

THE ETIENNE GILSON SERIES 26

*The Male Gaze and Other Reasons
for the Hypothetical End of
Christian Art in the West*

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Front cover

Detail from Jan Van Bijlert, *The Calling of Matthew* (ca 1620–1629).
Budapest: Museum of Fine Art.

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I begin this talk in a contrite frame of mind. My intention was, and is, to pay tribute to Étienne Gilson (1884–1978), because we are here to honor him and, speaking for myself, because, with a fragment by Xenophon of Colophon, his writings suggested a connection to my mind between the project of self-knowing and religious art as a kind of mirror that makes it possible for us to see, and know, ourselves. (After all, we cannot see our own faces without some kind of mirror.) However, Gilson’s writings offer little on the subject of medieval art. That is why, incongruously enough, I am offering to the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies a talk that follows where Gilson’s enthusiasms led, to the Counter-Reformation and its aftermath down to Cubism.

At another stage of my life, I might have chosen to celebrate my debt to Étienne Gilson, the founder of this Institute, with reflections on Augustine, but, this year, I find myself standing on his shoulders and looking into the Promised Land of Art. The study of art ran like a deep and driving current through Gilson’s life. As he recalled in his Mellon Lectures, *Painting and Reality* (1955), his first published work on the philosophy of art, exactly forty years earlier (1915), ignited his “personal evolution ... to the rediscovery of the solid, down-to-earth realm of the classical metaphysics of being as interpreted by St. Thomas Aquinas.” He hinted at the heights to which his passionate devotion to art had soared when he wrote: “He who sincerely exposes himself to creative art and agrees to share in its ventures ... will know the exhilarating feeling of finding himself in contact with the closest analogue there is, in human experience, to the creative power from which all the beauties of art as well as those of nature ultimately proceed. Its name is Being.”¹

My task tonight is a gloss on a few sentences in Gilson’s Mellon Lectures. “Religion can survive without art,” Gilson wrote; “it even survives in spite of the fact that its churches have largely become so many temples

1. Étienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), pp. x, 299. An essential body of material brought together in this lecture was collected during my year as Fellow of the Erasmus Institute, at the University of Notre Dame (2001–2002). I am grateful to the Erasmus Institute for its generous hospitality and for the intellectual companionship it provided.

dedicated to the exhibition of industrialized ugliness and to the veneration of painted nonbeing When Christian artists are called upon to celebrate the glory of God by co-operating, in their modest human manner, with the work of creation, it becomes imperative that their own works be things of beauty. Otherwise, these works would not truly *be*, and the artists themselves would contribute nothing.² Gilson did not go as far as his colleague at the Pontifical Institute, Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), who called the ugliness of nineteenth-century devotional art “devilish,” calculated to drive people from the Church.³

What Gilson and Maritain deplored as modern ugliness was the last flowering of Baroque devotional art, in particularly sentimental, mass-produced forms. I am concerned to follow a lead from Gilson in reading the crisis in Baroque art specifically as expressing a crisis in self-knowing – or, to use Gilson’s own term, “Christian Socratism.”

Gilson was witness to a long-protracted crisis behind the alleged ugliness. In *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, he wrote of a decline that began in the early modern period when metaphysical unities underlying Christian culture had failed because philosophy “forgot” its Christian essence. A splintering of Christendom by “the revolt of national egoism” – i.e., the Reformation and Counter-Reformation – followed, and then “decrepitude.” “Scholasticism and Christendom crumbled together under their own weight.” In *Forms and Substances in the Arts*, he recalled the technical perfection achieved by “the old masters” (referring to Veronese [1528–1588] and Tintoretto [1518–1594] in the sixteenth century and Tiepolo [1696–1770] in the eighteenth), perfection lost, perhaps never to be recovered.⁴ In identifying three catastrophes out of which the Baroque crisis came, Gilson left unmentioned the catastrophe that it anticipated: the French Revolution and the new forces of industrialization and mass culture that rushed in to fill the voids the Revolution left in its wake.

Armand Maurer has defined with elegant conciseness and precision Gilson’s emphasis on painting as an interplay of mind and hand – of knowledge and production – rather than chiefly a cognitive action. This premise gives the key that unlocks one of Gilson’s paradoxes: that, while the art of painting flourished after the Baroque – and, indeed, went from strength to strength – Christian art declined into industrialized ugliness. The key is exactly in the paired acts of knowledge and production. For Gilson, the art of

2. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, pp. 295–296.

3. Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism, with Other Essays*, trans. J.F. Scanlon (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932), pp. 63–64.

4. Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (New York: Scribner’s, 1940), pp. 402, 426; Étienne Gilson, *Forms and Substances in the Arts*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), p. 133.

painting was free of any subject matter, regardless of content. As in Cubism, it could be subjectless. “All creative art is religious in its own right,”⁵ he wrote, elevating art itself to the status of religion. But Christian art must always be representational. It was more picture than painting, always “pictorial illustrations of printable stories,” “so many talking images.” Though he elevated painting to the level of religion, Gilson was unsure whether any religious picture could “be conceived as a painting.”⁶

As Gilson put history together, a series of catastrophes occupying the entire sweep from the late Middle Ages to the end of the Baroque lay behind the decline of Christian art. It is very important for us that Gilson once reflected on the mental activity by which he formed artistic judgments such as his praise of Cubism and his lament over “industrialized ugliness” adorning churches. He wrote that he could see a picture in either of two ways. In the first, he looked at it as an object of analysis, “as a work of art.” As such, an accomplished picture could arouse “an esthetic emotion [admiration] caused by the art of the painter.”

From the esthetic standpoint, Gilson recognized the Baroque, not only as the end of a period in art history, but also, in those events which he described as “catastrophes,” as the beginning of something new and deeply true in a religious sense, though detached from organized religion. In this, his position resembles that set forth in a lecture given by Erwin Panofsky in 1934, and published posthumously sixty years later. There, Panofsky acknowledged the era of the Baroque as “the end of the humanistic tradition of the Renaissance,” but also “the birth of modern European consciousness.”⁷ In the second way of seeing, Gilson wrote, he looked at the painting as “a religious image”: that is, he looked to it as a reminder of the holy subject depicted, and as a spur to religious emotions. “The image,” he wrote, “makes me look within myself for the object of my piety.”⁸

The first, esthetic, way of seeing was a quest for beauty. It regarded artifice in pictures. The second, religious way, mistrusted beauty. It looked through

5. See, for example, Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2000), p. 9; *Painting and Reality*, pp. 151–152. Armand A. Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1983), pp. 97–100, comparing Gilson’s stance with Maritain’s; I am deeply grateful to Fr. James McConica for providing a copy of this essay, which began as a Gilson Lecture.

6. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, pp. 132, 244, 268, 294–295.

7. See Irving Lavin, “Introduction,” in Erwin Panofsky, *Three Essays on Style*, ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 8–9, with Panofsky’s “What Is Baroque,” pp. 19–88. I am grateful to Professor Lavin for directing me to this seminal lecture.

8. Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful*, pp. 172–173.

the picture, beyond art. We recognize in it the distinction, so common in medieval theology, between the exterior and the interior vision. What moved Saint Francis was not the painted crucifix that his bodily eyes saw, but the presence manifested to his inward senses as speaking from within the crucifix.

Plainly, to enter into the devotional use of art, one had to practice the second way of seeing. But was its purity compromised by the first, the sensual, way? The two ways of seeing – esthetic, or external, and religious, or internal – were not necessarily compatible. Indeed, the powerful risk that the artistic loveliness of nudity in painting would kindle fires of eroticism, and the rebellious tendency of art, even in the service of worship, to assert its autonomy were examples of why Christianity was mistrustful of art. Beauty, Gilson, acknowledged, could embarrass or sabotage the functions of religious art, as Michelangelo's did, blinding viewers to what his masterpieces represented.⁹ “Does not every great work of art,” Gilson asked, “involve to some degree a renunciation of God?”¹⁰ Christianity remained behind, with its pictures, while painting moved ahead to Cubism.

In setting forth these two ways of seeing, Gilson disclosed that they stood upon the same bedrock: namely, self-awareness. With its inward turning, his characterization of religious seeing is particularly obvious as a way of putting the Delphic oracle, “Know thyself,” into practice. But critical, esthetic analysis was also an exercise in the form of self-knowing Gilson called “Christian Socratism.”¹¹

When it came to artists, even Gilson wandered from the diagram. For he arrived at the radical proposition that there might be no self for artists to know. Literally absorbed in their creations, artists were what they made. With no fixed identities, they were always becoming something else as they moved from work to work. An artist's “I” never “existed at all, but was always becoming someone else.”¹² Similarly, Luigi Pirandello's lesson in his play, *Enrico IV* (1924), is that we are, chameleon-like, the multiple roles we assign ourselves. In the age of the Baroque, could the attenuation of the self and duplicity of role-playing have been functions of religious art for communities, as well as for artists and individuals generally?

For a little while, I am going on in my usual labyrinthine way, but there is a thread that will lead you safely through the labyrinth. It is this scheme of double vision: exterior, with the eyes of the body, and interior, with the eyes of the mind (or soul). This is also the thread that ties art to self-knowing, as

9. Ibid., pp. 171–173.

10. Étienne Gilson, *Choir of Muses*, trans. Maisie Ward (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953), p. 192.

11. Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 209–228.

12. Gilson, *Choir of Muses*, pp. 191–192.

Gilson implied when he wrote that looking at pictures as religious images made him look within himself. The scheme of double vision is nothing but a diagram of how we know by seeing religious art and how we know ourselves by watching ourselves in the act of cognition about it. In this regard, I have to qualify the statements by those unimpeachable judges, Gilson himself and Fr. Maurer, that Gilson's emphasis on art fell more on knowledge and production than on cognition. Not everyone accepted the double-vision diagram.

I admit that art, portraiture most of all, can be a weak reed for any project for self-knowing. In Baroque portraiture, patrons wielded heavy hands, at least at the end. The last chapter of an unhappy story of relations between an artist and his patron comes to mind. After Bernini's death (1680), his equestrian statue of Louis XIV was laboriously transported across the Alps and set up at Versailles for royal inspection.¹³ The King inexplicably avoided visiting the section of the Chateau where it stood. One day, he arrived and instantly ordered its demolition. There is no way to tell whether he was moved by residual disappointment in Bernini, who had failed to satisfy the King's architectural desires. Louis was prevailed upon to spare the statue, but only on condition that it be recarved to represent the Roman hero, Marcus Curtius, committing suicide, and that it be banished to a distant fountain in the gardens, invisible from the palace.

