] The use of the term "emblematic" is more appropriate because Rubens and his contemporaries would have conceived of his pictorial invention in these terms. Moreover,

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[14] Maria Varshavskaya and Xenia Egorova, *Pierre Paul Rubens: La sensualité de la vie* (London: Sirocco, 2003), 62-4.

[15] Although iconography as we know it today derives from manuals of the sixteenth century, these were not referred to as "iconography" or "iconographic" at the time. The most notable example is Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593, without illustratins; first illustrated edition: 1603), the title of which uses a different word (iconology as opposed to iconography). *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "iconography," accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=iconography; Eugene Kleinbauer and Thomas P. Slavens, *Research Guide to the History of Western Art*, Sources of Information in the Humanities, no. 2 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1982): 60-61; Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939). In his Universal English Dictionary of 1864, John Craig defines iconography as "a description of statues and similar monuments of ancient art," not quite the sense in which it is used today. John Craig, *Universal English Dictionary, Comprising the Etymology, Definition, and Pronounciation of All Known Words in the Language, as Well as Technial Terms Used in Art, Science, Literature, Commerce, and Law* (New York: Routledge and Sons, 1869), 996.

distinguishing between iconographic meaning more generally and the specific intellectual culture of the emblem that influenced Rubens allows for a subtler reading of his artworks and a deeper understanding of his creative process.

A new genre, emblem books appeared in 1531 when Heinrich Steiner, a printer, obtained the manuscript of Andrea Alciato, a lawyer, which contained mottos and epigrams modelled on the *Anthologia graeca*, and, adding illustrations to the original text, published the resulting hybrid to the author's great chagrin.[16] Over the sixteenth century, emblem books spread like wildfire across Europe, gaining enormous popularity in the first decades after their creation — a success they continued to enjoy well into the seventeenth century and beyond.[17] Rubens' earliest exposure to emblems, if it did not come during his studies with his father or at the school he attended in Antwerp with Christophe Plantin, who became his lifelong friend, would certainly have occurred in 1594, when he entered the studio of Otto van Veen.[18] Van Veen, his third and last teacher, was the only one of Rubens' instructors to have had a discernible stylistic influence on Rubens'early works.[19] One of the most distinguished painters in the Antwerp of Rubens' youth, Van Veen was, like his more renowned pupil, a Classical scholar as well as a painter, whose interest in emblem books culminated in the publication of *Quinti Horatii Flacci emblemata* (1607), *Amorum emblemata* (1608), and *Amoris divini emblemata* (1615).[20] The second of these, *Amorum emblemata*, became one of the most influential emblem books of the

[16] John Manning, *The Emblem* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 42-43; John F. Moffitt, Introduction to *A Book of Emblems: The* Emblematum liber *in Latin and English by Andrea Alciati (1492-1550)*, translated by John F. Moffit (London: McFarland & Company, 2004), 11.

[17] I.D. McFarlane, "Scève Before *Délie*," in *The Délie of Maurice Scève*, edited by I.D. McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 11-13; Manning, *The Emblem*, 43.

[18] Max Rooses, *Rubens*, translated by Harold Child, Vol 1 (London: Duckworth & Co, 1904), 28-9.

[19] Kristin Lohse Belkin, *Rubens* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), 26.

[20] Ibid., 26-7.

seventeenth century, and served as a model not only for emblematists but also for many artists.[21] Although these works were all published after Rubens left Van Veen's studio, it seems plausible that in the four years he spent with this painter, some of Van Veen's interest in the emblematic generation of meaning would have affected Rubens. In fact, some scholars — Kristin Belkin among them — believe that Van Veen's artistic practice and his engagement with Greek and Roman mythology and literature, as well as allegories, influenced Rubens' approach to pictorial invention.[22] Belkin also writes, however, that "Rubens never concerned himself specifically with emblems."[23] Although Rubens never authored an emblem book, a large body of his works were conceived precisely in the emblematic mode, not to mention those of his works that deal with emblems directly and his emblematic title-pages and frontispieces. In order to interpret Rubens' mythological images that center on the advocacy of peace, one of the goals of this essay, we must recognize his active engagement with the emblematic form of artistic creation.

To produce works on the basis of the intellectual approach common to emblematists, it is not necessary to abide by the well-known tripartite structure of the emblem (the motto, the image, and the explanatory text). In fact, this form was fluid even where the emblem books themselves were concerned.[24] For instance, the first French emblem book, Maurice Scève's *Délie*, a lyric poetry cycle published in 1543, cannot be said to abide by the traditional structure.[25] The argument presented here is not that Rubens actively created emblems in their

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[21] Tina Montone, "'Dolci ire, dolci sdegni, e dolci paci': The Role of the Italian Collaborator in the Making of Otto Vaenius's Amorum Emblemata," *Glasgow Emblem Studies* 8 (2003): 47.

[22] Belkin, Rubens, 33.

[23] Ibid., 33.

[24] Maning, *The Emblem*, 81-109.

[25] E. Donaldson, "Poema pictura loquens, picture poema silens: Text and Image in Maurice Scève's Délie," *Emblematica: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Emblem Studies* 18 (2010): 163-168.

canonical form, but rather that his intellectual approach to painting was similar to that of the emblematists — similar enough, indeed, that his paintings can be viewed as emblems that feature neither mottos nor explanatory texts yet operate on the same principles of the generation of meaning by symbolic means and references to ancient texts and art, and consciously provide intellectual puzzles as entertainment for their viewers.

What evidence do we have of Rubens' involvement with the emblematic mode of creation? The series of arches he designed at the end of his career for the entrance of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand into Antwerp in 1635 is perhaps the work best known for its emblematic flair. One of the main reasons why this series of artworks by Rubens can be accepted as emblematic is the commemorative volume *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, which features engravings of the pageant decorations by Rubens' pupil, Theodore van Thulden, and a commentary by Caspar Gevaerts, a close friend of the master. The fête book presents all three traditional components of the emblem: images (original by Rubens, engraving by van Thulden); mottos (by Gevaerts and Rubens); and explanatory text (by Gevaerts). Gevaerts' elucidation of the meaning behind his friend's visual creations suggests that Rubens played a crucial role in the invention of the emblematic message for the arches as well as the creation of this commemorative pageant volume, which, like several other such publications, adopted the well-known format of an emblem book.[26]

Elizabeth McGrath, in analyzing the *Arch of the Mint* (fig. 5) — one of the ephemeral monuments Rubens created to adorn the processional route for the entry of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand — refers to it as "a half-naturalistic, half-emblematic image" and explains in detail the meaning of the multiple visual elements Rubens employed, providing what is effectively a

[26] Elizabeth McGrath, "Rubens's Arch of the Mint," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 191-217.

reading of the *Arch of the Mint* as an emblematic work.[27] A prominent idea in McGrath's analysis is that in creating this arch, Rubens — guided by the goal of conveying to the new governor of Antwerp the dire economic circumstances of the Southern Netherlands and the vital importance of the help it could receive from the Spanish crown — created an entire complex of references to his country's sad plight and Spain's imperial glory.[28] *Arch of the Mint* is not moralizing or religious, nor was it made exclusively for intellectual entertainment, as many emblems had been; instead, it confronts the viewer with a serious political message framed by two river gods — a construction that will be of great importance to us later. As the recently published volume *Art, Music and Spectacle in the Age of Rubens* makes clear, the artworks created for Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi are notable for their use of ancient Roman literature and visual culture in communicating their political message, as can be seen from Rubens and Gevartius' references to Virgil's *Aeneid* and the artist's use of elements borrowed from ancient Roman coins for the purpose of political advocacy.[29] Rubens frequently applies the emblematic mode within a political context, whether for the expression of his own political views or in creating works that deal with politics more broadly.

Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi, however, is not the only example of Rubens' use of the emblematic mode or of references to the emblem books themselves. Among the most interesting instances that demonstrate Rubens' intimate knowledge of emblem books and his borrowing from them is the *Meeting in Lyon* from the Medici cycle. The *Meeting in Lyon* represents the

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[27] Ibid., 192, passim.

[28] Ibid., passim.

[29] Michael C. J. Putnam, "Virgil and the *Pompa*," in *Art, Music and Spectacle in the Age of Rubens: The Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, edited by Anna Knaap and Michael C. J. Putnam (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2013), passim; Carmen Arnold-Biucchi, "Coins and Classical Imagery in the Time of Rubens: *The Stage of Welcome* in the *Pompa Introitus Ferdinand*," in Ibid., passim.

union of Marie de Medici and Henri IV in the guise of Juno and Jupiter. The king and queen join hands, bringing to mind the traditional ancient Roman gesture of marriage, *dextrarum iunctio*. Hymen, god of matrimony, blesses their union. Below, the personification of the city of Lyon, seated in a chariot pulled by lions (a pun on the city's name, according to Julius Held), watches the ceremony.[30] Two cupids holding torches, symbols of marriage, ride harnessed lions while their playful brethren in the top right corner barely pay any attention to the royal marriage. The painting's composition is a synthesis of three emblems Rubens had gleaned from Alciato's *Emblemata*. According to Held, Rubens was inspired by "Potentissimus Affectus Amor," which shows Cupid riding in a chariot pulled by lions, a theme appropriate indeed for the representation of Henri IV and Marie de Medici's marriage.[31] The reference could also be seen as a clever double entendre: Henri IV — ferocious as a lion, a common royal symbol — is subdued by the bonds of all-powerful love. This, however, is not the only emblem in *Emblemata* that shows such a chariot: the emblem "Etiam Ferocissimos Domari" shows harnessed lions, symbols of cruelty and ferocity, subjugated by Mark Anthony as a means of proclaiming to the world his military supremacy.[32] This emblem, too, would be an appropriate reference for the *Meeting in Lyon* because it highlights Henri IV's sovereignty, and, consequently, the prominent and powerful position of his wife, Marie de Medici.

Rubens borrowed the overall composition of the *Meeting in Lyon* from yet another emblem in Alciato's *Emblemata*, "In Deo Laetandum" (fig. 6), which shows Ganymede being carried away by Jupiter's eagle.[33] If we look at the emblem and the painting side by side, we

[30] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 106-7.

[31] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul* Rubens, 106.

[32] Moffitt, *A Book of Emblems*, 47.

[33] Emblema IIII in the 1591 Leiden and 1584 Paris editions of Alciato's *Emblemata*.

notice several important similarities, too numerous to be coincidental. First, the position of both Ganymede and Henri IV on an eagle is remarkably similar; whereas Ganymede is traditionally represented in this fashion, Henri IV (or kings in general) is not. Moreover, the eagles' left wings are practically identical. The overall distribution of elements in the composition is also notable: both are divided by a diagonal which crosses from the upper right to the lower left, separating the earth from the man and eagle, shown against the sky. If we compare the lower half of the emblem and the painting, we observe that the dog was replaced by lions, while the mountain has metamorphosed into the carriage with Lyon, which echoes the curving form of the distant hills in the emblem: the overall curve of the silhouette has been preserved. Moreover, like the dog in the emblem, one of the felines looks up toward the sky. Rubens has even replaced the small rock in the sea in the lower left part of the emblem with the proud towers of Lyon. The epigram for "In Deo laetandum" speaks of Jupiter's love for Ganymede, which Alciato uses as a neo-Platonic metaphor for "he who takes joy in God's judgement and mind is taken away [in rapture] to be with Jupiter on high."[34] The use of this emblem underlines Marie's wisdom and virtuousness, which, the narrative claims, made Henri IV fall in love with her and elevate her to being his queen. The guise of Jupiter for Henri IV and Alciato's invocation of the same divinity in the epigram "In Deo laetandum" does not seem coincidental. We can perceive how a knowledge of Alciato's emblems — to be expected from Rubens' learned audience at the French royal court — provides additional readings for the painting; we must acknowledge, in this case at least, the emblems' crucial role in the organization of the painting's composition and the insights they

[34] Emblema IIII in the 1591 Leiden edition of Emblemata. "Emblemata (1591), Leiden: In Deo laetandum," *Alciato at Glasgow*, accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/emblem.php?id=A91a004; Moffitt, *A Book of Emblems*, 20.

provide into its meaning. From this analysis we may also surmise Rubens' knowledge of this art form.

Let us consider one more instance of Rubens' use of an emblem as a starting point for his composition. In doing so, we will return once more to the *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi* and consider *The Meeting of Two Ferdinands at Nördlingen* (*Meeting of King Ferdinand of Hungary and the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand of Spain at Nördlingen*) (fig 7). This painting is likely based on yet another emblem from Alciato: the illustration of Concordia (fig. 8).[35] The "Concordia" emblem shows two military commanders shaking hands; to their left and right stand their armies; right above their joined hands, a small city can be seen in the far distance. According to the epigram that follows it, the emblem is meant to recall a customary practice in ancient Rome:

> When Rome was marshalling her generals to fight in civil war and that martial land was being destroyed by her own might, it was the custom for squadrons coming together on the same side to exchange joined right hands as gifts. This is a token of alliance; concord has this for a sign — those whom affection joins the hand joins also.[36]

Rubens has adopted roughly the same composition for *The Meeting of Two Ferdinands* as that of the emblem, adding a river god and female figures in the lower part of the canvas as well as crowning eagles above the military commanders, and changing the position of the small town from above to below their joined hands. In the painting, Rubens depicted the meeting between King Ferdinand III of Hungary and Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand on September 2, 1634. On September 6 of the same year, the joined forces of the two Ferdinands defeated the Protestant Swedish army. The close analogy between the emblem and the painting's subject can hardly be

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[35] In the 1542 Paris edition, it is emblem XXVII.

[36] "Les Emblemes (1542), Paris: Concordia," *Alciato at Glasgow*, accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/emblem.php?id=A42a027.

denied: like ancient Rome, to which the epigram refers, the Europe of Rubens' times was overwhelmed by war; in the Battle of Nördlingen, the concordia between the forces of the Habsburgs had led to victory. Rubens used an emblem from Alciato to compare the battles of the Eighty Years' War to Roman civil wars, adding a new layer of meaning to his painting.

We have established, perhaps, Rubens' knowledge of and interest in emblems outside of his emblematic mode of pictorial invention for the composition of *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*. However, we do not have to rely on the words of art historians to confirm our view of Rubens as a painter who created emblematic works: his contemporaries convey to us the same impression.

On July 3, 1621, Charles Bonaventura de Longueval, Count Bucquoy, was killed during the siege of Ersekujvár, Hungary. Rubens was asked to create a sketch for a commemorative print of the late Count (fig. 9). On August 19, 1621, Chanoine Robert Schilders of Cambrai wrote to Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, a close friend of Rubens and the artist's correspondent for over a decade: "M. Rubens a charge de faire *un dessein d'emblème* qui doibt estre imprimé en taille-doulce avec le pourtraict et éldoge du défunct si tost qu'il sera achevé je vous envoyerai les premiers exemplaires…" (emphasis mine).[37] Note that Schilders refers to the sketch as an emblematic drawing, or rather, a drawing of an emblem. The "dessein" which Schilders mentions still exists and is currently in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum. Scholars who write on this image approach it in a manner frequently encountered in the reading of emblems, underlining the importance of establishing the separate meaning of the visual elements

[37] As quoted in Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 396; Elizabeth McGrath, "Tact and Topical Reference in Rubens's 'Medici Cycle,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (1980): 11; Wolfgan Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 9; Peter N. Miller, "Peiresc, Rubens, and Visual Culture Circa 1620," in *Art, Music and Spectacle in the Age of Rubens*, 49-51.

Rubens employs before finding the messages they generate when taken together.[38] Indeed, Maria Varshavskaya and Xenia Egorova explicitly link the image to emblem books such as Alciato's *Emblemata*, while also noting that the portrait of de Longueval is comparable to Rubens' frontispieces, an idea echoed by Julius Held, all of which suggests that Rubens' creation of "desseins d'emblème" was not restricted to this one work.[39] As will become clear in the course of this study, this mode of creation was fundamental to Rubens' invention of mythological paintings as well.

