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in light of this request. Rubens checked his memory of art in the way he measured his invented figures against the direct observation of nature. His collection of prints, drawings, paintings, and sculpture and the numerous copies he made and kept can thus be seen as the record of his memory of works of art.¹³²

The theory of artistic imitation was a focal point in Rubens's practice of art. It was here that future confronted past, art was balanced with nature, and personal style was reconciled with tradition and verisimilitude. Rubens's theory of imitation is remarkable for its extensive grounding in natural philosophy. It is original and innovative in the thoroughness with which it was applied.

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¹³² This point was first suggested to me by Professor Irving Lavin.

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Rubens's *Conversatie à la Mode*: Garden of Leisure, Fashion, and Gallantry

Elise Goodman

Rubens's *Conversatie à la Mode* of ca. 1632-34 (principal version in the Prado) is the most provocative and complex Garden of Love in seventeenth-century painting (Fig. 1).¹ In our time it has evoked varying interpretations. These, however, have not used the earliest titles assigned to it as their point of departure, nor placed it within its genre. Hence, few have focused on the gallant society reflected in it, and none has associated it with the contemporaneous ideas about fashion and etiquette which that genre

reflects. The predominant discussions of iconography have concerned either the presence of portraits in the work or allegorical symbolism.

Gustav Glück in 1920 saw Rubens and his recent bride, Helena Fourment, in the couple at the left of the painting, and assumed that members of her family were models for the other participants.² However, even if Rubens did portray or allude to members of his family, I would suggest that he subordinated these portrayals to a general scene of

This article derives from portions of my dissertation, "Rubens's *Conversatie à la Mode* and the Tradition of the Love Garden," Ohio State University, 1978. I am grateful to Francis L. Richardson, the director of the thesis, for his advice, support, and encouragement, and I wish to thank Charles Dempsey, Walter A. Liedtke, and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. for their helpful suggestions during the various stages of this project. Further, I am indebted to the Ohio Arts Council for a fellowship spon-

soring my research in Baroque art.

¹ For a catalogue of all the extant versions and their dates as well as a summary of the scholarly literature, see Glang-Süberkrüb, 77-80, 87-114. I shall discuss the Prado version rather than the Waddesdon Manor variant, since the former is universally accepted as entirely by Rubens's hand and is more sophisticated iconographically.

² Glück, 63, 96-98.



1 Peter Paul Rubens, *Conversatie à la Mode*. Madrid, Museo del Prado (photo: Alinari/EPA)

fashionable society. This is already suggested by the earliest titles of the painting, "Conversatie à la Mode" and "Conversatie van Joffrs" (that is, a conversation of young ladies).³

In 1942 Hans Evers focused on the three ladies in the center foreground as the basis for his iconographic interpretation, calling them "the Three Graces," goddesses among men, belonging to a more idealized world than the other characters. He also speculated that these "goddesses" personify sight, hearing, and touch, sensations linked to their postures and gestures.⁴ But, visually, these ladies occupy the same realm as the other figures, and have no attributes to lift them above humanity. As Julius Held has phrased it, they are "modern" Graces, suggesting an analogy with the mythological companions of Venus behind them.⁵

In 1975 Annegret Glang-Süberkrüb interpreted the painting as a Neoplatonic allegory of love, in which the female protagonist at the left is initiated into the realm of love by passing through various stages represented by the three ladies in the center foreground. Like Evers, she saw

the differences in their posture as symbolic of their identity. For her, they personify the orders of love: the woman who looks at the viewer is sensuous love; the heavenward-gazing lady in the middle is celestial love; and the matronly woman on the ground is earthly love. Glang-Süberkrüb discerns a sequence of events unfolding in time, represented by the rhythmic reappearance of the lady at the left, who, she alleges, recurs in a similar costume at the right center and once again as the woman who descends the stairs at the far right. She sees three stages of love represented by this supposed one-in-three figure: its initiation, maturation, and culmination in marriage.⁶

This interpretation is ingenious but unconvincing, since the three ladies do not sufficiently resemble each other to be considered one person, and are not compositionally juxtaposed so to bring out parallels. Further, as I shall demonstrate, the seventeenth-century viewer was more likely to look at the ladies in the center as amorous coquettes than as abstract personifications.

The iconographic details of the *Conversatie à la Mode*

³ M. Eisenstadt, *Watteaus Fêtes Galantes und Ihre Ursprünge*, Berlin, 1930, 142, sees "a happy fellowship with congenial in-laws, relations by marriage, and brothers and sisters." Leo Steinberg, in a lecture delivered at the Cleveland Museum of Art, April, 1978 (first given at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), recognizes Rubens and Helena Fourment as the pair at the far left, sees the latter's features again in the woman seated to the immediate right of this pair, and identifies the couple at the extreme right as Susanna Fourment and her husband. Steinberg reads the picture "as the aging Rubens' personal allegory of rejuvenation through Love." I am grateful to Professor Steinberg for a personal communication summarizing this information. J. Held, *The Oil Sketches of*

Peter Paul Rubens, Princeton, 1980, 1, 400, 401, identifies the woman sitting on a stool looking outside the picture as a portrait of Helena Fourment but rejects the traditional association of the couple at the far left with Rubens and his young wife. I agree with Held, since the features of the pair are too generalized to be portraits. The 17th-century titles will be discussed below.

⁴ H. Evers, *Peter Paul Rubens*, Munich, 1942, 339-48.

⁵ Held, 412, 413.

⁶ Glang-Süberkrüb, 13-35.

do not support interpretations of it as either a tableau of personifications or a moral-philosophical allegory. The picture belongs to the genre of "conversation paintings" in the open air, which was popular in the first half of the seventeenth century in Flanders and Holland, and it also shares iconographic and compositional motifs with French and Flemish amatory prints of the period. It embodies ideas on social conversation found in tracts written for the leisure classes. It breathes the consciousness of fashion of this class, of which Rubens was a member, and its theme arises from its leisure-time pursuits. This explains its association with love songs and lyrics and its use of a number of their images and conventions.

In order to understand the picture, it is well to begin with its original titles. In the sale of goods from Rubens's estate in 1645, two variants of the painting were referred to as "Conversatie à la Mode."⁷ In the 1657 inventory of Rubens's son Albert and his wife Clara del Monte, a picture that has been identified with the version at Waddesdon Manor was described as a "Conversatie van Joffrs."⁸ Peter Clouwet's copper engravings of 1665 after the *Conversatie*, however, were entitled "Venus Lusthoff" and "Le Jardin de Venus," titles not occurring elsewhere in the seventeenth-century documents. Clouwet evidently focused on the locality rather than the activity portrayed.

