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The Mythical Allegory Between the Divine and the Animal

Both the *Triumph of Venice* by Paolo Veronese and *The Horrors of War* by Peter Paul Rubens use mythical allegories to depict the aftermath of war and ultimately, the balance between the divine and the animal. Altogether, each painting was created during a period of unrest when destruction and betrayal encapsulated the daily lives of common civilians. Faced with two opposing religions, Catholicism and Protestantism, the country of present day Europe was turned upside down due to the unbecoming desire for power and greed. Despite each painting being conceived during a separate era, both will serve as a reminder of the responsibility we possess as a species.

Notwithstanding, these two paintings, done by Veronese and Rubens, are quite different visually; as one displays a victorious moment in bright, luminescent color, the other uses smoky, muted hues and contrasting light to present the demonstrable byproduct of war. One is of a flat design with structured depth while the other contains fluid and organic movement with very little depth in view. One is symmetrical, drawing the onlooker towards the center point while the other leads the viewer adrift from left to right. Nevertheless, both paintings provide the viewer with a sense of awe that takes hold of their attention and brings them on a journey of mythological proportions.

To begin, the *Triumph of Venice* was painted after the city of Venice won back their land from a Pope that strived to maintain religious control and gain more regions within Italy. Simply, after Pope Alexander IV died, Venice was in need of a new Pope and during the search for a new leader, Venice assumed dominion over new territory. Speculating that the new Pope Julius II would grant Venice their expansion, they were greatly dissuaded when instead, the entire Venetian Republic was ex-communicated and an anti-Venetian alliance with France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire was created. The League of Cambrai (1508-1510), as it is called, was made to help prevent the spread of Venetian influence in Northern Italy (Artble). To say the least, Venice proved to hold more secular views than the rest of Italy which the Pope deemed to be at the expense of one's spiritual path. Even more so, for Venice to become the most powerful city in Italy would cause the citizens to turn away from the leadership of the Pope and therefore Catholicism, altogether (Artble). With that being said, there wasn't a day greater than when Venice took victory over its regions to live and thrive in the way the people desired. Subsequently, this division between Venice and the rest of Italy is one of the major reasons why they have their own Renaissance—the Venetian Renaissance. If not just for the island lifestyle which lead artists to naturally produce brighter and more colorful artwork, the culture of Venice surely promoted the stylistic implications of a more lively visual depiction. The crowning of Mary—the allegorical figure for Venice—by two angels, on a carriage departing for heaven, with none other than Doge Leonardo Loredan gazing upon Venice with pride and protection, represents the lengths the people of Venice were willing to go to uphold their values. It was more than just a belief but the right to live as one desired. Specifically, Loredan, who's reign lasted 20

years during the League of Cambria, loved art and was responsible for many commissions during this time. It is to say, he was a huge influence on the artistic direction of Venice.

In comparison, *The Horrors of War*, also known as the *Consequences of War* and the *Allegory of the Outbreak of War*, shows a much different perspective on the battles of mankind. Rubens, of course, being raised as both Catholic and Protestant had a very unbiased positioning when experiencing the turmoils of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Instead of striving to obtain this umbrella of religious dominion, he instead only witnessed all that was being destroyed in the process. *The Allegory of the Outbreak of War* is a chaotic scene where “Mars, God of War, has left open the temple of Janus – which is closed in peacetime – and heedless of Venus, Goddess of Love, is dragged by the Fury Alekto into mayhem, accompanied by the monsters Pestilence and Fury. Cast aside and trampled Underfoot are those benefits of peace that are destroyed by war: architecture, harmony, the arts, letters and procreation, the latter represented by a mother and child. The grief-stricken woman dressed in black, robbed of all her jewels, personifies Europe.”(Phaidon). Using dark and horrific subject matter, that is so common in the Spanish/ Flemish Baroque period, Rubens was able to produce a compelling masterpiece that stirs the emotions of the viewer. The strikingly white flesh of the classicized figures almost allows the viewer to be fooled into only seeing the monumental beauty of the piece. However, the *tenebrism* that is so clearly present with the wall of smoke that graciously engulfs all beings, does not promote this disillusion for very long. Responsible for killing 8 million people, the Thirty Years War was incredibly bloody and Rubens, along with all of society that suffered the aftermath grew to know the destruction that comes from greed and power (History.com).

Unfortunately, Rubens died 8 years before the war ended so he never truly was able to leave this world knowing peace was upon his people (Phaidon).

Essentially, these two paintings mirror the highest contrast within human morality. With one showing a scene of pride and joy, fighting for a way of life while the other presenting all that we have to lose for the intangible essence of power. Altogether, they show the divinity of the collective and the importance of community versus the base instinct of survival of the fittest that so deeply resonates within all of us. Both strongly displaying our natural desire for peace and all that it brings and how easily it can be dismantled by a single selfish entity. Undoubtedly, war is inevitable but what we fight for, as well as, the battles we choose to fight is entirely curated by our ability to compromise and adapt. Therefore, we must choose wisely and know if what we are fighting for is worth it or if the fight is causing more pain than it is worth.

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