

Katrina Powers

University of Chicago

Title: The Image of Virtue: Interpreting Susanna in Lope de Vega and Renaissance Art

Abstract: In *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, Lope de Vega alludes to an ekphrastic scene from Terence's *The Eunuch*, in which a youth finds erotic inspiration in a picture of Zeus and Danae. Lope replaces this image with the Old Testament story of Susanna. This paper analyzes how the substitution affects the characterization of the play's female protagonist, establishing a parallel between her and the biblical model of virtue. I also consider the ways in which Susanna was represented in Italian Renaissance paintings, and whether or not these images influenced the misinterpretation of the story by Lope's character. The play seems to uphold the Tridentine decree that religious imagery is important in providing examples of model behavior. However, the ekphrastic scene can be read as either upholding or challenging Trent's exhortation that religious art should be presented in a decorous and non-lascivious manner. The scene, like the images of Susanna, can be interpreted in a variety of ways.