Held gives an exhaustive reading of the visual elements Rubens incorporated in the emblematic portrait of de Longueval, which, he writes, is meant to provide "a glorification of an admired martial hero, suffused with the expression of sadness at his untimely death."[40] In Held's view, the entire composition conveys that "the death of the supreme commander of the imperial forces had rendered the victory over the [Protestant] rebels so much more difficult to achieve."[41] While there is no disputing Held's commendable reading of the intricate emblematic meaning Rubens presents in the "dessein," one element of his interpretation — which, he himself admits, is not set in stone — can be read in an alternative way. This element is the couple in the lower part of the sketch, whom Held identifies as a river god and a bound province. Held suggests, appropriately, that the river could be "the Danube near which Longueval was killed."[42] The siege of Neuhäusel (Nové Zámky), in the course of which de Longueval met his death when leading a

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[38] Max Rooses, *Rubens: Sa vie et ses œuvres*, transalted by Louis Van Keymeulen (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1900), 310-11; Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 395-8; Varshavskaya and Egorova, *La sensualité de la vie*, 80-81.

[39] Varshavskaya and Egorova, *La sensualité de la vie*, 80; Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 396 and 398.

[40] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 396.

[41] Ibid., 397.

[42] Ibid., 397.

sally, was not a success for the Imperialist army and, after losing their commander in July, they retreated.[43] In these circumstances, it seems possible that Rubens could represent the area of the Hungarian Kingdom in the throes of the Bethlan revolt and the river Danube as shackled captives of the Protestant forces. However, another set of candidates is no less likely. Rubens, despite the artistic and diplomatic career that caused him to travel extensively in Europe, had a powerful devotion to his adopted hometown, Antwerp, where he had lived since he was twelve years old.[44] The death of a prominent Spanish military commander was a considerable loss to the Catholic world in general, as Held notes, and, consequently, to the war against the Protestants in Europe at large.[45] Rubens perceived this war as, most importantly, a battle for the future of the Netherlands, which he dreamed of seeing unified under the rule of the Hapsburgs, the Scheldt river free of the blockade imposed by the Dutch, and Antwerp once more a center of maritime trade.[46] We can perhaps suspect that, as a man for whom the banks of the Scheldt would have been an everyday reminder of the hardships brought to his country by the wars, Rubens could have associated a major loss by the Imperialist army with the prolongation of Antwerp's struggles. (We know that in the 1630s, he presented the victory at the Battle of Nördlingen as significant for the Southern Netherlands because of the peace that a Habsburg triumph would bring.[47]) Moreover, his subject — de Longueval — had a profound connection to the Spanish Netherlands, where his brilliant military career began.[48] An alternative reading of de Longueval's

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[43] Geoff Mortimer, *The Origins of the Thirty Years War and the Revolt in Bohemia, 1618* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 236-8.

[44] Rooses, *Rubens*, 1: 27.

[45] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 397.
[46] Ulrich Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War (1637/1638)," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 55 (2004): 197-8.

[47] McGrath, "Rubens's *Four Rivers* in Vienna," Die Malerei Antwerpens — Gattungen, Meister, Wirkungen (Internationales Kolloquium, Wien 1993) (Cologne: Verlag Locher GmbH, 1994), 73.
[48] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 396

portrait would include the Southern Netherlands and the Scheldt as representative of the country which, despite his close connection to it, de Longueval could not save.

Rubens' knowledge of emblems and his own use of an emblematic mode of invention are powerfully demonstrated in *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, especially *The Meeting of Two Ferdinands*, but emblematic usage is also found in his other works such as the Medici Cycle, of which we have considered an important example, and the portrait he had drawn to commemorate the death of Charles Bonaventura de Longueval. As we delve deeper into the symbolic mechanics of Rubens' mythological paintings, we must strive to keep in mind the importance that the emblematic mode had for Rubens and attempt to use this intellectual approach to the generation of meaning in our reading of his other allegorical works.

Rubens' Sources for the Divinities in the *Union of Earth and Water*: the Legacy of the River Gods

To begin our analysis of the *Union of Earth and Water*, let us identify the main elements of the painting. In the center, we see the figures of Earth and Water joining hands as they gaze into each other's eyes. Above them flies a figure commonly known as Victory, who crowns Earth with a myrtle wreath, symbol of marriage.[49] The cornucopia, gently held by Earth, has attracted the attention of a gourmet tiger, who reaches for the fruit. Between the bodies of Earth and Water is a water urn, from which fresh water pours into the sea. In the sea itself, a triton blows into a twisted conch shell while two putti enjoy the gentle surf. The setting of the painting can be divided into three elements: the sky, which forms the backdrop for the cornucopia; the hill or

[49] "Union of Earth and Water (Antwerp and the Scheldt)," The Hermitage State Museum official website; Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1977), 238-9. For instance, also compare the myrtle wreath held by the Victory-Hymen to the one held by Cupid in Lorenzo Lotto's *Venus and Cupid*, ca. 1525. Oil on canvas 36 3/8 x 43 7/8 in. (92.4 x 111.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Purchase, Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, in honor of Marietta Tree, 1986, 1986.138.

grotto, which provides a dark background for the union of the two gods; and the sea with a little beach in the lower part of the painting.

The identities of the gods as well as the symbolism of the different elements comprising the *Union of Earth and Water* depend on a careful contextualization of the picture. One of the most important sources for our inquiry are works of ancient Roman art that Rubens encountered and the pageant decorations created in the Netherlands to celebrate the arrival of important personages.[50] Let us begin by examining the traditional representations of deities pertinent to our research in ancient Roman art. We must consider the powerful legacy with which Rubens engaged in depicting river gods and other sea creatures on his canvas. The water deities figure frequently in Rubens' allegories and mythologies. The meaning of the sea and river gods, as well as their frequent companions, the female personifications of land, cast a strong political shadow over these paintings.

Ancient Roman visual culture, which formed the basis for Rubens' knowledge of Antiquity, overflows with river gods. From triumphal arches to freestanding sculptures, from coins to literature, they are a powerful presence in the ancient Roman artistic canon. Unlike many others, these deities were not forgotten after the collapse of the Roman empire but persisted in Byzantine and Medieval art.[51] In the Renaissance, however, they acquired new roles in the pageant decorations created to celebrate the entries of royalty or other important

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[50] Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

[51] Charles Bayet, *Art of Century: Byzantine Art* (New York: Parkstone International, 2014), 18; Leslie Ross, *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Westport, US: Greenwood Press, 1996), 93.

For examples of artworks of these periods featuring river gods see, for instance, the mosaics of Chrit's baptism in the Arian Baptistry and the Baptistery of Neon in Ravenna (I am grateful to Dr. Elizabeth Carson Pastan for bringing these to my attention); the mosaic representing Pishon from Church of Theodorias (Qasr Libya). For more on the baptisteries, see Otto Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress: Byzaontine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948) and Annabel Jane Wharton, "Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning: The Neonian Baptistery in Ravenna," *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (1987): 358-375.

personages into large cities. In the Joyous Entries, river gods were frequently accompanied by female personifications of land. From a variety of ancient Roman and early modern sources, these deities migrated to Rubens' art, and the *Union of Earth and Water* provides a striking example of the artist's interest and considerable knowledge (as well as his new reading) of these traditions. Let us briefly consider these deities, noting from which sources Rubens would have known them, and how he interpreted and used them in his own art.

In ancient Rome, river gods were personifications of geographic locations, representing a country's main river, which symbolized the land as a whole.[52] We know of these deities' presence in Roman art from a variety of sources; among these, the numerous surviving sculptures play an important role.[53] The most famous of these sculptures are the Louvre Tiber (fig. 10) and the Vatican Nile (fig. 11), considered the best examples of their respective types.[54] Tiber, the main river of Italy — at least symbolically and as far as Romans were concerned — stood for the great city, and for the empire; Nile, the river on which Egypt's kingdoms had been centered for millennia, represented this bountiful land, the new province, Aegyptus, that was added to the Roman empire after the battle of Actium in 31 BC.[55] The Tiber and Nile sculptural pair, discovered in 1513 and displayed in the Cortile del Belvedere in Rome,[56] were available to

[52] Molly Swetnam-Burland, "Egypt Embodied: The Vatican Nile," *Archaeological Institute of America* 113, No. 3 (2009): 439, 440, 45-6, passim; Phyllis Pray Bober, Ruth Rubinstein, and Susan Woodford, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Scultpure: A Handbook of Sources* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1986), 99.

[53] Of the Nile type alone we have over 20 sculptural examples fashioned in the round, Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 441.

[54] Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 441. Moreover, Rubens himself admired the physique of the Vatican Nile McGrath, "Rubens's *Four Rivers*," 77 (footnote 14).

[55] Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 445-6, and passim. Rivers were also seen as representative of the people that inhabited the land in which they flowed: Prudence J. Jones, *Reading Rivers in Roman Literature and Culture* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 41; Gay Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 12-18.

[56] During Napoleon's conquest of Italy, his forces had confiscated the sculptures and subsequently only the Nile was returned. Marjon van der Meulen, *Rubens: Copies after the Antique*, Vol 1, in Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig

Rubens when he visited Italy between 1600 and 1608. In fact, we know from copies of his sketches that he had seen both sculptures.[57]

Let us mention briefly some of the chief elements that Rubens either borrowed directly from these sculptures or inherited from scholars and artists who were influenced by these and similar artworks. The most interesting of these borrowings is perhaps a feature the artist had taken directly from the sculpture of the Nile and which affected several of his representations of river gods years later. The Nile is notable for the multiple little children who crawl around it — the very feature that Rubens had reproduced in his sketch. In Antiquity, these representations were referred to as "pecheis," a term which translates as "the distance from a man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger."[58] The *pecheis* were one of several common attributes of the river Nile, sixteen of them for the number of cubits of the Nile's highest measure during the inundation, and symbolized the fertility and abundance of the river and the land of Egypt.[59] The *pecheis* are also mentioned in several ancient texts that Rubens and his learned intellectual circle would likely have known: Philostratus describes a statue of the Nile surrounded by these children; Lucian and Pliny also mention small children accompanying the statues of the Nile river god.[60] Two paintings by Rubens that focus on river gods (*Four Rivers of the World*) or lean heavily on themes connected to these deities (*Union of Earth and Water*), puzzle modern viewers with representations of small children in close proximity to petrifying crocodiles and tigers. These

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Burchard, Part XXIII (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1994), 105; Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 440; Hans Henrik Brummer, *The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1970), 191-204.

[57] Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, 1: 105-107.

[58] Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 439.

[59] Ibid., 448-9.
[60] Ibid., 447-450.

putti, who might have been dismissed as images of love, are in fact the very *pecheis* Rubens had noticed when he saw the Nile. Although in Antiquity the *pecheis* were identified exclusively with the Nile, this is not the case in Rubens' art. The artist might have assumed that such children were a common iconographic element of Roman river gods — an idea that makes sense in light of the fact that both Tiber and Nile sculptures are accompanied by children, whether unidentified ones or Romulus and Remus. The other elements that Rubens could have borrowed directly from Tiber and Nile — or via the artistic legacy that stemmed in the Renaissance from sculptures such as these — are the cornucopia and the oar, which accompany the river gods, as well as their leaning poses and the wreaths that adorn their heads. Most importantly, from the sculptures themselves and later, early modern, interpretations of them, especially in the context of Joyous Entries, Rubens would have inherited a keen understanding that river gods are associated with the distinct land that they represent. The Tiber especially is explicitly connected to a state by the figures of Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome, suckled by the she-wolf. The connection between river gods, abundance as symbolized by the cornucopia, sea and navigation represented by the oar, and politics, state, and rulers is clear in this sculpture and can be seen in Rubens' own art.

Another important source for the river gods' role in ancient Roman art is the triumphal arch. During his sojourn in Rome, Rubens would likely have seen river gods on the triumphal arches of Titus, Septimius Severus, and Constantine — three of the most famous and well-preserved of such monuments. The arch of Titus was erected by the brutal dictator Domitian in honor of his deceased brother, whose name it bears; the Arch of Septimius Severus was made in honor of Emperor Septimius' victory over Parthia, which legitimized his rule; and the arch of Constantine celebrated the emperor's *decennalia* as well as the military destruction of his rival,

Maximilian.[61] The arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine feature river gods, reclining on water urns of a shape that would remain largely unmodified for centuries, in the spandrels of the side arches — an architectural space these deities share with flying victories, who occupy the spandrels on the main arches. (Hierarchically, the victories carry more importance than the river gods, but their loci underline the connection between them.) This early association, of which Rubens would most likely have been aware, between river gods and flying victories, who announced a military triumph, further deepens the connection between the river god, the land he represents, and the war a ruler has waged to acquire or keep it.[62] The river gods' poses and their main attribute — the water urns from which the river flows — would carry into the pageant decorations of early modern Europe and Rubens' paintings (among those of many other artists). Another common visual marker is the placement of river gods next to vegetation, also seen on these arches and in early modern European art.[63] The arch of Titus, however, does not have river gods in the spandrels; the one it does represent gives an insight into the role these deities played in the Roman triumph: the reliefs on the Arch of Titus show a statue of a reclining river god carried in the triumphal procession.[64] The gods' presence in the Roman triumph, attested to in literature, made these personifications "metaphors of the Roman triumph,"[65] which explains to a degree their close connection to the victories. The river gods in pageant decorations who carry coats of arms likely inherited their modified form from ancient Roman victories, often depicted holding trophies (the shape of early modern coats of arms probably derives from the ancient

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[61] Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 183, 329, 444.

[62] Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 135-6, 159; Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 449; Strong, *Art and Power*, 44-6.

[63] McGrath, "Rubens' Four Rivers," 73.

[64] Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 446; Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 158.

[65] Swetnam-Burland, "The Vatican Nile," 446.

Roman trophies). Like the trophies, the coats of arms refer to the power of the ruler to whom they belong. If, as is most likely the case, Rubens had seen these arches, he would have discerned the connection they put forward between the symbol of a land and the military victory of a ruler; such symbolic images not only justify martial politics but also, paradoxically, promote the peace that results from warfare.[66] Even if Rubens had not seen the arches (which would be hard to believe, given his passion for and knowledge of antiquities),[67] he would have had access to this iconography — via not only the pageant decorations for the Joyous Entries but also the contemporary architecture and visual culture that would have surrounded him with these deities.[68]

Aside from the river gods, another important personification that Renaissance and Baroque artists inherited from Antiquity were the female personifications of land, who would later (in the pageant decorations of the Joyous Entries) become the companions of the river gods. It must be noted, however, that the River god Oceanus was frequently paired with an earth goddess, Tellus, on Roman sarcophagi, which were known to Renaissance and later artists.[69] One of the most famous monuments that featured female personifications of Roman provinces, "united under the Pax Romana," and fragments of which Rubens could have seen, are the reliefs from the Temple of Divine Hadrian (Hadrianeum) erected by Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius.[70] The reliefs, like the earlier Theater of Pompey and Ara Pacis Augustae, showed provinces

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[66] Ibid., 449.
[67] Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, passim; Elizabeth McGrath, *Rubens: Subjects from History*, Vol 1, in Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, Part XIII (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 57. As Elizabeth McGrath writes, "of all artists of the period Rubens probably had the best classical education and the best classical library." McGrath, *Subjects from History*, 1: 57.

