Velázquez: The Spanish Style and the Art of Devotion

Lawrence L. Saporta

Bryn Mawr College, lisa@lisaboughter.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.brynmawr.edu/dissertations

Custom Citation
Velázquez: The Spanish Style and the Art of Devotion.

A Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.
Department of the History of Art
Bryn Mawr College

Submitted by Lawrence L. Saporta

Advisor: Professor Gridley McKim-Smith
Contents.

Abstract i

Acknowledgements iii

Image Resources

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 Jesuit Art Patronage and Devotional Practice 13

Chapter 2. Devotion, Meditation, and the Apparent Awkwardness of Velázquez’ Supper at Emmaus 31

Chapter 3. Velázquez’ Library: “an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries” 86

Chapter 4 Technique, Style, and the Nature of the Image 127

Chapter 5 The Formalist Chapter 172

Chapter 6 Velázquez, Titian, and the pittoresco of Boschini 226

Synthesis 258

Conclusion 267

Works Cited 271
Velázquez: The Spanish Style and the Art of Devotion.

Lawrence L. Saporta, Ph.D.
Bryn Mawr College, 2009

Supervisor: Gridley McKim-Smith

This dissertation offers an account of counter-reformation mystical texts and praxis with art historical applicability to Spanish painting of the Seventeenth Century—particularly the work of Diego Velázquez. The consequences of considering devotional practice and mystical experience in the analysis of Spanish painting in the siglo de oro yields new, more complete, and more intellectually satisfying readings of particular works. Without supplanting the long-established tradition of applying Flemish and Italian models to Diego Velázquez’ work, emphasis is placed on what is authentically Spanish in his accomplishments.
Acknowledgements.

This dissertation is dedicated to three people without whom it would never have come to fruition:

My wife, Lisa, who knows better than anyone that no one writes a text like this alone

My Mother, Gertrude Vandelagemaat de Saporta, whose support and love mean more than I can express

And my father, the late José Alberto Saporta, Sr.—Viejo, you are always with me

This project has taken longer than I could have predicted and called on resources that I did not know I possessed before I began it. Along the way I have experienced the generosity of wonderful and inspiringly learned people who were unstinting in giving the gifts of their time and advice. Where I have drawn on their knowledge, they deserve the credit. Any errors or omissions are my own.

That my advisor, Professor Gridley McKim-Smith, was a remarkably gifted scholar, I knew before I came to Bryn Mawr College years ago. That she would be such a wonderful teacher, by turns patient, nurturing, and stern—and always in just the right proportion to bring out what this project required—is something I have learned since.

The faculty and staff of Bryn Mawr College have brought me through this long process by means of their tremendous learning and kindness. I would like to mention Professors David Cast, Lisa Saltzman, and Steven Z. Levine, all of whom have been kind enough to serve on my committee and to provide invaluable advice throughout the writing of this text. I would also like to thank Professors Dale Kinney and Barbara Miller Lane. Both of them, I hope, know that my gratitude will always be commensurate with the kindness they have shown me and the inspiration they have provided me to be the very best scholar, teacher, and person I can be. Professors P. Koelle and M. C. Quintero of Bryn Mawr’s Spanish department provided guidance that was massively helpful. Terri Lobo and my friend Lea Miller in the graduate office have taken up the cause of my dissertation as if it were their own. I cannot thank them enough. Similarly, Pam Cohen of the Art and Archaeology Office deserves special thanks. I would be remiss if I did not make special mention of the thanks due to Eileen Markson, now retired, who made the Rhys Carpenter Library such a wonderful place to work.

Father Joseph Chorpenning, O.S. F.S., also kind enough to serve on my committee, and whose work on Saint Teresa of Avila served as one of the earliest inspirations for the direction I took in this project, wonderfully embodies the Salesian tradition of the Church. Like Saint Francis de Sales, he is a gentleman (in the truest sense of the term) and spiritual shepherd whose advice and generosity I will not soon forget.
What I am sure would have been a fruitful dialogue with Father Andrew Greeley, S.J., was interrupted by the terrible accident he had in Chicago in November. The generosity with which he expressed interest in my use of his book, The Catholic Imagination, was itself an inspiration to me. I have great hopes that his recovery will proceed apace, and I will one day have the exchange of ideas that I was looking forward to sharing with him. Until then, I am glad to hear that Father Greeley is back home and I offer my sincerest wishes for his complete recovery.

Professor Alice Donohue of the Archaeology Department not only introduced my to the issues of Style and Connoisseurship that have formed the heart of my research since I sat in her Seminar in my first year of graduate school; her advice also improved drafts of this document in ways that have changed the way I work and write. To be able to call her my friend is a source of great pride for me.

Elaine Beretz of the Center for Visual Culture at Bryn Mawr College provided advice and insights that enriched this text beyond measure. Elaine’s enthusiasm and generosity reminded me of why I chose Art History as my calling, whenever the pressures of writing this dissertation might have inclined me to forget it.

Librarians Jane McGarry and Jeremy Blatchley, know, I hope, how they have helped to make it possible for me to complete this dissertation. My dear friends, the librarians Arleen Zimerle and (at Haverford College) James Gulick, will, I also hope, take some satisfaction in knowing what I know all too well, that their help and support made this dissertation possible, and allowed me and my wife Lisa to bring it to a conclusion with our sanity intact. My dear friend Randal Gustitis, Systems Administrator at the Guild Computer Center at Bryn Mawr deserves special praise for patience and support. I have learned a tremendous amount from him—first and foremost about loyalty and friendship.

My friends who watched me choose the academy as the place where I have made my intellectual home, because they knew it was what I wanted, never failed to help me, to sympathize with me, and sometimes, just to endure me. They deserve mention in these acknowledgments at least as much as those I have already listed. Among these, pride of place must go to Christopher Marks and Ronald Violi, two old and dear friends who I admire more than I can say. My big sister, Virginia Saporta, and my big brother, Jose Alberto Saporta, Jr., helped bring me back to my better self when I had almost lost hope of finishing this undertaking.

My late brother Victor Javier Saporta, whose life ended too soon and had too little of the sweetness he deserved to draw from it, is the last person I would like to remember here. I like to think he would have been proud of me.

To those I have not mentioned, and I fear that there are many of them, I offer a sincere apology. You know who you are, and as I hope I am at the beginning of a long career as a scholar; give me time in the acknowledgments to future work to make amends.
Image Resources.

Unless otherwise indicated, images reproduced in this dissertation are from ArtStor and the Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 1. Diego Velázquez, *The Supper at Emmaus*, c.1620, oil/canvas, 123.2 x 132.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. .......................... 31

Figure 2. Paris Hilton (in brown wig) and Travis Barker photographed at Absinthe Bar in the Red Light District, Amsterdam. Posted September 28, 2006, at http://thesuperficial.com/2006/. ......................................................... 38

Figure 3. Titian, *Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1535, oil/canvas, Louvre, Paris. .............. 40

Figure 4. Jacopo Bassano, *Supper at Emmaus*, c.1538, oil/canvas, 235 x 250 cm., Sacristy, Parish Church, Cittadella. ................................................................. 40

Figure 5. Pedro Orrente, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1620’s, oil/canvas, 81 x 101 cm c.1629, MFA, Budapest. ................................................................. 42

Figure 6. Rembrandt, *Supper at Emmaus*, oil on paper on wood, 37.4 x 42.3 cm, 1628, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris. ................................................................. 43

Figure 7. Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1600-1601, oil/canvas 54 3/4 x 76 3/4 in. National Gallery, London. ................................................................. 44

Figure 8. Van Meegeren, *Supper at Emmaus*, oil/canvas, 1936. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam. ................................................................. 45

Figure 9. Albrecht Dürer, *Christ appears to the disciples at Emmaus*, woodcut, c. 1510 for the *Small Passion*. ................................................................. 46

Figure 10. Zurbarán, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1639, Academia de San Carlos, Mexico City. ................................................................. 49

Figure 10 A. *Supper at Emmaus*, oil on copper, private collection. .................... 50

Image from http://memorialunitedmethodist.org/the_way.htm

Figure 11. Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, Museo del Prado, Madrid. ....................... 84

Figure 12. *Las Meninas*, detail. Museo del Prado, Madrid. ....................... 84

Figure 13. Francisco Pacheco, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1619 ....................... 98

Figure 14. Diego Velázquez, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1619 ....................... 98
Figure 15. Luis Aláczar, *Vestigio*, 1614. ......................................................... 100

Figure 16. Francisco Ribera, *Commentarij*, 1590. .............................................. 100

Figure 17. Cardinal Bellarmine, *De Controversiis*, 1581/93. .................................. 100

Figure 18. Illustration from The *Opticorum libri sex* by Francis Aguilón, S.J. ........ 107

Figure 19. *Las Meninas*, detail. ............................................................................. 110

Figure 20. Andrea del Sarto, *The Redeemer*, 1515, oil on panel, 44 X 27 cm, SS Annunziata, Florence. .......................................................... 120

Figure 21. Associated Press, appears in BBC News/Europe, "Stolen Pompeii frescoes found," Tuesday, 8 April, 2003. ..................................................... 136

Figure 22. Juan Sánchez Cotán, *Still Life with Game Fowl, Vegetables and Fruits*, 1602, Museo del Prado, Madrid. ......................................................... 138

Figure 23. *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*, 1602, San Diego Museum of Art. ........................................................................................................... 143

Figure 24. Francisco de Zurbarán, *Still Life with Pottery Jars*, oil on canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid. ................................................................. 144

Figure 25. Zurbarán, *The Young Virgin*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. ........................................................................................................... 150

Figure 26. Saint John of the Cross (attrib.), *Christ on the Cross*, drawing on paper. . . 152
The Image is actually a prayer bearing a reproduction of the drawing published by the Monastery of the Incarnation, Avila.

Figure 27. El Greco (Domenico Teotocopuli), *Annunciation*, 1596-1600, Oil on canvas, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid ................................. 153

Figure 28. *Luis de Góngora*, Boston MFA. .............................................................. 164

Figure 29. *Juan Mateos*, Dresden. ........................................................................... 167

Figure 30. *Old Woman frying Eggs*, 1618, Diego Velázquez. ............................... 178

Figure 31. *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1619. ........................................................... 179

Figure 32. Diego Velázquez, *Los Borrachos* (The Feast of Bacchus), Museo del Prado, Madrid. ................................................................. 181
Figure 33. Diego Velázquez, *Joseph’s Bloody Coat Brought to Jacob*; 1630, Oil on canvas, Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.  

Figure 34. Diego Velázquez, The Forge of Vulcan (1630), Oil on canvas, 223 x 290 cm (87 3/4 x 114 1/8 in), Museo del Prado, Madrid.  

Figure 35. Grotto Loggia Facade  

Figure 36. Pavilion of Cleopatra-Ariadne.  

Figure 37. Diego Velázquez, *Rokeby Venus*, c. 1647–51, Oil on canvas, National Gallery, London.  

Figure 38. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656, Oil on canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid.  

Figure 39. Diego Velázquez, *The Fable of Arachne (Las Hilanderas)*. c. 1644-48. Oil on canvas. Museo del Prado, Madrid.  

Figure 40. Diego Velázquez. *Mercury and Argus*. c. 1659. Oil on canvas. Museo del Prado, Madrid.  

Figure 41. Alois Riegl, ca. 1890.  

Figure 42. Rembrandt. *The Syndics of the Clothmakers’ Guild (The Staalmeesters).* 1662. Oil on canvas. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.  

Figure 43. Gerrit Dou, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1650.  

Figure 44. *The Lacemaker*, c. 1669-1670 Oil on canvas transferred to panel 23.9 x 20.5 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.  


Figure 46. Johannes Vermeer, *The Art of Painting*, c. 1666, Oil on canvas, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.  

Figure 47. *Coronation of the Virgin*, Madrid, Prado, 1635.  

Figure 48. *Louis-Michel van Loo, Philip V of Spain with his wife Elisabetta Farnese and his descendants*, Prado.  

Figure 49. Innocent X, c. 1650, Galleria Doria-Pamphili, Rome.  

Figure 50, Francesco Giovanni Cresci, *Il Perfetto Scrittore*, 1570.
Introduction

The project undertaken here may seem old fashioned. It is, after all, an inquiry into, and an attempt to account for, *style*—the individual style of Diego Velázquez, but also, an even more fraught concept—national style. Critics and art historians used the quality known as style to account for the unique ‘look’ of Spanish paintings. It is a concept that has proven over time more problematic than the earliest historians of art, who applied it quite promiscuously, could have imagined. We might feel justified in assuming the less said about it the better. I believe that our discipline’s loss of confidence in the *wissenschaftlich* ambitions of earlier generations of art historians is the reason for the virtual absence of questions of style from our journals and symposia. In the history of art history, this crisis of confidence and this suppression, if not repression, of the treatment of style can be traced specifically to the collapse of the great project that was formalism.

Formalism was that movement in art theory that found its strongest expression in the work of American critic Clement Greenberg (1909 - 1994). From his position as art critic at the *Partisan Review*, beginning with his 1940 essay “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” Greenberg gave perhaps the strongest formulation—at least one of the most influential—of the idea that the work itself contained all that was essential to its meaningful interpretation. A work’s visual form, rather than its historical context, or its creator’s biography, or even its content (when it was of a mimetic character), was of paramount importance. Formalism gave to connoisseurship, focusing as it did upon the material nature of the artistic work, a role that far transcended its original applicability to
questions of attribution and of market value. Monistic and imperial, formalism rose together with abstraction, the style it championed and to which it was best suited as a theoretical framework, to a place of tremendous prominence in art criticism and art history.¹ Starting in the 1960s, a variety of approaches differing from one another considerably, but sharing a common hostility to the perceived reductiveness of formalism and the inhibiting nature of its dominance, began to arise; the “New Art History,” as Norman Bryson and others named it, was born.² European structuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and critical theory imported from literary studies all argued, not just for their own applicability, but necessarily, for the idea that social, and other radically contingent, historically located aspects of an artistic work were of far greater importance than its mere form.

This revolution has been spectacularly successful. As Jed Perl, art critic for the New Republic, wrote in 2005: “The central drama of our time is the collapse of


formalism, of the belief that emotion is lodged in the very facture of the work.”³ As Perl wrote in the same essay:

Formalism, which urged people to look closely and to trust the immediate evidence of their eyes, was an artistic faith — one of the greatest of all artistic faiths. Formalism offered a baseline of aesthetic experience by reducing art's power to its ABCs — to the relationships between lines and colors and shapes . . . And its eclipse is as cataclysmic as the collapse in the early twentieth century of the dream of romanticism, of the idea of the artist as the imagining individual, reshaping the world.⁴

This collapse of formalism was, in the end, a trauma that left art history as a discipline wary of style and disinclined to make too much use of the concept; nevertheless, it is not only contemporary documents or the taxonomists of style of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which attest that Spanish paintings of the golden age look different from paintings of the same period in Italy, Flanders, or France. It is a fact available anytime we visit a museum with a sufficiently diverse collection of European paintings—Style is still very much a part of our experience of these works.

I have considerable sympathy for the position that the connoisseurship of style may be, as of yet, too compromised by recent history and too tied to the personal authority and reputations of its great proponents (e.g., Bernard Berenson, Roger Fry, or Max J. Friedlaender) to be safely handled without considerable care. Such caution, however, ought not to cross over into taboo if it leads us to pass over in silence an experience available to any visitor to the world’s great museums. Perhaps the last great


⁴ Ibid.
theorician of style before the relative paucity of interest that seems to characterize our current situation is Meyer Schapiro (1904-1996). He was a profoundly insightful critic of the concept’s use and misuse. His essay, “Style,” which first appeared in A. L. Kroeber’s *Anthropology Today* (1953), gives a definition of the concept that encompasses, but also moves beyond, both the market-driven concerns of simple connoisseurship and the reductiveness of 1950’s formalism in the direction of the making of the concept a tool within social art history:5

By Style is usually meant the constant form—and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression—in the art of an individual or a group . . . Style is an essential object of investigation. [The art historian] studies its inner correspondences, its life history, and the problems of its formulation and change. He too (like the archaeologist), uses style as a criterion of the date and place of origin of works, and as a means of tracing relationships between schools of art. But the style is, above all, a system of forms with a quality and meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist, and the broad outlook of a group are visible. It is also a vehicle of expression within the group . . . through the emotional suggestiveness of forms . . . By considering the succession of works in time and space and by matching variations of style with historical events and with the varying features of other fields of culture, the historian of art attempts, with the help of common-sense psychology and social theory, to account for the changes of style or specific traits.6


Since his death in 1996, perhaps enough time has elapsed for a more measured reappraisal of Schapiro’s place in the pantheon of art historical theorists. As Alan Wallach pointed out in his spirited response to W. J. T. Mitchell’s disparaging “Shapiro’s Legacy” (in *Art in America*, 83, 1995, 29-31), Schapiro: “was around for so long and played such a central role in shaping the field . . . that today’s commentators are prone to forget that Shapiro’s intellectual formation dated to the 1920s, if not earlier . . . and that such books as Emanuel Loewy’s *The Rendering of Nature in Greek Art*, published in
For Schapiro, therefore, style was far more than a clue to chronology or direction of influence; it was itself a bearer of meaning—an aspect of the artistic work with real explanatory power. It is this meaning-laden formulation of style that informs my project. The golden age in Spain never seems to have attracted Schapiro’s special attention, but the applicability of his approach to Spanish national style and the complexities of its interaction with issues of social rupture and class conflict are displayed in his foundational essay “From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos.”

One qualification that must be made in what we have come to call the Spanish style, or the Spanish School, is that it is fundamentally the Sevillian style. This, along with its

---

7 For a treatment of Schapiro’s continuous engagement with the concept of style that seeks simultaneously to avoid entanglement with a “consistent critical position or a sustained theoretical commitment . . .” See Michael Ann Holly, "Schapiro Style," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 1 (1997).


9 Though, special consideration must be given to El Greco, Ribera, and a few others and acknowledging the style’s exportation to Madrid and other art centers on the peninsula, the ‘look’ that connoisseurs came to recognize as Spanish both in Europe and in the New Word was overwhelmingly Sevillian in its associations.
transformation by Diego Velázquez, is the style that concerns us here. This constellation of qualities is called in the wider international dialogue on painting the Spanish style. It was, admittedly, so categorized by foreigners, but is no less based on their experience of the paintings for that. It would have been recognized even in Spain by discerning collectors, such as Queen Isabel Farnese, as Sevillian.

Some of the attributes of this style can be generally agreed upon: The eschewal of deep Italian ‘window’ style perspective in favor of the placing of key objects and figures close up against the picture plane along with the frequent use of a dark, nondescript background. Further: the incorporation of a separate band of ‘visionary’ or ‘mystical’ space where heavenly or miraculous events are depicted, and an attention to surface textures such as exquisitely rendered flesh, fabric, or metal. In the context of the wider artistic discourse of Europe at the time, and the ascendancy of the personal styles of

\[\text{10} \text{ Taken in conjunction with his experience of the high-prestige Venetian paintings of the royal collection.}\]

\[\text{11} \text{ On the influence of Isabel Farnese as a collector, See Felipe Vicente Garín Llombart, Treasures of the Prado (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1998).}\]

"Isabella Farnese, who astutely acquired important works by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, also reinforced the traditional Spanish taste for Italian painting, and Italian fresco painters from Corrado Giaquinto to Giambattista Tiepolo were summoned to decorate the new palaces. (Many of their sketches remain in the Prado's collection.) This vast decorative enterprise, which was continued by Ferdinand VI (1746-59) and Charles III (1759-88), also yielded commissions for the Santa Barbara tapestry workshops. An entire generation of young Spaniards trained at the new Academy of Fine Arts was called on to design cartoons for tapestries, and those by Goya are among the Prado's treasures."

Also, on Isabel Farnese’s gallery at La Granja, See Marcus B. Burke, "Paintings by Ribera in the Collection of the Duque De Medina De Las Torres," The Burlington Magazine 131, no. 1031 (1989).
Velázquez and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682), we can also see among Spaniards a preference for the Venetian side of the old imported conflict between Florentine/Roman *disegno* and the freer Venetian tradition of brushwork, or *colore.*

Indeed, to the non-specialist in Spanish art history this aspect of Spanish style will be the one most familiar.

Even in the case of the prestige attached to the Florentine influence that does enter Spain, however, Spanish predisposition selects from that tradition precisely those aspects it finds most congenial, and not necessarily those ranked as primary by the Italians. One example of this is the importation of Leonardo’s *sfumato*—a technique that his contemporaries held to be that artist’s invention. By way of Leonardo’s Valencian disciples, this *sfumato* enters Spain (as *ahumado*—smoky) and evolves in a parallel line with the Venetian techniques seen in those works imported by members of the Habsburg dynasty for their massively influential collections. I argue, however, that the distinctive Spanish style is the product of far more than just what is imported and selected from Italy. The selection process from among all those things Italy had to offer was already pre-conditioned by Spanish concerns and obsessions—and these are overwhelmingly the result of the nation’s identification with Roman Catholicism and its own special contribution to the mystical aspect of that tradition.


One of the filters through which Spain experienced the art of oil painting that it imported from Italy and the Netherlands has always been the special character of its mysticism. Spanish art has long insisted on addressing visionary experience through its visual art. This insistence gave rise to habits of visualization that in and of themselves had an effect on the task of image-making as it is conceived of and executed by Spanish artists in the siglo de oro.

I demonstrate the explanatory power of these ideas through their application to an artist commonly understood as predominantly secular and realist in his concerns—that is, the Spanish artist to whom they might be assumed to be least applicable. Diego Velázquez was rediscovered and then introduced into the art historical canon by way of the admiration his work garnered from the French Realists and Impressionists, especially Manet.14 This has freighted the understanding of his work with a whole host of concerns anachronistic to his period. To show that even Velázquez is best understood by means of the concerns of his time and place makes the applicability of these ideas to artists whose enmeshment with the religious climate of seventeenth-century Spain is explicit, that much more persuasive.

A further goal of my text is to model an art history that does not a priori place the work of the Catholic Counter Reformation at a disadvantage. Anglo-American art history owes a great deal to the Protestant and Jewish scholars who respectively founded and

14 It was the Goncourt Brothers who placed Velázquez in a kind of trinity with Rembrandt and Rubens, Journal de Goncourt : Mémoires de la vie literaire, Paris, 1887-1896, vol. 3, 294: July 12, 1889, cited in Tinterow’s essay, (see below) , fn. 3, p. 3.

transformed the discipline. Both brought with them deep structures of thought that represent a strong tendency to privilege the word over the image and the rational over the rhetorical, and have therefore proven ill-suited to the understanding of Catholic art on its own terms.\(^{15}\) Drawing on the work of a sociologist, Fr. Andrew Greeley, SJ\(^ {16}\) and a comparative theologian, David Tracy,\(^ {17}\) I offer in the final section of this dissertation, titled “Synthesis,” the model of a specifically Catholic sensibility, the acknowledgement of which is, I believe, necessary if the Southern Baroque is ever to escape the patronizing assumptions that continue to inform much of what is written about it.

On a related issue, I hope to make this dissertation a further contribution to the critique of the Albertian narrative of painting undertaken by Svetlana Alpers, especially in *The Art of Describing* (1983), and, more recently (and specifically in relation to Velázquez) in *The Vexations of Art* (2005). Just as the Albertian model of the history of painting,\(^ {18}\) named for Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), cannot help but disadvantage the Dutch painting of the Seventeenth Century (as Alpers has persuasively demonstrated),

\(^{15}\) The bibliography on this complex topic is widely dispersed, but an excellent starting point is Catherine M. Soussloff (ed.), *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999). In particular, Donald’s Kuspits essay on Meyer Schapiro, dealing with what he calls the scholar’s “Jewish unconscious,” particularly as it relates to his very public quarrel with Bernard Berenson, the most famous connoisseur of his day and also a product of the Jewish diaspora from the Baltic states. See also George Goodwin, “Book Review: Jewish Identity in Modern Art History,” *Modern Judaism* 20, no. 2 (2000).

\(^{16}\) Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 2000).


\(^{18}\) Wherein the picture plane is understood as a window on a world comprehended neatly by projective geometry—commensurability being its key attribute.
expressions of Spain’s special Catholic sensibility will always be subtly disadvantaged if disconnected from the metaphysics and theology of immanence that inform them. In my opinion, the Albertian schema similarly institutionalizes, though by very different means than it does Dutch art, the mis-measure of golden age Spanish painting.

There is a third orthodoxy I would like to challenge in this dissertation. It is that paradigm of Velázquez studies currently regnant under the powerful influence of two of the most important Velázquez scholars working today, Jonathan Brown and John Elliott. Their achievement is foundational and worthy of tremendous admiration, but it can be said to have moved from framing to limiting at least what is written in the Anglo-American precincts of Velázquez studies. The questions José Antonio Maravall and others raise deserve to be seen as more than interesting detours from the orthodox model (which has thus far focused very profitably on patronage and iconography). There are new questions that deserve to contribute to shaping the future of Velázquez studies. That Maravall’s book, *Velázquez y el espiritu de la modernidad* (Madrid: Alianza, 1960), has yet to be translated into English is an indication that different approaches to Velázquez studies need wider dissemination among Anglophone scholars. I seek to make a contribution towards moving the field in a direction no longer circumscribed by the Brown-Elliot model—though heaven forbid anyone should do so without retaining a sense of profound gratitude for what these scholars have made possible, or seeking to emulate the rigor, passion, and commitment to historical context that their approach embodies.

*    *    *    *
Among those aspects of the archival record that will receive attention here, and that have hitherto been somewhat neglected, is the catalogue of Velázquez’ surprisingly rich private library. Those who have dealt with Velázquez’ library previously almost ritualistically note that it contains “only” two works that can be considered mystical or devotional in nature. They point out that far more space on Velázquez’ shelves was occupied by titles dealing with the so-called new sciences, especially Optics and Astronomy. In my third chapter, which I devote to Velázquez’ library, I insist that two titles are enough, if they are the right two titles. Also, that the dichotomy assumed between an interest in the new sciences and the world of spiritual exercises is actually far from automatic—and that, indeed, the new counter-reformation orders, such as the Jesuits, saw synthesis rather than distinction in such matters.¹⁹

Closely related to this topic, the issue of print-sources for Golden Age Spanish painting in general, and in the work of Velázquez in particular, has received far greater attention in recent years. I seek in this dissertation to heartily endorse this new direction in Velázquez studies: Benito Navarrete Prieto has established this line of inquiry, and it is fundamental to understanding both what is imported and what is indiginous in the achievements of Spanish painting’s Golden Age.²⁰

¹⁹ The catalog for the Casa Murillo’s exhibition on library of Velázquez is the most important new tool in this inquiry, Pedro Ruiz Pérez, De La Pintura y Las Letras. La Biblioteca De Velázquez (Seville: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, E. P. G., 1999).

This dissertation offers an account of counter-reformation mystical texts and praxis with art historical applicability. Margaret Deutsch Carroll,21 David Freedberg,22 and most recently (with greatest applicability to Jesuit art in the North of Europe), Jeffrey Chipps Smith,23 have done significant work already. With its specifically Spanish emphasis, this dissertation seeks to contribute to this wider undertaking; indeed, given the centrality of the Spanish mystics to the general movement of Catholic devotion in this period, I feel this focus is long overdue.

Any novel approach to a canonical artist must have a real applicability or it deserves the oblivion it will inevitably come to know. I will demonstrate exactly this: the consequences of considering devotional practice and mystical experience in the analysis of Spanish painting in the siglo de oro yields new, more complete, and more intellectually satisfying readings of particular works. Most importantly, my approach, without completely supplanting the long-established tradition of applying Flemish and Italian models to Velázquez’ work, allows us to see what is authentically Spanish in his accomplishments.


Chapter 1

Jesuit Art Patronage and Siglo de Oro Devotional Practice

As established in the introduction, it is the special ‘look,’ the style, of Spanish painting during the siglo de oro that is the subject of investigation here. I maintain that the origin of this style is to be found in a specific aspect of the religious culture of post-tridentine Spain. This is the particular, national expression of a set of imperatives that developed in the mystical theology of Latin Christendom. In Spain, its influence is so pervasive as to have decisive explanatory power even when brought to bear on the work of a painter as thoroughly secular as Velázquez. Diego Velázquez is, therefore, the litmus test of this interpretive strategy; if it can be applied even to his work, then it can be said to go well beyond being merely a requirement of church patronage, and to reveal itself as a consistent habit of the Spanish gaze.

This ‘look’ we feel we recognize in Spanish paintings need not be some numinous quality with which the connoisseur communes only after long and intimate familiarity. The disrepute into which investigations of style have currently fallen is, at least in part, the result of such gnosticism. Rather, when the members of a list of traits occur together in works produced under particular geographical and temporal parameters, we can pragmatically say that we are experiencing a style that has a (qualified) kind of reality over and above the particular works in which it can be said to find expression. Not all of the traits need manifest themselves in all of the works under investigation. They must, however, appear with sufficient frequency and in sufficient number that we can, no less

---

24 One might, in the Spanish context, even say “uniquely.”
than can statisticians or biologists, deduce a trend. The least controversial traits of golden
age Spanish painting, as I have proposed them, bear repeating at this point:

1. The eschewal of deep Italian ‘window’ style perspective in favor of the
   placing of key objects and figures close up against the picture plane (an effect
   more reminiscent of relief sculpture than the receding grid of the Italian High
   Renaissance tradition).
2. The use of a dark and/or nondescript background (not to be understood as
disregarding a visually persuasive foreground).
3. The incorporation of a separate band of ‘visionary’ or ‘mystical’ space where
   heavenly or miraculous events are depicted.25
4. Intense attention to surface textures such as exquisitely rendered flesh, fabric,
or metal.
5. A preference for Venetian precedent (based in colore) over Florentine/Roman
disegno, meaning an emphasis on free, loose brushwork and the physicality of
the paint itself.
6. Even beyond what is implied by the attention to texture mentioned above, a
preference for those elements of a narrative that are sense-provoking and
solicitous of empathy.

It can be demonstrated that during the period we are dealing with there was a
practice, widely diffused throughout the European continent, whereby people cultivated
virtually, using their imaginations, experiences that corresponded in most if not all
particulars to the qualities defining the Spanish style in painting. If, upon investigation,
we find that Europeans in general, and Spaniards in particular, understood that this
manner of cultivating imaginary experience was connected with Spain and had grown out
of the Spanish milieu, we have strong reason to believe such congruence to be more than
accidental.

In fact there was just such a practice, or set of related practices, that had become
extremely popular in Catholic Europe. Authors and corporate bodies that espoused such

25 The inclusion of this trait in a profile of the Spanish Style is due overwhelmingly to
Victor Stoichita, Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art (London:
practices were disproportionately Spanish or connected with Spain. The best known of these, because they were arguably the most successful in this undertaking, was the Society of Jesus, colloquially known as the Jesuits. This is not to disregard the importance of such practices in forming the mystical expressions of the Carmelites (i.e. Teresa de Avila) or the Franciscans (i.e. Francisco de Osuna), but to acknowledge the primacy of the Society of Jesus in spreading these practices among both lay Catholics and religiouses during the Golden Age.

*   *   *   *   *

Long before hypnotists or advertisers learned to exploit the fact, it was known that the human imagination could, when properly led, find in mere suggestion sufficient matter to provoke physiological and emotional responses of surprising intensity. Given that the mind and the body seem disinclined to distinguish between what is real and what is vividly imagined, it follows that experiences taking place only in the imagination have the potential to be as transformative as those that actually take place. It is from this realization that a tradition of devotional practice, designed to transform the individual through the systematic cultivation of such experiences, has arisen in many religious traditions. In the Christian culture of the West, several groups and individuals made use of such programs of internal cultivation. None could claim the success and prominence that the Roman Catholic Society of Jesus had achieved in presenting devotional practices based in this understanding of the connection between psychology and physiology.
The Jesuits were an order within the Catholic Church but outside the diocesan structure (the Commander General of the order answers directly to the Roman Pontiff). The Jesuit Order is a special and therefore useful case of the organizations within the Church that have propagated such disciplines of the imagination.

The founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius Loyola, synthesized various methods—one might even say “technologies” of spiritual transformation. He recorded his synthesis in a book entitled, in its original Castilian version, *Los Exercicios Espirituales*, or *The Spiritual Exercises* (1541). It is a text that seems to straddle two incompatible worlds, one quite modern and familiar, the other far less so. Upon superficial acquaintance, the text shows the modern reader its more recognizable aspect, its kinship with genres of writing we are quite familiar with—theological or psychological. Upon further examination, however, the text reveals roots that lie in more ancient and, to our modern sensibilities, alien soil, reminiscent of the accounts left us by the desert fathers of their encounters with forces divine and demonic as they practiced austerities in the wilderness.

If we look more closely at this text and the order that championed and disseminated it, we will find an illuminating correspondence with our subject: the achievements of Spanish painters during what is still called their golden age—their siglo de oro. Ignatius pre-dates the art historical period we are addressing by at least a generation, but to understand how his influence came to fruition in the seventeenth century, we must understand how it is rooted in his own sixteenth century and in the tradition of devotional practice in Latin Christendom. Born in 1491 at the castle of Loyola in Guipúzcoa in the Basque Country, Ignatius is the contemporary of the Council
of Trent, Erasmus, Luther and Columbus. The book he authored grew out of the conversion-experience that took place while he recuperated at Loyola in 1521 from a wound sustained in combat against the French at Pamplona. It is the result of a combination of influences.

The idea of spiritual exercises is actually pre-Christian. The Hellenistic philosophical schools, both the Stoics and the Skeptics, had their own spiritual exercises that they called *askesis* or *meletê*. These were personal and voluntary practices designed to bring about an inner transformation. While no Hellenistic treatise of spiritual exercises has survived from antiquity, many texts refer to those exercises. An authority on the history of Hellenistic philosophy, and the Stoics in particular, suggests that they most likely had a long oral transmission in the Mediterranean world. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius are likely a journal and workbook of an exercitant engaged in just such practices.

---


The type of devotions Ignatius offers in his book is disproportionately represented among mystics under Western Latin Christianity. A key to the development of this image-based devotional approach in the Latin tradition is provided by Dame Frances Yates in her now classic work on the peculiar post-classical revival of the *Ars Memorativa*, or Art of Memory, in the Renaissance. The use of artificial mnemonic systems involving the vivid visualization of the data one sought to remember converted into a striking scene or image was a practice never completely lost, and became the locus of special attention for some Renaissance humanists. Well before this, in his *Summa Theologica* (written 1265-1274), Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) states of memory:

\[
\text{oportet ut homo sollicitudinem apponat et affectum adhibeat ad ea quae vult memorari} \\
\text{(a man should apply solicitude and affection to the things he wants to remember)}^{30}
\]

It is Yates’ contention that Aquinas is simply misremembering (or perhaps it is an inspired misreading) the words of the *Ad Herennium*, a classical (first century BC) text believed, until Renaissance scholarship proved otherwise, to be the work of Cicero. The *Ad Herennium* states that the places imagined for memory exercises should be in deserted regions because:

---

28 Perhaps to be most profitably contrasted with the dominant mystical practice of the Eastern churches, *Hesychasm*, in which mystics are rewarded not with visions that encode sacred realities, but with direct experience of the *energia* of the Divinity, usually accomplished by means of repetition of the “Jesus Prayer.” See John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974).


30 in the *Summa*, II. ii. 49
Yates holds that Aquinas has mistaken "solitudo" for "sollicitudo," "introducing a devotional atmosphere which is entirely absent from the classical memory rule."

Whether Yates is right about the specific mechanics of this error (if that is what it is), she seems to have identified the origin-point of a new kind of devotion in the Latin West. This is the point where the ancient spiritual disciplines of the late antique stoics are reinvented as a Christian tool for devotion. The Romantic notion of “sentimental education”—the idea that an individual is given the proper formation by the training of affect as well as of his or her reason—may be here in embryo.

The availability of literature in the Jesuit mold, like Ludolphus’ *Vita Christi*, or the works of Spanish mystics such as Teresa of Avila or Francisco de Osuna, is greater than had been thought previously. In her article, “Printing and Reading Popular Religious texts in Sixteenth-Century Spain,” Sara Nalle makes this clear. By analysis of the inventories of booksellers, Nalle reconstructs a Spanish readership that goes well beyond the elite circles that tend to be more visible to the historian. Middle-class and lower-class readers were not likely to have their libraries of one or two precious volumes inventoried, but Nalle shows that theological sophistication and familiarity with the structure of

---

31 *De Ratione Dicendi ad C. Herennium liber* III, 3.31.

32 Yates, *The Art of Memory.* 76

devotional and mystical experiences were not necessarily to be explained by means of an implausibly historically opaque “trickle-down” mode of transmission. Interest in and familiarity with such material was more common than has been assumed, and as this dissertation shows, exposure to images that reinforced and confirmed such materials was virtually universal.

A sense of the devotional practices that mystically inclined religious orders, and particularly the Society of Jesus promoted and popularized (one might even say, as I will presently justify, “domesticated”) is important to what follows. The seminal influence of the Jesuits upon the power and sensuality of the Catholic Baroque can hardly be exaggerated. It is an artistic achievement of such power that it can still shock even a modern sensibility.

In “Art in Jesuit Life,” Clement McNaspy of Loyola University, speaks of:

Bernini, supreme master of the Italian baroque. He made the *Spiritual Exercises* on a number of occasions, at least once directed by Father Oliva, our eleventh General [Father McNaspy is speaking as a Jesuit to his fellows]. The former novitiate chapel of *Sant’ Andrea al Quirinale*, which many believe to be Bernini’s masterpiece, is one of the wonders of Rome and was done as a personal gift to the society.34

The depiction of the Transverberation of Teresa of Avila in the Cornaro Chapel of *Santa Maria della Vittoria*, a chapel devoted to a Spanish saint and mystic whose practice is precisely the sort that was employed by the Jesuits,35 was not the result of their patronage,

---


35 Teresa’s spiritual practice developed under frequent counsel from Jesuit confessors, and when diocesan authorities seemed inclined to view her activities as unorthodox, Jesuit evaluators of the *Vida* more than once stood surety for its contents. See Cathleen
but, likewise cannot be separated from their influence upon the artist. The Jesuits were of profound influence in Italy, but they were also a missionary order sent out to those parts of Europe disputed by Catholics and Protestants. The late Commander-General of the Society, the Reverend Pedro Arrupe (1907-1991), in an address given at Mondragone, in Frascati, Italy in 1972, reminded his audience that:

In Belgium, the great painter Rubens was a faithful member of the Marian Sodality [a Jesuit-directed Marian congregation], as was his fellow artist Van Dyck, and both have acknowledged their great debt to the Jesuits who guided and encouraged them.36

Arrupe also reminds his fellow Jesuits of “the offer of Michelangelo to build the Gesù.”37 He might just as easily have mentioned the relationship of Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644), Velázquez’ teacher and father-in-law, with the Jesuit authorities of Seville.

The Jesuits were an international order to be sure, but one founded by a Spanish Basque and very Spanish in its earliest character and membership. It gave its patronage to a certain kind of art that was produced by artists whose visual imaginations the Jesuits themselves had gone to great lengths to discipline, train, and inform. Devotional formats that lay Catholics would already have been familiar with would have been exploited in the furtherance of this goal:


37 Ibid.,
That Ignatius, not only founder of the order, but also formulator of the *Exercises* was in fact heir to and redactor of a long tradition has been well established. It may be said, indeed, that the key exercises (apart from the preliminary First Principle and Foundation) deal in images and parables. [Pedro de] Leturia has made a close study of the Books of Hours in wide use during Ignatius’ youth and finds clear indications of their influence on the triple colloquy, the composition of place, and other central Ignatian techniques.38

In discussing the importance of vivid images for the authentic practice of *The Exercises*, McNaspy admits that “there is little of the lyricism of John of the Cross in Ignatius’ constructions; but there most certainly is a vivid awareness of how manifest God is in his creation and redemption of man.”39 McNaspy therefore implicitly acknowledges a pre-existing tradition on which Ignatius draws, and even grants that, at least for sheer poetical virtuosity, John of the Cross surpasses even the Society’s founder in his own application of that tradition.40 McNaspy acknowledges that Ignatius’ version of this mystical tradition is not necessarily the most profound one achievable—it does not need to be. What it does need to be is the most generally useful to the institutional church rather than to the individual mystic.

The return of Jesuit image-making and Jesuit-made images to Spain, and specifically to Seville, can be traced with considerable confidence. The word “return” is of capital importance since the Jesuits were the exporters of autochthonous Spanish practices to the rest of Europe, and then redelivered them, modified and transformed, to


39 Ibid.: 106.

40 Note that he selects for the comparison another Spanish mystic.
the very place from which they had been borrowed. Suzane Stratton-Pruitt, in her book on the Immaculate Conception in Spanish art tells us:

The rapid propagation of this association of Apocalyptic details with the Immaculate Conception [in the evolution of the definitive iconography of the subject which definitively crystallized in the period we are more directly concerned with here, the 17th Century] was probably effected initially through Flemish prints, such as that designed by Marten de Vos, who also produced many large religious paintings for Spanish patrons, doing an especially brisk business with the city of Seville [emphasis mine]. The Antwerp printmakers were also connected to Spain through their relationship with the Jesuit order, for which the Wierix family, especially executed a large number of engravings. For example the Wierix brothers—Johannes, Hieronymus and Antonius—engraved the illustrations for the *Evangelicae historiae imagines, adnotationes et meditationes* which received the imprimatur in 1579 and was published in 1593.

Victor Stoichita sums up the Spanish tradition that had been re-imported thusly:

“Counter-Reformationary ideology, Islamic roots, Jewish culture, Flemish mysticism.”

He goes on to describe the nature of the change from the sixteenth century (the “golden era” of Spanish mystical writing) to the seventeenth (the period in Spanish painting that took the same epithet):

The scale of surveillance on the part of the Inquisition in Spain (much more vigorous and strict than anywhere else) reflected a desire to control an imagery that was very often hidden from all institutionalized constraints. Moreover, it is significant that at the heart of the great mystical literature of sixteenth-century

---

41 A doctrine, the devotion to which she demonstrates to have been overwhelmingly Spanish, strongly connected with the Jesuits, and deeply connected with the Spanish mystical tradition of vivid, disciplined visualization by way of Raymond Lull and others.


Spain, the debate surrounding the role of paintings in the exercise of religious devotion acknowledged the existence of diametrically opposed conclusions, ranging from absolute affirmation (on the part of Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila), to absolute negation (through the work of John of the Cross and later through that of Miguel de Molinos). There is an obvious temporal interval separating the sixteenth century, a period rich in visionary literature, from the seventeenth, which saw the burgeoning of Spanish visionary art. In its role as an instrument for the diffusion of extra-ordinary experiences (for the most part strictly personal and even private), painting was only just fulfilling its true vocation as the ecclesiastical authorities were succeeding in amassing, consolidating, and, so to speak, taming the mystical fury that had shaken the sixteenth century.  

In this context we can see the painterly efflorescence of seventeenth-century Seville as, at least in part, flowing from the successful suppression of the unruliness of internal, hidden images composed in and for the mind’s eye. It represents the bringing of these internal images to order within the image-making professions of the city.

In 1952, Lucien Febvre, in *Combats pour l’Histoire*, wrote: “Sensibility and History: a new subject. I know of no book that deals with it, I do not even see a formulation anywhere of the multiple problems that it involves. And so (may a mere historian be forgiven this cry of an artist) here is a splendid subject.” The founder of the *Annales* school of historiography, Febvre, and most influentially for the Mediterranean world, Fernand Braudel, have shown us an approach to the historical past through factors that are both subtle and ubiquitous.

