

Giambologna and the Sculpture with  
No Name

**Michael Cole**

# Giambologna and the Sculpture with No Name

Michael Cole

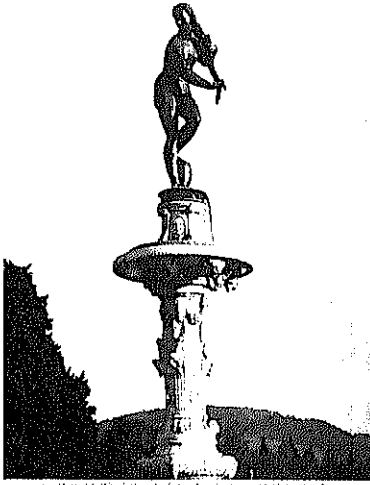


Fig. 1. Giambologna, *Florence/Venus*, ca. 1571–2, bronze, 125 cm. Villa La Petraia, Florence. (Photo: Allnari/Art Resource, NY.)

Much of the present essay was written while I was a postdoctoral fellow at the American Academy in Rome in 2001–2002; I am indebted both to the Academy and to the Getty Grant Program for the year of support. The version printed here would not have taken the form it did had it not been for Patricia Rubin's invitation to speak on the topic at the Courtauld Institute in the spring of 2002, as part of her project on the naming (and namelessness) of Renaissance artworks. I owe thanks to her both for the opportunity and for reading two later drafts of the essay, and to the members of that audience, especially Caroline Elam, for their helpful remarks. Evelyn Lincoln kindly invited me to present a revised version of the paper at Brown University in March 2004. A series of conversations with Michael Putnam were important for my understanding of Bernini and Virgil.

1. See, for example, the catalogue to the 1978 exhibit, *Giambologna, Sculptor to the Medici* (Arts Council of Great Britain: London, 1978), still a standard reference on the artist: the figure in cat. no. 5, called 'Woman bathing', is renamed 'Venus' in cat. no. 9, once a Cupid is added to the composition; the 'Mars' in cat. numbers 42–48 is renamed 'Executioner' when a head is placed in its right hand; the dwarf in cat. no. 54, identified as 'Luxuria', is included 'to complete the iconography of Morgante'; and the figure in cat. no. 12 is identified as 'Astronomy or Venus Urania'.

2. On the 'Florence', see especially the entry in *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2002), pp. 211–12. For the different names given to the 'Appennine' in

Given the ubiquitous insistence on narrative clarity in the art writing of the last third of the Cinquecento, it is remarkable how removed the statues of the period's premier sculptor can seem from the dictates of story-telling. Modern catalogues of Giambologna's smaller bronzes include numerous figures so generic that, in the absence of a telling attribute, it is often not possible to say just what the figure represents.<sup>1</sup> With major monuments like the so-called *Florence* (Fig. 1) and *Appennine* (Fig. 10) Giambologna made for Medici villas, historical evidence supports competing hypotheses as to what personification is actually shown.<sup>2</sup> The *Samson and a Philistine*, once it had made its way from Italy to England, came to be known as *Cain and Abel*, and was called by that name through most of the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> The *Bacchus*, originally made for a Florentine named Lattanzio Cortesi, was nearly sent, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, to San Gimignano, where it was to have served as a *John the Baptist*.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the monumental *Hercules and the Centaur*, early writers allegedly found the specific scene to be so incoherent that they doubted the artist had concerned himself with it.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, not all of these confusions of identity relate to the sculptor's intentions. Especially with objects like the *Samson* and the *Bacchus*, it was an unanticipated resituating of the work that led to the near or temporary transformation of its apparent subject. What is striking, nevertheless, is the frequency with which this seems to have happened to Giambologna's statues, large and small, a frequency that must make us ask whether something about the sculptor's approach to figural composition invited such a fate. Giambologna was repeatedly drawn to pared-down inventions that could be inserted into various contexts with little modification: his *Mercury*, placed on top of a column in Bologna, seemed to descend into the city; placed, in contrast, on top of a fountain in Rome, it seemed to be rising up, exhaled with the breath figured below.<sup>6</sup> Writing to Ottavio Farnese, the Duke of Parma, in 1579, the sculptor referred to a statuette he called simply 'la Femina' ('the woman') and went on to describe a new two-figure group 'that can be taken [to show] the abduction of Helen and perhaps of Proserpina—or as one of the Sabines'. That subject, he added, was 'chosen to provide space for showing knowledge and the study of art'.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the best known indication of Giambologna's awareness that the identities of his characters could readily be transformed is the story his earliest biographers tell about the colossal marble *Sabine* (Fig. 2) that was placed in the Loggia at the edge of Florence's central square, a few steps from the building that had become the ducal palace. Here is the way that Raffaello Borghini presents the circumstances behind this in his 1584 dialogue on the arts, *Il Riposo*:

[...] goaded by the spur of virtue, [Giambologna] set out to show the world that he knew how to make not only ordinary marble statues, but also many together, and the most difficult that could be done, and that he knew where all the of art of making nudes lay (showing defeated senescence, robust youth, and feminine refinement). Thus he depicted, only to show the excellence of art, and without intending any *historia*, a fierce youth abducting a most beautiful maiden from a weak old man; and this marvelous work, having been brought almost to completion, was seen by his Highness Grand Duke Francesco Medici, who, admiring its

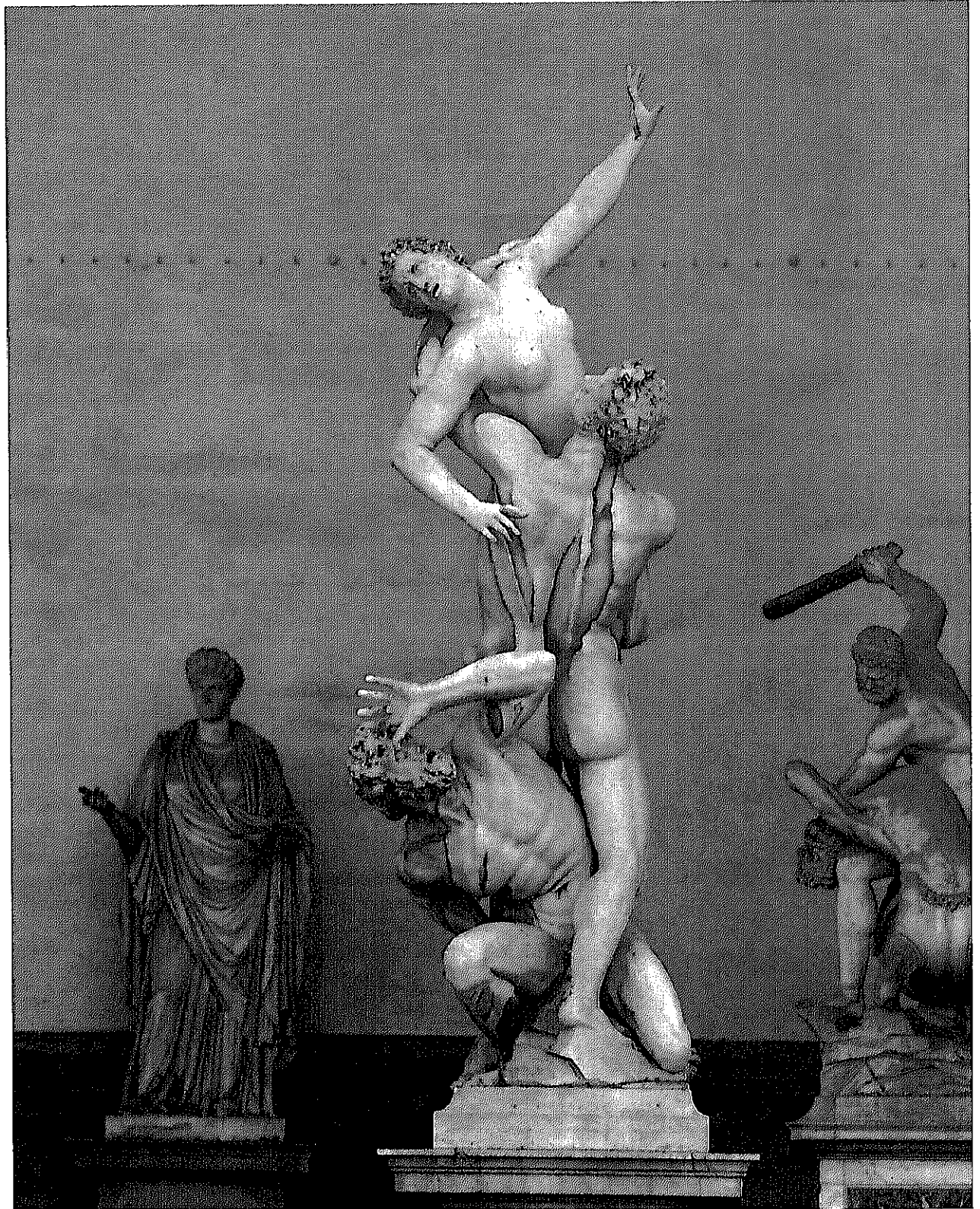


Fig. 2. Giambologna, *Abduction of a Sabine*, 1581–82, marble, 410 cm. Loggia de' Lanzi, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.)

beauty, decided that it should be placed where we now see it. And since figures aren't brought out in public without a name, [Francesco] asked Giambologna to come up with some speakable invention for his work.<sup>8</sup>

Giambologna's lifetime, see Herbert Keutner, 'Giambologna a Pratolino', in Alessandro Vezzosi (ed.), *Il Giardino d'Europa: Pratolino come modello nella cultura europea* (Mazzotta: Milan, 1986), pp. 55–60. The issue became still more confused after Giambologna's death.

3. For the renaming of the statue, see John Pope-Hennessy, *Samson and a Philistine, by Giovanni Bologna* (H. M. Stationery Off.: London, 1954), pp. 13–16.

4. *Magnificenza alla corte dei Medici: Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Cristina Acidini Luchinat et al. (Electa: Milan, 1997), p. 48 and, most recently, Dedeef Heikamp's entry in *Giambologna: gli dei, gli eroi* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Dimitrios Zikos (Giunti: Florence, 2006), pp. 155–7.

5. See Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua* (Eurografica: Florence, 1974–75), vol. 2, pp. 573–4.

6. For the *Mercury*, see Michael Cole, 'The Medici Mercury and the Breath of Bronze', in Peta Motture (ed.), *Studies in the History of Art: Large Bronzes of the Renaissance* (National Gallery of Art: Washington, DC, 2003), pp. 128–53.

7. Elisabeth Dhanens, *Jean Boulogne, Giovanni Bologna Fiammingo, Douai 1529–Florence 1608: Bijdrage tot de Studie van de Kunstbetrekkingen Tussen het Graafschap Vlaanderen en Italië* (Paleis der Academiën: Brussels, 1956), pp. 343–4: 'che possono inferire il rapto d'Elena et forse di Prosperina [sic] o, d'una delle Sabine: eletto per dar campo alla sagesza et studio dell'arte'.

8. Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo* (G. Olms: Hildesheim, 1969), p. 72: 'punto dallo sprone della virtù, si dispose di mostrare al mondo, che egli non solo sapea fare le statue di marmo ordinarie, ma etiandio molte insieme, e le piu difficili, che far si potessero, e doue tutta l'arte in far figure ignude (dimostrando la manchevole vecchiezza, la robusta gioventù, e la delicatezza feminte) si conoscesse; e così finse, solo per mostrar l'eccellenza dell'arte, e senza proporsi alcuna historia, vn giouane fiero, che bellissima fanciulla à debil vecchie rapisse, & hauendo condotta quasi à fine questa opera marauigliosa, fù veduta dal Serenissimo Francesco Medici Gran Duca nostro, & ammirata la sua bellezza, deliberò che in questo luogo, doue hor si vede, si collocasse. Laonde perche le figure non vsisser fuore senza alcun nome, procaccio Giambologna d'hauer qualche inuentione all'opera sua diceuole, e gli fù detto, non so da cui, che sarebbe tanto ben fatto, per seguitar l'historia del Perseo di Benuenuto, che egli hauesse finto per la fanciulla rapita Andromeda moglie di Perseo, per lo rapitore Fineo zio di lei, e per lo vecchio Cefeo padre d'Andromeda.' Recent

This report remains the best contemporary evidence relating to the origins of Giambologna's sculpture. There is no record of a commission, and though scholars have commented on the sophisticated way in which the sculpture seems to interact with the other works already standing in the Piazza, no known documentation indicates that Duke Francesco (reg. 1564–87) intended the work to go in this location before seeing the marble in nearly finished form in the sculptor's shop.

Borghini goes on to relate that Giambologna, instructed to find a title for his statue, passed this task on to the writers he knew. It was Borghini himself, to follow the *Riposo*, who proposed that the statue be called *La rapina delle Sabine* (lit., 'The Plunder of the Sabine Maidens'), and scholars have tended to regard Giambologna's eventual addition of a relief showing the Abduction of the Sabines to the base of the marble as a conclusion to the discussion (Fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> This 'completion' of the work did not really end the story, however. For one thing, the relief itself is but another image; the scene it shows conforms with what one would expect in a depiction of the Sabines, but nothing there really clarifies the identities of the characters above. Moreover, Borghini's text raises its own doubts. Not only does it insist that a sculptor working for Francesco could conceive a monumental statue as a work unfixed in meaning, even as that work approached completion, but it also loosens the 'fit' of its author's own explanation. In the dialogue, Borghini presents his 'Sabines' suggestion as the rival to an alternative offered by an unnamed interlocutor—that the statue represented Phineus abducting Perseus's beloved Andromeda from her father Cepheus. The author then gives a series of reasons why his idea



Fig. 3. Giambologna, relief from the pedestal of the *Sabine*, 1582–84, bronze, 74 × 89 cm. (Photo: author.)

was a better one, the first of which is that such a scene, had Giambologna depicted it, would be inconsistent with the story of Perseus that everyone knew.<sup>10</sup> Yet, it is not exactly clear how much closer the 'Sabines' proposal comes to that story's textual basis, for Borghini himself resists putting exact names to Giambologna's characters:

Giambologna thus depicted the aforementioned Sabine maiden as the young woman who is being lifted up; her abductor represents Talassius. Even if he did not himself take her in public, his men took her for him, and he took her in private, stealing her virginity. And the old man below represents her father, since the story, as I have said, tells that the Romans robbed the Sabines from the arms of their fathers.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of the discussion, Borghini has raised more questions than he has settled: whether the male protagonist represents Talassius or one of his men, whether the father below represents a specific character or simply stands in for the collective fathers from whom Sabine women were abducted. To maintain that the statue draws on the Sabine story, Borghini has to concede that the event it shows is no more connected to a single, well-defined episode than the alternative suggestion he dismisses.

Historians of early modern art conventionally distinguish a work's 'program', the iconographical scheme that is central to its invention, from that work's 'reception', the unanticipated meanings that viewers subsequently bring to it. Scholars also tend to take it for granted that the public monuments commissioned by autocrats were essentially propagandistic in meaning: promotions of the ruler that carry an unambiguous message to a public, quashing rather than inviting discussion and dissent. Thus, in the case of the *Sabine*, some of the best recent scholarship has focused on the ways in which the statue 'thematizes the grand duke's dominion over his subjects and rivals' and on its possible connection to the 1579 marriage of Duke Francesco and Giovanna of Austria.<sup>12</sup> It is no small part of the interest of Giambologna's *Sabine*, then, that it also works against anything this tidy. Borghini maintains that the Duke left it to the artist to come up with an 'invention' for the work, then implies that the artist passed this task along to others, who pursued it competitively and inconclusively. Patron and artist alike seem to have seen an interest in deferring invention, as if the work was conceived from the outset to be a subject of unending interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

### Namelessness and Knowledge

Giambologna himself, as we have seen, associated the subjectless work with *saggezza* (knowledge) and *studio* (study); Borghini connected it with *arte* (art). This suggests that in making the *Sabine*, Giambologna meant to illustrate his understanding of sculpture, an understanding based on engagement with earlier, authoritative examples. Scholars have demonstrated how the marble *Sabine* in particular takes up challenges from recent art, including those of showing one figure lifting another, of generating multiple figures from a single block of stone and of devising a composition that would have multiple beautiful aspects.<sup>14</sup> Less well appreciated is the fact that many of the sculptures Giambologna would have been expected to study bore only tenuous connections to the names they went by.

Antiquities, of course, usually came out of the earth with no names attached. When they did have attributes, experts could attempt to link the

studies that comment both on the statue and on Borghini's text include Margaret D. Carroll's now classic 'The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence', *Representations*, vol. 25, Winter 1989, pp. 3–30; Yael Even, 'The Loggia dei Lanzi: A Showcase of Female Subjugation', in Norma Brode and Mary D. Garrard (eds), *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (IconEditions: New York, 1992), pp. 126–37; Geraldine A. Johnson, 'Idol or Ideal? The Power and Potency of Female Public Sculpture', in Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco (eds), *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1997), pp. 222–45; Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape: the 'Heroic' Tradition and Its Alternatives* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1999); and Gerald Schröder, 'Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Begierde: Giambolognas Raub der Sabinerin im Spannungsfeld poetisch reflektierter Wirkungsästhetik und narrativer Semantik', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 31, 2004, pp. 175–203. Schröder's essay, the most substantial and intensive discussion of the work to date, appeared when the present essay was nearly complete. Its author arrived at a number of conclusions similar to my own, and I have attempted both to signal those and to indicate our points of disagreement.

9. Borghini, *Il Riposo*, p. 73: 'Ma essendo vn giorno capitato in bottega di Giambologna Raffaello Borghini, & hauendo veduto con suo gran diletto questo bel gruppo di figure, & inteso l'istoria, che douea significare, mostrò segno di marauiglia; del che accortosi Giambologna, il pregò molto che sopra ciò gli dicesse il parer suo, il quale gli conculse che à niun modo desse tal nome alle sue statue; ma che meglio vi si accomoderebbe la rapina delle Sabine; la quale historia, essendo stata giudicata à proposito, ha dato nome all'opera.' The view that the addition of the relief fixed the identity of the characters above is argued with particular force by Schröder, *Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Begierde*, p. 193: 'Die Fixierung der Bedeutung, die Borghini im kunsttheoretischen Text formuliert, wird von Giambologna durch die Anbringung einer Relieftafel erzielt, die den Frauenraub gewissermassen in den Plural setzt und ihn mit dem dargestellten Stadtprospekt gleichsam auf eine tragische Bühne hebt. Die potentielle Offenheit der Semantik des Bildes wird also – wie durch die *subscription* eines Emblems – geschlossen'.

10. Borghini gives a series of reasons why the statue could not represent Phineus, Andromeda and Cepheus: that Andromeda was never abducted by anyone; that Phineus never triumphed over Cepheus; that Phineus is not heroic enough to deserve such a depiction; that

such an identification would be uninventive, using the same characters Cellini had employed a few feet away; that the statue would actually undermine the Perseus, showing Perseus's enemy as a victor; that all the other statues in the Piazza show different subjects, and Giambologna's should do the same; that there was no good outcome from Phineus's acts, making the event portrayed 'vain and of little honor.' See Borghini, *Il Riposo*, p. 73–74.

11. Borghini, *Il Riposo*, p. 75: 'E' finta adunque la fanciulla rapita per la detta Sabina, & il Rapitore rappresenta Talassio, il quale se bene non la rapì in publico egli istesso, la rapirono i suoi per lui, & egli la rapì in privato togliendole la verginità, & il vecchio sottoposto dimostra il padre di lei, dicendo, come ho detto, la historia, che le rubarono di braccio a' padri.'

12. Carroll, *The Erotics of Absolutism*, here 10, and Schroeder, *Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Begierde*, esp. 194–6.

13. In some respects, the present essay takes up a topic from Creighton Gilbert's classic 'On Subject and Non-Subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 34, 1952, pp. 202–16, though that essay was not able to point persuasively to examples of the kind of work suggested by its title, Renaissance paintings with no subject. The issue with Giambologna's statuary, moreover, is not that they lack subjects—the subject of the *Sabine* is ravishment—but that they resist naming, inviting multiple and often contradictory identifications both of their characters and of their actions.

14. The standard studies of the statue *ex uno lapide* remain those of Irving Lavin: 'The Sculptor's Last Will and Testament', *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin*, vol. 35, 1977–1978, pp. 4–39 and 'Ex Uno Lapide: The Renaissance Sculptor's Tour de Force', in Matthias Winner et al. (eds), *Il cortile delle statue. Der Stauenhof des Belvedere im Vatikan* (Philipp von Zabern: Mainz, 1998), pp. 191–210. For the Cinquecento interest in sculptures with multiple points of view, see Lars Olof Larsson, *Von allen Seiten gleich schön: Studien zum Begriff der Vielsichtigkeit in der europäischen Plastik von der Renaissance bis zum Klassizismus* (Almqvist & Wiksell International: Stockholm, 1974); Charles Avery, *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture* (Moyer Bell: Mt. Kisco, NY, 1987), esp. p. 237, Mary Weitzel Gibbons, *Giambologna: Narrator of the Catholic Reformation* (California University Press: Berkeley, 1995), pp. 106–45; Schröder, *Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Begierde*, pp. 184–5, and Timothy Wutrich, 'Narrative and Allegory in Giambologna's Rape of a Sabine,' *Word & Image*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2004, pp. 308–22. For the interest on the part of Giambologna, his contemporaries, and his immediate followers in

figures to other familiar depictions or to historical characters known from literature, though this process was itself characterised by debate. Giambologna would almost certainly have encountered competing identifications of the Quirinal *Horsetamers* and of the Farnese *Bull*—to give just two examples of ancient sculptures he studied closely.<sup>15</sup> Although the recovered statues were fragmentary, new owners might ask modern artists to complete them, adding parts that 'baptised' the figures in an appropriate way.<sup>16</sup> Familiar as he was with ancient Roman sculptures, which he had spent two years studying before he moved to Florence in the 1550s, as well as with the restoration activities of Giovanni Battista Caccini, who moved from Rome to Florence in 1575, Giambologna would have known well that problems of naming were part and parcel of the antiquarian enterprise.