Patrons notoriously directed artists at the stage of composition, supplying furniture and costumes, often borrowed; from Antiquity onward, artists had known the wisdom of portraying subjects more comely than they were. Portraiture as exhibitionism – like Bernini's statue – made a natural alliance with this ancient demand for portraiture as nature to advantage dressed. Portraits of the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia (1566–1633), Regent of the Netherlands, illustrate how considerations of presentation entered into transactions between her and premier artists of her day.

In the magnificent altarpiece the Infanta commissioned for the Confraternity of Saint Ildefonso, in Brussels (1630–1632), Rubens portrayed her and her deceased husband and cousin, the Archduke Albert, in full imperial array.¹⁴ The picture was a theatrical construction; for it depicted Albert alive

13. Simone Hoog, "The Equestrian Statue of Louis XIV," in *Splendors of Versailles*, ed. Claire Constans and Xavier Salmon (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Arts Pavilion, 1998), pp. 38–41.

14. The connoisseurship of Albert and Isabella is celebrated in a painting by Willem van Haecht, *The Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Isabella Visiting the Picture Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest* (1628), Antwerp: Rubenshuis. Another painting entitled *The Archdukes Albert and Isabella in a Collector's Cabinet*, by Franz Francken II (and workshop) with Jan Breughel II (ca 1626) is in Baltimore, at The Walters Art Gallery.

and well, though he had been dead for nine years (1621). The Infanta too, so radiant and young and slender in the *Ildefonso Altarpiece*, had worn the habit of the Poor Clares as she matured in her widowhood and gained a Rubensesque corpulence. A little earlier than the altarpiece, Rubens painted her older self in an individual portrait (1627–1632) and again, in a grandly staged representation of the Infanta personifying St. Teresa of Ávila, lifted up to heaven in the company of angels and interceding with Christ for souls in Purgatory. After her death, Rubens portrayed the Infanta once again raised up to heaven, this time in a secular apotheosis. He depicted her airborne, in the Poor Clares' habit, but without any other pious iconography or allusions to Christian doctrine.¹⁵ In these pictures, exhibitionism and a ceremonial masking of physical realities combine with (probably) unintended humor, in the Infanta's corpulent defiance of gravity, in the unascetic personification of Teresa of Ávila.¹⁶

Rigaud's sumptuous portrait of the Cardinal Bouillon (1708) displays the same traits of exhibitionism, covering realities with the mask of ceremony, and unintended burlesque.¹⁷ This picture is anything but an exercise in self-knowing. What Rigaud and his exalted subject wanted viewers to learn from the attributes in the portrait was power, wealth, and pomp: from his robes and the insignia around his neck, that the subject was both Cardinal and a member of the most exalted order in France, the Order of the Holy Spirit; from the ornate and overflowing cash-box, that he had been Grand Almoner of France (1671–1700); from the gold mason's mallet and trowel, that he had served as legate in charge of opening and sealing the patriarchal doors during the papal jubilee of 1700. Serenely, the Cardinal sits in a pool of radiant light and unruffled opulence while a storm rages overhead, a souvenir of the fact that the Cardinal had survived a bitter dispute in which the King had confiscated his property and packed him into exile. When the King's Painter executed this portrait, Louis XIV had been reconciled with the Cardinal, but

15. See Maria Varshavskaya et al., *Peter Paul Rubens: Paintings from Soviet Museums* (Leningrad: Aurora, 1989), nos. 80, 81, pp. 169–172. The memorial arch for the Infanta that displayed her apotheosis was part of a lavish ensemble of temporary constructions erected to celebrate the ceremonial entry of her successor as Governor of the Southern Netherlands, the Infante Cardinal Ferdinand, in Antwerp (1635). *Ibid.*, nos. 72–89, pp. 158–187.

16. Peter Paul Rubens, *Ildefonso Altarpiece* (1630–1632), Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum. Peter Paul Rubens, *Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia* (1625), Pasadena, California: Norton Simon Foundation. Peter Paul Rubens, *St. Teresa Praying for Souls in Purgatory* (ca 1630–1633), Anvers: Musée Royale des Beaux Arts.

17. Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Cardinal de Bouillon* (1708), Perpignan: Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud. On the phrase, “mask of ceremony,” see below, n56.

only momentarily, since repeated confiscation and exile lay ahead. Amidst such pomp, there are touches of humor in the contrast between serenity and storm in the same space, the drapery flapping in the face of the classical bust, the Cardinal, jovially debonair and as mindless of the storm as he is of the magnificent Cross and the naked children before him, and the understated lace and the red biretta that he dangles nonchalantly, magnificently, at arm's length as the geometrical focus of the composition.

Evidently, these traits of exhibitionism, ceremonial masquerade, and humor in the portraits of the Infanta and the Cardinal signified more about how religion entered into their self-parade than about how it entered into their self-knowing. Later, I shall ferret them out in religious painting generally.

Gilson lamented that Christian art had become ugly, and he found the antecedents of that ugliness in three "catastrophes": the de-Christianization of scholastic philosophy, the splintering of Christendom (in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation), and the decay of technical proficiency in painting. I believe the case should be posed differently. Gilson leaves out one key actor in the drama of religious art: the community. Just as religions cannot exist without a community, so also there can be no private religious art. To the contrary, an essential characteristic of religious art is that the whole worshipping community recognizes and cherishes it as a vehicle of self-knowing and devotion, even in what *cognoscenti* judge to be ugliness.¹⁸ Thus, I look beyond the single line of development sketched out by Gilson. I look beyond the three "catastrophes" that led to the Baroque crisis to the crisis of the French Revolution toward which it pointed.

For me, debate and controversy generated by pluralism within tradition overarches everything else. Hence, it is crucial to take account of the fact that the transformations in Christian art in the age of the Baroque emerged from

18. For one seventeenth-century acknowledgment that ugliness did not count against devotional images, see Justus Lipsius, *Miracles of the B. Virgin; Or, an Historical Account of the Original, and Stupendious [sic] Performances of the Image Entitled Our Blessed Lady of Halle*, trans. anon. (London: [s.n.], 1688), p. 5. After saying that clothes and ornaments with which the statue was vested hid it from sight, Lipsius remarked: "It is not esteemed for its composure, nor the matter of which it is composed (that being slight and common) nor its black color, caused by its antiquity, and the smoake [sic] of lamps: but there is a more than human majesty attends it, because it represents the B. Virgin, who is so honorable, and hath done so many miracles and doth daily Amongst all the miraculous images of the B. Virgin (especially those that were found in the Netherlands) there was none whose manner was sumptuous, or composure elegant. Therefore they would not be esteemed, were not their worth enhanced by faith, which neglecting the curiosities of the image, fixes itself upon the mighty power of God which appears through the image"

conflict within a very long tradition, part of which denied any metaphysical purpose in religious art, and, in fact, without subsiding into iconoclasm, considered the visual arts at best matters of indifference and at worst dangers to spiritual self-knowing. This branch of tradition subverted Gilson's second way of seeing sacred art: to spur religious emotion.

Leaving patristic antecedents aside, I find this subversive indifference to art almost uniformly held by Carolingian writers. This is where we recover our thread through the labyrinth, the diagram of double vision. While they knew the two ways of seeing – by exterior and interior “eyes” – alluded to by Gilson, when it came to art, Carolingian writers generally excluded interior vision, a spur to religious emotion. They knew the first way, exterior vision, well enough and held to it. As Agobard of Lyons (769–840) wrote, we look at a painting (*pictura*) as a painting, something that lacks life, feeling and reason. The eye is fed by this sight (*visione*). Yet, the mind worships God who gives the crown of victory to his holy ones – not to painted angels, apostles, and martyrs – and, by their intercessions sustains us. Idolaters and the heretical Anthropomorphites adored works of human hands (*figmenta*). But, to avert the superstition of looking to images for help, orthodox Fathers decreed that there be no paintings in churches.¹⁹

In the extensive treatise he wrote against Byzantines, both iconoclasts and iconodules, Theodulf of Orléans (*ca* 750–821) plainly set forth the conviction that images had been invented by human beings, and that they were nothing other than works of human hands, whose use was a matter of custom. Among the Christian peoples of the world, he observed, some used religious images; others did not. Many ascetics lived holy lives without them, and the poor could not afford them. The physical beauty of the icon had nothing in common with spiritual beauty, for it was proportionate to the resplendence of its materials and the individual skill of its maker. Theodulf repeatedly insisted that the faithful saw Christ with the eyes of the mind, not with those of the body. For those who employed images as instruments of contemplation, the paintings were human barriers to knowing God and self alike. Like its antecedents in pagan idolatry, Theodulf wrote, Byzantine veneration of images sprang from figments made by human minds. It was self-worship, idolatrous.

A little later, the greatest theologian of the age, John Scotus Eriugena (*ca* 810–877), likewise brushed aside all material forms as treacherous decoys of carnal sense and superstition seducing souls from knowledge of self and God, and challenging ideas that the mind made of its sensory impressions as idols, empty dreams, that it made out of its inner phantasms.

19. Agobard of Lyons, “De picturis et imaginibus” 31, 33 in *Opera omnia*, ed. L. Van Acker, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 52 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), pp. 179, 180.

Many other writers in the ninth and following centuries followed and developed these lines of argument. Some, supremely St. Thomas Aquinas (1224/5–1274), left the arts entirely out of all cognition, including self-knowing. Even when such thinkers used the diagram of double vision to explain cognition, they excluded art, as did the Carolingians.²⁰

In the light of this branch of tradition, the connection between art and self-knowing appeared extremely problematic. What might appear metaphysical truths are unmasked as custom or habit. In its later medieval stages, the double-vision diagram belonged to the story of how Scholasticism transfused itself into Mannerism.²¹ Because religious art is common property for a whole community, I believe that the tendency of the diagram to dissolve esthetic vision into custom and religious vision into incommunicable personal inwardness fomented the three “catastrophes” mentioned by Gilson, and anticipated the catastrophe of the French Revolution, not mentioned by him. In fact, Gilson omits one salient characteristic of religious art: namely, that it belongs to a whole community.