⁷ J. Denucé, *De Antwerpsche "Konstkamers" Inventarissen van Kunstverzamelingen, te Antwerpen in de 16^e en 17^e eeuwen*, Amsterdam, 1932, 77, 78; Glang-Süberkrüb, 82-83. In the sale of Rubens's goods, Commis Maes of Brussels purchased a canvas of a "Conversatie à la Mode" for 18 guilders, and Helena Fourment bought a "Conversatie à la Mode" on panel for 120 florins. Glück (p. 95) and Glang-Süberkrüb identify this panel with one of the small copies made after the Waddesdon Manor painting. As Denucé (pp. 152, 197, 276) and Glang-Süberkrüb (pp. 83-84) have noted, a "conversatie" after Rubens on panel was recorded in the 1652 will of Victor Wolfvoet of Antwerp. In 1657 a "conversatie" after Rubens on panel and a copy of the "Conversatie" after Rubens were recorded in the Antwerp inventory of Susanna Willemsens. "A Conversatie after Rubens" was again mentioned in 1678 in the Antwerp will of Erasmus Quellen. The Prado picture was quaintly and summarily mentioned as "el Sarao" (informal dance or entertainment) in the 1666 inventory of the Alcázar, but M. Padrón (*Catalogo del Museo del Prado I: Escuela Flamenca Siglo XVII*, Madrid, 1975, 280-82) states that the painting was known in Rubens's time as "Conversatie à la Mode."

⁸ Glang-Süberkrüb, 83. "Staet ende inventaris van den Sterffhuuse van Mynheer Albert Rubens ende Vrouwe Clara del Monte: ... op de groote Caemer boven de salette ... Item eene andere representeerende eene conversatie van Joffrs."

⁹ *Ibid.*, 86, 94-97. The term "Garden of Love" was first used in 1746 in the catalogue of the Schönborn collection at Pommersfelden.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 84-86; the letter was sent to Roger de Piles in France, who apparently saw a version of "La Conversation" in the collection of the Duc de Richelieu. P. J. Mariette described the works sold from the collection of the Prince de Carignan in the following way: "Des Dames, la plupart accompagnées par leurs amants, rassemblées dans un jardin auprès d'une fontaine. Ce beau tableau de Rubens, qu'on nomme la Conversation, a été en France dans le cabinet de M. le Duc d'Orléans. ..." See *Abecedario de Pierre Jean Mariette et autres notes inédits* ..., 1859-1860, repr. Paris, 1966, 134-35.

¹¹ "Conuersatie, Conuerseringhe, Hanteringhe: Conuersation, Familiarité, Hantise, f. Hantement, m." *Dictionnaire flameng-francoys tres-ample et copieux*, comp. M. Sasbout, Antwerp, 1576, sig. 04v;

His titles point forward to the appellation "Garden of Love" that later became common.⁹ Otherwise, the paintings continued to be alluded to as "conversatie" or "La Conversation." Thus, in 1676, Rubens's nephew Philip mentioned a version of the picture as "La Conversation," and in 1742, Mariette described the variant now in Dresden, along with Clouwet's engravings, Rubens's drawings for Jegher's woodcuts, and Jegher's prints as "La Conversation."¹⁰

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Flemish word "conversatie" was defined as social intercourse, a circle of acquaintance, society, or company, and was synonymous with French "conversation."¹¹ Significantly, Rubens himself used the phrase "conversatie van jouffrouwen" in a letter of 1629 to Gevaerts to denote the society of young ladies from Antwerp that his brother-in-law fancied.¹² "A la Mode" was equivalent to "modern," and was often associated with *finesse* and *savoir-vivre* and with refinement in dress.¹³ English seventeenth-century usage was similar. Dryden in *Marriage à la Mode* characterizes a gentleman as one who "understands the Grand Mond so well, has haunted the best Conversations."¹⁴ A *Conversatie à la Mode* is then a painting that depicts a modish group of people in fashionable social interaction.¹⁵

Rubens's pictorial sources are modern and do not go

Conversatie: "Verkeer, omgang," *Middelnederlandsch Handwoordenboek*, ed. J. Verdam, The Hague, 1956, 305; *Conversation*: "des Compagnies, des Assemblées. (Il est receu dans toutes les conversations. Il est de toutes les belles conversations)," *Le Grand Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 2nd ed., ed. J. B. Coignard, 1695, repr. Geneva, 1968, 1, 148; *Conversation*: "Assemblée, compagnie," *Dictionnaire du français classique*, ed. J. Dubois, Paris, 1971, 124.

¹² Rubens to Gevaerts, London, November 23, 1629; "Myn swaegher verliest syn patientie, dat hy mynheeren syne confraters soo langhe in den druck moet laeten, als ook de conversatie van de jouffrouwen van Antwerpen quelt hem zeer soo langhen tyt de derven," M. Rooses, *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses oeuvres*, v, Antwerp, 1907, 239.

¹³ See Godard de Donville, 186, who quotes Figuière's definitions of *à la mode* in his *La Vertu à la Mode*, 1641. Figuière states that the expression signifies modernity and connotes *savoir-vivre* and *finesse*. Also see Godard de Donville, 129, 170, 172, for its meaning in Grenaille's *La Mode*, 1642, as refinement of dress in the current fashion. For its meaning as a painting that depicts a contemporary theme, see L. De Pauw-de Veen, *De Begrippen "Schilder," "Schilderij," en "Schilderen" in de zeventiende eeuw* (*Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Schone Kunsten*, xxxi, No. 22), Brussels, 1969, 173.

¹⁴ *Conversation*: "Circle of acquaintance, company, society; Manner of conducting oneself in the World or in society," *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J. A. H. Murray, II, Pt. 2, Oxford, 1893, 941.

¹⁵ A 17th-century "conversation" differs from an 18th-century "conversation piece," which features either a family group or a group portrait placed in familiar surroundings. See M. Praz, *Conversation Pieces*, University Park, 1971, 34; and G. C. Williamson, *English Conversation Pictures of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, New York, 1975, 1. William Hogarth's *Midnight Modern Conversation* of 1730 is most probably an ironic portrayal of a group of drinking companions, combining the 17th-century "company" with portraits. See R. Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times*, New Haven, 1971, I, 230, 305, 307. For Hogarth's "Conversation Pieces" in general, see Paulson, *The Art of Hogarth*, London, 1975, 14-22.



2 Crispin de Passe, *Hortus Voluptatum*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)



3 Esaias van de Velde, *Garden Party*. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (photo: Museum)

back, as some scholars have suggested, to the Renaissance and Mannerist periods. Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre* and Titian's *Mythologies* have only a vague iconographic similarity to the *Conversatie*.¹⁶ Bruegelian peasant pictures belong to a genre quite distinct from Rubens's fashionable society painting, and late Mannerist brothel scenes are equally improbable as generic models, since the spirit of their moralizing themes is utterly different from the *joie de vivre* that radiates from Rubens's picture.¹⁷ Rather, it is more likely that Rubens drew upon contemporaneous *tableaux de mode*, which have themes similar to those he portrayed in the Prado painting. These genre pictures and amorous prints were produced in significant numbers for the *haute bourgeoisie*, and were widely collected by it in

¹⁶ R. Liess, *Die Kunst des Rubens*, Berlin, 1977, 397.

¹⁷ Glück, 50-60.

