

“Qué hermosa pintura es esta”: The Ekphrastic Struggle Between Men and Women in  
*Las mujeres sin hombres*

Set in the mythological territory of Scythia, *Las mujeres sin hombres* (1613-18) retells the story of the Amazons and their struggle against the Greek male invasion and power. This play by Lope de Vega may also be loosely based on one of Hercules' labours, the theft of the girdle of the Amazon Queen Hippolyta even though there is a lot of debate on the playwright's inspiration. Literary critics, like Denise M. DiPuccio, have tackled the question of honour and dignity in the work (72-88), while Michael D. McGaha discusses the feminist components of the play possibly caused by Lope's most recent and last great love, Marta de Nevaes Santoyo (157-69). Frederick De Armas, on the other hand, has discussed the importance of the Greek painter Apelles in works by Lope de Vega. This scholar concludes that the play reenacts the fight between Mars and Venus in which love/Venus defeats war/Mars where Apelles “había presentado en su pintura al amor pisando libros y espadas” (722). While De Armas focuses on the significance of Apelles to Lope de Vega, I would like to look at another ekphrasis that thus far has been completely overlooked by academics. By studying the iconographic images inside Queen Antiope's chambers described by the Greek Teseo sent to discuss a truce with the Amazons, I will argue that the imagery encompasses the essential topic of the work: the struggle between men and women. By uncovering and studying the detailed description of this painting/curtain, the conflict of the play becomes evermore apparent.