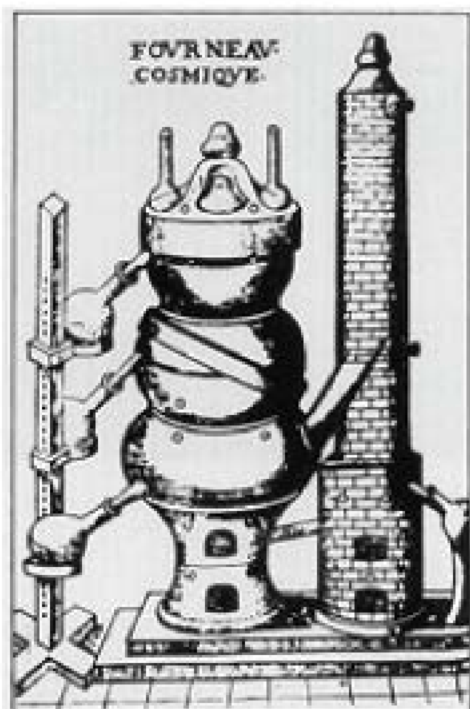
ATHANOR XV

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

ATHANOR XV

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY



Cosmic oven or *Athanor* from Annibal Barlet.
Le Vray Cours de Physique,
Paris, 1653.

Cover: John Biggers, *Shotguns*, 1987, oil and acrylic on canvas, 42 x 49 7/8". Private Collection.

ATHANOR is indexed in *Bibliography of the History of Art* and *ARTbibliographies Modern.*

Manuscript submission: Readers are invited to submit manuscripts for consideration. Authors should consult the *Modern Language Association Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* for matters of form; manuscripts should be original typescripts with xeroxed photographs and cannot be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The University assumes no responsibility for loss or damage of materials. Correspondence and manuscripts may be addressed to the Editor, ATHANOR, Department of Art History, FAB, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2037.

To obtain copies: ATHANOR is published annually by the Department of Art History as a project of the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts Press. The issues are available for a suggested minimum donation of $10.00 to cover handling and contribute to subsequent issues; please request volumes through the Museum of Fine Arts, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2055.

The 1998 Annual Art History Graduate Symposium will be held March, 1998; symposium paper sessions cover a wide variety of topics. Students from the Southeast make presentations which frequently become published essays in ATHANOR. The format of the symposium includes a lecture by the Appleton Eminent Scholar: Fred Licht, Boston University and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection of 20th Century Art, Venice (1993); Gerald Ackerman, Pomona College (1994); Marcel Roethlisberger, University of Geneva, Switzerland (1995); Robert Farris Thompson, Yale University (1996); Oleg Grabar, Princeton University (1996). For details of date and for precis submission, please contact Professor Patricia Rose, Chairman, Department of Art History, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2037.

The essays contained in ATHANOR are articles by graduate students on topics of art history and humanities. As such, ATHANOR exists as a critical forum for the exchange of ideas and for contrast and comparison of theories and research and is disseminated for non-profit, educational purposes; annotated allusions, quotations, and visual materials are employed solely to that end.

Günther Stamm Prize for Excellence

Partitioning the Parturient: An Exploration of the Aztec Fetishized Female Body by William L. Barnes won the Günther Stamm Prize for Excellence at the 1996 Art History Graduate Student Symposium.

Papers Copyright 1997 by Authors

Athanor XV Copyright 1997 by
Florida State University / Tallahassee, FL 32306-2055
All Rights Reserved
L.C. #81-68863

ATHANOR XV

DEDICATION 5

CARLA FUNK
"The City is a Prison, the Desert Paradise": Hagiographic Promotion of Carthusian Monasticism in the Belles Heures 6

AMY J. WRIGHT
The Bible of Borso d'Este: A Profile of Princely Magnificence and Christian Piety 14

WILLIAM L. BARNES
Partitioning the Parturient: An Exploration of the Aztec Fetishized Female Body 20

TRACI ELIZABETH TIMMONS
Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo *and the "Myth of Venice"* 28

ADERA SCHEINKER
Appropriation of Play in a Victorian Album: Idylls of the King and Other Poems Illustrated by Julia Margaret Cameron 34

SUNANDA K. SANYAL
Allegorizing Representation: Gérôme's Final Phase 38

SUSAN KLOMAN
Paula Modersohn-Becker and the Discourse of Motherhood in Turn-of-the-Century Germany 46

LAUREN BARTLETT NAGEL
The Icon and the Avant-Garde in Russia: Aesthetic Continuity in Tatlin's Painterly Reliefs 52

WENDY ELLER KAGEY
The Second Moses: The Messianic Tradition in James Hampton's Throne of the Third Heaven 60

JAMES W. RHODES
A View From Within: Mark Tansey, Mont Sainte-Victoire*, and the Iconography of Deconstruction* 66

KRISTIN SCHREIBER ROBERTS
Framing John Biggers' Shotguns *(1987): African American Art and Identity* 70

ATHANOR XV

Allys Palladino-Craig, General Editor, Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts Press
Julienne T. Mason, Senior Editorial Assistant & Designer, Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts Press

Typography and Design

Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts Press

Printing

Durra Print

Florida State University

Talbot D'Alemberte
President

Lawrence G. Abele
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

J. L. Draper
Dean, School of Visual Arts and Dance

Graduate Studies in the History of Art and Architecture Faculty:

Art History

François Bucher, Ph.D.
University of Bern
Professor
Medieval Art

Karen A. Bearor, Ph.D.
University of Texas, Austin
Associate Professor
19th and 20th Century Art

J. L. Draper, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina
Associate Professor
Dean, School of Visual Arts and Dance
Renaissance and 19th Century Art

Jack W. Freiberg, Ph.D.
Institute of Fine Arts
New York University
Assistant Professor
Italian Renaissance Art

Paula Gerson, Ph.D.
Columbia University
Associate Professor
Chair for Art History
Medieval Art

Cynthia Hahn, Ph.D.
Johns Hopkins University
Associate Professor
Medieval and Islamic Art

Robert Neuman, Ph.D.
University of Michigan
Professor
Baroque and 18th Century Art

Patricia Rose, Ph.D.
Columbia University
Associate Professor
Italian and Northern Renaissance Art

Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk, Ph.D.
University of California
Professor
Oceania, African and American Indian Art

Lauren Weingarden, Ph.D.
University of Chicago
Associate Professor
19th and 20th Century Art

Dorothy Wong, Ph.D.
Harvard University
Assistant Professor
Asian Art

Classics

Nancy de Grummond, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina
Professor
Etruscan and Roman

W. W. de Grummond, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina
Professor
Greek and Roman

Daniel J. Pullen, Ph.D.
Indiana University
Associate Professor
Aegean Bronze Age and Greek

Christopher A. Pfaff, Ph.D.
Institute of Fine Arts
New York University
Assistant Professor
Greek

DEDICATION

This issue is dedicated to Professor François Bucher who served as Faculty Advisor to *ATHANOR* from its first appearance in 1981 until his retirement this past summer.

When he arrived some eighteen years ago, one of his new colleagues described him as a tornado who whirled in and out leaving chaos in his wake. But it was the good old-fashioned kind of chaos from which ideas are spawned. He built a bomb shelter designed on the golden section, so comfortable that visitors refused to leave it. With his mind and hands and back he created a Renaissance scholars foundation from the scrub and swamp of rural north Florida. He persuaded us to try his idea for a graduate student publication that would give our youngest colleagues a vehicle for professional ventures. Of course, he also had an idea for its title, *ATHANOR*, the oven of the alchemists in the centuries when alchemy was a true science. In those times an *athanor* was for adventurous experimentation, for the mixing and cooking and distilling of opposites in a search for new ways to perfect the body and the spirit—the *ATHANOR*, a powerful analogue for the scholar's mind.

Through the intellectual cooking and distillation of our modern *ATHANOR*, ninety-six young Art Historians have seen their first works reach the public. This issue is dedicated to François with our thanks and theirs.

"The City is a Prison, the Desert Paradise": Hagiographic Promotion of Carthusian Monasticism in the *Belles Heures*

Carla Funk

The *Belles Heures*, illuminated by the Limbourg Brothers during the first decade of the fifteenth century, is one of many exquisite Books of Hours commissioned by the Valois prince, Jean, the Duke of Berry (1340-1416).[1] Today the book, which is roughly 8 x 5 inches in size, belongs to The Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and is displayed appropriately alongside other Books of Hours commissioned by French nobles. Books of Hours normally consist of a calendar, readings from the four gospels, prayers to the Virgin, prayers for the dead, and short prayers for various saints. These standard prayers are usually embellished with other illustrations and each book is personalized for its owner in some way.[2] The *Belles Heures* is extraordinary in that it contains eight special pictorial cycles, six of which are devoted to the lives of saints, based not on prayers but on texts from the *Golden Legend*.[3]

While scholars have noted the novelty of these special additions, none have examined the thematic relationship between the hagiographic cycles. This paper will discuss the thematic emphases of the four longest hagiographic cycles—the Life of St. Catherine of Alexandria (fols. 15-20), the Life of St. Bruno and the Founding of the Carthusian Order (fols. 94-97v), the Life of St. Jerome (fols. 183-189v), and the Lives of Ss. Anthony and Paul the First Hermit (fols. 191-194)—and demonstrate how the *Belles Heures,* like the larger and more famous *Très Riches Heures*, with its portraits of the Valois family castles, also illustrated by the Limbourgs for the Duke, reflects the Duke's private interests and promotes the glories of his Valois lineage.[4] The saints chosen by the Duke for depiction in the *Belles Heures* each represent ideals of studious piety with which the Duke wants to be associated. Continuing a Valois tradition of manuscript patronage, the Duke proclaims his own piety and that of his lineage through images of sanctity.[5]

In the *Belles Heures*, this is most obvious in the presentation of Carthusian monasticism as a port of spiritual perfection. The Carthusians and their charter foundation, the Grande Chartreuse, depicted in the *Belles Heures*, were very important to the Duke of Berry and his Valois family (Figure 1). The connection between the Grande Chartreuse and the French royal family began when Louis the Pious, esteemed ancestor of the Duke of Berry, donated a chapel to the foundation in the thirteenth century. The Grande Chartreuse and the region it occu-

This article first took shape as a paper for Cynthia Hahn's "Saints in Art" seminar and evolved into a Master's thesis which provides a more thorough and detailed account of its argument. I would like to thank Cynthia Hahn for guiding me through all stages of this project and providing me with insights and inspiration.

[1] Almost all of the miniatures are reproduced in color in Millard Meiss and Elizabeth Beatson, *The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry* (New York: Braziller, 1974). In *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Late XIV Century and the Patronage of the Duke,* 2 vols. (New York: Braziller,1967) and *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries,* 2 vols. (New York: Braziller, 1974) Meiss has written most of the definitive scholarship concerning the Limbourg Brothers and the artistic patronage of the Duke of Berry. The more recent, Raymond Cazelles, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (New York: Abrams 1988), also provides good information on the Duke and new insights on the atelier of the Limbourgs, but Cazelles' focus is the later *Très Riches Heures.*

[2] Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified* (New York: Braziller, 1988) provides a good overview of Books of Hours. See also, Marcel Thomas, *The Golden Age: Manuscript Painting at the Time of Jean, Duke of Berry* (New York: Braziller, 1988), J. Harthan, *The Book of Hours* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) and Cazelles 203-7.

[3] Specifically, the offices are the four gospel lessons, the Hours of the Virgin, the Hours of the Cross and Holy Spirit, two extra prayers to the Virgin, the Penitential Psalms, the Litany of the Saints, the Office of the Dead, and numerous suffrages to various saints. The extra cycles in the *Belles Heures* depict the lives of St. Catherine, the Procession of St. Gregory, Bruno and the Founding of the Carthusians, Heraclius, St. Jerome, St. Anthony and St. Paul the First Hermit, St. John the Baptist, and Sts. Peter and Paul. Meiss and Beatson 13-16 discuss the make-up of these "novel cycles." The cycles are discussed at greater length in Meiss, *The Limbourgs* 112-13. The imagery of the cycle of St. Catherine is examined by Alexandra Givens, "Contemplative, Corporeal and Charismatic: St. Catherine of Alexandria in the *Belles Heures* of Jean, the Duke of Berry." B.A. thesis, New College, 1993.

[4] Jonathan Alexander, "*Labeur* and *Paresse:* Ideological Representations of Medieval Peasant Labor," *Art Bulletin* 72 (Sept. 1992):436-52 and Cazelles provide analyses of the *Très Riches Heures* which link that manuscript's imagery to the Duke's promotion of the Valois dynasty.

[5] Joan Holladay, "The Education of Jeanne d'Evreux: Personal Piety and Dynastic Salvation in her Book of Hours at the Cloisters," *Art History* 17 (Dec. 1994):585-605 and Margaret Manion, "Art and Devotion: The Prayer Books of Jean de Berry," *Medieval Texts and Images,* eds. Margaret Manion and Bernard Muir (Sydney: Craftsman, 1991):179-80, discuss how images of St. Louis were employed in various Valois manuscripts as both models of behavior and declarations of dynastic piety.

pies, the Dauphiné, came into the possession of the Valois during the mid-fourteenth century.[6] Thus, the monastery symbolized the strengthening and legitimation of the Valois dynasty. Accordingly, the Duke and many members of his family supported the Carthusians financially and helped in the rebuilding of the Grande Chartreuse when it was destroyed by fire in 1371; for example, Margaret of Burgundy gave money to restore the clock tower and the Duke's brother, Charles V, founded a chapel and sent an alms of 4000 florins.[7] In return for their support, the Valois were prayed for by the Carthusians night and day, ensuring their salvation.[8] In the miniature of the Grande Chartreuse, visible at the tip of the tallest spire, in the very center, is a swan, the emblem of the Duke, a clear reference to his patronage of the monastery (Figure 1).

The inclusion of the obscure story of Bruno and the founding of the Carthusian Order among the more well-known lives of saints indicates that the Duke was promoting the importance of the Carthusians and also the canonization of their founder Bruno of Cologne (*c*. 1030-1101), a saint who was never formally recognized by the Vatican until the sixteenth century.[9] Because he was a learned Parisian scholar, Bruno and his followers were praised by many prominent humanists, including the influential Petrarch, whom the Duke of Berry admired.[10] Bruno's aim when founding the Carthusian order was a synthesis of Eastern eremitism within a traditional Western monastic setting that emphasized continual study.[11] By associating himself with the Carthusians, the Duke ensured not only the prayers of the order, but also respect as a truly pious and scholarly man.

The pictorial cycles of the Life of St. Catherine, the Life of St. Jerome and the Lives of Ss. Anthony and Paul the First Hermit all complement the cycle of St. Bruno and the Founding of the Carthusian Order by projecting a continual theme of studious living and idyllic seclusion from the urban environment. Because of the thematic similarities between these cycles and that of Bruno, it appears that Carthusian ideals of pious scholarship are given higher status through association with these more established Early Christian saints. Throughout the imagery of the cycles of St. Catherine, St. Jerome and the hermit Ss. Paul and Anthony, there are emphases and deviations from the text which enhance the scholarly and monastic aspects of the saints' lives.

The longest of the special pictorial cycles are devoted to Catherine and Jerome, two saints whose cults have well-known associations with scholarly pursuits.[12] Both of these pictorial cycles open with images that establish the saints' devotion to books and knowledge. As patroness of the University of Paris and also recipient of French royal patronage, St. Catherine was represented on the seal of the University and students of theology and philosophy regularly made processions to her priory church, St. Catherine des Ecoliers.[13] The illustrations of her life make up the very first pictorial cycle in the book and establish the scholarly tone maintained throughout the *Belles Heures*. The introductory miniature to the Life of St. Catherine portrays the unprecedented scene of Catherine studying (Figure 2). The text explains that she was a beautiful princess who lived during the time of the Emperor Maxentius and was well versed in all of the liberal arts. To emphasize the extent of her learning, an elaborate book stand with a variety of texts, is given a prominence that rivals the figure of Catherine herself.

This portrayal of Catherine's scholarly devotion is immediately followed by a scene of Catherine refusing to worship idols in the city of Alexandria (Figure 3). Catherine's study, reemphasized visually by the inclusion of a book in her hand, has taught her that such worship is false. Recoiling from the idol, Catherine stands apart from the group of pagans both compositionally and philosophically. The text of the miniature explains

6 *History of the Great Chartreuse,* trans. Edward Hassid (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1934):39, 176. The land was bequeathed to Jean le Bon in 1349 on the condition that the king's eldest son bear the title of Dauphin.

7 *History* 43-6, 174-5.

8 *History* 182-3. The Carthusian Order relied heavily on this type of patronage and through it their numbers grew from 46 foundations in 1223 to 150 in 1371; other well-known Carthusian foundations supported by royal patronage were the Certosa di Pavia, founded by the Visconti family, and the Chartreuse de Champmol, founded by the Duke of Berry's brother, Philip the Bold. Wolfgang Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972) 116-20, provides good, basic information about these institutions.

9 The best source for information on Bruno's life is Bernard Bligny, *Saint Bruno, le premier chartreux* (Rennes: Ouest-France, 1984). See also, *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 561-78. Bruno was never officially canonized, but his cult was approved by the Vatican in 1514.

10 The Duke's interest in Humanism and the writings of Petrarch is well-documented and discussed by Meiss, *The Limbourgs* 19-22.

11 Gordon Mursell, *The Theology of the Carthusian Life in the Writings of St. Bruno and Guigo I* (Salzburg: Analecta Cartusiana, 1988), *History* 11-55 and Braunfels 111-13.

12 For information on Catherine's cult see S. Zarb, "Origins and Developments of the Cult of St. Catherine," *St. Catherine of Alexandria: Her Churches, Paintings and Statues in the Maltese Islands,* ed. Mario Buhagin (Malta, 1979) 3-56, M. Brandi, "S. Caterina nella lettertura popolare e nel folklore," *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* III 976, and also Givens. Eugene Rice, *St. Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) provides a thorough study of Jerome's cult and Meiss, "Scholarship and Penitence in the Early Renaissance: The Image of St. Jerome," *Pantheon* 32 (1974):135-40, discusses the popularity of Jerome's scholarly image.

13 In *A Parisian Journal: 1405-1449,* trans. Janet Shirley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 307, a contemporary witness describes how in 1436 "The whole university. . .went to St. Catherine-du-val-des Ecoliers, each carrying a lighted candle in his hand. . .priests and scholars only. . .;" see also 63-4, 353. The processions are also mentioned in Zarb 35 and Brandi 976; further descriptions of processions to Catherine's priory church are found in Françoise Lehoux, *Jean de France Duc de Berri. Sa Vie. Son Action Politique 1340-1416,* vol. 2 (Paris, 1966-68), 221, 300, 352, 372, 441, (vol. 3) 300, 381, 484.

that Catherine, "armed with the sign of the cross" confounded the emperor with the "remarkable depth of her learning."[14] In contrast to the Emperor who stands opposite her and holds a large sword, she is armed only with her book. Empowered by knowledge, Catherine seems to illustrate the Apostle Paul's famous verse, "the word of God is quick. . .powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. . . ."[15] Because of this emphasis on her knowledge, the pictorial cycle continues with illustrations of Catherine's philosophical debate and eventual conversion of fifty respected pagan scholars.

The composition of this miniature seems indicative of the Duke's interest in and support of humanist learning. Christianity triumphs not through the miraculous, but through reason and a reason carefully demarcated from the pagan. This conflict between pagan tradition and Christian knowledge is also featured in the opening Jerome miniature, which shows Jerome, seated front and center, attending a pagan university lecture (Figure 4). The text for this unprecedented illustration explains that he was neglecting the books of the prophets and devoting himself to Plato. In anticipation of his later calling, the Limbourgs have depicted Jerome as a tonsured monk with a halo. This monastic dress and his prayerful gesture, coupled with his brooding expression and apparent lack of interest for the speaker, separate him from the pagan audience.[16] Jerome is unable to enjoy the lecture because he has realized that he should devote his scholarship to Christian concerns.

The text of the following miniature goes on to describe Jerome's dream in which he is condemned and beaten on Judgment Day because he is a "Ciceronian." Instead of opening with the dramatic scene of the dream, the actual textual impetus for Jerome's religious initiation, the artists chose a scene which defined his "Ciceronian" ways and highlighted his education. This sequence emphasizes Jerome's Classical training—a major reason for his popularity in the Renaissance—and simultaneously emphasizes his *own* decision to change his ways. Like Catherine, Jerome goes on to use his Classical education toward Christian means and expounds the scriptures as eloquently as the pagan philosophers.

This Christian devotion to study is shown in the miniature which illustrates Jerome translating the Old Testament (Figure 5). The prophets and the scrolls above him, usually depicted throughout the *Belles Heures* as grisaille sculpture, are here colored and literally brought to life. This implies that Jerome's perseverance and dedication to scriptural translation is responsible for keeping the prophets' words alive. It is also significant that in this scholarly context, there is a specific reference to the Duke. Jerome's circular lectern is crowned by a swan, a popular emblem of the Duke; this seems to relate the Duke's own learning and his love of books to that of Jerome.

The Duke's admiration for knowledge also figures prominently in his patronage and portrayal of Bruno and the Carthusians. The opening scene of the Bruno cycle contains striking parallels to the opening lecture scene of the Jerome cycle. Bruno's introductory miniature also portrays a university environment with prominent books (Figure 6). Raymond Diocrès, an eleventh-century theologian, sits on a cathedra at the center of the composition, engrossed in his study and surrounded by scholars, clerics and monks. The text, taken from a thirteenth-century *Life of Bruno,* explains that Diocrès was a well-respected and famous professor who died in Paris with many honors. The next miniatures portray the shocking event that had such an impact on Bruno. Twice after his death, Diocrès rose from his coffin and announced that he had been justly accused, judged by God and damned to hell.

This evocation of judgment and condemnation, occuring as it does immediately after the scene of scholarly devotion, calls to mind Jerome's dream of condemnation which also occurs after he attends a lecture. While no reasons are given for Diocrès' damnation, the introductory image of his intense scholarly devotion denotes that too much study in a university environment can lead one to neglect the true meaning of the scriptures. Apparently this was a common threat because stories of vain and misled students "struck dumb" after death were commonly employed in medieval sermons at the University of Paris as warnings against scholarly vanity.[17]

According to legend, the events of Diocrès' funeral were the impetus for Bruno's founding of the Carthusians, an order famous for its emphasis on solitude and study. After witnessing the damnation of such a well-respected man, Bruno refused an offer to become the Archbishop of Rheims and sought a secluded existence far away from worldly temptations. In the illustration of his retreat from Paris, the spires and turrets of the city create a striking contrast to the peaceful hills and forest on the right (Figure 7). Indicating his future life, Bruno points the way down a path which leads to a solitary monk reading in a cave. The partial view of an ecclesiastical portal foreshadows the soon-to-be-built monastery.

Throughout the special cycles of the *Belles Heures,* this withdrawal from the urban environment appears to be the necessary outcome of a life truly devoted to study. Catherine, at

14 All passages quoted from the text of the *Belles Heures* are taken from Meiss and Beatson.

15 Paul's verse is in Hebrews 4:12. Because of Catherine's connections to the University of Paris, this miniature could also illustrate the theologian Robert de Sorbon's idea that "The sword of God's word is forged by grammar, sharpened by logic, and burnished by rhetoric, but only theology can use it" (MS. lat. 15971, f. 198); quoted and translated by Charles Homer Haskins, "The University of Paris in the Sermons of the Thirteenth Century," *Studies in Medieval Culture,* 2nd ed. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965) 46.

16 Thanks to Jack Freiberg for pointing out the significance of Jerome's gesture.

17 Haskins 45-51. While many of these stories refer to students who were studying canon law or science instead of theology, the similarities are striking. Particularly noteworthy are stories of condemned students appearing after death to their masters or masters struck dumb because of their vanity.

first shown in peaceful, solitary study, goes into the city and, after rejecting the Emperor's offer to become rich and famous as his pagan queen, is tortured, starved and forced into prison for twelve days. Once inside the prison and away from the world, her private cell turns into a palace where she is nourished and her wounds are healed by angels (Figure 8). By depicting the cell as a rapturous solace, the Limbourgs' illustration evokes the Carthusian maxim that the "cell is necessary for the health and life of the soul."[18] Catherine's legend is associated further with remote solitude because her body was miraculously transported to the desert Monastery of Mt. Sinai. Included at the end of her pictorial cycle is an illustration of this desert shrine which includes the portrayal of the solitary monk discussed earlier in the Bruno cycle (Figure 9). The remoteness of the site is emphasized by the inclusion of pilgrims and a text which explains that it takes twenty days to reach the monastery.

The events depicting Jerome's retreat from the world are more similar to Bruno's. The Limbourgs portray Jerome's own flight from Rome and his eventual founding of a monastery in the East. Disillusioned, Jerome leaves Rome, visits the bishop of Constantinople, and then sets sail for the desert where he will take refuge in the wilderness (Figure 10). The simultaneous narrative of the miniature emphasizes the contrast between Jerome's past urban existence and his future of seclusive study. After receiving the necessary blessing from the Bishop, Jerome is shown reading as he sails away from the faintly visible cityscape in the background. Once in the desert, however, Jerome is still haunted by urban temptations (Figure 11). In a miniature portraying Jerome's torturous visions of beautiful women, the Limbourgs have placed the lascivious women within city walls, thus associating Jerome's lust with an urban environment. Jerome, symbolically assailed by a grotesque demon, tries to ignore them through prayer while the monumental religious architecture behind him and the cardinal's hat in the foreground serve as symbols of his strength and reminders of his religious devotion.

After his solitary struggles in the wilderness, Jerome founds a monastery near Bethlehem and the illustrations of these events emphasize the harmony of his new monastic life; throughout the rest of the miniatures, Jerome is established as a strong monastic leader. Significantly, this image is followed by the cycle of Anthony and Paul the First Hermit, a life written by Jerome himself. This cycle is a continuation of Jerome's monastic image and a more eremitic counterpart to the communal harmony emphasized pictorially in the cycle of Jerome's life. Anthony, "horrified" by events in Rome, has left the wicked city and fled to the "vast desert beside the Red Sea" (Figure 12). The text of the miniature explains that Anthony has dreamt of "one better than himself dwelling in the wilderness" so he is shown in search of Paul the First Hermit. The sailing ships emphasize his long journey and the inclusion of Paul studying in the background next to an ecclesiastical structure foretells the hermits' peaceful future of religious devotion.

By privileging seclusion and scholarly study, the cycles of Catherine, Jerome, and the desert hermits Anthony and Paul serve as perfect hagiographic models for the Carthusians. When founding the Carthusians, Bruno found his ideal refuge in the mountainous terrain of eastern France, the Dauphiné, acquired for the French realm by Jean le Bon, the Duke's father, and commonly known as "le Desert." Here Bruno organized the building of the Grande Chartreuse. The Limbourgs have portrayed the monks eagerly entering through the portal (Figure 13). Dressed in new white robes, they enter rhythmically in single file, and the vaulted structure, similar to that featured in the backgrounds of the other monastic miniatures, emphasizes the all-encompassing enclosure of their new life.

The Bruno cycle closes with a portrayal of the peaceful solitude of the Carthusian way of life at the Grande Chartreuse (Figure 1). The text of the miniature reads:

> This house, called in truth the Charterhouse, is situated among the serried mountains of Burgundy; according to Jerome, the city is a prison, the desert paradise. In the cell is peace; strife and war threaten without.

The unique architecture of the Carthusians—which follows Jerome's philosophy and provides each monk with his own cell—is made clearly visible by the bird's-eye-view.[19] The tranquil setting and the solitary figure rowing his boat, evoke the metaphor employed by Petrarch in his praise of the Carthusians: "How many outstanding men have come with great glory through the tempests of public affairs to the silence of the eremitical port."[20]

When the *Belles Heures* was produced, the French kingdom was in the midst of its long war with England and there were bloody, internal battles between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs from which the Duke, as Captain General of Paris and eldest ally of the Armagnacs, could not escape. The peaceful atmosphere of this final miniature projects the Grande Chartreuse as a safe haven far away from such turmoil. The Duke is known to have visited the Parisian Chartreuse de Vauvert in 1398 with his brother, Philip the Bold, who had the Champmol Chartreuse built for his own burial site.[21] Previous to this visit, the Duke had arranged for a chapel to be built after his death at the Chartreuse de Vauvert in exchange for prayers for his salvation.[22] The inclusion of his emblem, the swan, on the tip of the tallest, central spire of the Grand Chartreuse, serves as a

[18] *History* 21.

[19] Braunfels 111-24 discusses Carthusian architecture and provides several plans of typical charterhouses.

[20] Giles Constable, "Twelfth-Century Spirituality and the Late Middle Ages," *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe* (London: Variorum, 1988) 60.

[21] Meiss, *The Limbourgs,* 125 and 454, n. 223.

[22] Lehoux 273 explains that the Duke had this added in a codicil to his will before leaving on a trip to Italy in 1391. He also was to donate a reliquary of John the Baptist, his name saint as well as patron of the Chartreuse de Vauvert.

visual reminder of those prayers of the Carthusian order.