[68] For instance, La Porte de l'Escaut in Antwerp; contemporary title pages, e.g., the fortispiece to the 1623 edition of Nicolas Caussin's *De symbolica Aegyptiorvm Sapientia: in qua Symbola, Parabolæ, Historiæ Selectæ, quæ ad omnem Emblematv[m], Ænigmatv[m] Hieroglyphicorum*.
[69] Bober et al., *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, 67, 99.
[70] Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 284.

in the guise of young women, who alternated with trophies — evidence of Roman conquest and the endorsement of Hadrian's provincial system.[71] These monuments were described in ancient Roman literature, establishing the visual tradition by written word where the art did not survive.[72]

Another source for the images of river gods and female personifications of land, usually the provinces, was to be found on surviving ancient Roman coins, which were avidly collected in Rubens' time.[73] Perhaps one of the most important introductory texts for the study of ancient Roman numismatics was authored in 1587 by Antonio Agostini, the archbishop of Tarragona and a leading authority on Antiquity.[74] His *Dialoghi Didon Antonio Agostini arcivescovo di Tarracona intorno alle medaglie inscrittioni et altre antichita* first appeared in Spanish and was later translated into Italian.[75] This book was published only two decades before Rubens visited Spain. Its third dialogue, which deals with "provinces, cities, and rivers" ("Dialogo Terzo: De Rovesci Delle Provincie & delle Città, & de Fiumi"), contains illustrations of Roman coins (as well as statues) showing the river gods and female personifications of provinces who display the attributes that became canonical in the visual vocabulary of pageant decorations; indeed, their authors probably drew on similar (if not the same) numismatic sources. Antonio Agostini's third

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[71] Ibid., 284.

[72] Ibid., 11, 283.

[73] *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi* is saturated with illustrations of ancient Roman coins. As shown in *Art, Music and Spectacle*, Rubens and his contemporaries incorporated the images they gleaned from these coins into their symbolic vocabulary. Arnold-Biucchi, "Coins and Classical Imagery in the Time of Rubens," 190, passim.

[74] M. H. Crawford, ed., *Antonio Augustin Between Renaissance and Counter-Reform* (London: Henri Ling, The Dorset Press, 1993), 3, 173.

especially Antonio Agustin between Renaissance and Counter-Reform

[75] Full title: *Dialoghi Didon Antonio Agostini arcivescovo di Tarracona intorno alle medaglie inscrittioni et altre antichita tradotti de lingva spagnvola in italiana da Dionigi Ottaviano Sada & dal medesimo accresciutiÌ con diuerse' annotationi, & illustrati con disegni di molte medaglie & d'altre figure*.

dialogue provides his readers with an exhaustive discourse on ancient Roman coins, which it is beyond the scope of this study to analyze; we will mention, however, a few examples germane to our discussion. Among these is the personification of Italy, represented as a fully clothed woman seated on a globe, wearing a turreted crown and holding a cornucopia.[76] This prototype provides a good example of the important attributes of these female personifications. Occasionally, they hold coats of arms (or trophies) that bear an undeniable resemblance to the ones featured in pageant decorations.[77] These conventions are not universal but such types recur frequently. The third dialogue features river gods, usually reclining on water urns, the shape of which is identical to the one used on Roman triumphal arches and early modern Joyous Entries. In the pages of Antonio Agostini's treatise, the river gods, as illustrated by images of ancient Roman coins, frequently appear near vegetation, rudders, and miniature ships (in addition to the water urns).[78] The section on the river gods Tiber, Nile, and Tigris are illustrated with depictions of freestanding statues that were known at the time,[79] two of which we have already seen: the Louvre Tiber and Vatican Nile's presence on these pages confirms to us that the sculptures Rubens had studied were understood to be representative of the ways in which river gods were pictured in Antiquity.

The iconographic elements we have observed in our brief survey of river gods in ancient Roman art that Rubens had likely seen appear in the pageant decorations of early modern Europe, as we have mentioned. As it is beyond the scope of this paper to trace in full the iconographic journey of the river gods and female personifications of land from Antiquity to the

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[76] Antonio Agostini, *Dialoghi* (Rome: 1592), 91.

[77] See, for instance, Pannonia in Agostini, *Dialoghi*, 95.

[78] See, e.g., Tiberis, Nilus, and Danube in Ibid., 103, 104, 108.

[79] Brummer, *The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere*, 191-204.

Renaissance and Baroque, we will not attempt to cover (or even mention) all the joyous entries and other processions in the pageant decorations of which these deities appear. Instead, we will focus on two royal entries into Antwerp that Rubens could have seen and examine a few examples that are representative of this visual tradition as it appears in the master's art.

The pageant decorations created for the entrance of Ernest, Archduke of Austria, into Antwerp in 1594, and the Archdukes Albert and Isabella into the same city in 1600, as well as those fashioned by Rubens himself to celebrate the arrival of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand into his adopted hometown in 1634, will form the basis of our analysis. Let us now consider several important examples from the pageant decorations made in honor of the archdukes, which are pertinent insofar as they present us with figures of sea and river gods, goddesses with attributes of abundance, and personifications of specific geographic locations. Especially important for us is the personification of the Southern Netherlands, Antwerp in particular, and its political and economic afflictions connected to the division of the country and the blockade of the Scheldt river by the Dutch.

In 1594, Rubens was seventeen years old and had recently entered the studio of Otto van Veen.[80] Though we do not know for a fact that Rubens attended the Archduke Ernest's entrance, such an enormous artistic production would not have gone unnoticed by an aspiring young painter.[81] Moreover, when conceiving the *Union of Earth and Water* over twenty years later, Rubens would have had reproductions of the decorations at his disposal. In a book commemorating the decorations for the entrance of the Archduke of Austria, *Descriptio publicae gratulationis, spectaculorum et ludorum, in adventu Serenissimi Principis Ernesti*, Johannes

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[80] Belkin, *Rubens*, 26.

[81] John Rupert Martin states that Rubens "had undoubtedly seen" these decorations. John Rupert Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, in Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, Part XVI (London: Phaidon, 1972), 178.

Bochius, the author as well as the designer of the decorations, includes the illustration of *Pegma ad Pontem D. Ioannis* (fig. 12).[82] It represents the Scheldt river god, who, with his arms chained behind his back, is leaning on a water urn.[83] On the extreme right and left of him are two tritons blowing into conch shells. Tritons also appear in the lower register (the foundation of the stage). This image shows striking similarities — both visual and political — to the *Union of Earth and Water*. Visually, it presents an image of a water deity leaning on a water urn. The water urn itself is practically identical to the one in the *Union of Earth and Water*, including the decorative pattern on the neck of the vase. The appearance of tritons blowing into conch shells is another important similarity. Politically, *Pegma ad Pontem D. Ioannis* engaged the issue of the Dutch blockade of the Scheldt river and its disastrous effect on the economy of Antwerp, much as the *Union of Earth and Water* does.[84] The main action of the tableau vivant was the nymphs' liberation of the river god upon the archduke's approach— an explicit expression of the hopes of Antwerp's citizens.[85]

Two more pages from this record of Bochius' inventions for the entrance of the Archduke Ernest demand our attention. Pursuing the same political argument concerning the wealth and abundance produced by the union of land and sea via rivers — a theme all too current then in the Netherlands — Bochius produced *Arcus Mediolanensis* (figs. 13 & 14), an arch dedicated to Milan. In this arch, we perceive the development of the iconography that later appeared in the

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[82] Tamar Cholcman, *Art on Paper: Ephemeral Art in the Low Countries: The Triumphal Entry of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella into Antwerp*, 1599 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014), 59-60; Anita Joyce Joplin traces the connection between the pageant imagery of Pontem D. Ioannis and the *Union of Earth and Water*, in Anita Joyce Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age: Three Marine Allegories by Rubens" (Master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1974), 11; Johannes Bochius, *Descriptio publicae gratulationis, spectaculorum et ludorum, in adventu Serenissimi Principis Ernesti* (Antwerp: 1595), 115.

[83] Cholcman, *Art on Paper*, 60.

[84] Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, 178; Cholcman, *Art on Paper*, 60.

[85] Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, 178.

Union of Earth and Water. The *Arch of Milan* presents a symbolic connection between river gods, land, prosperity, and victory inherited from Classical Antiquity — the very themes Rubens explores in the *Union of Earth and Water*. The front of the *Arch of Milan* shows the figure of Lombardy surrounded by two river gods, Po and Adige, who recline on water urns of the shape traditionally associated with these deities.[86] All three figures carry the coats of arms of the House of Sforza and Philip II of Spain, the rulers of Milan. The figure of Lombardy is surrounded by two cornucopias — a symbol she has in common with Earth from the *Union of Earth and Water* — which signify the fertility of the land. The *Arch of Milan* communicates the following message: Lombardy, united with her rivers (that lead to the sea), prospers under the rule of the Habsburgs. On the other side of the arch, this message is elaborated. Two more river gods, Adda and Ticino, holding Insubrian coats of arms, now frame two female figures.[87] One is Insubria herself, holding a cornucopia with her right hand and pouring coins from a sack with her left. Next to her stands Amalthea Liberalitas, the nurse of Jupiter, holding lilies.[88] Insurbia, the land, is paired with a deity connected to abundance through her role in one of the cornucopia's origin myths and as the foster mother of Jupiter.[89] The *Arch of Milan* presents an artistic vocabulary that connects river gods reclining on water urns with a specific geographical location and prosperity symbolized by female personifications of land holding cornucopias. In the spandrels on both sides of this arch, victory figures carry laurel wreaths and palm branches, emphasizing that peace and prosperity of the land and its union with rivers result from military success. In the

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[86] Bochius, *Descriptio publicae gratulationis… Principis Ernesti*, 91.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., 93; John Mulryan and Steven Brown, trans., *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, Vol 2 (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies), 2006), 509.

[89] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 35; James George Frazer, *Ovid's Fasti* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), 269.

arches created for the entrance of Archduke Ernest into Antwerp, we find the reinterpretation of the ancient Roman political and visual vocabulary Rubens later employed in the *Union of Earth and Water*.

In 1599, the twenty-two-year-old Rubens, having finished his artistic training the year before, had established himself as a master in his own right; a year later, he would leave for Italy.[90] The preparations for the arrival of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella into Antwerp date from the same year of 1599. Johannes Bochius, then city secretary, was in charge of these pageant decorations as well, both as the inventor and director.[91] He produced another book, *Historica narratio profectionis et inaugurationis Serenissimorum Belgii Principum Alberti et Isabellae,* illustrating the fruits of his labor.[92] One of the decorations created under his direction was the monument *Opus Triumphale in Ponte D. Ioannes* (fig. 15).[93] Of interest to us are the figures of Oceanus and Thetis, a sea nymph.[94] Both lean on water urns that are strikingly similar in shape to the one in the *Union of Earth and Water*. The theme of this tableau vivant, like its predecessor, *Pegma ad Pontem D. Ioannis*, was the reopening of the Scheldt river for the benefit of Antwerp and the Southern Netherlands.[95] In the pageant decorations of Rubens' adopted city in this period, deities associated with water (both rivers and seas) are connected to a specific political message — the desolation of trade by the blockade of the Scheldt river, which it was the

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[90] Belkin, *Rubens*, 28.

[91] Cholcman, *Art on Paper*, 36-7.

[92] Ibid., 36-7.

[93] Joplin suggests the comparison between this monument for the Joyous Entry but does not carry it out in the detailed way presented here. See Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 11.

[94] Cholcman, *Art on Paper*, 57.

[95] Ibid., 60.

sovereign's main duty to lift.[96] These important elements of the *Union of Earth and Water* emerge from the tradition of pageant decorations in the Netherlands exemplified by the monuments created in Rubens' youth by Johannes Bochius. We know of Rubens' interest and astute awareness of the traditions and symbols used in the pageant decorations from 1634-5, when the artist himself created a decorative program for the entrance of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand into Antwerp.

Among the pageant decorations Rubens created for Ferdinand's Joyous Entry, one of the most famous is the *Stage of Mercury* (fig. 16).[97] Like its predecessors, this work engages the urgent issue of dying trade by vividly demonstrating how, with the Scheldt river in chains imposed by the Dutch blockade, Mercury, god of trade, is leaving Antwerp. In the central stage, the chained river god leans heavily on a dry water urn, while Antwerpia motions toward the departing Mercury. To the sides, scenes of poverty and abundance emphasize the contrast between Antwerp's happy past (as well as possible future) and its gloomy present.[98] Like *Pegma ad Pontem D. Ioannis* and *Opus Triumphale in Ponte D. Ioannes*, the *Stage of Mercury* communicated to the new governor the importance of trade to the city as well as his role in its restoration.[99] In the tradition of pageant decorations, the *Stage of Mercury* shows a river god paired with the personification of a geographical area in connection to a specific political issue. The stage was surmounted by a composition that also bears important similarities to the *Union of*

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[96] Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, 178; Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 11.

[97] Joplin suggests the comparison between the Stage of Mercury and the *Union of Earth and Water* but does not carry it out in the way presented here. See Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 19-20.

[98] Melion, *Rubens: Seminar* (lecture, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, March 23, 2016); Martin, The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi, 178-9; Elizabeth McGrath, "Le déclin d'Anvers et les décorations de Rubens pour l'entrée du prince Ferdinand en 1635," in *Fêtes de la Renaissance*, Vol 2, edited by Jean Jacquot (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1960), 173-186, passim.

[99] Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, 178-9.

Earth and Water.[100] Seated on a rock-like eminence near the globe of the world, which rests on the head of Oceanus, are Neptune, holding a trident and a rudder, and Amphitrite, who holds a cornucopia and a ship's prow — attributes of Fortune, which are not specific to the sea goddess.[101] In his letter to Peiresc of December 18, 1634, Rubens speaks of the "novelty of the designs" for the decorations "and the fitness of their [the designs'] application."[102] Considering the pairing of a river god and the personification of a city in the central stage, it seems possible that Rubens paired Neptune with an earth goddess to establish a connection between the two levels of *The Stage of Mercury*, thus reinforcing his message. Such an arrangement would have established a balanced hierarchical order in the composition of the stage: general deities representing sea and land presiding over local deities specific to the Scheldt river and Antwerp. As we will see, Rubens had already created a similar arrangement in the *Union of Earth and Water*. The symmetrical composition of the stage also presents elements reminiscent of the *Union of Earth and Water* on each side of the divine couple: water urns of recognizable "pageant" shape and tritons blowing into conch shells.[103] In the *Stage of Mercury*, we find key elements reminiscent of the *Union of Earth and Water*: Neptune and a female goddess holding a cornucopia who are celebrated by tritons, and water pouring from urns of recognizable shape adopted by the pageant decorations from Antiquity. In the same work, we observe the potential pairing of Neptune with an earth goddess and the definitive pairing of the Scheldt with Antwerp, or Southern Netherlands, and this couple's connection to the economic and political situation of

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[100] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 19-20.

[101] Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, 178-9.

[102] Ruthe Sanders Magurn, ed., *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 393.

[103] Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, 180.

Rubens' country. We have seen these same elements in our analysis of the pageant decorations that Rubens could have seen in his youth. The *Stage of Mercury* confirms the artist's acute awareness of this tradition and provides important visual parallels to the *Union of Earth and Water*.