Less privileged social orders, of course, had their own segments of the tradition, appearing only when exalted persons thought to record their contempt, as Erasmus (*ca* 1466–1536) did in *The Praise of Folly*. In a classic statement of the superiority the enlightened felt over the commons, Erasmus wrote about the devotional use of religious images. Devotées, he said, subverted true religion; for, by honoring lifeless images and pictures, they failed to distinguish between the subjects represented and the figures that portrayed them. This was sheer folly, he wrote, but so was the attitude of priests and religious who knew better but were eager to keep raking the profits of superstitious piety into their sanctuaries. “The worst art pleases the most people.” When he thought of “the common and baser sort,” Erasmus found follies beyond number, so many “that a thousand Democrituses [scoffing philosophers] would not suffice for laughing at them.”²² Such contempt was not immune to fear that the base could contaminate the noble. At any rate, contempt for the simple and rustic spurned the segment of medieval tradition that found divine beauty in ugliness, and, indeed, subsumed all dissonances into harmony and found uglinesses essential components in the beauty of the cosmos. The Baroque crisis is not understandable without reference to class segregation and its frictions.

20. Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful*, p. 113.

21. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 208–209.

22. Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly* 20, 23, 24, trans. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 56–58, 66, 67.

Thus, Gilson's comment on "industrialized ugliness" of contemporary church art raises another serious question: Who does the seeing? Obviously, the people who filled their churches with the art he disapproved thought it worthy to adorn the Lord's house. Who does the seeing?

I find it hard to escape the conclusion that, from the patristic age onward, powerful currents in orthodox tradition consistently separated the pursuit of religious art, as human custom, from that of revealed truth in theology. Consequently, the value of religious art as a means of knowing God and self was widely doubted. In fact, I am unclear exactly where to locate art in the project known as "Christian Socratism," or, more to the point, where Gilson would have located it in that project. (Panofsky left no such unclarity. The Baroque marked a conquest of the fetters and contortions and concealments induced by the Counter-Reformation, a free embracing of the world by self-consciousness, or, as Panofsky put it, a "triumphal outburst of the new freedom gradually conquered during the seventeenth century.")²³ The reason for Gilson's unclarity, again, is in patristic and medieval tradition. For, at least from Augustine onward, convincing, authentic voices declared that self-knowing was impossible, and even that the goal of self-knowing, union with God, brought self-forgetting.

I shall, without elaboration, offer the premise that Baroque religious painting took for granted one way of looking, a point of view that has come to be known as "the male gaze." Our own age of criticism has taught us that knowing is not a faculty inscribed uniformly in human nature. Instead, how and what we know is inscribed very differently in individuals by biology and by roles society assigns. Notably, society parcels out those roles differently, for biological reasons, to women and to men. Thus, in a male-dominated culture, literature and art are subject to censorship by "the male gaze." Responding to that gaze, books and pictures make sense from the masculine perspective, reinforcing spoken and unspoken ethics of male dominance and female subjection.

No one could doubt that there was a female gaze. But how is it to be recovered? When we go to the Bayeux Tapestry, the illuminations by Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), or the *Hortus Deliciarum* of Herrard of Hohenbourg (*d* 1150; *d* 1195), when we consider the visual apparatus sustaining "female spirituality" admirably analyzed by Jeffrey Hamburger, it is possible to detect individualizing traits of style and content.²⁴ But a generic "female gaze" is elusive. So it is also for women painters of the Baroque, Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614) and the rest, producing works to satisfy expectations of a male clientele.

23. Panofsky, "What is Baroque?," pp. 61–67.

24. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

By contrast, a generic male gaze presents itself with unadorned frankness. In exaggerated expressions, artists reduced the male gaze to sheer lust. But other themes, and artistic imaginations, allowed more sinister, convoluted treatments. A painting by Artemisia Gentileschi (1595–1652/3) illustrates how complex isolating the female gaze from the male may be.²⁵ In this picture, Gentileschi portrays a familiar subject with unusual splendor. David's first glimpse of Bathsheeba allowed her, like other artists, to portray the physical opulence of Bathsheeba dominating the scene, while reducing David and his burning, possessive stare to a background element, hardly visible. However, the cruel violence in the sequel to this love at first sight was packed into the covert, minute figure of the King. That tiny figure overpowered Bathsheeba's opulent grandeur; for in it was packed the multiple sin of deception, betrayal and murder of a loyal, innocent friend, adultery, and, of course, the death of the infant that punished the forbidden union. The minute figure of David in the background put Bathsheeba directly between the King and the viewer of the picture. Both of them – the painted David and the living viewer – were invisible to Bathsheeba, but the picture created an implicit voyeuristic parallel between David and the viewer, and, in fact, caused their lines of vision to converge on her naked body.

Of course, one gaze that is not represented dominates the entire composition: namely, the artist's, in this case, a female gaze working together with the insights of Gentileschi's male assistants. As St. Thomas wrote, in a passage quoted by Bossuet, the form-giving power of reason resides, not in the movements of artificial things, like clocks “and all devices put together by human art,” but in their makers – in this case, not in the picture, but in Gentileschi.²⁶ Could it have been true of Gentileschi, as Gilson maintained of artists in general, that she had no “I,” no self to know, since the essence of her was absorbed into her works one after another, and that, at least for this picture, whatever self she had was absorbed into David's predatory gaze?

There are signs that the mimetic tautology that underlay religious art was in jeopardy, that, in culture generally, people were less sure that they could contemplate, and know themselves, through the mirrors of cosmos, Scripture, and art. Indeed, there are signs that the entire project of self-knowing had come to be regarded as impossible. I refer, telescopically, to two works of art that deny the possibility of self-knowing – “Christian Socratism” – the one at the beginning of the Baroque era, the other at, or a little after, the end.

25. Artemisia Gentileschi (with assistants), *David and Bathsheeba* (ca 1636–38). Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Museum of Art.

26. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia–IIae, q. 13, a. 2, ad 3. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, “De la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-même” 5, in Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. F. Lachat (Paris: Vivès, 1864), vol. 23, p. 209.

They bracket the Baroque. Both depict the male gaze in action, and its failure. The first is a drawing by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (*ca* 1525–1569); the second, an etching by Francisco Goya (1746–1828).²⁷ Brueghel's drawing, *Elck* ("Everyman," 1558) takes its theme from a picture within the picture. On the wall in the background hangs a framed representation of a man looking at his own face in a mirror. The caption underneath the picture-in-the-picture subverts the self-regarding image with the words: "*Niemand en kent hem selven*" ("No one knows himself"). The joke in this picture is in the fictional character named "*Nemo*" ("No One"), the hero of sermons, parables, and folk tales about how "*Nemo*" actually did amazing feats that "no one" could do. Brueghel's drawing depicts a *Doppelgänger* of the fictional *Nemo*, a figure who, despite his sixteenth-century Netherlandish costume, is easily recognizable as the ancient Greek philosopher, Diogenes of Sinope, seeking an honest man with a burning lantern in broad daylight, and failing in all five episodes depicted.

More than two centuries later (1799), Goya also branded the project of self-knowing impossible. But his etching, *Nadie de conoiccie*, indicates a line of reasoning quite different from Brueghel's essay on the futility of competition. Instead of Brueghel's many episodes, Goya depicts one moment, an instant in a masquerade when a man and a woman, masked, encounter one another. Caught in a bright ray of light, the man bows with a gesture of sexual innuendo; leaning backward against some invisible support at the edge of the picture, both feet together, the woman responds with what may be a modified curtsy. Are they emerging from the dense shadows that surround them, or fading into them? There is menace in the dark figures towering over and behind them, nightmarish phantoms they do not appear to see, any more than they see what their own masks, costumes, and gestures hide. Neither they, nor the communities in which they moved, could see what they were beneath their disguises.

In denying the possibility of self-knowing two centuries apart, Brueghel and Goya struck the same note: that you can't believe your own eyes. Physical vision – and intellectual perceptions derived from it – cannot be believed. Brueghel's message is relatively simple. It is that, guided by external values of society, we look blindly for ourselves outside ourselves through competition and gain. Goya's message is the more complex of the two. It is that what we see cannot be believed, not only because it is external, but more exactly because it is artificial. We cannot believe our eyes because what we see, the pictures we paint and choose to live among, the social environment in which we move, in which we know and are known, is a tissue of calculated deceptions, of disguises we put on and roles we play, pretended selves.

27. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Elck* (1588), London: British Museum. Francisco Goya, *Nadie de conoiccie*, in *Los Caprichos*, no. 8 (1799), London: British Museum.

Two changes enter into the story of visualization during the Counter-Reformation. The first is an emblem: eyeglasses, a sign of physical impairment. The attribute of eyeglasses marks a turn away from the idea of a universal, uniform human nature. It accents the personal and circumstantial, rather than the absolute and universal. By pin-pointing the fallibility of individual eyesight, it stands as an irrefutable, empirical proof of the singularity, finitude, and mutability of each individual's cognitive experience, in as far as thought depends on physical sight. Correspondingly, it marks the end of an ancient assumption: a universal, and therefore universally accessible, meta-physical range of vision. I have already referred to the appearance of eyeglasses in Brueghel's picture of Diogenes—Everyman groping his way. As emblems of inner blindness, they appear also most strikingly in two early seventeenth-century paintings of the same subject: Christ's calling of the tax collector, Matthew, to be an apostle.²⁸ Of all the glaring anachronisms in these pictures by Caravaggio (1571–1610) and Van Bijlert (*ca* 1597–1671), the intrusive, modern spectacles have the greatest symbolic value. For both artists – Van Bijlert following Caravaggio's lead – used just those aids to vision to accent the irony that the men wearing them were blind to Christ's identity. As we shall see later, Valentin de Boulogne (*ca* 1591–1652) and Matthias Stomer (*ca* 1600–1650) used the same anachronistic, ironic cue when they portrayed scoffing on-lookers in their renditions of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*.²⁹

I emphasize eyeglasses as an emblem of how visualization was experienced by increasing numbers of people in a wide range of social classes. If it did nothing else, this increasingly common experience – altering vision

28. Caravaggio, *The Calling of Matthew* (1599–1600), Rome: San Luigi dei Franceschi. Jan van Bijlert, *The Calling of Matthew* (*ca* 1620–1629), Utrecht: Museum Catharijnenconvent and Budapest: Museum of Fine Art. Lavin's incisive comment on Caravaggio's conception of "seeing," as represented in his *Betrayal of Christ*, applies to *The Calling of Matthew* as well: "Potrei dire, in effetti, che per il pittore Caravaggio la capacità di 'vedere' equivaleva alla possibilità di salvezza: vedere, nel doppio senso del termine, usato anche nella Bibbia, con gli occhi e con lo spirito. La salvezza consiste nel vedere la luce nelle tenebre, e Caravaggio si autoritrae nel ruolo tradizionale della figura che regge la luce per illuminare il tradimento di Cristo, come nell'incisione di Dürer, che l'artista sicuramente conosceva" (Irving Lavin, *Caravaggio e La Tour: La luce occulta di Dio* [Rome: Donzelli, 2000], p. 25).