Clearly the Duke, whose own life was one of worldly hedonism, wanted to ensure the prayers of the most austere and respected monastic order. In commissioning the depiction of the great scholars Catherine and Jerome, the famous hermits Paul and Anthony, and the founding of the eremitic Carthusians who fled urban Paris, the Duke wished to portray a scholarly and pious self-image while also commemorating the spiritual superiority of the Carthusian order, in which he put his hopes for salvation. The end result also seems to mirror the words of the humanist Petrarch who claimed "to hardly think well of a man—especially a studious man. . .who does not eagerly flee from the storms of civilian cares into solitude as into a port."[23]

Florida State University

[23] Constable 62.

Figure 1. Limbourg Brothers, The Grande Chartreuse, Fol. 97v, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 2. Limbourg Brothers, St. Catherine Studying, Fol. 15, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 3. Limbourg Brothers, St. Catherine Refuses to Worship an Idol, Fol. 15v, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 4. Limbourg Brothers, St. Jerome at a Pagan Lecture, Fol. 183, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 5. Limbourg Brothers, St. Jerome Translating the Bible, Fol. 187v, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 6. Limbourg Brothers, Diocris Expounding the Scriptures, Fol. 94, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 7. Limbourg Brothers, St. Bruno Leaves Paris, Fol. 95v, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 8. Limbourg Brothers, St. Catherine Tended by Angels, Fol. 17v, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 9. Limbourg Brothers, St. Catherine's Body Carried to Mt. Sinai, Fol. 20, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 10. Limbourg Brothers, St. Jerome Leaves Constantinople, Fol. 185, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 11. Limbourg Brothers, St. Jerome Tempted by Dancing Girls, Fol. 186, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 12. Limbourg Brothers, St. Anthony Seeking St. Paul's Hermitage, Fol. 191v, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 13. Limbourg Brothers, Entering the Grande Chartreuse, Fol. 97, *Belles Heures*, c.1407-09, The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Bible of Borso d'Este: A Profile of Princely Magnificence and Christian Piety

Amy J. Wright

The Bible of Borso d'Este, commissioned in 1455, is one of the most beautiful and lavishly illuminated manuscripts of the fifteenth century. It was conceived both as an *objet d'art* and as a symbol of Christian piety and princely splendor. Its two volumes measuring 675 cm x 586 cm, with 650 parchment folios and over 1,000 miniatures, took ten miniaturists more than six years to complete.[1] From the contracts in the archives and in the Este library at Modena, Italy, where the Bible is now located, it is apparent that from the beginning the Bible was considered a *livre de luxe,* and is described in the contract as "*magnifico*."[2]

The text on each page is divided into two columns and fills approximately one-half of the surface area. The remaining area is filled with intricate floral, vegetal, or geometric motifs. Particularly prevalent are the so-called *bianchi girari*, a white vine-stem motif, and stylized flowers interspersed with paired animals. The upper margin contains the title of the book. The left margins of the text contain historiated initials, generally one to a page and measuring one to six inches. The *incipits*, or opening pages of each book are particularly elaborate, and the *incipit* of Genesis is the most lavishly decorated in the Bible (Figure 1).

The colors are strong primary hues. Magenta and royal blue with golden highlights dominate, reflecting the use of precious materials such as gold and lapis lazuli. Examples of *trompe l'oeil* illusionism are found in the ribbons at the top of some of the pages. Painted jewels appear in several borders and are reminiscent of Carolingian Bibles, particularly the cover of the Lindau Gospels, encrusted with gems set in gold. The inclusion of these illusionistic gem stones on the pages of the Borso Bible lends a sense of opulence to the *work* and reflects on the royal prestige and Christian piety of the patron.[3]

Within the lavish illumination is a subtly manipulated thematic program clearly conceived to link the rule of Borso d'Este with concepts of Old Testament leadership and sanctification. Until now, however, the iconographic significance of the specific motifs and their placement in connection to the biblical text has remained unexplored. In this discussion, by focusing on these motifs and their relation to the political aspirations of Borso d'Este in his role as *signore* of Ferrara, I will suggest that Borso d'Este's commissioning of the Bible, like his art patronage in general, was directly linked to his political agenda.

Despite popular support and ratification by Pope Nicholas V, Borso's succession in 1450 to the *Marquisate*, the highest judicial office of Ferrara, was technically illegal. His half brothers, Ercole and Sigismondo, as well as his nephew, Niccolo, the son of his brother Leonello, had prior claims. Recognizing the precariousness of his position, Borso responded by designing a broad program of social reform including changes in administrative and judicial systems, education, land reclamation, and revitalization of religious institutions, all intended to improve his image and to strengthen his claim to rule. This broad program resulted in and was reinforced by Borso's artistic patronage.

In addition to the necessity of developing the image of a wise and just ruler in Ferrara, Borso was governed in his artistic patronage by the social position of the Estensi in fifteenth-century Italy. Through marriage, the Este family was related to all the great houses of Italy and a respected part of the "aristocratic family" that set implicit standards of courtly style. Book collecting and the commissioning of illuminated manuscripts were integral to princely magnificence and the creation of an extensive library was highly desirable. By the mid-fifteenth century, collections of princes in Italy, such as the Visconti-Sforza at Padua, Federico do Montefeltro at Urbino, and the Argonese kings at Naples, and especially significant in our context, the library of Niccolo III d'Este, father of Borso, at Ferrara, were models of princely magnificence and erudition.

This paper developed out of a seminar under Dr. Jack Freiberg to whom I am indebted for his guidance, encouragement, and uncompromising standards for excellence. I wish to thank Dr. Cynthia Hahn and Dr. Maria Phillips for their generous advice and support.

[1] Charles M. Rosenberg, "The Bible of Borso d'Este: Inspiration and Use," *Cultura Figurativa Ferrarese tra XV e XVI Secolo* 1 (1981): 53.

[2] Rosenberg, "The Bible of Borso d'Este," 53.

[3] By the middle of the fifteenth century, the illuminated manuscript had reached the status of a precious object and was considered a suitable gift for royalty. There is evidence of Borso having had a breviary bound for presentation to Emperor Frederick III upon his visit to Ferrara in 1452, at the time of Borso's investiture as the Duke of Modena and Reggio. Borso also presented a breviary to the Bishop of Adria while in Rome in 1471. See Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara During the Reign of Borso d'Este (1450-1471),* diss. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1974, 150-1. The *Codex Tabulae Astrologiae* of Giovanni Bianchini, although ostensibly presented to the emperor by the astrologer himself in the miniature from the frontispiece, bears at the bottom the Este coat of arms, suggesting Borso was the true donor. See Rosenberg, "The Bible of Borso d'Este," 61.

The tradition among Italian princes of commissioning deluxe Bibles illuminated on a large scale was a revival of earlier monastic and imperial commissions. Formerly large-scale luxury Bibles in one or two volumes had been owned by wealthy monasteries for reading in the refectory. Bibles for Carolingian kings, such as the ninth century San Paolo Bible commissioned by Charles the Bald as a papal gift,[4] set the standard of splendor for a *livre de luxe* that was a model for King Charles V of France and his Valois brothers, most notably Jean, Duc du Berry. The Borso Bible was conceived to reflect this royal heritage and to integrate its owner into this august tradition, focusing attention on his princely magnificence and Christian piety.

To accomplish this, the lavish decoration of the Borso Bible included symbols of antiquity and early Christianity intermingled with those of the Este family and of Borso himself. Heraldic symbols such as the *fleur-de-lis* appear in the Este coat of arms and reflect the connections through marriage with the court of France (Figure 2). The imperial eagle, a symbol of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III, refers to Borso's imperial connections in his rule of Modena and Reggio, and it appears along with the other emblems of the Estensi, such as the hydra, the carnation in a ring, and the flaming fountain.

Borso's personal *impresa*—the unicorn, the font, and the *paraduro*—also appear in the decoration. The unicorn in medieval legend was said to purify water with a touch of its horn (Figure 3). This image is a frequent device in the Borso Bible and reflects the patron's deep concern for issues of water management, particularly irrigation and flood control for the Po River, so critical to the economy of Ferrara.

The image of the font with the floating bowl appears throughout the Bible and symbolizes the dukedoms of Modena and Reggio (Figure 4). Its shape suggests a Christian baptismal font. The *paraduro,* a wattle structure for damming water for irrigation, also relates to Borso's improvements in hydraulics (Figure 5). By combining the modern *paraduro* with the word *Fido*, Latin for "I trust," Borso imbued this worldly image with association of the Christian faith. The miniature above the *paraduro* on the *incipit* page of Numbers depicts the female figure of Justice seated next to King Solomon on his throne. The juxtaposition of that image with Borso's personal *impresa* at the opening of this book, the Wisdom of Solomon, associates Borso's reign with that of King Solomon.

The lavish use of personal symbols in fifteenth-century manuscripts was a frequent practice among fifteenth-century Italian princes. The iconography in Borso's Bible, however, expands self-glorification and portrays Borso himself, both symbolically and graphically, as the contemporary incarnation of the concept of Old Testament justice and wise leadership.

The figure of Justice Enthroned on the *incipit* page of the book of Numbers holds a shield featuring the Este emblems (Figure 6). Behind her stretches a verdant background landscape. The location of this image at the beginning of the book amplifies the meaning of the text. The opening chapters of Numbers contain the first account of the organization of the Israelites in preparation for their journey to the Promised Land: "the Lord spoke to Moses at the Tent of the Meeting in the wilderness of Sinai in these words: 'Number the whole community of Israel by families in the father's line'" (Numbers 1:1-2). It is this political organization through dynasties that provided the stability which made the development of Mosaic law possible. The figure of Justice, therefore, personifies the sacral qualities of leadership which God had invested in Moses and would have been recognized by a fifteenth-century audience as alluding also to Borso d'Este. The Este shield, prominently displayed by the figure of Justice, is the visual link between Moses's rule as the embodiment of Old Testament concepts of organization, stability, and justice and the rule of Borso d'Este in fifteenth-century Ferrara.

The figure of Justice as an alter ego for Borso was established early in his reign. An illustration accompanying a poem written to honor Borso applied the model of ancient Triumph to celebrate his rule. Borso is portrayed as the figure of the Just Ruler enthroned under a baldachin and accompanied by four women who bear the symbols of office. This image in small-scale illumination was given more dramatic form in 1453, the year after Borso was made Duke of Modena and Reggio by Emperor Frederick III. In the procession that formed part of the festivities to celebrate the event, the throne of Justice set atop a festival cart was dramatically left vacant for the Duke. The equation of Borso and Justice was given even more permanent form in a medal cast after 1452 in which Borso's image on the obverse is paired with the figure of Justice on the reverse accompanied by the epigram, *Haec Te Unum*, "You and she are one." In one of the boldest statements of this theme, a statue of Borso enthroned and holding the scepter of rule was raised in the main civic piazza of the city, in front of *Palazzo della ragione* (a modern copy of the original is now in place); this statue bore a striking resemblance to the figure of Justice enthroned in the Borso Bible.[5]

4 For a discussion of this commission, see William Diebold, "The Ruler Portrait of Charles the Bald in the San Paolo Bible," *Art Bulletin* 76 (1994): 7-18.

5 The original monument, erected in December 1454, represented Borso posed on a ceremonial chair set on a platform atop a marble column. He held the baton of his office in his right hand. The figure of the seated ruler with the badge of his office is an emblem of power which goes back to ancient Egypt and to the figure of *Justicia* in classical statuary. More recently, it may refer to the figure of Frederick II, the central image of the decoration of the Capuan Gate, with which Borso was familiar. The equation of Borso with the image of the just ruler was another example of his personal iconography and the location of the statue in the piazza in front of the *Palazzo della ragione*, the seat of the communal government and the main law court, was directly related to the political agenda underlying his art patronage.

With the renovation of the piazza by Borso's successor, Ercole I, the Borso monument was shifted to the left side of the *Arco del cavallo*. In 1796, with the French occupation of Ferrara, the statue was pulled down and melted to make weaponry. The present statue is a modern reproduction. See Charles Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara During the Reign of Borso d'Este*, 1-75.

Supporting this argument is another image from the Book of Numbers in which Moses prays outdoors next to a blooming tree and a wattle fence appears nearby. The adjacent text contains God's instructions to Moses: "These are the words with which you shall bless the Israelites: The Lord Bless you and watch over you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:23-26). The visual images of the flowering tree and wattle fence draw an unequivocal thematic link with the landscape of Ferrara made more fertile by the land and water reforms that Borso effected during his reign. Like a contemporary Moses, Borso, finding favor with God, also brings God's blessings of prosperity and peace to the Ferrarese though his leadership. In addition, the thematic association of Borso with Moses provides the dynastic link of legitimacy so integral to Borso's reign, beset by filial rivals.

A more elaborate example of Borso's assimilation of the Old Testament *persona* of the just and chosen leader appears in the miniature accompanying the first chapter of Deuteronomy. It is Moses who leads the Hebrews to the Promised Land. In this scene, however, the long-suffering Hebrews are depicted as modern fifteenth-century Ferrarese arriving at the crest of the hill to catch their first glimpse of the valley below. The text reads, "I have laid the land before you; go in and occupy it, the land which your father swore to give to your forefathers . . . and to their descendants after them" (Deuteronomy 1:8). The Promised Land is depicted with wattle fences, verdant vegetation, and a walled fifteenth-century city reminiscent of Ferrara and the surrounding countryside. We find a metaphorical correlation between the text and the image, which implies an extension of the narrative to portray Borso's reign as the Golden Age of Ferrara, a veritable Promised Land of peace and prosperity.

The *bas de page* on the *incipit* of Ecclesiastes makes this association more explicit (Figure 7). The king, sitting on his throne, is an idealized portrait of Borso himself, who, enframed in a round arch, turns to look at the verdant landscape bathed in soft golden light behind him. Wattle fences, abundant streams, and ample vegetation reflect the concrete improvements Borso introduced. The imagery clearly relates to the civic themes of Good Government, which had their origins in Roman political thought as *Pax* and *Concordia*.[6] The most famous visual example is in the fourteenth-century frescoes in the *Sala dei Nove* in the *Palazzo Pubblico* in Siena by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Here too, dancing figures suggested the peace and order of Good Government. The inclusion of this scene at the opening of the Book of Ecclesiastes implies an extended association of the reign of Borso with the wisdom and justice of King Solomon, who was often credited with writing this book of the Bible.

The images thus far discussed associate Borso d'Este with Old Testament models of wise and just leadership in an indirect manner. The *incipit* for the book of Judith, however, features a portrait of Borso d'Este himself enthroned with scepter in hand, among advisors in his court (Figure 8). Two of the accompanying figures who are depicted with eastern headgear may allude to the fact that Borso's reputation for princely magnificence was so widespread that eastern princes sent ambassadors with offerings to him in the mistaken belief that he was the sovereign of the territory of Italy.[7]

The meaning of this miniature is revealed through a subtle coordination with the text which describes King Nebuchadnezzar in conference with his advisors and princes: "Assembling all his officers and nobles, the king laid before them his personal decision about the region and declared his intention of putting an end to its disaffection (Judith 2:2)." Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne of Persia in 605 B.C., successfully thwarting the royal aspirations of a younger brother. During his forty-three year reign, his skillfully planned military operations gained him an empire larger than that of any other ancient people, including the Assyrians. He followed his conquests with measures to ensure law and order, which consolidated his position and characterized him as a model of just administration. He was mythologized as superhuman, more powerful than Hercules in Greek histories, and he was reputed to have diverted a river and rebuilt the old city of Babylon.[8] Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king, generally thought of as an evil persecutor of God's Chosen People in Babylon. In the Book of Daniel, however, we are told that after being stricken by God with physical and mental disabilities, and the subsequent loss of his kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar came to praise God as the "King of heaven" (Daniel 4:36-37).[9] It is for this reason that he was linked prominently in the traditions of just kingship.

No doubt Borso saw himself as a fifteenth-century model after Nebuchadnezzar, for like Nebuchadnezzar, he too had had to draw together various factions in his territories. He was the second consecutive bastard *signore* to assume power over legitimate male heirs, thus there was disaffection among those who resented his usurpation of power from his nephew and brothers, and several conspiracies were uncovered. Swift retaliation through the newly-reformed legal process served to suppress the opposition and maintain good government and

6 Justice and common good were twin elements of Aristotelian political philosophy. St. Thomas Aquinas associated justice and common good with concord and peace. See Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, vol. I (London: Oxford UP, 1936) 364-65. Pax and Concordia were twin ideals of Roman political thought which would have been familiar to the Humanist scholars of Borso's court through the writings of Cicero and Sallust.

7 Edmund G. Gardner, *Dukes and Poets in Ferrara* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1903) 81.

8 For a more extensive discussion of Nebuchadnezzar and his reign, see D.J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985).

9 After a period of madness described in Daniel 4:28-33, King Nebuchadnezzar describes himself as returning to his right mind and "praising and glorifying the Ever-living One." Also see Daniel 4:34-37.

peace throughout the realm. This image of Borso surrounded by his advisors at the opening of Judith signifies his assimilation of the royal persona of Nebuchadnezzar, as well as an extended association with the opulence and power of ancient Eastern empires.[10]

The symbolic association of Borso with three biblical figures: Moses, Solomon, and Nebuchadnezzar, was clearly designed to link him to Old Testament concepts of justice, kingship, and legitimacy in a fashion that to the modern eye appears nothing short of audacious. In cultivating the metaphorical image of Justice for his rule, Borso created a personal mythology which linked him to noble and antique origins in the Old Testament and graphically appropriated God's sanction and blessing of his political agenda.

The illuminated Bible served both a private and public role in advancing that agenda. Like other elaborately illuminated texts, it was displayed to visiting dignitaries and carried to other courts. Records indicate that in 1467 the Borso Bible was shown to the ambassador from Bologna.[11] When Borso traveled to Rome to receive the coveted title of the Duke of Ferrara from Pope Paul II in 1471, he carried the Bible with him, and it served as a major piece of propaganda in attesting to his legitimacy as ruler of Ferrara.

Commissioning such a lavish book carried a public message of his princely magnificence and Christian piety. Through its conception and execution, Borso controlled the specific image he wished portrayed for contemporary and future generations. That he was successful is evident in the descriptions of him from court literature. In his time he was called "glorious," "heavenly," and "divine."[12] Upon his death it was recorded that "To the people it seemed as though the Eternal God had died again."[13]

Florida State University

[10] Ronald H. Sack, *Images of Nebuchadnezzar* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1991) 95. It is certainly possible that in addition to the connection with Nebuchadnezzar and the empires of the Near East, Borso also may have had in mind an association with Hammurabi (*r.* 1792-1750 B.C.), founder of the Babylonian dynasty, known for his codification of the law.

[11] See John J.G. Alexander, ed., *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination 1450-1550* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1995) 11.

[12] Werner L. Gundersheimer, *Ferrara. The Style of a Renaissance Despotism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 127.

[13] Gundersheimer, 159, n. 52. Quoted from *Diario Ferrarese dall'anno 1409 sino al 1502 di autori incerti*, ed. G. Pardi, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, rev. ed vol. XXIV, pt. VII, Bologna, 1928, 70-71.

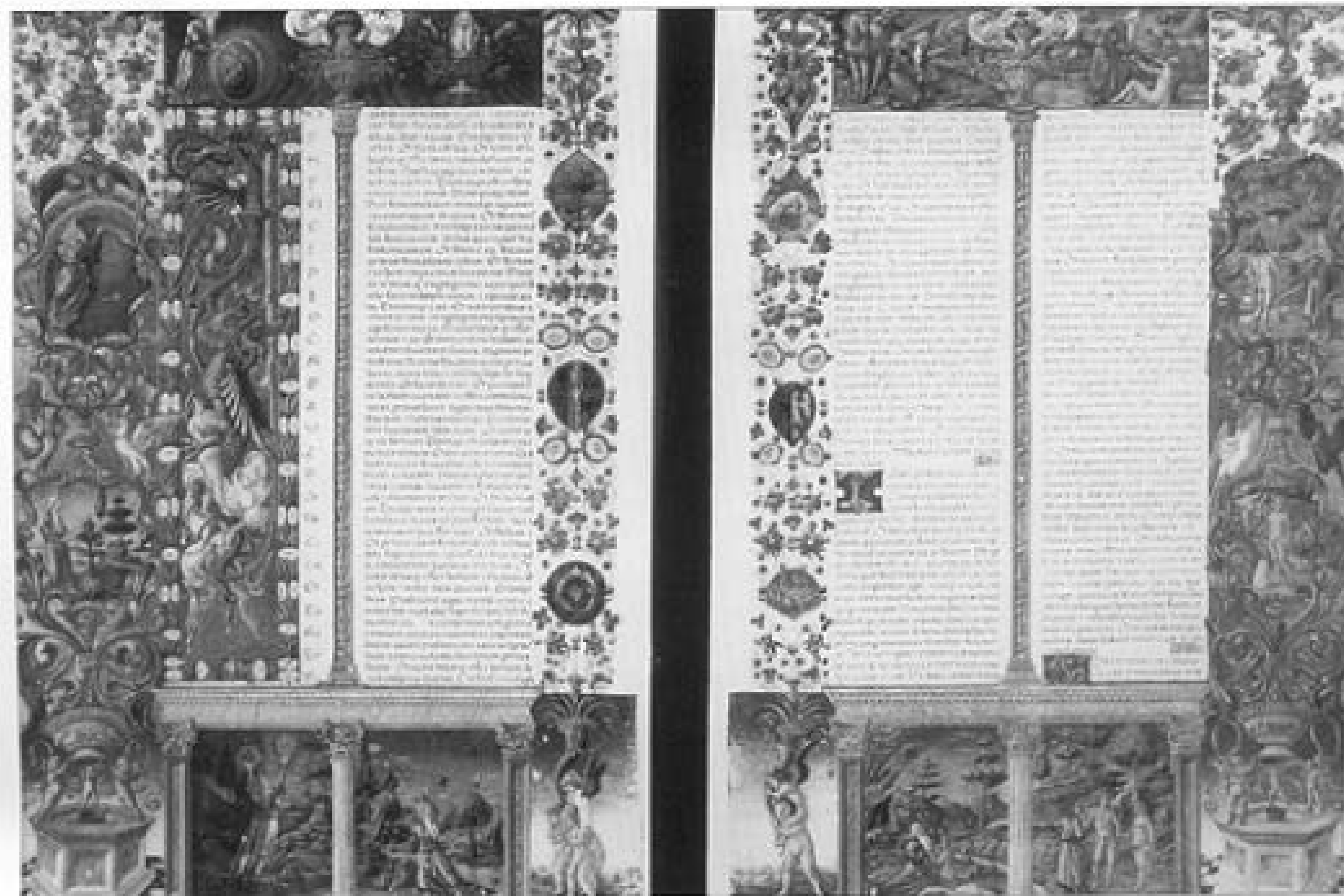


Figure 1. *Bible of Borso d'Este.* 1455-61. Opening pages of Genesis: Creation. Vol. I, fol. 5v, 6r. Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

Figure 2. *Bible of Borso d'Este*, 1455-61. Este coat of arms. Vol. I, fol. 212r. Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

Figure 3. *Bible of Borso d'Este*, 1455-61. Unicorn, personal badge of Borso. Vol. II, 233v. Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

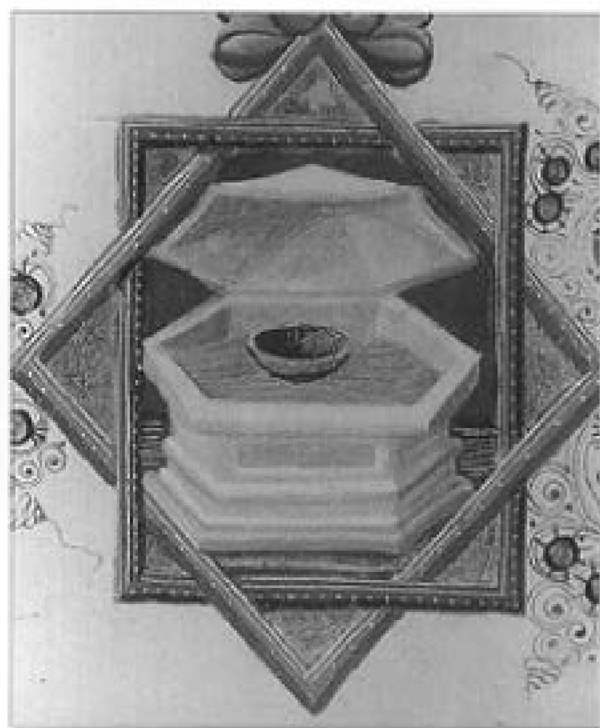


Figure 4. *Bible of Borso d'Este*, 1455-61. Font, personal badge of Borso. Vol. I, fol. 32r. Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

Figure 5. *Bible of Borso d'Este*, 1455-61. Paraduro, personal badge of Borso. Vol. I, fol. 286r. Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

Figure 6. *Bible of Borso d'Este*, 1455-61. Detail from opening page of Numbers. Vol. I, fol. 56r. Courtesy of Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

Figure 7. *Bible of Borso d'Este*, 1455-61. Detail from opening page of Ecclesiastes. Vol. I, fol. 280v.

Figure 8. *Bible of Borso d'Este*, 1455-61. Detail from opening page of Judith. Vol. I, fol. 217r.

Partitioning the Parturient: An Exploration of the Aztec Fetishized Female Body

William L. Barnes

Sixteenth-century Spanish missionary Bernardino de Sahagún spent many years collecting ethnographic information among the Aztecs of Central Mexico. Perhaps the most comprehensive of his works is the *Florentine Codex*, a twelve volume manuscript originally entitled *General History of the Things of New Spain.* Among a myriad of other topics covered in this monumental work, Father Sahagún discusses a curious phenomenon which I call the Fetishized Female Body.[1] As described by Sahagún, the body of a woman who had died in childbirth became a holy relic to the Aztecs, its individual components imbued with portentous magical power. At various times the woman's severed fingers, hair, hands and arms, became fetishized objects, affording supernatural power and protection for the bearers who were invariably male. In this paper I will examine the visual and written evidence of this phenomenon as well as mytho-historical connections which suggest that a woman's body served as a conduit between everyday life and the supernatural in Aztec thought and culture.

When an Aztec woman died in childbirth, in battle, or on the sacrificial stone, her spirit joined celestial spirits called *cihuateteo*. Translated as "god-women," these goddesses were considered the older sisters of the sun.[2] In the speech given at the death of an unfortunate mother she is said to join these "celestial women. . .those who are always, forever glad, content, joyous, happy by [and] near our mother, our father, the sun, whom they gladden, to whom they cry out."[3] However, as a group these goddesses caused widespread fear and trepidation in Aztec society, for they would return to earth and torment the living.

The *cihuateteo* are usually depicted in Aztec pre-conquest art as partially skeletonized figures with upraised claws (Figure 1). These women are seated in the proper Aztec female fashion, with their legs tucked up under their bodies.[4] Imagery differs slightly from sculpture to sculpture, from bare breasted skeletal women, bare breasts being typical of the non-noble Aztec woman's costume, to more elaborate examples with ornate costumes and mother-goddess imagery.[5]

The Aztecs greatly feared the days when these goddesses descended from the skies.[6] It was said that they would cause possession, deformity and illness to whomever they caught in the open. Most notably affected by these spirits would be children, necessitating that they be hidden away. The Aztecs so feared these days that more of their moveable feasts were dedicated to appeasing these goddesses than were dedicated to any other god or phenomenon. They were also addressed in parts of the larger monthly feasts. So widespread and popular was

1 Father Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain,* trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 12 books in 13 vols. (Santa Fe: School of American Research and The University of Utah, 1950-1982). It is important to note that this work originally consisted of two text columns, one in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, and one in Spanish, which was a loose translation of the Nahuatl by Father Sahagún. This particular edition (Anderson & Dibble's) mainly consists of translations of the Nahuatl section. Thus, when I refer to Sahagún, I am referring to the translated work of his native Mexican informants. For a good, critical look at Sahagún and his works, including a list of publications and recent scholarship, see J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H.B. Nicholson and Eloise Quiñones Keber, eds., *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico* Studies on Culture and Society, vol. 2 (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, The University at Albany, State University of New York, 1988).

2 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6:164.

3 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6:164.

4 See Donald Robertson, *Mexican Manuscript Painting of the Early Colonial Period* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959). See also the soon to be published Elizabeth H. Boone, *Histories and Historians*, n.d. (in press 1997) for a good overview of pictorial conventions.

5 See Esther Pasztory, *Aztec Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983) 220-222, fig, 187. See also Thelma Sullivan "Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina: The Great Spinner and Weaver," in *The Art and Iconography of Late Post-Classic Central Mexico,* ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks) 7-36, for more information on the complex Aztec mother goddess, and Cecelia Klein "Rethinking Cihuacoatl: Aztec Political Imagery of the Conquered Woman," in *Smoke and Mist: Mesoamerican Studies in Memory of Thelma D. Sullivan*, ed. J. Kathryn Josserand & Karen Dakin, 2 parts, BAR International Series 402 (Oxford: B.A.R., 1988), for an exploration of the phenomenon of Cihuacoatl, one of the foremost of these goddesses: however some of Klein's ideas in regard to the "conquered woman" are somewhat in conflict with those presented herein. See also H.B. Nicholson "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians* vol. 10, ed. R. Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971) 91-134, for a good general overview of Aztec religious beliefs and deities.