¹⁸ For an iconographic discussion of this picture, see J. and R. Genaille, "Deux tableaux de Louis de Caulery," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6th ser., LXVII, 1966, 111-14; and Banks, 209.

Flanders, France, and Holland in the first half of the seventeenth century. They depict a fashionable social group enjoying themselves in the open air, engaging in such pastimes as music-making, courtship, and promenading.

Fêtes and *Gardens of Love* by Flemish *petits maîtres*, such as Sebastian Vranx (1573-1647), Louis de Caulery (active 1594-1620), and Crispin de Passe (ca. 1565-1637), were likely to have been among Rubens's generic models. For instance, Caulery's *Homage to Venus* in Copenhagen depicts modish couples worshipping a life-like statue of Venus in a garden containing a pergola, which is adorned with atlantids similar to those on the garden pavilion in the *Conversatie*. This statue presiding over a *fête* of love is a significant seventeenth-century precursor of the one in Rubens's painting.¹⁸ Flemish prints with erotic themes must also have been known to Rubens, for example the widely circulating plate from Crispin de Passe's *Hortus Voluptatum* of 1599 (Fig. 2).¹⁹ Crispin's Love Garden contains the standard repertoire of images that recur in the *Conversatie*: the garden, a fountain, lovers, a lutenist, and atlantids. The verses beneath the print poeticize the carefree life of "sportive and joyful youth in the springtime when the earth spreads her flowers."

An intriguing analogue to Rubens's painting exists in Esaias van de Velde's *Garden Party* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, signed and dated 1624. The *Garden Party* is a Dutch descendent of the Flemish Gardens of Love and has several formal elements in common with the *Conversatie à la Mode* (Fig. 3). Both pictures feature fashionably dressed men and women in dalliance in a formal garden near a fountain decorated with curiously animated statues. In Esaias's painting an expressive Cupid at the left gazes downward at the group of merrymakers, while, in the Rubens, Venus at the right attentively watches her disciples below. Both pictures depict an architectural backdrop which underscores the affluence of the characters and embellishes the scene: a stately *maison de plaisance* at the right of the *Garden Party* and the lavish garden pavilion in the *Conversatie*. In addition, the postures and gestures of some figures in the *Garden Party* resemble those in the *Conversatie*: the promenading pair accompanied by their dog at the right of Esaias's picture are a close counterpart of Rubens's couple with a dog, who descend the stairs of the fountain of Venus. Also notable is the similarity in posture of the expressive open-mouthed ladies at the center of the compositions.

That Rubens was generally interested in Flemish Gardens and Parks of Love emerges also from his somewhat later *Château in a Park* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, another society painting (Fig. 4).²⁰ Its antecedent appears to be a garden painting like David Vinckboons's (1576-

¹⁹ See F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1450-1700*, xv, Amsterdam, n.d., No. 851, 285-86.

²⁰ For a recent analysis of the picture, see K. Demus, "Der Schlosspark," in *Peter Paul Rubens 1577-1640*, Vienna, 1977, 61-62.

1632) *Company in the Open Air* of 1610 in the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna (Fig. 5).²¹ In both pictures, an arcadian setting, rendered lightly in pastels, sets off the rather mannered couples who frolic in the foreground. Of course, Rubens's figures are more robust than those of Vinckboons, and his picture radiates a general lyricism and exuberance merely hinted at in the earlier work.

The contemporary of Rubens whose amorous prints are closest in style and tenor to the *Conversatie* is Abraham Bosse (1602-1676), the French engraver and etcher of society tableaux during the time of Louis XIII. Bosse enjoyed an international reputation as a recorder of the bourgeoisie; no doubt Rubens knew his prints, which were circulating in Flanders, having inspired at least two works by the Antwerp society painter Jerome Janssens (1624-1693).²² Bosse's *Le Printemps* (Fig. 6) depicts two lovers in amorous conversation on a terrace in front of a garden of love. Their animated expressions and gestures are similar to those of the couple seated on the ground at the left of Rubens's picture. Further, the garden pavilion behind them, which is embellished with statuary, a prominent pediment, and columns, recalls similar motifs in Rubens's garden architecture. In addition, both pavilions serve as stage-like backdrops for the lovers in the foreground.

The similarities between Bosse's *Adolescence* (Fig. 7) and the *Conversatie* are even more striking.²³ Bosse's amorous couple led by a Cupid towards a fountain of love is paralleled in the *Conversatie* by the pair at the left, who are gently pushed forward by the putto. Especially notable is the similarity between the left-hand sections of both works: Bosse's pleasance, dotted with feathery foliage and bordered by a stone balustrade, is a likely model for the corresponding section of the *Conversatie*. The meaning of Bosse's two prints, poeticized in the verses beneath them, loosely parallels the amorous sense of Rubens's painting: in *Le Printemps* the loveliness of the gardens is connected with the pleasures of the lovers, and in the *Adolescence*

the youthful ardor of the couple is as vigorous as the springtime.²⁴ The *fêtes* and Gardens of Love approve visibly of the carefree life out-of-doors. So does Rubens, who glorifies upper-bourgeois life more poetically than any other artist of the period.

If the *Conversatie à la Mode* reflects society pictures and prints of the first half of the seventeenth century, its seductive appeal, perfection of handling, and sophisticated iconography raise it far above any other work that may have been its source. Not surprisingly, it engendered a host of Flemish conversation paintings well into the eighteenth century. Only a few need be mentioned here; a study of period inventories would reveal many more.²⁵ Chief among the conversation painters were Christoffe van der Lamén (1606/7-1651/2), an Antwerp follower of Rubens; Simon de Vos (1603-76), who appropriated many of his figures directly from the *Conversatie à la Mode*; and Jerome Janssens, known as *Le Danseur* and an important precursor of Watteau.²⁶

For the social contexts, French courtesy books and tracts illuminate etiquette and manners of the *bonne société* portrayed by Rubens (Fig. 1). It was to France that the fashionable world was turning for rules and models.²⁷ So, *Le Manuel d'amour* of 1614 states that polite conversations are the focus of social life; when companies gather they should first discourse on the subject of love, the agent of harmony and happiness that binds them together.²⁸ *Le Jardin d'amour*, an early seventeenth-century courtesy book which is devoted to the best methods of entertaining the ladies, urges a prospective suitor to seek his mistress in the good society of other women, preferably in appropriate places of recreation.²⁹ And *La Maison des jeux*, a well-known tract by René Bary, suggests that a fashionable company meet in the garden, where foliage, fountains, and parterres stimulate the senses. The ideal social conversation is to blend fantasy and reality. So, for instance, ladies and gallants meet in the garden to play fanciful games; Venus, Cupid, and the Three Graces are

²¹ For a treatment of Vinckboons's *oeuvre* in general, see Legrand, 119-24; and Banks, 169-71.

²² Legrand, 87, 88, 94; several versions of Janssens's *Jeu de la main chaude* (Brussels, Troyes, Paris) were inspired by an engraving of Bosse, and *La Visite à l'accouchée* (Maison Gothique, Wörlitz) also derives from a Bosse print. For Rubens's acquaintance with French engravers and engraving rights, see his letter to Pereisc, December 18, 1634, Magurn, 396.