As mentioned in the introduction, formalism was ostensibly an interpretive framework for *all* art, but was especially well-suited to the abstract art that the formalist

---

44 *loc. cit.*

theoreticians were seeking to champion. The elegant and certainly applicable ideas behind a ‘history of sensibility’ have their own particularly suitable object. The vividly visualized worlds of Spanish devotional practice—talk about ephemera! Nevertheless, the devotional diegesis\textsuperscript{46} that the spiritual exercitant carried with him was the result of systematic method and discipline. Within the sphere of Jesuit influence, its genesis was guided and controlled by an entire institution that viewed such guidance and control as one of its primary objectives.

The motives of the Society of Jesus are certainly easier to identify than those of the anarchic mystics and visionaries (many of them women)\textsuperscript{47} whose techniques they appropriated. The order was the issuer of the laws of physics, or at least of optics, for these internal worlds and many of the excersants creating worlds under its guidelines were themselves visual artists and oftentimes produced works for the order, making for a rich field of inquiry.

The claim I advance is not that the Sevillian school is a projection of a uniquely Jesuit vision. Rather, it is substantially the projection of a Spanish mystical tradition—one that employs vividly imagined objects and persons—the Jesuit use of which (but also their appropriation and regulation of it)—is generally a good place to start when studying

---


\textsuperscript{46} The (fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur. The term can be traced to Plato’s \textit{Republic} (Bookk III), and is a term of art in contemporary film theory.

\textsuperscript{47} The panic sewn by one such \textit{beata}, Lucrecia de León, is documented in Richard L. Kagan, \textit{Lucrecia's Dreams : Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). The connection between Lucrecia’s visionary prophesies and the practices taught in the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} tempts Kagan to speculate about a connection (p. 163).
the phenomenon. As a counter-reformation religious order, its archivists and bureaucrats as much as its mystics and missionaries have left a paper trail. I do not doubt that evidence of the relevance of devotional practice to painting is to be found in other sources; I only suggest that we first train ourselves to look for it where the light is brightest.

That prints sponsored by the Society made their way from Flemish printing houses to Seville is important but not sufficient proof for the case I am making. Images orphaned from their sponsors can take on a life of their own under the aegis of a new context. We need to establish that the Society of Jesus was a major influence in its own right in Seville in the seventeenth century; that these images and exercises were not merely generated by the order, but that the order was of and with them. Scholars of the Sevillian milieu during this period are in agreement about the strong Jesuit presence in the city. Sara Nalle, Ronald Cueto, and W. J. Callahan all attribute to the Jesuits a high profile with regards to patronage in the city of Seville.

---

48 This is abundantly accomplished by Prieto, _La Pintura Analuza Del Siglo Xvii Y Sus Fuentes Grabadas_.


See also Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, "Sevilla En La Época De Velázquez," in _Velázquez y Sevilla : Monasterio De La Cartuja De Santa Ma Cuevas, Salas Del Centro Andaluz De Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla, Del 1 De Octubre Al 12 De Diciembre De 1999_, ed. Alfredo José Morales (Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, 1999).
In Velázquez’ case, however, we can dispense with the general in preference for the specifics of his situation. His teacher, Pacheco, was, after all, the Inquisition’s censor in Seville and had a long relationship with the Jesuits. One of his earliest commissions was for the Jesuit novitiates’ chapel in Seville—*The Adoration of the Magi* that we will deal with presently.

*     *     *

The manner in which this Jesuit style of devotional and meditational practice informed artistic production in the seventeenth century was first modeled in an examination of the work of an artist with impeccably Protestant *bona fides*—Rembrandt. In her 1981 article for the *Art Bulletin*, “Rembrandt as Meditational Printmaker,” Margaret Carroll examines two of the artist’s late prints that are extant in a number of bewildering states that the artist had progressively “reworked so extensively that by the final state the narrative itself was transformed.”52 Both drypoints, *Christ Presented to the People* (dated 1655) and *The Three Crosses* (dated 1653), move from vivid and precise detail through a “shearing away of narrative and spatial abstraction”53 to final states in which “compositional transparencies,”54 incompletely removed and peculiarly altered

---


52 Carroll, "Rembrandt as Meditational Printmaker," 585.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.
elements from earlier states, are retained in the final version. Perhaps most telling is
“Rembrandt’s boldly assertive non-representational markings and scorings [which] serve
as undisguised traces of his intense artistic and contemplative activity.”\textsuperscript{55} Carroll reminds
us that these “were unprecedented at the time of their making.”\textsuperscript{56}

In short, each print amounts to a series (even though, as Carroll concedes, they were
most likely not presented to the public as such).\textsuperscript{57} This suggests a method of composition
for which the usual concerns of print-making\textsuperscript{58} are neither necessary nor sufficient
explanations. What Carroll proposes is that the progressive states of both prints conform
with astonishing fidelity to the structural dialectics of a genre of devotional poetry being
produced by Rembrandt’s contemporaries. Indeed, among the poets working in this genre
are two of the artist’s patrons, Constantine Huygens and Jan Six.\textsuperscript{59} Carroll deals most
specifically with Huygens’ sonnets, and with good reason. Huygens produces several
Dutch poems that follow the meditational pattern that concerns us here. He is also a
translator of John Donne’s religious poetry into Dutch.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.: 604.

\textsuperscript{58} Be it to strengthen lines worn down through printing, readjustment of the composition
on purely esthetic grounds, or to refine or intensify the contrasts of light and shade.

\textsuperscript{59} Carroll, "Rembrandt as Meditational Printmaker," 586.

\textsuperscript{60} See Frank J. Warnke, \textit{European Metaphysical Poetry}, \textit{Elizabethan Club Series}, 2 (New
The historiography of the subject requires a step back from the goal of illuminating the Spanish painting of the Sevillian School. The digression into Protestantism and Rembrandt’s prints brings us to a crucial source. Carroll’s argument is rooted in the work of literary scholar Louis Martz. In his 1962 book, *The Poetry of Meditation*, Martz confronted the perplexing structure of the *Anniversaries* of English Metaphysical poet John Donne.61 He went on to transform the manner in which the (mostly) Protestant devotional poetry of Donne’s generation was contextualized and interpreted. The surprising source of a great deal of what was so unique in the poetry of Robert Southwell, John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, and Andrew Marvell, among others, was demonstrated by Martz to be “certain meditational sequences prescribed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *Catholic* devotional Handbooks.”62 As Martz states the matter:

During the latter half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, all the important treatises on meditation show a remarkable similarity in fundamental procedure. A large part of this similarity is directly due to the widespread influence of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, disseminated throughout Europe by religious counselors and by dozens of Jesuit treatises. The *Exercises* mark the beginning of a new epoch.63

In time for the second edition of his book, Martz would corroborate his own work with Edward Wilson’s article “Spanish and English Religious Poetry of the Seventeenth Century”—which addressed Spanish influences on English poetry but also identified


62 Carroll, "Rembrandt as Meditational Printmaker," 585-86.

meditational structures of the Ignatian style in poetry by Lope de Vega, Luis de León, and José de Valdivielso, among others. Notable is Luis de Góngora, who sat for Velázquez at a crucial point in the painter’s career and was the champion of a poetic school known as culteranismo, roughly equivalent in its concerns and methods to the “metaphysical” style in English poesy associated with John Donne. The relationship of his work to both Jesuit-style devotion and the paintings of Diego Velázquez will be addressed in chapter four—on technique.

In the next chapter I will continue the account of Jesuit-style devotional practice, and will simultaneously demonstrate its applicability to one of Velázquez’ early Sevillian works.

---

Chapter 2.

Devotion, Meditation, and the Apparent Awkwardness of Velázquez’ *Supper at Emmaus*

![Figure 1. Diego Velázquez, *The Supper at Emmaus*, c.1620, oil/canvas, 123.2 x 132.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.](image)

**Figure 1.** Diego Velázquez, *The Supper at Emmaus*, c.1620, oil/canvas, 123.2 x 132.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**At the Metropolitan Museum**

New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art holds a respectable collection of Velázquez’ paintings. 65 If we include those that have sometimes been suspected of being

---

workshop pieces, we can stand in a single gallery and see five canvases by this master: There is the full-length portrait of Philip IV dated to around 1624; the bombastic equestrian portrait of the Count-Duke Olivares (c. 1635); a study of the head of the Infanta Maria Teresa, dated between 1651-1654; the incomparable portrait of Juan de Pareja, executed to great acclaim in 1650 during the painter’s second stay in Rome; and finally, a canvas that is somewhat distinct from the others—first in not being a portrait, and second in employing a more colorful palette than its fellows in the same gallery.

The subject is biblical (Luke 24: 30-31): The Supper at Emmaus (Figure 1.). It measures 123.2 x 132.7 centimeters. The canvas, therefore, is virtually square and likely to be so read by the viewer. There is a table covered with a white cloth that is rendered in detail—every fold, cusp, and wrinkle precisely delineated. As a study in the possibilities of rendering white fabric, it is worthy of Zurbaran’s Saint Serapion (1628), currently at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. The tabletop is occupied by several objects: a ceramic bowl (white like the tablecloth but masterfully contrasted with it by means of texture and sheen), a dimpled lime, a knife (the handle hangs precariously over the table’s edge), and a loaf of bread. All the objects cast dramatic, raking shadows, as if spotlit from the upper left.

66 The New Revised Standard translation renders the passage as follows:

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. Luke 24: 30-31
Seated around the table are three figures. Two could easily be mistaken for genre stereotypes, lacking as they do any of the attributes of saints. This cannot be said of the third figure—clearly Jesus Christ. Dressed in red and blue, he occupies the left side of the painting (and of the table) which is brilliantly illuminated, unlike the shadowy right side occupied by Jesus’ two dinner companions. Christ’s two hands grasp the loaf of bread on the table with the right one clearly revealing the wound from his crucifixion. A subtle ring of highlights defines (or implies) the disk of a halo behind his head. His gaze seems to rest serenely on something above and beyond his two companions. The two companions are a study in contrast with the beatifically calm, brilliantly clad figure of Christ.

Closest to us and, in fact, partially occluding our view of the tabletop and the carefully rendered objects upon it, one of these figures throws up his left arm in a gesture of surprise. His highlighted palm slightly impinges on our visual access to Christ. His back is to us, and over his thigh, a brown piece of fabric (perhaps a traveling cloak) takes on a kind of monumentality not unlike the chairs and table-coverings that screen us off from the figures in interiors by Vermeer. In the trough between the three-quarter view of his face and his outstretched palm we get a cropped view of his comrade who looks not at Jesus, but at his fellow, as if seeking confirmation of that from which he has just turned his gaze. He also raises his left hand, seeming to gesture toward the figure of Jesus. His face is presented frontally so that the emotions it expresses are easily read—shock, surprise. They are dressed in dull earth tones, though the figure closest to us wears

---

a garment with a noticeable admixture of green. The background for all these figures is a mottled, earthy brown. It may represent a dirty plaster wall seen straight on, but in the absence of any confirming visual cues, can just as easily be read as a refusal on the part of the painter to define the background according to the standards of linear perspective.

This painting has received its most recent and thorough treatment in Charlotte Hale’s article for the *Metropolitan Museum Journal* in 2005. The literature from Aureliano Beruete’s first documentation of the painting in 1898 up to the present is efficiently summarized, and the dispute among connoisseurs as to the painting’s date is decisively settled by means of radiographic and other modern methods of analysis. Rather than discrediting earlier generations of connoisseurs, Hale’s analysis confirms that most scholars without access to modern radiographic equipment were quite right in assigning the *Supper* to Velázquez’ Sevillian period, which ended in 1623; she also explains how the abraded surface of the canvas might have given a false stylistic reading to those who sought to assign the work a later date.

The painting’s technique has received high praise, and Hale’s scientific analysis substantiates this. She notes the optically persuasive contrast achieved between the “undulating, rather abstract quality of the draperies” against the “greater specificity” with which the hands of the disciples are rendered. Furthermore:

---


69 Ibid.: 76.
Velázquez’s use of highlights is likewise extremely strategic—only the minimum of what is needed to describe the turn of a cheek or light hitting the rim of a vessel. This is the technique of an artist of extraordinary abilities.70

Despite all this, something about the Supper has kept it from the level of acclaim meted out to other canvases by the same master. After assigning a date of 1622-23 and giving a brief sketch of its provenance, José López-Rey’s catalogue raisonné tells us only that the painting was cleaned in 1979.71 Antonio Domínguez Ortiz is more forthcoming. While the painting is unsigned and its date has been the subject of some debate, its status as an autograph work, he states, has been seriously questioned in only one instance—in 1964, José Camón Aznar speculated as to its similarity to a Supper located in the Galleria Nazionale in Messina, by “Alonso Rodríguez, a Sicilian painter born in 1578, the son of a certain Spanish Captain Rodríguez, a native of León.”72 Domínguez Ortiz characterizes Camón Aznar’s scruples as being based on “thematic analogies,” but he points out that Rodríguez’ painting bears much closer resemblance to Caravaggio’s London version of The Supper than it does to Velázquez’.73 Despite all this, Camón Aznar himself concludes by reaffirming the traditional attribution: “this possibility does not suppose a definitive exclusion of this extremely enigmatic canvas from the oeuvre of Velázquez, for the

70 Ibid.

71 José López-Rey, Velázquez (Köln: Taschen : Wildenstein Institute, 1996), 100. Hale tells us a something more about this time in the painting’s history, including the attention it received from John Brealey, famed restorer of Las Meninas; Hale, "Dating Velázquez's the Supper at Emmaus," 67.


73 Domínguez Ortiz, Pérez Sánchez, and Gállego, Velázquez, 84.
admireable technique, the splendor of the brushwork, and the total environment are superior to what was being done in Italy at the time. With these reservations and hesitations we believe we must continue to grant primacy of attribution to the name of Velázquez.”

Camón Aznar’s scrupulousness is admirable, but his doubts are not taken up by any other scholar.

As an account of the painting, José Gudiol’s emphasis is the most teleological. He sees the Supper as embodying Velázquez’ preliminary assimilation of the contents of the royal collections in Madrid—but that this understanding is, as yet, untransformed by direct experience of Italy:

In my opinion, the radical transformation—or, rather, considerable mutation—that this canvas represents in the tempestuous progress of his first seven years as a painter reflects something of what Velázquez must have seen and assimilated during his first visit to Madrid.

Gudiol cites the figure of Christ as an example of Velázquez’ effort “to achieve a typology more attuned to traditional ideas of iconography,” but also holds that “to accentuate the contrast,” in the figures of the two disciples, he “intensifies the realism . . . almost as if they were characters from one of his early bodegones.” While this would seem to credit the artist with a fairly sophisticated and playful sense of style—an idealized, Italianate Christ intentionally contrasted with two figures out of picaresque

---

74 Camón Aznar, Velázquez, 207.


76 Ibid.
Sevillian genre—Gudiol joins other scholars in implying that the painting falls short. While “the harmony of the face [of Christ], and the goodness emanating from it are admirable,” it is “without any especially expressive character.”

While each scholar finds something to admire in the painting (except perhaps López-Rey’s laconic entry), the opinion seems to be universal (for we can add the great catalogues of Bardi, Pantorba, Trapier, and Mayer to the list) that this painting is mostly of interest by way of transition between the rough vibrancy of the early Sevillian work and the later, more successful work of Velázquez’ maturity—of what has yet to be, or has only incompletely been achieved. Even more explicit criticism of the painting, as merely transitional and therefore unworthy of esteem in its own right, but also as fundamentally flawed, appears as recently as 2002 in a contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to Velázquez*.

Here Jonathan Brown wrote about the *Supper at Emmaus*: “Velázquez is clearly attempting to inject movement and drama into the composition although his success is limited. Each figure seems to inhabit his own world, and again the definition of space and the placement of the figures within it is awkward.” Though I reject Brown’s attribution of what he perceives as the awkwardness of this image to the painter’s inexperience, his

77 Ibid.


insight into the nature of the painting’s composition is, nevertheless, characteristically perceptive. There is something strange about the image; indeed, something that at first would very much seem to be awkwardness. The disciple closest to the viewer in the fictive space shows us mostly his back, and, throwing up his left arm in a gesture of surprise, seems to screen us from the event to which other painters of the same subject generously grant access. The cloak thrown over his thigh looms massively, like a further barrier to our approach. Our access to the data the picture contains has been problematized.

Figure 2. Paris Hilton (in brown wig) and Travis Barker photographed at Absinthe Bar in the Red Light District, Amsterdam. Posted September 28, 2006, at http://thesuperficial.com/2006/

We live in the era of the candid photograph. Our paparazzi have so conditioned our pictorial expectations that scenes experienced from precarious or awkward points of view are seen as all the more authentic, and such awkwardness is an index of their
authenticity—of the ‘captured’ moment (Figure 2). Even if Velázquez’ *Supper* does not, therefore, seem as strange to us as it may have to his contemporaries, we purchase this sense of familiarity only at the price of the wildest anachronism. Given that his contemporaries only knew images as *composed* rather than ‘captured,’ their expectation of Velázquez would surely have been for greater cooperation with the viewer. He could have made the figures in this image more available to our gaze. We are the audience to this drama, with all the expectations to which such a role entitles us. Aren’t we supposed to see what is happening?

Scholars have done an excellent job in establishing what similarities with other artists’ depictions of the *Supper* are to be found with Velázquez’ version. Paulo Bardi tells us that the painting is to be understood in the context of Zurbarán, but also of Juan de Herrera the Elder, and Juan de Castillo.80 Pantorba, and before him Aureliano de Beruete, believed they had found the same models in the *Waterseller of Seville* (1623) and the *Feast of Bacchus* (c. 1629), respectively.81 Caravaggio’s *Supper* in London is cited universally, though Velázquez is unlikely to have been directly familiar with the Italian’s work.82

If we consult other artists’ depictions of the *Supper at Emmaus*, from the painters of the Renaissance up to Velázquez’ own contemporaries, however, we find that what

---


Figure 3. Titian, *Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1535, oil/canvas, Louvre, Paris.

distinguishes the NewYork painting is what is missing from it. In this context, absence of evidence truly is evidence of absence.

Figure 4. Jacopo Bassano, *Supper at Emmaus*, c.1538, oil/canvas, 235 x 250 cm., Sacristy, Parish Church, Cittadella.
As keen a student of Titian as Velázquez could not have been unaware of the master’s several treatments of the *Supper at Emmaus*, which was equally popular with other Venetian painters. In the version currently in the Louvre ([Figure 3.](#)),83 Titian shows us the disciple on the left emoting in such a way as to clearly call to mind the reaction of the disciples in Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, but there is also an innkeeper in a red toque and a page boy. Both are seemingly unaffected by the drama before them.

Jacopo Bassano’s version of the *Supper at Emmaus* ([Figure 4.](#)) at Cittadella shows us, beyond Christ and the disciples, not only three human figures extraneous to the Gospel account and thoroughly nonplussed by the presence of the risen Christ, but a dog and a cat equally so. Bernard Aikema states of the figure of the innkeeper: "With his arms folded behind him comfortably so that his well-filled belly is all the more conspicuous, he is the very image of spiritual listlessness, of indolence. As such he embodies the danger of tepidity: having lapsed into sloth, or *acedia*, he is heedless of the Divinity beside him."84 Aikema also states of Bassano’s naturalistic Venetian style that such "visual language met the demand for a particular type of devotionalia."85

Pedro Orrente, with whose work we can assume Velázquez to have been familiar,86

---


85 Ibid., 6.

(Figure 5.) shows a man and woman who seem completely unaware of the significance of what is occurring at the table next to them (along with yet another sleeping dog).

![Pedro Orrente, Supper at Emmaus, 1620’s, oil/canvas, 81 x 101 cm c.1629, MFA, Budapest.](image)

Indeed, Orrente seems to divide the composition equally between the half occupied by these two figures and the two disciples just beginning to react to their companion who has raised his hand in benediction.

Even an innovative painter like Rembrandt, though bold enough to trim away one of the disciples in his version of the *Supper* at the Musée Jacquemart-André (Figure 6), is still sufficiently bound by the iconographic tradition to include the silhouette of a servant girl in the background, in oblivious counterpoint to the tenebristically lit astonishment of the figure in the foreground. Rembrandt’s other versions of the *Supper* adhere even more faithfully to Italian Renaissance models in terms of composition, especially as regards the
inclusion of those figures unmentioned in the biblical account.

As has already been mentioned, Caravaggio’s *Supper at Emmaus*, currently in the National Gallery in London (Figure 7), is cited almost universally as the closest analogue to Velázquez’ painting, both iconographically and compositionally. This juxtaposition is understandable; with the exception of Christ’s youthful, beardless appearance in Caravaggio’s version, and the inky blackness against which his figures are set, the two paintings seem to correspond in almost every way except the point of view imposed on the viewer.

In Velázquez’ painting, the extravagant gestures of the disciples, the nondescript, muted background, and the tenebristic modeling of the figures all call Caravaggio’s earlier painting to mind, excepting what Barry Wind has called the “enamel-like” finish of Caravaggio when compared with Velázquez’ comparatively softer, more expressive
brushwork.\textsuperscript{87} Perfect correspondence is also defeated by Caravaggio’s inclusion, with as much solidity and detail as the other figures and in strict correspondence to the

![Image of Caravaggio's Supper at Emmaus](image)

**Figure 7.** Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1600-1601, oil/canvas 54 3/4 x 76 3/4 in. National Gallery, London.

...iconographic tradition, of the impassive, if not to say apathetic, servant at Christ’s elbow. The servant’s placement (a theatrical director would refer to his blocking) against the elbow of Christ’s outstretched left arm may be significant. Note also, that for all their agitation, the disciples act as bookends to the central figure of Christ. We are welcome to see what they see and are reacting to the revelation that their dinner companion is in fact the risen Jesus.

Quite possibly the most famous art forger in history is Hans Van Meegeren, who created the religious paintings that the art historians who were his contemporaries insisted must once have been a part of Jan Vermeer’s oeuvre. When Van Meegeren chose this

subject for the canvas he esteemed highest among all his forged Vermeers, his desire to match the expectations his contemporaries would have of a seventeenth century depiction of the *Supper* led him to include a young woman waiting on the trio (Figure 8). That a painter whose ultimate goal was the deception of connoisseurs could avoid the unconscious temptation to engage in the narrative minimalism that is such a constant feature of modern picture-making speaks volumes about how consistent the art historical record is when it comes to inclusion of these “extra” figures.88

Velázquez owned Dürer’s book on human proportions,89 and we know that the

---


German artist’s prints served as sources for him and for other painters in Seville.\textsuperscript{90} Yet even under the imperative to simplify imposed by the print medium, in his \textit{Small Passion} Series, Dürer does not dispense with the oblivious third parties to the \textit{Supper at Emmaus}. Like waning moons, these extra figures are just visible beyond the two disciples who occupy left and right corners of the table closest to the picture plane (\textbf{Figure 9}). The figures are barely visible; their inclusion is almost perfunctory, yet it seems Dürer cannot imagine their elimination. Neither Dürer nor other Northern print sources known to be circulating in Spain at the time gave Velázquez a precedent for limiting the scene to only 

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4 \textwidth]{figure9.png}
\caption{Albrecht Dürer, \textit{Christ appears to the disciples at Emmaus}, woodcut, c. 1510 for the \textit{Small Passion}}
\end{figure}

the three most essential figures.\textsuperscript{91}

It is worth noting that Benito Navarette Prieto’s *La Pintura andaluza del siglo XVII y sus fuentes grabadas* cites Dürer’s *Supper* as the source for a canvas by Zurbarán, currently in the Museum of the *Academia de San Carlos* in Mexico City.\textsuperscript{92} Compositionally the match is persuasive. Persuasive as long as we take note of the fact that the figure of Christ wears the pilgrim’s hat that seems to serve as a sign of his occultation just prior to the revelation of his true identity, and that the painter has included a small dog begging at the table, just right of center \textbf{(Figure 10)}. Zurbarán does seem to have made the break from the vestigial inclusion of the extra figures, though the darkened and abraded state of the painting may conceal figures no longer visible.\textsuperscript{93}

Nevertheless, the Zurbarán canvas must be dealt with if Velázquez’ chronological primacy as an innovator with regard to the *Supper* is to be confirmed. Zurbarán, with his Carthusian connections\textsuperscript{94} and his status as a contemporary of Velázquez in Seville, is likely to have come under influences very similar to those acting on his younger compatriot. Alfonso Pérez Sánchez makes the connection as follows:

\begin{quote}
The young Zurbarán, who was to relate that he had known Velázquez during his youthful years in Seville, can hardly have been oblivious to the marvelous precision of that eye and hand. The works of Velázquez’s youth, done before he traveled to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{91} See Prieto, *La Pintura Analuza Del Siglo Xvii Y Sus Fuentes Grabadas*.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 99.


\textsuperscript{94} We should remember that Ludolphus of Saxony, whose *Vita Christi* was the primary source for the *Exercises* of Saint Ignatius, was known in Spain simply as *El Cartujo*—The Carthusian.
Madrid, where broad and fertile horizons opened before him, were produced in the same ambiance as that experienced by Zurbarán in his early career, indicating a common training and a common taste for the individual and the concrete, viewed in the potent directed light of Caravagesque tenebrism.\textsuperscript{95}

Pérez Sánchez further describes this commonality in formative experience, stressing the currency of Jesuit meditational techniques:

Other factors also were significant in the evolution of his [Zurbarán’s] style: his patrons, drawn to the felt emotion and immediacy of everyday by the devout teachings of the Jesuits, who stressed that through the concentration of the mind and the senses in meditation one could transport oneself to the scene of a holy event and endow the object of meditation with sensible, visible intensity; and the wide circulation of Flemish and Italian prints, unstintingly employed in the studios as ready substitutes for invention, and at times imposed on the artist by his patrons, who often specified the use of iconographic and devotional features. These too contributed to the artistic milieu of Seville during the first third of the Seventeenth Century, the horizon against which Zurbarán’s silhouette as a painter is delineated.\textsuperscript{96}

It should be clear then, that even if Zurbarán’s \textit{Supper} without visible third parties to the event predates that of Velázquez, this is not fatal to those conclusions that we have drawn about the influences that could lead to such a treatment. Compositionally, the Zurbarán canvas more closely follows Renaissance precedent than does Velázquez’. Whatever adjustments would be called for, however, are unnecessary in the light of Zurbarán


\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
scholars’ consistent dating of this piece in the 1630s or 40s. It is sufficient to note that a Spanish, Sevillian-trained contemporary of Velázquez produced (nearly two decades after the canvas that concerns us here) a painting that mirrors one of the distinctive features of the Metropolitan Emmaus.

Time and again the tradition seems to require not just the three figures essential to depicting the Bible account but the inclusion of third parties who show a total lack of awareness of the significance of the event. These figures demonstrate that it is

---

distressingly easy to be in the presence of the miraculous and have no real appreciation of
that fact. Upon superficial inspection of Velázquez’ painting we might draw the
conclusion that the artist decided that this was one message too many. If this is the case,
then Velázquez has chosen a kind of narrative minimalism, discarding a traditional layer
of meaning from the subject in a way utterly without precedent in his milieu. This is an
explanation that we might be justified in considering necessary and sufficient if the
painting defied conventional expectation only in what it did not include. This is, however,
not the case. Despite the quality of the technique (according to Camón Aznar, “superior
to anything” being done in Italy at the time), as discerning a connoisseur of Velázquez’
work as Jonathan Brown feels compelled to describe the painting as “limited” in the
success of its composition and “awkward” in the placement of its figures.

Even allowing for some unevenness in the development of the various skills that
come together to make a competent painter, in what was, after all, still a very young
artist, such a profound contrast in the handling of paint and the treatment of space and
composition defies common sense. Velázquez’ work that is dated earlier by scholars,
consisting primarily of bodegones,98 and his Adoration of the Magi (1619, Prado,
Madrid), may show what can be regarded as errors in foreshortening and even
perspective, but they nowhere show a similar case of what might be regarded as
incompetence in the distribution of figures or of composition, generally so called.99

98 For those unfamiliar with the peculiarities of Spanish painting in the 17th Century, a
bodegón is a species of genre painting almost always involving foodstuffs and lower-
class characters, sometimes in comedic dialogue with the viewer. See José López-Rey,
Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of His Oeuvre (London,: Faber and Faber, 1963)., 45.

99 Wind, Velázquez's Bodegones : A Study in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Genre
Painting, 48-51.
Indeed, to do so privileges the Albertian perspectival model in which “in the first place, when we look at a thing, we see it is an object which occupies space,”\(^{100}\) and this “seeing” is based on a strictly commensurable geometric proportion. Hispanists and historians of the Netherlandish achievement in painting have come, quite justifiably, to mistrust this standard. In *The Art of Describing*, Svetlana Alpers both historicizes and denaturalizes the automatic association of the concepts of ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’ with linear perspective.\(^{101}\) Alpers’ liberation of Dutch painting from the Italian model can similarly free golden age Spanish painting from a standard of only late importation to Spain, and always honored more in the breach than in the observance. Indeed, even by such a standard, the apparent awkwardness of composition in the *Supper* requires further explanation. That other early works by Velázquez may contain what are, by the Albertian standard, errors, is insufficient to explain what is (or isn’t) wrong with the *Supper*.

We are left with two questions: 1) Why did Velázquez, virtually alone among painters of this subject, feel free to eliminate the oblivious third party or parties that appear in virtually every other depiction of this scene?\(^{102}\) and 2) How can a work that


\(^{102}\) Given the example set by Camón Aznar, I would be remiss to ignore the only other exception, besides the Zurbaran already discussed above, that might qualify this statement. There does appear to be one other depiction of the *Supper at Emmaus* without any “civilians” included produced in the Seventeenth Century, and it may, perhaps, pre-date Velázquez’. Joachim Wtewael (1566-1638) produced a small oil-on-copper rendition of the *Supper* (**Figure 10 A**), currently in a private collection and of uncertain date, where the snug accommodation of the three principle figures within an oval leaves no
embodies such acknowledged excellence of technique do so in the context of a composition so apparently awkward and, at least as regards the expectations of several Velázquez scholars, unsuccessful?

The standard by which this painting might be said to fail, insofar as it does, is demonstrably the Italianate one. Brown’s remarks are made about The Supper at Emmaus, a painting he (and all others) dates prior to Velázquez’ first trip to Italy.103 Alpers’ wariness of the Albertian model has yet to be fully assimilated into the scholarly understanding of Velázquez, as is clearly demonstrated by the maintenance of the traditional division of the artist’s stylistic development according to his two trips to Italy, even when to do so requires a great deal of qualification.

room for the establishment of a surrounding space and, therefore, no space for third parties.

Figure A. Supper at Emmaus, oil on copper, private collection.

Given the peculiarities of the composition and Wtewael’s stylistic remoteness from Spanish, Italian, and even other Dutch painters of the time (he continued to work in the Mannerist style of the previous generation), I hope the reader will agree with me in naming his Supper the notorious “exception that proves the rule.” The format of Velázquez’ Supper, a conventional rectangular canvas, certainly does not compel the excising of figures required by iconographic tradition.

See Anne W. Lowenthal, Joachim Wtewael and Dutch Mannerism (Doornspijk: 1986).

103 And in a context summed up by the title of his contribution to the Cambridge Companion, “Velázquez in Italy.”
However entrenched the Italianate model, we must consider the possibility that neither the exorcism of the third parties nor the apparent awkwardness of composition are deficiencies, but are, rather, deliberate decisions by the artist in the service of specific ends. Given the conditioned expectations of the viewers, based on earlier and contemporary depictions of *the Supper* and the manner in which the figures are arranged to partially screen our access to the scene, there would seem to be two questions any viewer at the time was likely to ask: Where are the “civilians” always seen at this supper? Who am I supposed to be by the people depicted such that they would fail to make themselves and the scene in which they participate available to my gaze, as my experience of painted images has always led me to expect?

Here, then, is an account of the painting whereby it does not fail, but rather succeeds at a very sophisticated level to involve the viewer, to provoke a set of questions from that viewer, and to relate itself to an image-tradition with which both painter and viewer are already likely to be familiar. The painting, on this account, would seem to ask: *Are you, and, what would it mean if you were, the indifferent third party at this supper?*

It would certainly change the standard by which we evaluate the painting’s success or failure, but is it a standard that would have meant anything to Velázquez and his audience? We must take into account the religious nature of the subject matter, and the practice of the different but closely related form of image-making that has already been introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation. If this form of internal image-making is not strictly peculiar to Velázquez’ formative environment in Seville, it is at least of an especially intense nature *in* that environment.
The Image of Devotion

In writing on the devotional paintings of Velázquez’ Sevillian contemporary, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Jonathan Brown tells us:

Devotional paintings are a casualty of the secularization of Western civilization. Placed within the sanitized precinct of the art museum, they are admired for their artistry and not for their function in assisting prayer and promoting spiritual development. Indeed, it could be argued that the best devotional paintings provoke rejection by audiences of today, who feel uneasy in the presence of their power.104

Going on to state:

The exercise of an individual expression of faith through the use of devotional imagery was not to be left to chance or choice. Ordinary people had to be taught to pray, a goal that was accomplished in several ways.105

The relationship of the image to the practice of prayer and meditation is especially privileged in Latin Christendom. It was reformulated and given special vibrancy in Counter-Reformation Spain. It is in its Spanish expression that we will find a context in which every aspect of Velázquez’ Supper at Emmaus that reads as a demerit under an Italianate scheme of image-making is transformed into a successful and even necessary quality of the work. Of course, this application is no more relevant, historically speaking, than the fact that the Impressionists could so fruitfully apply their own paradigm to


105 Ibid., 32.
Velázquez. The real power of this approach lies in the fact that I will demonstrate this context to be precisely Velázquez’ own.

The eighth chapter of David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images* is entitled “*Invisibilia per visibilia*: Meditations and the Uses of Theory.” It is probably the most thorough treatment available of the manner in which images were used to further the goal of meditation by means of what came to be known as spiritual exercises. The difference between the world view congenial to this approach and our own is summed up as follows:

> We may no longer have much leisure to contemplate the images before us, but people once did; and they turned contemplation into something useful, therapeutic, elevating, consoling, and terrifying. They did so in order to attain a state of empathy; and when we examine how they did so, a brilliant light is cast not only on the function of images but on a potential that for many of us remains to be activated.¹⁰⁶

Freedberg’s chapter deals with “the modalities of a practice in which we are no longer versed, but which for hundreds and hundreds of years used real images for directly affective purposes.”¹⁰⁷

What follows is a summation of Freedberg’s treatment. He begins by describing how such practices had come to rest “explicitly and avowedly on a massive theoretical framework”¹⁰⁸ that had, by the early Middle Ages, already come together into “an

---


¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
articulate and comprehensive whole.” It is important to note that an elaborate system of devotions, based in the memory systems of classical antiquity, which themselves evolved as part of the practice of rhetoric as characterized by Quintilian (ca. 35 – ca. 100), are of tremendous influence in counter-reformation Spain. What we take from Freedberg is the sense that this body of theory is actually a resource that can very profitably be mined, not only “for the evidence it provides for actual behavior” but “also for its assistance as we search for adequate terms with which to approach the cognitive bases of response.”

Freedberg divides this type of meditation into two “closely related” categories. First are “those forms that depend on real images for the production of mental ones.” We are told that the aim of such meditation is “to grasp that which is absent, whether historical or spiritual”—that we will find a steady theoretical insistence that we “cannot grasp the latter without starting from the former—except, perhaps in the case of the most superior and refined mystical talents.” The second form is based on “visualization unassisted and ungenerated by a present figured object, but dependent on recollections of real images . . .” The description of images being used to reach an understanding of higher, spiritual realities is incomplete, however, if we fail to note that this is accomplished by means of an intentionally provoked empathy on the part of the

\[109\] Ibid.

\[110\] See the first chapter of this dissertation.


\[112\] Ibid., 162.

\[113\] Ibid., 161-62.

\[114\] Ibid., 162.
meditator. If the mechanics of this process are those of anagoge or allegory, the energy that drives the mechanism is emotional. Indeed, Freedberg suggests that by the time that concerns us here, the anagogical aspect is practically vestigial in the image-based meditational tradition, leaving the provocation of empathy as its most significant feature.

In the thirteenth century, Saint Bonaventure’s book the *Journey of the Mind towards God*, sets forth the “anagogical” view:

> All created things of the sensible world lead the mind of the contemplator and wise man to eternal God. . . . They are the shades, the resonances, the pictures of that efficient, exemplifying, and ordering art; they are the tracks, simulacra, and spectacles; they are divinely given signs set before us for the purpose of seeing God. They are examples, or rather exemplifications (*exemplaria vel potius exemplata*) set before our still unrefined and sense-oriented minds, so that by the sensible things which they see they might be transferred to the intelligible which they cannot see, as if by signs to the signified (*tamquam per signa ad signata*).\(^{115}\)

Here also, are the origins of Christianity’s appropriation of the hermetic doctrine of correspondence—*microcosm* and *macrocosm*—as above, so below.

The ontological assumptions implicit in Bonaventure’s statement can be further unpacked as follows:

Since all created things lead the meditative mind to God, all pictures of them must do so too. But at the same time—implicitly in Bonaventure and quite explicitly elsewhere—God’s creating can only be grasped in terms of the simile of the creative activity of the artist; and so pictures and sculptures provide even more direct access to understanding Him.\(^{116}\)

---


It is an epistemological regime under which what can be known is known only when it is transformed into a concrete image. This brings us to the portion of Freedberg’s analysis of this long-lost body of theory, that we can most profitably carry away for our understanding of its Spanish expression in the Seventeenth Century:

In the course of the passage by Bonaventure, we also detect, if only faintly, the initial stages of the collapse of the strictly anagogical view. For what it betokens is not merely the notion that images may usefully lead the mind, by stages, upwards to God. It implies, once the usual position had been stated, that ascent is instantaneous.\footnote{Ibid.}

If contemplating the image can be said to \textit{always already} give us access to our goal, then our engagement with images, whether virtual and interior, or material and external to ourselves, is profoundly transformed. The task becomes not one of climbing from the material to the intellectual to the spiritual, but rather that of reacting as authentically as possible to that in the presence of which we find ourselves.

Art historically this means, as Michael Baxandall wrote in \textit{Giotto and the Orators}:

“[The painter (like the sculptor) was himself] a professional visualizer of holy stories. What we now easily forget is that each of his pious public was liable to be an amateur in the same line, practiced in spiritual exercises that demanded a high level of visualization.

\footnote{Ibid.}
of, at least, the central episodes of the lives of Christ and Mary.\footnote{118} The public served by a painter of religious scenes from the Thirteenth Century onwards:

\[\text{[W]as, one might almost say, a public trained to respond in particular ways to particular scenes. Trained it might have been, but that training exploited a potential that is present in everyone. It depended on the potentiality of images to present things that are liable to reconstitution by all beholders.}\footnote{119}

An example of the behavior of such a trained public in the context of seventeenth century Spain will be discussed later in this chapter.

In conclusion, Freedberg’s description of this new expression of image-based meditation demonstrates, specifically in those devotions dedicated to the theme of the Virgin and Child, that:

The relationships generated in this way are of the most intimate kind; they elicit protective feelings of parental love for the child, and a sort of courtly love for the mother—but a love whose links with the more ordinary incipient desires are never entirely submerged. The beholder thinks of the hungry infant, the caressing mother, their sweetly gentle looks; and he moves to dwell on the salvific tragedy of those so innocent.\footnote{120}


\footnote{120} Ibid., 167.
Which calls to mind the exhortation of the unknown author of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, at one time attributed to Saint Bonaventure: “. . . with your whole mind imagine yourself present.”

This serves as a prologue to Ignatius of Loyola’s “massive reinvigoration” of the form in the sixteenth century, and to the order Ignatius founded, the Society of Jesus. It is in the work of Jerome Nadal, Loyola’s companion and the author of the extravagantly illustrated *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels Read at Holy Mass throughout the Year* (1595, 1607, various later editions) that the very long process of formation for this type of meditative praxis finds its culmination. We are reminded that “Ignatius himself did not advocate the use of real images to assist meditation, but the potential of his literary images, taken into consideration with the exercise of ‘composition, by seeing the place,’ were swiftly realized in ways that were to influence all subsequent thinking about the uses of art—to say nothing of the influence on art itself.” If the complexity of this body of theory, the full flower of image-based, empathy-provoking meditation, gives the impression of a phenomenon restricted to an elite, the untenability of this view is demonstrated by the history of Nadal’s book, a project encouraged and supported by Ignatius himself and by Saint Francis Borgia:

---


123 Ibid., 180.
Although Nadal’s work was written specifically for a Jesuit audience (and for novices in particular), it received a far wider circulation. The same is true for Coster’s handbook of 1588 [Francis Coster’s *Fifty Meditations on the life and Praise of the Virgin* was another Jesuit work examined by Freedberg]—even though it was originally written for the young members of the Sodality of the Virgin of Douai. Furthermore, both provide evidence of a mode of response that was not restricted to the Latin reading public. Nor are they unique. Their value derives from their typicality, particularly when aligned with the rosary devotions and the meditative practices encouraged by other orders and institutions. Many of the works which adopted the same combination of images and sophisticated annotations as Nadal’s were written in or translated into the vernacular; and because of the pictures, they reached into the hearts of the illiterate as well as the literate.\footnote{Ibid., 182.}

Of course, Freedberg is not an Hispanist, but it is worth noting that the latter part of the chapter on this species of image-based devotion concerns itself with the influence of a Spanish Basque (Ignatius), a Castilian (Francis Borgia), and a Majorcan (Jerome Nadal)—all Jesuits. He also mentions Teresa of Avila. Loyola synthesized a great deal of earlier meditative practice, and recorded his synthesis in *Los Exercicios Espirituales*, or *The Spiritual Exercises* (1541).

As mentioned in the first chapter, Ignatius Loyola pre-dates Diego Velázquez by a generation, but to understand how his influence came to fruition in the early seventeenth century, in which Velázquez’ artistic and cultural formation took place, we must understand how it is rooted in the sixteenth.

Whatever Ignatius’ awareness of the earlier tradition of spiritual exercises in the thirteenth century represented by Bonaventure (there would have been, for Ignatius, no “Pseudo-Bonaventure”), he was most emphatically influenced by the *Vita Christi* attributed to Ludolphus of Saxony. Ludolphus was a Carthusian monk who lived during the fourteenth century in Mainz, where he wrote the work for which he is best known, a
story of the life of Christ told in a suggestive manner meant to inspire powerful sentiments of piety and devotion.

The *Exercises* was the fruit of Ignatius’ convalescence from a war wound. Driven to read a Castilian translation of the *Vita*, according to his autobiography, out of the deprivation of the books of chivalric romance to which he was practically addicted, the recovering Ignatius experienced a spiritual epiphany. What he synthesized out of this experience would transform the post-tridentine church. As Jeffrey Chipps Smith writes on Jesuit art in the German-speaking lands, “For the members of this new order, the text [of *The Exercises*], coupled with *The Constitutions*, offered their founder’s definitive framework for negotiating one’s path through this world to the next. As a formative experience shared by all Jesuits, these exercises influenced their sense of mission and their willingness to employ all possible means, including art, to accomplish their goals.”

Each of Ignatius’ spiritual exercises begins with a series of what he calls ‘Preludes.’ A pair of these Preludes comes before the exercitant undertakes even the very first of his exercises. The first reads as follows:

The First Prelude is a composition made by imagining the place. Here we should take notice of the following. When a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition consists of seeing in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place. By physical place I mean, for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus or Our Lady happens to be, in accordance with the topic I desire to contemplate.