It seems likely that Giambologna was also familiar with Giovanni Andrea Gilio da Fabriano's dialogue 'On the Errors of History Painters', the dedication of which lamented that modern artists 'pay little or no attention to the subject of the story they make'.<sup>17</sup> This is a remarkable charge—who today would believe that Michelangelo and his followers showed no concern for his subject matter?—yet it would have been born out by the modern works that an artist was most likely to study in Florence around 1580. The relief of the *Lapiths and Centaurs*, which Dimitrios Zikos suggests Giambologna contemplated, does not seem to have been based on any classical text.<sup>18</sup> Of the recumbent figures in the Medici Chapel, which had been serving as something of an academic study centre, only *Night* has any attributes; the identities of the others can only be inferred by association.<sup>19</sup> The *Victory*, to which Giambologna had been assigned to make a pendant, went by no more name than that, though its dominant figure is the wrong gender to serve as a conventional personification of 'Victory'.<sup>20</sup> Even the *David* suppressed two of the motifs that made earlier versions of the subject immediately recognisable—the sword and head of Goliath—and some contemporaries referred to it simply as 'the giant'.<sup>21</sup> There would, in short, have been any number of works by the premier Florentine master (whose apotheosising funeral Giambologna must have attended in 1564, the same year that saw the publication of Gilio's text) that could have given him the impression that readily legible clues to a figure's identity were inessential, even with public sculptures. Indeed, the first lesson Giambologna learned from Michelangelo may have been that of privileging pose and generic type over narrative. Michelangelo's sculptures may well have inspired conversations among artists and their patrons that resembled the discussions that contemporaries had about ambiguous antiquities and later about Giambologna's own works, centering on the inadequate clues various motifs offered to the story those works conveyed. Giambologna's move was simply to distinguish the kind of knowledge those occasions put on display from that which the artist had to demonstrate—while the restorer might add information to a sculpture, the knowing imitator of Michelangelo could do just the opposite, reducing the sculpture to what different models had in common.

### Poetic Criticism and Visual Narrative

Giambologna had lived in Florence for almost three decades by the time he began the *Sabine*, and he would have known that a well-defined community



was apt to comment, and comment publicly, on the artistic merits and faults of prominent new sculptures. As he would also have known, the comments typically took the form of epideictic sonnets, encomia to the new works or satires on them. Virtually any random sampling of these poems would have showed the sculptor that the poets' criticism, whether written in praise or in blame of their subjects, could be couched in terms of an invented narrative, one that used the work at issue as a point of reference but embroidered on what it seemed to show. Sometimes, the goal of the writer was to make the reader see the work in an unexpected, ironic way. In the sonnet Antonio Allegretti wrote at the unveiling of Cellini's *Perseus*, for example, the author praised the bronze for three stanzas before concluding with a tristich on Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus* (Fig. 4):

Già 'l Bandinello e gli altri veder parmi,  
Muti per l'stupore arcar le ciglia,  
E ne' lor volti apparir scorno e ira.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, it appears to me that [Perseus] sees Bandinelli and the others, mute with marvel as they raised their brows, and that scorn and anger appear in their faces.

The lines target the menacing countenance Bandinelli gave his *Hercules*, contrasting this with the placid face of Hercules's neighbour. While Bandinelli had certainly intended to recapture the intense stare of Michelangelo's *David*, the writer makes the expression instead seem like invidious irritation at the sight of the new arrival. Witticisms of this sort were not uncommon—Pagolo Mini, on the same occasion, made much the same joke, and other writers had the statues, or even their makers, speak, directly describing the situation in which they found themselves.<sup>23</sup> If Giambologna had a reason to believe his work would be displayed publicly (or, as is equally likely, if he simply invited writers into his workshop), he must also have expected that his work would meet similar treatment. Whatever he made, poets were likely to invent stories featuring the characters he showed, and even to imagine the sculptor himself as a character in the 'scene' that produced it.

This situation places Borghini's assertion that Giambologna made a work without a story in order to show the excellence of his art in a different light. In the knowledge that the city's poets would pronounce on the work's excellence or failing, the absence of story in the *Sabines* looks like an invitation. Borghini's implication that Giambologna made the statue with no thought to what might become of it is difficult to believe: blocks of marble on the scale Giambologna used were not readily available, and it is unthinkable that one have arrived in Florence, made its way to the Giambologna workshop across town, and taken shape there without the Duke's involvement. Still, the survival of poems on the statue that tell a story but do not mention that of the 'Sabines' lends credence to Borghini's description of the real situation and suggests that something like the sequence of events he describes did in fact happen.<sup>24</sup>

One of the reasons these poems survive and that they are today better known than many similar compositions is that two groups of them were published, one a vernacular anthology with the title *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della sabina* and issued by Bartolomeo Sermartelli in Florence in 1583 with the Medici coat of arms in its

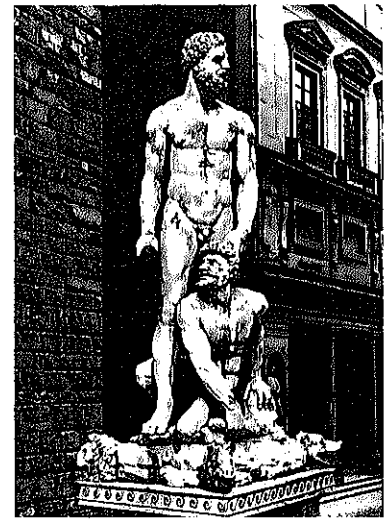


Fig. 4. Baccio Bandinelli, *Hercules and Cacus*, 1525–34, marble, 496 cm. Piazza della Signora, Florence. (Photo: Allnari/Art Resource, NY.)

the problem of balance, manifest especially in sculptures wherein one figure lifts another, see esp. Rudolf Preimesberger's entry on *Aeneas and Anchises* in *Bernini Scultore: La nascita del barocco in Casa Borghese*, ed. Anna Coliva and Sebastian Schütze (Edizioni de Luca: Rome, 1998), pp. 110–23; idem, 'Themes from Art Theory in the Early Work of Bernini', in Irving Lavin (ed.), *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: New Aspects of His Art and Thought* (Penn State University Press: University Park, Pa., 1985), pp. 1–24; and Schröder, *Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Fliegende*, esp. 186.

15. Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1981), pp. 136–41, 165–7.

16. I take the term from the conversation Cellini reports to have had with Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, when his patron showed him a newly arrived ancient torso: 'gli farò una aquila, acciò che e' sia battezzato per un Ganimede' (I will make an eagle for it, so that it can be baptized as a Ganymede). See Giuseppe Guido Ferrero (ed.), *Opere di Benvenuto Cellini* (UTET: Turin, 1980), p. 505. For the broader issues here, see the suggestive discussion in Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1999), esp. pp. 119–269, with further references.

17. Giovanni Andrea Gilio da Fabriano, *Due Dialogi* (SPES: Florence, 1986), p. 69v. Borghini's *Riposo* makes it clear that Gilio's dialogue provoked lively discussion among Giambologna's associates in Florence.

18. Zikos, 'Le belle forme della Maniera: La prassi e l'ideale nella scultura di Giambologna', in Strozzi and Zikos, *Giambologna*, pp. 20–43, here 33. To quote Joachim Poeschke: 'Confusion in the scholarly literature regarding the name of the work and the identities of the figures it portrays stems in part from the disagreement already evident between Condivi (1553) and Vasari (1568), but also in part from Michelangelo's total lack of interest in merely illustrating a classical text and his only minimal inclusion of attributes and the like that might have fixed this 'historical' scene'. See Poeschke, *Michelangelo and His World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p. 71.

19. For the variety of ways in which the Medici Chapel sculptures were interpreted in the sixteenth century, see Raphael Rosenberg, *Beschreibung und Nachzeichnungen der Skulpturen Michelangelos: Eine Geschichte der Kunstbetrachtung* (Deutscher Kunstverlag: Munich, 2000), esp. pp. 33–42.

20. For the reception of this and other figures in the Julius Tomb, see esp. Claudia Echinger-Maurach, *Studien zu Michelangelos Juliusgrabmal* (Hildesheim; New York: G. Olms, 1991).

21. Paola Barocchi (ed.), *La Vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, (Riccardo Ricciardi: Milan, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 208–209.

22. Carlo Milanese (ed.), *I Trattati dell'Oreficeria e della Scultura di Benvenuto Cellini* (Le Monnier: Florence, 1857), p. 408.

23. Milanese, p. 406: 'Il Greco non pur, non pur l'Elreo / Stupido l'un, l'altro sdegnoso resta; / Ma così bei vicini Judit ammira, / E dice: poi che 'n bronzo ancor l'un spira / Valor, e l'altra a crudeltà par desta / Ben venut'è dal ciel chi questi feo'.

24. Vincenzo Alamanni's 'Mentre io miro il bel Marmo, & scorgo in esso', for example, calls Giambologna's marble woman nothing more specific than 'Casta Donna' (Chaste Lady), and the same author's 'Dentr'una viva pietra viva veggio tutta tremar vergine pia' refers only to the statue's 'pious virgin' and 'ferocious boy.' Piero di Gherardo Capponi's 'Non questo ratto, o quello il fabro elesse in marmo rassembrar' refers to the characters as the 'bella donna' and the 'predator'. Poems by Bernardo Vecchiotti and Francesco Martelli, among others, similarly praise the work without mentioning it by name.

25. See esp. John Shearman, *Only Connect ... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1992), p. 53.

26. See Gilbert, *On Subject and Non-subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures*.

frontispiece, the other a collection of Latin verses written by Grazio Maria Grazi and published by Georges Marescot (aka Giorgio Marescotti), likewise with the Duke's imprimatur, one year later. The printing of such items was not totally unprecedented: a few of the poems praising Cellini's 1554 *Perseus* and his 1562 marble *Crucifix*, notably, were appended to the 1568 publication of the goldsmith's *Due Trattati*. What sets apart the *Sabine* poems—the contents of which the Duke or his agents apparently approved—is how consistently they call into question the identities of the characters, even after the statue had been given its definitive title. It is tempting to see this as a neutralisation of one conventional form of political dissent. Satires on Bandinelli's *Hercules* had implied criticism of Duke Alessandro I de' Medici, a predecessor of Francesco and that statue's patron; when Cellini's *Perseus* was unveiled, Duke Cosimo I (Alessandro's successor and Francesco's father) watched nervously from a hidden location, hoping that it would escape similar treatment.<sup>25</sup> Giambologna's own employer, the savvy Francesco, may well have realised that a more official poetic competition, with publication of particularly clever conceits as a prize, was a way to absorb the literary event that such statues provoked back into state control. The poems that avoid hewing to the 'official' identities of Giambologna's characters appear alongside others that unblushingly flatter the Duke.

All of this is to say that Giambologna probably made a work, and that his patron probably encouraged him to make a work, that was meant to be written about. Though earlier sculptures had received poetic responses, some even before their completion, such an approach to a sculptural undertaking was itself novel, and it called for a particular kind of *ingegno*. The wit of the *Sabine* lays in part in the invention of actions that could be variously, even competitively, interpreted, and the reception of the piece points to at least three ways in which this is true: the statue was so conceived that its action seemed to change when looked at from different angles; its narrative invited the beholder to reflect on the work's medium as well as its iconography; and the arrangement of its characters rendered ambiguous the statue's representation of power.