²³ I thank Walter Liedtke for bringing this idea to my attention.

²⁴ See A. Blum, *L'Oeuvre gravé d'Abraham Bosse*, Paris, 1924, 23, 51, for descriptions of both prints; Blum notes that the version of the *Adolescence* with verses is the second state of the etching, published in 1636. The first state without the poem, undated by Blum, could have been designed or published contemporaneously with the *Conversatie*; if so, then it is possible that Rubens could have seen it. *Le Printemps* is also undated. However, judging by the hairdo and costume of the lady, which are in the style of the first half of the 1630's, this print seems to antedate the *Adolescence*; in that case, it would have been available for Rubens's perusal. The visual affinities between both etchings and the *Conversatie* seem to support this hypothesis.

²⁵ J. Denucé, *Exportation d'oeuvres d'art au 17^e siècle à Anvers: La firme Forchoudt*, Antwerp, 1930, 125, 142, 143, 158, 164.

²⁶ For Flemish genre painting in general and specific discussions of these painters, see Legrand, 57, 58, 61, 62, 84-86, 87-95; and Banks, 210-11.

²⁷ See Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 1601, 1. ii, in which Laertes begs Claudius's permission to return to France; and 1. iii, in which Polonius instructs Laertes to follow those of "the best rank and station" in France's fashionable world, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. B. Evans, Boston, 1974, 1144, 1147; also see G. Squire, *Dress and Society: 1560-1970*, New York, 1974, 78-79, for France as the arbiter of elegant manners in the 1630's. E. Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms*, Berlin, 1980, 209, discusses France as the leader in setting trends in etiquette and fashion in the 17th century.

²⁸ *Le Manuel d'amour*, Paris, 1614; the Preface states: "La fréquentation des bonnes compagnies sert d'une lime pour polir nos imperfections." The author suggests that the group "commencast par l'amour, puis que c'est luy qui est cause de toute concorde et de tout bon-heur. ..."

²⁹ *Le Jardin d'amour, où il est enseigné la méthode et adresse pour bien entretenir une maîtresse*, Toulouse, n.d., 5, 7.

4 Peter Paul Rubens, *Château in a Park*. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (photo: Museum)



5 David Vinckboons, *Company in the Open Air*. Vienna, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste (photo: Gemäldegalerie)



imagined to be present with the company. It is surely just such a fanciful game that is intimated in the *Conversatie*;³⁰ it is hardly an accident that a Venus, Cupids, and the Three Graces are present in the painting as they are in the courtesy book.

³⁰ *La Maison des jeux*, Paris, 1642; in Vol. 1, 180, 186, 188-89, 250, Bary mentions the delights of the garden: "L'on les mena dans le jardin, où l'on pouvait dire que tous les sens auoient dequoy estre satisfaits." Here "l'agréable compagnie" takes its place near the grottoes of a terrace and plays the *Jeu de la chasse de l'amour*, a game to find Cupid, who allegedly flies in the air above them. In Vol. II, 259, the author describes the *Cérémonies de Venus et de Cupidon*, in which the group makes sacrifices to the religion of love; in fact some members impersonate the goddess

The courtesy and emblem books were geared to a society of leisure and fashion akin to that in the *Conversatie*. As is true for the group in *La Maison des jeux*, Rubens's conversation takes place in a pleasure garden. As in the courtesy books, society and garden are lift-

and her son. Mentioned also are props such as turtle doves, music, roses, and a flaming torch. Other diversions include a *Jeu de Graces* (p. 261) and a *Jeu du temple de Venus* (p. 311). In the *Conversatie*, other couples frolic in the garden pavilion, trying to protect themselves from the water jets (see Held, *Rubens: Selected Drawings*, Garden City, 1959, I, 154); such water jets were common features of period gardens; Stefano della Bella portrays one at the Villa Pratolino in an etching of 1640, in which sprays open up on unsuspecting *promeneurs*.



6 Abraham Bosse, *Le Printemps*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)



7 Abraham Bosse, *Adolescence*. Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago (courtesy Art Institute)

ed above reality by the presence of emblematic figures. As in *Le Jardin d'amour* and in *belles lettres* in general, Rubens's gallants meet their ladies in an ideal place of recreation, where lute music and amorous serenades are performed.³¹ One can imagine that the forlorn lutenist in the center of the picture plays a song in honor of *les belles*

dames that surround him, beauties that this Neo-Petrarchan lover can never possess.³² The *Conversatie à la Mode* provides a delightful access to gallant behavior of earlier seventeenth-century society and imaginatively re-creates the social life of the period.

Rubens may have had a special reason to think of the garden as the focal point of the life of society. He retired from political life in the year 1630 at the age of fifty-three, choosing, as he said in a letter to Peiresc, the life of quietude over the life of duty at court.³³ But Rubens in the letter and probably also in the *Conversatie* reflected a widespread bucolic longing for withdrawal from the hustle and bustle of court and city life to the tranquillity of the garden. Both the *Conversatie à la Mode* and the *Château in a Park* illustrate the life Rubens and his fellow retirees preferred, an active social engagement marked by freedom and ease and lacking the formal etiquette of the court. In the ambience of countryside, garden, or park, they sought good companionship and sophisticated conversation, and these *loci amoeni* became the backdrop for social interaction and friendship in the poetry and art of the period that they patronized and, in Rubens's case, painted.³⁴ Rubens's mentor, the philosopher Justus Lipsius, was an eloquent spokesman for the life of rural happiness. A passage in his *De Constantia* seems particularly relevant to the *Conversatie*. "O the true fountaine of joy and sweete delight! O the seate of Venus and the Graces. I wish to rest me and lead my whole life in your bowers."³⁵

Conversations were very often described in tracts on good society as opportunities for being dressed "à la mode qui court." Rubens's picture is in some manner a poetic fashion plate: the ladies who are the principal subjects wear the latest styles of the early 1630's. The beauty entering the garden at the left and the lady seated on the ground next to her wear the ample high-waisted gown or cloak with short sleeves which opens up in the center to reveal a second dress underneath. All the ladies display sumptuous taffetas and satins falling in full, rounded folds — the modish "bunched up" look, accentuating the sensuous female form. Their voluptuousness is daringly emphasized by the fashionable *décolletage*, made even more tempting when subtly veiled by a gauze, lace, or linen collar.³⁶ Rounded forms, which Rubens so lovingly represents, dominated fashion during these years — bared breasts, puffy sleeves adorned with decorative ribbons, and full-bottomed skirts.³⁷ The coiffure of Rubens's models is equally *à la mode*. Some wear their hair bunched out at the temples in two *bouffants*, another feature of the

³¹ Such serenades were performed for promenades at the *Cours-la-Reine*, the walk in Paris named for Marie de'Medici who regularly frequented the site. An amorous serenade appears in Daniel Heinsius's *Emblemata Aliquot Amatoria*, Amsterdam, 1620, 19, which contains an engraving of a garden scene in which a lutenist is singing a song about the lovely ladies of Holland whom Venus has given to grateful gentlemen.