6 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6: 10, 41, 45, 81, 93, 101, 107; 2: 35-41. He lists the dates of 1 Deer, 1 Rain, possibly 4 Wind, 1 Monkey, 1 House, 1 Wind, and 1 Eagle, as the most portent day of the goddesses' descent. Also of the eighteen moveable feasts that Sahagún describes the third, eighth, and the twelfth are dedicated to appeasing these goddesses. Their appeasement rites were also a part of the festivals of the twelfth month called Teotl eco, and impersonators of the *cihuateto* were sacrificed during the eleventh month of Ochpaniztli.

the belief in these goddesses that shrines to them were set up at almost every crossroads in the suburbs.[7] The rites of appeasement for these goddesses were important enough to be one of the few ceremonies illustrated in complete sequence by Father Sahagún in his *Florentine Codex* (Figure 2).

In this particular passage Sahagún's painter began the pictorial narrative with a Europeanized glyph for the day called One Eagle, one of the most auspicious days of the *cihuateteo's* descent.[8] Below this date the artist portrayed the actual descent of one of these goddesses, who startles two unsuspecting women. Next, a concerned matron is shown hiding away her children. On the following page Sahagún had illustrated different events in the appeasement ceremonies for these goddesses: men ritually scattering reeds, then covering images of the goddesses, and lastly, making offerings of thanks for surviving the goddesses' descents.

When a woman died in childbirth she became one of the *mocihuaquetzqui*; loosely translated as "apotheosized woman."[9] She not only joined the *cihuateteo* in the heavens, she was also responsible for bearing the sun across the sky each day. The spirits of male warriors who were killed in battle likewise rose into the heavens and carried the sun. The men carried it from dawn to zenith, where they would hand it over to the *mocihuaquetzqui.* These women's spirits dressed as warriors and skirmished before the sun. Their war cries, it is said, helped cheer the sun as the women carried it from noontime to its setting.[10] The Aztecs named the place of the sun's setting *cihuatlampa*, land of the *cihuateteo*. Upon their delivery of the sun to the west, and into the underworld, the women's spirits would come home to haunt their husbands and look for their earthly possessions.[11]

Father Sahagún also relates the process by which a parturient mother becomes semi-divine, one of the *mocihuaquetzqui*. He tells us that when it became apparent that the mother was having trouble delivering, the midwife would at first attempt to massage the fetus into a better position for birth (Figure 3a). If a natural or manipulated birth would not be possible, the midwife would halt the birth process and carefully remove the fetus.[12]

It seems that this late-term maneuver was objectionable to some families who preferred that their daughters be walled up and allowed to die either during the futile struggle to deliver or with the lifeless fetus still inside her. This point is punctuated in Sahagún's work with an illustration of the troubled mother being walled up to die in isolation; thus guaranteeing her apotheosis (Figure 3b).[13]

Following her death the woman's body was bathed and dressed. Symbolically, a hole was broken through the back of the family home and through it the woman was carried on her husband's back to her burial site. Where male warriors were usually immolated at their funerals and their charred bones were later buried in the floor of their houses, the women were not burned. They were buried at the nearest crossroads, site of the *cihuateocalli*. Accompanying the couple to the burial site was a band of midwives, armed to the hilt. Sahagún related that these armed midwives went along with the funeral procession "shouting, howling, yelling. They went crying, they gave war cries."[14]

The reason these midwives bore arms was that along the procession route young warriors lay in wait. These warriors were prepared to attack the funeral party and wrestle the woman's body away from them. Sahagún's Aztec informant added that "it was not play fighting, not plundering; when they fought they truly made war."[15]

The reason for this conflict was that when the mother died, her body became a holy relic and a depository of magical power, much in the same way as pieces and parts of the early Christian saints' bodies were highly sought as relics in Europe. Where European clergy sought relics to sanctify a holy place, the Aztecs used the body parts of these women to help augment the supposedly prototypical male activities of bravery and fierceness. Young, unseasoned Aztec warriors sought the hair and fingers of the woman to insert them into their woven battle shields. This was done in order to

> be valiant. . .brave warriors, in order that no one might contend against them. . .stand up against them, in order that they might overpower, might seize many of their en-

[7] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* 2: 37. These sites were called variously *cihuateocalli,* or *cihuateopan,* translated as "woman-god-house" and "woman-god-place" respectively.

[8] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 4: 107-109.

[9] 'One who raises herself woman-wise / like a woman.' Francis Karttunen, e-mail to the author, 16 Feb. 1996. The roots are *cihua-* (woman) and *quetza-* (to raise someone or something up).

[10] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6: 162-164.

[11] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6: 163. In this particular passage Sahagún states that the women would descend to search out their womanly implements, and that a *tzitzimitl*, a supernatural female (?) often translated as " demon," would also come down impersonating a *mocihuaquetzqui.* It is my suspicion that the *mocihuaquetzque, tzitzimeme* (pl. of *tzitzimitl*), and the *cihuateteo* (also called *cihuapipiltin*), were all different manifestations of the same deified mother.

[12] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6: 161.

[13] While this is generally considered an instance of what little regard there was for women in Aztec society, it is important to note that an abortion would have been performed in less than sterile conditions (in the sweatbath), with a hand-chipped flint knife. Morbidity would have been high following this procedure, and many a family may have seen the walling as a more humane way for the mother to die. Father Diego Durán in his *The Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar,* trans. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1971) 178, mentions that victims of the gladiatorial sacrifice during the festival of Tlacaxipeualiztli were given the psychotropic, alcoholic drink *Teooctli,* or *pulque*, before their dispatch to give them courage and dull the pain; there is no reason to believe that the same luxury was not afforded to unfortunate mothers.

[14] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6: 161.

[15] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6:161.

> emies. It was said that the hair, the finger of the *mocihuaquetzqui* furnished spirit; it was said they paralyzed the feet of their foes.[16]

That the inherent power of the parturient's body was formidable may be seen in two sixteenth-century paintings where an Aztec Emperor wears his typical battle dress of the Aztec god Xipe Totec: The Flayer of Men. Figure 4 shows *The Bilimek Warrior,* a sixteenth-century oil on cloth painting. This work is considered a generalized portrait of the sixth Aztec Emperor Axayacatl, who ruled from 1469-1481.[17] A similar image exists in the *Codex Cozcatzin*, a sixteenth-century European style codex written both in alphabetically rendered Nahuatl and native Mexican picture-writing (Figures 5a and b). In this work Emperor Axayacatl is depicted twice in battle dress during the continuous-narrative illustration of Mexico-Tenochtitlan's 1473 conquest of sister-city Tlatelolco.[18] Emperor Axayacatl is identifiable by the Nahuatl gloss next to his figure, as well as by the pictographic representation of his name: Water-Face.[19]

In most depictions of the god Xipe Totec he caries his shield called the *chimalli tlauhteuilacachiuhqui.* This shield most often has concentric red feather circles, representative of the sun.[20] On occasion the shield is shown divided into thirds, with one half covered with the red circle motif and the other half split between a covering of jaguar skin, and jade and emeralds. This shield then represents the sun, as well as royalty (the jaguar skin), and wealth (the jade). Preeminent Mesoamericanist Eduard Seler suggested that the jaguar skin and emeralds may also represent *atl-tlachinolli,* or Aztec sacred warfare.[21] The Emperor's shields in these two paintings, however, do not have the typical circle-motif, or the *atl-tlachinolli* metaphor; rather these motifs are replaced by an arm.

Working earlier in this century, Seler suggested that this unusual arm motif might be related to the hand-shield, or *macpallo chimalli.* Father Sahagún listed this shield among the insignia and battle costumes for members of lower ranking Aztec military orders in his *Primeros Memoriales* (Figure 5c).[22] This puzzled Seler as he was aware of the images of no less than the Aztec king bearing similar insignia.[23] Seler felt that this shield was related to one depicted with Xolotl, an Aztec deity with underworld associations.[24] He thought this iconographic conjunction may have had to do with Xipe Totec and Xolotl possibly having common origins. While the two deities do share some aspects, this explanation for the shield is unlikely.[25] The military costume of the Emperor was constructed to be an awe-

16 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6: 162.

17 John B. Glass "A Census of Native Middle American Pictorial Manuscripts" in vol. 14 of *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, ed. Howard Cline, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975) 91. This image is also discussed in Zelia Nuttall, "Standard or Head-dress?" *Archaeological and Ethnological Papers of the Peabody Museum,* 1.1 (1888), and in Eduard Seler, *Ancient Mexican Feather Ornaments*, in *Mexican and Central American Antiquities, Calendar Systems, and History*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 28, ed. and trans. by Charles P. Bowditch (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904) 57-74. Both authors focus primarily on the feather standard, rather than the shield as I do here.

18 *Codex Cozcatzin* facsimile edition (Mexico D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1995) ff. 15v-16r. A translation of the Nahuatl text of this section can be found in Robert H. Barlow, *Tlatelolco: Fuentes e Historia,* ed. J. Monjarás-Ruiz, E. Limón, M. de la Cruz Paillés H (Mexico D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1989) 77-87. For a history of this manuscript see Glass 114.

19 Rémi Siméon, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Nahuatl ou Mexicaine* (1885; Graz: Akademische Druck- U. Verlagsanstalt, 1963) 42. The Nahuatl name *Axayacatl* comes from combining the word *atl,* or water, with *xayacatl,* or face. It is interesting that the axayacatl is actually a marine fly used as a foodstuff by the Aztecs, however in this instance the author/artist chose to depict it quasi-phonetically by using pictograms for each of the word's morphemes, rather than simply depicting the bug. See Lori Boornazian, "Aztec Writing in Context: A Comparative Study" M.A. Thesis, Tulane University, 1996, for a more detailed discussion of Aztec pictographic phoneticism, the use of such in the Emperor's names, and a review of past scholarship in this field.

20 Seler, *Ancient Mexican Feather Ornaments* 62. Seler does not give a literal translation of this name, nor does he cite where he found it. H.B. Nicholson also used this term without translation, most likely taken from Seler, in his "The Chapultepec Cliff Sculpture of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin," *El México Antiguo*, 9 (1961): 403. Using Frances Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983) 210, 269, 270; Rémi Simeon 468, and Fray Alonso de Molina *Vocabulario en Lengua Castellana y Mexicana y Mexicana y Castellana* (1571; Mexico: Editorial Porrua, 1970), the morphology of *tlauhteuilacachiuhqui* seems to come from *tlauh = tlahuia*, to light the way (the red light of dawn), or red (*tlauhu(I)tl)*, referring to the sun; the second half *teuilacachiqui = teuilacachoa,* tourner, *teuilacachtic,* rond, sphérique, courbe, probably a play on the roundness and movement of the sun as well as a shield. The final part *-qui* is agentive, so it refers to someone or something that carries out the action of lighting the way. Thus the shield would be considered more than a likeness of the sun, rather the person carrying it would be carrying the sun itself. The term seems to have originally come from Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 1: 71.

21 Eduard Seler "Ancient Mexican Attire and Insignia of Social and Military Rank" in *Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology,* 5 vols., trans. Charles Bowditch, gen. ed. Frank E. Comparato (Culver City, CA: Labyrinthos, 1992) III: 49. The term *atl-tlachinolli* literally means water-fire, and was metaphorically used to refer to warfare. See also Eduard Seler, "Ancient Mexican Shields" in the same edition, II: 296-298.

22 Bernardino de Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, facsimile edition, ed. and photo Ferdinand Anders (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1993).

23 Seler, *Collected Works* III: 39.

24 See Nicholson, "Religion" 418-419, for a brief description of Xolotl.

25 See William Barnes, *Displacement and Renewal: An Iconographic and Interpretive Study of the Aztec God Xipe Totec,* MA Thesis, Tulane University, 1996, for an overview of Xipe iconography and associations.

26 In the Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart, there is a well known greenstone skeletal figure (see Pasztory colorplate 49) that Seler, *Collected Works. . .*IV: 199-208, identified as a Xolotl. It bears the dateglyphs of the *cihuateteo's* descent, suggesting a further relation between the two. See Emily Umberger, *Aztec Sculptures, Hieroglyphs and History.* diss., Columbia University, New York, 1981, 91. It is my belief that this figure could also be that of a *mocihuaquetzqui*, for as Sahagún pointed out, they dressed as male warriors, and bore the sun upon a bed

some weapon, rather than a document of theogony. Moreover, the objects on the shields differ in that one has simply a hand and the other has an entire arm. As stated above, it was young, unseasoned warriors who skirmished for bits of the dead woman's fetishized corpse, hoping to get at best a finger or some strands of hair to insert into their woven shields. This "hand shield" has more than a few fingers and strands of hair. It may actually represent the use of the *mocihuaquetzqui's* body by slightly higher ranked warriors who had access to entire hands. This would fit in well with the Cozcatzin and Bilimek images of Axayacatl as he possesses not just a few fingers, or even a hand, but a complete arm upon his shield. This arm is, I believe, the powerful, magical arm of a *mocihuaquetzqui.* That Xolotl was depicted with a hand upon his shield probably referred to this underworld deity's probable association with the *cihuateteo*, rather than commenting on his origins.[26] This arm was then a forceful weapon, for as an elite magical commodity, the value and power of a woman's body parts must have increased along with the amount of her fetishized flesh that one possessed. That this arm was an effective weapon is described in the Nahuatl text of the Codex Cozcatzin, where the Tlatelolcan enemies of Emperor Axayacatl flee to their homes upon simply seeing his insignia.[27] The unfortunate King Moquihuix of Tlatelolco, who did not flee, was then flung off of his own pyramid temple by Axayacatl, where he landed in pieces.

Additional evidence that this arm was powerful, and dangerous as well, is illustrated by its use in a less seemly segment of society. Not only did warriors and Aztec rulers make use of the magical woman's body, so did the *temacpalitotique*, literally translated as "one who dances by means of an arm."[28] These men were illustrated and described at length in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* (Figure 6).

This enigmatic thief was considered a source and repository of cultic knowledge and powerful magic. Sahagún stated that he was "a guardian [of secret rituals]; a master of the spoken word, of song. [He is] one who robs by casting a spell, who puts people to sleep."[29] These reprehensible people were notorious for digging up the deceased parturient's body precisely at midnight, and snatching away her arm.[30]

Upon acquiring the woman's powerful arm, these thief / wizards would then wait for certain propitious nights to strike, much as the *cihuateteo* would descend to earth on certain days. With the power of the woman's arm the thieves could place entire households in a trance. They would then rob and abuse the home's inhabitants with impunity.[31] Once finished with their escapades, the thieves then fled home, for if they were ever caught after daybreak they would be promptly stoned.

Interestingly, a protection against these thieves was to possess a bit of hair taken from their heads.[32] As mentioned above the young warriors also sought the hair of the *mocihuaquetzqui.* This was done, according to Sahagún, to aid in fierceness, however it may have also served as protection during the descent of the *cihuateteo*, much as did the thieves' hair during an attack of the *temacpalitotique.*[33]

Thus the inherent power of the woman's body was such that it could be used by the Aztec Emperor and his warriors, as well as the most powerful and devious magicians in the land. The appropriated power of the deceased mother's body afforded protection for these men, as well as providing them with a frightening weapon.

While this establishes that there was an intrinsic power attributable to women, more specifically women in the midst of childbirth, it does not solve the problem of why the Aztecs fetishized the woman's body, her hand, hair, fingers and forearm in particular. There is no evidence that the bodies of dead male warriors had similar power, even with powerful men such as the Emperor. Neither would the spirits of the male warriors afflict the living as did the women. Logic would suggest that male warriors' spirits were more aggressive than those of women, since the warriors would have invariably died a violent death on the battlefield or gladiatorial stone. However, when these men's spirits came down to earth they did not cause deformity and illness; rather they simply went about sniffing flowers and sipping nectar in the guise of butterflies and hummingbirds.[34] It follows then, that the relic-like power of

of quetzal feathers (both of which are upon the figure's back). In addition to this there are dual sockets on the front of the figure, rather than the usual single one representing the heart, the second one then was representative of the unborn child / captive still in the mother's womb.

27 Barlow 85.

28 Francis Karttunen, e-mail to the author16 Feb. 1996. *Temacpalitotique(I),* comes from *temacpal,* by means of someone's arm, and *ihtotia*, to make oneself dance.

29 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 10: 39.

30 See Alfredo López Austin, "Los Temacpalitotique: Brujos, Profanadores, Ladrones y Violadores," *Estudios de cultura Nahuatl* (1966) 6: 97-117, for a more in-depth discussion of these unusual figures.

31 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 4: 103.

32 Seler, *Collected Works* II: 47.

33 Colin MacLachlan, "The Eagle and the Serpent: Male Over Female in Tenochtitlan," *Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies* 5 (1976) 50, feels that the hair and middle finger of the woman taken by the young warriors actually functioned as a psychosexual fetish, that sensuous, long hair, combined with the phallic finger could be "flaunted" by men only on the terribly male battle field wherein this release of sexual tension and identification with "female symbols" was acceptable. I however see them more as a magical, symbolic talisman, totem or fetish, used to protect men from an inherent, threatening female power. The hair of the male thief, whose power emanated from the magically charged woman's arm, was actually sought after for protection from the appropriated power of the woman, rather than the thief himself. Thus it would seem logical that hair taken directly from the deceased mother would serve as protection from the *cihuateteo.*

34 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 3: 49

women's bodies emanated not from their association with male warriors, but from a separate source altogether. A clue to this source can be found in mytho-historical stories of the Aztecs wherein magical warrior women repeatedly challenge the supremacy of the main Aztec deity, Huitzilopochtli.[35]

In Father Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, the myth of Huitzilopochtli begins with the god's mother Coatlique, or Serpent Skirt, miraculously conceiving the god through a shower of eagle feathers which fell from the sky.[36] Unaware of the miraculous nature of their mother's conception, her children plotted to kill her for what they believed was a dishonorable pregnancy. Leading her innumerable male children against her was a woman, Huitzilopochtli's sister Coyolxauhqui (bells, her [face] paint). In prelude to the attack, however, Huitzilopochtli was born full grown and fully-armed (Figure 8a). Sahagún's illustration of this event shows both the god's birth and his meeting of Coyolxauhqui and his four-hundred brothers at the top of Coatepec (Serpent Hill) where he drove off his brothers, and slew his sister in battle, casting her body down the mountain where it landed in pieces (Figures 8b and 9). This outcome of the conflict may also be illustrated in the monumental Coyolxauhqui stone which originally was placed at the foot of the Aztec's main temple-pyramid (Figure 9).[37]

In Father Diego Durán's account Huitzilopochtli faces two women, another sister, this time a powerful witch called Malinalxochitl (wild-grass flower), and Coyolxauhqui, who is not mentioned as a sister.[38] Malinalxochitl, whose powers become great due to her beauty and intelligence, attempts to gain equivalency with her supernatural brother Huitzilopochtli through various magical means, including sending scorpions and snakes to kill her enemies.[39] Rather than confront his sister, as he did in Father Sahagún's work, Huitzilopochtli instructs his followers to escape from her by night, which they promptly do. Finding herself abandoned Malinalxochitl and her followers then go on to found Malinalco. This town, south of the future Aztec capital, even in the seventeenth century, was still considered a place of sorcerers and magic inherited from their supernatural founder.[40]

Following their escape from Malinalxochitl, the wandering Aztecs arrived at Coatepec, which they turned into a beautiful place with lakes and plentiful fauna. There a woman, Coyolxauhqui, and her followers decided the Aztecs should stay. They dedicated the place to Huitzilopochtli, declaring that from this place the Aztecs could begin to conquer all other lands for him. Angered by this, Huitzilopochtli instructed his priests to slay the woman; because only he could instruct the Aztecs to stop their endless migration. Coyolxahqui and her group were slain and their hearts torn out. Durán notes that this particular event inaugurated Aztec heart sacrifice.[41]

While this was transpiring, Malinalxochitl was down in Malinalco raising a son, Copil. She taught this son all of her magical powers, as well as her enmity towards her brother. She then sent Copil to rally the peoples of the valley of Mexico to destroy the still wandering Aztecs, and thus their god. On his way to observe the Aztecs destruction, however, he was ambushed by priests of Huitzilopochtli, and his heart torn out.[42]

In both authors' stories, powerful women variously challenge the supremacy of the main Aztec god. Contemporary scholars have suggested that such mytho-historical tales of god-women challenging Huitzilopochtli were actually metaphors for city-states who resisted the imperial spread of the Aztecs and upon their defeat, were cast in the role of women.[43]

When reviewing the mytho-historical past of the Aztecs, however, there is no mention of an Aztec man, nor a male deity, who of his own volition was powerful enough to initiate or mount a challenge to the supremacy of Huitzilopochtli. Such power is granted only to women, women both mortal and divine, typified by the goddesses Coyolxauhqui and Malinalxochitl. Coyolxauhqui died as a warrior and leader of her people. In one story she challenged the god directly, and in

35 For a good discussion of Huitzilopochtli see: Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural: The Image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico and Europe*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, vol. 79, no. 2 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989). There are many different recorded stories that deal with the birth and mythological family of Huitzilopochtli, for brevity I am dealing with the two most well known stories in this work; those of Father Diego Durán and Father Sahagún. For a good comprehensive account of all of these stories and sources see Susan Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings,* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989). See especially her chapter entitled "Mothers of Gods and Daughters of Chichimecs," 57-68.

36 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 3: 2.

37 Emily Umberger, Public Lecture, "Coyolxauhqui: Conquered Goddess or Humiliated Ruler?" Aztec Lecture Series I, Tulane University, November, 1995, pointed out that the Coyolxauhqui stone found in the Templo Mayor excavations is contemporary with Axayacatl's defeat of Moquihuix and Tlatelolco as mentioned above. This sculpture, Umberger believes, may then be a portrait of the humiliated ruler, cast in the role of a defeated woman. As mentioned to me by Elizabeth Boone, this conflict was in part started by King Moquihuix's mistreatment of his wife, Axayacatl's sister. Thus, womanly influence was actively operating on various levels when this work was created.

38 Father Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain,* trans. Doris Heyden, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994) 24-30.

39 Durán, *History* 24.

40 Durán, *History* 24.

41 Durán, *History* 28.

42 Durán, *History* 31-33.

43 Durán, *History* 27, n.6; 31, n. 1. See also Susan Gillespie, *Aztec Kings*, and Cecelia Klein, "Fighting with Femininity: Gender and War in Aztec Mexico," in *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History,* ed. Richard B. Trexler, (Binghamton, NY: Center for Early Medieval and Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1994) 107-146.

the other she dared to question his acumen. Malinalxochitl also managed to challenge Huitzilopochtli twice, once through her own magical means and a second time through bearing a son.

The stories of these two goddesses consequently help shed light on the phenomenon of the deified women and their fetishized body parts. Coyolxauhqui can be allegorically associated with the parturient mother. Her bravery in battling the most powerful warrior god in the universe was then a commentary on the bravery and courage needed for a mother to face the battle of birth, a battle she often lost.[44] Malinalxochitl is accordingly the prototypical magical woman, analogous to the parturient mother who is able to magically create life inside of her body.

When a woman died in childbirth her body was literally charged with the same power that enabled these goddesses to become threats to all-powerful Huitzilopochtli.[45] Such power was inherently lacking in men, and male warriors, Emperors, and thieves subsequently sought the body of the parturient to compensate for this. Aztec women occasionally engaged in combat, yet a man could never engage in birth. This simple paradox raises the question as to whether women in parturition emulated male warriors, or whether male warriors went to battle in imitation of birth, armed with womanly flesh. That an Aztec warrior called his captive "my son" and the captive replied "my father" suggests that warfare was, in fact, commensurable to birth.[46] When the woman engaged in this battle, she became the bodily representation of a god on earth. Such a transformation was natural for women as shown by Huitzilopochtli's sisters who were both mortal and divine. However, such a transformation could only be emulated by men. As evidenced by the Aztec fetishized female body, a woman was a conduit to the realm of the supernatural in Aztec thought, with magical residue as a woman's birthright.

Tulane University

44 Both Coyolxauhqui and the *mocihuaquetzqui* end up in pieces as well.

45 The walling of the doomed parturient mother may have actually served to protect the general populace from her power being unleashed at her death. Such activities have been noted in Indian communities of rainforest South America, wherein a chief's effects are destroyed upon his death to protect society from their inherent power running rampant without his control. See David Grove, "Olmec Monuments: Mutilation as a Clue to Meaning," in *The Olmec and Their Neighbors: Essays in Memory of Matthew Stirling*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1981) 66-67.

46 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 2: 54. In addition a warrior gained more prestige for capturing an opponent than for killing one.

Figure 1. Cihuateteo sculptures. Average size, 90x50cm. Museo Nacional de Antropologia, Mexico City (photo courtesy of Emily Umberger).

Figure 2. Appeasement ceremonies for the descending Cihuateto. Shahgún, Florentine Codex, bk. 4: pp.83-85 (Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico).

Figure 3a, b. Midwife attempting to massage fetus into position for birth, and the walling of the parturient. Sahagún, Florentine Codex, bk. 6: 160-61 (Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico).

Figure 4. The Bilimek Warrior. Handschriftensammlung Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (Drawing: William Barnes, after Glass).

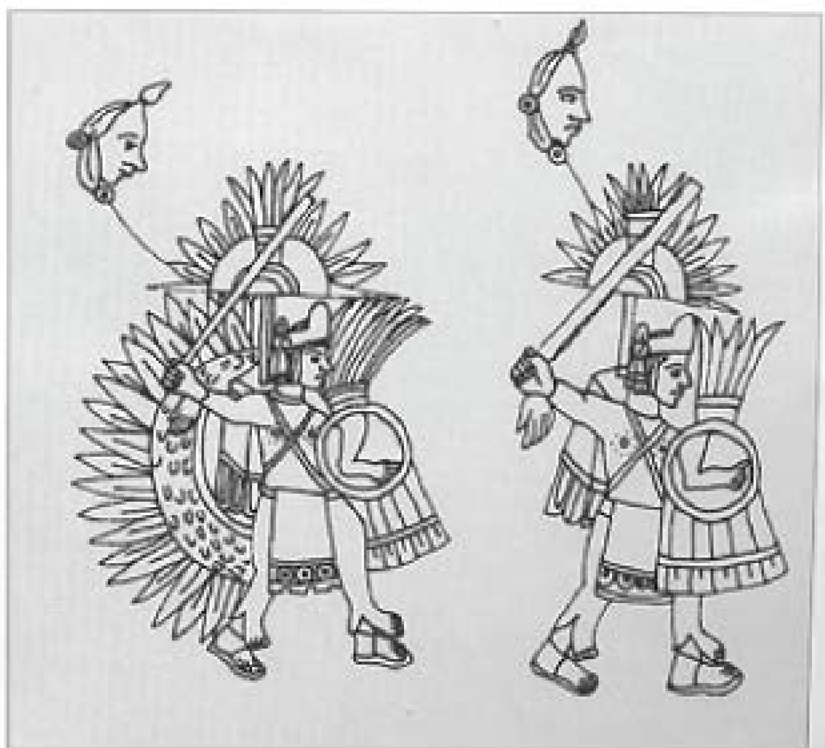


Figure 5a,b. Images of Axayacatl from the Codex Cozcatzin, ff.15v-16r. Images c. 5cm. on page c. 20x20 cm (Drawing: William Barnes, after Seler).

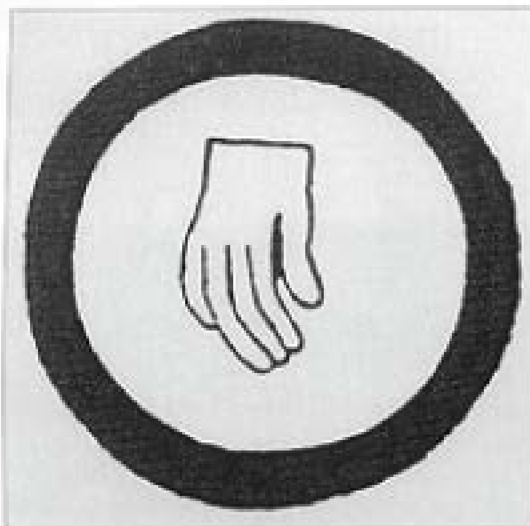


Figure 5c. Macpalo Chimalli. From Sahagún's Primeros Memoriales (Drawing: William Barnes).

Figure 6. Temacpalitotique. Sahagún, Florentine Codex, bk. 10: 39ff (Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico).

Figure 7a, b. Birth of Huitzilopochtli and Death of Coyolxauhqui at Coatepec. Sahagún, Florentine Codex, bk. 3: 1-3 (Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico).