## Rapire

Scholars have long used the *Sabine* to illustrate the ideal of a sculpture that was 'von allen Seiten schön'. They have pointed to the comments of Benvenuto Cellini, whom Giambologna no doubt knew, to the effect that sculptures should have many attractive aspects. And they have noted that a nearly contemporary pair of woodcuts, published along with a group of poems written on the *Sabine*, actually shows its characters from two different perspectives.<sup>26</sup> Less well remarked is that, when the viewer actually looks at the sculpture from different sides, what he or she sees dramatically changes.<sup>27</sup>

Approached from the right (Figs 5 and 6), the group gives the impression above all of violent movement. The young man appears to stride over his rival; only the lower half of the old man's body is readily visible, and this is placed almost entirely below the level of the younger man's knees. The rotation of the young man's torso seems to guide a movement that his right leg will follow, the old man appears to turn away from the place to which the woman will be carried, and the momentum of the whole tends towards the disintegration of the group. From the front (Fig. 2), in





Fig. 5. Giambologna, *Sabine*, seen as installed from below right. (Photo: author.)



Fig. 6. View of Giambologna's *Sabine* from right, from Bartolomeo Serrmartelli, *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della sabina* (Florence; 1583). General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

contrast, the whole composition stabilises. Though the now more legible man at the bottom still visibly bends away from what is above, his gesture, apparently that of shielding his face, becomes a dominant motif, one suggesting petrified awe or fear. More surprisingly, the young man, too, suddenly seems immobilised. From directly in front of the work, it becomes much less apparent that the youth could move his right foot; that foot appears to bear the weight of the two bodies above, and the arrangement of the old man locks it into place. From the left (Figs 7 and 8), finally, this impression of motionlessness is, if anything, amplified, and here a new reason for the stasis comes into view: the complex play of the characters' gazes. With the young man's head now in profile, his activity is subordinated to his vision of the woman; the woman herself looks outward, as if for help. Perhaps most remarkable is the way this perspective changes the appearance of the man at the bottom. Whereas from other angles he seemed to be turning outward and downward, folding in defeat under what takes place above him, now he looks to be bending, if awkwardly, towards the youth, as if to get a better view.<sup>28</sup> Moving around the sculpture, weight and balance appear to shift as well: from the right, and seeing especially the young man's right arm, there can be little doubt that he is supporting, even lifting the woman; from the left, his chest and right arm hidden, it is the upwardly reaching left arm that characterises the pose. Suddenly, the gesture looks more like an embrace, or even an effort to pull the woman downward, as if she might float away.

27. The following discussion starts from the same premise as Wutrich, Narrative and, who maintains that the pedestal of the statue implies four distinct views which in turn point to different narrative relationships between the characters. Wutrich based his arguments on a small later copy after Giambologna now in the Musée des Beaux Arts in Chambéry, however, and it is difficult to share his confidence that his argument 'applies equally to the monumental piece in Florence' (p. 319). For one thing, the installation of the Florentine statue makes it difficult to see the front and back of the statue from the same height, since one has to ascend into the Loggia to circumbulate the group. Moreover, the architecture of the Loggia makes it nearly impossible to see the Florentine work from the positions Wutrich thinks the base implies. My account also differs from that of Schröder, *Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Begierde*; whereas he takes the sides of the sculpture to show 'unterschiedliche Aspekte der Handlung' (p. 185), I see no singular plot at all, and take the statue's various aspects to be not just different but potentially contradictory.

28. Schröder, in *Versteinernder Blick und entflammte Begierde* makes a persuasive and interesting case for interpreting the man's gesture as one of marvel.

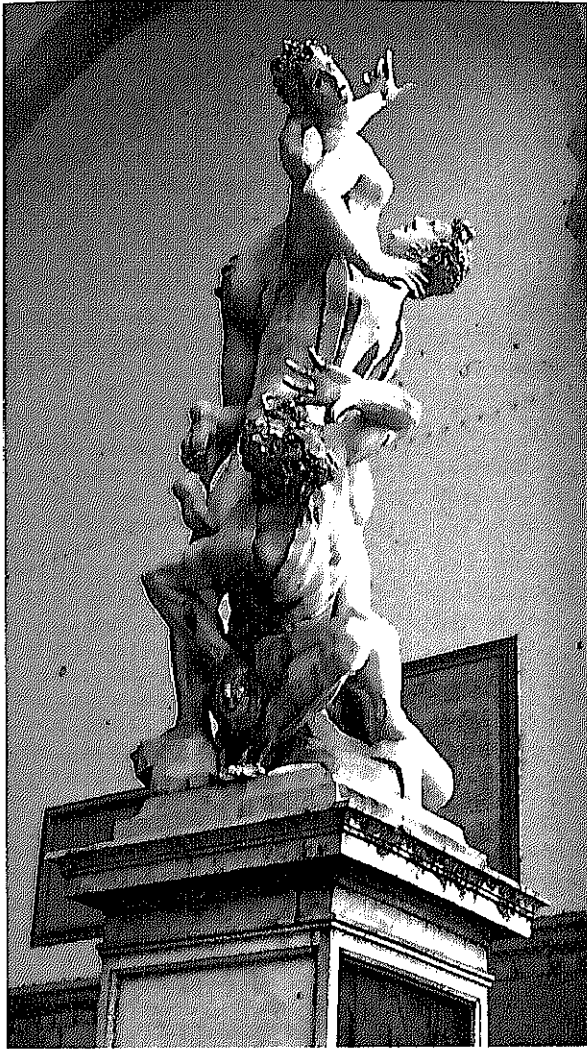


Fig. 7. Giambologna, *Sabine*, seen as installed from below left. (Photo: author.)



Fig. 8. View of Giambologna's *Sabine* from right, from Sermartelli, *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della sabina* (Florence: 1583). General Collection, Belnecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

Scholars have generally suggested that the eventual addition of the relief to the front of the monument clarified the story, though it is equally possible to argue that it only reinforced the competing ways in which the action itself could be read. Its scene focuses on a group of men and women in the foreground whose actions evoke the upper two characters in the marble statue; there is no reason to rule out the possibility that one of these pairs might even be the upper two characters from the marble, now shown with more company. One of the closest doubles appears just left of centre, in the man striding off with a woman, who turns away. Their formal echo of the marble group above reinforces the notion that the man bearing the woman in the marble statue is to be understood as lifting and carrying her. At the lower right of the relief, in contrast, appears a kind of fraternal twin to this character. Turned the opposite direction, his pose lends the whole scene a strong symmetry, though he is not abducting a woman but rather restraining a horse. Certainly this recalls various surviving antique horsetamer statues, but it also reads as a pointed variation on the original

marble invention—his pose, indeed, is closer than any other figure in the relief to the marble youth. It reinforces the impression that the axis of movement there, too, is a vertical more than a horizontal one, and that the stone man is drawing something towards him as much as he is carrying it away. It also raises the theme of animal passions and their necessary taming, an idea that does not sit easily with any view of the marble youth as unambiguously heroic.

In these ways, the relief works less like a label, lending the work a definitive title, and more like the prints that prefaced the published collection of poems, highlighting the statue's competing aspects. The printed images, in turn, shape expectations for the poems themselves, many of which likewise highlight the various sides to the sculpted action. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the puns the verses repeatedly make on the central event Giambologna purportedly depicted, a *ratto*. In Giambologna's time, the cognates of the verb *rapire*—'to steal,' 'to lift,' or 'to make off with'—could refer to everything from the seizure of a person to the ecstatic loss of the soul (what we would call 'rapture').<sup>29</sup> Sixteenth-century writers would have said that Ganymede and St. Paul were *rapiti* when they were *carried up* to Heaven, Helen when she was *led away* to Troy.<sup>30</sup> More significantly still, the common adjective derived from the participle could itself be used without implying any action whatsoever, referring rather to a type of fixed attention: to be *ratto* was to be rapt. The literature the *Sabine* generated played out all of these possibilities and more. Bernardo Vecchietti, for example, referred to the woman as the young man's 'rapina', connecting the term especially to her abduction. Others, however, drew on the range of meaning the word allowed, as well as the variously legible pose the statue offered, to suggest nearly the opposite of this. When Francesco Marchi wrote 'Rapir senti 'l pensier soura misura, / E restai come immobile, in astratto, / Quando mirai della Sabina il ratto / Ove Arte vince supera natura' (He felt his thoughts ravished beyond measure, and I remained as if immobile, abstracted, when I gazed upon the rape of the Sabine / where art triumphs over nature), he was interested above all in the work's thematics of desire, the marble-like state associated with the statue's depiction of looking.<sup>31</sup> His poem describes an almost passive experience of Platonic transcendence—the lines allude specifically to book 10 of the *Republic*, which compares the elevation of the inspired poet's soul to the 'ravishment' of a 'tender virgin'—and this platonisation of the statue's action allowed not just the Duke but the writer himself to identify with sculpture and its protagonist.<sup>32</sup> Similar lines of reading appear elsewhere, as, for instance, in this poem by Vincenzo Alamanni:

Mentre lo miro il bel Marmo, & scorgo in esso,  
D'alta prole infiammar gliovin desio  
Casta Donna a rapir, rapirmi anch'lo  
Sento dentro, e di fuor dal Marmo Istesso.<sup>33</sup>

As I gaze at the beautiful marble, and as I perceive how, in it, the youthful desire of the great progeny becomes inflamed to ravish the chaste lady, I, too, feel myself ravished inside, and outside I feel like I am made of the marble itself.

Alamanni imagines himself actually entering the work, joining its state of petrification. The *rapire* he finds so exciting links him, and his state of ravishment, less to the stolen maiden than to the lover overcome by her

29. The Latin root of the word is *rapere*, 'to seize'. The *OED* gives, among the earliest meanings of the verb *rape*, 'to hasten, hurry' ('in a rape' means 'in a hurry'), 'to take by force' and 'to carry off by force'. The *OED* also suggests that in English, too, the verb *stuprate* (from the Latin *suprare*, 'to have illicit sexual intercourse with') predates the synonymous use of *rape*. Tommaseo and Bellini's *Dizionario della lingua italiana* gives, as its first definitions of *rapire*, 'torre per violenza, o contr'a ragione', 'trarre per forza' and, more specifically, 'torre per forza o seduzione una giovane a' suoi attenenti'; it does not give *stuprate* as a synonym. Johnson, *Idéal or Idol*, in a footnote (p. 299, n. 59), appears to acknowledge that the primary meaning of the Italian *rapire* (carry away forcefully) can be inferred from Carroll's translation of Davanzati's poem: 'The glory of all divine art is in this triform image – the ideal and standard for all great artists. This, my Giambologna, is your Sabine, for whom you burned with desire. Long and wearing study (studio work) is the old father from whom you raped her'. In her text, however, Johnson selectively quotes Carroll's rendering of Davanzati's lines to make it read illicitly: 'divine art . . . is your [Giambologna's] Sabine, for whom you burned with desire . . . [and] whom you raped' (242, ellipses Johnson's). Wolfthal, *Images of Rape*, pp. 28–29, faults writers for referring to scenes like Giambologna's with terms like 'abduction', writing that 'these terms are not synonymous with the word *rape*, which is so often used in titles of 'heroic' rape imagery'. Zikos, who does not indicate awareness of most of the literature on the statue published since the 1980s, defines 'rapimento' as 'a figure violently lifted into the air' (*Le belle forme della Maniera*, p. 33).