³² See E. Goodman, "Petrarchism in Titian's *The Lady and the Musician*," *Storia dell'arte*, in press, for the stock situation of the Petrarchan lover imploring his lady to give him her love.

³³ Magurn, 391-92.

³⁴ M. Røstvig, *The Happy Man*, Oslo, 1954, 152, 314-15, 346-47. Røstvig's book is the best account of the theme of retirement in 17th-century literature.

³⁵ Justus Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, trans. J. Stradling (1595), ed. R. Kirk, New Brunswick, 1939, 133.

³⁶ Godard de Donville, 230-31, 238-39.

³⁷ Squire, 84.



8 Abraham Bosse, Frontispiece to *Le Jardin de la Noblesse françoise*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)

9 Wenceslaus Hollar, *Summer*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)

rounded silhouette; others sport the fashionable *garcette*, the short forehead bangs; still others fashion their hair in the ever-popular *chignon*. Their gallants are also garbed *à la mode*: they wear the wide-brimmed hat, a manteau partially covering the doublet and slashed sleeve and cascading over one shoulder, and the latest knee breeches.³⁸

Fashion was an important topic of conversation of the society portrayed in the *Conversatie*; it is discussed in courtesy books of the period, such as Charles Sorel's *Les Loix de la galanterie* of 1644. Grenaille in *La Mode* of 1642 states that fashionable costumes aid a person to take a secure place in the best conversations.³⁹ *La mode* is generally described as one of the best agents of love; in the *Cabinet des secrettes ruses d'amour* (ed. 1618) the messenger of love recommends to young women always to dress "à la mode qui court" in order to ensure success in love. In another treatise, Venus herself teaches *coquetterie* and *maquillage* to young women (called "goddesses") and informs them about the seductive powers of fashion.⁴⁰ We may see a similar association of fashion and love in the *Conversatie*.

Fashion plates of the early seventeenth century are close

pictorial analogues of, and possibly sources for, Rubens's figures and setting. Prints by such artists as Abraham Bosse, Wenceslaus Hollar, Jacques Callot, and Dirck Hals were very popular and enjoyed a wide circulation throughout Northern Europe.⁴¹ For example, Bosse's frontispiece to *Le Jardin de la Noblesse françoise* of 1629 (Fig. 8) portrays modish couples promenading in a formal garden adorned by an amatory statue — a motif similar to that of Rubens. Conventional figure types and poses in *Le Jardin* remind one of those in the *Conversatie*, such as the woman carrying a fan at the right who parallels the beautiful lady stepping down from the Fountain of Venus with her gallant. This female type also reappears in Wenceslaus Hollar's *Summer* of 1644 (Fig. 9). Here the lady's striding pose, profile face, and placement within the context of a garden parallel some of the poses in the *Conversatie*. The verses beneath Hollar's etching salute the beauty of the lady and her summer fashions. Doubtless, Rubens became aware of such plates designed by Hollar when the latter was in the service of the Earl of Arundel in the 1630's.⁴²

Like the ladies in fashion plates, Rubens's beauties are the literal and figurative center of his *Conversatie van*

³⁸ Godard de Donville, 223, 238, 242-43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 90, 198.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82, 124; Godard de Donville quotes from the courtesy book *Les Jeux de l'inconnu*, 1644, in which the author attributes to Venus and

Cupid all innovations in fashion.

⁴¹ Banks, 173.

⁴² K. Van Eerde, *Wenceslaus Hollar, Delineator of His Time*, Charlottesville, 1970, 9.

Joffrs, the *Conversation of Young Ladies*. Rubens pays homage to the beauty, grace, and wit of women as no other artist of the period does; they are the center of attention — promenaded, escorted, wooed, and serenaded as they are by their gentlemen. We know from social history that they presided over social conversations in pleasure gardens as well as in their salons, to take the *Précieuses* in Paris as an example.⁴³ They highlighted the promenade, an important ritual in upper-class society, and they set the taste in fashion. This new prestige of women is indicated in *Le Panégyrique des dames* by Gabriel Gilbert (Paris, 1650): women are more perfect than men because of their beauty, grace, and delicacy; their physical beauty is the outer manifestation of their inner perfection.⁴⁴ In *Le Mérite des dames* they are praised as agents of *politesse*, love, and gallantry, and even as accomplished artists.⁴⁵

Rubens's ladies re-create the general exemplar of womanhood known to their admirers at the period. For the author of *Le Mérite des dames* an ideal woman has a "majestical carriage, good proportions, abundant ... hair, frizzed and curled, ..., coral lips, rosy cheeks, a fat and stoutish throat, [and] high bosom."⁴⁶ As William Sanderson addressed the perfect woman in the 1658 edition of *Graphice*, "you have an unaffected freedom, *La Mode*, or *Bon Mene* of fashion, ... a goodly Plump, Fat, well Favoured, well formed Figure."⁴⁷

Rubens's beauties themselves were the subject of a Flemish poem written by J. de Heem, a composer of sonnets and libretti in the seventeenth century. Inspired by a 1665 copper engraving by Peter Clouwet (1629-1670) entitled *Venus Lusthoff*, after the *Conversatie*, he wrote verses describing an assembly dominated by coquettes who inspire the love and devotion of their suitors (Fig. 10). The verses consist of six strophes of four lines each and describe the activities beginning from right to left:

Look how Clootis pretends that she does not want to
come to the dance,
and how Amant gets hold of her and keeps pushing
her on;
in reality she would like to be there before him,
but it seems she has to be coy about it,
the better it appears, the safer the deed.

But Phillis in her case, she listens to the plaints
and is amazed at what Damon is saying
and what he attempts by day, she wishes for whole

nights;
why then so much sighing and anxious waiting.

The blonde Amaril, she gazes starry-eyed,
and doubts that her lover will come,
for the hour is long past, her whole being is tottering,
if only the sun would return even once, then a new day
would dawn.

And Tirce perks up as soon as she hears her Air sung
or when the lutenist plucks the chord.
When Florisel used to mention her name in his song,
that is what has moved her heart, and soul and
everything.

But Gallathe lies wantonly on the ground
and the cause of her pain lies in the middle of her lap;
she pulls her playmate, come, she says, my dear Van
Weerde;
Hero, let's sport awhile; Leander is dead.