The selection of paintings in which Rubens used (or, in case of sketches, planned to use) water deities does not appear to have been arbitrary. Water deities, especially river gods (alternatively, Neptune with attributes of river gods), frequently appear in Rubens' art as markers of important political motifs. Indeed, the majority of paintings in which water deities appear also feature contemporary political figures of no small importance: Marie de Medici, Henri IV, Anna of Austria, Louis XIII of France and his sister Isabella, Philip IV of Spain, Charles de Longueval, King Ferdinand of Hungary, Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand of Spain, and George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham. Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome, the greatest empire of Antiquity, and Constantine and Crispus (a fourth-century Roman emperor and his son) are also accompanied by these water deities. Moreover, *The Judgement of Paris* of 1597-9 (one of Rubens' earliest paintings, and one that features a canonical river god), also engages a highly political subject — the beginning of the Trojan War, which, in its length and devastation, would have reminded Rubens and his contemporaries of the Eighty Years War. According to my calculations, nearly sixty percent of Rubens' paintings and sketches featuring water deities also show important historical figures. There seems to have been a natural association in Rubens' mind between the river gods and important political personages. Considering these deities' presence in Antiquity in the context of imperial conquest, and in Rubens' times on the decorations that greeted arriving royalty, it may not be surprising that this association persists

throughout Rubens' career. Consequently, in paintings where political themes may not seem immediately obvious, water deities may allow us to recognize political undertones.[104]

Let us briefly consider the political meaning of some of Rubens' works featuring water deities, particularly river gods. We have already seen the arguments that can be made concerning the portrait of Charles de Longueval, and we have briefly touched upon the *Meeting of Two Ferdinands*, discussing its context (King Ferdinand III of Hungary and Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand joining forces to defeat the Swedish army in the Battle of Nördlingen in 1634) and Rubens' use of Alciato's emblem "Concordia" as the basis for its composition. We have yet to study the river god's presence in this work. The painting's context, of course, is highly political and of crucial importance for the Netherlands, a country divided in two by the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant forces. The river god reclining on the water urn is Danube; next to him is a female personification of Germany, who assumes the pose traditionally associated with melancholy.[105] As with the portrait of de Longueval, in a situation of war and conflict, when political events of great importance take place, the river gods and the female personifications of land are present also. An interesting detail in the *Meeting of Two Ferdinands* is the water that pours forth from Danube's urn: it is stained with blood. Rubens colors only a part of the waters with streaks of red, however, perhaps to avoid the confusion that might occur if the red waters were mistaken for wine, a symbol of Bacchic revelry and abundance. As Held notes, this is "an obvious allusion to the battle."[106] One of the most famous sources for this metaphor is Homer's

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[104] River gods appear in Rubens' paintings in the 1600s, 1610s, 1620s, and 1630s: in fact, according to modern dating of his paintings, not a decade of his career went by without him painting several water deities.

[105] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 228-9.

[106] Ibid., 228-9.

Iliad, specifically the scene in Book XXI of Achilles' rage near "the sounding stream of deep-eddying Xanthus" river:

> But the Zeus-begotten left there his spear on the bank leaning against the tamarisk bushes, and himself leapt in like a god, with nothing but his sword; and evil were the deeds he was devising in his mind, and turning this way and that he struck and struck; and from them rose up hideous groaning as they were struck with the sword, and the *water grew red with blood* (emphasis mine).[107]

However, the battle to which the blood-stained waters of the *Meeting of Two Ferdinands* refer is yet to happen: the scene we see is an event that took place four days before the confrontation anticipated by the ominously bloody waters. This retrospective prophecy suggests yet another source, beloved as much as the *Iliad* in Rubens' times — Virgil's *Aeneid*. "Wars, grim wars I see, and the Tiber foaming with streams of blood,"[108] rings the dark prophecy of the Sibyl in Book VI, as she predicts the bloody confrontations between the Latins and the Trojans. As with the emblem on which he based this painting's composition, Rubens uses the bloody waters to call to mind the wars of Classical Antiquity. In this context, we might suspect that the clear water pouring from the urn in the *Union of Earth and Water* is in a sense conspicuous precisely because of the absence of blood. In the *Meeting of Two Ferdinands*, the river god and his companion, the female personification of land, appear in a charged scene of a political alliance on the eve of bloody battle.

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[107] Homer, *Iliad*, translated by A. T. Murray, revised by William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library 171 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1925), 405-7.

[108] Virgil, *Aeneid*, in *Virgil, Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold, Vol 1, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 538-539.

Water deities, especially river gods, appear in other representations of political alliances as well, most notably marriages (as we will see, this is also true of the *Union of Earth and Water*). Perhaps one of the most important royal unions of Rubens' time was the double marriage between the Habsburgs and the Bourbons: Anna of Austria was wedded to Louis XIII, and Philip IV of Spain to Princess Isabella (sister of Louis XIII). This marriage was one of Marie de Medici's greatest political successes,[109] and one of the subjects Rubens depicted in the Medici series. Known as the *Exchange of Princesses at Hendaye* (fig. 17), the painting celebrated an event that took place on November 9, 1615, when the princesses were exchanged at the French-Spanish border, on a temporary bridge across the Bidassoa river (near Hendaye). Although the marriages' political importance was not rated very highly in retrospect, in Rubens' times they were perceived as an event of fundamental historical importance.[110] The princesses, attended to by male personifications of France and Spain, stand on a makeshift bridge, made to look like a stage, while water deities observe the scene from the Bidassoa river.[111] The river god leans, as usual, on his water urn, and, like Danube in *The Meeting of Two Ferdinands*, wears a wreath of reeds and yellow water-lilies; a nymph extends a gift of pearls to the future queens; a triton blows into a twisted conch shell to celebrate the marriage.

Celebratory tritons frequently appear with other water deities in Rubens' canvases. In the tradition of pageant decorations, the tritons were associated with music and festivity, hence their trumpeting is appropriate for the events celebrated in Rubens' paintings.[112] Beyond the triton's

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[109] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 115-6.

[110] Margaret D. Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence," *Representations* 25 (1989): 13; Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 115-6.

[111] Sarah R. Cohen, "Rubens's France: Gender and Personification in the Marie de Médicis Cycle," *The Art Bulletin* 85, No. 3 (2003), 490-522, passim.

[112] Jean Rousset, "L'eau et les tritons dans les fêtes et ballets de cour (1580-1640)," in *Fêtes de la Renaissance*, Vol 1, edited by Jean Jacquot (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1956), 237. We can

association with music in the pageant decorations, he also bears a resemblance to victories, who are often represented with trumpets. Indeed, as Natale Conti wrote in his *Mythologiae*, the triton, according to Ovid, was Neptune's and Ocean's trumpeter.[113] The conch shell, the invariable attribute of Rubens' tritons, carries a peculiar legacy that is separate from the context of pageantry and goes back to the Titanomachy — the mythological battle between the Olympian gods and the Titans. As Charles Dempsey notes, Renaissance artists (and consequently, the painters of Baroque) knew from two Greek authors that "when Pan fought with Jupiter against the Titans, he found a conch shell by the sea, and when he blew through it the resultant reverberating sound afflicted the Titans with an overwhelming terror, known ever after as 'panic' from the name of Pan himself, causing them to flee the scene of battle."[114] An interesting confusion existed, however, among early modern Classical scholars as to who had actually found and used the conch shell: as we learn from Conti's *Mythologiae*, some credited the triton, and not Pan, with the discovery of that elegant weapon.[115] Rubens' tritons with their conch shells are, therefore, part of one of the contemporary versions of the Titanomachy. Triton's conch shell is both musical — as prescribed by its pageant ancestry — and martial, recalling a divine war in which the Olympians were victorious, thanks to the conch shell, according to some accounts.

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observe celebratory tritons in *Birth of Venus* (1615) (photograph of lost work and extant sketch), *The Arrival of Marie de Medici to Marseilles* (1622), *The Happy Sea-Voyage of Cardinal-Infante* (*Quos Ego, Neptune Calming the Tempest*) (1635), *The Stage of Mercury* (1634-35), and *The Arch of Philip* (1635) as well as the *Union of Earth and Water*.

[113] *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, 2: 708; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by A. D. Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11.

[114] Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto* (Chapel Hill: Unversity of North Carolina Press, 2001), 116; Charles Dempsey, "Lorenzo's Ombra," in *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo mondo* (Convegno internazionale di studi, Firenze, 9-13giugno, 1992), edited by Gian Carlo (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1994), 345-46.

[115] *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, 2: 708.

The triton's conch shell is practically synonymous with victory. In the *Union of Earth and Water,* as in the other canvases, the triton proclaims victory and celebration.

Alliances and weddings are not the only important political events marked by the presence of water deities. Another critical instance is the birth of royal figures, whose importance is perceived retrospectively, as in the depictions of Marie de Medici and Henri IV. The sketch for the *Birth of Henri IV* (1628; fig. 18) features a canonical river god who represents the Gave de Pau river and the female personification of the city of Pau, where Henri IV was born.[116] Again we notice Rubens pairing a river god with a female personification of land, a couple similar to the one in the *Birth of Marie de Medici* (1622; fig. 19). The latter is almost unique among Rubens' paintings in that we have his own explanation of its figures.[117] Rubens' clarification was provoked by Claude Bartolomée Morisot's Latin poem, which he received from Pierre Dupuy: the poet mistook the female personification of Florence, the city where Marie was born, for the goddess Cybele. Rubens explains that the similarities of a city's and Cybele's attribute (a turreted crown) account for the confusion, but he remains critical of Morisot's abilities.[118] In *Birth of Henri IV* and *Birth of Marie de Medici*, we notice a recurring trend in Rubens' depiction of water deities: namely, their usual pairing with female personifications of land, be they countries or cities.

This trend of uniting earth and water is given unique attention in another canvas aside from the *Union of Earth and Water* — the *Four Rivers of the World* (1615; fig. 20). *Four Rivers of the World* has traditionally been seen as the representation of the four known continents and their main rivers — Europe and Danube, Africa and Nile, Asia and Ganges, America and Rio de

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[116] Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 125-6.

[117] Ibid., 101; Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 150.

[118] Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 150.

la Plata or the Amazon — although other interpretations have also been suggested.[119] The Nile is perhaps the easiest to recognize because of his companion, a dark-skinned beauty who stands for Africa. This river god has corn in his hair, which is meant to recall the abundance of Egypt and its land. Moreover, as in most traditional representations of this river, the Nile is in close proximity to a crocodile, with which the *pecheis* play.[120] Opposite the Nile sits Ganges with Asia, identified by the tigress and her young. Behind this pair sit America and Rio de la Plata or the Amazon. America's long hair is loose, marking her as the youngest, in the sense of the most recently discovered continent; her river god wears red pepper in his hair, a reminder of the exotic goods brought to the Old World from the New.[121] And, finally, we come to Europe accompanied by the Danube, who wears the traditional pageant wreath that we have seen many times on Rubens' river gods (including his Danube from *The Meeting of Two Ferdinands*) and who holds the oar with which he is frequently paired.[122] In the hierarchical arrangement of the river gods and female personifications of land, we find the strongest argument for the reading of this painting as a representation of the four parts of the world: Europe is seated higher than all the

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[119] Rooses, *Rubens*, 292-3; "Four Rivers of Paradise," Kunsthistorisches Museum official website, accessed March 10, 2017, https://www.khm.at/en/objektdb/detail/1614/?offset=5&pid=2598&back=576&lv=listpackages-5483&cHash=494d7d3a11c9c4810b0ca96886eabf8b; McGrath, "Rubens's *Four Rivers*," passim.

[120] The Nile appears as an African man seated on a crocodile and playing with small children in Philip Galle's print, *Nilus*, of 1586; and the already mentioned frontispiece of *De symbolica Aegyptiorvm Sapientia*.

[121] There arise interesting complications with the reading of the red pepper-crowned river god as America, because pepper was most famously imported from Asia, mostly India. Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 106-7. In his *Iconologia*, Cesare Ripa described pepper as the one of the attributes of Asia. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome: Appresso Lepido Facij, 1603), 334. However, a distinction ought to be made between pepper in general and red perpper in particular. Red pepper — most notably chili pepper — originataed in modern-day Mexico, was exported from the New World, and could, therefore, symbolize America. Kraig H. Kraft, Cecil H. Brown, Gary P. Nabhan, Eike Luedeling, José de Jesús Luna Ruiz, Geo Coppens d'Eeckenbrugge, Robert J. Hijmans and Paul Gepts, "Multiple lines of evidence for the origin of domesticated chili pepper, Capsicum annuum, in Mexico," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 17 (2014), passim; Freedman, *Spices and the Medieval Imagination*, 220.

[122] For example, by Philip Galle, *Riviergod Danubius*, 1586. Print, 6.49 x 4 in. (165 x 102 mm). Rijksmuseum; New Hollstein Dutch 421-1(2), RP-P-1898-A-19953.

other figures, her preeminence underlined by the royal red drapery. In *Four Rivers of the World*, we may behold Rubens' vision of the Spanish empire. The Habsburgs' motto, "plus ultra," a bold re-imagining of the words Hercules reportedly carved on his pillars, "ne plus ultra," declared the empire's reach and its rulers' active interest in expanding (and sustaining) their hold on colonized lands. Since the sixteenth century, Spain had been known as the "empire on which the sun never sets," a phrase that highlighted its extensive domains.[123] *Four Rivers of the World* shows more than the four continents: Europe, led by Spain, appears as a commanding influence on the other parts of the known world. Rubens, who had been knighted by the Spanish king Philip IV — a remarkable achievement for an artist in this period — believed that peace in the Netherlands could be achieved with greater involvement and help from Spain: for him, a painting that displayed Spain's dominance over the world was a reassuring image of peace.[124]

The *Union of Earth and Water* as a Specific Allegory: the Netherlands and the Scheldt

We can now begin to identify the main elements of the *Union of Earth and Water*. We easily recognize the elements that we have seen repeatedly in ancient Roman art and pageant decorations: the cornucopia, the water urn, the felicitous *pecheis*, and the celebratory triton. Let us consider the more complex figure we have thus far referred to as Water, following the title of the image. Scholars have identified him alternatively as the Scheldt, Neptune, Tiber, and Tigris.[125] I agree with Anita Joyce Joplin (and this can also be clearly seen from our examination

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[123] McGrath, "Rubens' Arch of the Mint," 194-5. The well-known phrase, empire on which the sun never sets, was used, among others, by the poet Torquato Tasso. Richard L. Kagan and Benjamin Schmidt, "The World of Early Modern Spain: Empire and Its Anxieties in the Golden Age," in *Spain in the Age of Exploration, 1492-1819*, edited by Chiyo L Ishikawa (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 60.
[124] McGrath, "Rubens's Arch of the Mint," passim; Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War," 197.

[125] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 6-7; "Union of Earth and Water (Antwerp and the Scheldt)," from The Hermitage State Museum official website.

of the pageant decorations) that the trident safely identifies the male figure as Neptune.[126] Rubens' expert knowledge of the attributes of the gods of Classical Antiquity, as well as *The Stage of Mercury,* where Neptune and the Scheldt are distinguished by the presence of the trident, certainly helps securely to identify this figure. The central male figure in the *Union of Earth and Water*, though he is Neptune, evokes pageant river gods and their symbolism: his wreath recalls the algae or reed wreaths of river gods, and its flowers, particularly the yellow water lilies, call to mind the river gods of pageant decorations and Rubens' works in particular; the way Neptune holds his trident is reminiscent of pageant river gods holding coats of arms. This line of reasoning is confirmed if we compare the painting with its oil sketch.[127] The sketch corroborates the suggestion that Rubens was thinking both of pageant decorations and the Scheldt, when he created the *Union of Earth and Water*. In this first version, the male figure is a typical river god: he holds no trident, and to the right of him are reeds, which frequently accompany river gods in ancient Roman art and pageant decorations.[128] As Rubens worked on the *Union of Earth and Water*, he replaced the river god with Neptune but left the water urn, the origin of the confusion over the sea god's identity.[129] The prominence of the water urn in the composition and its shape, so common in Roman art and pageant decorations, is also meant to recall the politically charged context of Roman triumphal arches and the joyous entries. In *Four Rivers of the World*, for instance, Rubens painted very different water urns, which suggests that the specific vase carries meaning and symbolism associated with pageant decorations and,

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[126] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 6-7.

[127] The sketch came to my attention first in Jaffé, "'The Union of Earth and Water' Revived for the Fitzwilliam" and later, in Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 325-6.

[128] See for instance: *Arcus Mediolanensis* (figs. 12 & 13), *Pegma ad Pontem D. Ioannis* (fig. 11), and *Opus Triumphale in Ponte D. Ioanne* (fig. 14).

[129] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 6-7.

especially, with the connection of the Netherlands to the sea via the Scheldt. The water urn is not simply an attribute of river gods: the combination of a river god and the water urn may be called a dual symbolic device since the god (a personification) and the urn (a symbol) represent the same essence — the river. Consequently, the water urn on its own may stand for a river, as it does in Rubens' *Nymphs and Satyrs*,[130] possibly recalling Antwerp's economic troubles in the context of the origin myth of the cornucopia. Similarly, in the *Union of Earth and Water*, the water urn represents a river: the fresh water from the urn falls into the sea, much as the Scheldt does. This interpretation finds additional support in an allegorical reading of the painting, to which we shall return later.

