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“Hercules and Omphale” by François Boucher, Pouchkine museum.



“Hercules and Omphale” by François Lemoyne, Louvre museum.



“Hercules and Omphale” by Rubens, circa 1602, Louvre museum.

After having killed Iphitos, the son of king Eurytos,**Hercules** was submitted to three years of servitude by the oracle Delphes, to atone for his faults. Bought as a slave by the queen of Lydie, Omphale, he carried out a number of exploits to free her kingdom of monsters such as the Certopes and bandits such as the Itones. There are many different versions of the love between Omphale and Hercules. The most well known is the one that says that from admiring Hercules’s strength and exploits, she sought to become his lover and once he was liberated from servitude, his wife. However at Lucien, Propertius and Seneca’s place, Omphale demanded Hercules to wear women’s clothing and to spin wool whilst she worked on the skin of the Nemean lion and making a club. At Seneca’s, Ompahele even went as far as punishing heroes by hitting them with her slipper. This theme of reversed roles in love has been used by many painters, during the 17th century and even more during the 18th century, because of its light and funny side. In fact during this century, stories about Hercules moved from stories about his work to his love stories. The works of Rubens, Boucher, and François Lemoyne are among some of the most famous representations of this mythological theme. There are also other variations of his stories like the one that says that Hercules, in love with Omphale, voluntarily gave himself up to be a slave, or the rumour by Paon that Hercules dressed liked a woman after having been turned down by Omphale. Whatever the story really was, the dividing stories of the heroic and mythical figure of Hercules all still reflect a reversal of genders in love.