29. Valentin de Boulogne, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1620s), Malibu, California: J. Paul Getty Museum. Matthias Stomer (*ca* 1630–1633), Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts. Orazio Borgianni (*ca* 1578–1616) also intruded spectacles into Christ's environment in his *Christ Disputing with the Doctors in the Temple* (*ca* 1608–1610); see Richard E. Spear, *Caravaggio and His Followers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), catalogue no. 6, pp. 52–53.

instantly by holding lenses in front of the eyes – established the circumstantial and highly individual character of visual perception and thought following from it. Vision itself was like a pair of spectacles hooked around a cord on an artist's letter rack, together with miscellaneous objects, pictorial and other, all waiting to be used to alter vision at will.³⁰

The lesson was clear. Reality is in the viewer and, more exactly, in the particular moment and circumstances in which the viewer sees and knows. What viewers reflect on is, not external objects as they are, but the viewers' own inward perceptions and the process of thinking which may mirror a nature invented by the imagination, rather than anything existing outside the viewers' minds – for example, in the cosmos or in Scripture. All we know, Hume wrote, is like scenes, constantly shifting in the theatres of our minds. If the self exists at all, it is, Hume wrote, a bundle of perceptions, passing, repassing, recombining, and gliding away. The self is that ever-changing state of isolated self-consciousness and reflection; the self is subjectivity.³¹ The tautology of archetype and image is shattered with its signature metaphor, the mirror.

To consider visualization a solitary and isolating activity meant that each individual was always an outsider, always a spectator, as in a theatre, and this leads us to a second Baroque change in the history of visualization. When he was a young man, still in Cardinal Richelieu's service (1640), François Hédelin, later Abbé d'Aubignac (1604–1676), began a book about the theatre, which, published almost twenty years later (1657), became a standard point of reference.

The Roman poet Horace's aphorism, "poetry is like painting" (*ut pictura poesis*) was so deeply ingrained in artistic theory of the day, that Aubignac could, without explaining himself, assert that looking at a play was like looking at a picture.³²

Here again we grasp our labyrinthine thread: the double-vision diagram. Aubignac provides an instructive contrast with the two levels of seeing that characterized medieval ideas about cognition and that Gilson took up as esthetic and religious ways of looking and thinking about the self through pictures. One may see a theatrical performance in the analytical way of critics, Aubignac wrote, as a spectacle in which art renders only images of things that aren't there. But Aubignac concentrates on a second way of viewing quite different from the level of introspective apprehension of truth. His second level is that of spectators, who accept the play as a segment of real

30. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Trompe l'oeil Still Life* (1666–1668), Karlsruhe: Staatliche Kunsthalle. Anon. (Italian, 18th century), *Trompe l'oeil Still Life*, Poughkeepsie, NY: The Frances Lehmann Loeb Art Center, Vassar College.

31. Cf. José Ortega y Gasset, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Mildred Adams (New York: Norton, 1960), p. 147.

32. Horace, *Ars poetica* 361.

life, while also knowing, but ignoring, the fact that it is a contrived representation made up of actors, painted backdrops, individual characters distinguishing themselves from all others by their speeches, and the arsenal of theatrical machinery. All these components make up “the ingenious magic that recalls to the world heroes of past ages, and that puts before our eyes a new heaven, a new earth, and an infinity of marvels that we believe we have before us at the very time when we are quite sure that someone is tricking us”³³ Even if it were as many as 2,000 people, the audience had to be complicit in a double deception: that the theatrical performance was, not simulation, but true life, and that the audience itself was not there, not witnessing something from a distant age and place.

Aristotle wrote that spectacle was the least important part of tragedy, and the most remote from poetry. Readers, he said, could feel the effect of tragedy without benefit of actors, and, besides, the production of a play was more the work of a costumier than a poet (*Poetics* 6, 1450a–b). By contrast, Aubignac considered spectacle essential to dramatic effect; for spectacle, he said, was what stirred spectators’ emotions. Without spectacle and its many duplicities, a play would never be enjoyed, however ingenious it was.³⁴

Aubignac took for granted an audience belonging to the dominant elites, educated in and admiring of classical literature, and sharing common expectations of theatrical experience, which included both a class-specific *bienséance publique*, and relatively closed standards of what merited admiration and rejection. The audience in his mind expected splendor, magnificence, and consummate ingenuity far beyond the capacity of “common spirits.”³⁵

In 1694, half a lifetime after Aubignac published his treatise on the theatre, an Italian priest, long resident in France, published a defence of comedy. Tomaso Caffaro, a member of the Theatine Order and a professor of philosophy and theology, could hardly have anticipated the savage attack that his belated justification of the theatre in Christian society would bring upon him from his priestly confrères, including the most venerable of them all, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), Bishop of Meaux. Bossuet asserted that, resting on Scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers, Church doctrine was, and always had been, unalterably opposed to the theatre as unworthy of Christians; for grave, impassioned tragedies and simple comedic buffooneries made vices into play and virtue into an amusement.³⁶

33. F. H. Aubignac (François Hédelin, Abbé d’Aubignac et Mainac), *La pratique du théâtre* (Paris: Sommaville, 1657), pp. 456–457.

34. Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, p. 462.

35. Cf. Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, p. 6.

36. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, “Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie” 35, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. F. Lachat, 31 vols. (Paris: Vivès, 1862–1866), 27: 75, 80; “Lettre au P. Caffaro, Théatin” (*Oeuvres complètes* 27: 3, 5, 14).

They were nothing but sensuality, curiosity, ostentation, and arrogance designed for the exclusive purpose of giving spectators the pleasure they were seeking: that is, of arousing sensual passions through “poisoned charms and deceptive graces.”

The effect of theatre was far more immediate and powerful than that of immodest nudity in paintings, Bossuet wrote, for, instead of inert lines and dry colors, spectators saw living persons with real eyes ardent or tender with passion. They heard real tears and watched real movements that cast the fire of passion through the whole audience from the pit to the boxes.³⁷

In his tirade against the theatre, Bossuet paused to reflect on one aspect of the theatricalization of the Church. He remembered what seemed to him the recent introduction of theatrical music (“*les grandes musiques*”) into the Church. He said that he did not blame those who had introduced it to reanimate believers who had fallen into lethargy, and to raise their eyes to the magnificence of God’s worship when their spiritual coldness had need of such help. Without condemning the new practice, he still lamented the lost simplicity and gravity of the ancient chant. He regretted that the holy refinements of the Fathers had been so completely forgotten, and that, far from singing the songs of Sion, people had abandoned themselves to the music with which Babylon inspired its own. But, like his condemnation of the “prostitutions” in the plays of Molière, who had died twenty years earlier, this lament was slightly out of date. Though Bossuet’s censure was long remembered by conservative clerics, Aubignac’s *pratique* of the theatre had come of age in the Church.³⁸ And yet, the Bishop’s censure of aristocratic art as an antidote to spiritual lethargy and coldness among the art-consuming classes echoes.

The labyrinthine thread of double vision is still at hand. As he elaborated his ideas about Christian Socratism, Gilson referred to a paradigmatic Baroque figure, none other than Bossuet, as upholding “the teaching of sixteen centuries of tradition” in his treatise *On the Knowledge of God and One’s*

37. Bossuet, “Maximes et réflexions” 4 (*Oeuvres complètes* 27: 4–5); “Lettre au P. Caffaro” (*Oeuvres complètes* 27: 25).

38. Bossuet, “Maximes et réflexions” 5 and “Lettre au P. Caffaro” (*Oeuvres complètes* 27: 2, 26). As examples of objectionable worldly music, Bossuet elsewhere refers to the operas of Quinault and the *airs* of Lully: “Maximes et réflexions” 3 and “Lettre au P. Caffaro” (*Oeuvres complètes* 27: 3, 22). Bossuet’s lament over the change in Church music is quoted by François Louis Gauthier, *Traité contre les danses et les mauvaises chansons ...* (Paris: Froullé, 1785), pp. 330–331. Bossuet’s great authority on the corrupting effects of visual art and on the superiority of simple over ornate music was Augustine. He recalled Augustine’s reference to a character in Terence’s play, *The Eunuch*, who was incited to adultery by a picture of Zeus (*Confessions* 3.11), and Augustine’s own experience of musical settings of the Psalms (*Confessions* 10.33). Bossuet, “Maximes et réflexions” 22 and “Lettre au P. Caffaro” (*Oeuvres complètes* 27: 4, 49–50).