But look how Rosemont with quick and bouncy steps
and Clooris at her side, descends from the Fountain of
Venus
and look how he takes enormous steps
for now he has her yes, although he paid dearly for it.⁴⁸

The second state of Clouwet's engraving, entitled *Le Jardin de Venus* (1665), was inscribed with French verses, which keep the general sense of the Flemish poem but slightly change the names in De Heem's lyrics and the meaning (Fig. 11). Cloris, rather than Clotis, is now urged by Amant to enter the garden of Venus; while Philis at the center (De Heem's Tirce) feels the effects of the lutenist's music and succumbs to an amorous ecstasy. Galathe and Flora (De Heem's Gallathe and Hero) now are scheming to win an amatory victory, not yet sharing the glory of love that Venus has promised them.⁴⁹

These poems are the most enlightening documents for the iconography of the *Conversatie à la Mode*. They indicate that in the eyes of Rubens's near-contemporaries, the prints, and therefore surely the painting itself, were viewed as secular, lighthearted works, not as abstruse allegories. De Heem's ladies, rather than personifying levels of Neoplatonic love, the Graces, or Senses, are worldly coquettes concerned with their love life. Tirce, who lifts her head towards the sky, is not a personification of spiritual love but is passionately responding to a song that her long-lost lover used to sing; neither is Rosement,

⁴³ The catalogue *Au Temps des Précieuses: Les salons littéraires au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1968, is a comprehensive account of the widespread influence of *Préciosité* on 17th-century art, literature, and music. Also see A. Blunt, "The *Précieux* and French Art," *Fritz Saxl: 1890-1948, A Volume of Memorial Essays from His Friends in England*, ed. D. J. Gordon, London, 1957, 326-38.

⁴⁴ Magendie, II, 708; also see E. Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, *Petrarchismo*, and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin*, LVIII, 1976, 392-93, for the ideal woman in Italian Renaissance art, whose inner grace is reflected by her external beauty.

⁴⁵ Magendie, II, 714; Saint Gabriel, *Le Mérite des dames*, Paris, 1655, 122f.

⁴⁶ *Le Mérite des dames*, 19-23.

⁴⁷ William Sanderson, *Graphice*, London, 1658, 23, 37-39.

⁴⁸ Glang-Süberkrüb, 95-96, discusses De Heem as a composer of occasional sonnets, libretti, and rhymes and apparently equates him with the Antwerp still-life painter. In the scholarly literature on the De Heem family, there is no mention of any one of them as a poet or a composer.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 94; E. Dutuit, *Manuel de l'amateur d'estampes*, VI, Paris, 1885, 165.

who has given her "yes" to her swain Clooris for a dear sum, the embodiment of the ideal married woman, as Süßerkrüb claims.

It is in love poems in general that the iconographic details of the painting are most closely paralleled; they are the best guides to its meaning. Erotic emblems, metaphors, and conceits were used in the gallant lyrics of the seventeenth century in a manner quite analogous to the pictorial details of the *Conversatie à la Mode*. We are dealing with international conventions here, and therefore French *Précieux* and *Libertin* lyrics, English Cavalier poetry, and Flemish and Dutch madrigals and poems will serve almost equally well for illustrations.⁵⁰ Most of these examples date from Rubens's lifetime and at least two were written in 1634, contemporaneously with the *Conversatie*. Common to them was the praise of beautiful women, the entry of a coy mistress into a garden of love, the courtship that transpires in this pleasance, and the stereotyped names of the paragons of beauty — Tirce, Philis, Cloris, and Amaril. Rubens must have known many such lyrics from his associations with the French court, his close contact with the circle of Charles I, and his acquaintance and dealings with the Flemish publishers of literature, Plantin and Phalesius.⁵¹

Poetic parallels to Rubens's amatory emblems and images can easily be gleaned from these lyrics. The doves and cupids flying above the amorous couple entering the garden at the left find their poetical counterparts in Ben Jonson's (1572?-1637) "turtles," fitting emblems for his couple under the spell of love.⁵² The amorino flying downward towards the ladies at the center of the *Conversatie* holds a torch and a flowered garland, respectively a symbol of the fire of passion and a tribute of courtship. Likewise in *La Guirlande de Julie*, the famous collection of madrigals of ca. 1633-34 and therefore contemporaneous with the *Conversatie*, "le flambeau de l'amour" and "la couronne impériale ... des fleurs" are major emblems of love and praise: Cupid carries the torch of love to pay homage to his "auguste Julie" and will place a crown of flowers upon her head to salute her glory and beauty.⁵³ The *Conversatie* heightens the compliment: it salutes the beautiful women who occupy the garden of love with roses carried by the cupid at the upper right who flies downward towards the ladies below and relates their radiance to the flowers climbing up the frontal column of



10 Peter Clouwet, *Venus Lusthoff*. Antwerp, Stedelijk Prentenkabinet (photo: Prentenkabinet)



11 Peter Clouwet, *Le Jardin de Venus*. Antwerp, Stedelijk Prentenkabinet (photo: Prentenkabinet)

the garden pavilion. In a similar tenor, contemporaneous composers and poets celebrate the beauty of their ladies, as does the Fleming Andries Pevernage (1543-1591), who dedicated his song, published in Antwerp in 1607, to "l'Honneur des belles dames."⁵⁴ The French poet Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-1655) pays homage to his lady with

⁵⁰ For an introduction to French love and *Précieux* lyrics, see O. de Mourgues, *An Anthology of French Seventeenth-Century Lyric Poetry*, Oxford, 1966, 17-20, and H. Lefay, *La Poésie française du premier XVII^e siècle, 1598-1630*, Paris, 1975. For the Cavalier School, see E. Miner, *The Cavalier Mode from Jonson to Cotton*, Princeton, 1971, and H. M. Richmond, *The School of Love: Evolution of the Stuart Love Lyric*, Princeton, 1964.

⁵¹ J. Held, D. Posner, *17th and 18th Century Art*, Englewood Cliffs, 1972, 197, 204-5, 207. For Rubens's dealings with the Plantin Press, see J. R. Judson, C. van de Velde, *Book Illustrations and Title Pages, 1, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, Pt. XXI, Brussels, 1977, 25-40; and *Rubens and the Book: Title Pages by Peter Paul Rubens*, ed. J. Held, Williamstown, 1977, 180-84. Peter Phalesius of Antwerp, Brussels, and Louvain, was the most famous publisher of gallant madrigals and songs.

Also see *Paradisus Musicus: Muziek en Samenleving in Rubens' Tijd*, Antwerp, 1977.

⁵² *The Masque of Hymen* of 1606 in Ben Jonson, ed. C. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, VII, Oxford, 1941, 225.

⁵³ The madrigals were dedicated to Julie d'Angennes, the daughter of the Marquise de Rambouillet; see *Lettres de Monsieur de Voiture, lettres aux Rambouillet, lettres amoureuses, suivies de la Guirlande de Julie*, ed. M. Genevoix, Paris, 1969, 258-59. A 17th-century painting on vellum formerly in the collection of Edmund de Rothschild depicts Julie and her mother holding the flowered garland, given to them by a Cupid hovering in the air over their heads (see the illustration between pages 20 and 21). The composition bears a striking resemblance to the central portion of the *Conversatie*; also see Blunt, 337, for a brief analysis of the painting.

⁵⁴ A. Pevernage, *Chansons à six, sept, et huit parties*, Antwerp, 1607, 3.