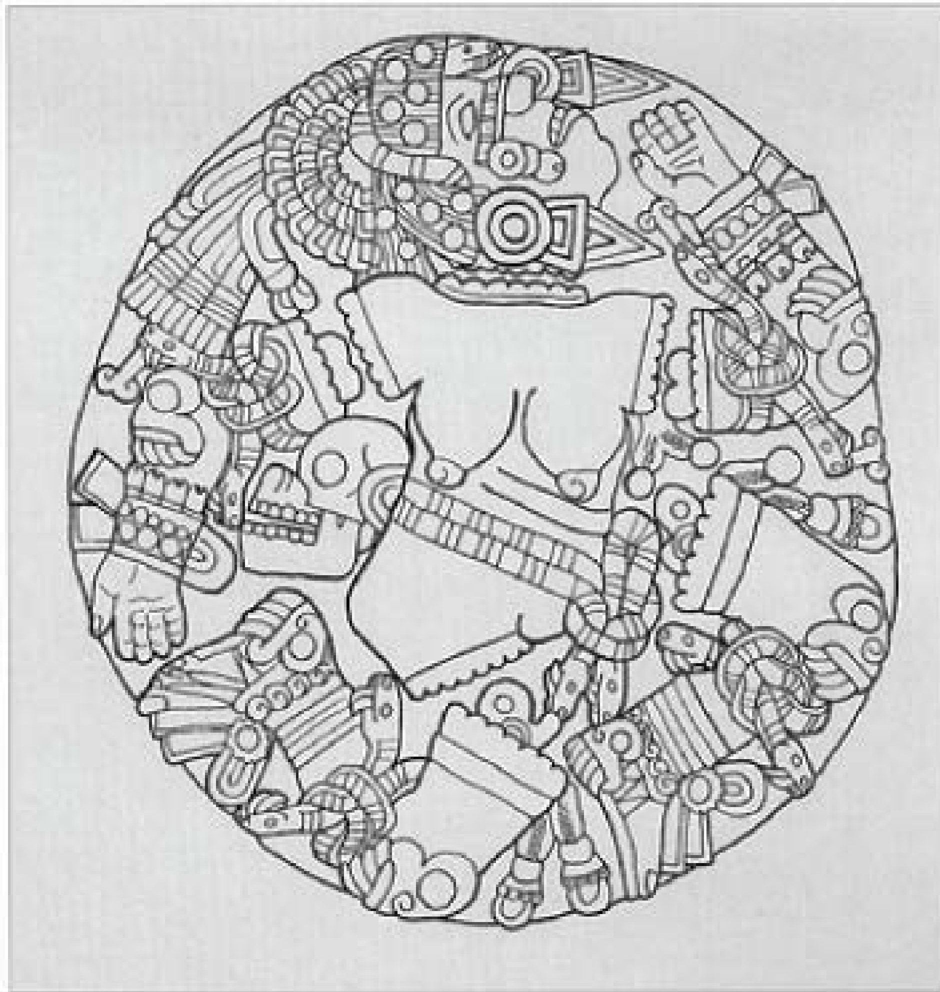


Figure 8. Coyolxauhqui relief from the base of the Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Stone, 3.3 m. in diameter. (Drawing: William Barnes, after Umberger).

Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo and the "Myth of Venice"

Traci Elizabeth Timmons

The purpose of this study is to shed new light on Cesare Vecellio's costume book *Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo* (Figure 1), printed at Venice in 1598.[1] Considered the apex of *Cinquecento* costume book achievement, *Habiti* has traditionally been studied as a source book on sixteenth-century dress. This study seeks to understand the book as an indicator of the late sixteenth-century Venetian social order.

Rather than discussing book production or focusing on the importance of the costume sources, this study proposes a reading of *Habiti Antichi et Moderni* as an embodiment of the "myth of Venice." Elements of the myth posited that Venice was a city of piety and liberty with an ideal constitution, ruled by a virtuous nobility.[2] Travellers' accounts of Venice, which traditionally relayed the ideologies of the myth, presented Venice as a city which garnered a reputation for great beauty and pleasure as well. Further, the myth suggested that Venice was an inheritor of the classical past. Rather than descending from meager fishermen as has sometimes been historically reported, the myth proposed that Venetians were direct descendants of ancient Rome. In fact, Venice saw itself as "New Rome," the true heir of both the ancient Roman Republic and the Empire.[3]

The myth relied in part upon outward appearances to demonstrate its ideals. This was accomplished through costume which assigned specific roles to its male and female wearers. In highly public roles, costume for Venetian patrician men suggested civic cohesion and religious piety. Venetian patrician women, with their sumptuous gowns and jewels, cultivated the beautiful self-image of Venice. Vecellio's costume book both conveys and promotes elements of the myth, and demonstrates that Venice had a very gender-and class-conscious social order in the late sixteenth century.

Part of the success of this myth is shown in its dissemination throughout Europe. The utopic outward appearance of Venice drew many travellers, especially from England. For Englishmen, at least, were most interested in the essential quality of liberty in Venetian political life. In the sixteenth century travellers, including Fynes Moryson and Thomas Coryat, continued to return to their homelands with tantalizing accounts of life in Venice. The many accounts of Venice helped to establish and perpetuate a kind of "myth fiction."[4]

> The Venetian civic myth tells a powerful story about Venetian male patrician images of themselves and others. The role the myth played as an idealized and ideologically motivated cultural fiction that the Venetian republic adopted itself, repeated and promoted in countless patriotic panegyrics and rhapsodic travel accounts.[5]

Importantly, *Habiti Antichi et Moderni* is an expanded and edited version of Vecellio's first costume book printed in 1590.[6] The 1598 edition includes a Latin translation along with an edited version of the original 1590 Italian text. The inclusion of this new translation, in the literary language, confirms *Habiti Antichi et Moderni*'s role in the "myth of Venice," whether Vecellio was aware of his participation or not.[7] Latin was important for disseminating the myth in a more active way, as officials were appointed to pen Latin histories that echoed the position of rulership.[8] The language of humanism (purported

1 Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo* (Venice: Giovanni Bernardo Sessa, 1598).

2 For a complete discussion on the "myth of Venice" see Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981) 13–61; Donald Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate: Myth versus Reality* (Urbana and Chicago: UP of Illinois, 1986) 3-28; and Gina Fasoli, "Nascita di un mito," *Studi storici in onore di Giacchino Volpe* (Florence, 1958) I, 445-479.

3 Queller 24.

4 Muir 52.

5 Margaret Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1992) 15-16.

6 Vecellio, *De gli Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Diverse Parti del Mondo* (Venetia: Damian Zenaro, 1590). This edition contained 420 illustrations with Italian texts. See the publisher's note in Vecellio, *Vecellio's Renaissance Costume Book* (New York: Dover, 1977) and Traci Elizabeth Timmons "*Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo* as an Indicator of the Late Sixteenth-Century Venetian Social Order" (M. A. thesis, University of South Florida, 1996) 18-21 and 27-31.

7 Moreover, Vecellio's use of Latin translations in the 1598 edition, *Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo*, and not in the 1590 edition, *De gli Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Diverse Parti del Mondo*, suggests that in terms of the "myth fiction," the 1598 edition played an entirely different role, despite the two editions' similarities.

8 Muir 25.

by Latin texts) had transformed a traditional myth of a holy city protected by Saint Mark, independent from all foreign powers, into a coherent political ideology that was classical in its derivation.[9]

Venice was essentially an oligarchy ruled by the nobility or patrician class, a relatively small group of males. Although the *cittadini* (upper-class men not of the nobility) had several elected roles, their power was relatively minimal. For the rest, the *popolani* and other lower-class males, their participation in the political affairs of the state was basically non-existent,[10] although their public presence was necessary for demonstrating the amiable coexistence of the different classes the myth suggested. Gasparo Contarini, writing in 1551 likened the Venetian class structure to a perfected human body:

> the nobility (patrician male class) were the eyes, seeing all and directing the actions of the body; the *cittadini* and *popolani* were the lower, more menial limbs, following the orders of the eyes. Yet there was reciprocity: the eyes and the limbs depended on each other for survival.[11]

In his illustrations of male patrician dress, Vecellio demonstrates that dress defines office, rank or age. Through dress Vecellio reflects the ideologies of the myth: a regal presence, authority, decorum and gravity.[12] He begins with the *Venetian Generals* (fol. 79v / Figure 2) who wear "the royal cloak of gold that is the true Roman cloak."[13] The Roman cloak emphasizes Venice's *all'antica* ideals and links them to the classical past. By wearing the readily recognized Roman cloak,[14] patrician men became living models of ancient Rome.[15] Further, similar dress among patrician men emphasized social cohesion and order. Vecellio reinforces this idea by illustrating male patricians in the same basic style. In *Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, the ducal dress with the grand sleeves open, also referred to as the "toga," is used to illustrate the dress of the *Senator* (fol. 80v / Figure 3), as well as that of the *Magistrate* (fol. 81v / Figure 4), several variations of the *Noblemen* (ff. 82v, 83v and 85v), and the *Young Venetian Nobleman* (fol. 84v / Figure 5).

The myth suggests that noblemen were primarily concerned with their duty to the Republic. Vecellio, on several occasions, discusses the public duties of males, describing the responsibilities of those who serve and protect. He describes the security duties of the *Minor Captains* (fol. 88v) for the Doge and the state, saying that "...they walk in front of the [Doge] wherever he goes... and they walk at night outside in the streets of Venice to search for people doing wrong things...."[16]

Vecellio establishes that male dress, both patrician and *cittadini*, is open and self-explanatory, clear and meaningful. For the *Heads of the Council of Ten*, Vecellio says:

> The dress you see here is of the *Heads of the Council of Ten* (*Magistrates*) [fol. 81v / Figure 4] who are three and who change every month...they are elected by strength and it is the magistrate who has the greatest, even tremendous authority...they carry the red vest...[he] is strong in life and his character is of great reputation...[17]

The *cittadini* are easily distinguished from the nobility by their difference in dress. Vecellio states:

> ...Many of the *Merchants and Shopkeepers* [fol. 91v / Figure 6] of the city of Venice wear the vest with gloved hands, but for the most part, they wear a short dress of heavy cloak...and they wear tall hats...[18]

Dress, as Vecellio illustrates, can also exhibit age, as in the case of the *Noble Venetian Youth* (fol. 84v / Figure 5) who, "until they are between fifteen and twenty years, they carry a short dress...[as they reach a certain age] they carry a long dress...they take the *toga* and induce with it gravity and modesty."[19] The matured youth's use of the toga reiterates Venice's adherence to classical tradition, and again, expresses social cohesion because all noblemen dress in the same style.

However, Vecellio's account of patrician male dress concurrently exposes the inequality of male ranks. Vecellio's arrangement reveals the social dominance of the noblemen and the subordination of the *popolani* and lower classes. Vecellio devotes sixteen woodcut illustrations and accompanying text

9 Muir 26.

10 For an in-depth discussion on the various ranks of men in Venice, see Dennis Romano, *Patricians and* Popolani: *The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987).

11 Gasparo Contarini, *De magistratibus et republica Venetorum libri quinque* (Venice, 1551) 131, translated by Lewes Lewkenor in *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (London, 1599) 146, cited in Muir 41.

12 Queller 13.

13 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 79r.

14 Vecellio's description of the cloak is similar to other contemporary accounts of patrician dress

> ...the forme and fashion of their attire is very auncient, even the same that hath beene used these three thousand yeares amongst them, and also uniforme. For all of them use but one and the same forme of habite, even the slender doublet made close to the body, without quilting or bombase, and long hose plaine, without those new fangled curiosities...used with us English men....

Thomas Coryat, *Crudities, Vol. I* [facsimile of the 1611 edition] (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905) 398.

15 Muir 25.

16 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 88r.

17 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 81r.

18 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 91r.

19 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 84r.

to dress of the patrician and upper-class males, far more than he devotes to any other male group. He unifies and distinguishes the patriciate by discussing their similarities in dress, reinforcing their maintenance of classical tradition, and divulging their admirable and honest qualities.[20] His other illustrations of Venetian males: those of students, soldiers, the servant- and other lower-classes, suggest that the *popolani* played a less important role in the terms outlined by the myth. Their dress is neither similar, nor distinctive, except in its ability to differentiate them from the noblemen. Further, Vecellio's treatment of the non-patrician classes fails to substantially recognize their various class levels, interspersing slaves with soldiers and students. In his devotion to the male patrician class, Vecellio reveals an oligarchic Venetian government and a social order that clearly defined the nobleman as deserving of political power.[21]

For his illustrations of patrician women, Vecellio's characterizations become very different from those used to describe men. Instead of defining women by rank or age, Vecellio defines women by their relationships *with* men: virgins, married women or widows. The Venetian woman's role in the myth was very different from that of the male. She created an appearance of wealth and beauty that was essential in presenting the glorious self-image of Venice.[22]

However, women held a paradoxical position tied directly to dress. While concurrently being considered the republic's embodiment of affluence and luxury, the costume and adornments of women were targeted by sumptuary laws which regulated extravagance, initially to save the wealth of the Republic's patrician class.[23] Rather than generally addressing men and women, the underlying ideas of the sumptuary laws narrowed the problem of excess and luxury to women alone.[24] This notion was problematic because the material adornments of a woman's body were expressions of the status of the related male.[25] The Venetian woman was continually under the auspices of the male—passing from the natal family of her father (as daughter) to the family of her husband (as wife).[26] In other words, the dress of noblewomen was restricted by noblemen who continually controlled it, yet it was woman's sumptuous display of patrician male wealth that warranted legislation.

Although costume aligned patrician women with sumptuousness and artifice, Vecellio demonstrates through dress that these women also had a structured and well-guarded visibility. Even though noblewomen's public appearance was tantamount to presenting a magnificent Venice, their appearance in public was very restricted. The *Venetian Virgin* (fol. 95v / Figure 7) provides a good example, as Vecellio describes her noble upbringing:

> The practices and institutes for raising the most noble virgins in Venice is in the highest and most notable honesty because they are well-guarded and custodianed in paternal homes so that very often not even the closest relatives could see them during girlhood.[27]

The virgin's visibility is further controlled by her use in public spaces of the veil "which is very large and covers the face and chest."[28]

In his illustration of the *Noblewomen Dressed For Public Holidays* (fol. 101v / Figure 8), Vecellio describes the time when women were instructed to be embodiments of display for Venice. During public holidays and festivals, or when an important visitor came to Venice, the sumptuary laws were lifted, giving a false impression of the city's normal conditions.

> Noblewomen were invited to be present at spectacles for grand personages as often happened in Venice. To these women it was conceded that they can dress and ornament themselves as it pleases them the most, which they cannot do at other times. So as it was when King Henry III, King of France, was brought...to a superb and marvelous spectacle. With great accompaniment, he was brought to the hall where there were two hundred gentlewomen, who were very beautiful and of high families...and they appeared with such beauty that the king and his following were astonished and stupified....[29]

For visitors, not familiar with the normal dress codes or the

20 Vecellio describes the *Squire* as having a "certain reputation," and the *Magistrate* as "strong in life [with] a character of great reputation." Vecellio, *Habiti*, ff. 81v and 90v.

21 Queller 13. One claim of the myth suggested, "that no other aristocracy had so deserved the power that it held."

22 Anne Christine Junkerman, "Bellissima Donna: An Interdisciplinary Study of Venetian Sensuous Half Length Images of the Early Sixteenth Century," diss., U of California, Berkeley, 1988, 196.

23 M. Margaret Newett, "Sumptuary Laws in Venice in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in eds. T. F. Tout and James Tait, *Historical Essays* (Manchester: The University Press, 1907) 246.

24 Junkerman 261-262.

25 Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1991) 52-53.

26 Stanley Chojnacki, "'The Most Serious Duty:' Motherhood, Gender and Patrician Culture in Renaissance Venice," in eds. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari, *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 141.

27 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 95r.

28 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 95r.

29 Vecellio, *Habiti*, fol. 101r. Also see fol. 99r, *Married Women in Time of the Ascension*, "If ever a time when wives made great effort to be seen as the most beautiful and appear the most ornamented, it was this time [Ascension Week] more than any other during when they are married...Riches are displayed: large pearls and other most precious jewels with which ornament the ears, neck, braids and chest, polished in shining gold and gems all about the shoulders. They are dressed with their most precious and richest details of ornaments which are used among them."

public restrictions placed on women, such events created false impressions of the republic. These impressions suggested economic prosperity even in times of the republic's financial hardships. Further, the use of woman as sumptuous display emphasizes women's position as that of republic embellishment.

Habiti Antichi et Moderni's account of late sixteenth-century Venetian dress demonstrates that costume was a signifier of rank, office or age for the patrician nobleman, and a signifier of sexual status and wealth for noblewomen. Vecellio also suggests that dress aligns its wearers with characteristics implicit in the "myth of Venice." The dress of the noblemen conferred the long-term preservation of the divinely ordained institution and suggested a well-ordered, cohesive society. The dress of noblewomen affirmed the glorious beauty of Venice.

Vecellio's costume book defines the social order of Venice, demonstrating that Venice embodied a very highly structured social order in the sixteenth century. It confirms that dress was one of the chief signifiers of that order. Through Vecellio's words and images on costume, *Habiti* denotes very different roles for men and women and delineates how dress defined the spaces that each sex could occupy. When examined as an artifact, *Habiti Antichi et Moderni* provides twentieth-century observers with insight into a *Cinquecento* Venetian male's contribution to the "myth of Venice." Through this highly informative account of Venetian dress, *Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo* discloses how costume defined and reflected the late sixteenth-century Venetian social order.

The University of South Florida

Figure1. Cesare Vecellio, frontispiece to *Habiti Antichi et Moderni di Tutto il Mondo*, woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Figure 2. Cesare Vecellio, *Venetian Generals* (folio 79v), woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Figure 3. [*above left*] Cesare Vecellio, *Senator* (folio 80v), woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Figure 4. [*above right*] Cesare Vecellio, *Magistrate* (folio 81v), woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Figure 5. [*right*] Cesare Vecellio, *Young Venetian Nobleman* (folio 84v), woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Figure 6. [*above left*] Cesare Vecellio, *Merchants and Shopkeepers* (folio 91v), woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Figure 7. [*above right*] Cesare Vecellio, *Venetian Virgin* (folio 95v), woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Figure 8. [*right*] Cesare Vecellio, *Noblewomen Dressed for Public Holidays* (folio 101v), woodcut, 1598, Venice. Photo by Paul Herrin, courtesy of the University of South Florida Library, Department of Special Collections.

Appropriation of Play in a Victorian Album: *Idylls of the King and Other Poems Illustrated by Julia Margaret Cameron*

Adera Scheinker

> . . .Gwendolen urged that instead of the mere tableau, there should be just enough acting of the scene to introduce the striking up of the music as a signal for her to step down and advance; when Leontes, instead of embracing her, was to kneel and kiss the hem of her garment, and so the curtain was to fall. . . Jarrett the village carpenter was absorbed in the preparations for an entertainment which, considering that it was an imitation of acting, was likely to be successful since we know from ancient fable that an imitation may have more chance of success than the original.[1]

George Eliot described this scene in her 1874 novel *Daniel Deronda*. In it, the characters prepare to perform a *tableau vivant*. In the same year as Eliot published her book, Julia Margaret Cameron created a series of photographs to illustrate Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. These photographs can be viewed as forms of *tableaux vivants*. Cameron presented these photographs in a volume which she titled *The Idylls of the King and Other Poems Illustrated by Julia Margaret Cameron*. It is this volume and its *tableau vivant* artifice which will be the focus of this paper. The book includes twelve large photographs measuring 13 3/4" x 10 1/2". Each is mounted on blue gray cardboard and signed and titled in Cameron's handwriting. The photographs are interleaved with the corresponding excerpts from Tennyson's poem, each also written in Cameron's hand.

Obvious artifice was employed by both Cameron and Tennyson in the creation of a medieval fantasy world. The dialogue between these artist's artifices enhances the *tableau vivant* play world found within the volume. The artifice as mediator which allows Cameron and her friends who viewed this volume to remain somewhat detached from the medieval scenes may be examined.

In the scene depicting the encounter of *Vivien and Merlin* (Figure 1), Cameron's husband, Charles Hay, and a woman simply known as "a lady visitor to Freshwater" were the models.[2] An alternate text page for this studio photograph contains the passage:

> For Merlin, over talk'd and overworn;
> Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.
> Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
> Of woven paces and of waving hands,
> And in the hollow oak he lay as dead.
> And lost to life and use and name and fame.[3]

In this idyll, the evil sorceress Vivien follows the wise magician Merlin into the woods, feigning love for the elder man. She does this in an attempt to convince Merlin to teach her an incantation. The spell which she seeks renders the object of the magic invisible to all except for the one who recited the incantation. Vivien's youthful enchantment wins out over Merlin's wisdom and he relinquishes the secret.[4] In this photograph, Vivien is frozen just as she prepares to cast a spell on Merlin which will change the course of Camelot forever.

In order to discuss this photograph, the tradition of the *tableau vivant* and its relationship to book illustrations must be explored. The *tableau vivant* was a popular Victorian parlor entertainment and Cameron herself was known to have directed such events in her own home. It entailed the use of elaborate costuming and props to recreate a theatrical setting. Each participant would be positioned in a pose illustrative of a climactic moment in a particular literary scene. The actors would then freeze in their positions for a few moments and allow the audience to admire the dramatic presentation. The players would thus become part of a living picture, or *tableau vivant*.

Generally, book illustrations could be seen as similar to *tableaux vivants* as they too are frozen visual representations of written stories. However, what sets *tableaux vivants* apart from many other Victorian book illustrations is that they are fractured from the original story. *Tableaux vivants* illustrate only

[1] Georges Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 53.

[2] Helmut Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron: Her Life and Photographic Work* (New York: Aperture, Inc., 1975) 43.

[3] Julia Margaret Cameron, *Idylls of the King and Other Poems Illustrated by Julia Margaret Cameron* (Freshwater, 1874).

[4] Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (New York: MacMillan, 1935) 182-220.

one scene and are presented independently from the complete text. The *tableau vivant* was seen as an imitation of acting, rather than a conventional performance, as was described by Eliot. This artificiality did not allow for the complete fulfillment of a fantasy.

Cameron's volume more closely resembles the *tableau vivant* than other more conventional book illustrations. Although Cameron's photographs are related to the text, they are placed beside excerpts from the poem rather than inserted into the full textual model. The images are therefore isolated from the words. Cameron did not merely insert her images into Tennyson's already existing text structure. Instead, she excerpted finite portions of his text and placed it beside her images. She did not merely transcribe the writings of Tennyson, nor did she decompose them. She re-produced them. She isolated photographs from the full text written by Tennyson. However, she placed them in an album beside excerpts from the text. They are therefore divorced from their context as a part of a complete text and image cycle. As a *tableau vivant* isolates a moment in literature from the entire work or event, this volume isolates moments from Tennyson's poem. This prevents the viewer from reading the full story and further bars the viewer from full entry into the fantasy world.

The *Vivien and Merlin* scene is particularly striking in this isolation due to the nature of the photographic process. Photography freezes a moment for eternity. The moment which is frozen here is one in which action is *about* to happen. Vivien is *about* to place a spell on Merlin. The action has not yet taken place. In most myths, the villain is left behind after a confrontation with the hero is completed.[5] However, here, the reader must face Vivien's power. The story can not move on and refocus on the protagonist. This frozen action, therefore, does not merely serve to retain the reader's interest, it also reinforces the isolated character of this moment as fractured from the complete text.

This photograph does not merely mimic the *tableau vivant* in its use of isolated scenes. It also mirrors the *tableau vivant* in its creation of a stage-like presence. Vivien has her back to the camera. The lower third of the image is obscured so that the figures seem to be ungrounded. This creates a division between Spectator and Specter which emulates the stage separation of actor and audience. This separation denies the viewer full access to the scene. Like a guarded fortress, this photograph tempts the viewer to enter into it. Yet, simultaneously, with its division, it reminds the viewer of the impossibility of such an endeavor.

To enhance this staged presence, elements of the theatrical setting are overtly displayed. Cameron's studio is visible in the background. Props, such as the tree which was brought in from Cameron's yard, also reveal the artificiality of the scene. This overt inclusion of anachronistic details and elements of the contemporary world is also found in the *tableau vivant*. For instance, a character in the Eliot story suggests, "'Our dress won't signify,' Rex said laughingly, 'it will be more Shakespearian and romantic if Leontes looks like Napoleon and Paulina like a modern spinster.'"[6] Thus, modern elements insistently reveal themselves. This both enhances the artificiality of the scene and allows for an imitation rather than an original. Because of this, the fantasy is never completely fulfilled and the characters remain within a contrived playland.

The use of props in this volume is not solely the creation of Cameron. Tennyson also utilized artifice to enhance his appropriated text. In creating the *Idylls*, Tennyson placed Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth century legend within the context of Victorian sensibilities.[7] In this way, he made the legend palatable for his contemporaries by highlighting sin as the ruin of all noble ideas. [8] As Tennyson himself proclaimed, "When I write an antique like this, I must put it into a frame—something modern about it."[9] Tennyson, too, denies full realization of the fantasy through the overt display of modern devices. This creates an intriguing layering of appropriation and artifice within this volume.

In order to understand Cameron's use of layered artifice, the *Vivien and Merlin* scene must be examined more explicitly. The tactile quality of the photograph is striking. Merlin's soft white hair lightly touches his thick black robe. Vivien's sumptuous jet black locks cascade down her milky-white dress.

It is not merely the tactile quality which makes the dress so enticing. Its signifying color is equally notable. Women in white have traditionally represented purity and innocence.[10] Yet, here, the white dress is worn by Vivien, the embodiment of evil. This convention of the white dress worn by a fallen woman was used by other pre-Raphaelite artists. The use of white in such images has traditionally been interpreted as a purification of the evil woman by cloaking her in virginal white.[11] However, in the Cameron photograph, the white dress may take on additional

5 Teresa deLauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 109-110.

6 Eliot 53.

7 Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* (London: Harvester Press, 1979) 97.

8 William Buckler *Victorian Imagination: Essays in Aesthetic Exploration* (New York: New York UP, 1980) 58.

9 J. M. Gray, "A Study in Idyll: Tennyson's 'The Coming of Arthur,'" *Renaissance and Medieval Studies* 14 (1970): 115.

10 Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993) 154.

11 Griselda Pollock, *Visions and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 141-3.

meaning as it mirrors the white of Merlin's locks and beard. When worn by Merlin, this white is a conventional male symbol of wisdom. This mirroring of white could represent the transaction taking place within the story. Vivien is in the process of taking knowledge from Merlin and using it for her own purposes. She has broken a male linguistic code and taken it for her own. In accord with this newly acquired knowledge, she appropriates the masculine meaning of white. She wears the male white robe of wisdom. This robe of knowledge, by virtue of the fact that it is worn by a woman, takes on a sinister quality, appropriate for the villainess in this scene.

Vivien, then, significantly alters the connotation of the white dress.[12] It evolves into a robe of dangerous female power. Her power is a result of the knowledge which she has appropriated from Merlin.

This white dress is particularly vibrant in contrast to Vivien's mass of flowing black hair. This wild hair is appropriate to her role as a fallen woman and sorceress as can also be seen in the Rossetti painting. Such hair is often viewed as a symbol of entrapment.[13] Vivien uses her web of hair to entrap Merlin and steal his knowledge.

As the active element in the image, she further defies the conventional role allowed to women. She is not the passive female foil to the active male hero.[14] Rather, the camera is focused upon her active finger while her body is blurred. This forces the gaze to rest upon the power source, rather than on the traditionally coveted female body. Cameron's lens is focussed on the powerful finger. This charged digit punctures the space between Vivien and Merlin and calls attention to the unbridgeable gap between the two figures. Vivien is omnipotent, not only through what she does, but also through what she does not do. Her finger comes so temptingly close to Merlin's face, yet never touches it. Vivien is allowed to *not* touch. The viewer is prevented from enjoying the desired tactile quality. This yearning for touch is increased by the words "Vivien and Merlin, taken from life" which are written out in Cameron's handwriting. This leaves evidence of the touch which is allowed for the artist but denied to the viewer.[15] Vivien's strength is not in her feminine caress, but in her refusal to caress. This further places the sorceress outside of the accepted female sphere.

In consideration of this focus on a woman's power and knowledge, the overt artifice revealed by Cameron becomes important. It alters the seemingly subversive notion of the female appropriating knowledge from the male. The props and obviously staged presence reminds the viewer of the innocent playlike quality of the photograph. Cameron accomplishes this by placing the scene within the traditionally female realm of the *tableau vivant*. Cameron, like the woman in Eliot's story, remains within the acceptable space allowed to nineteenth century women of her class. Cameron is not creating a statement about Vivien, but rather playing with her as a director in a frozen *tableau vivant*. She is therefore not implicated as a reflection of the villainous Vivien. In this way, Cameron's appropriation of Tennyson's story is not threatening. Rather it is an innocuous translation of his story within the vocabulary allowed to women. It remains in a safely feminized realm.

The artifice also serves a secondary purpose. It reminds the viewer of the unreal quality of the scene. It is this same quality which is exaggerated by Tennyson's artifices. Both Cameron and Tennyson use artifice to appeal to Victorian sensibilities. Cameron's circle of friends, like many Victorians, romanticized the preindustrial past but were often unwilling to relinquish the technological advances on which they had learned to rely. They frequently viewed the middle ages through the structures of their industrialized world. As Eliot explained, an imitation may have more success than the original. Hence, the artifices present in this volume could have served a dual purpose for Cameron. They may have soothed Victorian viewers who preferred to view medievalism through an obviously artificial lens. Simultaneously, these elements could detach Cameron from affiliations with the evil Vivien. Cameron is able to offset the tangled hair, the white robes of knowledge, and the charged finger with fractured action, obvious props and *tableau vivant* artifice. Through these devices, Cameron controls the fantasy. In this way, the middle ages can be viewed from a safe distance. Simultaneously, Cameron asserts her position within the space allowed to Victorian women.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

12 Nina Auerbach, in *Woman and the Demon*, described Tennyson's Vivien as a serpentine woman who, like most of Tennyson's female characters, is non-existent in a real world and can only be placed within a spiritual realm. *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982) 64.