Self.³⁹ To be sure, one must allow for some conspicuous modernisms, such as the meticulous inventory of human body parts in Bossuet's characterization of man as "an incomparably ingenious and delicate machine."⁴⁰ Still, like Gilson, Bossuet embraced both exterior and interior senses in his quest. And yet, he scattered through his long treatise arguments against relying on the witness of interior vision. Sensory impressions, he wrote, conveyed images to the mind, images no less vivid than sensation itself. Reflections on physical experience always entailed acts of imagination. One ceased to see with the eyes of the body, but continued to imagine, continued to feel.⁴¹ Bossuet put his finger on the weak point in sanctioning devotional images when he warned that one must not confuse imagination (*l'imagination*) with understanding (*l'entendement*). One could fall deeply into error by imagining God and the soul, imagining what was unimaginable since it had neither body, nor shape, nor any aspect open to perception by the senses. If one allowed imagination to usurp the function of judgement, which belonged to rational understanding, one would fall into the trap of those taken in by painters and designers of theatrical sets, who used tricks of perspective (*tromperies de la perspective*) to create illusions of enormous depth or size, or who made objects look to viewers like objects quite different from what they were, as artists did when they painted thin, oblique shapes to evoke square floor-tiles in the minds of viewers. Serving vagrant imagination, custom, in the form of habit (*jugement d'habitude*), makes viewers gullible and overrides judgement by rational reflection (*jugement de réflexion expresse*).⁴²

Elsewhere, Bossuet hewed more closely to convention when he preached that self-knowing readily escapes us because we lack detachment. The eye that sees is the object seen. We want to see only our good features; we complain against painters who do not cover our blemishes; we succumb to flattery; in contentment, we set ourselves up as gods inside ourselves.⁴³ The deceptions and duplicities of the theatre haunt Bossuet's use of the diagram of double vision as much as they do Aubignac's.

39. Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 38, 228.

40. Jean-Bénigne Bossuet, *De la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-même* 2.12 (*Oeuvres complètes* 23: 105).

41. Bossuet, *De la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-même* 1.5 (*Oeuvres complètes* 23: 42–44).

42. Bossuet, *De la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-même* 1.8–10 (*Oeuvres complètes* 23: 55–58).

43. Bossuet, "Sermon pour le Mardi de la IIIe semaine de Carême sur la charité fraternelle" (1662); and "Sermon pour la profession de Madeleine Angélique de Beauvais" (1666. *Oeuvres complètes* 9: 244–249; 11: 482–485).

Perhaps I have wandered from the straight and narrow course of the male gaze. There was, I suppose, no need to stress that artists and their publics expected paintings to function as dramas. There is, however, a need to emphasize that this expectation amounted to acceptance of duplicity in visualization. As I return to the straight and narrow, I ask: How did duplicities of the male gaze work in the visual arts? How were they represented?

Naturally, the male gaze came in many varieties. As I noticed in speaking about Artemisia Gentileschi, the primary one was the artist's gaze. We can track a telling change in representations of the artist's self-regarding eye in a cluster of paintings that depict the Evangelist, St. Luke, painting the Blessed Virgin and the infant Jesus.⁴⁴ These were virtuoso performances on the theme of visualizing visualization, not only because of the implicit parallel between the individual painter and St. Luke, as the patron of artists, but also because paintings on the theme were commonly submitted as evidence of professional mastery, qualifying the painter for admission into an artists' guild dedicated to St. Luke.

My little sample of such paintings, depicting the artist in the act of visualizing, begins with Rogier van der Weyden's *St. Luke Painting the Virgin and Child* (ca 1435) and ends with Pierre Mignard's *St. Luke Painting the Blessed Virgin* (1695). It illustrates increasing removal of the sacred into an exalted, hidden world, and the glorification of the artist who, by divine fury, envisions the sacred and performs the impossible task of representing it. By comparison with van der Weyden's domestic scene, the later paintings portray an etherealization of the holy. Rather than resting comfortably in the same space as the artist, and without mind-warping manifestations of the supernatural, the Blessed Virgin and her Child appear in explosions of celestial glory, accompanied by those most improbable fictions about the inhabitants of Heaven – cherubs, apparently infants of an age incapable of walking much less delicate physical co-ordination, yet ecstatically flying right on course. Artists also move into the eerie world of the supernatural in some paintings, where they performed a mind-boggling feat: representing themselves, as St. Luke, in the act of representing the Blessed Virgin and Child. The calm

44. Rogier van der Weyden, *St. Luke Painting the Blessed Virgin and Child* (1435–1440), Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts. El Greco, *St. Luke Painting the Blessed Virgin and Child* (before 1567), Athens: Benaki Museum. Passignano, *St. Luke Painting the Blessed Virgin and Child* (ca 1593–1598), Florence: Uffizi. Guercino, *St. Luke Painting the Blessed Virgin and Child* (1652–1653), Kansas City, Kansas: Nelson Atkins Museum. Pierre Mignard, *St. Luke Painting the Blessed Virgin and Child* (1695), Troyes: Musée des Beaux Arts (Dépôt d'État); cf. Pierre Mignard, *Madonna and Child* (1690, Paris: Louvre. On the Byzantine origins of this subject, see *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), pp. 569–571, 581–582.

portrayal by Rogier van der Weyden, in which St. Luke and his subjects are companions in the same space and time, gives way to the heated, breathless ecstasies of Bartholomäus Spranger (1546–1611; painting, 1582) and Passignano (Domenico Cresti, 1559–1638; painting *ca* 1593–1598). In his classicism, Guercino (1591–1666; painting 1652–1653) ingeniously omitted the Blessed Virgin and Child altogether, or rather put them imaginatively in the space facing St. Luke: that is, the space actually occupied by the viewer.

Classicism ties these pictures together, yet it follows an instructive course of development. In Rogier van der Weyden's painting, it figures in the restrained, but luxurious, architecture of the chamber where Luke works and, less obviously, in the background landscape and in an underplayed contrast with Gothic architecture outside the chamber. Van der Weyden set his picture squarely in his own place and time. However, the other three artists strained to accent the foreignness of the scene.

Classicism is among their alienating devices. The post-fifteenth century artists portray the holy presences in outbursts of supercelestial light. They clothe their Scriptural figures in exotic costumes, incongruous with the seventeenth-century costumes of privileged visitors to Luke's studio, and trick out the portrayal with those improbable flying infants, the *putti* of pre-Christian Europe. An assertive, ostentatious classicism is among the stronger accents of incongruity in the paintings by Passignano and Guercino. Astonishingly, in the foreground of his picture, immediately adjacent to Luke's painting, Passignano installed the Belvedere Torso, revered, after Michelangelo, as a consummate masterpiece of pagan Rome and an ideal of masculine anatomy. Guercino installed Luke in monumental surroundings dominated by the base of a massive column and supplied with furniture in antique taste. Though he omitted visual cues of classicism, Mignard still kept the air of antiquarianism in the books and other paraphernalia of Luke's studio and, to be sure, in the incongruity of Mignard's late seventeenth-century toilette with the Biblicized costumes of the others.

Virtuosity shows its hand completely – strips away its disguise – where the artist's movement from miraculous apparition is represented, not in spiritual ecstasy, but in cool workaday techniques of observation and preliminary sketches with steady eye-hand co-ordination. I return to the male gaze which is, actually, the subject of all these paintings. Van der Weyden depicts Luke's intense, scrutinizing gaze toward the Virgin and Child, as extraneous to the gazes exchanged between the Mother and her Son as it is, conspicuously, to those of the couple who stand on the parapet in the distance, backs turned to the holy ménage. The jovial glance of Guercino's Luke betrays, with a wave of the hand, remarkable self-satisfaction. Though the servant, pulling aside the door-curtain in Passignano's painting, appears diverted by the apparition of the Virgin and Child with *putti*, the two male visitors, one of them Passignano himself, look with critical detachment at the Apostle's painting.

Mignard portrayed himself with even greater detachment, looking at the viewer and taking no notice of Luke or the glowing visitors riding on a cloud, though, to be sure, he displays a sketch of the Virgin and Child that he had made for his own painting – possibly within the fiction of this composition for St. Luke’s guidance – using (as we know) his mistress as his model. In the radiant presence of the supernatural, Mignard displays no engagement with the subject or with the ecstatic Luke, no sign of reverence. He is only a mildly interested spectator, at best, a recorder of appearances.

Sang-froid characterizes the male gazes in the three later pictures, quite understandably. For, by the extreme illusionism of which artists were capable and its almost limitless varieties, religious painting demystified the mask of ceremony which it wore, with all the pack of conjurer’s tricks that included histrionics and flamboyant triumphalism.

Duplicities of the male gaze left many traces in paintings of visualization in progress. To illustrate a wider range of possibilities, I turn to another sampling of paintings on one subject. I have in mind paintings inspired by a passage in the Gospel of John (John 7:53–8:11): the story of Christ and the woman taken in adultery.⁴⁵ Now, biblical scholars have demonstrated that this passage did not belong to the earliest version of the gospel. Though interpolated in the original Gospel text, it was still accepted as genuine in the Baroque era, as it had been for centuries, and it provided one of the most common subjects of post-Reformation religious art.

The subject was so often painted in the Baroque period as to be a *leit-motiv* of the age. Yet, so far as I can tell, it was essentially a monopoly of male artists.⁴⁶

45. Lukas Cranach the Elder, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1540s), Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada. Lukas Cranach the Elder and Lukas Cranach the Younger, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1540s), New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tintoretto, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (ca 1546), Rome: Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica. Polidoro da Lanciano, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (before 1564), private collection. Guercino, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (ca 1621), Dulwich: Dulwich Picture Gallery. Valentin de Boulogne, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1620s), Malibu, California: J. Paul Getty Museum. Matthias Stomer, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1630–1633), Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts. Nicolas Poussin, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1653), Paris: Louvre. Sebastiano Ricci, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (before 1734), Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Caravaggists were prominent in this list: see Alain Mérot, *French Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 83.

46. A conspicuous exception is an engraving by Diana Scultori (also known as Mantovana or Mantuana, 1547–1612) printed in 1575, made after a painting by Giulio Romano, in whose workshop Scultori was employed.

According to the story in the gospel, Jesus's persistent enemies, the scribes and the Pharisees, put him to the test yet again as he sat one morning, teaching in the Temple. They abruptly thrust before him a woman whom they had caught in the very act of adultery. The law of Moses, they said, commanded that adulteresses be killed by stoning. What, they demanded, did Jesus say? Perhaps because he realized that the questioners were using the woman as bait with which to trap him, Jesus took evasive action. Instead of answering outright, he stooped and wrote in the dust something not recorded in Scripture. When the scribes and Pharisees persisted in badgering him, he stood up and said, "Let any among you who is without sin cast the first stone against her." Then, he stooped and began writing again. The accusers slipped away, beginning with the elders. Jesus found himself standing alone with the woman, face to face. He told her to go, uncondemned by him or anyone else, and to stop sinning.