30. Though these are not exactly the scenes of *stupro*, they are invariably sexually charged, and sometimes even sexually explicit. See, for example, Leonard Barkan's reading of Michelangelo's *Ganymede* drawing in Leonard Barkan, *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1991), esp. p. 89.

31. *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina* (Bartolomeo Scarmatelli: Florence, 1583), p. 19.

32. *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, p. 19. Carroll, *The Erotics of Absolution*, p. 25, n. 36, rejects a neoplatonic reading of Marchi's lines. Her reliance on a mistranslation of the Italian, however, obscures the fact that the 'ravished' subject, in this instance, is also the poet, a point that may support a different take on the verse. Compare esp. Schröder's discussion of *furor* and the Pygmalion theme.

33. Sermartelli, *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, p. 4.

34. See the discussion in Shearman, *Only Connect*, pp. 44–58. On the poems, in addition to the literature cited above, see Michael Bury, 'Bernardo Vecchiotti, Patron of Giambologna', *I Tatti Studies*, vol. 1, 1985, pp. 13–56, esp. 28–30. The best discussion of the marble metaphors in the poems is now Schröder, esp. 187–92, which bears on all of the following.

35. Sermartelli, *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, p. 10.

36. *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, p. 21.

37. See, for example, the version of Bernardo Davanzati's poem in *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, p. 7.

38. *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, p. 13.

beauty. It also characterises the statue in a way that is easier to comprehend when looking at it from the front or left than from the right. It is tempting to imagine some of these poets formulating their thoughts in Giambologna's workshop, and taking up different vantages while drafting their lines.

### The Marble Statue

As Alamanni's poem already suggests, some writers, characterising the 'ravishment' they perceived, realised that the medium of the work was central to this. Cued by the specific action the sculpture presented, they nevertheless also kept present the stone thing that Giambologna carved, foregrounding a sculptural artifice, or some substitute for it, that preceded any determination of story. A few writers imagined the statue's woman, so beautiful as to stupefy the young man who lifts her, to operate with what John Shearman and others have called a 'Medusa effect,' turning the statue's admirers into marble.<sup>34</sup> This conceit alluded to the bronze *Perseus and Medusa* in the neighbouring arch of the Loggia, but it also made sense of Giambologna's stone, suggesting that the young man is marble because he has looked at the woman. Alamanni made a related claim about the old man at the bottom, the white stone paradoxically capturing his frozen state, overcome by heated emotion: 'Grida in terra abbattuto il curuo Padre, / Nel cui gelato core / Bollon' ira, pietà, sdegno, e dolore' ('The bent father, beaten to the ground, cries out; ire, pity, disdain and sadness all boil in his frozen heart').<sup>35</sup> For Pierfrancesco Cambi, it was the woman who was stony: 'io sarò sempre al tuo desir di sasso', says Cambi's Sabine to the ferocious Roman who steals her away.<sup>36</sup> Others, taking the absence of names as a move towards allegory, proposed that the young man burned for nothing other than the glory that Giambologna himself would, with the statue of the Sabine, eventually win.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps, Gherardo Capponi suggested, the work showed the artist's love for his creation:

Non questo ratto o quello il fabro elesse  
in marmo rassembler, ma vaga e bella  
donna mostrarne e 'n leggiadri atti fella,  
nuda e lasciva, ond'ogni cor n'ardesse.  
Videla ardente giovine e le imprese  
baci alle labbra e fisse il guardo in ella;  
indi, rivolto all'amorosa stella,  
novo Pigmalion pregando fesse.<sup>38</sup>

The sculptor did not choose to simulate this rape or that one in his marble; rather, he showed in it a charming and beautiful woman; he put her in a graceful pose and made her nude and seductive, so that every heart would burn for her. The ardent young man, saw her, and pressed kisses upon her lips, and he fixed his gaze upon her, whence, turning to the star of love, and he prayed to be made into a new Pygmalion.

Capponi turned the sculptor of the work into a character within its fiction; he imagined that the stone woman in Giambologna's statue represents just that, a woman of stone, and the man below an artist. To follow Capponi, what Giambologna showed was not a rape at all, but a sculptor lifting a marble up to the heavens and asking that it be brought to life. The conceit resembles one that appears in the most elaborate of all the poems written, Cosimo Gacci's: Gacci's long eclogue on the work describes a scene in which a statue of Hercules, having come to life to embrace a nymph, is

transformed, along with the nymph and an old man who was her guardian, back into stone.<sup>39</sup>

Could Giambologna have intended this as well? From the time he knew that his work might go in the Piazza, a careful consideration of materials would have been difficult to avoid. When Cellini's *Perseus*, holding up the head of Medusa, was added to the space, some poets had suggested that the marble *Hercules* that gazed upon it seemed to have been petrified by the Gorgon. This implicitly highlighted the difference of Cellini's own material, bronze, and Cellini for one seems to have anticipated such thinking, prominently showing the blood that infused and enlivened his figures.<sup>40</sup> Borghini himself, in an earlier survey of the Piazza, taxonomised the statues found there according to their materials.<sup>41</sup> And when he explained Giambologna's own motivations in making the work, he mentioned above all the artist's desire to show that he knew how to make works in marble, and not just in bronze. Giambologna had every reason to trumpet the fact that this was a work in stone, and to challenge his poet-viewers to do the same.

### Possession

It is not always easy, in short, to assign proper credit for the conceits that came to be articulated in conjunction with the statue. We know, of course, who wrote the poems. At the same time, it took a sophisticated and playful arrangement of figures to elicit such clever responses from its viewers. Nor is the Duke's own participation, active or passive, to be underestimated, for one of the most extraordinary things about the *Sabine* is the way it at once borrows from and overturns the Piazza's earlier images of force, most of them appearing in works commissioned or newly positioned by Florence's recent rulers.

Donatello's *Judith*, which the *Sabine* displaced when it was added to the western arch of the Loggia, and Cellini's *Perseus*, to which the *Sabine* thence served as a pendant, were representations both of violence and of victory. Like Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*, one of the *Sabine*'s marble predecessors, these statues relied on a vertical hierarchy to imply that one figure had 'mastered' another; all the statues suggested, in one way or another, that the upper figure had taken possession of the lower one. It was in part on this that the *Sabine* played, placing the subject of a triumph at the base of the composition, and casting the woman, to use the words of Margaret Carroll, as 'a trophy in a contest between men'. Since the theme of victory almost always entailed the taking of spoils, it might even be said that the *Sabine* specifically engaged the dynamics of possession that were basic to the whole victory genre. By working with three figures instead of two, by grafting 'ravishment' or abduction onto a standard victory type, Giambologna made explicit the gesture of 'taking' that every triumph involved.

At the same time, the ambiguities of the *Sabine* are inextricable from its display of power. To suggest, for example, that the young 'ravisher' was in fact in the *Sabine*'s thrall, to suggest that it was he who was, so to speak, 'taken,' is to reverse Carroll's influential characterisation of the work as 'evidence of [the hero's] capacity to dispossess and incapacitate his enemies'.<sup>42</sup> The 'poetic' ravishment that Giambologna's critics both claimed to experience and attributed to the work has the curious effect of undermining the distinction between active and passive, between

39. *Alcune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, pp. 23–35.

40. Michael Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2002), pp. 43–78.

41. Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture*, pp. 79–80.

42. Carroll, *The Erotics of Absolution*, p. 9.

43. Borghini, *Il Riposo*, p. 164: 'alcuni dicono, soggiunse il Michelozzo, che l'Ercole douea fare piu fiera attitudine, e non mostrare di tener si poco conto del suo nimico, che ha fra piedi. Cotesti tali s'imaginano, rispose il Sirigatto, che Ercole sia in atto di combatter con Cacco, e s'ingannano, perche egli di già l'ha vinto, e Cacco si è renduto prigione.'

44. Borghini, *Il Riposo*, p. 13: 'di giambologna molte figure di cera, di terra, e di bronzo in diverse attitudini rappresentanti varie persone come prigioni, donne, Dee, fiuti, & huomini famosi.' Giambologna lived with Vecchiotti during his first years in Florence, so Vecchiotti no doubt knew what Giambologna took them to be. Borghini's report on what his friend had in his collection carries some weight.

45. The *Victory*, initially conceived in relation to Michelangelo's tomb project for Pope Julius II, remained in the artist's studio on his death in 1564. In 1565, on the occasion of the marriage of Francesco de' Medici and Giovanna of Austria, it was brought into the Salone del Cinquecento; in the same year, Giambologna was commissioned to make the pendant. See, most recently, Tommaso Mozzi's entry in Strozzi and Zikos, *Giambologna: gli dei, gli eroti*, pp. 237–8, and, for a subtle and persuasive reading of Giambologna's perhaps intentionally ambiguous iconography, Christina Strunck, 'Eine radikale Programmänderung im Palazzo Vecchio: Wie Michelangelos 'Sieger' auf Giambologna und Vasari wirkte', in Michael Rohlfmann and Andreas Thielemann (eds), *Michelangelo: Neue Beiträge* (Deutscher Kunstverlag: Munich, 2000), pp. 265–97.

46. Avery in *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture* compares the *Apennine* and the *Pisa* on formal grounds. The best discussion of the re-use of Michelangelo's *Prisoners* is Philippe Morel, *Les grottes maniéristes en Italie au XVIe siècle: théâtre et alchimie de la nature* (Macula: Paris, 1998), pp. 52–57.

aggression and submission, even between victor and victim. It might even seem that the statue, approached through the poems, explodes the conventional imagery of possession that made more conventional triumphal works so easy to identify and to read. Compare, for example, the exchange that Borghini includes in his *Riposo* about Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*, the two-figure marble that faced Giambologna's *Sabine* in the Piazza:

'Some,' Michelozzo commented, 'say that Hercules ought to adopt a fiercer attitude, and ought not seem to take so little heed of the enemy between his feet.'