We have identified Neptune and the Scheldt; we must now consider the two remaining figures — Earth and the flying figure, commonly thought to be Victory. Earth is the most intriguing figure in the entire composition. She is laden with intertextual references and is key to discovering the complex allegorical meaning of the *Union of Earth and Water*. Before delving into the details of her multi-layered identity, we should note that Rubens makes her importance clear in his choice of palette: Earth's body is the most prominently lit and most brightly white element in the entire painting — not even Neptune's *white* drapery can compete with the luminosity of her skin. Victory's skin is a shade darker than Earth's, which, like Neptune's tanned body, makes her less contrastive with the earthy background. Earth's importance is further signaled by her prominence in the composition. She has been commonly identified as Cybele, goddess of earth and Neptune's mother, although scholars have noted Rubens' odd omission of her attributes, the lion and a turreted crown.[131] This omission weakens the case for

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[130] Karolien De Clippel, "Rubens's 'Nymphs and Satyrs' in the Prado: Observations on Its Genesis and Meaning," *The Burlington Magazine* 149, no. 1247 (2007): 80.

[131] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 7-9.

identifying Earth as Cybele, given Rubens' keen awareness of the goddess' attributes, evident from his correspondence.[132] Joplin suggests that Rubens discarded Cybele's attributes because he wished to avoid confusion, as these are also the attributes of Belgica, the personification of the Netherlands; yet this seems unlikely, given his dismay at Morisot's misunderstanding of Cybele and Florence's attributes.[133] Considering the important connection we have observed in the pageant decorations between water deities and personifications of land, the figure of Earth most likely stands for the Southern Netherlands, although in the course of this analysis, it will become clear that she has multiple identities. As to which ancient goddess she bodies forth, Earth may be identified as Ceres — a hypothesis borne out by Rubens' own works, as well as by classical mythology. In *Mythologiae*, a well-known contemporary anthology of the deities of Classical Antiquity, Natale Conti (1520-1582) dedicates a section to Ceres, Neptune's sister, mentioning that the siblings were lovers and had a child, Proserpine.[134] That Ceres and Neptune, unlike Neptune and Cybele, were thought to have had a romantic connection makes them the more likely couple.[135] Ceres, like Cybele, is a goddess of earth particularly connected to the change of seasons and to ripe harvests, making her an especially appropriate goddess to pair with a cornucopia, the symbol of abundance. Mythologically, then, there is a reason to believe that Earth is actually Ceres.

Rubens' own oeuvre provides further support for the identification of Earth as Ceres. The Ceres in *Ceres and Two Nymphs* (fig. 21), painted in approximately 1615-17, is remarkably similar to the one in the *Union of Earth and Water*. Both goddesses feature soft brown hair,

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[132] Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 150.
[133] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age,", 8.

[134] *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, 1: 423-4.

[135] Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 7.

which is notable because this color, associated with earth, is a recurring feature in Rubens' portrayal of Ceres.[136] Moreover, the rightward bend of the two earth goddesses, their upwardly raised left shoulders, the way their hands hold the cornucopias, their hairstyles, and their facial features mutually correspond in both pictures. We see that in Rubens' art there is at least one precedent for a Ceres who looks significantly like the earth goddess in the *Union of Earth and Water*.

The identification of the next figure, commonly believed to be Victory, may further support our argument. The figure of Victory, who flies over Neptune and Ceres, seems to be crowning Ceres with a laurel wreath. Indeed, such is the official interpretation given to this figure by the Hermitage.[137] This character is reminiscent of Rubens' other Victories. For instance, on the occasion of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand's entrance into Antwerp, Rubens' *Stage of Welcome* featured an image of Ferdinand, on horseback, approaching Antwerpia (fig. 22).[138] Above Ferdinand flies a Victory with a laurel wreath. The billowing drapery, the direction in which the Victory flies, and the way she turns her head toward the new governor of the Southern Netherlands are all elements she has in common with the figure in the *Union of Earth and Water*. Walter Melion, however, identifies the flying figure in the *Union of Earth and Water* as a possible image of Hymen, god of marriage.[139] Moreover, the wreath that the flying figure places on Ceres' head may be a myrtle wreath.[140] This identification is further supported by a

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[136] See, for instance, *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus* of 1613 and *The Council of the Gods* (1622).

[137] "Union of Earth and Water (Antwerp and the Scheldt)," from The Hermitage State Museum official website.

[138] This illustration first came to my attention in Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War," 213.

[139] Dr. Walter Melion, personal communication during the presentation of the project, April 6, 2016.

[140] Ibid; Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 7; Andrea Bayer, "Paintings of Love and Marriage in the Italian Renaissance," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), last modified November 2008, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/marr/hd_marr.htm.

comparison with the *Meeting in Lyon*. We have already noted the similarities between these works in the arrangement of figures. The position and features of *Meeting in Lyon*'s Hymen and *Union of Earth and Water*'s Victory as well as the way in which this divinity looks at the goddess are very similar. The understanding of Neptune and Ceres' union as a marriage ceremony takes into account the joining of their gazes and hands — the latter an ancient Roman gesture known as *dextrarum iunctio*, which symbolizes marriage, performed in this painting with left hands. The androgynous features of this flying figure make both identifications (as Victory and as Hymen) possible. Interestingly, Rubens did not include a torch — an important attribute of Hymen, with which the artist usually depicts him.[141] Rubens leaves the identity of the figure deliberately ambiguous — perhaps to suggest that the marriage of Ceres and Neptune (symbolizing the Netherlands' access to the Sea) is in itself a victory. Such an amalgamation of Victory and Hymen would be entirely appropriate for this work in which multilayered identities play an important role. We may add here that the marriage of the siblings Ceres and Neptune, which functions on the political and metaphorical level, would be more decorous than that of Cybele and Neptune, who are mother and son.

We have established several integrated readings that will support our interpretation of the *Union of Earth and Water.* We have seen that Rubens borrows from ancient Roman art and pageant decorations the theme of interdependence between land, rivers, and the sea as well as the iconography appropriate for their representation. We have also established the identities of the three main figures: Neptune, who stands for the sea; Ceres, who represents land (the Netherlands), as do her female counterparts in the pageant decorations; and Victory-Hymen, who

[141] See, for instance, *The Allegory of Peace* (1629-30). Additionally, see *The Wedding by Proxy of Marie de Médicis to Henri IV* (1622-24), *The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de Médicis to Henri IV* (1622-24), *The Meeting of Marie de Médicis and Henri IV at Lyons* (1622), and *The Exchange of Princesses* (1622-5); *The Garden of Love* (1634-5).

crowns the triumphant marriage of Neptune and Ceres. We will now examine the *Union of Earth and Water* in accordance with the traditional reading of Rubens' allegories.[142] As a point of comparison, I will use Rubens' well-known allegory of 1637-8, *The Horrors of War* (fig. 23), which is an appropriate analogy considering its powerful political message.[143]

In the uppermost part of the *Union of Earth and Water*, three heads form a triangle: Victory-Hymen, Ceres, and Neptune. At this starting point, the figures of Ceres and Neptune are united. They gaze deeply into each other's eyes as they are wedded by Victory-Hymen. As we proceed downwards, we notice the complementary, mirroring poses of their upper bodies and the harmonious effect of their outstretched arms — Ceres's right arm, which extends to the cornucopia, creates a downward line that balances Neptune's raised right arm, with which he holds the trident. Thus far, Ceres and Neptune are an image of harmony. As we look lower still, we see their joined hands resting on the water urn. Further down, we see that the lower bodies of Neptune and Ceres continue to mirror each other, their legs crossed, even as they separate to form a stable pyramidal composition. This composition, seemingly peaceful and deceptively harmonious, bears important similarities to *The Horrors of War,* in which Mars having burst from the temple of Janus, escapes the loving embrace of Venus to unleash the terror of war on Europe.[144] As in the *Union of Earth and Water*, Venus and Mars make loving eye contact as they are united by a Cupid flying above them. (In the sketch for the *Union of Earth and Water*, a Cupid also unites the river god and Ceres.) The embrace of Mars and Venus, however, is subverted by their lower bodies, especially their legs, which express their imminent separation.

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[142] Melion, *Rubens: Seminar* (February 3, 2016).

[143] Joplin, though she does not explore it, also believes that comparing the *Union of Earth and Water* with *The Horrors of War* and *The Allegory of Peace*, would be fruitful. Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 40; Belkin, *Rubens*, 285-90; Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War (1637/1638)," 197-225.

[144] Belkin, *Rubens*, 285-90; Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War (1637/1638)," 197-225.

Although the overall composition of *The Horrors of War* is much more dynamic than that of the *Union of Earth and Water*, both activate the allegory that centers on the separation of two lovers: in both paintings, the lovers' eyes and heads are united though their bodies become progressively more divided.

The *Union of Earth and Water* displays a truly ingenious conception of this allegory. As we have seen, Neptune stands for the sea and Ceres for the Southern Netherlands. Their united hands rest on the water urn — the river Scheldt, as we have established, that connected the Netherlands to the sea. The water urn forms the basis of the union of Ceres and Neptune, whose joined hands rest on it. The geo-political reality that handicapped the Southern Netherlands economically was the blockade of the Scheldt river by the Dutch, which made the closed river an obstacle to Antwerp's (and the Southern Netherlands') access to the sea. In the painting, the water urn — the river — not only joins but also divides the figures: the union of their hands and the disunion of their lower bodies are both conditioned by the water urn, conspicuously placed in the very center of the composition. The main diagonals of the painting (from Ceres' left foot to Neptune's trident and from his right foot to Victory-Hymen's right arm) cross over the water urn, highlighting it. We are thus faced with a brilliant compositional conceit: the river, which is the way to the sea for the Southern Netherlands, both unites and divides the land and the sea — in painting as in real life. We have reason to believe, then, that the *Union of Earth and Water* is a complex allegory of the (dis)unity of the Netherlands and the sea, an allegory which borrows from the vocabulary of the pageant decorations to make its message plain.

Rubens' Peace Images: the *Union of Earth and Water* as a General Allegory

The *Union of Earth and Water*, however, is allegorical on more than one level. It combines a specific allegory (the issue of the blockade of the Scheldt) with a universal one — Rubens' more general view on peace and prosperity. In Rubens' art, peace is an important theme, as can be seen in works such as *The Horrors of War* and *The Allegory of Peace* (1629-30; fig. 24). Kristin Belkin writes that in his later years, Rubens created a remarkable "iconographic invention" — an amalgam of Peace and Venus. Belkin analyzes *The Allegory of Peace* as well as *Venus, Mars, and Cupid* of 1630 (fig. 25) as primary examples of this Venus and Peace amalgamation, noting that Rubens alters the traditional image of Peace in several important ways to create his iconographic innovation. His Peace-Venus is naked and sensuous; she is surrounded by Bacchic elements (vine leaves, grapes, leopard/tiger, satyrs) associated with sexuality as well as ripe harvest, to which Venus is connected by a line from the Roman playwright Terence: "Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus." According to Belkin, for Rubens, Peace-Venus becomes the condition for the existence of wine and harvest. This scholar emphasizes the motherly aspect of Rubens' Peace-Venus.[145] The interconnection between Venus and Ceres as well as Bacchus deserves more attention, however. For Rubens, an adept Classical scholar, Venus is more than a goddess of love — she is also the goddess of fertility.[146] This, according to Belkin, establishes a connection between Venus and maternal figures,[147] but it also connects her to Ceres, the goddess of harvests. Indeed, Rubens explored the Terentian connection between the three gods in several works painted in the second decade of the 1600s.[148] The *Shivering Venus* (1614) and *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus* (1613; fig. 26) both illustrate this theme. Rubens is reading "Sine Cerere et

[145] Belkin, *Rubens*, 279.

[146] Ibid., 273.

[147] Ibid., 273-91.

[148] Ibid., 153-4.

Baccho friget Venus," as a litotes — a rhetorical figure that alludes to a positive by stating it in the form of a negative. So, "Without Ceres and Bacchus Venus freezes" in fact signifies, "The unity of Ceres, Bacchus, and Venus," which is to say that the apothegm urges us to imagine the unity of the three gods.

Let us briefly consider the attributes common to the three deities who are part of the Terentian apothegm and, as we will see, form the foundation of Rubens' vision of peace. Rubens frequently presents Ceres as a dark-haired goddess with wheat in her hair, an attribute she inherited from ancient Roman sculpture, and she appears in this way in *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus* of 1613 and *The Council of the Gods* of 1622 (fig. 27).[149] When wheat does not adorn her head, Rubens' Ceres holds this plant, symbolic of harvests, in her hands, as she does in *Feast of Venus Verticordia* (1636-38) and *Statue of Ceres* (1614-15), or in other ways is placed in its proximity. Another attribute that frequently appears in connection with Ceres is the cornucopia, which she is offered by Pan in *Ceres and Pan* (1617) and herself holds in *Ceres and Two Nymphs* (1617). The consistent presence of these attributes in Rubens' depictions of Ceres suggests that they may help us recognize her in instances when her identity has been uncertain.

Like his images of Ceres, Rubens' paintings of Bacchus and his followers, notwithstanding their diversity, are characterized by three crucial elements: grapes, vine leaves, and felines, to which may be added two more — wine and satyrs. In any combination, these

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[149] For, instance, Portrait of Livia as Ceres, second quarter of the 1st century AD. Marble sculpture, 34 cm.

The State Hermitage Museum; ГР-3017. Such representations of Ceres (or women in te guise of that goddess) were also common in other media, see, for instance, Livia as Ceres, c. 13 B.C.-A.D. 29. Sardonyx cameo, 5.5 cm. Museo Archeologico; 177.

Two exceptions in Rubens' art are the golden-haired Ceres in *Ceres and Pan* of 1620 and *Venus and Cupid in Vulcan's Forge* of 1616-17, in both of which she still has wheat in her hair.

Paintings of Ceres with dark hair and wheat: *Venus, Bacchus, and Ceres* (1613); *Statue of Ceres* (1614-15); *Ceres and Pan* (1620); *Ceres and Two Nymphs* (Three Nymphs and a Cornucopia) (1617); *The Council of the Gods* (1622); *Feast of Venus Verticordia* (1636-38).

elements, when they migrate from exclusively Bacchic canvases to other works, must alert the viewer to the presence of the wine god. A formidable example of a combination of these attributes is *Two Satyrs* (ca. 1618; fig. 28), which seems a compendium of Bacchic symbols: a satyr wears a crown of vine leaves, the skin of a feline draped across his shoulders and a bunch of grapes in his hand as well as a drinking companion on his right. In Rubens' mind, there was no distinction between leopards and tigers in that both animals are associated with the wine god and are used interchangeably. Their connection to Bacchanalian themes becomes explicit in a 1618 sketch, *Satyr Pressing Grapes, a Tiger, and a Leopard* (fig. 29), which, as its name suggests, shows both species as equally appropriate participants in Bacchic revelry. Grapes, felines, and wine leaves also figure in other Bacchus-centered works by Rubens, such as *Drunk Satyr Sleeping* (1612-13); *Bacchanalia* (1614-15); *Two Satyrs* (1618); *Drunken Silenus* (1618/1625); and *Bacchus Seated on a Barrel* (1636-38). Bacchic works held a strong symbolic meaning for the artist, who, along with his contemporaries, saw the wine god as a chaotic source of poetic and artistic inspiration.[150]

Like Ceres and Bacchus, Venus has some distinguishing characteristics. In the overwhelming majority of cases, Rubens' Venus is golden-haired, nude, wearing pearls, and found in close proximity to red drapery.[151] Periodically, the goddess's pose recalls ancient Roman statues, most frequently the well-known Crouching Venus and Venus Pudica, as in

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[150] Svetlana Alpers, 'Creativity in the Flesh: The *Druken Silenus*,' in *The Making of Rubens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 101-157, passim; L. J. Davis, 'A Gift from Nature: Rubens' *Bacchus* and Artistic Creativity,' *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 55 (2004): 227-243, passim.