Unlike other Scriptural episodes of adultery – notably the stories of Suzanna and the elders and of David and Bathsheeba, the story of Christ and the woman taken in adultery was generally neglected by female artists. Yet, precisely because of its wide popularity among male painters and their patrons, a sampling of variations on the theme may suggest the drift of the male gaze.

The story itself is a tale of one duplicity within another, the dissembling of the adulteress within the double game of entrapment played by Jesus and his enemies. What claims our attention is the duplicity of the gazes in the painting, the artist's gaze and the gazes s/he represented. In paintings of this story, we meet the artist's gaze, hidden as David's is in portrayals of his first, lustful glimpse of Bathsheeba, but still controlling the action from its secret vantage point within the picture. Because a single picture could not convey a sequence of events, or things in motion, artists had to deceive by telling only part of the story. The artist's gaze therefore took a commanding role, thanks to the fact that the artist, rather than Scripture, spoke through the picture. When they illustrated the story, artists worked within pictorial devices of deceiving the eye handed on to them by tradition. They could not escape from falsifying the text, from betraying it as they translated its words into pictures, creating a counterfeit of one slice of the story.

The vignette about the woman taken in adultery is a story of sex, betrayal, and impending death, with a humorous twist. For the woman, threatened with death, was really a means to an end. The real plot has nothing to do with relations between men and women, but rather with treachery among men. The real plot is about his enemies' conspiracy to entrap Jesus. Sex, betrayal, and death are inscribed in that narrative line too. The joke of the story is in the way Jesus turned the tables on his deadly enemies, freed the woman and himself from their snares, and sent the foiled

trappers off ridiculously, in silence. The cats pounced, but the birds flew out between their very claws. Together with sex, betrayal, and death, laughter, *Schadenfreude*, is inscribed in these paintings. Panofsky identified humor as a sign of the subjective values introduced into Baroque art by the new freedom it expressed, a positive, “new critical attitude of self-knowing” represented by Descartes. Panofsky recognized the negative power of satirical humor, but, in the prevailing climate of 1934, silently left *Schadenfreude* out his account of the “superiority and freedom” he celebrated in the Baroque “creative sense of humor.”⁴⁷

In quite different ways, artists wrapped their ironies of verbal dialogue in mute painting. Still, by their manipulations of style and formula, all of them display the conviction that what makes the pictures speak is the technique of the artist. The duplicitous eye of the counterfeiter established the priority of technique over Scripture, and it is rendered visible, particularly in the theatrical lighting of some paintings with sharp contrasts of light and darkness, and above all in the settings represented, a century apart, by Tintoretto and Poussin, where the simplicity of the Biblical story is recast into the extravagant mute gestures of grand opera, a counterfeit rather than an imitation of life and by no means a speaking likeness.

The artist’s gaze accommodates other male gazes, including the ironic duplicity of the connoisseur, with its insistence that art correct nature by violating it. The pictures under review exemplify the critic’s delight in apparently effortless complexity and refinement, in taste conforming with an established canon of beauty. In fact, these paintings exhibit multiple ironies beyond those of the counterfeit. Perhaps the most apparent duplicity is in the teasing, voyeuristic presentation of the woman. The story is, after all, about sex, violence, and the evasion of impending death.

By the very nature of the story, the woman appears in these paintings as an emblem of sexual restrictions broken without punishment. Especially when she is depicted disheveled, trying to cover herself in the dark, she offers arousal forbidden to the men in the picture and, imaginatively, to living viewers. Multiple ironies play through the eroticism of the woman, appealing and dangerous to men, eroticism heightened almost pornographically by her bondage, her passive subjection to violence, deferred for the moment. Even Guercino, in his calm and chaste depiction, has the woman’s arm held tightly by her guard’s heavy hand, despite the meltingly sentimental gaze of Christ toward one of the accusers. When they depicted the opulence of her body adorned with luxurious costumes and costly jewels, artists played on other ironies, absent from these pictures but present in the minds of their

47. Panofsky, “What is Baroque?,” pp. 68, 80, 84.

intended viewers. It would have been difficult for a viewer in the sixteenth or seventeenth century to overlook the parallel with representations of the penitent Magdalene, arrayed in splendor yet contemplating a skull, and with *Vanitas* paintings, those memorials to death in life, littered with glories of this passing world, macabre in their luxurious beauty. Especially standing there in danger of instant death, the woman represents the irony of the skeleton at the feast. It is strange, in these pictures, how few of the other figures – notably men – look at her. Jesus never does, but there are exceptions in a rather disapproving man in the Cranach formula and the mysterious Madonna-figure in Poussin's background. So complete is her passivity that the woman herself does not so much as look at another person.

One of the greatest ironies in these very diverse pictures is that, in portraying the duplicity of the scribes and Pharisees, they display a duplicitous Phariseism of their own, an adherence to rules combined with skill in evading the rules while keeping them. Thus, they observed the rule of decorum when they excluded nudity from these pious representations, but evaded it when they depicted the woman with neck and shoulders enticingly bare. They observed the rule of vanishing-point perspective in their figure studies, but evaded it when their play of light and darkness blotted out foregrounds, backgrounds and receding planes of vision. They observed the rule of verisimilitude in anatomy, but evaded it when they engulfed human figures in grandiose architectural settings and deployed them with choreographical precision, as Tintoretto did in his painting of the subject, and, as Poussin notably did in stretching his figures out in a chorus line, like a sculptural frieze against the background of a towering architectural fantasy, moderating the severity of this antique composition with vivid colors.⁴⁸

There is theatricality everywhere in these pictures. In some, it is the sharp contrast between darkness and brilliant pools of light that come from no obvious source. In all, there is an invitation to voyeurism in the figure of the woman, the exhibitionism of the artist, and, of course, *Schadenfreude* over the thwarted predators.

How many male gazes there are in these pictures, seldom meeting, generally ignoring one another as completely as they disregard the woman! The scribes and Pharisees are blind to the divine Word standing enfleshed before them. The men-at-arms (Romans?) watch the goings-on impassively. Jesus looks, often into the middle distance, with a calm, anaesthetic gaze. Close as they may be in space, the figures seem unaware that they are jostling elbows in the same story, unaware that they are co-conspirators in a “false

48. On Poussin's composition of this painting, see, for comparative purposes, Todd P. Olson, *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 6–7, 155.

and deceitful sight.” The classicism of Poussin’s frieze-like painting, with its overpowering architectural background and the histrionic pantomime of its figures indicates how great a freedom from the words of Scripture painters assigned to their images, freedom even to contradict the words, as Poussin did when he represented the woman kneeling.

To the duplicitous gazes preserved in these pictures, what was sacred was the performance of the artist. The duplicity of the artist need not be far from what Diderot expected of actors. There was certainly a gap between sincerity and art when Protestant and Catholic painters crossed denominational lines in their search for patronage, and libertines and skeptics delivered to their patrons exquisite renditions of sacred subjects. As Hegel put it, “We are at the level at which works of art can be venerated as divine, and actually be worshiped.”⁴⁹ There was no point at which viewers could cease to regard pictures as art, but as windows on metaphysical realities. Empathy was not required. In fact, it might impede the pleasure of voyeurs in the performance.

In its ironies and Phariseisms, the male gaze also, with an ironic humor, announced its own self-subversion. As *jeux d’esprit*, *Vanitas* paintings, recalled by the figure of the woman taken in adultery, often included a picture or artist’s tools among the luxuries swept away by time.

The artificiality of theatrical arts in counterfeiting religion and the paramount esteem for artistic technique over the narrative – sacred or profane – in the work of art were signs of an elite art that was testing the tolerable limits of the elite’s own willingness for their eyes to deceive their minds. Rapid changes of style also witnessed to an art playing endlessly with illusions, and to a moment when the art of painting was detaching itself from the subjects it depicted, and sometimes presenting its holy subjects with a ribald wink.

There were ways of looking at painting that decisively ate away the connective power of religious art, turning it into a theatrical performance rather than a channel to unseen realities. We encountered three of them in our brief allusion to portraiture. We have found the same three again in pictures of Christ and the woman taken in adultery: voyeurism, exhibitionism and *Schadenfreude*. I shall now connect these ways of seeing with three gestures: nudity, disguise, and laughter. Each connection reveals the duplicity of living as a detached spectator in parallel worlds.

Because it is one of the most confrontational of all gestures, nudity is also one of the most problematic in the pictorial arts of early modern Europe. That it had the sanction of classical Antiquity does not address the fact that

49. G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* 1.16, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. M.J. Inwood (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 12.

in Baroque and Rococo cultures nudity expressed vulnerability and shame. One of Castiglione's characters recalls a lady who said that it made her shudder to think of having to appear naked on Judgment Day. Consistently, in other stories, Castiglione employed public nudity to accent extreme humiliation, whether of a penitent, or of a man condemned to be flogged to death, or of defeated warriors. His story about a woman who preserved her chastity while lying naked in her lover's arms celebrates heroism while also playing on the theme of vulnerability.⁵⁰ During the French Revolution, women at Angers who ridiculed the Constitutional Church were taken to crossroads, the most public of places, stripped naked and flogged (1791).⁵¹

The unbelievable, ideal beauty that nudity represented in early modern painting – including religious painting, to the outrage of moral reformers – was a form of abstraction, indeed escapism, which left aside the imperfections and deformities imposed in real life by nature, and the infirmities brought about by age and misfortune. Art counterfeited and corrected nature in those figures impervious even to the ravages of the life cycle, too abstract and too perfect for intimacy and certainly unlike what one saw with one's own eyes. Commenting on the unreal perfection of Michelangelo's (1475–1564) sculpture in a previous generation, Annibale Carracci (1560–1609) reportedly said that to judge them “one would have had to see the bodies of men in the days of Michelangelo.”⁵²

With secular art, religious painting used the voyeuristic gesture of nudity to mark out one area of duplicity inhabited by artists and their patrons: a way of seeing by which it was possible to cross back and forth between the parallel worlds of actual community standards and those imagined to have existed in classical Antiquity. In his puckish zeal for flaunting Christian taboos against nudity, Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) reached into pagan mythology to represent Duke Cosimo I, of Florence (1519–1574), as Orpheus, and the Genoese naval hero, Andrea Doria (1468–1560), as Neptune.⁵³ Though representing a woman of social eminence nude might have been “unthinkable in light of sixteenth-century Venetian mores,” that is exactly how Titian celebrated the marriage of Laura Bagarotto, possibly at her request, disguising the scandalous fact under the allegorical veil of *Sacred and*

50. Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* 2.24, 54, 86; 3.32, 43, trans. Charles S. Singleton, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 87, 112, 135, 171–172, 181.