---


This would seem to be sound advice on how to vividly imagine something or someone as if they were actually available to the senses. If they are to be made virtually so available we must visualize a space—one credible to the imagination—in which to set the people, things and events we wish to contemplate. In no meaningful way does this differ from the spaces one is called upon to compose for the classical *Ars Memoriae* already discussed in my first chapter. In the devotional application of this technique, however, we may also be called upon to assume roles in imagined scenarios—roles perhaps quite foreign to our quotidian experience. Gender, class, physicality—even intention—are all quite malleable for the purposes of the *Exercises*. One example of a persona to be assumed in this realm, that of the “little, unworthy servant” of *Exercises* number 114, is of special relevance to Velázquez’ *Supper* in New York.

Ignatius goes further, however, knowing that the exercitant will soon be called upon to deal with slippery subject matter—with what is “abstract and invisible.”

When contemplation or meditation is about something abstract and invisible, as in the present case about the sins, the composition will be to see in imagination and to consider my soul as imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole compound self as an exile in this valley [of tears] among brute animals. I mean, my whole self as composed of soul and body.\footnote{127 Ibid.}

In short, one does not change one’s method of contemplation as one changes the subject to be contemplated. Contemplation does not assume a mode as ethereal or vague as the that the *Exercises* have their own traditional numbering system supplied by anonymous editors so long ago as to become the de facto standard in their citation [and here supplied in brackets].
abstractions it seeks to examine, but rather reinforces its commitment to the concrete, the
corporeal, the sensual—even as Ignatius’ text emphasizes the inevitable connection of
these qualities with what is mortal and corruptible. Visualization in the *Spiritual
Exercises* is always specific to the body and its sensations. Ignatius is emphatic that it is
the compound self, the aggregate of body and soul, which is deployed to understand the
nature of (in this particular case) sin. Presence, not to be understood abstractly, but as it is
experienced ubiquitously by the exercitant in his everyday life, is key. Only the events
are extra-ordinary. In the catalogue for the exhibition, *Emblemata Sacra: Emblem Books
from the Sabbe Library Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*, Ralph Dekoninck deals with
other Jesuit sources that take up this principle from the *Exercises*.128

In a section entitled “Meditation on the res incorprea,”129 Dekoninck quotes Jean
Bourgeois’ *Mystères de la vie, passion et mort de Jesus Christ Nostre Seigneur* . . .
[Antwerp, 1622], 21: “About something abstract and invisible one will have to turn to
some similitude, because we can only perceive spiritual things by means of their spiritual
counterparts.” Dekoninck also finds in Louis Richeome’s *Trois discours pour la religion
catholique* . . . [Brodeaux, 1597], instruction on “wisely contrived figures, to signify some
qualities of the thing, although these figures are not really located in the thing, but only

---

129 Ibid., 23-28. Bourgeois’ remark about “castles in Spain” invokes the *Quijote* for the Modern reader. The Spanish obsession with the great Romances that Cervantes so famously parodies is already seen by the late Seventeenth Century as somehow linked to the same drive that would lead Spaniards in particular to establish the imagination as the engine of devotion. See Joseph F. Chorpenning, *The Divine Romance : Teresa of Ávila's Narrative Theology* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992).
by analogy and likeness.” Indeed, in the first of these texts (Bourgeois’), the reader is warned against the power of the imagination when turned loose upon such corporeal fodder to “take for real those things which are not,” and to “build castles in Spain.”  

Though not foreseen by Loyola himself, the effectiveness of transposing the Ignatian discipline of visualization onto the already existent “technology” of the emblem was too perfect for the order to ignore:

The tripartite structure of the emblem, in fact, offers the possibility of a transposition of the method of Ignatian meditative prayer: its technical dimension, which lies in the distinction between the composition of place, meditation, and colloquy; its psychological dimension, which successively appeals to the three faculties of the soul (the memory, intellect, and will); and its spiritual dimension, which represents the spiritual journey of the Christian as three successive stages (the purgative, illuminative, and unitive).

The *Exercises* are a difficult text for moderns to assimilate. One Jesuit author states “[I]t was never meant to be simply read since it is a teacher’s manual and not a student’s textbook. It is a how-to handbook with a set of directions for directors. . . .” This is crucial. The *Exercises* are not a self-help manual, but rather a resource for a spiritual director imbued with considerable authority as he takes an exercitant through a

---


series of experiences designed to introduce a radical new discipline to his interior life. The major tools of this undertaking are that of vivid sense-provoking visualizations and the emotions they engender. The balance that a director must employ in shepherding an exercitant might surprise our expectations of a practice sponsored by a Counter-Reformation order famed above all for adopting a military model of authority and obedience. Yet the Exercises begin with the following statement, headed:

Presupposition. That the giver and receiver of the Spiritual Exercises may be of greater help and a benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor’s statement than to condemn it. Further, if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong one should correct the person with love; and if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved.133

This surprising liberty granted the exercitant may spring from Ignatius’ commitment to generating images internally, out of the stuff of memory and experience. John of the Cross was similarly inclined. Other Spanish mystics (like Teresa of Avila), and, indeed other, later Jesuit authors, would, while still calling upon inner resources, be much more likely to encourage a reliance on the painted and printed image as a template for internal visualization.

Such liberty may have come under suspicion as the practice made inroads among laymen. This is the flaw that French contemplatives so famously found in the Ignatian style of meditation. Indeed, Spanish attempts to curb and domesticate the visionary

133 Exercises [22], 129.
hunger of their own population may have led away from pure visualization towards a practice based on something the Church could and did control—painted images.

As mentioned above, Jesuit texts providing training in image-based meditations reached a wide, popular audience. What is more, it was only a part of a general trend in devotional texts promoting the cultivation of mystical experiences. These texts had their own ‘Golden Age’ in Spain, contemporaneous to that of secular literature. E. Alison Peers wrote of this period:

Using the adjective ‘mystical’ in its widest sense, the foremost Spanish critic of the nineteenth century, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, computed that the number of works—either published or still in manuscript—to which it can be applied must be in the region of three thousand; and even if we take the word in a more restricted sense it is safe to assert that mystical authors who wrote during that great age can be counted by the hundred.\textsuperscript{134}

Peers’ account of the golden age of mystical literature is replete with Jesuit luminaries—Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, Baltazar Álvarez, and Luis de la Puente among them. De la Puente served as spiritual director to the founder of the Discalced Carmelites, Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), who, along with Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591), is described as one of “Spain’s two greatest mystics, who are also two of the greatest in the whole of Christian history.”\textsuperscript{135} Indeed, Joseph Chorpenning describes Teresa as


\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 21.
“preeminent among these spiritual conquistadores.”¹³⁶ A self-reinforcing network of contemplatives and authors emerges at this time in Spain with the Jesuits as one of the key nodes therein, but also with links formed by others—most notably—Saint Teresa. This was accomplished not only by means of her own writings, but through her championing of those authors with whom she was in sympathy.

Not only, then, did she [Teresa] rescue a few writers, notably [Bernardino de] Laredo and [Francisco de] Osuna, from the complete oblivion into which they could hardly have avoided falling, but one may be sure that she inspired numbers of the Discalced Carmelites who were to follow her, and who, without her, might never have written at all. Even writers as eminent as Luis de Granada and St. Peter of Alcántara would hardly have been read as widely as they were, or have had so much influence outside their own orders, had not St. Teresa commended them, quoted them, used them, and swept them, as it were, into the great mystical current. She fused diverse temperaments; absorbed, reconciled, and re-expressed apparently divergent ideals. Were it not for the clearly marked differences in thought which persist in certain of the religious Orders, she might be said to have found Spanish mysticism a movement and left it a school.¹³⁷

The nature of this emergent style of Spanish mysticism, coming out of the tradition as well as supported by the theoretical super-structure, is one to which the image, virtual and actual, was central. It gave to Spanish mysticism a character discernable even by those who did not approach it from those disciplines concerned with the visual arts. Its influence is such that it can be confused with the Spanish character itself; “Spanish mysticism has little to do with philosophy. The Spaniard has always tended to turn from abstractions, subtleties, and even systems, to the concrete and substantial. He prefers action to speculation. 'It is a mystery of our race, this dislike of the abstract,’ says

¹³⁶ Chorpenning, The Divine Romance: Teresa of Ávila's Narrative Theology, 1.

Menéndez y Pelayo. 

On the basis of this commitment to the substantial, which is to say, inevitably, the sensual, Allison Peers asserts of such mysticism that it, “far from being the vague, ethereal thing of popular belief, is the most exact science in existence,” stating that “nothing could be less like pantheism, nothing farther from self-annihilation.” This principle’s specifically Jesuit expression is recognized by Jeffery Smith when he writes:

This touches on the crux of Jesuit spirituality. From Ignatius to Nadal onward, the Jesuits accepted the use of the external senses, particularly when purified of all corrupting stimuli, as a means of engaging the spiritual senses. The senses create pictures and arouse thoughts in the imagination or mind’s eye. More significant is what happens next, in how one orders these messages and learns from or builds upon these diverse sensations. It is the nurturing of this cognitive process that preoccupied Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises*, with its careful, repetitive structure.

Perhaps a better sense of the distinctive quality of Spanish-style mysticism can be achieved by consulting those who, at precisely the period that interests us, found it worthy of criticism—the leaders of the emergent French school of devotion. Aldous Huxley characterizes their critique thusly:

---


139 Peers, "Introduction," 33-34.

This Copernican revolution in theology was [Pierre de] Bérulle’s reaction to the intense personalism of the then fashionable Jesuit devotion, based upon the “Spiritual Exercises” of St. Ignatius Loyola. At the beginning of his “Exercises,” Ignatius had, it is true, reaffirmed the fundamental Christian doctrine that man’s end and purpose in this world is the glory of God. But having made this affirmation he proceeded to write a book, in which the predominant role is played by the human individual. The exercises are a gymnastic of the personal will; so much so that, instead of being an end in itself, the worship of God is made, in some sort, an instrument to be used by the gymnast in establishing self-control. For this ptolemaic system of religious thought and feeling Bérulle substituted a thorough-going theo-centrism. God is to be worshipped without regard even to one’s spiritual profit. He is to be worshipped for his own sake, in an act of adoration and awe. He is to be worshipped as he is in himself, the sovereign and infinite being.141

The effect this image-centered pursuit of the mystical was to have on the visual arts, as staked out by the Spaniards, with all the gritty and unapologetic “personalism” that the French mystics found so objectionable,142 is addressed by Victor Stoichita. His book, Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art, documents the proliferation of depictions of the mystical visions of saints, martyrs and contemplatives in seventeenth century Spain. The first casualty of Stoichita’s presentation is the supposed Spanish antipathy for abstraction and theory. At least as regards art theory, this is not, and, as Stoichita explains, cannot, be the case:

The somewhat belated assimilation by Spanish artists (initially influenced by the work of early Flemish painters and later by Italian Mannerism and the Baroque)


142 It is a criticism that the church itself would, to a certain extent, come to endorse, at least to the extent that it endorsed the critics. Huxley tells us: “Bérulle advocated “adherence” and finally “servitude” to Christ and even to the Virgin. Urban VIII, who raised him to the cardinalate, gave him, along with the Hat, the title of “apostle of the Incarnate Word.” The nature and scope of Bérulle’s more than Copernican revolution as not only recognized by his contemporaries; it was also officially approved.” in Ibid., 99.
of artistic techniques devised elsewhere, prompted the evolution of a distinctive, openly contemplated language. In the pursuit of simplicity it could be said that the originality of Spanish painting did not lie in innovation but in elaboration. Being an elaborated form, Spanish painting will also be a vehicle to which any innovation will be submitted to an almost compulsory grilling. Since Spanish painting is both passionate and cerebral, it provides an extremely rich terrain for any research involving theoretical data on representation.143

That the circuit between real meditational images and ‘virtual’ images used as sources for meditation play such a role in religious image-making in Spain may be the result of theoretical commitment, rather than of its eschewal. The task Stoichita has set for himself is the elucidation of those Spanish paintings, prodigious in number after the Council of Trent, where the visionary experience is depicted—those depictions of saints or others who have related, or had related about them, the experience of a vision to which they alone had access. By means of a number of techniques that amount to a system or a rhetoric of expressing the visionary experience, Spaniards evolved what amounted to an unofficial genre—the visionary painting. It is at once a picture of the saint having his vision, a depiction of the vision she had, and also, an opportunity for the viewer to empathically participate in the experience of these visions. The last of these three objectives is the most important if the painting is to have value beyond the merely aesthetic for the viewer and at the same time remain true to the nature of the visionary experience—which is to say, an experience that is real while remaining completely subjective because it is inaccessible by anyone but the visionary.

*    *    *    *

We began with the stated aim of considering the possibility of an historically-situated scheme of painting that would allow for this specific painting—Velázquez’ *Supper at Emmaus*—to be a self-consistent work of art without qualifying as a failure, as it surely must be under an Italianate model of painting. Stoichita’s examination of paintings of the visionary experience is useful, but it is necessary to emphasize that Velázquez’ *Supper* is not such a painting. The *Supper* is instead an *historia*, the depiction of an event that, however miraculous, was believed to have occurred in quotidian time and space, and offers no theoretical bar to anyone and everyone seeking to experience it. The viewer of a painting of a visionary experience was not so empowered. In his case, it is through the painting’s special dispensation that he experiences a vision that the mystic’s contemporaries very likely did not see, even if present during its occurrence.

The last of the twenty-one theses that Stoichita offers as a conclusion to *Visionary Experience* defines the common ground between depictions of visionary experience and those images that, while not explicitly depicting such experiences, nevertheless assist in meditation—in the *cultivation* of visionary experiences: “21. The seeing body becomes the instrument of the representation’s rhetoric: its codified creation exteriorizes the unrepresentable.” The primacy of this “seeing body” in the conception of image-making is the defining characteristic of the painterly model in Seville at the time of Velázquez’ artistic formation. It imposes different imperatives than the Italian model.

Even as Velázquez seeks to assimilate this Italian model of intellect-satisfying perspective and status-asserting virtuosity (it would be foolish to deny that such an

---

144 Ibid., 199.
assimilation is a part of his project), there remains, irreducibly, this Sevillian concern for
the seeing body.

As has already been stated, the energy fueling the engine of image-based
meditation was empathically experienced emotion. This same fuel drives the mechanism
by which, on Stoichita’s account, the viewer is invited in certain Spanish paintings not to
be a *voyeur* enjoying the spectacle of the saint having a vision, but rather to identify with
the visionary.

Nina Mallory describes the artistic milieu out of which Velázquez emerged as
follows:

The naturalism of Spanish religious art of the first half of the seventeenth century,
of which Zurbarán was the principle exponent in Seville, aimed at instructing and
edifying the viewer by reaching him through strong, almost tangibly real images
of the divinity and saints that made the religious message as vividly actual as
possible. In many of these works the ascetic ideal was held up for imitation and
reverence, and the importance of an intense, firm, and simple faith as the path to
salvation was emphasized.145

The institutionalization of such a mechanism can be examined in William
Christian’s “Provoked Weeping in Early Modern Spain.”146 The art historical
applicability of this work of Religious Anthropology lies in its confirmation of

145 Nina A. Mallory, "Painting in Seville 1650-1700," in *Painting in Spain, 1650-1700,
from North American Collections*, ed. Edward J. Sullivan and Nina A. Mallory
University Press, 1982), 43.

1982), 33-50.
Freedberg’s prediction —that if we resurrect this long defunct body of theory we will also find “the evidence it provides for actual behavior.” Thus we can instantiate “adequate terms with which to approach the cognitive bases of response.”

To think of weeping as a learned behavior runs counter to much that we take for granted in our own world view. Few things in contemporary society have been more thoroughly relegated to the private sphere than weeping. But there have been times and places, Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries among them, where public weeping was part of the expectations and obligations that conditioned the individual’s place within the community. We know this because it is amply recorded: “The various potential religious significance of emotions meant that attentiveness to feelings, the engendering of certain feelings, and the public display of certain feelings were all encouraged. Tears were considered significant visible evidence for some feelings. Because they were visible and their presence was recorded, they permit us in retrospect to observe some of the occasions on which private and public sentiment was provoked for religious purposes.”

We should note the disproportionate part played by Jesuits in staging events that resulted in impressive displays of mass weeping. Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* and similar practices, along with public preaching by clerics who were themselves spiritual exercitants, were the means to achieving cultivated or provoked weeping. The understanding of emotion, or ‘feeling,’ underlying these practices needs explanation. Christian points out that physical sensations and emotions were not so clearly distinguished under a sixteenth or seventeenth century understanding. For spiritual

---

147 Ibid., 34.
purposes, “physical pain and sorrow, happiness and healthiness” were more or less part of one, unitary phenomenon, though this is not to say they were not subject to careful evaluation:

People’s emotions were a kind of test for their spiritual condition. One of the tasks of spiritual directors of persons actively seeking holiness was to discern the meaning of their confessant’s feelings. Because there was an important religious significance to unexplained emotional shifts and movements of the heart, lay people as well as religious were attentive to them.148

Addressing Loyola specifically:

This perception [of the emotions or feelings that correlated to his thoughts], at the root of Loyola’s conversion, was made an integral part of his Spiritual Exercises. The tens of thousands of persons who followed these exercises in early modern Europe were instructed to notice how they felt as they said each word of their prayers, “noting and pausing at those points in which I have felt more consolation or desolation or more spiritual feeling.” The range of possible feelings were described in detail in the commentary accompanying the exercises, and rules were given “to feel and know the various motions caused in the soul: the good ones so they will be received, and the bad ones so they will be rejected.” In this way those taking the exercises were sensitized to the “reality” of the divine and the demonic at work within them.149

It only remains for us to remind ourselves that this “sensitization” was accomplished by means of visualization, and visualizations were valued based on their ability to occasion such emotional discernment. Again, the imperative is to imagine oneself present at the event, to contemplate the self as implicated physically, emotionally, and by means of

148 Ibid., 39.
149 Ibid., 40.
intent, in the usually tragic and often brutal goings-on of the lives of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints and martyrs.

To return to the acknowledged uses for provoked weeping in early modern Spain, primary among these was purgation. Purgative weeping is endorsed by no less an authority than Teresa of Avila. “In thinking about and dwelling on what the Lord underwent for us we are moved to compassion, and this pain and the tears that result from it are savory.” Christian also finds, in Saint Tomás de Villanueva’s Brief Way of Serving our Lord (1555) “Our soul considers our redeemer bound to a column or nailed on the cross and understands that the innocent lamb suffers for our sins. From this consideration one becomes sad, moans, and weeps for having offended God and caused his death. This way is called purgative, for by it one purges one’s sins.” In other words, while there is much in such visualization meant to serve as fodder for imitation—we are to be meek and mild, compassionate and moral—we are also to identify with that which will lead us to guilt and repentance. Indeed, Villanueva implies that the taking on of such guilt in our trained imagination itself purges us of sin.

A shocking number of saints at this time who belong to orders with radically different missions share one thing in common, that which the Church at the time called “the gift of tears”—the bestowal of copious tears whenever a triggering event, such as

---


saying Mass, occurred. Teresa had it. Ignatius had it so abundantly that his fellow Jesuits feared for the health and sustainability of his eyesight.

Yet even while these emotional “gifts” are cultivated and sought after, the mystical experience remains the experience of a vision. “On the mystical plane, the visionary experience is not necessarily an optical one, though it remains the perception of an image.”152 Spanish confidence in such an assertion is exemplified by the famous passage in Teresa’s *Vida* where she responds to the horrifying rumors that in the Low Countries heretics actually destroy images of the Virgin and the saints. As Christian points out, Teresa cannot imagine such a thing, not because she is a connoisseur, nor very much interested in beauty, but because to do that which she does care about, seek union with the divine, she *needs* images:

> I had so little ability to represent things in my mind, except for what I could see. I could profit nothing from my imagination, [unlike] other persons who can see things in their minds wherever they pray. . . . for this reason I was such a friend of images. Unhappy those who by their fault lose this good! It surely seems that they do not love the Lord, for if they loved him, they would delight in seeing his portrait, just as here one is happy to see someone one loves dearly.153

**Seville and the Seeing Body**

In his essay “The Great Babylon of Spain and the Devout,” for the catalogue of the National Gallery of Scotland’s *Velázquez in Seville* exhibition, Ronald Cueto uses the itinerary of the royal visit by Philip IV and his brother, the Cardinal Infante, to the city in

---


1625 as one measure of the cultural and political clout of various religious institutions in Seville at the time. Along with the order most favored by the dynasty, the Hieronimites, and the ever influential Dominicans, we find “the Jesuit House of the Professed and of San Hermengildo,” and it is duly noted that “among these, the only recently founded order [is] the Jesuits.” Indeed, the King’s new First Minister, Don Gaspar de Guzmán, had Jesuit confessors despite his pride in a genealogy he could trace back to Saint Dominic (founder of the Dominicans). Furthermore, Cueto points out, the King’s late mother, Queen Margarita, had “like all the Styrian Hapsburgs... greatly esteemed the Society of Jesus.” Not long after the royal visit, Zurbarán would be commissioned to represent St. Alfonso Rodríguez for the Jesuits in Seville. The martyrdom of Jesuit missionaries in Japan in 1594 was the subject of special attention throughout Spain and of these martyrs’ particular veneration in Seville, bringing a Japanese delegation through the Andalusian city on their way to Rome. The Jesuits were the first specifically missionary order of the Catholic Church. It was this order that commissioned, in 1619, Velázquez’ *Adoration of the Magi*, painted for the Jesuit Novitiate of San Luis. The *Colegio de San Gregorio*— the College of the English


156 Ibid., 30.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid., 32.
Jesuits—employed Pacheco, Velázquez’ father-in-law, biographer, and teacher to paint a series of English kings in the role of defenders of the Catholic faith. In 1625, the Jesuits commissioned Juan de Roelas to produce *Triumph of Saint Gregory* (dated 1608). Pacheco is further credited with providing the color for Martínez Montañés’ statue of Saint Ignatius, the order’s founder and law-giver, currently in the Church of the Annunciation at Seville University.

In the year 1622, when Velázquez was still in his early twenties, Seville extravagantly celebrated the canonization of not only the great mystic, Teresa of Avila, but two Jesuit saints, the order’s founder, Ignatius, and St. Francis Xavier. Enriqueta Harris, in her article, “Velázquez, Sevillan Painter of Sacred Subjects,” points out that in his representation of the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*, Velázquez’ master, Pacheco, and afterwards, Velázquez himself (in both his own *Inmaculada* and in the *St. John on Patmos* that can be clearly demonstrated to be its pendant), can be shown to have drawn specifically on the work of Pacheco’s friend Luis del Alcázar, a Jesuit who wrote a treatise on the Apocalypse in 1614 (that was published by the Jesuit presses of Antwerp).¹⁵⁹ Del Alcázar’s treatise will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

In Velázquez’ *Saint Isidore Receiving the Chasubule from the Virgin*, a miraculous event in the life of a saint canonized the same year as Teresa, Ignatius, and Francis Xavier, Harris points out “His [Isidore’s] rapt expression suggests that his is a

---

vision as Salazar de Mendoza\textsuperscript{160} describes it, \textit{en cuerpo y alma} (in body and soul),” a phrase indicating a distinction that cannot but provoke association with the \textit{Spiritual Exercises}—a mystical experience, but \textit{by} and \textit{through} the senses.\textsuperscript{161} Harris’ account of Seville indicates that a great deal of patronage in the city was Jesuit in association, even when not specifically in origin.

The prominence of Jesuit institutions, along with the contributions of particular members of the order in Seville is well attested to by Cueto and Harris. As patrons, the Society of Jesus were indisputably prominent in Seville during and after Velázquez’ time there. What is more, wherever the Carmelites, Carthusians, or the many lay confraternities made a contribution to the Sevillian milieu, they often did so under the influence of Jesuit confessors, Jesuit spiritual directors (administering the exercises), and secular patrons such as the Guzmán family (or the Royal family itself) that had, for a variety of reasons, made common cause with the Society.

Andalusia and a powerful faction of the Andalusian elites were backing the Jesuits. The Jesuits were backing reform, especially as embodied by the Discalced Carmelites and similar orders where mental prayer was part of their discipline and rule.


\textsuperscript{161} Harris, "Velázquez, Sevillian Painter of Sacred Subjects," 47.
Return to *The Exercises, Return to New York*

The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius are engaged in under direction and over time. They have their climactic moments, but the overall effect is cumulative. On the first day of the second week, the exercitant is called upon to contemplate the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. In language that could not be more explicit, the exercitant is exhorted to enter the scenario in imagination, taking on a role that will facilitate not only contemplation, but also participation. Take special note of the role that is suggested:

First Point. The first Point is to see the persons; that is, to see Our Lady and Joseph and the maid, and, after His Birth, the Child Jesus, I making myself a little, unworthy servant, looking at them and serving them [the Holy Family] in their needs, with all possible respect and reverence, as if I myself were present; and then to reflect on myself in order to draw some profit.

Second Point. The second, to look, mark and contemplate what they are saying, and, reflecting on myself, to draw some profit.\(^\text{162}\)

What could Velázquez have reasonably assumed about the audience for his *Supper at Emmaus*? Firstly, he could have assumed that for any of his contemporaries, any depiction of the *Supper* would have included more figures than the minimal three of Christ and his disciples; he could also have assumed that in the audience’s experiences of

\(^{162}\) Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola : The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, [114].

Note that the same passage from the *Exercises* is cited by Heinrich Pfeiffer in his treatment of the Weirix Brothers’ engraving of “The Circumcision of Christ” for Jerome Nadal’s *Evangelicae historiae imagines* (Antwerp, 1607 edition), in which a servant boy appears bearing a jug of water: “The detail of the servant with the large water jug can be taken as an invitation to viewers to enter the scene itself as a holy theater, as the *Exercises* suggests.” In Heinrich Pfeiffer SJ, "The Iconography of the Society of Jesus," in *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540-1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley SJ, Gauvin A. Bailey, and Giovanni Sale SJ (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005), 204.
paintings of the *Supper*, the extra figures would almost always have represented studies in indifference or distraction. Velázquez’ contemporaries would have seen in his *Supper at Emmaus* a work that deliberately excluded figures that were included in virtually every other depiction of the scene they had ever encountered. The viewers must construct in memory or imagination the excluded figures, and to do so must establish what they all seem to have shared in common—their indifference to, their distraction from, the scene in which they participate.

In Seville, Velázquez could have assumed a viewer surrounded by the influence of Spanish-style mystical practice. This hypothetical Sevillan viewer could not help being aware of the presence of Saint Teresa’s Discalced Carmelites, of the Franciscans, and of several other religious orders, each using devotional handbooks based on image-centered meditation, some insisting on Freedberg’s first category of meditation directed towards real images, others insisting on strictly internal images concocted from memory and experience. Velázquez’ viewers would have been very aware of the presence of the Society of Jesus in Seville, and of the Jesuit’s international reputation as a missionary order. Further, he might be among the many to have participated in spiritual exercises and mental prayer of the kind promulgated by these orders. However exalted their position, they may have undertaken the very *Exercise* of Ignatius quoted earlier, during which he took on the imaginary role of a “little, unworthy servant” waiting at the elbow of a sacred personage.

Looking at Velázquez’ canvas, the viewer would see the brushwork so at variance with the smooth, enamel-like finish of earlier Italian and Flemish work, and already
reminiscent of the Venetians\textsuperscript{163}—the artist might assume a viewer also discerning enough to notice the distinction between the \textit{bodegón}-based figures of the disciples and the idealized figure of the risen Christ in his robe of lush red. Such a viewer would have perceived something like the effect of a character from a high-minded tragedy occupying the stage with two characters escaped from a rough comedy.

Velázquez could very likely count on another qualification from his imagined viewer—a conditioned set of responses based on the techniques of image-based meditation. Such a viewer, as likely to be a layman as an ecclesiastic, would approach Velázquez’ image in a very definite way. Given the use of painted images as starting-points for meditation, and the typical phase of such meditations aimed at purgative cleansing of sin from the exercitant by means of his empathic experience of guilt, shame, or regret, the invitation of the \textit{Supper} becomes clear. We are invited to consider ourselves as guilty of indifference—in vivid imagination—to implicate ourselves in the sin of apathy before the miraculous. The awkward space and composition that leaves us alienated from the event depicted is perfectly appropriate. What is failure according to Italianate elegance is a positive virtue according to the terms of a scheme of image-making where self-interrogation and felt-emotion are prized above rational or intellectual delectation.

Students of art history are often taught that \textit{Las Meninas} (1656), commonly regarded as Velázquez’ masterpiece, deserves its status not only because it has been

\textsuperscript{163} Wind calls it Velázquez’ “dry and leathery finish,” Wind, \textit{Velázquez's Bodegones: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Genre Painting}, 50.
masterfully painted, but because of a wonderful game it plays with the conventions and expectations of the artistic tradition it inhabits. We both are (and are not) the King himself when we stand before the canvas and see “our” reflection in the mirror on the far wall (Figures 11 & 12). “The painting comes out and gets you. You are involved!” I often tell my students, to gratifying effect. Indeed, you are. But we must no longer consider Las Meninas to be the first instance of Velázquez playing this game with the viewer. He has already done so in the Supper at Emmaus. In this light, Las Meninas can properly be seen as a thoroughly secular work that, nonetheless, relies on an attitude towards the image—a cultivated and conditioned sense of how to relate to an image—that has its origin in a religious or devotional context. The embodied and sensual contextualizing of the viewer to provoke memory and emotion is based in a whole host of habits, practices, and assumptions. That they can reliably be assumed by the artist as
available to and understood by his viewer is the ground on which Velázquez makes this offering to the king as a little unworthy servant.
Chapter 3.

Velázquez’ Library: “an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries”164

Diego Velázquez amassed a private library of quite a remarkable character. Warily, we need to look at Velázquez as a painter who was to a considerable degree also a reader. We must also keep in mind, however, that the books one owns do not map directly onto the ideas one holds. The difference between appearance and reality, together with a sense of the correctly cautious perspective from which such matters are to be evaluated, inform this examination of Velázquez’ books.

Before Velázquez’ books proper, I begin with an examination of those books most commonly mentioned when the painter’s library, and the painter himself, are addressed.

For almost two decades the place from which students first surveyed the field of Velázquez studies was an essay at the beginning of Jonathan Brown’s 1978 book Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting.165 This survey of the literature still repays attention even if its place has to some extent been taken by Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt’s introduction to the Cambridge Companion to Velázquez, wherein additions to the

---

164 The subtitle incorporates a phrase from the beginning of Jorge Luis Borges’ “The Library of Babel” (La biblioteca de Babel): a short story in which a universe is depicted as a vast library made up of all possible 410-page books that can be composed in a certain character set.


Another source formerly considered one of the promontories from which to survey the field is the *Varia Velazqueña*, first published in 1960 and containing virtually every relevant archival discovery up to that point.\footnote{Antonio Gallego y Burín and Dirección General de Bellas Artes Spain, *Varia Velazqueña; Homenaje a Velázquez En El Iii Centenario De Su Muerte, 1660-1960*, [Edición planeada, dirigida y anotada por Antonio Gallego y Burín] ed. (Madrid: 1960).} Though considerably older than Brown’s survey of the scholarly literature, it has called for far less revision, with barely a handful of archival discoveries in the ensuing thirty-seven years. It has nevertheless been thoroughly supplanted by the *Corpus Velazqueño* of 2000.\footnote{José Manuel Pita Andrade and Ángel Aterido, eds., *Corpus Velazqueño: Documentos Y Textos*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2000).}

On the surface, we seem to have considerable access to the painter’s life and context. Pacheco’s *Arte de la Pintura* of 1638 is, with those qualifications called for by the nature of his project, an excellent source on Velazquez’ career up to his first Italian journey.\footnote{Pacheco, *Arte De La Pintura, Su Antigüedad Y Grandezas* (1649).} With the crucial paragraphs in Jusepe Martínez’ *Discursos Practicables*,\footnote{Jusepe Martínez, ed. Julián Gállego, *Discursos Praticables Del Nobilissimo Arte De La Pintura* (Madrid: 1988).} and Antonio Palomino’s establishment of Velázquez’ reputation within the Vasarian
structure with which we Art Historians are most comfortable. Stratton-Pruitt is quite right that the basic chronology of Velázquez’ biography is firmly established and is unlikely to undergo significant revision. There is, however, a cervantenian slipperiness to the record that may undermine our confidence.

True, Velázquez’ position in an institution that chronicled, codified and regimented itself as thoroughly as did the court of the Spanish monarchy allows us to track the painter with a precision that Rembrandt scholars can only envy. At least this is so from his first significant appointment as ujier de camera and certainly once he becomes aposentador mayor de palacio. Yet with all of this we have only two letters in Velázquez’ own hand, and he seems, with the exception of what was necessary to secure his membership in the chivalric Order of Santiago, to have studiously avoided involvement in controversy. Indeed, the fall of his initial patron, the redoubtable Count-Duke of Olivares in 1640, despite its consequences for the rest of the Andalusian clique that the royal valido had gathered around himself in Madrid, left Velázquez serenely in place.

---


173 Ibid., 196, no. 12.


In the humoral jargon that was the psychology of his day, Velázquez is described as being of a phlegmatic temperament.\(^{176}\) We know he fathered a child out of wedlock while in Italy.\(^{177}\) Beyond this, he maintains a sphinx-like demeanor, not unlike that of the sitters for his royal portraits, crossing our remarkable certainty as to when and where with a provocative elusiveness as to why and what for. What a temptation, therefore, is represented by the inventory we have of the painter’s library! Indeed, when Sánchez Cantón published the inventory, expectations seem to have been high. Here was a window into the painter’s inner world. Few archival discoveries can seem to have promised so much and (since its appearance in the 1920s) have delivered so little. In 1942, the inventory of which the list of books was merely a part was transcribed and published, again by Sánchez Cantón, and again the sense was that important results could not but flow from the availability of such details. José Gudiol wrote in 1983: “The inventory of the private property of Velázquez and his wife was drawn up by the witnesses to the foregoing document, both of whom had been appointed executors,

\(^{176}\) Most famously in a letter written by the king in 1653:

No fue mi retrato porque a nueve años que no se a hecho ninguno y no me inclino a passar por la flema de Velázquez assí por ella, como por no verme ir enbejeciendo

It was not my portrait [that was sent] because it has been nine years since one has been made and I am disinclined to submit to Velázquez’ phlegm, nor by so doing to see myself age.

Antonio Moreno Garrido and Miguel Ángel Gamonal Torres, eds., *Carta De Felipe IV a Sor Luisa Magdalena De Jesús, Fechada El 8 De Julio De 1653, Velázquez y La Familia Real a Través De Un Epistolario De Felipe IV* (Madrid: Cuadernos de Arte de la Fundación Universitaria Española, No. 12, 1988), 12.

between the 11th and the 29th of the same month. *This is a document of great importance* [emphasis mine], which was published, with commentaries, by Sanchez Cantón in the *Archivo Español de Arte* in 1942.**

What is to be done with the painter’s library in all of its individualistic particularity has served (except in the case of Antonio Maravall) more to stymie the over-eager than to provide some key to Velázquez’ work.** Even while delivering this treasure with one hand, Sanchez Cantón, with the other, overlays the gift with a set of assumptions about Velázquez that may blind us to those items in the library with the greatest explanatory potential. We will deal with this presently.

Even before the publication in the 1920s of the inventory of the books left by Velázquez upon his death in 1660, and along with the general catalog of his possessions which contains some noteworthy items, we are informed in 1724 by the painter’s first truly systematic biographer, Palomino, that in Velázquez we have an artist of considerable learning:

> He practiced the lessons to be found in the various authors who have written distinguished precepts on painting. In Albrecht Dürer he sought the proportions of the human body, anatomy in Andreas Vesalius, physiognomy in Giovanni Battista Porta, perspective in Daniele Barbaro, geometry in Euclid, arithmetic in Moya, architecture in Vitruvius and Vignola, as well as in other authors, from all of whom he skillfully selected with the diligence of a bee all that was most useful and perfect for his own use and for the benefit of posterity. He studied the nobility of painting in Romano Alberti’s treatise, written at the request of the Roman Academy and Venerable Brotherhood of the glorious Evangelist Saint Luke; he

---


**One attempt to do so with this material receives interesting, if somewhat erratic, treatment at the website of artist Carol Sutton:

http://www.carolsutton.net/breda/Velazquez_lead.html . 08/01/08
illuminated his own concepts with Federico Zuccaro’s Idea, adorned them with the precepts of Giovanni Attista Armenini, and learned to carry them out quickly and succinctly from Michelangelo Biondo. Vasari spurred him on with his Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, and Raffaelo Borghini’s Riposo made of him an erudite painter. He also perfected himself with the knowledge of sacred and secular writings and of other important things, so as to enrich his mind with every kind of learning and a general knowledge of the arts. That is what Leon Battista Alberti advises in the following words; “Ma ben vorrei, chel Pittore fosse dotto, quanto possibil fosse, in tutte le Arti Liberali; ma sopra tutto gli desidero, che sia perito nela Geometria.” Velázquez was also well acquainted and friendly with poets and orators, for it was from such minds that he gained much with which to embellish his compositions.180

Every source Palomino mentions makes its appearance in Velázquez’ libreria—some in multiple editions.181 In Italy at this time, there might be some expectation that a painter could be both skilled in his art and learned. In Spain, it was far less likely; indeed when we encounter the pedantic manner in which Pacheco makes a show of his learning in the Arte de la Pintura, we cannot help but think of Doctor Johnson, who famously said about the spectacle of a dog walking on its hind legs, “It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”182 Protestations of a painter’s learning and erudition, at least during this period in Spain, are all too often assumed by scholars to be platitudes of the same genre. When the inventory of Velázquez’ library was published in 1925, however, it seemed to belie this unfair assumption.


181 As Martin Kemp confirms; Martin Kemp, The Science of Art : Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 105.

182 Boswell's Life of Johnson; Johnson’s comparison was to the phenomenon of a woman preaching, but Virginia Woolf scathingly transposes the comparison in the third chapter of A Room of One’s Own. Ever since, the anecdote is more likely to be misremembered as being about the perceived inappropriateness of literary ambition in women.
In its scope and in the unlooked-for eccentricity of its emphasis, Velázquez’ library has every indication of having been assembled out of genuine and stubbornly pursued interests.\footnote{Sánchez Cantón, "La Librería De Velázquez," 379-406.} It was the library of a savant, containing not only important texts on the art of painting, and those works of literature, and specifically of poetry, that a gentleman-humanist might be expected to know, but also, and in extraordinary numbers, works representative of the emerging scientific world view. When we inspect the inventory made of the painter’s other worldly goods,\footnote{First published by F. J. Sánchez Cantón, “Cómo vivía Velázquez. Inventario descubierto por D. F. Rodríguez Marín,”, Archivo Español de Arte 15 (1942), pp. 69–91, and frequently cited from its appearance as "Inventario De Los Bienes Que Dejó Velázquez, Madrid, 11, 17, 18 Y 29 De Agosto De 1660," in Velázquez, Homenaje En El Tercer Centenario De Su Muerte (Madrid: 1960), 313-4. Most recently re-published (and re-transcribed) as Carlos Baztán Lacasa and Meatríz Mariño (transcription), "Inventario De Los Bienes De Velázquez Y Juana Pacheco, Realizado Por Juan Bautista Del Mazo, a 21 De Julio De 1661," in 25 Documentos De Velazquez, En Le Archivo Historico De Protocolos De Madrid (Madrid: Consejería de Cultura de la Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1999).} we find among them ten mirrors (more than vanity would require) and a glass lens that was almost certainly a \textit{camera obscura}.\footnote{Baztán Lacasa and Mariño (transcription), "Inventario De Los Bienes De Velázquez Y Juana Pacheco, Realizado Por Juan Bautista Del Mazo, a 21 De Julio De 1661."} We find ourselves confronted with a mentality focused on matters quite other than those of the pure painter or the ambitious courtier that seems to occupy so much of the literature on Velázquez.\footnote{On the secular or, at least unascetic nature of Velázquez, confirmed by his books, see Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, "Cómo Vivía Velázquez. Inventario Descubierto Por D. F. Rodríguez Marín," Archivo Español de Arte, no. 15 (1942): 84.}
The other aspect of Velázquez’s library that is not so much ignored as hostily
discounted is the admittedly small part of it that represents theological and devotional
concerns. Indeed, only two books can be so classified, according to Sánchez Cantón.187
Yet it is only in comparison to the vast quantity of books dealing with the mathematical,
scientific, and technical concerns of the emerging Cartesian order—books that we cannot
suppress our surprise at finding in the library of the Spanish king’s painter—that these
volumes of a more spiritual character could be so thoroughly discounted and neglected.
Their cultural relevance and applicability to the painter’s oeuvre should lead us to
reapportion our attention according to a scheme other than the crudely arithmetical. In the
light of the preceding chapter’s account of the painter’s version of the Supper at Emmaus
and its relationship to the devotional texts and practices of the day, the
mystical/devotional volumes in Velázquez’ library take on new importance.

In 1942, when Sánchez Cantón published the complete inventory of which only the
list of books had been published in 1925, he had had seventeen years to consider the
books that were in the painter’s home at the time of his death. It is illuminating to read
his evaluation:

Las obras de imaginación ocupaban corto espacio en los estantes: nada de teatro,
una sola novela, y ésta tan poco famosa y divertida como las Auroras de Diana
(impresa en 1565), de D. Pedro de Castro y Anaya; unos Poeteas (567)—quizá las
Flores de poetas ilustres de Espinosa—y un Arte poética, seguramente la de
Rengifo. Preceptiva también, la Philosophia antigua (500), del Dr. Alonso López

187 Sánchez Cantón, "Cómo Vivía Velázquez. Inventario Descubierto Por D. F.
Rodríguez Marín," 84.
Pinciano, es probable que figurase entre los libros de Velázquez, más que por su carácter literario, por varios principios, acordes con el temperamento del pintor, como los de “Arte es un hábito de hacer las cosas con razón”, “El autor que remeda a la Naturaleza, simple pintor.”

Works of the imagination take up little space on the shelves: no theater, only one novel, and that one the obscure and un-amusing *Auroras de Diana* (printed in 1565), by Don Pedro de Castro y Anaya; Some poets (567)—perhaps the *Flores de poetas ilustres* by Espinosa—and an *Arte poética*, surely the one by Rengifo. Also the obligatory *Philosophia antigua* (500), by Dr. Alonso López Pinciano, which probably figures among Velázquez’ books, more for its principles, very much in tune with the painter’s temperament, than for its literary qualities, such as “Art is a habit of doing things with a reason,” and “the Author who imitates nature, simply a painter.”

We can certainly share what must have been Sánchez Cantón’s heartbreak at not finding a well-thumbed copy of the *Quijote* on the list. What follows as to Velázquez’ interest in spiritual matters and, specifically, in the substance of the Catholic faith that would have surrounded him like water does a fish at the court where he resided, is something from which we may wish to withhold our assent. Sánchez Cantón states of the painter’s library:

Si es chocante la escasez de obras literarias, todavía lo es más la casi ausencia de libros devotos, no poseía más que estos dos: *El Microcosmo y gobierno universal del hombre cristiano*, (481), de Fray Marco Antonio de Camo, y *De la Pasión de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo*, de Lucas de Soria (479). Otras dos obras representaban la Filosofía: la *Ética* y la *Política* de Aristóteles.

If the scarcity of literary works is striking, then even more so is the near absence of devotional books, he possessed only these two: *El Microcosmo y gobierno universal del hombre cristiano* (The Microcosm and the Universal Government of the Christian Man), (481), by Fray Marco Antonio de Camo, y *De la Pasión de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo* (The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ), by Lucas de

---

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.
Soria (479). Two more works represented Philosophy, the *Ethics* and the *Politics* of Aristotle.

The two devotional titles will receive our special attention at the conclusion of this chapter, but before that it is worth reading further in Sánchez Cantón’s account of the library to see the assumptions brought to bear on these two books—*no . . . más que estos dos*—*El Microcosmo y gobierno universal del hombre cristiano*, by Fray Marco Antonio de Camo, and *De la Pasión de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo*, by Lucas de Soria:

That Velázquez was neither a mystic nor an ascetic, nor given to fantasies, is well known; but that these characteristics reveal themselves so precisely in his library only serves to strengthen the deductions to be drawn from the presence of those works that are found there. Like, for example, an unsuspected interest in the divinatory arts; not less than seven books on this topic found their way into the collection. [translations from the inventory in the *Archivo* are my own]

Scarcity and rarity, of course, represent two very different value judgments of what is basically the same phenomenon. Sánchez Cantón points out that the copy of Alberti’s *Trattato della Pittura* need not make too strong a claim on our attention—it is a work common in the studies of the erudite at this time—but Velázquez has another work of “*exremada y preciosa rareza*” (extreme and precious rarity):

---

190 Ibid.: 84-5.
That of Leonardo da Vinci (558). There is some doubt that this is the manuscript that Pacheco used, or if it is the printed edition published in Paris in 1651.

Whether Pacheco’s exceedingly rare manuscript copy or the 1651 printed edition, the influence of Leonardo’s theories, especially his concept of *sfumato*, will be of great importance for what follows.

*  *  *  *  *

Bringing Velázquez’ library to bear on the painter’s work has a history of its own. Until quite recently its most important expression was *Velázquez y el Espíritu de la Modernidad* by José Antonio Maravall.192 This protégé of José Ortega y Gasset has been one of the great modern theorists of the Baroque, though much more of an influence in the field of letters, especially by way of his book, *Culture of the Baroque*193 than among

191 Ibid.: 86.


interpreters of the visual arts. His book on Velázquez and his place in the history of ideas has therefore proven difficult for historians of art to assimilate.

The relationship to Maravall’s take on Velázquez and modernity, as well as of Heinrich Wölfflin’s concept of style and the notion of form in Walter Benjamin's *Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiel* (* Origins of German Tragic Drama*) and in *Die Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (* The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*) has found a coherent synthesis in the writings of Massimo Lollini.\(^{194}\) It is in the retreat of a platonic conception of painting before a new conception—a conception that Maravall believes has been made possible, and that perhaps has been compelled to exist by the work of Galileo—that he locates the “spirit of modernity” that animates, for him, the work of the Spanish painter:

In his work on Velázquez, Maravall shows that the new and anti-Platonic vision of nature made possible by Galileo is at the origin of the new vision of nature that developed in Baroque painting. Following the advent of modern rationalism, Galileo's revolution, and the introduction of the telescope and various scientific instruments of measurement, what really counts in Velázquez's paintings was not imitation of nature or the creation of a perfect and ideal copy of it, as it was conceived by the neoplatonism of the Renaissance. What mattered was the painter's vision, the human experience of the natural object. Finally, Maravall, following his idea of the Baroque as an historical structure, shows how the two revolutions, the one introduced by Galileo and the one introduced by Velázquez, were related to the presence of a bourgeois audience no longer interested in the mythological and moral content of the painting.\(^{195}\)


\(^{195}\) Ibid.
Galileo looms large in Maravall’s account of the spirit of modernity, but unless we are to be content with a ghostly and indeterminate Hegelian *Geist* for this spirit, then it behooves us to investigate just what Copernicus and Galileo meant in Spain during the early seventeenth century. The connection is more direct than one might expect.

**Figure 13.** Francisco Pacheco, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1619

**Figure 14.** Diego Velázquez, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1619

Evidence of Velázquez’ engagement with such issues is demonstrated in the final chapter of Eileen Reeves’ *Painting the Heavens*. Here, in the iconography respectively endorsed by master (Pacheco) and pupil (Velázquez) in their treatments of the *Inmaculada* (**Figures 13 & 14**), or what was to become the standard form for depiction of
the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, we find a declaration of
sorts, on the part of the younger painter, in favor of the Copernican system:

Velázquez, on the other hand, endorsed the Galilean arguments so that a
collection of the paintings of the student and his master reveals the two sides of
a quarrel that emerged in the first decade after the publication of the *Sidereus
Nuncius* [of Galileo in 1610].

There is good reason, according to work by William Shea and Mariano Artigas, to
believe that Velázquez met Galileo Galilei in Rome during the painter’s second Italian
journey. Both were recipients of the Florentine ambassador’s hospitality: "Velázquez and
Galileo were guests of the Florentine government at the same time, but in different
residences. . . [I]t is likely they met at the ambassador's table." The possibilities of this
meeting will be addressed presently, but first we should take measure of just how much
familiarity with the ideas of Galileo and their implications Velázquez would have already
brought to such an encounter. It will help us to gauge Velázquez the reader and painter.
Among the books owned by Velázquez’ master, we find a work by one of Pacheco’s
close associates in Seville that is not duplicated in (or handed down to) Velázquez’
collection; nevertheless, we will have good reason to extrapolate Velázquez’
familiarity with the book—it is an exegetical treatment of the last book of the Christian
bible.

---

196 Eileen Adair Reeves, *Painting the Heavens : Art and Science in the Age of Galileo*

197 William R. Shea and Mariano Artigas, *Galileo in Rome : The Rise and Fall of a

Within the circle of Velázquez’ teacher, Pacheco, we encounter the noteworthy figure of Luis Alcázar (1554-1613). The Seville-based Jesuit published, as the culmination of his scholarly career, the *Vestigio arcane sensu in Apocalypsi*, (*Investigation of the Hidden Sense of the Apocalypse*), in 1614 [**Figure 15**].\(^{199}\) This work that came to 1000 pages is a prime example of the exegetical school known as preterism, the position that the prophesies of the book of *Revelations* have already been fulfilled. Though completely at variance with interpretations of the Apocalypse from contemporary fellow Jesuits Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) of the University of Salamanca or Cardinal [Saint Robert] Bellarmine (1542-1621), it accomplished the same goal as these other two Jesuit exegetes—it denied the Protestants’ identification of the papacy with Apocalyptic Babylon. Ribera’s *In Sacrum Beati Ioannis Apostoli, & Evangelistiae Apocalypsin Commentarij*, published around the year 1590 [**Figure 16**], is the signal seventeenth-century example of futurism as an exegetical school. Futurism holds that *Revelations* is applicable to a distant future time when the church will have fallen away from the

---

**Figure 15.** Luis Alcázar, *Vestigio*, 1614.  
**Figure 16.** Francisco Ribera. *Commentarij*, 1590.  
**Figure 17.** Cardinal Bellarmine. *De Controverseis*, 1581/93.

\(^{199}\) Reeves, *Painting the Heavens: Art and Science in the Age of Galileo*, 184.
institutional papacy, and therefore, into apostasy. This is the same position taken by Bellarmine [Figure 17], though on a different timeframe from the one proposed by Ribera in his *Polemic Lectures Concerning the Disputed Points of the Christian Belief Against the Heretics of This Time*, published between 1581 and 1593. It is Alcázar’s route to this goal that has special repercussions in the arts, especially the arts in Spain, where endorsement of the doctrine of the immaculacy of the Virgin’s conception is a special commitment on the parts of both church and state patrons, and therefore also for the artists they employed. It is by means of the iconographic formulation of this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception that the controversy over the ideas of Copernicus and Galileo find divergent expression in Spanish painting and demonstrate the level of awareness that Velázquez had of scientific thinking.

It is then in the furtherance of general Catholic apologetics and specifically Spanish Immaculist enthusiasm that Alcázar first familiarizes Pacheco with Galileo’s observations of the moon made by means of the telescope and first discussed in the Tuscan Scientist’s *Sidereus Nuncius* of 1610. Reeves tells us that Alcázar’s influence on Pacheco was “limited” exclusively to the idea, derived from Galileo, that the horns of the crescent moon must be depicted as pointing away from the sun. That Pacheco otherwise employs only those iconographic implications of the scholarship that specifically reject Gallileo’s *Starry Messenger* would be of little interest to us, had Velázquez not produced, virtually simultaneously (c. 1619), an *Inmaculada* that fully

\[200\] Ibid.
endorsed the idea of the Galilean moon, not only as regards which way the horns of the crescent moon should point, but in other respects as well.

This juxtaposition is not to imply a simple “painted debate” between master and pupil. It is precisely to contrast their level of engagement with certain issues, or, perhaps better said, the rather high threshold necessary for Pacheco to enter— even a little—into the territory of Optics and Astronomy, that Reeves makes the comparison in the first place. Both artists produced *Inmaculadas* that clearly engage with Alcázar’s exegesis of *Revelations*. According to Reeves, while “Alcázar, as his commentary shows, was an interested and tolerably well informed witness of Copernicanism; Pacheco, I believe, was not.”

One looks in vain for references to the new (or old) world system in the *Arte de la Pintura*, and one finds virtually no mention of other and yet more pertinent issues such as recent advances in perspective, optics, architecture, or geometry. Pacheco’s library was rich in the history of art and of the church, in studies of religious iconography, in saints’ lives, in descriptions of the Holy Land, and in humanist dialogues comparing poetry with painting. Yet it contained none of the more technical treatises of the sort later favored by Velázquez, and nothing even remotely related to developments in astronomy.  

It would take a theological connection, like that to the issue of Mary’s immaculate conception, to draw Pacheco into a “controversy over the moon’s nature and substance.” Not so Velázquez.

---

201 Ibid., 185.

202 Ibid.
The painter’s Sevillian milieu was one sufficiently plugged into the European scientific community that, quite apart from any controversy involving heliocentricity as an actual replacement for the Ptolemaic model of the universe, Copernicus’ book was being put to very practical use. The Casa de Contratación (the governmental House of Trade) made use of tables for determining the declination of the sun found in Copernicus’ *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*), based purely on the accuracy with which they yielded calendarical data useful to their official charge. Amazingly, Velázquez himself owned a copy of *De revolutionibus*.

This is not the place to detail Alcázar’s luckless attempt to endorse Copernicanism, two years before its condemnation by the Holy Office in Rome. Suffice it to say, he did so by way of reviving Origen’s mystical/allegorical interpretation of biblical prophesy—an approach contemporaneously condemned by none other than Cardinal Bellarmine as "the gravest of errors." Bellarmine specifically endorses Saint Jerome’s literal and historicist interpretations of scripture in his *Disputationes de controversiis*, over Origen’s approach.

---

203 Ibid., 186. Indeed, the history of reception history of Copernicus’ book prior to its condemnation as part of the “Process Galileo” has come up for substantial revision, See Owen Gingerich, *The Book Nobody Read : Chasing the Revolutions of Nicolaus Copernicus* (New York: Walker & Company, 2004).

204 Origen Adamantius, (ca. 185–ca. 254) was an early Christian scholar, theologian, and one of the most distinguished of the early fathers of the Early Church. Views he held on a hierarchical structure in the Trinity, the temporality of matter, "the fabulous preexistence of souls," and "the monstrous restoration which follows from it" were declared anathema in the 6th century. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, VI., xxxii. 3; Eng. transl., *NPNF*, 2 ser., i. 277.

205 As quoted and cited, Reeves, *Painting the Heavens : Art and Science in the Age of Galileo*, 189.
The Copernican aspects of Alcázar’s exegesis, in the wake of Galileo’s *Starry Messenger* being placed on the index of prohibited books in 1616, were met, even among his Jesuit confreres, with “silence and disapproval,” although this did not prevent the text from being influential. Indeed, the portion in which Alcázar criticizes the painters of his day for depicting the horns of the moon in the image of the woman clothed in the sun in *Revelations* (12) as facing away from, rather than towards, the sun is cut and pasted in its entirety into the *Arte de la Pintura*, as part of the instructions for painting the Immaculate Conception. Crucially, it is the part of Alcázar’s treatment of astronomical material that is neutral as regards the Ptolemaic versus Copernican systems.

For all this, the moon that appears in Pacheco’s *Inmaculada* is made of the unearthly stuff of Ptolemaic cosmology—semi-transparent, ethereal. The donor, Miguel Cid, a Sevillian worthy notable for, among other matters, poems dedicated to the immaculate Virgin, looks up in full approval at the figure of the Virgin standing atop a moon free of the blemishes (*macula*) that Galileo’s telescope had revealed, resembling exactly what we now know them to be—the mountains and valleys of the lunar surface.

Velázquez’ *Inmaculada* is assuredly a better painting than that of his teacher. The difference in quality is all the more manifest given how faithfully the student keeps to the prescriptions rigorously applied by his master and spelled out in uncompromising detail in the *Arte de la Pintura*; as a result, those particulars in which he departs from Pacheco are all the more striking. We see:

---

206 Ibid., 193.

207 Noted in Reeves, Ibid., 194. See Pacheco, *Arte De La Pintura, Su Antigüedad Y Grandezas* (1649), 576-7., and *Vestigio arcane sensu in Apocalypsi*, 453.
The manner in which Velázquez departs from, rather than follows, the suggestions of Pacheco. The horns, if they can be called such, do point downward, but the terminator—the arc on the lunar disk that separates the light part from the dark—is actually formed by a mountain in the landscape in the background. Somewhere within the globe, a small boat hovers on a shadowy body of water and beneath the stella maris, another icon of Marian purity. The Virgin’s robe, for all its bulk, seems to rest on a disk rather than on the solid sunlit sphere described by Pacheco and Alcázar.

Reeves’s argument here bears some examination. Her account of the Marian symbols (a fountain, a round classical temple) are awkward in the manner in which they are depicted, especially by comparison to the similar collection of symbolic items that Pacheco locates very convincingly in a perspectively correct landscape. One hardly need invoke Velázquez’ Waterseller of Seville (commonly dated to around 1620), as Reeves does, to demonstrate that such awkward handling of objects in space cannot be attributed to a lack of virtuosity on the part of the young painter—only look at and contrast the two figures of the Blessed Virgin. Rather, Reeves suggests that the moon in Pacheco’s Inmaculada is, in its ghostly transparency, “an allusion to a controversy that began with the publication of the Siderius Nuncius, and an index of his allegiance to the men who contested the claims of that treatise.’

In the light of this and combined with Velázquez’ painterly virtuosity—well attested to at even this earliest stage —Reeves implies that:

[W]hat is stiff, stilted, and unrealistic in the lower portion of Velázquez’s Immaculate Conception is meant to be so, and that these flaws stand as a commentary on an artistic convention and astronomical argument—that of the

---

208 Reeves, Painting the Heavens : Art and Science in the Age of Galileo, 195.

209 Ibid., 196.
transparent moon—which he found unacceptable. In sum, the two works take opposite sides of a current debate: Pacheco’s painting portraying and endorsing the conclusions drawn by Galileo’s rivals, that of Velázquez deriding and in effect contesting them.210

Here again we find an example of apparent awkwardness in composition that may, in fact, involve the use of style as a way of commenting on matters that transcend the painting’s content. That this happens in another (earlier) of Velázquez’ religious paintings is worthy of note. The factor that Reeves emphasizes and that we would do well to revisit, brings us back to the books that are our main focus in this chapter; that the argument of Copernican and Galilean ideas about the heavens were of interest to Sevillians—of importance—because they were viewed as having theological, specifically Marian and Immaculist, implications. 211

It is here that one of the books in Velázquez’ library that has received considerable attention from scholars, quite apart from having been owned by the painter, asserts itself in Reeves’s account: The Opticorum libri sex by Francis Aguilon, S.J. [Figure 18].212 It is in seeking to understand the interconnections between texts in Velázquez’ library that a categorical assertion on the part of Reeves should detain us: “The conflation of astronomical and doctrinal arguments occurs most frequently in works written by Jesuit

210 Ibid.

211 Ibid.

212 Ibid., 197-201. On this title and the edition most likely to be the one listed in the inventory of Velázquez’s books see Ruiz Pérez, De La Pintura y Las Letras. La Biblioteca De Velázquez, 136-7. See also S. J. Ziggelaar, François De Aguilon. Scientist and Artist (Rome: 1983).
authors.\textsuperscript{213} Indeed, he goes on to explain that “all three of the writers I will examine in this chapter [dealing with Sevillian depictions of the Inmaculada] were associated with the Society of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{214} Doctrinal advocacy and natural science are not only two leading arenas of Jesuit activity, they are hopelessly intermixed. It is also interesting to note that this enormous book on the subject of optics endorses the anti-galilean, crystalline moon that Velázquez seems to explicitly reject in the making of his Inmaculada.

![Illustration](image)

Figure 18. Illustration from The Opticorum libri sex by Francis Aguilon, S.J.

Velázquez’ library certainly possessed an impressive number of works on Mathematics, Optics, and Geometry. He also owned classical works like those of Euclid and Vitruvius, and Renaissance works like those of Alberti and Vignola, but these

\textsuperscript{213} Reeves, \textit{Painting the Heavens: Art and Science in the Age of Galileo}, 197.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
particular interests, when pursued in texts produced by contemporaries, meant texts produced disproportionately by Jesuits. Previous chapters have shown the extent to which Velázquez was trained in an environment steeped in Jesuit influence. It is important to note that having an interest in the new sciences at this historical juncture, however secular those interests might appear, meant that one entered a landscape where the order occupied a very similar position of prominence.

* * * *

Martin Kemp’s evaluation of Velázquez’ command of optics is worth quoting at some length:

In the popular and scholarly images of Velázquez, science is unlikely to enter into consideration at all. Yet we have more impressive evidence of his access to the exact sciences than for any other painter of the seventeenth century. On his death in 1660, inventories were drawn up of the contents of the suite of rooms he occupied in the Alcázar Palace in Madrid. These contained a library of 154 volumes. His holdings were relatively thin in fiction, poetry, and religion, but remarkably rich in the books which we have already encountered in the first chapters [in this, Kemp’s treatments of optics and the arts from “Brunelleschi to Seurat”].215

In this quotation Kemp, writing in 1990, acknowledges the persistence of scholars’ ‘unlettered’ Velázquez, or at least of a Velázquez whose learning is a matter of irrelevance to both the popular and scholarly opinion. He also echoes Sánchez Cantón’s emphasis on the painter’s scientific and technical interests, while likewise retaining the

215 Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, 104.
right to invoke the intellectually indifferent Velázquez on spiritual and theological matters. His personal library’s holdings are “thin” when it comes to “fiction, poetry, and religion,” the implication goes, so these must have been matters of comparatively little interest to the artist. One cannot refrain from wondering, under such a regime of bibliographic evaluation, why the painter bothered to make any acquisitions at all in subjects to which he was, apparently, so indifferent.

Looking down the inventory in order we find (with their inventory numbers): Luca Pacioli’s Summa d’aritmetica . . . (2); Aguilonius’s book (8); Durer’s treatise on proportion (11); Witelo on optics (13); Serlio on Architecture (16); Benedetti’s treatise on the gnomon (17); Zuccaro’s Idea . . . (30); Cousin’s treatise on perspective (35); a Spanish translation of Euclid’s books on optics and catoptrics (49); Daniele Barbaro on perspective (50); Tartaglia’s Works in Italian (56); Euclid’s Catroptics, in Italian (78); Guidobaldo on mechanics (82); the Perspectiva of Euclid, i.e. the Optics in Latin (91); Alberti’s Della Pittura, in Italian (or Latin?) (96); Egnatio Danti’s treatise on the astrolabe and planisphere (107); a Practica della perspectiva, possibly Vignola’s, whose Five Orders is next on the list (119 and 120); Tartaglia’s translation of Euclid’s Elements (132); Dürer’s treatise on measurement in Latin translation (141); and Leonardo da Vinci on painting, presumably the 1651 editio princeps from France (145). If we add to this list of already familiar works further writings in the same and related fields, including Cespedes’s Libros de instrumentos nuevos de geometria (Book of New Instruments of Geometry) (81), we have an astonishingly full bibliography of advanced learning in pure and applied geometry, perspective and those exact sciences which use projective techniques. Amongst his other appurtenances he also possessed ‘a little bronze instrument for producing lines’ (595), two compasses and ‘a thick round glass placed in a box’ (174, probably a camera obscura). And no less than ten mirrors!216

We return again to the work of Aguilonus. It is worth pointing out that François d’Agüilon was, along with authoring the volume Opticorum libri sex, and being a professor of the discipline examined in that book, the rector of the Jesuit house of the

216 Ibid., 104-5.
professed in Antwerp.\footnote{Ibid., 99-101. On Aguilonius, see Ziggelaar, \textit{François De Aguilon. Scientist and Artist}.} As already mentioned, his great textbook on optics has the distinction of having been illustrated by none other than Peter Paul Rubens, whose visit to Madrid had made such an impact on Velázquez and whose drawings were cut for Aguilonus’ volume by the great Flemish engraver Theodore Galle.\footnote{Kemp, \textit{The Science of Art : Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat}, 101.}

It is what Velázquez can be said to have made out of this state-of-the-art understanding of applied optics that permits us to judge the depth of his engagement with the texts he owned at the time of his death. Kemp demonstrates this depth of understanding by first offering a reading of \textit{Las Meninas}.\footnote{Ibid., 105-08.} Kemp’s reading need not concern us so much here as what emerges from the juxtaposition of this account of \textit{Las Meninas},

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{las_meninas_detail.png}
\caption{Las Meninas, detail.}
\end{figure}
Meninas with the work of Michelle Angelo Colonna and Agostino Mitelli, the two Italian painters recruited by Velázquez to produce the frescoes for the Salon Grande and other rooms of the Alcázar in Madrid. The frescoes are no longer extant, but the remarkable trompe l’oeil effects of the two Bolognese are amply attested to.\(^{220}\) It is important that in comparison with the effects achieved in the Salon Grande, Kemp uses Las Meninas to reveal the use made by Velázquez of similar techniques and principles to achieve effects of far greater subtlety and profundity:

Given Velázquez’ access to perspective science, this would represent a conscious choice. According to this interpretation he would be openly challenging the perceptual limitations of the Italians’ geometrical mechanics. They had painted ‘a little black boy going down a staircase looking like a real one’ using the traditional techniques of the illusionist decorators. By contrast, Velázquez’s man on the staircase is conjured up through a complex interplay of tone, color, definition, and scale. The bright patch of wall silhouetting the distant man—which optically draws the wall toward the spectator—and the more ghostly sfumato of the reflection in the mirror are to my mind quite deliberately juxtaposed. This is just one instance of Velázquez’s desire, manifested throughout the painting, to give a wider sense of the subtle processes of vision and how they can be magically evoked or paralleled in the medium of paint than was possible with the drier mechanisms of linear perspective and geometrical shadow projection. No painting was ever more concerned with ‘looking’—on the part of the painter, the figures in the painting, and the spectator. Velázquez’s art is a special kind of window on the world—or a perceptual mirror of nature—or perhaps even more literally in this instance his personal door to the subtle delights of natural vision and painted illusion.\(^{221}\)

Kemp selected Velázquez along with Rubens because both were:

\(^{220}\) Ibid., 105.

\(^{221}\) Ibid., 108.
major artists of high intelligence who experienced close contact with optical learning at an advanced level, who possessed a profound sense of the intellectual foundations of art, and yet whose paintings are almost devoid of conscious displays of constructional geometry.222

We might recall Palomino’s account of just how learned Velázquez was—an account of the authors from which the painter had gathered, with all the “diligence of a bee,” the learning that had made him a painter of such profound skill and knowledge.223

He takes care to mention Zuccaro’s Idea. Indeed, as the president of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, Federico Zuccaro held authoritative status. In 1607 he would write in this, the very text that Velázquez owned and that Palomino mentioned both by the author’s name and the title of the specific work, the Idea:

The art of painting does not derive from the mathematical sciences, nor has it any need to resort to them to learn rules or means for its own art, none even in order to reason abstractly about this art: for painting is not the daughter of mathematics but of Nature and of Drawing.224

222 Ibid., 99.

223 The Bee comparison has its origins in classical times. Both Seneca and Horace describe the rhetorician as gathering what is of value by means of imitation. Seneca, Epistles, 84.3-5.

'We must,' as they say, 'make like the bees': go all around the garden for suitable flowers, then back home to sort out the combs, and "stuff their cells/rooms with sweet nectar."

Seneca does not appear in Velázquez’ library as we have it in the inventory, but the Neostoicism of Justus Lipsius is a European phenomenon at this time. Horace, who is well represented in Velázquez’ library also uses the bee image in Ode, 4.2.

This is a testament to serious ambivalence. A tradition that privileged Vasari (another inhabitant of Velázquez’ library), was also a tradition that exalted Zuccaro’s *Idea*, and Zuccaro can be considered the most esteemed and successful artist of his generation. In Velázquez’ own day, this tradition, despite its roots in Vasari, could therefore endorse an eschewal of mathematics and perspectival exactitude in favor of *sprezzatura*—the nonchalance advocated by Castiglione in *Il Cortegiano* (1528), another occupant of Velázquez’ bookshelves. Indeed, the ambivalence is there in Vasari if we read carefully, as has Phillip Ball:

While paying lip service to the need to imitate nature, Vasari exhorts the painter to excel over nature and to develop a cultured eye before a facility with mathematics. In a declaration apt to endorse all manner of artistic snobbery, Vasari claims that the highest virtue of an artist—*grazia*, or grace—is a natural gift and not to be acquired by any amount of diligence. Such refinement is, he says, exemplified by works that hide any sign of the labor that went into them. Vasari dismisses Titian as too dutiful to nature (“some of whose aspects tend to be less than beautiful”) and upholds Raphael instead as an exponent of graceful color. He regards “German” (Gothic) art as particularly abhorrent—barbarous and full of “confusion and disorder.”

Ball locates Velázquez and his contemporaries in their relationship to the art theories of which they were inheritors, but also to the newly emerging scientific approach to observed phenomena:

> Painters of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries worked in a context constrained by a new religious intolerance yet over-heated by pious passion. They were acutely aware of the supreme achievements of their recent forebears, yet the

---

rules according to which those works were constructed had vanished. From this confounding maze each individual had to seek his own exit\textsuperscript{226}.

That Velázquez would have understood his artistic task in just these terms might seem like the wistful projection of theoreticians; nevertheless, Palomino, writing just after Velázquez’ death and having recourse to the living memory of the painter’s contemporaries recounts:

\begin{quote}
Everything that our Velázquez did at that time was in this vein, in order to distinguish himself from everyone else and follow a new trend. Knowing that Titian, Dürer, Raphael, and others had the advantage over him, their fame being greater now that they were dead, he had recourse to the fertility of his invention, and took to painting with bravado rustic subjects, with strange lighting and colors. Some people remonstrated with him because he did not paint more serious subjects with delicacy and beauty, in emulation of Raphael of Urbino, and he politely replied: \textit{That he preferred to be first in that kind of coarseness than second in delicacy}.\textsuperscript{227}
\end{quote}

In the seventeenth century everything worth doing had to have a Classical precedent—even innovation. It is with that in mind that Palomino buttresses his anecdote about the young Velázquez (in which subject matter, at least as much as style is identified as being in need of justification) by turning to Pliny’s \textit{Natural History}:

\begin{quote}
Certain painters have become famous for the eminence they achieved and the perfection of their taste in this type of painting. Not only our Velázquez had a fancy for such low themes; many others have been carried away by this taste and a special partiality for such subjects. Peiraikos, the famous painter of antiquity, according to Pliny, by choosing humble subjects achieved the greatest glory and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid.

highest esteem for his works, wherefore they gave him the nickname rhyparograpfos, a Greek expression meaning painter of low and coarse themes.\textsuperscript{228}

Palomino is telling us that Velázquez, in pursuit of the first rank of honor and recognition (remember we are told that this choice was made in furtherance of a goal), selected low subject matter and, as terms like “with bravado,” and “strange lighting and colors” would seem to indicate, an unprecedented style. Winkelmann would later address the ryparographer in the next century as well. In citing the example of Peiraikos, Palomino is merely echoing what Velázquez’ father-in-law Pacheco was at pains to tell us about a painter’s choices of style and subject matter—citing Peiraikos not once but twice. First in the tenth chapter, which addresses the place of color in the art of painting:

Porque hasta la antigüedad hubo esta diferencia entre los artífices; porque Plinio hace mención de un pintor llamado Pireico, que lo fue de cosas humildes (pero in aquel género de mucha fama), pintaba barberías, tiendas de oficiales, animals, yerbas y cosas semejantes, de donde le llamaron Riparógrafo; pero fueron muy estimadas y premiadas sus obras; que era como los que en este tiempo pintan pescaderías, bodegones, animales, frutas y países: que aunque sean grandes pintores en aquella parte, no aspiran a cosas mayores, con el gusto y facilidad que hallan en acomodada imitación y así, las repúblicas y reyes no so valen dellos en las cosas más honrosas y de mayor majestad y estudios, y no les hace mucha falta la ermosura y suavidad, aunque el relieve sí; mas, a los que están obligados a pintar ángeles, vírgenes y santos, y sobre todo a Cristo Nuestro Señor y a su Santísima Madre, y todas las sagradas historias, bien se ve la suavidad, belleza, decoro y todo lo demás que pretenece a los tales artífices. Y, pasando adelante, traigo una curiosidad de Leonardo de Vinci en uno de sus documentos:

<<He probado (dice) algunas veces no ser de poca utilidad cuando te hallas solo, a escuras en tu cama, andar con la imaginación repitiendo los lineamientos superficiales de las formas estudiadas, para confirmar las cosas más in la memoria.>>\textsuperscript{229}

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{229} Pacheco, \textit{Arte De La Pintura, Su Antigüedad y Grandezas (1649)}, 407.
Because even in Antiquity, there was this distinction among artists; for Pliny mentioned a painter called Peiraikos, who was a painter of humble things (but in that genre much admired). He painted barber shops. Shop stalls, animals, gourds, and such things, by reason of which they called him rhyparographos. But his works were highly esteemed and acclaimed, for his works were like those made today by those who depict fish markets, bodegones, still lifes, and landscapes. Though they may be great painters in that genre, they do not aspire to great things with the same taste and facility that they bring to mere imitation, and thus, republics and kings do not concede to them the things most honored and of greatest majesty to undertake. They have little use for beauty or refinement, though they do show these in their drawing. Further, those that are obligated to paint angels, virgins and saints, and above all, our lord Jesus Christ and his most Holy Mother, and the sacred histories, do indeed show refinement, beauty, decorum, and all the rest that pertains to artists. And, moving on, I bring a curiosity from Leonardo da Vinci in one of his documents:

“I have proven (he says) a few times that it is of some use, when you are alone, in the dark of your bed, with the imagination to repeat superficial lines of the forms one has studied, the better to fix them in the memory.”

[the translation is my own]

Though, peculiarly, in this first citation of Pliny’s rhyparographer (who, Pacheco grants, achieved considerable fame), we are told by Velázquez’ master that their selection of low subject matter has led other such painters, even when quite talented, to be neglected and left without honor in both “republics and monarchies.” The quotation from Leonardo, which may indeed seem like a non sequitur, should detain us when we think of the genre under discussion—one in which surprising, vivid and even distasteful things are depicted. It is here that Pacheco chooses to inject a bit of advice from Leonardo in which the time spent in our darkened beds can be used to fix forms of things better in our memories.230 There is more going on here, it seems, than Pacheco wrestling with his ambivalence about genre painting!

Pacheco’s second mention of Peiraikos bears careful reading as well:

Shall we find a painter of antiquity who was inclined to these common and humorous things? It seems so, since Pliny mentions one named Dionysus, nicknamed Anthropograpfo, who painted only ludicrous figures [Book XXXV, Chapter 113]. Among them was a memorable figure in a ridiculous habit. His name was Grilo, and this kind of painting took its name from him, and it is known as grilo. Peiraikos is mentioned in the same place; he painted humble things such as barber’s shops, foods, and similar things, for which he was given the name “painter of sordid subjects”; these paintings gave great delight and in this the artist achieved his highest glory.231

And within a very few lines Pacheco tackles the issue of whether such subject matter can, whatever fame may have accrued to Peiraikos, honorably occupy a painter of talent:

Well, then, are bodegones unworthy of esteem? It is very clear that indeed they should be praised if they are painted as my son-in-law paints them, achieving such superiority in this that no place is left for others; his works merit the greatest esteem. It was from these beginnings and from portraits, of which we shall speak later, that he discovered how to copy nature accurately, inspiring the valiant efforts of many with his powerful example. I too have done something of this kind of work; once, to please a friend, I ventured to paint a small canvas with two figures from life, with flowers, fruits and other trifles. This was while I was in Madrid, in the year 1625, and my learned friend Francisco de Rioja has the picture today. The imitation of nature was so successful in this case, that other things I have painted seem copies of that work.232

In her most recent book on Velázquez, Svetlana Alpers cites yet another use of the Peiraikos trope in association with a contemporary painter who is almost certainly Velázquez:


232 Ibid., 97.
Baltasar Gracián (1601-1658), a Jesuit, was a Spanish writer of courtesy books who is not unfamiliar to students of Velázquez. It has been supposed that Velázquez is the artist that Gracián refers to in his first book, *El héroe* (1637), when he describes a "galante pintor" who, avoiding the path of Raphael or Titian, preferred to be first in his kind of coarseness rather than second in delicacy. In addition, Gracián's verbal wit, his aphoristic style, and his praise of brevity have been likened, not wrongly, to Velázquez's way of painting.233

So Velázquez and Peiraikos are linked in the minds of the former's contemporaries as early as 1637, and, in the painter's own library, the basis for this comparison can be found in the multiple editions of Pliny that the painter possessed.

Pliny tells us that the rhyparographer succeeds in being valued even more highly than those masters who have chosen more exalted subject matter:

> Among these was Peiraikos, to be ranked below few painters in skill; it is possible that he won distinction by his choice of subjects . . . although adopting a humble line he attained in that field the height of glory [summa gloria]. He painted barbers' shops and cobblers' stalls, asses, viands and the like, consequently receiving a Greek name meaning "painter of sordid subjects [rhyparographos]"; in these however he gives exquisite pleasure [consummata voluptas] and indeed they fetched bigger prices than the largest works of many masters.234

We can only speculate that Velázquez might also have read Rabelais' notorious reintroduction of Peiraikos:

> As when formerly Apollo had distributed all the treasures of his poetical exchequer to his favorites, little hunchbacked Aesop got for himself the office of apologue-monger; in the same manner, since I do not aspire higher, they would

---


not deny me that of puny rhyparographer, or riffraff follower of the sect of Peiraikos.\textsuperscript{235}

For Velázquez to join this ‘sect of Peiraikos,’ then, is an attempt to claim primacy in a style within which reaching the heights of prestige and of excellence is still possible.\textsuperscript{236}

* * *

This treatment of the library of Velázquez—what its texts would have meant to him as a reader and as a painter, the history of interpreting those possibilities, and finally,

\textsuperscript{235} François Rabelais, \textit{Gargantua and Pantagruel}, trans. Peter Antony Motteux (Moray Press, 1894), Prologue, Book 5.

\textsuperscript{236} The example of Peiraikos would haunt innovators in painting down to the previous century, when we find Paul Klee writing in his diary:

Artist-martyrs of antiquity. (Laökoon, chapter 2, paragraph 3). as if the Greeks had not had their Pauson, their Peiraikos. They did have them, but treated them with stern justice . . . Pauson . . . , whose low taste delighted in expressing what was most faulty and ugly in man's appearance, lived in abject misery. And Pyricus, who painted barbershops, dirty workrooms, jackasses . . . with the zeal of a Dutch artist, as if such things in nature had indeed great charm and were seldom seen, received the nickname “Rhyparographer” (painter of dirt), although the luxury-loving rich paid for his works their weight in gold . . . the authorities themselves thought it not unworthy of their attention to restrain the artist forcibly within his true sphere. The Theban law is well known which ordered him to make his models more beautiful than they were and prescribed punishment for portraits that made them uglier. It was not a law aimed at ignorant daubers, as is usually thought by commentators, even by Junius (“de pictura . . .”). It condemned the Greek ghezzi, the clever trick of getting a resemblance by emphasizing the ugly features of a model, in a word: caricature.

the revision that project should undergo, is merely the beginning. The painter’s position at court, and the testament to his learning that his private library represents, must raise several questions regarding his access to and interest in the contents of the library assembled in the tower of the Alcázar for the edification of the young King Philip IV—one of the more impressive libraries in Europe at the time.  

The final concept to trace through Velázquez’ production and this library is the stylistic element/technique (and we will deal with it more completely as technique in the upcoming chapter) known as sfumato. Its invention is credited to Leonardo, whose treatise on painting is a fixture of Velázquez’ library and is in one form or another (as has already been discussed) a powerful source for Pacheco. For Leonardo, sfumato is "without lines or borders, in the manner of smoke or beyond the focus plane," and is

![Figure 20. Andrea del Sarto, The Redeemer, 1515, oil on panel, 44 X 27 cm, SS Annunziata, Florence](image)

---

237 Fernando Bouza, *El Libro Y El Cetro. La Biblioteca De Felipe IV En La Torre Alta Del Alcázar De Madrid* (Salamanca: Instituto de Historia del Libro y de la Lectura, 2005).

generally understood in the handling of oil paint to be the effect produced when washes of translucent layers of color are overlain to create the perception of depth, volume and form. In particular, this is accomplished by blending tones so subtly that all perceptible transition disappears.

The example of the phenomenon that has been cited into utter cliché is, of course, the smile of the *Mona Lisa*, or perhaps the aerial perspective effects in the background of both the *Mona Lisa* and the *Virgin of the Rocks*.

The bifurcation into sacred and profane branches of the development of images made manifest by way of *sfumato*, is laid out by Andreas Prater in *Venus at her Mirror*.239

In the small *Redeemer* that serves as the tabernacle door at SS Annunziata in Florence, the work of Andrea del Sarto [Figure 20], the *sfumato*:

. . . not only lends transparency to the physical boundaries, but also makes the aesthetic boundary between image and observer permeable. In this way, the originally distanced appearance reveals the possibility of experiencing the emergence and approach of the figure out of the darkness of the background as a floating state that suggests an intimate vision. The *sfumato* thus functions as a gentle flow that permits the transportation and exchange of feelings and emotions. It does not place new accents of content, nor does it create a narrative expansion of the theme, but forges a link to the soul of the viewer through its aesthetic appearance alone.

The last portion bears repeating: “It [the *sfumato* manner] does not place new accents of content, nor does it create a narrative expansion of the theme.” The image is related to in a new and intimate way, purely based on an alteration in style “through its aesthetic appearance alone.” What is more, this different way of relating to the viewer on the part

---

239 Prater, *Venus at Her Mirror : Velázquez, and the Art of Nude Painting*, 67-84. with special attention to those sections subtitled “Sensualist Sfumato” and “Spanish Sfumato.”
of the image is specifically one in which the “transportation and exchange of feelings and emotions” are facilitated; and this, because the smoky image offers itself as an “intimate vision,” because the image emerges and approaches “out of the darkness of the background.” Here we are encountering an optically sophisticated manifestation of the image that works quite differently from those that emerge under strict mathematical perspective. *Sfumato*’s efficacy for “transportation and exchange of feelings and emotions” gives it a natural resonance with the internal images in Jesuit-style meditation.

Prater traces the importation of Leonardesque *sfumato* into Spain by way of Valencia, being carried in the work of Alonso Berruguete and then Luis Morales.\(^{240}\) And on the Iberian scene, it became an aspect very particularly of religious painting. The blurring or ‘smoking’ (the Spanish translation of *sfumato* being *ahumado*) was thus not only available to Velázquez through its Spanish line of descent (and, indeed through his ownership of Leonardo’s treatise), but also by means of his ownership of a copy of the *Iconologia* of Cesare Ripa (most likely the second edition published in 1603). The allegorical emblem of *Belleza* in the *Iconologia*, counsels that the depiction of Beauty as a personified concept always be shown with her face veiled in smoke. How the image that is indeterminate engages an erotic circuit between viewer and image is a matter to be examined at greater length in the upcoming chapter on technique, but it suffices here that the repression of contour and outline and the resultant allowance for the image to boil up out of its background is linked, especially in Spain, with images of a devotional character, and that this tendency is reinforced by certain currents present in the humanist literature on profane, mythological, and allegorical imagery.

\(^{240}\) Ibid., 69.
The final task is to draw into context the two titles that, in their lonely disproportion to the mathematical and scientific content of Velázquez’ library, demonstrate for Sánchez Cantón the painter’s utter disinclination to the mystical or the devotional. To start with, the standard for inclusion of books of a devotional nature may be rather too strict. The inventory lists, for example, a text that is an account of the festivities held in Seville in 1611 to commemorate the beatification of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order and author of its constitution as well as of the *Spiritual Exercises*. While not strictly speaking a devotional work, it is a text rich in relevance and associations with devotional practice in Seville, especially as practiced and supported by the Society of Jesus.\(^{241}\)

Velázquez also owned the *Empresas Espirituales y Morales* by Juan Francisco de Villava, a clergyman from Jaen.\(^{242}\) Such emblems were implemented by the reader in a manner very much like that advocated by the *Spiritual Exercises*, and endorsed by other mystically inclined orders. Indeed, Jesuit emblem books were a very prominent and popular publishing phenomenon in the seventeenth century.\(^{243}\) If the title might not be classified by the strictest of bibliographers under “devotional works,” the entry on this text by Pedro Ruiz Pérez, in his catalog of the bibliographic exhibition on Velázquez’

---

\(^{241}\) Entry 90, Luque Fajardo, *Relacion de la fiesta que se hizo en Seivilla a la Beatificacion del glorioso san Ygnacio de Loyola*, in Ruiz Pérez, *De La Pintura y Las Letras. La Biblioteca De Velázquez*, 232-33.

\(^{242}\) Entry 97, Juan Francisco de Villava, *Empresas Espirituales y Morales*, in Ibid., 246-7.


123
library held by the Casa de Murillo in 1999 makes it clear that such a categorization could certainly be defended:

De los tres libros, el primero es dedicada a la explicatación de las virtudes, a partir de los rasgos de Cristo; el segundo trata de los vicios, incluyendo los enemigos del alma, los pecados capitales y los defectos que van contra la cortesania y la discretion; el último se consituye en una ampia explicación de la primera empresa, la única que incorpora un componente narrativo de resabios clasicos. 244

Of the three volumes, the first is dedicated to the explication of the virtues by means of the wounds of Christ. The second deals with the vices, including those that most go against courtesy and discretion. The last concerns the first edition, the version that incorporated a narrative component on the sages of antiquity.

Of the two works that Sanchez Cantón indisputably categorizes as libros devotos, the first is El Microcosmo y gobierno universal del hombre cristiano (The Microcosm and the Universal Government of the Christian Man) by Fray Marco Antonio de Camo. Ruiz Pérez seems correct in assessing this work as being primarily of interest as an expression of the conservative view of the place of the artist (among the mechanical arts) that Velázquez would have had strong interest in rejecting. He suggests it is present in the library as a pendant to Gaspar Gutierrez de los Rios’s Noticia general para la estimacion de las artes,245 though the catalog entry scarcely addresses its devotional agenda. The second is De la Pasión de Nuestro Señor Jesuchristo (The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ), by Lucas de Soria. Soria is a canon of the cathedral in Seville. This book is of a very different nature than the ones that have detained us thus far in our examination of

244 Ruiz Pérez, De La Pintura y Las Letras. La Biblioteca De Velázquez, 246.

245 Ibid., 210.
Velázquez’ library. It is a book containing a practice, rather than arguments or information (though it contains these as well). The Casa Murillo catalog sums up its character:

The text discourses with the prolixity proper to the Baroque devotion and spirituality of a theological treatise and spiritual exercises, with its combination of the narration of sacred history and the ‘composition of place.’ Its material could serve as well for the *inventio* of its pictorial text or for devotional exaltation, nourished by the naturalistic treatment of the evangelical events and directed towards awakening the lively sentiments and emotions of those who receive them, just as the counterreformation preachers sought to achieve. One is struck by its editorial austerity, with no illustrations, relying on the sheer force of its own rhetoric to achieve the evocations it seeks.

I have throughout sought to bear in mind that we have a list of only the books found in Velázquez’ home at the time of his death—not all the books he is likely to have read, not all the books he may have owned. We have no record of what he thought about what he read in these books, and speculation should be curbed when possible and qualified when undertaken. We do know that the sophistication of his engagement with some of these texts is borne out to a certain extent by the way we see the topics found in these texts applied in his paintings. We also know that the association of Velázquez with the ancient painter briefly mentioned in Pliny, Peiraikos the rhyparogarpher, was one

---

246 Ibid., 88.
established early among his contemporaries and repeated often by those seeking to explain the special character of his work. We know that his engagement with Leonardo’s writing, particularly with the concept of *sfumato*, is tantalizingly expressed in several of his works and can be plausibly linked with the “new style” that is invariably twined with the “low subject matter” that make up the Peiraikos trope. We must also admit that the irreligious Velázquez, whether or not he existed, is less easily established on the basis of his library than has hitherto been assumed.
Chapter 4

Technique, Style, and the Nature of the Image

Sir Ernst Gombrich once famously wrote:

[T]he field of art history [is] much like Caesar’s Gaul, divided into three parts inhabited by three different, though not necessarily hostile tribes: the connoisseurs, the critics and the academic art historians.247

This chapter draws upon the perspectives of all three of these ‘tribes.’ The topic is the understanding of style and technique in Velázquez’ oeuvre. It does not offer new scientific data. Rather I seek to contextualize Velázquez’ practice within the culture of seeing and thinking about vision that were peculiar to his time and place. The effects that Velázquez’ techniques serve to produce have far more to do with liminality than exactitude in representation. They are no less transcriptions of the experience of vision for this, but to analyze them, a somewhat indirect approach may prove useful. In this chapter, for example, I juxtapose Velázquez’ bodegones with the still lifes of a painter from the preceding generation: Juan Sánchez Cotán. In this way we can examine what is unique in Velázquez’ work against the background of a useful concept—that of a Spanish vision—a visual mode that is recognizably Spanish over time. I am well aware of the potential pitfalls of such an approach, so this chapter will also include a critique of the concept of Spanish vision, especially as presented in Robert Havard’s The Spanish Eye.

Velázquez’ technique is the vehicle of his style. The extent to which the painter’s style can be seen to bear and interact with meaning is our focus here.

Velázquez works within a clearly recognizable set of traditions. It grows out of, and concerns itself with, problems set by his immediate predecessors and older contemporaries, artists active in Seville, but also the great Venetian painters so esteemed by the Spanish Hapsburgs, and the larger discourse of the Southern Baroque. All of these traditions involved the painter in those matters most hotly debated in the art theory of the period. What Velázquez made of the issues debated in his day is hard to recover, however. This is so despite his having achieved considerable critical success even outside of Spain. The ambivalence that went along with the acclaim the painter came to know during his second Italian journey is encapsulated in the anecdote Palomino tells us of Pope Innocent X’s response to Velázquez’ astonishing portrait, now in the Doria Pamphlij Gallery in Rome: ‘Troppu Vero,’ the Pontiff is reported to have let slip—‘too true.’

In 1988, Gridley McKim-Smith wrote that the art theory of seventeenth-century Spain had received substantially less attention from scholars, including among Spaniards, than that of Italy and the Netherlands. She might have added France, where Nicolas Poussin’s work was soon to be theorized by the Royal Academy into something resembling an ideology, so powerful was its hold on the French aesthetic imagination:

---

248 Robert Enggass and Jonathan Brown, *Italian and Spanish Art, 1600-1750: Sources and Documents* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992), Philip L. Sohm, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Both serve as surveys of what was and was not the explicit subject of theoretical debate.


For Ingres, for instance, Poussin was a model of classical composition, surpassed only by Raphael and the Antique; Degas saw in him "purity of drawing, breadth of modeling, and grandeur of composition"; Cézanne aimed at revivifying Poussin's formal perfection by a renewed contact with nature; and the early Cubists saw in him the near-abstract qualities which they themselves sought.  

No such lineage goes back to Velázquez in Spain. He left behind no school, and with the passing of the generation that knew him, even his technique and style were steeped in oblivion. With the exception of Goya’s sincere admiration and some positive if patronizing remarks from Anton Raphael Mengs, it is Manet who must re-instruct the Spaniards in the worthiness of Velázquez’ example. With the replacement of the Hapsburg dynasty by the Bourbons, whatever environment there might have been for an unbroken and living tradition coming out of Velázquez’ oeuvre disappeared. With regard to modern scholarly attention to the theory that animated this moment, despite the revision initiated by McKim-Smith, Brown, Garrido, Véliz (specifically in relation to Velázquez), and the very important work of Giles Knox at Indiana University, the sheer scope of the head start that these other bodies of national theory have received is such that a great deal of the work on Spanish Baroque art theory is still under way. Much of it waits on further scientific analysis of those works that make up the


art historical record since, as McKim-Smith makes clear, theoretical texts and workshop practice seem to have diverged more sharply in Spain than in many other parts of Europe.\footnote{Just one example being the claims made about the desirability and use of pigments that, while rich in associations with Antiquity and with a conception of the artists’ role that Spanish painters were at great pains to endorse and advocate, bear little or no resemblance to actual pigments revealed through technical analysis. See McKim-Smith et al., *Examining Velázquez*, 8-9.} All this despite the fact that, as Stoichita has amply demonstrated,\footnote{See pages 67-8, and footnote 133 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.} Spanish image-making becomes one of the more self-consciously theorized in the Western tradition.

Though in the Spanish golden age we have art that is theorized, it is also peculiarly prone to diverge from this theory in its practice. Though somewhat prejudicially neglected by scholars, to understand technique in the work of a major artist of this period, and to do so without practicing mere formalism, we must rely with great care and considerable skepticism on the theoretical texts of the day. To rely solely on the Spanish texts will prove unhelpful. We must, therefore turn, if only to supplement what we have from Spain, to some of the art writing coming out of Italy at this same time.

*    *    *

We would do well to take stock of what we know about Velázquez’ medium of choice: oil paint. We should also take into account what he could have known about it:
A painting is made of paint—of fluids and stone—and paint has its own logic, and its own meanings even before it is shaped into the head of a Madonna. To an artist, a picture is both a sum of ideas and a blurry memory of “pushing paint,” breathing fumes, dripping oils and wiping brushes, smearing and diluting and mixing. Bleary preverbal thoughts are intermixed with the nameable concepts, figures and forms that are being represented. The material memories are not usually part of what is said about a picture, and that is a fault in interpretation because every painting captures a certain resistance of paint, a prodding gesture of the brush, a speed and insistence in the face of mindless matter: and it does so at the same moment, and in the same thought, as it captures the expression of a face.\textsuperscript{255}

The passage quoted above comes from James Elkins’ \textit{What Painting Is}. In its attempt to re-engage painting as a material practice (one that was once encountered without reference to the categories and presumptions of modern chemistry and material science, and that is still largely experienced as such by painters today), the book has done a great service to historians of oil painting in particular. He calls upon us to forget for a time what we think we know about the material that is the substantial matrix of the images we write about, so that we may better imagine how that substance was encountered by the painters whose approach we are seeking to understand. Elkins provides an illuminative comparison between painting as practiced by the artist and two other practices that were not systematic (as we have come to understand the term), but based always in the encounter with the gritty, particular and substantial nature of the thing: Alchemy and Numerology.

A reductive, but perhaps useful definition of Alchemy is \textit{what chemistry was before it became scientific}. It was a practice that sought to understand material substances according to correspondences and associations that today we would recognize as

basically esthetic rather than practical. Its most clichéd goal was the transmutation of base metals into gold. For Elkins, however, “It is an encounter with the substances in the world around us, an encounter that is not veiled by science.”256 The language in which alchemists expressed their formulae may have approached *gongorismo* in its elaborate and obscure web of reference, but, make no mistake, it was about substances minutely observed—naturalism at its most sincere.257

As regards Numerology, in this mode of understanding, even something as abstract as number can come to be known by its particulars—by precisely those qualities relegated to the category of ‘accidental’ under the classical Aristotelian order:

> Numbers unfold their peculiarities to people who think about them as individuals, instead of as anonymous markers on a notched line leading to infinity. Numerology can also be found in philosophy and the humanities, with their nearly mystical interest in twos and threes . . . and even today postmodern theorists shy away from “reductive dualities” and search for ideas that call for larger congregations of numbers.258

---

256 Ibid., 7.

257 The work of Historian of Science, Bill Newman on Isaac Newton’s Alchemical notebooks has revealed how much alchemical allegory ends up amounting to very accurate laboratory notes suitably poeticized to confound the uninitiated. See his website at the University of Indiana: http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/newton/


What can be true even of numbers, can also serve as an intuitively satisfying approach to knowing materials. While any painter seriously engaged in their practice can be seen as participating in this ‘alchemical attitude,’ there are painters for whom the tensions of this encounter are paramount:

Less interesting painters do not know what to do with the choice between substance and illusion. Poor painting does not push the equivocation as far as it can go, until the paint teeters on the edge of transcendence. An unsuccessful picture might have a passage where the paint doesn’t matter at all, and the forms might just as well have been photographed instead of rendered in oil. Then in another place the paint might suddenly become obtrusive, and distract the viewer from the contemplation of some distant landscape, bringing the eye sharply back to the surface of the canvas. It may be that the human mind can only think of one aspect at a time: either a painting is what it represents or it is a fabrication done on a flat surface. Or perhaps it is possible to think of both the surface and what seems to be behind it at once, in a “twofoldness” of attention . . .

It is in this useful reminder about the medium employed by an artist, and the manner of its employment, that we find an insight of special applicability for Velázquez’ work:

“Science has closed off almost every unsystematic encounter with the world. Alchemy and painting are two of the last remaining paths into the deliriously beautiful world of unnamed substances.”

Arthur Danto, not an art historian, but a critic, philosopher, and especially in the medium of the woodcut, an artist with his own practice, gives clearest utterance to the implication of Velázquez’ esthetic project as one embedded in the materiality of the paint he employs. In his review for the Velázquez exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of

259 Ibid., 187-8.

260 Ibid., 199.
Art in 1989, Danto insightfully recognizes the role of the materiality of the paint in Velázquez work, such that it cannot be discussed in terms merely of realism or naturalism:

He [Velázquez] was not bent on illusion and in fact had some sense of his limitations in bringing illusions off. What he meant to show was what he could do with paint; it was essential to the shock that it be perceived as paint and not misperceived as flesh.261

Note that realism/naturalism is not absent from the equation—it is necessary but not sufficient to Danto’s understanding of Velázquez’ achievement:

Viewers were meant to be astounded that anyone could generate out of visible flecks and dabs of white paint a lavish confection of lace. At no point was illusion a possibility. Nobody, looking at Pareja’s mop of hair, would think it real hair. Everyone would see it as smudges of paint of indeterminate color that, without giving up their identity as paint, miraculously became the wiry coiffure of an exotic man.262

This naturalist component has a clear genealogy in golden age Spanish image-making. It is Velázquez’ transubstantiative treatment of this component that Danto identifies. This treatment amounts to a style.

*   *   *

Bryson’s Cotán, Bryson’s Loyola


262 Ibid., 47.
The identification of this quality we seek to isolate in the Spanish making of images, along with the connection between it and the cultivation of a mystical experience (also Spanish in ‘style’), must be credited to Norman Bryson. In his 1990 collection of essays on still life, he defines a structure whereby the Spanish attitude towards image construction can be seen as a kind of unity under which the making of paintings, poetical imagery, polychrome sculpture, and even the ultimate ephemera—images composed for strictly internal delectation—can all be subsumed. In the second chapter of his book, *Looking at the Overlooked*, he addresses the still life in its Spanish manifestations.263

Having dealt in his first chapter with Antiquity’s equivalent to the still-life, the *xenia*, discussed by Pliny and Philostratus, Bryson notes how the ancient genre “share[s] a striking and defining feature with all the late forms of still life painting: the exclusion of the human form.”264 We should be cautious not to assume perfect identity between the *xenia* that we can see today (in the frescoes on the walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum) and the works discussed in the *Naturalis Historia* or the *Imagenes*265—and certainly not with still lifes properly so called. These *xenia* were more likely to be panel paintings (and in the case of the *Imagenes* may not have described actual, existent works of art at all266). Still, Bryson says of each of the four styles of Roman wall painting (a division first


264 Ibid., 60.


266 Ibid.
proposed by August Mau in 1882 that each makes essential use of *xenia* elements and “in each style what is actual (the experience of local interior space) is invaded by a

![Image of still life with fruit and a rooster]

**Figure 21.** Associated Press, appears in BBC News/Europe, "Stolen Pompeii frescoes found," Tuesday, 8 April, 2003.

principle of irrealisation or fiction.”

---

267 *Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji*. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1882


To *invade* is to commit an act of aggression. For Bryson, the absence of a line of transmission from the *xenia* of Antiquity to the still-lifes of the *siglo de oro* in no way disqualifies the Spanish paintings from inheriting this aggressive and subversive agenda within image-making. If we cannot historicize the persistence of this tendency, we must consider the possibility that it is an inherent trait (or at least tendency) of this particular mode of image-making.
*Historia* as a genre concerns itself with idealizing the human figure, the portrait with that figure as it is. The still life, by excluding that figure “negates the whole process of constructing and asserting human beings as the primary focus of depiction.”

Opposing the anthropocentrism of the ‘higher’ genres, it assaults the centrality, value and prestige of the human subject . . . Removal of the human body is the founding move of Still life, but this foundation would be precarious if all that were needed to destroy it were the body’s physical return: the disappearance of the human subject might represent only a provisional state of affairs if the body is just around the corner, and likely to re-enter the field of vision at any moment. Human presence is not only expelled physically: Still life also expels the values which human presence imposes on the world.

It is to this “wholesale eviction of the Event [i.e. Narrative],” that Bryson attributes the fundamentally radical role of still life within the structure of image-making.

Bryson applies Charles Sterling’s binary distinction: ‘megalography’ versus ‘rhopography’ (a term closely related to *rhyparography*, the genre of Peiraikos). Megalography—the depiction of greatness; the dramatic and the heroic, opposes but also requires the rhopographic—where humble, everyday facets of existence—“the unassuming, material base of life that ‘importance’ overlooks,” is depicted. The corrosive effect of rhopography is held in check in the *xenia* of Antiquity by embedding

---

269 Ibid., 60.

270 Ibid.


272 See note on Piraeicus the Rhyparographer in previous chapter. Also, in the relationship between the two terms, cf. Bryson, note 3, 182-183.

them in a kind of dialogue between necessity and scarcity on the one hand and luxury and sophisticated abundance on the other. 274 “It is in the monastic culture of seventeenth-century Spain that rhopography’s potential for overturning the scale of human importance is first revealed.”275 And it is this “fuller development” of the still life that is enabled by the “disappearance of this classical balance and moderation.”276

Figure 22. Juan Sánchez Cotán, *Still Life with Game Fowl, Vegetables and Fruits*, 1602, Museo del Prado, Madrid

What is sublimated in the *xenia* of antiquity erupts in the *bodegones* of Juan Sánchez Cotán [Figure 22]. These are works “conceived from the beginning as exercises in the

274 See Ibid., 46-53.
275 Ibid., 63.
276 Ibid.
renunciation of normal human priorities. Bryson first seeks to clarify this inversion of values represented by Cotán’s still lifes by comparing them to Velázquez’ *Las Meninas*.  

Cotán’s *bodegónes* accomplish their inversion of the regnant values of other genres (e.g. history painting) by means of either a ‘descending’ or ‘ascending’ process. The ascending process amounts to “a humiliation of attention and of the self.” The ‘descending scale’ is one wherein “attention itself gains the powers to transfigure the commonplace, and it is rewarded by being given objects in which it may find a fascination commensurate with its own discovered strengths.”

For the monk Cotán our visual faculty is no different from the rest of our faculties—corrupted and diverted from their proper purpose. The still lifes are tools for the re-education of human vision: the means by which this is accomplished is “hyperreality,” the “antidote” Cotán administers against “the vices of fallen vision.” It is through a “surplus of appearances” and “excess of focus and brilliance” that we are

277 Ibid.

278 This need not discourage us. The comparison between the social hierarchy of the court embodied in *Las Meninas* and those theaters of sheer immanence that Cotán’s minutely observed assemblages amount to is a valid one. We will come to see how this commitment to immanence informs even *Las Meninas* itself—transfiguring the human figure that is excluded by Cotán but later readmitted by his fellows.


280 Ibid.

281 Ibid.
inculcated with Cotán’s own sense of vision as “inherently wayward, yet capable of correction.”

We can say, then, that the rhopographic impulse is corrosive of transcendence—the higher meaning that animates other genres of image. It can, however, outside of its semiotic interaction with other image genres, wherein its function is negative and subversive, be viewed as having a positive function. Mapping the conception of vision embodied in Cotán’s still lifes onto the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, this function emerges. It endorses and instantiates immanence.

We have already mentioned Loyola’s “teacher’s manual” for spiritual directors, but it will be valuable to rehearse Bryson’s particular take on the document. It owes a great deal to that of Roland Barthes in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. Primarily, Bryson understands the *Exercises* to share a basic “suspicion” of the unreformed imagination:

> Before coming to the retreat and learning the exercises in visualization, the subjects’ mode of vision is assumed to be passive: desire pulls the eye this way and that; no object emerges clearly, since before it can do so it is already darting to the next form that seduces it; the images which appear are in a constant state of eclipse and fading. Vision has no internal resources to assert against the permanent tug of desire: sight is ensnared in the world, caught in pathways that cannot get out of, following tracks laid down in advance by the world’s show.

---

282 Ibid.


284 Ibid., 65.
Images of the kind constructed during the *Spiritual Exercises* must be sustainable in the retreatant’s attention: in one case, we are told to hold an image before our mind’s eye for as long as it normally takes to recite three *Ave Marias*.\(^{285}\)

Of course, the *Exercises* do not abolish either the human figure, or the narratives of sacred history, or the transcendental themes of the Catholic faith. For example, to vividly imagine Hell complete with unquenchable fires and the stench of sulfur, together with one’s place in it, is to heavily invoke all three. However, the reform of vision necessary in order to adequately sustain such an image is wonderfully exemplified in any number of Cotán’s *bodegónes*:

Histories. Cotán supplies forms that are articulated at immense length, forms so copious or prolix that one cannot see where or how to begin to simplify them. They offer no inroads for reduction because they omit nothing. Just at the point where the eye thinks it knows the form and can afford to skip, the image proves that, in fact, the eye had not understood at all what it was about to discard.\(^{286}\)

As a lay brother with the Carthusians, Cotán not only belongs to an order where solitary contemplation is the special mission of the order, but he is close to the very roots of the Ignatian tradition. Loyola had famously composed his *Exercises* upon spending the convalescence following his wounding at Pamplona with a work by Ludolphus of Saxony. He was most emphatically influenced by the *Vita Jesu Christi* attributed to Ludolphus—the Carthusian monk, most likely born in Saxony, who lived during the fourteenth century in Mainz. He wrote the work for which he is best known, a life of

---


\(^{286}\) Ibid.
Christ, told in a suggestive manner meant to inspire powerful sentiments of piety and devotion, and his influence in Spain, especially upon Ignatius Loyola, has already been discussed.\textsuperscript{287}

In Cotán’s still lifes we encounter the \textit{cantarero}—the cooling space—in which foodstuffs really were often hung from strings (laying them on surfaces would have accelerated decomposition). The \textit{cantarero} cannot help but conjure association with the Carthusians’ treatment of its members—each brother had his own cell, even eating in solitude; the night office and the Mass being the only communal activity in their daily lives.\textsuperscript{288}

The interest that the subject matter in these images would normally have sustained by their status as nourishment and objects of desire is meant to be replaced, at least partially, by their mathematical relationship to one another.\textsuperscript{289} “One can think of \textit{Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber} \textbf{[Figure. 23]} as an experiment in the kind of transformations that are explored in the branch of mathematics known as topology.”\textsuperscript{290}

\textsuperscript{287} The sources, acknowledged and unacknowledged in the image-based devotional practice of the Jesuits and of their Spanish contemporaries (Carmelite, Carthusian and others) are fascinating. The temptation to speculate is strong; that Islamic (Sufi) mystical practice and Jewish Kabala involve disciplined visualization and ecstatic meditation and had a long history on the peninsula is inarguable. That they may well have had a vestigial existence even among Christian believers of Ignatius’ generation is plausible, but finally, we can only speculate. However, the connection to \textit{el cartujo}—as Ludolphus was known in Spain, is clear and acknowledged by Ignatius at the time.

\textsuperscript{288} Bryson, \textit{Looking at the Overlooked : Four Essays on Still Life Painting}, 66.

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 66-69. Bryson relies on Martin S. Soria, "Juan Sanchez Cotan's \textit{Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber}," \textit{Art Quarterly} VIII (1945).

\textsuperscript{290} Bryson, \textit{Looking at the Overlooked : Four Essays on Still Life Painting}, 66-69. Topology (Greek topos, "place," and logos, "study") is the branch of mathematics that studies the properties of a space that are preserved under continuous deformations.
It is here that we may recognize another aspect of the rhopographic image—its identity as an artifact of geometrical analysis:

Geometric space replaces creatural space, the space around the body that is known by touch and is created by familiar movements of the hands and arms. Cotán’s play . . . replaces this cocoon-like space, defined by habitual gestures, with an abstracted and homogeneous space which has broken with the matrix of the body. This is the point: to suppress the body as a source of space. That bodily or tactile space is profoundly unvisual: the things we find there are things were [sic] reach for—a knife, a plate, a bit of food—instinctively and almost without looking. It is this space, the true home of blurred and hazy vision, that Cotán’s rigours aim to abolish.291

Topology grew out of geometry, but unlike geometry, topology is not concerned with metric properties such as distances between points. Instead, topology involves the study of properties that describe how a space is assembled, such as connectedness and orientability.

291 Ibid., 70.
The reader with a knowledge of Velázquez’ style—its painterly exaltation of the
brushstroke and loving recreation of optical effects like blur and fleeting glimmer, might
feel some concern at this stage. Have we pursued Bryson’s treatment of the still lifes of
Cotán, and even established those still lifes’ relationship to Jesuit devotional practice,
only to arrive at a place uncongenial to understanding the work of Velázquez? The
applicability of Bryson’s insights to our project is rescued by his introduction of the
closely related still lifes of Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). These still lifes “share
with those of Cotán the same Ignatian mission of reproving and refining worldly vision
through the transfiguration of the mundane,” yet, “their procedure is quite different.”

Figure 24. Francisco de Zurbarán, Still Life with Pottery Jars, Oil on canvas, Museo
del Prado, Madrid

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid.
Bryson credits these still lifes—only a portion of Zurbarán’s output—with expressing the same rhopographic imperatives as those of Cotán, but without the same absolute exclusion of the body. “They are forms which, passing from one set of hands, carefully direct the hands of those who will later touch and lift them. Imagine that you do so: the fingers, wrist and arm are obliged to find very different kinds of purchase on each object.”

Despite the mathematical/geometrical obsession that these stark assemblages represent, or the degree to which they seek to impose discipline upon our vision, they are, in a very important sense “the great anti-Albertian genre.” Realist and anti-Albertian. Here is the heart of Velázquez’ deeply interrelated structure of style and technique.

Of what exactly does this anti-Albertian mode of depiction consist? Negatively defined, it constitutes the rejection of the canvas’ surface as being effectively the pane of a window showing a vista of a rationally commensurate distance. Though perspectivaly correct, still lifes, including the xenia of Antiquity, eschewed the vanishing point (according to Bryson, “perspective’s jewel”), in favor of:

[A] much closer space, centered on the body. Hence one of the technical curiosities of the genre, its disinclination to portray the world beyond the far edge of the table. Instead of a zone beyond one finds a blank vertical wall, but no less persuasively it is a virtual wall, simply a cutting off of further space, like the outer boundary in medieval maps of the world. That further zone beyond the table’s edge must be suppressed if still life is to create its principal spatial value: nearness.

---

294 Ibid., 71.
295 Ibid.
296 Ibid.
Thus nearness is not merely a relative term, but a zone with its own parameters—almost its own physics.

What builds this proximal space is gesture: the gestures of eating, of laying the table, but also—in Zurbarán—the gestures which create the objects out of formless clay and metal. The basic co-ordinates are not supplied by calibration and mensuration, as the piazzas of Renaissance Italy or the floors of Dutch interiors supply the standard measurements of space by means of flagstones or tiles.\(^{297}\)

Instead, its “units”—Bryson’s term—are essentially the range of motion of the upper torso of the body. It is important to recognize that these are the very coordinates, exactly the zone and the means (by which I mean gesture) in which an easel painting is created, especially in oil where the indexical trace of the gesture is so easily incorporated into the image.

Is not the Ignatian method designed to provoke the senses? The manner in which Zurbarán’s rhopographical images do so is nothing if not thorough:

\[\text{[I]}\text{t is a space that is full of the idea of gravity, a sort of Einsteinian field in which distance and mass intersect. The eye not only reads for contour and volume, it weighs things: here the instruments are the muscles of the arm and hand And the eye also registers the textures of things as part of their being, inseparable from their weight: the relative roughness of earthenware, the feel of a glaze, the hardness and coolness of metal; here the sensing instruments are the fingertips. The unit of direction is not the line, as in Albertian or perspectival painting, but the arc, since bodily movements always curve.}\:^{298}\]

\(^{297}\) Ibid., 71-72.

\(^{298}\) Ibid., 72.
The other senses that are implicated in this experience are only involved through vision. And, as a reformation of vision, the essential contribution of such images is the specific manner in which they handle light: “...Zurbarán floods this normally darkened and non-optical space with brilliant, raking light.”²⁹⁹ It is this tenebritic element that moves us beyond the strict limitations of the Carthusian-inspired still life. “A perfectly coherent tactile space is subjected to brilliant illumination.”³⁰⁰

Of course, Zurbarán produced more than just his own versions of these “Carthusian still lifes.” He created New Testament scenes with a particularly haunting quality. The basis for which is, again, the application of chiaroscuro.³⁰¹ It is a technique that reasserts the supremacy of the visual because “the profiles it builds along the dividing edge between dark and light create shapes for the eye that correspond to nothing known by the hand.”³⁰² This disciplining of the tactile sense—what the early twentieth-century Viennese art historian Alois Riegl, borrowing the term from the psychological discourse of his day, would have called ‘the haptic’—is done in a very precise way. The tactile and visual spaces are separated from the visual, but both are fully established.

[T]he harsh tenebrist lighting produces for the eye shapes which are unfamiliar and unpredicted. Imagine the scene lit softly: touch would reign. Chiaroscuro elicits from these objects a dramatic-object-hood that is for the eye alone. There is

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 73.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 74.

³⁰² Ibid.
a move to separate the starkly revealed visual forms from a tactile sphere which is also fully established.\textsuperscript{303}

Thus, the tactile (haptic) sense is fully established, but also reintegrated into a hierarchy with vision decisively at the top. Bryson identifies the special quality of these Spanish still lifes—what it is that sets them apart from the xenia of Antiquity. The conventional High Renaissance—Albertian—composition strongly tends to place those objects that are understood as closest to the viewer along the bottom edge of the canvas, with those understood as farther away shown not only smaller but higher (nearer the top edge of the canvas). Bryson calls it the “compositional pyramid.”\textsuperscript{304} A painting like Zurbarán’s \textit{Still Life with Pottery Jars} (\textbf{Fig. 24}), resists this convention. Objects are arranged on a line such that each is equidistant from the viewer. It is an arrangement of space where the viewer is “pushed out.” The eye is prevented from circulating through and around the fictive space as in Italianate paintings since the Renaissance.

Between the eye and the forms it seeks to contact stretches a gulf which nothing traverses. And again this opposes the normal order of tactile space . . . Here, nothing can be touched at all: touch would do violence to the scene.\textsuperscript{305}

This is the overall effect of these paradoxical pictorial imperatives. This is the feeling Bryson calls “a protocol of distance. Tactile space is generally in constant movement:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{303} Ibid. 74
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid., 74.
\end{flushleft}
things are moved about, jammed together, lifted and carried informally, and the concept of motionless composition is entirely alien to it. But the motionlessness is precisely what Zurbarán’s objects insist on.” 306 This is necessary but not sufficient for the effect described above, for Zurbarán also applies a raking, tenebristic light to the objects he depicts that effectively disallows the very instinctive assumptions this type of image would otherwise confirm. Therefore, in Zurbarán’s work we get a pictorial format meant to provoke a synesthetic response—specifically provoking the memory of our tactile experience of the world by invoking the circuit of our gestures and reach, but insisting, nonetheless, of the primacy of vision. Just as in Cotán’s work, the tone struck seems to be one of admonition: of “correction offered to a mode of vision that inhabits the world benightedly, in the shadow zone of gestural repetitions and muscular routines.” 307

Zurbarán’s The Young Virgin [Figure 25] gives us a sense of how this reformed, spiritualized human vision would allow us to see the world:

The ability to see what is insignificant with clarified vision is presented as a spiritual gift, and in The Young Virgin the still life objects (flowers, book, scissors, embroidery, chocolate cup, linen basket) are attributes of sainthood, signs of grace and purity. 308

306 Ibid., 74-75.

307 Ibid., 76.

308 Ibid.
Cotán and Zurbarán, beginning with their still lifes, but also finding expression in what are ostensibly the *historia* and the portraits produced by the latter, are at the beginning of something new. They are the heralds of an ambitious and assertive rhopography. It goes beyond the *xenia* of antiquity in endorsing a kind of detachment that Bryson calls “monastic.”

This new, more ambitious rhopography seems to have special prominence in a Spanish context. Richard Havard’s 2007 book, *The Spanish Eye*, takes the Spanish roots and context of this “break out” of the still life and shows it to be a strong cultural imperative in Spain for both painting and poetry.

---

309 Ibid., 77.
In his forward, Havard acknowledges that his contention that “there is a way of looking at things that is peculiar to Spain,” and that this “distinctiveness holds true across two different art forms” This assertion may incite some skepticism, of the kind Eugenio d’Ors expressed in his book on Picasso with regard to the expression of national character in that artist’s work. Indeed, national style is, among stylistic categories the most readily contaminated by the most clichéd nationalist prejudice. However, Havard is also able to cite within a few pages of this statement, a passage from the same source that would seem to mitigate it considerably. D’Ors is speaking of Zurbarán:

He may well be the most Spanish of all artists, since in his work naturalism and mysticism hold joint sovereignty, lucidity generating an exact representation of the humblest objects, otherworldliness (‘fuga’: flight) rendering them sublime and forlorn.

It is this subtle dynamic between naturalism and mysticism that Havard sees as having a “strong and continuous presence in Spain.”

At the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila, there is displayed a very unusual relic: It is a drawing produced sometime between 1574 and 1577, attributed to Saint John of the Cross—a major poet of the siglo de oro, and, in his pastoral and

---


311 Ibid., xii.

312 Eugenio d’Ors, Picasso En Tres Revisiones (Barcelona: Folio, 2003), 37. cited in Havard, p. xiii, note 1.

313 The translation is Havard’s own, p. xiii, cited from Ibid., 39.

theological capacities, an author suspicious of over-reliance on internal imagery in the devotional practice of many of his confreres. The peculiar composition of this simple, awkward depiction of the physical suffering of Christ is of precisely the kind implicit in virtual and material image-making among Saint John’s Spanish contemporaries. In the image-saturated poetry of this Carmelite saint is found confirmation of a whole set of pictorial reflexes. These establish a kind of feedback loop in which the images invoked through poetry (and concocted in the imagination for purposes of memory and devotion) both confirm and encourage the construction of physical images that function the same way. The selection of point of view, the emphatic signs of physical suffering (note the

![Figure 26. Saint John of the Cross (attrib.), Christ on the Cross, drawing on paper.](image)

drops of blood and the oversized nails piercing the Christ’s hands) all find their echoes in the subject’s treatment by golden age Spanish painters.
A resident of Toledo when Teresa of Avila was founding her convent in that city and John of the Cross was brought as a prisoner by the unreformed faction of the Carmelites, Domenicos Theotokopoulos made the life and career that had failed to materialize either at the royal court, or in Rome or Venice.

He did a place in the Latin West congenial to his vision, however. In Spain, Domenicos becomes El Greco—a foreigner within Spain whose earliest formation as an artist was in the icon tradition of the Greek Eastern Church. Havard relies on the analysis...
of one of the previous century’s great Byzantinists, P. A. Michelis,\(^{315}\) for an account of the icon tradition in which El Greco would have first worked.\(^{316}\) He defines a structure for the icon that bears a striking resemblance to the structure of Zurbarán’s still life as described by Bryson and quoted above:

> Rather than submit to the objectivity of Euclidian geometry—Giotto’s ‘box of space’—the icon artist ‘aligned his objects here and there according to his subjective sense of order’. . . while perspective order, with its vanishing point and intrusive horizon line, ‘takes control of the spectator’s eye and may lead it far from where it would naturally linger’, no such tyranny applies in Byzantine art where the viewer’s gaze is ‘to rest undisturbed on the center of gravity and grasp the works ‘visual order’.\(^{317}\)

Of course, in El Greco’s case this does not take place in the stable context of Orthodoxy, but while simultaneously encountering the Renaissance that had so altered the creation of images in Latin Christendom:

> Crucially for Michelis, ‘the abolition of academic perspective and naturalistic chiaroscuro reveals an underlying tendency to let the irrational predominate, or to strive towards the transcendental’. The point is pure Bergson: Renaissance art, with its pronounced linearity, gives a sense of measured space (and hence time). Taking its markers from the \textit{finite world}, by contrast, the icon does not depict a spatial-temporal box and is not regulated by the external world. Instead it projects the artist’s inward, intuitive eye. This \textit{gives} it a decided edge in capturing the


\(^{317}\) Havard, \textit{The Spanish Eye : Painters and Poets of Spain}. 3
dynamics of the sublime which, as Michalis says, is ‘immeasurable in size and supernatural in order’.318

Saint John’s poems make a strong case for a notable obsession on the part of Spaniards with the emergence of light out of darkness. We will restrict our selection to one stanza from the ‘Llama de amor viva’:

¡Oh lámparas de fuego,
en cuyos resplandores
las profundas cavernas del sentido,
que estaba oscuro y ciego,
con extraños promores
calor y luz dan junto a su querido.319

Similarly, El Greco’s works with “[t]heir vibrant colors and arresting spatial design . . . suggests a new intense way of seeing, a kind of illumination after darkness.”320

“This is not to say El Greco was a visionary mystic himself who, as it were, saw what he painted. Much of El Greco’s strangeness, eccentricity or extravagance . . . derives from the fact that he was steeped in an iconographic tradition that is

318 Ibid., 3.

319 O lamps of burning fire
   In whose translucent glow
   The mind’s profoundest caverns shine with splendour
   Before in blindness and obscure,
   With unearthly beauty now
   Regale their love with heat and light together.


In short, he preserves something of the Eastern icon tradition while assimilating the Venetian, and, indeed, the whole of the Renaissance approach to image making. For understanding its reception and influence in the evolution of a Spanish style, it preserves “two key features” from the Icons of the east: “[F]latness and radiance. Flatness, like John’s intimate night, brings heaven and earth together on the same plane. Radiance . . . derives from an extreme form of chariscuro without modeling. The incandescence of El Greco’s work parallels John’s Dionysian doctrine—‘es la tenebrosa nube/ que a la noche escalaría’ [it is the tenebrous cloud/ that lit up the night.”

The next comparison is that of Diego Velázquez and one of the most influential of his older contemporaries—someone who actually sat for the painter at the beginning of the process that brought him to the royal court—the poet Luís de Góngora. The relationship of Góngora’s poetry to the theory that surrounded and buttressed the painted images of his contemporaries will require some attention here.

Góngora’s fame was such that Velázquez’ familiarity with his verses can be taken as a given. The common ground between each man’s respective media, words and paint, would seem to be the internal medium of the imagination, especially as codified by the Society of Jesus. The relationship, largely institutional or in the service of theological and historical pedantry, that Velázquez’ master, Juan Pacheco, had with the Jesuits, has been well documented (See Chapter 3, above), but it is in his student Velázquez’ work

321 Ibid.
322 Ibid., 18-19.
323 Ibid., 21.
that we find persuasive evidence for the influence of the Jesuit-trained imagination upon
the creation of actual images:

The crucial point, however, is that Jesuit influence on art in early seventeenth-
century Spain went beyond mere formalism and attention to detail. It centered on
the profoundly materialist ethos that promoted a high degree of realism. This
ethos can be traced to Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* where he expounded that
meditation is best conducted via ‘the composition of place’ or ‘viendo el lugar’
[seeing the place]. Loyola advocated that meditation topics such as the Passion
should be accessed via an imaginative use of the senses that must be brought to
bear on the subject separately and in turn before being united in a cathectic
whole. Only thus could the factual circumstances of Christ’s suffering—nails,
timber, crown of thorns, vinegar spear etc.—be experienced or relived with all
due intensity.324

Havard is aware of the apparent contradiction here. The purpose of the *Exercises*, being a
religious or spiritual one, would seem to be all about transcendence—the truths that lie
*behind* appearance. In a certain qualified sense this is true. However, the world
encountered in the *Exercises*, with the implication that we may encounter our own
external, ubiquitous reality in this same mode, is first and foremost a world experienced
with regards to such immanence—meaning that it is co-identical, incarnate, in the objects
that make it up. Not *behind*, but *with*. Havard calls it paradox:

Paradoxically this practice, designed to promote awareness of the transcendental,
centers on a highly tuned sensory perception of material things. Its impact on the
arts must have been considerable and it is hardly coincidental that the sober
realism of the *bodegón* emerged in Spain at this time.325

324 Ibid.

325 Ibid.
Havard also sees Ignatian influence on the *Senses* series of Jussepe Ribera (1591-1652). Like Bryson, Havard sees in these works the provoking of senses other than the visual. He also identifies the arena of this provocation—the circumference of what is meaningfully accessible to human gesture:

What is striking in Ribera’s treatment [in the *Senses* series], over and above the separate presentation of the senses, is that all five are genre paintings that depict a man behind a table on which appropriate objects are placed.\(^{326}\)

The tradition of understanding Góngora’s poetry in very similar terms has an august pedigree in the Spanish poetical tradition. Havard cites Pedro Salinas, one of the guiding lights of the poetic movement of the year ’27, on Gongora’s ‘exaltation of reality.’\(^{327}\) It is the same evaluation given by Lorca in his lecture of that same year of 1927, on the tercentenary of the poet’s death.\(^{328}\) He praises the poet’s style in which “every moment has identical intensity and plastic value,” going so far as to claim that he “converts his poem into a great still-life.” Lorca’s version of Góngora describes the poet as a materialist but of a transubstantiated kind:

His materialism, however, is not restrictive for he creates an extra-atmospheric context, or a rarefied sense of reality, on which basis Lorca dubs him ‘the spiritual Cordovan.’ Lorca’s argument is clear: Góngora steeps himself in sensory perception of the world, but this is intensified through the agency of poetry to such a degree that reality is transcended.\(^{329}\)

\(^{326}\) Ibid., 23-24.

\(^{327}\) Ibid., 25.


The catalog of painterly effects to be found in the poet’s work would be massive. Here is one example, dealing with coloristic effects:

Purpúreas rosas sobre Galatea
al Alba entre lúdios cándidos deshoja:
duda el Amor cuál más su color sea,
o púpura Nevada, nieve roja. (105-080)330

Another, with chiaroscuro:

Bala el ganado; al misero balido,
Nocturno el lobo de las sombars nace.
Cébase —y fiero, deja humedecido
en sangre de una que la otra pace. (171-4)331

And embodying what Havard calls the sheer “power and invention of his images,” these lines, where Góngora seeks to communicate the colossal size of the Cyclops Polyphemus, the protagonist of his poem:

330 From Polyphemus and Galattea.

Purple roses on Galatea
does the Dawn among candid lilies unleaf:
Love doubts whether her color be
more purple snowfall, or snow that is red.

Ibid., 26. The translation is Havard’s own.

331 The flock bleats forlorn, its whimpering
giving birth to the night’s wolf in shadows:
He feeds, savagely, and what another
will graze he leaves soaked in blood.

Ibid., 28.
Havard’s guiding principle: that in Spain the 'sister arts' of painting and poetry are mutually illuminating, and that this is because both base themselves on the visual image, is so overarching as to provoke a certain amount of skepticism. Fortunately, I do not need to defend his thesis in its entirety (though I believe such a defense could be very successfully mounted), but only its applicability to the seventeenth century, the period that concerns us here.

His claim that Spanish painters, as well as poets, have a unique and distinctive approach to depicting reality holds up rather well for the siglo de oro. Mysticism as the Spanish understand it, endorses a kind of hyper-reality that is itself the result of a superabundance of visual perception—that is, a visual faculty that has been transformed by the mystical imperative.

*   *   *

332 A towering mountain of limbs was this (being Neptune’s wild son, one-eyed the orb on his brow shines, near equal to the greatest star) Cyclop [. . .]

Ibid., 29.
The material conditions of Velázquez’ environment and the earliest influences on his practice are important aspects of my project. As has already been discussed, the city in which he was trained was, in many ways, a more cosmopolitan and sophisticated one than the royal capital where he lived out the majority of his days:

In the preceding generation the proportion of scientific publications relative to all books printed in Seville was double the average for the rest of Europe, and the city’s learned men were in contact with their European colleagues through the great thinker and scripture scholar, Benito Arías Montano. Their science was essentially experimental in contrast to the antiquated teaching methods of the university.\(^{333}\)

Arís Montano (1527-1598) was a scholar and an ascetic, but also a religious poet. The memory of his intellectual example and spiritual commitments would still have been powerful during Velázquez’ formative years.\(^{334}\) The decision to seek a life at the court meant more than giving up an intellectually stimulating environment for one that might be less so; traveling within the Iberian peninsula was a risky proposition. Moving away from the great port of the Indies to the stark Castilian valley containing Madrid was a decision not undertaken haphazardly.

Travel during the seventeenth century, indeed during all pre-industrial times was fraught with risk. For this reason the minority who undertook it without spur of war, famine or similar disaster needed strong motivation.


\(^{334}\) He is the subject of an *Elogio histórico* by Tomás Gonzalez Caral in the *Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia* (Madrid), vol. vii.

Velázquez’ two greatest journeys, those to Italy in 1629 and 1649, were made as the emissary of the most powerful monarch in Christendom. The hardships of such journeys must have been, though still enormous by our modern standards, as thoroughly mitigated as possible for the times. This cannot have been the case on his first trip to Madrid in April 1622. Up from Seville through Andalusia and across the harsh tableland of the proverbially barren La Mancha, and into New Castile, the young painter arrived in the Royal capital. The Velázquez who arrived in Madrid was a young painter of some reputation in his native Seville, but this would have counted for little had not the young Philip IV, upon his ascension, raised up as his valido, the Count-Duke of Olivares. The Count-Duke was an Andalusian like the young painter whom he no doubt knew from the circle around Francisco Pacheco, in whose academia the erudite politician had participated. Indeed, they were the earliest constituency for the young painter’s work, which up until that point would have consisted mostly of bódegon:

There can be little doubt that bodegón paintings, at the time a radical novelty, must have been attractive to these men on account of their objective, scientific representation of reality, and also because of the illustrious classical precedents offered by painters like Piraeicus and Dionysus the Anthropographer, both cited by Pacheco.335

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the discernment and sophistication of this early circle of connoisseurs and supporters, and the special quality of Velázquez’ work could not have found purchase at the court without it:

335 Lleó Cañal, "The Cultivated Elite of Velázquez's Seville," 27.
If . . . Velázquez’s early patrons did in fact come from this small circle of connoisseurs with modern taste, this would help explain why his name is almost never listed in the contracts which are preserved in the Archivo de Protocolos in Seville. Unlike the great altarpieces of cycles of religious paintings commissioned by monasteries and convents, Velázquez’s pictures would have been sold directly to his clients, perhaps in his studio and without any recourse to a public notary. These exceptional circumstances could not have continued for very long.336

It is here that the painter/savant we have previously extrapolated, from the catalog of his library becomes a much more plausible figure:

[F]or a select group of men classical studies and the cult of antiquity became almost an obsession to which they devoted much of their lives. What is more significant in the present context is that they were members of the circle of the painter Francisco Pacheco, Velázquez’s teacher and father-in-law.337

The logic of power in those days meant that the royal favorite had a strong incentive to pack the court whenever a vacancy occurred, with his relatives and with their clients, his Andalusian countrymen.

The good will of these well-placed individuals was not sufficient to provide the young painter with what we are told he wanted most of all: to paint the portrait of the young king. It was enough, however, for him to plant the seed that would bear fruit on his next trip to the city of the royal court—the portrait of don Luis de Góngora y Argote [Figure 28], whose position as one of the greatest Spanish poets was beyond doubt. We have already examined the relationship that Havard attributes to a fruitful exchange between Ignatian image-based devotion and contemplation and the special poetical

336 Ibid.
337 Ibid., 24.
characteristics of Góngora’s work. While the purpose of the portrait was, ostensibly, to supply his father-in-law with the basis for an engraved depiction of the poet to head the entry on Góngora in Pacheco’s *Libro de Descripción de verdaderos retratos de ilustres y memorables varones*, Velázquez also produced a portrait that caused comment at the court. At the time he sat for Velázquez, Góngora, having held the honorary post of chaplain to the previous King, Philip III, was a pensioner of the court and at sixty spent his time alternately litigating or supplicating for funds from the crown.

![Figure 28. Luis de Góngora, Boston MFA](image)

Writing in 1931, when the painting was still in the collection of Tomás Harris in London, before its acquisition by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, legendary Finnish-born connoisseur Tancred Borenius compares Harris’s portrait to the two known copies at the Prado and the Lázaro Galdiano Foundation, respectively, stating:
In order to convince oneself of the extraordinary difference which these at first
sight insignificant changes make, one has but to put reproductions of the three
pictures alongside each other; it is amazing how much more concentration of
effect there is in Mr. Harris’s picture, how differently the bust “sits” in the picture
space. And then, as to the quality of pictorial handling, it is evident that Mr.
Harris’s picture belongs to an altogether different world of art from that of the two
others. The sensitiveness of modulation in the face, as now brought out, is simply
amazing; what we see here is on the one hand, exactly what we may expect of the
painter of the Water Carrier at Apsley house, and, on the other hand, gives us a
foretaste of Velazquez’s later methods.338

If this is indeed the portrait of Góngora that appears in the inventory of the painter’s
goods made at this death,339 Velázquez lived through a long relationship with this canvas.

If so, it is chronologically the first of a subcategory of Velázquez’ production that would
receive considerable attention from the painter over the course of his career; Jonathan
Brown defines the parameters of this subcategory of portrait with regards not only to the
type of sitter, but also deeper structural consistencies and, finally, as to their purpose in
the painter’s overall praxis:

[I]nformal portraits are known from the 1620s as well and are a logical
component of the production of any portrait painter. Generally speaking, these

338 Tancred Borenius, "Velazquez's Portrait of Gongora," The Burlington Magazine for
Connoisseurs 59, no. 343 (1931): 152.

339 Sánchez Cantón, "Cómo Vivía Velázquez. Inventario Descubierto Por D. F.
Rodríguez Marín," no. 179. A Gongora portrait by Velázquez is found in the 1677
inventory of the Marqués del Carpio (no. 102). See Enriqueta Harris, "Las Meninas' at
drawn up at his residence at the Jardín de San Joaquin in 1689; also lists a “Gongora.”
See Marcus Burke and Peter Cherry, Collections of Paintings in Madrid, 1601-1755 (Los
Angeles: Getty Provenance Index, 1997), part 1, doc. 115, 837 (no. 106). Whether this is
the original portrait described by Pacheco, or whether the canvas in Boston or the one at
the Meadows Museum in Texas is this original portrait, remains a thorny issue.
portraits show the sitters in bust- or three-quarter-length against a dark or neutral background. The subjects often are not identifiable, but those whose names are known prove to be people like Velázquez himself—servants in the royal household or fellow artists and writers. Also, the jester portraits might be said to fall into this group. Presumably done on a casual basis, and with no great pressure to present the portrait to a public audience, the informal works were often used by Velázquez as a kind of experimental laboratory and thus contain some of his most audacious painting.340

**Experimental laboratories** and **arenas for audacity in painting** are sufficiently rich foci for our understanding of Velázquez’ work to justify taking Brown’s “informal portraits” as he specifically qualifies them, as a kind of ‘working category’ and building on it with my own ideas. Though lacking the sanction of the seventeenth century academies, this provisional genre presents itself to hindsight at least as persuasively as the *retrato a lo divino*, a category that some historians of Spanish golden age art employ quite unselﬁconsciously despite its total absence from the literature of the period.341 Therefore here, and only so long as it proves useful, let us inaugurate what I will call the **special informal portrait** within the larger category of **portrait** within Velázquez’ oeuvre.

Among the most useful of these special informal portraits may prove to be the one currently in Dresden—the Portrait of the Royal Huntsman, *Juan Mateos* [Figure 29].342

---


341 I must emphasize, the category is not Dr. Brown’s—it is my own. I propose it not as an historically deﬁned category, but as one of practical use in formal analysis and connoisseurship.

342 He was also an author. His book, *Origen y dignidad de la caza*. Written Juan Mateos, and dedicated to the Count-Duke of Olivares. Printed in Madrid by Francisco Martínez, 1634. The king was a devoted hunter and Mateos may be one of the few people not of royal or high aristocratic status whose access to and intimacy with the king could rival that of Velázquez. The frontispiece to *Origen y dignidad de la caza* contains a portrait that may well have come from Velázquez’ portrait, meaning its genesis may have closely
This portrait's peculiar provenance actually makes it an especially useful member of this new category; indeed, its trajectory through various non-Spanish collections, along with some of the errors that became attached to it on its journey, will serve as a kind of touchstone for what follows.

Though longer in proportion than the portrait of Góngora, allowing us to see the sitter’s hands along with his entire torso, the same three-quarter posture is presented to the viewer and the background provides no data as to the space the figure can be understood to occupy.

When representatives of the Elector of Saxony in the eighteenth century made their selection of the one hundred best paintings in the collection of the financially desperate Duke of Modena, Francesco III d'Este (2 July 1698 - 22 February 1780), the portrait of Juan Mateos was among those chosen. In 1746, then, it would seem that under the standards of connoisseurship in the eighteenth century it was considered a

Figure 29. Juan Mateos, Dresden

matched that of the Góngora—a source for a book illustration. That role fulfilled, the canvas remained in Velázquez’ possession as a painting to be worked, reworked and contemplated.
superior painting. The Saxon Elector’s connoisseurs had certainly recognized this, as had the caretakers of the Estense Gallery, but they had failed to recognize, until 1685, the hand of the Spanish Master. This is probably a function of the peculiarities of Velázquez’ critical fortunes, but the mistaken attributions made by the Modenese, given what they could not have known about the work and reputation of Velázquez, is extremely illuminating in its own right.

The painting was first attributed to Rubens and then re-attributed to Titian. What is more, since the painting is clearly unfinished and the Modenese, while apparently sufficiently impressed by the painting’s quality to attribute it to masters of the stature of Titian and Rubens, were unfamiliar enough with Velázquez’ proto-impressionist technique that they assumed the painting to be an oil sketch rather than a portrait intended for completion. There is much light to be shed on Velázquez’ technique by these interesting errors on the part of connoisseurs of considerable discernment.

Other works that can be said to inhabit this provisional category are: The Sculptor Martinez Montañes at Work, in the Prado, and dated to 1638, and the mysterious Portrait of a Bearded Man at the Wellington Museum in London, 1638-40. Some may wish to include the Knight of Santiago from Dresden (1645-8). We might also add the Portrait of a Man now at the Detroit Art Institute, dated to c. 1623, and the Portrait of a Young Man in Munich (1627-28), but these two are, I believe, more profitably considered merely portraits, rather than the “special informal” portraits that concern us here.

We can also disallow the inclusion of the great portrait of Innocent X and the Juan de Pareja, since what we know of their production and provenance; they do not depict

---

343 López-Rey, Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of His Oeuvre, 58.
subjects that Velázquez would have looked upon (even approximately) as social equals—one being a Pope and the other his slave. They were completed quickly and for spectacular public display, rather than “lived with” in such a way that their completion was indefinitely postponed. This is probably largely the case for the portrait of Francesco II d’Este, The Duke of Modena (1639) as well as the many fine small portraits of ecclesiastics that Velázquez completed over the years. A work must be more than a non-royal portrait to qualify for this category, and several that meet the criteria for format (three quarters or less, head and torso), or for appearing to be unfinished, should not be included for having been commissioned by or for an exalted personage, and for having been delivered under a time constraint that was, at the very least, not indefinite. The portraits that come closest to this category, as Brown himself mentions, are the dwarf and buffoon portraits that, while they may have been done at the king’s request, are essentially artifacts of the household to which Velázquez belonged, and their domestic and personal associations bring them closest to something like the informal portrayal of a colleague or a peer like the Juan Matteos or the Martinez Montañes. Such special informal portraits can be considered, and they probably did often function as, the research and development department of the painter’s enterprise, but they were also arenas for pure research—places where the paradoxes of presence and the physical construction of images could be explored in an activity very much like meditation.

Oil paintings from the seventeenth century are incredibly complex objects. Their apparent stability is deceptive, and more than many other objects that make up the art historical record they are in a heraclitan state of flux. Even if they have escaped re-lining, ill advised or inexpert restoration, or even cleanings that were more invasive than perhaps
they should have been,\(^{344}\) the very stuff of which they are made, especially the organic compounds suspended in the oil matrix, grow darker, more translucent, or simply change hue in accordance with their own natures. The pigments Velázquez had been trained to grind and mix with linseed oil were in their great majority gathered from mineral and organic sources close to home.

By his second trip to Italy there was a theoretical justification and framework being produced, most notably by Marco Boschini, whose idea of the “pittoresco” will inform our coming analysis of Velazquez’ specific technique,\(^{345}\) but it must be remembered that, in both Italy and Spain, the effects sought and the practice developed to achieve them predate the body of theory by a considerable margin. Given what Spaniards say and write about their practice and the results that seem so paradoxical in the light of these statements, one hopes for some other key to understanding how Spaniards thought about and understood their images. My argument in this dissertation is that the texts contemporary with the creation of such images, that would seem best to describe their

---


Brealey: “A sick painting cannot be dealt with simply in terms of its visible and invisible ills . . . Accumulated dirt and discolored varnish can be removed; loosened or flaking paint can be glued down and a new varnish applied. But what is essential to the work of art-its tonal harmony, its internal structure, its convincingness as an illusion-can perish absolutely in the process. The operation is a success, but the patient dies.”


composition, are not examples of art theory; they are instructional manuals in the art of religious devotion.
Chapter 5

The Formalist Chapter

In the preface to Velázquez: The Technique of a Genius, co-authors Jonathan Brown and Carmen Garrido state that their book “was inspired by a sense of awe at the artistic genius of Diego de Velázquez and was written in the hope of sharing this experience with our readers.” Brown and Garrido assert that “[w]orks of art, unlike pieces of literature or music, are structured by manipulation of material properties. By engaging with their physicality, we partake of their essence.”

As I type this I am listening to Glenn Gould’s 1981 recording of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Goldberg Variations. The music is encoded in digital files that did not exist at the time Gould made the recording. The Variations were originally written for the harpsichord rather than the piano on which Gould performed them. None of this matters since the Goldberg Variations do not reside—if that is the word—in the ones and zeros of a digital file, nor in the tone produced when a string is plucked by the quill inside a harpsichord or struck by the hammer inside a piano, any more than it does in the ink comprising the notes Bach set down on paper in the eighteenth century. The Goldberg Variations are elsewhere.

Likewise, the original manuscript of the Divine Comedy in Dante’s own hand that must once have existed, would, were it to reappear, no more be the Divine Comedy than

---


347 Ibid.
the version I can bring up on my computer via the internet. The *Divine Comedy* is elsewhere.

This cannot be said of the paintings of Velázquez. They are works of art in a different sense from these others, in that they are uniquely, particularly themselves. To reproduce one of them, even with the very finest high-resolution photography, is not to do so in the same sense of that word as when it is applied to the reproduction of a musical composition or a poem. In a sense, we are only being polite. In fact, they *cannot be* reproduced—*simulated*, but not reproduced. We need to bear in mind then, that what Brown and Garrido say about works of art may be categorically true, and therefore a commonplace, but it is emphatically and especially true of oil paintings and yet more so of oil paintings as Velázquez made them. This is not a new insight into the nature of oil painting, but an attempt to understand the formal qualities of Velázquez’ paintings requires us to bear their nature as unique products of the artist’s gestures uppermost in our minds.

We come to such works in a way that renders highly problematic the distinction between accidental and essential qualities. They *are* in a way that other things that are made (e.g. poems and musical compositions) are not. When I travel from Philadelphia to New York City and make my way to the Frick Collection to see Velázquez’ portrait of Philip IV (the ‘Fraga Philip’), that which I have come to see is present—in the very strongest sense; it is nowhere else. In some ways it more closely resembles a performance I might attend at Carnegie Hall than whatever musical piece is being performed there. But the painting by Velázquez is something I am in the habit of thinking about as a discrete object, not something that moves past me in time like the
performance of a piece of music—at least it does not seem so, though this may only be a difference in tempo. Even here, it would seem, time is of the essence.

Brown and Garrido seek to present the latest scientifically assisted knowledge of Velázquez’ technique to a non-specialist audience. The canvases they chose to examine came overwhelmingly from the Museo del Prado in Madrid. They drew on twenty-four out of a pool of fifty canvases, which amounts to about one half of the painter’s accepted oeuvre—by this means drawing on works that have almost all had the rare privilege of staying in what is essentially the same collection (that of the Spanish monarchy and then of the Prado) virtually from the day they were painted.

Interventions were believed to be minimal and the paintings were considered to be almost pristine, though the record shows this not strictly to be the case. Historically, it has indeed seemed that, based on such evaluations as could be carried out by connoisseurs with the naked eye, this singular circumstance had preserved the canvases from overzealous repainting, relining and the “attentions” of generations of unscientific conservators and restorers. The Velázquez collection in the Prado, during an ambitious cleaning and restoration program during the 1980s under the scrutiny of Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, formerly director of the Prado, and the late John Brealey, who had been the head of conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, has benefited from a state-of-the-art conservation effort. The Velázquezes of the Prado, are therefore, valuable for another reason beyond their esthetic and market value. They “are among the best preserved [paintings] of the seventeenth century and therefore provide an ideal

opportunity to study how a great master created miracles of art.\textsuperscript{349} Though this may be overstated, as we will have reason to see later in this chapter, it is generally true that the Prado Velázquezes are well preserved by the standards of many paintings of the seventeenth century.

Over the past several decades, the data on Velázquez paintings, aided by the latest in scientific techniques of analysis, has resulted in the publication of several important resources. Among these are the collaboration of Jonathan Brown and Carmen Garrido Pérez already mentioned, Garrido’s earlier and encyclopedic treatment, \textit{Velázquez: Técnica y Evolución} (Prado, 1992), Gridley McKim-Smith and Richard Newman’s \textit{Velázquez en el Prado: Ciencia e Historia del Arte} (Prado, 1993), as well as the volume McKim-Smith and Newman produced with Greta Andersen-Bergdoll, \textit{Examining Velázquez} (Yale, 1988). This scientifically informed analysis joins with the previous connoisseurship tradition on Velázquez which has its foundation in the work of Aureliano de Beruete, first director of the Prado, in his \textit{Velázquez} of 1898 (Paris, English edition, London, 1906), and had a kind of culmination in the great Catalogue Raisonné of August Mayer (1936). Though this earlier connoisseurship tradition cannot be considered obsolete by any means, the new technically enhanced approaches initiated by McKim-Smith and still yielding remarkable results not only in her work, but in that of Zahira Véliz\textsuperscript{350} and Manuela Mena,\textsuperscript{351} have forever transformed the standard for approaching the painter’s work from the standpoint of technique.


Oil paintings record the event of their own production to an extraordinary degree, with surfaces that can be mined for precisely the gestures that created them, but a great many of these events have been distorted and falsified by interventions that may have passed in their day for well-intentioned acts of conservation, but today can only frustrate the historical project. The Velázquez corpus in the Prado, having sustained a fairly benign level of intervention from restorers and conservators, has the potential to allow us to correct for some of these distortions; thus it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this grouping of paintings by a single major artist of the Baroque.

*     *      *

The Old Woman Cooking Eggs of the National Gallery in Edinburgh [Figure 30], along with the other bodegones of the Sevillian period, are described by Jonathan Brown as “virtually unprecedented in Sevillian, and indeed Spanish, painting.”³⁵² Velázquez innovation seems to have been one of faithfully transcribing the unflinchingly-observed appearance of his subjects. The bodegón was itself a fairly new genre.

Since 1985, our understanding of the evolution of this genre, especially as it relates to still life, has been transformed. William Jordan and Sarah Schroth’s catalogue for the Spanish Still Life In The Golden Age 1600-1650 exhibition at the Kimbell Art Museum not only collected earlier work on the subject, but presented new conclusions and

³⁵¹ See “La restauración de ‘Las Meninas’ de Velázquez”, published in the Boletín del Museo del Prado [5 (14), 87-107].

attributions based on archival discoveries.\textsuperscript{353} Jordan's account of the development of naturalism and still life painting in Spain indicates that even the enthusiasm for this genre in the Netherlands had more to do with Spanish example than had previously been assumed. Schroth's treatment of the inventories of Spanish golden age collectors transformed the art historical understanding of still life as a genre. Rather than the \textit{Bamboccianti}—genre painters of mostly Dutch and Flemish backgrounds who attract the attention of connoisseurs in Rome around 1625,\textsuperscript{354} it is Spanish \textit{bodegon} painters in Spain who appear to have been the first authentic rhoporographers since antiquity. When Salvator Rosa was complaining around mid-century about the unseemly popularity in Italy of works depicting: "rogues, cheats, pickpockets, bands of drunks and gluttons, scrubby tobacconists, barbers, and other 'sordid' subjects,"\textsuperscript{355} \textit{bodegones} had been an established and sought-after type of painting in Seville for half a century.

It is one thing to innovate within a genre that is itself a barely-assimilated

\textsuperscript{353} William B. Jordan et al., \textit{Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age, 1600-1650} (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1985).

\textsuperscript{354} The \textit{Bamboccianti} took their name from the nickname for the Dutch genre painter, Pieter van Laer (1599 or earlier – c. 1642), active in Rome between 1625 and 1639, whereupon he return to Amsterdams and his native city of Haarlem. His work found its way into the collections of several prominent connoisseurs, and very notably, he dedicated a series of engravings to Don Ferdinando Afán de Ribera, Duke of Alcalá, Spanish Viceroy of Naples ((1629-1631), who was an important patron of Jusepe de Ribera. See Francis Haskell, \textit{Patrons and Painters : A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque}, Rev. and enl. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 135-6.

Figure 30. Old Woman frying Eggs, 1618, Diego Velázquez

innovation, as the *bodegón* was when Velázquez took it up and, in some sense, transformed it; it is quite another to apply this same boldly innovative posture to established, hallowed and precedent-laden forms like religious painting. This would seem to be what Velazquez did in his *Adoration of the Magi* [Figure 31] (sometimes identified as the *Epiphany*) of 1619. Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar look as though they were recruited from a Sevillian street corner. Commissioned for the chapel of the Jesuit Novitiate in Seville, it was still there in 1764 which is when it is first recorded.\(^{356}\) The chapel was the room in which novices practiced their spiritual exercises, so it was kept separate from the novitiate’s church.\(^{357}\)

We can surmise the career that offered itself to the young Velázquez in Seville. He was married to the daughter of one of the most prominent painters in Seville. This same


painter, Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644), had been his teacher and included him in the activities of the informal academy that he hosted, where classical learning, poetry and the arts were discussed among practitioners and noble-born (and often well-connected) connoisseurs. A life of prosperity and no small measure of prestige was in the offing—indeed it would likely have resembled the career that his younger contemporary,

Figure 31. The Adoration of the Magi. 1619

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682) went on to have.
Murillo helped to found the *Academia de Bellas Artes*, the official, royally chartered successor to Pacheco’s informal circle of *congnicenti*. He belonged to one of the most prestigious confraternities of the city, the *Hermandad de la Santa Caridad*. It was a fine life for a painter, but not for a gentleman—or, at least this would seem to have been Velázquez’ conclusion. This conclusion, however, involved Velázquez in a basic contradiction. Brown calls it a “dilemma”— and, as we all know, dilemmas have two horns. Velázquez could only rise above his station by means of his manifest excellence as a painter, but painters (according to the worldview of those whom he aspired to join) were not meant to rise above their station. As Jonathan Brown puts it: “[H]is artistic calling was destined to be both his damnation and his salvation.”

* * *

The ladder of preferment was a structure of mind-boggling complexity at a place like the Spanish court of the house of Austria. On October 6, 1623, Velázquez was named a painter royal (one of several) salaried by the court according to a document signed by the young king who he must hardly have known. In 1628 he was *pintor de cámara*, chief among the court’s painters, which is to say, promoted over men of considerable seniority who might reasonably have cherished expectations of holding the position themselves—perhaps as the culmination of a career spent in artistic service to the crown. Human nature has not changed so thoroughly since the seventeenth century that we are

---


359 Pita Andrade and Aterido, eds., *Corpus Velazqueño: Documentos y Textos*. 
likely to be surprised by the reaction among Velázquez’ older and outranked fellows. Having risen so far based on his portraiture, it was whispered that this is all he can do—that he “only knows how to paint heads.”\footnote{360 Pacheco, \textit{Arte De La Pintura, Su Antigüedad y Grandezas} (1649). 36.} The artist is famously supposed to have

![Figure 32. Diego Velázquez, Los Borrachos (The Feast of Bacchus), Museo del Prado, Madrid](image)

responded that he considered this a great compliment, since he himself knew of no one who could execute a decent head.

In 1627 he achieved a position at court quite apart from the services he could provide as a painter—he became an usher of the privy chamber. This was a position for a courtier, which is to say, for a gentleman.

To be a gentleman and to have that status affirmed, if its affirmation was in any way in doubt, required the transfiguring power of the monarch, and that power was accessed by means of an institution with its own sociological peculiarities that we would
do well to take note of, lest we think that a court is like a White House, or a Number 10 Downing street, or a corporate board room, or any other place where political and economic power is managed, conserved and dispensed. A court is a very special kind of place and it takes a certain amount of adjustment to understand (to the extent that we can) its dynamics and requirements.

The seventeenth century may seem too far away. Though more rare than in Velázquez’ day, some such institutions have persisted into our own era. In Ethiopia such a court, that of the Emperor Haile Selassie, operated until 1974. Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski wrote an account based on interviews with the courtiers and functionaries of the ancien régime who had barely survived its fall and, in many cases, were in hiding when Kapuscinski sought them out. One man, identified by his initials, G. H.-M., served as an usher in the Imperial palace in Addis Ababa, the same basic function that occupied Velázquez in his first appointment at court that did not involve his services as a painter. G. H.-M. said of his duties:

The scoffers, who in any Palace like to make fun of their inferiors, would say jokingly that bowing was my only profession and even my sole reason for existing. Indeed, I had no other duty than bowing before His Distinguished Highness at a given moment. But I could have answered them—had my rank entitled me to such boldness—that my bows were of a functional and efficacious character and that they served a purpose of state, which is to say, a superior purpose, whereas the court was full of nobles bowing whenever the occasion presented itself. . . .After all, if our kindly monarch did not receive the established signal in time, he could fall into confusion and prolong his current activity at the expense of another equally important duty.361

Another of Haile Selassie’s old servants, identified as M., provided this insight into a system where one individual is the source of all power and reward, while himself being required, above all, to be perceived as doing nothing for himself:

Because the degree of power wielded by those in the Palace corresponded not to the hierarchy of positions, but rather to the frequency of access to His Worthy Majesty. That was our situation in the Palace. It was said that one was more important if one had the Emperor’s ear more often. More often, and for longer. For that ear the lobbies fought their fiercest battles; the ear was the highest prize in the game. It was enough, though it was not easy, to get close to the all-powerful ear and whisper. Whisper, that’s all. Get it in, let it stay there if only as a floating impression, a tiny seed. The time will come when the impression solidifies, the seed grows. Then we will gather the harvest. These were subtle maneuvers, demanding tact, because His Majesty, despite amazingly indefatigable energy and perseverance, was a human being with an ear that one could not overload and stuff up without causing irritation and an angry reaction. That’s why access was limited, and the fight for a piece of the Emperor’s ear never stopped.362

In a world of grand titles and aristocratic pretension there was at the heart of the courtly institution a paradox—the humblest quotidian services were often the avenues to power and influence.

Velázquez’ Feast of Bacchus [Figure 32], was believed by some to be a reflection of the mentoring provided by Peter Paul Rubens during his time at the Spanish Court starting in September of 1628, but not yet of Velázquez’ first and thoroughly transformative Italian journey for which he would depart in June of 1629. Los Borrachos may indeed be the special product of Velázquez’ encounter with Rubens363—an encounter

362 Ibid., 36.

in which he saw how at least one artist had negotiated the dilemma of aristocratic aspiration and artistic vocation, as well as how to look at the royal collections that surrounded him—so ample with Titians and Veroneses—with new eyes. Nevertheless, the transformative nature of this first encounter with Rubens can be overstated. The transformation from the dark *Adoration of the Magi* to the seemingly more colorful and freer *Triumph of Bacchus* may be more apparent than actual. The brown ochre utilized by Velázquez in the *Adoration* has darkened considerably over the years, and as the brighter pigments have grown more transparent, the ground has, correspondingly, made its darkness felt throughout the painting.\(^364\) It is far closer to the artist’s Sevillian technique than might appear. McKim-Smith and Newman show that the technique in this work is not nearly as far from that of the Sevillian period than superficial comparison might lead us to believe. Brown concedes that some of the flaws that Velázquez’ rivals permitted their envy to magnify are nonetheless there to be seen in *Los Borrachos* [Figure 32]: “characteristic infelicities of the young Velázquez do remain—the claustrophobic composition, the murky colors, the distorted perspective.”\(^365\) At the same time, it is something utterly new—a classical painting purged of classicism.

Velázquez’ time in Italy, especially in Rome, has left little documentary trace in the record. We have, as of yet, no primary document with information about which artists Velázquez met or what he thought about the works he saw—no primary document except for the works he produced immediately upon (or perhaps before) his return. First of these


is Joseph’s Coat Brought to Jacob [Figure 33].\footnote{Ibid.} According to Brown: “Velázquez pays homage to the Italian Renaissance by demonstrating his newly won mastery of its canons,”\footnote{Ibid.} but as Arthur Danto points out, the work is not very successful according to those canons—the receding chess board of floor tiles serving only to reinforce the awkwardness with which the figures are distributed across the perspectivaly defined space, along with their isolation from one another. Rather that a provincial Spanish painter’s declaration of independence, Danto sees in this work Velázquez coming to grips with the realization that, if he is to achieve renown as a painter, it will not be by abandoning his own pictorial sense for the one privileged by Italian Renaissance history painting.\footnote{Danto, "Velázquez."} The other work usually dated from this period, the Forge of Vulcan [Figure 34], certainly indicates a more authentic assimilation, on Velázquez’s part, of what Italy had to teach him, or at least of what he was prepared to take away. Here the naturalism he brought with him from Spain is again applied to classical subject matter, as in Los Borrachos, but the rhetoric of gesture that is the special province of the grand manner of Italian painting, along with a harmonious composition that is not an Albertian window, but is instead as balanced and satisfying as any classical frieze, is far more successful.
And what of the two landscapes—a very contentious subject for the history of Landscape painting—that may have come out of this first Italian Journey? If they had been lost like the Expulsion of the Moriscos, with which the King had commanded Velázquez to refute his rivals at the court who had slandered him as a mere painter of heads would simply have failed to understand what they were if forced to rely upon a mention in some letter or inventory?

369 Pertaining to the dating of these two canvases, a subject not without some controversy, see Enriqueta Harris, “Velázquez and the Villa Medici,” Burlington Magazine, Vol. 123, 942 (Sep., 1981), pp. 537-54. Harris’s discovery of documents pertaining to renovations at the Villa Medici that could explain the appearance of the Grotto-Façade as Velázquez depicted it have lead some to endorse dating these two pieces from the second journey, that is, the 1650s. However, McKim-Smith and Newman present persuasive technical evidence based on the material composition of the grounds on which the works are executed that fairly decisively settle matters in favor of the 1630s. See McKim-Smith and Newman, Velázquez En El Prado : Ciencia E Historia Del Arte, 95-96.
The Grotto-Loggia Façade [Figure 35] and the Pavilion of Cleopatra-Ariadne [Figure 36], two views from the Villa Medici outside Rome, are not to be adequately explained by the naturalism of Spanish bodegónes, nor by the pastoral inflection of so much Renaissance classicism. Terms like painting en plein air should be fairly inappropriate and anachronistic in a discussion of painting in the early seventeenth century, even if, as McKim-Smith and Newman point out, it was not the exclusive invention of nineteenth century French Impressionists—Baroque painters could certainly go outside and paint what they saw.\textsuperscript{370} It was not inconceivable for painters to set up an easel out of doors. Brown and Garrido, ardent partisans of the earlier dating of these works, concede that this

\textsuperscript{370} Ibid.
is so—but that they should somehow escape the way in which “artistic theory prescribed an idealizing mission for the painter, and landscapes were painted in the studio and arranged in compositions that were supposed to be more beautiful and orderly than nature in the raw” seems less likely. They may have been understood merely as sketches for an unrealized work, or they may indeed have been the product of Velázquez’ second Italian trip in 1649, when there would have been more precedent for pure landscape produced en plein air to at least be thinkable. Still, the documentary evidence, along with the technical analysis of the paintings, seems to support, at least provisionally, their being the product of the first Italian journey. “These innovative, even revolutionary pictures seem a fitting climax to

Figure 35. *Grotto Loggia Facade* (Left) & Figure 36. *Pavilion of Cleopatra-Ariadne* (Right)

---

years of experience and experimentation. However, the technical examination of the paintings *leaves no doubt* that they were indeed done in the summer of 1629.\(^372\)

Velázquez’ career is commonly divided into thirds by his two Italian Journeys. Given the shock to our art historically conditioned expectations represented by the Villa Medici landscape sketches, placing Velázquez at the inception of a painting tradition with which he has not historically been associated (Joachim Sandrart claims he and Claude Lorrain painted landscapes out-of-doors in the 1630s,\(^373\) but no extant examples date before the 1650s), it would appear that there is some real insight in this division—at least the first third of his career is very appropriately punctuated by this experience of Italy. It bears restating: Velázquez is taking painting in this new direction in 1629 by means of a “procedure that was destined to change the course of the history of landscape painting” and this is not even the direction with which he finally decides to spend the rest of his career!

The next decade— the 1630s— is the most productive by far of Velázquez’ entire career. Nor did his social ambitions sleep during this frenetic period. The positions of *ayuda de guarda ropa* (assistant to the king’s wardrobe) in 1636 fell to the painter, to be followed by that of *ayuda de cámara* (assistant to the privy chamber), each successive post denoting closer proximity to the King, whose prestige was such that it could

---

\(^372\) Ibid., 60. Emphasis mine.

transfigure those within the orbit of his good graces. The king was the *fons honorum*,\(^{374}\) and like grace could do for the soul, his was the power to exalt his servants beyond what they would otherwise have the right to expect. Velázquez was in charge of the conservation and arrangement of the royal collections at the Escorial and the Alcázar in Madrid. He was responsible for the decoration of two new royal residences—the Buen Retiro and the Torre de la Parada. It is also during this period that we find the great majority of explicitly religious works in Velázquez’ oeuvre. They make up a very small portion of his body of work, but precisely because they are relatively few in number, and because it was for his contemporaries quite otherwise—religious paintings were the mainstay of nearly all other Spanish painters—they are of special importance for understanding Velázquez’ work in relation to that of his compatriots.

With the new decade of the 1640s the pace of Velázquez’ output slows considerably. This corresponds to the grim state of things in the country at large and for the dynasty he served. Wars abroad and rebellion at home were punctuated by deaths in the palace that brought the Spanish Hapsburg dynasty to within a hair’s breadth of extinction; we might say that the inevitable was postponed for only a generation, when French and German claimants would battle one another in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). The Spanish government had declared bankruptcy once before in 1627, only to do so again in 1647 during this decade of twilight. As if in response to the change in quantity in his production, Velázquez produces during this decade works

---

374 The fount of honour (Latin: *fons honorum*) refers to a nation's head of state, who, by virtue of his or her official position, has the exclusive right of conferring legitimate titles of nobility and orders of chivalry to other persons.
that show not only no diminishment, but rather a new transcendent technical mastery and conceptual brilliance that is at once playful and profound.

The first of these, known today as the *Rokeby Venus* [Figure 37] was long believed to have been commissioned by Don Gaspar de Haro y Guzmán, marques of Heliche, and later of Carpio. This can no longer be asserted without qualification. This picture, the only surviving female nude in Velázquez’ œuvre, may have first belonged to a fellow painter, Domingo Guerra Coronel.³⁷⁵ That this painting may have been produced, not just for a great connoisseur like the Marqués of Carpio, but for a fellow image-maker, potentially adds a new dimension to our understanding of this enigmatic work, though the possibility that Guerra was simply an agent representing an aristocratic patron’s acquisition of the controversial work must also be considered. This same decade saw the production of the last of Velázquez’ religious works, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, which

Figure 37. Diego Velázquez, *Rokeby Venus*, c. 1647–51, Oil on canvas, National Gallery, London

was produced for the Queen’s own chapel. Again we see a work commissioned not for a public church, but a chapel. Part of this comes from the nature of the commissions Velázquez is likely to get at the court—aristocratic persons rather than corporate bodies, like the ones so prominent in his native Seville. But like the chapel of the Jesuit Novitiate (which was an institutional commission), a personal chapel is a place especially congenial to private devotions—and again we find Velázquez producing work for a space where spiritual exercises are especially likely to be taking place.

Velázquez’ ascent at the court seems to move into a new phase during the decade of the ‘40s as well. In 1643 he becomes superintendent of private works (a title that again denotes special attachment to the king’s personal sphere within the court), and in 1647, *Veedor y Contador de la Pieza Ochavada*, a title linked to the octagonal room and the hall of mirrors, two rooms within the palace of tremendous prestige based on their being the settings in which the monarchy presented itself to dignitaries and diplomats. As a further mark of the king’s esteem Velázquez was sent, in 1648, on his second trip to Italy, this time as the king’s agent in the acquisition of a significant number of paintings and sculptures. The contrast between life at the Spanish court in the ‘40s, and as a representative of the King of Spain visiting the courts of Italy must have been significant; the king had to write more than once to get Velázquez to return. After three years in Italy he returned to Madrid and achieved the peak of his courtly ambitions.

In 1652 he was appointed *aposentador mayor de Palacio*, for which there was a rough precedent in the appointment by Philip II of his favorite architect to the same
position in the sixteenth century. The title could be translated as Royal Quartermaster and is usually rendered in English as Royal Chamberlain. It gave Velázquez heavy responsibilities but it also brought him to a level in the hierarchical world of seventeenth century Spain that he could hardly have imagined when he was an apprentice in Seville decades earlier. At the pinnacle of his striving after social status, and successful beyond belief, Velázquez produced what would be the last two major, large-scale works of his artistic career: Las Meninas (c. 1656) and the Fable of Arachne (c. 1658). Further (though only after a humilitatingly legalistic process in which his worthiness of such distinction was called twice into question), he achieved membership in one of the great historic Spanish military orders—the order of Santiago—which made his status as a gentleman indisputable. It seems too literary that the artist would, so near the end of his life, provide us with two major works that serve as elegant commentaries on the issues to which biographers and art historians would be so naturally drawn. Yet, the artist’s status in society (in Las Meninas, shown to be nature’s aristocrat, seamlessly at home in the orbit of royalty), and that same calling (as polyvalently addressed in the Fable of Arachne) in a more fundamental hierarchy—a cosmic one, in which the creator of artworks stands up against the two great devourers—human finitude and time—seem, in my opinion, to be the themes of these astonishing late works. Scholars should be skeptical of too pat a correspondence between life and works, but should we be so ungrateful as to deny it when it does indeed occur? Velázquez was a very thoughtful


practitioner of an art form that seems to encourage and sustain a contemplative, self-aware attitude. His apprenticeship with Pacheco had already conditioned him to see his practice as a painter as embedded in larger cultural concerns—those of poetry, theology, history, even, as was argued in the third chapter of this dissertation, scientific controversies—but both *Las Meninas* and *Arachne* seem to be about more than this. They seem to be a working-through in paint of the dignity and the consequences of image making. If we recall Norman Bryson’s contention that the Ignatian mode in image making is about a fundamental reform of human vision, our understanding of these two mature works can benefit considerably.

For a man so apparently eager to rise above the station to which circumstance had assigned him, the task of organizing the “exchange of brides” (French princess for Spanish *infanta*) on the border between the kingdoms of France and Spain must have been as compelling a demonstration of his transfigured status as the red badge of Santiago that he now wore.378 Within a month of returning from the Isle of Pheasants, the *Apostenador Mayor* of the palace took ill and died on August 6, 1660. He was sixty-one years old. He was buried in the habit of the order of Santiago.379

Velázquez’ end, as it is commonly recounted, demonstrates how hazardous responsibility for the entertainment of rulers, his own monarch, but especially the French King Louis XIV (who became the son-in-law of Velázquez employer), could be. Madame de Sévigné, in one of her letters, bequeathed to French cultural history the very figure of


379 Ibid. and according to Palomino.
François Vatel (1631 -April 24, 1671). A chef in the service of the Prince de Condé, Vatel, famous for his perfectionism, was supposedly so distraught about the lateness of a shipment of fish for a banquet in honor of his patron’s guest, that very same Louis XIV, that he committed suicide. His death was treated as something of a national tragedy.

---

Figure 38. Diego Velázquez, Las Meninas, 1656, Oil on canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid
That Velázquez died within a month of his return to Madrid leads inevitably to the notion that the stress and overwork involved in managing an event of such importance was the proximate cause of his demise—I cannot help but speculate that for generations of Francophile Spanish scholars, the presence of Louis XIV and the legend of Vatel, have, consciously or unconsciously, inflceted the account of Velázquez’ death. Beruete’s account of the indignities suffered by the painter’s widow and estate at the hands of the Junta of Obras y Bosques—basically the department of public works— who decided to reclaim the thousand ducats that had already been paid to the painter as superintendent of works for the Alcázar,\textsuperscript{381} will cure anyone of such romanticism.

Whether Velázquez would have recognized himself as the martyr to duty that the Vatel paradigm imposes on his biography, art historians are more interested in the closing of his career as a painter. There was a commission for Velázquez during this, the last

phase of his artistic career—for four mythological scenes all lost to fire in 1734, except for *Mercury and Argus* [Figure 40].

A career for Velázquez in which the artistic summation is not *Las Meninas* and the *Fable of Arachne* is difficult to imagine. It can be said that the surviving portion of this ensemble seems at least consistent with the trajectory that reaches a kind of culmination in the two works we have already addressed. In the *Mercury and Argus*, Velázquez is just as assuredly pushing his materials to the limits of expressiveness by means of technical mastery, employing counterintuitive composition, and finally, achieving brilliant color effects with a far more limited palette than should be necessary given the resources at his disposal.

This biographical sketch gives us a general scaffolding from which to work, but it is in examination of Velázquez’ technique and style—the manner in which he applied

![Figure 40. Diego Velázquez. Mercury and Argus. c. 1659. Oil on canvas. Museo del Prado, Madrid](image)

paint to canvas—that the peculiarities of his approach allow us to reconstruct just what image-making meant to an artist in such special circumstances.
What is seen is not the secret of nature observed, but really a mystery within the painting itself and about the visibility of its figures.

—Daniel Arasse, *Vermeer: Faith in Painting*, 75

Daniel Arasse addresses the complicated topic of “Vermeer’s Religion” in his book about that artist, and in so doing points the way to a renewal of questions of this type in the history of art.

If we are to follow Arasse and carry away what is useful to our own project from his treatment of Vermeer’s religion, we must return, as he does, to Aloïs Riegl [Figure 41] and his last completed work, *Das holländische Gruppenporträt (The Group Portraiture of Holland)* of 1902. Arasse reminds us of how, in this last and most enigmatic of Reigl’s works, the Kunstwollen of Dutch painting in the Golden Age—its

Figure 41. Alois Riegl, ca. 1890
animating intention—its *geistlich* vocation, if you will—is the representation of interiority. In the group portrait, this is somehow expressed by means of the *Aufmersksamkeit* of the sitters—the manner in which they, the represented, seem to turn their attention toward the viewer so as to imply in that moment one set of subjectivities (them) confronting another (us/me/you). “The objective, outward coherence of the scene transforms itself into the inner experience of the person who regards it;”382 this is Riegl according to J. L. Koerner in his article “Rembrandt and the Epiphany of the Face” whose account Arasse endorses.

Arasse points out that, if Riegl’s Viennese formalism has any merit, and it is meant to have explanatory value not only for the peculiar corporate portraits of which the Dutch were so fond, but to the whole of the Dutch achievement in painting during the golden age, then those of us seeking through a similar type of formal understanding to grasp the special quality of Vermeer’s paintings have deceived themselves. The qualities that Proust intuited from the *View of Delft*, or the “Vermeer Structure” that Arasse synthesizes from the reactions of several scholars and connoisseurs are not illusory, but they are quite neatly and completely accounted for by the *Kunstwollen* Riegl has excavated from the seventeenth century Netherlands. Bitter disillusion for those who sought to identify what seemed unique and anomalous in the phlegmatic Catholic painter of Delft—only to see this “sphinx” subsumed into the Protestant, gleefully commercial *Kunstwollen* of his Dutch compatriots! “Just when we think we have grasped the truth, the ‘irreplaceable

deviation’ that characterizes the ‘Vermeer structure,’ Riegl’s text leads us to recognize in it a general truth of Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, a commonplace.”383

The “effects” that Arasse has identified in Vermeer’s work—“the suggestion of the invisible in the visible, of the intimacy of a figure simultaneously close and inaccessible”—these can be accounted for under a structure so general it does not even need to correct for the things that set Vermeer apart from his contemporaries: his “fine manner;” his eschewal of the very group portraits that are Riegl’s window into golden age Dutch painting, and, above all, his Catholicism. Riegl’s Dutch Kunstwollen would seem simultaneously to explain too much and not enough. At the very least we must concede, as does Arasse, that the “affinity between Riegl and Vermeer remains . . . paradoxical.”384

Figure 42. Rembrandt. The Syndics of the Clothmakers’ Guild (The Staalmeesters). 1662. Oil on canvas. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

383 Arasse, Vermeer, Faith in Painting, 76-7.
384 Ibid., 77.
After all, the *holländische Gruppenporträt* may be about an entire genre, but its great protagonist is Rembrandt, and no amount of methodological loyalty can completely eradicate the instinct that these two painters are to be contrasted, and that to pretend otherwise is to disregard something profound and visceral in our reactions to paintings. Arasse makes the connection with the gentlemanly ideal presented in Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* (translated into Flemish for the first time in 1662) of *sprezzatura*—usually rendered in English as *nonchalance*—being assimilated by the Dutch bourgeoisie and our own emerging modern sensibility:

Moving from the limited circle of the court milieu to bourgeois social groups, the success of the Italian model developed a dialectic (decisive for the makeup of modern subjectivity) between interior world and exterior world, private and public, subjective interiority and social role.385

This may indeed be the matrix from which the *interiority* that is the informing spirit of Dutch painting in the seventeenth century emerged, and we may endorse D. R. Smith’s account of its emergence along with Arasse’s linking of that emergence to Riegl’s *Holländische Gruppenporträt*, if we find it persuasive. I certainly do. But this is not


[T]he reference to Castiglione [in Franciscus Junius’ translation of Jan de Brune de Jonghe’s *De Pictura Veterum*] sufficiently attests that a relationship existed in Holland at the beginning of the 1640s between the art of painting and polite manners, between the prestige of the model of refined comportment proposed by *The Courtier* and the new refinement of the art of the painters—as, for example began in the mid 1630s with the “fine manner” of Gérard Dou and Johannes Torrentius.
really the issue that concerns us here. Solid Calvinist Dutch burgers strive to internalize
the manners and refinements of Italian aristocrats and courtly wits from a century before
their own time. The result? The fragmented subjectivity with which we live today. I
concede that it is possible, but it is only important to us as the route by which Arasse
arrives at his treatment of Vermeer’s “fine manner” in contradistinction to the style of
other Dutch Masters similarly identified as *fijnschilders* (“fine” painters).

The “fine manner” of Gérard Dou, Johannes Torrentius, Fabretius, De Hooch, and
the early Rembrandt, all expressing this newly discovered interiority, conceive of their
artistic practice such that “the height of technical competence is to make all traces of the
painter’s labor, all material presence, the ‘painterliness’ of the painting, disappear from
the work.”\(^{386}\) This means that in their case “the drawing, and hence the contour line,

![Figure 43. Gerrit Dou, Self portrait, c. 1650](image)

\(^{386}\) Ibid., 78.
remains the basis of the work and the fascinating effect that results.”³⁸⁷ In short, “the
attitude of Dou and the other “fine painters” saw drawing as the ultimate value.”³⁸⁸
Vermeer’s “fineness” is of another kind altogether, and it is here that he evades the net of
Riegl’s Dutch Kunstwollen.

**Vermeer’s Fineness and Blur**

Vermeer’s style sufficiently resembled that of the other “fine painters” to be
meaningfully grouped with them by their contemporaries, but his style can just as
empirically be brought under the rubric of a “blurred manner.”³⁸⁹ The blurred manner is
an artifact of the camera obscura, at least on the account of Arthur Wheelock.³⁹⁰ Here we
must involve ourselves in the whole vexed question of the relationship of Vermeer’s
canvases to the optical devices of his day, the camerae obscurae, but before this, let us
seek to understand this “blurred manner” strictly as it is experienced on the canvas.
Vermeer’s version of fineness is one in which the contour line is abandoned. In
Vermeer’s treatment of those zones of the canvas where contour is traditionally to be
found at its most assertive, “the border of the figure [is] not so much indiscernible as
transitional, an uncertain zone where ‘passages’ back and forth result, in a fusion of

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 69-71, 78.

figure and background.” 391 At precisely those points where line and contour are paramount to what the “fine painters” are trying to achieve, Vermeer acts out a completely different role—that of “a colorist working with light.” 392

The issue of Vermeer’s blurred manner is essential to Arasse’s argument and he addresses the technical parameters of its manifestation, in a section subtitled “precision and blur.” Arrase’s treatment of Vermeer’s blur begins with an examination of *The Figure 44. The Lacemaker, c. 1669-1670 Oil on canvas transferred to panel 23.9 x 20.5 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris

---

391 Arasse, *Vermeer, Faith in Painting*, 78.

392 Ibid. *emphasis in the original*. In footnote 11 on p. 122, to precisely this sentence, Arasse points out to those who claim Vermeer’s individual brushstrokes are not to be seen, that the absence of impasto (“what does not show it Vermeer is the thickness of the paint with which this touch is set down”) does not mean that the strokes themselves are not there to be seen. He bids skeptics to examine the turban worn by the girl with the pearl earing in Washington DC.
**Lacemaker** [Figure 44]:

Vermeer’s painting is *blurred*. He does not linearly define the object that he depicts. . . we have just seen the contrast that *The Lacemaker* raises between the threads coming out of the naaikussen [needle cushion] and the linear quality of the working thread; but it is in the whole silhouette of the young woman that Vermeer shows a singular absence of drawing, an indifference to any ‘linear legitimation’ of the form.393

Gowing also recognized the lack of any linear drawing in the shadow as definitive of Vermeer’s technique in *The Lacemaker*, *The Guitar Player*, and the *Lady Writing a Letter* in the Beit Collection, and he “insists on the exceptional character of such a practice at the time.”394

One rather reductive explanation for this peculiarity of Vermeer’s images that has been largely laid to rest is that he simply transcribed in paint the image he achieved by means of a *camera obscura* with an imperfect focus.395 Vermeer, in some highly qualified and paradoxical way *represents* the type of image produced by the optics of such devices (and may indeed have made use of one) but emphatically does not mechanically transcribe such an image to the canvas.396 Vermeer’s “blurred manner” is not to be explained (or explained away) as the unthinkingly transcribed result of a poorly focused optical device.
In the preceding century the camera obscura had attracted the attention of a number of major artistic and intellectual figures. Among those that Arrase mentions, two should be of particular interest to us here—Leonardo da Vinci and Daniele Barbaro, the Venetian Cardinal who was a figure of some importance and influence at the Council of Trent as well as his generation’s great commentator on Vitruvius. The camera had a special place among savants as a tool for the observation of nature. It revealed, as Arasse puts it, “‘secrets’ of nature that . . . [one] could not observe with the naked eye.” For now, it is enough for the use we have for Arrase on this matter to state confidently that the “blurred manner” of Vermeer relates to the optical device known as the camera obscura, but is not, as an artistic decision made by the painter, explained by it. As Arasse sums up the issue:

If, as a painter, he [Vermeer] plays with this mechanical aspect revealed by the camera obscura, it is because it corresponds to his own artistic search, his “prospect” as a painter. What he kept of it was, in painting, a painterly effect, a selective blurring that evoked “scientifically,” and manifested pictorially, the invisible in the visible.

Vermeer models his figures differently from his contemporaries. “With extreme precision, Vermeer worked in certain places to blur or prevent the identification of what he depicts. “This goal is pursued even to the extent of ‘distort[ing]’ the appearance of the object and, even while manifestly ‘depicting’ it, make the object become strangely disquieting . . .” In the case of Girl with a Pearl Earring, the figure appears against a dark, basically unreadable background. She herself, however, is brilliantly lit—setting up

---

397 Ibid., 71.

398 Ibid., 73.
the greatest possible contrast between foreground and background but accomplished completely without recourse to outline. All along where an outline would be were the painting to have been created by Dou or De Hooch, Vermeer negotiates between the background and the figure which seem, resultanty, to boil forth out of the ground of the painting.

It is Arasse’s claims that this amounts to a highly personal expression of Leonardo da Vinci’s great innovation in oil painting—*sfumato*. According to Ernst Gombrich: “[t]his is Leonardo's famous invention … the blurred outline and mellowed colors that allow one form to merge with another and always leave something to our imagination.” In this alternate model of oil painting, it is not contour, but shadows and subtleties of color that are the mark of the painter’s mastery. Sometimes called “aerial perspective,” for those passages in Leonardo’s paintings where the bluer and hazier atmospheric effects are as much an indicator of depth of field as any of the perspectival cues, *sfumato*—from the Italian *sfumo* for “smoke”—is as much at play in the corners of the Mona Lisa’s enigmatic smile and the border between her flesh and her hairline as in the blue, hazy landscape over her shoulder.

Arasse marshals André Chastel’s authority to substantiate his own sense that Leonardo’s *sfumato* is more than just a technique too subtle and difficult to master and to teach for it to achieve the popularity with artists that *disengo*-based, strong contour image-making did; it constitutes a direct challenge to this other way of thinking about
painting. It “contradicts the clear outline of the drawing by effacing its contour and produces, instead of a formal statement, a diffuse state of emerging.”

Figure 45. Mona Lisa (Italian: La Gioconda, French: La Joconde) Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1503–1506, Oil on poplar, Musée du Louvre, Paris

To understand Arasse’s treatment of the specifically Catholic nature of Vermeer’s art, we have found it necessary to inquire into his account of Vermeer’s “blurred manner”

---

at some length. Having done so, it is important to do justice to his presentation. He states very strongly the challenge to the dominant paradigm of image making that Leonardo’s (and Vermeer’s) *sfumato* represents. If one were inclined to search the ancients for substantiation of something like Leonardo’s paradoxical sense of contour, Pliny was a useful authority. In book 35 of the *Natural History* we find the example of Parrhasios who triumphed over Zeuxis by drawing a *trompe-l’oeil* veil across a painted panel. Pliny does call the depiction of contour “the supreme subtlety of painting.” Academicism tends to lead us to project backward an emphatic attitude towards crisp, clearly drawn outlines that isn’t necessarily supported by the sources, be they classical (like Pliny) or of the Renaissance. Though, contour as the space between figures is certainly important, the effect recommended, for example, by Alberti, is far more ambiguous than we tend to imagine.

Nevertheless, in Vermeer’s context, to reach back to Leonardo and endorse precisely the road not taken in the history of oil painting up to that point is to dissent from the reigning understanding of what a painting was supposed to do: “In Vermeer’s eyes, the aim of painting was not to make its object known but to make the viewer witness to a presence. This is one of the continuing searches of his art—for him, an ‘end of painting.’”

This leads us back to Arasse’s account of Vermeer’s religion. The “blurred manner” needed fairly precise definition to be useful in what follows and certain predictable objections to this understanding needed to be addressed. Vermeer differed in other important respects from his contemporaries. He did not make portraits, properly

---

400 Arasse, *Vermeer, Faith in Painting*, 74.
understood, and did not make use of the device of the threshold, whereby we peer through a fictive doorway into an interior, bringing into play a social understanding of the public and the private. Within Vermeer’s interiors we are often screened or obstructed in our access to the principal figures, but “the figures of Vermeer do not address any secrets to us,” whereby we are granted access to social spaces otherwise understood as private, but rather “what we see of them, in full light, manifests the mystery of what is present, but not visible.”

Central to this is Vermeer’s depiction of light. Arrase’s argument for the great relevance of a Christian “metaphysics of light” need not detain us here, except perhaps long enough to note his useful contrast between Vermeer and Rembrandt. The chiaroscuro of Rembrandt has been used by David Smith to explain a fundamentally Protestant worldview—the spiritual and the material are irreconcilably opposed, choice is necessitated. In Vermeer’s images of even, and perhaps especially, quotidian scenes and objects, where the visible and the invisible are mysteriously united. His images do not allow access to a usually hidden interior. They show forth presence. In this sense they are emphatically not just about something profoundly different from those of Rembrandt and Vermeer’s other contemporaries—they are something profoundly different.

Vermeer’s conversion to Catholicism at the age of twenty coincided with his engagement to Catherina Bolnes. This is strong evidence that Vermeer’s unknown master was probably a Catholic painter, since this would have provided entrée for a his student’s

---

401 Ibid., 79.

courtship of a young Catholic woman from a respectable family, which would otherwise have seemed unlikely in the Calvinist environment of Delft where the hostility of the authorities relegated Catholics to meeting in private homes for worship. We can consider, therefore, the strong possibility that, even before his conversion, Vermeer was trained by and, in some sense, as, a Catholic painter. If there is a specifically Catholic approach to image making, he is likely to have absorbed it, and to have absorbed it in an environment where its distinctiveness is likely to have been heightened rather than elided by the attitude, not only of the Calvinist majority, but of a community of painters trained to address that majority’s needs and expectations.403

By the seventeenth century, this contrast cannot be understood in terms of crude iconophilia versus iconoclasm/iconophobia—Rembrandt can hardly be regarded as iconophobic, and actual iconoclasm is a distant memory in the Netherlands by this time. The difference, therefore, between the Calvinist and Catholic communities with regards to images rests in the appropriateness of their use in “spiritual meditation.” It is the spiritual power of images that is in contention:

Protestant techniques of spiritual meditation have as their source earlier Catholic practices; in their sequence one cannot help recalling the successive phases of Ignatian meditation but they differentiated themselves more and more clearly in the seventeenth century, as Protestants developed their own conception of spiritual meditation.404

---

403 Ibid., 82.

404 Ibid.
In *La Peinture spirituelle ou l'art d'adorer, aimer et louer Dieu en toutes ses oeuvres*, published in Lyon in 1611, an influential tool in the counter-reformation church’s ongoing attempt to reclaim those zones north of the Alps that had been lost to the various Protestant confessions, Father Richeome, SJ (“the French Cicero”)*405* counsels believers to always have with them an image to assist them in prayer. He states that this image can function in the place of the internal image that Saint Ignatius employs in his devotional practice.*406* The Calvinist excercitant, in his practice, would refrain from inserting himself into a vividly imagined scene—he seeks to hear and understand rather than to see and experience. The Catholic excercitant seeks, in a very real way, to attain vision. This grows out of established pedagogical view linked to an understanding both of memory and of the cultivation and conditioning of feeling whereby, as Richeome puts it: “nothing that delights more and makes a thing glide more softly into the soul than painting, nor that engraves it more deeply on the memory, nor that more effectively rouses the will and sets it energetically in motion.”*407*

The religion of Vermeer to which Arasse refers is not Catholicism *per se*, which is the subject of the Allegory itself, but rather the religion of painting as practiced by Vermeer, which is itself informed and conditioned by a Catholic world view. The distinction is an important one:

---


*407* Richeome as translated and cited by Arasse, 83.
Vermeer took this ambition of the painter into a private world; he made interiority the mystery he celebrated and, at the same time, he exalted, in a measured way, the luminous color that Leonardo used. Vermeer thus invites the viewer to share the inaccessible privacy of his paintings, at the cost of an enigmatic experience: the presence of a painted picture.  

We may take Arrase’s insight a bit further, with an eye to its applicability to Velázquez, if we make one final comparison to a work by Vermeer, his *Allegory of the Art of Painting* [Figure 46]. Mariët Westermann makes explicit comparison, not only of *The Allegory of the Art of Painting* and *Las Meninas*, but also of the trajectory taken by each artist from dealing with genres situated at the bottom of the hierarchy of painting that is generally accepted by the painters’ contemporaries, to “ambitious statements on the nature of the painter’s art.”

Further, that both Vermeer and Velázquez arrived at a “mode of communication” that was “distinctly visual rather than literary in origin”— Westermann’s term is *eidetic*:

Philosophers might say that Vermeer was a strongly eidetic painter (from the Greek *eidos*, mental image, visual thought) in that his way of conceiving his paintings and their mode of communication was distinctly visual rather than literary in origin. In this respect there are uncanny resemblances between the interests of Vermeer and Velázquez, the Spanish master who died about the time of Vermeer's beginnings. Velázquez's tactile renderings of eggs beginning to congeal and water condensing on ceramic jars have striking parallels in Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*, both in the description of stuffs and in the temporal freezing implied by moving liquids. Like Vermeer, Velázquez's art matured from these early, dazzling displays of virtuosity expended on the low genres to ambitious statements on the nature of the painter's art. It is often said, not wrongly, that the Art of Painting is Vermeer's *Las Meninas*.  

---

408 Arasse, *Vermeer, Faith in Painting*, 86.  

In short, the eidetic practice is one that—rather than despising the material constraints of painting and placing value in disegno, perspective and the “story” that animates historia—seeks to transfigure that material:

These works arose in distinct social contexts and without direct genealogical linkage, as their quite different original destinations and quite different interpretations of the artist's immediate task suggest. Yet the vast distance from the court culture of Madrid to the urban bourgeois milieu of Delft should not obscure congruencies of interest for ambitious painters active most anywhere in
17th-century Europe. The Art of Painting and *Las Meninas* make strong claims for the painter's privileged role in revealing and shaping knowledge in a period newly preoccupied with visual modes of apprehending the world. Their authors thereby occupy seminal positions in a modern history of art that sees art as an activity that must be intellectual and manual in balanced measure.\textsuperscript{410}

Does Velázquez’ treatment of his actual, material, works substantiate this view? For that we must look at them, and at how they are constructed, very closely.

\textsuperscript{*} \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{*} \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{*}

As we move from Vermeer and his ‘religion of painting’ to the Spanish oeuvre of Velázquez, we would do well to note Brian Sewell’s insight when he reviewed the recent exhibition of the Spanish master’s work in London for readers of the *Weekly Standard*:

Is anything in Velázquez's paintings quite what it seems? His dark early paintings of figures contained in undefined and gloomy atmospheres are often explained as reflecting the influence of Caravaggio, but he had not at that stage been to Italy and, as no painting by Caravaggio had yet reached Spain, the influence can only have been at a remove, filtered through the work of imitators - Velázquez and Caravaggio may have kinship in subject but not in color or the handling of paint.\textsuperscript{411}

Velazquez’ paintings are clearly under the influence of tenebrism and therefore of Caravaggio, but this is quite literally a superficial correspondence. What Velázquez does to the canvas requires us to look at Titian far more closely than Caravaggio.

\textsuperscript{410} Ibid., 232-33.

\textsuperscript{411} Brian Sewell, "Painter of the People," *Evening Standard*, October 23 1996.
The effects possible in oil, especially as regards glazes, were extremely rich and varied. The techniques that presented themselves as this medium was explored were to revolutionize how the painted image could be encountered and appreciated. For the Art Historian inclined to focus on the object, this, perhaps less obvious but equally revolutionary modification of the practice of painting should be ranked at least equally with the coloristic and technical advantages oils introduced. The material parameters of oil painting change the pace and tempo of painting and therefore, radically, the experience of [making a] painting itself. Painting in oils (at least potentially, since one must acknowledge that it still may be necessary to finish a painting quickly) takes on a tempo and encourages a stance toward both the object and the process that has much more in common with other, more contemplative and more frequently-contemplated activities such as the composition of poetry and certain types of religious devotion.

An exploration of how the pigment-bearing oil acts and reacts will help to clarify and justify this emphasis on time. Returning to the ever-present Venetian damp, it is important to note that these oils are hydrophobic and encase the pigment, whether organic or mineral, in an envelope that is resistant to water. A fairly high standard of purity is necessary if the oil’s drying properties are to be adequate to the task, and even when sufficiently refined, siccatives (drying agents) such as a variety of metal salts might be called for. Van Eyck’s contribution is the use of glazing: “He developed glazing from a craftsman’s decorative technique into a method suitable for the finest paintings,”

though not by means exclusively of oil. Van Eyck placed oil glazes on top of a tempera ground. An oil glaze, it is helpful to remember, is a thin layer, sometimes so thin as to qualify as a wash, that makes use of the translucence of the oil medium to achieve color effects that are basically the result of a tinted filter modifying an underlying solid color or another underlying glaze. These mutually interacting glazes can reach a level of complexity in Titians work such that they defy even our most technologically advanced means of analysis. The complexity of these glazes is again made possible by the nature of the hydrophobic envelope in which the pigments are suspended. The pigments are not only insulated from water but from one another. Materials that would react disastrously with one another in an egg tempera matrix or in plaster can maintain their individual integrity when suspended in oil. And again, there is time to see how layers interact on the palette and on the painting’s surface. This encouraged a level of engagement with his materials on the part of the artist that the mercurial nature of other binding matrices did not. This facilitates not only new styles and new techniques, but at least as importantly (again, because it changes so slowly), a new awareness of how the artist’s physical intervention upon the object is preserved in the medium—the brushstroke and the gesture of the painter.

As Vasari tells us about oil painting, and we know Velázquez owned the book in which this is found:

A most beautiful invention and a great convenience to the art of painting was the discovery of coloring in oil. . . This manner of painting kindles the pigments and nothing else is needed save diligence and devotion, because the oil in itself softens and sweetens the colors and renders them more
delicate and more easily blended than do the other mediums. While the work is wet the colors readily mix and unite one with the other; in short, by this method the artists impart wonderful grace and vivacity and vigor to their figures.\textsuperscript{413}

Vasari lauds oil paint for the manner in which it “kindles the pigments,” delivering results that surpass other media. The colors are brighter. Further, the method allows the artist to “impart grace and vivacity to their figures.” Not unlike the earliest understanding of the canvas, oils make it easier to accomplish one’s goal. It takes time, however, to categorically modify the goal. It produces colors that are better (in some sense) than those produced by pigments suspended in other media. There is no sense in Vasari that the oil painting is a different kind of object from the painting executed in, for example, egg tempera. There is certainly no sense that the painter in oils is doing something meaningfully different from his confrere working in, say, fresco.

For oil painters to begin to theorize their practice as oil painters we must wait a considerable amount of time. Indeed, it may be helpful to consider whether such a theoretical understanding is even thinkable before the transformation of painterly practice by the assimilation of the oil medium.\textsuperscript{414}

Federico Zuccaro (c.1542-1609), together with his brother Taddeo, who is buried in the Pantheon in Rome close by the tomb of Raphael, represents a real advance in the prestige of the painter in Europe. The Palazzo Zuccari in Rome, with its hagiographical frescoes depicting the rise of this artistic dynasty, is a testament to the place at which

\textsuperscript{413} Vasari’s Introduciton, Vasari, \textit{The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects}.

\textsuperscript{414} Elkins, \textit{What Painting Is : How to Think About Oil Painting, Using the Language of Alchemy}.
artists had arrived, at least in Italy.\textsuperscript{415} Federico undertook during his tenure as president of the \textit{Academia di San Lucca} in Rome some of the very first lectures on Art that can be genuinely called theoretical. A key step in the prestige he acquired on his rise to such heights was the work he executed for the decoration of the Escorial during the reign of Philip II. It was Federico who, despite the prestige of Alberti and the concept of the proper training of an artist found in Vasari, would write that:

\begin{quote}
The art of painting does not derive from the mathematical sciences, nor has it any need to resort to them to learn rules or means for its own art, none even in order to reason abstractly about this art: for painting is not the daughter of mathematics, but of Nature and Drawing.\textsuperscript{416}
\end{quote}

If painting in Spain was to achieve the respectability it had in Italy, then the anti-intellectualism of the Counter Reformation would tend to discourage that it do so by associating itself with Philosophy and Mathematics, as the earlier Renaissance masters had done (that route was less appealing—guilt by association with Erasmian and Humanist principles), but by association with poetry and rhetoric. In abandoning one set of allies for another, Titian and the Venetian masters were an important model. The special prestige of poetry and the counter-reformational interest in rhetorical persuasiveness make oil painting of the Venetian sort very appealing to Spanish painters.

The debt owed to Venetian painting is, of course, about color and a mimesis of surfaces and their textures over that of space geometrically understood. There is


\textsuperscript{416} Federico Zuccaro (1607), \textit{Idea de’pittri, sculitori e archtetti}, bk, ii, ch. 6, excerpted in Blunt, \textit{Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600}. 
something before even this, however; the fundamental nature of the canvas. It is in exploration and exploitation of the materiality of this new vehicle for the image—a surface with qualities so fundamentally different from that of the wooden panel that had been the bearer of such images in the past—that the Venetian contribution is to be understood. It may go a considerable way towards explaining Velázquez’ choice of the Venetian manner, for such is what it was, over that in which oils were carefully set on panels, or the way in which they were subordinated to line and drawing. The actual mode that Spaniards like Velázquez, Ribera and Zurbarán selected— the Venetian way in which the stretched canvas was painted in oils—was a field of color and tactility.

Velázquez selected this way of approaching the oil-painted canvas, then, in a deliberate and thoughtful way, but in a way that was already established as one among several options. Another cause of the selection of the Venetian option, taken even as far as the older Titian—composing in oils directly on the canvas, may be a quite unintentional side-effect of the way Sevillian artists were trained. Zahira Véliz tell us:

As elsewhere in Europe, drawing was the medium through which the artist’s inventions were transferred from the imagination to visible form. In Spain, at least in the early part of this period [the late 16th and early 17th century], in order to develop this faculty, an apprentice would copy extensively after prints or drawings from the master’s collection. In contrast to the practices established in Italy, for example, at Bologna with the Carracci, there is no evidence to suggest that drawing from life was practiced regularly, nor was it considered in Spain as a principal source of new ideas.417

However much drawing itself was praised and emphasized by a cultured, well-read painter like Pacheco\textsuperscript{418}—his students received an education in which this conviction was subtly undermined. In an environment where drawing was not taught from the life, it became merely a technical skill, not an arena for invention as this term was understood in the Italian tradition. This tradition received a great deal of lip-service in the studio of a learned painter like Pacheco, but the basic disjunction between practice and theory—between what drawing meant in the experience of Spanish students versus their Italian counterparts—must have been subtly subversive. Véliz again:

While in both cultures drawing was the medium of artistic invention, in Spain, drawing was taught not so much as a means of enabling the young artist to study nature, and to improve upon what he found, but more as a technical skill necessary to the creation of new visual statements formulated from a recognized vocabulary. This vocabulary was made up of images and iconography authorized by convention, and by the new, all-important desiderata of decorum and narrative clarity. It was a vocabulary limited by post-Tridentine codes and the censorship of the Inquisition, and assimilated through the copying of prints, drawings, paintings and sculpture by recognized masters of the past.\textsuperscript{419}

In the case of Velázquez, this seems to have led to a kind of independent discovery of the value of drawing from life.\textsuperscript{420} We know from Véliz that in his earliest works, consistent with Pacheco’s recommendations: “Velázquez ‘drew’ with a pointed, rather stiff brush

\textsuperscript{418} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{419} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{420} Pacheco, \textit{Arte De La Pintura, Su Antigüedad y Grandezas (1649)}. Also, Véliz, "Becoming an Artist in Seventeenth-Century Spain," 17.
that produced a thin graphic line that stood in relief to the preparation layer." Finer
details are often picked out with chalk or white lead drawing point. What is of special
interest to us here, however, is the overall trend in Velázquez’ practice from the 1620s
onwards: “Although these fine graphic strokes continue to be seen from time to time in
radiographs of paintings by Velázquez dating from the later 1620s, they become
increasingly infrequent, suggesting that Velázquez’ method had outgrown the laborious
methods learned in his apprenticeship.”

To further our understanding of his practice within its own material parameters, it
would be helpful to examine the pigments he used in a palette that was minimal not only
by our own standards (spoiled as we are by color options made possible by industrial
chemistry), but even by the standards of his contemporaries.

*The Coronation of the Virgin of 1635* [**Fig. 23**] is the result of only five different
pigments in masterly combination. The standard *velazqueño* palette doesn’t go far
beyond this, typically including seven basic colors, two of which—green and purple—are
derived from a mixture of others. His basic colors consist of white, yellow, red, brown,
and blue, as well as the composites green and purple. Here, far more than the gradual
diminution of underdrawing that we have already discussed, we are confronted with what
has every indication of being a deliberate choice:

---


422 Ibid.

Velázquez seems intentionally to have limited his palette to inexpensive, abundantly available colors. This is most certainly a departure from his master’s practice, especially in the period around 1600. Pacheco’s own paintings are designed to be painted in brilliant, enamel-like oil colors, where the quality of pigments and smooth application are more important than the more subtle optical effects that can be achieved with a reduced palette.424

The challenge of Velázquez early works, given the dark grounds upon which he was initially trained to paint, was dependant upon a “smooth opaque paint mixture capable of maintaining its brightness when laid over a dark ground.” 425 This comes from an acute familiarity with the qualities of his medium:

This skill suggests that the lessons learned in Pacheco’s studio while mixing paints for the master gave the young artist a thorough understanding of the technical potential of the linseed oil medium.426

This palette, then—deliberately limited—should be given some attention if the materiality of Velázquez’ achievement is to be understood.

*Chiaroscuro*, one of the great effects of oil painting, is visually persuasive mainly by means of the counterpoint provided by the bold highlights possible with lead white. Some critics opine that the deep, inky blacks of the Dutch Masters are necessarily symbiotic with this assertive white pigment. Certainly, for the modern analysts of historic canvases, this pigment’s ability to render ideas visible under x-radiography makes it


though as Gridley McKim-Smith points out, there are very few contracts for Spanish works that specify the use of particular pigments, Velazquez’ disciplined and minimalist palette shows that the colors used must have been a matter of careful 

Figure 47. Coronation of the Virgin, 1635

the skeleton key to the (quite literally) underlying traces of the artist’s intentions.427

427 Ball, Bright Earth : Art and the Invention of Color, 65.
When tenebrism spread to distant Spain, where expensive pigments were far less easily come by than they were in Italy, painters like Velázquez, Ribera and Zurbarán were able to achieve much more homogeneous color compositions, in which the abrupt transitions from brightly colored lights to murky neutral shadows is far less marked than in Caravaggio himself. A more limited palette, a simpler technique and a greater reliance on palette mixtures makes the Spanish Caravaggism the most important watershed between the attitude to color that put great emphasis on raw materials and one wholly concerned with design and handling: what Annibale Caracci laughingly characterized as ‘good drawing and coloring with mud’.  

Chapter 6

Velázquez, Titian, and the *pittoresco* of Boschini

It can be argued that Velázquez’ practice was far out ahead of the art theory that would have justified and explained it to his contemporaries. It does seem, however, that such a body of theory was being developed in his lifetime, even if it was to bear fruit only after his death.

In the specifically Spanish context of Velázquez’ reception and influence, the connection is difficult to address. In Seville we have a painterly tradition that shares common roots with the style of Velázquez and has considerable longevity, but out of Madrid and the court, in the ‘direct line,’ to continue the genealogical analogy, Velázquez’ manner of making images suffers the same fate as the Spanish Hapsburg dynasty whose interests it served—it dies out and is replaced. The Bourbons who finally defeated other claimants to the vacant Spanish throne brought with them the artistic style that was to supplant that of Velázquez as emphatically as they themselves would the Hapsburgs [Figure 48.].

This may be why a major theoretical work that champions the Venetian style of oil painting and cites Velázquez’ endorsement of it as proof of its prestige, would be published in Venice in 1660, while a Spanish work written (and which we know to have been completed in the 1670s) by a younger contemporary of Velázquez, Jusepe Martínez and which similarly championed this painterly style, languished in manuscript until it was
published in 1866—a date by which publication might have been driven more by antiquarian than polemical or theoretical interest.430

This is not to say that the painting of the seventeenth century was un-theorized. Far from it. Gian Pietro Bellori stands tallest among the art theorists of this era, thanks to his influence as secretary of the Accademia di San Luca in 1671, and his book, the seventeenth century’s answer to the Vita of Vasari, Le vite de’ pittori, scultori et architetti moderni (The lives of the modern painters, sculptors, and architects).431 His conceptualization of the painter’s enterprise, however, could not but place at a disadvantage those, like Velázquez, whose practice emphasized the brush and was understood to look back to the achievements of the great Venetian painters like Titian and Veronese. Bellori endorses Vasari’s concept of disegno, linking it to the cardinal virtue of 'prudence.' The standard is essentially that of Aristotle; idealism, in choice of subject matter and in the attitude towards the work of art itself—which is seen as an object transcendent of the labor the artist imparts to it, is the proper goal of painting. Prudence is the virtue of Idealism. Excessive naturalism, or distracting expression of style (maniera) are imprudent and therefore deficient in virtue.

430 Martínez. Nobilíssimo Art de la Pintura.


The canon of painters as Bellori sets it out is informative: twelve artists, Annibale and Agostino Carracci, Domenico Fontana, Federico Barocci, Caravaggio, Rubens, van Dyck, Francesco Duquesnoy, Domenichino, Giovanni Lanfranco, Alessandro Algardi and Poussin.
Robert Enggass and Jonathan Brown say of Marco Boschini (1613-1678), “[He] is the anti-Bellori of the Seicento. His writings contain the closest thing we have to a theory of Baroque art written in the Baroque age. He was not an intellectual like Bellori, nor did he ever develop what could seriously be called a systematic body of art theory. But his peculiar blend of lively art criticism and fragments of art theory includes both attacks against specific tenets of the theory of classicism and an enthusiastic appreciation of the stylistic components of Venetian painting—components that for the most part we would today call Baroque.”

Figure 48. Louis-Michel van Loo, *Philip V of Spain with his wife Elisabetta Farnese and his descendants*, Prado

Boschini, then, is the author of a work that addresses Velázquez’ style written by a fellow practitioner who was specifically familiar with his work. His writings made it into

---

print in Venice in time for Velázquez’ contemporaries to take their measure, and that makes them especially useful.

*    *    *

In 1660, the same year Velázquez died, a press in Venice published a long poem by Marco Boschini. His work, entitled La Carta del Navegar pittoresco, is, in its very form and method, a measure of the differences between our own intellectual world and the one inhabited by Velázquez and his contemporaries; it is a dialogue (a form not much in use by theoreticians anymore) in verse (likewise) consisting of quatrains with an ABBA rhyme scheme, divided into eight chapters called venti, or breezes. It is written in the Venetian dialect and enacts a discussion between a ‘dilettante Venetian Senator’ and a ‘professor of painting.’

It contains a set of verses that have long drawn the attention of Velázquez scholars, and that, as Gridley McKim-Smith points out, reverses the typical hierarchy of prestige by seeking to persuade the reader of the greatness of Venetian painting by citing the opinion of a Spaniard. Boschini’s characters share an anecdote about a supposed conversation between Salvator Rosa and Velázquez during the latter’s second trip to Italy:

Lu storse el cao cirimoniosamente,  
E disse; Rafael (a dirve el vero;

---

433 Marco Boschini and Dario Varetari, La Carta Del Navegar Pitoresco : Dialogo Tra Vn Senator Venetian Deletante, E Vn Professor De Pitura, Soto Nome D'ecelenza, E De Compare : Comparti in Oto Venti (In Venetia: Per li Baba, 1660).

434 McKim-Smith et al., Examining Velázquez, 29.
The master stiffly bowed his figure tall
And said, "For Rafael, to speak the truth—
I always was plain-spoken from my youth—
I cannot say I like his works at all."

"Well," said the other, "if you can run down
So great a man, I really cannot see
What you can find to like in Italy;
To him we all agree to give the crown."

Diego answered thus: "I saw in Venice
The true test of the good and beautiful;
First, in my judgment, ever stands that school,
And Titian first of all Italian men is."435

These lines were frequently quoted in the nineteenth century. Though Boschini’s book
had fallen into oblivion, it was resurrected for students of Velázquez by William Stirling
Maxwell. Few who quoted the lines that introduced so clear-cut a distinction—Raphael


The lines are cited from Marco Boschini, La Carte De Navegar Pittoresco (Venice: 1660), 58., and Maxwell credits the translation as follows: “For this translation I am indebted to that eminent scholar, my friend the Rev. Dr. Donaldson,” in footnote 1, p. 163, and it is this same translation that is quoted by Ruskin and other writers in English in the Nineteenth Century.
on one side, Titian on the other, and Velazquez making a clear, unambiguous choice—
were prepared to make use of much beyond those specific lines in Boschini’s massive art-
theoretical epic.

In the nineteenth century, Stirling Maxwell called it: “a heavy and verbose
panegyric, in which the dullest conceits that ever grew in the poetical garden of Marini; are engrafted on the vulgar dialect of the boatmen of the lagunes, and the degenerate
painters of the day are lauded as princes of their art, and peers of Giorgione and Titian."437

Kart Justi, in 1889, found Boschini somewhat more applicable. First, addressing
the esteem Velázquez seems (by way of the acquisitions he made on behalf of the King) to have held for Tintoretto, a painter whose intensely mannered style could be understood as antithetical to the naturalism of the Spanish painter:

Tintoretto is one of those who have always had quite as enthusiastic admirers as haters, the former amongst artists, the latter mainly amongst the general public. Some feel irritated at his treatment of the subject, his frivolity; others see nothing but his pictorial genius, his inexhaustible power of representation. To the former belonged Pacheco (ii., 14, 130, 295, "lack of decorum"); to the latter Velazquez, although his quiet spirit of observation was so fundamentally different from the fiery temperament of Tintoretto. For the description of painting which the Spaniard brought to such perfection the Italian certainly did not lack capacity, as shown by his portraits, but only

436 Justi is referring to Giambattista Marino (also Giovan Battista Marino; 14 October 1569 - 25 March 1625); a Neopolitan poet. He is most famous for his long epic L’Adone. His style, which came to be known as Marinism, later Secentismo, uses extravagant and counterintuitive conceits, along with strong appeals to the senses. It is the Italian style correspondent to ‘metaphysical poetry’ in the English tradition and “conceptismo” in Spain—where Lope the Vega was an ardent admirer of Marinismo.

437 Stirling Maxwell, Velazquez and His Works, 161.
the phlegm and—time. For the swarm of Tintoretto's admirers at that time in Venice, naturalism was an abomination. Whoever is no stylist (*manieroso*) is a mere cobbler, said Marco Boschini, who has preserved for posterity the sentiments and the cant of these "aesthetes."  

In his analysis of Velázquez' portrait of *Pope Innocent X* [Figure 49], Justi invokes Boschini’s opinion after giving what I think is still the best appraisal yet written of this key work in the painter’s oeuvre, worth quoting in its entirety so that we may better appreciate his citation of Boschini, who is himself both a Venetian painter and a contemporary of Velázquez, rather than an evaluator viewing the work from the other side of Impressionism and nineteenth century naturalism:

[H]is principle was to produce the greatest effect with the least expenditure of means and time; or that here the fundamental laws of draughtsmanship are seriously attended to, painting what one really sees, not what one fancies one sees or infers; or again coloured light effects carried to the point of optical delusion. But the less we can measure or grasp this special object of painting, the more delicate and steady must be the hand that precipitates and crystallizes the mental picture. Hence the broadness of treatment, the artist working with a full grasp of the general impression; hence also the incalculable nature of the touches inspired by the subtle optic feeling of the moment.  

And invoking Boschini (along with Richardson and Anton Rafael Mengs):

Boschini, himself a Venetian, already noticed in Innocent X.'s portrait *el vero colpo* Venetian ("the true Venetian touch"); Richardson called attention to *la grande varie'te de technics coitchees se'parc'nient sans ctre noyc'es ensemble*;

---

438 Justi, *Diego Velazquez and His Times*, 153.

439 Ibid., 389.
and it was this that Mengs had in his mind when he said of a picture that it seemed painted with the will alone.\textsuperscript{440} Boschini is writing in the seventeenth century. Richardson and Mengs in the eighteenth, but Justi cites them together in his treatment of Velázquez’ \textit{Innocent X} based on the unity of their response. Bear in mind that the will, at this time, is a faculty that was understood as quite distinct from the rational faculty. John Ruskin would tell painters in his own day about Boschini’s account of how Velázquez endorsed Titian over Raphael:

\begin{quote}
Learn that line by heart, and act, at all events for some time to come, upon Velasquez' opinion in that matter. Titian is much the safest master for you. Raphael's power, such as it was, and great as it was, depended wholly upon transcendental characters in his mind; it is "Raphaelesque," properly so called; but Titian's power is simply the power of doing right. Whatever came before Titian, he did wholly as it ought to be done. Do not suppose that now in
\end{quote}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure49.jpg}
\caption{\textit{Innocent X}, c. 1650, Galleria Doria-Pamphili, Rome}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{440} Ibid.
recommending Titian to you so strongly, and speaking of nobody else to-night, I am retreating in anywise from what some of you may perhaps recollect in my works, the enthusiasm with which I have always spoken of another Venetian painter. There are three Venetians who are never separated in my mind,—Titian, Veronese, and Tintoret. They all have their own unequalled gifts, and Tintoret especially has imagination and depth of soul which I think renders him indisputably the greatest man; but, equally indisputably, Titian is the greatest painter; and therefore the greatest painter who ever lived. You may be led wrong by Tintoret in many respects, wrong by Raphael in more; all that you learn from Titian will be right.  

Jonathan Brown gives Boschini as the primary source for the works that Velázquez acquired while in Venice on his second Italian journey. He credits Boschini’s accuracy as far as his love for the Venetian tradition, but states that attributing to him distaste for the Roman tradition “is not true.”

It is Gridley McKim-Smith, in Examining Velázquez, who reestablished Boschini as a source of importance for understanding the Spaniard’s work. For those willing to take up the reintroduction of Boschini into the library of sources that a Velázquez scholar should consider, it is fortunate that over the past two decades Canadian art historian Philip Sohm has published two books that address Boschini in a thorough manner, and

---


442 Brown, Velázquez, Painter and Courtier ., 298, f.n. 44.

443 McKim-Smith et al., Examining Velázquez. p. 28-29

444 Sohm, Pittresco : Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy., and (continued.) Sohm, Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy.
that both of these books have had the good fortune to be thoughtfully reviewed. In the following section I will present from Sohm’s comprehensive treatment of Boschini’s writing those aspects most useful to us in the task of examining the style and technique of Velázquez.

* * * * *

In the Sixteenth Century art came to be written about as never before. One can read a great deal of this material and find little or no mention of what today we would call brushwork—the physical trace of the artist’s gesture transmitted through the brush to the pigment-bearing medium—and certainly not understood as something that contributed significantly to the viewer’s aesthetic experience. Not until the Impressionists of the Nineteenth Century do we have a thorough appreciation, if not fetishization of the brushwork. Peering back over the shoulders of Jackson Pollock in the Twentieth century, Manet in the Nineteenth, Watteau in the Eighteenth, and Velázquez, or perhaps Rembrandt, in the Seventeenth, it seems peculiar that theoreticians of the High Renaissance had so little to say about this aspect of painting.

Of course, much of the painting produced in oils during this period would not itself lead us to notice this omission; painters sought to give their work a finished, enamel-like surface, or, in the case of Leonardo’s sfumato, a vaporous, hazy effect by means of the

---

subtle interplay of glazes. Most artists did not fail to carefully conceal the traces of the passage of the brush through the oil medium, save perhaps when examined at so short a distance that the viewer could no longer be considered to be engaging the work aesthetically. There was, however, a major exception to this standard of which many, if not most, of the authors of these Renaissance texts could not have been ignorant. It attracted prestigious patronage, was highly successful in the market, and yet “[t]he critical reaction ranged in tone from ambivalent to vituperative, but even the most sympathetic critics had difficulty understanding a style that intentionally disrupted the illusion of a view through a window by calling attention to the material presence of paint (impasto, dry brush, etc.).”

This exception was that of oil painting as practiced in Venice, especially by masters like Titian and Tintoretto.

The standard explanation for this theoretical blind spot, this outpacing by painting of the intellectual categories meant to buttress and justify the viewer’s experience as well as the painter’s practice, is that of the paragone, or, as it would be imported into Spanish art theory, the parangón. The paragone was an Italian literary form in which the partisans of one of the fine arts (usually sculpture or painting) sought, often with the affectation of considerable belligerence, to establish its supremacy over the others. In fact, the paragone amounted to just one of the arenas in which painters, first in Italy and later throughout Europe, fought to justify painting as belonging among the liberal arts,

446 Sohm, Pittoresco : Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy, 25.

447 McKim-Smith et al., Examining Velázquez, 5-6.

448 The best treatment of the paragone, and the one on which Sohm relies, is that of L. Mendelsohn, Pragone: Mendelsohn L., Paragoni. Benedetto Varchi’s Due Lezzone (Anne Arbor: 1982).
Despite the lack of historical precedent for its inclusion among either the *Trivium* (Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic) or the *Quadrivium* (Geometry, Arithmetic, Music, and Astronomy) that had, since classical times, been understood to comprise those arts. To borrow a phrase from computer programmers, the *work-around* for this problem amounted to arguing that painting was *in its essence* the practice of some combination of these arts—usually Geometry and Music—within the number-based *Quadrivium*, rather than the persuasive arts of the *Trivium*. The artist had to know Geometry to apply perspective, and further, which proportions were harmonious and which disharmonious (the broader, classical understanding of ‘music’) for almost every other aspect of his practice. Painting was therefore only an *arte manovale* to those too ignorant to see past the superficial aspects of the art to what was ‘really’ going on—something rigorous, something intellectual—something superlunary. A painterly style, and especially one with theoretical legitimation, that “drew attention to itself as a physical fact—pigment sitting on canvas—and as a physical act of the artist wielding the brush,” would have seemed ill-suited to the route towards social mobility that was the consensus selection of Italian painters and their cultural allies.

The truth is that, in Italy by the sixteenth century, the battle had largely already been won on these terms. Among Renaissance aristocrats and powerbrokers, esteem for artists had become prestigious enough even to be worth faking when it was not sincerely felt, but like the *parvenus* they were, artists could not keep themselves from emphasizing,
and perhaps self-defeatingly over-emphasizing, their right to the position they had acquired.\(^449\)

I began by saying that this was the standard explanation. It is also, in my estimation, the correct one. It accounts for the phenomenon. These social pressures—or perhaps by the sixteenth century we should say ‘social anxieties,’ produce a structure in which, as Philip Sohm states it, “[m]ost writers on art in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries shared an unease with the physicality of painting, and hence they diligently avoided any mention of Titian’s unsavory habits [of using his fingers to smear pigment across the canvas and, reputedly, making a mess of himself in the process]. . . Over one hundred years had passed before this practice could be seen as other than demeaning.”\(^450\) The social and material genesis of such a structure is also productive of something—a fundamental attitude towards the work of art—that has motive force and explanatory power independent of its origin. I would call this fundamental attitude one of transcendence. The work of art is the product of the artist, but it then exists—indeed, is conceived of by the artist as existing—in a state of radical separation from all that has accidentally given rise to its formation. Without an overly Marxist freighting of the word, I would say that the painting is alienated from its painter in a way that is fundamentally intended by the painter (or at least by the theoretician seeking to explain what that painter has made).


\(^450\) Ibid., 26.
The anxiety that produced this alienation of the made from the maker is magnified by the fact that most painters were not intellectuals by any reasonable use of the term, and were trained and certified in guilds that were set squarely in the craft traditions of previous centuries. They “adhered to the craft tradition of the fifteenth century which demanded that a painter be a master of his medium and display that mastery by subduing it.” There was a place for “the painterly pen or chalk,” but it was in a private sphere, such as in notebooks of drawings, or, when in a work displayed publicly, only when viewing them at the ‘proper’ distance allowed these marks to merge optically into the overall effect of the autonomous, transcendent image.

A seventeenth-century viewer, like a modern one, could find equal pleasure in both [the ‘painterly’ mark as an indication of the creative process and the actual form of a finished work], but sixteenth-century writers gravitated toward the former so that one may say that fluid brushwork could only be admired within the context of creative activity, but not as pure form. As form, it was considered to be unfinished or chaotic, acceptable if concealed in a sketchbook or muted by distance.

Giovanni Battista Armenini described the final phase of painting to be *componimento*—this is not composition, as we understand it, which would fall under the rubric of *disengo*. He does not mean merely drawing, nor designing the image either—but rather, “that union and extreme diligence by which means one gives the concluding finish to paintings in such a way that all of the figures come to be harmonized and replete

---

451 Ibid.
452 Ibid.
453 Ibid., 27.
with the highest union.” Sohm points out that this same passage is plagiarized by Francesco Bisagno in his *Trattato della Pittura* of 1642 (Venice), testifying to the persistent prestige of this traditional understanding well into the seventeenth century. However, “it should be emphasized that the continuous tradition traced here is only a critical one, evidenced only in the formal medium of writing theories or histories. The tradition of painting itself changed much more quickly and became more radical than any text before 1650.”

Of course the raw or painterly mark could be appreciated as a sketch or *abbozzato* (*boceto* in Spanish) by the writers on art at this time. It is in this sense that Vasari uses the term. But these marks are of value only as insights into the artist’s creative process, and the pleasure to be derived from contemplating them is the pleasure of looking at what is unfinished in the light of what could have or might have been completed. Diligent readers of Pliny the Elder, which most art theorists of the period can safely be assumed to have been, would have known the passage in which he states of unfinished works: “[They] are more admired than those which are finished, because in them are seen the preliminary drawings left visible and the artists’ actual thoughts (*cogitationes*), and in the midst of

---


457 Ibid., 30-32.
approval’s beguilement we feel regret that the artist’s hand, while engaged in this work, was removed by death.” The pleasure of the abbozzato is one tinged with melancholy—as Sohm states it, “a certain nostalgia for the never-to-be finished work.” It is from this perspective that Vasari invites us to understand the reputation that Leonardo da Vinci had for laying his works aside before they had been completed:

Leonardo, with his intelligence of art, commenced various endeavours, none of which he ever finished, because it appeared to him that the hand could never achieve the perfection [worthy] of the object or purpose which he had in his thoughts, or beheld in his imagination; seeing that in his mind he frequently formed the idea of some difficult project, so subtle and so wonderful that, by means of his hands, however excellent or able, the full reality could never be worthily executed and entirely realized.

Here, rather than death removing the artist’s hand, as per Pliny, it is the exalted nature of the artist’s conception as such that human hands, however skilled, are simply too ignoble to give actual form to it. As Sohm points out, “the form may appear in potenza, but it has not been completely fulfilled. The expectation of completion is forever present.”

The abbozzato is, for the writers of this foundational period in art

---


theory, a sign pointing towards the work that could have been finished, or perhaps that
could never have been finished, but only because it was fore-defeated by the sheer
magnificence of what an artist of genius could conceive of in the teeth of what was
physically possible. We must understand that this is merely the pre-history of the theory
that would seek to understand true *pittoresco* style in the century to come. Practice, in
Venice, was already well along on its way towards flourishing as a phenomenon for
which the theoretical writing of the period could give no meaningful account. “The
history of *pittoresco*, to remind the reader again, is how seventeenth-century critics came
to appreciate the irresolution of form without appealing to the formative concept in the
artist’s mind. It is also how seventeenth-century critics came to accept this painterly form
in finished, rather than sketched, works [.]”

Another term important in the prehistory of a true painterly aesthetic is the *macchia*
(Italian) or *borrón* (the Spanish term) which corresponds roughly to what we mean by
*stain* or *blotch* in English. *Macchia* comes from the Latin *Macula*. Original sin was the
*macula* on our human natures, and the Immaculate Conception was understood as the act
of divine intervention that preserved the Blessed Virgin from acquiring that stain. “Since
*macchia* is an accidental form and no classical art could be accidental, it would naturally
bring negative associations in art criticism. These were de-emphasized and de-limited in
the mid-Sixteenth Century when *macchia* was applied to sketching where the artist seeks

---

462 Ibid., 33.

more perfect form from the flux and ill-definition of his ideas.” Vasari conceded that
an artist’s sketch could take the form of macchia—“in forma di una macchia”—but
they were too random to have a part in any finished work. The macchia is a tool
whereby the artist can take inchoate and imprecise ideas and sharpen them sufficiently
that they can then appropriately lead to one of sufficient precision to result in a finished
work.

**Optical Understanding and Viewing Distance.**

There is one place for the abbozzato quality in a painting, for macchia in the
finished work, however, and this is when it enters by way of optical understanding. When
a precise understanding of viewing distance and its effect upon the viewer’s experience
of the painting is in play, theoreticians of the sixteenth century will grant its legitimacy,
and even praise its sure execution. It is a fact of our perception that figures seen at a
distance appear to diminish in size according to certain proportions, but the intervening
atmosphere also tends to blur detail and soften color. Raffaele Borghini’s *il Riposo* of
1584 states that figures must be “only sketched and not finished because otherwise one

---

464 Sohm, *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly
Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy*, 36.

translation, p. 36.
See also George Knox, “Roman and Less Roman Elements in Venetian History Painting,

466 Sohm, *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly
Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy*, 36-37.
would falsify nature, teacher of art.”\textsuperscript{467} Vasari discusses this phenomenon and the incorporation of it into the execution of relief sculpture in his technical preface to the \textit{Vita}\textsuperscript{468} when he addresses Donatello’s and Luca della Robbia’s \textit{Cantoria} in the Florence Cathedral.\textsuperscript{469} Here, “sketched form is seen in the context of imitation of nature, not (as some seventeenth-century critics would see it) as a beautiful form to be seen and appreciated from nearby and for itself.”\textsuperscript{470} Similarly, in painting, the sketchy quality with which figures could be rendered was suitable for the backgrounds of paintings, and were, therefore, often applied to the depiction of landscape.

It is in a passage where Vasari addresses an example of what we might call ‘optical finish’ that we come upon a ‘transitional form.’ The mythology themed cycle of paintings that Titian executed for Philip II of Spain provoked the second mention of this phenomenon of painterly, rough brushwork in Vasari’s \textit{Vita}:

\begin{quote}
[The] early works [by Titian] are executed with a certain finesse and an increadible diligence, so that they can be seen from close to as well as from a distance; while these last pictures are executed with broad and bold strokes and smudges (\textit{condotte di colpi, triate via di grosso e con macchie}), so that from nearby nothing can be seen whereas from a distance they seem perfect. This method of painting has caused many artists, who have wished to imitate him and thus display their skill, to produce clumsy pictures. For although many people have thought that they are painted without effort this is not the case, and they deceive themselves, because it is known that these works are much revised and
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{468} Sohm, \textit{Pittoresco : Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy}, 44.

\textsuperscript{469} Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{470} Ibid., 44.
that he went over them so many times with his colors that one can appreciate how much labor is involved. And this method of working, used in this way, is judicious, beautiful and stupendous, because it makes the pictures appear alive and painted with great art, concealing the labor.\textsuperscript{471}

Vasari feels it is important for his readers to realize that he is describing works executed in a mature style—that Titian had demonstrated already his ability to work within the paradigm that Vasari endorses throughout his writing. This is the point of contact between the idea that what is admirable about these paintings by Titian is that they hide, belie, or misrepresent the labor that went into their production. This, in and of itself, is admirable. This is the concept of \textit{sprezzatura}, as described by Baldassare Castiglione in \textit{Il Cortegiano}:

\begin{quote}
Having already thought a great deal about how this grace is acquired, and leaving aside those who are endowed with it by their stars, I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practise in all things a certain nonchalance (\textit{sprezzatura}) which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless. I am sure that grace springs especially from this, since everyone knows how difficult it is to accomplish some unusual feat perfectly, and so facility in such things excites the greatest wonder; whereas, in contrast, to labour at what one is doing and, as we say, to make bones over it, shows an extreme lack of grace and causes everything, whatever its worth, to be discounted. So we can truthfully say that true art is what does not seem to be art; and the most important thing is to conceal it, because if it is revealed this discredits a man completely and ruins his reputation.\textsuperscript{472}
\end{quote}


When *macchia* or *abbozzata* are present in the finished work, but viewed from the proper distance so that they appear, in the viewer’s perception, to be optically finished (or when our own perceptions of nature would be indistinct and deficient in detail—as when we see figures at a distance and/or through atmospheric distortion), then the artist can be understood to have done something admirable with *macchia*. This is not the same as finding the *macchia* itself to be a source of aesthetic delectation, but it is the place where painting in blotches and blobs threatens to destabilize the structure of art theory—a structure that already has difficulty making a place for Titian and his Venetian followers. The paintings Titian did for the Spanish king are deemed admirable for reasons that point beyond themselves.

Of course, from the right viewing distance, works like these measure up to the standards of excellence implicit in texts by Vasari or Armanini, but in finding that optimal viewing distance, works painted with *sprezzatura* introduce an external value to the experience; the artist and his labor still animate such a canvas in a way that, while strictly true of works executed in the more conventional mode, those conventional works actively seek to occlude or deny.

* * *

Thus theorists of the *seicento* concede that rough, sketchy forms, when they can resolve themselves into finish at the right viewing distance, can be a legitimate artistic tactic. The apparent nonchalance of a set of marks can seem like the result of casual, undisciplined technique, but when we find the correct viewing distance, this is revealed
to be an elegant deceit. The making of these marks, then, is revealed (indirectly) to be the result of considerable skill and discernment. To understand how the *macchia* resolve themselves into the experience of the finished transcendent work is to experience the pleasure of deciphering and, in some sense, exposing this deceit—seeing the labor and skill that went into the work precisely because it has taken this extra step to veil itself. This combines in important ways with another set of theories and practices that emerge in the art world at about the same period. And that is similarly grounded in avoiding, or exposing deceit—connoisseurship.

Though the term itself would not be coined until the late seventeenth century, the emergence of connoisseurship as a kind of discipline can be dated to the appearance of *Alcune considerationi appaartenenti alla pittua come de diletto di un gentilhuomo nobile* and *Alcune considerationi intorno a quello che hanno scitto acluni autori in material della pittura*, both of which were in manuscript by 1621, in which form they had an astonishing influence and circulation even if they were not to be published until the twentieth century.\(^{473}\) Both were authored by Giulio Mancini who, in an interesting endorsement of some of the ideas on the nature of connoisseurship presented by Carlo Ginzburg in his famous article on the topic,\(^{474}\) was the practitioner of an inductive, diagnostic science—he was the personal physician to Pope Urban VIII. Whatever other satisfactions it may yield, connoisseurship’s primary business is that of attribution, a task


that makes sense in the context of copies or forgeries that can be mistaken for original works by identified and sought-after masters. It is fundamentally concerned with the market and with the exposure of deceit, or, at the very least, of error in attribution:

For Mancini, like the formalist connoisseurs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, brushwork was not an indication of artistic quality but simply a means to attribute paintings. The handling of the brush, especially when it is freely wielded, was thought to be an inimitable act, a “master touch,” and so connoisseurs discovered that its visible trace was a characteristic signature which separated copy from original, student from master. Brushwork, like style itself, was individual to the painter and irreducible to any other state.475

What, from this standpoint, Mancini has to say in a single paragraph about brushwork is important enough that Philip Sohm makes it the subject of an entire preliminary chapter before dealing with Marco Boschini and the theorization of the pittoresco. I will quote it in its entirety here:

Moreover, one should consider whether the painting reveals the assurance of the master himself, and above all in those parts that are executed with the degree of boldness that cannot be imitated. This is especially true of the hair, the beard and the eyes. When they have to imitate the ringlets of hair, they do so with a certain awkwardness that is apparent in the copy. But if the copier decides not to imitate it, then the copy lacks the degree of perfection that the master’s work has. And those parts of the picture are like those flourishes and clusters in handwriting that require the boldness and resolution of the master. You can see the same thing in those spirited strokes of lights, scattered here and there. The master decisively places them with one stroke and with resolution of brushstroke that cannot be imitated. The same thing can be seen in the folds and highlights of cloth, which depend more on the imagination and the resolution of the master than on the actual appearance of the object.476

475 Sohm, *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy*, 64.

Attention to brushwork becomes very important in the service of such a project, and not because it has been executed so skillfully as to resolve itself into a convincingly illusionistic image at the correct viewing distance, but rather because in itself it is potentially revelatory. As Sohm states it, “[Early Seventeenth Century connoisseurs] gave brushwork a greater importance than it had ever received before. More importantly they (with Mancini as the first) discovered that an artist’s style is most discernible when the brushwork was most visible.”

The two aspects of Mancini’s understanding of brushwork that will concern us here and that will serve to illuminate the treatment of Boschini’s pittoreSCO (which is our next order of business) are his analogizing of the painter’s brushstroke to the mark of the calligrapher, and the idea that those painterly marks most useful in attribution have more to do with the artist’s fantasia—this faculty of imagination, than “the actual appearance of the object.”

In making the comparison between calligraphy and painting, Mancini is only amplifying the well known passage from Vasari’s conclusion to the Vite, in which he states that “like a learned and practiced chancellor can identify the different scripts of his peers,” so can he recognize the work of his fellow practitioners by their particular styles. Calligraphy, like painting, carries the imprint of the individual practicing the art, and like painting it is subject to taxonomies of individual, national and period styles:


478 Ibid. 77
[M]ost historians of calligraphy agree that by 1600 florid ornament was in the ascendancy and by 1620 it had triumphed [over the chancery script of the sixteenth century which had stressed “order and legibility”]. The border decoration of Lodovico Curione’s *L’anatomia* (Rome, 1588) and Alberto Mureti’s *Della teorica e pratica di bene scrivere* (Siena, 1594) consist of elaborate flourishes that “escape” from the page and replace the pictorial ornament (figures, grotesques, architectural motifs) that originally served this purpose. By 1619 with Francesco Periccioli’s *Terzo libro delle cancellareresche corsive*, the distinction between flourishes in the text and border flourishes had dissolved completely into an organic flux. Whereas ornament used to adhere to the letters or the borders of the page, by the 1620s it began to displace the text with displays of manual virtuosity and acquire a life and significance of its own.479

Just as a sketchy mark is “detached from the represented object,”480 so are the flourishes of the Baroque calligrapher’s stylus “pure forms detached from the content of the text.”481

In other words, they refer more to the artist and his means of production than to the subject of the text or painting. They are imaginative forms, drawn from within rather than outside the artist, and hence they were as unique as the artist’s imagination. Being unique, habitual and conspicuous, they served as a reliable sign of attribution.482

Of course such marks can be appropriate and resonant with the subject matter depicted, or inappropriate and distracting, just as the calligrapher’s flourishes can harmonize or not with the content of the text. They have, however, in both cases broken free.

The other issue raised by Mancini’s concept of connoisseurship, then, remains the tension between a *macchia*’s usefulness in faithfully representing the facts of perception,

479 Ibid., 81-82.

480 Ibid. 82

481 Ibid.

482 Ibid., 82.
which is to say in its contribution to the goal of maintaining faithfulness to nature (i.e.,
the effects of atmospheric perspective), and the extent to which they are the spontaneous
and irrational product of the painter’s fancy. For justifying them according to the
theoretical strictures of the seicento, it is the former, faithfulness to optical phenomena,

Figure 50, Francesco Giovanni Cresci, *Il Perfetto Scrittore*, 1570

that is emphasized. For the purposes of attribution, under the emerging science of
connoisseurship (if it can be characterized as such at this early phase, or if it can be so
categorized at all), the latter, idiosyncratic fancy, asserts itself.

*    *    *

The term *pittorioso*, the type of navigation to which Marco Boschini’s book serves
as a *carta*, or map, originally was an adjective for anything to do with painting—
“pictorial” being a good equivalent. When his book was first printed in 1660, those who
looked at the cover were not likely, upon looking at the title, to have any other associations. This was a long poem that claimed to be a map of “pictorial” navigation. Having finished the book, they would have had the beginnings of that understanding of the word that carried on into the eighteenth century and finally found its modern reinstatement in Heinrich Wölfflin’s term, *malerisch*—for him, the defining quality of Baroque painting when contrasted with that of the Renaissance—its “painterliness.” The sleight of hand that leads to this shift in the accepted meaning is accomplished by means of Boschini’s patriotism—if not outright chauvinism—regarding the worth of the painting of his native Venice. As Sohm states: “Pittoresco became ‘painterly’ because that is *the* Venetian style for Boschini. Much as Vasari gave *maniera* a normative reading by identifying it with imitation, so too Boschini made *maniera* and *pittoresco* painting synonymous with *macchia.*”

If there is a unifying thread to this strange work, beyond its insistent boosterism of all things Venetian, it is the setting up of Vasari as a foil for all the author feels the need to say about painting. Tuscan hegemony in cultural matters is a source of real resentment for Boschini, especially when it translates into the setting of *disengo* as superior to *colorito* on Vasari’s authority.

Another matter that becomes the source of some conflict, though with considerably more ambiguity (and of great importance since our goal is to facilitate an understanding

---


of Velázquez’ style by way of Boschini) is the whole vexed question of naturalism.

Despite a virtually universal reputation as a master of coloristic effects, Boschini chooses to leave his countryman, Guido Cagnacci, off his list of worthy painters. What is more, he makes remarks in his work that are very likely coded slights upon the competence of this painter, famed for the fidelity to nature of his work. “Oh God, how much do I feel exactly like this, that it is diminishing to make half-figures and that one despises and blames those paintings that are called curs (Cagnazzi [the Venetian dialect’s version of Cagnacci]), Bear and Wildboars.”

Sohm unpacks the insult as follows: “The cruel play on his name (Cangacci as curs) identifies a particularly vulnerable point for someone who changed his name to Canlassi specifically to avoid such ghastly puns,” and echoes what contemporaries had noticed was a strong tendency among naturalist painters (like the Bolognese school or the Bambacianti) to paint half-figures, perhaps a vestige of the relationship between their naturalist practice and the habits of portraiture. One is inevitably reminded of the slur against Velázquez that he “only knew how to paint heads.” Boschini says further of those he calls naturalists:

Because these Venetians have such command [of their art] and their ideas are so well impressed in it from their past studies, they can print money in front of anyone [i.e. they can paint from their imagination]. They can compose a large painting with just two strokes of charcoal and without continually referring back to nature. . . If in painting a story with hundreds of figures, one had to portray each from nature, one would never attain fame. He who lacks this artifice and is


always endebted to nature will be wealthy on with half-figures. . . If they [naturalists] want to make a concert [i.e. a polyphonic painting], they know only how to set four figures in relief; nor do the know they language of light and reflections which Venetians are so expert in. (Ecelenza [the other interlocutor in the dialogue]:) And so it is. The Venetian leaves the dock and goes fishing in the high seas. He gives the finger to those stupid hacks [left behind] and produces marvels with his hands.  

This is rendered problematic by the fact that many painters Boschini admires (Titian and Bassano foremost among them) are praised routinely by other critics for their naturalism—usually stated as their fidelity to nature—while Boschini himself praises certain Venetians for the verisimilitude of their images. I think Sohm’s interpretation of this puzzle is correct:

Why should Boschini accept and praise representatives of nearly every form of naturalist painting in Venice and yet lavish so much space and such wonderful invective on naturalists in general? . . . Could Vasari be the missing target? This seems more likely [than the case these naturalists are a “straw man” for Venetian style and imagination]. Vasari, it may be recalled, popularized the notion of Venetian painting as a pure form of naturalism. This has been a useful and enduring notion particularly when a foil is sought for Mannerist artifice. Boschini, however, found it less attractive. . . My proposal then, is that Boschini wished to defend his compatriots against Vasari’s attacks on Venetian naturalism by deflecting them onto another group which he renames “Naturalists.” By savaging naturalism in general, he is able to distance Venetians from its infamous flaws.

---


**Flavor and Appetite**

In anticipating criticism of his choice of the Venetian dialect for the *Carta*, given that the effort to grant cultural authority to the Tuscan academy was already under way, Boschini offers up the following “*E in fin sta ben che tute le cose sapia dal so saor,*** “All things are understood according to their flavor.” Indeed, his preface was entitled “*Icita apetito ala cursiositá,*** or “Incites the Appetite for curiosity.” The reliance on gustatory metaphor, indeed, the sensualist tone that permeates the poem, is more than poetical ornament. They express the true heart of the paradigm shift that Boschini’s championing of the *pittorese* represents.

The explication that Sohm gives to this gustatory theme is, I believe, the single most important insight that his study, the most thorough and complete to date, has to offer us. If we seek to understand the Spanish predilection for Venetian-style painterliness as something more profound than the influence of Hapsburg patronage and imperfect understanding of Italian standards—that is to say, as an authentically Spanish response to stylistic options in painting—we would do well to parse carefully his account:

Almost everyone who wrote about art before Boschini would consider understanding (*sapia*, hence *sapienza*) to be the product of cogitation, with the intellect, rather than the senses, as the dominant faculty. Understanding depended on knowledge that could be rationalized and codified (perspective, proportion or

---


490 Ibid.
anatomy for example). Taste (*gusto*) and style (*maniera, stile*) were common ways to describe the individual stamp or accent that each artist gave to his knowledge. Usually gusto tended to be identified more with mental habit than sensory perception, while flavor (*saor*) takes the sensory side of taste to the complete exclusion of the intellectual. Just as we would be discomforted by the expression “artistic flavor” (instead of “artistic taste”), so too *saor* distorted conventional meaning, evoking the strange within the familiar, the flavor of taste. . . . *Saor* also anticipates the frequent culinary metaphors that later describe how Venetian painting is served and tastes, and hence what Venetian artistic practice and taste is. 491

If the seicento theorists sought to dignify painting by associating it with the most rational among the liberal arts, like Geometry and Music, Boschini, without abandoning the goal of glorifying painting, would seem to have staked his claim on the most persuasive—rhetoric. Sohm does not make this explicit connection, but if we look at the classical canon of rhetoric, the connections emerge. In the *Institutes*, Quintilian arranges rhetorical training under five canons:

1. *Inventio* (invention)—the development and refinement of argument.

2. *Dispositio* (disposition, or arrangement)—how the argument should be organized, beginning with the *exordium*.

3. *Elocutio* (style) and *Pronuntiatio* (presentation).

4. *Memoria* (memory)—how the speaker recalls each of these elements during a declamation.

5. *Actio* (delivery)—how to present one’s speech to the audience. 492


The discipline of persuasion is not strictly rational; that is the province of logic. It appeals to the passion and to the senses, especially as it involves memory. In that connection, the remainder of Sohm’s analysis of Boschini’s emphasis on the sensual persuasiveness of pittoreseco images brings us full circle:

[S]ight, not reason, convinces the intellect. Hence compare was forever urging Ecelenza (and hence the reader) to “fix your eyes on this painting” and asking him “do you see?” . . . In order that the reader may share these experiences Boschini tried to match his subject with a sensuous Marinist style of writing, satiating his reader’s appetite with a surfeit of sensual stimulation. Throughout the Carta, he tells us what paintings taste like (spices, spongy bread, marzipan and pasta) and sound like (a sweet and loving concert) and even how they feel (Boschini rubs his hands over the surface of Bassano’s St. Valentin Baptizing St. Lucy). He tells us what they smell like and what emotional effect they have: “It seems to me, when I leave the Scuola [di San Rocco], that I was in a druggist’s shop and had under my nose those aromatic smells which completely comfort the heart.”

It is by means of appeal to the senses that these paintings persuade. It is by delighting the senses that they attach themselves to the memory.

---

Chapter 7.

Synthesis.

Remember that an education through images has been typical of every absolutist and paternalistic society, from ancient Egypt to the Middle Ages. An image is an indisputable visual summary of a series of conclusions reached through cultural elaboration. . . [T]here’s something about communication through images which is radically limited, insuperably reactionary.494

The quote above is from Umberto Eco. It expresses explicitly an attitude towards the image-saturated religiosity of what is sometimes called the Catholic Reformation that informs a great deal of the intellectual response to that tradition since the Enlightenment. As such, it is as legitimate a reaction as many others. In terms of political and social history, its explanatory power had had much to recommend it. It is, however, an approach that a priori instantiates an indifference to how this tradition understood and explained itself. For an art historical understanding of this tradition, it is therefore, distorting, and such distortion should, at the very least, be accounted for.

Bernard of Clairvaux’s spirituality, it has been claimed, can be best represented by the motto: credo ut experiar (I believe that I might experience). This is the motto of a piety that is subjective and individualistic. Bernard’s brand of mysticism spread

494 In Tobias Jones’ chapter, “The Means of Seduction,” in his book The Dark Heart of Italy, he selects these lines from Umberto Eco as prologue to his treatment of the Italians’ incredible discernment with regards to visual style, and the triumphal period, in the middle of the Twentieth Century, of that country’s film industry. Umberto Eco as quoted and translated in Tobias Jones, The Dark Heart of Italy, 1st American ed. (New York: North Point Press, 2004), 136.
throughout Europe. It was a mysticism that found its most congenial metaphor to be that of the marital union, the union between Christ and the soul.\footnote{John P. Dolan, Catholicism : An Historical Survey, Baron's Compact Studies of World Religions (Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1968), 76.}

This motto of Saint Bernard’s will serve us well as we seek to define not only the Catholic sensibility, but the assumptions underlying that sensibility. It is this sensibility that is expressed in the Spanish devotions and the art forms produced by artists steeped in such practices. The gloss on St. Bernard— that one believes so that one might experience—is the transformation of an earlier expression from Saint Anselm. At the end of the first chapter of the \textit{Proslogion}, Anselm states: "\textit{Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo, quia, nisi credidero, non intelligam.}" (Nor do I seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. For this too I believe, that unless I first believe, I shall not understand).

An approach to the Southern Baroque, that is to say the assertively Catholic art produced after the Council of Trent, is finally seeing reevaluation by scholars. The essays in Giles Knox’s \textit{From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, ca. 1550-1650}, have made an excellent start. Michael A. Mullett's \textit{Catholic Reformation} (1999), and Robert Bireley's \textit{Refashioning of Catholicism} (1999), also represent a new trend towards evaluating this period without the prejudicial assumptions that have been so strongly present especially in the early twentieth century.

David Tracy has examined this peculiarly concrete approach to the abstract that seems to so thoroughly inform Catholic spirituality. Historically speaking, this approach discloses itself most clearly since the rupture of Western Christianity in the sixteenth
The Analogical Imagination excavates the deep structures that underlie Catholic religious forms—the way these forms express a fundamental epistemological stance towards the world.

Among Catholics this stance is basically analogical. Analogy consists in using the things one knows to understand the things one does not. The abstract truths of faith are understood by means of embodied, physical things. This involvement of the senses is also very important in the Classical memory systems, and the devotional systems that appropriated their techniques, because it is as concrete images that ideas are best retained in memory. The fourth of Quintillian’s canons is *memoria*, making it an integral part of the practice of classical rhetoric.

In Catholic practice, some physical things go beyond their status as symbols—they are sacraments. A sacramental object or experience does not merely point to the divine—it conveys it. In the central Catholic sacrament, the Eucharist, the bread offered during the mass becomes the body of Christ.

This sacramentalized view of the world is best understood by means of contrast with what Tracy calls “dialectical language.” The dialectical approach emphasizes creation’s alienation from the divine. To emphasize the world’s alienation from God is to emphasize the consequences of sin—and the resulting need for redemption.

This formulation of the difference in emphasis between Catholic and Protestant epistemologies is applied to the problem of sensibility by Andrew Greeley in *The Catholic Imagination*:

---

496 Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism.*
Put more simply, the Catholic imagination loves metaphors; Catholicism is a verdant rainforest of metaphors. The Protestant imagination distrusts metaphors; it tends to be a desert of metaphors. Catholicism stresses the “like” of any comparison (human passion is like divine passion), while Protestantism, when it is willing to use metaphors (and it must if it is to talk about God at all), stresses the unlike.⁴⁹⁷

What Greeley says in his earlier book, *The Catholic Myth*, is applicable to the more recent *Catholic Imagination* as well; that he has produced "not a book of theology but a book of sociology (of a mostly non-technical variety)." He asks the reader to evaluate it "on sociological and not theological grounds."⁴⁹⁸

Velázquez works at the height of Catholic self-consciousness and institutional self-definition. The Council of Trent (1545-47, 1547, 1551-52, 1559-63) not only sought to reform the Church in response to the critique posed by the Protestant Reformation, but also to reaffirm the specifically Catholic character of the faith. Greeley’s account of the culture this effort produced, even without those factors contributing to its special intensity in Spain, provide a framework whereby the forms we have dealt with can persuasively reside. Among these forms are: the nature of the devotional practices that received new endorsement after Trent, the emergence of an approach to oil painting that stressed the physical, sensual and material, and finally, a shift away from linking painting with the mathematical arts of the Quadrivium (primarily Geometry), in the direction of the persuasive arts of the Trivium (Rhetoric most emphatically). All these trends illuminate one another under the aegis of a Catholic imagination.


⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 20.
Greeley’s application of Tracy’s comparative theology to his own project—a sociological one—resonates with our art historical concerns. The style of images, rituals and stories central to Catholic experience have shaped not only the imagination, but inevitably, the non-religious behavior of Catholics.

For Greeley, the Catholic imagination emphasizes the presence of God in creation (“immanence”), while Protestants tend to emphasize God’s unassailable separateness from the world (“transcendence”). This is a formative aspect of Catholics’ understanding of the sacraments, architecture (sacred space), ritual, hierarchy, and "the mother love of God," which, for Catholics, is embodied in the Blessed Virgin.

The central symbol (of religion) is God. One's "picture" of God is in fact a metaphorical narrative of God's relationship with the world and the self as part of the world.\textsuperscript{499}

The Catholic presupposition is of a God who is immanent in the world. He is revealed “in and through” his creation. Creation is, therefore, however fallen, like God in some sense. This is not, according to Greeley and Tracy’s formulation, the view endorsed by the Protestant foundational texts. These assume “a God who is radically absent from the world, and who discloses (Himself) only on rare occasions (especially in Jesus Christ and Him crucified). The world and all its events, objects, and people tend to be radically different from God.”\textsuperscript{500} This serves both as endorsement and at least partial explanation for the primacy of the image in Catholic practice.


\textsuperscript{500} Ibid.
The Catholic predisposition to see all of creation as a metaphor—not merely a symbol—is exactly how that tradition differs from the "dialectical" Protestant approach. In seven chapters, *The Catholic Imagination* demonstrates the applicability of this Catholic sensibility by means of the sociological analysis of survey research data (accumulated by the National Opinion Research Center) on the American Catholic population, as well as survey results for a number of majority-Catholic countries including Ireland and Austria. One example: American Catholics are, according to Greeley, consumers of fine arts in significant disproportion to their Protestant countrymen. They tend to stay in or near the neighborhoods where they were raised. “Catholics tend to picture society as supportive and not oppressive, while Protestants tend to picture society as oppressive and not supportive.”

Contemporary American Catholics are not Spanish Catholics of the seventeenth century—but as a model for the relationship between the most abstract of commitments (“immanence versus transcendence”), institutions (the institutional church), and the sensibility that both can engender, Greeley’s insights have a broader historical applicability. “The Catholic imagination is different from the Protestant imagination. You know that: Flannery O’Connor is not John Updike.”

The school of Spanish mysticism found, in the technique of disciplined visualizations and the training of affect, very effective tools for installing and cultivating the sensibility that Tracy and Greeley have codified. In *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (2004), Evonne Levy traces the history of rhetoric as the explanatory model for

501 Greeley, *Catholic Imagination*, 130.

Baroque art. Levy describes the “rhetorical basis of Baroque art in theory and practice” as “a commonplace in the literature of the period,” and as “if not peculiar to the era, then particularly renewed in it, this in spite of the continuity of rhetoric throughout the early modern period.” Debates spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the relative merits of philosophy and rhetoric were also “contiguous” with those concerning disegno and colore, where “colore functioned virtually as a figure for rhetoric.” In the seventeenth century this debate, which had gone back and forth repeatedly, was transformed by the Catholic Church’s decisive endorsement of one side of this problematic conflict:

The disegno / colore debates of the seventeenth century were not particularly novel in approach or substance. But where the reframing of the visual arts in rhetorical terms gave fundamental impetus to Baroque art, many have argued, was through the reprioritization of the goals of art in the Counter-Reformation. Alberti’s argument in De Pictura (1435) that art should have as its goal the representation of the historia was now embarrassingly unspecific and insufficiently directed to the Catholic historia for the embattled church. The connection between rhetoric and the religious reform of the visual art is made explicit . . .

The particulars of this Catholic endorsement of rhetoric—in effect the sanctification of the art—are detailed in Frederick J. McGinness’ Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome (1995). He “seeks to chart the changes in sacred oratory to trace the way Rome began to think about itself from the period at the end of the Council

---


504 Levy, Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque, 49.

505 Ibid.,
of Trent (1563) to the end of the reign of Paul V (1621).”\textsuperscript{506} Indeed, “The pursuit of rhetoric was a serious matter at Rome. In this era the city became a virtual workshop of sacred oratory.”\textsuperscript{507}

The classical tradition of rhetoric is revisited and its authors’ authority revitalized, “reflecting the shift from the more thematic (scholastic) style of preaching to one based on the classical tradition represented by Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, among others.”\textsuperscript{508} The Council of Trent and its encouragement of sacred rhetoric, led, among Spanish rhetoricians, to a kind of Ciceronian Renaissance. Jorge Fernández López’s article, “Rhetorical Theory in Sixteenth-Century Spain: A Critical Survey” in \textit{Rhetorica} (Spring 2002, Vol. 20, No. 2, Pages 133–148), details the Spanish prioritization of the Liberal Art dedicated to persuasion.

Effectively, we have another example of the Spanish talent for the creative misreading of Italian theory. The model of the \textit{paragone}, and the privileging of painting by associating it with the liberal arts is a prestigious one, and Spanish artists were eager to make it their own. But post-tridentine Spain is not Italy of the rationalist Renaissance with its Erasmian and pagan associations. If painting is to be accepted as a Liberal Art, and if it is to be the art of painting that has evolved in symbiosis with the internal image-making of Spanish mysticism, it must do so as an art of rhetorical persuasion. It must be a sensual, incarnate practice. Velázquez’ pictures are in and of this world—they are relics of immanence.

\textsuperscript{506} McGinnis, \textit{Sacred Oratory}, 5.

\textsuperscript{507} McGinins, 5.

\textsuperscript{508} Ibid., 50
In chapter five of this dissertation, I apply the insight of Daniel Arasse, who says of Vermeer: “What is seen is not the secret of nature observed, but really a mystery within the painting itself and about the visibility of its figures.” From Delft to Seville, in Europe of the Counter Reformation, especially under the influence of Spanish mysticism (and often mediated specifically by the Jesuits), painters in oil reimagined their practice, resulting in what might be summed up as a “privileged role in revealing and shaping knowledge in a period newly preoccupied with visual modes of apprehending the world.” Spanish Paintings of the siglo de oro bear everywhere upon their painted bodies the mark of this reimagination.

---


510 Westermann, "Vermeer and the Interior Imagination."
Conclusion.

The time when a scholar, or an amateur for that matter, of the work of Diego Velázquez needed first to argue for his canonicity or his continued relevance is past by more than two centuries. Admirers of the best work from the great age of oil painting that the Seventeenth Century embodied are powerfully committed to the appreciation of his work, and modern painters like Pablo Picasso and Francis Bacon have sought artistic dialogue with his achievement. His position in the survey texts of Art History from which people are educated in colleges and universities is secure. The galleries given over to his work in the Prado museum in Madrid have provided his work with shrine on the pilgrimage road taken by tourists and connoisseurs of painting. It is certainly no longer necessary, as it must once have seemed, to justify his inclusion in the list of painters whose work one should know if one is to know the history of art, by representing him as, miraculously, an Impressionist before Impressionism. Nor is it necessary to overstress his kinship with other great Baroque painters who, at one time, even a well-informed listener was more likely to know—Rembrandt, Poussin, Caravaggio. But the reflexes inculcated by the project of his inclusion have been slow to disappear. Perhaps this is partly due to the solitary nature of his achievement. There were Caravaggisti and followers of Rembrandt; Poussin served as St. Paul for the message of the Rafael-based project of French Classicism. Velázquez’ contribution is distorted so long as it does not stand on its own merits and in its own social and historical context.

This dissertation has sought to emphasize a set of verifiable statements about Diego Velázquez’ painterly production:
1. Diego Velázquez is a Spanish painter. His talent was formed in Seville. His dialogue with the larger context of Baroque painting never occluded the pictorial approach that he formulated in that city.

2. Velázquez is a Catholic painter. As the painter to the king his output was dominated by the genre of portraiture. He produced relatively few works of a specifically religious nature and some of his most important works drew on classical mythology for their subject matter. As the preceding text has hopefully demonstrated, however, the task of composing and producing images was intimately interwoven, especially in Seville, with the Catholic theology of immanence and the endorsement of imagery as the means of persuading viewers of those truths their society most prized. The least Catholic painter in seventeenth century Spain was still, in terms of the structure of his approach to reality and its depiction, a thoroughly Catholic painter.

3. The Catholicism of Velázquez’ Spain had a special commitment to and investement in the techniques and visual habits reinforced by Spanish mysticism. The images produced in the trained imaginations of Spaniards were designed to make themselves available to contemplation and, perhaps most importantly, to provoke emotional and somatic responses of an especially intense nature. All the characteristics of Spanish style: the eschewal of deep, linear perspective in favor objects placed up against the picture plane, the use of dark, nondescript backgrounds, the incorporation of a separate portion of the composition for ‘visionary’ or ‘mystical’ events, and the intensity of attention to the surface
textures of what was depicted—all are joined in the work of Velázquez with a powerful engagement with the physicality of his medium. These stylistic features of his works draw the viewer into a mode of engagement with them that satisfies, point by point, the qualities required of the images produced upon the screen of the imagination according to the techniques of Spanish mystics and contemplatives.

Velázquez library, so long invoked as proof of his indifference to the spiritual and religious climate of his environment—with its emphasis on emerging sciences like Astronomy and Optics—is actually proof of his engagement with those authorities and institutions that were the primary champions, not only these sciences, but of the mystical practices that took intense visualization as their core value. William Shea and Mariano Artigas deserve all the credit for uncovering the likelihood that Velázquez met Galileo Galilei in Rome when they were both guests of the Florentine ambassador. This richly suggestive discovery seems not yet to have found its way from historians of science to art historians, however, and I take great pleasure in bringing it to the community’s attention.

The Albertian model helped to shape some of the greatest art, including the greatest Catholic art, that continues to inspire and move scholars and the general public down to today. It was, however, forged before the historic rupture in Western Christendom that lead the Roman Catholic branch of that tradition to define itself with new intensity and necessarily greater introspection. Its prestige, combined, especially in the Ango-American precincts of the scholarly community, has put the art of the Southern Baroque at a critical and conceptual disadvantage. The work of scholars like Svetlana Alpers and
the much-lamented Daniel Arasse have begun to restore a sense of the proper, less-distorted meaning of the art in this category. I hope this dissertation has made a cautious and modest contribution to this project, especially as it applies to the art of Spain produced during the *siglo de oro*. I was born in the United States, but my family came to this country from the Republic of Argentina. Current demographic trends mean that my country must, for reasons that are both ethical and practical, come to a better understanding of the Hispanic culture that is, inevitably, becoming a part of our wider culture. I hope that this dissertation, quite beyond its art historical impact, can serve as a contribution to this effort.

Personally, at the closing of this effort, I cannot help but think of how my father’s family left *Sepharad* sometime after 1492, and I hope that this long line of exiles would have seen in this text the first, tentative steps of a journey of return.
Works Cited


Borghini, R. *Il Riposo in Cui Della Pittura E Della Scultura Si Favella*. Florence, 1584 [1734].


Dissertation,
Bibliography

Saporta


Dissertation,
Bibliography