13 Elizabeth Gitter, "The Power of a Woman's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA* 99 (1984): 951.

14 For a discussion of these conventions, see Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: McMillan, 1989) 19.

15 This becomes all the more striking a contrast when Cameron's delight at the sensual result of pen touching paper is realized. See Lady Ritchie Thackeray, *From Friend to Friend* (London: John Murray, 1919) 7.

Figure 1. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Vivien and Merlin*, photograph, 1874, *Idylls of the King and Other Poems Illustrated by Julia Margaret Cameron*. From the copy in the Rare Book Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Allegorizing Representation: Gérôme's Final Phase

Sunanda K. Sanyal

In the last couple of decades, French and British academic art of the nineteenth century has resurfaced in art historical scholarship.[1] Once-famous, but long-forgotten Salon artists have drawn attention of scholars, who are interested in reevaluating their works. Jean-Léon Gérôme is one such name (1824-1904), relevant to virtually any study of the mid- or late nineteenth-century French Academy. During his lifetime, Gérôme was supremely famous as a practicing artist and teacher: in the six decades of his artistic career, he produced a prodigious volume of work that established him both at home and abroad as one of the best painters of his day. In addition, in his four decades of pedagogical practice, he trained countless students of various nationalities, who later became famous in their own rights. But Gérôme's public image had another side to it: among the Academicians of his generation, he was one of the most persistent and vociferous opponents of the avant-garde artists of the late nineteenth century, and a passionate defender of the artistic values of the École des Beaux-Arts. This paper is about the last phase of Gérôme's career; it reconsiders a small, but significant section of his *oeuvre* in a fresh perspective.

While self-representation is practically non-existent in Gérôme's earlier work, several paintings from the last two decades of his life evince his strong interest in representing himself at work in his studio. What is more, this inclination curiously coincides with his enthusiastic pursuit of sculpture. Here I examine his enterprise of sculpture and self-representation in painting with a two-fold objective. First, I demonstrate that in the last phase of his career, the artist was involved in an introspective project of realizing in practice his personal philosophy of representation. This process, I argue, has two crucial aspects: his effort to bridge the gap between painting and sculpture in allegorical terms, and the role of his own image and that of the model in that allegory. Second, I place this aspiration in a historical context, and suggest that this manifestation of Gérôme's ideals at the end of his life can be best understood in the light of his relationship to the avant-garde endeavors of his time.

Painting and sculpture were interdependent in Gérôme's work; making small plaster models as visual aids to paintings was a common practice for him. But it was not until the mid-1870s, when excavations of figurative sculpture in Greece drew his attention, that he seriously considered pursuing that medium. He became especially interested in producing painted sculpture, and made his debut as a sculptor in 1878; *Gladiators*, his first finished sculpture, followed *Pollice Verso,* his highly successful painting of 1872.

In the 1880s, Gérôme executed several of his major sculptures, including *Omphale*, and it is also in this period that he painted what is probably his first image of himself in his studio. This composition, named *End of the Seance* from 1886 (Figure 1), shows two important things: first, despite his apparent lack of interest in painting in this period, Gérôme definitely found time and motivation to paint himself *as a sculptor*, and second, here the model steps out from her usual role as a model and actively participates in covering the unfinished statue of the Lydian queen *Omphale* with wet rags.

After his success with *Omphale* in the 1887 Salon, Gérôme presented *Tanagra* in 1890 (Figure 2). A life-size nude, she represents the *tyche*, or spirit of the city of Tanagra. She sits on a mound at an excavation site, carrying a small statue of *Hoop Dancer* in her left hand, and figurines of different kinds appear half-buried in the mound. The striking naturalism of the marble version was enhanced by the application of paint. Around the same year, Gérôme also made at least three variants of *Pygmalion and Galatea* in painting (Figure 3), and a life-sized, tinted marble group on the same subject appeared in the salon of 1892 (Figure 4). The subject of this work is a Greek legend, in which sculptor Pygmalion's talent and passion, mediated by divine intervention, brought to life the statue of Galatea he had carved. Galatea is still a statue in the lower part of her body, while her upper portion is already vibrant with signs of life. Each painting presents the kissing couple from a different angle and in a slightly different pose, in a setting of Pygmalion's studio.

In 1895, that is, at least five years after completing *Tanagra*, Gérôme produced *The Artist and His Model* (Figure 5).[2] Whereas other self-representations usually have a diagonal view of the room, showing two walls, this is the only one that has a

I am indebted to Dr. Marc Gotlieb for generating my interest in issues such as those I discuss here.

[1] For a critical discussion of this issue, see Neil McWilliam, "Limited Revisions: Academic Art History Confronts Academic Art," *Oxford Art Journal*, 2 (1989): 71-86.

[2] There is, however, another slightly different version of this theme from 1890 that has recently resurfaced, and has been acquired by the Dahesh Museum in New York.

strictly lateral view. The artist is in profile, occupying the center, working on the left leg of the plaster version of the statue. All around him are objects for use in his paintings and sculptures, and on the back wall is one version of *Pygmalion and Galatea.* We feel the demanding presence of the trio on the platform in several ways: first, the claustrophobic, flat wall pushes the figures forward. Second, the strong contrast of the white plaster and the sensuous flesh tint of the model, and that of the upright female forms and the curve of Gérôme's body attract our attention to that area. Finally, the gestures of the *Hoop Dancer* in the background and the bust on the cabinet are such that their gazes seem to focus on the central group. The flagpoles, on the other hand, draw us to the painting on the wall.

Gérôme never represented himself in sculpture in the act of sculpting, nor did he show himself in painting in the act of painting. He made sculptures of characters from his paintings, and vice versa, yet he himself appears only in painting. Therefore we can ask: why is Gérôme's self-representation in painting so conspicuously tied to his production of sculpture? In response to this question, let us have a close look at the subject of *Pygmalion and Galatea*.

It seems to me that while working on this theme, Gérôme faced an interesting emulative problem. In the legend, Galatea is half-human, half-statue. When the subject is rendered in tinted marble, it is only visually, through the colors, that we can distinguish the effect of human flesh from that of marble on Galatea's body. However, tactility, an intrinsic property of sculpture—particularly of free-standing sculpture—resists our understanding of the difference between human flesh and stone surface. Because of our knowledge of the material as marble, we can never really forget that the body of the male, or the upper torso of the female is as much a stone surface as her lower portion. In other words, sculptural rendition of this subject collapses the distinction between a representation (Galatea's upper torso) and a representation *of* a representation (her lower body) by creating a conceptual impasse.[3] According to the French academic realist tradition of painting, however, when a subject was depicted on a flat canvas with the help of paint, the entire discourse of representation could neatly be confined within a world of illusion, where tactility itself was an abstraction—merely a visual experience. A sculpture, when rendered in a painting, is a *picture* of a sculpture, and so it is truly a representation of a representation. As a result, in the painted versions of *Pygmalion and Galatea*, each element successfully performs its assigned role of a representation or that of a representation *of* a representation. Therefore, by painting this subject repeatedly around the same time when producing the sculpture, Gérôme was able to resolve the problem and produce a pure representation of the transformation of cold, hard stone into life. Moreover, in each painting he also provided a different vantage point that we, as viewers, would adopt when beholding the free-standing sculpture group. In short, it was an attempt to use a painting *of* a sculpture as a form of mediation between painting and sculpture, thus bridging the gap between the two disciplines. And herein lies the clue to the significance of Gérôme's self-representation as a sculptor.

Dating from the 1880s, almost every piece of sculpture had at least one colored version. Conversely, in the last half of this decade, for the first time the artist produced paintings with sculptures as center of interest. I argue that Gérôme, in this period, was engaged in an investigation of the nature of representation itself. We can understand his exploration of painted sculpture only if we are willing to see it as a practice complementary to his interest in making paintings *of* sculptures. Then only we recognize that his desire to produce painted sculptures was not only a result of his admiration for a similar Greek tradition, but it was also due to his concern about the nature of the two media and the conceptual problems they presented.

Once, referring to the works of Ingres and François Rude, Gérôme remarked:

> They took up the task of being the reflection of *la belle nature*, and succeeded in their enterprise, for the interpretation—healthy, strong and true—of Nature is the only path that leads to masterpieces. . . .[4]

Furthermore, in December of 1887, he wrote to his American admirer and biographer Fanny Hering:

> The question is, to lead young people into a straightforward, true path. . .to habituate them to love nature [the true], and to regard it with an eye at once intelligent, delicate, and firm, being mindful also of the plastic side.[5]

These comments suggest that Gérôme's idea of truth (*la vérité*) was inseparable from his concept of *la belle nature*. He rejected the optical realism of the Impressionists as well as the idealist form of Puvis de Chavannes, because the "truth," according to him, could only be realized through a (utopian) combination of faithful documentation of nature and purity of form, i.e. the *spirit* of nature. Because fidelity of documentation was so important to him, these statements also explain—albeit indirectly—a vital aspect of his working procedure: drawing from the model, as opposed to working from the memory.[6]

With this understanding, Gérôme probed the ambiguities of representation, and that is why in his works of this period, we find a continuous dialogue between the visual and the tac-

3 I should point out here that this conceptual problem hardly has anything to do with the aesthetic merit of the sculpture. Just as the marble Galatea betrays the artifice behind its rendition, we are also aware of the fact that artifice is an integral aspect of representation to begin with. The "problem," as I see it, is purely an intellectual one.

4 Gerald Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme: with a Catalogue Raisonné* (New York & London: Sotheby's, 1986) 160, citing Gérôme's preface for Fanny Hering's book *Life and Works of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (New York: n.p., 1892).

5 *Century Magazine*, 4 (1889): 493.

6 Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 160.

tile. On the one hand, in his painted sculptures, the visual appears as an agent of illusion, acting in the domain of the tactile, aspiring to present tactility itself as an illusion. In his paintings *of* sculptures, on the other hand, we see the tactile encased in the realm of the visual, and completely subservient to it. I suggest that to Gérôme, sculpture, with its tactility, signified representation of tangible nature, and production of sculpture was the act of imitating nature. The medium of painting, on the other hand, because of its ability to offer the tangible as pure visual representation, showed promise as an ideal ground for realizing *la belle nature*. Hence, his production of painted sculptures and that of paintings *of* sculptures complemented each other, and both groups bear evidence of his effort to realize *la vérité*.

In 1893, Gérôme painted two pictures on the same theme: *A View into a Tanagran Ceramic Shop* and *Sculpturae Vitam Insufflat Pictura* (*Painting Breathes Life into Sculpture,* Figure 6). He himself invented the Latin title for the second one.[7] Each work shows a Tanagran woman (virtually the same woman in both scenes), sitting in a Greek ceramic shop, painting *Hoop Dancer*s, and the actual statue of *Tanagra* is displayed in a niche in the background. The metaphorical quality of this expression leaves no doubt that the artist wanted to unite the two media not just on a physical, but also on a more abstract, conceptual level. The woman working on the figurines can be interpreted as *Tanagra* herself, who has come to life because painter Gérôme put her *in* a painting that "breathed life" into her, as she herself is involved in the act of "giving life" to the statuettes. At the same time, *Tanagra* the sculpture, the *Hoop Dancer*s, and all the other statues in the scene play their part as representations of representations. Having seen the works in this perspective, we can understand that to Gérôme, representing Galatea in a painted form was also an act of "giving life" to her, as in the story Pygmalion brought her to life. And this whole vantage point helps us to see that the 1893 pictures are as much allegories as *Pygmalion and Galatea*.

In his self-representations, Gérôme does not appear inactive, but is engaged in the production of sculpture. This no doubt reflects his sincerity and involvement in the discipline, but I argue that we can also read an allegory in these images. This is most clearly manifest in *The Artist and His Model*, painted only two years after the images of the Tanagran ceramic shops. At first glance, such a work appears to be a banal "window on the world," a veristic presentation of a mundane studio scene; a close analysis, however, penetrates its seeming triviality, and helps us to recognize the artist's awareness of the complications of pictorial unity as well as that of the physical and metaphorical dimensions of the media in question.

The model in this scene partly overlaps the sculpture, creating a juxtaposition of a representation with a representation of a representation. The plaster *Tanagra* on the turn-table does not directly represent nature because it is two steps removed from nature. Instead, the female model serves as a direct imitation of tangible life. Here her relationship with the statue is passive, very different from that in *End of the Seance*; yet in both scenes she is somehow connected to the sculpture. In view of Gérôme's aversion to memory drawing, the conspicuous presence of the model clearly implies his faith in a particular method of emulation, and the juxtaposition of the two females strongly emphasizes the mimetic act. Let us not forget, however, that the production we witness here is itself a *representation* of a production, in which the incomplete plaster statue is not the allegorical female symbolizing an ancient Greek city, but is a double signifier. On the one hand, it is a painted image of the actual plaster *Tanagra*, and on the other, it represents the *painted image* of the model. In short, this represented sculpture is a representation of two representations. Now, if we see this plaster figure with our understanding of painting's allegorical role of "breathing life" into sculpture, we realize that by virtue of being *in* a painting, this figure has a "life" of its own, and from this, we can also see the allegorical dimension of the entire work.

This allegory, however, cannot be understood without considering the role of the self-representation of the artist. He stands apart from the model and the sculpture, yet all the objects in the scene assert his identity as an artist: the oriental paraphernalia, the folios, the gladiator helmet, the painting on the wall and the sculptures, all testify to his success as an artist, his authority in manipulating the visual and the tactile. Thus, secure in his status, the artist in the picture exercises his control over the entire process of production. As a representative of his own culture, he is the one who orchestrates this discourse of representation. Yet as a representation, he himself is not outside this discourse. He is a crucial link in the artist-model-artwork trio, which, from an allegorical perspective, becomes the Culture-Nature-Art triangle. This entire allegory—the allegory of Representation—becomes clear when we recognize this symbolic triangle. Moreover, we realize at this point that this discourse would not be possible in sculpture because given Gérôme's line of enquiry, a sculptural rendition of this subject would present the model-artwork relationship as problematic. So in order to allegorize Representation by using Painting as a touchstone of life, Gérôme had to transfer all his tactile images to the realm of the visual.

The allegorical nature of this work is further confirmed by two other elements. By incorporating *Pygmalion and Galatea* in this scene, the artist not only represented himself as a sculptor with the aspiration and passion of Pygmalion, but he also identified his production of *this* picture with his previous production of the one *represented* in this picture.[8] And this connection suggests that this work too, like the one within it, is an allegory.

The second element is the presence of masks in different works. Most of them are parts of Greek theatre costumes. All versions of *Pygmalion and Galatea* have masks in some form, they dominate sections of the 1893 paintings of the ceramic shops, and appear in *The Artist and His Model*. It is curious

7 Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 141.

8 Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 134.

that masks play prominent roles primarily in works that deal with artist, artistic production, and problems of representation.[9]

Around 1895, the same year he painted *The Artist and His Model*, Gérôme made a portrait bust of the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt (Figure 7). Here fidelity to nature is juxtaposed with idealized, allegorical elements.[10] A bizarre, masked figure, clad in toga, appears at the foot of the bust as the tragic muse, while the putti at the other end stand for comedy. When compared to other portrait busts by the artist, such a combination stands out as unique to this particular work. It seems that in this example the sculptor used this novel approach because he wanted to emphasize Bernhardt's identity as an artist, her involvement with representation. I therefore argue that as a representation of a human face, a mask, in Gérôme's work, represents representation. Because of the allegorical nature of its own presence, its recurrence in certain artworks turns it into a motif; and this motif, in turn, confirms the allegorical nature of those works.

It is time for us to raise another question: why did Gérôme have these strong interests in self-representation and allegorization of representation in this particular period? For a possible answer, we need to consider his projects in a historical context.

Until his death in 1904, Gérôme was an uncompromising enemy of the Realists and the Impressionists, and his attitude and reactions to them were topics of public discussion on various occasions. In 1869, as a part of the salon jury, he was instrumental in rejecting the works of Manet and the would-be Impressionists, which led to the formation of the *salon des refusées*. From then on, he launched a relentless struggle against any attempt to publicize these artists, and he didn't hesitate to be proud of this. He wrote Fanny Hering in December, 1887:

> I claim the honor of having waged war against these tendencies and shall continue to combat them. . .many painters of the modern school, the impressionists, *the plein-air-istes*, the independents, etc., are more or less *fumistes*, some of them humbugs and some ignorant as carps. To-day, when a work is insipid and badly executed,—badly drawn, badly painted, and stupid beyond expression,—it stands a good chance of being a success. . . .[11]

In most of his criticisms of the new trends, Gérôme's central concern was about the education of his students. He taught at the École for forty years, from 1864 to 1904, and followed strict academic methods of pedagogy.[12] Odilon Redon was in his first class for a very short time, and found the training excruciating. Later, Redon remarked in his memoirs, "I was tortured by the professor. . .The teaching I was given did not suit my nature. . .He didn't understand anything about me."[13] The situation, however, changed significantly in the next few decades. Theophile Thoré commented on how the new generation was becoming increasingly interested in *"effet,"* rather than academic polish in art.[14] Later, close to the '90s, the Symbolists and the early Expressionists emerged in the intellectual scene. By the mid-'80s, it was impossible for Gérôme to continue to impose his methods of instruction on everyone; gradually, he had to become much more flexible in his expectations from his students. He even accepted Fernand Léger as an independent student in his atelier in 1903,when young Léger was refused admission at the École. The younger artist later acknowledged Gérôme's liberalness toward his students.[15]

Gérôme lived for the better part of the nineteenth century, and his fame gave him ample reason to believe that his ideas and methods were the "correct" ones. His cultural bias and his unflinching commitment to the values of the École made it impossible for him to mentally accept—much less actively endorse—the new movements. In the last three decades of his life, his deep-rooted beliefs were continuously challenged by the trends of rising modernism, but he couldn't comprehend the nature of those currents. Once he said about Pissaro's work: "Some paint like this, some in dots, some in triangles or what have you; I tell you, they are all anarchists! crazy!. . ."[16]

Yet, except for his occasional success in rejecting Impressionist paintings at the salon, Gérôme lost every battle; despite his protests, the avant-garde eventually established its claim. In 1884, he was against the proposition for a posthumous show of Manet's work, but the exhibition took place anyway.[17] He also objected to the acquisition of Gustave Caillebotte's col-

[9] In 1902, Gérôme produced a female nude called *The Ball Player*. The woman stands in a critical contrapposto and drops balls into the mouths of several masks lying at her feet. There are two things that should concern us here: first, the problems of anatomy and contrapposto that intrigued the artist while representing Galatea led him to explore this particular pose (Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 140), and second, the game shown here was an invention of the artist, because Ackerman found no evidence that any such game existed in the ancient world (Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 152). Therefore, once again we find the appearance of masks in a context of artistic investigation. Furthermore, two almost identical paintings from the same year show Gérôme in his studio, polychroming the masks of this statue.

[10] Ackerman, "Gérôme's Sculpture" 87.

[11] *Century Magazine*, 4 (1889): 493.

[12] Barbara Weinberg, *The American Pupils of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1984) 123-33.

[13] Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 168, citing Redon's *A soi-même* (Paris: n.p., 1922) 22-4.

[14] Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986) 99-100.

[15] Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 177, citing *Fernand Léger 1881-1955* (Brussels: n.p., 1956) 25.

[16] Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 143, citing "Enquête â propos de la Donation Caillebotte," *Journal*, III (1895): 530-31.

[17] Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 128, citing Guillemin, *Mémoires* 174.

lection by the state in 1894, and made acerbic public statements against it.[18] Nonetheless, the project was implemented and the collection was housed by 1897. At the Paris World Fair of 1900, Gérôme even tried to prevent the French president from entering the room exhibiting Impressionist works, saying: “Mister President, in that room lies the shame of France!”[19]

If we look at Gérôme’s personal life in this period, we see that between 1884 and 1891, several of his close friends and relatives died in a flu epidemic. Among them were Paul Baudry, Gustave Boulanger, Gérôme’s brother-in-law and friend Albert Goupil, father-in-law Adolphe Goupil, and above all, his own son, Jean-Léon. Several letters and conversations with Fanny Hering reveal that the artist was deeply affected by these losses, and was growing increasingly melancholic and introspective in his attitude toward life.[20]

Looking at Gérôme’s art of the 1880s and 90s in these biographical and cultural contexts, I conclude that his explorations of the intricacies of representation in the last two decades of the century were largely conditioned by these associations. As he continued his experiments with painting and sculpture, his investigation of the visual and the tactile eventually became a silent declaration; a manifesto of his very own theory of representation. And this process intensified in the middle of the last decade, around the time of the Caillebotte bequest. By then, Gérôme had begun to realize that time was changing, whether he liked it or not, and that the radicalism in art, which he despised so much, was in the process of establishing its own hegemony in French culture. Above all, it was clear to him that many of his students had a different frame of mind, which meant that they would not carry his legacy into the next century. In virtually every anti-avant-garde comment he made, Gérôme gave alternative statements about his own views of art, and suggested how they could benefit his students. Therefore, he suffered the greatest loss when, by the 1880s, he had to forego his strict pedagogical principles, and allow—if not actively encourage—his students to experiment with new ideas and techniques. It was a loss no less painful to him than the death of his close ones. He was old and tired, and his constant defeat in combats with the avant-garde drove him more and more into the explorations of the complexities of image-making. By using the model as a sign of his allegiance to nature, he aspired to realize in abstract terms the ideals behind his own art, and the depiction of the confines of his studio clearly implies the introspective dimension of his enquiry.

The practice of artists using their own art in their representations, or referring to the history or legend of art-making, goes far back into the past; one could cite countless examples from ancient Greek, Renaissance or modern art, where the artist exploited such sources. Therefore, it is not difficult to see in this light that Gérôme’s portrayal of himself as a sculptor in his studio was a gesture of his reverence for that tradition; it alludes to that heritage as an alternative to what he thought was the bad art of his time. However, what in my view is unique about his work of this period, compared to that of any of his contemporaries is the complementarity between his painted sculptures and paintings *of* sculptures. This entire endeavour for him was at the same time a means of self-renewal, and an assertion of his artistic identity and authority. As Gérôme himself stated, work was the only way he could come to terms with life, and so, in the final phase of his life, he put all his zeal into allegorizing his own doctrine of representation.

Emory University

[18] Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 144, citing “Les Legs Caillebotte,” *L’Eclair*, 9 March 1897, and from Maurice Guillamot, “La Questions Caillebotte,” *La Figaro*, 13 March 1897.

[19] Gerald Ackerman, “Thoughts on Finishing a Monograph on Gérôme,” *Arts Magazine*, 60 (1986): 82.

[20] Ackerman, *The Life and Work* 130-131, Fanny Hering, *Century Magazine*, 4 (1889): 497.

Figure 1. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *End of the Seance*, 1886, canvas. Whereabouts unknown.

Figure 2. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Tanagra*, 1890, tinted marble, 60" high. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Figure 3. [*above*] Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1890, oil on canvas, 35 x 27". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 4. [*above right*] Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1892, tinted marble, 77" high. Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument, California.

Figure 5. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Artist and His Model*, 1895, oil on canvas, 20 x 15". Haggin Museum, Stockton, California.

Figure 6. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Painting Breathes Life into Sculpture*, 1893, oil on canvas, 19.7 x 27". Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Figure 7. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Sarah Bernhardt*, c. 1895, patinated plaster, 26.5" high. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Tanenbaum, Toronto. Photo: Courtesy of Mr. Tanenbaum.

Paula Modersohn-Becker and the Discourse of Motherhood in Turn-of-the-Century Germany

Susan Kloman

Contemporary feminist art historians have had difficulty reconciling what they view as the paradoxical nature of Paula Modersohn-Becker's artistic production. Modersohn-Becker was a "modern" woman in that she sought autonomy and independence as a professional artist, in spite of societal conventions in turn-of-the-century Germany. However, feminist art historians such as Linda Nochlin, Wendy Slatkin, Griselda Pollock, and Rozsika Parker have aligned her pejoratively with essentialist ideologies which theorize women as bound to nature and their natures by their biological ability to reproduce. Essentialism, in the words of Diana Fuss, "appeal[s] to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted by a patriarchal order."[1]

Slatkin compares Modersohn-Becker's work to that of male artists such as Gauguin and Maurice Denis who employ the theme of the mother as a fertility symbol, a universal type that equates metaphorically nature, sexuality, and maternity.[2] She admits the figure's "abstract power or significance," while maintaining that it "reduce[s] woman to an animalistic level, denying her personality, intellect, or full human faculties."[3]

Pollock and Parker similarly cite Gauguin's paintings as a standard by which to diminish Modersohn-Becker's works. Believing that Modersohn-Becker's female figures are powerful, they feel, nevertheless, that these images are "undermined" by the natural settings and fruit which reductively equate woman to nature.[4] By equating Modersohn-Becker's imagery to what they perceive as Gauguin's sexist imagery they reduce both artists' works to a stereotype, and, therefore, dismiss these artists without consideration of temporal context.

Nochlin views Modersohn-Becker's mother and child imagery, produced between 1906 and 1907, as "dark, anonymous goddess[es] of nourishment, paradoxically animallike [sic], [and] bound to the earth," created when the artist herself was "looking forward to motherhood."[5] Indeed, she was pregnant in 1907, but her personal ambivalence about actual motherhood is well documented.

These too-easy dismissals of Modersohn-Becker's work based upon retrospective views colored by contemporary political concerns obscure the fact that representations of motherhood are symbols with multivalent interpretations. As such, they may be used as weapons in interclass and intraclass conflict to effect social changes. Further, these feminist dismissals ignore the historicity of feminist discourse. Early twentieth century European women's movements may appear conservative to us, but this judging of the past, by the standards of the present, diminishes the real power of this movement within its cultural context. Moreover, it reveals a reductive "presentist" bias that, as Amy Hackett has said, "assum[es] that equality of rights is the essence of feminism."[6] Furthermore, these feminist dismissals fail to recognize differences between Anglo-American and European ideas of feminism. As Karen Offen has demonstrated, instead of being informed by ideas that assert the similarities existing between the sexes, as espoused in the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill, for instance, Europeans were more entrenched in the idea that differences did indeed exist, and were to be celebrated. Rather than seeking equality per se, Europeans wanted to assert the fundamental complementarity of this relationship as a means of social reform.[7] Therefore, as I will argue, Modersohn-Becker's mother and infant imagery should not be limited to interpretation as an aspect of an overall "primitivist" discourse based upon stylistic affinities with the work of famous male artists. It must instead be seen as engaging with the political discourse surrounding the League for the Protection of Mothers, a German women's organization

For all of her support and guidance, I wish sincerely to thank Dr. Karen Bearor. Thanks also to Dr. Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk for her insightful commentary.

1 Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, Hall, Inc., 1989) 2.

2 Wendy Slatkin, "Maternity and Sexuality in the 1890s," *Woman's Art Journal* (Spring/Summer 1980): 13.

3 Slatkin 13.

4 Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) 119-121.

5 Linda Nochlin, "The Issue of 'Women's Imagery'," in *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, (New York: Knopf, 1977) 67.

6 Amy Hackett, "The Politics of Feminism in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890-1918," 2 vols., diss., Columbia University, 1976, v; quoted in Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14.1 (Autumn 1988): 124.

7 Offen 124.

which advanced its cause primarily through metaphors of the maternal. As I will demonstrate, as a result of her parallel concerns with this movement, her depictions of the mother and child will undergo abrupt changes signaling her engagement with these issues. Thus, Modersohn-Becker's work can be seen not as a passive acceptance of already naturalized prescriptions about women's biological nature, or simply anticipation of her own role as a mother, but as an expression of a leftist progressive movement which sought far-reaching social reform.

Further, Modersohn-Becker's representations of the mother and infant theme, within this historical context, can be viewed as one articulation of a discourse focused on maternalism, or woman in the constructed role of mother. Carol Duncan has written, in her classic article on the "happy mother" in eighteenth-century French art, that such images were not based on social reality, nor commonly accepted ideals. Rather, they were intended to effect social change by promoting the view that motherhood was the only emotionally fulfilling role for the middle-class woman. Artists moralized the role of the mother through visual associations with the Holy Family. Motherhood was then objectified; it was represented idealistically as a pure state of harmony and bliss.[8] A century later, German social activists might likewise try to affect social change by employing the image of the mother. Here, however, by defining the mother as a subject, or an active agent capable of defining and fulfilling her own self-interests, activists could then be empowered to resist the societal devaluation of women.[9]

The women involved in the maternalist women's movement wanted to exercise what they felt were their innate female talents: the ability to care for and nurture others, an ability that should be extended beyond the family, to benefit society as a whole. It is this theme that finds resonance in both European and American suffrage movements of the early years of this century.

The rise of socialism in Germany in the 1890s provided a new political framework that allowed women to assert themselves by subverting right-wing mores. With the changes in the political landscape, the idea of the family as a microcosm of society became a point of contention.[10] The employment of women outside the home coupled with the low birth rate in urban areas brought about debates concerning the changing roles of women in an industrial age. Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and August Bebel's widely read *Woman Under Socialism* (1883), were the source of much thinking about the redirection of women's roles in society, even for those who might not have been members of the Socialist party.[11] Socialist rhetoric categorized women and the working class as two groups united by a history of oppression. Moreover, the female ability to reproduce was considered a form of labor which benefited society, just as the working class provided society with material goods.[12] Women interested in the reformation of women's roles and societal discontent chose the symbol of the mother to assert their political position. They saw their ability to mother as their ability to regenerate culture. They were to be the mothers of society, of civilization renewed. But outmoded sentimental notions of motherhood needed to be replaced by more modern constructions. This was given explicit expression by Ellen Key, a Swedish feminist contemporary whom Modersohn-Becker met in Paris in 1906 through their mutual friend, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke.[13] Key said "the sentimental belief in motherhood as an always holy and always reliable natural force must be superseded, and this natural phenomenon must be shaped by culture."[14] Key's ideas on motherhood provided the ideological framework upon which the League for the Protection of Mothers was built. "The great social household" was the often repeated metaphor for society as a family.[15] Although many voices existed in this maternalist discourse, the collective notion was that women, as potential mothers, should be allowed to be mothers under the best possible economic conditions. Those choosing not to be actual mothers, were to be assured the agency and the opportunity to nurture others. More than this, those desiring reform embraced the notion that woman was the source of all culture.