51. John McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Régime: A Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), p. 279.

52. Charles Perrault, *Memoirs of My Life*, ed. and trans. Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 73.

53. Agnolo Bronzino, *Cosimo I as Orpheus (ca 1538–1540)*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art. *Portrait of Andrea Doria as Neptune (1550–1555)*, Milan: Brera.

Profane Love.⁵⁴ Though nude infants and adults were familiar in religious art, Caravaggio's portrayal of a nude adolescent as John the Baptist was deliberately provocative, and there were moments when he and other artists tested the limits of the socially tolerable by carrying devotional painting into that new and flourishing genre of voyeurism, pornography, as Guido Cagnacci (1601–1682) did in his *Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity*.⁵⁵

The second gesture, disguise, also exhibits a duplicitous way of seeing, “the mask of ceremony.”⁵⁶ For, while art of the Baroque and Rococo eras glories in its exhibitionism, it also delights in the macabre pageant of a dying world. The histrionics of these pictures – the mask of ceremony – characterize much of the triumphalist art of the Baroque and Rococo periods, including portrayals of the victory of Time over falsehood, or in the discovery of truth. For the conception of religious painting as defined by custom or fashion inscribed it with the curse of obsolescence, the endless, circular dance of Time, as meaningless as the bubbles blown into the air by *putti*. Time conquered by destroying, devouring its own.⁵⁷ Behind this self-subversion were long centuries of ascetic spirituality, with its insistence on the vanity of all earthly things. Art further subverted its own glories with the so-called *Vanitas* paintings, which depicted emblems of human achievement and aspiration, including pictorial arts and artifacts of religion itself, as dead, dead as skulls, even when they most expertly counterfeited life. In a particularly self-referential *Vanitas* painting, one artist represented himself as a young man holding a portrait of himself as he was twenty years later, at the time he made the painting. He sits beside a table strewn with tools of the painter's art, rare and costly objects, and a skull.⁵⁸

The mask of ceremony came in many designs. Records of the early Church celebrated the heroism of believers who died excruciatingly as martyrs rather than worship the pagan gods. In an age when the biblical subject

54. Rona Goffen, “Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*: Individuality and Sexuality in a Renaissance Marriage Picture,” in *Titian 500*, ed. Joseph Manca (Washington, DC: National Gallery, 1993), pp. 121–144, at pp. 123–126, 132. I am grateful to Fred Unwalla for this reference and much else.

55. Caravaggio, *St. John the Baptist* (ca 1602), Rome: Pinacoteca Capitolina. Guido Cagnacci, *Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity* (1660), Pasadena: Norton Simon Museum.

56. I take the phrase, “the mask of ceremony,” from Trajano Boccalini, *Advices from Parnassus* 77, trans. “by several hands” (London: D. Brown, 1706), p. 137.

57. See for example, Nicolas Poussin, *Dance to the Music of Time* (1638–1640), London: Wallace Collection. François Le Moyne, *Time Saving Truth* (1737), London: Wallace Collection. William Hogarth, *Time Darkening a Painting* (engraving). Francisco Goya, *Time Devours Its Own* (or *Saturn Devouring One of His Children*) (1820–1823), Madrid: Prado.

58. David Bailly, *Vanitas: Still-Life with Portrait of a Young Painter* (1651), Leiden: Stedelijk Museum.

of Solomon sacrificing to foreign gods became fashionable, fear of being seen to honor demons had so far diminished for some that, in an extraordinary self-portrait, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1600) depicted himself as an abbot with attributes of the god Bacchus (1568).⁵⁹ Even more daringly, Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) drew himself standing at an altar in the act of honoring demons as he participated in sacrifice to Bacchus, Venus, and Ceres.⁶⁰ The lead tenor of the Sistine Chapel choir was celebrated in a portrait depicting him, in a theatrical costume, crowned by the god Apollo, magnificently nude.⁶¹ Breathtakingly, Cardinal Richelieu, remembered above all swathed in scarlet as Philippe de Champagne (1602–1674) depicted him, is discovered elsewhere, stripped down and portraying Hercules.⁶² (The degree of glory implied is indicated by the fact that Hercules had become an emblem of French kings, that Louis XIII and Louis XIV were commonly portrayed as that paragon of strength and creator of social order.)⁶³ Celebrating Marie de' Medici on a colossal scale in the idiom of pagan mythology, Rubens was able to depict the Queen divinized and bare-breasted.

The last self-subversive gesture in Baroque and Rococo painting that I wish to discuss is laughter. Unlike the gestures of nudity and disguise, laughter, as an index to ways of seeing, lay outside religious paintings. It lay in viewers' responses, and manifested itself most notably in the complex emotion called *Schadenfreude*, delight in pain. In Baroque and Rococo religious art, as in devotional art of earlier periods, *Schadenfreude* was sought in representations of violence, the sufferings of martyrs, and, above all, in the Passion of Christ and the compassion of the Blessed Virgin. Yet, the manner of portraying suffering changed from the violent, sometimes repellent depictions of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, to soft, tender, even languid representations, a tendency denounced in music as effeminate and shameful *bousoiserie*.⁶⁴ Zinzendorff's life-wrenching encounter with Domenico Fetti's (1588/89–1623) *Man of Sorrows*⁶⁵ and the fervent devotion to the

59. Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Self-portrait as an Abbot of Bacchus* (1568), Milan: Brera.

60. Hendrick Goltzius, *Sine Cere et Libero friget Venus* (ca 1606), St. Petersburg: Hermitage.

61. Andrea Sacchi (1599–1661), *Pasquino Crowned by Apollo*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

62. Philippe de Champagne, *Portrait of Cardinal Richelieu* (ca 1642), London: National Gallery. Claude Vignon, *The Triumph of Hercules* (1634), Paris: Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites.

63. Todd P. Olson, *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style*, pp. 16, 103 (on Louis XIII).

64. Gautier, *Traité contre les danses et les mauvaises chansons*, p. 333.

65. Munich: Alte Pinakothek.

Sacred Heart of Jesus are enough to demonstrate the degree of *Schadenfreude* that sentimentality untapped, regardless of the critical derision it met.

I am not so much concerned with the calculated deceptions of *sprezzatura*, designed to present the most laboriously achieved effects as though they had come about spontaneously and taken little forethought or effort, or even with the use of art to get laughs by caricature or burlesque.⁶⁶ I come closer to the mark with artists' sometimes salacious use of *double entendre* with sacred images, such as Sebastiano del Piombo had in mind when he proposed that Michelangelo paint Ganeymede, the icon of homoerotic love, in the ceiling of the Medici Chapel, outfitting him with a halo to impersonate St. John the Divine.⁶⁷ There was usually a good bit of tongue-in-cheek when male patrons had their mistresses portrayed as the penitent, St. Mary Magdalene, generally in semi-nudity, a joke carried to a still bolder level in England at the creedally ambiguous court of Charles II, when Sir Peter Lely portrayed the King's mistress, Barbara Villiers, and their bastard son as the Virgin and Child.

Laughing at the weakness, or misfortune, of others served to affirm the superiority of the laughers, artists, *cognoscenti*, and ordinary viewers. For artists, connoisseurs, and their patrons, this kind of *Schadenfreude* enabled the laughers to assert their superiority, not only over rivals, but also over the common run of people. New styles were always good for a laugh from people who hadn't seen them before, and therefore displayed their ignorance by scoffing.⁶⁸ So-called *cognoscenti* could share bourgeois standards of art, Perrault allowed, if they weren't afraid of being laughed at.⁶⁹ Obscurely shut away from the world, even nuns practiced this kind of criticism, laughing in their cells at the works of inept painters, and also tempted to lewdness by their pictures.⁷⁰

Delightful as *Schadenfreude* was, confronting the esthetic gap in the flesh was not always comfortable, even when one was sophisticated enough to realize the voyeurism in art as spectacle. By chance, as I was writing this study, I came across a little anecdote in the *Memoirs of a Father* by Jean-François Marmontel (1723–1799). When the incident he tells occurred, Marmon-

66. For example, Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* 1.28, 2.93 (ed. Javitch, pp. 34–35, 140).

67. Paul Barolsky, *Infinite Jest: Wit and Humor in Italian Renaissance Art* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1978), p. 70.

68. Gabriele Paleotti, *De imaginibus sacris et profanis* 2.31 (Ingolstadt: Sartorius, 1594), p. 271.

69. Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*, 4 vols. in 1, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1692–1697), 2: 217.

70. Giovanni Battista Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting* 3.7, ed. and trans. Edward J. Olszewski (New York: B. Franklin, 1977), p. 238.

tel, still a young man, had abandoned his training for the priesthood, left the provinces, and begun to make a name for himself as a man of letters and a career at the court of Louis XV. He was *en route* to becoming the official historiographer of France. He was a bit a draftsman. At Versailles, he took special interest in the paintings accumulated to adorn the palace, and the sculpture in the gardens. He had conversations with some of the celebrated artists commissioned to make those works. He was an arbiter of elegance.

While traveling in Provence, he arrived in Aix in time for a popular religious celebration, the *Fête-Dieu*. Peasants acted out their parts. The Queen of Sheba sprang about with Solomon chasing her; the Magi reeled like drunkards – all in the rain and mire.⁷¹ Marmontel could hardly keep from laughing, but the unaristocratic onlookers watched so seriously that he stifled his amusement. He felt a dangerous undertow of passion in them. “Nothing,” he wrote, “takes away all inclination to laugh so much as the fear of being stoned.”⁷² Marmontel was confronting one social element kept out of sight at Versailles, popular art and devotion. The Court contemptuously regarded such ways of visualizing out of the corner of its eye, measuring how far from vulgar superstition were its own elegance and enlightened skepticism. The lower orders in Aix had plainly retained some form of knowing themselves through religious art unknown at Court – in this case, living out analogies of art in a kinesthetic way, and with passion.