[151] *Judgement of Paris* (1597-9); *Assembly of the Gods on Mount Olympus* (1602); *Judgement of Paris* (1607-08); *Venus and Adonis*, inspired by Titian (1610-11); *The Return from War* (*Mars Disarmed by Venus*) (1610-12); *Toilet of Venus* (1613-14); *Freezing Venus* (*Sine Cerera et Baccho friget Venus*) (1614); *Toilet of Venus* (1615); *Venus and Cupid in Vulcan's Forge* (1616-17); *Ceres and Two Nymphs* (*Three Nymphs and a Cornucopia*) (1617); *Venus Supplicating Jupiter* (*Jupiter Comforts Venus*) (1620); *The Council of the Gods* (1622); *Venus Receives Achilles' Armor from Vulcan* (1630-32); *Venus Tries to Retain Mars* (1634-36); *Venus and Adonis* (1635-38); *Marriage of Peleus and Andromeda* (1636); *The Horrors of War* (*Consequences of War*) (1637-38); *Judgement of Paris* (1638-39).

Freezing Venus, *Mourning the Dead Adonis* (*Adonis' Death*) of 1614, and *Feast of Venus Verticordia* of 1636-38, to name only a few examples.[152]

These three deities, with their distinctive attributes, form the basis for a subset of Rubens' peace images, in which divine allegories (allegories that center on gods of Classical Antiquity) advocate peace. Rubens' *peace images*, a term originally used by Belkin to describe the amalgamation of Venus and Peace, must be broadened to include paintings in which Rubens uses mythology to discuss peace and war, whether of his own time or in Classical literature, which could be symbolic of the Eighty Years War. Let us briefly consider the different types of what can be called Rubens' peace images before focusing on those, especially in his later works, that engage Terence's apothegm, alerting us to the discussion of peace even in paintings that have not been traditionally associated with this theme.

Rubens' peace images can be divided into those that present images of undisturbed peace (let us call them positive peace images), those that include explicit references to war (negative peace images), and a mixture of the two (transitional peace images). Regardless of the type to which they belong, these paintings feature either Venus, Bacchus, or Ceres (or all three) in a context that evokes thoughts on war and peace. One of the earliest paintings by Rubens, and one that is comprised by the negative peace images, is the *Judgement of Paris* of 1597-9 (fig. 30). He returned to this subject on numerous occasions: once more in the 1600s and twice in the 1630s.[153] In all four paintings, Rubens shows us the moment between peace and war, when Venus, goddess of love, promises Helen, queen of Sparta and wife of its king, Menelaus, to Paris, a Trojan prince, in exchange for the golden apple on which Eris, the goddess of discord,

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[152] Also: *Ceres and Two Nymphs* (*Three Nymphs and a Cornucopia*) (1617); *Mars, Venus, and Cupid* (1630).

[153] See *Judgement of Paris* of 1607-08, 1632-35, and 1638-9.

had written "to the fairest," provoking a contest between Venus, Juno, and Minerva. Paris' escape to Troy with Helen led to a bitter war between the Greeks and the Trojans and ultimately resulted in his city's downfall. It is notable that in the first of these paintings, Rubens includes a river god leaning on a water urn of pageant shape and a female figure who is likely a personification of land. The *Judgement of Paris* is a negative peace image because it offers us a moment that will inevitably lead to war.

Another subset of the negative peace images involves Venus and Mars, or, alternatively, Venus and Adonis. In the first case, Venus, disarms Mars or seeks to prevent him from unleashing violent conflict onto the world.[154] The most famous of such paintings is *The Horrors of War*, which we have already seen. Similarly, in the paintings that represent Venus and Adonis, the goddess attempts to restrain her lover from the hunt, which, she fears, may bring about his death. She fails, and her lover is killed by a wild boar.[155] Rubens made a copy after Titian's *Venus and Adonis* in the 1610s and returned to the same theme in the late 1630s, using a composition that echoed but did not imitate the one he had learned from the Renaissance master. In the 1610s, he also painted *Mourning the Dead Adonis* (*Adonis' Death*), showing the grievous results of the young man's scorn for his lover's warnings. In both paintings that show Venus and Mars and Venus and Adonis, Rubens pitches peace, a female element, against war (or hunt), the dark domain of men. Ancient Romans established an equivalency between these activities (war and hunt) in their art, of which Rubens would have been aware.[156] The commonality between the two subjects is also apparent in the compositional similarities between the 1630s *Venus and*

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[154] *The Return from War* (*Mars Disarmed by Venus*) (1610-12); *Mars, Venus, and Cupid* (1630); *The Allegory of Peace* (1629-30); *Venus Tries to Retain Mars* (1634-36); *The Horrors of War* (*Consequences of War*) (1637-38).

[155] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 241-2, 247-8.

[156] Michael Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 34.

Adonis (fig. 31) and *The Horrors of War* from roughly the same period. In both, strong diagonals animate Venus' struggle to restrain her lover's bloodthirst, and the goddess herself — from her pose to her features — is nearly identical. *The Horrors of War* is one of the most explicit allegorical depictions of conflict that Rubens had ever created, the quintessential representation of the negative peace images type.

A set of paintings that mediates between the negative and positive peace images is made up of the many variants of *Victory Crowns the Victor* that Rubens created over the years (fig. 32).[157] As Heinen has noted, for Rubens — who, like any intellectual, was a product of his time — peace was necessarily gained by war.[158] The images of a crowned Victor who, like the victorious emperors on Roman triumphal arches and columns, tramples his enemies — personifications of debauchery or conflict — show a moment after the war's end, at the threshold of peace.

Another set of peace images that shows the end of a war that will result in peace — even though these paintings operate in a hypothetical mode — consists of the multiple depictions of Perseus and Andromeda (fig. 33).[159] In the Southern Netherlands of Rubens' time, plagued by the problem of the Dutch blockade of the Scheldt river and the economic decline of Antwerp, the myth of Perseus and Andromeda came to be seen as a metaphor for the country's plight.[160] A young maiden was easily identified with Belgica, the female personification of the Netherlands, chained to the rock and in need of rescue from a sea monster: it can be argued that this story

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[157] *Victory Crowns the Victor*, 1613-1614; *Victory Crowns the Hero* (*The Effects of Virtue*) (1613-14); *Victory Crowns Victor* (Dresden) (1615); *The Coronation of the Victorious Hero* (1635).

[158] Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War," 197.

[159] *Perseus Frees Andromeda* (1622); *Perseus Releases Andromeda* (1622-24); *Perseus and Andromeda* (1639).

[160] McGrath et al., *Mythological Subjects*, 16, 212-13; E. J. Sluijter, "Rembrandt, Rubens, and Classical Mythology: the Case of Andromeda," *Travaux de l'Institut Interuniversitaire pour l'Étude de la Renaissance et de l'Humanisme* 14 (2009): 32-4.

appealed to its audience, from the artists to consumers of art, precisely because of the myth's connection with the sea, access to which Antwerp and the rest of the country so desperately needed. It is a theme that bears important similarities to the city's joyous entries, which also used aquatic allegory to plead with important royal personages on behalf of the city and country. Rubens' images of Andromeda as a mythological allegory of the Netherlands are closest in message to the pageant decorations, including the ones he himself had created for the Cardinal Infante Ferdinand. They are appropriately categorized as peace images, however, because the restoration of the country's prosperity had to be achieved, at least in part, by the establishment of peace.

In discussing the transitional peace images, we must consider the two *Drunken Hercules* that Rubens painted in the second decade of the seventeenth century (figs. 34 & 35). Rubens' interest in Antiquity is prominent in these canvases, which are based on an ancient Roman relief.[161] The two paintings, overflowing with the easy lust and pleasant drunken stupor that characterize the contemporary *Drunken Silenus* (1616-17; fig. 36) and related paintings, show the hero who was the epitome of masculine prowess, a great warrior and hunter, helplessly drunk, leaning heavily on his companions for support; his inebriation is so complete that he does not notice (or mind) a satyr wearing the skin of the Nemean lion and a putto dragging around his club, the two creatures impudently stealing and almost mocking Hercules' main attributes, symbols of his strength and achievement. *Drunken Hercules* bodies forth the power of the wine god, who has reduced this violent hero to a sleepy, peaceful drunk. Particularly worthy of notice in the *Drunken Hercules* of 1613-14 now in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, are the musical instruments lying at Hercules' large feet. Ever since the Ancient Greek symposium, the musical

[161] Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, 34-5.

instruments have been associated with Dionysus' feasts, but they also represent the arts through music's connection with lyric poetry and poetry's link to painting.[162] The powerful feet that could crush the delicate flutes and tambourine in an instant do not seem to imperil the instruments, for Hercules seems too drunk even to trample them. This is in stark contrast to *The Horrors of War*, where Mars' first action upon unleashing war onto Europe is the destruction of the arts — he steps onto an open book, on which appears a drawing of the three graces, and seems already to have damaged a lute, the symbol of harmony.[163] The arts (and the world) are safe, therefore, when peace inebriates heroes, making them too drunk to wage war. *Drunken Hercules* is a positive peace image that still retains cryptic references to war. Indeed, as we will see, positive peace images can be said to refer to war by being such absolute antitheses to it.

Having briefly considered Rubens' negative and transitional peace images, we may now turn to his positive peace images — paintings that display peace and the unity of three deities who, in Rubens' mind, are its pillars. The crucial theme that initiated this alliance in Rubens' art is the apothegm by Terence, "Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus." Rubens is as likely to have first encountered this line in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (*On the Nature of the Gods*) as in the play itself.[164] Cicero, in the passage where he cites this line from Terence, discusses how "the

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[162] Judith M. Barringer, *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Greece* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 159; Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 163-76.

[163] Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War," 200.

[164] Gerd Hagenow, "Der nicht ausgekehrte Speisesaal," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 121 (1978), 261-2 (footnote 7). Rubens is very likely to have encountered Terence's maxim in Cicero because of the emphasis on the former author in the education of his time. Paul Monroe, *A Brief Course in the History of Education* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1924), 172. However, in his early school days, passages from Terence would have been available to Rubens. Rooses, *Rubens*, 29.

gods of popular worship are the divine gifts to man deified or virtues and passions personified."[165]

> Many other divinities however have with good reason been recognized and named both by the wisest men of Greece and by our ancestors from the great benefits that they bestow. For it was thought that whatever confers great utility on the human race must be due to the operation of divine benevolence towards men. Thus sometimes a thing sprung from a god was called by the name of the god himself; as when we speak of corn as Ceres, of wine as Liber, so that Terence writes: "when Ceres and when Liber fail, Venus is cold."[166]

This passage can be interpreted as a description of ancient Roman (and Greek) symbolism. More importantly, the gifts that the divinities bestow are interchangeable with the gods themselves (symbolic of them), suggesting that their union is, in fact, a combination of gifts — what Rubens would come to conceive of as the result and the embodiment of peace.

By the time Rubens created his first illustration of Terence's apothegm, *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus* of 1613, it was already a popular subject in the art of his time.[167] This painting shows a peaceable union of the three gods. If the negative peace images feature Venus in opposition to male epitomes of martial prowess, in positive peace images, she appears with war's antitheses, Bacchus and Ceres, whose gifts pacify even such great heroes as Hercules. To my knowledge, all three gods appear in embodied form on only two other canvases by Rubens: *The*

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[165] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, translated by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 268 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1933), 180-181 (note 4).

[166] Ibid., 180-181.

[167] See, for instance, Hendrik Goltzius, *Sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus (Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze)*, c. 1600-1603. Ink and oil on canvas, 41 3/8 x 31 1/2 inches (105.1 x 80 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art; Purchased with the Mr. and Mrs. Walter H. Annenberg Fund for Major Acquisitions, the Henry P. McIlhenny Fund in memory of Frances P. McIlhenny, bequest (by exchange) of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert C. Morris, and gift (by exchange) of Frank and Alice Osborn, 1990, 1990-100-1. Marian Franson Scott, "Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus is Chilled: The Changing Interpretation in Late Mannerist and Baroque Art of a Mythological Theme from Terence" (PhD thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1974), passim.

Council of the Gods and *Feast of Venus Verticordia*. Rubens explicitly depicted the apothegm itself one more time in *Freezing Venus* (*Sine Cerera et Baccho friget Venus*) of 1614, which shows Venus and Cupid shivering (fig. 37). This painting, with its dark background and unusual depiction of the love deities, is perhaps unique in that it can be read as a negative peace image (one that tells of the deprivation caused by war) despite its connection to the phrase that is associated with positive peace images.

An interesting development in these peace images is that Rubens does not always depict all three gods, though he adds elements that signify the one who is absent from the canvas. This is evident, for instance, in *Ceres and Pan* (1620; fig. 38), where Pan stands for his lord, Bacchus, but Venus is seemingly absent. Her presence becomes evident when we consider the pairing of the two gods: the couple may be seen as romantic, Pan wooing Ceres with his gifts, and their connection becomes the embodiment of Venus, goddess of love. A similar implied presence occurs in *Ceres and Two Nymphs,* where Venus is present but Bacchus, seemingly, is not: however, once we notice that Venus (the nymph seated on red drapery) holds grapes and recall that bunches of grapes are likely to indicate the wine god's presence, we realize that this painting is yet another representation of the three gods. This tendency to substitute Terence's gods with their symbols reaches a new level once Rubens begins to paint images of Peace herself — paintings where peace is not an abstract concept to be illustrated by the trio, but a female personification.

This brings us to what is perhaps one of the most famous of Rubens' divine allegories: *Allegory of Peace* (also known as *Minerva Defends Peace from Mars* and *War and Peace*) of 1629-30, currently in the National Gallery of London, and its later copy, *Minerva Defends Peace from Mars* of ca. 1630 (Munich's Alte Pinakothek; fig. 39). The two paintings are the

culmination of the symbolic presence of Venus, Bacchus, and Ceres. Although none of the gods is to be found in these paintings, their proxies and attributes remind the viewer of their importance: the Venus-like Peace, blonde, wearing pearls and red drapery, surrounded by satyrs, felines, vine leaves, and cornucopias brimming with grapes and even wheat (Munich work). In both paintings, Peace suckles small children, connecting her to Tellus, the Roman earth goddess who was frequently represented breastfeeding infants, most prominently on the *Ara Pacis Augusta* but also on *Gemma Augustea*. Moreover, breastfeeding connects the figure of Peace to Charity, similarly recognizable for her motherly nourishing of babies, whom Rubens had depicted in earlier works.[168] The two paintings bring together the elements of positive and negative peace images to create — for the first time in Rubens' art — an opposition between their underlying forces: Mars, on the one hand, and Ceres and Bacchus, on the other, their conflict mitigated by the figure of Peace-Venus.[169] In these paintings, Rubens does not describe peace or war on their own, or the transitional stages between the two extremes. He pits them against each other and adds Minerva, the goddess of just war, as the defender of Peace, once more underlining his notion that peace is necessarily gained by war.

Let us conclude our brief overview of Rubens' peace images by considering his later works that feature the three Terentian gods as a means of depicting peace. Prominent among these is the *Kermis* (1635-38; fig. 40). The overconsumption of wine we have seen in *Drunken Hercules* and the consequent indulgence of sensory desires, especially manifest in the peasant *kermis*, an annual celebration of a saint, served as a subject for Rubens' painting of the same name, from which he later borrowed elements for the *Feast of Venus Verticordia*. The *Kermis*

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[168] See, for instance, *Charity Enlightening the World* (1627-28).

[169] Alpers also notes that the *Allegory of Peace* brings into contact the two oppoising forces (war and peace). Alpers, *The Making of Rubens*, 30.

naturally links the three Terentian gods: the abundant harvest of Ceres, the sway of Bacchus, and their joint power of bringing Venus to life. Svetlana Alpers connects the *Kermis* to the *Feast of Venus Verticordia* by pointing out a pair of lovers that migrates from one to the other, suggesting "interchangeability of figural poses between representations of the mythic past and the peasant present."[170] These two paintings, however, and one other, *Nymphs and Satyrs*, dating to roughly the same time, are connected by the theme of peace, which binds them together in a display of the union of three gods.