'Such people,' Sirigatto replied, 'imagine that Hercules is in the act of fighting Cacus, and they are deceived, for [in fact, he] has already won the battle, and Cacus has been made his prisoner.'<sup>43</sup>

In Bandinelli's statue, the victor is known precisely through his antithesis to the prisoner; the prisoner is the *attribute* that points to the hero's victoriousness. Can this be said of the *Sabine* as well? Certainly Giambologna had thought as carefully as any sculptor in his day about the relevant representational forms: Borghini himself, when listing the contents of the villa belonging to Vecchiotti, notes that one room contained 'many figures by Giambologna in wax, clay, and bronze,' the first group of which was 'prisoners'.<sup>44</sup> Though it is impossible to say precisely what Borghini had seen, we do know that Giambologna's *Florence Triumphant over Pisa* (Fig. 9), his response to Michelangelo's *Victory*, went so far as to place its mastered figure, which Sermartelli called a 'prigione', in chains.<sup>45</sup> If, on the other hand, Borghini's comment suggests that Giambologna's prisoner studies were single figures, it will also be tempting to consider works ostensibly different in genre, like the colossal allegory of the *Apennine* (Fig. 10) at Pratolino: in form, as Charles Avery has observed, the *Apennine* is comparable to the figure of *Pisa*. This work may well have helped to inspire the eventual incorporation of four Michelangelo prisoners into a grotto in the Boboli gardens.<sup>46</sup>

It is equally possible, of course, that Borghini was referring not to any of these works, but to some of the numerous wax, clay and bronze studies Giambologna made in the course of designing the *Sabine*. These, too, reflect his interest in Michelangelo's prisoners, which were designed in much the same way. And that Michelangelo's prisoners had themselves been extracted from the triumphal monument for which they were originally commissioned and made into independent subjects around which their maker would formulate love sonnets should make us wonder just which character in Giambologna's *Sabine* best plays the prisoner role. One possibility is to see Giambologna's youth as an agent who does what Michelangelo's men cannot, taking hold of and making off with that for which he burns. At the same time, the erotic dimension of Giambologna's work, no less than Michelangelo's, forces further consideration of the *relative* states of the three figures. If there is a character in the *Sabine* that is taken into custody, after all, it is not—as with Bandinelli—the man at the bottom of the piece, but the woman at the top. And if there is a character that functioned like the rapturous Michelangelo prisoners Giambologna studied, it is neither the old man nor the woman, but the young man between them.<sup>47</sup>

To whose credit is this? By so assimilating one of Michelangelo's central themes, Giambologna positioned himself as the great Florentine's sculptural heir. At the same time, the Duke can only have been pleased to be able to add such a work to the outdoor museum that the Piazza was

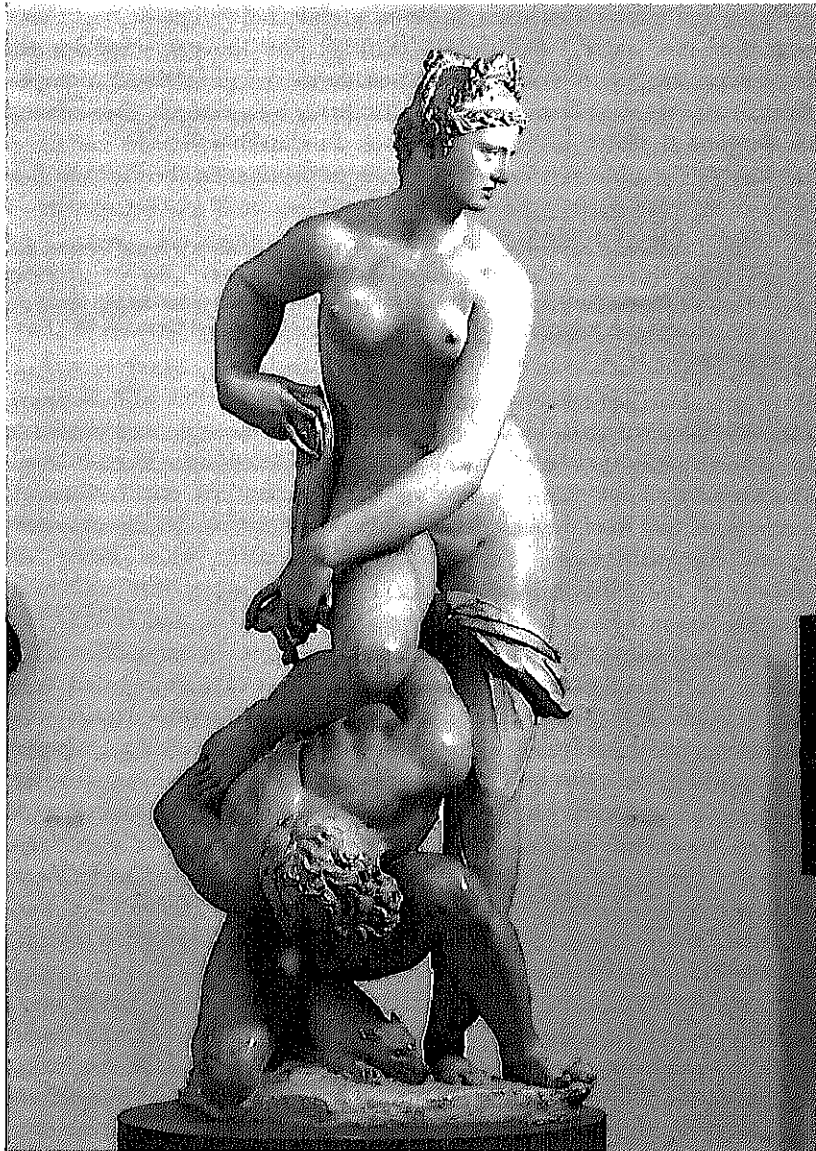


Fig. 9. Giambologna, *Florence Triumphant over Pisa*, ca. 1575, marble, 260 cm. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.)

quickly becoming. The statue could be read **inside** or **outside** the triumphalist tradition of Francesco's predecessors; it was heroic, even potentially menacing, but this menace was also plausibly deniable. The young hero's absorption in the woman he elevates made his gesture look like an act of affection, and the statue would thus have resonated with the conflation of Florence and Venus that the Medici had long promulgated, as if the city has been founded and continued to be guided by nothing worse than love.<sup>48</sup>

### Beyond Florence

I have been arguing that the novelty of Giambologna's *Sabine* consists in part in the variety of wit it involves. I have also been suggesting that this wit was distinctly Florentine in a number of respects, tied as it was to a

47. An instructive comparison, on this point, is Adriaen de Vries's *Sabine*, which is modelled closely on the *Sabine* De Vries would have known from the days he was in Giambologna's studio. The younger artist's version omits the old man and changes the woman's posture so that she grasps her abductor by the hair—a gesture that, everywhere else in both Giambologna's and De Vries's sculpture, signals mastery, or the taking of a prisoner. See Fig. 13.

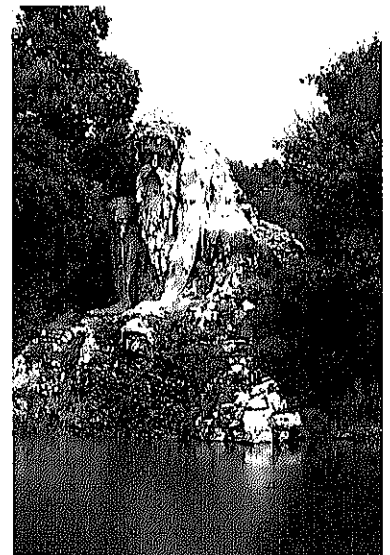


Fig. 10. Giambologna, *Appennine*, 1580, mixed media. Villa Demidoff, Pratolino. (Photo: author.)



48. This idea of Florence, which has roots in fifteenth-century Medici imagery, is perhaps most clearly promulgated in the bronze statue Giambologna himself made for the Medici Villa. See, most recently, Isabella Lapi Ballerini's entry in Strozzi and Zikos, *Giambologna: gli dei, gli eroi*, pp. 158–60.

49. The best short biography of De Vries is now that in Frits Scholten (ed.), *Adriaen de Vries, 1556–1626*, exhib. cat. (Rijksmuseum; Nationalmuseum; Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum; In association with Waanders, 1998).

50. Compare Scholten's entries in *Adriaen de Vries, 1556–1626*, pp. 125–7 and 144–7.

51. Compare Bartholomäus Spranger's *Hercules, Deianira, and Nessus*, likewise made for Rudolph II, as discussed in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, 'Eros et poesia: La Peinture à la cour de Rodolphe II', *Revue de l'Art*, vol. 18, 1985, pp. 29–46. For the general topos of the 'Woman on Top', the standard discussion remains that of Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top', reprinted in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1975), pp. 124–51.

specific dynasty of patrons, tradition of artists and community of poets. Giambologna's *Sabine*, however, also had an international reception, one considerably more wide-ranging and complex than that of the sculptures mentioned at the beginning of this essay. The intentional irresolution of its subject—a kind of polished *non-finito*—offered an invitation not just to Florentines, but also to Giambologna's European imitators, encouraging them to interpret his invention in their own way. The best illustration of this appears in the work of the Dutch sculptor Adriaen de Vries.

De Vries entered Giambologna's bottega in 1581, at the age of 25, and he remained there throughout the years during which the *Sabine* was the shop's central undertaking.<sup>49</sup> The work must have made a considerable impression on the young artist, for he would spin variations on its theme throughout his remaining career. The earliest of these seems to be a small bronze probably made for Emperor Rudolph II and currently in the Queen of England's collection (Fig. 12). The work shows a muscular, bearded nude man twisting his body to hold and gaze up at a nude woman, who in turn holds a bow. Here, as in Giambologna, there is a problem of naming: though Frits Scholten has suggested that the bow could identify the woman as the Amazon Antiope and her abductor as Theseus, it should be noted that De Vries's own *Hercules, Deianira and Nessus* (Fig. 12), dated by Scholten himself to roughly the same years as the Queen's piece, incorporates figures with nearly identical poses, and also gives the woman what seems to be a bow.<sup>50</sup> More important still is the fact that, however the bow may work as an attribute, hinting at the woman's name, it must also suggest something about the relationship of the characters. Significantly, the woman alone here is armed, and this complicates the question of which character has overcome the other. Is this a simple abduction scene, or is it an elaboration of a topos popular in Germany, that of the woman-on-top?<sup>51</sup>

While the general arrangement of De Vries's figures seems borrowed from Giambologna's *Sabine*, the woman's attitude is entirely different. Giambologna shows her resisting the aggressor, turning away with outstretched arms, but De Vries eliminates all of this. His *Deianira* looks calmly down at *Hercules*, opens her mouth and raises her index finger, as if to make a point. The arrangement provides for an antithesis absent from Giambologna's work: whereas the *Sabine* shows both figures aflame with emotion—Carroll goes so far as to suggest that 'a contemporary description of the standing man as a burning, or ardent, youth was no doubt suggested by the flamelike shape of the composition'—here the collected control of the 'ravished' woman distinguishes her from her abductor, who, no less furiously than Giambologna's *Talassius*, strides forward. While the muscular man seems even more the warrior than Giambologna's, the pose of the woman, her acknowledgment of her captor, dilutes, or at least qualifies, the impression of violence that pervades Giambologna's statue.