It never entered Marmontel’s head that Christian art might be impassioned. In 1797, in the aftermath of the Terror, many years after the incident at Aix, he spoke in the National Assembly for the return of freedom of worship to Roman Catholics, and the restoration to them of their ceremonies and signs, including the Crucifix. Worship, he said, addressed, not passions, but “the most modest, the mildest virtues.”⁷³ In fact, those words capture the ideals of eighteenth-century Christian art: “the most modest, the mildest of virtues.” The contrasting interlaces of Baroque piety had subsided into *bondieuserie*.

Without unduly emphasizing the fact, I note that two major art critics in the age of the Baroque, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1600) and Gérard de Lairese (1640–1711) were artists who went blind. For me, the reliance of these sightless

71. Contemporary illustrations of these and other segments of the masquerade appear in Gaspard Grégoire, *Explication des cérémonies de la Fête-Dieu d’Aix en Provence* (Aix: Esprit David, 1777).

72. Jean Francois Marmontel, *Memoirs of Marmontel, Written by Himself*, 2 vols. (London: H.S. Nichols, 1895), 1: 316.

73. “Opinion Delivered by Marmontel on the Freedom of Religious Worship,” in *Memoirs* 2: 327.

critics on their memories and on aural communications underscores one risk inherent in the ideas we have reviewed. For, under those conditions, even sighted critics could easily conceive a painting, in Perrault's words, as "a mass of precepts" and blind themselves to ways in which technical finesse subverted religious conviction. The diagram of double vision was cut off at its roots; everything hinged on the most deceptive faculty, imagination, rule-bound and divorced from direct experience.

All that we have said elucidates how the tautology of self-knowing that sustained Christian art, and that still sustains the devotional use of icons, was broken in the elites of western Europe. I believe that the Baroque crisis in religious art came about when art began its autonomous career, breaking away from the tautology of self-awareness. The duplicities of the male gaze are signs of that budding autonomy, and, incidentally, of art's separation from theology as an area of innovation and discovery.

For me, the gestures of voyeurism, exhibitionism, and laughter express a delight in illusion and a debonair pragmatism about its ephemeral value. I see this point of view in the thoroughly dispassionate household account records of King Louis XVI for the year 1791. The royal accountants inventoried in minute detail expenses for artists and artisans, for the toilettes and pin-makers, for printers, books, and suppliers of paper, for makers of musical instruments and members of the King's *Chapelle de musique*.⁷⁴

What strikes me is the contrast between modest expenditures witnessing to the mortality of the royal family and the enormous expenditures for festivals – including the solemn festivals of the Church along with theatrical productions. Amid the expenses for the grand illusions of ceremony and theatre, there are payments for the pharmacist and the surgeon, the costs of medicine. Ceremonial illusion and mortality coincide in payments for a gala illumination celebrating the King's recovery from an illness. They converge again under the heading, "unanticipated expenses," with costs for another gala illumination celebrating the King's acceptance of the new French Constitution. Decades earlier (1775), against the advice of his prudent minister of finance, Louis XVI had decided that his coronation would surpass all others in its opulence, thereby proclaiming the greatness of the state and its stability. Without regard for cost, the chancel and part of the nave of Rheims cathedral, that masterpiece of Gothic style, were transformed into a Baroque stage set by building temporary stalls and loggias. For these sumptuous neo-classical structures, the architect combined features from the Chapel and the Opera at Versailles. Because they shut out the daylight, he illuminated the

74. Administration de l'Argenterie, Menus-Plaisirs et Affaires de la Chambre du Roi, *Recueil des bordereaux des dépenses de l'année 1791 avec l'extrait des comptes de la dite année*, MS, private collection.

area where the liturgy was performed with a forest of chandeliers, gloriously ablaze with thousands upon thousands of candles. It seemed even to some participants that worship had been submerged in theatre.⁷⁵

Like the Lady of Shalott, religious art depended on the fidelity of images in its mirrors. Like the Lady of Shalott, Baroque art discovered that it was trapped in the web of its own illusions. The Lady of Shalott wove her web of many colors, replicating the images in her magic mirror. But the day came when she said, "I am half sick of shadows," and brought the curse upon herself by looking beyond the images in her mirror to the people and the earth and the sky she had before only seen by their "shadows" in the mirror.

Baroque art recognized that its effects depended on its duplicities. The male gaze sustained religious art even then, accepting art as a mirror of custom, sometimes ridiculous, rather than as a mirror of truth. In the diagram of double vision, esthetic seeing was custom; religious seeing was subjective. Both were free of metaphysical truths. The moment of recognizing duplicities as the essence of the venture reminds me of the Lady of Shalott at the moment when she knowingly abandoned her illusions and her art, looked at the physical world, and accepted her mortality.

Absurdity by excess proved to be the *pons asinorum* of Baroque and Rococo religious art, the point at which self-recognition by viewers failed. Some absurdities entered religious painting by way of subjects sanctioned by theological tradition or pious legends. These were excesses of piety challenged, even repudiated as they were by historical criticism. Others entered by way of the self-ostentation of painters, deflected by gleeful critics eager to publish mistakes caused by ignorance, flashy techniques that pandered to common tastes, undigested eclecticism, filching images from other artists' works and jumbling them together without rhyme or reason on their own canvasses. The histrionics in Anthony Van Dyck's *St. Augustine in Ecstasy* (1628) vexed the religious community that had commissioned it. When they saw the figure of Augustine staggering backward, supported by two angels, his head reeling heavenward, the church authorities thought he looked drunk and demanded a renegotiation of the settlement.⁷⁶ The grandiosity of patrons also gave rise to *tours de force* of the absurd in allegorical or mythological fantasies, which occasionally even the painters who created them discreetly lampooned. The Tiepolos left indications of their ridicule in the monumental frescoes they painted apotheosizing Archbishop Karl Philipp von Greifenklau, at Würzburg.

75. Alain-Charles Gruber, *Les grandes fêtes et leurs décors à l'époque de Louis XVI* (Geneva: Droz, 1972), pp. 88–102.

76. Anthony Van Dyck, *St. Augustine in Ecstasy* (1628), Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. See Arthur K. Wheelock et al., *Anthony van Dyck* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990), p. 202.

The pretentiousness of these bravura performances is indicated in the expressionless portraits of the persons being glorified, and generally, indeed, by other figures represented. Bewigged and resplendent in their robes of office, the magistrates of Paris pose grandly for their group portrait, gazing forward through the picture plane to the viewer, unruffled by the clouds of glory billowing above them, transporting St. Geneviève and hosts of angels.⁷⁷ In the titanically self-glorifying frescoes he commissioned from the Tiepolos, Karl Philipp von Greifenklau seems to take his entry into heaven calmly, all in a day's work.

The anachronisms of mixing figures from different ages and places, of historical with mythological figures, were kinds of absurdity in religious painting. Far more evident were the anaesthetic expressions in the paintings – martyrs serene under torment, impassive or mildly scornful torturers, curious but disengaged observers, heroes and heroines of the faith benignly unruffled by their tumultuous welcomes into Paradise, all according to the rules of decorum. We have returned to the anaesthetic imitation of Christ in the art of dying well.

In his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), William Hogarth (1697–1764) discerningly observed, “custom and fashion will, in length of time, reconcile almost every absurdity whatever to the eye, or make it overlooked.”⁷⁸ Thus, he said, mythological beasts like griffins and cherubs' heads mounted bodylessly on wings passed unnoticed for the ridiculous figures they were. By contrast, when excess became conspicuously clumsy or inelegant, he said, it simply excited laughter.

What custom was to be followed? There was the *recherché* custom, known as “taste,” pursued by court societies and the learned elites that served them, and the custom of lower orders, who cherished the kind of art they were used to simply because they were used to it, and tended to favor flashy colors over good design. Some religious orders were divided. The Cistercian Order was conspicuous among them because, in a landmark text of European

77. Nicolas de Largillière (1656–1746), *Ex-voto des échevins de Paris à sainte Geneviève*, Paris: Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Naturally, there were Protestant counterparts. In one, for example, the autocrat, Friedrich Wilhelm I, of Prussia, sits enthroned in state robes. He stares fixedly ahead, toward the outer space of the viewer, oblivious to the celestial creatures and mythological beings who swirl adoringly around him with their tributes, oblivious even to the divinity – is he Hercules or Christ? – shining supernaturally at his elbow, oblivious finally to the political realities of his day. See Michael Willmann, *Allegorical Glorification of Friedrich Wilhelm I, the Great Elector* (1682), Berlin: Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten.

78. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Ronald Paulson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 37–38.

culture (1125), St. Bernard of Clairvaux, confident in the austere simplicity enforced by the discipline of his own Order, had excoriated the Cluniacs for luxurious indulgence. He censured their fondness for lavish fantasies in painting and sculpture, exuberance ravishing enough to distract monks from meditating on God's law. "Ridiculous monstrosities" he called them in their intricacy, simultaneously beautiful and ugly.⁷⁹ Yet, some Cistercian houses had so far departed from the Bernardine severity by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, that they could cheerfully commission Rococo extravaganzas, such as the interior of the monastery of Wilhering. This triumph of one custom provoked the reassertion of the Order's original custom by reformers. The monastery of La Trappe was reformed to follow the strict observance, and decades of hostility ensued between the laxist and the rigorist traditions. Divisions such as these in the Counter-Reformation and its wake prepared for the eclipse of religious painting among the fine arts after the Baroque and Rococo periods and the triumph of devotional art congenial in its ugliness with simple rustic piety. They anticipated the moment when, with shifts of fashion, customs of its patrons changed and trumpeting excesses in which elites had once recognized themselves seemed laughable, if not signs of a coming whirlwind.

79. Bernard of Clairvaux, *St. Bernard's 'Apologia' to Abbot William* 12.28–29, trans. Michael Casey (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1970), pp. 63–66.