The *Kermis* shows scenes of peasant revelry — alcohol flows freely and lusts are satisfied *sur place*. In her detailed reading of the painting, Alpers notes that its subject seems unclear: the setting makes it difficult to determine whether we are truly seeing a saint's feast day or a wedding (or, it should be added, a celebration of harvest).[171] Alpers argues that the reason for showing peasant revelry that transcends time by virtue of its unspecificity stems from Rubens' concerns for his country and his understanding that the last source of hope was the countryside, where agriculture flourished while cities, which depended on maritime trade, dwindled.[172] This assessment could not be more true or better evidenced by the context, yet it does not exhaust the meaning of this painting. Let us call, once more, upon the signifiers of the three gods: wheat for Ceres; wine and revelry for Bacchus; love for Venus. All these elements are present in the *Kermis*: wheat is placed conspicuously in the foreground, and a mother, seated on Ceres' symbol, breastfeeds her infant, recalling the personification of Peace while reminding us of the satyress in several versions of Rubens' *Drunk Silenus*, who feeds her young amidst drunken festivity. The ripe harvest these peasants seem to be celebrating (note again the sheaves

[170] Ibid., 38.

[171] Ibid., 36-8.

[172] Ibid., 25-31, 36-8.

of wheat) is the gift of Ceres, as we have established, whose presence is the most cryptic, yet clear, of the two gods. No one would question the joint effects of Bacchus and Venus' power over these peasants: nearly everyone in the scene is drunk, and cups are full of wine and beer; numerous couples make love shamelessly in public, while some have more discretion and walk away from the festivity to indulge their lusts in semi-privacy. Note as well the musicians, whose instruments we can see in so many Bacchic paintings by Rubens. It might be argued that these are all natural, even traditional, activities of peasants: the wheat has simply been gathered, the alcohol consumed, and desire indulged in sight of fellow carousers. Perhaps, this may be true for a painter who specialized in such scenes but not for Rubens, in whose oeuvre the *Kermis* stands out as extraordinary.[173] With his penchant for the emblematic construction of meaning, Rubens is simply not an artist to depict things for their simplicity; he is, on the other hand, likely to take a scene seemingly of everyday life and transform it into an allegory. Rubens' love and concern for his country is evident in his portrayal of Flemish peasants as the embodiments of the forces of three ancient gods, their revelry the very essence of peace. The three deities — Ceres, Bacchus, and Venus — have created the conditions for these peasants' festivity, their celebration of peace. The painting's timelessness, which seems to puzzle scholars, is indeed the main indication of this work's meaning as a peace image.

In noting that one of the reveling couples in the *Kermis* also appears in the *Feast of Venus Verticordia* (fig. 41), Alpers suggests that the interchangeability of mythological beings and peasants is the reason behind this similarity. We may, perhaps, find another compelling reason for the figures' resemblance. Let us begin by pointing out that the paintings share more similarities than the couple of lovers. Their compositions — marked by revelry, dancing, love

[173] Ibid., 5 and passim.

making, and music — produce a similar impression of chaotic festivity. Both are set in a bucolic landscape, which contains elements of peasantry (the *Kermis*) and Classical architecture (the *Feast of Venus Verticordia*), and are populated by an abundance of human figures, whose varied, dynamic, and animated poses give the viewer's eye a great deal to study. Indeed, one may be hard-pressed to find a word other than "busy" to describe the two scenes. Their difference is in the kinds of characters they depict — ancient Romans and mythological beings, on the one hand, and Flemish peasants, on the other. However, they body forth the same overarching theme — that of peace based on the powerful union of Ceres, Bacchus, and Venus.

It has been commonly accepted that in the *Feast of Venus Verticordia*, Rubens depicted the celebration of Venus Verticordia.[174] Indeed, the amount of detail the artist has borrowed from Ovid's *Fasti* makes this reading fundamental to our understanding of the work. However, this interpretation does not fully account for the presence of Bacchus and Ceres in this painting.[175] Their sculptures are prominently displayed next to a water urn of the shape we recognize from our discussions of Roman art, pageant decorations, and Rubens' own river gods. Bacchus is depicted with a feline — knowing Rubens' interchangeable use of tigers and leopards, we will not seek to determine the species — while Ceres holds a sheaf of wheat. The presence of satyrs and tambourines as well as the grapes and wheat in the putti's garlands spread the influence of Bacchus and Ceres far across the canvas. In Terence's famous apothegm [sic] ("Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus") Bacchus and Ceres are united as a condition for Venus' existence: Bacchus and Ceres are part of the clause while Venus is the subject. Rubens follows the grammatical, and, one might add, the logical, structure of Terence's apothegm [sic] in the

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[174] Philipp Fehl, "Rubens' 'Feast of Venus Verticordia,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 114, no. 828 (1972): 159-62.

[175] Fehl also notes the presence of the two deities in this painting. Fehl, "Rubens' 'Feast of Venus Verticordia,'" 159-62.

composition of the *Feast of Venus Verticordia* by placing the Ceres and Bacchus pair on the periphery and Venus in the center, while employing a hierarchy of scale that underlines this distinction. As Philipp Fehl has noted, Bacchus and Ceres's presence is not entirely inappropriate in this painting, considering that April — the month of Venus — also had feasts that celebrated the two other gods. However, there is a discrepancy between Ovid's text and Rubens' painting: whereas the Roman poet describes the rites of worshipping the statues of Venus and the gifts that women ought to bring her, nowhere does he mention statues of Bacchus and Ceres. Moreover, Titian, whose work on the same subject Rubens copied and from which he drew inspiration, does not feature either of the two deities. (Interestingly, Titian's original also lacks grapes, which appear in Rubens' copy). Can we argue that Rubens is simultaneously showing us a specific celebration — the feast of Venus Verticordia, which he certainly does depict — and yet somehow represents the celebration for the whole month of April? Such a reading is not impossible, but it fails, among other things, to explain Venus' preeminence, so clearly shown in the painting. Perhaps there is another way to explain the combination of the three gods. We can imagine that Rubens overlaid his vision of peace as the union of the three gods onto a representation of the feast of Venus Verticordia, adding his personal political philosophy to the writings of the Roman poet. The presence of Bacchus, Ceres, and Venus in the *Feast of Venus Verticordia,* and the celebratory mood which animates this canvas much as it does the *Kermis*, places this painting among Rubens' positive peace images.

The late 1630s also saw the creation of *Nymphs and Satyrs* (1639; fig. 42), another painting that suggests a reflection on peace. *Nymphs and Satyrs* features many figures occupied with the filling of the cornucopia. We immediately notice the Bacchic elements: satyrs and a baby tiger ready to eat the grapes which a playful putto dangles before the beast's muzzle. The

cornucopia itself may suggest the presence of Ceres, and a small but visible stalk of wheat among the fruits with which it overflows deepens our awareness of the earth goddess in addition to the main action of the figures, who are gathering Ceres' gifts. The very fruit (apples) everyone gathers in this scene is Venus' attribute. We note, as we have in the *Feast of Venus Verticordia*, a prominently placed water urn of pageant shape. Near it sits a female figure who catches the viewer's eye, underlining her importance and demanding that we pay her closer attention. Her pose echoes the Crouching Venus type, which would have brought that goddess to the mind of Rubens' contemporaries. Other young women in the painting recall the love deity: golden-haired, they wear pearls or red drapery. We do not need to argue with certainty that one of the figures is Venus; we must only acknowledge that the women call to mind this goddess while other elements recall Ceres and Bacchus, in order to realize the work's function as a peace image.

Considering the importance that water urns of the shape present in the *Feast of Venus Verticordia* and *Nymphs and Satyrs* has thus far played in our analysis of the *Union of Earth and Water*, we must briefly consider their presence as well. Fehl argues that the water urn in the *Feast of Venus Verticordia* is an attribute of Bacchus, meant to "give forth wine," but this is unlikely for several reasons.[176] One is compositional balance: the water urn is shared by the two gods, who both lean on it (bringing to mind Ceres and Neptune in the *Union of Earth and Water*). Ceres and Bacchus each have one attribute — a sheath of wheat and a feline, respectively. If the urn is ascribed to Bacchus, this creates a misbalance where the god has two attributes and the goddess only one. Another reason for skepticism is that the liquid pouring from the water urn is clearly not red, but is rendered, as water usually is, with strokes of white paint. Finally, the water urn is of the shape associated with river gods, not with Bacchus. So what,

[176] Fehl, "Rubens' 'Feast of Venus Verticordia,'" 159-62.

indeed, is this symbol of rivers doing in Rubens' peace images? Perhaps the water urn is meant to remind the viewer of the Scheldt and, consequently, the Netherlands, in a context evoking peace. Perhaps these peace images feature water urns to continue the artist's lifelong advocacy of peace for the sake of the prosperity of the Low Countries.

Let us explore the connection between Venus (as well as Peace-Venus) and Ceres in the *Union of Earth and Water*. In *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus*, a comparatively early work of 1613, Rubens establishes a connection, an equivalency in fact, between the two goddesses. Not only does he place them facing each other, but he bases Ceres on the famous sculpture of Crouching Venus.[177] In the later *Ceres and Two Nymphs*, Rubens again establishes this connection. Like *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus*, *Ceres and Two Nymphs* portrays the two goddesses together. In fact, visual analysis helps both to establish the relationship between the two divinities and to identify one of the "nymphs" as Venus. There are only three figures in the painting, all of them female, but only two of these are naked. The *clothed* figure in the background is evidently subsidiary to the two figures in the foreground: she is only partially depicted and does not occupy a place of great prominence compositionally. The two nudes, however, are equals — unlike their clothed counterpart, they are both seated. Moreover, these figures are complementary in color: Ceres is partly covered with blue drapery, her companion is seated on red drapery. If two figures are equal and complementary and one is known to be a goddess, it seems logical to assume that the second is, also. Several attributes secure her identity: she is fully nude, has golden hair, wears a pearl earring, and assumes the pose of crouching Venus, modified but recognizable. Indeed, Rubens used a very similar pose for his Venus in yet another illustration of Terence's line, *Venus in Vulcan's Forge* (fig. 43). Moreover, in both *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus* and *The Council of*

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[177] Belkin, *Rubens*, 153.

the Gods, he established the same contrast of drapery colors: red for Venus and blue for Ceres. *Ceres and Two Nymphs*, a painting already discussed in comparison to the *Union of Earth and Water*, is yet another example of the interconnection of Ceres and Venus in Rubens' art.

Let us now return to the *Union of Earth and Water* to explore its link to the themes of peace we have traced briefly in Rubens' art. It is important to note that Rubens' exploration of the interdependence between Venus, Bacchus, and Ceres predates his creation of Peace-Venus, and to emphasize that in his most explicit statement of this amalgamation, *The Allegory of Peace*, Rubens surrounded his Peace-Venus with a Bacchic and Cererian presence. The joining of Bacchus, Ceres, and Venus can also be observed in the *Union of Earth and Water*. Like Peace in *The Allegory of Peace*, the Ceres in the *Union of Earth and Water* is in close proximity to a cornucopia and a tiger.[178] While the cornucopia underlines her connection to bountiful harvests, the tiger adds a Bacchic note to the allusion to land's fertility. Moreover, Ceres' pose is based on Praxiteles' Resting Satyr, copies of which were sometimes identified as Bacchus; in fact, Rubens' own house featured such a statue of the wine god (fig. 44) which, it should be mentioned, was paired with a statue of Ceres.[179] Furthermore, the oil sketch for the painting

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[178] Though, in *The Allegory of Peace*, Venus is near a leopard, there is an equivalency between the two animals as they both are Bacchic creatures and are used interchangeably by Rubens. See, for instance, *A Satyr Pressing Grapes, a Tiger, and a Leopard* where both animals are part of Bacchic festivity. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 1:353, 2: Ill. 275.

[179] E. Kieser, "Antikes in Werke des Rubens," *Münchner Jahrbuch* 10 (1933): 119 as quoted in Joplin, "Return to the Golden Age," 44; Barbara Uppenkamp, Ben van Beneden, and Piet Lombaerde, *Palazzo Rubens: The Master as Architect* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2011), 117. Ceres' pose in the *Union of Earth and Water* has many sources: scholars have suggested the *Aldobrandini Wedding* (Varshavskaya and Egorova, *La sensualité de la vie*, 64.) and the Coryatids by Primaticcio (Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), 89.). Moreover, her pose recalls the sculpture of Pathos, a copy of which Rubens made during his stay in Italy (Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, pl. 56.), as well as that of Venus in ancient Roman sculptures that pair her with Mars: of one such sculpture Rubens had also made a copy, which is now in the collection of The State Hermitage Museum. Another possible source for Ceres' pose is Hendrik Goltzius' *Aqua* (1586). However, the closest model for Rubens would have been the sculpture of Bacchus that he brought from Italy and would have seen daily in the pavilion in his garden. This sculpture is still in the Rubenshuis and its presence there in Rubens' time is documented by a 1640 painting, *Rubens and His Second Wife in the Garden* (fig. 45) by the artist's workshop (though Michael Jaffé attributes it to the artist himself. See: Jaffé, *Rubens*, 319). Uppenkamp, Beneden, and Lombaerde, *Palazzo Rubens*, 117-119.

shows a satyr on Ceres' left, much as one appears in other paintings by Rubens featuring Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus.[180] As the satyr disappears from the sketch, Ceres assumes more explicitly the Resting Satyr pose that connects her to him and his lord, Bacchus. Additionally, the reeds to the right of Neptune are replaced by wine leaves — a crucial attribute of Bacchus. From the attributes that surround her and the arrangement of her body, we perceive that Ceres bears a connection to Bacchus — in fact, she is simultaneously Ceres and an embodiment of the god of wine.

Considering the connection between Bacchus, Ceres, and Venus, it may not be surprising to discover that the Ceres from the *Union of Earth and Water* bears elements that suggest she may also be an embodiment of the love goddess. Most prominent is her nudity. Another important element to support this identification is her conspicuous pearl earring — indeed, while Venus does not hold exclusive rights to pearls in Rubens' paintings, the type of earring Ceres wears is frequently found on Rubens' figures of Venus.[181] Ceres' cornucopia also contains apples, Venus' fruit. In the oil sketch for the *Union of Earth and Water*, a Cupid — Venus's son and attribute — floats above her and the river god. Indeed, in the mid-seventeenth century, when Gonzaga sold the painting to Salvetti, the female figure in the *Union of Earth and Water* was described as Venus.[182] In the *Union of Earth and Water*, we see an early development of Rubens' amalgam of Peace-Venus not simply as a blending of these two goddesses, but rather as an equivalency between the union of Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus, on the one hand, and Peace, on the other. Neptune's role in pageant decorations reinforces the theme of peace seen in the *Union*

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[180] See, for instance, Rubens' *Ceres and Pan*, 1620.

[181] See for instance, in *The Horrors of War* (1637-8); *The Allegory of Peace* (1629-30); *Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus* (1613); *Toilet of Venus* (1614); *Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus* (1614); *Venus, Mars, and Cupid* (1630); *Venus and Adonis* (mid-1630s). Even the statue of Venus in *The Feast of Venus Verticordia* (mid-1630s) wears the same pearl earring.