Johann Jakob Bachofen's text *Mother Right* (1861) was popular at the turn-of-the-century, and by this point his ideologies had already been incorporated by both Engels and Bebel. Bachofen portrayed the origin of Western culture as matriarchal. He praised the relationship of the mother and child as the "origin of all culture, of every virtue, of every nobler aspect of

[8] Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," in *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1993) 4, 20-21.

[9] Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, eds., Introduction to *Representations of Motherhood* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1994) 2.

[10] Richard Evans, "Politics and the Family: Social Democracy and the Working-class Family in Theory and Practice Before 1914," in *The German Family: Essays on the Social History of the Family in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany* , eds. Richard J. Evans and W.R. Lee (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981) 262-263.

[11] Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914* (New Brunswick, NJ:Rutgers UP, 1991) 155 and 209; Evans 262.

[12] August Bebel, *Woman Under Socialism*, trans. from German by Daniel De Leon (New York: New York Labor News Press, 1904) 22 and Conclusion, n.p.

[13] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. by Jane Bannard Greene and M.D. Herter Norton (New York: W.W. Norton Co., The Norton Library) 387 n. 111.

[14] Ellen Key, 1911, quoted in Ann Taylor Allen, "Mothers of the New Generation: Adele Schreiber, Helene Stöcker, and the Evolution of a German Idea of Motherhood, 1900-1914" *Signs* 10.3 (Spring 1985): 419.

[15] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 3.

existence."[16] The empowering notion of a matriarchal past was, in socialist thought, in dialectical relationship to the patriarchal present. The utopian ideal was a synthesis of the two cultures as a union of equals.[17] For Modersohn-Becker the meaning of the image of the mother was not fixed. Early in her career she employed the image of peasant mothers to suggest the perceived morality of the laborers and liberal views toward German society. Fritz Mackensen, her teacher at the artist's colony in Worpswede had employed mother and child imagery. His *Mother and Infant*, 1892 (Figure 1), also known as the *Worpswede Madonna*, depicts an idealized image of the peasant mother. The woman sits in a peat cart, "the throne of the landscape."[18] The woman is turned in near profile to give the viewer a sense of her modesty and dignity. He forces the viewer into a reverential gaze by suggesting that the viewer is looking up to the subject. This reverential gaze equates the woman who is breast feeding to the piety of nature itself.

In her *Peasant Woman and Child* of 1903 (Figure 2), Modersohn-Becker uses similar subject matter as Mackensen. Although she abstracts the forms, the natural landscape of the field is upheld. The point of view is raised to eye-level, but the sense of modesty remains. This is still a somewhat mawkish representation of the subject.

In her *Silent Mother*, 1903 (Figure 3), Modersohn-Becker gives the canvas a raw, unfinished look to translate her ideas of simple form signifying the perceived unaffectedness and heroicism of the peasant mother. The rough surface metaphorically reinforces viewer recognition of the difficult way of life of a rural peasant. Physical labor is metonymic of the working class. Thus, Modersohn-Becker's labored surface also signals her identity or at least empathy with the woman depicted, the artist who labors over the canvas, now one with her subject. The treatment of the composition is a statement by the artist that this is a true and sincere representation of what motherhood is really like under adverse conditions. Although the subject is not in a natural environment, her role as a peasant is further signified by her plain and weathered clothing, and by her large, dark hands. The intimate view and the fullness of the woman's breast prohibits discretion. Her gaze is not fixed lovingly on the child, instead she looks away as though she is totally disengaged from this bodily function. Her beleaguered expression suggests that this moment is but a respite from her more tiresome obligations.

Modersohn-Becker viewed these women as heroic,[19] addressing them intimately, and with subtle distortions that do not allow for a fixed perspective. This shift in treatment of the subject parallels her own shifting viewpoint regarding motherhood. She has chosen to reject her teacher's form of expression, and subsequently no longer aligns herself with his more sentimental ideology.

It is in 1906 that she appropriates images and techniques that aligned her with so-called primitivism. Concurrent changes in her images of motherhood question the notion of biology as destiny and suggest the idea that artistic creation is analogous to the creation of life. Modersohn-Becker was constructing an identity that might resolve the ongoing conflict between societal expectations of women and their personal desires. Images such as her *Reclining Mother and Child* of 1906 (Figure 4), and *Kneeling Mother and Child* of 1907 (Figure 5) are the most indicative of this ideology that gives primacy to women's role as mothers. This shift occurred while she was separated from her husband and living in Paris in 1906, where she gained new tools, both formal and ideological, with which to explore the complexities presented by the potential to mother. She was exposed to the works of Gauguin and Cezanne. She met and painted a portrait of the professor Werner Sombart, one of the earliest members of the League for the Protection of Mothers.[20] It was also during this time that she met feminist Ellen Key. Her 1906 and 1907 images of motherhood, appropriate the maternal metaphor to convey ideas of a universal life force and the power of women to create, which would have held further symbolic meaning for her as an artist, as well as a woman, seeking autonomy from convention. This is particularly true when considering that during this time she was experiencing personal upheavals. By February of 1907, after a reluctant reconciliation with her husband, she was pregnant. As the experience of motherhood moved from the abstract to a reality for her, she problematized and questioned the mixed implications of motherhood.

In *Reclining Mother and Child*, the image is separated from a recognizable setting. In opposition to Nochlin's and Slatkin's perception of this image as animal-like, I would posit that in her own language she is monumentalizing the form to suggest a personification of the eternal and symbiotic nature of the mother and infant. Unlike the obviously class-based images of the subject, the woman is nude, suggesting a natural state of being which was Modersohn-Becker's vehicle for transforming individual mothers into the universality of motherhood itself. If unclothed and lacking obvious signifiers of class, this Italian mother,[21] as an immigrant, is representative of the lower classes.

16 J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, with a preface by George Boas and intro. by Joseph Campbell. Bollingen Series (New York: Princeton UP, 1967) 79.

17 Allen, "Mothers of the New Generation," 427.

18 Gillian Perry, "The 'Ascent to Nature'-Some Metaphors of 'Nature' in Early Expressionist Art," in *Expressionism Reassessed*, eds. Shulamith Behr, David Fanning, and Douglas Jarman (Oxford and New York: Manchester UP, 1993) 57.

19 Gunther Busch and Liselotte von Reinken, eds., *Paula Modersohn-Becker: The Letters and Journals*, ed. and trans. by Arthur Wensinger and Carole Clew Hoey (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1984) 112; Journal entry dated October 29, 1898.

20 Allen, "Mothers of the New Generation," 423.

21 Christa Murken-Altrogge, *Paula Modersohn-Becker: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: DuMont and Buchverlag, 1980) 77.

The "primitive" yet sympathetic handling of her form also signals her "base" or foundational status in society. This evokes Bachofen's assertion that motherhood is the basis of culture, it is the one constant underlying all other transitional structures.[22]

Kneeling Mother and Child alludes to notions of matriarchy and fertility in its ritualistic arrangement. The mother's kneeling position on a white circular pallet connotes an act of submission and sacrifice. The woman is dark, but her womb is highlighted to evince her fertility. The mother's dark skin and the tropical vegetation behind her signifies her exotic Otherness. However, there may be a more pointed reference indicated by her dark skin, as Bebel had cited the German protectorate of Cameroon in West Africa as evidence of the existence of a matriarchal past.[23] Thus, Modersohn-Becker appears to invoke a so-called primitive matriarchal past which nourishes the present. Civilized German bourgeois society is signified by the pale-skinned blond baby whom she cradles and nourishes. If not the actual child of the woman, the infant is, nevertheless, the fruit of a woman's labor, just as the upper-class survives upon the fruit of lower-class labor.

This public dialogue surrounding the female role of mother was constructed by many voices in German society. While maintaining motherhood is the ultimate function of women, the maternal proponents simultaneously challenge societal expectations based solely on biology.

Modersohn-Becker then frames the public discourse in private, contemplative terms. Unknown to her at the time, her art, and consequently her self would be sacrificed to motherhood: she died from complications from childbirth. Yet, her ambivalence about her pregnancy is evidenced in letters to friends. She avoided discussing the pregnancy. Instead, she lamented about not being able to attend the Cezanne retrospective at the Salon d'Automne in Paris.[24] In a letter to her sister, rather than expressing happiness, she states, "never again write me a postcard with the words 'diaper' or 'blessed event'."[25]

Perhaps the maternalist ideology to which Modersohn-Becker subscribed is restricting by today's feminist standards, for motherhood is most often framed in terms of constraints rather than liberation. It does not allow for autonomy as a woman. The maternalist discourse of Modersohn-Becker's time provided the tools by which she could question social mores. The symbol of the mother provided a strategic point from which reform-minded women could subvert the right-wing status quo. It is a strategic point because of its unifying factor. It was a malleable metaphor because everyone had some concept of motherhood. Women could address the power structures by reconstructing the dominant language for their purposes. The protean maternal metaphor was employed to suggest "new life" for a society willing to embrace "motherly" traits. The women of this time did not portray an immaculate image of woman as mother. They sought to change women's lives for the better in early twentieth-century Germany in the hopes of an ideal tomorrow. Paula Modersohn-Becker, in her mother imagery subverts the societal and artistic canons by implying the harsh realities of the present while questioning the idea of a transcendent eternal.

Florida State University

Figure 1. Fritz Mackensen, *Mother and Infant*, 1892. Kunsthalle Bremen.

[22] Bachofen 79.

[23] Bebel 25.

[24] Busch and von Reinken, eds., 425; in a letter to Clara Rilke-Westhoff, dated October 21, 1907.

[25] Busch and von Reinken 422; letter to Milly Rohland-Becker, dated October 1907.

Figure 2. Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Peasant Woman and Child*, c. 1903. Hamburger Kunsthalle.

Figure 3. Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Silent Mother*, 1903. Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover.

Figure 4. Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Reclining Mother and Child*, 1906. Böttcherstrasse Bremen.

Figure 5. Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Kneeling Mother and Child*, 1907. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbestiz Nationalgalerie.

The Icon and the Avant-Garde in Russia: Aesthetic Continuity in Tatlin's *Painterly Reliefs*

Lauren Bartlett Nagel

> As the commencement of a series, this work [*The Bottle*] (Figure 1) has been repeatedly quoted as the unquestionable proof of the entirely French Cubist origin of the *Painterly Reliefs*...This gave birth to a completely mechanistic vision of the succession of modern art movements which, considering the visit of Tatlin to Picasso as the providential cause and *The Bottle* as the connecting link, tried to artificially draw a linear evolution of Constructivism directly from French Cubism.[1]

The Western Dogma of the Primacy of European Modernists

The indigenous influence of folk and religious art on the Russian avant-garde is acknowledged but downplayed by Western art historians, who favor theories of European influence. This tendency to conflate the achievements of Russian artists beneath the mighty penumbra of Western European influence may be due to the great percentage of Russian artists who emigrated to Europe in the 1920s, when after a period of artistic fervor and Soviet encouragement, the "elitist" radical formalism of the avant-garde fell out of official favor. Western art historians and curators seem to treat Russian modern artists as second cousins to such innovators as Picasso, Braque or Marinetti. Scholars scramble to document points of contact between European artists in their studios and their visiting Russian admirers.

Such a dependence on the traditional hierarchies of early 20th century art history reveals a lack of thorough investigation into the indigenous influences of icon-painting and folk art on the Russian avant-garde.[2] Thoroughly modern in every sense of the word, these artists, however, differ distinctly from their Western counterparts due to the depth of certain structures in the Russian artistic tradition.

It may seem difficult at first glance to discern a similarity between medieval icon-painting and the avant-garde; but in Russia, historically isolated from the West, the tradition of icon-painting developed without interruption in some regions, especially Novgorod, from the 12th to the 20th century. Numerous aesthetic elements and art-making techniques will be shown to exist in both icon-painting and the work of Vladimir Tatlin. These elements and techniques will not be investigated as simple influences upon Tatlin's modern art, but as continuous and deeply rooted cultural structures that Tatlin chose to acknowledge in his work.

I will demonstrate that the idigenous artistic elements of the icon: monumentality, the respect for materials, certain compositional canons and art-making techniques far outweigh the influence of European cubists and futurists on Tatlin's work. Tatlin's biographer, John Milner, and Russian art scholar, Christina Lodder, appear to have fallen prey to the theory of the supremacy of European artists as innovators in modern art. Thus, in discussing Tatlin's early development, we hear the following statement from Milner:

> It is vital to an understanding of Tatlin's early introduction to art to place an adequate emphasis upon this aggressive development that *so strangely and like a curious hybrid emerged fully fledged from Parisian example.* (italics mine)[3]

Tatlin's rapid artistic development did not occur in a cultural vacuum. There were of course several French painting exhibitions that artists like Tatlin, Larionov and Burliuk viewed with interest. However, it is quite disconcerting that some Western scholars believe that Tatlin's first constructions, experiments with material properties or *faktura,* could have been made by an artist satisfied with copying French innovations.

Radu Stern discusses the problem of assuming as truth the theory of direct lineage from Picasso to Constructivism. In challenging the assumption, Stern sees Tatlin's *painterly reliefs* as vastly distinct from Picasso's collages. Stern compares Tatlin's selection of materials, industrial samples representing their own material properties, with Picasso's more eclectic use of materials; and he concludes that "Tatlin's revolutionary move from surface to space can not only be explained by Picasso's influ-

[1] Radu Stern, "Tatlin's Bottle (1913) and the Rise of Abstraction," *Arts Magazine* 62 (Dec. '87): 57.

[2] But See Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), a ground-breaking book considering Kandinsky's ethnographic experience as a fundamental key to his life's work and a means to view the continuity and coherence of his iconography from beginning to end.

[3] John Milner, *Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 9.

ence."[4] Stern does not discuss indigenous influences, but instead talks of Tatlin's personal approach to abstraction. His critique of Western assumptions of European predominance in early abstraction, however, supports my investigation.

Tatlin was an Icon Painter

Vladimir Tatlin, born in Moscow in 1885, began his artistic training in 1902 as an icon-painter, studying with Levenets and Kharchenko.[5] As a teenager, he worked on ships as a sailor. During the period 1904-1910, Tatlin occasionally took work copying ancient Russian church frescoes.[6] The lessons Tatlin learned in the studios of master icon-painters are expressed throughout his later work; though, on the surface, his shift toward abstraction and dimensional painting may camouflage icon-painterly elements.

Controversy over the Inspiration for Tatlin's Painterly Reliefs

Tatlin may be best known for his tower, the model for *Monument to the Third International* of 1920. Before Tatlin began creating materialist utopian sculptures and pseudo-architecture, however, his reverence for materials and investigations into texture or *faktura* developed over time through a series of Cezannesque paintings, his collage-like *painterly reliefs*, and finally, the wall-bound but fully sculptural and abstract *counter-reliefs* and *corner counter-reliefs*. Russian art scholars acknowledge the influence of icon-painting on Tatlin's early paintings and also on the fully dimensional *corner counter-reliefs* that were often hung high in the beautiful corner, a place traditionally reserved for household icons. However, the present investigation is the first indepth discussion of the connections between icon-painting and icon cover *(oklad)* construction, and the transitional *painterly reliefs.*

In 1913, Tatlin made an assemblage entitled *Bottle* (Figure1). This is considered his first *painterly relief*, and it is the only one that contains figurative elements. Tatlin was fascinated with the nature of widely varying materials and the possibility for compositional interaction. I propose that Tatlin's respect for materials, his belief that an art material should not be used in a manner that does not correspond with its inherent properties, evolved from his work as an icon-painter. Seeing a Picasso collage was certainly a catalyst, but evidence points to strong indigenous influence from Tatlin's intimate understanding of the construction of icons. When studying the *painterly reliefs*, one should note the materials, methods and formal choices employed and their similarities to the respect for wood, paint and plaster, and the elaborate building up and revealing process of icon-painting and *oklad* construction.

The series in question, the *painterly reliefs*, includes *Bottle* and a number of purely abstract wall assemblages. According to Stern, *Bottle* was not a paper and paint collage, but an assemblage of tin foil, glass, wire, sheet metal and wallpaper attached to a board. Though a bottle is clearly represented, Stern sees this work as a greater step toward abstraction than Picasso's collages, even though Picasso's works depict less recognizable objects. More revolutionary than collage is Tatlin's approach to the nature of materials as the artist's primary interest. Tatlin, in effect, investigates the nature of transparency by comparing the qualities of more or less transparent materials to each other. Stern sees these materials arranged according to a scale of transparency with the opposite of the transparent, a curved piece of sheet metal at the bottom, the semi-transparent wire grill making up part of the contour of the bottle, and the fully transparent shard of glass inside.[7] Stern proposes *Bottle* as a very early, possibly first, manipulation of the void as an element in sculpture, where "space is considered a real material."[8]

The subsequent *painterly reliefs* were non-objective assemblages of iron, plaster, glass and asphalt. Milner discusses the retention of the format of painting, and even suggests that "when it is recalled that Tatlin had worked with icons, whose mounts might be metal or wood in high relief, the transition from a flat painted surface to relief is less surprising than it would be for a Western European painter."[9] However, Milner misses the opportunity to make more specific comparisons with the process of icon-painting. Tatlin's use of plaster foundations for the *painterly reliefs* not only references painting in general but parallels the plaster-covered boards used to make icons as "portable frescoes." What Milner means by metal or wood "mounts" is not clear. The jewel-encrusted metal icon cover or *oklad* is constructed, often in high relief, separately from the underlying painting (Figure 2). Often, only a holy figure's painted hands and face would peek through fitted openings in the *oklad*. The rest of the painting was considered too sacred to be seen, except during special times in the church calendar.

Both the process of building up the plaster and paint of the icon itself and the construction of the metal icon cover can be connected to the process and end result of the *painterly reliefs*. A close look at *Painterly Relief: Collation of Materials* of 1914 (Figure 3) reveals even more specific parallels. The assemblage of metal and wood is mounted to a plaster-covered board. Given the role of the traditional icon cover in concealing and revealing the holy painted image, the notch cut away in the central triangle of *Collation of Materials* takes on new significance. Milner believes Tatlin cut away this area to reveal the zero point on a grid of sorts, a point from which the different materials expand. However, the cut-away niche more closely resembles the opening in an *oklad* that reveals some small part of the image underneath. Here, let us remember that the bottle form in the first *painterly relief* was also a cutaway designed to re-

4 Stern 57.

5 Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 8.

6 Milner 9.

7 Stern 57.

8 Stern 57.

9 Milner 93.

veal the shard of glass inside, much like an ancient church reliquary would house and only partially reveal the shard or fragment associated with a saint.

The interpretation of the *painterly reliefs* as extensions of the icon aesthetic is supported by a comparison with a 1913 sketch entitled *Composition-Analysis* (Figure 4). Larissa Zhadova has made a visual comparison between this sketch and a well-known Russian icon of the *Virgin and the Don*, late 14th century by Theophanes the Greek (Figure 5). Additionally, she notes a direct connection between the sketch and a *painterly relief* of 1917.[10] In this pivotal sketch, Tatlin has reduced the virgin and child to simple triangles and ovals. This sketch appears to be a study for an assemblage: wedges overlap, gray-shaded planes intersect the oval face of the child, heads and limbs are revealed from beneath the layers, and the use of gray, brown and black for background planes resembles the sheet metal used in the above-discussed *painterly relief*. This sketch shares an alignment along a vertical axis with both the *Painterly Relief: Collation of Materials* and with the 14th century icon. Thus, if one accepts the connection between this sketch and the *painterly relief*, the association of icon-painting with the *painterly reliefs* is strengthened. At the very least, such a reading is not incompatible with the other evidence from icon-painting methodology: the parallel uses of plaster, layers of metalwork, and cut-away areas that reveal small sections of the surface underneath.

Thus, Christina Lodder misplaces her emphasis on Cubist influence against indigenous influence in her discussion of the *painterly reliefs*. According to Lodder, the *painterly reliefs*

> exploit and extend the principle of collage as developed by Cubism, [they] could be seen to be a logical continuation of the Cubist interests. Without this artistic interest in Cubism, Tatlin's 'painterly reliefs' remain an *apparently inexplicable change of direction, seemingly lacking any solid basis in his previous work.* (italics mine)[11]

To strengthen the tie between Cubist collage and Tatlin's reliefs, Lodder attempts to find a Cubist painting in Tatlin's *oeuvre* that predates the reliefs. However, the earliest paintings that correspond most closely to a Cubist formula are panel paintings completed in 1917. Lodder cites the infamous visit by Tatlin to Picasso's studio in 1913,[12] which surely would have made an impression but does not supersede indigenous aesthetic concerns.

Turning to the paintings completed immediately before the *painterly reliefs*, Lodder is more comfortable attributing influence to icon-painting. That she cannot extend this recognition to Tatlin's transitional experiments in assemblage could be explained by the Western predilection, discussed by Stern, that turns art historians' primary attention to established chronologies of modern art, where they expect to find a trickle-down effect of artistic ideas from the so-called greater to the so-called lesser artists.

Icon Elements in Tatlin's Early Paintings

The series of paintings and drawings that precede the *painterly reliefs* clearly show the influence of icon-painting. Tatlin mixed his own paints, using formulas he had learned as a student of master icon-painters. In *Sailor* of 1911 and *Nude* of 1913 (Figures 6-7), the choice of colors (ochre, red and blue), the use of white highlighting and black shading on top of the base colors, the minimal use of contour shading, the choice of gestures and body canons, and the monumentality of figures all point to direct connections with Tatlin's knowledge of icon-painting.

It is interesting to compare the style of these two paintings with an example of an icon painted by Tatlin himself. With *The Apostle on the Cupola of the Church of St. George* of 1905-10 (Figure 8), one sees an icon that Tatlin completed as a student. The method of white contourless highlighting is used throughout the figure. Especially important for this study is the use of white highlighting in the face, used to flatten and reduce the features to geometric planes. Looking at the *Sailor*, one can clearly discern similarities to icon-painting. There is a dramatic separation of colors, and flat white highlights delineate the simplified planes of the face. The *Nude* and traditional icons share the use of white highlighting, the exaggerated curvilinear form of the figure's neck and head and its monumentality as devices.

Further supporting the connection between traditional icons, Tatlin's paintings, and the pivotal sketch of 1913, one must notice the semi-detached hand in the *Nude*, created by overlapping contour lines in black and gray, and the wedge- or triangle-shaped breast and head areas. These elements can be compared stylistically to portions of *Composition-Analysis*. The gradations of yellow ochre into white on the legs, arms and head of the abstracted mother and child mimic the body contours of the *Nude*, although in *Composition-Analysis*, the figures are even more interrupted by actual planar triangular wedges. Thus, I see a direct development from Tatlin's actual icons, to *Sailor* and *Nude*, to *Composition-Analysis* and on to the *painterly reliefs*.

The similarities between Tatlin's paintings and icons led his colleague, art critic Nikolai Punin, to state that "the influence of the Russian icon on Tatlin is undoubtedly greater than the influence upon him of Cezanne or Picasso."[13] Descriptions of icons from the Novgorod School could be used to describe the compositional and technical elements of Tatlin's *Sailor* or *Nude* equally well (Figure 9). Talbot Rice says of the Novgorod School:

10 Larissa Zhadova, *Tatlin* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988) 63-66.

11 Lodder 11.

12 Lodder 11. A 1914 letter exists mentioning Tatlin's visit to Picasso's studio; it was found inside a sketch pad including Cubist drawings.

13 Nikolai Punin, "St. Petersburg Art," *Russkoe Iskusstvo* 1 (1923): 18.

> As time went on the various features. . .such as the elongated figures, the slender forms, the absence of modelling, and the bright coloring, all became more accentuated, so that by the 16th century an essentially linear style had evolved.[14]

According to Lazarev, late 13th century icon-painting in Novgorod experienced

> a rebellion of sorts against the Byzantine tradition...Composition is flat, with hint of a third dimension. The artist applied paint over large surfaces without any effort at chiaroscuro modelling...On the top of the flesh tints the artist put deep shadows and bright highlights rendered by separate thin lines... the beginnings of an iconographic technique which later was to become almost canonical."[15]

It is well-documented that the paintings completed before Tatlin turned to the *painterly reliefs* were influenced more by icons than by Western art. It is also well-known that Tatlin's fully dimensional series of *corner counter-reliefs* (Figure 10) that were produced after the *painterly reliefs*, were actually displayed as icons, high in the "beautiful corner." Thus, I experience considerable frustration when faced with assumptions of primary European influence for the transitional *painterly reliefs* in spite of available comparisons with traditional methods of icon-painting and *oklad* constructing.

The Oklad as Relief and the Process of Icon-Painting

A highly supportable structure for the development of Tatlin's three dimensional, mixed-media reliefs can be found in the *oklad* that appeared from the 13th to the 19th century (Figure 2). As a student of icon-painting, Tatlin must have been impressed by the ornate, gilded covers encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones, as an extension of the painterly medium. Icons with covers could themselves be described as extended paintings or as *painterly reliefs*. Thus, in addition to parallels between the *oklad's* openings for hands and faces and similar cutaways in the *painterly reliefs*, including the cut-out of the bottle form in *Bottle*, other general parallels can be made between the construction of icon covers and the concepts behind the construction of the first assemblages.

Descriptions of the process of icon-painting reveal other threads of continuity between traditional and modern Russian art. Keeping in mind Tatlin's emphasis on the essence of materials, the following description provides a glimpse of the potential depth and variety of influences and structures found by the modern Russian artist in the icon-making process.

According to Boris Uspensky, inner symbolism has a fundamental significance for the icon, a symbolism not really relevant to the finished work, but to the process of icon-painting. "A fixed symbolic meaning already characterizes the very material of the painting: the colors of the icon represent the animal, vegetable and mineral world."[16]

The icon painters of the Old Believers or priestless sect used a technique of building up the representation to symbolically express the process of the re-creation of the figure depicted in the icon. First the skeleton was painted, then musculature, skin, hands and clothing. Finally, the identifying qualities of the person were added. This process is seen as a gradual revealing of the image and the paint itself acts as the revealer. The actual selection and preparation of the board used for the icon shows an equal amount of attention to process and materials. Many layers of glue, plaster and chalk are applied until a smoothly sanded surface is prepared to receive the paint. The surface in essence becomes a portable wall. Just as icon-painters freed frescoes from incidental architecture, so Tatlin freed paintings from the two-dimensional canvas with the *painterly reliefs*.