12 "La Belle Charite," from *The Extravagant Shepherd*, London, 1654, Princeton University Library (photo: Library)

floral metaphors: her face, formed by Cupid's hands, is an enclosure for spring flowers.⁵⁵ Similarly, Edmund Waller (1606-1687), the Cavalier poet, "resembles" his mistress to "a lovely rose."⁵⁶ Charles Sorel, in the romance *Le Berger extravagant* (first ed., 1627), even went so far as to have roses and lilies growing on the fair cheeks of his "belle Charite," whose forehead is crowned by a Cupid (Fig. 12). Literary metaphors become here a literal reality.⁵⁷

Rubens's fountain statues, particularly the Three Graces in the pavilion behind the ladies, are emblems of the grace and beauty of their mortal counterparts. The ladies in the foreground, fleshy and rose-tinted, are

⁵⁵ *Sonnet à Mlle. d'Arpajon* in *Anthologie des poètes français: XVII^e siècle*, ed. F. Duviard, Paris, 1947, 179-80. Also see Thomas Champion's *There is a Garden in Her Face*, a song published in 1617.

⁵⁶ *Go Lovely Rose* in *Seventeenth-Century Verse and Prose*, ed. H. White et al., New York, 1951, 1, 352. Pevernage (p. 26) in a song calls his love "my sweet new flower," and "my sweet spring."

⁵⁷ The print from the 1654 English translation is a burlesque of extravagant Petrarchan conventions of beauty: Charite's hair is golden wire, her breasts twin hemispheres, her lips coral, her teeth pearls, her eyes suns, and her eyebrows bows; see J. H. Whitfield, "La Belle Charite," *Italian Studies*, xviii, 1963, 32-53; and L. Forster, *The Icy Fire*, Cambridge, England, 1969, xi, xii.

⁵⁸ *Chanson 68* in *Le Doux Entretien des bonnes compagnies*, Paris, 1634, 115.

animated effigies of the grisaille, stony statues behind them; their beauty rivals that of the goddesses. The Venus statue emblematically presides over and protects the ladies under her aegis at whom she gazes; they are her living incarnations, and they serve at her court. Baroque poets and composers similarly intermingled goddesses and mortals to emphasize the everlasting radiance of their lady-loves. As the composer of the 1634 collection *Le Doux Entretien des bonnes compagnies* put it, the Three Graces know how a beloved ignites the hearts of the gallants.⁵⁸ Vincent Voiture (1598-1648), the leader of the *Précieux* poets and regular visitor at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, asserted hyperbolically that his Phillis's beauty outshines Venus's, her patroness. And emblem books of the period often call the beloved a Venus.⁵⁹

The ladies in the center of the *Conversatie* are not accompanied by attentive suitors, as are many of their artistic counterparts. Rubens appears to have created them intentionally as unattached, in conformity with the poetic convention (as well as the reality) of young ladies without lovers. Robert Herrick (1591-1674) consoled lonely maidens that their day for "going a-maying" would come soon, and in 1634 a French composer dedicated a song to "Mes jeunes dames, / Qui vivez sans amant."⁶⁰ Notably, De Heem saw Rubens's unaccompanied ladies as the blond Amaril, who doubts that her lover will come; as Tirce, whose heart is nostalgically moved by the song that her swain used to sing; and as Gallathe, whose playmate is a putto rather than a gallant.

Rubens's ladies cannot be dissociated from the garden which their ample, voluptuous forms populate; his garden, like that of contemporaneous love poems, is a metaphor for female beauty. So the Dutch poet Jacob Westerbaen (1599-1670) in *Denkct niet dat lieven geur* likens the charms of his ladies to horticultural delights: "Maidens are like garden bowers / Fill'd with flowers, / Which are springtime's choicest treasure."⁶¹ And Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) in *Upon Appleton House* credits his Mary with the splendor of the formal garden she graces: "'Tis She that to these Gardens gave / That wondrous Beauty which they have; / She streightness on the Woods bestows; / To Her the Meadow sweetness owes."⁶²

Similar verses accompany period prints that relate the beauty of the lady to the garden around her. Jacques Callot's *Parterre de Nancy* (Fig. 13), an etching of 1625

⁵⁹ *Rondeaux XXXIII (Tout son corps)* in Duviard, 1947, 124; the beloved is often called Venus in period emblem books, such as *Euterpae suboles* by Peter Rollos; see E. L. Goodman, "The Sources of Pieter de Hooch's *The Game of Skittles*," *Studies in Iconography*, v, 1979, 153, 156.

⁶⁰ *Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. J. M. Patrick, Garden City, 1963, 79. See also *Entre vous, mes jeunes dames*, *Chanson 91*, *Le Doux Entretien*, 145.

⁶¹ J. Bowring, *Batavian Anthology or Specimens of the Dutch Poets*, London, 1824, 198-99.

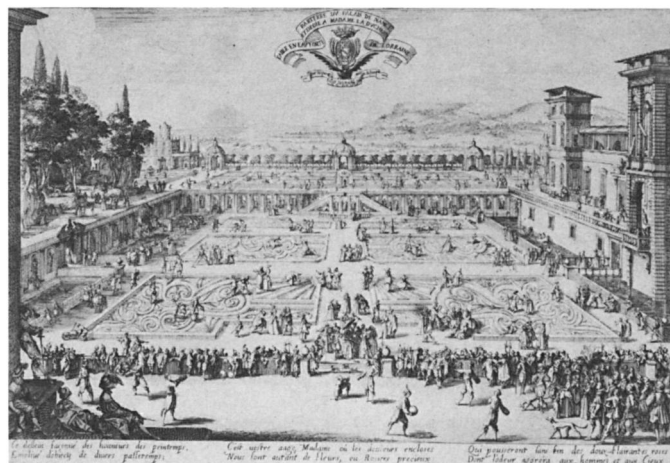
⁶² White et al., 468; another significant *topos* in 17th-century poetry is the mistress who commands the respect of nature around her. "Promenade poems" by Ronsard, Lovelace, Cleveland, and Waller depict the lady walking through the garden, while flowers, rocks, and trees admire her charms. See Richmond, 155, 162-66.

dedicated to the Duchess of Lorraine, portrays the noblewoman promenading in her garden, surrounded by courtiers, and protected by an umbrella which encircles her head like a halo or sun. Callot's dedicatory poem compares her youth with the beginning of spring and her beauty with that of the flowers in the garden.⁶³ Like the ladies of Callot, Westerbaen, and Marvell, the women of the *Conversatie* possess all the attractions of the garden and become metaphors for its radiance and life-giving powers. Rubens himself used this metaphor in a letter he wrote to Lucas Fayd'herbe on May 9, 1640: "I have heard with great pleasure that you planted the May in your beloved's garden; I hope that it will flourish and bring forth fruit in due season."⁶⁴

Perhaps the most significant convention on which Rubens drew for the *Conversatie à la Mode* was the garden as a setting for courtship and amorous dalliance. Of course this motif in some manner can be traced to pictorial love gardens of the later Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, where it occurs in Books of Hours and cassone panels.⁶⁵ Yet it was also a popular Baroque convention. Everywhere, in the society pictures of Rubens's contemporaries and in literature, the garden was a backdrop or a stage setting for the activities of the society that inhabited it — "un coin de nature" the French called it — to which they withdrew for intimate conversation and dalliance.⁶⁶

Rubens in particular must have been familiar with the motif known as the "amorous grove," in which poets describe gallants and their mistresses making love in gardens and parks far away from the restrictive life of the court. For example, the Libertin poets, active in France in the first half of the seventeenth century, had their couples dally in a paradisiacal enclosure, and this convention (and probably the practice) was adopted in England and Northern Europe.⁶⁷ For Rubens and poets such as Théophile de Viau, Thomas Carew, and Robert Herrick, nature was a backdrop for the gentleman's endeavor to win his lady's favor.