[182] McPhee, *Bernini's Beloved*, 182-3.

of Earth and Water: the sea god acted as Peace's defender from Mars, performing the role Rubens also assigned to Minerva in *Allegory of Peace* and *Minerva Defends Peace from Mars*.[183] In this light, the *Union of Earth and Water* can be seen as an allegory of more than the union of the Netherlands and the sea, personified by Ceres and Neptune. It is also an allegory of peace in Europe, which Rubens believed would result in the restoration of prosperity to the Southern Netherlands, Antwerp in particular.[184]

As Ulrich Heinen points out, Rubens' vision of peace, especially as expressed in *The Horrors of War*, is connected to war as the means of achieving this peace.[185] In this context, the cornucopia, which Ceres languidly holds and which contains the fruits symbolic of the three Terentian gods, brings further meaning to the painting and concludes Rubens' vision of the union of the Netherlands and the sea, as well as the joining of Venus, Bacchus, and Ceres. In his work, Rubens uses the texts of Ovid, which, clearly, he knew well, with extreme dexterity.[186] Unlike the more common story of the origin of the cornucopia, which is associated with the childhood of Jupiter and his nurse, Amalthea, Ovid's explanation in *Metamorphoses* is actually connected to conflict.[187] According to Ovid, the cornucopia was a direct product of a battle between Achelous, a river god, and Hercules. During the battle, Achelous transformed himself into a bull and Hercules tore off one of his horns. After the fight, nymphs filled the horn with fruit, and so the cornucopia came into being. Rubens depicted this origin story in *Nymphs and Satyrs*, where a

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[183] Sheila Williams and Jean Jacquot, "Ommegangs Anversois: du temps de Bruegel et de van Heemskerk," in *Fêtes de la Renaissance*, 2: 360.
[184] Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War," 198.

[185] Ibid., 197-8.

[186] Aneta Georgievska-Shine, "From Ovid's Cecrops to Rubens's City of God in 'The Finding of Erichthonius,'" *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 1 (2004): 58-74, passim; Fehl, "Rubens' 'Feast of Venus Verticordia,'" passim.

[187] Joost Vander Auwera, "L'Origine de la Corne d'Abondance (Les Naïades Remplissent le Corne d'Achéoloos)," in *Albert et Isabelle: Catalogue*, edited by Luc Duerloo and Werner Thomas (Belgium: Brepols, 1998), 113-15; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 199-202.

water urn of pageant shape recalls one of the participants of the conflict, as well as in the *Feast of Achelous* (1615).[188] The cornucopia held by Ceres in the *Union of Earth and Water* thus brings together important elements of the work. Reminiscent of a river god's battle, this symbol of plenty originates in strife — as peace inevitably does, in Rubens' eyes.

The political dynamics expressed in the *Union of Earth and Water* ultimately come down to Rubens' vision of the Netherlands and Europe at peace. In this regard, it is compelling to examine another connection between the *Union of Earth and Water* and Rubens' earlier works. In 1598-1600, Rubens painted *Adam and Eve* (fig. 46), basing the composition on Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael.[189] *Adam and Eve*, like the *Union of Earth and Water*, is notable for the subtle interaction and balance of male and female forms. In fact, the pose of Eve, who leans lightly on the tree with the serpent, and especially the crossing of her legs, is highly reminiscent of Ceres.[190] Adam's legs, like Neptune's, mirror the pose of his female companion as he leans toward her, balancing her slight bend. If in creating the *Union of Earth and Water* Rubens was indeed thinking back to this early work, it opens a thought-provoking reading of the painting. The Adam and Eve we see in Rubens' early canvas are captured moments before the fall of man: the serpent curling in the tree reminds us of their imminent damnation. From his meticulous study of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, Rubens would have known the great master's *Fall of Man and the Expulsion from Paradise*, in which two events are set side by side: the moment before the fall and the fall itself.[191] This fresco would have established an artistic

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[188] De Clippel, "Rubens's 'Nymphs and Satyrs' in the Prado," 80.

[189] Belkin, *Rubens*, 29.

[190] Held also sees the connection between the crossed legs of Eve and Ceres. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, 326.

[191] Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy*, 19-22.

precedent for Rubens in thinking about Adam and Eve before the fall as antecedent of the fall itself. When drawing on *Adam and Eve* two decades later, Rubens would have recalled Michelangelo's treatment of the subject. *Adam and Eve,* then, imparts a possible retrospective aspect to the *Union of Earth and Water*. The *Union of Earth and Water* alludes to the union of land and sea, and to the prosperity of the formerly united, now divided Netherlands — a harmony subverted by the separation of Ceres and Neptune's bodies, much as the serpent warns the viewer of impending disaster in *Adam and Eve*. Another interpretation is possible. Just as the cornucopia's abundance issued from strife, and Adam and Eve, having striven against God, were ultimately saved by Christ in limbo, so too, the *Union of Earth and Water* may be seen as a prospective vision of the Netherlands — the country re-unified under the rule of the Habsburgs in the manner envisioned by so many pageant decorations.

Rubens and Empedocles: the *Union of Earth and Water* as a Universal Allegory

We have seen that the *Union of Earth and Water* can be read as a specific political allegory that foregrounds the problems connected to the Dutch blockade of the Scheldt river, as well as a more general peace image that asks those with power and influence to work to achieve peace; yet we have not accounted for all the possible readings of this phenomenally imaginative and rich painting. One notable change from the sketch to the final painting is the number of human (or divine, mythological) figures, reduced from five to four. The satyr is replaced by the tiger; the cupid by the Victory-Hymen. The four figures in the final version are Ceres, who stands for earth; Neptune, who represents water; the Triton blowing his conch shell; and the Victory-Hymen with her billowing red drapery. If given four figures, two of which are earth and water, is it too rash to infer that the four elements may be at play on this canvas?

The Triton's main action, as we have seen, is connected to the conch shell. Paradoxically enough, the sea creature may actually symbolize air because his occupation is specifically connected to this element. A sculpture by Giovanni Bologna may give further credence to this notion: his *Flying Mercury* is the work that laid the foundation for the pose of the same god in the *Stage of Mercury*, making it safe to assume that, whether through reproductions or personal experience, Rubens knew this work of art.[192] The figure of Giovanni Bologna's trade god is shown standing on one foot, which rests on a peculiar base: the wind coming from the head of what is, one assumes, a god of the wind. The face of the wind god, with its puffed cheeks, is highly reminiscent of the triton in the *Union of Earth and Water*, suggesting a possible association between the triton and the wind. In Rubens' own art, one of the most famous representations of a wind god is that of *Boreas and Orithyia* (1615), where the Northern wind is shown with the puffed-up cheeks that characterize the triton. This is by no means to suggest that the triton is a wind god, but only to underline that the action of blowing air and the facial expression that accompanies this exertion are connected to the element of air.

Next, the Victory-Hymen. Her billowing red drapery calls up her corresponding element, fire; so also does her association with the love of Ceres and Neptune, which she seems to bless with her myrtle wreath. In Rubens' canvases, Hymen frequently (though not always) appears with a flaming torch, one of his main attributes. This association furthers the connection between this figure and fire.

The importance of recognizing the possibility that the *Union of Earth and Water* displays the four elements is connected to Rubens' deep engagement with Classical texts. One of the most important philosophical visions of the universe's functioning was expressly connected to the four elements and two forces acting upon them. According to the Greek philosopher Empedocles,

[192] Martin, *The Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, 186.

whose writings have come down to us in fragments, mostly reported by other writers, the four elements (fire, earth, water, and air) made up the universe under the pressure of two other forces — Love and Strife.[193] Before we consider the ways in which Empedocles' philosophical views may be reflected in the *Union of Earth and Water*, let us briefly state how Rubens would have come to be acquainted with this philosopher's ideas. One of the main ancient sources for Empedocles' philosophy is Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.[194] Beyond his remarkable education in the Classical literature, which Rubens cultivated throughout his life, as is attested by multiple sources and evidenced by his scholarly circle of friends,[195] Rubens possessed an exceptional library, and we are fortunate to know some of its contents. Among his books is the *Omnia Opera* of Aristotle.[196] Considering his passion for Antiquity, his education, and his library, it seems likely that Rubens would have read of Empedocles in the *Metaphysics*. Furthermore, the influential authors of Rubens' time (his earlier contemporaries) — among them, Natale Conti — referred to this philosopher in their writings.[197] We will consider the possible implications of Conti's rendition of Emedoclean philosophy on the *Union of Earth and Water* shortly, but first

[193] Denis O'Brien, *Empedocles' Cosmic Cycle: A Reconstruction from the Fragments and Secondary Sources* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

[194] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by Hugh Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library 271 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1933), 26-28.

[195] Belkin, Rubens, 191; Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, 9-12, 16-20; McGrath, *Subjects from History*, 1: 56-7, 55-67, passim.

[196] Prosper Arents, Frans Baudouin, Lia Baudouin, Elly Cockx-Indestege, Jacques De Bie, Marcus de Schepper, and Alfons K. L. Thijs, *De bibliotheek van Pieter Pauwel Rubens: een reconstructive* (Antwerpen : Vereniging der Antwerpse Bibliofielen, 2001), 283; Coline Silvestre, "Les éditions d'Aristote à Lyon dans la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle : chroniques d'un déclin annoncé?" (master's thesis, Université de Lyon, 2014), passim. The book in Rubens' library was: *Aristotelis Stagiritae opera, post omnes quae in hunc usque diem prodierunt editiones, summo studio emaculata, & ad Graecum exemplar diligenter recognita. Quibus accessit index locupletissimus recens collectus (a Hieronymo Gemusaeo)* (Lyon: (Symphorien barbier) pour Jean Frellon, 1561).

[197] *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, 1: 21, 64, 90, 94, 336; 2: 534, 741, 885; McGrath et al., *Mythological Subjects*, 30-31.

let us examine Aristotle's writings about Empedocles' conception of the four elements and the forces of Love and Strife operating on them.

> Now since it was apparent that nature also contains the opposite of what is good, i.e. not only order and beauty, but disorder and ugliness; and that there are more bad and common things than there are good and beautiful: in view of this another thinker introduced Love and Strife as the respective causes of these things—because if one follows up and appreciates the statements of Empedocles with a view to his real meaning and not to his obscure language, it will be found that Love is the cause of good, and Strife of evil. Thus, it would perhaps be correct to say that Empedocles in a sense spoke of evil and good as first principles, and was the first to do so — that is, if the cause of all good things is absolute good. … At any rate, Love often differentiates and Strife combines: because whenever the universe is differentiated into *its elements* by Strife, fire and each of the other elements are agglomerated into a unity; and whenever they are all combined together again by Love, the particles of each element are necessarily again differentiated (emphases mine).[198]

In other words, there are four elements that constitute this world, and they are activated by Love and Strife, the forces of good and evil. In the *Union of Earth and Water*, the water urn acts as the center of unity and separation of the sea and the Netherlands — a reflection on the blockade of the Scheldt by the Dutch. This blockade, which handicapped Antwerp and a large part of the Southern Netherlands' economy, was the result of war — or, to put it differently, of the absence of peace. If ever a painting was to illustrate Love and Strife, a more appropriate one than *The Horrors of War* could not be found. Indeed, it seems natural to think of Love and Strife in the context of Classical literature as the well-known association of Mars and Venus[199]. Bringing these ideas together, we find in the *Union of Earth and Water* Rubens' re-interpretation of the Empedoclean view of the universe: the four elements acted on by the forces of Love, or peace, and Strife, or war.

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[198] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 26-28.

[199] We can trace this pairing in Rubens' art to a time period preceding the creation of the *Union of Earth and Water*. For instance, in *The Return from War* (*Mars Disarmed by Venus*) (1610-1612).

A passage from Natale Conti's *Mythologiae* could perhaps explain the greater importance accorded to the elements of water and earth, aside from their role in the specific allegory of the Netherlands and the Sea.[200] In the reference to Empedocles, Conti suggests that Neptune could stand for water and Ceres for earth.[201] In creating his allegory, Rubens did not abide by all of Conti's suggestions for the deities corresponding to the elements, however — Triton and the Victory-Hymen are his own inventions. In another passage where he mentions Empedocles, Conti explicitly rejects Homer's notion that water and earth have precedence over the other elements as the only ones from which life originates.[202] Nevertheless, his emphasis on this negation lends earth and water more weight. Rubens' own emphasis on Ceres and Neptune may be a playful nod to the oldest of all poets as well as to the Greek philosopher and his elder contemporary. As he so frequently does,[203] Rubens reimagines a Classical text within the already complex political program of his work, lending his painting yet another layer of meaning — as an allegory of the universe — that would have been appreciated by his learned audience, for whom the divination of the meaning of art, literature, and emblems was a favorite intellectual pastime.

Conclusion

The *Union of Earth and Water* is an immensely complex work. It draws on artistic precedents in ancient Roman art and pageant decorations, which connect it to contemporary political issues and give it the visual vocabulary that reminds viewers of this connection. Rubens presents us

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[200] Natale Conti' *Mythologiae* is listed in the catalogue of Rubens' son, Albert, library. Arents et al., *De bibliotheek van Pieter Pauwel Rubens*, 352, 370. Moreover, McGrath suggests Natale Conti to be among the authors Rubens could have known. McGrath et al., *Mythological Subjects*, 31.
[201] *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, 1: 90.
[202] Ibid., 1: 336.
[203] Aneta Georgievska-Shine, "From Ovid's Cecrops to Rubens's City of God in 'The Finding of Erichthonius,'" *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 1 (2004): 58-74, passim.

with three allegories that function on different levels: the specific allegory of the Netherlands, the Scheldt, and the Sea, which recalls pageant decorations; an allegory of peace, which Rubens began developing in his art between 1610 and 1620, and which is based on the union of Bacchus, Ceres, and Venus, as described by Terence, as an epitome of peace; and an Empedoclean allegory of the universe, acted on by the forces of Love and Strife. The *Union of Earth and Water* bears the undeniable touch of the Flemish master to whose use and personal interpretation of ancient Greek and Roman mythology it testifies. This painting is a fascinating example of Rubens' use of mythology and allegory for the expression of the most pressing political issues of his time.

The first owner of the *Union of Earth and Water*, Guidi di Bagno, was a man of considerable importance who had made a brilliant political career.[204] He met Rubens between 1621 and 1627, when Guidi di Bagno served as the papal nuncio in Flanders.[205] A man of learning as well as a politician, the papal nuncio was the one to introduce Rubens to Peiresc, one of the most distinguished Classical scholars, with whom Rubens corresponded for over a decade.[206] The artist spoke highly of Guidi di Bagno, referring to him as "one of the best patrons and friends I have in the world … [whom I consider] a papal possibility, and worthy of every great fortune."[207] Considering their friendship and mutual respect, as well as Guidi di Bagno's prominent position in Flanders at the time the *Union of Earth and Water* was painted, can we not find further support for our arguments in the fact that Rubens created this painting for this important political player at the very beginning of his presence in the Netherlands? In giving him

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[204] *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol 61 (2004), s.v. "Guidi di Bagno, Giovanni Francesco," by Rotraud Becker, accessed March 12, 2017, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/guidi-di-bagno-giovanni-francesco_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.
[205] Elizabeth McGrath, *Jordaens, Psyche and the Abbot: Myth, Decorum and Italian Manners in Seventeenth-Century Antwerp* (Leiden: Primavera Press, 2009), 31-2.
[206] Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, 9.
[207] Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 178.

the *Union of Earth and Water*, perhaps Rubens wanted Guidi di Bagno to be reminded of the desperate plight of the Netherlands in the wake of the death of Archduke Albert and the end of the peace treaty with the Dutch; of the importance of peace; and of the truth that the universe is constantly agitated by Love and Strife, Peace and War. Could the papal nuncio be meant to find in the beauty of this painting the motivation to labor for peace?

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Fig. 43 Rubens, *Venus in Vulcan's Forge* (*Sine Cerere et Baccho Friget Venus*), ca. 1616-17. Oil on wood, 179.5 x 199.5 cm. Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium.

Fig. 44 Statue of Bacchus in Rubens' garden in Antwerp.

Fig. 45 Rubens's workshop, *Rubens and His Second Wife in the Garden*, 1640. Oil on wood panel, 97.5 x 130.8 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.

Fig. 46 Rubens, *Adam and Eve*, ca. 1598-1600. Oil on canvas, 180.3 x 158.8 cm. Rubenshuis, Antwerp, Belgium.

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