Conclusion

When Tatlin breaks free from the retained painterly elements of plaster backboard or wood mounts to create the fully sculptural constructions called *counter-reliefs*, it should not be surprising that Tatlin acknowledges his works' connection to icons by hanging a *corner counter-relief* in the traditional "beautiful corner." When Tatlin abandoned the figure in his reliefs, he remained committed to investigating the relationship of various materials to one another. This emphasis on distinct properties of particular materials extends the thread of aesthetic unity from the icon to the relief and on toward construction. On many fronts, from the choice of color and painting technique, to the building up and revealing process in the *painterly reliefs*, and the respect for and the selection of materials in the *counter-reliefs*, Tatlin extended the traditions of icon-painting into the era of the Russian avant-garde. Thus, ample evidence supports the primacy of indigenous Russian icon traditions as the impetus for a rigorous form of early modern materialist principles in Tatlin's *painterly reliefs.*

University of Florida

14 David Talbot Rice, *Russian Icons* (London: The King Penguin Books, 1947) 25.

15 V. N. Lazarev, *Novgorod Icon-Painting* (Moscow: Iskusstvo Publishers, 1969) 14.

16 Boris Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press, 1976) 16.

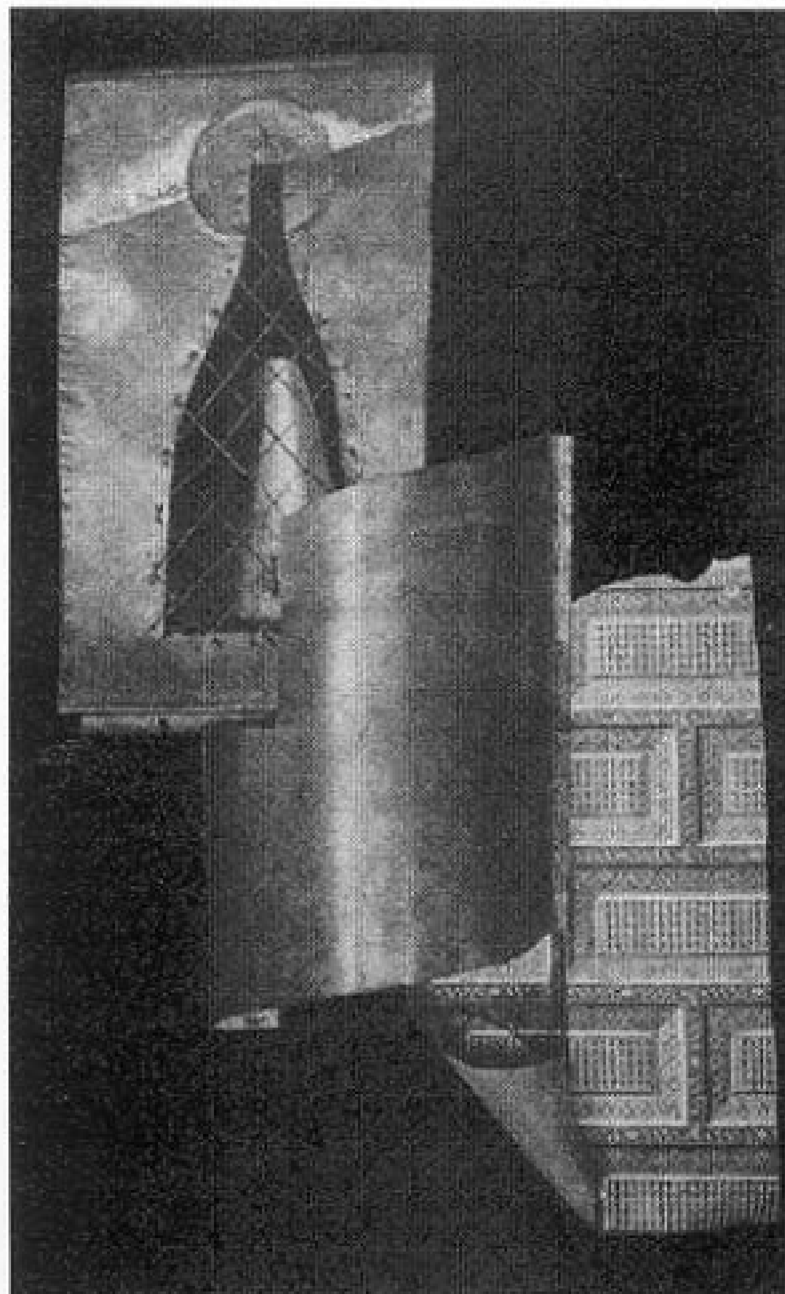


Figure 1. Vladimir Tatlin, *Bottle*, 1913, tin, cardboard, netting, wallpaper, whereabouts unknown. Photo: Collection of D.V. Sarab'ianov, Moscow.

Figure 2. Artist Unknown, *Oklad* or Icon Cover for a Russian Icon (*Fedorovskaia icona Bogomateri*), undated, Russia. Photo: *Chudotvorniya Ikony Bozhiei Materi Kz Russkoi Historii*, Russian-language publication. New York: Russian Youth Committee, 1976.

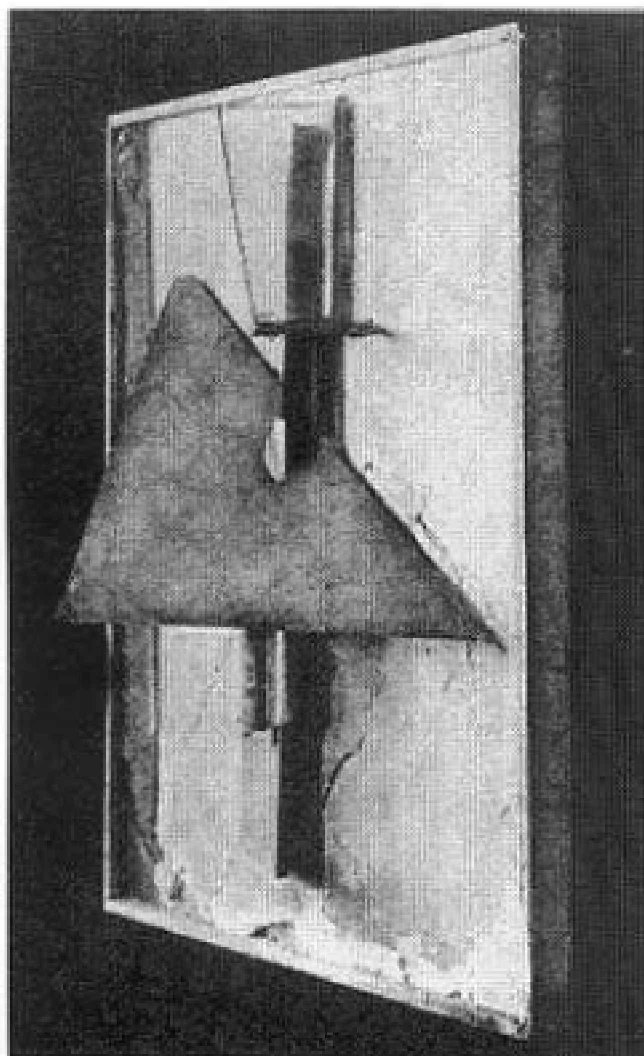


Figure 3. Vladimir Tatlin, *Collation of Materials* (Painterly Relief), 1914, iron, plaster, glass, tar, whereabouts unknown. Reproduction: Nikolai Punin, *Tatlin* (Protiv Kubisma), Petrograd, 1921.

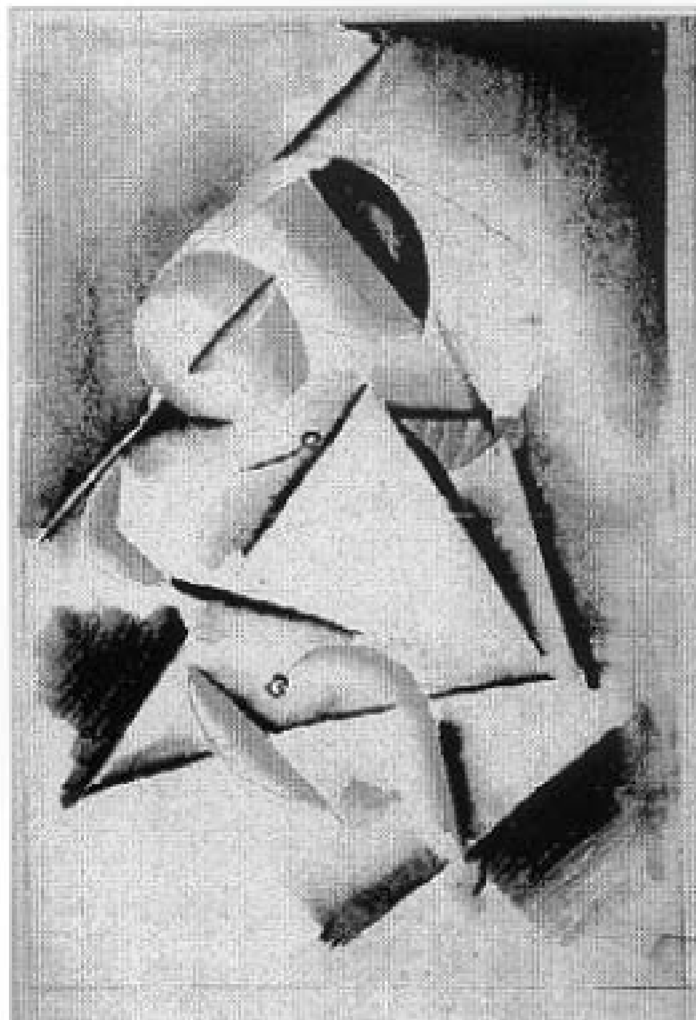


Figure 4. Vladimir Tatlin, *Composition-Analysis*, 1913, pencil, gouache and watercolor on paper, 49 x 33 cm Collection A.A. Kapitsa, Moscow.

Figure 5. Theophanes the Greek, *Our Lady of the Don*, late 14th century, 86 x 67.5 cm Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

Figure 6. Vladimir Tatlin, *Sailor*, 1911, tempera on canvas, 71.5 x 71.5 cm State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Figure 7. Vladimir Tatlin, *Nude*, 1913, oil on canvas, 143 x 108 cm Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

Figure 8. Vladimir Tatlin, *Apostle on the Cupola of the Church of St. George, Staraia.* 1905-10, copy of 12th-century fresco, watercolor and white paint on tracing paper glued to paper, 24 x 15.5 cm TsGALI, Moscow.

Figure 9. School of Novgorod, *The Transfiguration of Christ,* 15th century, 89.4 x 57.5 cm Museum of Art History, Novgorod.

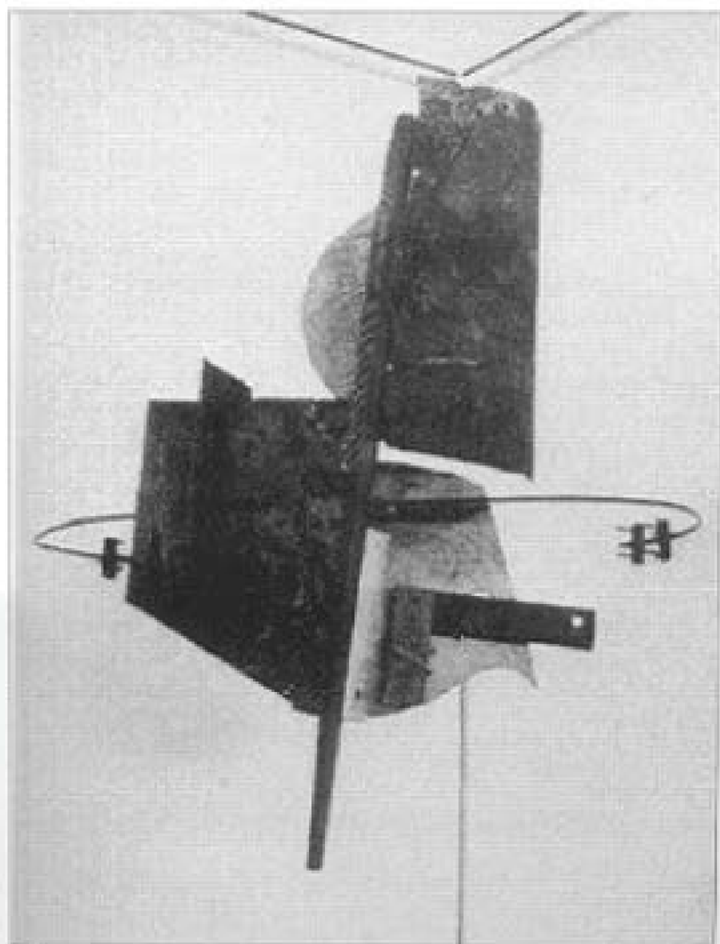


Figure 10. Vladimir Tatlin, *Corner Counter-Relief,* 1915, iron, aluminum, primer; destroyed. Photo: State Film, Photographic and Sound Archive, St. Petersburg.

The Second Moses: The Messianic Tradition in James Hampton's *Throne of the Third Heaven*

Wendy Eller Kagey

In December 1964, the doors of a slum warehouse at 1133 Seventh Street NW, Washington, D.C., were opened to reveal the glittering vision of *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly* (Figure 1), created by James Hampton (Figure 2), a religious recluse who claimed God had visited him regularly. Prior to its discovery, people curious enough to ask Hampton what lay behind those doors were told that this "is the secret part of my life."[1] When this secret later became public, *The Throne* was acknowledged as one of the most extraordinary religious visionary pieces in twentieth century American art.

The discovery of *The Throne* created many iconographic problems for scholars. Hampton had few friends and never married. Pertinent records and documents concerning Hampton's early life and upbringing were lost in a fire in St. Louis and family members were reluctant to talk to anyone. Thus, much of the information had to come from *The Throne* itself. In various publications, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan has discussed Hampton's role as a visionary artist, his fundamental Baptist background, his interpretation of the millennium, grace, the second coming, and his close affinities to St. John (author of the Book of Revelation). In his book *Flash of the Spirit*, Dr. Robert Farris Thompson draws attention to Hampton's reliance on Kongo-American methods of grave decorations such as the wrapping of jars and discarded furniture with gold and silver foil. Stephen Jay Gould, on the other hand, links *The Throne's* design and arrangement to the traditional biblical concept of time and its meaning for human history. This paper will concentrate on how *The Throne* conforms with and deviates from the conventional interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

James Hampton's telling faith may well have resulted from his religious upbringing and life experiences. He was born in 1909 in Elloree, South Carolina.[2] Little is known of his childhood or early education, except that he was one of four children of James Hampton, Sr., an African-American Baptist minister and gospel singer.[3] Although it is not certain if Hampton regularly attended church services as a boy in Elloree, his father's participation does, in fact, speak for such an involvement. Furthermore, the inside back cover of Hampton's Bible found in the precincts of *The Throne* reads: "Instruct a child in the way he should go, and when he grows old he will not leave it."

The poor living conditions in South Carolina forced Hampton to move to Washington, D.C. in 1928. On arriving there, he began to frequent the Mt. Airy Baptist Church (North Capital and L Streets) where he encountered the Reverend A.J. Tyler, one of the most influential African-American ministers in the Washington, D.C. area.[4] Tyler preached regularly in the church from 1906 until his death in 1936, so that Hampton would seem to have been considerably influenced by his "fervent sermons."[5] Probably affected by the hardship of the Great Depression in 1929, Hampton became more and more contemplative, becoming a visionary. He had his first vision in 1931, at the age of twenty two and only three years after his arrival in D.C. He was drafted into the army in 1942 and sent to Guam where his responsibilities included minor carpentry and maintenance of airstrips.[6] The first parts of *The Throne* would seem to have been made around this time; for a stand in the assemblage has a label that reads: "Made in Guam, April 14, 1945." Because this piece is relatively small and could easily be disassembled, it may have been transported to Washington, D.C., although there is no evidence to substantiate that it was made in Guam.[7] After being honorably discharged in 1945 and awarded a bronze star, Hampton returned to Washington, D.C. In 1946,

1 Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, "'The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly'" (Montgomery, Ala.: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, 1977) 6.

2 As an intern at the National Museum of American Art in the 1970s, Michael Quigley points out that it was not a law in South Carolina to record births until 1915. Therefore, there is no record of James Hampton in Elloree, South Carolina. As Lynda Roscoe Hartigan asserts in her essays on *The Throne*, Hampton was inconsistent with his birth date on a number of his job applications, but this date appears most frequently, and is the one accepted by such scholars.

3 Hartigan 6.

4 Although it does not appear that Hampton officially belonged to Tyler's congregation, he did live in the church's neighborhood and Tyler was a widely known minister in the Washington, D.C. African-American community.

5 James Dickinson of Washington, D.C., personal interview with author, 21 September 1993. According to Mr. Dickinson, Reverend Tyler could raise anyone's "Christian fervor."

6 Hartigan 7.

7 The measurement of this stand is 21 1/2 inches (wing span) x 12 inches x 17 1/2 inches.

a year after his return from war, he resumed life as a civilian and was hired by the General Services Administration as a janitor.[8] In 1950 he rented the garage space where the majority of *The Throne* was discovered fourteen years later in 1964.[9]

Hampton obviously conceived of himself as a messenger of God. *The Throne* is a reflection of his divine service and his belief in a millennium, as well as other biblical passages. Constructed principally of old furniture and a variety of objects covered in gold and silver foil and purple craft paper, *The Throne* celebrates, forewarns, and instructs the viewer about the second coming of Christ. In addition to the construction of *The Throne*, the artist also created accessories such as crowns, decorative panels, leg holders, and wall plaques. As part of his piece, he wrote a series of notes in a personal script that has not yet been deciphered.

Hampton's knowledge of the Book of Revelation and Christian doctrine is subtle yet sophisticated. The title, arrangement, and components of his work give evidence to the scope of his remarkable comprehension of one of the most complex, controversial, and least understood books of Scripture. The Book of Revelation tells of the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgement where God appears enthroned and surrounded by angels. The "Third Heaven" in Hampton's title refers to the biblical abode of God. As described in Genesis, Matthew, and II Corinthians, the "Third Heaven" is of God; the Heaven of Heavens. The term "Nations Millennium," also part of Hampton's title, suggests the day of judgement for all nations, which will be called together at a "General Assembly."[10]

The Book of Revelation also refers to pre-Messianic prophesies and unfulfilled predictions, and these ideas are symbolically reflected in the composition of *The Throne*.[11] Such distinctions between pre- and post-Christian era can be seen in the labels in the left (Figure 3) referring to Christ, the New Testament, and grace, and those on the right (Figure 4) side referring to Moses, the Old Testament, and the law.[12] Similarly, the wall plaques on the left bear the name of the apostles, and those on the right, the names of the prophets. A variety of metaphorical motifs appear throughout *The Throne*, including trinity symbols, drawings, and diagrams set into a monstrance. Freestanding large angel or bird images are often placed at the top of stands arranged throughout the work.

In view of these parallels, some scholars associate *The Throne* with traditional Christian fundamentalism, a movement that swept through the United States in the early part of this century, calling for a literal interpretation of the Bible.[13] However, by claiming to have received physical visitations from God, Hampton has not followed the *literal* meaning of John 1:16 and Exodus 33:20, among others, where it is stated that no man has or will see God and live to profess it.[14] Furthermore, by adding to the word of God in his manuscripts entitled "Book of the Seven Dispensations" (Figure 5), "Second Set of Commandments," and "Millennial Laws for Peace on Earth," Hampton has deviated from traditional and literal interpretations of passages such as Revelation 22:18 and Deuteronomy 4:2, among others, that warn against adding to or omitting from the word of God.[15] These deviations seem to reflect not only Hampton's personal visions but also Christian theology as *reinterpreted* by the Black Church in an attempt to provide solace for African-Americans in their struggle for freedom and civil rights.

During slavery, the Black Church compared the circumstances of slavery and racial discrimination with the enslaved Hebrew nation in Egypt as recorded in the Book of Exodus. African-Americans saw themselves, like their biblical counterparts, as an oppressed people, denied their rightful place in the history of civilization.[16] This perspective continued into the early parts of the twentieth century, despite the abolition of slavery, surviving in various forms today, and has been used to cope with the realities of racial discrimination and other injustices. As James Evans, Jr. puts it:

> Both the call of Moses (Exodus 3:1-17) and the missiological declaration of Jesus (Luke 4:16-30), the scriptural touchstones of African-American Christianity, reflect the inherent connection between God's self-disclosure

8 James Hampton's service and government records were lost in a fire in St. Louis.

9 This garage was located at 1133 N Street NW, which has since been razed.

10 Hartigan 7.

11 Pre-Messianic prophesies include: Christ's virgin birth, his role as the Savior, and the conditions of his death. Some of the unfulfilled prophesies include: the rapture, Christ's second coming, the millennium, and the day of judgement.

12 The left refers to the viewer's left and the right refers to the viewer's right.

13 According to George Marsden in *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925*, African-Americans were not even part of the beginnings of the Fundamentalist movement in America.

14 John 1:16 New American Standard: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained Him." Exodus 33:22 NAS: "But He said, 'You cannot see my face, for no man can see Me and Live!'"

15 Revelation 22:18 NAS: "I testify to everyone who hears the word of the prophesy of this book; if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book." Deuteronomy 4:2 NAS: "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor shall you take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."

16 Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1982) 34-35.

17 James Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 11.

> and the manifestation of God's liberating intentions in the context of a people who suffer under the yoke of oppression.[17]

It may very well be, though we are not sure at the moment, that Reverend Tyler interpreted this aspect of Black theology in ways that had a lasting impact on James Hampton.

It is significant that Hampton's first vision that occurred on 11 April, 1931 was about Moses (Figure 6): "This is true that the great Moses, the giver of the Ten Commandments appeared in Washington, D.C. April 11, 1931." Could it be that Hampton saw himself as another Moses? Certain intriguing parallels exist between these two men. Moses is known as the giver of the Law, similarly, Hampton may have regarded himself as the "second giver of the Law." Moses transcribed numerous covenants with God and authored the first five books of the Bible. Likewise, Hampton recorded an "Old and New Covenant."[18] Since Moses led God's chosen people out of bondage and into the promised land, Hampton might have seen himself as a deliverer, a shepherd destined to lead his people to the "promised land" of heaven, through a church he had planned to establish. Some scholars have suggested that *The Throne* might have been intended to serve as the altarpiece of that church.

Perhaps the most compelling association between Moses and Hampton is the instruction they both presumably received from God to build a tabernacle or throne. During the Old Testament period, the tabernacle was the place God dwelt and met His people after the exodus from Egypt.

The Throne can also be considered a symbolic dwelling for Christ's second coming. For instance, it shares many formal characteristics with the Jewish tabernacle. Each is arranged symmetrically with specified furnishings, such as altar stands, tables and lamp stands, that are all covered in gold or silver. Analogous to Hampton's central throne chair is the tabernacle's ark of the covenant. Both are referred to as the "mercy seat" and are considered the key element in their assemblages. Two large winged adornments are located on either side of Hampton's throne chair (Figure 7). Similarly, two massive cherubim were placed on the ends of the Mosaic mercy seat. According to descriptions in the Book of Exodus, these cherubim most likely had a human shape with the exception of their wings. They are always depicted in a standing position, but unlike the two figures in *The Throne*, these angel-like creatures are facing one another looking down upon the mercy seat with their wings forward in a brooding position.[19] Ultimately, both the tabernacle and *The Throne* were intended as symbols of the true grace of God. By constructing their "tabernacles" to God, both Moses and Hampton contemplated the greatness of God and the sinfulness of man, since each was amazed that God should deign to dwell with men.

Preachers of the Black Church not only associated the plight of African-Americans with that of their biblical Israelites in Egypt, but also identified them as a messianic race.[20] The idea of Jesus Christ as the suffering servant who died and was later resurrected to eternal glory has deep cultural roots in African-American theology, developing during slavery and continuing throughout the civil rights movement. Symbolically equating African-American slavery with the suffering Christ, the Black Church uses the idea of His second coming, as revealed in the Book of Revelation, to reinforce the hopes of the downtrodden of a glorious future. Traditionally, for the newly converted African slaves, apocalyptic language reflected an ancient cosmology that put God firmly in charge of the universe. Furthermore, this language did not simply tell the future, it told a story.[21] The Messiah embodies the hopes and dreams of an oppressed people as well as the promise of divine favor. The key to understanding this experience lies in the relation between the biblical notion of the Messiah and the various heroic figures that empower the African-American experience—from Nat Turner, to Booker T. Washington, to Joe Louis, to Martin Luther King, and for James Hampton, even the Reverend A.J. Tyler. To African-American Christians, the Messiah, then, was endowed with the power to usher in a new age, possibly a third millennium, in which the powers of this world would be vanquished, sinners punished, and the righteous rewarded.[22] Christ and His second coming, are the signs of the revolutionary intentions of God in a world gone awry.

The apocalyptic language found in the Bible, particularly the Book of Revelation, with its striking and colorful images of a radically different future, became the cornerstone of African-American public Christian discourse.[23] For many African-Americans after Reconstruction and during the early part of the twentieth century when racial discrimination and civil injustices were rampant, this apocalyptic discourse continued to be preached at the pulpit. They spoke of Christ's return to lead his people home, just as Moses had done with the Israelites. For African-Americans like James Hampton, in the twentieth century, the story of God's rectification of the world called him into creative participation in the journey toward the promised land, the new Jerusalem.

By the time of his death in 1964, Hampton had witnessed the imminent threat of nuclear war (1945), the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s and ultimately the march in

[18] This writing appears on plaques, tags, and notebooks and is in a cryptic code, not yet deciphered.

[19] For further elaboration on the Mosaic mercy seat's description, please refer to Exodus 25:20 and Deuteronomy 32:11.

[20] Wilson Jeremiah Moses 76.

[21] Evans 146.

[22] Evans 79.

[23] Evans 146.

Washington, D.C. of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963), and the assassination of John F. Kennedy (1963).[24] Seeing little or no hope in this world, perhaps convinced that the end of time was approaching, and anticipating Christ's return, Hampton constructed *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*. A label above the central throne chair, instructs the viewer to "FEAR NOT," hinting at the righteousness of God and Jesus Christ. The gold and silver wrappings radiate a mysterious light, evoking the numinous and transcendental, and announcing as it were, the approach of the Great Savior who is expected to give hope to the hopeless, help to the helpless and joy to the joyless.

Virginia Commonwealth University

[24] Toby Thompson, "'The Throne of the Third Heaven Nations' General Assembly,'" *Washington Post*, 9 August 1981, 33.

Figure 1. James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*, c. 1950-1964, mixed media. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Anonymous Donors.

Figure 2. [*upper left*] James Hampton, early 1950s. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Figure 3. [*upper right*] James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly, AD Altarpiece* (detail), *c.* 1950-1964, mixed media. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Anonymous Donors.

Figure 4. [*left*] James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly, BC Altarpiece* (detail), *c.* 1950-1964, mixed media. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Anonymous Donors.

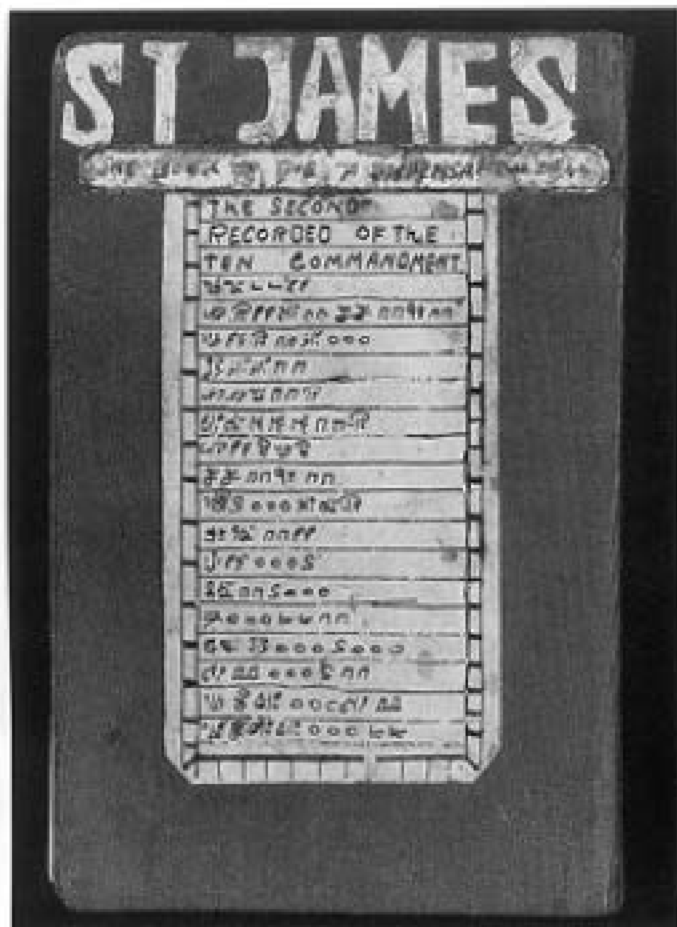


Figure 5. [*upper left*] James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly, Book of the Seven Dispensations* (detail), *c.* 1950-1964, mixed media. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Anonymous Donors.

Figure 6. [*upper right*] James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly, Moses Altarpiece* (detail), *c.* 1950-1964, mixed media. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Anonymous Donors.

Figure 7. [*left*] James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly, Throne Chair* (detail), *c.* 1950-1964, mixed media. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Anonymous Donors.

A View From Within: Mark Tansey, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, and the Iconography of Deconstruction

James W. Rhodes, Jr.

> A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. Semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth.[1]

This quote by Umberto Eco exemplifies Mark Tansey's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1987). What upon first glance appears to be a figurative scene of male bathers entering a lake in the shadows of a large, distant mountain becomes upon reflection, a lie. The reflections in the lake are not male but female bathers; the mountain is a cave, and the clouds, rock. These reflections also seem to lie (Figure 1). Yet as signs together, they do speak a measure of truth. A close examination of these signs and their interrelation is the task of this essay. This "close looking" will take the form of an intertextual and iconographic study of the signs within *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Through these two pictorial strategies, Tansey reverses the way we traditionally look at images.

The title of the work initiates the discourse between the viewer and the work of art. It offers a way to enter the painting, acting to draw upon the viewer's historical as well art historical knowledge of *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. *Mont*, or mount is an easily recognizable truncation of the French word, *montaigne*, or mountain. *Sainte-Victoire* is French for holy victory. Historically, this Mountain of Holy Victory received its name from the Roman general Marius after he defeated the Teutons and the Cimbri at what is today Aix-en-Provence in 102 BCE. The Romans, a patrilinear society held off the invading barbarians, whose system of power was based on equality between the sexes.[2] Art historically, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* becomes a marker (Figure 2). The mountain and its environs were captured on canvas by what modern art critics called the "father of 20th Century art," Paul Cézanne.[3] Cézanne painted this mountain throughout much of his life while at his home in Provence. By placing a small Roman aqueduct in several of his *Mont Sainte-Victoire* paintings, Cézanne incorporates the rich history of the mountain within the frame of the work of art itself.