For example, Théophile de Viau (1590-1626), the Libertin whom Rubens much admired, urges his Philis in *Le Matin*: "allons a nostre jardinage" — a horticultural metaphor for making love.⁶⁸ An English court poem of ca. 1625 unabashedly paid tribute to the erotic life the protagonist had enjoyed in gardens and groves: "See that



13 Jacques Callot, *Le Parterre de Nancy*. Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago (courtesy Art Institute)

garden, where oft I had reward in ... / Hail to those groves, where we enjoyed our loves."⁶⁹ Robert Herrick invited the lady to "enter Cupids field ... / and let all the Balmy meades / Smell, where your soft foote treads." He also bid his Corinna to "come, and coming, marke / How each field turns a street; each street a Parke / Made green."⁷⁰ This poetic invitation is paralleled pictorially at the left of the *Conversatie* in Rubens's courtier, "Amant," inviting his Cloris to enter the garden of love.

Altogether, the mood, the contexts, and the iconographic details of the *Conversatie* make it something quite different from the esoteric statement with moral and spiritual overtones it has been claimed to be. They also make it something much more important than a distinguished link in the chain of Love Gardens from the Middle Ages to the Rococo and a transmitter of the iconography of this tradition. They add a great deal to our knowledge of the personal tastes of Rubens and show him steeped in the literature and culture of his own time. He is sometimes thought of as a rather august figure; but he was a paradoxical man with paradoxical inclinations. When he fashioned religious and profane pictures in the Grand Manner, he could also paint earthy, naturalistic landscapes. At the same time he painted peasant Kermesses, he could also portray, as he did in the *Conversatie*, the fashionable life of the upper classes among whom he was at home. He had, after all, been knighted by Charles I,

⁶³ For an English translation, see H. D. Russell, *Jacques Callot, Prints and Drawings*, Washington, 1975, 28.

⁶⁴ Magurn, 415.

⁶⁵ See P. F. Watson, *The Garden of Love in Tuscan Art of the Early Renaissance*, Philadelphia, 1979, for the theme in cassone painting.

⁶⁶ E. Magne, *Les Fêtes en Europe au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1930, 235-36; G. Morley, *Le Sentiment de la nature en France dans la première moitié du dix-septième siècle*, 1926, repr. New York, 1972, 138-39.

⁶⁷ F. Kermode, "The Argument of Marvell's Garden," *Essays in Criticism*, II, 1952, 231.

⁶⁸ *Le Matin in Baroques et classiques: Anthologie des lyriques français de 1550 à 1650*, ed. A. Blanchard, Lyon, 1947, 69. For Rubens's interest in

Théophile de Viau, see the artist's letters to Valavez, December 12, 1624, and Jacques Dupuy, October 15, 1626, in Magurn, 98, 147, 453-54.

⁶⁹ *A Well-Wishing to a Place of Pleasure* in N. Ault, *A Treasury of Unfamiliar Lyrics*, London, 1938, 154-55.

⁷⁰ Patrick, 82-83, 99. The garden motif also appears in the theater of the period, such as *La Comédie des Tuileries* of 1638, in which it is a backdrop for the activities of good society intermingled with allegorical personages. It is also a feature of Caroline dramas with amorous themes, such as James Shirley's *Hyde Park*, played in 1632, and Richard Brome's *Sparagus Garden*, acted in 1635, a spoof of the fashionable pastimes of courtiers and their ladies on an amorous promenade. See T. Miles, "Place-Realism in a Group of Caroline Plays," *Review of English Studies*, XVIII, 1942, 428-40.

who surrounded himself with Cavalier poets. How could he have missed courtly culture and gallantry, and with them the poetry of dalliance and love? The *Conversatie* shows that he did not. It is not to the Classics, nor to philosophy, nor to allegory that we must turn as the sources for the *Conversatie*, but to *la belle galanterie* and *la mode qui court*.

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Rembrandt's Early Double Portraits and the Dutch Conversation Piece

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This essay deals with some problems of vocabulary and meaning in a small but significant group of Rembrandt's works, his double portraits of the 1630's. These portraits, more obviously than most of his portraits, have a frame of reference that extends beyond the individual as such. Not only are two figures compositionally and perhaps psychologically a more difficult subject than one; implicit in the problem of number is also the larger issue of the imagery of social form. For these are marriage portraits, and, as such, they are tied to a social institution that in the seventeenth century was well defined as to the roles and relationships of its members within the family and society at large.

Marriage and domestic life had become an increasingly important focus of European sociability during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nowhere more strikingly than among the middle-class Dutch. As Philippe Ariès has observed, one of the chief consequences of this development was a gradual turning away from the fundamentally public social ideals of the court and the guild. In their place arose a more private, domestic social ideal that was to find its fulfillment in the eighteenth century.¹ The rising interest in marriage portraiture, which itself led to the

eighteenth-century flowering of the conversation piece, is a significant reflection of these social developments. Only gradually, however, did the conventions of the genre take shape. Like other artists of his time, Rembrandt was faced with the problem of finding forms that would suit increasingly complex understandings of the marital relationship. His early double portraits reveal both the character of the problem and the richness of the theme.

Three substantially independent studies follow, each devoted to one of the three works in question. This admittedly loose approach acknowledges the all-too-obvious differences between these portraits, and some of the less obvious ones as well. Not only do they differ in composition, format, and medium, but each also draws on different sources and different ideas about marital relationship. Nevertheless, the threads that bind them together should also become clear as the discussion develops. The connections are particularly evident in the case of Rembrandt's first two double portraits, the *Portrait of a Couple* in Boston (Fig. 1) and *The Shipbuilder and His Wife* in London (Fig. 19). Their settings are similar; and though there is probably little doubt that the London picture is the later and the more advanced of the two, it is

A version of the second section of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in San Francisco in 1981. The paper as a whole represents an amplified, revised, and, I hope, improved version of a chapter of my doctoral dissertation, "The Dutch Double and Pair Portrait: Studies in the Imagery of Marriage in the Seventeenth Century" (Columbia University, 1978). For his guidance of that dissertation and for the advice, criticism, and encouragement with which he has continued to support my work, I would like to express my profound gratitude to John Walsh. Others who read earlier drafts of this paper and

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¹ Ariès, 365-404.