This is to underscore the ways in which De Vries's work departs from at least one traditional view of the Giambologna model it followed. Given De Vries's own background, however, it seems equally possible to approach his bronzes as readings of what Giambologna himself had done. The role De Vries gives *Deianira* is consonant, to begin, with contemporary glosses on the *Hercules* myth: one anonymous sixteenth-century Florentine synopsis of the hero's encounter with *Deianira*, for example, treats her as an embodiment of *Hercules*'s wisdom,<sup>52</sup> and writers from Vincenzo

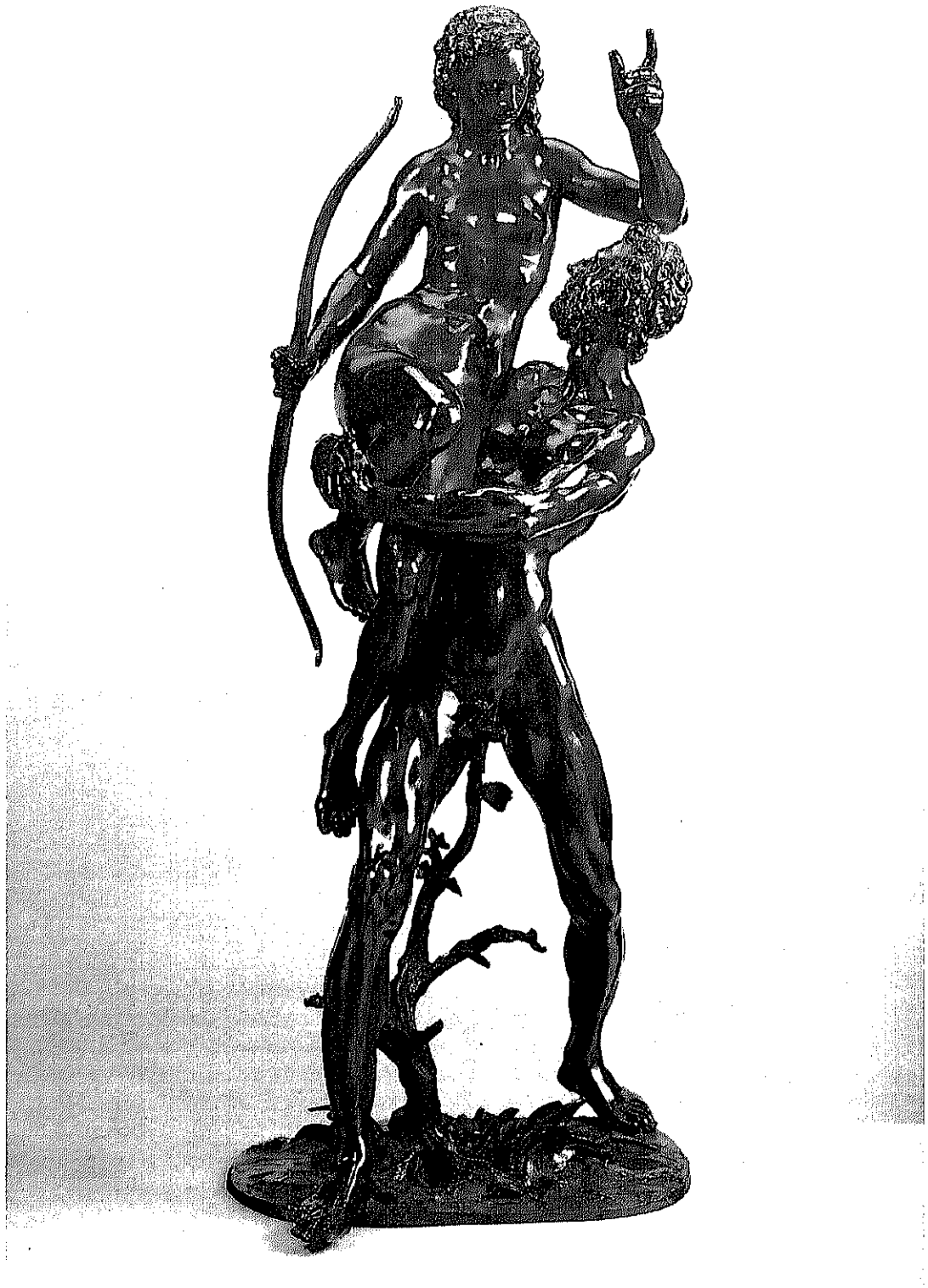


Fig. 11. Adriaen de Vries, *Theseus and Antiopé (or Hercules and Deianeira?)*, 1600–01, bronze, 95 cm. The Royal Collection © 2008 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



Fig. 12. Adriaen de Vries, *Hercules, Deianeira and Nessus*, 1603–08, bronze, 81.7 cm. Louvre, Paris. (Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.)

Cartari to Giovanni Battista della Porta stressed that Hercules's labours were deeds of the mind, not of the body.<sup>53</sup> Seeing the bronze in this light, it becomes all the more striking that Florentine viewers, looking at Giambologna's statue, had already associated the elevation of the woman with something like the mind or intelligence of the hero: Bernardo Davanzati, deciphering what he took to be an allegory, contended that the young woman stood for 'Idea', the 'thin old father' below for 'Study', and the ravishment itself for the yield of the artist's long work.<sup>54</sup> De Vries could well have heard and remembered this interpretation of the statue, and we might consequently ask whether he did not simply transform Giambologna's image of the inspiration that guided art-making into an emblem of the counsel that the acting hero must constantly take.

This is not to say that De Vries simplified what we might call the *direction* of ravishment, or that he saw only the gentlest side of his Florentine master's work. If anything, De Vries was even more sensitive than Giambologna to the excess of force such abduction scenes might seem to promote. Consider De Vries's own *Sabine*, made in 1621 (Fig. 13). This exchanges the old man over whom the hero (in most accounts) triumphs for a small sprite, outfitted with *talaria* and a caduceus. Though no contemporary documents naming this figure have yet come to light—Lars Larsson, in the standard De Vries monograph, refers to it as a 'Hermesknaabe,' and Volker Krahn likewise calls it 'Mercury'—a more plausible identification is Anteros, the child of Venus (thus his Cupid-like form) and the *pupil* of Mercury (thus his attributes).<sup>55</sup> As a comparison with Rubens (Fig. 14) or Poussin makes clear, Anteros represents a function as much as a genealogy: he appears where it is necessary to restrain worldly ardor, whether that be mundane love or the fury that drives soldiers to pillage.<sup>56</sup> The *spiritello* at Talassius's leg, in fact, might be compared with the Amor attached to De Vries's own earlier *Mercury and Cupid* (Fig. 15), where, in keeping with the work's inscription—'Industry is reined by love of the law'—a small winged figure, *Amor legis*, stays the god by removing his shoe. De Vries's Anteros might likewise be aligned with the images of Cupid mastering lions that could be found in contemporary emblem books, which, as D. J. Gordon has argued, stood for the taming powers of eloquence.<sup>57</sup> Or it might simply be approached with a view to the statue's own original setting, where, at the portal of Count Ernst von Holstein-Schaumburg's castle at Stadthagen, it would have served as a pendant to another De Vries statue, that of *Venus Detaining Adonis* (Fig. 16).<sup>58</sup> In any of these contexts, the work would have enjoined its viewers to compass their behaviour while conducting worldly and military affairs.

De Vries's *Hercules* demonstrates the artist's own capacity for serial variation on a theme, though it may also reveal an ambivalence about the enlivening ardor that Giambologna's *Sabine*, at least to some eyes, exemplified. Ardor could be an incitement to art and to virtue, but it could also embody the impulse that overrode one's better judgment and led to mindless action. What De Vries shows is that, even without straying from the brief to make statues that provided a moral exemplum, the primary actor in Giambologna's *Sabine* could be recaptured either as an aggressor or as a subject, as a wilful abductor or as an enthralled captive, motivated and controlled by something or someone outside of himself. And to bring this antithesis back around both to the broader question of Giambologna's audience and to the way his statue was understood in and immediately after Giambologna's time, we might conclude with a glance at

52. *Le dodici fatiche di Hercole* (Florence, no date), not paginated: 'Et Hercole che ancor di duol s'accora / giunse maladicendo la sua sorte, / Doue era Deianira saggia, & bella / E alla città andò con quella / [...] & pareo proprio la città di Thebe / Ampliata di seggio veramente / Nella qual visse lungo tempo in pace / Con la sua Deianira alma verace'. Italics mine.

53. See Caterina Volpi (ed.) Vincenzo Cartari, *Le immagini degli dèi* (De Luca: Rome, 1996), p. 378; one ancient source for this is Phornutus. See also Giovanni Battista Della Porta, *Della Fisonomia dell'huomo* (Pietro Paolo Tozzi: Padua, 1613), fol. 226r: 'Questa virtù per auanzar la nostra human conditione, fa l'huomo, nel quale alberga quasi simile al Angelo, ouero alle diuine intelligenze; perche quell'huomo che è pieno di tante virtù, par che auanzi la nostra humanità, ma non per questo può assomigliarsi alle intelligenze, ouer Angeli, a quali non conuengono le virtù morali, per auanzarne tutte le virtù morali, ma si chiama Heroe, ouero mezzo Dio. Tal fù nel tempo antico Hercole, Mercurio, Gioue e gl'altri.'

54. Sermartelli, *Aleune composizioni di diversi autori in lode del ritratto della Sabina*, p. 7.

55. On Anteros, see especially Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1996), pp. 230–7.

56. Relevant here is Edgar Wind's discussion of bridling, chastisement and instigation: see Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), pp. 145–51.

57. In describing an emblem from Achille Bocchi's *Symbolicae quaestiones*, Gordon comments: 'a putto, standing on a lion's head, and bridling it to show his mastery of it, points up to the gods whence his mastery comes: the motto is *sic monstra domantur*. To combine prudence or active sagacity with the suasions of eloquence for the taming of monsters: what else had Rubens tried to urge on rulers?' See D. J. Gordon, *The Renaissance Imagination: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Stephen Orgel (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1975), p. 48.

58. See Larsson, Lars Olof Larsson, *Adrian de Vries: Adrianus Fries Hagtiensis Batavus, 1545–1626* (Schroll: Vienna and Munich, 1967), p. 85.

one other early seventeenth-century sculptor who reflected seriously on the artist's composition.

In the *Pluto and Proserpina* (Fig. 18) he carved for Cardinal Scipione Borghese in 1621–1622, the young Gianlorenzo Bernini offered his own response to the *Sabine*. The artist's close attention to physiognomy and expression, no less than his astonishing transformation of hard stone into wrested flesh, together amplify the violence he saw in Giambologna's prototype. In this case, too, the statue came to be associated with a poetry that characterised its action as a 'ravishment': in a distich carved into the base of the statue, Maffeo Barberini (the future Pope Urban VIII) wrote 'O you who, bent to the earth, collect flowers, look at me, raped to the realm of cruel Pluto'.<sup>59</sup> The poem's primary device—the male poet speaking in the voice of the work's female victim, turns the marble into a kind of *statua parlante*, an effect likewise witnessed in Florence, if we imagine the poems with similar conceits there being likewise attached, at least temporarily, to the work itself. Yet no less significant is the imperative Barberini's lines assign to Proserpina—'inspice me'—especially given that that Bernini added black pigment to Pluto's irises, augmenting the intensity of his gaze.<sup>60</sup> Evidently the sculptor was attuned not only the *Sabine's* abduction narrative, but also to its thematics of looking, something that becomes all the more clear when we realise that the *Pluto*



Fig. 13. Adriaen de Vries, *Abduction of a Sabine*, 1621, bronze, 180 cm. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. (Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.)

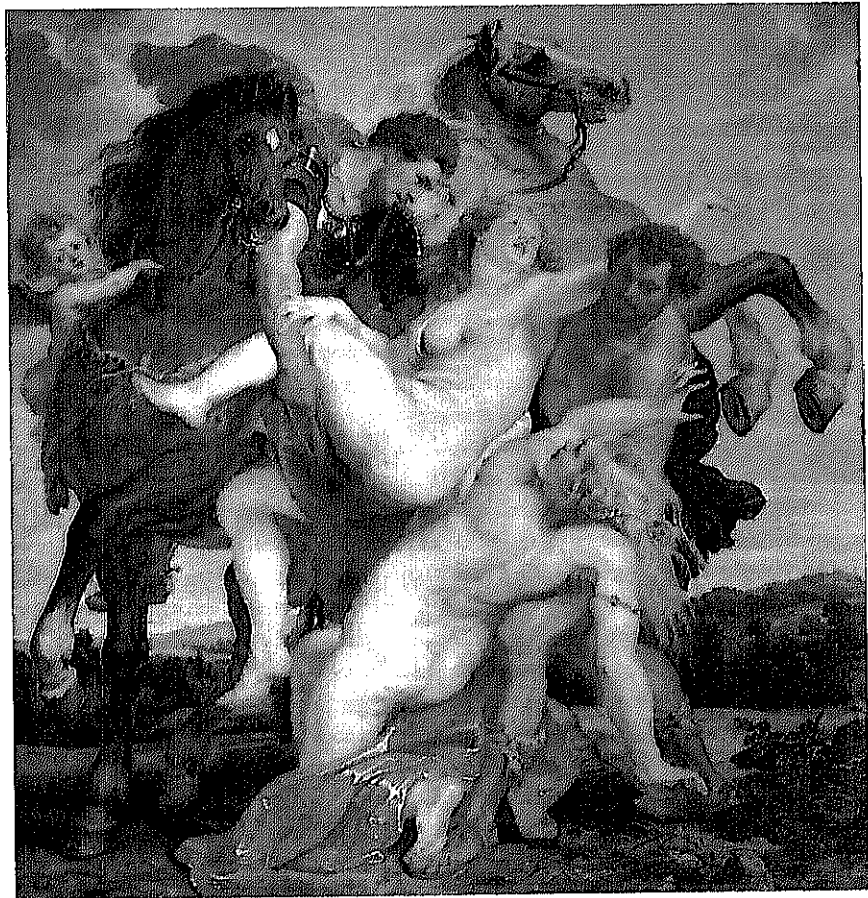


Fig. 14. Peter Paul Rubens, *Abduction of the Daughters of Leucippus*, ca. 1617, oil on canvas, 224 × 211 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich. (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.)



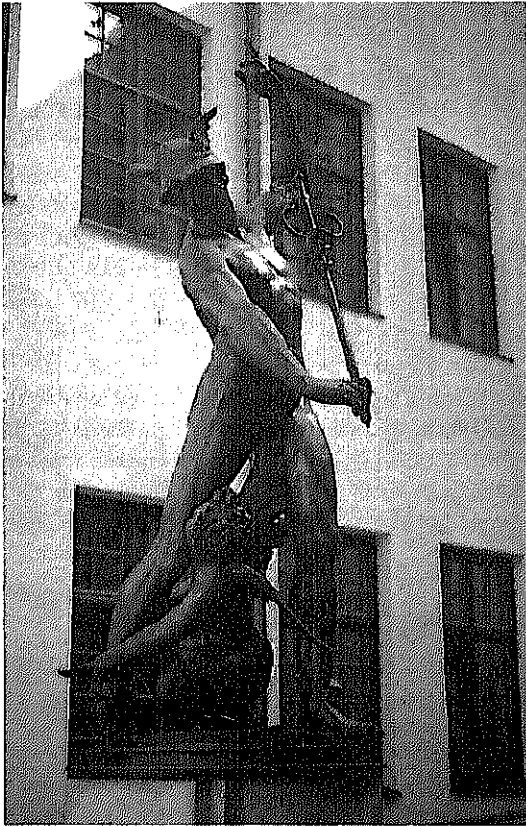


Fig. 15. Adriaen de Vries, *Mercury and Amor*, 1596–99, bronze, 250 cm. Städtische Kunstsammlungen, Augsburg. (Photo: author.)

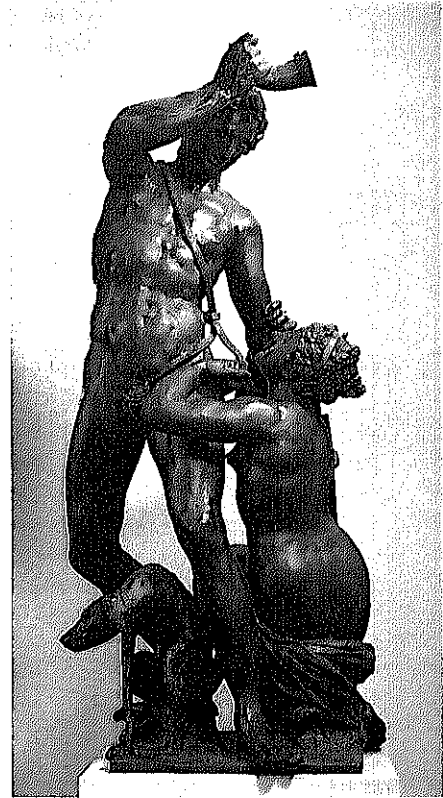


Fig. 16. Adriaen de Vries, *Venus and Adonis*, 1621, bronze, 175 cm. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. (Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.)

was not Bernini's first engagement with the sculptural format Giambologna had invented. A few years earlier, in his *Aeneas and Anchises* (Fig. 18), Bernini had spun Giambologna's model in a different way. Here, as in Giambologna, there are three figures, all carved out of a single stone. Like Giambologna's, Bernini's central character is a young hero with whom the patron could identify, and he is shown carrying off a second figure, thereby performing an act mythically associated with the founding of Rome. The textual basis for Bernini's rendering, moreover, allows that the gesture of carrying here, as in Giambologna's *Sabine*, involved a reference to the mind behind the hero's action. The *Aeneid* describes Anchises, shouldered by his son, as *prospiciens* (looking through the shade / seeing far off / foreseeing / providing for), and Bernini paid attention to this detail: whereas the main actor in his sculpture, the youth at its centre, glances vaguely down and to the side, Anchises, with furrowed brow and penetrating eyes, stares directly ahead.<sup>61</sup> Virgil's early sixteenth-century commentator Josse Bade (pen name Iodocus Badius Ascensius), focusing on whether the word *cerno* (I discern) in the line that follows was spoken by Anchises or by Aeneas himself, decides, on the basis of Servius's authority (and thus departing from most modern translators) on the latter.<sup>62</sup> Even Bade, though, allows that Aeneas would only have spoken the words *post Anchisae admonitionem* (following Anchises's warning); what remains is an understanding of Anchises as Aeneas's eyes and counsel. Bernini's own careful specification that it is Anchises's gaze to which the group's

59. For this, and for an important discussion of the sculpture generally, see Matthias Winner's entry in Coliva and Schütze, *Bernini Sculture*, pp. 180–223.

60. Winner, *Bernini Sculture*, p. 197.

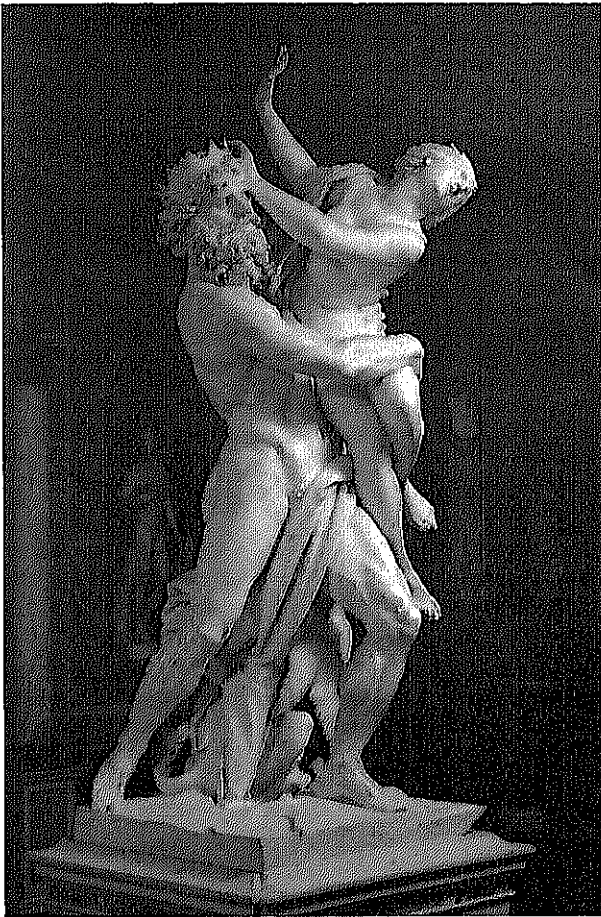


Fig. 17. Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Pluto and Proserpina*, 1621–22, marble, 295 cm. Villa Borghese, Rome. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.)

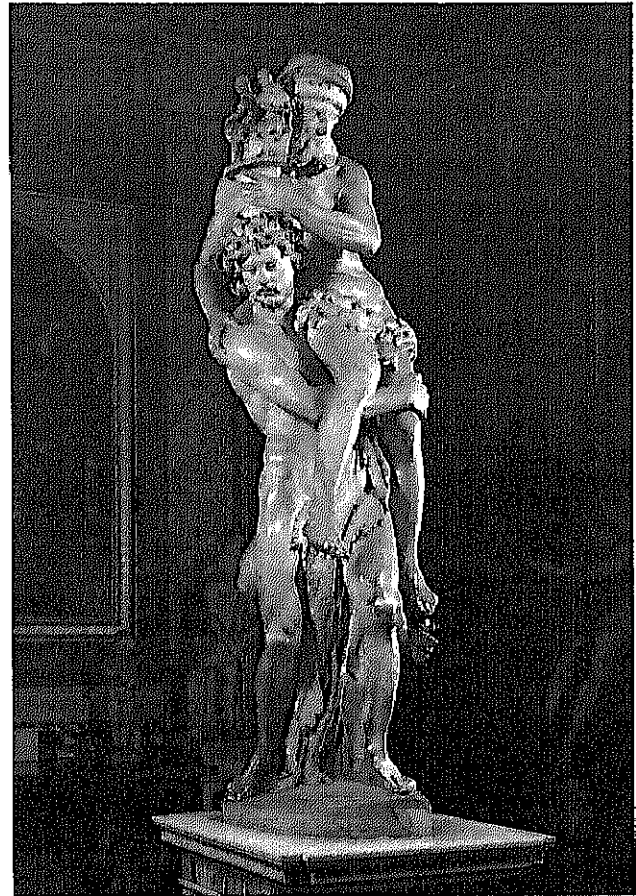


Fig. 18. Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Aeneas, Achises and Ascanius*, 1618–19, marble, 220 cm. Villa Borghese, Rome. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.)

61. *Aeneid* 2.733.

62. Virgil, *Opera* [1544] (Garland [facsimile edition]: New York, 1976), p. 232v.

directed movement corresponds (note, too, that Bernini's Anchises rests the *penates*, the household gods, on Aeneas's head) supports the possibility that the old man being carried is no helpless victim, dependent on his son for salvation. More than this, he is a guide, a lantern to Aeneas's course.

It might well be that Bernini could take the *Sabine* in two such radically different directions because of the kinds of access—or lack of it—that he had to Giambologna's statue. Having not been to Florence, he had not seen the relief Giambologna eventually affixed to the front of the work, establishing the story being treated. Probably Bernini knew the work from a nameless bronze reduction, or from one of the woodcut views of the work in circulation. Very likely, Bernini knew Borghini's account of the *Sabine's* nameless invention, since his father Pietro's teacher, Rudolfo Sirigatti, was one of the speakers in Borghini's dialogue. Bernini's access to the work, in other words, was of a sort that would, in anything, have heightened the work's liability to competing interpretations. His response to the earlier sculpture dramatises the degree to which Giambologna's avoidance of immediately recognisable story, his resistance to letting the statue work as illustration, forced viewers to scrutinise the represented action, asking themselves what should be attached to it.