The mountain in Mark Tansey's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* is a typical intertext. Intertextuality has gained currency in literary criticism in the last twenty-five years since its inception by Julia Kristeva in 1969.[4] An intertext can be considered any sign which is borrowed from a past author/artist. Intertexts in art history have been differentiated from iconography in three distinct ways by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson. First, the artist who appropriates the sign from the older artist plays an active role in taking the image. Mark Tansey appropriates the image of Cézanne's mountain not in order to pay homage to Cézanne, but in order to reply to Cézanne. Second, a borrowed sign necessarily comes with meaning. The artist borrowing the sign must deal with this meaning whether endorsing or subverting the former meaning. As Tansey states, he uses the mountain:

> in response to (Cézanne). In contrast to, having perfect respect for what he accomplished and the influence he had, but realizing that is no longer the path that can be traveled again. But we can go back and use part of what was perhaps discarded by Cézanne, the thematics, and say well, you can't throw any of these levels of content out. Those thematics were important symbolically. Symbolically as a transitional point.[5]

For Tansey, pure form and color, two issues important to Cézanne in *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, are not primary to his work. Intertextually, Tansey subverts Cézanne's concepts while responding to them in his own portrayal of the mountain. The third way intertextuality differs from iconography is that the borrowed motif takes with it the text of the former painting while constructing a new text. Art historical text has been so firmly attached to Cézanne's work that it can never be ignored,

I would like to thank Robert Hobbs, Kathy Shields, Julie May, and Mark D'Amato for their editing comments, and Mark Tansey and the Curt Marcus Galley for their helpful insights.

1 Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: UP of Indiana, 1976) 7.

2 William L. Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948) 93. Additionally, this insight was provided by Susan and Hartley Schearer.

3 Michael Hoog, *Cézanne: Father of 20th Century Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994) 1.

4 For information on intertextuality see, Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980). See also Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein's *Influence and Intertextuality* (UP of Wisconsin, 1991). For an art historical approach see Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin* 73. 2 (1991).

5 Mark Tansey, personal interview, November 11, 1995.

whether original or intertextual. Starting with Clive Bell, who makes reference to Cézanne when describing significant form, and continuing to *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, where as Richard Martin points out, "Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* [is read] as a turning point and a fully developmental painting for the escheloned history of modern art," art history has viewed Cézanne as the patriarch of modernism.[6]

Clement Greenberg looked at Cézanne's work in the context of mid-twentieth-century modernism:

> Cézanne sacrificed verisimilitude, or correctness, in order to fit drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas. . . .It was the stressing, however, of the ineluctable flatness of the support that remained most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism.[7]

Tansey has always been in conflict with Greenberg's view of painting since his days as a studio assistant to Helen Frankenthaler where Greenberg was a frequent visitor. As Tansey states, "Greenberg was a great teacher, but for me he was a teacher in the negative. The problem, as I saw it, was how to do exactly what he prohibited. If he said, 'Easel painting and illustration are out,' well that was the prescription for me."[8] Tansey chooses to work with Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* intentionally to subvert Greenberg's ideas about painting while initiating a new discourse. By reversing the way the viewer sees *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, Tansey opens a rift of tension in the center of the painting. This tension is enhanced by the introduction of the philosophers Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida within the painting.

Seated among three standing military men at the far left of the painting is Jean Baudrillard. Iconographically, the placement of Baudrillard in this position by Tansey is not arbitrary but reflects the philosopher's ultra-leftist views about material culture. Baudrillard looks out over this imaginary scene which is a simulacrum, a copy for which no original exists. In traditional iconography Baudrillard would act as a signifier of the simulacrum. Tansey reverses this thinking about signs. The inscripting of signs does not begin with the image of the philosopher, and work its way out of the painting, as traditional iconography would have it. It is only through the act of deciding that the painting itself is a simulacrum that the art historian can finally decide that Baudrillard acts as a sign for that code (simulacrum) and reinscription occurs. Therefore, the painting itself can be seen as a simulacrum reinscribed in the image of Baudrillard, and not the other way around. If Baudrillard were not in the painting, the idea that the painting is a simulacrum and not part of an objective reality would still exist. Tansey reverses the thinking of traditional iconography which would need the image of Baudrillard to convey meaning. To this extent, the images of the philosophers within *Mont Sainte-Victoire* are secondary and act as "pointers," indexing the larger signs inscribed within the painting.

One of the uniformed officers points to the right, in the direction of Roland Barthes. As the viewer's eyes look from left to right, she sees the men dressed in military attire, disrobing. These critics taking off military garb can be seen as signs of the demilitarization of the writing of avant-garde proponents. Words and phrases such as, "avant-garde," "dogmatic opponents," "enemies," "art in general as in decline," all come from the art criticism of Clement Greenberg.[9] By demilitarizing this avant-garde style, Tansey hopes to show the futility of a militaristic approach to art, where one mode or style tends to dominate over every other mode or style. Tansey welcomes a more pluralistic approach to art which will open many different and new discourses.

Almost hidden behind a cloak-like veil, Roland Barthes reclines, lights a cigarette. Two visual codes Tansey inscribes within the image of Barthes are the neutrality of the author/artist and intertextuality. In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes wishes to "create a colorless writing. . . .Th[is] new neutral writing. . .achieves a style of absence which is almost an ideal absence of style."[10] Because both painting and writing are made up of a system of signs, Barthes' ideas may be transferred from written to painted signs. It is within this context the figure of Roland Barthes acts to reinforce *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. The scene is painted in a sepia monochrome. As Tansey states:

> In the beginning I was attracted to monochrome because everything I liked was in it, from Michelangelo to scientific illustration to *Life* magazine photos. Because this simple but versatile syntax was shared by art, fiction, and photographic reality, it made another level of pictorial fiction where aspects of each could commune.[11]

"Scientific illustration" and "*Life* magazine photos" are not usually signed, seemingly have no author, and are "neutral" to the extent that they lack a definitive style. Tansey appropriates Barthes' "absence of style" within his own work which, in turn, becomes the style associated with Mark Tansey.

Although the term "intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva, Barthes was using the concept to validate his claim for the death of the author. "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which

6 Richard Martin, "Cézanne's Doubt and Mark Tansey's Certainty on Considering Mont Sainte-Victoire." *Arts Magazine* Nov. 1987: 80.

7 Howard Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 15-18.

8 Nancy Stapen, "Mark Tansey: Seriously Funny." *Artnews* Summer 1994: 102.

9 See especially Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

10 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 77.

11 Arthur C. Danto, *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992) 138.

a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."[12] Both the mountain in the background and the bathers act as intertexts, none of which is original to Tansey, constantly blending and clashing with the original paintings as well as within Tansey's work itself. Here again, Tansey's larger visual agenda is reinscibed in the visage of Barthes. Initially, the image of Barthes was not included in *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. In fact, Barthes it not necessary to support the meanings of the canvas. Tansey's inclusion of Barthes acts to index the philosophic discourses that ebb and flow within the frame.

The man pointing at the far left continues to focus the viewer's attention away from the left of the painting toward Jacques Derrida who stands to the right of Barthes ready to disrobe. Derrida's writing was a significant influence on Tansey during his painting of *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Tansey was reading Derrida's book, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. In this book Derrida wishes to break down polar oppositions in his writing by questioning commonly held beliefs such as truth and falsehood, male and female. Derrida writes:

> There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depthless depths to its ruin. There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because that untruth is 'truth.' Woman is but one name for that truth of untruth.[13]

This deconstruction of truth to untruth, of woman to not woman is taken by Tansey *via* the figure of Derrida and used to construct an entire pictorial scene about the equivalence of opposites. Derrida's image is an index for revealing an opening to this discourse, the breaking down of metanarratives, like Truth, Woman, Modernity, through the painting.

When the painting is inverted 180 degrees, the reflections betray the images. The male bathers become female, the phallic *mont*, the sign of modernism is now a womb-like cave, and the equivalence of opposites takes place. Just as the male bathers were disrobing in an act of demilitarization, their female equivalents seem to do the opposite, and remilitarize.

The left grouping of bathers is an intertext of Cézanne's *Large Bathers* 1906 (Figure 3). This intertext is not another attempt by Tansey to subvert the trope of modernism, however. Some bathers in Cézanne's work, have been characterized by many critics as Hermaphrodites. A.J.L. Busst has shown that the Hermaphrodite is depicted, "in every aspect of French culture of that period, social and political as well as artistic. In the first half of the century this attraction was optimistic, but by the second half the figure had become a symbol of decadence."[14] In the *Large Bathers* in particular Mary Louise Krumrine notes, "Cézanne [is] appearing in two androgynous guises, as the Hermaphrodite and as a woman with masculine characteristics."[15] Krumrine uses this analysis to investigate Cézanne's psychological makeup. Whatever value the androgyne has in the Bathers motif for Cézanne, for Tansey it reinscribes the equivalence of opposites found throughout the work. The androgyne is neither male nor female, but equal. Tansey has also taken up the idea of the Hermaphrodite in his *Utopic* (1987), where a Hermaphrodite reclines, "allowing the irreconcilable to become one."[16]

The most fecund element within the painting is the umbrella. It lies in the middle of the *Great Bathers*' intertext, unopened at the place where the shore meets the lake, a sort of *Coastline Measure*—indefinite, indistinct, indeterminate. Derrida brings up the issue of the umbrella in *Spurs*. An unpublished fragment of Nietzsche's writing states, "I have forgotten my umbrella." Derrida takes the fragment to task. He describes that the fragment actually may not be a fragment at all, but rather intact and whole without any other context. The fact that the fragment is inaccessible to the reader could mean that it holds a secret, or no secret at all. Perhaps Nieztsche meant to say nothing. Perhaps it means exactly what it says, "I have forgotten my umbrella."

Derrida also scrutinizes the text in terms of psychoanalysis with the umbrella representing a phallus, and the fact that it has been "forgotten." Psychoanalysts, "Assured that it must mean something, look for it to come from the most intimate reaches of this author's thought. But in order to be so assured, one must have forgotten that it is a text that is in question, the remains of a text, indeed a forgotten text. An umbrella perhaps."[17]

Derrida finally concludes that, "it is always possible that it [the fragment] means nothing at all or that it has no decidable meaning. There is no end to its 'parodying play with meaning,' grafted here and there beyond any contextual body or finite code."[18] With this "umbrella" Derrida explains that meaning is indeterminate, always deferred. The umbrella exists on the left side of the painting, lying at the border, the edge, the indefinite line which determines the water and the shore, the mountain and the cave, the male and the female, or actually shows their equivalence, determining nothing. No meaning is True, in fact all meaning is deferred. There exists no transcendental signifier, only slippage around the gap of mean-

12 Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968) 146.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 51.

14 Mary Louise Krumrine, *Paul Cézanne: The Bathers* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987) 218.

15 Krumrine 218.

16 Martin 81.

17 Derrida 131.

18 Derrida 133.

ing. Derrida stands near the center of the painting, playing a seemingly essential role in the work. This however is a lie. Tansey uses the medium of paint to show the equivalence of opposites: male and female, mountain and cave, clouds and rock. In effect, the image of Derrida is (de)centered, acting only to point out that these philosophic choices exist. These choices would exist within the painting, without Derrida.

Mark Tansey uses signs in unconventional ways to disseminate possible meanings. By using intertexts Tansey reverses the role of the artist from passive receiver to active transmitter breaking down any effort to secure one stable meaning within the work of art itself. By using primary figures within the painting (Baudrillard, Barthes, and Derrida) as indexes "pointing" to meanings, instead of as signifiers of meaning, Tansey reverses the way the viewer looks at images, creating a necessary level of ambiguity between narrative and visual strategies for viewing painting. Endless relations among signs blend and clash, continuously bifurcating, where no single sign or meaning gains total primacy over any other.

Virginia Commonwealth University

Figure 1. Mark Tansey, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, 1987, oil on canvas, 100 x 155". Private Collection; courtesy Curt Marcus Gallery, New York, © Mark Tansey 1987.

Figure 2. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, 1886, oil on canvas. London, Courtauld Institute. Photo: Art Resource.

Figure 3. Paul Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1906, oil on canvas, 82 1/8 x 98 3/4". Philadelphia Museum of Art: purchased with the W.P. Wilstach Fund.

Framing John Biggers' *Shotguns* (1987): African American Art and Identity

Kristin Schreiber Roberts

During the 1980s, African American civil rights organizations, communities, and churches began to determine ways to stabilize and counteract negative trends in their culture, such as the disintegration of the family unit, increases in crime, drug use, and teenage pregnancy, and a general atmosphere of despair and hopelessness.[1] John Biggers also responded to this dilemma facing his community by drawing upon his upbringing as a paradigm of Black culture. Born in 1924 and raised in the small segregated town of Gastonia, North Carolina, he was surrounded by an extended family and community that taught him values of discipline, diligence, self-respect, and self-direction. From this stable foundation, he went on to have a successful career as an artist and chairman of the art department at Texas Southern University in Houston. Biggers gained firsthand insight into the evolving attitudes of Black youths because he taught hundreds of them at Texas Southern from 1949 through 1983, crucial years for political and social change for African Americans. During the 1970s and early eighties, he realized that the group identity of these new generations had moved away from the values and upbringing with which he was familiar. He commented, "Young people don't know nothing about twenty years ago. We're producing such ignorance in society because people don't know what happened. And if you don't know where you come from you don't know where you're going."[2]

Subsequently, Biggers sought to counter negative social trends with works of art that positively defined the cultural pattern of the lifestyle experienced by the artist in his childhood.[3] He responded to the task of creating images to which members of the Black community could relate and respond by developing a vocabulary of symbols taken from the everyday realm that balanced personal experience with a deep knowledge of the history and traditions of West Africa and African American culture.

With this iconography, his art reached new levels of maturity and clarity in a series of paintings from the 1980s that centers on the shotgun house—a domestic structure found throughout the United States—as a key symbol. In this series, as evident in three works from 1987—in particular *Shotguns* (Figure 1), but also *Shotguns, Fourth Ward* and *How I Got Over*—the artist isolated the shotgun house, scrub board, wash pot, quilt, and railroad tracks because of their compound ability to refer to the artist's personal life and the group experience of African Americans. By combining these symbols, Biggers encouraged Black Americans to take pride in their African ancestry, appreciate the advancements of previous generations, strengthen the family unit and the community, and find inner harmony through spiritual ascension.

John Biggers painted *Shotguns* and the rest of the series at a time when African American culture was moving in a decidedly different direction from the hopeful expectations of prosperity and equality that thrived during the civil rights era. In the decades up through the 1960s, despite widespread negativity promoted by whites about African Americans, Blacks, particularly those living in rural or small-town settings, countered the hostility focused upon them by turning inward; they relied on institutions like the extended family, the community, and the church for support, direction, and positive affirmation of their self-worth. From this background, a generation of young Black leaders arose in the 1950s and '60s to challenge the hegemonic political and social systems in the United States. The ensuing struggle against racism, segregation, and discrimination united African Americans during this era, resulting in relative changes in social structure and a sense of optimism for total parity in the future.

As increasing numbers of Blacks moved to cities, the traditional culture that had fostered a positive self-identity came under new stresses because of the economic and social realities of a minority group in an urban environment. Moreover, African Americans who did not live through the civil rights movement often grew up knowing little about their history or African heritage because it was not taught in schools or in the home.

[1] In particular, national civil rights organizations like the NAACP, National Urban League, National Council of Negro Women, and SCLC addressed the agenda changes that the problems with recent generations have necessitated. See "Has the New Generation Changed the Civil Rights Agenda?" *Ebony* 45.10 (August 1990): 60-64.

[2] *John Biggers' Journeys (a romance)*, dir. Sherri Fisher Staples, Chloë Productions, 1995, videocassette.

[3] Biggers questioned, "How does one introduce the positive African American image?" Olive Jensen Theisen, *John Biggers' Murals* (Hampton, Virginia: Hampton UP, 1996) 85.

[4] The seventy-five percent employment rate of Black males in 1960 has declined to a rate of 54% in 1984. Out-of-wedlock births soared to 86 percentage points in 1981, up from 36 in 1950, underscoring changing attitudes towards sexual morality. All statistics come from *Ebony* 41.10 (August 1986).

Instead, they took for granted the advancements of their predecessors, and in this way the development of a strong individual and group identity was thwarted.

Certainly, many Black youths were brought up in supportive and nurturing environments and went on to lead directed and fulfilling lives. However, statistical trends reveal obvious changes in the social landscape of the United States during the 1970s and '80s.[4] The number of families headed by African American females reached a record high during the 1980s, and the absence of fathers left millions of children without male role models to influence them and demonstrate stable paradigms of parenthood and marriage. Numerous Black youths of the post-civil rights generations who lacked strong self-esteem and discipline tuned into the materialism and instant self-gratification engendered by popular culture. Subsequently, they turned to drugs and street culture for acceptance and affirmation, which led to increased rates of violence and crime in which Black youths began to victimize their peers and people in their communities.[5] In a separate but related phenomenon, middle-class African Americans embraced bourgeois values of individualism and competition that, as a result, alienated them from the traditional social environment in which the welfare of the group took precedence over that of the individual.[6]

The cultural shift in Black America came under the public scrutiny of the media, politicians, and social activists during the 1980s and evoked various dialogues about the problems facing African Americans, despite evidence that similar trends were occurring in society-at-large. Particularly in 1986, the year before Biggers painted *Shotguns*, the media's interest accelerated and led to heightened public awareness of this situation. For instance, CBS nationally televised the documentary entitled "The Vanishing Black Family" in February while *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Crisis*, and *Ebony* each devoted issues in 1986 to the problems experienced by Blacks in the United States.[7]

Through such publications and other avenues, individuals and organizations examined solutions to the major issues facing African Americans, most often placing an emphasis, as Biggers did, on the need for knowledge of Black history and African ancestry, revitalization of the extended family, spiritual support from the church, and the strengthening and intensification of communal involvement and responsibility. Marian Edelman, the president of the Children's Defense Fund, summarized: "The Black community again must become the extended family it once was and provide the role models and support to guide and sustain those in the next generation."[8]

Biggers turned to the medium of painting to participate in this ongoing dialogue, using images like *Shotguns* to give visual form to the solutions proposed by social activists and leaders during the 1980s. Through these works he attempted to reassert the conventional values and social structure that he believed had sustained generations of African Americans through several centuries of discrimination and oppression. He focused on the shotgun house in particular because of its rich potential to signify positive elements of African American culture, particularly the essence of the tightly-knit community, closeness of family, and African heritage.

The name of the shotgun house comes from its axial arrangement of rooms, where it was said that one could shoot a bullet through the front door and out the back without striking any walls. Its layout consists of a series of small rooms that are aligned along a central axis with the short gabled end facing the street. Regardless of variations in design, this type of dwelling enforces a communal lifestyle because its spaces are accessed in a linear progression, making every room a necessary thoroughfare. Thus, no demarcation of personal space exists; rather, its design causes a high level of interaction amongst inhabitants and results in a strong awareness of group identity.

The spatial sharing of families extends to neighbors because of the proximity of each home in a row of shotgun houses (Figure 2). When shotgun houses line a neighborhood, the community shares a similar ordering of space and perceived experience.[9] This psychological unity is enforced by the physical regularity of a row of gables and narrow façades that form an aesthetic unit.[10] In addition, occupants often leave the restricted interior space to gather on porches and along sidewalks. Thus, this residential architecture encourages the interaction of com-

5 See *Ebony* 41.10, a special edition devoted to the problems facing Black children; Norman Riley, "Footnotes of a Culture at Risk," *The Crisis* 93.3 (March 1986): 23-8, 45-6; and Bruce R. Hare, "Black Youth at Risk," *State of Black America 1988* (National Urban League, Inc., 1988): 81-94.

6 Martin and Martin argue that the group-oriented Black culture originated in Africa with the extended family structure and was strengthened during slavery and Reconstruction, only to decline in the twentieth century due to factors such as the embracing of white bourgeoisie ideology. See Joanne M. Martin and Elmer P. Martin, *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers, Inc., 1985).

7 Nicholas Lemann, "The Origins of the Underclass," Parts 1 and 2. *The Atlantic Monthly* 257.6 (June 1986): 31-55; 258.1 (July 1986): 54-68 and *The Crisis* 93.3 (March 1986). *Ebony* identified "the biggest crisis Blacks have faced since slavery time," not as the issue of segregation and the conquering of it, but the disintegration of the Black family in the post-civil rights period. See *Ebony* 41.10 (August 1986): 33.

8 Lemann 58.

9 One can read particular aspects of culture through examinations of its use of space because man and his environment affect one another; that is, man creates his physical environment and, in turn, that environment shapes man's experience. Further, people from various cultures perceive their environments differently because they live in different sensory worlds. For example, what may seem crowded to one set of people does not to another because of the variation of proxemic expectations and needs. See Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966).

10 "Sameness in houses is a statement of similar ideals, of shared experiences and expectations. A house is both a personal and a cultural expression." Vlach, "Sources of the Shotgun House: African and Caribbean Antecedents for Afro-American Architecture," diss., Indiana University, 1975, 7.

munity members in the outdoor spaces that, as a result, become part of an extended domestic domain.

The limited space of a shotgun house indicates a group-oriented and inclusive social structure, which is likely a continuation of the lifestyles of African predecessors who resided in homes similar to the American shotgun house.[11] Indeed, this house type originated in the coastal zones of West Africa that extend from Senegal down through Central Africa. Group rather than individual orientation characterizes the social structures of these African communities, a phenomenon that seems to have been handed down to their American descendants. Biggers experienced this communal lifestyle in Gastonia, where he was born and raised in a shotgun house that was one of many in his closely-knit neighborhood. Thus, the shotgun house in Biggers' paintings symbolically stressed the importance of a group-oriented community and the cultural continuation of lifestyles and architecture from Africa to the United States, thereby recalling the long historical past of Black Americans.

From the prevalence of the shotgun house in the predominantly Black enclaves of Houston, it is clear that the architecture of this community inspired Biggers to repeat the shotgun house motif throughout the 1980s. For example, the streets surrounding Texas Southern University in the Third Ward, where Biggers lived and worked, are lined with rows of shotgun homes (Figures 3 and 4).[12] These residences inspired those depicted in the shotgun house series, although Biggers modified their design somewhat.[13] In particular, the coloration of the homes on Alabama Street recurs in the muted hues that Biggers employed in *Shotguns*. Since the shotgun house clearly permeated Biggers' environment in Gastonia and Houston, he turned to it as a composite symbol of his perception of the African American experience. He also knew that Blacks who viewed his paintings could relate to its form and symbolism because of its prevalence in the rural and urban landscape in the United States.

Although he first depicted the shotgun house in paintings like *First Shotgun* of 1949-50, he did not focus on this architectural form as an icon and embodiment of the Black lifestyle until the 1980s as seen in *Shotguns*. This painting's composition features a symmetrical, balanced composition with five women placed laterally across the pictorial surface. Biggers rendered the triangles and rectangles that comprise the shotgun homes with a geometric precision that generates compositional stasis and regularity. The houses stand five deep and five across at regular intervals, and each row overlaps the one behind it, suggesting a spatial recession that is ultimately denied by the abstract patterning of the pediments and contrasting dark voids. The horizontal bars of the railroad tracks draw a visual barrier between the viewer and the community, a spatial construction that evokes the social boundaries legally imposed and enforced during the Jim Crow era.

In *Shotguns*, the regular organization of the shotgun homes forms a cohesive block that represents the harmonious balance and order of an ideal community.[14] The spatial arrangement conjures the atmosphere of the compressed living spaces of actual shotguns and shotgun blocks. Moreover, the doors are left open in a gesture of sharing and confidence in one's neighbors. Thus, in *Shotguns*, Biggers suggested that the unified community exists as a positive environment for families and children.

The African American women in *Shotguns* stand as the protectors and sustainers of their domestic temples. Biggers conveyed this role through the figures' stoic poses and the miniature replicas of shotgun houses cradled below their waists in a manner that recalls pregnant women holding their stomachs when they are with child.[15] Biggers visually emphasized the association of the home with the mother's womb, a metaphor for a protective, nurturing environment.[16] The artist recorded the different generations of African American women through the caryatid figures themselves, who undergo (from left to right) a transformation from an ancestral African statue to a modern Black woman. On the left, the African ancestor has the stylized face of a West African sculpture, similar to those recorded in drawings like *Yoruba Shrine* from Biggers' 1957 journey to Africa. In this generational evolution, the women possess increasingly naturalistic features until the figure on the far right is recognizable as a contemporary woman. This dynamic growth conveys that previous generations have played crucial roles in the development of modern African American women and, because of their ability to bear children, the entire Black race.[17]

A quilting motif, seen on the ground, in the sky, and in the patterning created by the pediments, appears in Biggers' im-

[11] John Vlach has examined the shotgun house at length, in particular see *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978); "The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy." Parts 1 and 2. *Pioneer America* 8.1 (1976): 47-56; 8.2 (1976): 57-70; and "Sources of the Shotgun House." He concludes that the shotgun house as "a building form is the end product of a long evolution of an architecture of intimacy among black people" (Vlach, *Afro-American Tradition*, 123).

[12] The "wards" are predominantly Black areas located in the geographical center of Houston.

[13] Indicated by Alvia Wardlaw, interview by author, Houston, TX, 21 November, 1995.

[14] At a lecture in Raleigh, North Carolina, Biggers looked at a slide of *Shotguns* (1987) and claimed, "Okay, this is the community." Biggers, lecture.

[15] I am grateful to Professor Barbara Tsakirgis for this observation.

[16] Biggers emphasized that "you walk back into her womb each time you walk into your home." *John Biggers' Journeys*.

[17] As a child, Biggers greatly benefited from the intergenerational contact he experienced in Gastonia. He said, "wisdom. . .came from the elders. . . . When I was a kid, I was a friend to my father and grandfather and grandmother. I was a friend to them because there are many things we saw alike." Biggers, lecture.

ages of the 1980s and derives from the artist's memory of women, including his mother, who quilted around him in his youth. It recalls the continuum of quilting by Black women, who have created quilts out of old scraps since the era of slavery and passed this knowledge on to their daughters.[18] The quiltlike patterns also refer to the larger inheritance of skills, values, folklore, and other traditions that generations of African Americans handed on to each other. Moreover, in an era of high technology, the quilting motif suggests that American culture needs to return to a basic humanitarian level where creativity and the poetic essence of life can be explored and understood.[19]

Biggers viewed quilting as an act of transformation in which women adopted old, unwanted fabrics and integrated them into the patterns of blankets. He used the quilt as a metaphor for a society renewing itself, just as quilters created a new order out of discarded scraps. As in his childhood, quilters must come together and assist each other in this act of rebirth, a model of cooperation that he believed the Black community must follow. The quilt in his imagery suggests, in the words of the artist, "a common thread of culture, symbolic of. . .a world of peace and a world in which we might survive."[20]

The emphasis on upward motion in *Shotguns* elicits the theme of spiritual ascension, an important component of the traditional system of values outlined in the shotgun house series. The birds in flight symbolize this rising and the rub boards represent ladders for ascent. The peaking rooflines of the shotgun houses, pronounced through strong highlights and shadows, look like arrows pointing heavenward, a motif echoed in the pointed boards of the white picket fences between the structures. The suggestion of ascension encourages the possibility that the human spirit can rise to above the mundane and material realm.[21]

John Biggers once said, "It is really important for me to speak about my feelings and *what I believe should be*. I have something to say to people."[22] Through images like *Shotguns*, Biggers voiced his beliefs about the past and future of Black America, using this painting to draw attention to cultural ideals that he felt were being lost or de-emphasized in modern America. In doing so, he participated in a larger movement to counteract cultural instability in the post-civil rights era. The themes discussed in *Shotguns* appear in many of his paintings from this decade and were translated into the public arena through large-scale murals by the artist.[23] The symbolic content of all these images conveys an optimism and faith in societal regeneration. The path to renewal is simple: as Biggers says, "It is all in going back to your roots."[24]

Vanderbilt University

18 For the artist's discussion of quilting, see *Stories of Illumination and Growth: John Biggers' Hampton Murals*, dir. Sherri Fisher Staples, Cinebar Productions, 1992, videocassette.

19 By way of example, the spirituality found in numbers and forms that Biggers learned from his examination of sacred geometry shows a level of cognition about the universe that cannot be reached through computers and machines. Robert Powell, a close friend of the artist, explained, "The problems that we face are not artificial. . . .The language of the computer is not adequate to the problem." Interview by author, tape recording, Houston, Texas, 21 November 1995.

20 Rebecca N. Felts and Marvin Moon, "Artists' Series: An Interview with John Biggers," *Texas Trends in Art Education* (Fall 1983): 9.

21 In the shotgun house series, Biggers suggested spiritual uplifting, a metaphysical rising of the soul, believing, "This to me is what art is all about—showing the spirit of man struggling above the mundane, above the material, above suffering." Felts and Moon 10.

22 Felts and Moon 10.

23 Particularly noteworthy are Biggers' murals at Hampton University, *Tree House* and *House of the Turtle* (1990-2), and those at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina entitled *Ascension* and *Origin* (1990-2). In these works, Biggers expanded his iconography into more complex compositions that become veritable expositions on the simple themes already expressed in the shotgun house series. The placement of these paintings in such public spaces enables the community to read Biggers' symbols and thereby detect the value system and cultural pattern conveyed by the artist.

24 Felts and Moon 14.

Figure 1. John Biggers, *Shotguns*, 1987, oil and acrylic on canvas, 42 x 49 7/8". Private Collection.

Figure 2. Elgin Street, Houston, Texas.

Figure 3. Alabama Street, Houston, Texas.

Figure 4. Holman Street, Houston, Texas.

ATHANOR XV

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY
SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS & DANCE

A PROJECT OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS PRESS
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY